



Alva Paul Ritz family.

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Ritz, Alva Paul (1899–1988) and Avanelle Ruth (Renshaw) (1904–1964)

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Alva Paul and Avanelle Ruth Ritz spent two decades as missionaries in the Far Eastern Division. They were instrumental in the establishment of the first Adventist church in Bangkok in 1933. They also pioneered the Adventist work in the northern part of Thailand.

Early Life

Alva Paul Ritz was born on July 16, 1899, at Bloomfield, Davis County, Iowa, to parents, Benjamin Franklin Ritz (1870-1910) and Amelia Della Jones (1873-1959), both of Iowa.¹ His four siblings included Bertis (1897-1981), Ferne Bessie (1903-1989), L. Ruth (1905-1979), and Forrest (1906-1917).² He spent his early years in Farm Davis County, Iowa; and Yakima and College Place, Washington.³ Ritz was converted to the Adventist faith in 1912, along with his mother and another sibling, through a Harvest Ingathering contact, and following a series of Bible Studies he was baptized in March 1912 at Yakima, Washington, by F. A. Detamore.⁴

Education and Marriage

Ritz was able to attend both public schools and church schools in his early education. He began schooling in Bloomfield, Iowa, (1904-1908) and Yakima, Washington (1909-1911). He attended the church school in Naches and Yakima, Washington, from 1912 to 1916 and Laurelwood Academy in Gaston, Oregon, from 1916 to 1918. He earned a bachelor's in theology at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington, where he enrolled in 1918 and graduated in 1928.⁵

Ritz married Avanelle Ruth Renshaw, a registered nurse who was born on June 17, 1904, at Kooskia, Idaho County, Idaho. They were married on September 3, 1927, in Portland Oregon. Avanelle Ruth was the daughter of Henry Edgar Renshaw and Una Mable Downing.⁶

Avanelle Ruth spent her early years in Kooskia, Kamiah, and Orofino, Idaho, and also lived in Portland, Oregon. She was converted into the Adventist faith and was baptized in 1916 at Orofino, Idaho. She attended Idaho Public Schools from 1910 until 1918. Then she attended Doremus Union (later known as Portland Union Academy) from 1919 to 1920. She also attended Columbia Academy in Battle Ground, Washington, from 1921 to 1922. She then proceeded to Portland Sanitarium and Hospital in Portland, Oregon, from which she graduated with a nursing degree in 1926. She also attended the theological seminary in Takoma Park, Maryland, for a term in 1941. She took further coursework at Walla Walla College for two quarters in 1951 and 1952.⁷

Before their marriage, Ruth was already working as an X-ray technician, laboratory technician, and anesthetist at Portland Sanitarium and Hospital (1926-1927). Paul and Ruth were blessed with three children named Janice Lavonne, Halden Edgar, and Karen Lotus.⁸

During her service in the Southeast Asia, Avanelle Ritz served in Thailand, Penang, and Singapore. She carried multiple responsibilities as the work demanded. Sometimes she worked in the treasury, but more often in her chosen profession of nursing.⁹ She was employed as a nurse at Penang Mission Clinic at Penang, Malaya from 1929 until 1930. From 1931 until 1940 she did office work at Siam Mission Office. From 1946 until 1951, she was employed by Bangkok Mission Clinic and Bangkok Sanitarium and Hospital, as nurse supervisor and instructor of nurses. From 1952 until 1954, she was the surgery supervisor at Penang Mission Hospital.¹⁰

Ministry

Alva Paul Ritz started his denominational service in the summer of 1927 assisting in a tent effort in the Upper Columbia Conference for a year. He was then called to serve in mission work in Malaya and Siam from 1928 until 1931.¹¹ Upon arrival in Malaysia on November 27, 1928, Ritz helped in the construction of Penang Mission Hospital (now Penang Adventist Hospital).¹²

