

# Effenberg, Johann H. (1894–1982)

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Johann H. Effenberg was a German pioneer missionary to China for 23 years. His work focused mostly on the central and western regions of the country. He also worked in Tibet and Mongolia.

## Early Years and Marriage

Effenberg was born on September 17, 1894, in Dresden, Germany. At the age of 19 he became a Seventh-day Adventist and received his theological training at the Friedensau Mission Seminary from 1914 to 1915.<sup>1</sup> He also studied at the universities of Halle and Breslau. During World War I he worked as a paramedic in the German and Turkish service, respectively. In the wake of the war, he not only served as a noncombatant, but was also an ardent supporter of pacifist views.<sup>2</sup>

In 1918 he worked as a literature evangelist. Later that year he became the treasurer of the Silesian Conference<sup>3</sup> From 1919 to 1921 Effenberg worked as a conference evangelist for the Silesian and West-Saxonian conferences. As a licentiate in Berlin from 1922 to 1923 he got to know his wife, Emmy Heil, and became a district pastor in Breslau (today's Wrocław, Poland) in 1924 and Chemnitz in 1925.<sup>4</sup> In May 1925 he was ordained to the ministry at a conference where William A. Spicer conducted the ordination service. Two months later, on July 19, 1925, he was married to Emmy Heil (1900–1974).<sup>5</sup>

## China: Chongqing

That same year the Effenbergs were sent to China.<sup>6</sup> They arrived on September 25 and began to work in the East Sichuan Mission in Chongqing, where Effenberg became officially the director in 1928. Unofficially he served as director already from May 1926.<sup>7</sup>

Within a few years Effenberg formed congregations, trained staff, built schools and small health clinics, and earned a lot of respect from the local population.<sup>8</sup> The Adventist mission had been established in Chongqing in 1913. However, there were not more than 70 members when Effenberg arrived. In 1926 the mission station along with the chapel was partly destroyed because of a revolt by Communists in that area. The daughter of the Chinese local pastor was killed in the revolt. From a trustworthy source, Effenberg learned that his name was on the list of those to be executed by the revolutionaries.<sup>9</sup> In spite of the danger, the Effenbergs continued with their ministry, for he was convinced that China was the land "Sinim" of Isaiah 49:12: "the land, which the Lord will remember, for even those from the land of Sinim will come."<sup>10</sup> This motivated him to continue with missionary service.

After this experience, Effenberg began seeking access to the population through medical mission. Effenberg founded a school for the training of local mission workers as colporteurs, evangelists, and teachers. Through long itineraries, which needed several months, he baptized many converts in a short time. As he reported in 1927, he was allowed to



Johann H. Effenberg, 1962.  
Photo courtesy of Karsten Wilke.

open up new mission stations and “burn hundreds of idols.”<sup>11</sup>

During the Chinese civil war (1927), all American missionaries left because of the ongoing struggles between different warlords and their partly nationalist and Communist worldviews. Yet the Effenbergs decided to remain. Even in this time of perplexities the East Sichuan Mission prospered and became a project of the worldwide Thirteenth Sabbath School Ingathering campaign in 1929. One report published in several magazines in that year explained, “In number of members this has been the largest local mission in West China. It is also the oldest mission we have in the West China field.”<sup>12</sup> Beside this success, the Effenbergs suffered the loss of their 18-month-old daughter. She died because of dysentery in the same year.<sup>13</sup> This did not deter them from continuing his mission.

## China: 1930s

In the beginning of the 1930s Effenberg undertook several mission expeditions to Tibet and Mongolia and opened mission stations in the provinces of Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai. Keeping pace with modern achievements, Effenberg with his “gospel truck” was apparently the first automobile driver on the newly built auto roads in northwest China.<sup>14</sup> Together with the provinces of Shaanxi and Xinjiang, this large territory formed the new Northwest China Union Mission, whose first superintendent, from 1932 to 1935, was Effenberg. Its headquarters was in Lanzhou (Gansu region).<sup>15</sup>

During his travel he encountered the Chinese Muslim world and was very touched by their faithfulness to their religion.<sup>16</sup> In his eschatological musings the great Chinese Northwest is the spot from where “the kings of the east lead the millions of the rising sun westward for the last great battle of Armageddon.”<sup>17</sup> This gave him the motivation to go into “the dark heart of the continent,” as he called his field.<sup>18</sup>

His passion came at a price. Right in the midst of the planning for a union training institute<sup>19</sup> and a central medical institution— the Lanzhou Sanitarium and Hospital— “and before any structural work could be undertaken, Pastor and Mrs. Effenberg had to leave for their long-delayed furlough, health conditions indicating that it was not best to delay longer the home leave.”<sup>20</sup>

