

# THE ECHO

THE  
WORLD  
RADIO  
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FELLOWSHIP,  
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## THE AUCA EPIC January 8, 1956

Monday, January 9th, a special prayer meeting was called for noon time on the compound of HCJB. All that anyone knew was that something was wrong in Shell Mera and the jungle. By that same evening it was fairly certain that Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, Jim Elliott and Pete Fleming were in trouble. They had made radio contact with Marge Saint on Sunday at noon and then nothing more was heard from them.

Monday was the Off the Record Program at HCJB. Dr. Clarence Jones prepared an official announcement concerning the five missing missionaries and it was broadcast at intervals beginning at 6:45 p.m. January 9th. In the meantime, Dr. Paul Roberts, John Lindscoog and Abe Van Der Puy spent a considerable time at the U. S. Embassy asking for a rescue squad from Panama.

Tuesday morning Abe Van Der Puy, Jack Shalanko along with Don Johnston and Bub Borman of S.I.L. left for Shell Mera. Dr. Paul Roberts took his place at his radio; Ben Cummings took his recording equipment to record all the reports as they came over the jungle network. Dr. Clarence Jones stood by to send out the English releases by air; Bob Savage and Ray Loyola worked to translate the news bulletins into Spanish and Phyl Carlson transcribed from the tape recorder to the typewriter. Down in Shell Mera, Marge Saint stationed herself at the controls of the jungle network where she remained until Friday, January 13. The other wives were brought in from their different jungle stations. Dr. Art Johnston was already in Shell Mera and he with Jack Shalanko joined the ground search party. Abe Van Der Puy became liason man, with Larry Montgomery of S. I. L. coordinating activities. Abe Dyck, Mick Fick, and Bob Hart manned the Aranjuno mission station. Harvey Bostrom and C. E. Carlson of C. M. & A were also on hand helping. Every mission in the area banded together in the search.

Russ Camp was using his amateur radio set to make contacts through to the parents of the five men involved. John Lindscoog maintained the S.I.L. radio contact in Quito.

Tuesday morning a body was sighted on the river beach. That same day Abe Van Der Puy sent out his first informative release. These reports were relayed to the world. We quote from his first release: "On Friday, January 6, 1956, the first friendly contact with the savage Auca Indians was made on the beach of the Curaray River by five evangelical missionaries. The five men were Nathanael Saint of the Missionary

Aviation Fellowship; Edward McCully, Peter Fleming, and James Elliott of Christian Missions in Many Lands; and Roger Youderian of the Gospel Missionary Union. The last word heard from these five men came at noon on Sunday, January 8, when they indicated that everything was going well and that they would give a further report by radio at 4:30 p.m. the same day. They did not keep the scheduled report. John Keenan of The MAF flew over the site on the Curaray River the next morning and found the Piper Family Cruiser the men had used to get to the Aucas. The plane was standing on the beach with the fabric



stripped off it.

"We believe that a few paragraphs of a letter written by Nate Saint on Dec. 18th adequately express the purpose and feeling of the entire group of men, and give a very justifiable reason for risking their lives to reach these savage Aucas: 'Would that we could comprehend the lot of these stone-age people who live in mortal fear of ambush on the jungle trail-- those to whom the bark of a gun means sudden mysterious death -- those who think all the men in the world are killers like themselves. If God would grant us the vision, the word sacrifice would disappear from our lips and thoughts; we would hate the things that now seem so dear to us; our lives would suddenly be too short, we would despise time-robbing distractions and charge the onery with all our energies in the name of Christ. . . .'

"For some years now a number of evangelical missionaries in Ecuador have been deeply concerned about reaching the Auca Indians. A party went in search of them byalsa raft down one of the jungle rivers, only to be ambushed by the Indians at a river bend when the current of the river carried the raft near to the bank. Fortunately all the people on the raft escaped without any serious injury. Then during the past year, it has been possible to be in contact with four Auca women who fled from their own tribe.

". . . This particular incident begins with sighting the Auca Indians from the air on Sept. 29, 1955. From that time forward, the five fellows involved made very thorough, ingenious, and remarkable preparations to establish contact with the Aucas. The journal of flights, carefully kept by the pilot, Nate Saint, indicated that from October 6, 1955 until the end of the year, a total of 12 flights were made to the village of the Aucas -- about ten minutes flying time from Arajuno. On all these 12 flights gifts were freely dropped from the plane or sent down to the Indians by the unique bucket method perfected by Nate Saint. . . The regular flights, made about a week apart, seemed to make the Indians increasingly friendly.

