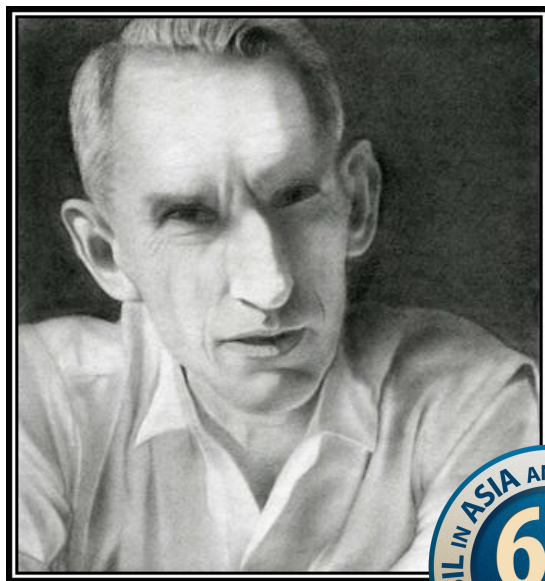


# Richard S. Pittman

SIL Statesman Linguist

and the

Asia-Pacific Rim of Fire



Arthur Lynip

edited by Jean Lieffers



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*Cover drawing of Richard Pittman by Mariano Peñalver from a photograph by Cornell Capa*

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## About the Author

Arthur W. Lynip (1913–2011) was a contemporary of Richard Pittman. The two men in their eighties were still actively working to document the story found in these pages. Pittman's life is worthy of note and so is Lynip's. Both men used the gift of education that they had received to benefit others. During his professional career Dr. Lynip helped implement the liberal arts curriculum at his former alma mater, Houghton College, New York. There he served as academic dean for sixteen years under President Stephen W. Paine, one of the NIV Bible translators and father of former SIL International President Carolyn Paine Miller. At Westmont College, Santa Barbara, California, where Lynip taught English from 1967 to 1977, he was the first faculty member to be named a distinguished professor. He held a master's degree in English and sociology and a doctorate in language development from New York University (1939, 1950). Houghton College awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1975. Dr. Lynip's career included international assignments as well, including a year with SIL in the Philippines. This e-book is published posthumously.



Dr. Arthur Lynip, Distinguished  
Professor of English,  
Westmont College



Dr. Lynip when writing  
this book with Dr. Pittman

## **Publisher's Foreword**

Stories teach us so much. And stories that encourage us to reflect on the past and give direction for the future are particularly powerful. SIL International is grateful to Dr. Arthur Lynip for this careful narrative on the life and work of Dr. Richard Pittman as it relates to the development of the work of SIL in Asia and the Pacific. Through his personal relationship with Richard Pittman and times of deep sharing together, Dr. Lynip had the opportunity to learn of the personal courage, strategic thinking and relationships that opened the door for SIL's work in Asia and throughout the region. But rather than viewing this book as a history of SIL, consider it instead a chance to glimpse the impact of a life well lived – the life of Dr. Richard Pittman.

Lynip notes that behind every great movement in history there stands one person with a great vision. The fulfillment of the vision of Dr. Richard Pittman can be seen through the work of many Asians today who care deeply about the languages and cultures of the Philippines, Vietnam, Nepal and other nations described in this book. From small beginnings in 1953, there are now many thousands of men and women throughout the region who are motivated to research, document and — more importantly perhaps — use their languages to celebrate their identity and reach their own education and development goals.

In the twenty-first century, as in years past, SIL International continues its commitment — in partnership with others — to serve language communities worldwide, building their capacity for sustainable language development, by means of research, translation, training and materials development.

The use of the languages that are understood best and used most is still the most powerful means to support transformation in the hearts and lives of individuals and communities. Throughout the world, SIL endeavors to serve by means of strategic partnerships with community associations, academic institutions, governments and international organizations.

Examples of the strength and impact of community associations can be seen among the Matigsalug Manobo and Blaan in Mindanao where language and development plans and activities are initiated and implemented by association leadership with technical assistance from SIL Philippines. Similar community

associations can be found in other nations mentioned in this book and across the region.

Believing that knowledge about all the world's languages matter, SIL embraces a scholarly and professional approach. Sixty years of experience in language and culture fieldwork has resulted in a wealth of language research data as well as a cadre of consultants in many domains with decades of experience: linguistics, translation, ethnoarts, literacy and education, orthography development and language documentation. As capacity in these areas is shared, it is exciting to see technical and strategic leadership grow in the region through colleagues who are citizens of Asian and Pacific nations.

SIL International has a tradition of innovating and creating new methods of working in partnership with speakers of minority languages. SIL has intentionally chosen to position itself to be responsive to and respectful of language community leaders. Following Richard Pittman's example, we hope to remain a helpful servant-partner for decades to come.

## Editor's Foreword

Humble fishermen cast their nets and have for eons. One such humble man was asked to cast his net across the entire Pacific Ocean and Rim of Fire. That man was Richard S. Pittman. The task presented to him was of incredible proportion: assist in developing alphabets for unwritten languages and provide access to literacy and literature for speakers of minority languages across Asia and the Pacific. Pittman was to start a process that would provide for others what those with written languages take for granted: choice, access, and the ability to hold one's own in a world that functions on the written word.

Pittman was convinced of the rightness of the concept but not necessarily of his ability to meet the challenge. He accepted the assignment. He didn't choose it. He did what was right. That decision led him to friendships with those in the highest levels of government and education across Asia and the Pacific. He met with heads of state and was given audience by some of the most influential world leaders of his time. He partnered cities in the United States with needs of nations and had officials on either side of the Pacific working together to meet the practical needs of little-known hilltribes and hunter gatherers of isolated places where he ventured.

The initiative Pittman lead has benefited minority cultural groups across Asia, Aboriginal peoples of Australia, isolated villagers of New Guinea, as well as nations across the region. Throughout the war in Vietnam and Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 70s, Pittman shepherded a band of equally humble volunteers who worked at personal risk to provide literacy, literature, and hope to countless minority peoples during a difficult time in the history of Southeast Asia. For twenty-five years it was Pittman in the lead.

This book was written by one who admired Pittman from afar at first. In the waning years of Pittman's life, Dr. Arthur Lynip, a distinguished retired English professor and father of one of those who followed Pittman, asked the elder statesman to recount stories of his early years in Asia. This biography began with those memoirs. By the time I received a copy, it had become "couldn't put it down" material to anyone even remotely connected to these years. My own connection is as one who came of age during the Vietnam War years and has since met many of the remarkable men and women who are players on these pages. Many of them assisted me in confirming details

of events, people, and places. Their personal contributions to the record of SIL's achievements in Asia-Pacific would merit books as well!

***On the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SIL in Asia and the Pacific  
this book is presented in tribute to the Richard Pittman family***

As former President of SIL International, Dr. Carolyn Miller encouraged, "The story of Dick and Kay's lives needs to be told." Indeed, the Pittmans were models of faith, dedication, commitment, and vision. Incredible people. Servant-leaders. Like so many who share their story.

*Jean Lieffers*

SIL International - Philippines Public History Archives

P.S. With gratitude to Dr. Stephen Lynip, son of the author, for his long service with SIL and assistance in bringing this book to publication.

## Asia-Pacific Region





## Preface

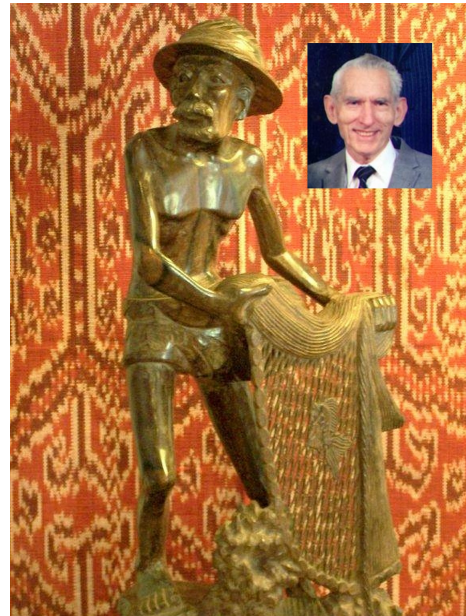
*Rim of Fire* can tease one's imagination as though peering out of a tiny port of a space shuttle to see the total Pacific Ocean outlined by erupting volcanoes. Common sense comes to the rescue. The Pacific contains half the ocean water of the world, has no rim, and even if all its volcanoes were in action the watcher would see only a distant blur. Imagination is better served by watching a Filipino fisherman throw his circling net out across the waters. Such a figure can illustrate an actual event.

Some years ago a lone man stepped onto Luzon Island in the Philippines and whipped out a sort of net that covered the entire Pacific area called the Rim of Fire. It was a net of communication that billowed out as good news to that vast expanse of sea, land, and people. Those reached were given the gift of Choice. They were numbered with the thousands upon thousands of unidentified minorities, the unknowns, who live in the mountain fastnesses and islands of the world.

Call the lone visitor Net Caster. Prior to his visit those minorities had no sure knowledge of their own country. These had managed to survive, but surrounding pressures offered no guarantees for the future.

Net Caster is Richard S. Pittman. Of normal height, weight, and dress and with no equipment or retinue, he did not appear to be a person of great significance. He might have escaped all notice. His strengths were commitment to a great cause, a friendly, intelligent face, and a gift for telling stories. However, his achievements from 1951 through 1975 provide a greater story than any he could tell. It had to be acted out, and he was the one called to take the leading part.

Pittman's larger-than-life story is greater than the sum of the parts of his narration. The image might be a larger-than-life figure casting an immense net out over the total Pacific Rim of Fire and beyond. This is Richard Pittman's story.



# Introduction

*Who is wise? He will realize these things.  
Who is discerning? He will understand them.  
Hosea 14:9a NIV*

Dr. Richard S. Pittman initiated and directed the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in Asia and the Pacific from an initial language survey in the Philippines in 1951 through an incredible quarter century ending in 1975. That work has, from its first day until today, continued to enlarge. The extent of Pittman's influence is partly suggested by the scope of his activity – from the Philippines to Papua New Guinea and Australia through Indonesia and mainland Southeast Asia to India and Nepal. Pittman's career had begun with the Aztecs of the Americas and included directing SIL in Mexico before he was called upon to begin SIL's work in Asia and the Pacific.

The Asia-Pacific phase of Pittman's career found him establishing and maintaining contacts and contracts with government and university officials throughout the region. Additionally he personally conducted linguists to their remote allocations. For twenty of those years, he directed the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the University of North Dakota, eighteen of those summers on site, in addition to his responsibilities across the Pacific.

Pittman's directness and meticulous honesty won the acceptance of SIL activities throughout Asia and the Pacific. It was said of Pittman that after he had made one visit to a state or university, he was thereafter greeted as a dear friend. Those officials, whom he held in high esteem, were of many political and religious persuasions.

This work began as a memoir narrated by Pittman to the author between 1990 and 1998. It presumes to be a faithful representation of Dr. Pittman's remembrance of his Asia-Pacific experience. Pittman requested that this book convey his profound gratitude to the officials of nations, universities, and remote villages which extended their hospitality to him and his SIL associates.

## Chapter One

### The Context

#### *Gift of a Book*

Someone has said that a butterfly batting its wings in Ecuador could provoke a hurricane in Texas. That supposition had a literal fulfillment in the Philippines.

It began in the early days of Ramon Magsaysay's tenure in the cabinet of Philippine President Quirino. In 1951 an incidental event took place. Magsaysay asked a secretary to place a call to a Richard Pittman in the United States. Of all the population of the Philippines only a handful had ever heard the name. Pittman was a graduate student who lived with his wife and children in rented rooms in Philadelphia, USA. Pittman had recently completed a preliminary survey of minority languages of the Philippines. The secretary tried to place the call but failed. She tried again. Failed even a third time. On the fourth try she succeeded. Her persistence is likened to the wing beat of the Ecuadorian butterfly. But in this real-life instance, a force stronger than a hurricane began to swirl.

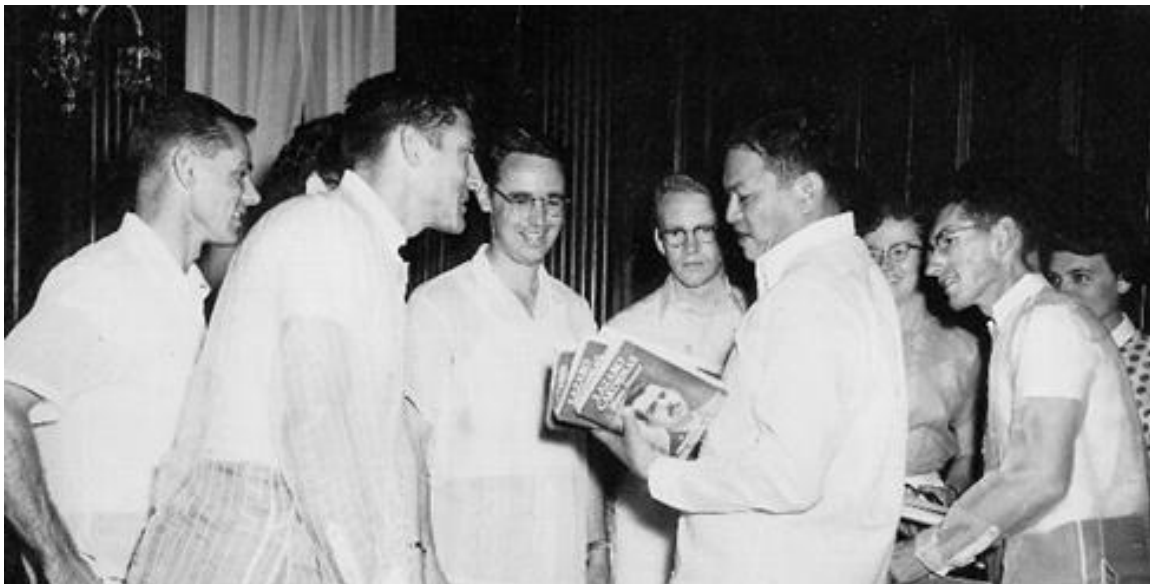
The wing beat developed its tiny breeze like this: Pittman, a linguist, had visited the Philippines to conduct a language survey. He was a thoughtful man, considerate almost beyond belief. He had read a biography of Lázaro Cárdenas, President of Mexico 1934–1940, written by Cameron Townsend with whom Pittman was associated. Having learned much about Magsaysay during his visit to the Philippines, he thought that the new Secretary might appreciate the book. To Magsaysay, Pittman was a totally unknown American. In appearance, the book was—only a book. Though it contained no personal linkage or intention that pertained to the Philippines, Pittman mailed the book and a note to Magsaysay.

Magsaysay read the book at once. How many cabinet ministers receiving a book from some unknown person would read it? And how many would then ask a secretary to locate and telephone (trans-Pacific and trans-continental) the one who sent the book? And how would the secretary find the unknown book-giver newly located in rented quarters? Who pulled these improbabilities together? Magsaysay delighted in the book

and declared later that the Cárdenas biography had guided his decision-making in his candidacy for president.

The Cárdenas biography established a strong connection between Magsaysay and the unknown Pittman. In December 1953 Magsaysay became president of the Philippines. That friendship opened the door for linguists to be assigned among minority peoples throughout the Philippines. Later Magsaysay wrote a letter recommending the Pittman SIL scholars to President Ngo Dinh Diem of Vietnam. That letter led to cordial relations between the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Vietnam. Within months, seventeen minority language research programs were under way in spite of growing unrest in Vietnam. The linguists devised alphabets, taught writing, recorded priceless language data, and translated wisdom literature into previously unwritten [languages of Vietnam<sup>a</sup>](#), just as others were doing in the Philippines. The heroic work of those pioneer researchers has outlasted the tides of war, imprisonments, executions and the erosions of time to rally and equip multiple remote peoples for participation in the twenty-first century. [SIL Bibliography: Vietnam<sup>b</sup>](#)

Entry into Vietnam was followed by the opportunity for Pittman to bring SIL teams into Papua New Guinea, then further into Asia. Along the way the steadily increasing company of linguists turned into the Australian Outback, into Indonesia, and beyond. Because of a thoughtful gesture, the gift of a book, a friend was made; because of the friend, a country was opened; because of one grateful country, another extended the welcome mat; because of another, another . . . approvals became contagious. The wing beat that began with the persistence of a secretary placing a long distance phone call eventually resulted in the winds of a magnificent storm that blew not only in the Philippines but across Asia and the Pacific.



Philippine President Magsaysay with Cárdenas book welcoming SIL (Howard McKaughan front, Pittman right).

### *The Gift of Choice*

The acceptances and satisfactions produced in nation after nation resulted in thousands of hitherto unidentified minority people receiving what is, at its exact center, the gift of choice.

Literacy, for example, offers the possibility for legal status: written records, an established history, recognized leadership and a share in the nation's government. The once "unknowns" become a significant presence in their world. Literacy and knowledge confer choice without one restricting obligation. Such persons are free to pursue any or all of their earlier ways or to work out new patterns.

Why do these SIL linguists do this? It is a fundamental question with answers aptly and often provided by Townsend and Pittman and their colleagues. I would say that SIL linguists and their support teams are motivated by, among other things, a recognition that access to the wisdom of the ages as recorded in the Bible has become a source of personal freedom and community development for multitudes of people in many countries for over two thousand years. There is a reason why the Bible is the most popular book ever written. The Bible is not a religion. It is the wisdom of the ages captured in history, in poetry, in character study, in inspiration, and in spirit. It is the inspired revelation of the nature of existence. In the Bible these linguists and literacy

workers have found truth, knowledge, and understanding which they wish to make available for others. With knowledge and access, there is the gift of choice.

When linguists and literacy scholars leave a village, they leave no bill that a community is obligated to pay. What they do leave are resources that may enable a people to emerge into the contemporary world in possession of their own individual place in the order of creation. They leave knowledge of the identity of their community in their own language within their world.

Motivated by just such vision, Richard S. Pittman, Ph.D., linguist, from Streator, Illinois, was induced by colleagues to accept, albeit reluctantly, an awesome responsibility. His whole desire had been to return to Mexico to continue study of the Aztec language, culture, and people. When he was asked to set aside personal interests, he complied, knowing that the assignment would cost his family and himself dearly. It was an act of obedience to a calling in which he believed. In the course of the next quarter century, the SIL governing board largely followed Pittman's recommendations. He accepted their authority, and they accepted his judgment. In a logical, natural sequence, Pittman became the expeditor and energizer and counselor for the total Asia-Pacific area. The title "Net Caster" is not an exaggeration.

Pittman was given the succession of jobs because he was on site, because he was known, because he was respected by several heads of state as well as by university officials, and because linguists and literacy workers and their support personnel trusted him. He became the agent for sending hundreds of volunteer linguists and their assistants throughout the Asia and Pacific regions.

What has been presented has been a synopsis of a world-changing process, introduced not by fierce-eyed conquerors nor spellbinding politicians but by mild-mannered, conventional scholars, both men and women. The central figure happened to be a model of modesty—so modest, in fact that he was a reluctant ambassador who would have preferred life with the Aztecs of the Americas. From early on Pittman's best recommendations were humor-filled eyes, an esteem for human nature, a cooperating family, and a wealth of good stories. He was one who delighted in his own profession but placed it "on hold" when an inner voice prompted him to do so.

Here follows the story *behind* the story of that linguist.

### ***Cameron Townsend's Vision***

An adage runs that behind every great movement in history there stands one person with a great vision. It is good to quickly add “. . . and many who stake their careers on the worth of that vision.” In this instance the individual with the powerful inspiration was named Townsend.

