7-21-1977

Oltman, Theodore V and Helen Oral History Interview: Old China Hands Oral History Project

Julie Van Wyk

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/old_china

Part of the Archival Science Commons, and the Oral History Commons

Recommended Citation


http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/old_china/8


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Interviews at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Old China Hands Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.
This project has been made possible by a grant from the Youthgrants in the Humanities Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, a Federal agency established by Congress to promote research, education, and public activity in the humanities.

This manuscript is authorized as "open"
Hope College Archives Council
Holland, Michigan
1977
Dr. Theodore V. Oltman
Table of Contents

Preface ................................................. v
Biographical Sketch and Summary of Contents .............. vi
Interview ................................................ 1
Index .................................................... 60
Preface

Interviewees: Dr. Theodore V. and Mrs. Helen Oltman

Interview I: July 21, 1977
The Oltman's home in Riley, Kansas

Interviewer: Ms. Julie Van Wyk
B.A., Hope College
Theodore V. Oltman was born in Saga, Kyushu, Japan on April 9, 1900. His parents, Albert and Alice Oltman, were ministerial missionaries to Japan. Theodore Oltman spent most of his childhood in Japan, returning to the United States in 1919 to enter Park College. After graduating from Park College in 1923 with his B.A. in French, he went on to Rush Medical College from which he received his M.D. in 1927. He also received an M.A. in pharmacology in 1926 from the University of Wisconsin.

On June 25, 1927 Dr. Oltman married Helen McCuish. Miss McCuish was born in Leadurth, Colorado on September 21, 1903, but spent most of her early years in Kansas. After receiving her B.A. from Park College in 1923, she went on to the Presbyterian Hospital School of Nursing and earned her R.N. in 1927.

From 1927 through 1929, the Oltmans went to Los Angeles, where Dr. Oltman completed his internship and began his residency. In October, 1930, the Oltmans arrived in China to begin medical work there under the sponsorship of the Reformed Church in America. Their first assignment was to Tong-an, Fukien, where they began their study of the Amoy language and were soon deeply involved in medical responsibilities at Elizabeth Blanvelt Memorial Hospital.

In October of the following year, the Oltmans were assigned to Neebosch Hospital in Sio-khe where they stayed until 1936, with the exception of their evacuation of the town in May, 1932 due to a Communist invasion of Sio-khe, and the year of June 1934 to September 1935, which they spent at Hope Hospital on Kulangsu.

On their return to China in 1937 following a furlough spent in Princeton, N.J., the Oltmans were detained in Tokyo, Japan until conditions in Amoy were stable enough after takeover by the Japanese to permit their return. By July
of 1938, relations between Japan and the U.S. had deteriorated to the extent that it seemed safer for Mrs. Oltman and the children to return to the United States. Dr. Oltman remained in Kulangsu, and was interned by the Japanese from December, 1941 to June, 1942.

The Oltmans were reunited in Newton, Kansas for a year, but in April of 1943 Dr. Oltman was asked to serve as a medical officer in the U.S. Army. For two years he worked in a hospital unit in West China. After the war, the Oltmans returned to China to help re-open Fagg Memorial Hospital in Leng-na, which had been closed since the Communist invasion of Lungyen in 1929.

In the fall of 1949, the Communists came into Leng-na. Mrs. Oltman and the children returned to the United States in the fall of 1950, but Dr. Oltman stayed and continued his work until he was given permission to leave in October, 1951.

Dr. and Mrs. Oltman spent the next year in Newton, Kansas, and then set up a private medical practice in Riley, Kansas which they still continue.

The Oltman's interview is interesting and informative, covering many phases of their work in China. Dr. Oltman speaks of the Christian impact of the hospital, of his work with Chinese doctors, of his internment by the Japanese, and of his war years in West China. Mrs. Oltman gives a graphic account of the family's evacuation from Sio-khe in 1932. Together the Oltmans discuss the re-opening of Leng-na, life under the Communists, and the local people's feeling toward the Communists. The end of the interview centers on some of their reflections on mission work in China, life in the new China, inflation, and the reforms that Chiang Kai-shek had begun before the Communists came in.
INTERVIEW

VAN WYK: How did you decide to become a missionary to China?

DR. OLTMAN: Well, let's answer it this way. I decided to become a missionary because of the influence that my father and friends and church people whom I had known all of my young life. And in college I was interested in chemistry, and I had a very consecrated teacher who taught chemistry, and he said, "Ted, you'd do better learning to be a doctor because I think you'll find interrelationships between people suits you more than something academic." And then, of course, there was the example of my father and friends, as I said, and I wanted to devote my life to mission work. Now, why I picked China is because in Japan there was no opportunity. Well, just leave it that way. And there was plenty of opportunity in China, and naturally, that's the field I thought about.

VAN WYK: Did you have any language study before you went to China?

DR. OLTMAN: None whatsoever, or study of culture or such things. No, none at all.

VAN WYK: What kind of language study did you have once you arrived in China?

DR. OLTMAN: We had a teacher assigned to us--and he was good, too--to teach us the language, but unfortunately we could not do as the mission planned, and that is to have at least two years of full-time study of the language. This was because when we arrived at Tong-an where we were assigned, Dr. and Mrs. Harold Veldman, who were supposed to be there another year, had to go back to the United States because of Mrs. Veldman's illness, I believe. So, willy-nilly I was plunged into the medical work, although we did study and learn quite a bit in our first year of half-time study. And then we moved
to another place. Again it was the situation that the Mission assigned us there because there was no foreign doctor. And being assigned there, presumably we again, I'd say, did full-time medical work and over-time studying. It was something like that. The long and short of it is that we had completely inadequate language study.

VAN WYK: Did you feel that you ever reached a level where you had good enough Chinese to do your work properly?

DR. OLTMAN: I don't think that there was much trouble there. In the first place, I pick up languages fairly easily, and in the second place, the language used was mostly having to do with things medical, and with medical terms we used partly English and partly Chinese. So there wasn't any trouble that way.

VAN WYK: Can you discuss some of the issues that raised tensions, or questions in mission policies?

DR. OLTMAN: I don't know that I can pontificate upon that because these storms raged over our heads, so to speak. We were the subject of one of these issues which was a matter of assignment, and we just went where the majority vote told us to go. I found mission meeting very interesting, and the beautiful thing about mission meeting was that as far as I know, nobody held any grudges. There were no hard feelings, although there were intense feelings. No, I don't think that at any time we were a mission divided. I think we argued things out, and when it came to settling them, why, that was it.

VAN WYK: So you didn't notice great divisions between the generations, the older and the younger missionaries?

DR. OLTMAN: Only this, that the younger generation, by the time we got there,
were pretty well seasoned, and it was apparent, increasingly so, that they
would take over from the older people.

VAN WYK: In your work in China were you ever working very closely with the
British missionaries?

DR. OLTMAN: No. There was medical work carried on by the British in a town
called Changchow, a large town, where there was opportunity to work along with,
or cooperate, to a certain extent. Whereas, where we were assigned there was
none of that. Later on we were in Kulangsu, but in Kulangsu there was no
British missionary medical work going on. So, no, the answer is there was no
opportunity for us to work with them. If you asked Dr. Hofstra, he would an­
swer this in a different way, and even Dr. Holleman, also, in Kulangsu.

VAN WYK: Did you have very close relations with the American Consulate?

DR. OLTMAN: I think we had cordial relations with the American Consulate, but
I don't know just how to answer that.

VAN WYK: Let me try phrasing it in a different way. Did they give you orders
or advice on when to evacuate from the upcountry when the Communists came
down?

DR. OLTMAN: Never any orders. Advice.

VAN WYK: And were missionaries involved at all in giving them information a-
bout conditions upcountry?

DR. OLTMAN: I'm not aware of that.

VAN WYK: Let's go on to a description of your work in Tong-an. You picked
up responsibilities right away. Can you tell me about what it was like to
start working so soon after you got to China?

DR. OLTMAN: I think sometimes you take it for granted that you're going to work when this work is waiting for you. And I think that with interest and I hope a certain amount of dedication--maybe too much, to the slighting of opportunities of studying the language--I found no real difficulty there. In the Tong-an Hospital was a group of four so-called students, Chinese students, who learned by example, without any formal educating or teaching on my part. There was minor bickering among the students from time to time, but all in all, they learned something, and I did as much work as I could. I never felt discouraged, although some of the conditions were fairly primitive.

VAN WYK: Were you equipped to handle the types of diseases that you ran up against in China?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes, I think we were. Not as a first rate base hospital, but as an out-lying hospital. We had a laboratory, and we had surgical facilities, not too bad.

VAN WYK: The students you say you had--the quote "students"--were they learning to become doctors? Would they go on from Tong-an to other hospitals to train after that?

DR. OLTMAN: In the case of these students, I think all of them after having been with me for a year, and I don't remember how many years more they stayed there; well, one by one they drifted away and set up little medical shops of their own in this or that town not too far away. And to a certain extent they were able to handle some of the situations. None of them did surgery.

VAN WYK: There was no such thing, then, as a doctor's license in China at that time?
DR. OLTMAN: Not that I know of. Either for ourselves or for these Chinese "doctors" at that time. Later on, I think, there was.

VAN WYK: You mentioned in your vita sheet that the political instability around Tong-an that first year made hospital outreach rather difficult.

DR. OLTMAN: There was a district up the road into the mountains from Tong-an, about a half a day's travel, called An-khoe, and I think that probably there were only two occasions in which we went up there and saw a few sick people, but no such thing was organized, and the effort was rather scanty. I remember the time when we first went to China, and from then on in the places where we were outside of Kulangsu, there was a great deal of local unrest, a great deal of banditry, and a great deal of restriction from traveling around and doing clinic work in surrounding areas.

VAN WYK: When people talk about bandits and how they were a limit to moving around, were most Chinese afraid of traveling around when bandits were out, or was it because you were Americans that you were afraid of going out to the outstations?

DR. OLTMAN: No, I don't think so. Actually, I think that the local banditry didn't want to touch foreigners. If they were Communists the answer is different. But the local ones, these bandits usually came to political power and often were assigned from higher up to be the local magistrate, or manager of certain areas.

VAN WYK: Let's go on to Sio-khe for a while. You went from Tong-an to Sio-khe. Were you the only doctor there again?

DR. OLTMAN: The situation in Sio-khe was as follows: There was an older doctor, we called him Tšu Sian-sî. He was a very fine man, he was wise, he
was tolerant, he was just a joy to work with. His wife, second wife—not that he had two wives at one time—his wife who was several years younger than he, was energetic, and intelligent, very helpful as a nurse, though she had no formal training. Tsu Sian-si, the elder doctor, had a nephew whose name was Saw Tat-Beng, and he was a very fine young doctor. We grew to know him and to love him very much, and kept up connections with him after we left, and even in the U.S.A. So in that respect it was easy to work with these people who were very capable and efficient, and nice people to get along with. It was a very fine situation that way. We did not have any students. This thing about students was beginning to wear off as far as the type of men we took to work in the hospital. They were starting to go to medical schools, and so we had no student problem and no student responsibilities.

