

Delhove, David E. (1882–1949) and Virginie (Baily) (1884–1963)

CHIGEMEZI NNADOZIE WOGU

Chigemezi Nnadozie Wogu, MTS, is a Ph.D. student at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, the Netherlands and a research associate at the Institute of Adventist Studies in Friedensau Adventist University, Germany. At Friedensau, he manages the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventist* research project for some parts of Europe. Wogu is a junior member of the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion. He is co-editor to *Contours of European Adventism: Issues in the History of the Denomination in the Old Continent* (Möckern: Institute of Adventist Studies, Friedensau Adventist University, 2020).

David and Virginie Delhove were pioneer missionaries to today's Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo.

Early Years

David Elie Delhove was born on June 9, 1882, into the Protestant family of François Delhove and Joséphine Ghislaine (née Lebrun) in Marchienne-Dorcheris, a village in Belgium. David's parents had nine children; unfortunately, one died at birth. Of the eight (four boys and four girls), David was the fourth child. His parents were farmers who encouraged their children to work together in the farm in order to eke out a living. After his primary school and high school education, David became an apprentice in a workshop from the age of 16 to 18.

Virginie Baily was born in the same village of Marchienne-Dorcheris in 1884 to Augustin and Sylvia (née Mascaux) Baily. She had three other siblings: one brother and two sisters. At the young age of eight, she lost most of her family members to death.¹ Virginie and her little brother, Auguste (age three), were taken in by a neighbor to care for them. However, this neighbor maltreated them through severe beatings and meal deprivations.

At age 19 Virginie met David. David had heard of the maltreatment of this young woman and decided to help her. Virginie wanted to run away, but did not know anyone she could trust. Luckily, David arranged for Virginie to care for an elderly sick woman. With this arrangement Virginie became free while her brother, Auguste, found his own way. David and Virginie became friends and started courtship.

Conversion

Around 1899 the Delhove family received a box with Seventh-day Adventist tracts from a relative in Canada. David began reading these tracts with interest. After his apprenticeship, at age 19, he did a six-month course in shoe repairing. Upon completion, he opened his own shoe repair shop in his parents' home. Not long after that, he was conscripted to military service. After spending 20 months in the military, he returned to his home in Marchienne-Dorcheris and continued his shoe repairing shop.

In the meantime David heard of an evangelistic meeting of Adventists held at Liège, 106 kilometers (66 miles) from his village, by Joseph Curdy from Switzerland. David attended the meetings amid opposition from his family. Soon afterward David moved out of the family home as a result of these conflicts. At some point, while he was ill, Virginie



David E. Delhove.
Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists Archives.

visited. He took the opportunity to convince her to go to live with Mrs. Curdy. Virginie took the advice, and not long after, in 1906, both David and Virginie were baptized by Curdy in Belgium and Switzerland, respectively²

Marriage

While Virginie worked for an Adventist woman in Switzerland, Delhove began working as a colporteur around the city of Charleroi in Belgium.³ At times he assisted with the evangelistic meetings held by either Gustave Roth, Joseph Curdy, or Aimé Girou. During this time he attempted to visit his fiancé, Virginie, in Switzerland. Since he had no money for transportation, he went by bicycle.⁴ On April 22, 1909, Virginie and David Delhove were married in a ceremony conducted by Gustave Roth in Belgium.⁵

Mission Work

After eight days the Delhoves moved to England, where Delhove completed a medical nursing course⁶ first at Watford, then at the Caterham Sanitarium (where he also served as head nurse)⁷ Virginie took a nursing course at the Leicester Sanitarium. Meanwhile, Lydie was born May 7, 1911, and Lucy, July 7, 1913. In 1912, while waiting to be called for mission work, Delhove assisted in the evangelistic series held by R. Klingbeil in Brussels and in Seraing, near Liège.⁸

In 1913 the Delhoves received a call to go to work in a mission school at Kamagambo, near the shores of Lake Victoria in British Africa. Delhove was to work together with Canadian missionary Arthur A. Carscallen.⁹ However, in preparation with his family to embark on the trip, they got news that Delhove was to go alone. The leadership of the Adventist work on Europe claimed that “husbands going to do pioneer work would do so under primitive conditions; that such would be no place for women and young children—not for a while.”¹⁰

Thus, leaving his family behind in Belgium, Delhove sailed to East Africa alone. On arrival at the Kamagambo mission, he was joined by Carscallen, and together they began the buildings for the mission school. Not long after, in August 1914, World War I broke out.