William Cameron **Townsend<sup>c</sup>**, having completed his junior year of college at Occidental College, Los Angeles, California, journeyed by freighter with a companion from San Francisco to Guatemala for the purpose of selling Spanish Bibles in Central America. The two were on a “mission trip” to make the Bible more available in Latin America. The year was 1917. Townsend was twenty-one years old.

Townsend's first contact was with the Cakchiquel Indians in Guatemala who complained that they could not read Spanish. The young man and the Mayan Cakchiquels established bonds of mutual respect. Thereafter, Townsend spent a year traveling by foot in Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua selling Bibles. However, his first contact proved strongest. He left the Bible distribution program and settled down to live with the Cakchiquels. He would learn their language and help them in any way that he could.

In the course of studying the **Cakchiquel language<sup>d</sup>**, Townsend happened on the teaching of an anthropologist named Edward Sapir who wrote that every language should be described in terms of its own structure. The practice had been for linguists to shape an unwritten language into a Latinized version of its own syntax and grammar. Sapir had gained his insight from a German ethnologist named Franz Boas. This preceding concept might seem minor, but for young Townsend it came as the first ray of the rising sun. It was an insight that would eventually impact the entire field of applied linguistics through Townsend and those who followed him.

In 1921 Townsend and several others proceeded with ambitious building plans on behalf of the Cakchiquel people. These included a primary school, two dormitories, a chapel, and a small hospital. In the midst of the building operations, he plunged into translating a portion of the Bible into the Cakchiquel language. Describing this part of his career, Townsend later wrote:

While I was engaged in this work among the Cakchiquels, I came to realize that in order to be completely accepted by the Indian it is extremely important to

be able to speak his language. I began to study the Cakchiquel language and found that it was very complex and possessed an extraordinary grammatical system. I discovered more than one hundred thousand forms for each verb as well as other notable peculiarities.

I found that the science of linguistics was one of the sciences to which least attention was given; that more than one thousand languages were yet to be studied in the world; that very few universities offered extensive courses in descriptive linguistics; that very few organizations were engaged in complete investigations of these languages; and that one would need a small army of young linguists who would be willing to work long and hard to gather the necessary data which this implied.

Christopher Columbus himself could not have felt more emotion when confronted by the importance of exploring the new world that he had found than I did when I thought of the great secrets that would come to light through a detailed and comparative study of all the unknown languages of the world.

The above passage eloquently testifies to the moment of fusion when three understandings came together. First, that the yet infant science of descriptive linguistics called for researchers to scour the world to discover and interrelate the languages of minority people—like the Cakchiquels. Second, that each of those separate groups deserved to possess its own language in its own written form, not in a form forced into reconciliation with an alien language structure. Third, that college-trained young people could be recruited to achieve a goal of world linguistic research. These would be young people like himself who recognized the worth of literacy and access to knowledge including what the Bible has to offer.

As for this third circumstance, Townsend knew the tremendous appeal that translation of the Bible for all would hold. This was the appeal that had taken him to Guatemala. He knew of a score of colleges that were noted for producing graduates of the necessary competence and vision. The acquisition of scientific skills by these graduates would not be too great a problem if that learning could be concentrated into summer study programs.

From this moment progress towards achieving his goals was slow but definite. During the 1920s Townsend continued to give attention to the Cakchiquels. He later reported, “For the Cakchiquels I had established five schools, a hospital, a printing program, a bit of agriculture, and a Bible institute. And I had translated a substantial



segment of the Bible. That is what I dreamed for the Cakchiquels.”

By the early thirties Townsend was increasingly dedicated to Indian peoples in Mexico. During that decade he also conducted a very small summer program in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, designed to concentrate linguistic training into ten weeks. At the invitation of the Mexican government, he took the entire student body (seven) to Mexico. Students at Townsend’s summer training programs would be given hands-on experience in confronting linguistic and translation problems from this time on.

### ***Summer Institute of Linguistics***

By 1939 Townsend’s summer program in the United States registered twenty-two students. The name Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)<sup>e</sup> was first used during these years. Townsend introduced himself to scientific groups of linguists both in Mexico and in the United States. From those earliest days the members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics have maintained a presence in professional associations and contribute regularly to scientific enterprise. In fact, today SIL has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and is an official NGO partner (non-governmental organization with consultative status) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The SIL *Ethnologue*<sup>f</sup>, founded, named, and edited by Richard Pittman for 20 years, helped establish an official ISO<sup>gh</sup> standard for language identification worldwide. SIL’s achievements and contribution in the fields of linguistics, language development, literacy, and multilingual education have proved enormous.

One challenge dogged the Townsend efforts: “Why,” it was repeatedly asked, “focus on the languages of remote ethnic groups? Some of them are quite small. Why not teach those minorities the national language of their respective countries?”

The answer is that Townsend had discovered for himself that a remote people live *in* and *through* their own tongue. They are separated from others by that “different” language. Outsiders reckon them as “other.” But a community’s identity is established in the words and inflections and rhythms and metaphors of its own language. Whatever is going to affect its reasonings must come to those people by way of their own language. Language authorities report that the language of a society is always totally adequate to meet the needs of that social group. No language is vocabulary-poor for its

community. If people are deprived of their own tongue, they lose the essence of their corporate inheritance.

Furthermore, the huge expectation that minority people must learn the national or trade language has a greater potential of success when they have opportunity to learn to read and write their own tongue, with its own alphabet, first. The second language comes from outsiders. It is useful in matters of trade but is often divorced from their worldview and local knowledge structures. Moreover, it is pedagogically futile to try to teach unknown concepts in an unknown second language. In this instance, the difficulty is compounded for the learner if the second language is taught simultaneously with the discovery and mastery of the skills of reading and writing. Teach the skills of literacy in the learner's first language, and then bridge those skills into the trade or national language.

Motivation for literacy develops from such realities as the need for knowledge and abilities in commerce and trade, health education, community development, land claims and legal matters, preservation of history, success in dealing with the modern world, and in providing a future for the next generation. Literacy and literature are part of the gift of choice, access to knowledge, and so much more. First comes the establishment of their own identity; second, the recognition of relationships with larger society.

The belief that had taken hold of Townsend's mind was that all of the peoples of the earth could be given their written language in his generation. That belief dictated early action on all levels. His charisma and urgent message brought hundreds of young college graduates into the program. As for "in one generation," Townsend seems to have been overly optimistic, but his insistence caused no harm and gave wings to the program.

In the 1940s the group incorporated as a non-profit enterprise, set up a business office in Glendale, California, started linguistic courses in Canada, took a research program to the Navajos in Arizona, set up a jungle training camp (required of all recruits) in Mexico, and purchased an amphibian aircraft to be used by the linguists in areas of Peru where commercial transport was unavailable. This aircraft served *all* in need, as a general policy. After the modest beginning, an excellent air transport program known as [JAARS](#)<sup>i</sup> was inaugurated. Additionally, by the early 1950s four linguistic teaching programs were operative, three of them as university offerings. The number of young scholars affiliated with SIL grew rapidly.

That which had been envisioned by Cameron Townsend in Guatemala was quickly endorsed in the United States, in Mexico, in Canada, in Peru and in Australia. The program appealed to educational leaders, heads of states, scores of college students in a half-dozen countries, and to hundreds of sympathetic supporters around the world.

### ***Hall of Fame***

Townsend's gift of farsightedness, his enthusiasm, and his almost boundless energy attracted remarkable associates. Typical of the academic excellence achieved by Townsend's linguists were Kenneth Pike, Joseph and Barbara Grimes, Robert Longacre, John Bendor-Samuel, Sarah Gudschinsky and others.

[Kenneth Pike<sup>j</sup>](#), Ph.D. University of Michigan, nominated repeatedly for the Nobel Peace Prize, became a world-renowned phonetician and pioneer in phonological analysis and description, including especially the description of tone languages. SIL International grew under his [leadership<sup>k</sup>](#) as its first President (1942–1979) and then President Emeritus (1979–2000).

[Joseph Grimes<sup>l</sup>](#), Ph.D. Cornell University, became a professor of linguistics at Cornell where he pioneered in processing language data by computer. [Barbara F. Grimes<sup>m</sup>](#) was longtime editor and compiler of the world-standard [Ethnologue catalog<sup>n</sup>](#) of languages. In their collaboration, standard three-letter codes for language identification became a feature of the *Ethnologue* database. Both of the Grimes received Doctorate in Literature degrees from Wheaton College. Their early linguistic studies focused on an Aztec language of Mexico and more recently on Hawaiian Pidgin in addition to decades of language research worldwide for the *Ethnologue*.

[Robert Longacre<sup>o</sup>](#), Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, whose dissertation, *Proto-Mixtecan*, was the first extensive linguistic reconstruction in Mesoamerican languages. Longacre has maintained status as a world leader in discourse analysis. His scholarly publications exceed 200 books and articles.

[John Bendor-Samuel<sup>p</sup>](#), Ph.D. London University, initiated SIL work across Africa, edited *The Journal of West African Languages* (of which he was an expert), directed the SIL training program in the UK concurrently serving as SIL Africa Area director for many years and later as [Executive Director<sup>q</sup>](#) of SIL International.

[Sarah Gudschinsky<sup>r</sup>](#), Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, became a world leader in

applying linguistic analysis to the development of effective literacy materials and a reading approach that was subsequently named for her. She served SIL as International [Literacy Consultant](#)<sup>s</sup> and Coordinator.

One such remarkable associate of Cameron Townsend was [Richard S. Pittman](#)<sup>t</sup>, Ph.D., the individual who sent the book to Ramon Magsaysay, the one who “cast the net” across and around the Pacific. Richard Pittman’s name is permanently linked with that of his wife, Catherine Matthews Pittman. Their [biographies](#)<sup>u</sup> are written large in the lives of the multitudes on the islands and along the margins of the Pacific basin, including the continents of Australia and Asia.

In Townsend and Pittman’s generation, the multitudinous minority language groups of these regions were the pawns of forces beyond their knowledge or control. “Knowledge” and “control” lodge deep in the hearts and minds of humanity. None except the greedy would withhold these two capabilities from others. It is one step to admit this truth. It is another matter to reach out to provide the vital “knowledge and control” to those without such basic human rights. Thanks to the Summer Institute of Linguistics and others, an increasing number of residents of the Rim of Fire and beyond in Asia and the Pacific now possess access to knowledge provided by alphabets, literacy and literature. These tools are foundational.

One could say that Pittman “happened” on the scene. He was caught in the riptide of activity that issued in the changes described in these pages. If one thinks that Pittman arrived entirely “by accident,” it would be difficult to explain how so many other “accidents” are identified with the program. The story of SIL and Pittman is crowded with amazing coincidences, surprising meetings, microscopic connections between causes and effects, adversities that melted into affirmations, stinging defeats that restructured themselves into victories. Sometimes progress seemed to unfold naturally; sometimes it seemed stalled. The “stalling” often vanished without obvious cause.

But one person in Asia and the Pacific was central: Pittman. He was at times the initiator, other times a mediator, at times a presiding elder, often the court of last resort, but always he was the designated one. The curious side to those assertions is that Pittman was an unassuming individual. He was a scholar, not forceful, not a manipulator, unpretentious, and by no means self-seeking. He had been a careful, thoughtful, skilled linguist until duty called elsewhere. Then he laid aside his personal plans in order to do what his heart told him to be duty. This is how it all came about.



Pittman accepting the Magsaysay Award for International Understanding in 1973 on behalf of SIL in the Philippines



## Chapter Two

### Pittman to 1952

#### *The Source*

The birthplace of Richard Pittman was [Streator, Illinois<sup>a</sup>](#), eighty miles southwest of Chicago. Streator is deceptively small, looking like scores of similar villages in the flatlands of the midwestern United States. Summer tourists driving through the area would see miles of corn lining the highway. Not visible were the marvelous varieties of hybrid corn developed right there in those fields of LaSalle County and seeded all over the world. It was not only the deep loamy soil that distinguished Streator. Beneath the endless acres of corn lay seams of bituminous coal. And the coal was flanked on the north by a stratum of dazzling high-silica sand. The sand was ideal for glassmaking. The coal would fuel the ovens. The corn would fill a million stomachs. Give Streator credit for making the most of its resources.

One other Streator product would go beyond all coal, sand and corn. It would feed the heads and hearts of multitudes. That fourth export is less tangible but far more enduring. It centers around a Streator son by the name of Richard Pittman.

His parents, Edwin John Pittman and Edna Louise Shepard Pittman, moved to Streator from New York State to superintend the installation and operation of a plant for the manufacture of glass milk bottles. Here they established their home. Here they raised their four children, Raymond, Richard, Ellen Joy and Ruhama (a Bible name meaning “loved”).

The factory flourished. During the prosperous years of the 1920s, two hundred men worked three shifts. The Pittman family lived in a company-built house in a low-cost, ethnically mixed neighborhood. The Pittman children were playmates of children of the factory employees.

That second decade of the twentieth century picked up the name “Roaring Twenties” with an unhealthy postwar burst of speculative investments that undermined solid growth and development. The little town of Streator saw nothing of that kind of extravagance. However, Streator was not far from Chicago, a center of population, business, culture, education, and crime. Streator, like ten thousand other small towns in the United States, went about its business of farming and mining and industry almost

untouched by Chicago life. The Pittman family lived well out of range of the “High Life.”

Richard Pittman said that his father taught him that disciplined, exacting work is wholesome. Additionally, he taught tolerance and sympathy for others. “He never spoke disrespectfully of anyone,” Pittman said. “I owe to my mother my sense of wonder. She stimulated her children to delight in the marvels of the sky and of geology and of animal, bird, plant and insect life. My home life was wonderful. We were a typical American family.” The Pittman children were daily marshaled by their mother to the breakfast table and then to a session of Scripture reading and prayer. “Then, as though impelled by uncoiling springs, we children raced off to school.”

Pittman remembers few conflicts in the community. Children played together without breaking up into gangs. “There was one exception to the peace of our neighborhood,” he allowed. “During Prohibition I was coming home one night when I saw a chimney blazing. Accumulated creosote roared upward. I ran to the door of the house and knocked furiously. The door opened a crack and out came the muzzle of a pistol pointed directly at my stomach! Apparently I had come upon a bootlegger making illegal liquor.”

Pittman home life was working class. His father and the co-administrator, a quality control engineer, were paid adequately but not liberally. As most families in the working class in those days, the Pittmans lived frugally.

In 1929 the stock market crashed. The Depression set in. The plant closed two of its furnaces. Household income, modest at best, was reduced. Right at this time a demoralizing event took place in the local high school. Although the Pittmans were not involved in the problem, good judgment dictated that the two boys should be packed off by train to a different school. The already financially limited parents somehow cut expenses to an absolute minimum to pay the additional education costs.

The school that the parents chose shared the campus of Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, about four hundred miles southeast of Streator. The boys delighted in attending the academy and were overjoyed to remain on the same campus when they were ready for college.

Pittman summarized those years: “Of all the myriad experiences of the college years, one was most lasting: an enthusiastic Spanish teacher.” All circumstances at Asbury College contributed to an effective undergraduate education, but that teacher’s

energy breathed life into his students, especially into Richard Pittman.

That one teacher's influence made all learning easy for him. Among his joys in those classes was the pleasure of interacting with that instructor, in being recognized as a person and in being involved in honest intellectual exploration. This combination of an invigorating collegiate life and an inspiring teacher united to determine the direction of Pittman's career. Enthusiasm would be central in his approach to any undertaking.

Pittman graduated from Asbury College in 1935. Those were still the days of the Great Depression. The economic life of the United States, especially in cities, had slumped into stagnation. College graduates like Pittman could find no employment. People walked the streets hunting jobs. Breadlines fed the urban poor. Bankruptcies crowded the courts. Out of school and out of work, Pittman kept himself busy at minor jobs, additional studies, and at home, but he endured idleness along with an entire generation of American youth. Uncertainty dogged his steps.

In the gloom of high intentions and poor prospects, an ancient quotation flashed into Richard's mind: ". . . in this will I be confident." He tried to find what "this" might be for himself. He found the source of the saying to be a song written by King David: "Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." Well then, he thought, I want my life to affirm truth and justice. The God of the Universe inspired David to such faith, and I want His guidance above all. I, too, will move forward with confidence, even with enthusiasm!

### ***Lonely Confidence and Catherine***

For him, "confidence" meant proceeding as though he would be guided step by step, and to "step," he thought, he should find a life partner. A college classmate, Catherine Matthews, seemed a reasonable choice, but he wanted some assurance that she was the right one. He and Catherine were only moderately acquainted. They had attended some social functions together. Sometimes they sat at the same table in the college dining commons. However, they had never spoken in terms of making a commitment to one another. In his present loneliness, memories of those few hours of pleasant companionship crystallized into a decision. They had parted as friends only. However, the Pittman family was planning a twenty-fifth wedding anniversary reunion back in New York State. At his mother's suggestion, he invited Miss Matthews of New Jersey to join them as his guest.



Pittman wrote to Miss Matthews. No answer came the first week, of course. Mail from Illinois to New Jersey and back would require at least two weeks. No answer came the second week. The answer delayed and delayed. Three full weeks. Then came a letter with the familiar handwriting. He fled to his room and tore open the envelope. She would come!

One speculates about courting practices in the 1930s. Pittman, many years later, had no recollection of any correspondence that might have taken place between Catherine and himself prior to his invitation to the family reunion. However, it may be noted that he recognized her handwriting. The anniversary reunion was held in upstate New York, three hundred miles from the Matthews home in New Jersey. Miss Matthews would travel by train, changing trains in New York City. She was to be met by a young man not seen or heard from for two years. One may assume that as Catherine left home to board that train, she knew that she was not invited to a family reunion as merely “a guest.” What wonderments might she have entertained as she stared out the coach window during that long journey? And yet her wildest speculations could not have touched what actually lay ahead.

She descended from the train at a small rural station. In later years, Pittman, a man of fabulous memory, had no recollection of the name of the train station. The “what ifs” were forgotten. Catherine’s college “friend” Richard was there.

The next question: Would the totally unknown “people of the reunion” accept her? And would Richard and his family suppose that she had accepted the invitation as a kind of vacation? Did she wonder that some cranky cousin should say, “She doesn’t talk like us.” Whatever thoughts might have drifted through her mind remain secret.

Miss Matthews proved a most sociable guest. Pittman recalled that her beauty and vivacity added greatly to the celebration.

Yet even as he returned home to Streator, Pittman was unsure. How could he be absolutely certain that Catherine should be his life’s companion? “In this will I be confident,” came into his mind again.

Family letters describe the celebration as “delightful.” But for Pittman, all was as it had been before . . . until “out of the blue” that enthusiastic teacher of Spanish at Asbury College wrote to him offering work. The teacher had been invited to direct a

minimum-salary youth program in El Paso, Texas. Would Pittman join him? Pittman accepted immediately.

Three months after his arrival in El Paso, the teacher was transferred to another location and Pittman was given full responsibility for the youth program, with occupancy of an attractive house as part of his compensation. He wrote to Catherine Matthews: "Would you be willing to marry me at my brother's home in New Mexico and then join me here in El Paso?"

Once more Catherine Matthews took a solo train ride this time much longer than the "Anniversary" trip. And this time she no doubt had different questions on the 2500 mile journey from New Jersey to New Mexico. An old ballad gives us descriptive words: "And the wheels hummed a song as the train rolled along . . ." They were married on December 31, 1936.

These would prove but the beginning of Catherine's journeys. As the partner of Richard Pittman, traveling would take her to the ends of the earth.

Pittman could not have found a better companion. Catherine was vivacious; he was reserved. She mixed readily with others; he tended to hold back. She was a gracious hostess and conversationalist; he was almost shy. As matters turned out, she could endure a meager lifestyle or be at ease with royalty. She would hike endless miles under a fiery sun or in a tropical downpour. She would make a thatched hut attractive to a Mexican president. As a mother, she instilled in the three children God gave them an appetite for dignity and estate while moving from country to country and from remote regions to populous cities. She was always a lady. She never lost her keen sense of humor. One observer said, "It was almost as though Pittman was guided to the one person in the world who could see him through his tumultuous career."

