



Doolittles returning to China, 1921. Left to right: A.N. Anderson, Mr. & Mrs. H.J. Doolittle and child.

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Doolittle, Henry John (1890–1976) and Florence Jessie Delph (1889–1976)

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Michael W. Campbell, Ph.D., is North American Division Archives, Statistics, and Research director. Previously, he was professor of church history and systematic theology at Southwestern Adventist University. An ordained minister, he pastored in Colorado and Kansas. He is assistant editor of *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Review and Herald, 2013) and currently is co-editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*. He also taught at the Adventist International

Henry John Doolittle, more affectionally known as “Harry,” and Florence Jessie Delph Doolittle were Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to China (1913-1927). Harry was a minister, administrator, and treasurer, while Florence was a nurse. Harry’s Chinese name was: (pinyin Dù Lìdé). No official record of Florence’s Chinese name was found.

Early Life

Harry was born July 13, 1890, in Eldred, Pennsylvania, to Henry (1845-1918) and Rosalie (1867-1903) Doolittle. Harry was a public school teacher who was converted thanks to the efforts of church members in Duke Center, Pennsylvania. He later became a colporteur.¹ During the summer of 1911, he attended summer school at Mt. Vernon College in Mt. Vernon, Ohio.² He afterward continued his studies for the following school year.³ He was able to help work his way through school utilizing his new vacuum cleaner to clean homes.⁴ In 1912, he was placed as a “provisional appointee” while preparing for foreign service at the Washington Foreign Missionary Seminary.⁵ During this time, he had an emergency operation for appendicitis at Wabash Valley Sanitarium.⁶

Florence Jessie Delph was born December 14, 1889, in Fairland, Ohio, to Richard (1851-1924) and Bertha (1873-1953) Delph. Her family became Adventist about 1897.⁷ As a young girl, she donated proceeds from some chickens to raise funds for missions.⁸ She attended Wabash Valley Sanitarium, where she studied nursing.⁹

Missionaries to China

The couple were both under appointment to serve separately in China. Their official call to serve in China was voted March 16, 1913.¹⁰ Likely it was their mutual interest as prospective missionaries that brought them together. The couple married on June 5, 1913, in Takoma Park, Maryland, during a ceremony conducted by James E. Shultz in the Washington, D.C., Memorial Church.¹¹ They left on August 16, 1913, on the Shinyo Maru¹² and arrived in Shanghai on September 9, 1913. They stayed in Shanghai while they learned the language and obtained vaccinations.¹³ Within the first year, he began to travel with O. A. Hall to Nanking and Pukow to encourage some of the local evangelists.¹⁴ On June 30, 1914, the Doolittles left with other missionaries for Mokanshan to spend the hot season in the mountains.¹⁵ By the time of the Nanking general meeting, which started September 2, Harry had preached his first sermon in Chinese.¹⁶ During the meetings, they organized the Nanking Seventh-day Adventist Church with 13 charter members.¹⁷ They afterward returned to Shanghai, but then on November 18, 1914, they returned to Nanking, which became the headquarters of the East China Mission, where they made their home.¹⁸ This enabled Hall to be able to give more attention to the work opening in the northern part of the field.¹⁹ Harry was appointed as acting secretary-treasurer of the mission.²⁰ The mission had been through difficult times. During the revolution of 1911, and then again in the summer of 1913

when a second revolution came, the city (and mission) was looted. Specifically, the “chapel was broken into and some damage done, and the preaching of the gospel was hindered for some time.”²¹ Now church leaders hoped that by bringing the Doolittles to Nanjing they could bring stability to this Adventist mission.

Part of the reason that denominational leaders kept investing in sending missionaries and rebuilding the mission in Nanking was they recognized that it had strategic value because of its location and influence based on its location. It was especially recognized as a center where a number of influential schools and universities, including language training centers, were located. From 1912 to 1913, an Adventist “training school” was located in Nanjing, but the school was closed afterward due to more political unrest. In 1914, a general meeting resulted in the first baptism of six, and by mid-1915, as the Doolittles continued to minister, membership had increased to 18. Church leaders hoped to see a school re-established in Nanjing and placed Harry in charge of the educational work for the division.²²

