

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Robert Dean Carlson (CN 205, T1)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words which were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

( ) Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[ ] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was created by Christopher Easley and Paul Ericksen and was completed in November 1993.

**Please note:** This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.



**Collection 205, Tape 1. Oral history interview with Robert Dean Carlson by Bob Shuster on February 27, 1982.**

[Recording begins with microphone noise in background]

**SHUSTER:** This is an interview with Robert Dean Carlson by Robert Shuster for the Missionary Sources Collection at Wheaton College. This interview took place at the Billy Graham Center, on February 27th, 1982 at ten o'clock in the morning. Mr. Carlson, [pauses] you were born in Wheaton, I understand, and...

**CARLSON:** Yes.

**SHUSTER:** ...grew up on the Tibetan-Chinese frontier.

**CARLSON:** That's right.

**SHUSTER:** Where precisely were your parents stationed?

**CARLSON:** My parents were stationed in southern Kansu province. The capital of the province is Lanzhou, which is now a major industrial center in China. Somewhat above Lanzhou, there is a large river called the Tao River joining the Yellow [River], and it was primarily in the Tao River valley that they were working. Although at various times they lived in some of the other valleys, some of the other areas. For a time in Labrang, which is, I believe, the third largest lamasery in Tibet, and then for a number of years they were across the ethnic boundary in strictly Tibetan areas.

**SHUSTER:** What mission were they with?

**CARLSON:** They were with the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

**SHUSTER:** And was the Alliance the only board that was working in that area?

**CARLSON:** No. There were a number of boards in there. Generally, there was an agreement between missions boards that there would not be competing work. The China Inland Mission had the largest group of missionaries in Kansu province. They were to the east and to the north of us, from Lanzhou northwest through the remainder of the province. See, Kansu province is shaped somewhat like a dumbbell with the axis running from northwest to southeast with two...two knobs on the end. Lanzhou and other major cities are in the knob on the south, and then up the panhandle there are a few cities also, but I believe that area, the further north you go gets more and more dry and arid, desert-like. But most of the province was their's [China Inland Mission's]. In the eastern part of the province, I believe there were missionaries of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission, now TEAM. In the immediate area where we worked, the Christian and Missionary Alliance had the primary responsibility. There were a few Assemblies of God missionaries, not very many. During the time that I was there I think that they had all left, retired or something like that. I had almost no contact with them. Most of them had originally been with the Christian and Missionary Alliance,

and then in the early years of this century there came a doctrinal split over tongues, and a number of the people who had been with the Alliance joined the Assemblies of God. And there was an Assemblies mission station in Min Xian. There was another family in Labrang. Those are the only ones that I remember. With the...with the family in Labrang, James Vigna, we had occasional contact as he would pass through our stations. With the people in Min Xian, at the time that I was there, I don't think they were there. From the very early years, oh, say about 1933 or '34, I have vague recollections of a missionary family of another mission. There was one family of Swedish Pentecostal missionaries, with whom we had very good relations. They attended at least one of our mission conferences, and he spent Christmas and some weeks with us when he was still there as a bachelor. [clears throat] His name was Albert Carlsson, with Swedish spelling of two s's. And they...they were there, I think the only missionaries of their society anywhere in the area. The Seventh Day Adventists were in Lanzhou. They had a hospital and a number of people. I have no idea how many. Near us there was one family of SDA people. Catholics in Min Xian: there was a church. Somewhat up the Tao River valley there was another church. Taozhou New City, I believe, had Catholics. And those are the only places that I have any memory of Catholics working. The priests, the only ones with whom we had any contact, were Germans.

**SHUSTER:** Franciscan?

**CARLSON:** I don't know. I don't know. We very seldom met them. Occasionally, we would pass on the road, and at one time one of them came and visited in our home. It was always an interesting experience. We had no common language except Chinese [laughs].

**SHUSTER:** I guess that must have been quite a [unclear].

**CARLSON:** But they were not a very strong group.

**SHUSTER:** Were there ever any occasions on the year...during the year when the entire Christian community would gather?

**CARLSON:** The missionaries?

**SHUSTER:** Yes.

**CARLSON:** The missionaries from the CM&A would gather once a year for conference.

**SHUSTER:** I was thinking of, just generally, all of the missions represented.

**CARLSON:** No, no. Communications were primitive and difficult and slow. From where we were, the years that I remember best, we were in the towns of Jone, and Taozhou Old City. The nearest missionaries were two normal days travel away. To Min Xian in an emergency it could have been done in one day, but we always did it in two. And those...those were our closest neighbors. To Lanzhou by horseback was almost a week and that's where the CIM [China Inland Mission] people were. So that because of the distances and the time that it would take to get together, there were never any large scale gatherings that I remember. I think in 1920 or 1921 there

was a large gathering of both CIM and Alliance people, but that's the only one that I have any recollection of, any knowledge of. Of course, I wasn't around then, so just from seeing pictures of large groups that I have any knowledge of that.

**SHUSTER:** Was your family the only one at the station?

**CARLSON:** Generally, yes. For a couple of years we had, living with us on the same station, a lady whose husband had passed away, and she lived on the same station with us. For a short period, we had a new couple with us for language study, but then they moved on to another station of their own.

**SHUSTER:** Language study of Tibetan or Chinese?

**CARLSON:** I think they were studying both. They had had some language study either in the States or on the coast. I think it was in the States. So they had some knowledge of Chinese. I think their major emphasis when they were with us was Tibetan.

