

THE STORY OF AGNES

AUGUST J. AND ELIZABETH HOEGER



Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name...they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

–Mark 16: 15-18 (NRSV)

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August J. and Elizabeth Hoeger

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*“For we remember before our God and Father
how you put your faith into practice,
how your love made you work so hard,
and how your hope
in our Lord Jesus Christ is firm.”
I Thessalonians 1:2-3*

Preface

The time was February 1942. In the mountainous jungles of Southwest New Guinea, the grim reality of World War II was a vivid and often terrifying experience for the American and Australian missionaries. After much bombing and strafing, the Japanese were now invading and occupying the remote island. Of those who had not yet been evacuated, many would suffer and 12 would be killed. Thankfully, most of the women and all of the children had been able to leave safely.

One group of missionaries, five men and one woman, were in imminent danger of capture. At the last possible moment, wanting to remain with their Papuan friends as long as possible, they left their station under cover of darkness. For seven days, they fled through almost impenetrable jungle toward their destination, a small air strip high in the mountains at the Lutheran Mission School near Wau.

The six-member group often walked at night and slept during the day to avoid detection by the Japanese planes above and the Japanese patrols below. The nights were cold and wet in the rugged mountains. In spite of their discomfort, the group kept moving, even though two of the men had dangerously high fevers.

The lone woman in the group was a Lutheran medical missionary, not yet 32 years old. She was the last white woman to leave before the Japanese took over the area.

How did a young woman doctor, born and raised on a prairie homestead in central North Dakota, find herself in such a predicament? This is the story of Agnes.



For we remember...

Chapter I—Arena and Arthur

Agnes Marie Hoeger was born in Arena, North Dakota, on June 16, 1910. Just one year earlier, her father, Rev. August Hoeger, had brought his bride to the wind-swept prairie just north of Bismarck to begin forming a congregation of the German-Russians who had settled in the area. He had also brought with him a deep and abiding faith, which would one day inspire his children to seek lives of faithful service.

Pastor Hoeger's own life had begun in Mendota, Illinois, on July 12, 1885. The youngest of five sons, he was raised in a devout Christian family which included a strong tradition of missionary service. His mother had come to America as a Lutheran deaconess from Germany to care for the children in a Lutheran orphanage. His father, a Lutheran lay missionary, arrived from Germany to work at Wartburg Theological Seminary as housefather and farm manager. Because August was actually born at Wartburg and later graduated from that same institution, he often told his friends that he was the only pastor in the Iowa Lutheran Synod who was born in and had graduated from the Seminary.

Since both of his parents were missionaries, it seemed only natural that August Hoeger's consuming interest as a boy and seminary student was for the cause of foreign missions. This interest remained dominant throughout his entire life. While attending seminary, he assumed that he would become a foreign missionary, but his professors discouraged him because of his difficulty with languages. Unable to pursue his dream of foreign missionary service, August told his seminary professors to send him where no other graduate cared to go. He was given a call to the prairies of central North Dakota, with the assignment to gather together a few of the homesteaders and form a congregation.

In 1909, Pastor Hoeger married Amelia Aden, whom he had met while interning in Gothenburg, Nebraska. Together, they journeyed by train to Arena, North Dakota, stopping for a two-day honeymoon in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In a relatively short time, Pastor Hoeger organized three congregations at Arena, Tuttle, and Wing. A year after their marriage, the Hoegers welcomed a daughter, Agnes Marie, the first of their eight children.

During this horse and buggy era, life on the northern prairies was difficult and often tedious. Compounding the inconveniences and isolation were the fierce prairie blizzards, with nary a tree to slow the deadly winds. In summer, there were terrifying storms: tornadoes, straight-line winds, and hail as big as baseballs. Perhaps nothing was more dreaded than the close lightning strikes that occasionally caused wild fires—great walls of flame would streak across the plains faster than a horse could run.



Agnes with her mother, 1910.

However, for many homesteaders of the Dakotas, the worst condition of the prairies was loneliness. The closest neighbor was often a mile or more away. Trips to town were rare and always a treat. Social activities revolved around church and school. The solitude of prairie life was especially hard on Amelia Hoeger, who fondly remembered her Nebraska home, where literally hundreds of friends and family members were close by. Pastor Hoeger was often busy calling on settlers to form a congregation, thus increasing the isolation of mother and daughter.

Yet Agnes remembered these days with great pleasure and retained nothing but happy memories of her early childhood. She maintained friendships with some of her Arena friends throughout her life. One of the highlights each year was the arrival of the thick Sears & Roebuck catalog, which contained glorious pictures of thousands of items Agnes would never have. Her happy family life also included hours of play with a huge St. Bernard dog—until a neighbor shot her beloved pet, claiming that it must be the animal responsible for killing his calves.



*Agnes, age 6, with sisters
Cecelia, age 1 and Ruth, age 3.*

When Agnes was three, she gained a new companion, her sister Ruth. Two years later, sister Cecelia began her prairie life. Thus, by 1915, the pastor's family consisted of husband, wife, and three daughters. There was plenty for everyone to do!

Agnes was especially busy, sometimes filling in for her mother, who was often ill. Agnes' sister, Ruth Burgum, vividly remembers Agnes serving as her "second mother," although the sisters were only three years apart in age.

In May 1918, the Hoeger family moved from their homestead in Central North Dakota to Arthur on the extreme eastern edge of the state. Here, in the rich Red River Valley were plenty of trees, abundant crops almost every year, and people everywhere. Pastor Hoeger served both a town and a country congregation at this Arthur parish. It proved to be a wonderful home for the Hoeger family.

Undeterred by his growing family and church responsibilities, Pastor Hoeger retained his passion for foreign mission work. The Lutheran Missionary of June 1950 records this history:

After the turn of the century, far-seeing pastors spoke of organizing mission work within [the] synod and longed to have some project in which congregations might be interested. But [the] synod took no action.

Then things began to happen. In 1912, Pastor August Hoeger, father of Agnes Hoeger, mortgaged his only property to begin publication of *Die Missions-Stunde* with Pastor Martin Wiederaenders as coeditor. These men, through their mission paper, succeeded in

intensifying and crystallizing the latent mission power in the congregations. They frequently suggested [the] organization of a mission society.

The “Child” is born May 30, 1916. Hoeger and Wiederaenders had so aroused mission interest that when a mission conference was held in a tent at Wishek, North Dakota, 75 charter members formed the Mission—Hilfverein Fuer Neu Guinea (The Mission Auxiliary for New Guinea). First officers were Pastors Wm. Kraushaar, Richard Taeuber, and August Hoeger.

In its first year this society took over publication of “Die Missions-Stunde” with a monthly circulation of 2900 copies. The income of the society in its first year, 1916, was \$1,916, with 20 cents to spare (profit).

The “Child” Learns to Walk. The first task of the Mission Auxiliary was to spread mission information, to work up mission interest, and to focus the existing mission-mindedness upon a common goal, namely, the New Guinea Mission of the Neuendettelsau Mission Society of Germany. World War I was in progress; the mission was in dire need. In an unbelievably short time the Mission Auxiliary had transformed the “Missionary Synod” of Iowa into a synod with a mission. This was done by publication of its periodical, by distribution of tons of tracts and pamphlets, and by covering the country with illustrated lectures.

When World War I came to a close, the Mission Auxiliary had so paved the way that the whole Lutheran Church was mission-minded and ready to take over the New Guinea mission field, which the Germans had been forced to abandon. Now, through the preliminary work done by the Mission Auxiliary, the Iowa synod officially agreed to do mission work abroad and elected its first Board of Foreign Missions.

Through the columns of its papers, *Die Missions-Stunde* and *The Lutheran Missionary*, many projects were launched successfully. It was the Mission Auxiliary that started the Medical Mission program in New Guinea, the Commissary Department now a project of the Women's Missionary Federation, [the] New Guinea Scholarship Fund, several mission boat funds, an \$11,000 memorial fund, a large post-war printery fund, etc. The Mission Auxiliary's history is that of a helping hand to the church in its mission program.

Like his own parents, Pastor August Hoeger had planted the seeds of mission-mindedness, which would later take root and blossom in the life of his daughter Agnes.

Chapter II—School Days

From an early age, Agnes proved to be a precocious child. She showed a special capacity for learning languages, a skill which had eluded her father. Before beginning school, Agnes mastered the “high German” of her father’s people, who came from Bavaria; the “low German” of her mother’s family, who came from northern Germany (near Holland); and the “Swabish” spoken by most of the German-Russian settlers in the Arena area. In addition, she learned to speak and write English.



Agnes' first school Arena, ND.

Agnes also demonstrated unusual musical ability. By age 12, she played both piano and organ for church services in her father’s Arthur parish. She also excelled academically, graduating from high school at age 15 with an “A” average. Her mother always felt bad that her oldest daughter was cheated out of her carefree childhood years, but Agnes truly liked school and pursued every possible educational opportunity for her entire life. Although Agnes was not what could be called “popular,” perhaps because she was somewhat shy, she was well liked by her school mates and by everyone who knew her.

Upon graduating from Arthur High School in 1925, Agnes enrolled at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, the same college her father had attended. She stayed at the home of Professor Johannes Becker, a close friend of her father. During her stay, Agnes became especially close to Mrs. Laura Becker, a friendship they maintained until Mrs. Becker’s death in 1968.

Agnes enjoyed Wartburg College a great deal, but curriculum requirements created a problem for her after the first year. Convinced that God wanted her to become a



Agnes and classmates at Wartburg College.

foreign missionary, Agnes planned to serve as a medical doctor in India, where many women would not go to a male doctor. However, attaining this goal would require many science courses, and Wartburg would allow only one science course a year because of the difficulty and time involved. Therefore, Agnes decided, at age 16, to transfer to North Dakota State College in Fargo. Leaving Wartburg was not an easy decision, especially since her classmates had elected her to be class president for the next year. Reluctantly, she said good-bye to many friends.

The change proved to be a good one. At North Dakota State, Agnes was allowed to take four science courses in one year, all of which she successfully completed even while working part-time as a waitress to help fund her education. She sailed through them all. And Fargo was only 35 miles from Arthur, so Agnes could enjoy more frequent visits with family and friends.

Once again, after one year at North Dakota State, Agnes transferred to the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks to begin her pre-medical work. She was now 65 miles from home in Arthur, but ties to the family remained strong, as they would throughout her life.

During the Arthur years (1918-1930), the Hoeger family expanded to include five more children: Laura in 1919, Amelia in 1921, John in 1923, August Jr. in 1927, and Gertrude in 1929. As her mother continued to have children, Agnes returned home to help. In fact, when her mother became quite ill, Agnes took off two entire years to return home and help with the growing family.



The Hoeger family in 1927.

After her study at the University of North Dakota was completed, Agnes enrolled at the University of Minnesota Medical School in Minneapolis. Two years later, she began her residency at Bethesda Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio. These were happy years for Agnes, who loved school, loved medicine, and even enjoyed her part-time waitressing job.

During her residency in Cincinnati, Agnes observed a turning point in U.S. history—the repeal of prohibition. She served most of her residency as a doctor in the emergency ward at Bethesda Hospital. While prohibition was in effect, she treated very few instances of auto accident injuries, knife wounds, gun shot wounds, or victims of domestic abuse. The very night that prohibition was repealed, and throughout the rest of her residency, Agnes witnessed an abundance of injuries and deaths from these alcohol-induced incidents. She felt strongly that prohibition was not the failure we have sometimes been led to believe.

Although Agnes was the only woman in the pre-med course at the University of North Dakota, she was one of six women to graduate from the University of Minnesota Medical School in 1935. When her residency was finished, Agnes had completed what she thought was the last hurdle in her great dream of becoming a medical missionary to India. She was wrong!



Agnes during medical school at the University of Minnesota.

The Foreign Mission Board of the “new” Lutheran Synod, the American Lutheran Church, told her that the need for a medical doctor was then most urgent on the South Pacific island of New Guinea. Would she be willing to go there? “Yes, of course I would,” was her reply.

Agnes knew well the stories her father had told of this mission, begun in 1886 by the first German Lutheran missionaries in New Guinea, near what is now Finschhafen. In this place, Agnes would spend most of her 30 years of service on this beautiful tropical island. For the first missionaries, however, New Guinea was hardly a paradise. They labored for 13 years before baptizing their first convert, and during this time, many missionaries died or were killed. In spite of these set-backs, the mission continued, and Agnes was eager to join with the many dedicated Christians who had preceded her.



Agnes at the time of her graduation from medical school.

In looks, stature, and emotions, Agnes closely resembled her mother; in later life, the two were often thought to be sisters. It was her father, however, who Agnes most idolized and sought to emulate. His great interest in foreign missions inspired Agnes and her younger sister, Amelia, to consider no other possible career than missionary service. Dad Hoeger not only agreed with Agnes’ decision to go to New Guinea, but was thoroughly delighted with it! Her mother was less enthusiastic, simply because she could not bear the thought of her dear, oldest daughter being gone seven years at a time. In spite of her reservations, Mother Hoeger did nothing to discourage Agnes in her decision to go to New Guinea, and it was she who faithfully wrote to her daughter at least every week during Agnes’ three decades of foreign service.

In 1930, the Hoeger family had moved to Fargo, North Dakota. Eight years earlier, Pastor Hoeger had started a Christian home for physically and mentally handicapped persons in Arthur and had soon begun receiving requests from other communities to begin similar homes for those in need. As these requests increased, Pastor Hoeger resigned from his Arthur parish and moved the Central Office of this new organization, The Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society, to Fargo, North Dakota's largest city.

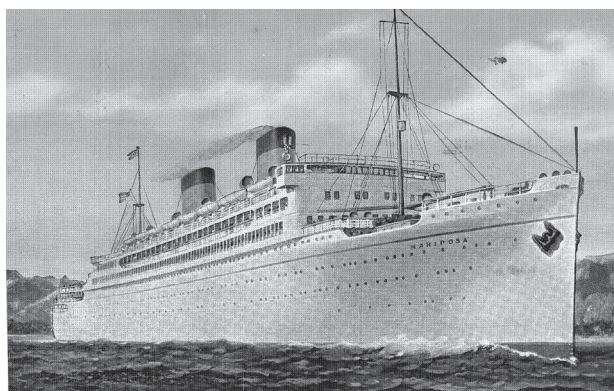
By early September 1935, Agnes had completed all of the necessary planning for her trip to New Guinea. On September 10, a family dinner was held at the home of her sister and brother-in-law, Ruth and Leland Bergum, who also lived in Fargo. It was a farewell for the family, which had recently grown from 10 to 12 members. Everyone experienced the moving realization that Agnes, now 25, was about to begin the fulfillment of her life-long dream by becoming a medical missionary in a far-off land. After much fellowship, Pastor Hoeger conducted a family communion service. Agnes' prayer was a simple request: "Lord, keep us all ever near Thee."

Chapter III—The Long Journey

Agnes left Fargo and took the train to Los Angeles, California, where several Lutheran pastors and their families met her and showed her many of the sights in the area during her five-day stay. Agnes spoke for the cause of foreign missions at several local churches and also gave an organ recital. There was an especially large crowd in attendance at her farewell communion service.

On September 18, 1935, Agnes boarded an ocean liner, the *Mariposa*, joined by four other Lutheran missionaries, all heading for New Guinea. One of them was her close personal friend, Irma Taeuber, whose father, Richard, had served with Dad Hoeger as one of the first officers of the Mission Auxiliary for New Guinea. The two men had worked together to get the Iowa Synod to adopt this mission after the Germans were forced out of New Guinea. Now their daughters would have a first-hand opportunity to participate in that mission.

Ocean travelers during this era often became very seasick, and Agnes was no exception. Just after leaving California, she experienced the first of many such bouts to plague her journeys across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Yet, she retained her good spirits, and on her second day at sea, she wrote this entry in her diary: “Everything is grand and glorious!”



The S.S. Mariposa.

Agnes' table mates on board ship were cow-punchers from California who were going to Australia to seek their fortunes. She enjoyed their company a great deal, and those first days at sea passed quickly. On September 22, Diamond Head Crater was prominent on the distant horizon, and the next morning the passengers disembarked at Honolulu.

Agnes used some of her time in Hawaii for sight seeing and shopping for Christmas gifts for her family, but most of her hours were spent visiting medical doctors who specialized in treating tropical diseases. She received much practical help from these medical colleagues, especially the advice to treat tropical ulcers with 10% ammoniated mercury. A few years later, Agnes herself became a leading authority on tropical medicine, and doctors from all over the tropics sought her opinions.

Not everyone was enthusiastic about her plans for missionary service, however. One of the Hawaiian doctors told Agnes that it was criminal for her to go to New Guinea. "You'll never come out of New Guinea healthy; in fact, it could very well kill you," he said. Agnes always regretted that she didn't have the gumption to tell him that it was the health of souls and not just of the body in which she was most interested.