In 1938 the Pittmans left the Southwest. He had been invited to teach undergraduate Spanish part-time at Wheaton College, near Chicago. He would be on a two-year fellowship and allowed to take any classes that fit into his schedule. Tuition would not be charged. He taught two classes in elementary Spanish and, in the course of the two years, took classes in French, German, Greek, and anthropology.

In his second year at Wheaton with spring recess approaching, eight adventure-hunting students petitioned their Spanish teacher Pittman and his wife to chaperone them to Mexico City. They were out to experience Mexican culture firsthand. The distance from Wheaton to Mexico City is 2200 miles. They traveled by car.

Pittman later said that the ten visitors were rewarded twice over for their prodigious journey. Mexico was more than they had dreamed. Every hour was crammed with activity.

Prior to the trip L. L. Legters, a speaker at Wheaton College, had urged Pittman to look up Cameron Townsend, a pioneer linguist for cultural minorities in Mexico. Pittman found Townsend. That meeting was pivotal in the Pittmans' lives, for Townsend was a crusader looking for recruits. Townsend was a magnet, and the Pittmans reacted like steel. His vision caught their hearts.

Other events of the trip eventually faded from memory, but that one contact determined the Pittmans' careers. They felt the tug of their hearts and the magnificence of Townsend's vision for the minority peoples of Mexico. They applied to the newly founded Summer Institute of Linguistics.

The next summer, 1940, the Pittmans among sixty other students attended the seventh annual linguistics session of Camp Wycliffe at Sulphur Springs, Arkansas. That autumn they, now full members in the developing organization today known as SIL, took their two-year-old daughter and traveled by truck to Tetelcingo, Morelos State, Mexico. They would learn the Aztec-derived language and begin research. Tetelcingo was the community where Townsend had begun his first Mexican language study.

### ***Land of the Aztecs***

Pittman found that the Aztec dialect of Tetelcingo had an alphabet that lacked suitable symbols for long vowels. These sounds had eluded recognition. The Pittmans completed the alphabet. With the help of a competent national co-translator, the now adequate orthography began to accumulate tribal lore, health instruction, agricultural advisories, high moral teachings and the like. In ten years Pittman and his co-translator completed a draft of the last twenty-seven books of the Bible. In the same time frame, Pittman completed a Master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania and published three articles in professional journals.

Pittman's very first paper was read publicly at Yale University at the annual conference of the Linguistic Society of America on December 30, 1947. His presentation was preceded by a report from another member of the conference. In the discussion that followed, that speaker's paper was "torn to bits." Shaking in his shoes, Pittman rose to

deliver his treatise. As he completed his presentation, the audience stood to its feet in tumultuous applause!

On that subject, the above statement came from Dr. Pittman himself. That is a wonder. In all the interviews and conversations that ultimately resulted in this biography, Pittman more often itemized his mistakes and misjudgments—not his accomplishments. But the Yale event was an exception. The enthusiasm offered by such distinguished professionals early in his career caused even Pittman's characteristic modesty to leap over the fence.

By the late 1940s, Pittman was carrying his own Aztec program forward and directing the language programs of more than fifty other SIL members who were working in twenty plus language groups in Mexico.

Those responsibilities required much travel. In those days not all accommodations in rural Mexico measured up to others. Once, in the process of placing new linguists, Pittman, his wife and two of their young children plus the three new recruits were given shelter by a friendly farmer. He opened an adequate storeroom to them, but there was no furniture. The farmer generously brought in four sawhorses and a stack of boards. Sharing their accommodations was a panicked rooster with flapping wings and threatened dignity, quite unable to sleep with so many strangers in his room. It was an eventful night. Good stories come at a cost.

### ***A New Venue - Australia 1951***

The Summer Institute of Linguistics was invited by a consortium to found a linguistics program in Victoria, Australia. Dr. Kenneth Pike, a senior linguist of the organization, and his wife Evelyn took charge of the first session of classes in January 1950. Fifty-six enrolled. With demand that high, a plan for the second session became urgent. Townsend and Pike decided that the Pittmans should conduct the 1951 session. As might be expected, the Pittmans agreed to go, but Richard was less enthusiastic about a side mission that was added. After the Australian classes, he was to make a brief side-trip to the Philippines to investigate minority language needs in the islands.

The Pittmans had been translating, writing, and supervising in Mexico for a decade. Later they would say, "Those were the happiest years." Their three children felt at home in Tetelcingo. Recruits were being safely allocated among remote people groups. The Mexican Department of Education knew them and their work and gave

strong support. For them to break off even temporarily evoked dismay.

In January 1951 the Pittmans departed to Melbourne where the Australia SIL training program had become established. During their absence, the children lived with Richard Pittman's parents.

On March 31, the task in Australia completed, the Pittmans went separate ways at the Melbourne airport, she to return to the children in the United States, he to make a forty-five-day investigation into the needs of Philippine minorities. In Pittman's heart was a cold fear that if he found a need for SIL services, he would be a prime candidate for leading the project.

### ***After the Twig is Bent (to Manila)***

"April is the cruelest month . . ." Those famous words of the poet Eliot surfaced in Pittman's mind. He had not objected to the assignment of the Philippine survey, but now suffered a crowded, undigested feeling that his entire future was somehow tied into this "short-term" visit. His plane lowered from the troposphere onto the well-heated Manila tarmac. April is the hottest month in tropical Philippines. Ruefully, he ticked off his liabilities: no letters of introduction, little experience in dealing with governments, no friends to greet him, limited finances—with such resources he was to make contact with the Philippine government, conduct an initial survey of minority languages, and discern whether remote communities might want the services SIL had to offer.

Cameron Townsend had once admonished, "The powers that be are ordained by God. Before looking around in a strange city to find friends, go to the office of the principal person with whom you hope to do business." Well, — Pittman hailed a taxi. "Take me to the Department of Education," he said.

This was only a few years after World War II. Devastation and reconstruction made travel less than a joy. Rubble reduced traffic to single lanes on the immense Dewey (now Roxas) Boulevard. The driver dodged craters. Windowless, half-destroyed buildings lined the streets. Clouds of wind-driven dust converted laborers into ghostlike creatures pushing shovels and brooms. Jeepneys dodged around sandbagged redoubts on which soldiers leaned, rifles at the ready. "Why?" he asked. "Huks attack" was the answer. Problems had not ended with WWII.

They pulled up to a scarred sandstone flight of stairs leading into a once-imposing building. Pittman worked his way up the half-shattered staircase. How, he thought, can

these people look so clean and neat in all this dust and construction? The building was crowded with men in starched barongs (embroidered dress shirts) and women in pastel business attire, all immaculate. Everyone rushed. He thought, “Who in this chaos has time to think about ethnic groups hidden among the mountains?” Eliot was right about April.

“Go to the top,” had been Townsend’s counsel. The person to see was Dr. Cecilio Putong of the Department of Education and Culture of the Philippines. A secretary greeted him. “Would Mr. Pittman please be seated? I’m sure Dr. Putong will see you shortly.” He waited less than fifteen minutes. The massive office door was opened by a keen-eyed, white-haired gentleman in his early seventies, Pittman guessed. “Welcome, Dr. Pittman!” His voice was low but firm, a person of resolution. “Come in and talk with me. What a pleasure!” Pittman did not know what he had expected after the devastation in the street, but he was thrown off guard by the personification of intellectual vitality in front of him.

Dr. Putong proved a poised host: “Is this your first visit? I hope that the wretched aftermath of war has not caused you inconvenience.” Pittman had heard of the grace of Filipino hospitality, but the reality was beyond all expectation. He relaxed.

Preliminary exchanges left behind, he put forward his inquiry: “Are there many minority cultures in the Philippines that would profit from the services of linguists?”

“That’s a good question, Dr. Pittman. Various aboriginal groups live in remote regions. Subsequent immigrations have pressured them deeper into the mountains. How many, we do not know. Eighty-seven languages is commonly suggested. What does your organization do?”

Pittman fell back on what he knew best. He told of the SIL work in Mexico. First would come the survey to learn how many people spoke a certain language and whether that language had been established in written form. Next, an effort would be made to discover related languages. Then teams of trained linguists would, after securing permission, make their homes in receptive communities. Finally, the researchers would record legends and folklore as they worked with local people to produce literacy and health materials and the translation of wisdom literature into the language.

Secretary Putong responded: “This is a larger matter than I can answer without further investigation, but as to the first part of your question, you might well visit our

trade schools. You will find in them great ethnic diversity and gain much information on minority cultures. You are welcome to make that inquiry. I will list several schools and have our secretary give you letters of introduction.”

It was as simple as that. As he descended the sandstone steps, a helmeted soldier half-saluted him. April seemed less threatening.

Students were delighted to talk about their home languages. Using a language assessment survey list, Pittman secured vernacular equivalents for each of two hundred common words. Grammatical constructions were obtained by asking for local equivalents of elementary statements. With this data he could begin to discover linguistic relationships between ethnic groups.

A university president gave him a letter of introduction to other leaders in education. One school official presented him to another. In this fashion he was able to gain an initial understanding of languages that might be found in the mountainous interior. After visiting educators in the metropolitan area, Pittman turned north into Mountain Province of Luzon and then south to Mindanao.

Pittman had been told that Americans were warmly received in the Philippines, but he had not anticipated the generous treatment extended. Hospitality was lavished on him wherever he turned. This included chance contacts made on buses as well as his reception at universities. Wherever he turned, he was greeted almost as a member of the family of the host. He himself was quick to recognize the whimsical side of life and found Filipinos equally given to such humor. They were delightful company.

A second revelation directly concerned his mission. Every segment of information he received magnified the number of languages spoken in the Philippines. At the onset he had been told: “Five or six languages are spoken in that country.” Dr. Putong had said “eighty-seven.” Compiling his own findings with other reports, he drew the conclusion that “Almost every valley and plain had its own language. The tongues of the islands may have had a common ancestor, but time and isolation have generated scores of languages.”

Pittman reported to SIL’s Board of Directors on his survey. He listed what he thought to be the extent of need and then every negative that his visit had revealed. His conclusion ran as follows:

If we really believe that even very small language communities should

have extensive portions of vernacular scriptures, we should undertake translation work in the Philippines. . . . A linguistic center there would also serve in the near future for sending translators into Taiwan, Borneo and other Pacific islands.

### ***Still and Small But a Voice***

Pittman had looked forward to making his report and then hurrying back to his first interest, the Tetelcingo translation in Mexico. There he was at home with the descendants from the Aztec empire. There he had made a significant contribution to linguistic scholarship. There was the unfinished research work. There his family shared a place in the culture of the Indian village. There he could continue to serve as the director of the SIL Mexico Branch and to assist in placing and helping the influx of new linguists. But the apprehension he had felt as he first entered the Philippines became reality. The Board voted to seek entrance into that country and asked Pittman to relinquish the Tetelcingo assignment and to initiate relations with the Philippine government. A letter written later to Cameron Townsend clearly expresses Pittman's position. His passion for exactitude in communication is obvious. He wrote in part:

I found that somehow an erroneous impression has begun to get around regarding my attitude toward the Philippines. The gist of the impression is that perhaps I "have a hankering" to go to the Philippines.

In order to keep the record straight, I am endeavoring to state my attitude more explicitly. The request of the Board that I return from Australia via the Philippines did not originate with me. I accepted the assignment as a Board directive, both because I believe in obedience and because I believed the Philippines needed more translations. I was frankly frightened by it because I am not an adventurer. However, I felt little doubt but that my report would recommend SIL studies into the islands. This report was submitted with a heavy heart, for I suspected that, if it were accepted, I might likely be named to head the undertaking.

Now I wonder if some are interpreting my obedience to the Board and my report on the Philippines as a manifestation of a desire to leave Mexico... and "do something on my own." If so, they are very far from the truth. All of my natural human desires and longings are for remaining in Mexico. My feelings toward the Philippines are, as yet, largely ones of deep uneasiness. My "feelings" are all opposed to going to the Philippines, but my judgment says SIL should go there and I should obey SIL direction. I trust that obedience, while doubtless



costly, will someday produce the fruits of enthusiasm, joy, peace and success.

This goes to the heart of understanding Pittman, his motives and attitudes, and the anguish of this commission. Pittman surely sensed the enormous costs that his family would suffer as he set out in the new direction. Everything of his personal preferences counseled, “Don’t!” And yet he accepted the challenge. Why? Was it because he liked danger? He said of himself that he was timid. Could he have been argued into it? Not likely. He was most excellent as a speaker and most competent in discussions. He was no “pushover.” He thought his own thoughts, reasoned with others but held to his own convictions and positions. The most cogent argument *against* his taking the job was his great love for his wife and family. He loved his family intensely. When he accepted this call, he knew that he was volunteering their suffering.

The factor in favor of accepting the commission was his recognition that great commissions call for great sacrifices. If he thought or felt that a program was worth doing, he invested himself and his resources fully. Many people trim involvements to suit local pressures. Pittman was not of that disposition. He gave himself wholeheartedly to each task. It is as though he said, “If I am correctly following the divine Will, God will look after the project and those who are affected, including my family.” At least, that is what he dared to do even when his personal interests and family suffered in the process. That practice of daring to move ahead by faith stood his programs in good stead, but he knew the risks. He also knew the risks of not daring. He was a master detail person and tried never to leave a task until it was completed. Pittman reckoned his judgment to be subject to error; hence he suffered acutely when his faith cost others pain. His route was to move in faith and from that point to move forward with great caution.

One person asked Pittman why in conversation with a visitor he concentrated so wholly on the visitor. Pittman answered that every person with whom he talked must of necessity express something of God’s nature. That contact is what he wanted to experience.

Pittman was not a superman. He was an exceptional student and he cared for other people. But, the principal determiner of his personality was that he believed in a personal God. He saw God as not only the creator of the universe but also as the caretaker of every aspect of that universe. And it followed that God extended His care to individuals. The reason for the concentration on a visitor was to observe and profit from God’s mind as expressed in the words and attitudes of that individual. The words and

attitudes of the visitor became a correcting and recreating agency on his own nature. People responded to Pittman with attention and respect.

When a momentous decision was thrust upon Pittman that seemed to threaten that which he held dear, Pittman would silently pray, and having prayed, act accordingly as he felt led. He would not claim that he heard a voice nor would he assume that he had surely heard from God. But, he would know that because he had acted in faith, any misunderstanding would be corrected.

### *Into the Depths*

Still, the decision to accept a change of career made the spring and summer of 1951 difficult for Pittman. Care for the individuals of Tetelcingo was in the fabric of his life. By leaving them he was leaving a part of his “family.” Besides that he would be abandoning his first professional venture. After all, he was a scientist who had discovered clues that promised a breakthrough in comprehending a distinguished people. Now, on the brink of distinctive achievement, he must clean out his desk, pack up and turn away with no hope of ever coming back to lay open his discovery.

Something else was involved. It was the sort of thing that he could not talk about at the time; it was an insult added to the lost plans and hurt pride: a physical torment. Somewhere in Australia he had acquired a painful skin ulcer. He could scarcely walk or remain seated. Medications available at the time brought no relief.

Despite his distress and discomfort, Pittman took his place on the faculty of the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the University of North Dakota. In late September when he returned to his doctoral studies, the physical and mental agony of the summer accompanied him.

Having earlier earned his Master’s degree in linguistics (M.A. 1948) at the University of Pennsylvania, he chose to continue at that university. With Catherine and two of their children, he rented accommodations in the home of a retired teacher named Margaret Thomas on Kingsessing Avenue in Philadelphia.

A Philadelphia winter can be bleak. Pittman might have wondered if he could endure the next months, but relief finally came. The unresolved dismays of summer and autumn gave way to deliverance in winter. Pittman found a marvelous medical specialist who completely released him from the painful disorder. And word from across the Pacific encouraged him as to the future.

### ***Magsaysay's Call***

During Pittman's forty-five days in the Philippines, he had followed the progress of Secretary Magsaysay in his deft handling of the Huk insurrection. As said before, upon an impulse, Pittman had mailed Townsend's Cárdenas biography to Magsaysay. In response, Magsaysay attempted an international call to Pittman in Philadelphia. Pittman wrote, "I was not home when he called first, so the call was relayed to Princeton (where I was giving talks . . . ) but that call did not get through either. Three days later, Magsaysay tried again at the house in Philadelphia; this time it went through." His young son Bobby told his Dad, "You had a telephone call. I told the man you weren't home." "Who was it from?" he was asked. "I don't know," answered the son. "Somebody from the Philippines."

When eventually Magsaysay reached Pittman, the connection was poor. The best that he could make out, Magsaysay was inviting Pittman to visit when he next came to the Philippines.

Pittman wrote at once and the personal relationship with the man who was destined to become one of the most distinguished of Philippine presidents and Asian leaders had begun. Twenty years later Pittman would again be invited to return to the Philippines, but this time at the request of the Magsaysay Foundation – to receive an honor named for this man whose reputation eventually became institutionalized in Asia's prestigious Magsaysay Award. Pittman returned to accept that award for International Understanding when it was conferred upon SIL in 1973. But we are getting ahead of the story!

For Pittman the route ahead had been made plain. That small "voice" within banished all doubt as to whether the SIL group should enter the Philippines, all doubt as to whether Pittman should leave Tetelcingo, and all doubt whether he was the person to lead the Philippine advance. Pittman had to concede that the call was so exceptional in concept and execution as to defy all probabilities. A new confidence wiped away all the doubt and dread of the past year. Perhaps that old quotation came back to him, "In this will I be confident."

Somewhat later than the eventful spring of 1952, Secretary Magsaysay visited the United States. He was greeted as a hero in San Francisco, Washington, and New York. He visited Mexico City and made a side trip to talk with Mexican President Cárdenas.

Along the way he telegraphed Pittman in an effort to effect a meeting. This was not to be, for Pittman was involved in directing and teaching at the SIL course at the University of North Dakota.

Upon receipt of the Magsaysay telegram, Pittman wrote to Magsaysay:

“I am happy to report that several American and Canadian students and teachers have indicated their interest in the possibility of cooperating with your government in the work of providing for the mountain peoples of Luzon, Mindanao and other parts of your country which may not yet have scientific alphabets, dictionaries, primers, grammars, Bibles and other literature, both in their own and the national language.”

Those words proved prophetic. It was a dream that would come true.

### ***Pittman's Ph.D.***

The rare year of 1952 brought yet another marvel to Pittman. This took the form of a brief conversation with an unknown clerk at the registration counter of the University of Pennsylvania. The teeming affairs of that great school continued uninterrupted by a lesser drama that was concentrated at the clerk's desk. Pittman stopped to pick up enrollment forms for his second year of classes. His Ph.D. dissertation was well along, but the catalog called for at least a second year of residence.

The young lady behind the counter started to page off the necessary forms. Suddenly she stopped, looked up and said, “Why are you registering for another year?”

“I'm required to take a second year of classes in residence,” Pittman answered. It might be noted here that Pittman was not a typical graduate student. He was already a distinguished professional directing field work in linguistics in Mexico as well as training at the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the [University of North Dakota](#)<sup>b</sup> (Grand Forks).

“Why don't you petition for these to be waived?” she suggested.

“I did not know I could,” he said.

“Try.” The clerk ignored Pittman's grasping the edge of the counter to catch his balance.

Pittman: “How do I do that?”

Clerk: "Write a letter to the committee and get your advisor to countersign it."

Pittman: "When will the committee meet?"

Clerk: "It is meeting now."