VAN WYK: Who took your place in Tong-an, then, when you left?

DR. OLTMAN: There was a Dr. Tan who was there when we first came and he continued—how many years, I forget—after we left. Of course the big battle was, "Which hospital shall we leave with no foreign doctor? Shall it be Sio-khe, shall it be Tong-an?" And the votes went for the Mission doctor to go to Sio-khe.

VAN WYK: Do you know why, or were the two stations pretty much the same as far as their needs went?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes, I think their needs were about the same. The needs actually were greater, I think, in Tong-an because of what I described about Tsu Sian-si and his wife, and his nephew Dr. Saw, with his wife, a Hope Hospital trained nurse, as compared with Dr. Tan and these students. I think the need was greater in Tong-an than in Sio-khe, but it didn't make any difference. The majority ruled. And we were not unhappy to go to Sio-khe. Again it was
a challenge, and it was a pleasant surprise to find some of these good features about Sio-khe.

VAN WYK: Were you involved in administration of these hospitals as well as in medical work?

DR. OLMAN: In Tong-an Mr. Koeppe was administrative head, and in Sio-khe I guess I was administrative head. I don't recall any particular difficulties. It would be seeing that people went about their business and did it as well as they could, it was about interpersonal relationships, and I don't recall any unpleasant or difficult circumstances.

VAN WYK: You mentioned you had village clinics in Sio-khe. Was that in Sio-khe itself or in out-lying districts?

DR. OLMAN: Not in Sio-khe. In out-lying areas. And there were a few of those. The Chinese have a time they call Hi Jit, which is market day. And on market day in one particular town, the next town won't have it on the same day. They'll have it on a different day. So we had the opportunity to go out and do clinic work in these towns where a lot of people gather to buy and sell. There weren't too many of those occasions. Partly, as things got worse banditry-wise, it just wasn't wise to do it.

I remember a trip that Mr. Voskuil and I took up-river to a town about twelve miles away, for what purpose I don't remember. Coming back by river we had hired a river boat. About a third of the way back to Sio-khe on the river, a fellow who was no doubt a cohort of the head bandit motioned us over to the shore, and we said, "No, we have hired this boat." "It makes no difference. Come over here!" He was armed and we were not, and we wouldn't use arms if we had any. So he got a free ride on our boat. But that sort of
frightened the man whose boat we had hired. Well, this sort of thing militated against our taking Chinese personnel and going some distance and setting up clinics. So that clinic activity really did not amount to what it could have.

VAN WYK: When you did go to the markets, to the towns, did you just set up a clinic and work with whoever happened to stop by who needed help?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes we carried medicine and minor supplies with us and, gee, I don't remember whether we called on the services of the local pastor, or if there was a pastor. We probably did.

VAN WYK: And he would advertise the fact that you were coming?

DR. OLTMAN: That's right, yes.

VAN WYK: What did you find was the Chinese people's reaction to hospitals and Western medicine? By the time you got to China was that quite widely accepted?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes. We used to say, the patient after going to the local Chinese-style medicine man, and shopping around and getting nowhere, sometimes as the place of last resort came to the foreign doctors, and the foreign hospital.

VAN WYK: Could most people afford coming to your hospital?

DR. OLTMAN: They could because our charges were negligible, next to nothing. This was not true in the base hospital, in Kulangsu, where there were many wealthy people who could pay the charges which were modest at that. But in our small upcountry hospitals although we tried to have everybody pay something, not just give free medicine and service, it was not very much.

VAN WYK: So then were the hospitals in Tong-an and Sio-khe self-supporting?
DR. OLMAN: No, not self-supporting. The expenses were partly covered by mission grants.

VAN WYK: Did you deal with public health at all, in distributing inoculations, or sanitary conditions?

DR. OLMAN: Innoculations, especially with the elementary school children, and sometimes hundreds of them. We would hold clinics on the porches of the hospitals, and two or three hundred children came at one sitting, you might say. Cholera, typhoid, plague shots. And then the patients in the hospital would see these children getting their shots, "Oh, we want a shot, too." "Well, what do you want it for?" "Well, everyone's getting shots. We want one." They didn't know what the shot was for, but they wanted to get a shot.

VAN WYK: Were these mission schools where you gave the shots?

DR. OLMAN: Mission schools.

VAN WYK: So you didn't have to go through city government or officials to arrange that?

DR. OLMAN: No.

VAN WYK: What sort of evangelism did you carry out in the hospital?

DR. OLMAN: Personally?

VAN WYK: Personally or within the hospital you worked in. Was there a Bible woman or a chaplain?

DR. OLMAN: Each of our hospitals had a chaplain who was a full-time preacher, and a full-time Bible woman, and they were quite effective because they had the hospital back of them. The hospital was a place these patients came to
for healing, and hence as far as possible they were exposed to Christianity in action. It is often said, and with truth, that the church first started in any particular location because there was a man or woman who came to the hospital and was healed and became a Christian, and that's the way that the big impact of the hospital is. I was almost going to say, you don't need to evangelize in a formal way. Your actions spoke louder than words.

The Bible woman and the hospital preacher did very fine work in Bible exposition, in exhortation, in singing gospel hymns, conducting services. Sometimes we would conduct a service before a clinic started. The clinic people, those who wanted to come to the out-patient clinic, would sit down in the chapel and there would be a short religious service, and then we would get busy with whatever we had to do for the out-patients. What I'm trying to say is the hospital made its impact and it was the opening wedge and there were certainly occasions where there was a big impact.

I don't know whether Mrs. Oltman wants to tell this herself or not. A man came in, a young man with a dirty, infected, and neglected wound. Not purposely neglected. His father saw Helen one day changing his dirty dressings. And his father was amazed. He said, "This is menial work. Even a woman would hesitate to do that. Why did you come all the way from your country to do things like this?" Well, this was Christianity in action. And how much impact it made beyond this man's wondering, I don't know, but it must have been something.

VAN WYK: As an example I can understand how that would have a great effect, but I was wondering if you ever ran up against a problem where the Chinese would grasp at Christianity because it was associated with a magic cure, or modern science. Did you run into that at all?
DR. OLTMAN: No, I don't think so. Patients' responses to their stay in the hospital or their treatment in the out-patient clinic varied. They were all exposed to the Christian influences of the hospital and clinic. Many patients seemed unaffected. A goodly number had an impression which caused them to wonder about our work. Some of them were on the way to being converted to Christianity, or actually became Christians. Many people were benefitted or helped, and many really first learned about Christianity in a formal way by the preacher and the Bible woman, and in the "impact way" by the hospital nurses and doctors.

VAN WYK: You mentioned a minute ago that the position of a nurse is considered a pretty low status job in China. How about the position of a doctor? Where did he stand?

DR. OLTMAN: It was different. In the first place the nurse was a woman, and woman's status was not too high. Second place, the type of work the nurses did was cleaning up patients and carrying bedpans and urinals, and helping with dirty dressings, things like that, and it was all considered menial. And the early nurses were not trained, or highly trained, and they were given a name, Kan-Haw, and that's not a complimentary title. I don't remember exactly what it means, but a true nurse, a well-trained nurse was called Haw-Su. And I remember in Tong-an hospital the students themselves, those four students, looked down upon the nurse. We had a good nurse, a well-trained nurse, and the great difficulty was maintaining her position and her self-respect, because they looked down on her. It was difficult.

VAN WYK: Did that change noticeably over the years while you were in China? The status of nurses?
DR. OLTMAN: I'm sure it did, and it had its biggest impact in the base hospital on Kulangsu where we had our nurses' training school. Quite a large number of girls went through this training, and quite a lot of girls became Christians. They entered as non-Christians, and when they graduated they had become Christians. This must have been the impact of the hospital and not just their medical teaching and learning. I think people whose eyes were opened realized the true status as it should be of a well-trained nurse.

VAN WYK: Did you have to compromise any of your practices in order to go along with Chinese traditions?

DR. OLTMAN: You mean medical practices?

VAN WYK: Yes.

DR. OLTMAN: I'm not aware that we did. No. Often, when a person had been through the mill as far as Chinese-style doctors is concerned and came to us, it was taken for granted that he or she wanted help, and we did what we thought we should do. The only compromising would be giving in in certain situations, such as timing. For instance, if a person came in and was scheduled to have an operation, and lo and behold the day we picked for the operation was a bad day—by superstitious rites some days are good; some days are bad—we would change the schedule. Or they'd go to the temple across the way and pick up a couple of pieces of wood that were flat on one side and rounded on the other side. They'd throw them up in the air, and the way the wood landed would determine whether the patient would go to the foreign doctor or not. Would it be the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do. Those are examples of their superstitions. There are other sorts of things, as a big hollow section of bamboo, with a lot of little sticks in it, and at ran-
dom one stick is pulled out and that tells whether to go to the doctor or not, or to go to a Chinese-style doctor, or take medicine. Little superstitions, but we had to deal with them.

VAN WYK: Were you in contact with opium very much?

DR. OLMAN: Oh, my, yes. In Tong-an and in Sio-khe both. In Sio-khe we lived in a compound and just right next to us grew a flourishing field of opium poppies. And we had sometimes a whole ward full of opium addicts, mostly from smoking opium. It became too expensive to buy plus paying bribery to the minor officials, because officially smoking opium was banned. But actually it went on and flourished a great deal. So we'd treat them and give them the cure, and they would actually give up. But it's more pleasure to smoke than not to smoke, and then they'd start it again in a month or so. We never cured an opium smoker unless he became a Christian, and even then it was uphill keeping him away from the pipe.

VAN WYK: Did the Chinese church take a definite stand on the opium issue?

DR. OLMAN: I don't recall that they did. I think they realized that it was a bad thing, but I don't believe they propagandized. I'm sure that if an opium smoker became a Christian, why, they'd give him the support that they could. Sometimes it would work, sometimes not. Yes, we dealt with a lot, we had a lot of opium-smoking patients.

VAN WYK: We were talking about the hospital. Let's go on to the Communist invasion in 1932 while you were in Sio-khe. Did you evacuate at that time?

DR. OLMAN: I was thinking, maybe I ought to let Helen describe that.
VAN WYK: O.K. I'll save that one. Let's go on from there. The mission Board minutes mention that the following summer after the Communist invasion the hospital was emptied of patients a couple of times because of the political situation. Do you remember anything like that? Of losing patients in the hospital because of problems in the countryside?

DR. OLTMAN: If so, I don't remember it very well. But the hospitals--all the hospitals--at a certain time of the year for some reason were semi-empty. I don't know that it was because of any political disturbance, or anything like that. I really don't. I draw a blank on that.

