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## OSWALD GOULTER: FROM NARRABRI TO NANKING

Missionary and prisoner of war

11

## OSWALD JOHN GOULTER FROM NARRABRI TO NANKING - MISSIONARY AND PRISONER OF WAR

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The Churches of Christ in NSW will consider for publication short papers on historical and theological topics relevant to the development of Churches of Christ. The publication of a paper does not constitute an official endorsement of the views expressed therein.

# Oswald John Goulter (1890-1985)

Oswald Goulter was challenged to become a missionary after hearing H.G. Harward preach on the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) at Colac, Victoria. He later came into association with Churches of Christ through a house church started by George and Gracie Carslake at Narrabri NSW in 1911. After hearing in his youth stories about the Boxer Rebellion, China was his chosen destination for mission service.

In January 1909, Oswald Goulter was in Market Square, Colac in Victoria, when he saw a man standing on a box near a tent speaking with “forcefulness and poise.” Wilfred Powell, Oswald Gould’s biographer described Goulter’s reaction as follows:

Oswald liked the man’s straightforward manner, his clear presentation, and—as it seemed to the interested hearer—his reasonable message supported by careful use of quotations from the New Testament. He listened to the preacher and accepted some of his tracts which were simply printed copies of some of the man’s sermons. These Oswald read avidly, and the inquiries they aroused were pursued with vigour. The man standing by the tent was the state evangelist of the churches of Christ in Victoria, H.G. Harward.<sup>i</sup>



*Image: A young Oswald Goulter, student at Phillips Theological Seminary*

Harward’s soapbox address was on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The call to “Go and make disciples of all nations” became an imperative of Goulter’s life.<sup>ii</sup>

## Beginnings

Oswald John Goulter was born in 1890. One of a family of eight, he grew up in the small village of Irrewillipe some fourteen kilometres from Colac in south-western Victoria. Nominally Baptist, the family attended a small Wesleyan church some five kilometres away at Barongarook. Goulter’s life was moulded by this early background in a farming community. In 1905, the family moved to Colac, and it was here the young Goulter had his fateful encounter with H.G. Harward. Goulter was a studious

youth and is said to have milked the cows with a book propped up in front of him. However, having not completed his secondary education, he was unable to matriculate to agricultural college. At one stage, he ran his father's farm while batching alone in a hut. This was an indication of the independence and perseverance which was later to save his life.

## **To Narrabri NSW**

In 1911, Oswald's brothers Arthur and Harold took up farming allotments in Narrabri, north-western NSW. Oswald, an adventurous spirit, joined them in a temporary capacity to help them become established. This move brought the three Goulter brothers into contact with George Carslake and his family who had moved there from Balaklava in South Australia at about the same time. The Carslakes had a long association with Churches of Christ and had set up the Lord's Table on the front veranda of their home and invited others to join them. Oswald and his brothers attended. As described by Powell, these were happy, sociable occasions:

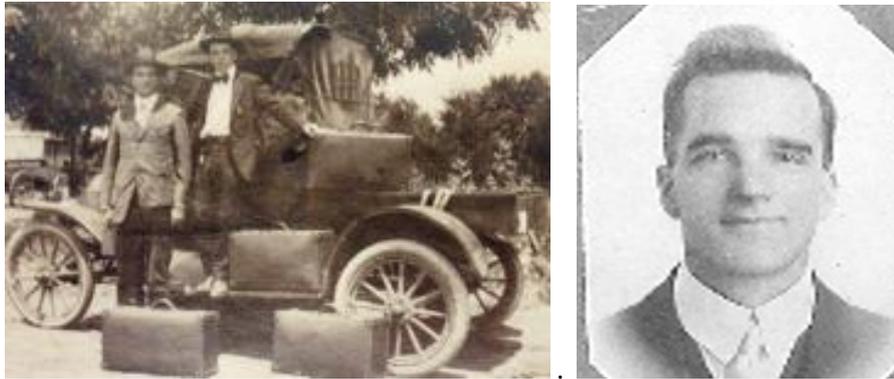
The morning schedule included some Bible Study, an informal service with words of edification, and the observance of the Lord's Supper. An ample dinner followed, and, in the afternoons, there were hours of good-natured conversation which shifted freely from farm problems to questions about the church and the Christian life.<sup>iii</sup>

When numbers grew, the little house meeting was shifted to the Narrabri School of Arts, and E.J. Waters, serving as evangelist at the Church of Christ at Inverell (180 kms away), was invited to undertake some occasional meetings. Waters conducted a brief mission at Narrabri, resulting in the three Goulter brothers being baptised in the Namoi River.<sup>iv</sup> Powell records that the call of discipleship "had been heard with increasing clarity since his (Oswald's) encounter in Colac with the evangelist by the tent," and Oswald set his heart on mission work. But he had good examples in the call to mission work, as two of his sisters had already been drawn into this work themselves.

## **To America for Training**

Goulter decided to enrol at a missionary training college in Adelaide, which his sister Annie had attended.<sup>v</sup> However, he considered that he needed a deeper study of the Bible if he was to present the true meaning of the gospel against prevailing liberalism. On a visit home to Colac in 1914, he spoke to the local Church of Christ pastor, American-trained Gilbert Chandler, about the pursuit of higher education. Chandler recommended Phillips University in Enid Oklahoma, where a new Christian Church-related school had been established. Since funding was a problem, Chandler's advice that there were numerous small churches in Oklahoma looking for student ministers was an attraction. For six months, Goulter took odd jobs and saved up enough money for a 'steerage' class fare to San Francisco. To save money, he made his way by a devious route to Enid, camping out on the journey as needed.

Enid was little more than a prairie town, but he was welcomed there by Christian Church members. However, the situation at the College was challenging, it being understaffed and yet unaccredited. Further, without the prerequisite qualifications, Goulter found himself looking at a six-year training term. Fortunately, with allowances for courses undertaken in Australia, Goulter completed his high school education in 1916 and plunged into his college course.



*Images (l-r): Goulter and friend Wilfred Powell of New Zealand worked their way through college by selling aluminium kitchen cooking pans;<sup>vi</sup>  
Oswald Goulter, 1919 in the Phillips College magazine*

During his studies, Goulter heard some of the great visiting Disciples of Christ, but the clarion call by the man “standing near the tent” (H.G. Harward) was still clear. Goulter ministered as he studied, sometimes to two churches at one time, and was simultaneously ministered to by his congregations. It was tough, but he had the motivation. Powell records that on one occasion Goulter surprised a handful of locals at Deer Creek church, having walked through the snow for ten miles to preach.<sup>vii</sup> While serving in a pastorate at Avard (1915-17), Goulter met Irene Minerva Goucher who was the pianist and music leader in the local Christian Church. They married in 1918, making their home in Enid. Irene’s family, like the Goulters, were pioneer famers in the area. This rich background in farming and agriculture was to serve the Goulters well in their missionary work in China.

## Postgraduate Study

Goulter’s earlier thirst for a deep theological knowledge had not been assuaged by his time at Phillips, thus he decided to undertake postgraduate study at Yale Divinity School, the foremost such school in the United States. The fees were a problem, but a cash prize in a Y.M.C.A essay competition enabled him to proceed. Significantly, his winning essay was entitled *The Significance of Foreign Missionary Enterprise in Making the World*, focusing on the role of missions in helping to reshape the world following the horrors of the Great War. In the autumn of 1919, Oswald enrolled at Yale, moving with his wife, Irene and their baby daughter Lovena, to New Haven, Connecticut. While attending Yale, Goulter ministered at the century old Bethany Congregational Church (now First Church of Christ Congregational).

His time at Yale and Bethany was one of broadening ecumenical experience but he never lost sight of his goal: missions. For his B.D. graduation in 1921, Oswald presented a thesis entitled *Adapting a Program of Religious Education to the Needs of the China Mission Field*, prompted to go to China after learning as a young man about the Boxer Rebellion, a violent anti-foreign and anti-Christian upheaval which took place in China between 1898 and 1900. With China in mind, Oswald began studying Mandarin. It was now almost ten years since Goulter had wrestled with the question of his future vocation. In high hopes, he applied to the United Christian Mission Society (UCMS)<sup>viii</sup> but was advised to take special training at the College of Missions in Indianapolis.

Moving to the College of Missions, Goulter won another essay competition, this one conducted for foreign students by the (US) Intercollegiate Prohibition Society. His essay, *Prohibition in America—a World Object Lesson*, brought with it a cash award of \$US100.00. It was reprinted by the Churches of Christ NSW Temperance Committee in 1923 and distributed to the churches.<sup>ix</sup> At the College of Missions, the Goulters met others bound for the mission field, some of whom became lifelong friends. Finally, after a further year of specialist study, they were on their way (July 1922) to China via Australia.

## Arrival in China

After their brief visit to Australia, Oswald, Irene, and little Lovena arrived in China in October 1922. It was not clear on arrival what work Oswald would do: at one stage, he aspired to be a medical missionary, but he was not trained for that. They travelled to Nanjing (Nanking) where the administrative headquarters of the Disciples' China Christian Mission (CCM) was located.