"After a number of trips the Indians became understanding enough to return some gifts of their own. The first such incident occurred on November 12 when the Indians placed a feather crown and some combs in

the bucket as their return gift. On six other occasions the Indians returned gifts including a parrot, a large black bird, and some of their own foodstuffs such as yuca, fish, cooked meat, etc.

"There were at least three other things which the Indians did which gave evidence of a certain degree of friendship. 1. They cut down large trees around their village, making a clearing so that it would be easier to drop gifts to them. 2. They made a crude model airplane and put it on the roof of one of their houses. 3. They built a platform about 20 feet high from which they could establish better contact with the low-flying airplane.

"Based upon the increasing friendliness of the Aucas, the five men now made specific preparations to fly to a beach on the Curaray River, just a few miles from the Auca village. The entrance was made on Tuesday, January 3, 1956. Nate Saint wrote concerning the difficulties of landing and taking off those first days and added, 'We find that we have a friendlier feeling for these fellows all the time. We must not let that lead us to carelessness. It is no small thing to try to bridge between the 20th Century and the stone age. God help us to take care.'"

January 6th, a diary entry by Pete Fleming reads: "This is a great day for the advance of the Gospel of Christ in Ecuador. About 11:15 this morning, an Auca voice boomed out of a barrage of unintelligible excited sounds to give us the long-awaited-for and much-prayed-for first contact with these savages. . . . Suddenly from directly across the river, a strong masculine voice began jabbering at Ed, and immediately three Aucas stepped out into the open on the opposite bank, two women and a man. My heart jumped and thumped wildly as we walked slowly to join Ed and to shout phrases with him." (Note: Jim Elliott went into the river to meet the Aucas. Jim caught them by the hand and led them back to the fellows.) "The man was a young fellow 20 or so, the girl younger, and the woman perhaps 30 or so. They were completely naked except for a G-string around the waist. They showed neither fear or comprehension of what cameras are, and some excellent shots were taken.



The man was interested but not forward, completely unafraid and unembarrassed and at home. Soon the fellow began to show interest in the plane, and we guessed from his talk that he was willing to go to the Auca village to call his comrades.

"We put a shirt on him, and he climbed into the plane with no sign of any emotion except eagerness to do his part. Nate taxied down the strip and took off while the fellow shouted all the way. After circling and shouting briefly, Nate landed again thinking to give the fellow a rest before making the flight to Terminal City (Auca Village.) Nothing doing he was ready to go then. I guess he shouted all the way over and back and thoroughly enjoyed the trip."

These diaries and the pictures taken, are only available now because Nate Saint and one of the missionaries flew out each night and had the forethought to take out the film they had taken each day as well as flight journals and diary.

By Wednesday, January 11, two bodies had been sighted. Sam Saint, brother of Nate arrived from the States, as well as Grady Parrott, the President of MAF. Mrs. Faith Turner of our group went down to help the women and Frank Cook to help identify the fellows. That same day the Air Rescue Squadron under the direction of Capt. DeWitt arrived. Two C-47's containing a small helicopter and service crew made up the group. The same morning the land party was made up and composed the following missionaries: Frank Drown, Morris Fuller, Dee Short, Jack Skalanko, Art Johnston, Don Johnson and Bud Berman with 13 Ecuadorian soldiers and some Indians.

The next morning the ground party was flown to Aranjuno and at 10:45 a.m. started out. The Quecha-speaking Indians, all part of Ed McCully's congregation were carrying packs to 40 lbs. The first five or six hours were overland and involved sliding down banks, wading through five or six rivers. They reached the junction of the Oglan and Curaray river and there they spent the night.

The canoes were prepared for travel and at 7:30 a.m. Thursday Jan 12th they went by water. Ten to nine that morning John Keenan flew over and made radio contact with the ground party telling them that the two canoes and 8 Indians who had gone up river before were now returning. At 10:45 in the middle of the river, the

the party met the Indians who had gone up to the site. They brought back with them a radio from the tree house, a tennis shoe and a wrist watch. At three the helicopter landed and the pilot talked with the ground party.

By this time, the Auca Epic was world news. On Thursday morning, Dr. Jones had a two-way point to point contact with Dave Garroway on his U. S. nation-wide Television program. Dr. Jones read the report as Abe Van Der Puy had sent it, and then Dave Garroway asked, "Can these people of Stone Age ever be evangelized." Dr. Jones was inspired to answer, "They have a heart, and God can reach their hearts."

Abe Van Der Puy's news bulletin of Thur. Jan. 12th contained the following: "A helicopter searching party that was able to go to the site today has definitely established that there are four unidentified bodies on the beach and in the water near the camp site of the five evangelical missionaries who made an all-out attempt to reach the savage Auca Indians with the Gospel."

