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-- FEATURES

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Southern Baptist Chaplains
Recount Invasion Experience

By Beverly R. Scheland

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (BP)--When an emergency alert sounded at 7 p.m. Oct. 24, most of the United States Army soldiers who scattered to prepare for immediate troop deployment assumed it was just another practice alert.

"When we saw the live ammunition being loaded onto the aircraft, we knew this wasn't a game," said Army Chaplain Capt. William Merrifield. "By 1 a.m., we knew it was real."

Merrifield, chaplain for the Army's 2nd battalion of the 325th Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division, was one of three Southern Baptist chaplains who followed the Rangers into Grenada as part of the United States' invasion forces.

"The Rangers had jumped into Grenada at 500 feet with no reserve parachutes and secured the air field," said Capt. Robert "Knox" Herndon, 2nd Brigade chaplain of the 82nd Airborne Division. "The Communists had laid wire 100 meters across the runway so planes couldn't land," he added.

"We knew the Rangers were being shot at and dying. They sent us a message: 'Please hurry,' and we were trying to get there to help," explained 1st Lt. John Owings, chaplain of the 3rd battalion of the 325th Infantry.

"Four times we tried to land at the Grenada runway and were prevented by enemy fire," said Owings. "After we finally landed, I spent the night in the hills with the young paratroopers. I slept on the ground under a poncho--never at the same place twice--and was usually awakened by being rained on. Whatever they did, I did. It was rough, but a blessing," Owings observed about his first combat experience.

The chaplains were constantly being called upon to pray--from commanding officers at secret clearance briefings and on the planes bound for Grenada, to battlefield requests by soldiers and civilians. "The Bible says to pray for our enemies," Merrifield maintained, "and even my wounded soldiers took time to pray for the families of the killed Cuban soldiers.

"It was a fantastic opportunity for ministry," Merrifield continued. "My guys took some pretty heavy hits when we went in and death wasn't something off in the distance. Most of them had never had to face the finality of death before. They were asking for Bibles--I went in with 181 New Testaments and brought less than 31 back--and there was a burst of rededications to God," he concluded.

Herndon used a "liberated Cuban vehicle" to carry hundreds of sheets of paper and envelopes to American soldiers in the field for writing home. "I waited around about 30 minutes and then collected the letters. Many of the soldiers had been writing home on cardboard from their C-rations," he said.

"A lot of the civilians were initially nervous and afraid about our being there because they had been so brutally victimized by the Cubans," Owings said. A family with eight children was under house arrest with no water or food, he explained. "And we hid 65 civilians in an attic of a barn to protect them from Cubans who would slip back in and persecute them at night," he added.

"When one lady was shot in the leg by snipers we had the opportunity to talk to some of the civilians as we treated her and prepared to evacuate her. We explained we were there to protect them," Owings concluded.

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"They began to turn in the Cubans right and left and tell us where the weapons were that had been brought in secretly during the curfew time when all the electricity was also cut off," added Herndon.

Herndon indicated he saw 50 Cuban armored personnel carriers with guns, and church officials had been marked for elimination by the Communists. "We went in in the nick of time," he said, "otherwise it would've been a different story."

All the churches had been closed by the Communists for a month, according to the chaplains, and the first thing the civilians did was to reopen them. "The major asked me to conduct a small service and the Grenadans gathered around. They were so thankful they could open their churches," Merrifield said.

"All afternoon the church bells were ringing," recalled Owings. "The people kept coming up to us saying, 'God bless you. God bless America. Thank you for being here.'"

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Missionaries To Enter
Nepal And Sierra Leone

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Nepal has become the 102nd country or territory where Southern Baptists have missionaries. Early next year Sierra Leone will become the 103rd.

Bruce and Pat Thorpe, appointed missionaries in October, were assigned to Nepal effective Dec. 13. Veteran missionaries Bert and Ruth Dyson will transfer to Sierra Leone effective Feb. 1. Neither couple, however, will arrive to fill their new assignment until April.

The Thorpes will work under the direction of the United Mission to Nepal, a cooperative of 37 member missions and churches with 335 missionaries from 18 countries. He will work as a physician and she as a social worker, though their precise assignments will be determined by the mission.

Nepal lies on India's northeast border, next to China.

The Dysons, now on furlough, have been missionaries to Nigeria since 1955. They will return to Nigeria April 1 before moving to Sierra Leone later that month.

Dyson has become known throughout West Africa for literacy work and will continue some work in that ministry, though his primary assignment will be general evangelism.

The Dysons' work in Freetown will be in cooperation with European and Nigerian Baptists. The European Baptist Mission Society, which inherited the country's earliest Baptist work from British Baptists, also has missionaries in Freetown.