World War I

When the war began, the British East African missions were looted,¹¹ and Belgium became a German territory, which blocked communication to British East Africa. Thus Delhove could not communicate with his family. The war led him to a difficult decision: if he went back to Belgium to serve in the Allied Forces, he would not get an opportunity to keep the Sabbath; neither would he be able to get noncombatant treatment. Hence, for the four years the war lasted, he joined the Belgian authorities to serve against the campaign of the German-held territories adjacent to British East Africa.¹²

Official Adventist documents have reported that during this time, Delhove served as a clerk in the Belgian army!¹³ In reality, his assignment was different from that of a clerk.¹⁴ For a year he was made an intelligence agent who scouted the Anglo-German border. As a spy he would set out with a company of natives through unmapped territories, taking note of the movements and plans of the Germans, sneaking in and out of enemy territory. According to his biographer (his daughter Lydie Delhove), he was never caught, perhaps because of his short stature, and because he was quick in his movements—such that the indigenous people nicknamed him “Nziye,” meaning “grasshopper.”¹⁵ A year later he was made district commissioner at Rutshuru on the border of Ruanda-Urundi. In addition, he became a recruiter for the army because he knew the natives. He soon was serving as food and medicine supplier, police chief, and tax collector. In June 1916 he was asked to scout and spy the enemy territories for the Allied Forces. He was successful, for through the intelligence he provided, Tabora in Tanganyika fell and surrendered!¹⁶

During this time Delhove refused to use a gun, which he seldom carried. He also insisted on having Sabbath offs. Moreover, Delhove ensured he could share his faith, for he still saw himself as a missionary. He made it a point to find other Adventists. He would ask for permission to visit the German colony of Tanganyika, where most of the missionaries were Germans. He also treated wounded individuals and used this opportunity to study the Bible with them. In addition, he took note of the mission needs in the region, which became an advantage when he was later officially sent to Ruanda-Urundi as a missionary.

Ruanda-Urundi¹⁷

In May 1918 Delhove was granted a furlough to England. While he waited to reunite with his family (this was possible in December 1918), he worked in a pharmacy. In the meantime, he also met with a newly married couple, Henri and Winfred Monnier from Switzerland, and persuaded the couple of the missionary need in East Africa. In March 1919 both families were sent to the then Belgian Congo.¹⁸ When they arrived and did not succeed at first in entering the Congo, Delhove arranged with the Belgian colonial government to locate a mission station at Kigoma on the east side of Lake Tanganyika.¹⁹

The region was familiar to Delhove, for it was in this area that he had worked during the war²⁰ In essence, Delhove had been equipped in dealing with both the colonial government and the indigenous leaders in his mission service.

Mission Administrator

From 1920 onward Delhove, now superintendent of the Belgian East Africa Mission,²¹ began conducting Bible studies, and together with Monnier (whose wife had just died at childbirth),²² reopened mission stations at Rubengera, Kirinda, and Remera,²³ as well as a girls school at Kirinda. Those mission stations had been abandoned by other Protestant missionaries.²⁴ Both men were gifted in languages. One writer claimed that Delhove himself knew 11 languages.²⁵ Hence, Delhove and Monnier also translated Adventist hymns and literature into Kinyarwanda.²⁶ Meanwhile, two Delhove daughters, Clara (born 1919) and Edna (born 1920), were born during this period.

Soon Delhove moved his mission to another side of the border, where he opened the Gitwe mission station in today's Rwanda.²⁷ Gitwe was a cursed hill that had been completely abandoned by the indigenous people. It was called "the place of skulls" because several bones and skulls of dead persons lay there. After getting permission to build a station, Delhove coordinated the building of a mission station at Gitwe.²⁸ When nothing happened to him on the cursed hill (as expected), the interest of the local inhabitants was heightened. Delhove and his Rwandese coworkers²⁹ also began building a church, a dispensary (whose operation Virginie directed), and a school.³⁰ At the same time, he helped Monnier to open a mission station at Rwankeri.³¹ Delhove was ordained in 1922.³² In 1923 Delhove baptized five people, including his eldest daughter, Lydie,³³ while Jean-François was born to the family in 1924.