Nanking, on the Yangtze River, was a city of several million people, an industrial and textile centre and capital of the Kiangsu province. It served for a time as the national capital. The Mission there commenced around 1886 and despite some hostility towards “foreign devils” (Westerners) it was well established and had opened stations in several outlying regions. One was Luchowfu, another, Chuh-sien. Initially, the Goulters stayed in Nanking and attended classes at the Nanking Language School. Obtaining proficiency in a language that has around ten thousand characters was a tedious but necessary job. The Goulters found themselves in a bewildering world of contrasts and challenges. In May 1923, Goulter wrote of this world in a letter to his sisters in Colac, Victoria. He said:

Being yet students at the language school we have had but limited experience in actual work among the Chinese themselves .... We blush to think how inadequate and almost childish our conception of this great land was before we saw it. What surprised us most is that China is not a great barren waste filled with evil men as we somehow vaguely imagined, but a land of scenic beauty and uncommon interest, the home of human beings like ourselves. Truly God did not forget China when he created the

world... [but] ...where poverty, superstition and ignorance hold sway...there are sure to be places that are unlovely. Chinese cities are tragic proof of this. Filthy streets, filthy people, filthy customs make them eyesores to the Westerner....Yet with all their unloveliness Chinese cities are wonderfully interesting. The present time has been very appropriately named the Chinese Renaissance...it is true that there are factories beginning to revolutionise the economic life of the Chinese...But the revolution is taking place so slowly that the greater mass of people is unaware of it.<sup>x</sup>

Twelve months later, the *North Western Courier* of Narrabri published an account of the great educational changes occurring in China written by “Mr. O.J. Goulter, formerly of West Narrabri.” In this account, Goulter expresses concern about the radicalisation of the young and that the Christian Church had not done more in education. He predicted a great future for China and presciently supported an assessment by American statesman John Hay that “China controls the future of the world.”<sup>xi</sup> Goulter’s reference to radicalisation of the young may allude to growing political problems linked to the emergence of communist and nationalist elements. Nanking, however, was safe for the time being.

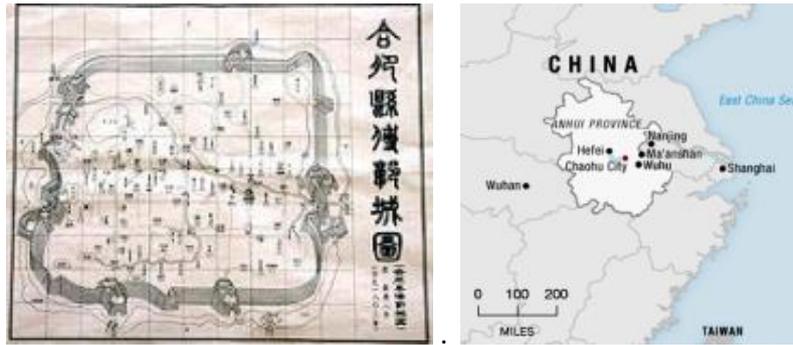
## Work at Luchowfu

On completion of their basic language course, the Goulters were ready for assignment in the field. But Irene’s confinement<sup>xii</sup> was approaching. The family were sent to Kuling, a mountain area in Kiangsu province, where missionaries were sometimes sent for rest and recreation. As it turned out, Irene’s confinement went badly and in August 1923, the Goulters lost a baby boy. Irene was ill for a time but recovered, and the family were able to take up their assigned roles in the old walled city of Luchowfu (later Hofei, now Hefei) in Anhui province. Luchowfu was an ancient walled town (population around 30,000) of historic importance.<sup>xiii</sup> The Disciples were the only Protestant missionaries in the region and had established several institutions (a hospital, and boys’ and girls’ schools) and built up a loyal Chinese congregation.



Coe Memorial Girls' School, Luchowfu

Image: Coe Memorial Girls' School, Luchowfu



Images (l-r): Map of old Luchowfu (later Hefei now Hefei), showing ancient walls and rivulet or moat.; Anhui Province, showing Hefei (formerly Hofei and Luchowfu), Nanjing (Nanking) and Wuhu.

Goulter's primary role was that of an evangelist, with additional oversight of the maintenance of the buildings. Through its work in education and medicine, the Luchowfu mission had become well accepted in the wider community, which Goulter now took as his pastorate. Oswald refined his understanding of evangelism in China as being about "genuine Christian commitment, a concern for persons, careful education and familiarity with Chinese language and ways of thinking ... together with infinite patience and application."<sup>xiv</sup> Goulter began expanding the frontiers of his ministry, reopening a nearby church and seeking to plant new churches. He was warned, however, not to venture too far outside the district because of bandits. As Goulter's ministerial roles expanded, so too did Irene's family duties, having given birth to two girls. This was more of a blessing than a burden. The three girls learned the local dialect and became a means by which Irene could communicate with mothers and young families. Local nannies (amahs) brought into assist the family became close friends and were later of great assistance when the Goulters were faced with crises brought on by the Japanese and the Communists.

### Civil War and Anti-western Violence

In May 1925, nascent anti-western feeling erupted into violence after twelve Chinese students were killed in Shanghai by the International Settlement Police. This was a worrying time for the Goulters. Luchowfu remained peaceful but some students renounced their Christian allegiance. In the summer of 1926, Chiang Kai-shek, commander of the Nationalist army, launched an offensive against warlords and factions in the north. This culminated in the occupation of Nanking by his armies in March 1927. Stirred up by Communist agitators, rioting and looting broke out. For the time being, the Luchowfu missionaries were safe and carried out their normal duties but in early April, they were instructed by the American consul to "leave at once." The missionaries moved out of their homes (which were marked for confiscation by the army) and into the hospital, intending to leave the following morning. But Chinese friends woke the group around 1:00 am advising them to leave immediately.

Led by Goulter and Dr Douglas Corpron (from the hospital), everyone grabbed whatever they could carry and set out on the long walk to the river where hopefully they could catch boats down to the coast. They managed to persuade the gatekeeper of the walled city to let them out, and an assorted convoy of missionaries, children, helpers, Chinese carriers, and girls from the school (who wanted to stay with their teachers) set out in the pre-dawn. Reaching the river, the missionaries farewelled their helpers and secured two houseboats. Their progress was hampered by strong wind and by the efforts of the boatmen to avoid detection by soldiers on the riverbanks. It was at this stage it was discovered that essential baby food, canned milk etc., had been left behind in Luchowfu.



*Image: 'Flight from Hofei', Oswald Goulter, family and colleagues, 1927.*

Courageously, Oswald walked some fifteen miles back to the city to retrieve it. Outside the city walls, he found Christian friends who said that the missionaries' homes had been looted and their household goods destroyed. However, his friends managed to retrieve the baby food from the hospital and weighed down by the load, Goulter made his way back over slippery paths to the mooring area only to find that the boats, for safety reasons, were now anchored a half-mile from the shore. There was no alternative but for Goulter to strip down and wade out. Goulter and his precious cargo were eventually pulled exhausted from the water. Against their better judgement, the boatmen, who were still concerned about winds and weather, were persuaded to press on down the river.

The relief the missionaries felt at being on the move was short lived when soldiers on the shore commandeered their two boats. But an appeal to a high military officer resulted in permission to proceed. Then, during the night, warning shots forced them once again to the shore. Here, they were told that they would be killed the next day. Once again, an appeal to a higher-ranking officer was successful and they moved on. On April 16, 1927, the eight missionaries and five children arrived at a wharf on the Yangtze River near Wuhu. Standing in the middle of the river was a US gunboat.<sup>xv</sup> Given

temporary shelter on the gunboat, they were conveyed by freighter to Shanghai and onto the coast. While the missionaries' escape owed much to their courage and perseverance, the support of their numerous Chinese friends and supporters should not be overlooked. The Goulters then returned to the USA for a well-earned furlough, having spent almost five years in China.

## To the Philippines

At the expiration of their furlough, they "set their minds steadfastly" to return to China, but because faction fighting and banditry continued in many areas, the Missionary Society deemed it unwise for the Goulters to return, sending them instead to Laong on the northwest coast of Luzon in the Philippines. The contrast was striking. The weather was pleasant, the people friendly and responsive, and their love of music was appealing, especially to Irene, former pianist and worship leader at Avard Christian Church in Oklahoma. Oswald Goulter's primary responsibility was the pastoral oversight of a congregation that consisted of the students from the mission schools. Goulter preached, conducted Bible studies, and baptised those who were making commitments to Christ. Among those he baptised in the Laong River was his own daughter, Lovena. At that time, he must surely have thought of his own baptism many years before in the Namoi River on the other side of the world. As conditions improved in China, the opportunity came to return. What should they do? Stay at Laong, where the work was "pleasant" and the language less complex, or return to Luchowfu to a home that had been ransacked and where there were still pockets of unrest? Irene reflected that the need in Luchowfu was greater, and that there was an imperative to honour the huge investment that had been made in their mission and language training.

