

Chapter One

At 12:20 a.m., December 9, 1941, Pastor John Scott Holladay sat in his office with his pregnant wife, Marie, patiently watching their 11-year-old son, John Scott Jr., Jacky, fine tune their short-wave radio, searching for the signal from Singapore.

Frustrated with waiting, finding something else to talk about, Pastor John said, “We’ve been here for thirteen years. We’ve nearly finished building the hospital, and now we may not be able to complete it.” He stretched forward, eager to help Jacky tune the radio. He chomped down, held back, and watched.

Jacky slowly turned the large, black knob, finding only squelch and static.

Marie tugged John’s arm and dragged him back into his chair. “Jacky’s better at this than either of us.” She pasted on her reassuring smile, reminding him that he’d previously delegated all radio responsibilities to their son.

He smiled and relaxed. *She’s right, again.*

By then, his office had jammed with members of their small staff and their families.

He nodded at Kamonchrisporntip, his assistant pastor. The name roughly meant, heart and mind in Christ's blessing. He'd changed his family name right after John baptized him more than eleven years earlier.

John had no clue about their given names. The Thai people never used them. They commonly used nicknames. His assistant pastor's nickname was Preecha, meaning intelligence or wisdom. The name fit in both English and Siamese. Preecha was smart, and he loved to preach the Gospel.

John decided to fill them all in, again. "The Empire of Japan is expanding and setting up defensible perimeters. Now, yesterday, they've invaded Thailand. I don't . . . Nobody knows what Phibun will do."

Preecha said, "I think he will do what he thinks is best for Siam."

"Thailand," said John, reminding Preecha of how their military dictator, Phibun, had recently changed the ancient name of their country. At the time, they'd all questioned why he would do such a thing. Thailand had long been Japan's name for Siam.

None of that mattered anymore. News over the previous two days had been filled with reports of aggression by the Empire of Japan. They'd attacked the U. S. territories of the Philippines, Midway Island, Guam, Wake Island, and the Hawaiian Islands. They'd also attacked Hong Kong and Malaya, both colonies of the United Kingdom.

Japan had been at war with China since 1937, and had entered into the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy on Sept. 27, 1940. Neighboring, French Indochina, had officially gone under the control of Vichy France.

After the signing of the Franco-German Armistice on June 22, 1940, Vichy France had gone into a wait-and-see policy, and were, more or less, cooperating with the Germans. This gave Japan leverage over French Indochina.

John felt the walls closing in.

A day earlier, December 8, 1941, Japan had landed troops in the south of Thailand.

The short-wave radio screeched and popped, finally tuning into the *Voice of Singapore*.

Jacky feathered the fine tuner knob.

The voice on the radio was in midsentence, “. . . transmitting from the chamber of the United States House of Representatives, where they’ve just announced President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Stand by.”

Applause preceded the familiar voice of the American president. "Mister Vice President, and Mister Speaker, and members of the Senate and the House of Representatives: Yesterday, December seven, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

“The United States was at peace with that nation, and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government, and its Emperor, looking toward maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American Island of Oahu, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States, and his colleague, delivered to our Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. And, while this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war, or of armed attack.

“It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan will make it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time, the Japanese Government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

“The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

“Yesterday, the Japanese Government also launched an attack on Malaya.

“Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.

“Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam.

“Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.

“Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island.

“Last night, the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

“Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday speak for themselves. The people of the United States

have already formed their opinions, and will understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

“As Commander-in-Chief of the army and navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

“Always will be remembered, the character of the onslaught against us.

“No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people, in their righteous might, will win through to absolute victory.

“I believe I interpret the will of the Congress, and of the people, when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost, but will make very certain that this form of treachery shall never endanger us again.

“Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger.

“With confidence in our armed forces – with the abounding determination of our people – we will gain the inevitable triumph – so help us God.

“I ask that the Congress declare that, since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.”

The Singapore reporter came back on the air to assure the stability of Singapore, and to welcome America into what had suddenly become World War II.

Under the Tripartite Pact, Hitler’s Nazi Germany and Mussolini’s Fascist Italy would certainly declare war against the United States.

Pastor John took a deep breath. “God help us all.” He stood and looked at Preecha, their doctor, two of their nurses, at Marie, and at Jacky. “I’m tired.”