**SHUSTER:** As a...as a young child growing up, what are your first memories?

**CARLSON:** My very first memories are of small Tibetan villages where we were living at the time. Yeah, I was born here in Wheaton on my parents' first furlough. They went out to China originally in 1922, and started out studying Chinese. They were in the town of Titao. I ought to mention here that most of these towns that I mention have at least two names, and some people will...will refer to them by one name and some will refer to them by another. It...it seems to be a Chinese custom to change the names of places periodically. So Titao was one of the main Alliance stations. It's also known as Lintao. I believe that Bob Ekvall's tape [interview of Robert Ekvall, Archives collection 92, T1] refers to it as Lintao, but I'm not sure. I think on your index I saw that. Min Xian is also known as Minchow. Lunghsi is also known as Kongchang. Hezhou is also known as Linxia. Labrang is also known as Xiahe. Taozhou is also known as Lintan. So that...[laughs].

**SHUSTER:** Yes, is...is there one...is one of these names the official and one is the local, or is...?

**CARLSON:** One of them is the older name, and then sometime after the 1911 Revolution, and the Kuo min-tang takeover of the country, somewhere along in there these names were changed, and the official...the official name was changed although the older name was often used. So that you would see on official material or postmarks one name, but everybody called the town by another name.

**SHUSTER:** I've heard the capital of China has been called both Peking and Peiping, or Beijing. Is that the same kind of...?

**CARLSON:** Same sort of idea. Beijing means northern capital, and when the capital of China was moved to Nanking under the republican government, of course the northern capital was no longer the capital, so they called it Beiping, northern peace. And when it became the capital under the

communist regime, why of course, the name northern capital became appropriate, so it is now called Beijing and Peking.

**SHUSTER:** But you were saying your first memory was of this small Tibetan village?

**CARLSON:** Yes. Okay, now to...to crank it back then. My parents started out with Chinese language study in Titao. All of the missionaries were expected to learn Chinese first. Then after a couple of years there they moved to Jone, where they took up the study of Tibetan, and were designated as Tibetan workers. In 1927 they came back to the States on their first furlough. It was a...a hurried trip because at that time I think almost all the missionaries of China left. I was born here then in 1928, and went back...

**SHUSTER:** Left?

**CARLSON:** ...to China in '28.

**SHUSTER:** The missionaries left because of the political and military unrest?

**CARLSON:** Yes, uh-huh. Very strong anti-foreign sentiment at that time. In 1928 then, we went back and arrived there right in the middle of a very, very bloody Muslim rebellion. The area is a mixture of Chinese, Tibetans Muslims, and tradition says that every thirty years the Muslims rebel, and, well, the Chinese and the Muslims go on a slaughtering rampage. 1921...1929, was one of these rebellions, '28-'29, and my folks arrived back at the height of that and at that time moved across the mountains, the Min Xian, into strictly Tibetan area, where there was a little bit more peace and security. And it was in that area that I have my earliest memories. They were living in an area called the Tebu Valley. Tebu is a name for a number of Tibetan clans or tribes. Rather hostile.

**SHUSTER:** Hostile to Westerners or to each other?

**CARLSON:** Hostile to...hostile to anybody. They love a good fight, feuding and warfare and robbing.

**SHUSTER:** Like West Virginia.

**CARLSON:** Yeah, yeah. That stuff is just natural to them. They're described as surly, unfriendly, bellicose, belligerent. And it was there that we lived for a while in the little village of Drachamna. They were introduced there by a Christian trader, a Chinese Christian who introduced them to a family in Drachamna and arranged for them to live there. Then, after a couple of years on Dragsgumna, they moved down the valley to the town of Denga because it was a little more centrally located. They were able to rent a house there because the man from whom they rented was having a fight with the rest of the village, and figured the most spiteful thing that he could do to the rest of the village was to rent his house to foreigners [laughs]. I don't know if they knew that when they moved there. But we lived there for a couple of years, built a house there, and then when we came back on furlough in 1934, the Tebus promptly got together and burned the house down.

And that was the last time that missionaries ever lived in Denga, although Dad and some traveled back there quite a number of years later.

**SHUSTER:** As a child growing up, [train noises in background] what was it like to be part of an American family in a foreign culture? Did it strike you in that way or did it seem...?

**CARLSON:** Well, we were different certainly, but yet that was home. That's all I knew. In our home we always spoke English. My parents were determined that their kids would not grow up as some have, speaking only the national language and not English. That's one extreme that has sometimes been found. At the same time, they carefully avoided the other extreme of having their kids speak only English. So that when we became of school age, mother taught my sister and me for a number of years. We had English school in the morning, and in the afternoon we had Chinese school with a Chinese teacher. They were...they were set on the idea that we should learn both languages, become proficient in...in both. And, of course, Chinese was the only language that we used outside the home because there were no other missionaries in the area. There were no English speakers in the area. So as a very young child, in...in these Tibetan areas, I spoke English at home, and Chinese and Tibetan with my playmates, who, of course, knew no English.

**SHUSTER:** I was going to ask you that next. Who were your playmates?

**CARLSON:** The...the kids of the area: children of Christians, neighborhood kids, children of the servants, pastors, preachers, and so on, anybody that was around. But all...all Chinese. The only time that we saw any Western kids was generally at conference time and occasionally during the year when a family would travel through for some purpose or another. But mostly conference time. Annual conference was the only time that we had contact with other missionaries.