After his return to China at the end of 1934, Effenberg was asked to form a Medical Cadet Corps for the Adventist mission, together with Denton E. Rebok at the China Training Institute (???????) at Qiaotouzhen (???) / Nanjing.<sup>21</sup> The Medical Cadet Corps program was similar to the one in the United States. “About 150 young men took the training,” which “was very useful in helping the youth to maintain a status of noncombatancy.”<sup>22</sup> For his contribution, the National Red Cross Executive Council of China awarded Effenberg the rank of “Red Cross general.”<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Effenberg worked briefly as secretary of the Anhui Mission (1935–1937).<sup>24</sup>

In 1938 Effenberg was appointed secretary of the Central China Union in Hankou. While there he wrote an article entitled “Make Ready a People Prepared for the Lord.” It shows marks of the widespread last generation theology of the period: while Effenberg charged church members to be guilty for the delay of Jesus’ return, he suggested using the Sabbath School to revive the indifferent church membership and to teach reading to the illiterate. This showed his passion for social questions and problems.<sup>25</sup> That same year Effenberg went to Shanghai for four and a half months to preserve the church property and to repair the church buildings damaged by the Second Sino-Japanese war.<sup>26</sup>

In 1939 the Effenbergs were relocated to Hankou, where Georg J. Appel and Effenberg worked together before Appel became the new superintendent of the Central China Union Mission and Effenberg was sent to Yencheng to direct the Honan Mission.<sup>27</sup>

## China: 1940s

It was at the visit of William H. Branson, then a vice president of the General Conference, in Hankou (1940), when it was decided to open a school that will belong to the Union in the buildings of the Wuhan Sanatorium. The school year was to start in the same year. This school was extended to cater for about 1,300 pupils when Effenberg returned to Hankou. From 1941 to 1945/46 he served as chairperson of the Emergency Mission Committee and directed the Adventist sanatorium and hospital in Wuhan.<sup>28</sup>

After World War II Ezra L. Longway, acting president of the China Division, reported that the Central China Union suffered more during the war than any other section of the division. He continued to note “Elder and Mrs. J. H. Effenberg, our German workers in the Hankow area, did much to preserve our property during these years. Elder Effenberg organized two private schools and carried them on until the close of the war, and from these schools a considerable number of students have been baptized.”<sup>29</sup>

Actually Effenberg understood the schools always as denominational schools even when they encountered serious problems. During this time Effenberg hired non-Adventist teachers and took loans from questionable sources. G. J. Appel and I. V. Stonebrook, educational secretary, demanded to close the schools.<sup>30</sup> Not willing to follow in November 1945, Effenberg opened a factory where students and refugees found employment. The Central China Union reacted in the beginning of 1946 and dismissed Effenberg from his secretary position.

Between 1946 and 1947 it was unclear whether the Effenbergs would remain in China. Conflicts with the China Division leadership, an arrest by the authorities, and intervention by General Conference president W. H. Branson finally gave way to further continuation of their ministry.<sup>31</sup>

From September 1947 to August 1948 Effenberg worked as transportation assistant at the Treasury Department of the China Division in Shanghai, as well as contact person for UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), which made him responsible for the transportation of supplies, building materials, and equipment for the rehabilitation of the China Training Institute.<sup>32</sup>

After 23 years in China the Effenbergs went on furlough to the United States. Shortly after their arrival the General Conference voted a permanent return. Effenberg hoped that the action of the General Conference could be withdrawn. But when Effenberg's furlough ended, mainland China was under Communist rule.<sup>33</sup>

## Later Years

In 1950 Effenberg moved to Turlock, California, where he was listed as a retired (in the *SDA Yearbook*: "honorary") minister of the Central California Conference until 1953.<sup>34</sup> Within this time he claimed to have earned a Ph.D. degree and, according to his own self-representation, was "associate professor of natural therapeutics in the School of Health at Sierra State University in California."<sup>35</sup> In addition, he was a member of various medical and naturopathic associations. As a strict vegetarian and a missionary who was always concerned about health care, he was concerned with questions of nutrition and personality formation. This is demonstrated in his book *Personality and the Body: A Handbook on the Role of Diet and Health in Personality Engineering* (1962). Other publications—besides earlier literature on experiences in China<sup>36</sup>—included "Ozone, God's Gift to Humanity" (1951).