He left his office, crossed the small courtyard, and retreated into the shelter of his family’s bungalow. He walked across the raised teak floor into their bedroom, dropped to his knees, dropped facedown onto the floor, and spread his arms wide, reaching out to God. “Lord Jesus, what are we to do?”

The door opened in the outer room, accompanied by the soft voices of Marie and Jacky.

John touched his forehead to the floor. "Protect our family, Lord, and keep us safe. Protect this, Thy flock, and this, Thy mission. Guide our path, Lord, through this treacherous time, that we might continue in Thy service.

"Amen, and Amen."

He climbed back to his feet.

Marie entered, leaving the door open. "The staff is frightened. They've never seen you like this." She softly stroked his chest. "Neither have I."

John leaned down and kissed her forehead. "Let's get some sleep. Things always look better in the morning."

She turned on their single table lamp, crossed to the small wall mirror, and unpinned her nurse's cap. She set it on their single night table and turned her back.

He unbuttoned the back of her nurse's gown and helped her undress.

Nearly eight months pregnant, and she was still beautiful. This pregnancy wasn't as big as Jacky's had been, but her belly was big.

How could they travel with her pregnancy?

“I am so happy to be married to you.” He cupped her face and kissed her gently.

Good night.

She knew him too well, reading his face. “You’re right. Things will look brighter in the morning. They always do.”

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John woke around 5:00 a.m., his usual time, and the gloom of the night before had vanished. With the new dawn came renewed hope. He’d been refreshed. He knew, in his heart, that if Marie hadn’t confirmed it, it might not have happened. She seldom made predictions, but when she did, they nearly always came true. It didn’t matter that he’d said it a moment earlier.

He stepped out to their small, private garden adjacent to their bedroom, clasped his hands over the porch railing, and bowed his head under his divine Host. “All blessings in Heaven and on earth to God and Jesus.

“Bless us now, Lord Jesus; this, your flock in Chiang Mai. Bless them, Lord, during this treacherous time, and keep them safe. Bless our family, Lord, as we prepare

to evacuate in front of an angry, evil empire. Bless Marie's pregnancy and bless our unborn child. Guide us and keep us safe. In Jesus name we pray. Amen, and Amen."

He and Marie had grown to love the people of Thailand, their eternal optimism, their persistent choice to be happy, and especially their collective joy in their salvation through Jesus Christ.

He turned inside, dressed quickly, and woke Marie. "We need to get packed. Just bring what we need. We'll be traveling light. We're leaving at 6:00 a.m., tomorrow morning."

He lifted and helped his very pregnant, sleepy-eyed wife sit on the edge of the bed.

"Fix yourself and Jacky something to eat, then get over to the clinic and help them form a plan for evacuation."

She blinked in his direction, still looking sluggish.

"They need to evacuate, sometime after we're gone. We're leaving tomorrow morning."

She gazed up at him, still sleepy-eyed.

“Are you awake?”

She rubbed her face with both hands, looked up at him, and nodded, finally paying attention.

“This mission needs to evacuate, after we’ve gone. The Japanese might come north. They’ll want to block the Burma Road. Our people need to be ready. I need for you to help them make plans.”

Marie nodded and extended both arms.

John helped her to stand.

She squeezed his hands, let go, and pushed him away. “Good morning.”

“It is.” John turned out of their bedroom, crossed the living room, and opened their front door wide.

Early light and fresh morning air flooded in. He left the door open and strolled across the stone paved courtyard, gratified by what they’d all accomplished over the previous thirteen years.

At the bottom of the gently sloping courtyard stood their three largest buildings, the chapel, the busy clinic, and the school, all built of hewn limestone. Their overlapping

walls and roof spans blocked his view of the busy street below. The new hospital, connected to the back of the clinic, had a street entrance. It would have soon opened to any in need. It certainly would have opened doors to evangelize.

Maybe after the war, God willing.

White stucco cottages mingled with giant trees, wild orchids, and big-leafed philodendron, wove their way up the slope on both sides of descending courtyard. The wide, overhanging, red tile roofs wrestled their way toward sunlight from under tall teak and mango trees, adding perceptive depth to their mission community. *Beautiful.*

Thank you, Lord. He swiped a tear from his cheek.