Educational Missionary Work

The 1915-1916 school year found the Doolittles moving back to Shanghai to take charge of the newly begun China Missions Training School.²³ This was due in part to the delay of missionaries who church leaders had initially expected to lead the school.²⁴ Harry felt woefully unprepared, but started with a deep sense of responsibility despite not having a curriculum, textbooks, or pretty much anything, it seemed.²⁵ Enrollment blossomed to 134 students who enrolled that year.²⁶ It was a happy school year, and the Doolittles soon discovered that Florence was pregnant with their child, Lloyd, whose seven-pound arrival on July 21, 1916, was noted in church papers.²⁷ The next school year, the principalship fell to a new missionary, F. A. Allum, and Harry remained as treasurer of the school and science teacher.²⁸ Harry described the difference between Adventist mission schools and those conducted by other Christian missions:

Our own mission policy in school matters differs materially to that of most of the other denominations in that we do not establish our schools as direct evangelizing agencies, but as training schools and colleges in which to develop our own believers or their children, to become evangelists, teachers, Bible workers and assistants for offices. And while we do not ordinarily refuse the request of the unbelieving heathen to attend our school, yet we do not bait them to come by offering them strong courses in English or business, which is undeniably true of most other mission schools.... We believe that with this method we will be able to reach more souls with a far small investment of funds, equipment and laborers than is possible with the other method.... But after all we want results and not a mere outward show.²⁹

Harry believed that the greatest challenge for students in China was finances. He and others worked together to explore ideas for new industry by which young people could help fund their education.³⁰

In 1917, Harry was ordained to the gospel ministry and placed in charge of the Anhwei Mission (with headquarters in Nanjing).³¹ In 1918, due to an outbreak of pneumonic plague, it necessitated the return of missionaries back to Shanghai.³² This was a temporary measure. By 1919, Harry reported that the church membership had grown to 160 across the mission. In the spring of that year, they went on a four-month itinerary in which Allum joined them for the last month. They baptized 45 new members during this journey. After the trip, minus some deductions due to death or apostasy, the membership grew to 193.³³ The Doolittles shared a sense of urgency in their missionary work. "We are in the time of the latter rain," wrote Harry, "just before Christ's second appearing."³⁴

Furlough

On August 15, 1920, the Doolittles arrived in San Francisco on the S. S. China for a furlough.³⁵ Florence went to her parents to help recuperate after a "serious illness." To help raise funds, he sold suits from the Royal Tailors.³⁶ While he was away, Nathan Brewer took charge of the mission.³⁷ During their furlough, Harry spent the 1920-1921 school year attending Washington Missionary College, which he graduated from with his A.B. (Bachelor's degree). The Doolittles also used their time to speak at churches and schools to help promote Adventist missionary work.³⁸ They also took some "some special treatments to fit" them for their return at the St. Helena Sanitarium.³⁹

Return to China

On October 22, 1921, the Doolittles sailed on the S. S. Nanking back to China.⁴⁰ Soon, they were conducting meetings across the Anhwei Mission. He cited Ellen White's prophetic writings for guidance on their strategy for missionary outreach. After learning the language, he credited Ellen White for his belief that the next most important thing was to educate the people to "become workers." He wrote:

I earnestly believe that we as foreign missionaries," he wrote, "will accomplish more in the reaching of China's millions with the angel's message, if we will spend more time in training capable Chinese men and women in the full knowledge of the Bible truths for this time and in the fundamental methods of presenting these truths to others; then send these trained workers to their own people, and with these Bible truths clothed in the idiomatic phraseology of their own language and adapted to their own Oriental method of thinking, they will enter into the heart and sympathies of the Chinese people, winning them to Christ."⁴¹

They arrived at a very difficult time. In the autumn of 1921, the Hwai River (today known as the Huai River) flooded, causing thousands of people to drown and massive crop failures. The ensuing famine "made these calamities even worse." Harry described how some of the people blamed these misfortunes on "the displeasure of their gods at the presence of the foreign missionary, and especially the 'Yeh-su doo-li' (Jesus doctrine) which

they teach."⁴² Bandits then began to prey on those more fortunate. The region was becoming increasingly destabilized. Harry reported on Hwang Tien Do, an evangelist, who miraculously escaped from a city being ransacked. Church workers were "risking their lives" to share their faith. And if that were not enough, Harry became ill and had surgery from which he had to recover.⁴³ Despite this, he reported, the work of the church sustained "normal growth," and tithe receipts in 1922 were "double those of the previous year."⁴⁴ Between 1921 to 1923, Harry reported eight to ten evangelistic efforts, nearly as many "chapel efforts," and "numerous shorter meetings."⁴⁵ Harry reported on the miraculous preservation of church facilities from fires, although he acknowledged that not always did God miraculously answer prayer.⁴⁶ The Doolittles also had a second child, Henry Richard, who was born on June 10, 1922. Tragically, young Henry died on August 4, 1924.⁴⁷

