

Daily Record of [the] Trip through Northern Thailand
By Elder Alan Hess and Elder Larry White
{(December 1968)}¹

December 3, 1968 [Tuesday]

Elder White and I made final preparations the morning of December 3rd with the intention of boarding the 12:00 noon train, which ends up in Chiang Mai. We arrived at the station at 11:45 and were informed at the crowded ticket desks that the train was full. After some {more} inquiry and about ten more minutes, we were told that another counter might sell us third[-]class tickets. The man at that other counter refused to sell us anything because the train was leaving in three minutes. We informed him that we could run there, and I did just that as Elder White finished the transaction. I waited on the stairs of the last car, and, just like the movies, Elder White jumped on as the train pulled out.

December 4, 1968 [Wednesday]

We arrived in Pitsanulok at 7:30 p.m. and saw {by the train station} a little "two-bit" hotel. We asked {a samlor driver} if there was anything better and, sure enough, right away he took us to a "three-bit" hotel. We spent the evening trying to fix my camera and getting something to eat.

Today, we walked a distance from town and came across, amazingly enough, a small US military base². We were on a quest for breakfast at the time and got acquainted with a certain Sergeant Panian. The good sergeant took us under his wing and invited us back for lunch. We went back to town and then returned at lunch time. The food tasted good to us and saved us from impending starvation.

Later, we taught several introductions in different sections of town. At one of these, a young man named Wilot was listening from close by, and after a while, he came over, timidly at first, and began asking us questions. He seemed very interested, so when we finished and he still wanted to know more, we went back to the hotel, picked up our strips and Bible, and went to his home and taught him a first discussion. He had to catch a train, but he lives in Bangkok. We may see more

¹ [] - denote the content of the original document in possession of Robert Reed. { } denotes the content of the current version of the document in possession of the author Alan H. Hess. () denotes added explanatory text.

² Original text: [Today we went out to the local airbase on our quest for something for breakfast. After we got in, a Sergeant Panian took us "under his wing" and invited us for lunch. We went back to town and then turned out about lunch time]

of him

December 5, 1968 [Thursday]

Today is the King's birthday. We're on a train on our way to Lampang. We got up at 5:30 and hustled to the train station. The weather is quite cool and pleasant.

December 6, 1968 [Friday]

It's morning; we spent last night in the Rom Sri Hotel in Lampang. The weather is quite cool {a shock to my system after some months in the heat and humidity of Bangkok}. On the train yesterday, after the city of Utteridit, we passed through some beautiful small mountain passes. This city has a pretty good elevation. Upon arrival, we checked into a hotel, {went and} got something to eat, took a shower, and then went out to meet people. Right away, a young American waved us down and wanted to talk to us. He wanted to know who we were and what we were doing. He was in the Peace Corps. While we talked in the lobby of the hotel, one of his friends came and sat down. He was a Filipino who was attending an education convention. It turned out that he was the lay leader in a Methodist [Church] {congregation} in the Philippines. It worked out so spontaneously that Elder White and I taught simultaneous introductions, he to Mike Radetsky and I to Mr. Marcos S. Ramos. We placed two [Books of Mormon] {copies of the Book of Mormon} there and went out to teach one more introduction and meet some more people before dark.

Later, we had dinner with Mike and two other Peace Corps volunteers. We went home, had a Gospel study, and went to bed.

[Addresses of Mr., Radesky and Mr. Romos deleted]

December 7, 1968 [Saturday]

Yesterday afternoon, we tracted for a few hours in Lampang. One young man, Suthap, seemed quite interested. We rode a horse-drawn carriage out to one end of town and buses and sam-lors elsewhere. About 3:00 p.m., we got in a car and headed for Chiang Mai. The drive was very beautiful, with the mountains, fields, and blue sky. Last night, we spent a while looking around the city and getting something to eat.

December 8, 1968 [Sunday]

Yesterday morning, we came out of our hotel room, and the son of the hotel owner offered to take us to the {Suriwong} Hotel so I could try to get a check cashed. They wouldn't cash the check, but we ate breakfast there. When we went outside, a smiling little samlor driver helped us find {a} place to rent two bicycles. {It was odd because they were puzzled by the idea that anyone would want to rent bikes.} We then started riding through a residential area of town. Before long, we met a young fellow, who was also on a bicycle. After we asked him, he invited us to stop at a road-side group of shacks and teach him and his friends. Manod was already a Christian and listened intently to our story about Joseph Smith the prophet. He told us "I believe you."