When the *Mariposa* crossed the equator on September 26, Agnes received an elaborate diploma to mark the occasion. The next evening, they passed the ship *Monterey* at about 11:00 p.m. Her diary simply noted, "Very beautiful, ships that pass each other at night, or something like that!"

Her diary entry for the next day included this short entry, "Billie's birthday!" (sister Amelia). Several times, she revealed in her diary that she was terribly homesick.

The next stop in Agnes' first trip to New Guinea was Samoa at Pago Pago. She was very impressed with the beauty of this island nation and its people. "All buildings were white with green roofs," she observed. "Native police wore white loin clothes. Native wares were sold all up and down the one paved street. A native band played with gusto and vim. The boys teased the girls by choking roosters and watching them gasp for breath. Other boys carried a whole roasted pig on bars between their shoulders. These youngsters are so good looking," Agnes wrote.

In Samoa, Agnes visited a hospital, encountering people with dermatitis, typhoid, leprosy, and yaws, which later proved to be the most prevalent disease in New Guinea. The native governor's wife courteously showed Agnes around and presented her with a bright lei. Agnes' final diary notation from Samoa described "another grand and glorious day."

On September 30, 1935, she wrote, "Today is Monday but it should be Sunday because yesterday was Saturday." The ship had crossed the international date line, but its passengers held church services anyway. "A wonderful sermon based on Psalm 103," Agnes noted. The rest of the day, spent playing deck games, helped combat her pangs of homesickness. "Deep longing for home!" her diary noted.

On October 1, the ship reached Fiji, and Agnes spent the day there with her close friend, Irma Taeuber. They found that the shops were full of tortoise shell articles and jewelry. They also watched a boys' football game with all the players barefoot. For the first time, they saw cars with the steering wheel on the right side being driven on the left side of the road (after a few years in Australia and New Guinea, it would seem strange for Agnes to see cars the other way again.) On the whole, however, the women were unimpressed with Fiji and were glad to re-board the ship and get underway again.

Agnes was, however, impressed by the ship's physician, a Dr. Moore of the University of Nebraska, with whom she shared many lively professional conversations. She was also especially happy to meet his assistant—a tall, blonde Scandinavian doctor—because, for once, she could look up into a man's face rather than feel as though she were towering over him.

On October 4, the ship docked at Auckland, New Zealand. Agnes was delighted to be back in a major city again, for Auckland reminded her of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Her diary read, "I am so thrilled about city life after being absent from it for 16 days. What will it be like after seven years in the jungles of New Guinea?"

The ship arrived in Sydney, Australia, on October 7. “What a beautiful harbor!” Agnes wrote. Irma was sick with gastric distress, leaving Agnes alone to wish the California cowboys well in their new land. She also bid farewell to many others—once strangers, but many now good friends. The missionary travelers passed through customs without even opening their luggage.

Agnes spent 17 days in the Sydney area, mostly at the Sydney Hospital learning more about tropical medicine. Much of the time she stayed with a family named Smith and found it to be “just like home.” She was interviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which featured an article about her the next day.

At the end of the month, Agnes boarded another ship bound for Brisbane, and almost immediately became seasick again. At Brisbane, she spent a pleasant day with friends and gave another newspaper interview. The next day she arrived at Cairns where she did some shopping and went to a movie. At a newsstand, she saw her picture and interview in the Brisbane newspaper. Her comment: “What a picture! That took me down a few pegs.”

Chapter IV—New Guinea at Last

The great moment had finally arrived. On October 28, 1935, Agnes disembarked at Port Moresby, New Guinea, where the realization of her life-long dream was about to begin.

In her diary for that date, Agnes wrote, “Rather bare, dry, and dreary-looking country. Many natives with mountains of bushy hair, dyed red. Kiddies diving for coins just like fish!” It’s too bad that she had landed on the one place in all of New Guinea where this “dry and dreary-looking” description would be accurate!

Agnes spent her day in Port Moresby visiting the European hospital and also the native hospital. Of the latter, she said, “Did I have fun! No whites around at all. Sometimes they understood my English, but most of the time they did not. Everyone was very courteous.” She saw immediately what she would witness countless times in the 30 years ahead: yaws, ulcers, enlarged spleens, and fractured bones. The hospital was very bare with the patients sleeping on mats; it was clean but very hot!



*Some of the New Guinea natives,
who had never before seen a white woman.*

The next day, the ship docked at Samarai, New Guinea. Agnes’ impression here was as it was to be in all the rest of New Guinea—“A beautiful tropical island! Palms, flowers, tall trees, fluffy white clouds, beautiful beaches, great thundering waves, beautiful views, and a pleasant breeze.”

Again she spent the day at the local hospital, where she saw several miserable cases and became very enthusiastic about medical work in New Guinea. Even her friend Irma was surprised at Agnes' enthusiasm, as Agnes was not naturally very demonstrative.

While talking to the hospital personnel—the administrator, doctors, nurses, and staff—Agnes observed how easy it was to become small, narrow, and jealous with so many people about and everyone at such close quarters. Nonetheless, she concluded her visit on a positive note: “The natives are so very friendly and helpful and the children are simply darling.”

Agnes was very impressed with the Kwato Mission but not with the treacherous truck ride up the mountain to get there. She enjoyed visiting with a very pleasant group of young missionaries from England, who took her on a walk around the island and invited her to attend Anglican worship with them. In addition to doing evangelistic work, their mission had started several new industries to provide more employment opportunities for the nationals. Though she didn't know it at the time, this activity would become very important to Agnes in her own missionary work.

While in the area, Agnes also visited Yule Island. She was rowed out to the island by eight native police officers. When she arrived, she was offered whiskey and cigarettes, which she promptly refused but did admit the coffee was pretty good. Insects were biting and stinging. Agnes was not impressed with Yule Island, and her final comment was, “What an Existence!”

The next stop for the ship was Rabaul¹, the last capital of German New Guinea before World War I. Agnes had planned to meet with two well-known medical doctors there, but due to a mix-up, the arrangements had fallen through. Agnes was very disappointed!

Three days later, her disappointment gave way to joy when the ship arrived at Lae and Agnes was met by Rev. Pietz, a missionary and close family friend from the United States, and by Dr. Braun, with whom

1 Rabaul was the German capital of the territory until 1914. After World War I, a League of Nations mandate gave Australia the right to administer former German New Guinea.

she would be working. Dr. Braun was a well-known missionary doctor among the Lutheran churches of Germany and the United States. Agnes had met him several times before, but didn't really expect to see him until her arrival in Madang. What a wonderful reunion these friends provided after so long a journey!

On November 10, 1935, the boat left for the last leg of its trip from Brisbane, Australia, to Madang, New Guinea. Since leaving the United States, Agnes had been traveling for 51 days. As they sailed along, the travelers were told that Lutheran church services were being held all along the Morobe Coast. Soon, they passed Finchhafen, where missionary work had begun in 1886 and where Agnes would eventually work for most of her 30 years in New Guinea.

Arriving in Madang, New Guinea, at 6:30 p.m. on November 11, 1935, Agnes was met by a large crowd of the mission staff. Seeing them all and realizing the great responsibility of her work, she wanted to run and hide. She said good-bye to the ship's steward and took one last look around for anything she might have left behind. Lo and behold, there were her eye glasses! She could not have read anything without them.

As the anxious, young missionary doctor stepped off the boat, Rev. E. Hannemann read I Corinthians 13. He then told Agnes and the crowd, "You have to apply your own devotional zeal and commentary." A sudden downpour of rain abruptly ended the celebration for Agnes' arrival.

Chapter V—The Dream and The Reality

Before she could actually begin her medical work, Agnes had to concentrate on language orientation. With almost 800 different dialects in use throughout New Guinea, the realization that a more universal language was essential for success as a nation was self-evident. The two most common languages became Pidgin English and Police Motu, with Pidgin being the more dominant.

In addition to learning the language, Agnes spent much time during those early days visiting mission stations close to Madang, especially health centers and hospitals where she would be working. She did a good deal of minor surgery during those first weeks, along with skin grafts. Mostly, it seemed, she treated boils, boils, and more boils.



A New Guinea mission hospital.

Suddenly, things began to happen far too quickly. She wrote later that she had to skip Christmas 1935; there was simply no time for it! Dr. and Mrs. Braun were on furlough during Agnes' first year in New Guinea, adding to her busy workload.

Although she never did like obstetrics, Agnes still brought hundreds of babies into the world, both native and missionary. Especially delightful for Agnes were the visits of many of these missionary "babies" 40-55 years later while she was in retirement!

However, in this pre-World War II era, Agnes experienced her share of discouragements. Especially distressing were the many native people and the occasional missionary suffering from severe infections who could not be saved. This was, of course, before the discovery of “wonder-drugs,” the antibiotics sulfa and penicillin.

Once, twins born to a missionary both died. Agnes wrote in her diary, “Will I ever forget it?” Many died of convulsions. One child died of heart failure. The simple question, “Why?” summarized the doctor’s doubts and occasional despair. She treated many cases of cataracts, some successfully, some not. It was a tough two years for an idealistic, young doctor, but Agnes was determined to stick it out and improve her medical skills.

However, an unexpected development caused a dramatic change in Agnes’ plans. Her best friend Irma had not been well during these two years in New Guinea. In fact, she was having spells of dizziness and seizures with increasing frequency. Irma’s father, Dr. Richard Taeuber, chairman of the Foreign Mission Board of the American Lutheran Church, was so concerned for the health of his daughter, that he asked Agnes to accompany Irma home to the United States to seek additional medical help.

Agnes agreed to the request. She and Irma began the long return home. They set out by ship on October 5, 1937, arriving at the University of Minnesota Medical School almost 11 weeks later, on December 20.

Soon Agnes was rather unexpectedly at home with her family in Fargo, arriving there on December 21, 1937. Instead of a seven-year term, she had been gone for only 2-1/2 years. She enjoyed a glorious Christmas with her whole family, including a new nephew, David Bergum, born while she was away. On December 27, she was off again to the Twin Cities to check on Irma’s progress. Finding her much improved, Agnes sent her home.

Irma’s condition was never clearly diagnosed but was characterized by extreme nervousness, severe headaches, dizziness, fainting spells, and seizures. Physicians at the University of Minnesota Hospital tentatively diagnosed the illness as a malfunction of the brain (the cerebellum), but

could offer little help. Agnes then took Irma to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, where physicians said that the source of the problem was most likely the inner ear (not the brain!), but even they could offer no solutions.

By this time, Irma was already feeling better and the spells were becoming more infrequent. Irma agreed with the advice that she not return to New Guinea, where the high humidity seemed to aggravate her condition. After a period of time, most of her symptoms disappeared. She was still a young woman and went on to have a wonderful life: marriage, family, and a career. However, because of the high humidity in New Guinea, she could never return.

While seeing to Irma's medical care, Agnes had received numerous requests from many parts of the country to speak about mission work in New Guinea. Assured that her friend's needs were met, she began talking to public and parochial schools, to civic organizations, but mostly to Lutheran church groups, especially for the Women's Missionary Federation.

By early spring of 1938, Agnes was quite weary of the pace of it all and wrote in her diary, "Sorry, I just don't want to leave home, now or ever." Still, she did continue, for on the same day she penned that entry, she boarded the train to Ohio for another series of lectures.

On her way back from the Ohio tour, Agnes traveled through Dubuque, Iowa, where fourteen years earlier, she had attended the National Luther League Convention. While attending that convention, she had written a letter to her folks in Arthur, telling them that they did not have to worry about her safety as she was too old-maidish to be bothered by anyone. Perhaps it was this false self-image, formed by age 14, that kept Agnes single her whole life.

Following her return from Ohio, Agnes took up residence in the Wartburg Hospice in Minneapolis and spent a great deal of time doing what she enjoyed so much—studying at the University of Minnesota library. She also decided to take some courses at the Lutheran Bible Institute in Minneapolis. She mentioned the bad food she often ate at the "dimestore food counter."

During these few months in the United States, Agnes spent as many days as possible at her family home in Fargo, North Dakota. She wrote, "At home and all is well. It will be hard to leave again. But you can't always stay at home!"

The very next day, she and her dad left for Minneapolis. As their train was leaving Moorhead, Minnesota, it struck a five year old boy, inflicting fatal head injuries. Agnes did what she could, but nothing could save the child! Her diary entry read, "Terrible! Simply terrible!" The experience sickened her, causing a severe headache.

Back in Minneapolis, Agnes continued to enjoy her classes at the Lutheran Bible Institute, especially those taught by Dr. Samuel Miller. She also spoke frequently for the cause of foreign missions in New Guinea. In her diary entry for March 7, 1938, she reported that besides attending classes in the morning, she had given four different speeches in the afternoon and evening, and by 10:00 p.m. she felt tired. Although she was disappointed at times with what she said, Agnes was pleased about the enthusiasm of her audiences. She was convinced that she had little public speaking ability, but her audiences felt otherwise.

Chapter VI—London

Agnes did not head directly back to New Guinea after delivering Irma Taeuber home because she greatly desired to improve her knowledge and skills in the area of tropical medicine. The best tropical medicine school in the world in 1938 was in London, England. Agnes applied and found herself the first woman ever to be admitted. She would attend their spring session from March 30 to July 6, a session specifically for medical doctors who either had been or were going to be practicing medicine in the tropics. Agnes qualified either way.



*Agnes around the time
of her trip to London.*

On March 23, 1938, she boarded the *Queen Mary* out of New York, one of 300 third class passengers bound for England. She quickly made friends with many of her fellow travelers and seemed to really enjoy this trip. She especially mentioned the acquaintance of a Jewish man, exiled from Germany. Agnes' fluency in the German language enabled them to have some lively discussions. Two subjects he liked to discuss were, "Why did Christianity fail?" and "Did a whale really swallow Jonah?"

On the sixth day out, the travelers briefly glimpsed the coast of France, and then at 11:00 a.m., they docked at South Hampton on a lovely spring day. Agnes found a very comfortable room at the YWCA for \$7.00 a night but stayed there just two nights because she felt the cost was too high. After two days of looking at every available cheap room in London, Agnes finally found one that was fairly clean for less money. This lodging became her "home" during the four-month stay in London stay.

Satisfied with the faculty of the London School of Tropical Medicine, who were real international authorities in their particular areas

of tropical medicine, Agnes was growing eager to make use of her new skills among her many friends in New Guinea.

The time in London was not all spent with lectures and class assignments, however. Together with friends from the school, she enjoyed many plays, operas, musical concerts, and movies. In addition, she became well acquainted with some of the world's greatest museums, where she especially enjoyed the anthropology sections.

One of the greatest pleasures of her London stay happened while she was attending a wonderful concert at Albert Hall. Seated not far from the Royal Box, Agnes was thrilled when, just before the concert began, the King and Queen took their places. Before she ever boarded the *Queen Mary*, Agnes had written in her diary, "I'm going to London to see the Queen," but she really hadn't expected to fulfill that wish.

Despite a busy schedule, Agnes still experienced a certain amount of homesickness, knowing that she must travel right on from London to New Guinea, to continue her medical missionary work. Again, the trip promised to be a long journey. She was especially sad on days when no mail arrived from home.

One letter, however, she did not enjoy reading. Her mother had written to tell Agnes of the great problem her father was having in his work with the Good Samaritan Society. Some of his very best friends, who served on the Board of Directors, were devising a scheme to take control of the organization from him. Agnes' letter to her father said a good deal about the close relationship between father and daughter:

My Own Dear Dad,

I have been thinking about you a lot and your problems since Mother wrote me her last letter the last of May. It is a fearfully hard struggle that God is testing you with; but that only goes to show that God is examining you for the next higher degree and He must be sure that you will not fail otherwise He would not have given you the test.

Personally Dad, I feel that God has a much greater work for you in store and that this terrible crisis will prove to be a great blessing. It seems to be that He is showing you that His Kingdom is not built of outward things but of the inward things. And although your best friends can stop you from building the Kingdom of God outwardly, they cannot stop you from building His Kingdom in the hearts of human beings.

And Dad, you are just the man equipped to do that thing. You have a wonderful way of leading people to Christ and making the way straight for them. But you are like Moses in saying that you have not that gift. And you know that that is just the thing everyone is looking for today. Whether that inner Kingdom is to be built in the Good Samaritan Society or outside, God will surely show you.

Oh, Dad, I am too young and inexperienced to know much about this struggle that you have been through. In God's Kingdom I am a mere babe that has to be fed on a carefully balanced formula of milk or I am very nearly dead spiritually. But, Dad, I shall always be so grateful for your wonderful spiritual guidance—the Bible stories: Peter's denial, the rich young ruler, John the Baptist, Christ's suffering, death and resurrection—later confirmation with the "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life." And then those lovely talks we used to have at the stations before train time. They all mean so much. But Dad, I do regret that I did not help you any while I was at home. I was too selfish again—wanting everything from you and willing to give you nothing at all.

