

## CHAPTER 1

### Trouble's Road

With sickening suddenness the Dodge pickup crashed against the rude timber guardrail, careened sideways across the rain-swept road, and then headed wildly toward the edge of the bridge which spanned a swollen river. The driver fought the steering wheel, trying to bring the skidding vehicle back toward the center of the bridge. Finally it came to a shuddering stop amid the smell of burned rubber and the sound of splintering wood.

The torrential rain continued to pelt down. Below the bridge the stream, now grown to a surging depth of seven feet, roared angrily as it ate at its ravaged banks. The trucks headlights picked up J. P. Anderson racing back out of the watery gloom toward the crash site.

“Are you fellows all right?” he shouted as he neared the truck. “That was a terrific crash. I thought you would go over the side for sure!”

The truck's two occupants, Ezra Longway and Denton Rebok, couldn't answer for a few moments. They were wrapped up in private thoughts - and prayers of thanks. They had escaped almost certain death.

“Yes,” Longway, the driver, breathed at last, “we're OK. God only knows how and why we survived. I don't know how we could have stayed on the bridge without His help.”

Climbing from the truck into the driving rain, the two men could see that the front end was askew and the wheels knocked completely out of alignment. As they squatted in the dark wetness to study the damage more closely, Rebok's mind compared this latest misfortune with the others that had plagued them from almost the moment they left Hong Kong less than five hours before.

The trip had started out routinely enough, except that it was raining in the New Territories, something it hadn't done for far

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too long. But as they moved out of the city, it looked as if nature was trying to make up the entire deficiency in just one day.

Rebok planned to accompany Longway in the China Division truck to Hankow. There they would split up, Longway going toward the southwest and Rebok to the northwest, where he planned to do Ingathering work as far west as Lanchow.

Because they were driving a new truck, the otherwise long and hazardous trip seemed less dangerous to the two men as they started out. Also accompanying them in his own car were J. P. Anderson, director of the Cantonese Mission, and several Chinese workers. But as they moved out of the city and started up a crooked mountain road, the truck engine sputtered and stopped.

Longway motioned to the Chinese mechanic, who had been sent along for just such emergencies, to check on the engine and take a look under the hood.

"This engine no belong proper," the fellow exclaimed after a few minutes of inspection.

"Well, you'd better fix it," Longway told him. "We have a plenty long trip to make."

At last the mechanics tinkering with the wires, screws, and caps brought results. The motor vroomed into action, and they were on their way again - until they came to the next hill and the engine failed again.

The frustrating little ritual continued at every hill until they were almost to the New Territories boundary. Then strangely the engine began to run smoother. But just as they were nearing the border, a tire blew out.

"And this is supposed to be a new truck," Longway sputtered as they crawled out into the spattering rain.

Rebok's job was to hold the umbrella over Longway and the mechanic as they changed the heavy truck tire. The result of his shifting and slipping about, trying to cover all three, was that none of them kept dry. Moments after they had climbed back into the truck, the rain slackened and then stopped completely.

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It was six o'clock and starting to get dark when they pulled up by the customs shed at the border. Well aware of how thoroughly the guards usually inspected vehicles as loaded as theirs, the men expected to spend the night there. Just as they pulled to a stop, another cloudburst began.

The soldiers and customs officials, rain capes held over their heads to fend off the almost solid sheet of rain, took a look at the small mountain of supplies.

"I think I'll take your word for it this time," one of the officials shouted above the din of the storm. "Come inside and we'll get the formalities over with quickly." A few minutes later the mission group moved away from the customs house on their way to Canton.

With the onset of darkness the downpour seemed to increase. The falling water formed a liquid curtain over the truck's windshield until the taillights of Anderson's car just ahead of them were no more than tiny, diffused, red dots in an eerie sea. The flooded road was barely visible.

Through the deluge the drivers made out the faint outline of a bridge. Anderson's car kept to the right and seemed almost to jump across. But it was too late when Longway saw the four-foot break in the road just before the edge of the bridge. It was on the left, the side on which the truck was traveling! The pounding rain had washed the approach away leaving the perilous hole. The truck's left front wheel dipped off the road into space. Then the truck struck the end of the bridge with a bang and a grinding crash, throwing the men against the roof of the cab as the vehicle bounced high into the air and then back down. Then the truck skidded toward the guardrail!