VAN WYK: You say yearly there were just low periods?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes. Let me go and ask Helen. [tape momentarily turned off] Well, I consulted with my better half and she reminded me that before Chinese New Years time they were too busy with preparations and so forth and the hospital became practically empty. To a lesser extent this was true also during rice harvest time. So in neither case was it due to political upheaval.

VAN WYK: In 1934 you were called down to Kulangsu to work at Hope Hospital for one year.

DR. OLTMAN: That was to take the place of Dr. Holleman who went home on furlough.

VAN WYK: Again did you just leave Sio-khe in the hands of the Chinese doctor there?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes, that's right, with the confidence that he could carry on.

VAN WYK: And how did you find that went?
DR. OLTMAN: How did it work? I'm sure it worked alright.

VAN WYK: You got back and the hospital was still running.

DR. OLTMAN: Yes. There was no trouble that way. As I have described these people before, they were very responsible and they didn't like it but they stuck with it anyway.

VAN WYK: While you were in Kulangsu did you find that life was quite a bit different from upcountry, and was this different in a better way?

DR. OLTMAN: Things in Kulangsu as compared with living in the smaller places where we had hospitals—they were quite different, and each had their drawbacks and each had their desirable features. It was nice to be in the country. It was a more intimate style of life; one was more on his own as far as his work was concerned. On the other hand there were handicaps. Sometimes you felt isolated from your mission community where you were able to see each other and work with each other. And personally, in the larger center... It was nice to be in Kulangsu. It was a beautiful place and the facilities for working were better, and association with our peers, foreign, also educated Chinese, and real good friends. So it had its attractions. It's sort of like living in not primitive, but less than highly organized society. So each had its advantages. I don't know about the disadvantage of being in Kulangsu—I don't think there was any. But it was nice to be upcountry also.

VAN WYK: You returned after furlough to Kulangsu in 1937, and your family didn't come until a little bit later. Can you explain why?

DR. OLTMAN: When we left Seattle to go back to China the war between China and Japan hotted up and there were attacks and mini-war in and around Shanghai. Incidentally, one of our dear friends by the name of Bob Reischauer was killed
by a bomb in a hotel in Shanghai on the day that we sailed. Things were un­settled so the Board felt that women and children were not to go on in. Ac­tually they stopped myself as well as the family, and so we lived together in Tokyo for a couple of months when the mission in Fukien called for my services. They said it was all right for me to come so in November I left and went back to Amoy, whereas Helen and the children stayed in Japan until about May of the following year.

VAN WYK: When the Japanese occupied Amoy in 1938 did that change your work­ing conditions in the hospital at all?

DR. OLTMAN: It made us about three times as busy as we would have been. I remember the two days that it took the Japanese to overrun Amoy there were thou­sands of refugees that came across the harbor to Kulangsu, including wounded. Some of them soldiers, some of them maybe soldiers wearing civilian clothing, escaping from Amoy. And there was shooting going on and we boarded the win­dows on the harbor side of the hospital because bullets came across the harbor. And meanwhile a load, a heavy load of wounded civilians and soldiers... We were very busy in the surgical and dressing wards. And then our business continued because we had these people to deal with and also thousands of people who were in refugee camps in Kulangsu. Yes, our working conditions were considerably increased.

VAN WYK: What sort of work did you do with the refugee camps? Did you actual­ly go from camp to camp to provide services?

DR. OLTMAN: I don't remember that we did. I think in case of illness they came to the hospital clinics or to be in the hospital as in-patients. Dr. Poppen and some of our other personnel were very much busy and involved in supplying and everyday running of the camps. This did not affect us medics.
VAN WYK: Were you able to get all of the supplies you needed after the Japanese came in?

DR. OLMAN: I was not directly involved in this, and frankly I don't remember.

VAN WYK: Another thing I noticed was that Hope Hospital supervised some of the hospitals upcountry, like the hospital in Tong-an. Were you involved in any upcountry hospital supervision?

DR. OLMAN: At a later time I think I made two or three trips up to Sio-khe, and I made more than one trip to Tong-an just to see how things were getting along. It was hardly supervision, unless it's looking over the situation. And it doesn't impress itself on my memory particularly, except the fact that I made several trips to Sio-khe. I wish we all had perfect memories regarding all these things. Certain things stay very well, and other things which probably were sometimes rather routine just don't remain in one's memory.

VAN WYK: Your family left Kulangsu in April, 1941. This was before Pearl Harbor, but had conditions gotten worse? Why did they finally leave?

DR. OLMAN: I think there was a general feeling that the conflict between China and Japan was steadily widening, and the United States government was increasingly alarmed and disturbed by Japanese conquests and Japanese apparent aims. This was enough, I'm sure, for our State Department to suggest that there might be more trouble ahead and that it would be a good idea for women and children to return to America. Several mothers with children, and single women due for furlough did leave in April, and other stayed. Does that sort of answer your question?

VAN WYK: Yes.
DR. OLMAN: I think that because there was public alarm on the part of
the United States government their feelings were transmitted to us through the
State Department.

VAN WYK: So did the women and children leave at that point?

DR. OLMAN: Yes. Mrs. Oltman can give you more details.

VAN WYK: So Pearl Harbor comes and you are interned. Can you explain how
that was carried out?

DR. OLMAN: The Japanese were pretty well organized in various places. They
were in a position to carry out planned actions. And on Klangsu it was as
follows: Early in the morning, December 8, this is what happened where we
lived, and probably happened in various other places on the island also.
Mr. Poppen, Mr. Veenschoten, and I were living in the same house. Mr. Vos-
kuil and Mr. Koepe lived in the house next door. We were awakened early in
the morning by a couple of Japanese soldiers who were armed with bayonets stick-
ing out, and a rather amusing dialogue went on. I woke up and answered the
door, and they said something and I pretended that they were looking for a
school. They had some sort of a paper with them. They had their bayonets at
the ready and then there was some question, and they put their bayonets down
and they all pored, p-o-r-e-d, over the paper. Then they asked where certain
individuals were. "Five-five," and I shook my head. Anyway, I called Mr.
Poppen to the door, and we went through the same rigamarole, and finally they
said that we were to go with them. Mr. Veenschoten was a little hard of
hearing, so we just didn't bother him. He was staying in the same house that
Poppen and I were staying in. We were led over to the girls' school which was
six or seven blocks away, and there was a superior officer and a Japanese com-
mon soldier, seated, squatting down behind a machine gun. And drifting into
the compound of the girls' school were various people from various houses.
They were Dutch, and British, and Norwegian, because these were belligerent
on that day, belligerent nations. And then the American personnel were herded
into this place. Then we were led over to an unused, empty Japanese hospital,
and we stayed there overnight. And then throughout the next two or three days
these internees were sent to their own residences under so-called house arrest.
I was the only doctor in the group so I was given an armband. I was allowed
to go to and from the hospital, and I was allowed to go home.

VAN WYK: How long were you under house arrest?

DR. OLTMAN: Oh, until we left to go home. My house arrest was very, simply
very lenient indeed, because I was able to go through the streets.

VAN WYK: The others were actually kept inside their houses?

DR. OLTMAN: The others had to stay inside, yes, in their compound. Not the
house, but within the walls of the compound. I remember I went out one day
and I was dangling my armband and not having it on. A Japanese officer passed
me and he stopped me and "Oi! Oi!", and uttered a few gruff commands and told
me to put on my armband. Our radios were confiscated from our houses. I was
allowed to make calls, house calls on foreign belligerents and foreign neutrals.
The first month or so I was able to garner quite a bit of news because their
radios were not confiscated. So they passed me the news, and then I could
pass it on.

VAN WYK: How were you treated in general by the Japanese? Were they really
rough on you?
DR. OLMAN: They were not. They were not, no. I think they were navy personnel, and navy personnel were actually a little more genteel, not quite as coarse as the army was. That was a characteristic I think that you will find for some time.

VAN WYK: Did you also use your Japanese with them? Did that get you anywhere?

DR. OLMAN: I tried to keep them from knowing that I could understand Japanese. I thought it might come handy. But I didn't learn anything, particularly. I'd forgotten so much, and it was boyhood Japanese--some of it stuck and some of it didn't. There was one other feature, during the first few days belligerent shipping, freighters and whatnot, came into the harbor and the personnel, belligerents, of the belligerent nations were interned in Kulangsu, and we in the hospital provided space for them. They lived in the hospital and the Japanese sent out food for them. Wretched food. They subsisted after a fashion. Oh, I have a picture, but I imagine there were about forty on ships that were on the high seas and were stopped and commandeered by the Japanese.

VAN WYK: And they all stayed at Hope Hospital?

DR. OLMAN: Yes.

VAN WYK: Were you able to get the food and supplies that you needed while you were under house arrest?

DR. OLMAN: When they took over, they took over our bank accounts also, and they were fairly generous in letting us requisition amounts of money for our needs. And food, apparently, did not seem too very difficult to obtain. We didn't eat high on the hog, so to speak, but we had plenty, and our servants could go out and purchase food for us.
VAN WYK: How did you finally return to the United States?

DR. OLTMAN: There apparently was a little hassle among the authorities regarding myself because a day and a half, two days before the vessel departed Amoy to Shanghai--it was going to take personnel to Shanghai--I was called to the Japanese Consulate and advised to go, and I said, "Well, I intended to stay and help with the work in the hospital." I was dealing with a Formosan interpreter who knew Japanese. And he appeared very stern, but the crux of the matter was I found out later I was classified as government personnel, U.S. government personnel. This was because Dr. Holleman and I for years had done vaccinations and inspections of Chinese personnel going from Amoy to the Philippines. And we were classified as Temporary Assistant Surgeon in the U.S. Immigration Service. Both he and I had that title. The immigration department in the United States apparently called for us and they thought it would be a chance to yank some of us out from under the clutches of the Japanese, I don't know. But anyway, that's why in about half a day I hastily made my good-byes, picked up something to wear, and got on the ship.

VAN WYK: Was this just an ordinary ship, or was this like an exchange of prisoners?

OLTMAN: No. No, this was a small Japanese ship. I think it was a freighter, or maybe a passenger ship. It was very small. But it was adequate for traveling up and down the coast. And Americans and British, and whoever there was in Kulangsu who wanted to go home and the Japanese had no point in keeping them, then they'd go. Included--I don't know whether it was on that ship or on the later ship--the American Consul was on board, and was taken to Shanghai. Then in Shanghai we had considerable liberty. We could roam the streets without surveillance. We were housed in the Shanghai American School for
two weeks, then moved to the Columbia Country Club.

VAN WYK: Do you know why they were more lenient in Shanghai?