They say that Frank Buchmann says to "Outlive, out love, and out laugh your enemies." If they strike your left cheek, give them the right one to strike as well. If they ask you to carry a burden for them a mile, carry it two miles. Dad, you will not get bitter, will you? Love them and out love!

That, after all, is the most Christ-like virtue.

Ach, lieber Vater! wer bin ich, dass ich dir was vorpredigen soll!

In aller liebe,
deine Tochter,
Agnes Marie

Another factor complicating her London stay was Agnes' realization that she had grown very fond of one of her professors. As far as anyone knew, this was the only time in her life that Agnes was really in love, but that love would remain unrequited.

On June 24, Agnes attended her last classes; she had accomplished another goal by becoming a "Fellow" in Tropical Medicine. Finishing the course was not an entirely satisfying experience, however. She wrote, "Am I sad or am I sad!" Her mood resulted not because school (which she loved) was over, but because she could no longer attend the class and gaze, for one hour each day, at the bachelor professor she loved. Agnes was only another bright young doctor as far as he was concerned. She lamented in her diary, "You missed your cue too often and now it is gone for good."

On one of her last days in London, Agnes went with two friends to observe the Parliament. They all left with good feelings for Neville Chamberlain, who was holding forth. Two days later, on July 7, 1938, she visited with her beloved professor (known only by his initials, J.J.C.) for the last time and commented, "not too painful." She sailed from Dover at 1:00 a.m. on July 8.

Chapter VII—The Long Journey Back

From Dover, the first stop on Agnes' 84-day journey was Belgium. She then traveled by train across the European continent, stopping in Dortmund, Germany, where she visited several friends, including fellow New Guinea missionaries. Agnes also spent a day at the famous Bethel Institute in Bielefeld. Home to several thousand handicapped children and adults, the Bethel Institute had served as a model for The Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society and, therefore, seemed very familiar to Agnes. She wrote her father, who had never actually seen the Bethel Institute, a very complete account of her visit to Bielefeld.

After leaving the Dortmund area, Agnes traveled south through Zurich and Geneva, Switzerland, and on to France. The next day, she sailed out of Marseille on a smooth sea. Agnes' table mates included a delightful Arab girl who was returning to Jerusalem and an Egyptian man, a lively conversationalist with whom Agnes looked forward to spending meal times.

Though somewhat shy, Agnes was a friendly and open person who loved visiting and in-depth conversation. People were always far more interesting to her than were places and things. She had little use for money except, if she had some, to give it to persons more needy. Her salary as a missionary medical doctor was \$200-\$350 per year for almost 30 years.

Not surprisingly, Agnes' diary entries were rich in their description of people but provided only sparse mention of time or place. Her record of the return trip to New Guinea was no exception.

Three days out, the ship docked at Port Said on the Egyptian coast, where Agnes got her first glimpse of the Middle East. She wrote that the city's many beggars managed to communicate with visitors who spoke almost any language. On her long walk around the town she inhaled the pungent odors of the open-air food market!

From Port Said, the ship continued through the Suez Canal. Busy visiting with her fellow passengers, Agnes hardly noticed her surroundings. She did remember the camels on the road beside the canal, the sweltering

July heat, and the discomfort of her third class sleeping cabin throughout her Red Sea passage.

On July 22, the ship arrived at what Agnes called “the real Africa.” Port Sudan, on the Red Sea coast, was so hot that few of the passengers had the energy to explore the city. Agnes observed, “Heat, heat, and more heat. Everyone is complaining. We are all wearing as little clothing as possible.”

Although her mother’s maiden name was that of the city of Aden (now a strategic oil port in the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen), Agnes was unimpressed with her surroundings, commenting, “What a desert!” However, she did enjoy a tour of the city, noting that Moslem women were wrapped in purdah, even in the intense heat, and most carried water jars on their heads. Agnes felt, that somehow things hadn’t changed much since the Queen of Sheba’s time.

From the Gulf of Aden, the ship passed into the Indian Ocean, where the rough waters created general seasickness. Agnes lamented, “We are all greenish-yellow, whether Indian, African, or European.”

The ship’s next port of call was Bombay, where Agnes had a delightful time with several shipmates who had become good friends. Unfortunately, Bombay was the final destination for most of these friends, so Agnes had to reboard the ship alone. At sea the next day, she wrote, “I am simply lost without my good friends! I will try to pick up the thread again but it is hard to do. I didn’t know I had depended on them so much. No one is self-sufficient.”

At the next stop in Columbo, Ceylon (then a British colony, now the independent nation of Sri Lanka), Agnes took a guided tour. Except for all the elephants, the island was much like New Guinea.

Back on board, Agnes passed her days reading, visiting, and playing deck games like quoits, deck tennis, and badminton. Often becoming quite stiff, she was never very enthusiastic about exercise or sports. She thoroughly enjoyed beautiful moonlit nights on tranquil seas, but on days when the sea was heavy, Agnes was usually seasick.

After 10 days at sea, the ship arrived in Perth, Australia, a new and modern city in 1938. Several of Agnes' Australian friends met her at the dock, and she spent a wonderful day with them. She lunched with members of the Oxford group, with which she had become acquainted while in London. Founded in the 1930s by Englishman Frank Buckman, the Oxford Movement encouraged members to revitalize their Christian faith by sharing with each other their personal sins and how Christ's presence in their own hearts had influenced their lives.

In Perth, as in most ports, Agnes was interviewed by several newspaper reporters. However, she became somewhat cautious in her remarks after an Austrian friend, Dr. Wells Rucker, received a telegram from her government with instructions not to release any more press comments about Austria. After receiving the message, Dr. Wells Rucker was worried that she had revealed too much. With tensions mounting in Europe, these were dangerous times!

The ship next stopped in Adelaide, where Agnes again found friends to visit. At the port of Melbourne, Agnes saw the *Mariposa*, the ship on which she had taken Irma Tauebur from New Guinea to the United States a year earlier.

At 6:30 the next morning, the ship sailed under the Sydney Harbor Bridge. Thrilled to be in a city she knew quite well and had often likened to cities in the United States, Agnes shopped for things she expected to use in New Guinea during the next seven years, not knowing that this term, too, would be cut short. Again she was interviewed by reporters, who told Agnes that they were very discouraged by the possibility of war.

From Sydney, she traveled by train to Brisbane, sharing a compartment with an 81-year-old who was sick all night. Agnes doctored far more than she slept!

Brisbane and nearby Ipswich seemed almost like home to Agnes because of the many friends and fellow New Guinea missionaries who were living there. She spent 3 1/2 weeks in the Brisbane area giving radio

broadcasts and lectures, many of which were in German. One Sunday morning, she gave five speeches and witnessed two baptisms in 2 1/4 hours; she spoke again that same evening. Of special interest was a visit to an aboriginal settlement, which Agnes described in her diary as “so much like New Guinea.”

On September 13, 1938, Agnes boarded the liner *Mantors*, along with Mrs. S. Lewis, a teacher at the Lutheran Mission School in Wau, New Guinea. After three days of smooth seas, they arrived in Townsville, Australia, just in time to catch a ride to Castle Mountain with a mother and two children, who succeeded in driving Agnes “almost mad.” The missionary women then continued on to Cairns, where Agnes was interviewed at length by the local press.

Tragedy struck on the first day out of Cairns when a new acquaintance, Dr. Thompson, jumped overboard. The crew searched the water for several hours, but were unsuccessful in finding him. At the end of this tragic day, Agnes wrote in her diary, “I’m deeply aware of my insufficiency.” The next day at sea, she read from E. Stanley Jones’ *Victorious Living*. Both of the Thompsons had been members of the Oxford group with which Agnes had become acquainted in both London and in Perth. After her husband’s suicide, Mrs. Thompson sought comfort by sharing Agnes’ compartment.

From that point on, the journey was primarily a repeat of the one taken three years earlier. The ship stopped at Port Moresby and then at Samarai, where she again visited friends at the Kwato Mission. The journey continued on to Rabaul and to Kavieng, where Agnes said good-bye to another traveling companion, a German Catholic priest who served as a missionary there. Mrs. Lewis, the young missionary teacher, disembarked at Lae, the next stop.

Finally, on September 29, the ship docked at Madang, where Agnes was welcomed by a large crowd of missionaries and nationals. Two days later, she walked the 10 miles to the Amele hospital, which she had left just one year earlier. Agnes wept tears of joy at being “home” again. She

was especially pleased to be able to resume her work with Dr. Theo Braun, though they each had their own hospitals, patients, and practices, he in Madang and Agnes in Amele.

The biggest surprise was that an electric plant had been added during Agnes' absence. She no longer had to perform surgery or deliver babies by kerosene lamps; now she had lights, along with power for the x-ray machine.

Viewed by the missionaries as a marvelous convenience, electricity for the Amele hospital appeared to the natives as almost a miracle. Agnes felt especially blessed by a sermon from a native pastor who compared electricity to Christ's power to heal the woman who had merely touched his garment.

For most of her stay in New Guinea, Agnes' closest friend was Mrs. Hilde Schoettler. Hilde and her husband Fred were missionaries from Germany who worked closely with Agnes for almost 30 years. The women's friendship continued until Mrs. Schoettler's death in 1989, long after their years in New Guinea. (The Schottlers retired to Trinder Park Lutheran Retirement Village outside of Brisbane in 1965. Agnes stayed with them on a visit to Australia and New Guinea in 1985, almost 30 years after leaving New Guinea).



*Hilde Schoettler,
Agnes' life-long friend.*

yaws (open sores that would not heal). Performing operations, treating accident victims, and delivering babies were also common in Agnes' New Guinea practice, but her interest was greatest in the area of disease prevention. She constantly emphasized the fact that it was much easier to avoid illness than to cure it. As a preventative measure, she injected every single person in a community of 5,000 with a new vaccine for yaws, eliminating a disease that had once ravaged the country. She also set up clinics stressing baby care and cleanliness.

Another significant emphasis was Agnes' training of health care professionals, especially nurses and physicians' assistants. Agnes wrote much of the classroom material for the intensive training, which lasted from four to eight years. Perhaps this was her greatest legacy to the people of New Guinea—setting up a thorough training program for hundreds of nurses and physicians' assistants who later established medical stations throughout southeast New Guinea.

With the help of her friend Hilde, Agnes set about unpacking and setting up the equipment she had brought by ship to New Guinea. Sixteen porters had carried Agnes' belongings—two large trunks and numerous other items—from Madang to Amele, walking 10 miles and carefully crossing two or three rivers with no bridges.

With the medical equipment safely delivered and in place, the hospital was again ready for patients. They arrived quickly, suffering from malaria, leprosy, stomach disorders, and



*Agnes with young
New Guinea patients.*



*A New Guinea
physician's assistant.*

In her later years, Agnes became quite sedentary. However, during her stay in New Guinea, especially prior to World War II, she was known as “the walking doctor.” While patients were generally brought to the hospital, at times relatives or friends could not carry a stretcher over the great distances. On these occasions, Agnes walked many miles to the scene of an accident or to the home of a stricken person. Although she always had native guides on these emergency excursions, Agnes found the foot paths to be tricky at night and very slippery during the frequent rains. There were giant mountains to climb and rushing rivers to be crossed in dug-out canoes or on three-rope bridges. Never very athletic, Agnes always managed to complete each errand of mercy, though her diary often noted how stiff her legs were.

Conditions in outlying areas were often uncomfortable; when an emergency took her away from the hospital, Agnes frequently slept on a pile of hay or straw which had been hastily thrown together to make a bed. Yet, she was thrilled to be welcomed to each village by the rhythmic beat of native drums and the triumphant trumpeting of conch shells.

In addition to her emergency excursions, Agnes also visited the tribal villages of the Madang and Amele areas to conduct clinics and health screenings. During these visits, the “surgical” procedure most commonly requested was ear piercing. The village health excursions usually lasted 10-14 days, and Agnes was always glad to be home again to enjoy her soft bed and electric lights. Yet, she was always aware of the beautiful scenery of New Guinea and of how blessed by God she was for the great privilege of serving these wonderful people.

In spite of her deep faith and strong sense of purpose, Agnes' isolation from friends and family continued to pose a challenge, especially during the early years of her missionary career. She was still a young woman, 25 to 29 years old, in an environment where there were almost no other young persons from the United States or Australia. She had occasional contact with missionaries from Germany, but there was often no one with whom to share her frustrations, homesickness, or even depression. At times, when no mail had arrived for six weeks or longer, a letter from home or from a friend seemed like a message from heaven.

Agnes' loneliness was sometimes reflected in her diary entries. On November 1, 1938, she wrote, "Very much disgruntled and down. No reason at all. I deserve a good spanking. What a difference a letter would make. Silianit [a native patient and friend who had been in her care] died this morning. Sometimes I feel like I want to be three years old again and just hide."

On November 11, 1938, Agnes quietly celebrated the third anniversary of her initial arrival in New Guinea and the 20th anniversary of Armistice Day. Her diary recorded a question shared by many people around the globe: "Will there soon be a World War II?" Three days later, she wrote, "Feeling so much better. Out of that depression entirely. My pep is coming back and I'm getting new ideas again." She had some friends over for supper, with whom she enjoyed laughter and pleasant conversation. Yet, a common entry in her diary continued to be, "waiting for mail, waiting for mail." When the mail boat did finally arrive in Madang, Agnes was rarely disappointed. She had also purchased a wind-up phonograph and some records so that she could enjoy a concert every evening.

Each Christmas season, all of the missionaries unpacked and distributed Christmas boxes from Lutheran churches all over the United States. This practice was especially meaningful for Agnes, whose father had started the Christmas mission tradition in 1918.



*Mission boxes sent to New Guinea
by U.S. Christians.*

For her 1938 Christmas message, Agnes spoke about the appearance of the angels to the shepherds on the hillside, likening Bethlehem's shepherds with New Guinea's nurses and physicians' assistants. She also mentioned her worries concerning Adolph Hitler. Following Agnes' inspirational message, a large party was held at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Braun.

Chapter VIII—1939 and 1940: Prelude to War

On August 18, 1939, Agnes wrote of her concern about the seriousness of the rumors of war. Many missionaries from the United States were of German descent, and most of the rest were actually German natives. Hitler's expansionist fervor was of grave concern to them all. Was World War II imminent? This troubling question broke into almost every conversation among the missionaries.

Speculation ended on September 1, 1939, when Germany declared war on Poland. Agnes and her colleagues wondered what role England might play, but no one had the slightest inkling that they, far away in New Guinea, would ever be affected. How wrong they were!

Apart from the anxieties produced by war, Agnes experienced many days which were far from smooth. Often irritable, tense, and edgy, she became increasingly discontented with herself. At times, she experienced doubts about the meaning and purpose of her work, once writing, "Is this my life's calling—examining stools?" When unable to save a patient's life, she became discouraged and downhearted.

Agnes' good friend and mentor, Hilde Schoettler, was ill almost the entire year of 1939. Agnes felt that she should be able to find a cure for her friend's illness. When she was unable to do so, her feelings of inadequacy increased. Fortunately, these periods of doubt about her calling in life were generally short-lived.

A more enduring problem for Agnes was loneliness. Though still only in her twenties, she felt that any possibility of marriage and a family had already passed her by. Several of the New Guinea missionaries were eligible bachelors, but either Agnes was not attracted to them or she found herself tongue-tied and unable to converse. The absence of regular mail also depressed her. Not until November 6, 1939—some 80 days after the fact—did Agnes learn that her sister, Ruth, had given birth to a son on August 18. On many days, her diary entries read, "No mail as yet." Toward the end of this frustrating year, Agnes took stock:

1. Spiritually very deficient—no definite quiet hours.... Only just scratching the surface in talks with Dr. Boys [physicians' assistants] and an occasional patient. Why won't I be bold?
2. Haven't made my job big enough for me. Do a lot of little things—just puttering around—little research done, few trips made, no original work or new treatments tried.
3. Can't speak Amele language well. Lack enthusiasm, concentration, and willingness.
4. Getting so old maidish—exactly what I thought I couldn't be. I'm not sweet, pleasant, and modest the way I thought I was once upon a time.
5. Contact with my family is better (more letters arriving).
6. Too much thinking about what I think!
7. Medically much too far behind the times.