After a while, we decided to go in search of the people who sold the Karen Hill Tribes music tapes. All seemed to go without a hitch. {The post office gave us the address of the owner of the post office box number we had received relative to the tapes.} When we got to the place, we found it to be the Baptist Mission. They have done extensive work among [those] the hill tribes. They were quite curious as to why we wanted the tape, but they sold it to us anyway. Later, we went into a tape recorder shop and played it. The narrator told how these people have a legend about a golden book which was given to their forefathers. They say they lost this "Book of Life" through negligence. They also say that some white men will bring it to them again.

Our room at the hotel was given to someone else, so we spent last night in a "bungalow" near there. It was really something to behold. It was small and dirty, and there was one little, pint-sized quilt on the bed, which Elder White and I battled for all night long.

December 9, 1968 [Monday]

This morning, we rented a car and "driver" and headed for a Karen village about 80 [k.m.] {kilometers} from Chiang Mai {(Huay Laa)}. The people there were extremely poor. They wore clothes similar to those {which reminded us of something I would expect to be} worn by American Indians. The women and little girls smoked pipes.

We wanted to talk to the village leader, but we were informed that he was out in the rice fields. We tried to get two little village boys to get in the car and go there with us [there]. This they refused to do, but after we gave them a couple of baht, they agreed to go to the fields themselves and bring him back. After we had waited for almost an hour, they came back to the village and told us that he said he

was busy and couldn't come.

Most of the women and children couldn't speak Thai, but some of the young boys could. Finally, one boy agreed to go with us. We walked through a little forest and the through about a mile of rice fields (some of them partially cut) to a little bamboo sun shelter, where we found the chief waiting. He was quite youthful and, I would suppose, not highly educated. Elder White gave him an introduction -- no sparks flew. He said he had never heard of this legend and was only possibly interested in our message. After some probing, he told us where we could reach some other villages, but none of them were within 100 [k.m.] {kilometers} from there.

Our taxi driver turned out to be less than a sweet person and refused to take us any further than Chiang Mai.

Upon arrival in Chiang Mai, we were speaking with some of the taxi drivers, and one of them gave us the name of a Mr. Thompson, who was from a Karen Tribe, but was taken as a child and raised by Baptist missionaries. He works in a local bank and is active in the Baptist Church. The Lord was really with us in that, almost as soon as we arrived back at the hotel, one of the workers there came to our door, and, even before we asked, she said she knew where Mr. Thompson lived and offered to take us there. We went with this little lady on a bus and up a road on the other end of town that would have been almost impossible to find on our own.

Mr. Thompson received us most kindly, and, upon our request, related the tribe legend to us, a little bit differently than we had heard it before. He said there was a gold book and a silver book which had been lost. The Baptists had been teaching that one book was the Bible and one was the hymn book. We told him about Joseph Smith, the gold plates, and the story of the Book of Mormon. He seemed impressed, but I'm pretty sure he didn't understand the real importance of what we were telling him. However, he did agree to pray about it, and we told him we would go to his bank the following day and {to} take him a copy of the Book of Mormon.

[Mr. Thompson's address removed]

December 11, 1968 [Wednesday]

It's Wednesday afternoon, and we're sitting in the train station in Lampang waiting for the train to Denchai. The last three days have been such a whirl that I haven't written.

Sunday night after seeing Mr. Thompson, Elder White and I went to the hotel and filled up on bread, oranges, and peanuts that he had bought from an old Thai woman squatting on the pavement. I had second thoughts about eating the peanuts. Had I had third thoughts, I might not have done it, but as it was I ate them.

The morning of the 9th, I felt a little uncertain in the stomach. After we had a couple of eggs for breakfast, we went to the bank {(Siam Commercial Bank)}. I gave Mr. Thompson a copy of the Book of Mormon. The Lord was with us again; because we had gained Mr. Thompson as a friend, the bank cashed my check. Personal checks are almost uncashable in that town, and we would have been out of money by now.