Buganda (Urundi)

The mission in Gitwe was a success. In 1924, after the visit of William D. Read from the European Division, another mission station at Buganda (in the province of Cibitoke, in today's Burundi) was opened. Alfred Matter, who had just returned from furlough, began taking care of the Rwankeri mission station, while Gitwe was left to Monnier to lead.³⁴ With the new development Delhove scouted the new region around Buganda, and in April 1925 he, Virginie, and the rest of the family moved to Buganda.³⁵ The coming of the Delhoves to this region made them the first Protestant missionaries to enter the territory of modern-day Burundi after World War I.³⁶

Aside from their furlough (from 1926 to June 1927), the Delhoves served at the Buganda station until January 1928. During this time their sixth child, Paul, was born (1925), and they laid the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in today's Burundi. As Ndikumana rightly observed, Delhove's ability to speak the native languages "enabled him not only to deal with indigenous chiefs right from the beginning of his ministry at Buganda, but also to communicate his message to the people right from day one without any need for translation."³⁷ Delhove erected buildings, directed three mission schools, and, together with Virginie, opened a dispensary.³⁸ In addition, Delhove did a course in tropical medicine while on furlough in Belgium. When he returned to Buganda, he did a one-month internship at a government hospital to qualify as "agent sanitaire" (health professional).³⁹ Moreover, he recruited Maxime and Rachel Duplouy as missionaries. The Duplouys in turn treated malaria among the indigenous population. They also trained some natives in dispensary work, thus enabling the facilitation of sustainable health among the people. The Duplouys and the local staff took over when the Delhoves left Buganda to return to Gitwe early in 1928.⁴⁰

In Gitwe, Delhove assumed leadership of the mission and participated in the running of the training school, where workers were trained for the entire newly created East Congo Union Mission.⁴¹ In addition, he also maintained a tannery and boot repair shop.⁴²

Congo

Toward the end of 1929 the Delhoves moved to the southern Congo, to the city of Lubumbashi (then called Elisabethville). Delhove worked there for one year, helping C.W. Curtis in evangelistic meetings, rural camp meetings, and Bible studies. Delhove's prowess in languages was an additional advantage for the mission team there.⁴³ However, the team tried unsuccessfully to get permission to open a mission in the region of Sakania.

In 1931 the Delhove and Curtis families went on furlough to Cape Town. There Delhove was instrumental in some evangelistic activities in Claremont.⁴⁴ During this time their daughter Lydie Delhove became a medical missionary nurse at Songa Hospital of the Songa Mission in Congo. A few months later Delhove was appointed the director of the Songa mission station.⁴⁵ Lucy, their second daughter, also began teaching at the school in Songa.⁴⁶

Toward the end of 1935 the Delhoves were sent to Kirundu mission, where Virginie directed the dispensary there. At Kirundu, Delhove aided the government in arresting a witch doctor who was involved in the cultic and evil practice of killing people at dawn disguised as a leopard.⁴⁷ In 1939 Delhove took the gospel to the Bas-Congo region, i.e., to the Lowa area, south of Kirundu Mission. People there had rebelled against the government and as a result were exiled into the interior. When Delhove reached the exiles, he was met by one of their leaders who had dreamed of his coming to teach them about the truth.⁴⁸ Half of the people accepted the gospel.⁴⁹

That same year the Southern African Division voted to return Delhove permanently to Belgium as a result of developing several controversies with the government.⁵⁰ It appears that one of the controversy was connected with his work in Lowa. The division leadership also had concerns about his and his wife's health. It seems this plan never

materialized, for Delhove remained director of the Kirundu mission station until 1943, when he became director of the Lubero mission station, which later moved to Rwesse (North Kivu region).⁵¹ While traveling on furlough, the Delhoves had a car accident. The accident killed their daughter Lucy, who had been working as a nurse in Rwankeri. She had joined her parents on trip for a family vacation.