The booklet "Ozone, God's Gift to Humanity" needs substantial comment. This booklet was apparently written by Effenberg as a way to further the interest of a group of health fraudsters. This group became popular in the 1950s by inventing a generator, Calozone Ozone Generator, which created, or claimed to create, ozone. However, the Calozone Ozone Generator, "also known as Vitozone, Purozone, Orozone, Nevozone, and Airozone, was the most widely distributed phony device" ever investigated by the U.S. bureau in charge of health frauds and quackery. A juridical report says that "one of the promoters published a series of so-called lectures titled 'Ozone—God's Gift to Humanity,' in which he misquoted eminent toxicologists, physicists, and medical authorities as advocating the use of ozone in the treatment of disease."<sup>37</sup>

Effenberg and others were investigated and found guilty of health quackery and fraud. As a result the case went to trial in Alameda County Superior Court in 1954.<sup>38</sup> In the end,

the phony doctor, John H. Effenberg, served a year in jail. . . . All four [accused] were placed on probation for five years.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to his Ph.D. degree, it has been claimed that Effenberg studied at three universities in the United States and had four other doctorates (LL.D., D.D., N.D., Psy.D.), one of which was awarded "honoris causa."<sup>40</sup> There is no substantiation that the other doctorates were earned or that the honorary doctorate was in fact awarded.

The Effenbergs opened a health food store under the name of his wife in 1955/1956.<sup>41</sup> Effenberg himself became a real estate agent and insurance broker.<sup>42</sup> In 1963 they gave up all their business and moved to North Fork, where Effenberg worked on volumes 2 and 3 of his trilogy "Personality and the Soul" and "Personality and the Spirit," which were never published.<sup>43</sup>

From 1965 to 1966 Effenberg traveled around the world and held lectures. It was Effenberg's last attempt to win some souls. According to his memory, he traveled through 30 countries, held more than 200 lectures, and everywhere tried to convince the people of the midnight cry (Matthew 25:6). This journey was based on his interpretation of Matthew 24:14, which says that the gospel shall be preached in all the world, "and then shall the end come."<sup>44</sup> After a second trip to Germany in 1972 and the death of his wife on July 7, 1974, sometime later he was remarried, to Anna. He died in Fresno, California, on February 24, 1982.

## Contribution

As a pioneer missionary, Effenberg's work helped establish Adventism in China, especially in its founding years. He not only concerned himself with China as such; he made several efforts to reach the populations of Tibet and Mongolia. As an administrator, Effenberg used his leadership to establish health and educational institutions in China. Those institutions contributed to economic and educational development of the regions of China where they were established. It also created employment opportunities for new converts, students, and refugees. As an educator Effenberg trained young Chinese converts who later took over the leadership of the mission in China. This move helped the Chinese church when missionaries were forced out of the country.