Sierra Leone is located along the Atlantic coast north of Liberia and south of Guinea. Fewer than 10 percent of its 3.5 million people claim to be Christians. The Sierra Leone Baptist Convention and Nigerian Baptists report more than 1,600 members in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone is the only English-speaking country in West Africa without Southern Baptist missionaries.

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Map to be mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

CORRECTION--In (BP) story "Hands Reach Out Of The Dark In War-Weary South West Africa" mailed 12/9/83, in third paragraph, please change "(almost called Namibia)" to "(also called The Namibia)".

Also, in (BP) story "Hamptons Bring Good Hope To South Africa's Cape" in the same mailing, the first sentence in the 12th paragraph should read Leaders in the Baptist Union of South Africa have made progress in dissolving racial barriers in their churches and outreach in South Africa.

Thanks, Baptist Press

Elder Emphasizes
The Local Church

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The local church must be the focus of every program of the Baptist Sunday School Board, Lloyd Elder told state and associational leaders at the annual December planning meetings at the Sunday School Board.

Elder, president-elect of the board, spoke in separate sessions of associational metro religious education directors and state executive directors, family ministry, church music, church training, Sunday school and church administration leaders.

Elder, who becomes president of the board Feb. 1, 1984, said: "It is our purpose to serve the local church and to let the strategic focus of all our planning be to serve the local church. We will measure our success at the Sunday School Board by asking how the churches are doing and what part did the board play in helping things happen."

He said church training, by helping leaders know who they are and what they are about, can bring Southern Baptist people and churches to their finest hour.

"I dream of the time when we will no longer talk of fragmentation but of denominational renewal," he said. "When this happens we will be able to ask tough questions of one another yet work together in a spirit of brotherly love."

In a challenge to Sunday school leaders, Elder said while the board produces excellent literature "the Bible is the textbook for Sunday school. We do not have a question about the word of God. We must communicate a confidence in the word of God."

He emphasized the importance of evangelism through the Sunday school, commenting: "When Baptist people go, people come. When Sunday school enrollment increases, attendance increases. When attendance increases, hearing increases. When hearing increases, faith increases. When faith increases, people follow the Lord in believers' baptism. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

He called for Sunday school and church administration leaders to team up "to touch the pastors' hearts with what the Sunday school can do. Sunday school is a great organization and it builds great churches. Sunday school work is pastors' work. It is not something added; it is his work."

In an address to music leaders, Elder called Southern Baptists "the singing people of God," and said "music can facilitate understanding of the sermon."

"Churches are blessed when there is a sense the minister of music is also a minister of the gospel who has a beautiful way to express the gospel message," said Elder. "Churches are blessed most when the music program is built on a sense of responsibility for leading persons to Christ and into the church."

Elder addressed family consultants by video tape, emphasizing the imperative of ministering to families. "Even good Christian families need our help," he said. "Our best families still need models and encouragement."

He praised efforts made during the administration of President Grady Cothen to increase family ministry resources, and said: "We will never fall away from the basics or quit our focus on family. Our foundation for family ministry is our biblical theology."

During one session, Elder was asked about his personal style of leadership.

He said he would like to participate in "servant-leadership or shared ministry where the leadership and creativity of a lot of people work together. I want to invest my life at the Sunday School Board so that 1,500 dreams come true rather than having 1,500 people working to make my dreams come true."

Foreign Board Opposes
Ambassador To Vatican

By Bob Stanley

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptists' Foreign Mission Board Dec. 13 urged President Reagan not to appoint an ambassador to the Vatican.

A resolution approved by the board opposes "such a dangerous precedent that intertwines American self-interest and the higher priorities of the Kingdom of God."

It calls on Reagan and the U.S. Congress to reappraise the reported decision to upgrade diplomatic relationships with the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church.

Establishing full diplomatic relations with the Vatican could blur or compromise Baptist missionary witness in Roman Catholic countries, the resolution said, and potentially cause animosity or feelings of betrayal in areas "that may be non-Catholic in orientation."

Board members took the action after news reports said President Reagan plans to name William A. Wilson as U.S. ambassador to the Vatican. Earlier, Congress repealed a 115-year-old ban against funding for a Vatican diplomatic mission.

The resolution said appointment of an ambassador would be a flagrant violation of the principle of separation of church and state, a "cherished concept based on biblical precept and refined in the fires of religious persecution." Baptists and other Christians, it noted, have historically opposed anything that would threaten or jeopardize this principle.

Other actions at the December board meeting included beginning work in Nepal as the 102nd country or territory where Southern Baptists have missionaries, transferring a veteran Nigerian missionary couple to start work early next year in Sierra Leone on Africa's western coast, and establishing fraternal relations with the New Zealand Baptist Union.