Above all else, her love for and faith in her Lord Jesus Christ sustained Agnes through the tough times. How remarkable it was for her to be part of the unique heritage of Christianity in New Guinea, begun when the first Germans arrived in 1886! Those early missionaries had labored for 13 years before the first baptisms were celebrated. During the first years, many lives were lost to unknown tropical diseases, but the survivors labored on despite their hardships and apparent lack of success. Gradually, they realized that the New Guineans were tribalistic rather than individualistic. Therefore, conversions to Christianity were not accomplished one individual at a time, but rather tribe by tribe. Thus, Agnes witnessed baptisms of hundreds of natives. Yet, it was the individual commitment to Christ, made by each new convert, that caused Christianity to take root in New Guinean soil.

Meanwhile, as the decade drew to a close, reports of the war grew steadily worse. Agnes and her colleagues wondered what the decade of the 1940s might hold.

For Agnes, the new decade began with a change of scene. Called to work away from her hospital in Amele, she spent three months doing much needed medical work in New Guinea's inland highlands. Agnes found the mountain air and her fellow missionaries in these surroundings much to her liking. One co-worker, a 26-year-old man she called "John II," made her heart beat a little faster, but he was even more shy than Agnes. Their time together with a group was just fine, but when the two of them were alone, hardly a word was spoken. Agnes' married friends became frustrated with her for being so reserved. "Why don't you talk?" they pleaded. After a time, they all give up match-making; both Agnes and John II remained single.

After three months in the highlands, Agnes returned to the hospital, confessing in her diary, "my heart is heavier the nearer I get to Amele." A few days later she wrote, "I am wandering around Amele trying to feel my way back. Sort of lost and don't fit. My heart is in the highlands, my heart is not here. Silly, foolish me."

For several more weeks, Agnes continued to feel dissatisfaction and self-pity. But on April 18, 1940, she confessed, "I must wake up to the fact of how very selfish my last 18 months have been here in New Guinea. I haven't given myself to the Lord at all. Terrible!! I'm always thinking of that [John II] which is out of reach!" A few days later, she met another man named John. Her friends thought Agnes might fall for him, but she wrote, "There will be no John III!"

At the missionaries' conference that summer of 1940, it was decided that Agnes would transfer from the Amele hospital to Finschhafen, a necessary move because all German missionaries in Finschhafen, including medical doctors, were being interned in Australia by the Allies. The war, which had seemed so far away, was already intruding in New Guinea!

By August 17, Agnes had said good-bye to her loving Amele friends and associates. She took her leave by ship from Madang, believing she would return after a time in Finchhafen, but that was not to be. In fact, it would be 45 years before Agnes would return to Amele.

After several days of orientation at her new hospital, Agnes fell into much the same routine as she had experienced in Amele. Most days at the hospital were spent treating both resident patients and outpatients who had journeyed over high mountains and through dense jungles to get there, often carried by relatives and friends. In addition to seeing patients, Agnes performed the usual lab work. In the evening, she wrote reports and shared Bible study, prayer time, and fellowship with other missionaries. Many nights, the last thing on the agenda was a rousing game of Rook.

A major highlight each month was the arrival of the mail ship Total. Agnes was a prodigious letter writer, regularly corresponding with friends and acquaintances around the world. Sometimes she noted in her diary that she had written 20 letters in a single evening, so she was seldom disappointed when the mail boat arrived.

Agnes' closest associate at Finchhafen was Bruder Karl from Adelaide, Australia. The two worked well together and remained close friends for the rest of their lives.

When Agnes was feeling down or lonely, she played classical music on her wind-up phonograph and tried to think of London, spring, and John I. Apparently her relationship with Bruder Karl was purely platonic. She enjoyed his company and found him to be an exceptionally capable medical professional.

On one of many trips into the bush, this time to inoculate an entire village, Agnes' horse bucked in the middle of the stream, sending Agnes through the air and into the water. Never much of a swimmer, she later stated that it was the only occasion in her life that she had been completely submerged. On the whole, however, she was completely happy with her move to Finschhafen.



*Wedding of Len and Thea Behrendorf at Finschhafen
in March 1941. Agnes was the bridesmaid.*

Chapter IX—War Comes To New Guinea

As war clouds gathered during 1941 and 1942, hope remained among the missionaries that the tiny village of Finchhafen might be ignored by both the Japanese and the Allies. These hopes were shattered on February 13, 1942, when the American and Australian military ordered all missionaries evacuated from Finchhafen immediately in the event that the Allies needed to burn everything before the Japanese arrived.

The women and children left by plane as soon as possible. As the area's only doctor, Agnes was permitted to stay, as were a few of the men. However, within three days, this small group too was ordered to leave immediately. The Allied military forces arrived at 9:00 p.m., commandeering the area and most of Agnes' medical supplies. "What a grand rush," she wrote. "I can't even be mad or sad about it because of the fact that the soldiers are so nice."

With Japanese reconnaissance planes overhead, Agnes and this last group of male missionaries arrived safely in Lae. But the Japanese were about to bomb, so a total black-out was in effect every hectic night; not even a match could be lit. No one was very interested in cooking food anyway.

The last missionaries stayed with lingering hope that the momentum of the war would change and that the Allies might reclaim the areas held by the Japanese, enabling them to return to their stations. Some missionaries did not have the good fortune of Agnes and her group. Eighteen became prisoners of war, and regrettably, 12 of those 18 lost their lives. At least two of these martyrs had been commissioned and sent to New Guinea by Agnes' father. The surviving six had all faced death but survived by the grace of God.

As Lae was being bombed by the Japanese, Agnes and several men set out on foot for Wau, where there was a small air strip. Having already faced several close encounters with the Japanese forces, Agnes' journey from Lae to Wau was by far her most dangerous. Reaching the mission station and school at Wau, in a remote mountain area, would have been a difficult walking trip even if the missionaries had been able to follow the

road. With Japanese bombers overhead, they were forced to cross directly through mountain jungles to avoid detection. Agnes' diary revealed the long and treacherous 80-mile trek:

“We were a party of six including the voluntary rifleman who escorted us. We were fortunate in having mostly dry weather so that we had to do very little slithering down mountain paths or wading through swampy country. It also made the work of carrying easier for the native men accompanying us, for carrying a man up and down those mountains several thousand feet high is no pleasant game.

The villages where we stayed overnight were all of our mission and the people took good care of us. We saw how they always held their morning and evening devotions. It was a joy to know that many of them had grasped what the Christian message meant. The seed had been sown, and on such soil there would be growth and fruits. They all expressed regret that the missionaries had to leave but we told them their most precious gift—the Word of God, translated into their own language—could not be taken away from them.

The last day of our journey we spent resting at our mission station, Mumeng. All along, one or the other of the men had been ill with dysentery or malaria and they were nearly at the end of their strength. That day Japanese bombers were overhead again. We saw the great clouds of smoke and heard the bombing in Wau and Buolo, although we were some twenty miles away.

The next day we arrived at the main military camp and I pleaded with the authorities to let me stay and let some of our old sick men go to Australia. But it was to no avail. I was a woman and the last woman at that in the Morobe District. It was their business to get me out as quickly as possible. We flew in one of the Ford planes—two pilots, the mechanic, an officer, and myself. After an hour of flying we had to turn back because of bad weather. Imagine our thankfulness when we heard that we had just missed a raid at Port Moresby, our destination. Twelve hours later we tried again and this time without any mishap.”

For nine days, Agnes stayed at Port Moresby with the lone nurse who had refused to leave when all the others were evacuated. Then a ship landed to take the evacuees, mostly men unfit for military service, back to Australia. During that time, Agnes' diary reported at least one raid each day by six to twelve Japanese bombers.

Although thankful to God for her safe passage, Agnes was already homesick for Finschhafen and bush life. Her traveling companions, Pastors Ross Boetcher, Boeltgen, Hertle, and H. Walen, all successfully made their way to freedom, for which Agnes was also grateful.

After five days in Port Moresby, Agnes remained optimistic. On March 5, she wrote, "The longer I can stay here, the better chance there is of going back." Despite a Japanese bombing raid that morning, everyone's spirits were bolstered by reports of Kitty Hawks arriving soon. When she learned that same day that the Japanese had taken Finschhafen and Lae, she expressed her gratitude to God that her friends had escaped safely and the hospitals and other mission buildings were not too badly damaged. Concluding this entry, she noted, "There are six Japanese planes overhead now."

By the end of her first week in Port Moresby, Agnes was already frustrated and bored. "My only hope is that I can get back to my work soon," she wrote. "But why do I want to go back? Is it altruistic or egotistic? I feel like this is a prisoner of war camp. I know I should be grateful, thankful, and all that. Hilde [Schoettler] would be wild with me. Just can't write home." And again, "A lot of time for introspection and retrospection. I just won't be the person I want to be at all. Horrible!! Much worse than the war."

Agnes boarded the *M.V. Nordheim* for Australia on March 13, realizing that no hope remained of returning to New Guinea; thus, her second term of missionary service had come to an end, shortened by World War II. Agnes was heavy of heart and spirit.

Japanese planes strafed the deck of the *Nordheim* for several days, doing surprisingly little damage. For some unknown reason, they never dropped a single bomb. One of the officers on the ship, a Mr. McCloud,

remembered Agnes. “You pulled my wisdom tooth in Amele three years ago,” he reminded her.

Three and one-half years later, in September 1945, Dr. T.P. Fricke and Dr. John Kuder, officials of the American Lutheran Mission, returned to New Guinea to survey the devastation resulting from the Japanese raids on various Lutheran mission stations. Amele hospital had been destroyed: bomb wreckage of three homes, schools, and students’ houses was strewn about the place, and the good ship *Total* lay at the bottom of the lagoon. Madang was even worse. Dr. Fricke wrote in the May 1953 edition of *The Lutheran Missionary*, “Poor, poor Madang! Our beloved American Lutheran Mission stations have been blown to bits. Everything has been destroyed to the very foundation, utter devastation!”

However, Lutheran mission work in New Guinea had not been destroyed. If anything, it was strengthened by war, for its ultimate purpose had little to do with buildings. As with all Christian mission work, the goal of Lutheran mission work in New Guinea was to fill the hearts of people with the love of Christ. Therefore, when the missionaries returned to New Guinea in 1946, they were welcomed by thousands of Christian natives, some of whom were already third generation Christians. In fact, many New Guinea Christians witnessed their love to Australian and American soldiers. Two of these strong medical workers were Simin and Fullalek, on whom Dr. Agnes depended for many years.



Agnes and a group of New Guinea missionary friends.

Chapter X—Australia and the U.S. Again

Agnes arrived in Australia on March 16, 1942, amid rumors that Lutheran missionaries were serving as guides for the Japanese. She wrote, “How terrible that anyone could even think such a thing, far less print it. What can it all be about?”

Still hoping that the war would soon end so she could return to New Guinea, Agnes decided to remain in Brisbane, where she had many friends. She knew, of course, that licensure as an Australian medical director would require passing a series of challenging exams. Several acquaintances had failed, but Agnes studied hard and passed the requirements. After applying to several hospitals in the area, she realized that two factors were hindering her chances: her German surname and her gender.

While Agnes waited and hoped for a job opportunity, other missionaries continued to arrive from New Guinea. Some had had very rough journeys, including detention and internment at Townsville for those without citizenship papers in their possession. Many wore the marks of their difficult escapes. When veteran missionaries Rev. Pietz and W. Locke arrived, Agnes commented, “They look like a pair of bums!”

After two long months of waiting, Agnes obtained a position as a physician at Children’s Hospital in Brisbane. Although she had accepted many speaking opportunities, Agnes had become bored and eagerly anticipated working again. She began her new position on May 20, 1942.

After a few months at Children’s Hospital, Agnes transferred to the Bundaberg Hospital, where she remained for almost a year before finally admitting to herself that the war would not soon end and that she should return home. Upon landing in San Francisco on July 4, 1943, she commented: “Too swell! Not at all at home here and not at all thrilled.” Agnes continued to long for the bush life of Finschhafen!



Bundaberg Hospital

She decided to travel home by way of Seattle in order to meet Frank Wilcox, her sister Amelia's fiancée. "One good looking fellow," she wrote in her diary. Frank and Billie (Amelia) later began their own foreign mission career in India, Pakistan, and Nepal.

Agnes learned from Frank that her brother John was in Tacoma working for the shipyards while making plans to attend Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. When she visited John in Tacoma the next day, she couldn't believe how he had grown in the four years since she had last seen him: he stood six feet, 3-1/2 inches.

Leaving Tacoma, Agnes traveled by train, arriving in Fargo on July 12, 1943, her father's 58th birthday. What a happy reunion with parents and sisters Billie and Trudy! The next day, the family drove to Shevlin, Minnesota, where sister Laura lived with her husband, Pastor Jake Jerstad, and their year-old son Mark. Agnes' younger brother, August, Jr., then 15, was also staying with the Jerstads. So it was that within eight days of landing in San Francisco, Agnes had already been reunited with her parents, three sisters, two brothers, two brothers-in-law, and one nephew. The family enjoyed a picnic at Itaska State Park in northern Minnesota.

Less than three weeks later, Agnes applied for a commission to the United States Army Medical Corps. The recruiting officer seemed favorably impressed with her previous employment, and Agnes was confident that she would be accepted. While awaiting orders from the U.S. Army, she delighted in visiting her sister Cecelia who had come home to Fargo from Detroit, where she served as a parish worker at a Lutheran church.

Agnes traveled by Greyhound Bus to New York, to spend several weeks with her sister and brother-in-law, Ruth and Leland Burgum, and their three children. She also visited a number of friends in New York and at stops along the way in Chicago, Columbus, and Pittsburgh. The entire trip cost \$18.00.

Chapter XI—The Peru Years: In The Army Now

Agnes returned to Fargo to learn that she had been accepted by the United States Army. She was commissioned a First Lieutenant in the Army Medical Corps on December 3, 1943.

Agnes had assumed that the Army would station her in her beloved New Guinea, where she could make a significant contribution to the war effort, but the Army had other ideas! On July 10, 1944, after training for Medical Corps work in Washington, D.C., she was sent to Lima, Peru, as a part of Nelson Rockefeller's Commission on Inter-American Affairs. After orientation in Lima, Agnes was assigned to two different areas of Peru: her task—to establish basic health programs.

With her strong interest and experience in disease prevention, this assignment suited Agnes very well. She knew the importance of establishing basic hygiene and sanitation principles that could save hundreds of lives, especially the lives of young children. She also knew that to establish these principles would not be easy; success required convincing people of the need to change their life-long habits and living conditions.

In the village of Tingo Maria, east of the Andes cordillera, most residents had come down from the mountains to work on a huge road construction project. Unaccustomed to tropical living, they were easily susceptible to malaria, dysentery, ringworm, and hookworm. Most prevalent among children, the parasitic hookworms entered through the soles of bare feet, traveling to the stomach, where the hookworms would eat most of the food their victims consumed. Therefore, though the children's stomachs were greatly enlarged and they looked fat, those suffering from hookworm were actually starving to death.

Agnes understood that convincing the children to wear sandals would not be easy, since none had ever worn shoes. She held hundreds of classes and demonstrations illustrating exactly how this worm infected people. She also used the technique that had proven successful in "spreading the word" in New Guinea—thoroughly training a few health care workers, who in turn trained others. By the time Agnes left Tingo Maria,

hookworm had been reduced to a minor annoyance instead of the leading cause of mortality in children.

Another goal was to educate people to use soap and wash more frequently, but classes didn't convince natives that this habit held value. So Agnes took another approach: she talked to the local Roman Catholic priest, the most respected person in each small town. After the priest had publicly "blessed" each bar of soap, people could hardly wait to get a bar of soap and lather up.

In the early 1940s, only quinine was available to help treat malaria, but it was prevention of this disease that Agnes most often stressed. Since the disease was spread by the anopheles mosquito, she emphasized the importance of sleeping in netted or screened-in areas. In fact, she strongly recommended screening off all living areas, including porches. Gradually, Agnes gained the confidence and respect of the people of Tingo Maria who became eager to follow the new health principles.

While at Tingo Maria, Agnes was promoted to the rank of Captain. Her immediate supervisor was Lt. Colonel Edward A. Westphal, Army M.C. Agnes and Lt. Colonel Westphal held each other in high regard. The Westphals remained good friends with Agnes long after the war years.

Almost a year later, Agnes was transferred to Chimbote, a tropical town on the Peruvian coast. In a letter to Dr. Westphal, she revealed the situation: "I thought the nutrition of children in Tingo Maria was bad—but I must admit that it is even worse in Chimbote. We desperately need milk for the children."

Agnes instituted many of the same programs that had been successful in Tingo Maria, with similar results. These programs included maternal and child welfare classes, preventive medicine classes, pre-natal and well-baby classes, sick-baby clinics, health education (in the schools), and milk distribution. Overall conditions of life in Tingo Maria and Chimbote were so greatly improved by her work that Agnes received many commendations and awards from the U.S. Army and special commendations from Nelson Rockefeller and from President Harry S. Truman. When she

left Tingo Maria, the newspaper carried a blazing front page headline: “Our Savior Leaves Us!”