He would miss this place, inspired by the Lord, and all the work they'd done.

He knocked at the front door of Preecha's small cottage.

Sukhon, Preecha's pretty young wife, opened the door. "Pastor John. Good morning, sir."

John smiled, projecting calm. "Good morning, Sukhon."

Preecha opened the door wide and stood behind his wife, surprised to be summoned so early. "Yes, sir." He pulled his wife aside. "Please, come in."

“No, no. Sorry to disturb you so early. It’s going to be a long day.” He turned sideways, beckoning Preecha to come outside.

Preecha kissed his wife’s forehead, stepped outside, and closed the door.

John asked, “Is the bus running?”

“Yes, sir, but we need one tire in back.”

“What about Thaksin?” Thaksin served as bus driver and handyman.

“He’s okay. Dengue all gone for now.”

“Ask him to get the bus in good order today. Fill the gas tank, change the oil, fill the tires with air, get two five-gallon cans of extra gas, and two cans of fresh water. Early tomorrow, we’re heading up to Taunggyi, then across the mountains to the railroad.”

“Myanmar?”

“That’s right.”

“Ah! Good for you. Sukhon speak good Bamar.” The Bamar were far-and-away the majority of Burma’s population.

John hadn’t thought about that. One of those small items to remind him that God had known beforehand. Sukhon was in the right place at just the right time. He smiled

and nodded. "I need for you to send runners over to the Baptist Church, and down to the Methodist and Catholic Missions. They all have American clergy. It's about 350 miles to Taumgyi. Maybe that far again to cross over to the Burma Road. If it's still running, the railroad can take us down to Rangoon. Tell them we're leaving at 6:00 a.m., tomorrow, first come, first served. We can only carry sixteen passengers. With us, you, Thaksin, and your wives, we have room for ten more. Thaksin will drive. He's number seventeen. We won't have room for a lot of luggage."

Preecha nodded and turned to leave.

John hooked his arm. "After you get that done, call everybody into the chapel. We'll have a prayer session, and a final meeting at noon today."

* * *

By noon, their small chapel had filled to overflowing. John, Marie, and Jacky squeezed through those standing in the aisle, saying hello, touching shoulders, shaking hands. Some smiled, glowing with faith. Others wore wrinkled faces, fraught with worry.

John would miss them all. He climbed two steps onto the altar and turned to face his congregation.

Marie and Jacky stood in back, near the entry, quietly saying their goodbyes.

John said, "Thank you for coming."

The chapel grew quiet. Traffic noises seeped in from the street outside.

"I've called you here to report on the events of the last three days. The Empire of Japan is now at war with the United States and the British Empire. As American citizens, I, Marie, and Jacky will depart for home, early tomorrow morning. Should God allow, we will see all of you again."

He waited for their murmurs to die, and for their eyes to return.

"If Japanese troops should come north into Chiang Mai, you should stay clear of them. They are unpredictable and are proving to be brutal in their treatment of others. They are not Christian, and their actions defy the teaching of Buddha. If they come up here, stay in your homes.

"After we are gone, there will be no way to pay those who work here. If you choose to volunteer your services, the Lord's joy will reward you. Of His unspeakable joy, you are already aware."

He looked from face to face. He'd baptized most of them.

He swallowed the lump in his throat, but he could not block his tears. He blinked and they tumbled down his cheeks. He wiped them away. “We have entered into dark times. Let us pray.”

He waited for his congregation to bow their heads before he bowed his. “Lord, guide us and guard us through this dark period. Protect this, thy flock, and bring them peace in their ever-growing faith. Shield them, Lord, from the forces of evil, and bring them safely to the other side.”

He looked at their still bowed heads, “Amen! And, Amen again.”

Their heads turned up, looking at him, waiting for more.

“If any of you know other Americans or British in the area, we’ll be leaving at six, tomorrow morning.” He had seen other Caucasians from time to time. “Our bus can only take ten more passengers. It will be first come, first served.”

He shook hands on his way out, as his congregation pressed in on all sides, kissing his hands and touching him.

Lord, protect them and keep them safe.