**SHUSTER:** From your own experiences, both as a...as a kid and as a parent, what are the advantages and disadvantages of growing up or raising children on the mission field?

**CARLSON:** I would say it's a tremendous advantage. I think you...the missionary kid may end up neither...neither fish nor fowl, neither completely American nor completely Chinese, or whatever you have, but something halfway between or a mixture of...of both. Now defi...definitely more American than anything else, but yet not quite totally American. And I have never been sorry. I've never regretted it one bit. Now my life has been a little bit different from that of many missionary kids, so that perhaps I do look at it differently. When...we...we came to the States in '34 and I started school here. I had first grade and part of second grade here in Wheaton. Then we went back in 1936, I believe it was, and Mother continued to teach us. She had been a teacher here in the Wheaton school system before she went overseas, and she was very disciplined. She set up a regular schedule, and we had school every morning. My sister was three years behind me and when it came time for her to start school, she started school. And the morning was set aside for school. Every morning at...I've forgotten what time it was, that was when we started school, and we continued until about noon. So there was not the experience of going away to boarding school which so many missionary kids have.

**SHUSTER:** You mean separate them?

**CARLSON:** Right, not separated from parents. Now, they made plans for us to go away to school, but it seemed that just about every time plans were made a new war would start. In 1937, of course, the Sino-Japanese War started. The school was located in Southeastern China, and things got a little bit tumultuous there. Then the Alliance had a hostel for missionary's kids in Hong Kong. There was a school in Dalat in French Indochina, and we were planning on going to one or the other of those, but then, of course, things began to look darker and darker in the Pacific, relations between Japan and the States. And in 1941, of course, [pounds table] came Pearl Harbor, so that wrecked those plans. And so I was at home right through eighth grade, and my sister through fifth grade. Other families had children, some were in Chefoo in the far eastern part of the country. Some were in Hong Kong. Others in...well, Bob Ekvall had his son in Dalat in Indochina. And there were long periods of separation there. But in my case, we...we started out together, and because of the political situations we never [bumps table] got separated. When I was ready for high school, Mother felt that I was a little bit more than she wanted to tackle. At that time we became acquainted with a school in Chengtu in Szechuan province.

**SHUSTER:** That is Canadian.

**CARLSON:** Canadian school. You are acquainted with it.

**SHUSTER:** Other...other interviews.

**CARLSON:** So, for my freshman year in high school we went there. And that was my first time that I had been separated from my parents.

**SHUSTER:** Was that a difficult adjustment?

**CARLSON:** No, not at all. I enjoyed it. At least [pauses] I don't...I don't have any memories of it being difficult. You know, they say that when you look back on something, the things...you forget the difficult parts, and you remember the pleasant parts. I don't know whether it's true or not, but in...in my case, it seems to be. I...I remember the...the pleasant times [bumps table], some great teachers, some good friends. I enjoyed it.

**SHUSTER:** What about the change from just being taught, you and your sister by your mother, to being taught with a classroom full of other children?

**CARLSON:** Well, now this...this was a rather small school. I think [bumps table]...I don't remember the exact figures. I think there were twenty-some in high school. I know that there were not enough boys in high school to make up two...two basketball teams. We had to draw from junior high and for anything that required more than five people on the team, we had to have the...the girls. Co-ed sports were nothing unusual there.

**SHUSTER:** Necessity.

**CARLSON:** Numbers called for that. So from that standpoint, I think, my upbringing was different from that of many missionary kids. I was not separated from my parents during those

growing-up years. Then when we came to the States in 1944, after my freshmen year of high school, we came back to our home town. This is where my dad was born, where my mother lived starting with her high school years, I think, and it had...it had been our family home for many, many years. And my folks bought a house here in Wheaton, and several years later when they returned to the missions field, my sister and I continued to live in the house. They rented the house, but we went along with the house. So that there was never a feeling of being rootless, never a feeling of being left [in] some strange place, without any place that we could call home or say this is where we belong.

**SHUSTER:** And that's important for a missionary kid?

**CARLSON:** I think it is. And I think it was a very, very good arrangement.

**SHUSTER:** When...when your mother was teaching you, what subjects did she teach you?

**CARLSON:** Everything. Of course, the thing which many people use now is the Calvert course [a correspondence school program]. That was impractical for us. Mail communications were so bad that you would never be able to depend on getting a course in time for the next year. Mail sometimes took as much as a year to get from the States to where we were. So, she scrounged from here, there, and everywhere whatever books she could find to cover the subjects which would normally be covered in a grade school and junior high course. And when I went to a regular school, like [?] my freshmen year in high school, I had no problems. One year in China, in the Canadian school, then a few months in Northern India in Woodstock School. The school in Chengtu closed down at the end of the year that we were there. They just couldn't keep going because of inflation and horrible economic conditions in China. So they closed up. And a number of us went to India. The school year there was different, so that we arrived in the middle of the year, and we repeated the last three months or so of whatever year we had just finished. So, I had another part of my freshman year in India. Now that school was larger, I...several hundred people in the entire school. And that was sort of a step from there, a half-way...a half-way house, so to speak, between the very, very small family-type school in China, to ordinary high school here. And I had no problem.

**SHUSTER:** Was there a feeling of isolation when you were growing up on the Chinese-Tibetan boarder or was that just more or less your world?