In 1930, Ritz served as accounting director, secretary-treasurer, and mission director in Lampang, Thailand. In 1931, he was called to Bangkok, Thailand.¹³ He was one of the pioneer Adventist missionaries to Siam (now Thailand). Together with R. L. Milne, he went house to house selling books in Phuket, Southern Thailand.¹⁴ From 1931 to 1932, he served as the acting director of Siam Mission (now Thailand Mission) and from 1932 to 1933 he served as its director. Under Ritz's leadership, the first Bangkok Adventist church was completed in 1933, and the school at Soi Sap was moved to Rama 4 Road to become a Thai primary school under the new name "Adventist School."¹⁵

After a furlough in 1933-1934, Ritz taught in the Malayan Seminary from 1935 to 1936. He returned to the Siam Mission, where he was again mission director from 1936 to 1940. On July 13, 1935, he was ordained in Singapore. Ritz took a second furlough in July of 1940. During the years of World War II, the Ritzes remained in the United States. Paul Ritz served as a Bible instructor in Gem State Academy while pastoring three to five churches in the Idaho Conference. His congregations included Gem State Academy, Caldwell, Parma, Nampa, and New Plymouth.¹⁶ In 1945, he moved to Portland, Oregon, where he taught Bible at Portland Union Academy and pastored the Lents church.

After World War II, on September 6, 1945, a request was forwarded to the North Pacific Union and the Idaho Conference from the Far Eastern Division for Ritz to return to the Far East to serve as superintendent of the Thailand Mission.¹⁷ He returned to Thailand and served as the director of Siam Mission from 1946 to 1951. He also served as chaplain and business manager of Penang Mission Hospital from 1952 to 1953.¹⁸

In 1956, Alva Ritz served as a business manager of Youngberg Hospital in Singapore.¹⁹ In 1957, Alva Ritz requested a permanent return to the United States in order to care for his parents. The General Conference Committee voted on April 18, 1957, to authorize the permanent return.²⁰

Upon his return from missionary service in the Far East in 1957, Ritz received several calls. Among them was to serve as district leader in the Texas Conference, the Oregon Conference, and to serve as hospital administrator of Ardmore Sanitarium and Hospital in Oklahoma.²¹ He accepted the call to serve in the Oregon Conference, pastoring the Brookings district, which included the churches of Roseburg, Medford, and Shady Point, from 1957 until 1967.²² In May 9, 1964, his wife Ruth Avanelle Renshaw Ritz, passed away at the Portland Sanitarium at the age of 59 after an illness of several months.²³ She was buried in Tahoma Cemetery at Yakima County, Washington. After the death of his wife, Ritz continued to be active in denominational service. In 1966, he was the pastor of the Ashland Valley View district.²⁴ Ritz was also a member of the Oregon Conference's executive committee from 1964 to 1967.²⁵

Later Life and Legacy

Ruth Avanelle Ritz died on May 9, 1964.²⁶ Alva Ritz was listed among the North Pacific Union Conference's ordained ministers until his death in 1988.²⁷ He died on October 8, 1988, at the age of 89 in Yakima County, Washington, and was buried in the Tahoma Cemetery.²⁸

Alva and Avanelle Ritz spent two decades as missionaries in the Far Eastern Division. They were instrumental in the establishment of the first Adventist church in Bangkok in 1933 and moving the Thai Primary School from Soi Sep to Rama 4, where it was renamed "Adventist School."²⁹ They also pioneered the work in the northern part of Thailand. Alva Ritz held Bible classes for Thai-speaking workers and conducted evangelistic meetings in many parts of Thailand and the United States. Ritz's passion to God's cause led to the organization of a church in Homedale, Oregon.³⁰

Avanelle Ruth Ritz was a great support to her husband in their missionary calling, always ready to do whatever work was needed. She assisted Dr. Ralph Waddell when he opened medical work in Bangkok, leading to the founding of the Bangkok Sanitarium and Hospital. She was instrumental in the development of a school of nursing in Thailand.³¹

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