Dazed, Pittman sat down at a nearby table and struggled to write a petition. Two days later the appeal was returned, stamped "Approved."

Passed over as unnecessary was another year of expensive residence in Philadelphia and an extended postponement of the Philippine advance—all the result of a thoughtful suggestion by a helpful attendant: "Try."



## Chapter Three

### 1952—1956

#### *First Steps to the Philippines*

The way appeared open for SIL to enter the Philippines. Pittman took the astounding phone call from Magsaysay and subsequent communication as an invitation although official governmental approval had yet to be achieved. Nevertheless, he was jubilant. During the 1952 [Summer Institute of Linguistics at the University of North Dakota \(UND\)](#)<sup>a</sup>, Pittman's enthusiasm was contagious. Every one of the students had expectations of where the linguistic training would be put to use, but Pittman's description of the opening doors in the Philippines fascinated them. Twenty-two linguists at UND that summer abandoned previous plans and became part of the Philippine project.

Howard McKaughan, Associate Director of SIL-North Dakota, withdrew from his program in Mexico and became a co-director of the Philippine advance with Pittman. According to Pittman, this was an ideal partnership. In October 1952 the Pittmans and the McKaughans separately sailed from America to Manila. They found temporary residence and sought audience with Cecilio Putong, the Secretary of Education whom Pittman had met on his first visit.

Pittman and McKaughan were graciously received. Pittman had previously informed Education Secretary Putong of the progress of his language survey. Putong had learned, happily enough, of the SIL contact with his friend, Ramon Magsaysay. The upshot of the meetings was that the Secretary would be glad to receive a proposal for contractual relations with SIL.

The proposal was drafted and presented to Putong. He assigned this to an assistant to work out further details on an agreement. McKaughan and Pittman waited for the contract. Time passed. Back in the United States, the eighteen remaining linguists also waited. They had been given a measure of assurance that visas would be granted. Each was responsible for his or her financial support. Friends and supporters had pledged to meet those needs. The linguists had packed for what they guessed would be the demands of village life. Their families and associates had been thrilled at the prospect of the venture into the Philippine hinterlands. But nothing happened. They waited.

Pittman and McKaughan grew restless but did not want to make themselves a nuisance to the authorities. November brought no word. December came and went with no action. January passed. At last the two returned to Putong's office. "Had they heard nothing?" Putong looked surprised. The expression on his normally amiable face gave way to annoyance. "We'll see about that," he said.

A few days later, on February 28, 1953, the Memorandum of Understanding was signed and sealed. Only a little later it was determined that SIL's work would benefit the nation to the extent that it was the first organization ever to receive a certain category of Special Non-Immigrant visas. That visa classification would be subject to renewal not in one or two years, but in ten years. Furthermore, the Department of Education would serve as a *sponsoring* organization! For their own part, the linguists were to offer their expertise to assist Philippine colleges and universities with the results of their research.

Pittman and McKaughan could not have been more gratified.

The word went out. The remaining eighteen linguists moved into action. A thrill of new life energized the entire organization. The Townsend goal of taking the power of choice to all minority peoples of the world now officially included Asia.

Following the acceptance by the Philippine government in February 1953, the linguists were made welcome far beyond their hopes. What remained was for the directors, Pittman and McKaughan, to walk credentials through Immigration, to find temporary housing for the newcomers, to clear personal effects through customs, to meet arrivals, and, after introductions to the officials of the Department of Education, to convey the linguists, with letters of introduction, out to the far-off language communities where they were to begin their assignments.

Pittman had been advised by H. Otley Beyer (senior anthropologist of the University of the Philippines) to give first attention to Mindanao where, he said, a great diversity of minority people lived in the isolated fastnesses of the rugged rain forest covered mountains.

Bukidnon Province is central to Mindanao. Central to Bukidnon was the Mindanao Agricultural College [now [Central Mindanao University<sup>b</sup>](#)] in Musuan. Pittman had journeyed to that college the preceding year when he made his preliminary survey. It was at that time that he met college President and Mrs. Zosimo Montemayor.

On that initial visit Pittman had approached the office of the college president in hopes of making an appointment. The receptionist accepted his letter of introduction. She excused herself and went into an inner room. Within minutes she returned, and directly after her came the president himself. Pittman was greeted as an honored guest, almost as an old friend.

After preliminaries, Montemayor quizzed Pittman concerning the SIL program. The more the president learned, the more enthusiastic he became. He invited Pittman to dinner and would accept no reluctance. Having such a delightful evening in the company of Zosimo and Felicidad Montemayor and their children, Pittman was persuaded to accept their invitation to share their home with them during his entire visit. When McKaughan and Pittman planned the placement of their first group of linguists, they looked to the Mindanao Agricultural College for a starting place.

### ***Montemayor and Mindanao***

Montemayor had been a power figure in Luzon where he had begun his career. His stature as a man is suggested by an incident that occurred while he was president of a Luzon agricultural college. During that administration he received word that the Hukbalahap revolutionaries were stealing lumber from college land. Alone and unarmed, he walked into the Huk camp. At that very time the encampment had spread a big feast. Montemayor sat down among the heavily armed men and began to eat. The commander spotted him and shouted, "Who are you?"

Montemayor casually looked up and answered, "A Filipino."

"What are you doing here?" roared the officer.

"I am helping you celebrate," said the president quietly.

"Who are you?"

"I am Zosimo Montemayor. I am a neighbor of yours."

Not a man moved a muscle. The silence was deadly.

The Huk commander sized up the man before him. Then he sat down across from him. "What is your business?" he asked.

"You are cutting trees that belong to my school."



With this introduction the two entered into conversation and negotiation and, finally, agreement. The Huks would “share-crop” certain areas, giving a percentage of their proceeds to the school.

Montemayor might have remained in Luzon nearer the center of influence in the Philippines. Instead he chose Mindanao because it was least developed, least “spoiled.” The agricultural college that Pittman visited was Montemayor’s first goal only. He was determined to found a university in Mindanao. This he did. In the matter of Pittman’s visit, Montemayor saw at once the promise the linguistics program held for Mindanao minorities, and he also saw in Pittman a kindred spirit. The two became close friends. Years later Pittman said, “I cannot speak too highly of Montemayor.”

The acceptance of Pittman and SIL by Magsaysay and Montemayor held tremendous meaning. Both men were intellectually and politically “strong men.” Both were national figures. Both were uncompromised leaders. Both esteemed the worth of the common man to their nation. When Magsaysay and Montemayor endorsed SIL, the knowing Philippine people could be assured that SIL could be trusted. From such endorsement the SIL team took fresh courage in the worth of their daring enterprise.

The zenith expression of Montemayor’s hospitality was dramatized a year later. It was the dark of the moon and the dead of night. After five hours of groaning and chugging and protesting, the “Malaybalay Express” bus ground to a dusty stop in the middle of nowhere. The driver cut the engine and shut off the headlights. Passengers stirred uneasily. Someone had halted the vehicle in the midst of the blackness. The driver called out, “Mericanos, here-o.” Pittman and co-director McKaughan were in the lead bus bringing the first of the group to the Mindanao Agricultural College in Bukidnon. The Express had been halted by Montemayor himself who had stepped in front of the headlights. They were at the driveway of the president’s home.

The inter-island ferry had conveyed them from Manila to Cagayan de Oro on its famous two-day excursion. Cattle and chickens crowded the foredeck. Passengers were packed cot-to-cot on the afterdeck. The linguists gathered their bags on the dock and struggled to and into the crowded Bukidnon bus for its five- to six-hour canyon-conquering junket to Malaybalay, Valencia and on to Musuan. How Montemayor knew when the vehicle would be passing his home remains a mystery. He directed the driver to go up the driveway to the house.

Their invitation had been, they thought, to college dormitories. Behold, the first to

receive them turned out to be the college president and his wife. On the bus were six of the men. Not far behind was a truck carrying three others, plus the freight for the entire group that would soon be arriving.

The nine were treated to a chicken dinner, to baths, and to a welcome night of rest in the president's home. From this haven in Mindanao, the linguists would fan out into the mountains.

That reception marked only the beginning of assistance from the college president and his wife. Their initial hospitality was succeeded by repeated advisements and kindnesses. In fact, the president wanted SIL to locate at the college. Some time later he was convinced of their need for their own property. Thereafter, he helped them find the beautiful Nasuli Springs area: grassy, undulating land bordering a jungle-fringed stream into which flowed the outlet of a twenty-five hundred square meter lake fed by subsurface gushing *cold* springs.

Thanks to the welcome extended and sustained by the Philippine government, the language programs prospered. By December 1954 thirty-four SIL linguists were in the Philippines. More were ready to join. Eleven linguistic and ethnographic articles by ten authors had been published on seven Philippine languages. By 1956 the SIL number in residence in the Philippines was fifty-seven, with work proceeding on nineteen languages. [SIL Bibliography: Philippines<sup>c</sup>](#)

### ***Ups and Downs***

Tales of travels in the mountains and life in remote villages multiplied. An excerpt from a letter of Pittman's:

Bus Dawson, Vivian Forsberg and Myra Lou Barnard have just returned from a nearly-three-week trek through Tagabili [now known as Tboli] and Cotabato Manobo [who have recently begun to use the name Dulangan Manobo] country, searching for the Cotabato Manobos. They found them on their fifteenth day out. But the account of the search is memorable. Much of the time they were in mountains whose inhabitants had never seen white people. But since Vivian speaks Tagabili easily, rapport was immediately established at every stop. Word of their coming always preceded them, and they were always guided into each place by some of the local inhabitants. In order to get the picture, imagine that you live on a lonely farm in Montana and that one day a neighbor comes

running up and says, “Three Martians are coming here. One knows how to speak our language. They sleep on air. One must be made out of rubber.” (The “air,” of course, would be air mattresses, and the rubber man would be Bus Dawson, whose gymnastics were loved.) Could you ever forget such a visit?

From a Philippine memo of December 7, 1956:

Palawan. Jenny [McKay] and Rosemary [Rodda] have had a small house built about an hour’s hike from their location where they hope to spend a few days each week in order to be nearer the Bataks. Jenny writes that the shelter is about 7' x 6', has two windows and they can stand up in it. Jenny also says, “It is a pity you were not here for supper tonight. We are having real beef. After you had eaten it, we would tell you that it is from a cow that a crocodile had a bite of, and which was found in the river near the bridge.” It is quite good, though, and the smells coming from the pressure cooker just now are enough to make anyone’s mouth water.

Pittman and McKaughan alternated between Manila and the southern area. One would handle government relations in Manila while the other would look after the placing of linguists in their allocations. McKaughan, however, was in the USA from late 1954 to late 1957, completing his Ph.D. at Cornell University. Whichever person handled the allocating hiked into the mountains, often for days. He would present letters of introduction to *barrio* officials and talk with tribal chiefs who would find housing for the visitors.

Within a decade, short take-off and landing (STOL) Helio Courier aircraft made some of the allocations more accessible, but at the start almost all of the translation outposts required most difficult and long treks into the interiors. The following account is from a July 1955 letter written by Catherine Pittman, wife of Richard Pittman:

Then we flew to Davao. Here we met the two girls who took us to their location. Saturday morning at 4:15 the bus came for us—only to take us a little ways out of town to wait while they ate their breakfast. Finally by 5:00 we were on our way. We traveled until 11:30 a.m. to the end of the line—and the beginning of nowhere.

We started hiking—straight up—straight down—mud—more mud—river—stones—more river—more stones—beautiful trees—up again—over a log—cross river—recross—cross—recross—stones—up a muddy trail—down a muddy trail

—leeches—red ants—black ants—fall down flat—get up—mud—more leeches—more bugs—snakes—more logs—over them—under them! Five and a half hours of this! Then a typical mountain shower! Rain by cloud-fulls! Clean feet—clean shoes—drippy dress—drippier hair—twenty minutes of a hard downpour—cross stream—climb muddy side of mountain—lost in abaca field—find trail—cross log—climb last hill—enter village without pride or dignity. But how the Manobos enjoyed us! We all had a good laugh and became good friends. We arrived Saturday and left on Tuesday—over the same trail—but in less than five hours!

We had a delightful time hearing Myra Lou and Jan speak the language, watching as they fixed our aches and pains, traded soap, cookies, kerosene for rice, corn, bamboo heart; hearing the native flute, their native songs; watching [our son] Bob teach the Dibabawon boys a game he had learned in Manila; but best of all knowing that it would not be too long before these people would have access to Scripture in their own language.

After coming out and on our way home we decided to visit two of our single men in another language area. We went as far as we could go by bus by six o'clock that evening of the same day. Then we started to walk—thro' tall grass—in the dark—in the moonlight—in the river—around a mud puddle—thro' a coconut grove—in a field—"There's a snake"—"He's gone"—up a hill—down a hill—Where is that house?—one hour—two hours—No, just five—ten minutes—now a steep muddy hill—a light!—a house!—At seven o'clock we arrived. Get supper—find floor space—blow up air mattresses—put up [mosquito] nets—fall into bed. Next day back out again and on to Davao.

A couple days later we took a sixty-two-foot boat to visit another group where an SIL family of three live. It took us 18 hot hours to go but 30 hot hours to come back. We went south along the coast about 60 miles. Coming back our boat stopped many times to pick up copra and abaca. The sea was rough and there was very little space anywhere on the boat. We had only eighteen inches between bags of copra and the ceiling, which meant that we had to crawl anywhere we needed to get.

The exhilaration among the linguists that accompanied their first professional assignment began to suffer erosion. Housing in Manila was in short supply. The best that could be found was expensive and congested. The mix of single adults with couples herding babies and children yielded predictable chaos. Added to those

discomforts were limited privacies, inadequate bathroom facilities, sporadic telephone availability, rationed water and electric power—to identify a few. That was post-war Manila.

### ***United By Fire***

Myra Lou Barnard and Jan Forster were taking a short break from their work among the Dibabawon Manobos. On August 8, 1955, they were enjoying a delightful evening with Dr. and Mrs. Lincoln Nelson and friends at the Nelsons' medical clinic in Malaybalay, Bukidnon. Someone smelled smoke. A call came from the kitchen that the kerosene refrigerator was on fire. Barnard, an action-person, quickly snatched up a hotpad and smothered the flames. For a moment the emergency seemed over. Suddenly, compressed fumes reignited and erupted in Myra Lou's face, setting her clothing on fire. Others rushed to extinguish the blaze but Barnard was burned over seventy-five percent of her body.

Dr. Nelson, a surgeon, and his wife, a nurse (also badly burned, but she would not excuse herself from helping Barnard), began what became a twenty-four-hour-a-day battle over the following eight days to sustain life in the young woman. Barnard was in constant torment. Her body fluids had to be re-supplied, and every intravenous insertion was torture.

Ten days after the accident, the Philippines Air Force flew her to the American Hospital in Manila. As they carried her to the plane, she was wrapped in bandages from her feet to her head, save for her blackened face. The only surfaces unscorched were the corners of her eyes. She had squinted against the blast and preserved three white streaks at the corner of each eye.

In the hospital in Manila, the fight went on. All of her associates rallied to provide plasma and round-the-clock nursing care as skin graft procedures went forward. Fifteen months after the explosion, Barnard, wrapped like a mummy, was driven to the international airport. Just as she was wheeled into a military evacuation plane bound for the United States, she received a gift from the Philippine government: a re-entry permit! She returned three years later to finish what she had begun for the Dibabawon Manobos.

The second stunning blow felled the director himself. Pittman, in Manila, was suddenly seized by agonizing stomach pains. Usual palliatives failed. Death seemed

imminent, made more likely by the vicious typhoon of September 23, 1955, battering Manila. A taxi was called, and against enormous odds, the driver picked his way through the raging storm to deliver Pittman to the American Hospital. However, it was morning before Dr. Ong, the surgeon, could be brought. Ong operated at once to discover a ruptured appendix and acute peritonitis.

Upstairs in the hospital lay the burned Myra Lou Barnard, held to life only by the constant care of staff and colleagues.

The Pittman bulletins shifted from “extreme” to “critical” to “stabilized,” all in one week. Even in his lowest hour, he smiled each day when told that Myra Lou Barnard was still alive.

As the company of linguists confronted the emergency and its excruciating demands, the irritation of personal inconveniences melted away. The SIL team had become united by shared suffering.

The fateful incidents of the summer of 1955 upstaged all else of the SIL program. Members in the Philippines, families and supporters in the United States and Canada, and the SIL Board of Directors waited on every bulletin from the hospital.

Overlooked in the distressing circumstances were certain promising events of the previous spring.

### ***A Man In Season For Nasuli***

In April 1955 the Pittmans had welcomed Benjamin and Hilda Needham to Manila and showed them around the city. The Needhams were enthusiastic, hard-working California agriculturalists. Successful ranching and cultivation of avocado orchards had purchased their retirement and the proverbial trip around the world, plus the prospect of a comfortable life on the sunset side of the Sierra Mountains. However, their reputation for extraordinary good judgment had brought them into membership on the SIL Board of Directors. It was this responsibility that prompted the Needhams to interrupt the final stages of their journey in order to look in on the newly formed SIL Philippines Branch. Their visit with the Pittmans would prove memorable for both couples.

Like Townsend, Pittman knew a recruit before the recruit could dream of the risk. Also, like Townsend, Pittman possessed a superb sense of timing. There were things for

Needhams to see in Manila, of course. That having been accomplished, someone suggested to the visitors that the center of action actually lay in Mindanao. "Might the Needhams afford time to include a stop at the Mindanao Agricultural College and meet any of the linguists in from their village locations?" Yes, they had come thus far and ought to be willing to add that extension to their tour.

Six hundred miles south of Manila, in the heart of the province of Bukidnon, the Needhams were introduced to those who were then living at the Mindanao Agricultural College and, of course, to President Montemayor. They were guided through the college and then were taken a few miles away to investigate a tract of land available for lease and recommended by Montemayor as a possible center for the SIL program.

Pittman led the Needhams onto the property. The guest plunged into the head-high cogon grass, leading the way. He looked over the mountain-fed cold springs that surged up from the bottom of a clear deep pool and out into a fresh-water lagoon. A babbling rocky stream was outlet to the lake, dropping several feet into a substantial river. Needham paced over the land and through the jungle that bordered the river.

Needham became more and more animated the farther they went. Finally he exclaimed, "Nasuli could be developed into a center for the entire Philippine field."

Pittman spoke the words that he had been saving since the Manila meeting: "Would you come out to help us?"

The Californian stopped in his tracks. Then he turned back and talked with his wife. He returned to Pittman: "Hilda and I would like to come here each year to develop this property for you."

That was the beginning of a fine friendship between the Needhams and the Nasuli group. Pittman later wrote:

"We have had remarkable teamwork among our members . . . Especially to be mentioned has been the coming of Ben and Hilda Needham. They brought with them to the Philippines not only their wealth of experience in agriculture, horticulture and business, but also an ability to fit in and get along. To me, it was a never-failing source of wonder to see how they could go right out to the villages over the trails, on difficult launch trips, adapt themselves, eat the food, sleep on the hit-or-miss accommodations available, come out smiling, and head right off for another trip, often with energy that put younger ones of us to shame.

“Since they have gone to Nasuli, the center has blossomed like a rose,” he said.



SIL Board member Ben Needham at the Nasuli Spring



Ben and Hilda Needham in Mindanao

### ***Second Steps: Vietnam***

Pittman entertained the Needhams with a hidden agenda, but Ben Needham was urging his own convictions on Pittman as well. Needham had come to the Philippines in April 1955, directly from Vietnam. His Saigon experience coincided with wild celebration over the dissolution of French control of that country. Along with wide publicity released to the world, came much information on the multiplicity of minority peoples of South Vietnam. The Needhams learned that many of the minority groups had no written language.