Our tracting that day assured us that all was normal in Chiang Mai. Some were indifferent and one lady invited us out of her house when she heard me say that the religions of the world were false. Somehow, we didn't find time to eat all day, and when the evening came, we still put it off because we wanted to see a Thai movie. The movie was called "Thai Cat" and could be especially noted for its aimless plot, distorted music, and narration which even made the Thais concentrate in order to understand.

We left part way through the show and went next door to the noodle stand to get something to eat, but all they had were "Quicklime Eggs" and "Pygmy Frogs." We ate at a coffee shop and went home. I was not feeling well, so Elder White went out to buy some medicine. I spent most of the night between the bed and the bathroom, {sometimes lying on the floor by the toilet}. My system was not partial; it rejected everything.

I wasn't feeling very [frisky] {well} the morning of the 10th, but by about 10:30 I managed to muster enough strength to get in the car and head out looking for the hill tribes again. After about 50 KM out, we stopped to get a soda pop, at which place we met the local Protestant minister. He seemed "overjoyed" to know that the Mormons were eyeing his parish.

The driver stopped and picked up his niece, who supposedly knew the way to the village. After the pavement ended, we picked our way through several miles of dirt roads. After some jarring experiences, we arrived at the village {(Huay Saay)}. It was much as the other one had been, but probably not so often visited. The chief was an older man who was ignorant of the legend that we had heard about. Our introduction didn't mean much to him and it looks like it will be many years before the Gospel can be effectively preached to such people.

On the way back, the driver took us through some very beautiful mountains. The terrain, the river, etc. really reminded me of Utah's canyons. My

enjoyment of all that was a little cut short by the lingerings of my sickness of the night before. We got [home] {back to the hotel} just in time {for me to fly into the bathroom}. I've really sworn off Thai street peanuts.

This morning, we caught a taxi to Lampang and arrived just in time to miss our train to Denchai. We hope to stay in Phrae tonight.

[Further notes from the missionary journey of Elder Hess and Elder White, early December 1968]:

Phitsanulok (population 30,364).

This town is quite, rural, and much cleaner than Korat. There is a small US-Thai air force installation near the town, which provides a small amount of the usual corruption, but not nearly so much as that of Korat. Many of the people here are Chinese, and many of the older ones are not very well educated in Thai.

There are young people, but I assume that many of the brighter ones have gone away to school or elsewhere [because] many of those [left] {remaining} work in shops or drive pedicabs.

There isn't much industry, and the atmosphere is relaxed. We have introductions to several people. One person was very interested, so we taught him a first discussion; he lives in Bangkok. One other man, a soldier, showed some interest. The people on the street were generally quite friendly, and several of them offered kindnesses to us.

From what we saw, there isn't a lot of Christian activity. There is a Catholic and a Protestant school, but I assume that their congregations are fairly small. Three of the people to whom we taught introductions knew nothing of Jesus Christ.

Lampang (population 36,486)

Lampang is the second largest town in the north of Thailand. It seemed quite a bit larger than Phitsanulok, {and most of the people seemed even friendlier.} The people speak the Phuun Muan dialect, which is a fairly major change from Bangkok Thai, but it's understandable and all the people speak Bangkok Thai also.

Some of the people we talked to were Christians. Two of them expressed some desire to know more. To assure us that things were not too far out of the ordinary, one young man made an appointment with us and the stood us up.

One Peace Corps volunteer whom we met and {with whom we} ate a meal, informed us that this particular town was notorious for lack of success among missionaries. Of course, had we followed everybody's advice upon entering Bangkok, we would have kept right on going.

The town was pretty clean and the residential area which we saw was large enough to keep missionaries busy for quite some time. While there we saw one Catholic school which had about 1,500 students, and others told us that there was a local Protestant church also. As we tracted, some people mistook us for Jehovah Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists. So I assume that these are active in the area.

The town was quite pleasant. On its streets were some horse-drawn carriages (the only place in Thailand) along with the usual cars, pedicabs, and samlors. I had a good feeling there, quite favorably impressed. There are very few westerners there. Those who are permanent residents were a few Peace Corps {volunteers}, ministers, and one small Coast Guard detachment (20 men) a few miles {about twenty miles} from town.