DR. OLTMAN: I don't know why. They just were. Maybe they thought they didn't want to expend the trouble to coop up that number of people. Anyway, we were pleasantly surprised, because later on, I think in northern China, there were internment camps and I don't think they fared too well. But with us, I remember Koeppel and I roaming the streets trying to buy a pound of coffee. And we succeeded in buying some coffee and then when we finally set sail on the Conte Verde—you know the Gripsholm only came as far as Portuguese East Africa—and the coffee we had on board the Conte Verde had a lot of chickory in it, so we got next to some of the Italian waiters and they brought us hot water and we had a percolator, and then we had good hot coffee. That's a little aside.

VAN WYK: Did you spend some time recovering after you got back to the United States?

DR. OLTMAN: My health, you mean?

VAN WYK: Yes. And was that due to internment? It doesn't sound like your internment was that difficult.

DR. OLTMAN: No. It was really quite easy. I had no trouble then. It was when I came out of China the last time in 1951, I was beat. Not beaten, but I mean, I was in poor health. I think I weighed 119 pounds. My clothes hung like rags on me. Somebody wanted to take a picture of me—before and after. But that's going way ahead of the story.

VAN WYK: But this first time back in '42 when you left China you weren't . . .

DR. OLTMAN: No trouble.
VAN WYK: I'd like to know a little bit about what you were doing during the war years, while you were with the army medical unit in West China. Did you enlist or were you drafted?

DR. OLTMAN: I'll tell you. When I got home on the Gripsholm, I got home in late August, and I had to report to the civilian officer who was appointed by the army to interview medical personnel with a view to finding out whether they were essential in the situation where they found themselves. I was non-essential because I wasn't practicing, and therefore after about a month or so I received an invitation from the Surgeon General that the president would be very happy if I would voluntarily enlist. And through the grapevine the idea was that if a person didn't, he might be enlisted as a non-officer. So it was a polite threat.

So then in April I received my appointment as a major in the U.S. Army, and was sent to Camp White in Oregon, was there a couple months for training, and then came back across to New York and was in camp for just a few days there, and then we embarked. We got on the West Point. It had been a great big U.S. luxury liner. There were maybe about five thousand troops on it. We set sail from New York without escort. The vessel went at a high enough speed that the submarines in those days couldn't catch up with it. It seems to me I left out something in my account here. Well anyway, we landed in Capetown, and we were there for one day and then went to Bombay and disembarked at Bombay. We stayed there just two or three days, went by rail across India, and through Calcutta on the narrow gauge railroad up to Assam. And we stayed in Assam during the rainy season, and finally we were flown across the hump and made camp near Kunming, China. While were were in Kunming we were in training, learning to climb mountains and keep in condition because we were going to a high altitude camp. Where we were in Assam it was only about three or four hundred feet above sea level. So we did some hardening training. Then
our field hospital was separated into three units. There was one officer in charge of each of the three separate hospitals that had been functioning as one large hospital.

A team went ahead to scout out the land, so to speak. They called for our other hospitals to come on ahead and we were then located in three separate places between the Salween and the Mekong Rivers. We set up camp and hospital tents, and whatever buildings we could find in our area, and we began to take care of sick and wounded Chinese soldiers. But as the American personnel in the valley where we were situated increased, our work became increasingly taking care of American personnel. I remember one case where five or six American soldiers walked through from Assam to where we were on the China side of the area, and they all died of scrub typhus. It was terribly bad about that but there was not a thing we could do. If we’d had certain medicines that they have now that wouldn’t have happened necessarily.

VAN WYK: But at that time it wasn’t a case of a lack of supplies, but just that the medicine didn’t exist?

DR. OLTMAN: It didn’t exist. Army life was interesting. At times it was unpleasant, at times it was enjoyable. We weren’t in combat. We were non-combat troops. From the three hospitals, when the fighting got a little warmer, there were surgical teams, and I was on one surgical team following along behind the front line. There was some risk there, but not too much. Not too bad.

VAN WYK: You mentioned that the other two unit commanders also had missionary experience?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes, true. Dr. Yates was himself a medical missionary under the
Presbyterians in North China, and Major Baker was the son of, I think, a Baptist missionary in Swatow.

VAN WYK: Do you think that they got to China in the same way you did? Through the same kind of a request from the government?

DR. OLTMAN: I wouldn't doubt it.

VAN WYK: You said you worked some with Chinese soldiers. What can you say about their morale?

DR. OLTMAN: The Chinese possess a great deal of patience and a great deal of inured to hardships, and to poor living conditions. It's hard to know what their morale was. It cannot have been high. There were certain units in Burma and Assam with General Stilwell, where the soldiers were well-fed and well-trained, and were proper troops. That is opposed to the ones that we got on the China side. In our emergency team, operating team, behind the fighting lines we saw a lot of wounds and treated them as best as we could. And here the Chinese soldiers must have stood for a whole lot of misery. And evacuations was a big problem. We'd fix them up to send on to base hospitals and things like that, and because of difficulties in logistics, in moving the wounded to the base hospitals there where they'd pile up in places and this led to a lot of hardship on these wounded. Probably some of them died on the way.

VAN WYK: Were they getting decent diets through the Chinese Army?

DR. OLTMAN: I don't know, but I would just imagine that they were not.

VAN WYK: Were these only Nationalist soldiers that you came in contact with?
DR. OLTMAN: Only Nationalist soldiers.

VAN WYK: You never were around the Communist soldiers?

DR. OLTMAN: They were hundreds of miles north.

VAN WYK: How about the American soldiers out there? Did they enjoy being in China? Did they like the cause?

DR. OLTMAN: (laughter) On the whole I think they probably detested it. There were some who were more perceptive, whether they were officers or not, who generally took an interest in their surroundings, in the Chinese people, and tried to understand them and appreciate them. But that was only a minority. Everybody else quote "bitched" about it.

VAN WYK: After you left China and your service in the army there, what did you do for the two years before you returned to China from 1945 to 1947?

DR. OLTMAN: After I got home I waited around for a month and a half or two months, and then rejoined the clinic that I had worked in before I went to the army, in Newton, Kansas. And then I was with that clinic and I worked oh, from December, what year would that be? '45. December '45 to about June or July '47.

VAN WYK: What prompted you to return to China then?

DR. OLTMAN: The Board said they wanted us. And we were still missionaries at heart.

VAN WYK: So when you returned to China you went to Lyngyen?

DR. OLTMAN: Right.
VAN WYK: To open up an old mission station.

DR. OLTMAN: Or Leng-na. I was talking with Helen about that, and I think the hospital was running after a fashion before we got there.

VAN WYK: Under Chinese administration?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes.

VAN WYK: How long had the mission station been closed?

DR. OLTMAN: Gee, I don't remember. Dr. Holleman and others were chased out of there in 1929, and I don't think that was reopened until after the war, maybe a year before we got there.

VAN WYK: But it had been open for a while before you got there?

DR. OLTMAN: It had been open for a while before. Maybe it was longer than that. I certainly don't remember.

VAN WYK: I was going to ask how the missionaries were received back into that area, but you weren't the first ones in, so you wouldn't know.

DR. OLTMAN: Helen? How long before we arrived in Leng-na to work there was the hospital open, do you know?

MRS. OLTMAN: I think it had been open more than a year.

VAN WYK: And missionaries, then, had also been in Leng-na for that period of time?

MRS. OLTMAN: No, the deVelders were the first ones there, and they had been
there . . . Let's see, we got there in the fall of '47. I think that they had been there two months.

DR. OLTMAN: Two months, yes.

VAN WYK: Were you welcomed quite readily back into that area as missionaries?

DR. OLTMAN: Oh, yes. By all means.

MRS. OLTMAN: In fact, I think that's the reason that they went, because there had been a request for help. And the people of Leng-na felt, the church felt that things were just opening up and ready to go, and they wanted schools started, and they wanted the hospital opened again. It was a very progressive community.

VAN WYK: What all had to be done to the hospital in order to start working there again?

DR. OLTMAN: Restock it with supplies, build up the staff and workers, and improved the physical plant with repairs and then with new construction. That on a thumbnail sketch indicates what had to be done.

VAN WYK: Had the hospital just gone into disrepair, or had it actually been looted and destroyed?

DR. OLTMAN: No, it had not been destroyed.

MRS. OLTMAN: I think it had been used for a while, but just as a barracks, that sort of thing. So it hadn't been destroyed, but all the floors and walls were dirty. It needed cleaning up in that way. When we got there there were even beds, just the plain wooden beds, you know.
Van Wyk: What kind of a staff did you get together, then to work with you?

Dr. Oltmann: How many nurses did we have? About four or five?

Mrs. Oltmann: Well, at first we just had Tek-I, the doctor's wife, and then we got two more. There was another girl there for a little while. We had four graduate nurses for a short while. But mostly we had three. And they were all Hope Hospital graduates.

Dr. Oltmann: We had two doctors, two Chinese doctors, and myself. Then later, one of the doctors left and we got a new doctor in.

Mrs. Oltmann: When did Dr. Young come?

Dr. Oltmann: I don't know, but he stayed with us.

Mrs. Oltmann: He was there at least a year.

Dr. Oltmann: About a year. Dr. Tai, the other doctor, was there about two years and a half.

Van Wyk: Was the physical plant there much larger than the hospital in Tong-an and Sio-khe?

Dr. Oltmann: It was somewhat larger, yes.

Van Wyk: I'm just surprised at the number of workers you had in the hospital in Leng-na as compared to how many people you had working in Tong-an and Sio-khe.

Mrs. Oltmann: Of course in Tong-an the hospital was not as active that year, and so that there weren't many patients. The staff could handle the work.

Dr. Oltmann: In each case they were smaller communities to work in. Leng-na was a much larger community.
Mrs. Oltman: It's a larger city, and drew from a larger area.

Van Wyk: Had the Communists actually been in control of Leng-na during this time?

Dr. Oltman: Oh, yes.

Mrs. Oltman: Not all this time, but . . .

Van Wyk: For parts of this time, though?

Dr. Oltman: From the time that the missionaries had to flee it was empty.

Van Wyk: Were you aware of people who sympathized with the Communist cause after the Communists left Leng-na? Were you aware of people in town who still retained their sympathies, or if they ever had sympathies towards the Communists?

Dr. Oltman: I don't think we knew about that. I think we were aware of the fact that there were plenty of Communist agents probably in the city and out in the countryside.

Mrs. Oltman: But the first two years we were in Leng-na I didn't ever have a feeling of unease about having to be careful what I did or said. And I think most of the people didn't, although as Ted said, they knew that there were Communist agents, and that there were probably Communist cadres just not very far away, that could be immediately be mobilized.

Dr. Oltman: Well, toward the end, before they actually came in, they requisitioned from the business people. "We need so much black cloth, we need so much this. Hand it over or else." We never knew about those things, except that we heard they were going on.
MRS. OLTMAN: And when they did come in, the actual movement that came in one morning with an army, they were unarmed, and they came in very peacefully. But they were made up of groups of local people from villages around, and the people in Leng-na knew many of them, and knew that they just put on their uniforms and came in with the group like this to take over. But there was no battle in our area, fortunately.