Out of this knowledge Board member Needham determined to urge that the SIL Board include Vietnam in their program. That determination on Needham's part set the wake-up call. Their visit in the Philippines fixed the place for the alarm to go off, and it would ring in the Pittmans' quarters.

The twin disasters of the Barnard accident and the Pittman emergency appendectomy changed nothing. The clock ticked on. The SIL corporation conference met in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas, in September. McKaughan attended the conference and wrote, “The Philippines Executive Committee has passed a motion expressing themselves as favoring linguistic studies in Vietnam.” Later he made the motion that “. . . this conference endorse Dr. Pittman's purpose of investigating the possibility of studying the minority languages of Vietnam. . . .” Language needs elsewhere in the Pacific were also discussed. One can imagine a divided screen: the corporation



conference in Arkansas projected on the right. On the left screen is the interior of a mosquito netting-draped cot occupied by Pittman. In Arkansas the Board votes. Pittman in the Philippines, racked with pain, groans weakly, without knowing why.

That distant Board action would have a considerable influence on the life of Pittman as he lay recuperating at Nasuli in the heart of the central Bukidnon plateau, listening to the rain pound on the tin roof over his head.

Probably the Board members themselves scarcely understood the implications of their action. In effect, they had made Pittman into an SIL Secretary of State with accountability for Southeast Asia and the islands of the Pacific. Their reasoning might have gone the distance: “Clearly he is the one to approach President Magsaysay’s friend, President Diem of Vietnam. Also, while he is at it, he could help establish a language research center in New Guinea. It would follow that in traveling between Vietnam and Australia, he could visit Indonesia and perhaps some day India.”

As the extent of even the first proposal reached the convalescing Pittman, he may have shaken his head in disbelief. What he once saw as an idyllic life in Tetelcingo had vanished. A handwritten letter to Townsend suggests something of his dismay: “We will be interested in knowing your thoughts on these matters (the quantum leaps to Vietnam, Indonesia and New Guinea). The flesh rebels at the prospect, but the spirit is willing.”

On October 27, 1955, Pittman included these words in a newsletter to his friends:

This past September the biennial conference of SIL heard a report from Mr. J. Robert Story . . . to the effect that there are at least one thousand languages without written representation in the area which includes Indonesia, Papua, Australia and Dutch New Guinea, the Solomons, New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Fiji and the Australian aborigines. This was a well-documented report from a man who has a close personal knowledge of those fields. “ . . . and we authorize Richard Pittman (read the conference report) to investigate the needs for work in Indonesia.” As we said in our last letter, we have been planning to visit Vietnam to check the need for further translation work. The September conference thus added Indonesia to the itinerary. Before either of them could be visited, I was given a good rest. That gift was provided the best way—so that folks wouldn’t think I was loafing: a ruptured appendix. And our magnificent team! They rallied around like the Dutch to a broken dike, with nurses, and people to do my work,

even a purse of money to use to take the vacation [recuperation time at Nasuli mandated by his doctor]. By the way, Myra Lou Barnard is steadily recovering from her severe burns.

As stated, Magsaysay and Vietnam President Diem were well acquainted. January 1956 Pittman appeared at Magsaysay's office among scores of early morning audience-seekers. Magsaysay singled him out quickly: "A letter of introduction to Diem? Most certainly. Write it and I'll sign it."

Within the hour Pittman took the letter to the Department of Foreign Affairs and asked whether notification of his coming might be sent to the Saigon Philippine embassy. It could and was. When on February 2, 1956, Pittman stepped off the plane in Vietnam; he learned how significant was the letter he carried. The *Chargé d'Affaires* of that embassy met him personally and took him to a guesthouse where he was to live. This proved most strategic, for it was central, not expensive, and gave him an appropriate address with connection to the Philippines to use in making initial contacts with officials in Vietnam.

A first objective was, of course, to present Magsaysay's letter to President Diem, but this would take time. Meanwhile, the Minister of Education greeted him most kindly and assigned an aide the chore of grilling him thoroughly as to the work of SIL.

Two weeks later an invitation came from the presidential palace. In anticipation Pittman stretched his financial resources to buy a tailored white duck suit, the approved style. The "stretching" did not allow funds for taxi fare as well. A pedicab would do (were it not for the rain in Saigon, he later realized). Other vehicles have a measure of disdain for pedicabs. Pittman rang the palace bell with well-spattered trousers.

President Diem never saw the mud stains. His warm greeting and inclusive approval of the SIL program were perfectly matched. One warning he raised: "You'll have to be careful because there are infiltrators coming down from the North. They will not hesitate to make problems."

Word went out: SIL would be welcomed into Vietnam. It did not seem necessary to officials, however, that a contract be signed or, in fact, that anything needed to be in writing. Pittman preferred the detail of clearly written agreements, but he bided his time. When he knocked on doors and clerks asked for documentation, he explained, they understood, and all went well.

### *The Trail Goes On To Indonesia*

The next destination for Pittman in 1956 was Jakarta, Indonesia. The prospect was not promising. Pittman knew no Indonesian. Telephoning would be difficult. Giving directions to taxi drivers would border on the impossible. And there were problems in the wake of nationalism, as Indonesia had received independence only a decade previously after 350 years of Dutch colonial rule.

Pittman had tried in advance to secure accommodations, but “No. There has been no reservation. There are none here and none in all Jakarta.” Well, then, thought Pittman, I’ll just sit up all night—stretch out on a couch. It was not to be. The bellboys and clerks depended on those facilities. Indeed, the bellboys and clerks had a perfect understanding as to who would occupy which sofa. A transient, carrying however-many letters of introduction, was totally ineligible. It would be a straight chair.

This was the first formal call by SIL on the government of Indonesia. Another, with a very different welcome for Pittman comes later.

Pittman nodded, leaned, jerked himself upright, almost lost his balance. Finally, he abandoned all dignity and lay down on the floor. At three in the morning two guests checked out. A room was hastily readied, and the American secured four hours of quiet sleep.

The visit would be with the Minister of Education. Pittman presented himself and a letter of introduction from the Philippine Secretary of Education. A secretary greeted him with a blank stare. “There is no Minister of Education in Indonesia. The former minister has resigned, and his replacement has not been named. I am most sorry.” Pittman was nonplused. Prospects that had been doubtful shrunk to grim.

A conversation with the Ambassador of the Philippines to Indonesia elicited this advice: “The person you ought to meet is Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX.” Further research proved that this man was, among other things, the benefactor who had endowed one of the largest and most prestigious universities in Indonesia at Yogyakarta. A call on the sultan was no easy matter, for Yogyakarta lay near the south coast of Java halfway down the island.

The sultan was a hereditary monarch who, with the coming of independence, had lost certain family status perquisites. Nevertheless, he was wealthy, expansive, generous, and articulate.

The assistant to the sultan addressed Pittman in an anxious tone of voice. “You must promise before you go in that you will stay only twenty minutes; at the end of twenty minutes you must break off the conversation. He will not break it off; you must do it and leave!” Pittman promised. The sultan took complete charge.

After forty minutes, the former Sovereign stopped to catch his breath. Pittman, red-faced, quickly excused himself. He had the feeling that the trip to Yogyakarta had been futile.

Time proved that the sultan was an astute observer and understood more than seemed possible. For instance, at one point, almost at random, he threw in the line, “SIL should start its work in Irian Jaya.” Pittman took note of this, and thereafter the sultan was quoted as recommending that linguists make Irian Jaya their starting point in Indonesia. When the time finally came much later in this story, the sultan’s advice proved prophetic. But that was fifteen years yet to come.

Up to this moment the negative prospects loomed large. All was out of joint. A rough encounter with four pickpockets seemed to establish closure. Indonesia was clearly not the place. Only one affirmative could be claimed. Thanks to a letter from Dr. Cecilio Lopez, the leading linguist of the Philippines, Pittman met Professor Prijono, Dean of the Faculty of Literature and Arts of the University of Indonesia. Dr. Prijono was a recipient of a prestigious regional peace prize and a leader in establishing the orthography and spelling standards for Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of the nation.

Meeting Dr. Prijono enroute from Vietnam, Pittman thought to share with him a linguistic discovery he had recently made. While in Vietnam, Pittman had obtained a word list in Jarai, a language of the Vietnam highlands. He recognized that [Jarai is a Malayo-Polynesian](#)<sup>c</sup> Austronesian language, not an Austro-Asiatic Mon-Khmer language like Vietnamese. Prijono, the language professor, was delighted to receive this information and wrote down the Malay cognates for almost all of the Jarai words. This proved most valuable for both scholars.

But Pittman’s primary purpose in coming was lost. How could he offer the power of applied linguistics to indigenous language communities without access to a Ministry of Education?

His dream that the Indonesia experience would replicate the Philippines and

Vietnam initiatives was shattered. He had come to a dead end.

One irksome errand had been left until last. He had let himself be talked into delivering the best wishes of one brother in Manila to another in Jakarta. He forlornly fingered the sealed note. The writer was Chinese. Chinese were out of favor in disrupted Indonesia. Mere possession of such a letter might be a liability. However, Pittman had promised.

The reason for the obligation is traced to another incident. Pittman had broken a tooth on the very eve of departing Manila for Vietnam. Annoyed at the breaking, at the delay, and at the cost, he made a foot-dragging trip to the dentist. As he was sitting in the chair, the doctor asked, "Where are you going?" "To Vietnam and then to Indonesia." The physician's face lit up. "Oh," he exclaimed, "I have a brother in Jakarta! You must look up my brother! As soon as I finish with your tooth, I'll write a letter for you to take to him."

The negatives ran through Pittman's mind: the non-existent minister, the tooth, the delay, and now this delivery of a family note from a little known sender to an unknown somebody. Pittman thought, "When is it okay for me to throw up my hands?"

He at least ought to try to reach that Indonesian brother of the Manila dentist. Wearily he reached for the telephone.

"Where are you?" came the answer to his call and then, "I'll come over to see you."

The two men formally greeted one another and sat down on a sofa. Pittman handed over the letter. The brother read and then looked up.

"What is the purpose of your visit?"

Pittman told of his hopes and added that he was greatly disappointed because he would be unable to meet the Minister of Education since there was none.

"Oh," said the dentist's brother, "Don't believe it! There is one. I'll take you to him!"

Pittman could not believe his ears!

His new acquaintance went on, "The minister has just been appointed, but it hasn't been announced. He is a close friend of mine and staying at my house." The government had delayed an announcement to allow public unrest in that majority

Muslim nation to abate “for the new minister is Catholic.”

The ridiculously impossible hit Pittman between the eyes. The thing that could not be had occurred. A complete reversal! Within an hour he found himself talking with a person who, theoretically, did not exist! And all because of a cracked tooth!

A critic will add, “Nothing took place after the visit with the minister.” That was true but only temporarily. Fifteen years after that dramatic moment, the SIL program was accepted in Indonesia with a direct linkage to this day. Even Pittman was thunderstruck. A contract with the University of Indonesia was signed in 1971 that provided the remote peoples of Irian Jaya and others the attention they richly deserved.

Coincidentally, over the intervening years Pittman had repeated opportunities to call on Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX who later became Vice President of Indonesia. Never once was the sultan too busy to give time and assistance to his guest.

### ***Then Australia and New Guinea***

After the incident of the prestigious sultan and the improbable benefit of the broken tooth, Pittman made a brief stop back in Manila. From there he flew to Melbourne, Australia. The Indonesian venture had been into new territory with scant introduction. The turn southward would be to renew proven friendships. In the late 1940s a group of Australian businessmen was inspired by the Townsend dream of offering every people group in the world the gift of reading and writing its own language. They recognized themselves as accountable before God to provide some benefit to their neighbors. Within their own continent were the Aboriginal Australians, one hundred fifty thousand of them: capable, versatile individuals who were marvelously equipped to survive in the inland deserts but who were trapped between vying threats of exploitation and neglect.

The second “neighbors” were those to the north in what was then the Australian Territory of Papua and New Guinea, today the nation of Papua New Guinea. The towering Owen Stanley Mountains formed a spiny backbone to their island that divided the eastern half of its populace alone into eight hundred language groups. The Australian businessmen had, in the late 1940s, asked SIL to send a phonologist to teach a course in linguistics. As noted earlier, Dr. Kenneth Pike and his wife Evelyn were sent to conduct the first session in Melbourne in 1950. Pittman and his wife Catherine took over that program in 1951.

From that original sponsorship and from those courses, an Australian council was formed, and a sizeable group of trained linguists graduated. Some of these joined the Philippines project. Some wanted to work with the Australian Aboriginal languages. Others sought involvement in New Guinea.

Pittman met with the Australian council on June 2, 1956. His principal objective was to obtain permission to visit what is today Papua New Guinea with a view to initiating linguistic and translation work if all were agreed. He was joined by SIL members Dr. James Dean of Canada and William Oates of Australia. Both had experience with SIL in the Philippines.

During the council meeting it was discovered that one of the members, Alfred Coombe, had an acquaintance who knew Paul Hasluck (soon to become Sir Paul Hasluck), Minister for the Territories of Australia. Hasluck was friendly and efficient, but he assigned a subordinate, Dudley McCarthy, to give the three SIL representatives a thorough grilling—three hours worth—on the principles and practices of SIL. Softness and geniality were not included in the agenda.

Pittman satisfied all the doubts of Hasluck and McCarthy. The three were then sent to Port Moresby to meet Mr. Wilson, the Acting Administrator of the Territories.

Wilson, having read the recommendations of Hasluck and McCarthy, was most genial. He added his own imprimatur to the other credentials and passed the visitors on to the highest education officer in the Territories, Dr. W. C. Groves.

Groves was a gifted educator who was much concerned with the languages of the island. His enthusiasm prompted him to assign a guide to the trio. That guide, Thomas Dietz, coincidentally enough, had studied in the SIL linguistic classes in Australia and was well known by Pittman, Dean and Oates. “The deck was stacked,” so to speak. The program would be approved.

Several locations in the highlands were to be visited. They flew into Kainantu in the eastern highlands. There a district officer advised that they look at a five-hundred-acre block of land that had recently become available. He said that if the program were to go forward, this might be a suitable site for a station. Unfortunately, the land in question could be given only superficial attention. Their schedule demanded a return to the Kainantu airstrip to catch their next flight.

The plane they were to take was the famous “Dragonfly,” a beautiful, delicate wire-

and-fabric craft—like an enlarged model plane. Unfortunately, it could carry only twelve passengers. Much to their dismay, they were informed that the agent had overbooked that flight. Even though the quartet held reservations, only three could be accommodated.

Pittman's response was predictable. He said, "That's all right. Jim, why don't we stay over and meet the others in Lae?" Two aspects of Pittman's character are illustrated. One, he would put others ahead of himself. Two, he may have sensed that such an unwarranted interruption of plans was one of those God-ordained "coincidences." When the plane left, he turned to Dean. "Let's go back and re-examine that land."

The two men retraced their grassland route to the area they had glanced over. That was the first day. They returned again the next day. They walked back and forth over the five hundred acres. The tract was named after a Mr. Peacock who had planned to start a coffee plantation. When the project proved unfeasible, the property reverted to the territorial government but was still known as the "Peacock Block."

The longer they tramped, the more convinced they became that if permission were given, the tract would be ideal for a linguistics center. It was central to the land mass, the water supply was ample, the altitude of five thousand feet provided an ideal climate, and the nearby airstrip at the agricultural experiment station could take care of their needs for rapid transportation.

The "tentative" exploration was transformed. The "chance" delay had served its purpose. Then a curious conviction suddenly settled into both men's consciousness. SIL not "could enter," not "should enter," but *would* enter Papua New Guinea, and this would be the site where language work would begin. Approvals and signings would take place, but "the die was cast." And that is exactly how the matter turned out.

The flight back to Lae and then to Port Moresby would have been routine except that the plane left so early that Pittman, Dean and Oates had no time for breakfast. (Dietz had left earlier.) They were famished upon their arrival. Dean and Oates had turned quickly towards a traveler they seemed to recognize, but Pittman spotted a welcome table loaded with fresh pineapple juice and fancy biscuits. Towards this he made a beeline. He filled both hands with food and then bore his treasure to the others. With them, he half-noticed as he drew near, was the traveler, a man with a slouch hat and nondescript jacket. The man turned to Pittman. "How was your trip?" he asked.



Pittman started to make a routine “Oh, fine,” response. Then he did a double take and recognized Mr. Wilson, the Administrator of the Territories! Years later he would remember his slowness to recognize Wilson as a barely averted catastrophe. A non-recognition of the chief officer of the land would have been unforgivably rude.

That tour of what is today Papua New Guinea took place in July of 1956. By October 4 formal permission was given for SIL to establish a center on the Peacock Block and to begin language research. [SIL Bibliography: Papua New Guinea](#)<sup>d</sup>



## Chapter Four

### 1957—1968

#### *Airplane Idea Takes Off*

It was time for a furlough for the Pittmans. However, the demands of the vastly enlarging Pacific area did not permit Pittman to be away for a year. A half-year seemed best. Townsend quietly suggested the Pittmans reside in Seattle for those months. The whole family would have preferred a more familiar part of the country. “Another reason for Seattle,” resumed Townsend, “is so that you will be able to follow up on work already started in publicizing the need for a Helio Courier airplane for the Philippines. Seattle is an ideal place,” he added. The familiar was lost to a higher calling.

Pittman had no experience at fund raising and cringed at the thought. He had no training or coaching on how to raise funds. What he could do was accept any speaking engagements that came his way. Little by little the invitations came: churches, schools, the University Linguistics Club, and the Anthropology Club. Not much money came in. In fact, in the course of two months hardly any money came in. His doubts as to the wisdom of his assignment multiplied.

However, at one point he approached the mayor of Seattle, Gordon Clinton. At the opening of the conversation, the mayor seemed nettled by the suggestion that the city sponsor a plane. The more he heard, the more he thought that maybe something could, after all, be done. Before long he had agreed to become Honorary Chairman of the project.

Along came a prominent businessman, Sol Levy, volunteering his help on the promotion committee. Up stepped another businessman, Hilding Halvarson. He became the chairman of the program. William Devin, a former mayor of Seattle, agreed to serve on the committee.

Just at this time came a great tragedy. On March 17, 1957, Philippine President Magsaysay was killed in an airplane crash. The blow was devastating for the Philippines and hit Pittman hard. Magsaysay was his personal friend. The loss was prodigious. Pittman’s time and attention were diverted from the Helio Courier project. In spite of all, the campaign marched on.

Henry C. Crowell of the Quaker Oats Company was pleased with what he saw being done and contributed heavily. Others joined. With funds secured, plans for a ceremony to present the Seattle Helio Courier to representatives of the Philippines could be made.

Philippine President Garcia, previously Magsaysay's Vice President, had scheduled a state visit to the US and agreed to be guest of honor at the presentation of the airplane. Ambassador Carlos P. Romulo<sup>a</sup> of the Philippines from the embassy in Washington accepted the assignment of introducing Garcia. US Vice President Richard M. Nixon would be present as state host to President Garcia. SIL founder Cameron Townsend planned to attend as did Harvard's Dr. Lynn Bollinger, the developer of the Helio. To climax the rising tide of enthusiasm, the ceremony was moved from Seattle to Washington, DC, and scheduled for June 20, 1958. With the plethora of dignitaries, the US State Department became involved and organized the complete program. Then the Navy volunteered to crate the plane and carry it to the Philippines.

That Navy crate itself was a masterpiece. When freed from protecting the plane, it was converted into a "radio shack" at the Philippine SIL facility in Manila and served thus for several years.

The project of securing a Seattle Helio Courier may have been started by a reluctant Pittman, but it resulted in a significant diplomatic event and an airplane that served remote villages for decades. He reported in typical Pittman form, "The program gathered momentum almost on its own and eventuated as an auspicious celebration in Washington, DC, of worth for all concerned and meriting world news coverage."