Sidney and Alwilda Reber, former missionaries to Singapore-Malaysia, will spend two years in an auxiliary service assignment as the board's first representatives working with a New Zealand Baptist church to help start a new congregation. Reber retires Jan. 31 as the board's vice-president for management services.

Bill Wakefield, director for work in South and Southeast Asia, noted that a strong Baptist Union exists in New Zealand and said the board is grateful for the "opportunity to link hands" with fellow Baptists. The board action will facilitate sending personnel for project involvement and partnership missions, but New Zealand will not be considered a mission field.

Bert and Ruth Dyson, Nigerian missionaries who spearheaded evangelistic literacy efforts in that country, will be transferred to Sierra Leone effective Feb. 1. This country will be counted next year as the board's 103rd area of work.

The board also named 20 new missionaries at a service in Culpeper, Va., and approved reappointment of two couples. These bring the year's career and associate additions to 207, plus 25 reappointees. Total additions to the missionary force this year are 359, compared to a record 406 in 1982. Including the latest appointments and resignations, Southern Baptists have 3,364 foreign missionaries.

Qualifications for missionary candidates also received approval. Most of the policies have been in effect for a number of years, but this was the first time all had been pulled together in a comprehensive statement.

The action reaffirmed a long-standing policy that missionary candidates whose jobs require a seminary degree must be graduates of a Southern Baptist seminary or have earned a degree from an accredited seminary followed by a year of study at one of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries.

Some Southern Baptists have questioned this policy, saying it puts undue hardship on those who graduate from other accredited seminaries. But Louis Cobbs, director of the board's personnel selection department, said the policy underscores the tenet that the board operates along denominational lines.

The qualifications restate the basic board position that candidates "must give evidence of mature Christian faith, commitment to share their witness with other persons, a sense of God's leadership in considering missionary service and a record of meaningful membership and participation in a Southern Baptist church."

The ages for career appointment now are 24 to 45, with candidates for missionary associates (who serve four-year, renewable terms) eligible from ages 35 to 60.

The qualifications included the recently approved requirement that candidates have continuing witness training or comparable training including personal witnessing experience.

Board members also appropriated \$2 million from current funds to meet urgent capital needs overseas that went unmet when the 1982 Lottie Moon offering fell almost \$4 million short of its \$58 million goal.

Hunger and relief funds released in October and November totaled \$859,814.

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Foreign Board Names
20 New Missionaries

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CULPEPER, Va. (BP)--Clarence Jackson knew 20 years ago he should be a foreign missionary, but he also realized God wanted him to prepare at home first.

On Dec. 13, four pastorates and three states after he felt the call, Jackson became one of 20 new missionaries named by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Culpeper, Va.

The South Carolina native and his wife, Carolyn, from Georgia, will go to Trinidad.

Jackson was not the only new missionary who told an appointment service congregation at Culpeper Baptist Church he recognized the call but also understood he needed preparation.

"I responded and was ready to get on the boat and go," said Dara Gallemore of Texas. But she realized God "wanted me to experience things first." She will go to Ivory Coast.

Dave Crum felt the urge to do foreign mission work while a college freshman. Enthusiastic but unprepared, he went overseas with an evangelism team, but soon realized that to continue such work would be out of God's will.

"I had to grow before I could be the kind of missionary God wanted me to be," he said. "I have since come to realize God doesn't start special plans on mountaintops, but in the hearts of people he has called to serve him."

Crum and his wife, Jamea, of Missouri, will go to Japan.

The new missionaries appointed and four reappointed during the Foreign Mission Board's December meeting brought the number of missionary appointments for 1983 to 359.

Also appointed at the service were Ron and Alana Ichter Greenwich, of Tennessee and Louisiana. She is the daughter of Bill and Jerry Ichter, Southern Baptist missionaries to South Brazil. The Greenwiches will go to South Brazil, also.

Others were Bill and Joyce Beatty Burkhalter, of Georgia and Florida, to Bangladesh; David and Elwanda Brown Cornelius, Arkansas and Texas, to Nigeria; Janice Cowart, Louisiana, to Taiwan. Also named were Robert and Rebecca Levacy Davis, Texas, to Mexico; Mark and Cindy Stringer Morris, Tennessee, to South Africa; Karen Schaffner, Texas, to Japan; Ron and Shirley Hipp Hanie, Georgia, to France; and Don Reed, Texas, to Japan.

Reappointed were Jack and Pauline Hansen Hebb, West Virginia and Florida, to Mexico; and Irvin and Mickey Meadows Northcutt, Alabama and Georgia, to Colombia.

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