**CARLSON:** That was my world. I think my parents would have felt much more isolated.

**SHUSTER:** But you didn't pick that up from them?

**CARLSON:** No, no, not really. When we first went out in 1930...well, let's start with about 1934 [pauses], because that's the time that I remember best, 1936, there was no airmail service across the Pacific, and letters would take months to arrive. With the inauguration of airmail service in about 1937 or thereabouts, occasionally a piece of mail would arrive in three weeks or so. Three weeks was the record. But surface mail would take anything up to a year. During the times that we were living across the mountains in Tibetan country, we were completely shut off during the winters. Their first winter there, there was no...no contact across the mountains to the outside for two





months, because the passes were blocked with snow. So, I think undoubtedly, they felt isolated and cut off, but that was my world. I didn't know anything else. I didn't know enough to feel isolated. When we went back in '36, we had...we had a radio run on a...on an automobile battery, so we were in touch with what was going on with the rest of the world. We weren't dependent upon three-month old newspapers. And that cut down the sense of isolation somewhat.

**SHUSTER:** As a...as a boy when your parents had their furlough in '34, you were about six years old?

**CARLSON:** Yes.

**SHUSTER:** What did you think of America when you came at that age? Do you recall?

**CARLSON:** No, I don't really recall. America, of course, was the strange country to me. That was the foreign land, and the strange people, and so on. But I really don't remember very much of that time, or certainly not my feelings or emotions.

**SHUSTER:** What specifically were your mother and father's assignments?

**CARLSON:** When they were on the Chinese side of the border, their assignment would have been to assist the Chinese church. During the political difficulties of 1927, 1928, the Chinese church organization became completely independent, self-supporting, and self-governing. And following that time missionaries' work with the Chinese church was in the nature of advisory, helping. Dad preached from time to time. Mother had meetings with the women, women's work, Bible studies and so on. So that there they were working with an organized church.

**SHUSTER:** So on the Chinese side they were not church planting?

**CARLSON:** No, not...not really church planting there.

**SHUSTER:** But evangelizing.

**CARLSON:** Yeah. Among the Tibetans now, that was strictly pioneer work. During the time, '36 through '40, when we were living in the Chinese area, we used to go out during the summers among the Tibetans, off in some of the side valleys of the Tao River, camping out, living...taking our tents and stuff along with us, camping out near the Tibetan villages. [Train passing in background] And there it would be evangelistic work. Living among the Tibetans it was strictly pioneer work. You really can't call it church planting because the believers were [laughs] weren't enough to form a...a church. But it was pioneer evangelistic work.

**SHUSTER:** How was the church governed or organized in the China part [?] of the border?

**CARLSON:** There was, I think, a church committee made up of leaders from a number of churches. Exactly how they were elected, I don't know. But there were both pastors and laymen on this committee. And I believe that that was the governing body of the organization.

**SHUSTER:** So they were not [pauses] just independent congregations, but there was a strong community?

**CARLSON:** No, they were...they were...they were associated. Just how that association was set up, I don't know. I was too young to pay much attention to that.

**SHUSTER:** How did a Chinese Christian fit into his own society? Was the fact that he was a Christian [pauses] mark him out as very different or was it apparently [?] accepted?

**CARLSON:** [Train noise increases; Carlson increases his own volume to compensate.] That's a hard one to answer. I think there was a fair amount of tolerance among the Chinese. Now, you're dealing in that area with a number of different groups. The Muslims of course would be very, very intolerant. That would be an extremely difficult road to walk, and there were very, very few Muslim believers, almost none. I think there were...well, you could probably count them on the fingers on one hand. Among the Tibetans, again there was a...different categories of Tibetans. Along the Tao River there were what were commonly referred to as half-Tibetans, people who were sort of a mixture of Tibetan and Chinese cultures. There were some converts in that area among the pure Tibetans, the Tebus and the other tribal groups there, and the nomads, very, very few. And that would be a very difficult position for...for believers. Very, very strong opposition. But among the Chinese, there would, of course, be opposition, but I...it was not as far as I know, to the extent of a threat to life as there was among the Muslims. Most of the believers in the area were Chinese. Not all, but most.

**SHUSTER:** In the United States among church communities, you could have a spectrum from, say, the Salvation Army church, in which people are very close knit, tight community, to perhaps a local Unitarian church which consists of people going once a week on Sunday. On a spectrum like that, what was a Chinese church like which you have experienced? Was it an extremely close-knit community? Was it nominal?

**CARLSON:** I would, in general, put it more towards the close-knit community. Certainly not the very, very loose [pauses], loose group of nominal believers, no.

**SHUSTER:** Were there...what were typical activities for the Christians besides the Sunday...Sunday morning service? What other things were there during the week, where they met together and fellowshiped, worshipped?

**CARLSON:** There were women's meetings at various times. Now what else there was, I really don't remember.

**SHUSTER:** Of course, in the U.S. we have things such as Wednesday night prayer meeting, or at appropriate times picnics or church socials. Was anything like that...do you remember anything like that?

**CARLSON:** I don't...I don't remember anything like that. There were during the year, conference times when there would be a Bible teacher or an evangelist or short-term Bible schools or children's rallies. There was not a great deal, as I remember, going on in the evening and at night. Night time people went home and went to bed. There was no...no electricity, no electric lights or anything like that. And, well, you got up when the sun came up and you went to bed when the sun went down. That was...that was it.