VAN WYK: So then when the Communists pulled out, the people in the surrounding areas did retain their sympathies, or do you feel that . . .

MRS. OLTMAN: Yes, I think they did somewhat. I don't know whether it was for the Communist ideal or thought, or whether it was just the practical thing to do. And I think it is true that the Communists in Leng-na had won the sympathies of the people as opposed to the Nationalist soldiers who did occupy Leng-na for about a year. They had the small company that were out there at the fort edge of our hill, and many others were stationed in town. They had to live on the country. They weren't supported as an army is supported, you know, and they had won not much sympathy from the townspeople and the villages around because they had to scrounge for what they got. They didn't have very much money, and so they just took things from the stores and didn't pay for them. And that sort of thing, you know, doesn't win many friends.

DR. OLTMAN: Are you speaking of the Nationalists or the Communists?

MRS. OLTMAN: The Nationalists.

DR. OLTMAN: Yes, that's true. Well, they were a defeated army, and a defeated army is more apt to loot and make away with material things because discipline has fallen down.
MRS. OLTMAN: Well, one thing that was very interesting to me, of course, was Communist propaganda, because now I was seeing it first hand. The people in Leng-na, many of them said, "Well, we don't know. They say this is the people's army, and that they're not going to steal from the people. They're not even going to take a needle and a thread." And that was repeated several times. It was the acme of not taking anything. That "They are the people, and they're for the people. It certainly sounds much better than the soldiers that have been occupying our country." And so they were winning, by their propaganda, winning friendship.

VAN WYK: These are the kind of things that were being said before the Communists actually came in?

MRS. OLTMAN: Yes, before they actually came in, while the Nationalist soldiers were still occupying the town. We kept hearing rumors that the Communists were going to come in, you know. Everybody had heard that there might be a battle. But the Communists were sending out this propaganda that they wouldn't be harmful.

VAN WYK: Were people not that afraid to express pro-Communist sentiments, then, in Leng-na?

MRS. OLTMAN: I don't think they were afraid of it, do you? Not at that time.

DR. OLTMAN: I imagine that they just didn't commit themselves. Certainly they weren't going to express pro-Communist sentiments before any Nationalist soldiers to hear.

VAN WYK: But they would be willing to say it to you or to their friends and neighbors?
MRS. OLTMAN: Yes, just in a small group. They wouldn't say it very publicly, probably.

DR. OLTMAN: I think that they would say, "Well, if the Communists come in it can't be any worse than what the situation is now."

VAN WYK: And just not commit themselves to either side?

DR. OLTMAN: That's right.

VAN WYK: You mentioned that in the summer of '49, before the Communists came in, you lost some of your key medical staff due to the Communists, or the threat of Communism.

DR. OLTMAN: Dr. Tai left us and went down to Amoy, and was hired by Hope Hospital. Dr. Yang . . .

MRS. OLTMAN: Dr. Yang developed T.B, and was not active part of that year.

DR. OLTMAN: He left us, but how much of it was because of fear of the Communists and how much was his health, I don't know. We had another doctor, I forget his name, who stayed with us, and was there when the Communists took over. And I mean took over, because they really took over the running and the administration of our hospital. The whole staff were required to have self-criticism meetings, and their propaganda speeches, and intensive propaganda meetings. Things like that took up so much time.

VAN WYK: Those who did leave before the Communists came in, what exactly were they afraid of in connection with the Communists? Was it because of their affiliation with the American missionaries, or was it their property they were afraid of losing?
DR. OLTMAN: I think the doctors maybe figured that, according to Communists, doctors are all rich—like they figure in this country. I think they were afraid of finding themselves in a situation where they'd have to do just what the Communists told them to do. Even worse than that maybe was the "process of re-education"... I think everywhere, I mean throughout the Communist world, that's true. The bourgeoisie, and the monied classes, and the educated classes were objects of special scrutiny and special treatment, not exactly favorable.

VAN WYK: Did you and the children leave after the Communists came in or just before?

MRS. OLTMAN: We were there for a year.

VAN WYK: You were there for a full year with them, too?

MRS. OLTMAN: Well, yes, it was almost. They came in in the early fall, I believe September, and we were there until the next June. We would have stayed longer, but we ran into the problem of what to do with our family. Our daughter Kathy had been in Shanghai American School, and she was evacuated from there the spring of '48 when the Communists took over Shanghai. And then she went to Baguio, Philippines. She, and David, and John Angus all were sent to Baguio. And so what were they going to do during the summer of 1950? You see, they couldn't come back to Leng-na. David had graduated and gone on home, and John and our daughter Kathy went to Hong Kong and were staying with friends there. And very soon it became evident that they couldn't even get back to Baguio, because the Philippines were not taking anybody from China because so many of the Chinese were fleeing from China to get away before the Communists came as they were moving down the coast. And so, what were we going to do with her?
So we resolved that our family would try to go to Hong Kong for the summer and then see what arrangements could be made, perhaps have her go home to America to school, and we come back to Leng-na in the fall. But we were not allowed to have permits like that. We could have permits to leave, but we couldn't come back.

DR. OLTMAN: A little bit of anecdotal value here, when our daughter Kathy was evacuated from Shanghai, it was on an American hospital ship, the Repose, and Miss Voorhorst, her cousin, was a nurse on that ship, but they never got together. They didn't know. (laughter) A missed opportunity!

MRS. OLTMAN: We really had no trouble to get permits to go down to Kulangsu. Ted's was limited to ten days, isn't that right?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes.

MRS. OLTMAN: And when we got down there we found that there was no way to leave Kulangsu. The ships were not coming into the harbor which was blockaded by Nationalist ships, and there was just no way to get out of Kulangsu, so he tried to get Ted's permit lengthened, but they refused to do it. He had to go back to Leng-na, or lose his return permit. Then we, my son and I, stayed there, and that's the summer we lived with the Kleinjans. We all lived in the same house and ate together all summer. And we really had no trouble, except they just quietly put us off all the time. Ets Kleinjans did most of the talking because he talked Mandarin, and he'd go over to Amoy, you know, every two or three days, and ask about a ship and traveling. We were told when a ship came, if the captain would take us, we could go. It just went on and on like that. But we had no personal problems at all when we lived in Kulangsu, although the Communists were in control, except we couldn't travel without permission.
VAN WYK: But your work continued up in Leng-na even under the Communists?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes.

VAN WYK: You said they were in control?

DR. OLTMAN: They were pretty strict with us. They made us inventory everything in the hospital including the pins that fell on the floor. And it hampered us some in our work because our medical supplies were, you might say, under lock and key, and if we needed something, why, we'd tell them and they doled it out to us. So it kind of slowed down our work. I was held responsible for everything material in the hospital, and I was also in a sense responsible to see that whatever was done was done in a proper fashion.

Toward the end of the year, 1950, the Amoy University moved faculty and students to Leng-na. They occupied the deVelder's mission house, which was empty, and soon told me to move to the hospital so that my house could be used for faculty residences. I had applied to get out of there and come on home because my colleagues and friends said to me quietly, "Don't do any major operations. If anything goes wrong, why, it's pretty rough on you." So, actually, for about six months I just had small quarters in the hospital and did no work at all. And about every three or four days, as Helen said about Ets, I went to the police station and asked when my permit would come through. Well, they said, "It hasn't come through yet. It'll be coming."

And the trouble was that there was the local group of Communists, and there was the upper echelon provincial area in Foochow, and some of them—which party I didn't know—wanted to take over the hospital and run it, and the other faction wanted the hospital to continue with its present staff, and employees. And until that was resolved, why, I was just hanging in the wind. And when they finally made up their minds, why, (snaps fingers) just like that I could go.
VAN WYK: When they had all the Communist self-criticism meetings, were you ever invited to join or come?

DR. OLMAN: Oh, no.

VAN WYK: Definitely told to stay out?

DR. OLMAN: I hadn't even considered the matter of wanting to attend. I wanted to make myself as scarce as possible. Almost, but I did have a little feeling of "Let's see what they'll do", because everyday I'd take a walk out of the city and walk back again.

VAN WYK: This was beyond where you were supposed to go?

DR. OLMAN: Nobody had said I couldn't, so I just did it anyway. And also I started visiting a few of the drug shops in town, but I stopped that because it may throw suspicion upon them. So I stopped that.

VAN WYK: Were either you or any of the other missionaries in Leng-na ever held up for criticism, or put on trial?

DR. OLMAN: I think that one time there was one particular Communist official who was appointed to oversee the hospital and anything to do with the foreigners and their property and whatnot, and he held a public meeting in the church, I think, and he said that Aw Tien-su, my Chinese name, was not a specially good doctor, and made some derogatory remarks about me. I heard about it through my friends that had gone. That's all. I was never held up in person in censure or anything like that such as incurred to Poppen. They stopped short of that.

MRS. OLMAN: There never was anything like that about the Angus's either, was there?
DR. OLTMAN: When the Angus's were there still, and I think the Korean War was headed up at that time, this man read the law to Angus and myself, and to the effect that "Dorobun", that was Truman, and "Makasa", MacArthur, were very bad. The American people were good. They were O.K., but the government and the military were very bad.

VAN WYK: And this was from a Communist soldier?

DR. OLTMAN: Not a soldier. He was the appointed person who took care of, oversee the work at the hospital and everything. And Angus is a big, big, tall fellow like that, you know, and this little fellow was was about, came this high on me (to his chin) and Angus looked down this way in a tolerant fashion, and this little fellow was reading the law to us. It was ridiculous. (laughter)

MRS. OLTMAN: Bill Angus could be so mild and moderate. I can just see--not even the expression of his face would look as though he were being critical. The year before this, during the year that the Communists were in control, the women in the church, we went about our visiting and went out a couple times to villages outside the city, and to people in the church area. And I asked them, a couple time I said, "Now, are you sure you want me to go?" to the pastor's wife. She said, "Oh, yes, we do." I said, "Well now, if you don't want to be seen with me, why please, tell me so." No, no, that was fine. No problem at all. It didn't seem to be. I suppose during the year about five times we went out, and twice out some little distance to little villages, doing church calling.

VAN WYK: So you didn't feel a drop off in your Chinese friends?

MRS. OLTMAN: No.
VAN WYK: How about you as you stayed there a little bit longer, and a little bit longer, you said you stopped going to drugstores. Is this true about your friends, too? Did they stop seeing you?

DR. OLTMAN: I remember one friend who was a professor in Amoy University which moved up to Leng-na, and I visited him a few times at the little house down in the city. I was afraid for him. He was quite frank in his criticism of the Communists and what they were doing and so forth. I was afraid the walls had ears and would make trouble for him. No, I think I was sensitive to what might happen to them, and I think I, in the main, avoided too much contact.