Chiang Mai (population 65,736)

Chiang Mai is the second largest city in Thailand. Although its population is much smaller than that of Bangkok, the percentage of Christians there is much higher. During our stay, we spoke to many people, some of whom were Christians. Only one person became angry at our message; she asked us to leave (Buddhist). The majority were indifferent, and two in particular reacted favorably. One was a young Christian man who told us he believed what we said and wanted to know more. The other, Mr. Thompson from a Karen Tribe, agreed that if he could find out that it was true, it would be of great importance. He agreed to pray about it; in fact, before we left his home he requested that we have a prayer together. He was partially raised by the Baptist missionaries and is now a banker and very active in the Baptist Church.

The people in Chiang Mai speak the up-country Thai dialect, but I doubt that it would be worth the effort for missionaries to learn this dialect, as it would "localize" their ability to communicate. Almost all [other] {the} people can speak Bangkok Thai. The two dialects are quite close.

Chiang Mai is a tourist town for both Thais and other races. The town is full of wood carving shops and silver shops to go after that tourist money. American servicemen are frequently seen on the streets. The pace of the city is much slower

than that of Bangkok, and it was quite easy to get people to take time to listen to us for a while. Financially, the residential area of town was from poor to modestly prosperous. It was pleasant and extensive and could probably keep four missionaries busy.

{Elder White's Note: Residential areas were quite extensive, unlike Nakhorn Sawan.}

In our visits to the hill tribes, we found them to be generally very backward, poor, and inaccessible. Perhaps our impression might have been different had we had an opportunity to visit more of the tribes. The ones we visited were those who could be reached in one day by car. To reach the more part of the tribes requires that one travel half a day by car and then hike a day [or days] into the mountains. Some of the tribes still have the legend of the "gold book" but the ones whom we contacted were quite ignorant of any such thing.

They have their own language, which varies somewhat between villages. Some of their more educated men can speak Thai to a degree, but most of the women and children cannot.

The Protestants usually send men into these villages to live. They give them medical aid, food, teaching, and religion. Most of their success has come in this way.

The brightest ray of light we saw in relation to these people was Mr. Thompson (Sant Khankaew) who is a Karen man whom the Baptist missionaries took when just a child and raised and educated. He today is a devoted Christian and a banker. We were blessed to be able to get in touch with this man at his home on Sunday evening and taught him an introduction. He said that in their legend were two books, a gold one and a silver one. The Baptists had explained these to be the Bible and the hymn book. He listened intently about the golden plates and the Book of Mormon. He agreed to read it and pray about it.

The Lord willing this man may be one to help his people receive the restored Gospel, but at this moment, preaching among the hill tribes would not be most feasible.

{Elder White's Note:] There were some Karen children attending the Protestant school and were those who had done the singing [on the tape]. We were unable to contact any of the 4,000 Karen Christians in Thailand. Reportedly, there are 200,000 Karen Christians in Burma who were converted to Christianity through the legend.}

Phrae (Population 16, 006)

Phrae is, as I recall, the fourth largest city in the North. We found it to be very quiet (almost dead). This was the only town so far in which we did not see [any] other foreigners. Most of the income is from farming, and most of the people we talked to were, on the whole, quite simple.

Out of those we talked to, two demonstrated a desire to know more. One was a young housewife who seemed very sincere and had many questions to ask. The other was a young man who had recently moved there from Bangkok.

There was no western food and the place seemed to be quite unprogressive. One tailor show displayed fashion charts from the 1940's.

On the way into the city, we saw one Protestant church and while there we heard of a Catholic school. There is some activity there, but I don't know to what extent they've been successful.

Nakhon Sawan (Population 34,947)

This city is about 300 KM [above] {north} of Bangkok and stretches along the banks of the Chao Praya River. It resembled many of the other northern towns we visited. Our time here was very limited, so we only had a few hours to converse with people and try to get the feel of the town. Many people were friendly, but none that we talked to would let us present the Gospel message.

The people weren't very well educated, and although the city seemed a little more progressive than Phrae, it was still quite backward. There are four Protestant lady missionaries there, of whom we met one. We didn't see any church buildings.