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## NOTES

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2. Ex-Deutsches Generalkonsulat in Hankow, China, to Johann H. Effenberg, October 15, 1945, in "Register of the Johann Heinrich Effenberg Collection," Collection 21, Box 1, Folder 4, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.?
3. Effenberg to W. P. Bradley.?
4. "Silesian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1921), 90.?
5. See "Register of the Johann Heinrich Effenberg Collection," Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, September 2010, processed by Denis Kaiser, Collection 21, accessed August 21, 2018, <http://www.centerforadventistresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/collections/C0021.pdf>.?
6. See General Conference Committee, October 17, 1924, 737, General Conference Archives, accessed July 20, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1924.pdf>.?
7. W. K. Ising, "Aus dem unruhigen Fernen Osten," *Adventbote*, March 15, 1927, 92.?
8. Johannes Hartlapp, "Vorbilder Gesucht . . . und Gefunden!" *Lesungen zur Gebetswoche, 2008*, 16, accessed July 28, 2018, <https://www.adventisten-ansbach.de/dateien/ab2010/Jedermanndateien/Gebetslesungen/Gebetswoche-2008-2.pdf>.?
9. Johann H. Effenberg, "From West China," *Quarterly Review of the European Division*, April 1, 1927, 5, 8, 9.?
10. Johann H. Effenberg, "Sinim," *Adventbote*, June 1, 1926, 171–173.?
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12. Raymond H. Hartwell, "The East Szechwan Mission," *Southern Union Worker*, November 20, 1929, 1.?
  13. "Trauernachricht aus China," *Adventbote*, December 15, 1929, 384.?
  14. Clarence C. Crisler, *China Borderlands and Beyond* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1937), 271.?
  15. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), 4:151; see also John Oss, *Mission Advance in China* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1949), 221.?
  16. See Johann H. Effenberg, "The Moslems of China." *XXth Century* 6, no.3 (December 3, 1941): 198–208.?
  17. Johann H. Effenberg, "A Call from China's Great North West," *China Division Reporter*, July 1, 1932, 9.?
  18. *Ibid.*?
  19. Henry W. Miller, "China's Great Northwest," *Review and Herald*, January 18, 1934, 14.?
  20. Crisler, 275.?
  21. Herbert Ford, *For the Love of: The Life Story of E. Rebok* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1971), 92, 93.?
  22. Handel Luke, "A History of Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education in the China Mission, 1888-1980" (D.Ed. thesis, Andrews University, 1982), 32.?
  23. See "Register of the Johann Heinrich Effenberg Collection."?
  24. B. Petersen, "The Anhwei Mission," *China Division Reporter*, April 1, 1935, 8, 9.?
  25. Johann H. Effenberg, "Make Ready a People for the Lord," *China Division Reporter Supplement*, February 1, 1938, 2, 3. He was engaged in care for sick, starving, and blind people.?
  26. "News Notes," *China Division Reporter*, January 1, 1938, 12; see also "Register of the Johann Heinrich Effenberg Collection."?
  27. W. H. Branson, "A Visit to Hankow," *China Division Reporter*, April 1, 1940, 1.?
  28. "Register of the Johann Heinrich Effenberg Collection."?
  29. E. L. Longway, "The China Division," *ARH*, June 14, 1946, 184.?
  30. See Johann H. Effenberg to J. L. McElhany, March 9, 1947, Record ID 45666, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, MD, USA.?
  31. Because of his ill health, Effenberg applied for furlough in the United States at the end of January 1946. But the China Division voted for Effenberg's permanent return. Effenberg, however, saw himself unable to leave Hankou without paying back his loans, but the China Division set an ultimatum for him to leave until April 1947. Effenberg, now willing to leave China, applied for the entry visa to the United States just with signed papers by the "Top-Nazi in Hankow, Mr. Glatzel," and Effenberg was suddenly arrested. Fortunately, officials of Hankou, such as Liu Pu Ho of the Foreign Affairs Office of China, testified: "Mr. J. H. Effenberg is neither in the Nazi member list nor in the supplementary list." After Effenberg was released and an investigation in central China, W. H. Branson demanded to stop "the opposition of the brethren toward the schoolwork," and Effenberg felt justified. See Georg J. Appel to Johann H. Effenberg, April 2, 1946, Record ID 45666, General Conference Archives; see also General Conference Committee, April 4, 1946, 2363, General Conference Archives, accessed August 22, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1946-04.pdf>; N. F. Brewer to Johann H. Effenberg, February 18, 1947, Record ID 45666, box 6750, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, MD, U.S.A.; Johann H. Effenberg to N. F. Brewer, February 28, 1947, 3, Record ID 45666, box 6750, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, MD, U.S.A.; Johann H. Effenberg to J. L. McElhany, November 11, 1948, Correspondences, Record ID 45666, Box 6750, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, MD, U.S.A.; see also the originals in "Register of the Johann Heinrich Effenberg Collection"; Johann H. Effenberg to W. K. Ising, April 24, 1947, Correspondences, Record ID 45666, box 6750, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, MD, U.S.A.?
  32. Effenberg to Ising, November 11, 1948, correspondences; see also "Appointments and Transfers," *China Division Reporter*, October 1, 1947, 8.?
  33. The General Conference tried to find practical work for him in one of the Adventist institutions in southern. But Effenberg was apparently not interested in these offers. H. T. Elliott to Johann H. Effenberg, December 14, 1948, Correspondences, Record ID 45666, box 9845, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, MD, U.S.A.?
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  35. See Johann H. Effenberg, *Personality and the Body: A Handbook on the Role of Diet and Health in Personality Engineering* (New York: Exposition Press, 1962), 32.?
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37. Special Committee on Aging, "Health Frauds and Quackery: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Frauds and Misrepresentations Affecting the Elderly of the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate, Eighty-eighth Congress," Second Session, Part 1, San Francisco (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 13, 1964).?
38. See "Ozone Machine Peddlers Jailed," *The Times Standard*, 2.?
39. Special Committee on Aging, 16.?
40. See "Register of the Johann Heinrich Effenberg Collection."?
41. "Advertisements," *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 16, 1956, 14.?
42. Emmy Effenberg to Irmgard Busch, December 29, 1960, Correspondences, Record ID M24-32, box N53-1, Adventist European Archive, Friedensau, Germany.?
43. Emmy Effenberg to Irmgard Busch, November 11, 1963, Correspondence, Record ID M24-32, box N53-1, Adventist European Archive, Friedensau, Germany.?
44. Johann H. Effenberg to Irmgard Busch, December 22, 1966, Correspondence, Record ID M24-32, box N53-1, Adventist European Archive, Friedensau, Germany.?

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