**SHUSTER:** What kind of training did the ministers receive?

**CARLSON:** There was a Bible school in Titao, and I think that that is where most of them got their training.

**SHUSTER:** Was the faculty there Western, Chinese, mixed?

**CARLSON:** Mixed, but primarily Chinese.

**SHUSTER:** And what about...what was the role of the elders within the church?

**CARLSON:** That I really don't know.

**SHUSTER:** Was there [pauses]...some of the missionaries have talked about...have also talked about the role of elders within...discipline within the church, maintaining moral standards and a witness. Do you recall anything of that nature [unclear]?

**CARLSON:** No. I would have been too young to know much about that. My parents were very careful in their conversation about what they talked about in the presence of the kids. They know in any group of missionaries there are going to be clashes, there are going to be strong differences of opinion. And I guess those were there among the missionaries, but I was never aware of them. The things which went on in the mission business meetings at annual conference, or conflicts, which there undoubtedly were, between the missionaries, personal feelings that there may have been, those were never discussed in the presence of my sister and me. We were totally unaware of them. And I think, I think the same thing was true as far as the disciplinary matters in the Chinese churches. I think they felt...my folks felt that it wasn't appropriate for the kids to be in on that sort of thing. And I think it's...I think it was a wise move. So that in...in later years, many, many years later, Mother asked me once, "Well now, were you ever aware of the...of the conflicts or different opinions that some of the missionaries had, and some of these subjects in relation to the...to the Chinese church, or how things should have been done?" And I...I could [pauses] truthfully say, "No. I had no idea that there were these differences of...of opinions and conflicts and arguments and debates. They...they weren't brought out.

**SHUSTER:** How was the mission itself governed, at least in this field?

**CARLSON:** The mission itself was governed with an elected chairman and executive committee [train passing in background].

**SHUSTER:** Elected by all the missionaries?

**CARLSON:** Elected by the missionaries, by the senior missionaries. I think during the first couple of years, or until a missionary had passed his language exam, he could talk, but had no right to vote. The mission was extremely isolated from the home board. Telegraphic communication was practically non-existent. Oh, for a while there was telegraph service, but it was extremely unreliable. Everything came through very, very garbled. Of course, there was...the idea of a phone call to the States was never even dreamed of. Radio contact was unknown yet. Mail took months. And so there was much more independence or autonomy on the mission field then than there is now, where you can get on the phone to New York or Wheaton or wherever you have your headquarters and talk, and a representative from the home board can be on the mission field in a couple of days or something like that. We were separate, isolated, and I think for probably twenty years or more, were not visited by anyone from the home board. The foreign secretary visited the field in about 1939 and almost died. He was...well, I...I looked upon him as extremely old. He may have been in his...oh, maybe around sixty or so. I'm not sure. But [pauses] Dad was mission chairman at that time and he went to the capital, Lanzhou, to meet him and traveled with him through the various missions stations, he and a couple of...of the other men. And on the day that they arrived in our station, Dad came ahead of the group, and Mother asked him if Mr. [Alfred C.] Snead was coming. And Dad said, "Yes. But I don't know whether he'll be dead or alive." And he wasn't kidding.

**SHUSTER:** Because of the rigors of travel?

**CARLSON:** Because of the rigors of travel. Everything was horseback. He was traveling up eleven thousand feet or so. He was not a physically robust man. And it was cold and the places that he had to stay, the food he had to eat were not [pauses, laughs] comparable in any way to what he would have here.

**SHUSTER:** He must have been quite conscientious?

**CARLSON:** Oh yes, he was...he was a great man. But...(what brought that out?) oh, mission government. The executive committee was elected by the missionaries. The chairman was elected by the missionaries. The chairman had, as one of his duties, to visit every mission station once a year if possible. Sometimes it wasn't possible. During the years that Dad was chairman, I know that he never got to the city of Xunhua. It was just too far away. That's...that was up west of Lanzhou someplace. I have...I have never been there at all, but we had one family there. Lhamo, was again a major undertaking, at least four days each way. So some of these more remote stations, you just never got to. For a time we had a family in Songpan, in northern Szechuan province, and that again was way out of the way to get to. You couldn't go there on the way to anywhere else, and that was at least a week as I remember from any other mission station. So, with distances like that and time like that involved, the poor chairman didn't always get around to all of the stations. The executive committee, I think, met once a quarter, if possible, and again they had to consider where

the members of the committee met. If they elected somebody who lived ten days away from where the committee normally met [laughs], they might have to make some sort of arrangement there.

**SHUSTER:** And they wouldn't meet for trivial reasons then?

**CARLSON:** No, no, you didn't meet for trivial reasons.

**SHUSTER:** What exactly did the chairman of the committee do? What were their responsibilities [pauses] besides visiting stations?

**CARLSON:** [Sighs] I believe that with the chairman and executive committee lay such things as missionary appointments, who was to work in what station, what type of work a missionary was to engage in. For example, if a person was to be in Chinese or Muslim or Tibetan work, that was a matter for the committee to decide. Furloughs or trips away from the field, those were a matter for the executive committee to discuss and approve. What else? I don't...I don't know what all they got into. Probably just about anything that you could think of involving conduct of the work or the missionaries, what they were to be involved in and...and so on. Trips, journeys away from the field had to be approved by the executive committee. Prolonged absence from the...from the station, those had to be approved.