Dignitaries at the presentation ceremony of the Seattle Helio Courier in Washington DC



Ambassador Romulo & President Garcia (center of color photo)



Arrival of the Helio in Luzon, Philippines



The Spirit of Seattle in use on a remote landing strip.

A letter of 1959 from linguist Richard Roe captured the first landing of the *Spirit of Seattle* in the small Isnag barrio of Dibagat, close to Kabugao, itself remote enough on Luzon Island, Philippines.

At 12:12 Orling, one of the young men, spotted the Helio coming in low from the southeast, following our Binuan creek, and a few seconds later we could hear it. It was a thrilling moment! Orling's shout had then carried beyond the church and far downstream, even across the Apayao River, so that by the time Larry Montgomery and Mel Turner had reached overhead and were wagging the wings, there were floods of people pouring towards the two lines of white stones marking the landing strip... Isnag women in the fields came running with their hoes in their hands. People left their plates of hot rice to the chickens that, not caring about the big bird overhead, picked up where the eaters had left off. Mel said it looked as if someone had disturbed an anthill.

Larry circled the town once, "walking along on one wing" so he could get a good look, then came over the creek low, landed, and did one of those ski turns so that he faced right at the house.

Larry got out; I shook hands with him and then you couldn't see the plane anymore. It was buried in people. They handled it and even moved the flaps. "It flaps its wings too," one said. One man shouted to me to ask for a seed of it. "Maybe if we plant it, there will be more some day," he joked.

Now there are between three and five days cut off the usual trip from Manila to Kabugao. The strip in Dibagat will cut off one more day.

As for the Helio Courier just described, it was the fifth of a series of such gifts to SIL

worldwide named in honor of citizens of the respective cities. In years that followed, SIL in the Philippines received three more Helios given by Pontiac MI, San Diego CA and Jackson MS, a Piper Super Cub from Rockford IL, and an Aero Commander dubbed “Friendship of Minnesota.” All saw many years of service with SIL for the Philippines.

As for the character of the Helios and of how they became such a marvelous help to the linguists, that is a saga best covered in detail elsewhere, but a synopsis of the story may be justified.

An aviation department for SIL was established as early as 1948. The use of airplanes for transportation to remote areas had become common by 1955. Early that year Cameron Townsend was driving from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Sulphur Springs, Arkansas, after trying to persuade officials in Tulsa to make the gift of a plane to SIL. Townsend suddenly caught sight of a curious fixed-wing plane that seemed to be standing still in the air. He hurried to the nearby airport and asked about the aircraft. He learned that it was called Helio Courier, that it was new, that it could slow to thirty miles an hour without stalling, and that it could land just as slowly. It could become airborne in two hundred fifty feet and had a cruising speed of one hundred fifty miles an hour.

At the 1955 SIL business conference in Sulphur Springs, Townsend heard the report of J. Robert Story and the challenge to begin work in places like New Guinea. He well knew the immense worth of the planes in South America. The prospect of entering Papua New Guinea doubled the importance of having such a plane for transportation services. Immediately after the Sulphur Springs meeting, he took Larry Montgomery, Don Burns and Lawrence Routh to the factory in Pittsburgh, Kansas, where the Helio was made. Montgomery tested the plane and pronounced it ideal for their purposes.

Dr. Lynn Bollinger of Harvard, president of the company and chief developer of the revolutionary plane (designed by Dr. Otto Koppen of Massachusetts Institute of Technology), greeted his visitors, smiled indulgently at their enthusiasm, and teasingly asked, “How many can you use?” Townsend responded, “We could get by with six for now, four for South America and two for the Philippines.” Townsend confessed later, “I hardly had lunch money in my pocket.”

The preceding report on the arrival of the *Spirit of Seattle* in an SIL linguist’s allocation in the Philippines in 1959 and the flashback to Townsend’s “finding the Helio Courier” in 1955 are background data related to the Pittman half-furlough of

1957. After the June 20, 1958, dedication of the Helio in Washington, DC, Pittman again taught and directed the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the University of North Dakota and then traveled back to the Papua New Guinea SIL center, now called Ukarumpa.

### ***A Beachhead Outback***

At Ukarumpa Pittman was overjoyed to find a substantial company of linguists already at work. Six were Australian, five Canadian, four American — these plus eight children. The courteous, skilled SIL folk had quickly become a source of competent assistance to all neighbors. Ranchers who had wrung their hands at the prospect of a settlement of neophytes were now delighted. Their scholarly neighbors had practical skill too. The new settlement was declared the best thing that could have happened to their valley.

Two years later SIL linguists were involved in ten language projects in Papua New Guinea. Sixteen months after the first arrivals, seven houses had been built, two bridges completed, and a sawmill was in operation.

When originally Pittman had called on Paul Hasluck, Minister for the Territories, to seek access to Papua New Guinea, Hasluck had assigned an aide, Dudley McCarthy, to examine every aspect of the SIL intentions, history and activities. As has been reported, he was hard-nosed. Upon Pittman's second visit to the Australian Ministry of the Interior two years later, McCarthy could not have been more affable. He had become like family! On the other hand, Mr. Lambert, Secretary of the Interior Ministry, was aloof. He "did not have time," but he would grant an interview. The "few minutes" he allowed stretched into an hour and a half. At the end of the conversation the two men turned to Pittman. "What can we do to help?" they asked.

Pittman recognized that opportunity was at the door. He reckoned himself a timid person, but sometimes even faint hearts win fair ladies. This lady was fair indeed. Almost instinctively he responded, "We would like to begin study of the languages of the Australian Aborigines." That was an impromptu response. Pittman spoke out of his home training. Those who proffered assistance reacted out of their training in courtesy. For a moment a slender thread was all that linked two worlds. Then the thread thickened and became a tie and then a cable.

Among the SIL leadership there had previously been some consideration of the

Aborigines of Australia. Mention had been made in the Australian linguistics classes, now entirely under the direction of Australia SIL. In general, Australians felt drawn to the Papua New Guinea program over that of the Philippines. At that time the Aboriginal languages were not even on their agenda.

Behind Pittman's spontaneous "Aborigine" answer lay a disposition that was rooted in his childhood. From his father's makeup and from his mother's generous hospitality—always extended to the multi-national laboring force all around their home—he had been given a pattern. He was quick to accept schoolmates whose parents were of different nationalities and races. Exposure to the standard popular epithets of discrimination found no lodging place in his mind. When he met Townsend and later President Cárdenas, he was entirely at ease in their acceptance of all people everywhere. So concern for the Aboriginal peoples of Australia was totally consistent with his regard for all minorities. The implication that perhaps Australia may have been negligent toward its own people had escaped mention.

At this present moment the Australian gentlemen were too polite to show a flicker of hesitancy. SIL began study of the languages of the Outback shortly thereafter. [SIL Bibliography: Australia<sup>b</sup>](#)

### ***Vietnam Revisited***

Backtracking briefly to Jakarta, there was one quite meager immediate affirmative in the venture into Indonesia. Thanks to a letter of introduction from Dr. Cecilio Lopez of the Philippines, Pittman had met Professor Prijono, Dean of the Faculty of Literature and Arts of the University of Indonesia. Pittman had shared with him a language assessment word list in Jarai, a Montagnard<sup>c</sup> language of Vietnam. As previously reported, Pittman had seen almost at once that Jarai is a Malayo-Polynesian Austronesian language not Austro-Asiatic like Vietnamese. Professor Prijono was pleased to have this knowledge of Jarai and had provided Pittman Malay cognates for most of the Jarai words. That little item may seem irrelevant, but there is a "sleeper" in this discovery and the collaboration with Dr. Prijono – another of those curious "coincidences."

Pittman was only a visitor in Vietnam. Yet he had made a significant discovery concerning a language of the host country. This might appear a little awkward. But Pittman was a language specialist. Other visitors to a country might spend time in curio shops accumulating souvenirs. Pittman collected syllables. In the midst of a frenetic

schedule he had found time in the Philippines to study Tagalog and Ilocano. When in Vietnam he studied Vietnamese. In this instance his explorations soon found him deciphering Vietnamese languages with Asian scholars. That would not be a great matter in an adventure story; however, the results were far from trivial, as usual.

On a remote chance, he put his discovery into an academic paper and sent it to the prestigious Pacific Science Congress scheduled for November 1957 in Bangkok. The paper was accepted for presentation and was well-received by the specialists who had gathered there from Oceania and Southeast Asia. Out of the resultant discussion and subsequent conversations, he and his SIL companion, David Thomas, were invited by the rector of the University of Saigon to accompany him on the flight back to Vietnam. The rector and his companions were accorded a resounding reception at the airport. A welcoming delegation of Vietnamese educators appeared. Pittman and Thomas were not only included in the welcome, they were introduced to the leading Vietnamese linguist, Dr. Nguyen Dinh Hoa. Furthermore, because they blended nicely into this fellowship of scientists, Daryl Keefer, the Dean of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, in Vietnam as an educational consultant to the government, invited the two to stay in his home until they could find a place of their own. This was a major favor as any expatriate traveling on limited budget would know.

How did it happen that SIL achieved such a distinctive position among scholars in Vietnam? First the finding of the Jarai word list. Then Pittman recognizing that the words of this list seemed to place the Jarai language as a member of a language family dissimilar to most Vietnamese languages. Then (Why not?) submitting a treatise to a cluster of scientists totally unfamiliar to Pittman. The actual presentation of the paper was well received. Then came the invitation of the rector to return to Saigon in his party and (but yes) share in the reception that included Dr. Hoa. Such recognitions greatly enhanced the reputation of SIL.

A similar occurrence took place as Pittman and Thomas prepared their diplomatic skills for renewing their Vietnam visas (every two weeks). They set out on the desk-to-desk process of applying for visa extensions. Pittman cautioned Thomas: “Everybody wants to learn English, and they will look on us as resource teachers. We don’t want to do that. We need to study Vietnamese, not to teach English.” Within hours he rued those words. On they went, each stop taking them a stratum higher until they arrived before the Under Secretary of the Interior. As they entered the office, this gentleman, all



smiles, rose to receive them. “Oh,” he exclaimed, “I’ve heard of you people. I want you to teach English to my immigration officers!”

Pittman was on one side of the room, Thomas on the other. He could not signal to Thomas that this official controls the issuance of all visas, and Thomas must understand that all prior cautionings were to be scuttled at once. Pittman thought, if the Under Secretary needs his employees to be tutored in English, it will be done! He would have to risk being thought a turncoat by Thomas. It will be done!

“And it turned out,” said Pittman, “for some years the people handling visa renewals for the government were our own students of English.”

At a later time that same Under Secretary, now the Minister of the Interior, said of SIL, “You are the only foreigners of any description that we are allowing to live in tribal villages of Vietnam.”

Wrote Pittman, “When a member of another organization that had been there many years learned of that, he said mournfully, ‘We’ve been trying to get a place to live among the Stieng for thirty years.’”

The Vietnam Minister of the Interior, whose officials were being taught English by SIL linguists, invited Dr. and Mrs. Pittman to a grand dinner in their delightful home. The Pittmans were intrigued to watch the wife of the minister direct their hovering servers by glancing at one or another and simply flicking her eyebrow. Without interrupting herself or anyone speaking, she would catch the eye of a server and one of the eleven courses would be cleared away and another brought on.

Pittman remembered a strange line of ancient biblical poetry that he had never understood: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go; I will guide you with mine eye.”

This is what he saw: “There are three levels of alertness that these servants have. If they cannot recognize an eye signal, then the next attempt is a hand signal, then a spoken command. That is the lowest category of all, a comedown, a putdown for both the hostess and the servers if there has to be a spoken command. It is important that one watches for the subtle signals. Perhaps that, he said, is the meaning of that ancient advisement.”

In a detailed report on the Vietnam pre-war years, Pittman recounted years later:

The winter of 1959–60 was what I call the Golden Age of the work in Vietnam . . . One reason it was golden, in my opinion, is we were given a number of resources that were ideal for our size and time. Not the least of those was a group house . . . in a wonderful location, on a quiet, shady street near the offices that we had to visit . . . Since this is the tropics, we of course had to have all doors and windows wide open all the time for whatever air could circulate there, and we had no screens since the total air circulation space had to be maximum. Even screens inhibit some of the air that circulates.

We had a big tropical fruit tree out in the front yard bearing the fine fruit called macopa. That's in the myrtle family, for you botanists. The fruit was good not only for human beings to eat, but also for fruit bats. One evening during a meeting . . . here came a fruit bat carrying a macopa. Not wanting to be ungenerous, he dropped the fruit right into the lap of one of the ladies and kept on flying right out the other end of the room!

One noon someone put a cake on to bake in the kerosene stove then went off to take a siesta and overslept. The stove overheated. When it was discovered, I could see flames coming out of the fuel tank. I knew the danger. This was almost a duplication of the explosion that burned Myra Lou Barnard.

I did not know much Vietnamese, but finally managed to express the danger and get the fire department there... The fire was still burning merrily in the fuel tank. I tried to explain the danger of that thing exploding. All the fire department men could think was bombs. Instead of trying to put the fire out, they came to me with a long questionnaire and a very serious look. The fire chief began to write down all the information about who was I, where did I come from, what was my passport number, and visa number—with a fire burning furiously in the kitchen! I was about to explode with concern! I think that they took at least fifteen minutes to cross-examine me and ponder what kind of a threat I might be to national security. Only then, after they had filled out the whole questionnaire, did they bring in the fire extinguisher and put out the blaze.<sup>d</sup>

### ***Attempted Coup***

Other aspects of the Golden Age of the Vietnam program included the ready issuance of visas, the cordiality of all officials, and the availability of skilled assistants. At this time nine language projects were in progress. Eight additional linguists were in

preparation to arrive in 1961. Auxiliary assistants were either on the scene or were being readied to join as well. All were aware of President Ngo Dinh Diem's warnings; however, the country seemed generally at peace.

One SIL member was teaching English in the household of the President. A second was doing the same in the Ministry of the Interior. Others were similarly giving English teaching assistance to officials even as they proceeded with their own language research.

An abrupt announcement of change darkened Saigon on November 11, 1960. Dissidents tried to stage a coup. The attempt was put down. Yet four months later raiders attacked a village in Darlac province where SIL members Henry and Evangeline Blood and their children were placed in jeopardy. They escaped unhurt this time. In short, the situation had escalated into open bloodshed.

The government became uneasy about foreigners in the remote areas and began to hold up the issuance of visas. In a matter of a few months, the Golden Age began to tarnish. Distant observers counseled withdrawal. Instead, the linguists and their language assistants took as their guidance an ancient saying: "He who observes the wind shall not sow; he who regards the clouds shall not reap." With accelerated energy they pushed forward. Dictionaries were developed, folklore recorded, health manuals produced, primers printed, translations advanced, goals realized—all snatched from under the shadow of war. [SIL Bibliography: Vietnam<sup>e</sup>](#)

The Pittmans remained in Saigon the winter of 1960–61. With permission of the military they visited the highlands village of Lac Thien, which had been recently attacked. No further action having taken place, the SIL family living there was encouraged.

In the Pacific area at that time four highly active areas of language research existed: the Philippines, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, and the Australian Aborigines. After attending the SIL biennial conference in the United States and directing the summer linguistics session at UND, the Pittmans hurried back to Vietnam for another winter.

### ***Personal Perspective***

In the spring of 1962, Pittman made calls at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and Jakarta, Indonesia. Such visits helped keep alive the SIL bid to work in additional languages.

Because the Indonesian government was not yet ready to enter into a contractual agreement with SIL, he visited every two years.

On one of his visits to Kuala Lumpur, Pittman made the acquaintance of a Dutch linguist named Roolvink. The two shared their language interests and, thanks to this cordial scholar, Pittman met other linguists. The congeniality of the two carried promise for future reciprocities. Pittman held himself responsible, however, for allowing this friendship to languish.

Of this neglect he was to receive a sharp reminder a few years later. At that future time he was directing strong programs in India and in Nepal. During a layover in Bangkok, the airline provided him transport to their guesthouse. It was night when he boarded the airline cab to return, too dark for him to recognize that he would share the trip with a companion. Aware at last that he was not alone in the cab, he made an effort to be friendly by saying where he had been and where he was going.

The other responded by stating his own travel details—not more. Pittman gathered from the comments that the man was from Kuala Lumpur. Laying hold on this fragment, he tried to carry the exchange a little further: “Well, I know only one person in all Kuala Lumpur.” In this he was confessing to himself that he had forgotten everyone else because he had not maintained contact. Hurriedly, he continued, “He’s a linguist at the University of Malaysia.” Another long silence. He strove for a holding place, “But I cannot even remember his name.”

From the dark form across the seat came a slightly wearied tone, “Could it have been Roolvink?”

“Yes,” came Pittman, delightedly. “Roolvink. That’s the name. That’s who it was!”

Another long silence and then, from the obscure figure: “I’m Roolvink.”

At this point Roolvink, Pittman and perhaps the controller of destinies broke into laughter. The two amiable characters proceeded to sit together and converse from Bangkok to Bombay. They maintained correspondence until the day Roolvink died.

This story is told by Pittman in confession of his failure to maintain proper contact with former acquaintances and without realizing the incredible expectations that he held for himself. Behind such self-criticism lies an almost painful disposition not to be seen as a mastermind or as a manager who is always right. Pittman went out of his

way to admit mistakes and missed opportunities. He named “blind spots.” Year after year he continued to evaluate previous decisions that he thought might have been improved upon. The term “ultimate honesty” is not amiss.

More mention of that marvelous virtue is justified in an appraisal of this nature. Pittman’s deliberate honesty was a way of trying to draw a line between his linguistic skills and convictions and the acts of statesmanship that were thrust upon him day after day. The scholarship he was prepared to claim unabashedly. Hence his expression of pride in the acclaim given his presentation at Yale. On the other hand, his remarkable accomplishments as a diplomat were seen by him to be in another realm—a reason for wonder rather than pride. The gift of a book to Magsaysay that had such amazing results, he did not see as a great coup. Rather, he took not one ounce of credit. He looked upon that entire transaction as a gift from God and as a signal that he should accept the role assigned him even though he disliked the prospects. His cordial reception by persons in high office was also received with gratitude but not with self-esteem. He had been brought up to be polite to everyone. That which we have seen as astute diplomacy was the only way he knew how to behave. The astounding success of the fund-raising for the *Spirit of Seattle* Helio Courier, he thought to be a good joke. “The campaign ran itself.” The one who thinks Pittman’s summary to be false modesty should consider Pittman’s inability to lie. “False modesty” and raw honesty do not mix.

Pittman carried a grief for twenty years for an incident that took place in the company of two other men in the early morning hours somewhere in his travels. They emerged from an airport and hailed a taxi. They piled in and rode off secure. Too late came the memory that a lone individual was also waiting for a cab, a woman. Why, he deplored, had they not given her the cab? In his last years of life she was still a shadowy figure on the curb at the darkened doors of an unremembered airport.

That story and others and the above actions and dispositions do not describe a magistral character striding through life seeking whom he may impress. Rather, they present one whom Pittman described as a man of humble birth who wanted to do one thing but was ushered into a completely unfamiliar environment. All he could do was to be true to his upbringing, to have faith in God, and to have confidence that the Power who had placed him in these astounding situations would see him through.