## Return to Luchowfu

On 22 October 1929, the Goulter family sailed from Manila to Shanghai.<sup>xvi</sup> In contrast to the Philippines, the weather in China was bitterly cold but the return to Luchowfu did not bring with it the anxieties of their evacuation. Their home was completely wrecked. Every pane of glass was smashed, and snow was beating in. All the furniture had been broken. All their bedding, crockery, personal effects and even Oswald's precious library had been stolen. The fruit trees outside had been chopped up for firewood. However, more than compensating for this was the warm cordiality with which they were greeted by the community. There was much celebratory feasting, speechifying and tea drinking. Dr and Mrs Corpron, with whom they were strongly associated also returned about this time. This brought most of the mission team together again. Sadly, Mrs Corpron had guided her babies to safety during the evacuation only to see them die in the Philippines, thus the joy of reunion was overshadowed by great tragedy. Yet due to the diligence of local staff who had stayed at their posts, the community buildings, the hospital and the schools, had fared much better in the riots. Rather than move into this more secure accommodation, the Goulters decided to repair their own home, setting

about repairing broken furniture and securing carpenters and builders. Despite the relative security of Luchowfu, murderous gangs still roamed the countryside.

#### **“Women and Children must Evacuate Immediately”**

All this took its toll on Irene who suffered a nervous breakdown. As she was recovering, word was again received from the American consul for women and children to evacuate the area. This was a blessing in disguise for Irene. The single women decided to remain, but the mothers with children were evacuated to the coast. On the coast, following a strict fitness regimen which included ocean swimming, Irene regained her health. When the emergency was over, she was able to return to Luchowfu with the children.



*Image: Irene Goulter, Oswald's wife*

### **A Changed Approach to Mission**

The emergencies led to changes of emphases by the mission. The government had placed restrictions on teaching religion in schools and the mission concentrated more on relief and social reconstruction. Oswald Goulter changed his approach to evangelism. Reflecting on the fact that his constituents were rural poor, Goulter decided that an urban approach to evangelism was missing the mark. He concluded that proclamation would not be in words alone. “How can we expect them to hear the gospel in our utterance unless we can show Christian concern in ways they can understand?” he mused.<sup>xvii</sup> He concluded the way forward was to assist the people by improving their agricultural methods—better seed and improved farming techniques. This was ‘Goulter, the farm hand from Colac and Narrabri’ speaking, not Goulter the BD from Yale. Evangelism was reframed as demonstration, proclamation, and teaching (in that order). He recommended the appointment to the mission of an agricultural specialist. Efforts were made to improve pastures, crop yields and to introduce new crop varieties. Merino sheep were brought in from Australia to provide yarn for cheap and warm clothing. A cannery was set up to preserve and sell fruit.

With the departure (at least temporarily) of the Apocalyptic Horsemen of Conquest and War, it was inevitable that the Horseman of Famine would soon arrive, which he did in 1931, when the region experienced its worst ever floods, followed by drought and the destitution of most people. The innovative approach to evangelism was the right antidote. The longer-term aim was to make people self-sufficient. To this end, the now underutilised school buildings at Luchowfu were converted to a Rural Centre which focussed primarily on practical, agricultural training. At the invitation of village elders, rural institutes were set up in several centres. These provided a forum for the discussion of agricultural, hygiene and social issues.

Job creation was seen as part of the drive towards self-sufficiency. Goulter won contracts to build roads (he knew nothing about road building<sup>xviii</sup>), but labour was cheap and there was plenty of it available. The labourers were not paid much, little more than a few cents per day, but enough to buy food. Three miles of hard surface roads were built, and improvements made to a further six miles. It was enough to put money in the pockets of the labourers and improve access to markets and wharves. It is possible that Goulter's efforts to provide practical training and stimulate industry was the start of the revolution which saw the city grow tenfold in the following twenty years.<sup>xix</sup>

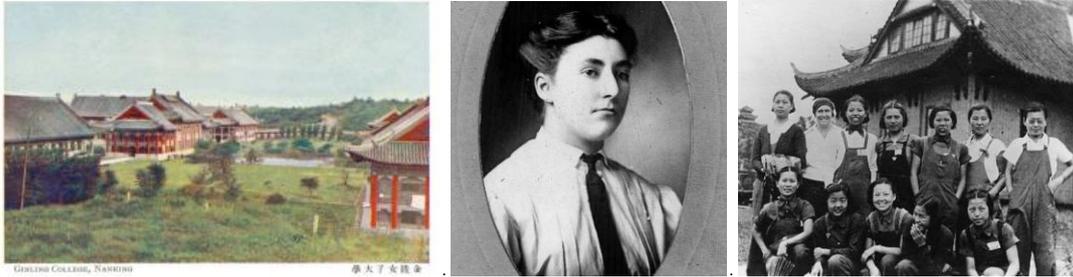
Despite the socio-economic situation, or perhaps because of it, the work of the church was prospering. Irene Goulter used her musical talent to help communicate the Christian faith. A choir was formed and created much interest. The Goulter home became a place for choral groups to meet and practise, or just sing informally. It was a means of improving social and language skills for participants. By the mid 1930s, threatening political and international problems reared their heads: Chiang Kai-shek launched offensives to wipe out banditry, and there were ominous developments in the north; the Japanese marched into Manchuria (north-eastern China) in 1931, and in 1934, the Communists under Mao Tse-tung, began their long march to the north.

## On Sabbatical

In 1936, the Goulters planned for another "sabbatical." After ensuring their ministries were in safe hands, the family departed for Europe in June. After a brief visit to Britain, they returned to the United States in September. The Goulters appreciated being reunited with family in Oklahoma and friends in Bethany, Connecticut, but mission was never far from Oswald's mind. He spent part of his sabbatical at Columbia University, New York, researching information relevant to his agricultural ministry. A thesis he wrote on his research earned him a second M.A. qualification. In 1937, the Japanese army streamed into northern China and a temporary alliance of the Nationalist and Red Armies was powerless to stop them.

In December 1937, the Japanese captured Nanking. The so-called "Rape of Nanking" is remembered to history as one of the world's greatest atrocities. Among those choosing to stay behind were four Disciple missionaries, including Wilhelmina 'Minnie' Vautrin, formerly the Principal of the Luchowfu girls' school. As President of Ginling College, she fought hard to keep the College a haven for young women during the rape of the city. It is estimated that through the College she had saved 10,000 women. But the lone struggle and weight of the atrocities bore down on her and she had a nervous breakdown. These days, her condition would be known as post-traumatic stress syndrome. Returning to the United States in April 1940, Minnie committed suicide a year to the day after she left Nanking.

Following the capture of Nanking and nearby Wuhu, the Japanese army turned its attention to Luchowfu.



*Image: Ginling College, Nanking (postcard); Ginling College President, Minnie Vautrin,<sup>xx</sup> Ginling College Girls pose before starting their 'Trek to the West,' a joint Ginling College - Chinese Government summer service educational program to villagers, road laborers and soldiers, c1938.*

## Return to China

The problems in China weighed heavily on the minds of the Goulters, but they were prevented by events from returning home to Luchowfu. A telegram from the US Consul to UCMS Headquarters, Indianapolis reported cryptically on the situation as follows:

The following are now in Hofei—Misses Wenona Wilkinson, Grace Young, Lyrel Teagarden and Mr. and Mrs. C. Burch. It is their present intention to maintain the services of Luchowfu Christian Hospital even in the event of hostilities....<sup>xxi</sup>

The Goulters used the delay to visit churches in the USA and enlist support for the suffering of China. Based on experience and the trickle of mail received, they knew an immediate requirement for the dislocated Chinese would be warm clothing, so they appealed to the churches for help. Bales and trunks of clothing poured in. In November 1938, they secured passage for their return to Asia. The bales of warm clothing were sent on by freighter. They were met in Shanghai by the Corprons. The men received permits from the Japanese Special Service Bureau to return to Luchowfu, now renamed Hofei.

Leaving their families, the two men went ahead, but Goulter was delayed at Wuhu by restrictions on his permit and returned to Shanghai. Dr Corpron's arrival at Hofei on Christmas Eve was greeted with wild enthusiasm. The hospital had maintained limited services despite bombings and restricted supplies, but the heavy workload took its toll on Acting Superintendent Burch, who was now in poor health. Meanwhile, back in Shanghai, Goulter sought to gain a permit to return to Hofei and to figure out how he could transport the numerous bales of clothing (which had arrived on the freighter) to the mission station. In the meantime, he was aware of local groups that were desperately in need of clothing. Shanghai was full of refugees. Among them were some Jews fleeing from the horrors of Nazi Germany. They had only the summer clothes they were dressed in. Gaining access to his bales of

clothing, Goulter was able to fit them out with warm clothes. This incident is possible the basis for unusual story told about Goulter (see following).

