

The First Year of Missionary Work in Thailand

From The Personal Journal of Elder Alan H. Hess

Jan 23, 1968 President Keith E. Garner of the Southern Far-East Mission made it known to all the missionaries, who would be sent to begin the work in Thailand. The following were chosen :

Elder Alan H. Hess, Hong Kong
Elder Robert W. Winegar, Taiwan
Elder Larry R. White, Taiwan
Elder Craig G. Christensen, Taiwan
Elder Peter W. Basker, Taiwan
Elder L. Carl Hanson, Taiwan

As a point of interest, the land of Thailand had been dedicated over a year earlier by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley. At that time, six elders had been chosen to begin the work there, but because of delays in receiving permission to enter the country, none of those were able to labor in Thailand. The following were those six: Elders Robert Mouritsen, Steven Egbert, Darwin Brimhall, Stephen Norris, Elliott Funk, and Lovell Densley.

Jan 28, 1968 The five elders from Taiwan arrived in Hong Kong for preliminary language study and other preparation. The Elders were instructed by Elder Steven Egbert and were able to use some of the tapes and other materials accumulated by the elders who had been previously chosen to go to Thailand.

Feb, 2, 1968 The six elders traveled to Thailand on a late evening flight accompanied by President and Sister Garner. The elders were accommodated that evening at the home of Brother and Sister Keith Wilcox.

The following day was spent looking for a home. Finally, a house at 129/1 Soi 49 Sukhumvit was secured. Craig Christensen was chosen as Thailand Zone Leader.

Feb 4, 1968

The elders and the Garners attended the Thailand District Conference. The meeting were most inspiring, many testimonies and prayers were offered in thankfulness that full-time proselyting would now begin in Thailand.

For the next week the Elders spent full time in their home studying the Thai Language; evenings were spent proselyting in English or Chinese or in getting some speaking experience with local people in Thai.

Feb 14 - Mar
5, 1968

The elders enrolled in an intensive three-week course in the Thai Language at the Association of American University Alumni (AUA). During this time, the Elders were completely submerged in learning the Thai Language, again with some time in the evenings to do a little proselyting in other languages. The teacher at AUA with whom we became good friends and who even developed some slight interest in the gospel was Mrs. Saangtong.

During the time spent in school, efforts were also made to begin translation of some basic proselyting dialogue. The problems encountered in this area were difficult. Time after time, our translators proved to be less than adequate. The first one we employed stumbled to our house one evening, drunk; he threw down what he had completed, and left swearing.

Mar 6, 1968

The elders began full-time proselyting in Thai. Needless to say, the first several weeks were difficult. Our language was growing very rapidly, but the interim period was awkward. When in trouble, one could only look to the great patience of the people and the help of the Lord. The Lord's blessings were great, and fluency came rapidly.

Mar 17, 1968 The Elders conducted the first meeting completely in Thai. It was a frightening but wonderful experience

Conducting : Elder Hess
Opening Prayer : Elder Winegar
Sacrament Prayers : Elder Christensen & Brother Anan Eldredge
Conducting Songs : Elder White
Talk : Elder Hanson
Lesson : Brother Eldredge

At the time Brother Eldridge was the only Thai member; six investigators were in attendance.

Apr 28, 1968 The next big adjustment was the Sunday on which Brother Eldredge was no longer with us to help us with the services. Brother Eldredge had proven to be a big help to us. He had been living with us for about a month to help us with the language.

May 18, 1968 This day marks the first baptisms performed by the missionaries in Thailand. Brother Boonpluke and Sister Rabiab Glaupin received baptism. They had been drawn to the church by the example of an American member, Brother Gordon Flammer.

May 27, 1968 Two more missionaries arrived in Thailand. These were Elder Lawrence D. Blake from Taiwan and Elder Scott E. Blickenstaff from Hong Kong.

June 4, 1968 Elder Alan H. Hess was called to be president of the newly created Bangkok Thai Branch. Elder Hanson was a counselor, Elder Basker was secretary, and Elder Winegar was Sunday School superintendant. Up to this time meetings had been held in the Elders home on Soi Klang; the Elders spent considerable effort to find a suitable chapel. Finally, the Thai branch shared the YWCA with the American Branch.