**SHUSTER:** What [pauses] was the strategy of the CMA for their work in this province? What...you mentioned that the church had become independent, so basically all the missionaries were advisors. Do you have any recollections or impressions about what the major goals of the mission were?

**CARLSON:** I think the major goals there would have been to help, to encourage the churches to branch out, evangelize, grow, open up new areas. The main towns had churches [coughs], but of course, there were many, many villages, smaller communities that needed...needed the Gospel testimony. So encourage them, get out into these areas, do something there, get the message out. Among the Tibetans, well, there it was starting from scratch. Nothing to build on there.

**SHUSTER:** So that was mainly evangelization?

**CARLSON:** Yes. There it was going in, learning the language, starting from scratch.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned a little earlier the split that resulted out of assemblies coming out of CMA, and with resulting in some of the different missions stations. Was that something that developed on the field between the missionaries or was that something more that they brought from the U.S., and affected missionary setup and...?

**CARLSON:** I'm not sure of the history of that, but I believe that it was both in the States and on the field, that there came this growth of [pauses] Pentecostalism, speaking in...speaking in tongues, charismatic movement. I think primarily it was emphasis on speaking in tongues, which was the main split. Like...as...as I understand it, that was both in the States and on the mission field.

**SHUSTER:** What about, first in the United States there was great controversy between the modernists and fundamentalists. Was there any evidence of a similar kind of development in Kansu?

**CARLSON:** No, no. That people never bothered with?

**SHUSTER:** What was a Chinese church service like?

**CARLSON:** The ones which I remember were somewhat like the average service here in that there would be singing, sometimes Chinese tunes, sometimes Western tunes, sometimes the Psalms sung to Chinese music. Offering, and in some churches [pauses]...in fact I think it may have been a general practice, that the offering...the individuals brought their offering to the front of the church. And in some churches it was actually written down, so and so, so much, an actual written record supervised by the leaders of the church. Then, of course, sermon, preaching, communion at various times.

**SHUSTER:** But not every week?

**CARLSON:** No, no, not in the churches that I remember. But that...that was about it: singing, Scripture, message, offering.

**SHUSTER:** In the sermons that you heard in Chinese churches, did there seem to be a different...somewhat different emphasis on certain content or in the themes that pastors preached to their congregations than say in the U.S.?

**CARLSON:** That I don't remember. I think there would of necessity be a difference in the sermons because of the different problems that the believers here would face and the totally different cultural background of the preachers and the believers. But I really don't remember.

**SHUSTER:** What were the relations between Chinese pastors and leaders and the Western missionaries?

**CARLSON:** As far as I know, good. The...in Taozhou where we lived, the pastor lived on the mission compound with us. He and my father took turns preaching, though I think the pastor may have spoken more than my dad did. But Dad spoke by...by invitation. And as far as I know, the...the relationships there were good. In other missions stations I don't know how close a relationship there was between pastor and missionary.

**SHUSTER:** How did...how did your dad spend his day? What were the kind of tasks that he [pauses]...that he did [pauses] when he was in China...was in China?

**CARLSON:** There would be times of study, a fair amount of that, sermon preparation and so on. It was...it was a job for him to preach. I don't think that he really enjoyed preaching. So I think...I think that preaching was a job for him. That's...that's my impression. I don't know. There would also be time that he would spend on mission business as...as chairman. There'd be correspondence

that he would have to take care of as mission chairman. He was also mission treasurer, so he would have to see that the missionary accounts were straightened up, and that, of course, involved personal accounts for all of the missionaries, handling the funds which came to him for distribution to them. There would be talk with all kinds of people who would drop in, just to talk, to visit, pass the time of day, sometimes what would be called counseling, other times it would be just, well, maintaining friendly relationships with anybody and everybody.

**SHUSTER:** What about your mom? What was her day like?

**CARLSON:** Supervising the household, teaching....

**SHUSTER:** Teaching you and your...your sister?

**CARLSON:** Teaching my sister and me. Women's meetings, children's meetings. I don't...in fact, I know that she did not preach in church. That was...that was not accepted. But working with the women...with the...what they called Bible women.

**SHUSTER:** And what did that involve?

**CARLSON:** Bible study classes, classes teaching the.... There were regular women's meetings, (I don't know how often), which would involve Bible study, teaching about Christian life, trying to build these believers up in the faith.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned working with Bible women. Would these women then go out and hold other classes?

**CARLSON:** Yes, they would work with women. There was still at that time a rather strong line drawn between women and men. Men and women very definitely sat on different sides of the church, and in some churches there was a wall down the middle so that the pastor could see the men on one side, he could see the women on the other side, but the men and the women could not see each other. There was the...the custom. And for...for a woman to speak in front of a mixed group, that would not have been appropriate. And at the same time, I don't think that my dad could have spoken to a group of women. That would not have been appropriate. He could...he could speak to a mixed group. That's...that was all right. But for work with the women, it was advisable that there be women to do it.

**SHUSTER:** What were the children's meetings?

**CARLSON:** Children's meetings, well, Bible stories, singing at the top of your voice, evangelistic appeal.

**SHUSTER:** Centered around Sunday school.

**CARLSON:** Yeah.

**SHUSTER:** What...you mentioned that there were both Chinese and Christian...Western hymns at church services. Was that atonal Chinese songs or....?