During the first half of 1925, Doolittle reported the most "fruitful year in soul-winning in China" so far. He planned to make a trip to the upriver mission stations believing that "God will protect" him.⁴⁸ By late 1925, he reported that the Anhwei Mission had 15 mission stations with 98 baptisms over the previous 18 months. He was assisted by 18 colporteurs. They had ten church schools that enrolled 358 students.⁴⁹ Once Dr. Selmon returned to the United States, the language training for new missionary recruits shifted to Nanjing. These recruits were now trained primarily by the Doolittles at the mission station, which was conveniently located near several universities and not far from the China Training School, making it an ideal place for new missionaries to spend their first-year learning about the local culture and language.⁵⁰

Dramatic Escape During Nanking Incident, March 1927 ⁵¹

The Doolittles were besieged with other missionaries who were studying Mandarin at the Nanking University Language School⁵² when the National Revolutionary Army (NRA) conducted their northern expedition to subdue northern warlords. "For some years now," Harry noted "the war lords of North China have been gaining in power month by month."⁵³ At the Seventh-day Adventist Mission compound near Drum Tower (Peh Chi Know), missionaries began to hear canon fire from the south about 5 p.m. on Monday, March 21st with the shooting continuing all night.⁵⁴ The next morning, March 22nd, they took three women (Lucile Burwell, Mary Wallace, and Vera White) and six children to the gun boats on the Yangtze River for safety. The rest remained at the mission compound to pack any remaining valuables.

The missionaries spent the next night at the Doolittle's home. They took turns watching and waiting. On March 23rd about 3 p.m., heavy firing could be heard as northern soldiers rapidly retreated, and by 7 p.m., southern (NRA) troops entered the city. Once again, they prayed on the floor of the Doolittle home for safety, claiming Bible promises.⁵⁵

Relieved that they had been delivered from the attacking soldiers, they dispersed to their own homes to eat breakfast on Thursday, March 24th. Soon they saw soldiers coming to loot the compound. "After some of the soldiers fired at them," recounted Doolittle in his report to the American Consulate, "an old servant went down

in his knees before the soldiers to beg for the foreigners' lives. In that moment of delay caused by the intercession of the servant, Doolittle and his party scooped around the houses⁵⁶ and fled to the United States Consulate. Warned by the ambassador, Mr. Davis, that they were no longer safe even at the American Consulate as there were only 12 marines there to protect them,⁵⁷ they evacuated to the home of Earle and Alice Hobart, a Standard Oil Company executive at Socony Hill,⁵⁸ near the city wall closest to the Qinhuai River (a tributary of the Yangtze). "We seven S. D. A. men lay downstairs on the floor and pleaded with God to deliver us," wrote fellow missionary Hartwell. Soldiers came to demand money several times, threatening to kill them. Finally, orders were given for the warships at the river to fire shells just above the buildings they were in. This provided cover as the attacking soldiers dispersed, thus giving the 52 foreigners, mainly Americans and Britons, held hostage at Socony Hill an opportunity to escape to the safety of gunboats stationed at the river.⁵⁹ They ran to the wall and, using sheets tied together at a section that was only about 50 feet high, they hastily made their escape. Everyone safely escaped to the British S. S. Wolsey, where they had supper and afterward reunited with their wives who had been on an American Destroyer. They "carried nothing away but the clothes we had on."⁶⁰ This "miraculous escape"⁶¹ he believed was nothing short of "the hand of God working in the deliverance of His people."⁶²

It later came to light that the NRA's commander, Chiang Kai-shek, suspected that some Communist and Soviet leaders used anti-imperialist and anti-foreign sentiments to instigate the Nanjing incident. Doolittle afterward remembered the incident as the "antiforeign revolution"⁶³ in "troubled China."⁶⁴ The Doolittles were overdue for another furlough, so they departed on April 4, 1927, for the United States.⁶⁵

Departure from China and Later Ministry

While on furlough, they spoke at various churches, schools, and camp meetings, sharing about their providential deliverance.⁶⁶ They spent time with family at Mt. Vernon Academy in Ohio, after which they were invited back to serve in China.⁶⁷ Florence's deteriorating health, which required an operation, initially prevented them from returning to China.⁶⁸ Harry also had health challenges requiring surgery, too. Their continued health challenges brought them "sorrow" at their inability to return "in person in the field."⁶⁹