Now, as the men squatted at the front of the truck to inspect the wreckage of wheels, axle, and metal bars, Rebok knew they wouldn't be keeping to their carefully prepared timetable for arrival at Hankow. Night closed in on them as the rain continued to pour.

"Well, let's check off everything that seems broken and see what we'll have to buy to get this thing put back together," Anderson directed as he bent lower under the bumper to

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examine the damage. "We'd better get started to Shumchun in the car right away to see if we can catch someone still up. If they have the parts we need, we can be back here early in the morning to start repairs."

Curious villagers soon began to appear as if by magic out of the rainy night. Anderson and Longway made out their list of needed parts and then left in the car. With the help of the two Chinese workers who had been riding with Anderson, and a score of villagers, Rebok pushed the truck across the bridge and off the road.

He asked a village boy to bring a warning light of some kind so it could signal danger to other vehicles which might come along. The youngster returned with a small Chinese lantern and some red paper. They pasted the paper over the lantern and soon had a warning light aglow.

Then Rebok and the two Chinese workers crawled into the cab of the truck to try to sleep. But sleep did not come. They shivered in their rain-soaked clothes and worried that the bandits who infested the area might attack. Without guns, and with a truck of supplies, they would be a prime target if discovered.

During the night several people came along, each curiously examining the washed-out portion of the road, then inspecting the truck where the missionary and his Chinese companions lay huddled. But no bandits appeared. One old peasant seemed particularly solicitous about their safety. For the rest of the long night he walked back and forth, checking frequently on his "charges" inside the truck. Then, without leaving name or other identification, he just faded away before dawn. "I wonder," Rebok mused, "if he could have been one of God's angels sent to care for a few of His servants?"

About 2:30 the next afternoon Anderson and Longway returned with the repair parts and three mechanics to help install them. An hour and a half later they gunned the truck into position behind Anderson's car, and the weary group moved off slowly along the road, by this time a slippery ribbon of deep mud. The truck, having had its muffler broken in the

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crash, roared as they started up the next hill. Part way up they had to stop to apply water to the radiator of the overheated engine.

They were to repeat this process, stopping several times on every hill, all the way to Canton. And the deep mud repeatedly sent them skidding across the road toward sheer dropoffs. To add to their anxiety, the lights on Anderson's car burned out shortly after sunset. Rebok, now driving the truck, tried to supply some visibility from the truck's lights while the car stayed in front of him. After hours of impossible driving conditions, the weary, exhausted group reached Canton about midnight.

Thursday morning they found a garage where they ordered repairs on the overheating engine, the muffler, the failing lights on Anderson's car, and a dozen other things which needed attention before they could undertake the rest of the rugged journey. Then the three men decided to make their forced delay as profitable as possible by calling on the mayor and the military garrison commander to see if they could collect funds earlier promised to Dr. William Wagner for the church's Ingathering fund. They were cordially received, the mayor contributing \$500 and the garrison commander \$1,000. Had they waited to make these calls when they returned from the long trip north and west, the funds would not have been available for Canton was destined to fall into enemy hands shortly.

At seven o'clock Thursday evening Rebok and Longway set off in the truck again, this time with Hankow as their destination. The nighttime departure was purposeful, for Japanese bombers were dropping their lethal cargoes throughout the countryside during the day. It was October, 1938, and much of China was suffering massive attacks.

The men planned to drive through the night and then rest on Friday and Saturday. As they ground their way up the mountains in the gathering darkness, Rebok thought of the times he had seen these lovely peaks in daylight. The mountains between Kwangtung and Hunan provinces provide some of the

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most beautiful scenery in all of China. For many centuries their lofty majesty had kept south and central China separated. Beautiful to look at, but difficult to cross in a car or truck, and especially at night, the mountains posed real hazards. The grades were steep, and in many places the curves were extremely sharp. As the truck continued climbing, a heavy mist settled in to add to the difficulties of the twisting, slippery road. They met numerous trucks driven by soldiers who assumed that they had the right of way over civilian vehicles. Often their truck lurched dangerously close to the edge of the road which dropped off sheer to the canyon floor below.

Just before sundown, exhausted after twenty-four hours of driving, the two men rumbled into the little city of Chensien in Hunan province. It took only a few minutes to locate a place to stay, for few inns grace such a town - none of them very desirable or comfortable. Nevertheless, they soon fell into an exhausted sleep in one of the places. At 9:15 the next morning they awakened, ate breakfast, and then went back to sleep again.