- June 16, 1968 President Garner arrived in Bangkok for a visit. Elder Christensen was released as zone leader and was sent to Korat along with Elder Blickenstaff to open the work there. Elder Hanson had developed a serious defect in one of his feet incident to an overdose of radiation administered by a local hospital to remove warts on the bottom of his foot. At this time he was sent to Hong Kong for treatment.
- Elder Alan Hess was chosen to be the new zone leader.
- June 21, 1968 Elder George E. Brown arrived in Bangkok to fill the vacancy left by Elder Hanson. Elder Brown had first served in Taiwan and then Hong Kong.
- June 23, 1968 All the Elders made their first trip out of the country for reasons of visa renewal. The trip was made by train to Vientiane Laos. The Elders returned to Bangkok by plane.
- July 4, 1968 Sister Srilaksana Gottsche was baptized into the church. Even arriving at the date of her baptism was fraught with many obstacles. During the early months of the Church in Thailand, she proved to be a strong influence **in** the church. She was called as Sunday school teacher, and her daughter Korani was called as Sunday School organist.
- July 7, 1968 The Bangkok Thai Branch held their first fast and Testimony meeting. The sweet spirit which filled that room that day was almost unspeakable.
- July 22, 1968 President Garner had returned to America, and the new Mission President, W. Brent Hardy, arrived in Bangkok for his first visit. He spent some time getting to know the Elders. We traveled to Korat to visit the Elders there, and then President Hardy continued on his journey to other parts of the mission.

Aug. 4, 1968

President Hardy returned to Bangkok. He spent some time proselyting with us; some of the time was spent looking for a Marvin Brown, an inactive Mormon who worked in a linguist capacity for the AUA. On this visit, President Hardy and his assistant, Elder Egbert, met with the Elders in a most inspirational testimony meeting. The Elders had encountered some problems with unclean spirits; it had been rough on morale, and in this particular meeting President Hardy invoked the power of the priesthood to cleanse our home. It really seemed to help for a while.

Aug. 22, 1968

This was a day that none present will soon forget. The Elders again were troubled with evil spirits. I, myself, had seen and felt the awful presence. Elder White had been attacked while in his bed. Every Elder there was troubled, and a dark feeling seemed to hang over the house. It had gotten to the point at which it could no longer be tolerated. On this particular day, the Elders all fasted and prepared themselves. In the evening, we held a testimony meeting. The spirit there was so absolutely beautiful, the veil so thin, and the testimonies so strong that none can forget. I felt inspired to close with prayer and in that prayer, through the power of the Priesthood, commanded the darkness to depart. All present felt the tremendous release of spiritual pressure. I am aware of no other instances after that time of trouble with evil spirits.

Sep. 29, 1968

Elder Hanson returned from Hong Kong to resume his labors in Thailand.

Dates
Uncertain

Elders G. Wendell Hamilton, Rex L. Dearden and Troy L. Corriveau arrived in Bangkok. These were the first Elders to arrive directly from home to labor in the Thai Zone.

Nov. 1, 1968

We began trying to arrange an audience with the King of Thailand for Elder Ezra Taft Benson on his upcoming Nov. 30 visit to Thailand. We found many obstacles, and nobody we could talk to would give us any hope at all that such a thing could be arranged. Finally, on the very eve of Elder Bensons's visit, permission was granted. The Lord really opened the door; all the official who informed me could say was "I can't believe it" and "most unusual!"

Nov. 29, 1968

Elder Benson arrived in Bangkok. He visited with the missionaries, now numbering twelve, and he and Sister Benson participated in a testimony meeting with the Elders, Brother and Sister Hardy, and Brother Phil Haymond. During this meeting, a printer, whom we had contracted, delivered to our house the first printing of Joseph Smith's Testimony. One of the pamphlets was to be included with materials given to the King on the following day. During the meeting, the Apostle was given a report on the progress of the work in Bangkok and Korat by Elders Hess and Christensen.

Nov. 30, 1968

Elder Benson met with the American Thailand District Conference, after which, he, Elder Hess and Brother Phil Haymond traveled to the home of the American Ambassador. Brother Benson and the Ambassador then traveled to the palace. Brother Benson told us later that a very nervous official had told them that their maximum time would be 15 minutes. The King was so congenial and interested that he didn't let them go for over 45 minutes. The King was presented with a copy of Meet the Mormons, a copy of The Book of Mormon and a copy of the Thai Joseph Smith's Testimony. We found out later that the King had kept a stadium full of people waiting over fifteen minutes because of the interview.

Later, Elder Benson spoke at the Thai session of the conference. The occasion was most inspiring. Conference speakers and translators were as follows:

Sister Hardy	Elder Christensen
Sister Benson	Elder White
Pres. Hardy	Elder Hess
Elder Benson	Elder Winegar

Dec. 3, 1968

Elders White and Hess boarded a train headed for Northwest Thailand. President Hardy had requested that we take about two weeks and proselyte in all of the reasonably large towns all the way up to Chiang Mai. Towns visited and proselyted in were: Phitsanulok, Lampang, Chiang Mai, Phrae, and Nakhon Sawan. Elder White and I made several attempts to contact Karen tribesmen while in Chiang Mai. President Hardy had requested that we do so because of a legend he had heard about concerning a golden book which was to be brought to them by white men from across the sea. Our report was submitted to the mission home in Hong Kong. [This report also written by Elder Hess is available on-line].