VAN WYK: Did they take over your house when they came in?

DR. OLTMAN: Yes. Not right away.

MRS. OLTMAN: It was after we had gone. Ted was still living there.

VAN WYK: Were you still in the house?

DR. OLTMAN: I was living in the doctor's house. And the Angus's, let's see, I guess they weren't evicted from their house, while I was evicted, and I had headquarters then in a section of the hospital, which was comfortable. Before I moved I sold some possessions in the house, and there was some furniture. We had a gas burning refrigerator, and one of our local doctors bought that from us. And I was able to subsist on money I got from selling various articles.

VAN WYK: Otherwise they had frozen all of your income?

DR. OLTMAN: I don't think I had anything in the bank.

MRS. OLTMAN: Did they confiscate anything that was left in the house?
DR. OLTMAN: I don't remember. Whatever was in the house that I was able to sell, why, that was fine. If I wasn't I didn't care for it. I remember—this is also something of anecdotal value, maybe—before I moved out of the house I took my army insignia and made a little package of them, and put them under the crawl-space of our outside kitchen, and I had the American flag and my full uniform, and I burned them in the stove. I hated to do it, but it might have given me trouble because Jack Hill had a pair of army trousers and they raised all Ned about that. "Where'd you get those things? The army issued them." "No, no," Jack said, "I bought that." "No. Your army gave it to you." "No," he said. They were his pinks, his officers' pinks, and you have to buy them yourself. And that raised a little hassle there. I knew ahead of time that it would cause me trouble.

VAN WYK: Did you have any trouble, finally, when you did get out?

DR. OLTMAN: Oh, just delays, that's all. Examination of baggage, turning them inside out, harsh words. No privation.

VAN WYK: How about in your exit from China?

MRS. OLTMAN: No real trouble, but just fearful that there might be. Our baggage had been taken down to Amoy, and we had packed several trunks, you know, with the bedding, and our Chinese rugs. They were stored in the godown over on the Amoy side. And so after a while when we were expecting to get our permits to go, they said, "Well, you better have your baggage examined so it will be ready to go, if you can go." So the Kleinjans and we, and—let's see, I believe somebody else, I guess the Legges too, a British couple who also went with us—were told to go over there on a certain day and we did. We had to open everything, and they went through everything, and they opened every trunk—just fine-combed it. There were about eight or ten men—
think they were customs officials--and they questioned us about some of the pictures, photographs we had. They'd look at the thing, "What's this?" "Oh, nothing." But they really pawed through everything. So it ended by being all right. They closed it up and sealed it, and they didn't make any more fuss about it. They did question pictures--some that I had, some that the Kleinjans had in their trunks. I had a picture of Ted's army unit, I believe it was, and they pulled that out, "What's this? These men in uniform?" But it ended by being no trouble at all. So they said after we left, or when we left, that these would go on the first ship that went out that could take baggage. And the baggage was in Hong Kong when we got there. I thought I'd never see them again. I thought that was it. But they were all in Hong Kong when we got there. And the other day I got a letter that Wally deVelder had written. He followed our group by one week. And I had taken a trunk of his along with my things. He said the same thing, that they went through his baggage, but he really had no problem at all, and he was thanking me for the trunk, that it had gotten through without any trouble. I suppose that if they had found something that was suspicious they could have made a lot of trouble about it, but it seemed to be that they were just exerting authority. They were having to create an image, I think, probably for other Chinese and for us, too.

VAN WYK: There are some things I was going to talk to you about. Your husband said you would know more about them. One of those, while we're on the topic of Communists, was the Communist invasion of Sio-khe in 1932. Do you remember that at all, how you were evacuated, conditions ... ?

MRS. OLTMAN: Very well. (laughter) Very well. In fact I have a story of it that I wrote up somewhere, but I guess Peggy has a copy of that. In Sio-khe we kept hearing rumors, that there was trouble. And the Chinese were
concerned, too, because they knew that any of them who were land holders or who had any position would also be suspect if the Communists did come in. And they didn't know very much about Communists, at this time. The Leng-na people later, you see, had much more of an idea of what Communism was and what they would do because they had been occupied for years. But there in Sio-khe, they didn't. They were just concerned about it and they knew that foreigners were liable for persecution, and that they really were persecuting the landowners and people of any means. Our buildings there just stood out, boldly different and better than anything else. So, one morning I had had the carpenter come up. He was making a slide for our children, a slippery-slide, you know, and he said to me, "Have you heard anything from Changchow?" And I told him no, I hadn't. Well he said, "The rumors are that the Communists are coming this way today or tomorrow, and that Changchow is already taking steps to evacuate people." We hadn't heard anything about it. Shortly thereafter--an hour or so--we did get a messenger from Changchow saying that that was a fact. And there was, I think as I remember, something from Mr. Veenschoten suggesting that we move out if we could and come down to Changchow while the boats were still running on the river. So the Voskuils and we got together, and we packed up a few things that we wanted to keep above all else, you know, and we got a boat ready, and it was afternoon before we got started. The Voskuils were still packing some of their things on another boat which was to follow. We went down the river on this boat and tied up at one of the places along the bank where boats tied up for the night. About the time we tied up, a runner came in from Sio-khe, who had already come down, and said, "Don't go any farther. Changchow has been occupied by the Communists."

DR. OLTMAN: A runner on a bicycle.
MRS. OLTMAN: Yes, I believe he was. And that the Voskuils had not been ready to start until this message had come and so they were staying in the house for the night, but we should come back. So the next day in the morning we went back up the river again to our houses. The Voskuils in the meantime had made arrangements for us to continue on a boat upriver, about twelve miles to Poa-ah, which was a village where Ted had been a number of times for clinics. He used to take clinics up there, and the Voskuils knew it well. There was a church there where we would stay. And so we did. We just sailed right past our houses there in Sio-khe and went on up to Poa-ah. And we stayed there during the night. Actually we stayed a couple of nights, didn't we? Two or three nights, I guess.

DR. OLTMAN: Yes. I went up on Sunday, and Voskuil showed up Sunday night.

MRS. OLTMAN: That's right. We went ahead; the men stayed in Sio-khe.

DR. OLTMAN: Because of the bad news. I went up there just to visit them over Sunday. Mr. Voskuil followed me by about six hours.

MRS. OLTMAN: That's right. Ted came up, and Mr. Voskuil came late that evening, ten o'clock or so. It was very late for travel in that country. He came in and he really was quite upset, and who was with him? Was the bok-su with him?

DR. OLTMAN: I don't remember.

MRS. OLTMAN: Somebody was with him, anyway. They had left hastily because bandits had come in and it turned out that it was the forerunners of the Communists. And so that was the start, and all together we were on the way from that morning till we got to Kulangsu for two weeks. We stayed different
places, little villages, and we stayed there two or three nights; and then we went somewhere for a day's walk; we stayed somewhere else, then we went to what they call a round house. It's a village that lives inside a big round compound with high walls. They said that this carpenter who had first brought us the word had an aunt or somebody who owned one of these little sections in the round house. She had died a few months before, and we could use that. We went in, and it was three stories high, and we had a kitchen, and bedroom, and dining room on the first floor; and then a big bedroom on the second floor; and the third floor was partly open, and I don't think we used that, as I remember. They said this was an exceptionally dirty old woman who lived here, Clouds of dust came up from the mosquito netting off the beds, and we got it washed down and cleaned up, and we lived there for about four days because to go farther on we had to go through the territory of the head bandit who was in control. Then I got very perturbed, showing my extreme ignorance and impatience, because I thought Mr. Vosquil didn't know what he was talking about, but I found out later he was very wise; he knew the Chinese; he knew how to deal with them; he knew just exactly when to move and when to let them take the lead, you know. And he really managed it beautifully. They negotiated back and forth with this bandit, and finally one day they said he would give us safe conduct down the road. And we started out. Oh, that was a beautiful day of tramping in the mountains! I think we had three sedan chairs. Mrs. Vosquil had to ride because she had very bad feet, and the Bible woman, the head of the school, and the doctor's wife and I traded around the other three chairs. Sometimes we walked. But it was a beautiful walk through those mountains.

DR. OLTMAN: Well, how about Peggy and Mary?
MRS. OLMAN: Yes, Peggy was three years old and Mary Vosquil was five years old, and they were carried in rice baskets on the ends of a pole. (laughter) And Linda, who was twelve, was a trooper. She walked right along with everybody else all the way—Linda Vosquil. And so we came into the village that night, to this bandit’s village. We’d gotten through without any trouble, you know; it was just like a big long walk through the mountains—a sightseeing walk. He entertained then, I think he entertained the men for a feast, didn’t he?

DR. OLMAN: I don’t remember that. I remember I did a little something medical for a relative or something.

MRS. OLMAN: The bandit was not well. And later we learned that that was the only day we could have gotten through. Before that, he didn’t have control over all the roads, or he did have but would not let anybody go through. And the next day some bandits and Communists came and cut off the village.

VAN WYK: Now, you say that these bandits were working in conjunction with the Communists?

DR. OLMAN: No. Helen said something that sounded like that.

MRS. OLMAN: I really don’t know. I think that they were negotiating to keep their power and their control as much as they possibly could, and negotiating rather than fighting the bandits. And I think Mr. Vosquil really knew that. In discussing it with the Chinese, he knew how to find out, and he knew when was the day to move, although it was on the advice of the Chinese, of course. So that night we stayed in a Chinese home there in that little village. No, we didn’t stay there all night either. That’s the night we got on the boat, wasn’t it?
DR. OLMAN: At Un-Sio? We slept on the floor in that house. And then we got on a boat and sailed on the river.

MRS. OLMAN: A little coast steamer that was to go to Amoy. And then we began to realize how serious it was because that steamer was very over-crowded. There wasn't an inch of space in it, and it listed down like this.

VAN WYK: All refugees?

MRS. OLMAN: Yes. People also that were leaving as well as we. We hadn't realized that before, or known it, but the people from Un-Sio there were leaving to go to Kulangsu because Kulangsu was of course an international settlement, and they felt Amoy would be safe from the Communist drive, which it was, too. They came, the Communists came down to Changchow and part way down to the coast, but never got to Amoy. And that was quite a trip that night. After midnight...

DR. OLMAN: A coolie slept in Helen's lap, I think.

MRS. OLMAN: No, the coolie was sleeping on Mrs. Vosquilt's lap. (laughter) He was sitting beside her, you know, and he got sleepier, and finally he laid there with his head in her lap. We had a quilt on the deck, and I slept on the outside because I was afraid Peggy would roll off. And Linda and Peggy and I were all sleeping on that quilt, and we lay down. We slept very fitfully, you know—and one time when I woke, here my feet were all tangled up with the feet of some man that was at the other end of the blanket. (laughter)

DR. OLMAN: The ship had a terrible list...