**CARLSON:** Pentatonic scale, the five-tone scale. The Western tunes were pretty generally mangled, so that sometimes you would listen to a group singing a Western tune and wonder really what were they singing. Singing and Scripture reading also were not very much together. Each person would sing or read as fast as he could read the characters. So if you have a slow reader, in unison Scripture reading for example, he would be reading for quite a while after the rest of the people had finished. And the same thing could be true of the hymns. Literacy was not too high. There were those who could not read at all and those whose reading was very, very laborious, and they went on at the speed that they could read.

**SHUSTER:** When you say literacy was not too high, do you mean less than half could read or [pauses] very, very, very few could read?

**CARLSON:** Of the women probably less than half. Education for...for women was still not the general norm. Among the men, somewhat more than among the women, but I really don't know what the percentage would be.

**SHUSTER:** How did...how were new converts admitted to the church [train passing in background]?

**CARLSON:** How were the which?

**SHUSTER:** How were new converts...converts admitted to the church?

**CARLSON:** That I don't know. [Pauses] Well, let's see. I'm not sure whether there were any sort of acceptance into membership. I think transfer from one church to the other was very rare because the people really didn't move from one town to another to any extent. New converts, after an initial profession of faith would go through a sort of probationary period and then be baptized. Very seldom were people baptized immediately upon profession of faith. It was usually required that they do a bit of study, know what they are getting into, learn something of the basic Christian doctrines, perhaps even demonstrate that they're really sincere about this before being baptized and accepted into full membership.

**SHUSTER:** What was [pauses]...how was...how were missionaries supported financially?

**CARLSON:** By remittances from the States. The Christian and Missionary Alliance has, and I think they had at that time also, the policy of all support being pooled, so that the missionaries did not have to individually raise support. We didn't have the situation where one person might fall behind compared with others because his supporters had defaulted or died or something like that, but it was all share and share alike. And they had the policy that there was a...an amount of support, and if the mission as a whole received enough to pay full support then everyone received the full amount. If the mission, as a whole, fell behind, then everybody fell behind. During the '30s they fell behind, so that there were times there when, I think, my parents received thirty dollars a month.



**SHUSTER:** And what was the standard? What was...what was supposed to be the standard?

**CARLSON:** I think it fell down to about fifty percent, I'm not sure, so it was probably double that for the...for the family.

**SHUSTER:** Was...was it difficult to live on thirty dollars a month? Was it...?

**CARLSON:** They managed. I don't know how you would rate that. You lived pretty much off the land. Canned goods or anything like that were totally unavailable. If you had any canned goods, it was something which you brought with you. Vegetables could be obtained locally during the summer. Meat was available, milk was available, butter you could make, eggs were available, and I think what most people did was do a lot of canning during the summer for the winter. I know Mother did. We had a large garden every year. Missionaries brought in a lot of seeds, vegetables. I think the general standard of...of living went up somewhat with the introduction of seeds from the outside. One of our missionaries was very interested in gardening and used to get large shipments of seeds from Burpee, and he would...he would grow a lot of stuff and send packets of seeds around to other missionaries, whatever would grow at whatever altitude they happened to be. So that one didn't need a great deal of money to survive. Grain was grown locally, barley, and some wheat. And you did an awful lot of stuff just as the pioneers here used to do. I think there has been a tremendous change between missionaries who go out today and missionaries who went out fifty years ago. Missionaries who went out fifty years ago were much more acquainted with basic survival skills [train passes] than those who go out today. Mother canned an awful lot of stuff. She knew how to take a pig carcass and make ham and bacon out of it. She knew how to make clothes for everybody in the...the family, because, of course, there were no clothing stores. There were tailors of greater or less skill. Dad could...

**SHUSTER:** She would buy the cloth for them... for [unclear]?

**CARLSON:** She'd...she'd buy the cloth and put something together. Dad could put together a rough pair of shoes. All these...Mother knew how to make soap. She made our own soap. You name it, the things that were necessary for running a household, they did it somehow.

**SHUSTER:** It sounds as if money was almost irrelevant?

**CARLSON:** Money was not extremely important during those years.

**SHUSTER:** What...were there any Bibles available to the church?

**CARLSON:** Bibles could be shipped in from the coast. Hymnals also. During the war years, I think there may have been shortages there, but those were...those were available. I don't think that was an extremely grave problem.

**SHUSTER:** But there was no printing in the province?

**CARLSON:** Very little. In Lanzhou there undoubtedly were printing facilities. One of our missionaries, William Ruhl....

**SHUSTER:** R-U-A?

**CARLSON:** R-U-R-U-H-L. He was a Pennsylvania Dutchman, I believe. He had a small printing press with type fonts in English and Tibetan and Chinese, and he could print some things, tracts, small booklets, and that sort of thing. In the towns where we were...towns where I lived, I don't know of any printing establishments of...of any sort, but nothing big. In the capital, I'm sure there must have been something. I think there were...there may have been a newspaper in the capital. But, of course, everything was hand set in movable type and it was a very painstaking operation.