Later Years

Two years after the tragic furlough, the Delhoves were placed on retirement in 1945. However, they refused to return to Belgium, for they had become much attached to the region where they had spent most of their lives in as missionaries. As a war veteran Delhove was given land to settle.⁵² They built a house in the Belgian Congo and were placed on a sustentation fund by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁵³ Two weeks before his death he was knighted “Chevalier de l’ Ordre de Léopold II” by the royal prince regent of Belgium for his service to the natives of the country.⁵⁴ Delhove died after a heart attack on March 12, 1949, in Rutshuru, at the age of sixty.⁵⁵ The government gave Delhove a full military funeral as a war veteran.

Virginie went on to live for more than 14 years with her children. During her last years she was disabled and developed Parkinson’s disease. She died in October 1963 at the age of 79 and was buried in Rwesse.⁵⁶

Contribution

Both David and Virginie Delhove gave their lives to service of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as Bible workers, health workers, a pastor, and a teacher for 36 years in a mission context. As pioneer missionaries to today’s Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo, the Delhoves were instrumental in founding Adventism in several regions of those countries. As a mission administrator, translator, and educator, David Delhove was a key figure in the growth of Adventism in Central Africa. As a medical missionary, Virginie supported her husband in several dispensaries, bringing help to those who may otherwise not have had access to health care. By serving for several decades, these veteran missionaries were representative of an epoch when mission service was a life calling, and their legacy still runs in the Adventist workforce. Their children—Lydie, Lucy, Clara, Edna, Jean, Paul—either were medical missionaries in Africa or worked within the Seventh-day Adventist Church elsewhere.⁵⁷

Memory Statements From Obituary Announcements of David E. Delhove

“Only a month before his death he assisted a group of workers in laying out the site for the latest station to be opened in the Congo. His knowledge of native problems was wide, and his counsel appreciated throughout the colony. During the last years of his life, he was invited by governors and rulers to join their inner councils. At the time of his death, he was a member of the council of the governor general of the Belgian Congo. His wife, five sons and daughters, three of them workers in the Congo Union Mission, are left to mourn.”⁵⁸

“Every contact was to Elder Delhove an opportunity to give witness to the truth and only the day of final reckoning will show the extent of the Christian influence of this man of God. He sleeps, but his works do follow him. He awaits the return of His Lord, whom he loved and served so long.”⁵⁹

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NOTES

1. Her two sisters died of scarlet fever, her father died of cholera, and finally her mother died, according to popular rumor, of a broken heart. See Lydie Delhove, *A Daughter Remembers D. E. Delhove: Pioneer Missionary in Central Africa* (self-published, 1984), 2.?
2. *Ibid.*, 4.?
3. *Ibid.*?
4. *Ibid.*?
5. *Ibid.* David Delhove was then 27 and Virginie was 25.?
6. General Conference Committee, July 24, 1912, 239, General Conference Archives, accessed April 8, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1912.pdf>: “The chairman read a letter from D. E. Delhove, whose name has been considered for Fast Africa and the Congo, stating the brother’s willingness to accept an appointment, now that he has finished the nurse course.”?
7. William M. Scott, “North England Conference,” *Missionary Worker*, December 18, 1911, 203,?
8. Delhove, 5.?
- 9.

