

# Currie, Holman Carl (1918–2009) and Eva Ruth Longway-Currie (1919–2015)



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BRUCE W. LO

Bruce W. Lo is the ESDA assistant editor for the Chinese Union Mission.

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Holman Carl Currie ( ) and Eva Ruth Longway Currie devoted half a century to denominational service on three continents: Asia, North America, and Africa, of which 26 years were in the mission fields of China.<sup>1</sup>

They arrived in China at the height of the Sino-Japanese War but, unlike others, they chose to remain in or be near China throughout the war. They are best remembered for their leadership and pioneering work in Taiwan, where Carl established the Adventist mission and became its first president, serving in this position for a total of 14 years. He also led the Zambesi Union in Africa when the former British colony of Rhodesia became the independent state of Zimbabwe.<sup>2</sup>

## Family Background

Carl Currie was born December 28, 1918, in Presque Isle, Maine, to the home of John Tracey Currie and Fae Easler Currie.<sup>3, 4</sup> Carl had two half-siblings, Ralph and Naomi, who were children of his father from a previous marriage. He was his mother's third child, with older sister Greta and older brother John. Two years later brother Zenas was born.

At an early age, Carl learned to do his share of chores on the family dairy and 2,000-acre potato farm. He was able to milk the cows when he was only five. The lessons he learned from hard work on the farm prepared him well for his overseas mission service later in life. Carl attended a multi-grade elementary school only two miles

Carl and Eva Currie in 1990.

From *Adventism in China Digital Image Repository*. Accessed December 11, 2019. [www.adventisminchina.org](http://www.adventisminchina.org).

from his home. He excelled academically and was the valedictorian of his class. Carl then attended Washburn High School for the next four years. He was active in the school's athletic program in basketball and baseball. During his senior year, he was elected president of the National Honor Society and gave the main student address at his graduation.

Carl's mother, Fae Currie, was a Seventh-day Adventist and she was determined to bring her children up according to her faith.<sup>5</sup> Carl was baptized at the age of 13. However, it was four years later that his father, John Currie, accepted Christ and was baptized when Carl was 17.

Eva Longway Currie was born in Bangkok, Siam (now Thailand) on March 20, 1919, to Ezra and Inez Longway, pioneer Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to the country of Siam. When she was three years of age, the family moved to China where her childhood and adolescent years were spent on the mission compounds of Hankow (now Wuhan), Hubei, and Yencheng, Henan.<sup>6</sup>

Eva's first two years of secondary school studies were completed at Far Eastern Academy in Shanghai. Her junior year in academy was during her family's furlough in New England so Eva attended South Lancaster Academy. It was then that she fell in love with Carl who was a freshman at Atlantic Union College on the same campus. Eva moved back to China for her senior year during the time that Far Eastern Academy was in the process of moving to Hong Kong due to civil unrest. Her college studies were done at Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, where she completed a two-year secretarial science course.<sup>7</sup>

## Higher Education

Drake University in Iowa offered Carl a scholarship for his college studies, but he chose to attend Atlantic Union College (AUC), a Seventh-day Adventist institution in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, which had also offered him a scholarship. At AUC he enrolled in the theology course, hoping to become an evangelist. At college, he worked at the E. E. Miles book bindery, a business owned by his future wife's uncle. He lived at the bindery dormitory, which was dubbed "The Silo" at the time.<sup>8</sup>

It was during the time when Carl was at Atlantic Union College that China missionary, Ezra L. Longway, brought his family from Shanghai on furlough to South Lancaster. Before long, Carl was dating their oldest daughter, Eva. By the end of the school year, before she returned to China with her family, Carl and Eva became engaged. They kept their cross-ocean courtship going by postal mail over the next 12 months. The following year, on June 14, 1939, Carl and Eva were married by the president of the college, G. Eric Jones.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that Eva's father, Ezra Longway, met his wife, Inez, at Atlantic Union College; Eva met her husband, Carl Currie, at Atlantic Union College; and both of Eva and Carl's daughters, Ruth and Laura, met their future husbands at the same school.<sup>10</sup>