#### TRUE OR FALSE?

When the money [for his return fare] came, he [Goulter] went to a coastal city in India to take a ship home. While waiting for his ship he heard that there were many exiled Jews sleeping in the countryside. They had been denied entrance into every country in the world except India, and they had gone inland and were sleeping in barn lofts. It was Christmas time and the old missionary, Oswald Goulter, went around to those barns proclaiming to the Jews, "It is Christmas! Merry Christmas." They said, "We are Jews. We do not observe Christmas." The old missionary said, "I know, but what would you like for Christmas?" They insisted they were Jews and did not keep Christmas. "I know," said Rev. Goulter, "but what would you like if someone gave you something for Christmas?" Finally, they said, "Well, we would like some good German pastries." Rev. Goulter went into the city and found a shop that baked fresh German-style pastries. He spent his "ticket money" for pastries, which he took back out to the exiled Jews and said, "Merry Christmas!" Then he wired the Missionary Society and said, "I need a ticket home." When that story was being told, a young seminarian on the front row was absolutely incensed. He said to Dr. Goulter, "Why did you do that? They do not believe in Jesus!" And the old missionary said, "Yes, but I do. I do!" <sup>xxii</sup>

Goulter also provided clothing for a group of Chinese "sing song" girls who had suffered at the hands of the soldiery and were eking out a miserable life in confined quarters. Similarly, he supplied men's clothing to the local Salvation Army whose stock had run out. Delayed again at Wuhu, Goulter renewed acquaintances with local church leaders there. Through them, he met up with an Episcopal missionary who was caring for abandoned babies. He was able to donate to her some the baby clothing forwarded by young people in Kansas. Permits received, Goulter and his baggage were eventually accommodated on a military train for the journey back to Hofei. He reached there on 21 January 1939. He did not expect a welcome and his heart sank when he saw the desolation of the city.

To his great surprise, he found Douglas Corpron and some locals waiting to greet him. The chapel and other property had been damaged, but the flame in the hearts of the congregation still flickered, just waiting for a little more fuel. Goulter managed to resuscitate the Rural Centre at the station and a

program of reconstruction was commenced. As anticipated, the gifts of clothing were appreciated by the community. More was still in storage in Shanghai and further supplies were on their way from the USA. Irene Goulter, who was still in Shanghai, served as the forwarding agent. On one day, Goulter took delivery of twenty-two items of freight in Hofei. With the arrival of supplies, the hospital under Corpron began catching up with the backlog of work. Goulter estimated that in just over a fortnight it carried out over 15,000 treatments. An abandoned Japanese boiler was put into action to ensure a good supply of hot water and a baby bathing program was put into operation. Each mother received two sets of baby clothes from Goulter's clothing pool—one set to use after every bath while the other set was being washed. The chapel was repaired, church services fully resumed, and an evangelistic campaign launched. At Easter 1939, thirty-one people were baptised.

### **Inasmuch as ye did it not...**

Irene Goulter and Grace Corpron were still stranded in Shanghai, their attempts to return being frustrated at Wuhu. Goulter repaired the family home in Hofei and wrote, telling his music-loving wife that "the piano is back in its position." The women did not reach home until September that year. With the return of other seasoned missionaries, the mission resumed a full range of programs including youth education and the preparation of evangelists to service outstations. But there were still great pockets of need in the community. Powell relates the following example:

One day a shivering lad of nine years sought Goulter's help. He asked what he wanted; the boy could hardly restrain himself as he poured out a story of grief and despair. "I am hungry" he cried. "My mother died of hunger; my father is dead; my grandfather died last week; and when I awoke this morning my uncle was dead in the same bed as I slept in." Goulter investigated the story and found it true. The house he lived in had no doors and in addition, a thief had stolen the boy's meagre coverings.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The city was still occasionally disturbed by the sound of distant cannon fire. As relations between Japan and the United States deteriorated, the Japanese military began scrutinising the operation of the mission more closely. Chinese teachers were sometimes brought before tribunals and questioned about material in the reading books used in the schools. To be on the safe side, any books likely to arouse concern were culled. Early in 1941, the UCMS again urged the evacuation of women and children from the China Christian Mission. In March, Goulter was at an emergency meeting in Shanghai when word came through that fighting had broken out at many points around Hofei. Irene Goulter, still in Hofei, recorded cryptic detail in her diary:

City cut off on all sides...The firing kept up all last night...twenty-three truckloads of Japanese dead brought in...some railroads blown up...telegraph is dead.

Somehow or other, Goulter managed to get back to Hofei, collect his wife and two children and take them back to Shanghai. There they were put on a ship bound for San Francisco. With the withdrawal of the women, Goulter and Corpron were the only missionaries left at the station. They attempted to fill the gaps left by the women and with the enlistment of local support, managed to maintain a substantial program. But it took its toll. Dr. Corpron went to Japan for a period of much needed rest. Goulter, the last missionary, also fell ill and was permitted by the authorities to go the resort area of Kuling, where the family had shared several holidays and Lovena had gone to school, for a three-day rest. Returning to Hofei, Goulter learned that Corpron's illness was worse than expected and had to take an early furlough. Goulter was now 'home alone.' He took comfort from a trickle of mail that was still getting through and occasionally picked up messages at night through the shortwave station broadcasting from San Francisco. Occasionally he heard the comforting words "Here is a message for Mr. O. J. Goulter from his wife,"<sup>xxiv</sup> but then the wave band would shift a little and he would lose the message. But Goulter knew Irene was 'out there.' Little mail got out.



*Image: "Here is a message for Mr. O.J. Goulter at Hofei..."*

*A photo of Irene Goulter sits on the radio. Goulter's suit was made from the first wool from the sheep to be imported from Australia to Hofei.*

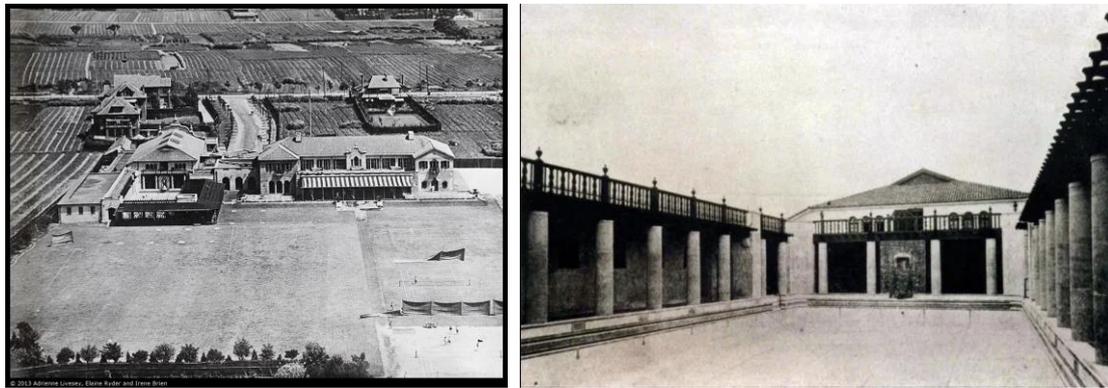
On 7 December 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the United States subsequently declaring war on Japan. Goulter was immediately placed under house arrest and isolated. Initially, his isolation was strictly enforced, but later visitors were allowed. Goulter used these opportunities to seek information and advice on the operation of the mission and was indirectly able to continue the clothing distribution program; and having taken in supplies in anticipation of the crisis, he hosted a Christmas party for poor village children. In the beginning, the Japanese guards were civil, but as the Japanese suffered setbacks in the war, the guards grew surlier and outside contact was forbidden.

In mid 1942, the school property was occupied by the army, the hospital stripped of its furniture and Goulter was interned. Because of his Australian citizenship, he was sent off to join British prisoners in the Great Western Road camp (the former Columbia Country Club) in Shanghai. The building was crowded with around 400 hundred men, women and children sleeping in bowling alleys, club rooms

and lounges. Goulter had an expectation they would soon be repatriated under a prisoner exchange scheme, but his name was not on the first departure list as some influential Shanghainese got preferential treatment on the few available ships. Goulter settled in for the long haul but took comfort from the fact that he had been able to give one of the deportees a letter addressed to his wife. This letter was eventually forwarded to her from South Africa.



Images (l-r): Columbia Country Club c1939; Columbia Country Club exterior with mature gardens.



Images (l-r): Aerial view of the Club, note rural surrounds; Columbia Country Club swimming pool (drained) c1943



Images (l-r): Bowling alley interior (dilapidated, the spectator's gallery above was used as the sleeping quarters for internees).<sup>xv</sup> The Columbia Country Club c2014, now overshadowed by high rise apartments.

Despite their cramped conditions, the internees worked out a suitable modus operandi. Concerts and entertainments were arranged, a chess tournament organised, and regular church services commenced. At Christmas time 1942, a party was arranged for the children and a performance of Handel's "Messiah"

was staged. For reasons now unclear, Goulter was given some freedom of movement in and out of the Club<sup>xxvi</sup> and he used this time to visit Jessfield (now Zhongshan) Park with a botanist to learn and classify the Chinese names for every tree and shrub. He was able to meet up with two China Christian Mission missionaries, Edwin Marx and Lois Ely, who were still loose in the city. All told, life was not intolerable. What agitated Goulter was the absence of news from his family in the USA, the suffering in the community, and the enormous waste of talent locked up in the camp. He did something about suffering in the community by gaining access to the last shipments of clothing still stored in Shanghai, to distribute it to those-in-need in the city.

## Pootung Civil Assembly Area

Early in 1943, Goulter was moved to the Pootung Camp, euphemistically referred to as “The Civil Assembly Centre”. His CCM friends, Marx, and Ely, were also interned. The Pootung Camp consisted of a collection of old buildings previously owned by the British American Tobacco company. In its yard there was a collection of industrial waste and the ruins of a small Chinese village destroyed in the bombing of 1937.