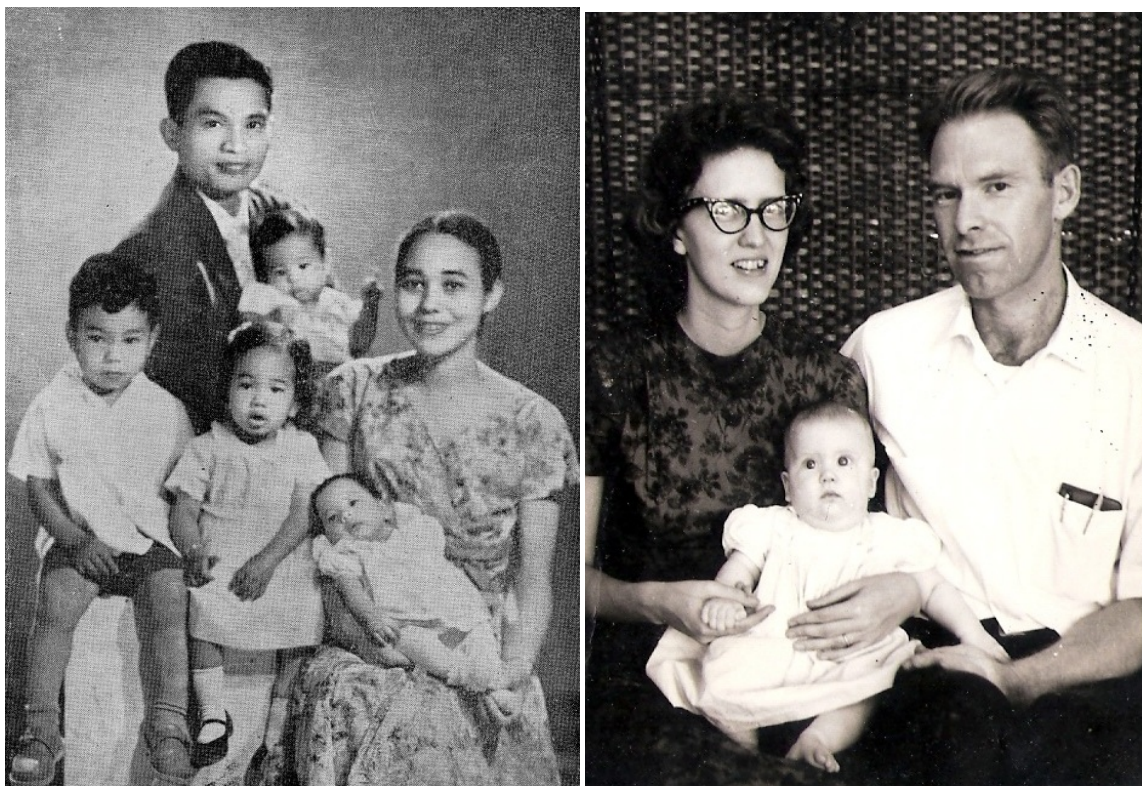
Yet another hurtful replay concerns the development of the Australian SIL Council. Malcolm Hepburn was the dynamo that energized the Australian businessmen to form the Council and to take rapid, decisive action. Hepburn carried off all aspects of his

work well, but he was fulltime in business and, it seemed to Pittman, that he might be overdoing physically. When another member of the Council, Alfred Coombe, retired from his wool business, Pittman thought he might opportunely relieve Hepburn of the burden of the Council Chairmanship. Pittman quotes himself: “I asked Malcolm Hepburn if he would like to be spelled off by Alfred Coombe as Chairman of the Council. He said, ‘Well, if that’s what you want, sure,’ but I was too dense to comprehend it. Not only had Hepburn been outstanding in his management of the Council . . . this had also become the principal joy and delight of his life. When I suggested that he transfer the chairmanship to Mr. Coombe, the light went out. He seemed to have nothing much left to live for—and, in fact, he died not many years after that.”

Such self-indictments were costly to Pittman. However, they served to build confidence among his associates. They knew that their leader was on no ego trip.

### ***The High Cost of Giving***

The next winter found Pittmans on home assignment in Illinois. A dread telephone call reached them on March 4, 1963. SIL members in Vietnam driving on a supposedly secure highway were waylaid. The group was en route from Saigon to Dalat. Gaspar Makil and Janie, his six-month-old daughter, were killed. A son was badly injured, and Elwood Jacobsen, a second linguist, was killed.



Gaspar & Josephine (holding Janie) Makil family      Elwood & Vurnell Jacobsen family, Saigon 1963

Additional information revealed that the Viet Cong (VC) had set up a roadblock and halted twenty or thirty cars. These they systematically looted. A helicopter reported the action to a military post that dispatched a truckload of soldiers. When a lookout fired a warning shot, the VC ran. But certain attackers turned on the foreigners and began firing. The two SIL men were shot pointblank.

Pittman flew to Vietnam at once. He visited each SIL family and gathered information from witnesses. He wrote, “I am convinced that our people were not guilty of indiscretion, presumption, or provocation in what happened. I found no evidence of any kind of negligence, waywardness, or irresponsibility. As for those who were killed, the fragrance of their lives is with us—not less, but more than before. Their work is not past—it has now begun to do more than most of us will do though we live twice as long.”

The shock of the attack on their colleagues and the violent deaths of three beloved friends hurt the Pittmans deeply.

SIL linguists, literacy workers, and support personnel know the risks. The question is, how much can idealists do toward helping when the ideologues of other persuasions

cast off the codes of constructive engagement? SIL personnel take their assignments knowing that they and their children will lose the security and the comforts of their homes and that they will also lose any hope for immediate reward. They know that their lives may be in jeopardy. Nevertheless, they go and go again. The person in charge, however, carries a heavier responsibility. He or she must sense whether there is too much risk-taking among the altruistic workers and whether or not the cooperating government can control its adversaries. The time comes when a director must withdraw those working in remote regions for such reasons.

When an SIL life is lost, great questions arise. The immediate supervisor suffers a soul searching. Is the tragedy a result of exceptional circumstances or is it part of a pattern likely to be repeated?

David Thomas<sup>f</sup>, a member of the Vietnam team from its inception, offered this assessment of the early Vietnam program, “From the time we first began in Saigon in 1957, we were all very conscious that we couldn’t count on more than six months in Vietnam. (It turned out to be 17 years!) We made plans as if we had 25 years, but worked each day knowing that we might not be there tomorrow. We kept pressing forward into new languages right up to 1975 . . . In January 1975 we even voted to expand into Laos. From 1960 we had already been living in cities. The Tet Offensive of 1968 did not change things all that much. Local security situations went up and down.”

One remarkable skill of craftsmen of the East results in the hammering out of a copper-alloy shield: circular, a meter across, so precisely shaped that when one taps the center ever so lightly he hears only a minor ripple of sound, a fundamental. A metallic pulse picks up that first tone, and becomes augmented, is joined with others, quivers and swells and unites with still others until a simple vibration becomes a resounding crash that fills the house.

In Vietnam a fundamental vibration was struck in March 1963 at the Viet Cong roadblock when SIL members Gaspar Makil, his infant daughter Janie, and Elwood Jacobsen died. The following November resonances developed and built on one another over the next twelve years. With that chaotic condition, the life-giving work of SIL in that country seemed to have been dealt a mortal blow. The high hopes of the linguists had struck a tone, too, and had been augmented and resounded up into the deep mountains, and then seemed to be lost. Yet it was not lost.



In the thinking of Pittman, the fateful note struck was the assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem in the November 1, 1963, *coup d'état*. Leading up to that, Diem was struggling to unite a people brought up in a battlefield of internal and external powers: France, Japan, the Vietminh, and France again. The Geneva Peace Accords divided the country between the North (backed by Russia and China) and the South. Diem became Prime Minister of South Vietnam. He declared it a republic and became its first president in 1955.<sup>8</sup>

From the beginning the communist North claimed dominion over the South. In 1959 their thrust southward intensified with guerrilla infiltration into the South in force.

A series of sensational acts made great color news spreads in the United States. As the situation in Vietnam escalated, television and the press became fierce in their denunciations of the Diem administration.

When Diem was assassinated (along with his brother), no one was charged.

Just three weeks later in November 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated. Pittman and his wife were in Melbourne when the Diem assassination took place. They were in Papua New Guinea when Kennedy was killed. These infamous deeds were seen as portents of rough times ahead.

### ***Setting For a Gem In India***

In early 1964 the Pittmans were in Australia at the first Summer Institute of Linguistics given at the University of Queensland in Brisbane. He led a grammar workshop there for a number of teams working in Australian Aboriginal languages. Catherine Pittman was on the grammar course staff (under Ellis Deibler).

Far distant, another teaching program was going forward that would quickly challenge attention. SIL's Dr. Kenneth Pike, renowned linguist, and Dr. Colin Day had been invited to deliver lectures at [Deccan College<sup>h</sup>](#) in Pune, India, in 1963. These men had been sought out because their expertise coincided with the chief purpose of the college. Pike and Day were enthusiastically received. During their stay Director Katre of Deccan suggested that he would be glad to enter into a contract with SIL. The invitation was informal, but it made further action opportune.

So it was that, glimpsing a vast, unprecedented opportunity, Pittman and James

Dean called at the college. They, too, were given a hearty welcome. In response to that friendship, Pittman urged new members of SIL, Ronald and Gail Trail, to enroll in Deccan for doctoral level linguistic studies. The Trails promptly did so to their own great satisfaction. By November 1964 Pittman as Asia-Pacific Area Director and Dr. James Dean, the PNG Director who had agreed to lead the work for this opening door of opportunity, signed an agreement with Deccan College to sponsor visas for SIL linguists.

Pune, placed on a high plateau, could boast an ideal climate. The city had been carefully planned with wide streets and adequate facilities. Included in the planning is the splendid Deccan College, a premiere school for linguistics and the source of a comprehensive Sanskrit dictionary. Furthermore, a committee of Indian and foreign scholars had planned Deccan College to be a linguistic research center. The combination of an attractive city and a university-level college that shared their interests exerted a strong attraction for the SIL linguists.

The winter of 1965–66 found the Pittmans in Pune, maintaining communication by mail with SIL's work elsewhere in the Pacific area. Competent leadership in the Philippines carried that broadening program forward nicely. The aboriginal language research was making progress under Australian SIL supervision; Papua New Guinea activities were expanding almost exponentially. The hope for working in Indonesia was on hold, pending the outcome of a coup attempt in that country. Thus the Pittmans were able to concentrate on the India progress.

This is what I call the "Pune winter," because Kay and I, along with Jim and Gladys Dean, Ron and Gail Trail, Dick and Edie Hugoniot, were all living together in one two-bedroom apartment for awhile—with the Dean and Trail children! For all of us, I'm sure, this was one of the happiest winters we have ever spent.

You might wonder how we all crowded in. Trails and their three children lived in one bedroom. Deans and their three children lived in another bedroom. Kay and I had the parlor for our bedroom . . . only available when the bed was let down at night. When Dick and Edie Hugoniot arrived, there was no bedroom for them so they slept on the roof. But you must not feel sorry for anyone sleeping outdoors in India; it was the best place of all, where it is cool and the air fresh. There were no tears shed; we had a lark. It was a prolonged picnic in part because of an outstanding old Indian cook who fed us three wonderful meals a day.

“It seemed”, Pittman wrote, “as though everything was in the finest possible setting for the start of our work.”

### *The Perspective of Experience*

In retrospect, Pittman wished that life in Pune had been less inviting. Experience had taught the SIL leadership that its purposes required consistent contact not only with local governments and academia but with national government officials as well. Delhi, the capital city of India, was where they might have been in touch with the officials of India.

The nature of SIL’s work calls for trust and government-level communication regarding its motives and practices. While a selfless person might be welcomed by society, the work of a large international service-oriented organization is less well understood.

SIL members do not involve themselves in activities that suggest linkages with home governments. Academic as well as vernacular publications for local communities are presented to appropriate university and host government libraries and officials. SIL representation in professional societies and the abundance of papers read in those societies testify to the scientific worth in their program.

Because of its impressive history including expertise in applied linguistics and functional literacy, SIL today has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and is an official NGO partner (consultative status) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Pittman knew the importance of establishing relationships with India’s officialdom. Early on he had obtained a letter of introduction to the person in charge of the India International Center (IIC) in New Delhi. But, his request for accommodations at that Center had been overlooked. When he, James Dean, and Ronald Trail arrived at that prestigious facility, no reservation had been made. However, in a kind of compensation for the oversight, the director introduced the SIL visitors to IIC Founding President Dr. C. D. Deshmukh, who was also Vice Chancellor (President) of the University of Delhi (1962–67). “Nothing could be finer than meeting him,” said Pittman. Deshmukh had previously been Minister of Finance for India and on the first Board of Governors of the

International Monetary Fund. Simply to know him was a high honor. Dr. Deshmukh became enthusiastic about the work of SIL.

This contact set off a chain of introductions that proved quite remarkable. Deshmukh introduced the SIL representatives to the Vice Chancellor of Utkal University in Orissa. The latter introduced them to the speaker of the House of Commons in New Delhi who, in turn, presented them to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and to India's President Radhakrishnan.

The question might again be raised, how did it happen that Pittman so readily found acceptance in high diplomatic and educational circles? After all, was he not of fairly modest background and innocent of political endorsements? One time he is received by a president, another by a university president; here he is entertained by royalty, there by a diplomatic corps. Why was he so well received? Was it an immediate recognition of the brilliance of Townsend's founding vision of a custom-made alphabet and written literature for every minority language group? Did that almost fanciful quest quickly capture the attention of so many ministers and rulers? But most presidents, governors, and prime ministers are inoculated against suitors with magnificent schemes. Furthermore, Summer Institute of Linguistics is not a convincing title, and neither is a stranger's story of success somewhere else.

One could add to that which has been mentioned earlier: Pittman respected all whom he met. People appreciate being appreciated. Pittman simply enjoyed whomever he met. Add his hoard of novel experiences that he could summon up on the spur of any moment, fit for any occasion. Residents of a country delight in hearing the encounters of foreigners in their land. Pittman could speedily come up with complimentary impressions of any country. For instance, he told, with relish, of an incident in Orissa, India.

The sole of one of my shoes had come loose; I was concerned lest it be lost altogether. I explained to our guide that I needed some help. "No problem," he said. Soon we were in a biggish city. I saw him looking; I thought he was looking for a shoe repair shop.

Presently as we were driving along, he saw two men seated on the curb of the street. He had the driver stop. He asked me for the shoe and showed it to these two men. They said, "No problem." One of them pulled out a boll of cotton

and began making a thread with his fingers from the cotton boll. The other one had a needle stuck into his lapel.

When the first one had finished making the thread, the second one threaded it through the needle and sewed my sole back on my shoe. About ten minutes and ten cents later, we were on our way again.

For some his conviction of the worth of his cause earned an audience. For others it might be his relaxed sharing of stories. On yet another level it might be the profound meanings that leaped out from some of those stories. An Indian official asked him whether he believed in astrology—a dominant source of guidance for many. Pittman responded by telling the story of the mathematical genius, Johannes Kepler.

Much abbreviated, the story runs as follows: For years Kepler used his knowledge of the orbits of planets as an aid to earning a living by casting horoscopes. Then he was hired by Tycho Brahe to calculate the orbit of Mars. Mars was the god of war. Its influence was supposed to be crucial to those who wanted to know whether war might break out. “The time came when he completely and accurately worked out the orbit of Mars, to the satisfaction of everyone. Instead of this confirming his astrological convictions, it destroyed all his faith in astrology. He renounced astrology, but his faith in God became more fervent than ever. The success of his work on the orbit of Mars confirmed and assured him of the intelligence and activity of his Creator.”

Pittman’s meticulous attention to detail, the breadth of his knowledge concerning nature and science, and his gift for coming up with a tale that went to the heart of a matter earned him multiplied privileges. He took life seriously but found reason for optimism even in dark hours.

### ***The Lost Jewel***

Dr. C. D. Deshmukh, the Vice Chancellor (President) of the University of Delhi, in advising SIL had recommended that language research be done in the Araku valley in eastern India. Dean assigned two SIL teams to that area.

“It seemed,” Pittman had written, “as though everything was in the finest possible setting for the start of our work.”

Only a thin partition separated “finest” from “not fine at all.” Pittman explains:

Indira Gandhi was a very generous and charitable woman. She allowed Jim

Dean and me to have an interview with her. She received us kindly. However, she never really believed in our work. I can explain that, partly at least. The states of India are defined to large extent by language. [A decade earlier the country had undergone a major reorganization of states by language boundaries.] Well, they already had a large number of languages officially recognized which gave them representation in the two houses of Parliament based on statehood. Our plan, to write primers, dictionaries, grammars, New Testaments, etc., would have the effect of documenting more viable languages, which could imply more viable states, which would make more representatives in the upper and lower houses of Parliament. They did not want any more languages represented.

So, although she was kind and friendly to us, she was forthright also. She just told us right from the shoulder that she disagreed.

We had a brief time of acceptance in India, and then in Parliament they rejected us. We were not rejected in some little corner of the bureaucracy, but right on the floor of the House of Commons. One member stated emphatically that the Summer Institute of Linguistics need not be allowed in India at that time.

Never underestimate the power of language! In India a language had the potential to define a state.

The India story has other chapters. This one held special meaning for Pittman:

When negotiations were getting started with the government, James Dean was asked to write and submit a proposal for what he thought would become the SIL program for bringing written language and literacy to the little-known language communities. It was shortly after this that SIL individuals from non-commonwealth countries ceased for a time to be granted visas. However, the Dean-drafted proposal apparently found daylight. It helped form the basis for the terms of reference of the Central Institute for Indian Languages (CIIL) which was given a worthy office in Mysore, a staff and a budget. Over the years CIIL personnel have occasionally attended SIL workshops and SIL researchers have found CIIL Library resources most helpful in gathering information on minority languages in India. In 1980 Dr. Kenneth Pike, President Emeritus of SIL, and Evelyn Pike were invited to CIIL for a semester as resident scholars, resulting in lasting, warm relationships with many Indian linguists. CIIL continues to make a valuable contribution to Indian language development today.

*Farther Up and Further In To Nepal*

Another “coincidence” led Pittman in a northerly direction. Prior to first meeting Dr. Deshmukh in Dehli, Pittman and Dean had discussed possibilities for working in yet another country, Nepal. They had learned that expatriates were being admitted in limited numbers. Because the country had previously been tightly closed to outsiders, its people had been largely untouched by literacy in their own languages. On a long chance, Pittman asked Dr. Deshmukh whether he knew the Vice Chancellor of the principal university in Nepal. “Then I timidly took another step. ‘We do not want to impose on your kindness, but would you be willing to introduce us to him?’ Dr. Deshmukh rocked back in his chair. ‘Of course! Why not?’ he exclaimed.”

Thus it was that the Pittmans went up to Kathmandu, Nepal, to the office of the Vice Chancellor of the prestigious Tribhuvan University.<sup>i</sup>

Presiding over the “top of the world,” Nepal is a cold country in winter. Fuel is scarce. Buildings are constructed to retain heat. College administrative offices are not exempted in the need for conserving warmth. The Pittmans were ushered into a tiny low-ceilinged room, the walls of dark brick. The Vice Chancellor pulled three chairs up to the open fireplace. Hard-to-come-by firewood crackled cheerfully on the hearth.

Preliminaries over, Pittman sketched the work of SIL in the Philippines and in Vietnam and in Papua New Guinea. Then he asked the large question: “We would like to begin a language research program in Nepal much as we are doing in the Philippines. May this be possible?”

The fire had dwindled into a warm glow. The Vice Chancellor stared into the coals for long minutes. Then he spoke, “Well, that will be all right, but...”

Pittman was quiet. The room was quiet save for the whisper of the fire. His thoughts raced ahead. What moment is this? What resides in this decision? What displacements? What labor? What risks? What great resource for the gallant Sherpas? A bright yellow flame shot up from the dying embers.