Agnes’ salary as an Army doctor was \$210 a month, the largest salary she ever received during her 50 years as a physician and surgeon. As a medical missionary, her salary had only increased from \$200 to \$350 annually; yet she never missed sending a birthday present to each member of her family.



Captain Agnes Hoeger

Chapter XII—From Peru To New Guinea

Although war had forced the evacuation of the Lutheran missionaries from New Guinea, their influence among the island's natives remained strong. For example, a January 1944 letter to his pastor from Fred Callies, a U.S. serviceman stationed in New Guinea, noted the simplicity of the church built by the natives—really just a hut with an addition for the alter and pulpit. Construction had taken several weeks and payment for services was in Bibles. Callies was impressed by the strong Christian faith held by the converted:

The faith of these natives puts many of us to shame. I wish everyone at home would see what a wonderful job our missionaries have done with these people who were at one time cannibalistic and unruly. I'm sure the pennies and nickels we paid for missions when we were kids are paying us back a hundred fold. Everywhere you read about our job being made easier by friendly natives. Believe me someone had to make them friendly in the first place. . . .I wish I could say that the American people (of whom these natives think a lot) could be half the Christians that these natives are. Their faith doesn't end at the end of the church services.

In April 1945, the Board of Foreign Missions of the American Lutheran Church informed Agnes that its missionaries would soon return to New Guinea and requested that she seek release from the Army. Beginning a process which would prove far more difficult than getting into the Army, Agnes contacted her commanding officer on April 29, 1945, requesting "to be able to return to...former work as medical missionary with the American Lutheran Mission, Madang, Territory of New Guinea." Her rationale included her seven years of experience in the field as well as the need for an experienced physician to "whom they can send for the care of their missionaries and the natives under their jurisdiction."

Major Westphal's reply revealed his appreciation for Agnes' desire to return to her missionary work, but expressed his wish (on behalf of the armed forces) that they "would still like to keep you here!"

Hopeful of a quick discharge, Agnes also wrote to Dr. Taeuber as Chairman of the Board of Foreign Missions, advising him of her plans: "I am anxious to do more studying in the field of obstetrics especially and brushing up on some surgery in some hospital." Certain she'd receive her separation papers, Agnes commented, "For once it may be an advantage to be a woman in the Army. In fact, one of my friends in the Medical Corps wrote to me recently that two of our women had been released already."

Nevertheless, seven months and countless letters passed before her separation papers arrived in December 1945. During the wait, Agnes continued her service in Chimbote, and though she enjoyed every day, her heart had already returned to her beloved New Guinea. Finally, she was transferred from Chimbote to Washington, D.C., and within a couple of weeks, she was discharged from the Army.

While still awaiting release from duty, Agnes wrote an article which was eventually published in *The Women's Medical Journal*. Entitled "The Development of a Rural Public Health Program in a Tropical Area: Tingo Maria, Peru," the article was well received.

Agnes' career as a physician in the Army Medical Corps spanned only two years, yet her labors had a long-lasting impact on the general health of people in Tingo Maria and Chimbote, Peru. Agnes remembered those years with great satisfaction, proud to have been an American soldier and the only United States military person present for hundreds of miles.

Once discharged, Agnes returned home to Fargo shortly before Christmas 1945. Her parents and the three sisters and two brothers still living in the area rejoiced and gave thanks; everyone agreed that Agnes' safe return made it the best Christmas ever. Agnes' father loved family celebrations for any possible reason, but Christmas was always a major event in the Hoeger household, beginning with the first Sunday in Advent and ending with Epiphany.

Agnes returned to a family in which two important influences had shaped the eight children. One factor was their father's family devotions, held twice each day, most of which took the form of Bible stories related with such gusto and realism that the children looked forward to hearing them. Following a story, there was hymn singing and prayer time. Perhaps even more important to the Hoeger children was their mother's unconditional love. When Dad disciplined an unruly child at table, he sent the child to his or her room, even if that meant missing the meal. But within an hour, Mother always brought a specially prepared meal and comforting words for the one who had been disciplined.

With nearly six months remaining before she could sail again for New Guinea, Agnes visited her family, fellow missionaries, and friends in Fargo and Minneapolis. She enrolled in a second course at the Lutheran Bible Institute in Minneapolis and also purchased several pieces of medical equipment that she knew would be useful in New Guinea.

On July 10, 1946, Agnes left by train for Los Angeles, accompanied by her two brothers (John, then 22, and Augie, 18), who were traveling to California for the first time. They spent two weeks with their sister and brother-in-law, Cecelia and Gilbert Fjellman, who lived near Rosco, California (later called Sun Valley). Gilbert, the first Lutheran pastor of a home mission congregation, later became the Lutheran Church's Home Mission Director for the West Coast and for many years served as Bishop of the Pacific Northwest Synod of the Lutheran Church. As tourists, the Hoegers saw all of the usual sights before the boys accompanied Agnes to San Francisco, where she was to join other missionaries traveling to Australia and New Guinea.



Leaving San Francisco with fellow missionaries in 1946.

The trip would again take almost three months. Agnes and Mrs. Hanneman were the only experienced missionaries returning to the field; the rest were going to New Guinea for the first time. As usual, Agnes suffered from seasickness much of the time.



Ready to depart for New Guinea.

Chapter XIII—New Guinea: Third Term

Agnes arrived at her New Guinea home in Finschhafen on October 19, 1946. During the war, all of the mission stations and hospitals had been completely destroyed. Thus, the years of Agnes' third term, from 1946-1953, were a time of rebuilding and making do. The missionaries made good use of the equipment, supplies, and buildings which had been left by the American and Australian armies.



Buangi Hospital

Her third term, a full seven years, seemed to fly by for Agnes. Native people came to the hospital from many miles away, seeking help for almost every kind of illness. They always received the best possible care and treatment, whether their religious beliefs were Christian or animist.

By the time she completed this term, Agnes had spent almost 17 years as a doctor in tropical settings. Her competence and reputation as an expert in tropical medicine were renowned. In fact, the alumni of Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, honored her on May 26, 1949, for her dedication to the natives of New Guinea and for her “enviable record of achievements” in the face of the hardships of World War II. The citation concluded with this commendation:

We the Alumni of Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa,
on this 26th day of May in the year of our Lord 1949,
hereby do commend you for your exceptionally meritorious

contributions as Doctor of Medicine in Lutheran Mission New Guinea, and pray that in His own good time our heavenly Father will add to ours His commendation: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.

During her third term, Agnes continued to serve as “the walking doctor,” noting in a September 1949 report for the American Lutheran Church’s Foreign Mission Auxiliary that she had traveled 1,900 miles during that year. Some of her travel was by plane or boat, but most of it involved walking from village to village.



Agnes sometimes traveled by boat.

In each village, Agnes checked the health of mission personnel and the condition of the station's medical supplies. She also organized baby clinics, instructing missionaries and their wives in the techniques for giving injections and advising them on newer treatments for tropical diseases. In addition, Agnes checked the health of school pupils and presented health lectures to the village natives. Her report summarized the medical work done by the various mission stations in the Madang area: "99,132 were given medical treatment; 24,894 injections were given for yaws; 35 lepers received treatment; 1,830 examinations of infants at baby clinics; 806 patients were treated at our small hospitals at Amele, Karkar and Kaiapit."



Agnes examining children at a native village.

In addition to providing a statistical recap, Agnes' 1949 report also included an interesting story about two of her native assistants, Simin and Fulalek:

In one case during World War II the Army Medical Dr. was quick tempered and occasionally beat natives in his rage, even resulting in physical injury to the natives. Then he also encouraged Simin and Fulalek as supervisors to do the same. When he (the Dr.) recovered from his anger, Fulalek and Simin told him that they could not partake in such beatings. Sooner or later the government would hear about it and punish them but above that there was

God who says, 'Thou shalt not kill or hurt or harm thy neighbor in his body.' Later this medical doctor thanked Fulalek and Simin for showing him the Christian way of life and like King Agrippa he was almost persuaded to become a Christian.

As the New Guinea mission field continued to flourish, stations destroyed during the war were rebuilt, and missionaries established new sites from which outreach could be provided. In an April 1950 article for *The Lutheran Missionary*, Agnes again gave a recap:

Since our return to New Guinea after the war our dream of mission hospitals in areas further away from the two main hospitals is coming true. Hospitals have been built at Karkar Island, in the Madang area, at Ulap in the Finschhafen District, and at Ogelbeng in the Central Highlands. . . . The first of these hospitals to be established was at Karkar Island. . . and is in the charge of Mr. Edwin Racharke from South Australia.

The Lutheran Missionary featured Agnes in the February 1952 issue.

Today, more than 16 years later, she [Agnes Hoeger, M.D.] is one of the most highly regarded medical authorities in the South Pacific. Most of those years have been spent aiding the natives of New Guinea, offering relief from physical distress and at the same time pointing the way to Him who can relieve spiritual distress. When you come to consider those 16 plus years you can see how packed they have been with thrills and opportunity for service for this eager healer.”

Chapter XIV—Impact of the New Guinea Mission

Before World War I, the Germans controlled New Guinea; after that time, it became a League of Nations Mandate, with Australia playing a leading role. In a 1984 interview, Agnes said,

All the years I was in New Guinea [1935-1965], I really felt that Australia did a wonderful job among the New Guineans. After World War II they did so much as far as education and training were concerned to get them ready for independence in 1975. The Australians had many people who had to really give much of themselves. They had to be in isolated places and sacrifice a good deal in order to encourage and teach the New Guineans about modern law and all that sort of thing. I truly thought that the Australians and Australian government did a really fine job. It was a terribly difficult task because the New Guineans were such a divided people with hundreds of different clans each speaking their own languages. Many felt that such diversity could not be joined together in one unified nation, but it did! And Australia should be given much credit.

During her years in New Guinea, Agnes had witnessed first-hand the divisiveness of the clan structure. Often, the clans fought with each other, sometimes to the death; there were always a number of knife wounds or severe bruises from thrown rocks, so Agnes was often called to treat the wounded. Lining them up on the grass, she stitched and bound their wounds with needle, thread, and iodine, always providing a good lecture on fighting for no extra charge. Once a clan had accepted Christianity, however, the inter-tribal “wars” ceased: just one impact that Christianity had on the people of New Guinea.

At a native Christian conference held in the 1940s, two men related their stories. One was an old man who testified that he had killed his brother and his best friend in separate fights. Years later, after accepting

the missionaries' invitation to receive Christ into his life, he wished he had done so as a young man.

Another speaker related how he had felt very old. Even though he was only in his early 40s, he could hardly drag his tired body around and he never felt well. After he accepted Jesus and became a Christian, he felt like a new man—young and happy. “It’s just like I have been born again,” he witnessed.

The church was truly the backbone of life for the nationals during the time that Agnes served in New Guinea. She wrote, “Each village had its elders—men of good repute who had some authority. . . . any difficulties in the village. . . would go to the elders to be talked about and to be prayed over and corrective action taken. . . .It wasn’t so much the pastor who did all of that but rather the elders of each congregation. Then the more educated pastor. . . delivered the sermons and conducted the services. . . [E]lders often had some part in the worship service as well. A third group, trained teachers, also played a very important [educational] role in the life of each village and congregation.”



New Guinea teachers.

Once asked how her missionary experience had affected her own faith, Agnes replied, “I would say it strengthened it very much. I saw Christianity around me all the time, both nationals and missionaries, every day from morning until night. It was a very nice, wonderful experience.”

Another time, Agnes was asked whether her life been a lonely one, always far from home. Her reply was, “Not at all! I was most always

with wonderful people and close friends. My life has been a privilege and a pleasure, not a sacrifice.”

The return of the missionaries to Lutheran Mission New Guinea in 1946 and their increasing presence in the years following had a telling effect on the daily lives of the native people. The May 1953 edition of *The Lutheran Missionary* featured an article entitled, “A Mission Rebuilt,” which included another summary of post-war activities in New Guinea. By that date all the former missions had been rebuilt and six more established. Six schools had opened: three area ones, one technical training institution, an English speaking school, and a boarding school for children of missionaries.

The Mission staff had increased six-fold in the seven years after the war. To answer the question of whether the increased staff and expanded physical plant was effectively fulfilling its “*raison d’etre*,” the article cited the following mission statistics:

In 1950 there were 8,763 souls baptized into the Christian Church in the area served by Lutheran Mission New Guinea. In 1951 the number of converts was 10,658 and in 1952 it was 13,091 making a total of 120,000 living Christians in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea. Almost half of this number has been added since the war.



A New Guinea baptism

Two philosophies challenged the New Guinea missionaries in the late 1950s: collectivism vs. individualism and the concept of redemption despite sin and guilt. The importance of the individual, so prominent in Western thought, was almost non-existent in the thinking of New Guinea natives for whom the group (tribe) was all-important. There are, of course, advantages and disadvantages if either concept is stressed in the extreme; the missionaries' task was to find an agreeable middle ground.

The second concept, dealing with redemption in the presence of sin and guilt, proved even more difficult. Most New Guinea nationals had little concept of their own personal sins and felt little guilt. Yet, the primary doctrine of the Lutheran missionaries was **Justification by Grace through Faith in Christ**. They taught that we love our Lord for what he has done for us—for his willingness to die for our sins. This doctrine lost its meaning if there was no sense of sin or guilt, and therefore, no appreciation of the sacrifice made by Christ to redeem lost sinners. Once again, the missionaries had to find a middle ground that had meaning for the New Guineans as well as for themselves.

Chapter XV—The Last Years in New Guinea

For 23 years, Agnes' parents had lived in a large, older home in south Fargo. After all eight children left home, the folks had no reason to keep up such a large place, so they moved to a new, smaller house in north Fargo. It was to this home that Agnes returned for a year's furlough in 1953.

These furlough years were always a source of great joy to Agnes' friends in the United States, and to members of her family, now widely scattered. Sister Billie (Amelia) and her husband Frank were missionaries in Pakistan, with the remaining Hoeger siblings spread throughout the United States. Although the family was widely spread, reunions in Fargo were held as often as possible while Agnes was home.

Extending from March 1953 to June 1954, Agnes' furlough proved to be a very special and happy year. In addition to attending family reunions, she accepted many speaking engagements throughout the United States and Canada. Agnes also attended the University of Minnesota, earning another Master's Degree in her favorite subject, Public Health, a field in which the emphasis is placed on the prevention of illness and disease, rather than only upon cure. This focus coincided perfectly with what Agnes had emphasized during the first 20 years of her medical practice in New Guinea, Australia, and Peru.

Agnes returned to New Guinea, where the mission work continued to thrive. Nevertheless, she felt that her time there was coming to an end.



While she remained committed to her friends in New Guinea, she also wanted to be with and care for her parents.

Agnes examining a New Guinea patient.

Shortly after her return to the mission field in 1954, Agnes' father celebrated his 69th birthday. Healthy and active, he remained in charge of the work of the Good Samaritan Society; a single assistant, who lived and worked in Kansas, helped oversee the 65 facilities which then comprised the organization.

Pastor Hoeger's salary as CEO of this large organization was \$350 per month. Although a small salary, it was adequate for the Hoegers' simple lifestyle. Agnes had little need for money in the jungles of New Guinea. Therefore, she sent a few dollars each month to her folks (and to many others). On one such occasion, her dad wrote back, "Many thanks for your check for an old man. It went into the waste basket. Your love is all we need."

A letter written by Agnes' mother on December 12, 1962, mentioned failing health, prompting Agnes to give more serious thought to returning home. She informed the Missions Board of her intent to return to the United States when her term ended in 1965.

Knowing that she would not return to her beloved New Guinea made Agnes' departure both sad and triumphant. Huge crowds of well-wishes gathered at various locations to say good-bye. Many Christian services were held to thank God for her 30-year ministry; thousands expressed their best wishes for Agnes' future in her homeland.

At the time of her return to the U.S., Agnes was a young 55-year-old. Her mother, age 75, had been sickly for many years, but her father, age 80, was still actively pursuing new opportunities for expansion of the Good Samaritan ministry. As fewer people died of childhood diseases and people lived longer, almost every community experienced a need for a



*Agnes, just back from New Guinea,
with her mother.*

“home” for older persons and others in need. Pastor Hoeger viewed this as an opportunity to serve his Lord Jesus Christ by caring for more elderly and infirm persons. Agnes did not know then that she would one day become instrumental in this mission; her only thought was to be reunited with her parents and help care for them.

At age 55, Agnes had spent 30 years—more than half of her life—away from her own homeland. Her missionary days seemed over—or were they?