Images (l-r): ‘Dormitory 14 at Pootung Camp’<sup>xxvii</sup> and ‘Pootung Camp in Summer’, by Australian artist, Arthur Lindsay.<sup>xxviii</sup> The Pootung Civil Assembly Area. The flags on the water tower are allied victory flags).

Conditions at Pootung were much more restrictive. The space for Goulter’s personal effects was limited to eight square feet. Into this space he squeezed his personal belongings, his typewriter, and books. At one stage, the camp had as many as 1,500 internees. There would be no more walks in the park. With typical resilience, the internees set about tidying the place up: the junk in the yard was cleaned, gardens laid, and a small playing field created. Goulter played a role in establishing the garden which in time would produce the vegetables that would help keep them alive. With his usual foresight, Goulter had thought to take with him various packets of seed. A well was dug to provide irrigation for the garden. A “university” was established and Goulter took classes in public speaking and teaching social ethics.

Goulter's morale was boosted by the arrival of a letter from Irene. Posted months before, it had come by circuitous route involving the UCMS and the International Red Cross. The letter contained a newspaper cutting covering his daughter Lovena's graduation from UCLA. In September 1943, several internees were repatriated. Among them were his CCM associates, Marx and Ely. Goulter was able to send a letter and posy to Irene through them, his gift arriving just before Christmas 1943. This was Irene and Oswald's third Christmas apart since their separation at Hofei.

The internees at Pootung tried hard to keep up their spirits by maintaining various programs. But the strain was beginning to tell. The quality of food deteriorated and so did Goulter's health. Kind friends in the Chinese community, made aware of his situation by Marx and Ely, sent food supplements (particularly salt, sugar, and fats) to Goulter via the Red Cross. In March 1944, Goulter managed to get a message out of the camp by short wave radio. It said:

Dear folks and everybody in Australia. Life goes on quietly here. I am still teaching at the university and sleep ten hours every night. My own little garden grows lettuce, tomatoes, and onions. Have had no letters for ages. Please write me.<sup>xxxix</sup>

How the message got out is unknown. Presumably, somebody in the camp had constructed a radio. The message was picked up in Nationalist-controlled Western China and forwarded to Goulter's sister in Colac, Victoria. The consensus was that the message was partly coded and that Goulter was only in fair health and exhausted. By mid-year, Goulter was unable to work in his garden and had to crawl on his hands and knees to his second-floor room. Few Red Cross parcels got through, but some did. With their arrival and the improvement in the food provision, Goulter's health improved.<sup>xxx</sup>

The appalling conditions were to be endured for another year. The Japanese built military installations close to the camp and the bombing of them produced chaos within the camp. In August 1945, Goulter prepared a final letter for his wife should the end come. But suddenly, the camp guards disappeared and instead of bombs falling from the sky there came parcels of food: chocolate, army rations and fifty-pound drums of peaches. One of these drums burst open, splattering the stairs and walkways with its contents. Men, who had not tasted canned peaches for years, could not resist devouring whatever they could reach on the stairs and walkways.

## Facing the Future

Delighted that the slaughter was now over, Goulter pondered his future. Though his first thought was to leave, he recognised that returning to Australia or the United States would be difficult at that time. After taking advice, he decided he should first check on the mission situation in Nanking and Hofei. Faithful pastor Chu arrived to accompany him back to Nanking. Looting was rife as the city reverted

to Chinese control. Goulter moved into the Christian Girls' School to prevent the theft of its furnishings and was thus able to secure mission property pending the return of the other missionaries. Learning that it might be possible to get through to Hofei, he determined to try. Some of the young men Goulter had trained to be evangelists came to Nanking to accompany him, whilst others met him at Wuhu.

According to Powell, "as they approached Hofei, hundreds of people—Christians and non-Christians—walked miles out of the city to greet him and to celebrate his return as a faithful friend and worthy citizen."<sup>xxxii</sup> He was deeply touched. The mission property was, as expected, in bad shape. The hospital still functioned in a limited way. The church had continued faithfully and was now aware of new opportunities. Hofei was to become a seat of provincial government and the arrival of the United National Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) representatives in the region heralded the possibility of foreign aid and the revitalisation of essential services. For the next three months, Goulter gave every waking moment to the restoration of mission property and to the resumption of services. His own house had not fared too badly. Again, every pane of glass in the windows had been shattered, but the building itself had sustained no structural damage. An air raid shelter in the backyard had to be filled in, tree stumps removed, new trees planted, and milk cows recovered.

### **Christmas at Home?**

A telegram was received in December indicating that a passage to the United States would soon be available. With a heavy heart, he had to decline, so pressing were the needs of the mission. He wrote to Irene to tell her.

In January 1946, Goulter was away from Hofei for a fortnight securing building and medical supplies. He had only received one letter from Irene since his release from Pootung. He returned to find four letters from her, one bringing news of the serious illness of their daughter, Jean. In the circumstances, Goulter felt he should return to the USA imminently. His decision was eased by the knowledge of the impending return of faithful mission colleagues, Lyrel Teagarden and Douglas Corpron. Goulter was farewelled by the church on 17 February and left for Nanking the next day. At Nanking station, as he prepared to depart for Shanghai, a messenger from Hofei pressed something into his hand. It was small banner inscribed with the Chinese characters "Forgetting self for the Gospel's sake." It was a token of love and appreciation from the church.

Goulter had the expectation that he would leave within days on a military transport and hurriedly received necessary medical injections. But though his papers were in order, it was revealed that no berths were available. Shanghai was still thronged with others wanting to leave. But life had taught him never to give up. In early March, he learned there was a berth available on a freighter leaving on 7

March. Four weeks on the ocean improved his health and he stepped ashore at New Orleans on 9 April. Irene was there to meet him.

The next months were filled with family and church reunions, preaching engagements, deputation work, and meetings with the UCMS at Indianapolis. The family reunion was made happier by the restoration to health of daughter, Jean. His daughters had grown up in his absence and he had to get to know them again. In mid-1947, Goulter had conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity by his alma mater, Phillips University. In addressing the Phillips alumni, he told them “You will go to China carrying the Gospel or carry weapons of destruction.” And words, he said will not be enough for “men with empty stomachs, one cannot speak of high principle.”

## Back to Hofei

In September 1947, the Goulters sailed from San Francisco to return to Hofei. This was their fourth term, and the only time they had not been accompanied by their daughters. Their previous terms in China had been marked by severe social dislocation. But there was a hope that with the “New Day” announced by Chiang Kai-shek, things would be better. On the ship with them was their old friend Grace Corpron. The ship’s hold was full of supplies—food and clothing, seeds, and agricultural equipment to be used for rural reconstruction.

Waiting at the wharf was Douglas Corpron, who had a US landing craft to transport the freight up the narrow rivers to Hofei. But the many cases of freight, which included a tractor and agricultural equipment, took weeks to clear through customs. While waiting, Goulter received an invitation to go to Nanking to head up a Regional Reconstruction Unit based at Chuh-sien (formerly Chuchow) to do on a larger scale what he had been attempting to do through the Luchowfu Christian Rural Centre and the Anhwei Rural Reconstruction Unit. The opportunity of leading the Regional Reconstruction Unit was extremely attractive to Goulter. However, he considered his immediate obligation was to Hofei, so it was agreed he would be based at Hofei for at least a year, gradually moving to the regional position based at Chuh-sien after the work at Hofei had been consolidated.

The pressing issue of the moment was how to navigate the overloaded landing craft through the rivers, narrow creeks, and canals to Hofei. On 3 November, a convoy consisting of the landing craft and Corpron’s sailboat loaded to the gunnels with freight and missionaries (the Goulters, the Corprons and new missionary, Verla Elliott) headed into the waterways. Progress was slow in the narrow waterways crowded with sampans, but they eventually they reached the outskirts of Nanking. Here, Irene and Verla left the convoy to travel the remainder of the way “more comfortably” by bus (really a converted army truck). But bandits were a real threat to both bus and boat. The bus ahead of the one Irene and Verla were traveling in had been blown up. The women left Nanking on the morning of 17 November

and arrived seven hours later in some disrepair at Hofei. Six days later, they were on the wharf with many others as the boats arrived. With many willing hands they moved eleven loads that day.

Douglas Corpron had seen to it that the Goulter home had been thoroughly repaired and renovated. Rooms were made available for Verla Elliott and Wenona Wilkinson. The former housekeeper, Liu Datzze, looking much the same, was back and performing her duties in her usual efficient way. There were endless welcomes and courtesies. But things were not the same for Irene. Six years ago, she had two young daughters with her. Now as she looked out her window towards the South Gate, she could see beneath the snow the pill boxes and trenches, the most visible scars of war. Oswald Goulter was constrained to get food and clothing out to the needy people as soon as possible.