MRS. OLMAN: A terrible list.

DR. OLMAN: ... and the night just as calm. Just like a pond, I think it would have gone over with a little push.
MRS. OLMAN: And they had two euphemistically called staterooms (laughter) down below deck which they said that we as foreigners could have, but we took one look and said, "No thank you, we'll sleep on deck." They were close and very smelly as down below would be with crowded, crowded quarters, so we slept up on deck. We made the trip and pulled into Amoy about daylight.

VAN WYK: How long did you stay in Amoy, then, before you went back to Sio-khe?

DR. OLMAN: We went to Japan first.

MRS. OLMAN: Yes, all summer. But we couldn't get back right away because . . . I forget how long the Communists were there.

DR. OLMAN: I don't know. Not too long.

MRS. OLMAN: I'd say two or three weeks at most. Maybe not even that long.

DR. OLMAN: They got as far as the town . . . What's the name of the town where the boats started? The boats went that far and then from there on you went by truck, or by bus. They got that far and no further.

MRS. OLMAN: Yes. But you see, all of our mission personnel were in Kulangsu, and it was very crowded. So the suggestion was that anybody who was due for a vacation, which we were allowed every two years—a vacation off the island—that maybe we could take a vacation, so we—it was our second summer—decided to go to Japan. So we had a very nice summer in Japan, with Ted's family.

VAN WYK: So by the time you came back the Communists were gone.

MRS. OLMAN: Yes. We came back in August or the first of September, and by that time things were ready to be opened up again.
DR. OLTMAN: All this time that we were traipsing around in the backwoods, in the mountains, and so forth; folks in Kulangsu didn't know where we were, and they were very anxious, and they didn't know what had happened to us, whether we'd been captured or whatnot. When we finally did arrive and they found out that that little boat in the harbor contained us, and we got a sampan and went to the hospital jetty, we were greeted like the long lost cousins of years ago. Dr. Holleman kissed me or something like that, I believe. Do you remember that? That was quite a greeting we had.

MRS. OLTMAN: Yes I do. I remember particularly I had a suede jacket. I'd been wearing that night, and Peggy had gotten seasick and had vomited all over me, and you know what it smelled like when we got off the jetty. Clarence just put his arms around me like this, dirty suede jacket and all. I thought, well, they're certainly glad to see us. (laughter) So that was really quite an experience. It really was very eye-opening. I enjoyed so much of seeing the country. You see, it was only the second summer that we were there, and so it was a real opening way of knowing how Chinese lived in the villages.

VAN WYK: It sounds like you weren't too scared about your own well-being at that point.

MRS. OLTMAN: Well, we weren't most of the time. Once or twice we had some scary moments.

DR. OLTMAN: I think at times we were just blissfully ignorant.

MRS. OLTMAN: We were. I think that Mr. Voskuil handled things so well that we didn't always realize how near to troubles we were. I think he did, and I think Mrs. Voskuil knew. Of course, they were old hands, and he had traveled the country so much and knew people, and knew Chinese. Chinese used to say that if they heard him talking and didn't see him, didn't know
he was a foreigner, they wouldn't know it because his Chinese was very good, very idiomatic. And he knew how to talk, you know, with the Chinese, which was wonderful, so I'm sure that he was much more aware than we were that there were times which were really dangerous.

We had one very bad time. Mrs. Voskuil had so much trouble with her feet, so she just couldn't walk. We had tried to get chair bearers and they had promised to come, but they couldn't get there. And if we were going to walk to—that was when we left this first village, Poa-ah—we had to get started or we wouldn't get there before dark. And of course it was unthinkable to be on the road after dark because there was banditry all around. So we all just went off and left her sitting there, trusting the Lord that that chair would come. And that really was kind of bad, but the chair came. She made the trip and we all got together that night. And then one night we were in the church there, and the Communists came in and occupied the church below us.

DR. OLTMAN: Not Communists, the Nationalist soldiers.

MRS. OLTMAN: The fleeing Nationalist soldiers. And our coolie, we had a young boy who was our coolie, who was carrying baskets and things, you know, and I never saw anybody else who really turned green. He was so afraid, he was green. He just thought he was going to be nabbed to go with the soldiers. He was afraid for his life. So we took him upstairs, and the cook, too—the Voskuil's cook—went with us, otherwise how could we have ever gotten along when we needed help with things. You can't hide us, you know. We just looked different, and talked different, and we would just stick out. And so without help like that we could never have managed.

DR. OLTMAN: Another little anecdote here. As we went through some of these villages, they were particularly interested in the children, Mary and Peggy,
and one of them looked at Peggy's eyes, which were blue, and said, "Can she see?" Because in certain eye diseases that the Chinese have there is sort of a bluish film over the cornea, and then it gives the whole eye a bluish appearance. So the people thought that she had this trouble with her eyes, and she couldn't see.

MRS. OLTMAN: Because at these villages where we stayed they had never seen a non-Chinese. I remember one time when we were walking along, we went past not a real village but a big house where a multiple family lived. And the young women, several of them, came running out to see these foreigners going by, and I heard them talking about us and they said, "That's a man," pointing to me. I was wearing a knit cap that had a roll around the edge, and I realized what they thought it was, a man with his queue wrapped around his head. Some of the men in the country still wore this, and they'd wrap it around their heads during the day. They didn't know whether we were men or women or what. They were so curious. But they fluttered away like butterflies when they saw somebody they thought was scary. Then they'd come out again and get curious and look at our clothes. It was a very fascinating experience. There was a brief notice about us in the New York Times. My sister saw it. She was in New York at the time.

VAN WYK: About how the missionaries had been lost and found, and the New York Times printed this? Great!

MRS. OLTMAN: I might add this about that experience that we had, and the Changchow people, too. People came in and looted our houses. And the Communists, of course--now, we say Communists, I don't know who they were, but they were at least the followers that were following along with them. Actually, it was the big march northwest that was starting, you know. And so they came in and they said, "Here, these houses are so big and all this, and this belongs
to the people. Come and help yourselves." And so they did. They came and helped themselves. And many people took things and kept them for us, or took them and then kindly returned them later. Our cook and his wife were telling us how they came in and they said people said, "Come in.' So we just came in and looked around, too, and we carried off everything we possibly could." They carried off bedding, and the cook carried our kitchen stove which was a three burner Perfection cook stove, little oil burner. I said, "How did you do that?" He was a small man. He said, "Oh, my wife helped. I squatted down and she helped me. She raised it up on my shoulders and we carried it off."

VAN WYK: So they saved all those things for you?

MRS. OLTMAN: They saved a lot of things like that for us, and then they came back to us. But some things, materials particularly, were too useful to be returned, and I saw children walking around with pants made out of my dining room drapes. The Changchow people the same thing—saw many of their drapes and blankets and things like that made into clothes for the children, or adults, too.

VAN WYK: I have some very general questions. What do you feel were the primary objectives of the R.C.A. mission in China, and to what extent were they met?

DR. OLTMAN: I'm thinking... I think the R.C.A. mission at the time we went there felt that the mission had gone a long way in preparing the work which they had started: the institutions, the organizations. And the R.C.A mission had gone a long way in schooling the native Chinese to take over something which had been patiently built up and was very much worthwhile. They had this idea when they began work in China, and by the time we'd been there
several years--ten years, fifteen years--through all these vicissitudes, why, all of a sudden one woke up and realized that this aim was really being fulfilled, that schools, school boards were changed, and Chinese Nationals were in charge of schools, the ministerial associations. The Chinese and the foreigners were on an equal basis, an equal standing. There was nobody who necessarily felt superior or felt that they had more knowledge of a certain situation. And in general, I think, it was that given favorable circumstances of peace, which were not actually given, these would have come to further fruition and a great deal of progress would have been made. How do you feel about it, Helen?

MRS. OLMAN: Well, I think that the R.C.A. mission was very strongly evangelical oriented, that the primary purpose was to bring the gospel, and to give the Chinese people an opportunity to come to know Jesus and to know the story of salvation, and to know God and worship God. The way to do this had been through these organizations because that was the best way that most people could be reached. But the schools, for instance, the girls' school, had a very strong impetus to bring the gospel message to all the students. This was true of the hospitals, too. The nurse training school that I know was the one which Jean Nienhuis had started at Hope Hospital, and she was such a devout and practicing Christian that that was really the aim of her life, to make these nurses good nurses to serve their Lord and to come to know Jesus. And the churches I think were the same, very evangelical. All of these institutions which had been built up were motivated by the gospel.

VAN WYK: When you look at the organizations that were started, you say that given peace, they probably would have gone quite far in being put under the control of the Chinese. Do you feel that in the hospital sufficient steps were taken to bring the Chinese to that position?
DR. OLMAN: Yes, I think so.

VAN WYK: So that by the time you left there was hope that the hospital could continue on its own?

DR. OLMAN: Given a healthy atmosphere, yes, instead of the deterioration in political conditions throughout all of China which was true in our area also.

VAN WYK: Would you like to see a renewal of the missionary movement in China?

DR. OLMAN: Yes.

VAN WYK: Under what sort of a form?

DR. OLMAN: Any form which furthers the common goal that we were speaking about. Any form which is evangelical, any form which is on a sound and progressive organization with responsibility taken by dedicated personnel. That's what I would like to see. That's my way of putting it. Helen?

MRS. OLMAN: Yes. I would like to see it. I have no idea, with what we know of China as it is now under the Communists, whether the Christian message through schools or even the church itself would flourish or not. I doubt that it would be allowed, governmentally, you know. But I suspect it perhaps would, if, for instance, the Chinese were allowed to develop their evangelistic methods themselves. Given the present situation I don't think we as foreigners could possibly do anything about it.

VAN WYK: There are people who talk about Christianity and say that it's a Western religion, it has Western cultural trappings. How do you feel about that? Do you hear that occasionally?

MRS. OLMAN: Yes, occasionally, but I don't think it is true. I learned in
China so much through Chinese ways of doing things that made incidents and stories in the New Testament so much more real to me because they were much more Oriental than Western. And I think the Chinese saw that. They understood many things in the Bible, in particular the New Testament, that were still hard for us to understand because it was different from our culture. But I think Christianity was criticized that way by those who were opposed to it and saying, "Don't be taken in by this Western evidence and culture." Those who really became Christians, I think, repudiated that, or didn't feel it.

VAN WYK: Do you have anything to add to that?

DR. OLTMAN: I was thinking about the teacher who was teaching a little group of Japanese Sunday schoolers, telling the story of the prodigal son. And when it came time to carry out the father's orders about "Bring him shoes and put them on his feet and rings on his finger," that didn't mean very much, and so the storyteller said, "Heat the bath!" (laughter) The point of this all is that things are different, and customs are different, but the idea is the same.