Carl's knowledge of foreign missions and China, specifically, was largely the result of the stories shared by his new wife and father-in-law. This sparked his interest in becoming a foreign missionary himself. During his final year at AUC, he wrote a letter to Elder N. F. Brewer, the then president of the China Division, expressing his interest in mission work in that country. Within a week, Elder Brewer wrote back and invited him to join the work in China. The couple believed that this was the leading of the Lord and responded positively to the call!<sup>11</sup>

## Mission Work During the Sino-Japanese War

The official call from the Seventh-day Adventist Mission Board to serve as a missionary in China came immediately following his graduation. In August 1940, at the age of 21, Carl and Eva Currie sailed from San Francisco bound for China. When their ship arrived in Shanghai, they discovered that the city was already occupied by the Japanese and the danger of World War II was imminent. They were advised to immediately return to the United States because of the political unrest and impending war. Many veteran China missionaries had already left or were about to leave China for the US. However, believing China was God's calling, they, along with four other new young missionary families, chose to stay. After spending a few days with the Longways, Carl and Eva moved to the missionary quarters at the Shanghai Sanitarium and Hospital grounds and began learning the Chinese language. Two months later, however, the war situation worsened. Leaders at the China Division decided that it was necessary for them to transfer the five missionary families, along with their Chinese language teachers, to Burma (now Myanmar). In the hills of Kalaw, Burma, they continued their language study. It was there that Carl and Eva Currie's eldest son, David Carl, was born.

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States was drawn into the Pacific side of World War II. The American Consulate in Rangoon, Burma, advised immediate evacuation from Burma. But even as they were planning for evacuation, the Japanese military had begun to bomb Burma in April 1942. Eva Currie and her son, together with women and children of other missionary families, were evacuated by plane to western China. Due to the fact that the China Division had ordered 16 truck-loads of literature to be transported into China, the missionary men drove the trucks up the Burma Road—2,000 miles of the most tortuous road ever built. Inasmuch as there were no service stations along the road, they had to carry their gasoline supply with them on the trip. Likewise, the absence of lodging along the route necessitated their sleeping on the ground under the trucks. Three days into the trip, Carl became infected with typhus due to flea bites and spent three of those weeks desperately ill in the back seat of his father-in-law, Ezra Longway's, car. A Chinese nurse, Chen Alloy, cared for him during the time it took the car to make the trip. His wife, Eva, had no knowledge of her husband's severe illness until Carl reached Chongqing a few months later!<sup>12</sup>

Upon reaching Chongqing, the war-time capital of China, Carl received medical treatment. After several months, he regained his health and went to Jiangxi to become the president of Jiangxi Mission. But the Japanese army was advancing toward that province also and the situation was not very safe for Americans. Therefore, the

family moved to Changsha, Hunan. The transportation between Changsha and Jiangxi was very difficult. It usually took three days by river launch, train, and bus to travel between them. At that time, Elder Jerald Christensen, president of the Hunan Mission, and his family also lived in Changsha. Carl and Jerald Christensen would take turns when traveling for mission business to ensure that there would always be a male member at home in case of an emergency.

In September 1943, Carl and Eva's eldest daughter, Ruth Anne, was born, during a bombing raid by the Japanese Air Force. In the same year, around Christmas time, Carl took a 10-day journey to Chongqing to attend the Annual General Meeting of the China Division at which time he was ordained.

In 1944 the Japanese Army attacked Changsha. The Curries barely escaped by taking a boat, followed by riding in an empty coal car of a freight train crowded with people also attempting to escape the Japanese. Before they were able to reach Hangyang, Eva Currie got very sick. As she was dying, Carl pled with the Lord for her life and she began to rally. Fortunately, they were able to find a church-operated hospital in Hangyang where they obtained the needed medication and where Eva was hospitalized for a few days. From Hangyang the family flew in a US military plane to evacuate to Kunming, Yunnan, in southwest China. There they were hosted by Elder and Mrs. Doyle Barnett for three months. During this time Carl was appointed president of the Guizhou Mission in southwest China. Within a few more months, they were compelled to evacuate again due to the advancing Japanese army. This time they moved back to Chongqing in Sichuan province. At this point Carl was appointed the executive secretary of the West Sichuan Mission.