That Christmas, Irene prepared the choir to provide special music and the Goulters spent their first “home” Christmas for nine years. They were joined by the Corprons and their daughters Mary and Ruth, who managed to get home despite traffic disruption caused by the blizzards. They were also joined by two Mexican Roman Catholic priests who, travelling in the region, were similarly disrupted. Goulter made several visits to outlying churches, which he found in good heart and where he was received excitedly. With the receipt of supplies and equipment from UNRRA and the return of staff, the hospital returned to full operation. The school program also revived and was providing education to hundreds of girls and boys. But resurgent Communist agitation was ever-present, and it became clear that the future was a race between applied Christianity and aggressive Communism. For the Communists, Christianity was a sinister tool of the Capitalist West. The church remained faithful and admonished one another (in the words of a favourite hymn) to “Breast the Wave, Christian.”<sup>xxxii</sup> Goulter’s response to the threat was “to work for the night is coming.” Friends were aware of the enormous energy and zeal he brought to the tasks ahead of him. He was now shuttling between the centres of Hofei and Chuh-sien, endeavouring to meet the challenges of both.

## The Move to Chuh-sien

Chuh-sien, thirty miles from Nanjing, had been a centre of early missionary endeavour. The mission there survived the Boxer Rebellion but since the Nationalist drive of 1927, the work had been in the hands of Chinese nationals and had suffered badly in the Sino-Japanese War. The church, however, was still meeting. Most buildings had been destroyed or irreparably damaged. As Goulter struggled to set up the Regional Reconstruction Union, the missionaries George and Margaret Cherryhomes arrived to assist the church. The task of the Union was to “bring scientific knowledge, technical help, wide practical experience and Christian guidance to bear on the problems of the rural people of the territory.”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

From February 16 to March 27, 1948, the Union held a Farmers' Winter Institute at Chuh-sien, north-east of Nanjing. Experts came from the University of Nanjing and elsewhere to provide informative lectures on, and demonstrations of, improved agricultural methods. Students were provided with literature, improved seeds and in some cases, calves of a good milking strain. Irene travelled to Chuh-sien for the event. Delayed by rains she returned to Hofei in time for Easter to oversee final choir rehearsals and to assist with the impending baptism of around fifty people.

Oswald now spent most of his time at Chuh-sien where further regional training programs were conducted. Satisfactory progress was reported but there was some restlessness on the streets indicated by occasional calls of "white devil" directed at missionaries. Inflation was rampant, public servants were threatening strike action because of the erosion of their pay levels, and students were agitating for the removal of an unpopular provincial governor. To the consternation of their many friends in Hofei, and doubtlessly with great personal misgivings, the Goulters decided to move permanently to Chuh-sien. They did this after a brief holiday in the familiar environment of Kuling. Now as Field Director of the Union, Oswald planned his most ambitious scheme: the establishment of a model farming community in a beautiful valley that had been virtually uninhabited since the Japanese invasion. His plan was to use the talents of motivated refugees to develop model farms. With UNRRA assistance work was commenced, sites were marked out and lumber and farm equipment were purchased. But it was too late.

## **The Arrival of the Peoples' Liberation Army**

In late 1948, it was becoming clear that the Nationalists were losing the fight against the Communists. The Goulters returned to Hofei, and the place they called home for twenty-five years to pack for the move to Chuh-sien. This action was tinged with sadness, especially as the church prepared for its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations. To compound their problems, Goulter found that all the strenuous activity of the past few months had aggravated an old hernia operation. He was advised by Corpron to have immediate surgery followed by a period of rest.

On 7 November 1948, two large armies of the Communists and Nationalists fought a desperate battle at Hai-Huai, 200 miles to the north. The Nationalists were routed, and Chiang Kai-shek's army began to dissolve. On 20 November, Goulter was sufficiently mobile to undertake the eight-hour bus journey to Nanjing. Two days later, they went on by overcrowded train to Chuh-sien. Goulter, not yet strong enough to climb off the overcrowded train, had to be lifted off by soldiers. Irene climbed out through a window.

In Nanjing, the civil authorities, concerned by Communist infiltration, closed the city's gates to refugees fleeing from the north and many went on to Chuh-sien. Despite the confusion, the Goulters

were amazed to find their household goods stacked neatly in their backyard at Chuh-sien, a feat of transportation attributed by Goulter to the fidelity and perseverance of their Chinese friends and the supervision of their housekeeper, Liu Da-tse. As best they could, they moved into their new home. With the advance of the Peoples' Liberation Army, Chiang Kai-shek decided to make a stand south of the Yangtze River. Being on the edge of that perimeter, the people of Hofei found a Nationalist army encamped around them. A decision was made that a missionary couple with a baby child should evacuate, but no general order to leave had yet been made by the American consul.

In Chuh-sien, the Goulters and the Cherryhomes decided that they would not leave at a time of need and thereby risk damage to the Christian witness that had been made. But Margaret Cherryhomes was pregnant and needed to go to Nanking for treatment. She later flew on to the Philippines where her parents were missionaries. This left Irene Goulter as the only white missionary woman in the town. With winter closing and a blizzard blowing, Irene found herself opening bales of clothing and distributing them to the needy. For the comfort of their co-workers and the community an effort was made at the church to provide an enjoyable Christmas program. Despite some removals, attendances were good. In the short term, Goulter continued to persevere with the Rural Service Union, but all thought of establishing a model farming community was put aside for the time being. Pamphlets on crop improvement and health were translated and the training program for rural ministry was continued. The medical service was curtailed when the young doctor fled in the night. His place was filled by a less adequately qualified student doctor, but limited services were provided.

During January 1949, government services began to close. The Nationalist Army headquarters moved, shops closed, the railway station closed, and the last train left for Nanking. When the church met on 23 January, it knew that a test of the faith was coming. They were urged by their pastor to stand firm. Having dug an air shelter, the Goulters began looking for hiding places for the few items they hoped to preserve. They watched as the last remaining Nationalist soldiers cut down telephone wires and looted properties. They tended to the needs of a wounded soldier, who stripped of his outer garments had been left to die by his departing comrades. Tearfully, lacking proper medical equipment, they could offer only palliative care to another soldier whose wounds had become gangrenous. It was a long and sleepless night. From their attic they watched in horror as the sky beyond the East Gate lit up where houses were being burned. They felt the impact of the explosion as the bridge to south—their last means of escape—was blown up. During the night they were startled by footfalls outside, fearing the arrival of troops or looters. But these turned out to be friends from the church who had come during the night to keep a watchful eye on them and their property. Early the next morning, the Eighth Route Army did arrive. The Communists had taken over.

## The New Order

The missionaries and townspeople took comfort from the initial attitude of military officials who ordered those shops would be opened, businesses and buildings would not be interfered with, rioters and looters would be punished, and that the army would pay for any supplies it needed. Seeking clarification of this policy for his Christian Service Union,<sup>xxxiv</sup> Goulter sought an interview with a high-ranking army official. As he explained the work of the Union, the military official misunderstood his intention and thought Goulter was asking for money. The official told Goulter he did not have much money but may be able to help a little. When Goulter clarified the situation, the official gave an emphatically positive response to the program Goulter outlined. "Certainly, you can proceed," said the official, "don't you realise you have been liberated?"

So, the work went ahead. A few wounded Nationalist stragglers had their wounds attended to and were sent on their way. George Cherryhomes fed and helped on their way a group of fifty students, belongings on their backs, trying to walk home. The Goulter home became a thing of interest to Communist soldiers: youths from country areas, they were simply curious. As many as 500 per day poured through the Goulter home, fogging it with smoke, driving Irene to distraction. Goulter invited some high officials for dinner, and explaining the situation to them, they agreed that signs would be put up forbidding trespass. The young soldiers continued to loiter in their courtyard and Goulter took the opportunity of telling them about "applied Christianity." Overall, things were going to work out. There was concern, however, that there might be some retaliation from the Nationalist Army which was still in control of Nanking 30 miles away.

On the first Sunday after the occupation, an early baptismal service was planned with Goulter as officiator. A restless crowd of curious onlookers arrived. During Sunday school, which followed the baptismal service, a plane flew low overhead and began strafing nearby streets. The pastor's wife, Mrs. Chu, was able to distract the children by her story telling. Strafing planes returned during the communion service. With the arrival of civil administration, a change occurred in the attitude of officials to the work of the mission, a little more officious and more bureaucratic. But the work of the Union was not impeded. Clothing was distributed, the day school reopened, and the clinic reactivated. A Family Life Institute attracted a good response from interested learners. Goulter sensed widening opportunities. In search of additional workers, Pastor Chu found his way through the static battle lines to Nanking. There, he found members of the Hofei mission staff, Wenona Wilkinson and Verla Elliott, stranded and unable to return home. Chu brought the women back with him to Chuh-sien, a dangerous trek through military lines in blinding rain. Goulter agreed to guide them back to Hofei by a long circuitous route. With the Communist army massing for an attack on the beleaguered Nanking this too was going to be dangerous.

