



Alfonso and Mayte Anderson, 1946.
Photo courtesy of Bruce N. Anderson.

Anderson, Alfonso Nils (1887–1958)

BRUCE N. ANDERSON

Bruce Anderson, B.A. (Pacific Union College), M.S. (Ohio State University), M.D. (Loma Linda University). Internship at Stanford University Hospitals. Residencies at Harding Hospital; Ohio State University Hospitals Child Psychiatry fellow. Captain, MC, US Army 1975-1977. Staff psychiatrist at Hinsdale Hospital 1970-78, St. Helena Hospital 1978-present. President of Pacific Union College Alumni Association 1982-85. Founding Chair, Walter C. Utt Endowment. President and board chair, Adventist Health California Medical Group. Trustee, Loma Linda University Behavioral Medical Center Operating Board. Medical Director, LiveWell Behavioral Health, Adventist Health, Clearlake.

Alfonso N. Anderson, with his wife Mayte Landis Anderson, devoted more than thirty years to pioneering mission work in Japan and in the Philippines, where they survived three years in the harsh conditions of World War II internment camps.

Early Life and Education

Born March 4, 1887, in a sod house in Carthage, South Dakota, Alfonso Nils Anderson was the younger son of Lewis and Emma (Nilson) Anderson. After Lewis's death from tuberculosis in 1888, Alfonso's mother moved west with her two fatherless boys, settling first in Kent, Washington and finally Oakland, California.¹

A member of the California state militia, Alfonso saw active duty after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, earning enough money to enroll at Pacific Union College, then located in Healdsburg.² When the college closed for a year he transferred to Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska where he graduated with the Class of 1913, and was class poet. The same year he and classmate Mayte Landis were married, and promptly accepted a call to mission service in Japan.³

Missionary to Japan

For more than three decades, Anderson was a missionary to the Japanese people, first in their homeland, then in the Japanese community in the Philippines. After heading the mission station in Hiroshima (1915-1917), he did editorial work with the Japanese periodicals *Toki no Shirushi* (*Signs of Times*) and *Shimei no Otozure* (*Tidings of the Message*). His additional roles included home missionary secretary and publishing secretary of the Japan Union (1919-1921), teacher of Bible and history at Japan Mission Training School (1921-1927), director of Tohoku Mission (1928-1934), and Bible teacher at Japan Union College (1934-1936).⁴ A fluent Japanese linguist, the mild-mannered, near sighted missionary once had to calm an angry mob that had been inflamed by wild rumors accusing Koreans of poisoning wells in the aftermath of the 1923 Tokyo earthquake and was bent on attacking a Korean worker at the Adventist press.⁵

The Andersons had two children, both born in the mission field. Charles, born in Tokyo on October 21, 1914, became a physician who practiced psychiatry at Hinsdale Hospital in Illinois for 26 years. Virginia, born July 26, 1919 in Shanghai, China, where her father was attending church meetings, would herself later serve in the Far East with her minister husband, William A. Hilliard.⁶

The Philippines, World War II and Internment

The Andersons moved to the Philippines in 1937, with the assignment of seeking converts among the large Japanese community in Davao, in the southern island of Mindanao. In 1942 Alfonso and Mayte were interned after the conquest of the American colony by the Japanese army. Two years later they were transferred to a harsher environment at the large internment camp created at Santo Tomas University in Manila. Though forbidden by their captors from watching the skies, they were aware of the aerial dogfights which came ever closer to Manila. Alfonso maintained his sanity by studying astronomy.⁷

Alfonso was near death, weighing 70 pounds, when the camp was liberated by troops of the American 1st Cavalry Division on February 3, 1945. He was hospitalized, but Mayte was among the emaciated prisoners cheering General Douglas MacArthur who visited on February 7, even as the battle for Manila continued. Later it was learned that Japanese general orders to camp commandants called for executing all prisoners if threatened by American forces.⁸

Final Years

Alfonso emerged from this experience permanently weakened, but still deeply in love with Japan and Japanese culture. After retirement in 1946, he carried on quiet personal evangelism among Japanese Americans. He enjoyed teaching astronomy to young Pathfinders, and became a skilled amateur poet. The following sample captures something of the spirit that animated his commitment to the cause of Christ:

Miracle

I ask for neither name nor niche
In corridor of fame,
Nor thrill of sense, nor touch of gold,
Nor laurels in earth's game.

I only trust my Lord all-wise,
By miracle of grace
Will grant a faith enriched by love,
And then— to see His face!⁹

Alfonso Anderson died March 16, 1958 in Hinsdale, Illinois. Mayte Landis Anderson passed away six years later on April 27, 1964 in North Sacramento, California.¹⁰

SOURCES

"Alfonso Nils Anderson obituary." *ARH*, May 29, 1958.

Anderson, Alfonso Nils. "Miracle." *Northern Light*, March 1954.

Charles Landis Anderson Remembers. Angwin, CA: Bruce N. Anderson, 2002.

Henderson, Bruce. *Rescue at Los Baños: The Most Daring Prison Camp Raid of World War II* New York: Harper-Collins, 2015.

Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia. 2nd rev. edition. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1996. S.v. "Anderson, Alfonso Nils."

NOTES

1. *Charles Landis Anderson Remembers* (Angwin, CA: Bruce N. Anderson, 2002), 7, 14.?
2. Healdsburg College was renamed Pacific Union College in 1906 but remained in Healdsburg until 1908 and then after closing during a transitional year reopened in its present location of Angwin, California in 1909. See *Walter C. Utt, A Mountain, a Pickax, a College*, 3rd edition (Angwin, CA: Pacific Union College, 1996), 28-41.?
3. *Charles Landis Anderson Remembers*, 13-15.?
4. "Alfonso Nils Anderson obituary," *ARH*, May 29, 1958, 25; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. edition (1996), s.v. "Anderson, Alfonso Nils."?
5. Author's personal knowledge from Charles L. Anderson, son of Alfonso N. Anderson.?
6. *Charles Landis Anderson Remembers*, 15-17, 131-132; "Alfonso Nils Anderson obituary."?
7. Author's personal knowledge from Charles L. Anderson, son of Alfonso N. Anderson.?
8. Bruce Henderson, *Rescue at Los Baños: The Most Daring Prison Camp Raid of World War II* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2015), 170.?
9. Alfonso N. Anderson, "Miracle," *Northern Light*, March 1954, 2.?
10. "Alfonso Nils Anderson obituary"; "Mayte Landis Anderson obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 22, 1964.?

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