The chilling wail of sirens awoke the two missionaries from their second sleep.

“Hurry! Hurry! You cannot stay here! The air raid is on,” the innkeeper shouted as he appeared in the doorway. “You men must go!”

In a scramble of flying trousers and shirts the two missionaries raced out to the courtyard and jumped into the truck. Glancing at his watch, Rebok saw that it was about 1:30 p.m. The long trip had exhausted them more than either had realized.

Gunning the engine, Longway sent the truck racing through the little city and out into the countryside. They soon found a clump of trees near the side of the road. Longway parked the truck under them. The planes appeared from the northeast, sweeping low over the truck and men. Their dreadful roar filled the sky, but they did not release their eggs of death. They were after bigger targets.

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While hiding under the trees, Rebok noticed one lone figure walking calmly toward the threatened city. He was clad in the garb of a Taoist monk with the knob of long hair sticking out through the hole in the top of his hat. Thinking to warn the old man of his danger, Rebok said in his most polite Chinese, "My elder brother, please stay with us and rest awhile. The siren has given the warning of an air raid. The planes will appear any minute."

The old Taoist priest, pointing to his breast, solemnly replied, "If you are all right and at peace in here, you can go anywhere at any time."

Rebok smiled in spite of the danger. "Maybe the old boy is right about that," he thought.

When the bombers had gone, the men discussed what they should do. "It certainly doesn't seem that other planes will be coming again soon," volunteered Longway. "Since they didn't bomb us, that probably means this place is of no military value to them. But I'd still favor moving on in case Chensien may be slated for bombing by another group."

"Sure, let's move on," Rebok agreed. "We would have just as good a chance on the road to Changsha as we would here."

So, after retrieving their luggage at the inn, they started for Changsha. By evening they reached a ferry on which they could cross a river. As they alighted from the truck amidst several cars and other trucks, an air raid siren sounded again. The ferry man refused to take anyone across the river during the air raid.

"But why not?" protested Rebok. "Man, you ought to be sensible. If China is going to win this war, you can't stop everything every time a Japanese plane flies over. You ought to take some of us across the river. If the pilots see all these cars and trucks piled up here waiting for the ferry, they just might drop some bombs. We are a concentrated target. It would be better to take some of us across."

His argument convinced the ferryman. "You make good sense. I will take you across, and we will outwit the invaders!"

After hiding in a moonlit field on the other side of the river as a group of bombers flew overhead, Longway and Rebok

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returned to the truck and started again for Changsha. But it was a hectic ride. Every few miles bands of soldiers tried to persuade them to keep off the road. However, the missionaries' arguments compounded of equal parts of psychology, oriental face-saving, and bravado, always persuaded the soldiers to back down and permit the truck to move on.

At a railroad crossing they found a train stopped because of an air raid warning. The engine and the first few cars needed only to back up a hundred feet to permit traffic to move on the road, but the engineer seemed to ignore this fact. Longway, using his special brand of psychology, finally convinced the engineer he could move the train without causing the downfall of the nation. At last they were able to move on again.

A few miles out of Changsha a large crowd of people and vehicles blocked the road.

"The planes have just bombed the city," someone told the missionaries as the truck stopped. "All the people in Changsha have fled into the countryside. You won't be able to get into the city."

But Rebok and Longway wanted more than just to get into the city; they wanted to get through it and on to Hankow. They slowly inched the truck forward, blasting the horn and waving wildly to get the people off the road. Then, a line of about twenty soldiers strung across the road halted their progress altogether.

"Say, this isn't good," Longway muttered as he pulled the truck to a stop behind the clogged traffic. "With all these cars piled up here and the moon full like it is, we'll be sitting ducks. Let's go see if we can't get these fellows to see the danger."

Once again they employed the arguments which had persuaded the ferryman to take them across the river, but the arguments had little effect on the soldiers who were under strict orders. Then the missionaries spied some officers and outlined the danger to them; but again they drew only gestures of futility. Finally they saw several higher officers standing nearby.

"Look," Longway told them, "do you mean that a few Japanese planes can stop every wheel in China as they have



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done with this line of cars? The Chinese will never win the war that way. There is more to this war than just cutting everything off tight every time there is an air raid." This time his argument produced results.

"Where do you want to go?" one of the officers asked.