## House Arrest

Just before Easter 1949, Irene received word that the party had arrived safely in Hofei. But as she prepared the choir for Easter music she received a note, smuggled out by Goulter, that he and the two women had been placed under house arrest. They were interned in the Goulter's old home where seven years before he had been held by the Japanese. As before, the guards gradually relaxed their control and occasional visitors were allowed who provided food and comfort. Meanwhile back in Chuh-sien, military police visited the Goulter home and searched the place for about eight hours. Suddenly, after about six weeks, the guards outside the house at Hofei disappeared. Goulter and the two women were free to leave. Wenona Wilkinson<sup>xxxv</sup> and Verla Elliott resumed their work at Hofei and Goulter travelled back to Chuh-sien. It seems that during the period of house arrest, Goulter and the two women had been under investigation for treason. Some members of the congregation at Hofei had been interrogated, and the house at Chuh-sien had been searched, looking for evidence. But none had been found.

Goulter regarded his enforced "holiday" as little more than a glitch in the program of the Christian Service Union. During the year, the Union had provided medical care through the clinic, education for the young, home science demonstrations in fruit bottling and shoe making. Outside, demonstration garden plots were planted with seeds, wheat, trees, tomatoes, and vegetables. Inside, a games room was set up to provide light entertainment. This was frequently used by recuperating soldiers of the Liberation Army. The local church was in a healthy condition and now largely under the control of locals. Rural evangelists trained through the Union were sent out equipped with literature, agricultural advice, and improved seeds.

Travel outside Chuh-sien was still difficult due to the need to obtain permits, but contact was made with the seven Disciples still working at mission headquarters in Nanking. Notwithstanding staffing changes and restrictions, the stations at Wuhu and Hofei reported good progress. Goulter considered 1949 to have been "their most worthwhile year in China."<sup>xxxvi</sup> This spirit of optimism spilled over into 1950 as more of the burden of leadership was devolved on to locals.



*Image: Meeting at Nanking in 1949. Oswald Goulter (Chuh-sien) and Douglas Corpron (Hofei) at left. Edwin Marx is also shown*

## Ominous Developments

However, the world was again changing. In mid 1949, the Kuomintang (Nationalist) government fled to Formosa (now Taiwan) and active fighting finished in 1950. Early American support for Chiang Kai-shek brought American missionaries under scrutiny by the Communist secret police. As tensions rose, the Americans withdrew their consular staff from China at the end of 1949. In June 1950, North Korean Communist forces invaded South Korea. This resulted in the American forces being ordered into Korea. When United Nations soldiers expanded their toehold in South Korea and poured into North Korea, the Chinese Communists entered the war. The China Christian Mission was being drawn into the geopolitics that still influences the world. Now masters of mainland China, the Communists embarked on a large-scale land reform program. In accordance with Leninist/Marxist ideology, American capitalism was regarded as closely aligned to the landed ruling class. Further it suited the regime's reform agenda to cultivate a grass root "hate America" campaign.

## The Sun Sets but Morning has Broken

Time was running out for the missionaries, but some hoped to stay on. The Goulters enjoyed another Christmas with their church family in December 1950. But at 2:00 am on 1 January 1951, five soldiers burst into their house pushing their faithful housekeeper, Liu Da-tze, before them at the point of a gun. The Goulters were told their property and personal effects were being seized. After rooms were carefully examined, they were sealed up and the Goulters denied access. Thereafter they were confined to one or two rooms and the outside courtyard. All contact with the outside world was cut off. Attempts were made to fabricate charges against them. Interestingly, however, not all the visiting

officials were cruel. Some recognised the false nature of the accusations and showed kindness, but they could do little about the situation. It was through them that occasional messages got through to the Goulters.

The church functioned without the Goulters, but exit permits for them were refused. The authorities wanted assurances that the church was free from “foreign control” and the “influences of imperialism.” They were looking for nothing less than some sort of public denunciation of the Goulters by the local church as a condition of their release. Members of the congregation who were aware of this development covertly sent messages of a reassurance to the Goulters. At the right time, a farewell was arranged in which speeches were made declaring the church’s independence from foreign control (which was true) and denouncing the missionaries as “tools of imperialism.” Later that night, one of the church leaders managed to slip past the guards on Goulter’s home and apologise for the sham nature of the farewell. Two days later at 10:00am, the Goulters were told they would leave Chuh-sien that night. That evening they moved through potentially hostile crowds to the station. The faithful Liu Datzze and a companion accompanied them to assist with the baggage. At the station, their exit passes were queried but they were eventually cleared and boarded the train for Shanghai. Moments before they boarded, a woman clad in the rags of a beggar emerged from the shadows and while looking elsewhere (to avoid attracting suspicion) whispered “I have come to tell you that your many friends wanted to bid you farewell, but they are being watched, and could not come.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> At Shanghai, the group was questioned and searched again. There might be a change in the decision to release them. Eventually, however, they were given exit visas and boarded a crowded train to Hong Kong. There, surrounded by posters of American atrocities in Korea, they joined the long queue of people moving towards the last point of inspection—the exit gate.

## Home to Australia

In what seemed a noticeably brief time, they joined a plane that bore the livery of the Flying Kangaroo and they were on their way to Australia. The decision to return to Australia was influenced by personal and practical considerations. Oswald Goulter had not seen his seven ageing brothers and sisters (Oswald was the youngest sibling) for thirty years, though he had written to them. One such letter written to his missionary sister in Alice Spring was published in the *Centralian Advocate* in March 1951. This letter, written in December 1950, expresses resolution in the face of the worsening situation in China. It reads (in part):

These are anxious times... but despite what you may hear you can be sure that the greater part of the people is very friendly... Officials and soldiers are instructed to protect strangers in their midst, but what changes may come we cannot tell. Mail may be cut off for a while, and if it is we want you to know that whatever happens we will willingly and peacefully face it. The staunchness of many Chinese Christians, in this time of testing, gives one confidence that they will not fail in loyalty to the Saviour.

A family reunion at Colac in June 1951 brought all the Goulters together for the first time in thirty years. With two or three famers and three missionaries or former missionaries among them, one can imagine there was much to talk about. It was an opportunity for Goulter to visit his past. He was undoubtedly reminded of the evangelist who challenged him with the Great Commission.



GOULTER FAMILY REUNION, COLAC, 1951

*Image: Oswald and Irene Goulter, back row right. Harold Goulter, back row centre.*

The practical consideration requiring the Goulters' return to Australia was that being an Australian citizen, he needed to obtain a visa and permits to permanently reside in the United States. This was not going to happen quickly, and there were endless delays caused by typographical errors in documents, misinformation, and the need to gain certification from UCMS. A complication was that having been in Communist China, the USA required all applications for permanent residence to be vetted by their security staff in Tokyo.

The Goulters used the waiting time to visit and address churches. Especially pleasurable for Oswald was the opportunity to visit the Pilliga area in mid-September, where his brother Harold still lived and farmed, and the Namoi River in which he was baptised still flowed. The little Church of Christ had long since ceased to operate but he took the opportunity of preaching in the local Methodist church.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Speaking of the appalling living conditions of many Chinese, he said it was understandable that many would turn to something that would offer them a better way of life. He said that the Communists promised a better life, more food, better living conditions and equality. But promises were all they had to offer. He called on Christians to work hard at their faith and show the practical implications of life abundant as portrayed in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is possible that around this time, Goulter may well have visited his sisters Annie and Elsie Goulter, who were Aborigines Inland Missioners based in Alice Springs. A lengthy article by Oswald published in the *Centralian Advocate* (Alice Springs) in September 1951 deplored the ruthless deforestation of the countryside which he claimed was creating desert conditions. In this, he was anticipating modern environmentalists.

## Return to America

By this stage, the Goulters had been in Australia for more than three months and were eager to be reunited with their daughters whom they had not seen for four years and grandchildren whom they had never seen. Reservations for flights home were made and broken as various delays occurred in the clearance of Oswald's papers. Finally, a date for departure was fixed for early December 1951. When there was a last-minute hitch, it was decided that rather than cancel both fares, Irene would go on alone. She arrived unexpectedly at her daughter Jean's place on 14 December. Within hours of his wife's departure, Oswald received news that his clearances had come through. He left Australia a few days later and arrived at Los Angeles on 23 December, making his way to his daughter's apartment, only to find no-one home. After all they had been through, the return of the Goulters was very anticlimactic. But the family had their first Christmas together for five years. Mission for the Goulters was not over. Oswald accepted a position as Chair of Christian Missions at his alma mater, Phillips University in Oklahoma. Together they taught, preached, and lived mission for the next ten years. They built a modest house at Enid and despite an unlikely site, were soon surrounded by a forest of fruit trees. For her work and advocacy of mission, Irene was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity. During their

time there they received a constant stream of visitors and were in constant demand for preaching appointments.

## Retirement

In 1962, Oswald and Irene they retired to San Jose, California. Goulter's niece, Iris, visited them several times in San Jose and observed a garden with many trees and vegetables, grown for himself and others. She commented "Uncle's garage was the sorting place for many items of clothing, garden needs etc. for shipping to needy folk."<sup>xxxix</sup> In retirement they undertook an around-the-world trip on the SS *Himalaya* and used the trip to reconnect with friends and former students and to make themselves aware of centres of need. Their voyage included a visit to Australia. From time to time, they received news of developments in China and rejoiced in the faithfulness and resilience of many they had been associated with. But with the rise of the Red Guards in the 1960s, China was still a dangerous place for Christians.