Instead, they settled in Miami, Florida, where Harry initially served as a minister until 1929. During the 1930s, he began a second career in mechanical dentistry. From 1940 onward, he served as a minister again in the Florida Conference. At one point, he hoped to return as a chaplain at Shanghai Sanitarium, but poor health prevented him from being able to serve. Instead, about 1945, they moved to Fletcher, North Carolina, where he remained active giving Bible studies, visiting, and teaching a Sabbath School class.⁷⁰

Florence died on September 28, 1976, and Harry died the next day, both in Candler, North Carolina. They are buried next to one another in Shepherd Memorial Park in Naples, North Carolina.⁷¹

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NOTES

1. I. G. Bigelow, "Eldred, Duke Center, Coryville," *The Columbia Union Visitor*, April 27, 1910, 4.

2. See note, *The Columbia Union Visitor*, June 14, 1911, 6.
3. See note, *The Columbia Union Visitor*, August 16, 1911, 3,
4. See note, *The Columbia Union Visitor*, September 27, 1911, 4.
5. General Conference Committee Minutes, December 22, 1912, 329.
6. See note, *The Columbia Union Visitor*, October 30, 1912, 3.
7. See Obituary, *The Columbia Union Visitor*, May 1, 1924, 6.
8. See *ARH*, May 6, 1902, 22.
9. "Wabash Valley Sanitarium Notes," *Lake Union Herald*, January 4, 1911, 8. See also "Wabash Valley Sanitarium," *Lake Union Herald*, November 23, 1910, 8.
10. General Conference Committee Minutes, March 16, 1913, 382; an additional \$20 was allotted to help them prepare and obtain supplies for mission service, see *Ibid.*, April 1, 1913, 395.
11. See note about their wedding in *The Columbia Union Visitor*, July 9, 1913, 6-7.
12. See announcement, *Pacific Union Recorder*, August 21, 1913, 10, 11.
13. See note, *Asiatic Division Outlook*, November 1, 1913, 11.
14. "Notes," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, June 1, 1914, 4.
15. "Notes," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, June 8, 1914, 8. [Note this issue is inaccurately dated June 1, 1914, but is volume 3, no. 4]
16. "Notes," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, October 1, 1914, 6. Another report stated that "The Chinese brethren say it was connected, clear and readily understood by them." *The Columbia Union Visitor*, November 4, 1914, 8.
17. O. A. Hall & H. J. Doolittle, "Anhui Province," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, November 1, 1914, 2.
18. See description on *Asiatic Division Mission News*, December 1, 1914, 6.
19. R. C. Porter, "A General Advance," *ARH*, August 13, 1914, 11.
20. "Laborers," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, January 1, 1915, 5.

21. O. A. Hall, "Report of East China Mission: Three Years—1912-1915," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, July 1, 1915, 22.
22. "Nominations for Asiatic Division," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, July 1, 1915, 18.
23. "Notes," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, September 15, 1915, 4.
24. Church leaders utilized the verbiage: "On account of the shortness of workers" to explain the delays in personnel that necessitated moving around missionary workers. See "Notes" *Asiatic Division Mission News*, October 15, 1915, 4.
25. H. J. Doolittle, "Christian Education in China," *The Sligonian*, February 1921, 10.
26. F. A. Allum, "Report of China Missions Training School for the School Year 1916-1917," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, April-June 1917, 14.
27. See under "Notes" *Asiatic Division Mission News*, August 1, 1916, 4.
28. See under "Faculty," in "The China Missions Training School," *Asiatic Division Mission News*, December 1, 1916, 2.
29. H. J. Doolittle, "Christian Education in China," *The Sligonian*, February 1921, 11.
30. *Ibid.*, 12, 26.
31. See vote to ordain him along with other missionaries at the Asiatic Division Conference (held April 5-24, 1917): *ARH*, June 21, 1917, 17. This report also appears in the *Australasian Union Record*, August 13, 1917, 6.
32. C. C. Crisler, "Refugees from Plague-stricken Nanking," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, April 1, 1918, 7.
33. H. J. Doolittle, "The Anhwei Provincial Mission," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, October 15, 1919, 4-5.
34. *Ibid.*, 5.
35. *ARH*, September 9, 1920, 16.
36. See advertisement *The Sligonian*, December 1920, 26.
37. C. C. Crisler, "Provincial Meetings in Mandarin Territory," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, November 1-15, 1920, 9-10.
38. "News Notes," *Lake Union Herald*, September 15, 1920, 5.
39. See note, *Pacific Union Recorder*, September 22, 1921, 6.