**SHUSTER:** What about your own spiritual experiences? When did you come to know Christ?

**CARLSON:** That's a hard question to answer. I don't know. It's...it's sort of like my mother used to say that she could never pinpoint a definite time that she came to know Christ, because she grew up in a strong Christian family. So with me. There were various times of, what shall we say?, growth or spiritual crisis, or realizing here's something that I've got to take care of. But as far as a time when I can say "On such and such a date I was born again," I can't point to a specific time. I was baptized at one of the annual...well, I was going to say annual baptismal services. They may have been held more frequently than that. But I remember baptismal services coming along about once a year at the end of a short term Bible school course, or series of meetings for new converts who are baptized in the...in the river, along with other new converts of the previous year. But, as far as a...pointing to a definite date, no I can't.

**SHUSTER:** Did the idea that you wanted to be in Christian work or that you wanted to be a missionary yourself, develop while you were still a child, or was it later?

**CARLSON:** No. As a child I don't really think that I thought much about what I wanted to do or what I wanted to be, at least not while I was there. I don't really know that I had any feelings that this what I was going to be. In high school, I didn't have any sense that I wanted to be in Christian work, I wanted to go back. It was not.... High school was sort of...[pauses] well, that part of my life had ended, and I had to make a new life here. So that during those high school years I'm not sure that I ever thought of going back to China. It was sort of...and, of course, with the communist takeover, why it was felt...it was taken for granted, "Well, that's it."

**SHUSTER:** Right, yeah. [Pauses] But did you...you see China as your home, or as a...a second home, China?

**CARLSON:** A second home, not...not primary home, but a second...second home.

**SHUSTER:** What...of course, you were practically growing up bi-lingual, speaking English and Chinese and some Tibetan, as you said. How would you characterize the Chinese language as a spoken language? Is it...English has been said to be more appropriate for communication of concepts that involve...that need clarity or logic, such as scientific technological ideas, and some

languages are supposedly more poetic, or more [pauses] romantic, or have various instinct...various inherent characteristics. Do there seem to be characteristics that come to mind [unclear due to bumping] to Chinese?

**CARLSON:** Whoa! That's...that's a hard one to answer. Chinese, it seems to me, has a problem with its characters when it comes to adopting new terms. We can...in English we can borrow a term from French or German or anything you want, or coin a new word from Latin and Greek, and after the thing has been around a while everybody knows what it means. We can put our alphabet together into any sort of a pronounceable combination.

**SHUSTER:** Like "stethoscope."

**CARLSON:** Yeah, or...well, you can think of all kinds of words, tech...technological terms that have come into use, laser, radar, all that sort of stuff. Chinese, of course, without an alphabet, you can't coin new words. You can make up new characters for technical things, but it's...it's a more difficult process to combine old characters to somehow express the new idea, or sometimes take a couple of characters and represent the sound of a new word, some sort of technical term. Radar as I remember is called *leida*, but it really doesn't mean anything and kind of sort of remains a part of technical vocabulary that's hard to disseminate. Words for abstract ideas are difficult to come by. Goodness: you can say good and bad, but goodness - yes, you can...you can say it, but abstract ideas are a little more difficult. Complicated sentences are awkward. It was seriously maintained...back in the last century when missionaries first began to try to learn Chinese it was seriously maintained that translation between Chinese and English was impossible because the two languages were so different. Of course, there they were talking about classical Chinese, which is another whole kettle of fish.

**SHUSTER:** What do you think of the various pronunciation and spelling and grammatical changes that the Peking government has inaugurated over the last few years?

**CARLSON:** As far as the romanization goes, any system is almost as good as another one. There's a...there's a saying that anyone appointed to a chair of Chinese studies spends his first couple of years developing a new system of romanization and the rest of his career fighting for its adoption. No system of romanization can automatically represent the sounds of the language. Every system has to be learned, and whether you use the present Peking system, or whether you use the Yale system, or the old Wade-Giles system, it seems to me doesn't make a speck of difference. They are all equally useful, with the exception that the Wade-Giles system with its system of indicating tones with numbers is a very awkward thing to type. And the system of indicating aspirations with an apostrophe often gets lost when the name is commonly transcribed. But other than that it is just as useful as anything else. The Yale system is easier to type, but you still have to have a typewriter with diacritical marks for the tones. The Peking system, again it can be typed on an ordinary typewriter, there are no extra characters, but you have to have something for the tones, but that's no...that's no great problem. So the Romanization system that they have done, well, I don't know that it was really necessary. Maybe there was a bit of chauvinism there. We've got to have our own system, not something that was cooked up by foreign scholars. Simplification of characters, that is good and bad. Good from the standpoint of making it easier to write some complicated characters,

making it faster to write. Now, quite a number of the characters they are using have been in use for many years in informal handwriting, taboo in a school competition for example.

**SHUSTER:** A kind of [?] shorthand?

**CARLSON:** Yeah, a sort of...a sort of shorthand, but those have now been made official. There have, of course, many other simplifications made which have not been in use in the past. Good from the standpoint makes it easy to write. Bad from the standpoint that if you know only the short forms you might have some trouble reading stuff which was printed before you learned your language. Short forms, some of them might be difficult for a person brought up on the old style characters. It might be difficult for them to recognize. So it creates something of a division. Not being Chinese, I can't say how much of a division, but it creates something of a division between those who have learned in the present school system, and those who have learned in some other school system, as far as what they can read and write. You can tell instantly, by looking at a...just a paragraph or even a sentence, whether it's the communist shortened characters or whether it's standard writing.

**SHUSTER:** I think that's about all we'll have time for today. I want to thank you for a very interesting interview.

**CARLSON:** It's been my pleasure.

**END OF TAPE**