At the end of the war in 1945, Elder Carl Currie was appointed the president of the West Sichuan Mission until 1947. The family was stationed in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province. It was there that their second daughter, Laura Fae, was born. During his first seven years of service in war-torn China during World War II, Carl moved his family seven times between 1941 and 1948, often evacuating just ahead of the advancing Japanese army. The various modes of evacuations ranged from Chinese river junks pulled up the river by coolies and himself, open coal cars pulled by a smoke belching steam engine, military trucks with Carl sitting on top of live bombs, and a military airplane with bucket seats. His time in China was divided between pioneer missionary work and church administration.<sup>13</sup>

## Post-War Mission Service in China and the Far East

In 1947 the family took a much-needed furlough to visit family and friends in the United States. Carl and his family returned to Shanghai in 1948, only to find that internal war had broken out between the Communist party and the Nationalist government. At this point all missionaries were urged to leave China. Rather than returning to the United States, Carl chose to accept a call to take his family to the island of Formosa (now Taiwan) to begin pioneer missionary work, since there was no formal Adventist mission in Taiwan at that time. In December 1948, he became the first Taiwan Mission president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a post he

held until 1954. Arriving in Taiwan with him in 1948 were: Alva Appel, who became the treasurer of Taiwan Mission; Pastor Lim Punshen ( ) and Pastor Li TeinJae ( ). During Carl Currie's tenure as president of the Taiwan Mission, the Bible Correspondence School was established in Taizhong in 1951; the China Training Institute (now Taiwan Adventist College) was re-opened in Taiwan in 1952; Taiwan Sanitarium and Hospital (now Taiwan Adventist Hospital) was opened in 1955; and the Taiwan San Yu ( ) Bible School was established in Pindong ( ) in 1961.

In 1955, Carl took a one-year furlough in the United States, during which time he completed his MDiv at the SDA Seminary in Washington, DC. After graduation, he accepted a call to be president of the Southeast Asia Union Mission with headquarters in Singapore. While there he began mission work in Laos and Cambodia. He also established the Chinese Secondary School in Singapore.

In 1960 Carl returned to Taiwan as president of the Taiwan and North Taiwan Mission for another six years. During his years of service in Taiwan, he opened the mission work not only in the cities on the plains of Taiwan, but also among the mountain tribes of the island where the gospel had not previously reached. Particularly worthy of mention are the Paiwuan ( ) tribe and the Five-Mountains ( ) tribes. Eva recalled that reaching the mountain people was not an easy task as there were no maps to indicate where the villages were. They followed the mountain paths by foot or on bicycles. From 1948, when he first arrived in Taiwan, until 1966, when he left, the membership of the Taiwan Mission increased from less than ten to about 4,500; the number of Sabbath Schools increased to more than 100; while Sabbath School attendance reached 12,000.<sup>14</sup>

## Pastoral Work in United States

In 1966, after completing 26 years of service in China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia, the Curries decided to move back to the US on permanent return. In the United States he pastored the Bridgeport and Danbury churches in Connecticut and had the pleasure of performing the wedding ceremonies of both of his daughters, Ruth to Victor Chant and Laura to Stephen Nyirady.<sup>15</sup>

## Bermuda, Africa, and China Again

After two years in Bridgeport, the General Conference asked Carl to go to Bermuda to be president of the Seventh-day Adventist Bermuda Mission where he served for two and a half years.

In 1969 he was invited by the General Conference to move to Africa to be president of the Zambesi Union, with headquarters in Bulawayo, Rhodesia. In Africa, Carl endured another war, leading the church through the tumultuous years of the county's struggle for independence, transitioning from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. During his 14 years in Africa, church membership of the Zambesi Union increased significantly. He also conducted mass evangelistic meetings, leading many to Christ and realizing his long-time dream since college days to become an

evangelist.