*Image: Oswald and Irene Goulter, c 1960*

With the subsidence of the Red Guards and the Cultural Revolution, some Western Nations sought a normalisation of relations with the People's Republic of China. China's isolation from the rest of the world had turned it into a pariah state. Early in 1972, US President Richard Nixon took the first step towards rapprochement by visiting China. Not long after Nixon's visit, Oswald Goulter received a letter from the Chinese government inviting him to return and resume his work of rural reconstruction. Goulter was tempted to accept the invitation and though he was still able to go mountain walking, he realised he was too old for roadmaking and for the grind of grassroots organisation. It is likely that the Chinese government never expected he would accept the invitation and that, while this was not exactly an apology, it was their way of saying "come home all is forgiven." The message was not lost on Goulter.

Oswald and Irene lived long and fruitful lives. He died in 1985, at the ripe age of 95 years. Irene died in 1991, aged 92 years.

## Epilogue

Oswald Goulter was challenged to become a missionary after hearing H.G. Harward preach on the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) at Colac, Victoria. He later came into association with Churches of Christ through a house church started by George and Gracie Carslake at Narrabri NSW in 1911. After hearing in his youth stories about the Boxer Rebellion, China was his chosen destination for mission service.

Coming from a farming and missionary inclined family, Goulter well understood Jesus' parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3) and the connection between sowing seed and sowing the Word. That connection characterised his later ministry where the sowing of crops and the use of improved seed went hand in hand with preaching the Word. In addition, his association with farming taught him patience, perseverance, and independence—all qualities which stood him in good stead during his turbulent years in China. It is consistent with this that he decided to be a well-equipped sower who could correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) and he undertook some six or seven years of graduate and postgraduate study to prepare himself. Going to China in 1922, the Goulters were simultaneously appalled and fascinated about what they saw. With great prescience, Goulter recognised that China would one day become one of the world's greatest nations.

The story of the Goulters is one of faithful perseverance and of personal sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. But it should be noted that they were not the only ones who persevered faithfully during the difficult years of the civil war and the Japanese invasion. The names of several missionaries have been mentioned in this paper—but there were many more. It should also be noted that there were many wonderful Chinese Christians who held fast to the faith, supported the Goulters and others at risk to their lives, and assumed leadership roles in local congregations. The Japanese Invasion of 1937 and the Communist takeover in 1949 seemed to sound the death knell of the church in China. Around 14 million people died during the Japanese invasion—more in the civil war and the famines which followed. Goulter was right about the need for more and better food production.

Rather than constrain the church, these events may have liberated it. When asked by church growth expert, Donald McGavran, the reasons for the growth of the church in China, Goulter offered the following:

First, after the Japanese invaders had been repelled with the aid of American arms and American missionaries, for the first time in 60 years, Americans appeared to the public as "our friends and allies." Instead of hostility,

indifference or suspicion, friendliness greeted them. The gospel could be “heard;” it no longer appeared itself the spearhead of foreign invasion. Second, the training schools instituted a new form of training for evangelists. They were taught evangelism and agriculture. They went out not only to teach peasants the way of salvation but also the ways to increase their yields of rice and pigs. Wherever these evangelists went, small rural churches sprang up.<sup>x1</sup>

James McCallum who had been field administrator of the CCM mission in Nanking during the time of the Communist takeover (see photo above) noted “During those years several independent congregations in Nanking decided to affiliate with our work.” To the faithful Chinese at Chuh-sien and Hofei, the attempts to vilify men and women they knew and trusted raised issues about the credibility of the new regime.

The final word might be left to the Donald McGavran a contemporary of the Goulters and a UCMS missionary in India:

“The field, maintained at great cost and agony over many years often proves to be the seedbed from which harvest is finally reaped.” One sows, another reaps.

#### HYMN OF THE GREAT RELIGIONS

God whom Buddha sought  
When by the sacred tree  
He agonized for Thee;  
Set thou my inmost thought  
From wayward passion free.

God of the Moslem's prayer,  
As morning, noon, and night  
He bows before Thy might;  
May I his ardour share,  
And seek Thy holy light.

God whom the Hindu craves  
With fervid ecstasy,  
And would be one with Thee,  
The mystic truth which saves  
Grant that I too, may see.

God whom the Christians see

Father of all mankind,  
We come with heart and mind;  
One perfect way to Thee  
Through Christ our Lord we find  
O.J. Goulter

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The principal source used in this paper is Powell, W.E. 1969 *Scattered Seed* printed on behalf of Phillips University by Bethany Press, St. Louis, Missouri. Other sources are indicated in the references below. The assistance of library staff at Phillips Theological Seminary in providing photographs of Oswald Goulter is gratefully acknowledged. The assistance of Mrs. Iris McBride of Grovedale Vic. in providing family information about the Goulter is also gratefully acknowledged. Mrs. McBride is a niece of Oswald Goulter.

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<sup>i</sup> W.E. Powell, *Scattered Seed*, (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1969), 20. H.G. Harward was the first State Evangelist in Victoria. He served as the first Principal of the College of the Bible in Victoria, 1907–1911.

<sup>ii</sup> The sermon/tract was probably “The Divine Marching Orders” found in H.G. Harward, *Evangelistic Sermons*, (Melbourne: Austral Publishing Co. 1905), 37.

<sup>iii</sup> Powell, 21 - 22.

<sup>iv</sup> See H.E. Hayward, “Frontier Churches: Narrabri”, *Churches of Christ NSW Occasional Papers*, No.9 July 2014.

<sup>v</sup> Possibly the Alexander Chapman Australasian Bible Institute established in 1914.

<sup>vi</sup> Powell became a lifelong friend of Goulter and wrote Goulter’s biography “Scattered Seed” on which much of this paper is based

<sup>vii</sup> Powell, 30.

<sup>viii</sup> The Disciples of Christ Mission Society

<sup>ix</sup> The Australian Christian, 1923, 265.

<sup>x</sup> *Camperdown Chronicle*, ‘Road to Yesterday’, 10 May 1923, 4.

<sup>xi</sup> “China Waking Up. Great Education Sweep” in the *North Western Courier* 9 June 1924, 2. This account was probably taken from a letter to family members who still lived in Narrabri.

<sup>xii</sup> ‘Confinement’ a term used to describe a period of withdrawal from social life owing to pregnancy.

<sup>xiii</sup> The “fu” suffix in its name indicates it was, at some point, the head of a prefecture.

<sup>xiv</sup> Powell, 56.

<sup>xv</sup> The United States maintained several gunboats on the river primarily to protect Standard Oil tankers travelling to Nanking. The sinking of the USS *Panay* by Japanese bombers on 12 December 1937 sparked an international incident.

<sup>xvi</sup> Powell, 67.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>xviii</sup> It is understood that Goulter applied Roman road building techniques.

<sup>xix</sup> The population is now around 7, 000, 000 (at August 2014).

<sup>xx</sup> In Hofei, she saw that poverty was prevalent and most of the Chinese women were illiterate. She was determined to devote her life to helping the poor and promoting women’s education. After months of effort, she established a girls’ middle school there. <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/minnie-vautrin>

<sup>xxi</sup> *China News Letter*, publication of CCM, Kowloon 21 January 1938.

<sup>xxii</sup> F.B. Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, (Atlanta: Chalice Press, 2001), 141–142. This story has its origins in a book written by reputable Disciple preacher Fred Craddock, published in 2001. The anecdote was included in numerous Christmas sermons in following years. But around 2009 it was queried on the blog site Chamblee. The blog attracted responses from Goulter relatives and descendants. The story’s connection to a departure from India could not be established but may relate to a port stop on the way to Europe during the Goulter sabbatical of 1936. But the incident may refer to Goulter’s arrival in Shanghai in December in 1938 as described above. That date would also be

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consistent with the flight of Jews from Germany. Shanghai had many resident Jews. The bloggers agreed it was an action consistent with Goulter's life view. Furthermore, it is likely that Craddock, the author of the story, knew Goulter personally. Two or three other stories about Goulter's compassion are also on the record.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Powell, 106

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>xxv</sup> <https://www.historic-shanghai.com/columbia-country-club/>

<sup>xxvi</sup> This freedom possibly related to an intention to use the Club only as transit accommodation for those listed for repatriation.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Australian artist Arthur Lindsay was an internee of Pootung Civilian Assembly Centre at Shanghai from 1943 to 1945. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1145031>

<sup>xxviii</sup> An inmate, dressed in a singlet, shorts and hat, sitting in the sun in a fenced yard at Pootung Camp.

<sup>xxix</sup> C.L. Twomey, *Australia's Forgotten Prisoners*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 76.

<sup>xxx</sup> It was discovered after the war that the Japanese often warehoused Red Cross parcels unopened. They contained food like condensed milk, chocolate and spreading cheese.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Powell, 137.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> It seems that the Union expanded beyond rural reconstruction to embrace other elements such as health.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Wilkinson had served at Hofei for over 25 years.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Powell, 189.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Ibid, 197.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> It is possible that Oswald's brother Harold attended the Methodist after the closure of Narrabri Church of Christ.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Letter from Mrs. Iris McBride, 15 August 2014.

<sup>xl</sup> D. A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 109.