40. Initially, they were scheduled to sail on September 14, 1921, on the S. S. China. "Mission Board Notes," *ARH*, September 29, 1921, 24. But apparently, they were delayed, and a later announcement noted they actually sailed on the S. S. Nanking on October 22. See "Missionary Sailings," *ARH*, December 15, 1921, 24.
41. H. J. Doolittle, "The Work in Northern Anhwei," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, February 1-15, 1920, 3.
42. H. J. Doolittle, "The 'Wan-Ning,' or Anhwei Provincial Mission Workers' Institute," July 1, 1923, 5.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 6.
45. H. J. Doolittle, "Report of the Anhwei Mission, 1921-1923," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, November 1924, 8.
46. H. J. Doolittle, "Things Supernatural," *ARH*, November 27, 1924, 9-10.
47. Obituary, *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, July 1, 1924, 12.
48. C. C. Crisler, "Our Work and Workers in China," *ARH*, August 27, 1924, 12.
49. H. J. Doolittle, "The Anhwei Mission," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, November 1925, 6-7.
50. See list of new recruits at the Language School featured in *ARH*, July 28, 1927, 7.
51. The author and editor wish to express their appreciation to Professor Susan Patt, formerly of La Sierra University, who provided additional information to this article on the experiences of S.D.A. missionaries during the Nanking Incident of March 1927.
52. Crisler provides a list of missionaries in Nanjing just before the revolution. I. O. Wallace, Le Clare Reed, Raymond H. Hartwell, with their wives, H. M. Burwell. They were also joined by Mr. & Mrs. Dallas R. White, Mr. & Mrs. Lyman W. Shaw, and Mr. & Mrs. Cecil D. Nichols. See C. C. Crisler, "A Further Word Concerning Our Work and Workers in China," *ARH*, March 10, 1927, 12-14. In addition, Paul Quimby and Fred Landis were also part of this group that escaped.
53. Harry J. Doolittle, "Our Escape from Nanking," *ST*, May 31, 1927, 8.
54. E. C. Lorenstine, "Report on The Nanking Tragedy," in Yale University Archives. Divinity School, "University of Nanking Publicity/Reports:" 83-88.
55. H. C. Hartwell, "Hazardous Experiences of Our Missionaries in China," *Central Union Outlook*, April 26, 1927, 1.
56. H. J. Doolittle's account in J. B. Griffing, "Report of Looting of Nanking", in Yale University Archives. Divinity School, "University of Nanking Publicity/Reports:" 75-82.

57. Ibid., 77.
58. E. C. Lorenstine, "Report on The Nanking Tragedy", in Yale University Archives. Divinity School, "University of Nanking Publicity/Reports:" 85.
59. Alice Tisdale Hobart, *Within the Walls of Nanking* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), 216-229.
60. H. C. Hartwell, "Hazardous Experiences of Our Missionaries in China," *Central Union Outlook*, April 26, 1927, 2.
61. See report of talk by Doolittle in R. E. Hay and Opal Rogers, "Report of Camp-Meeting Sabbath School, June 25, 1927," *Central Union Outlook*, July 12, 1927, 5-6.
62. "News Notes," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, August 10, 1927, 4.
63. See note of his talk under "New England Sanitarium Gleanings," *Life & Health*, October 1927, 161.
64. See report of his talk in Bakersfield, California, by B. L. Howe, "Bakersfield Tabernacle News," *Pacific Union Recorder*, May 26, 1927, 4.
65. "Departures," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, April 1927, 16.
66. General Conference Committee Minutes, July 25, 1927, 327.
67. General Conference Committee Minutes, February 6, 1928, 489.
68. "From Pastor and Mrs. H. J. Doolittle," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, April 1928, 11.
69. "From Pastor H. J. Doolittle," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, July 1928, 2.
70. Obituary, *Southern Tidings*, January 1977, 27. The exact year of their transition is unclear. Up through 1944, he is listed as having ministerial credentials from the Florida Conference; in 1945 he is listed as having ministerial credentials from the Southern Union, which seems likely to indicate this transition. The 1950 United States Federal Census lists them as living in North Carolina.
71. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95861247/florence-jesse-doolittle>, accessed 12/28/22.

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