By that time, he had completed 45 years of service to the church with all but two-and-a half years being outside of the United States. However, as he was thinking of retirement, once again the church asked him to return to China and serve as chairman of the East Asia Administrative Committee in Hong Kong. He accepted the call and served in that position for five years, from 1985 to 1989. He oversaw the radio broadcast of the Three Angels' Messages to the vast land of China, through the Adventist World Radio (AWR) facilities on the island of Guam.<sup>16</sup>

## Active Retirement Years

By 1990 Carl had completed 50 years of active service for the church and it was time to formally retire. During the 1990 General Conference Session in Indianapolis, he was honored for his exceptional service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Carl and Eva then moved to Collegedale, Tennessee, later in 1990, to be close to their youngest daughter and family. There he served as one of the assistant pastors of the Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist church for a few years. Then he was requested by the Georgia-Cumberland Conference to revitalize a small church in Summerville, Georgia. He pastored that church for four years and increased its membership from eight to 35. It was in Tennessee that Carl and Eva became homeowners for the first time. They resided there for 14 years, surrounded by family and making new friends.

When his son-in-law, Dr. Stephen Nyirady, and daughter Laura Currie Nyirady received an invitation to work at Loma Linda University in 2004, Carl and Eva made their final move to Yucaipa, California, where Carl continued his retirement service for an additional two years as one of the associate pastors of the Calimesa Seventh-day Adventist church.<sup>17</sup>

During his retirement years, while living both in Tennessee and later in California, Carl led a number of tours to mainland China where he was able to reconnect with former colleagues and church members.

On January 3, 2009, Holman Carl Currie, aged 90, a resident of Yucaipa, California, died from complications following a hip fracture. A memorial service was held on January 9, 2009, at the Loma Linda Chinese Seventh-day Adventist Church, for this much loved and well-respected veteran missionary, who guided the Chinese Adventist Church under the Lord's leading throughout those difficult war years during the mid-1900's.<sup>18</sup>

Eva Currie lived another six years after laying her husband to rest in 2009. She passed away peacefully, following a short illness, on October 11, 2015.<sup>19</sup>

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## NOTES

1. David Currie, Ruth Currie-Soule, Laura Currie-Nyirady and Stephen Nyirady, and Arlys Fillman, email messages to author, over the period July-August 2020, they are children, son-in-law, and friend of Carl and Eva Currie.
2. Carl Currie, "Holman C. Currie" *Chinese SDA History*, (editor) Samuel Young, Hong Kong, China: Chinese Union Mission, 2002, 732 (in Chinese).
3. Ibid.

4. Find A Grave, "Holman Carl Currie," in [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com), accessed July 19, 2013, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=65647358](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=65647358).
5. Bruce W. Lo, "Holman Carl Currie (1918-2009) and Eva Longway-Currie (1919-2015)," *Adventism in China*, accessed July 1, 2020, [www.adventisminchina.org/individual-name/expatriates/curriehc](http://www.adventisminchina.org/individual-name/expatriates/curriehc).
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7. Bruce W. Lo, Notes from an interview with Eva Currie, Laura Nyirady, and Stephen Nyirady, Yucaipa, California, August 26, 2013.
8. Bruce W. Lo, "Holman Carl Currie (1918-2009) and Eva Longway-Currie (1919-2015)," *Adventism in China*, accessed July 1, 2020, [www.adventisminchina.org/individual-name/expatriates/curriehc](http://www.adventisminchina.org/individual-name/expatriates/curriehc).
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12. Ibid.
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17. Ibid.
18. Find A Grave, "Holman Carl Currie," in [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com), accessed July 19, 2013, [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=65647358](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=65647358).
19. Dignity Memorial, "Life Sketch of Eva Ruth Longway Currie," Memorial Service, October 17, 2015, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/colton-ca/eva-currie-6632933>.

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