Chapter XVI—Agnes’ Good Samaritan Mission

The Hoeger family always looked for reasons to gather, and Agnes’ return to Fargo presented a perfect opportunity. The immediate family had grown to include 53 members, many of whom planned trips to visit with Agnes. Everyone believed that her traveling days had ended, and so they had—for a time.



Hoeger family - 60th anniversary of Dad's ordination, 1968. Back Row, L-R: Gertrude Lucey, La Crescenta, California; Amelia Wilcox, Fullerton, California; Agnes Hoeger, John Hoeger, August Hoeger, Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Cecilia Fjellman, Seattle, Washington; and Laura Jerstad, Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Front Row: Mom and Dad Hoeger.

(Not pictured: Ruth Burgum, Sequin, Texas.)

Agnes returned with one mission in mind—to return her father and mother to better health. She immediately changed their medications, eliminating many. Her father, especially, felt so much better that he was able to resume traveling by car to visit Good Samaritan centers all over the country. After spending a couple of winters at the Good Samaritan Village in Hastings, Nebraska, however, he and Agnes’ mother decided to escape the severe North Dakota winters by moving there permanently. Mother Hoeger looked forward to the return to her home state of Nebraska as well as to the visits of her many relatives. Agnes shared her parents’ apartment and enjoyed this good time in their lives.

Becoming their personal physician while living under the same roof enabled Agnes to keep her parents active and alert, physically and mentally, for several more years. Her father remained interested and involved in the work of the Good Samaritan Society. His advice and counsel were eagerly sought, and he shared his message with large crowds as the main speaker at dedications of new facilities and at anniversary celebrations of established nursing and retirement homes. In fact, Rev. Hoeger was about to leave for one of these speaking engagements on October 7, 1970, when he died very suddenly.

Agnes' mother, who had been sickly for many years, became even more frail after her husband's death. However, Agnes was able to keep her alive and functioning until her death in 1975. Like her husband, Mother Hoeger lived to be 85 years old.

During the decade that Agnes cared for her aging parents, she also found time to engage in a favorite activity—going to school! In 1970, she qualified by examination as a nursing home administrator; each year thereafter, she completed the required continuing education hours to retain that licensure. She also spent several months at a physicians' institute on Public Health at a university in Denver, Colorado.

Beginning in 1966, Agnes also held down a full-time job as the Director of Medical Services at the Good Samaritan Village in Hastings, a large retirement village of some 1,200 residents, including 340 persons receiving skilled nursing care. Her brother John was the administrator of this large complex until accepting the position of Co-Director for the Good Samaritan Society and moving to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in 1972. John never ceased to marvel at Agnes' medical skills, her sensitivity to others, and her in-depth knowledge in all matters of healing.

Thus, the ten-year period following her return from New Guinea was a fruitful time in Agnes' life. She made her parents' last years as happy and productive as possible and did the same for hundreds of other infirm and aging persons at the Good Samaritan Village in Hastings.

During her tenure as Village Medical Director, Agnes received requests from many other administrators to visit their facilities and advise the staff on nursing and medical records procedures. By the mid-1970s, there were almost 200 Good Samaritan facilities in 26 states, all with urgent needs to improve documentation to support quality care and to satisfy government regulations. Agnes responded to this apparent need by again returning to school. This time, her intent was to earn a degree in medical records administration so that she could better assist Good Samaritan facilities in this important aspect of resident care.

After considering several colleges and universities, Agnes chose to enroll in the medical records program at St. Mary's College in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1977. Because she was already a physician with an additional degree in Public Health, Agnes was able to complete the four-year course of study in just one year. Living in a college dormitory, where all the other students were at least 35 years younger, was a novel experience for Agnes. She also delighted in the opportunity to spend time with the faculty of St. Mary's, many of whom were Catholic Sisters. Although a staunch Lutheran who had dedicated her entire life to Christian missionary work, Agnes was not overly concerned with denominational differences.

By completing the medical records program and graduating from St. Mary's College, Agnes had earned her seventh post-secondary degree. In October 1978, after passing the national registered records administrator examination, she then began one of the most amazing adventures in her life—a four-year tour that would take her to Good Samaritan centers in 26 states, from Blaine, Washington, to Kissimmee, Florida, and from Crosby, North Dakota, to Brownsville, Texas.

One obstacle to overcome was that Agnes had never learned to drive a car! In fact, she had so little interest in anything mechanical that she had never even attempted to drive. How then, would she travel to these 200 Good Samaritan centers? She chose to go by Greyhound Bus (“leave the driving to us”). At an age when most people had retired and traveled only for pleasure, Agnes was setting out on one of the most rigorous journeys of her life.

She tried to spend an entire day at each Good Samaritan facility, during which time she met with physicians whose patients resided at the center, and with the medical director, nurses, therapists, and especially with the facility's medical records personnel. Her primary focus was always the same: documentation. If every medical and therapeutic procedure was not properly documented, it hadn't happened. Many administrators of the facilities expressed the view that more good came from Agnes' visits than they could ever have imagined.

However, Agnes could not be on the move every day during those four years. Her home was an apartment just one block from the Central Office in Sioux Falls. When not traveling to Good Samaritan facilities, she began writing a book about The Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society, which would soon celebrate its 60th anniversary.

Agnes, who had been a young girl of 12 when Good Samaritan ministry began, knew more about the Society's early history than any living person. Her memories of stories told by her father served her well as she gathered together early editions of the *Sunshine*, a publication sent by Rev. Hoeger to thousands of the Society's friends. Minutes of the national Board of Directors, correspondence, photos, and transcripts of several taped interviews with her father's friends and co-workers were also among the resources Agnes used. She was encouraged by her brothers and sisters and assisted by her long-time friend, Irma Taeuber Person, who edited her work before its publication.

Agnes entitled the book *Ever Forward!*, the English translation of her father's German expression, "*Immer Vorwaerts.*" Her work was a labor of love, for which she would not accept payment of any kind. Only after her death did anyone realize the full extent of Agnes' tribute to her father's ministry: during her four years of traveling and writing for the Society, she had personally paid for everything—bus fares, four years of motel lodging, paper and supplies, printing, and postage to send a copy of her book to every Good Samaritan center. Her work for the Society was truly a labor of love!

After these fatiguing years of writing and traveling, Agnes retired from her work with The Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society in 1982. She was now 72 years old, and everyone (except Agnes) agreed that she needed a rest.

Chapter XVII—A New Mission

For his entire 85 years, Dad Hoeger had loved picnics, and his enjoyment of this activity was passed on to all eight of his children. One family picnic never to be forgotten took place at Sherman Park in Sioux Falls, just a block from the home of Mark and Sandy Jerstad, Agnes' nephew and his wife. They provided the food in honor of Agnes' recent retirement from the Good Samaritan Society. Several of Agnes' sisters, her two brothers, and their families were also present.

The big question on everyone's mind was how Agnes would spend her time in retirement. She very calmly told the family that she had been accepted by the Peace Corps and would soon be leaving for the South Pacific island kingdom of Tonga. What a bombshell!



A family party just prior to Agnes' departure for Tonga. From left: Betty and Augie Hoeger, Agnes, Laura and Jake Jerstad, and Kathy and John Hoeger.

As astonished as everyone was, none of her brothers or sisters objected because everyone knew that once Agnes had made up her mind, there was no chance of changing it. At 72, she was as sharp as ever. Her health was still quite good, even though she was overweight. Her family decided that perhaps it was best for Agnes to have one last adventure before really retiring.

Some of the challenges Agnes faced in her new role were described in an article included in the Summer 1982 issue of the Society's newsletter, *The Good Samaritan*:

At an age when most people are planning or enjoying their retirement years, Dr. Agnes Hoeger is heading off to Tonga, a group of islands in the South Pacific, to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer. At age 72, Dr. Hoeger will learn to speak Tongan, cope with medical problems, and teach health education in the tiny British Commonwealth kingdom some 500 miles from Fiji and 1,400 miles from Australia. It is an amazing challenge!

True to form, Agnes shared her observations and experiences through a steady stream of letters. Her first letter from Tonga, written on July 7, 1982, described a great feast to welcome the Peace Corps staff. Complete with native dancing, the feast reminded Agnes of scenes from a movie or of pictures from a *National Geographic* magazine. She wryly noted that "due to my great age, I got a chair; also a plate and fork."

A challenge with which Agnes struggled during her early weeks in Tonga was mastery of the language. "Language is very slow for me," she commented. "The five younger people learn it much faster. I have to give it more than my all; The Peace Corps prides itself on the fact that its people learn the language." Eventually, private tutoring was arranged to help Agnes with her language studies.

During a visit from Topoaki, her private language teacher, Agnes learned that she had a "medicine tree" growing just outside her kitchen window. "A young woman came by and asked if she could pick some of the leaves," she recalled. "She was sending them to New Zealand as medicine for some of her relatives. Agnes added that the use of natural healing substances in medicine was a great field, passed down through generations of people in Tonga or New Guinea, and one which merited further exploration.

Agnes was pleased to be assigned the job she enjoyed most—that of teaching medical aides for the villages. Six Tonga natives were enrolled in the medical aide program, which included two years of study and field work in clinic, hospital, and village settings. While overseeing student aides in the villages, Agnes also did blood pressure screenings and occasionally cared for sick patients in their homes.

One frustration which Agnes reported was the lack of any predictable work schedule. In December 1982, she wrote that she had been supervising the medical aides in their hospital work for several hours each day, and that the work had proven rather taxing. “It is either feast or famine with the assignments,” she commented.

As had so often happened when she was in New Guinea, Agnes grew lonely. Letters from family and friends continued to sustain her, and she expressed her gratitude: “It has been wonderful getting letters from all of you. . . . I am the envy of my whole group. No one else has such a large loving family as I do. I usually am blessed with three letters to their one. Thank each one of you so much. You know how much that means when you are far from home.”

Agnes also continued her correspondence with Hilde Schoettler, a life-long friend. “I talked to Hilde by telephone at the Cable & Wireless office,” she wrote. “It was the first overseas call that I have ever made. I was apprehensive about it, but everything went so well. We talked for six minutes.”

Many of Agnes’ letters mentioned her participation in church services. Missionaries had first journeyed to Tonga around 1850, and by the time of Agnes’ Peace Corps tour there were many Christians in Tonga. She noted that 75% of the Tongan Christians were Methodist, another 10% were Roman Catholic, and the remainder were Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, and Mormons. Agnes often attended Mass in English as well as interdenominational services, most of which were conducted by lay people.

Prior to joining the Peace Corps, Agnes had become increasingly sedentary; walking to church each week was a challenge. She had been in Tonga almost seven months when she voiced her concern: "I wonder if I will make it to the Centenary Church tomorrow? That mile seems such a long way to me." Happily, Agnes persevered. In her next letter she reported that she had walked the whole mile, taking about 20 minutes. "After an hour's rest in the church I was able to walk again. You can be sure that I prayed to the Lord for strength before I left and He put wings on my feet."

Chapter XVIII— “Homecoming”

During the 16 months in Tonga, the longest period during which she had not flown somewhere, Agnes was becoming restless again, despite contact with good friends there, including a veteran Peace Corps couple, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Boswell. Agnes’ younger brother, Augie, was planning a trip to Australia and New Guinea with his wife, Betty. This trip was to be the fulfillment of a life-long dream for Augie, who had been only seven when Agnes left for New Guinea. When Betty wrote to Agnes in Tonga, inviting her to take a leave of absence from the Peace Corps and join them for this trip, Agnes was delighted! Since Tonga was such a desirable location for Peace Corps volunteers, there was no problem finding another doctor to replace her.

After an 18-year absence, Agnes received a glorious “homecoming” in both Australia and New Guinea. Many retired missionaries from Germany and the United States had chosen to retire in the beautiful city of Brisbane, Australia. Here, in the suburban home of Doug and Elvira Kohn, Agnes was greeted by some 40 missionary friends.

Agnes spent three weeks with her dearest New Guinea friend Hilde Schoettler, who had retired in Australia with her husband, Fred. Agnes made it very clear that she wasn’t interested in any sight-seeing or traveling during her stay in Brisbane; she wanted only to visit, visit, visit. And that’s what the two old friends did together along with other New Guinea friends who lived nearby. Agnes did make one short trip by plane to Adelaide, where she visited Bruder Karl, with whom she had worked so many years in New Guinea. Although the Australian visit was a complete delight for Agnes, the best was yet to come—her return to New Guinea!

For most of her life, Agnes had always considered places as rather ordinary; it was people who were truly special. After an 18-year absence from New Guinea, Agnes found that both people and places had become very important. With teary eyes, she viewed the ruins of the abandoned mission hospitals in Amele, Madang, and Fischhafen. She realized, however, that those buildings had served their purpose and were either no longer needed or had been replaced by newer, much improved structures.

Agnes found that the medical missionaries' work in New Guinea was progressing better than ever. Even more satisfying was the fact that much of the medical work was being carried out by New Guinea nationals, some of whom she had trained as health care professionals.

In fact, one of Agnes' most lasting contributions to the people of New Guinea had been the development of a training program for national health care professionals. Many years after her departure from the mission field, these native professionals continued to care for their own people and to encourage others to attain similar skills. At the time of her return visit in 1983, she found that many of her trainees, although retired from active service, were highly respected by both fellow nationals and by medical missionaries alike.

Agnes' three-week stay in New Guinea was planned and organized by Pastor Gary Reitz and his wife, Jean. They couldn't have done a better job; those three weeks were as happy and important to Agnes as any time in her entire life.

A typical experience during this period occurred while Agnes, Augie, and Betty were house guests of missionaries Gordon and Christa Gerhardy. On October 4, 1983, the Gerhardys accompanied their guests on a tour of a number of New Guinea villages.

At each stop, everyone in the community—men, women, and children—gathered in an open area near the center of the village. Agnes was seated on a chair, while each village elder and pastor welcomed her and paid tribute to the work she had done among them. Presented with gifts, Agnes responded in Pidgin English. Her message was simple, but inspiring: God had richly blessed her by giving her the privilege of serving them for such a long time. She thanked the villagers for their goodness and love for her. But most of all, she thanked her Lord Jesus for his saving presence among them all.

During village gatherings, many young children ran up to touch Agnes. When asked why they did that, Pastor Gerhardy replied, “Each youngster wants to be able to tell his children and grandchildren that they touched the great white doctor.”

The entire ritual was repeated several times during the afternoon as each community honored Agnes. At one village on the coast, where most of the men were famous ship builders, a new church was nearing completion. New Guinea has a reputation as a land of expert carvers, with some of the very best craftsmen belonging to that congregation. Their plan was that no one in the village would be allowed into the new church to see their handiwork until the time of dedication, but now they faced a dilemma. They wanted Agnes to see this beautiful new church, but dedication was still a few weeks away. After lengthy discussion, the church members held a special showing for Agnes, who was thrilled by this privilege.

Agnes was especially eager to see the two persons who had been her faithful drivers and helpers for so many years. They were older, like Agnes, and had retired from their work. Tears welled up in their eyes when they met their dear friend. Those watching were very moved to witness the mutual love and respect of these former co-workers.

Agnes also had the privilege of spending several days with her close friends, Dr. and Mrs. Edwin Tscharke, who lived on Karkar Island off the coast of Madang. She had first gone to this island in 1949 to inoculate all 5,000 of its residents against a terrible outbreak of Yaws. Nearly 35 years later, the island’s population had grown to some 20,000 people.

Agnes was deeply grateful to those who had arranged these visits with her former friends and co-workers, for New Guinea was the place she had lived and worked for the biggest part of her life. Her time there would never be forgotten.

Chapter XIX—Agnes and Critters

Agnes was a people person. Even though her mother always had canaries to fill their home with song, and her father loved all animals, both domestic and wild, Agnes had little or no interest in pets of any kind. As a very young girl, she had loved a St. Bernard dog bought by her father and later killed by a neighbor, but as an adult she kept a cat only because she hated the rats, mice, and other pests that threatened to move into her homes in New Guinea, Peru, and Tonga. Unfortunately, the result of this arms-length relationship was that the cats also ate all the geckos, the tropical house lizards that controlled proliferation of the very tiny critters like mosquitoes, beetles, flies, and other bugs.

Although she was not a nature person, Agnes always enjoyed visiting with the scientists who came to New Guinea to study the annifauna. Many world-renowned ornithologists, anthropologists, and foresters came from all over to study the island's conditions. Not surprisingly, Agnes enjoyed most the anthropologists who studied and tried to understand the New Guinea natives as they were.

Agnes was a healer, most interested in the human potential to be healthy in body, mind, and spirit. For her, there was only one way to be totally healthy. That way, of course, meant a complete surrender of one's life to the will of God as taught by his son, Jesus. Agnes viewed her work as a medical doctor as a means to heal the body while witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ. It was toward this end that she dedicated her life.