In the meantime, four of the wives in Shell Mera waited. Marilou McCully returned to Aranjuno to wait there. And as they waited in Shell Mera, everyone was witness to the fact of perfect peace among this noble group of young women. The Air Rescue Squadron testified to the fact that part of their work ordinarily is to care for the hysterical women -- but to the contrary in this case. They, the women were concerned for the welfare of the rescue squadron. Wonderful peace and calm reigned. Of course there were tears, but shining faces, courage, and complete submission to God's will was the proof that these women, like their husbands, know God.

Thursday night there was just a glimmer of hope still left that one missionary might still be alive. So the ground party and the helicopter crew laid plans for their rendezvous on Friday morning. That night the ground party slept on a stretch of beach just 80 feet wide. On one side of them the treacherous jungle and on the other the river, right in Auca territory. The poison of a thousand insect bites added discomfort. The Indians made banana leaf houses and the group posted guards, 2 soldiers, 2



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Indians and 2 missionaries on 2 hour shifts. But night duty in the Auca jungle only emphasizes the fact that everything is moving and everything is moving toward you. The night was moonless and long.

Friday morning, January 13, the ground party started off at 5:30 a.m. and by 10:45 they had reached the site. The ground party which had been organized by Frank Drown went into action. It was a sad sight. The plane was beat up. Dr. Art Johnston told the final chapter of the story. He added, "It was a heart-sinking sight." The common grave was dug, the bodies recovered. At this point it became difficult to direct the Indians as they became listless and afraid. A tropical storm accompanied the scene. The bank of black clouds and strong winds made it dark at midday. But worse than that, an oppression fell upon the group. It was hard to move, hard to understand, to give, or follow out orders. The Indians which accompanied the group retreated, went down to the beach covering themselves. They have a superstition that the Aucaas when planning an attack can bring on a sudden storm and they were resigned to their fate. The rains filled the open grave and it was with great difficulty that the four were laid to rest. For although five were absolutely established to be dead, only four bodies were recovered. And there, at the request of the five wives; Marjorie Saint, Betty Elliott, Olive Fleming, Marilou McCully and

Barbara Yeuderian, the missionary martyrs were buried beneath the tree house they had built. We could not tell this story without mentioning Playa, the Cristian Indian, who helped to the very end.

By this time it was three in the afternoon and the party was anxious to leave Auca Territory. Because of the extraordinary circumstances there had been no opportunity for a ceremony at the graveside. But that night when the party gathered on another beach out of Auca territory, the missionaries gathered in a circle in one of the banana leaf houses for their memorial service. The life photographer stood at the opening of the makeshift house recording what they said on his wrist tape recorder. This same commercial photographer was heard to say that because of what he had seen and heard, his life could never be the same.

On Saturday the five wives were flown over the incident site in the C-47 of the U. S. Navy. Mrs. Faith Turner accompanied them and together they had their own memorial service where comments like these were made: "I think that's the most beautiful little cemetery in all the world." "I know of no better tombstone than the MAF plane." "They lost the battle but won the victory."

Sunday, a group from Quito flew down to Spell Mera to conduct a Memorial service; later on Betty Elliott held her own service in Shandia for her husband, Jim; Sunday night, Jan. 15th, the "Back Home Hour" of HCJB became an hour-long Memorial Service. And since then at least ten duplicate programs have been sent to areas for re-broadcast. In the first week over 150 letters were received at HCJB, to say nothing of all the cables, and telephone calls, telling of the impact of this incident.

A trust fund has been set up. It is called Five Missionary Martyrs Trust Fund, Box 385, Washington, D.C., or c/o The Voice of the Andes, 21 Spadina Road, Toronto, Canada.

The night before the five men started out on this venture - that was Monday, Jan. 2nd, they gathered to sing and pray. One of the verses of one of the hymns was:

"We rest on Thee our shield and our defender. Thine is the battle, Thine shall be the praise. When passing through the gates of pearly splendor Victors, we rest with Thee through endless days."

From this beautifully prophetic hymn, Abe Van Der Puy has chosen the phrase, "GATES OF SPLENDOR" for the title of the book he has been requested to write. He will begin work on this book in February.

The ground party found a lance used by the Aucaas with a portion of Spanish Scripture wrapped around its tip. The Scripture was torn from a Spanish N. T. one of the gifts of the missionaries to the Aucaas. The Scripture page around the lance point found its target. But God says, "My Word shall not return unto me void." And all of us in Ecuador are confident that God's Word and love will soon pierce the heart of an Auca Indian.