- Ibid., 6.?
10. Ibid.?
 11. See David E. Delhove, "La Songa Mission," *ARH*, April 6, 1933, 11.?
 12. Lydie Delhove, 7. The German territories included Tanganyika to the south and Ruanda-Urundi to the West.?
 13. For instance, Virgil Robinson, "Third Angel Over Africa," *TMs*, n.d., 97, 98, accessed June 15, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Books/TAOA1954.pdf>; Matilda Erikson Andross, *Story of the Advent Message* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1926), 269.?
 14. This based on additional historical data by Jean Cripps and Lydie Delhove. See Jean Cripps, "Our History, No. 9," *Trans-Africa Division Outlook*, July 15, 1971, 6.?
 15. Lydie Delhove, 8.?
 16. Ibid.?
 17. Today Ruandi-Urundi is the modern Rwanda and Burundi.?
 18. M. N. Campbell, "Plans for 1919," *Missionary Worker*, April 1919, 1.?
 19. "Word from Brother Delhove," *Missionary Worker*, May 1919, 16.?
 20. Matilda Erikson Andross, 269, noted this connection quite early.?
 21. "East Africa, *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1920), 130.?
 22. "Belgian Congo," *Missionary Worker*, February 2, 1921, 1.?
 23. Lydie Delhove, 24.?
 24. David E. Delhove, "In British East Africa After the War," *ARH*, May 26, 1921, 9, 10.?
 25. Cripps.?
 26. David Delhove, "In British East Africa After the War."?
 27. See David E. Delhove, "Ruanda," *Missionary Worker*, December 7, 1921, 4, 5.?
 28. David E. Delhove, "Building a Mission in East Africa," *Present Truth and Signs of the Times*, January 19, 1922, 5.?
 29. Notable were Moses Segatwa, Lazaro, and Johana Munyampundu.?
 30. Lydie Delhove, 24; J. M. French, "Joining Hands in Africa," *ARH*, February 12, 1925, 12.?
 31. An interesting detail here is that when the duo first went to Rwankeri, the inhabitants consisting of warring tribes ran into the hills on sighting the Europeans, for they feared they would be killed. C. W. Bozarth, "Report of the Central African Union Mission Rendered at the Division Council," *African Division Outlook*, October 24, 1929, 1.?
 32. "The East African Institute," *Missionary Worker*, February 8, 1922, 2.?
 33. W. E. Read, "Notes of Progress in Our Foreign Missions," *Quarterly Review of the European Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, fourth quarter 1923, 15.?
 34. Samuel Ndikumana, "The Fruit of a Work String: Beginnings of Seventh-day Adventism in Burundi" (research paper, Friedensau Adventist University, 2010), 11.?
 35. Lydie Delhove, 24.?
 36. See Ndikumana, 2. See also Ngabo Birikunzira Jerome, "Implantation and Growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda (1919–2000)" (MA thesis, University of South Africa, 2008).?
 37. Ibid., 14.?
 38. Ibid., 13, 14?
 - 39.

- Ibid., 13.?
40. Lydie Delhove, 35, 36; E. D. Dick, "Buganda Mission," *African Division Outlook*, April 1929, 1.?
 41. Its territory included Ruanda, Urundi, and the Kivu district of the Belgian Congo. See "East Congo Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1929), 229.?
 42. Bozarth, 1.?
 43. See "Harvest Ingathering in the Congo," *African Division Outlook*, October 13, 1930, 8; C. W. Curtis, "Camp Meetings in the Congo," *ARH*, December 4, 1930, 28.?
 44. Lydie Delhove, 47.?
 45. Ibid.; David E. Delhove, "Songa Mission," *Southern African Division Outlook*, October 1, 1932, 8; W. R. Vail, "Mission Geography Helps," *Home and School*, January 1935, 22.?
 46. David Delhove, "La Songa Mission."?
 47. Lydie Delhove, 53, 54.?
 48. Ibid.?
 49. P. S. Marsa, "The Western Congo Calling," *Missions Quarterly*, third quarter 1946, 11.?
 50. A. W. Cormack to A. V. Olson, January 16, 1939; A. V. Olson to A. W. Cormack, March 30, 1939; C. W. Bozarth to D. E. Delhove, May 25, 1939, correspondence, Box 9842, Record Group 21, General Conference Archives.?
 51. See "Kirundu Mission Station," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1942), 149; "Lubero Mission Station," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1942), 159.?
 52. Lydie Delhove, 76.?
 53. A. V. Olson, "Missions of South Africa," *ARH*, October 14, 1948, 15.?
 54. Lydie Delhove, 84, 86.?
 55. Milton Robinson, "Word has been. . . ," *Southern African Division Outlook*, April 1, 1949, 5.?
 56. Ibid., 87.?
 57. Their daughter Clara served in Canada; at the time of writing, Peter Delhove, a grandson of the Delhoves, is serving as ADRA country director in Madagascar.?
 58. "Obituaries," *ARH*, April 28, 1949, 20.?
 59. "Obituaries," *Sothern African Division Outlook*, April 15, 1949, 8.?