Chapter XX—Agnes and Education

A constant thirst for knowledge inspired Agnes' approach to education. Throughout her lifetime, she applied this approach to herself and sought to use every possible opportunity to inspire a similar love of learning in others. In New Guinea, she was as well-known for her teacher training as she was for her medical work.

As a doctor, Agnes' great emphasis was that avoidance and prevention were preferable to cure. Similarly, she felt that education should prevent problems by helping the natives prepare not only for village life, but also for the unknown challenges they might face in the future.

Believing that native people could and should help themselves, Agnes was delighted when some 300 native mission teachers all passed their exams in 1958. She was even more elated when the government announced a 1959 decision to push for universal primary education for all New Guineans, and she stressed that the Lutheran Church must make its mission facilities available for this purpose.



*Some of the native New Guinea nurses
Agnes helped to train.*

Chapter XXI—The Last Chapter

Following her year in the Peace Corps and travel to revisit Australia and New Guinea, Agnes returned to Sioux Falls. Present for her homecoming were Laura and Jake Jerstad, John and Kathy Hoeger, Frank and Billie Wilcox, Mark and Sandy Jerstad and their three children, and John Jerstad. Three other sisters, Ruth, Cecelia, and Trudy, were able to arrive in Sioux Falls a short time later. Brother Augie and his wife, Betty, were still traveling in Australia.

Agnes' life in Sioux Falls fell into a pleasant routine. Each morning she worked at the Central Office of the Good Samaritan Society, located just one block from her apartment, continuing to serve as a medical records consultant. She often presented the story of the beginnings of the Good Samaritan Society to workshop groups at the Central Office, considering this sharing to be a special joy and privilege.

Highlighting the Good Samaritan Society's 1984 Annual Meeting was the recognition of Dr. Agnes on the 50th anniversary of her graduation from medical school. A plaque was presented to Agnes, which read:

Dr. Agnes Hoeger

In recognition of the 50th Anniversary of graduation from
medical school and ensuing services as

Physician

Missionary

Army Physician

Peace Corps Instructor

Gerontologist

Beloved Friend

Your fellow members of the Good Samaritan family love
and honor you.

It was a fitting expression of gratitude to a woman whose rich and varied career had touched so many, many lives!

On May 20, 1985, a shovel in her hand, Agnes joined her brothers and other co-workers outside the Central Office building to plant a tree recognizing her father and his work. Good Samaritan facilities throughout the country planted trees that spring and summer commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Society's founder.



*Agnes and several co-workers planting a centennial tree.
Pictured, L-R: John Hoeger, Frank Wilcox, Charlotte Himmler,
Don Gobl, Betty Jensen, Agnes, Pete Peterson, Augie Hoeger.*

Shortly after the tree-planting, a dramatic change took place; Agnes fell and broke her hip. After being hospitalized, she spent several months at the Sioux Falls Good Samaritan Center where she received therapy. From there, she moved into a new home at Sunnycrest Retirement Village in Sioux Falls, where she lived for the next three years. With family nearby, her daily needs were met with tender loving care.

Another change occurred in 1988. Rev. Frank Wilcox retired after serving for six years as Director for Spiritual Ministries with Good Samaritan. He and Billie planned a move to the Good Samaritan Village in Kissimmee, Florida, where Frank had been offered a position as chaplain of the Village. Laura and her husband, Pastor Jacob Jerstad, had moved to Kissimmee two years earlier, and Jake was now chaplain at the Village's Health Care Center. Because her doctor felt that Agnes could no longer live alone, her sisters invited her to join them in Kissimmee. Agnes was easily persuaded, and arrangements were made for her to move into the Health Care Center there in Kissimmee.

Billie accompanied Agnes to Florida on September 1, 1988. A strong-looking woman was waiting at O'Hare with a wheelchair to take Agnes from one gate to another. She pushed Agnes at top speed for nearly a half hour to make the connecting flight. Typical of Agnes, she spent the time asking the woman questions about her life, her family, and her work.

Agnes was soon at home in the Village Health Care Center. She never complained; in fact, she said many times, "I have it so good here!" She was liked and respected by the nurses and aides. One aide, who worked in the dining room, said, "The difference between Agnes and many others is this: Agnes will come up to us and say, 'I'm sorry to bother you, but could I have some juice—my diabetes seems to be acting up. Many others will shout, 'I'm going to die! Get me some juice.'" Another aide added, "She doesn't have a mean bone in her body."



Agnes in the Village Health Care Center dining room.

Agnes always maintained strong family ties. Until the end of her life, her greatest joy was spending time with her family. Laura and Billie visited Agnes each day—Billie in the morning and Laura in the afternoon.

During the winter months, her brothers and their wives, John and Kathy and Augie and Betty, moved to Kissimmee where they also spent time with Agnes. Sisters Cecelia and Trudy came regularly; only Ruth, who struggled with her own health problems, was unable to visit Agnes in Kissimmee.

Before Mother Hoeger died, she had said many times to her sons and daughters, "When I am gone, take care of Agnes." For seven years, Agnes needed the "care" and concern of her siblings and their families. In the old testament, we read the story of Jacob serving his father-in-law, Laban, for the right to marry Laban's beautiful daughter, Rachel. We read

in Genesis 29:20, “Those seven years seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her [Rachel].” Those seven years of caring for Agnes seemed to her siblings like a few days because of their devotion to their sister.

On June 16, 1992, Laura, Jake, Billie, and Frank took Agnes to the Good Samaritan Village Café to celebrate her 82nd birthday. She said that night, as she had so many times before, that she expected to live until she was 85 as both her parents had done.



*Agnes on her
82nd birthday.*

The following Sunday, Agnes and Billie sat side-by-side at the Health Care Center where Frank was leading the Sunday Worship Service. When the service ended with the final verse of “How Great Thou Art,” Agnes sang in her still-strong, beautiful voice: “When Christ will come with shout of acclamation and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.” As she sang, Agnes turned to Billie, a radiant smile on her face. Billie did not realize then how significant those words would be in the days which followed.

Two days later, on the morning of June 23, Billie had a pleasant visit with Agnes. In the afternoon when Laura was there, she noticed that Agnes’ fingernails needed cutting. One of the aides came in to cut them. Always interested in others, Agnes started asking her questions about her Jamaican homeland and her family. Laura noticed that the aide cut Agnes’ nails very slowly—wanting to prolong their conversation. Laura remembers that visit with Agnes as a very happy time.

At 9:00 that evening, Billie received a call from the Health Care Center. Wanting to break the sad news gently, the nurse said, “Agnes is gone!” Billie answered, “Gone—gone where?” She had visions of Agnes wheeling herself out of the building in her wheelchair. “We found her dead a few minutes ago,” the nurse reported.

Billie immediately called Laura, repeating three times, “Agnes is dead,” before the words really sank into Laura’s mind and heart. Laura, Jake, Billie, and Frank all hurried to the Health Care Center.

Agnes had stopped at the Nurses Station to chat awhile, as was her habit. A few minutes after she had returned to her room, a nurse entered to give some medication and found Agnes still sitting her wheelchair, her head resting on her shoulder. She had slipped away quietly to be with her Lord, whom she had served so faithfully throughout her life. As family members encircled her bed, they held a service of thanksgiving and celebration of Agnes’ life.

On June 29, a Memorial Service was held for Agnes at the Good Samaritan Community Church in Kissimmee. Her Pastor, Peter Seig, led the service, remembering her many years of ministry in New Guinea. Billie spoke for the family, expressing their deep love and admiration for their sister.

A few weeks later, another memorial service was held at the Annual Meeting of the Good Samaritan Society in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The following day, July 16, 1992, family members drove to Arthur, North Dakota, where Agnes was buried beside her father and mother in the cemetery on the ground of the Arthur Good Samaritan Center.

Among the texts chosen for her memorial service was this passage from Hebrews 13:7-8:

Remember your former leaders, who spoke God’s message to you. Think back on how they lived and died, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

It was a fitting remembrance of one whose life was inspired by faith and lived out in humble obedience to the call of her Lord.

Remembrances

When I remember Agnes five words come quickly to mind. The first is the word **affirming** - Agnes was always so ready to say a supportive word of another's ministry.

The second is the word **generous** - how well I remember her sending us a monthly check in our first months of marriage.

The third is the word **natural** - she was always just Agnes in her conversation and her actions.

The fourth word is **effective** - whether in New Guinea, the army, the Good Samaritan Society or Tonga, she was effective in helping others.

The fifth word is **self-effacing** - modest in her own evaluation of her very committed calling to be in the service of her church and Jesus Christ.

These five words, Affirming, Generous, Natural, Effective, and Self-effacing, in their first letters spell the name Agnes which is defined as a person who is pure and committed to the cause of Jesus Christ. Her parents named her well.

Dr. A. G. Fjellman (brother-in-law), Seattle, Washington

I remember Agnes in Arthur. In Springtime her favorite flowers were the lilacs and she loved to pick big bouquets for the living room table. I can still see her burying her face in the lilacs to enjoy the full fragrance! Even today I especially appreciate the beauty and the fragrance of the lilacs because of Agnes. When friends of Agnes and Ruth would come to our home, we frequently spent time around the piano which Agnes played. Everyone sang and Agnes knew all the popular tunes of the 20s - (Tip-toe Through the Tulips and many others). I remember Lydia and Emma Sommerfeld, Dorothy Boettcher, Anne Kuehn and I'm sure there were many others. Another especially happy memory usually took place in the early evening when Agnes would practice the organ at our church. Mom and Dad and some of us children would sit on the front porch and listen to her music. We children took turns pumping the organ so that she could make her beautiful music.

Agnes was by nature a shy person but had a spirit of adventure and courage as well as great intelligence. She skipped several grades in school and graduated from high school at age 15. She frequently worked for strangers for her room and board when she attended college and universities. Because she enjoyed music so much she attended concerts on the University campuses. Because she had very little money, she would sell her blood in order to buy the very cheapest ticket possible.

We played “school,” “church,” “house,” and even “weddings.” It seemed Agnes was always the minister. In those days you had to be male to be a pastor, so Agnes wore Dad’s trousers. The only times I’ve ever seen pants on Agnes.

Cecelia Hoeger Fjellman, sister - Seattle, Washington

June 11, 1986, Columbus, Ohio

Ever since we received the invitation to join in the remembrance of your medical service, we have been recalling what that service has meant to our common Papua New Guinea work. And so it is with pleasure that we write these few words which, after all, can’t possibly measure up to the contribution you have made.

I (John) have always associated you with your interest in preventative medicine and was always glad that this kind of medical service was also being considered in our work. Then I think of your efforts to deal with framboesia on Karkar Island and of your success in clearing out this serious affliction from the island.

It was not without reason that you were the last woman to be evacuated by the military during World War II. Even if this meant that you received an accolade from war-time TIME magazine. Nor do I overlook the many personal services to our staff members and families. So, for example, your care of Irma during her incident on the Biliau reef and following; the care of Mrs. Scherle during her pregnancy resulting in the birth of Fred, Jr. when she had lost her previous pregnancies or the care of our family members in Finschhafen when Edna and Paul and children were there. Also at our Jim’s birth at Amele 46 years ago! For these and many other services we thank you and bless God that he gave you the vision and strength to carry out your manifold, weighty responsibilities.

Louise and John Kuder, (Director of Mission work in New Guinea)

Thank you so much for writing to us three days after dear Agnes fell asleep to be with her beloved Savior. She was closer to us than a dear friend, not only being one of the huge mission family which bonded us together, but to me she was someone special to whom I could go to with medical problems and she was always noble and ready to help in a concerned and Christlike way. I had a very close feeling for Agnes when we were in Finschhafen before the Japanese invasion. She was the only white woman permitted to remain after all the other mission women and children were evacuated prior to the impending invasion.

It was Agnes who patrolled Karkar Island as the mission doctor before we ever saw or knew of the place. While there the Karkar church leaders took up a collection and gave this small amount to her with the request that she find a doctor to remain with them and help them with their acute medical needs. We became the answer to that special request. Agnes would come over to Karkar during those early years as the patrolling mission field doctor of L.M.N.G. We looked forward to those visits. She often called Karkar "My St. Helena!" Her unselfish outreach to help the less fortunate Third World people will never be forgotten. She walked many, many miles as there was no vehicle road. She never hesitated to travel the high seas as we had to, because there were no planes. She crossed swirling rivers by canoe or cane suspension bridges wherever the medical work called her to go and the Lord held her securely and your father's motto, "Ever Forward" was surely hers, too.

Edwin and Tabitha Tscharke, Queensland, Australia 7/18/1992

I never worked with Agnes in New Guinea as she was stationed in Finschhafen and I was in Madang at Vagaum Hospital. I remember the times she came to visit at Vagaum and the times I served with her on medical committees at conference times. Of her work in New Guinea I know that she was very interested in Public Health and she is the one that started out-station dispensaries that were run by New Guinean aid post orderlies in the Finschhafen area. She had a large network of these out posts in the Finsch area, had trained the men that manned these stations and she did visit them on a regular basis. When I was teaching nurses at Vagaum I did refer to some of the material that Agnes had written. I found her to

be a very warm person and I know that the New Guinea people loved and respected her. Agnes loved New Guinea and its people and the work she did there had far reaching effects.

Marie Reitz, Gladstone, OR 11/4/1992

As far as Agnes is concerned, she was indeed a wonderful and faithful friend. She, together with my fiance, Felix, Irma Taeuber, Emma Blum and Mr. Thogerson travelled to New Guinea by ship in 1935. When I was expecting our first child, Waldemar, she attended to me in a most gentle, loving manner, both pre and post delivery. I also recall her visiting me at Kerowagi in 1940 and in post war years also at Ogelbeng. Those were always very special days and highlights in those earlier years when we were rather isolated. It always gave us a lift with her friendliness and easy laughter. Her visit was like a breath of fresh air and we hated to see her leave. It was a sad day when Agnes retired from the New Guinea Mission field.

After Felix retired from the ministry we had the great joy of traveling by car and visited many of our New Guinea co-workers, among them Agnes at Sioux Falls. What a precious memory that remains. We had so much fun spending a night or two with her. She said, "I haven't laughed so much in years!" I thank God for having had the privilege of knowing her and counting her among the dearest and most cherished friends. The beautiful memories will not fade.

Hedwig Doering 12/7/92

We are happy to share a few recollections of Agnes with you. One of my first memories of her is the time, in 1947, about two weeks after Marion's and my marriage, I stepped on a nail sticking 3" out of the concrete foundation of a pre-war building at Amron. The nail was rusty, and went up into my foot quite a way. Dr. Hoeger just happened to be there on a visit, examining the students, and she treated me. It was painful, but her gentle manner and reassuring voice put me at ease, and seemed to take the pain away. Then she taught Marion how to treat the skin puncture daily. With that good treatment and training, I was about my work again in several weeks.

Dr. Hoeger made visits to each station, educating about tropical medicine, training in the giving of injections for yaws, etc., and helping the missionary wives set up child health clinics. With my injection training I was able to give many of them without incident. Marion conducted a clinic which many mothers and children attended, in turn training the mothers about hygiene, nutrition, and first-aid. She helped Marion with her first pregnancy. Marion was 20 at the time, and had a lot of questions. When Marion developed a stubborn case of dysentery, we wrote a note and asked what to do. She responded, "Send some boys down to carry my things, and I'll be right up." She walked up the 1,300 foot mountain the same day with cheerful healing treatment, and stayed until she thought Marion and the fetus were okay. (That baby is now 44, and has nearly completed his work on a Ph.D. in Theology at Notre Dame University.) She seemed to have a special place in her heart for little missionary kids who were almost strangers in America, and understood them, even when the language was interspersed with Pidgin English. (Our son, John, became attached to her. Did she, perhaps, help influence him in becoming a doctor?)

In some ways she was like a mother to missionaries, especially the younger ones, and she was also greatly respected for her medical skills, and the way she could "make do" with minimum equipment. Her helpful, caring, selfless and gentle devotion to her work endeared her to all of us, both missionary and native. She was a good scout, enduring sea voyages in small ships on big waves, walking in muddy or rocky trails, uphill and down, and flying in small planes, all to bring health and healing to the New Guineans, and also the missionaries in need. Her cheerfulness and good humor carried her and us through many situations. Her memory will always be cherished in our family.

Alfred and Marion Walck

After thinking back some 40 years, I can offer these two observations:

I remember Dr. Hoeger at Finschhafen Hospital in 1946. A tall, slightly stooped figure in two-piece whites and sun helmet with stethoscope around her neck on her way to yet another "Well Baby Clinic." Women and babies came once a month to the hospital to have their babies weighed and checked for signs of illness. Dr. Hoeger traveled to villages with native assistants and bearers to do what she could in the care for mothers and babies.