"We're going to Hankow, and we've got to get there by tomorrow morning."

"Well, if we stop you here, you certainly won't get to Hankow by morning, will you?" another of the men challenged, a sly smile on his face.

A few tense moments passed before the top officer of the group spoke.

"We might let you go on if you will go around the town as we tell you. You cannot go into Changsha itself. Take the road that leads around the city and bypass the town altogether. That is the only condition under which I will let you go on."

Those terms were easy to accept, and soon the two men roared around the cars and past the soldiers who moved aside to let them by.

On the other side of Changsha they met what appeared to be the final obstacle to any further travel. Scores of halted military trucks, heading toward Changsha, had jammed the road. It was impossible to get around them. Desperate to keep moving, the two men tried their persuasion again.

"We have just come from Changsha," they told the driver of the lead truck. "We have not had any problem. If we can get through so easily there is no reason why you can't take your trucks around the city."

"Well, if you could do it, we should be able to also," the fellow finally agreed. To the driver of the truck behind him he passed the word that they were moving out and started his engine. Soon the trucks were snorting on toward the city. Rebok and Longway resumed their pilgrimage to Hankow.

At the next ferry, as the missionaries waited to cross the river, a flight of Japanese bombers flew directly over them. But the formation kept to its high altitude, bound for other targets.

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When they left the river and started again into the mountains, they passed increasing numbers of retreating soldiers - a sorry-looking lot of sick, dirty, hungry men, many just barely dragging themselves along the road, all with little or no military equipment.

"Where are you coming from?" Rebok asked one heavily-bandaged man.

"We are from Yangsin," the soldier said. "It was a defeat for thousands of us. The enemy is really advancing now."

Passing through Tungcheng, the two travelers met a band of about 200 badly wounded soldiers just evacuated from a battle only twenty miles away. The boom of large guns firing in the distant battle sobered both men.

"I thought Hankow would hold out for many weeks yet," Longway murmured as he looked beyond the pitifully wounded men toward the sound of artillery fire. "It looks as if my calculations must be all wrong."

The impression that the area would be captured soon became even stronger as they passed through the mountains and came upon the large plain on which Hankow is situated. Practically all the people had abandoned the countryside.

"Well," Longway said with a wry grin as they rolled along the road, "it looks as if I'll have to treat the Harris family."

The admission came from an agreement Longway had made with another missionary, W. J. Harris, in Shanghai during the past summer as to when Hankow might fall. With China's armies suffering one defeat after another, it seemed almost certain that eventually Hankow would be captured. The only question was when the blow would actually come. The talk had turned into friendly rivalry when Harris had agreed that if Hankow did not fall before January 1, he would treat Longway and his family of seven to as much ice cream as they could eat at one time. If, however, the city fell before that date, Longway would treat the Harris family of five. With January 1 still some nine weeks away, and the Japanese armies sure to overrun the city soon, it looked as if the Harrises would be eating Longway-purchased ice cream. Now, as the two travelers neared the city,

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Longway added, "I think I will leave tomorrow night for Chungking as soon as we have delivered the supplies in Hankow and Wuhan. The road may be cut if I wait longer."

Now they began passing thousands of soldiers setting up new defense lines to which the main army would withdraw when the battle for Hankow became too costly. At 2:30 Sunday afternoon they reached Wuchang, Hankow's neighboring city across the Yangtze River. As if in greeting, air raid sirens began to scream just as they entered the city. The wailing had become so familiar by now, however, that they kept driving through the streets. The city appeared deserted except for a few soldiers and policemen at intersections. Passing through the almost deserted streets, Longway and Rebok learned that the city was to be set afire just before the Japanese entered. Hankow was also scheduled for the torch. At a given signal a thousand fires would flare in the cities. It was part of China's "scorched earth" policy to leave nothing to the invaders.

The situation looked grave to the two men as they bounced along the streets. They could only watch helplessly as thousands of panicked people left behind everything they owned and fled toward an unknown future. And what about their own plans to continue toward the northwest? With the invading army poised for a thrust into the city and families desperately fleeing their homes for miles to the south, Longway and Rebok wondered if it would be safe to enter Hankow at all. Just when would the Imperial Japanese Army come sweeping down Hankow's streets? "One thing is for sure," Rebok thought as the truck rattled through the deserted streets, "I don't want to let those fellows get their hands on me. They probably would not have much sympathy for foreign missionaries."