MRS. OLTMAN: I do think we as Westerners made many mistakes on that score, and that we did insist on forms, perhaps, which were Western and were not relevant. But I think that was changing a lot during the time that we were there. We had in our area, particularly around Changchow, quite a little difficulty for a while with the Pentecostal group that came in who were called the Little Flock. They called themselves the Little Flock. And they insisted on immersion for baptism. You know, that was foreign, but I'm sure we insisted on other things. One problem, for instance, which is very difficult is what about a man who has several wives? When he becomes a Christian, the church insisted that before he would be accepted into the church he must have just one wife. I remember hearing about a family like that--I didn't have anything
to do with them—but he just couldn't come into church, then, because he was responsible for this second wife and these children. What was he going to do with them? You know, it was almost an insoluble situation. What things do we need to enforce? And we have to look at it through eyes other than our Western culture eyes, and be sympathetic, too, and understanding of some of the things in their culture.

**DR. OLTMAN:** You might consider some of the circumstances surrounding the church during the time of Paul when he said to Timothy that a good elder should be the husband of one wife, indicating possibly that among other members in the church there were plural marriages, that they didn't bear down heavily on them. But if a man was dedicated to be an elder or deacon, he better just have one wife. Maybe they would have plural wives. I'm not arguing for plural wives.

**VAN WYK:** But just for a more open view when you're going into another culture?

**DR. OLTMAN:** Yes.

**VAN WYK:** As health workers, you must react in some way to stories about the Communists have cleaned up China—improved sanitary conditions, less insects...

**DR. OLTMAN:** No flies.

**VAN WYK:** How do you react to that?

**DR. OLTMAN:** I can't believe that there are no flies. (laughter)

**MRS. OLTMAN:** It's wonderful. I hardly see how it can be true, but it must be.

**DR. OLTMAN:** I think that one may say that where an oligarchy or a single person issues a fiat and where that is accompanied by strict discipline and fear
or terror or what have you, a lot can be done that can not be done so much or so quickly in a system of politics and government that we have. I don't doubt that Chiang Kai-shek, if he were allowed to continue, or somebody like him, would have carried on some of these things, but not nearly as quickly and efficiently as the Communists. A despot can make things in some way much better, but the price that one pays is another matter which we are not discussing now. Sure, I believe that they have more trained medical people. I believe that their hygiene is a great deal better than it used to be, and you can accept the fact that all these things are true, but what is the price?

MRS. OLTMAN: I was impressed, very much impressed, when I was watching the Nixon trip to China over television, and I just was glued to the television, it was so fascinating. But the first thing I noticed when Mrs. Nixon met with these children, they all had beautiful teeth. I couldn't, I just couldn't, believe it! Never did I see a group of children in China that had teeth like that. And I think it probably is very true that they have better nutrition and they learn to take care of their teeth. That was just an outstanding thing to my eye that showed that they undoubtedly do have many of these practices of better hygiene.

VAN WYK: I don't have any more questions, but if either of you would like to add something on the end here... I do have inflation written down here as a possible area to talk about. I don't know if you have any special anecdotes relating to inflation that you would like to cover.

DR. OLTMAN: Well, there was a time in Leng-na when on payday, which was the end of the month, I got two great big wicker suitcases and stuffed them full of bills and I went down to the hospital and paid salaries and wages. Inflation got pretty bad that last year we were there. It took, I think—if I said ten million, if I said a hundred million dollars to make the U.S. dollar I'd
probably be just about right. Half-way in between there. When we got our paper money we quickly bought something or quickly changed it if we could for hard cash.

VAN WYK: That's why you say that when the Communists came in you didn't have money in the bank?

DR. OLTMAN: I don't think we ever banked any money in Leng-na, did we? We had banked money in Amoy and in Hong Kong-Shanghai Bank, but there weren't any branches in Leng-na. No, I don't think we banked any money there.

MRS. OLTMAN: Most of the time that we were in Leng-na, our money came through the mission for salaries and for the schools and hospital. They usually had it sent to us in Hong Kong money.

DR. OLTMAN: It came in Hong Kong currency, and as we needed it we spent it that day on what we needed.

MRS. OLTMAN: We'd only exchange for local currency what we needed for that day because it changed a great deal. Just one example—this is really runaway inflation when it just went wild like that. Joyce Angus and I in February of 1949 went up to Shanghai to visit our children at Shanghai-American school. There was so much trouble that the children had not been able to come home at Christmas. Only fourteen- and thirteen-year-olds, and they'd been away from home that long. So we went to Amoy, and we had our money in Hong Kong currency or silver dollars, I guess, and we went to the To's cloth shop. And the To family were very helpful to us. We went in the morning before we bought our airplane tickets, and they exchanged the dollars for us into local paper currency, and each of us had a big knitting bag full of that currency. We hurried over to the airport and bought our tickets right away with that money. (laughter) And I forget how many million
dollars it was, but it was just, you know, just astronomical. Probably not worth as much as the paper it was printed on. You know, I'd like to make this comment: I feel that our time in China was at the beginning of the real transition. That it was long enough after the war--I mean after 1918-1920--so that things had settled down. We went in 1930. Things had begun to change into the modern era of openness and of the eastern part of the world developing with the western part of the world. Education was becoming more common. In fact, people give Chiang Kai-shek little shrift, but along in the thirties he had arranged for some laws to be passed that everybody should have education, that there should be government-paid primary education, and that all children should go to school. Well, of course, that's a long process. And the Communists have had quite a while to do that, and I think that they've been able to do it by decree, where Chiang Kai-shek couldn't. But he started it. And many things of that sort were changing while we were there.

DR. OLTMAN: Roads.

MRS. OLTMAN: Education is one thing; roads were being built; bus service where it had never been anything but boat travel before, or walking.

DR. OLTMAN: Land reform. That was in its infancy, but it got a start.

VAN WYK: You noticed some of that around the areas you were in?

DR. OLTMAN: We heard about it.

MRS. OLTMAN: That was one reason that things were better in Leng-na, because . . .

DR. OLTMAN: He initiated them and started to carry out several of these reforms which the Communists built on and were able to effect more sweepingly.
MRS. OLMAN: And it had affected the work of our mission, too. The schools were bigger; the schools were better; they were beginning to be recognized by the government; they had to register with the government. The hospital I was especially interested in—the nurses' training school, you know. They were working toward government registration, and had almost achieved it before the war. Then it was after the war they finally completed this registration so that the Nursing School was recognized. And it was after the war—I suppose Jeannette Veldman has talked about this—that they made their requirements for the girls to be middle school graduates, so that their standards were being raised. Hope Hospital pioneered in that in the Province of Fukien. The Chinese people have always had an independence in their own local affairs, but they also were subject to provincial and national government. Now they were beginning to break free of that so that they could express their own independence in business, schools, and the churches the same way. And the churches were growing and becoming much more indigenous churches because by the time we went to China they all had Chinese pastors. None of them had any of the missionaries as pastors. The missionaries would help when they had special meeting, but they all had Chinese preachers or pastors, so that the churches were growing stronger. And for that reason they stood better than they would have otherwise.

DR. OLMAN: I remember the first church service we attended when we arrived in China at the Hok-In-Tong, a big building, crowded. Maybe five hundred people, Christians, worshipping in this church.

MRS. OLMAN: There were wonderful services at the Hok-In-Tong, usually with a big choir—just like our big city churches.

DR. OLMAN: It was very impressive. It wasn't a special occasion, either. It was just an ordinary Sunday church service.
INDEX

American Consulate 3
American soldiers 24,26
Amoy 16,33,35,40,46,47,57
Amoy University 36,39
Angus, John 34,37,38,39
An-Khoe 5
Baguio, Philippines 34
Baker, Major 25
Banditry 5,6,7,45,49
Camp White 23
Changchow 3,42,46,50,51,54
Chiang Kai-shek 56,58
China
 education in 4
 holidays of 7
 political instability in 5
 refugees of 34,46
 status of doctors and nurses in 10-12
 superstitions in 12,13
 western medicine in 8
Columbia Country Club 22
Communists 3,5,26,30-47,53,55,57,58
Conte Verde 22
 deVelders, Mr. and Mrs. Wally 27,36,41
Foochow 36
Fukien 59
Gripsholm 22,23
Hill, Jack 40
Hofstra, Doctor 3
Holleman, Doctor 3,14,21,27,48
Hong Kong 34,35,41,57
Hope Hospital 29,33,52,59
Japan
 interment of belligerents 18-21
 occupation of Amoy 16-21
 war with China 15,16,17
Japanese Consulate 21
Kleinjans, Dr. and Mrs. Everett 35,40,41
Koepppe, Rev. Edwin 7,18,22
Korean War 38
Kulangsu 3,5,14,15,35,43,46,48
Legges, the 40
Leng-na 26-39,42,56,57,58
MacArthur, Douglas 38
Mekong River 24
Missionaries, British 3
Mission meetings 2,3
Nationalists 25,26,31,32,35,49
Newton, Kansas 26
New York Times 50
Nienhuis, Jean 52
Oltman, Helen
 evacuation of Sio-khe 41-46
 language study 1,2
 leaves China with children 17
 nursing 10
 on inflation 56,58
Oltman, Helen, continued

perceptions of the introduction of Communism 30-35
return to China 26
statements of the Reformed Church Mission to China 51-55

Oltman, Dr. T.V.
decision to become a missionary 1
detained in Japan 16
exit from China 40,41
hospital evangelism 9-11,12
hospital fees 8
in Japan 47
in Kulangsu 14-16
in Sio-khe 5-8,13
in Tong-an 3-5
interned by the Japanese 16
language study 1,2
medical work 3-13,16,17
on China in transition 57,58
on inflation 56-58
preparation for becoming a missionary 1
perceptions of introduction of Communism 30-35
return from China in 1942 21-22
return to China 26
statements on politics 55,56
statements on the Reformed Church Mission to China 51-55
war years in West China 23-26
work in clinic in Kansas 26
work in Leng-na 27-33,36

opium 13
Pearl Harbor 17,18
Poa-ah 49
Poppen, Dr. 16,18,37
Reformed Church America Mission in China 51,52
Reischauer, Robert 15,16
Repose 35
Salween River 24
Saw Tat-Beng 6
Shanghai 15,16,21,22,34,57
Shanghai American School 22,34,57
Sio-khe 5,6,7,13,29,41,42,43,44,47
Stilwell, Doctor 25
Tai, Doctor 29,33
Tan, Doctor 6
Tong-an 1,4,5,6,13,29
Truman, President Harry 38
Tsu Sian-si 5,6
United States Immigration Service 21
United States State Department 17,18
Un-Sio 46
Veenschoten, Mr. Henry 18,42
Veldman, Dr. and Mrs. Harold 1,59
Vosquils, Mr. and Mrs. 7,18,42-49
West Point 23
Yates, Doctor 24
Young, Doctor 29,33