Later she was transferred to Madang Hospital at Amele and later I was there, too. We were staying at a plantation some miles from Madang when we received word that one of the missionary wives was in labor and was coming by boat to the plantation. Dr. Hoeger was aware of the coming birth and had brought a sterile maternity pack with her. Some time later we prepared a sterile room for the patient and the labor was under way. Then Dr. Hoeger calls on me to give an old fashioned anesthetic (a first for me) - a cone and bottle of chloroform. After a little girl was born, Dr. Hoeger went to her room to rest - it was very late into the evening - and she asked me to care for the newborn and see if the mother needed for anything.

Agnes was very helpful to me and many other newcomers to the Mission. Once she arranged for me to have the BEST experience of my whole stay - a trip with a doctor boy and several bearers to an out station to give injections. I was to stay at this station for 10 days. At night the camp fires of the villagers were seen in all directions. Some had traveled days to arrive. A ship was to come to take me back to the hospital. It was delayed so a runner brought word to me to WALK HOME. This I did in sun helmet with large umbrella and saddle shoes. I had cold biscuits, cheese and hard candy. The trip took two nights. If Dr. Hoeger had not made arrangements for me to do this, I would have missed out on a life-time experience.

I remember her playing an old up-right piano left over from the Army. She played from memory and from an old Lutheran Hymnal. I still think of her when any of several hymns is played in my church.

Zoe Banfield, Worthington, Ohio

A MEMORIAL
DEDICATED TO
DR. AGNES HOEGER
by
Gerhard and Jean Reitz

Dr. Hoeger, as we called her, served in Lutheran Mission New Guinea from 1935 to 1965. We do not know the many personal details of her formative years nor of the decisions which motivated her to volunteer for the service of medical missions in New Guinea. We do know that Dr. Hoeger was a daughter of August Hoeger (Sr.) who was listed as one of the leaders of the first mission conference of the Iowa Synod. This mission conference met in the Dakota District of the Synod on January 20-22, 1914 in the Neudorf Lutheran Church where R. Taeuber was pastor.

Although the members of the Iowa Synod considered themselves a missionary synod in America because of (1) "10,000 towns with 800 to 1000 population" west of the Missouri "where the Word of the Cross is not yet preached", (2) "30 Indian tribes in which nothing is printed of the Scriptures in their own language", and (3) "6 million blacks without the ministration of the church", they also stated that the Neuendettelsau mission in New Guinea was "our mission" because of the support in prayer and gifts given to that mission from the very beginning of Senior J. Flied's arrival in Simbang in 1886. This support was consistent and by 1914 amounted to one-third of the budget of the Neuendettelsau mission in New Guinea.

The mission conference of the Dakota District was called to regularize and to cultivate the continued interest in overseas mission in the Iowa Synod which had decided in May 1913 to raise the very respectable sum of \$113,000 in one year for New Guinea. How providential the organization of the mission conference proved to be became evident on August 3, 1914 when war was declared in Europe. Although Lutheran missionaries in New Guinea, by in large, were not interned by Australian forces, nevertheless supplies and support of the New Guinea mission ceased abruptly and emergency action was necessary to supply the most necessary items.

At a Fourth Missions Conference held in the Dakota District on May 29-31, 1916 at Wishek, North Dakota, a New Guinea Aid Society (later called the Mission Auxiliary) was formed on May 30th with 80 friends present. W. Kraushaar was elected as chair, R. Taeuber as secretary and A. Hoeger (Sr.) was treasurer. By 1917 the Aid Society had 1019 members, and by 1919, 3000. The Aid Society proved to be the leaven which moved the Synod as a whole to give a total of \$86,438 to New Guinea for emergency needs during the years of the war plus another \$4,500 to over six other mission fields. The Synod's own mission committee was authorized by the General Synod in August 1917 but first met on July 16, 1919 in Sioux City, Iowa. A. Hoeger (Sr.) was one of the five members of this committee.

The New Guinea Missions, both the Neuendettelsau and Rhenish missions, would have been lost to the Lutheran church had it not been for the timely intervention by Dr. Richter, president of the Iowa Synod who traveled to Australia and in the early part of 1921 led negotiations which helped many splinter Lutheran churches to unite as the United Evangelical Lutheran Church and then made successful negotiations possible with the Australian government which eventually authorized the Iowa Synod and Australian Lutherans to assume full responsibility for the New Guinea mission area of the Lutheran church.

The first American missionaries to respond to the need for personnel left from Vancouver, B. C, on September 9, 1921. The party included Rev. and Mrs. F. E. Pietz, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Knautz and Misses Ida and Ludhilde Voss. Through the 1920s an increasing number of American missionaries were sent from the Iowa Synod. When the Synod joined with the Buffalo and Ohio Synods to form the American Lutheran Church in 1930, the mission work in New Guinea was continued.

Negotiations which had been conducted for years between Lutherans in Australia, America and Germany eventually resulted in the new American Lutheran Church taking over the former Rhenish Mission field in the Madang area of northeast New Guinea. Dr. T. Braun, who arrived in 1930, and Hattie Braun (nee Voss), influenced the Madang mission to begin construction of a hospital at Amele. Begun in 1933 the hospital was finally dedicated on May 17, 1937.

Dr. Agnes Hoeger arrived on November 11, 1935 in Madang from the Dakotas in time to be introduced to the work by Dr. and Mrs. Braun before the pair left on furlough in May of 1936. Of Dr. Hoeger's early service I have written

She (Dr. Hoeger) soon noticed the bad health of the mission staff and hoped that a planned health station would bring some relief. She called immediately for more nursing staff, both for the hospital and for the outstation patrols. For the recovery of the sick missionaries, she recommended better supplies of fresh milk, meat, butter and lots of vegetables. She took over the training program of indigenous medical staff which was begun by Dr. and Mrs. Braun. The most elementary facts of anatomy, of physiology, and of the most common diseases had to be taught together with practical work with patients. Within one year three missionary personnel were lost: C. Lewald at Nagada in June 1936, D. Spier in March 1937, and young Dieter Schwarz in May 1937.

As with Dr. Braun, there was no rest for Dr. Hoeger. During 1937 she complains that she seldom was at the hospital for two consecutive weeks before being called on an emergency trip. In ten months she made fifteen such trips. At the end of 1937 Dr. Hoeger emphasized two phases of medical work: (1) a good health status of mission staff must be maintained, and (2) many young Christian men must be trained as medical workers.

After Dr. and Mrs. Braun returned from furlough, L.M.M. enjoyed the blessing of two medical doctors until Dr. Hoeger was sent to Kakoko Hospital in Finschhafen on September 3, 1940 to take over there after Dr. Stuerzenhofecker was interned in Australia. More staff meant better training of workers. In 1939 Dr. Braun reports nine men in the Amele training school for medical helpers. Besides their studies, these men did nursing and cleaning,

supported themselves from their own gardens and went about their duties willingly and enthusiastically. Two of the most distinguished of these trainees were Fulalek from Arnele and Sirning from Bel. A perennial shortage of nurses, however, continued to plague the medical program. This complaint appears in the annual doctor's reports.²

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Australian government as well as the missionaries realized that New Guinea would very likely become an active war zone in a short while. All European women and children were ordered evacuated but doctors and nurses were permitted to continue service. Dr. Hoeger had chosen to stay. When the Neuendettelsau missionaries at Finschhafen were interned in Australia, including Dr. Stuerzenhofecker, Dr. Hoeger was sent to the Finschhafen hospital at Kakoko in September 1940. There she remained in charge of the Lutheran mission work in the large Morobe District.

After the fears of Japanese invasion proved true when the invasion of Rabaul took place on January 23, 1942 by the Japanese 4th Fleet, Dr. Pietz, Rev. Ackermann, and Dr. Hoeger, Americans serving in the Morobe district were ordered evacuated by the Australian authorities and made their way overland to Wau, a tremendous trip for Dr. Hoeger. From Wau the men traveled overland by foot to the Papuan coast and Dr. Hoeger was evacuated by plane to Port Moresby and from there to Australia and the United States.

Unpublished is an account printed in the sensational Australian and New Zealand press and later picked up by TIME magazine in the United States, that Dr. Hoeger was one of the Lutheran missionaries who traitorously led the invading Japanese up the Markham valley in their attack on Port Moresby. As far as we remember, the documentation in the archives of the ELC-PNG in Lae, indicates that this false report was encouraged by remarks of former Administrator McNicoll who had served

2 Reitz, G. "The Contribution of American Lutherans to Lutheran Mission Work in New Guinea From 1886 to 1945" - May, 1985, Lae, P.N.G. (An Unpublished Manuscript available in former seminaries and colleges of the ALC - 99 pages plus 23 pages of footnotes) pp. 54-55.

in Rabaul until the invasion. McNicoll had a very strong anti-German and anti-Protestant bias. Anyone knowing the geography of New Guinea would know that leading Japanese up the Markham river would be to lead them away from Port Moresby. What was true was that the trip from Lae to Wau first led up the Markham, then over the mountains to the Bulolo river valley and the gold fields of Bulolo and Wau. During the months and years that followed, the Japanese never were able to conquer Wau or Bulolo.

The story of Dr. Hoeger continues.

When Dr. Agnes Hoeger returned in October 1946, she was sent to Madang. This area being as yet without a hospital, she traveled throughout Amele, Nobonob, Karkar, and Bongu to concentrate on health promotion and disease prevention. She initiated the Maternal Child Health (MCH) program in New Guinea, thanks to experience she had gained while working in Peru during the war. Dr. Hoeger wrote twelve health lectures in Pidgin, recognizing that health education would be a major factor in eradicating belief in sorcery. She also taught the missionary wives to conduct clinics on every mission station. By October 1947, there were thirteen clinics in Nobonob, Amele, Graged Island, Bongu, Biliau, Bunabun, Karkar, and Begesin. Soon pre-natal care was also added.

The earlier-trained medical orderlies, like Siming, Fulalek, and Joseph, helped with the injection program to eradicate yaws, which was now brought under control. They also conducted child health clinics. By mid-1949, Fulalek reported 200 babies attending regularly for clinics, and he gave health talks to their mothers. Siming had built up a bush hospital on Graged Island where he treated yaws and leprosy, and held baby clinics, besides treating common everyday illnesses.

Dr. Hoeger wrote in her report in 1948:

Evangelistic work must go hand in hand with medical work. Modern medicines and health education can benefit those New Guineans most who are on a firm Christian footing, and who have overcome most of their superstitions and fears of sorcery.

Our medical mission work rests upon the kind of New Guinean medical assistant whom we train. They must first and foremost have steadfast Christian character or else their work is of little avail. Those who train these people must be qualified professionally and also be spiritual leaders, who can show their trainees and patients what it means to be a Christian.

Dr. Hoeger transferred to Buangi in 1950 when Dr. and Mrs. Braun came to Madang to begin the work in the new Yagaum Hospital.³

Dr. Agnes Hoeger transferred from Madang to Buangi in 1950, and was for Finschhafen what Dr. Braun was for Madang. After coming into the Finschhafen area, she immediately set up MCH services.⁴

In Finschhafen on the southern side of the Mape River was the Butaweng Chest Hospital built by the government and staffed by the Lutheran Church. It was officially opened in December 1958. Dr. Mary Finsch took charge of it until 1959; Dr. Agnes Hoeger then took over and remained until her retirement in 1965, having completed almost thirty years of service in the country.⁵

In addition to her work in the Finschhafen hospitals at Buangi and later Butaweng, Dr. Hoeger greatly assisted Ed Tscharke, an Australian lay medical worker in writing and publishing a 300 page Pidgin Medical Handbook.

The above account was written to give a background to Dr. Hoeger's decision to serve her Lord in medical mission work.

In the middle of 1947 I was a single, young, active missionary on Karkar Island in the Madang district. Dr. and Mrs. Braun were in Finschhafen at the Buangi Hospital, the 119th field hospital purchased from the American Army. Dr. Hoeger after arriving in October 1946, was sent to Madang. She traveled from station to station with a small staff of New Guinea medical aids trying to deal on the village level with the tremendous

3 H. Wagner and H. Reiner ed's; "The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea" - Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, July 1986, p. 522.

4 Ibid, p. 528.

5 Ibid, p. 529.

medical problems which had gone untreated during the war years.

Especially prevalent was “Yaws” or framboesia, a disease similar to syphilis but transmitted through cuts and sores in the skin. Thousands in every area were affected. If in the first six years of my missionary service I gave over 5000 injections for framboesia, Dr. Hoeger must have given a hundred thousand or more.

In mid 1947 I was completing a tour around Karkar island, visiting each village and ended up at Kurum plantation on the southern end of the island. There I met Dr. Hoeger camped in Kurum village by the sea giving injections and medical treatment to the thousands who came. Only in the southern part of the island occupied by 4,500 Takian speaking people, there must have been at least 2,000 suffers from “Yaws,”

Dr. Hoeger saw that I was lean and thin. At that time we lived for the most part on what was available locally. She had heard of my engagement to Jean Kammuller, secretary to Dr. Kuder, head of the mission since October 1946, and so she sat down and wrote Jean as follows. “If you plan to marry ‘Gary’, [as Jean called me], you better do it quickly while there is still something to marry.”

In 1948, after our marriage which proceeded the annual conference in January, Jean and I were posted to the Amele-Begesin circuits which covered a huge area from the Madang coast to the top of the central range - the Bismarck mountains.

Dr. Hoeger knew that Jean and I had much medical work before us so she trained us in giving injections, both intravenous and intramuscular upon which we were certified officially by the government medical service.

In addition, as the time for the birth of our first son Philip drew near, Dr. Hoeger advised us in preparation. Our Sunday morning on the 9th of January 1949, we were sleeping in the small guest house in Madang when at 3 a.m. Jean told me that labor pains had begun. We timed them and by 5 a.m. it became apparent that I should call Dr. Hoeger who was living nearby in one empty office room of Lutheran Mission Supply House and using the other office room as her medical office. The Supply House

had no supplies as yet. On her order, Mr. Al Zimmermann and I carried Jean on an army stretcher over to Dr. Hoeger's one room and placed Jean on her bed. There, about three hours later, Dr. Hoeger on one side of the bed and I on the other, our first son Philip was born. Dr. Hoeger was giving me instructions all of the time. An hour later I had to preach the Sunday morning service at the Chinese school a block away.

On hand training of this nature proved invaluable in the years ahead until newly trained New Guinea medical assistants were able to take over. For us that only became possible during our second term of service from 1953 to 1960.

Dr. Hoeger introduced Jean to Baby Clinics. In the Amele area, Dr. Fulalek, trained by Dr. Braun adequately took care of these clinics, but in the Begesin area where we moved in mid 1949, there was no one to carry on the work. Week after week, different groups of villages came to our little clinic where the babies were examined, weighed, treated, and the mothers taught about health care. All then participated in a devotion and Bible study. These Baby Clinics were encouraged by Dr. Hoeger wherever there was someone able to conduct them. They have remained a part of the public health program in New Guinea ever since. In a land where malaria, parasitical infections, and all kinds of virus diseases are endemic, the public health programs promoted by Dr. Hoeger have continued to be a tremendous blessing.

Dr. Hoeger continued to be a close family friend until her death. She is fondly remembered by the many missionary and indigenous mothers who were aided in having one or more children due to her kind but incisive medical treatment and advice. Both men and women of all ages trusted her and followed her instruction and example.

I can still see her in my imagination as she traveled to and from Begesin in those rugged mountains in 1947 and 1948 for the purpose of giving help to the most forgotten of peoples. She traveled in areas where there were no paths. Sometimes the going was so rugged that her New Guinea guide made the sides of his bare feet serve as stepping stones so Dr. Hoeger could navigate the steep mountain side in the wet and dark jungle

area. She was slightly overweight and blamed it on the wonderful taro her New Guinea friends cooked for her.

For us, Dr. Hoeger will always be one of God's special saints who served her Lord with great dedication, perseverance, faith, love, and kindness.

For many years, our sister Agnes was encouraged by family members, co-workers, and fellow missionaries to record her memories, especially those related to her remarkable service in New Guinea. At one time, before Agnes joined the Peace Corps and left for Tonga, a series of taped interviews about her life was started. However, Agnes was always more interested in visiting with others than in talking about herself; interviewing her proved to be a difficult task, and the project was never completed.

Following her death in 1992, a more serious effort was undertaken to record Agnes' story. Letters and diaries yielded a wealth of information about Agnes' life of service for her Lord. She wrote as she lived — simply, without adornment, affection, or hyperbole — yet her words offer a powerful testimony to the power of our Lord at work in the world today.

In the end, Agnes wrote much of her own book. It is story of a woman whose faithful obedience to God's call enabled her to accomplish great things. May God bless the reading of this story of faith.

A.J. "Augie" Hoeger
1997