Later, another Vice Chancellor, successor to his present host, signed a contract with SIL. However, it was to that first cautious but friendly reception all would be traced. On December 20, 1966, an agreement was signed with Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu for linguistic research in Nepal. Pittman added:

Furthermore, the King of Nepal had declared at that time that he was going to launch a back-to-the-village campaign to get his university students back into the villages, helping their village people, instead of living endlessly in Kathmandu. When we explained to the Vice Chancellor that we wanted to have our people in villages studying indigenous languages, he said, “Great! That will fit right in with the King’s back-to-the-village campaign! You will set an example for our university students here who need to go back to their own villages.” So the Lord got us off to a marvelous start in Nepal.

Pittman provided a side comment on the linguistic relationship between India and Nepal, a matter of consequence to the researchers:

The main language of India is Hindi. The main language of Nepal is Nepali. They are closely related, in fact, so closely you could almost say they are dialects of a single language because many Nepalis can understand Hindi and many speakers of Hindi can understand Nepali. Furthermore, although India has many different scripts, Hindi and Nepali are both written with the Devanagari script. Though there are differences, they can read and write each other’s language. There is a greater problem in communication between many states of India which use different languages and different scripts to the point that they cannot understand each other.

In 1967, after visiting an SIL school session in Horsleys Green, England, the Pittmans stopped in Germany and Switzerland. Pittman wrote, “We were not sightseeing. In fact, there are few people who have seen fewer sights in those places than have Kay [as he and most others called Catherine] and I.” That statement can be broadened far beyond the Pittmans’ stops in Europe. As sensitive as Pittman was to the marvels of flora and fauna, one seldom found him devoting time or energy to tourist attractions.

When traveling, Pittman’s areas of concentration were, first, relating to host government officials; second, seeking to help meet the needs of SIL personnel; third, personally contributing to university linguistics scholarship. His wide-angle vision came to him at birth. He gradually learned to apply that gift to all daily needs. His own home life had provided emotional and social stability. College was vastly broadening, but even so, he was yet an American provincial as he set out on his own. Along the way he learned to concentrate on one task at a time, to complete whatever he started, and to



attend to details. That disposition became habitual during the decade that he and Catherine spent with the Tetelcingo Aztecs.

Increasing contact with Dr. Townsend during the 1940s brought Pittman closer to government authorities and into leadership responsibilities. By the time he had weathered the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and India experiences, his world had changed remarkably. By the late 1960s he was known in the education departments of most nations in southeastern Asia and throughout Oceania. His papers were welcomed at major world linguistic conferences and published in their journals. Among international linguists he was accepted as a qualified colleague and as most knowledgeable regarding minority languages in Asia-Pacific.

### ***Take Two Cookies***

The Pittmans returned to Pune in India and assisted Director James Dean in establishing language research in the Araku Valley of Andhra Pradesh State.

It was on a bus trip to Araku Valley that the incident of the two cookies took place. Pittman rode without a companion. The rickety, noisy bus creaked up the steep dusty road over the Kadiri Pass. On the left was a near-vertical rock-studded clay wall, on the right, space with no holding place. His uneasiness had to do with the age of the bus, the youth of the driver, the lack of one single guardrail, and the blank stares of his fellow passengers.

Midway up an unbelievable grade, the shuddering ancient vehicle lost its meager momentum, coughed twice, and became ominously still. Pittman was puzzled. Other passengers seemed undisturbed. He tried to match their indifference. Then, on his left, the cliff side, he saw that there was a break in the wall just ahead. Indeed, a fairly wide gully opened and a flight of stairs led up from the road. Down those stairs came a robed priest. As Pittman glanced upward, he could now make out a plateau and the corner of a shrine. The priest made his way to the bus holding aloft a little flat basket. Clearly the passengers would be asked to make obeisance to the local deity by way of a gift.

“Oh my,” thought Pittman to himself, “all of us will be expected to ask for the protection of the presiding spirit, and if I fail to share in their reverence, I will stand out as defying him or her or it. They will think, ‘The foreigner could bring disaster on us.’ What shall I do?”

The priest boarded the bus. Then Pittman saw that in front of the man was a little girl, no doubt his granddaughter. The priest handed the basket to her and pointed her down the aisle. She, tiny, shy and beautiful, extended the basket to the nearest passenger.

“What shall I do?” Pittman again asked of his conscience. A sudden memory brightened his face: the lunch packed for him early that morning. He reached into the paper sack and pulled out two homemade cookies. The child stopped before him. He held up the cookies, pointed at them with his free hand and said, “These are for you.” Then he laid them in the basket.

Her brilliant smile showed him that she understood. Nearby passengers grinned and nodded. The question, “What shall I do?” had been answered.

Within a very short time India-Nepal with Dr. James Dean as director became the most international of all SIL branches. Personnel came from countries like Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US, and then Japan, Finland and elsewhere.

Reasons for elation were to be seen elsewhere as well. The Philippines program could not be better. Vietnam, although troubled, was a beehive of research energy and achievement. Papua New Guinea was developing rapidly. A linguistics school had been started in New Zealand. Friendships were being made in Indonesia that promised a welcome as soon as the political situation stabilized.

Pittman was invited to read one of his papers at the January 1968 Tamil Conference in Madras. This was most fortuitous because he met many linguists of India at that time and in particular Professor J. D. Singh, whose reputation was widely known.

Pittman made remarkable discoveries “by accident.” For instance, another SIL team was to join Pittman for the Tamil conference—Doyt and Irene Price. They would arrive by train at the Madras Grand Central Station. Madras is a large city and the station constantly crowded. The Prices would be new to that scene, and Pittman could envision great difficulty in finding them. He therefore checked all details carefully. He arrived well before train time, studied the bulletin board, and identified the train and track and time of arrival. Nevertheless, to be sure of his way, he pushed through the crowd to the gate where he hoped later to meet them. Then he even went down to the thronged platform—all of this an hour in advance of their scheduled arrival. As he sized up the

crowd, the very couple he would later hope to find “suddenly materialized.” Fault bulletin board and schedule. Give credit to over caution. The young travelers were met precisely as they had expected.

The Madras conference on Tamil was rewarding. In high optimism, Pittman met James Dean in New Delhi en route to Nepal. They called at a number of offices in order to update officials on SIL activities and then set off to the airport. The date was January 30, 1968.



## Chapter Five

### 1968—1998

#### *Worst Scenario in Vietnam*

Newspaper headlines on January 30, 1968, turned Pittman to stone: VIETCONG TET OFFENSIVE. He bought the paper and studied its columns in vain. The publishers knew little more than the headline announced. Filled with foreboding, Pittman and Dean continued on to Nepal. Reports available at the airport in Kathmandu looked even more ominous. Pittman took the next flight for Saigon. Midway to Vietnam came an intercom announcement: “Landing in Saigon is not appropriate at this time.” The plane would proceed to Manila.

Manila was a welcome alternative for Pittman. His son-in-law, Daniel Weaver, was assistant director of the Philippines Branch of SIL. Weaver and his wife Marilou, the Pittmans’ eldest daughter, would provide accommodations, refreshment, counsel, and, perhaps, information.

Information was lacking. For Pittman, waiting in Manila became torment. Calls to the airport promised nothing for access to Saigon. No word leaked out concerning the SIL expatriates in Vietnam. Hours were days, and a day was a week. Newspapers divided their stories: “Defending Forces Push Back Invaders,” “Vietcong in Saigon,” “Business Continues Uninterrupted,” “Panic Reigns.”

Excerpts from accounts of SIL persons who were caught in the Tet overrun give some idea of what Pittman was missing: “Hank Blood, twice before endangered by previous attacks, has now been captured and marched off at gunpoint.” “The SIL Center in Kontum had, in months past, become flanked by two army camps . . . a chopper landed in their midst from Military Assistance Command-Vietnam (MAC-V) headquarters.” A chaplain announced that one escape flight only would be allowed them. They crowded into the helicopter, but not all could be taken.

Eugenia Johnston Fuller remembered:

The Miller children were on the chopper . . . It lifted off. There was Carolyn, [the children’s mother who would later become President of SIL International] . . . I remember almost screaming at her, “Carolyn, get on!” It was too late.

Carolyn said, “Be calm, Eugenia, he’s coming back!” The chopper did come back and took off with the others.

We were crammed into a bunker, quite a lot of us. The children curled up and went to sleep . . . You couldn’t stand or lie down. . . . About 5:30 in the morning a red alert sounded . . . All this firing had been going on all night . . . so we kind of raised our eyebrows . . . (meaning, “How could we be more alert than this?”).

The following paragraph summarized the conditions:

Our language assistants were with us; US officers had let us take them into the military camp, which was a concession on their part. Later we went on with the workshop at Nha Trang on the coast (as though nothing was happening). Then we learned that Hank Blood [SIL], Betty Olsen [of the Christian & Missionary Alliance] and Mike Bengé, who was a USAID friend, had been taken captive. Mike was the only one that came back from that ordeal several years later; Betty and Hank both died in captivity.

Pittman was in Manila for one week before flights resumed to Saigon. He remembered:

I got there a week later. I was able to get to Kontum. I was able to walk over our former workshop site. It had been leveled by bulldozers, but it was a hasty job. You could see bones of those who had fought there and lost their lives.

### ***Global Perspective***

The history of SIL’s contributions to literacy-for-the-minorities is voluminous. The [SIL Bibliography<sup>a</sup>](#) (now part of the SIL Language and Culture Archives) today contains more than 40,000 entries, most of which are focused on the minority languages of the world. As war engulfed Vietnam, gratifying achievements were recorded elsewhere by SIL in the South and Central Americas and in the United States and Canada. Africa was receiving large and increasing attention especially from European SIL members and their assistants. During this particular period of time, SIL was exploring with Soviet educators and linguists the potential of bilingual education in five republics of the Caucasus region.

Pittman however, in contact with and concerned with all else in SIL’s worldwide

progress, was the sole director for the entire Asia-Pacific region. The quantum leaps forward from nation to nation in the span of less than twenty years stagger the imagination: the Philippines to Papua New Guinea to the Australian Aborigines, to Vietnam, to Cambodia, to India, to Nepal, and to Indonesia. Pittman's part went far beyond initiating contacts and signing contracts. He personally placed teams of linguists and literacy workers and arranged for, and brought up, support assistance.

By 1971 SIL was involved in work with one hundred eighty-six languages of Asia and the South Pacific. Not only were individual contacts maintained throughout the years, but Pittman, joined by his wife and children, personally taught eighteen summers at SIL-University of North Dakota, edited the early volumes of SIL-UND Workpapers from the summer sessions, and directed that training program for twenty years. In transit, he also produced his own formidable tally of professional, [published papers](#)<sup>b</sup>.

Significant among Pittman's published works were the early editions of the *Ethnologue* – founded, named and edited by Pittman for 20 years. The *Ethnologue*<sup>c</sup> now in its 17<sup>th</sup> edition documents 7,103 living languages. The *Ethnologue* database of language codes contributed to the establishment of the [ISO 639-3](#) international standard for language identification. Today SIL International is the official registration authority for the ISO 639-3 standard inventory of language identifiers and administers the annual cycle for changes and updates worldwide. SIL's contribution in this through decades of language development and documentation can be traced back to Pittman's original mimeographed publication of the *Ethnologue* in 1951.

### ***Lowering Clouds***

Up to January 1968, it seemed SIL in Asia and the Pacific had received acceptance, encouragement, and success at every turn. However, the 1968 Tet Offensive marked an abrupt change for the Vietnam program and signaled an impending shift in the focus of the Pittmans' career. The Director-extraordinaire, who had initiated SIL work across the region, would begin addressing withdrawal from a country that had welcomed him.

At first, the military action in Vietnam had only slowed the SIL program. The Tet Offensive heralded coming problems. On May 23, 1970, Pittman wrote to the home office, "In the SIL work in Vietnam . . . the teams are working with little interruption since they are almost all now living in large cities where there is little fighting of any consequence."

But curtailment soon became the order of the day. A stream of cautionary advisements traced the events of the next years. In early 1970 the instruction to continue business as usual was expressed as follows: “Slim down the Branch only to the extent of those who are about to transfer out for normal reasons . . . Personnel who are effectively functioning and envisioning no travel in the normal course of their program are to continue . . . ”

In May 1972 a report asserts that there was no general evacuation of dependents. “In some cases where furloughs or home leaves are fairly near, people due for such are going early, especially if their effectiveness in-country has been somehow reduced by the present intensity of fighting.”

Word was passed around repeatedly that any who thought that they should leave for any reason were free to leave the country without the slightest unfavorable reflection on their decision. Bulletins gave advisement as to how members were to handle emergency situations. Directions were given on procedures for emergency evacuations. Reassembly points were specified.

A line written in June 1972 read, “Civilian and military authorities do not believe the current situation warrants evacuation of foreign civilians yet, though some folks have moved to safer areas.”

On April 16, 1973, Pittman wrote to Richard Watson, the Branch Director, “It would be very feasible for Ralph and Lorraine Haupers to take one or more language helpers with them to the Philippines and do translation while living there with their children.” But, according to Watson, “. . . it was either impossible or very difficult to take nationals out of the country.”

A memorandum (perhaps an outline for a note to the Branch Director by Pittman) stated:

Embassy people not being asked to leave... [but] Tan Son Nhut airport is a strategic target of the first magnitude. If the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] elect to attack it, evacuation of mothers with children from there could be distressing to those involved. That the NVA will try to harass it must be considered highly probable. The same can be said of the Nha Trang airport. While it is not so strategic as TSN, yet it is more vulnerable, so could be more easily attacked . . .

In the same handwritten memorandum was this item: “An orderly transfer of

transferable members at this time is the best insurance for a confident return of members later.”

Another memorandum read: “American and Vietnamese military advice should be respected and obeyed; their offered help should be accepted with appreciation. It must *not* be assumed, however, that they will surely be able to evacuate our members in a serious emergency.”

The preceding items represent a multitude of advisements from Pittman as Asia-Pacific Area Director. He wrote to Branch Director Watson: “We are terribly proud of the work which the Branch is doing in Vietnam and Cambodia . . . I am sure that the SIL effort will figure more prominently than anyone presently reports. But the examples of such great leaders as Jesus . . . in withdrawing, at least temporarily, from places where there was considerable hostility, need to be a part of our total guidance.”

These kinds of counsel taken together could be seen as Pittman’s seeking to encourage Watson to move early in removing personnel from points of danger and to be prepared to leave the country at an early rather than a late date. The decision belonged to Watson and the branch Executive Committee, but the counsel of Pittman constituted more than a repetition of standard procedures.

A relevant consideration for Pittman lay in the courage of Watson. Watson had been in Vietnam almost from the beginning. His energy, optimism, and strength of character as director had carried the branch during most difficult years. His confidence in the rightness of the program was unwavering. However, as Pittman saw it, Watson had not been director at the time of the deaths in 1963. Pittman had suffered deeply and was still troubled by the loss of Elwood Jacobsen and Gaspar Makil and his tiny daughter Janie. Pittman had personally invited Jacobsen, Makil and POW Hank Blood (whose death in captivity was later confirmed) to join him in the work in Vietnam.

Complicating the general scene, already approaching the chaotic, were numerous announcements by highly placed Americans that South Vietnam would be supported in its “gallant struggle” and would be able to stem the advance from the North. At the time Nha Trang was abandoned on March 28, 1975, a message came from the US consulate at 9:00 a.m. to the remaining seven SIL expatriates in Nha Trang: “The last plane on which you can be assured of passage will leave at 3:00 this afternoon.” The school had been closed with teachers, mothers and children evacuated only a week before.



*Final Days in Vietnam*

Thus on March 28, 1975, when Nha Trang was abandoned, all hope for continuing work in Vietnam, even in the larger cities, was lost. The SIL Executive Committee (EC) in Saigon determined that remaining branch members should all plan to leave on or before April 22, 1975. Pittman was not at the meeting. He had no opportunity to discuss the logistics with Watson or the committee. When he heard “April 22” his heart sank.

Pittman sensed the risks of the SIL program. Take, for instance, his letter back in 1968 to the SIL Board of Directors. A motion had been passed by the Board to the effect that the Asia Area administration ought to remember that any tragedy taking place in Vietnam might prove a hindrance to SIL work in other places. Pittman wrote to a board member:

This problem gets extremely close to basics. All of us accepted the fact of danger when we applied to SIL. Those of us in Vietnam accepted it a second time when we came here. Did the Board and corporate administration not face up to it when the decision was made to start work in Vietnam? The branch leadership also, in my opinion, seeks to maintain and enforce every security measure possible, short of abandoning the work. But there is now no place in Vietnam that meets the ordinary American definition of security. Should we therefore now leave?

For many years the Board and the corporations have been recommending that we seek to enter Indonesia. I have been trying to carry out these instructions. But Indonesia has also been a troubled land. Security there is also less than in the US. Does anyone believe we can enter there without incurring new risks? Will we tell those who go there that if they get hurt, they can hurt our cause worldwide?

Pittman knew the dangers, but he was a cautious person. He once said, “It is one thing to risk one’s own life. It’s another matter for an administrator to put other people at risk.” When the three (Makils and Jacobsen) were killed at the roadblock along the Saigon-Dalat highway on March 4, 1963, Pittman made an emergency trip from the United States to Vietnam to study the scene and to talk with all concerned. After careful research he was convinced that every reasonable precaution had been taken. The roadblock and the murders had included SIL people, though not by intent. As the fall of

Saigon neared, Pittman was caught between knowing that risks were inevitable and a fear, born of experience, that his associates were too close to great peril.

The tentative April 22 departure of all personnel struck Pittman as deferring too long. If the ambassadorial complement in Saigon should leave the scene, a panic among expatriates and among nationals would likely result. He knew of a situation where flight attendants had been unable to close airplane doors, where frightened nationals had to be physically beaten back as they scrambled to gain access to overcrowded carriers. Pittman was a praying man. In this instance he concluded that the branch ought not put off their exodus to the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

One of SIL's founding principles was to delegate decision-making to field administration. A branch in those days would have to meet certain governance criteria before the SIL Board would grant a charter. From that time on the branch director and the EC were, within policy limitations, to large extent self-governing. Watson was an excellent director. However, the situation in Vietnam had eroded from low-level insurgency, to which the administration had adjusted, to all-out war. At the critical hour when Watson and the Executive Committee settled on the date for withdrawal, Area Director Pittman and Kenneth Smith, the incoming branch director completing Ph.D. studies in the US, had not been available for consultation.

As a result of these confusing circumstances, Pittman saw himself in a position to disallow SIL to run what he felt to be mortal risks. He asked for an earlier withdrawal date to provide for what Pittman believed to be the safety of all those involved.

In the end, with self-criticism before and after, Pittman did what he felt needed to be done. He knew that as founder and recruiter for the SIL Branch in Vietnam, he held a moral responsibility for the Vietnam program. The remaining members would, he felt, accept his wishes out of deference to his senior status even though they might differ. Without consultation with other advisors, he requested that all SIL personnel depart Vietnam on or before April 8. This would be two weeks ahead of the previously planned exodus. He did this confident that Watson and the other members would comply. His request was honored.

The members left on scheduled flights without major airport confusion. Pittman's account of the events of early 1975 follows:

On Monday, March 10, the North Vietnamese (NVN) attacked Banmethuot.

John and Carolyn Miller<sup>d</sup> and their young daughter LuAnne were among the fourteen expatriates captured there and eventually taken to Hanoi.

My itinerary and flight plans had me on my way to New Jersey via the SIL home office at Huntington Beach [California] at the time. Our impasse in attempts to obtain the release of Hank Blood, taken by the NVA several years earlier, and total absence of news of the Millers' fate gave us little hope for obtaining an early release for them.

I had already asked Dick Watson to cable Phnom Penh (Cambodia), instructing the last of our people to leave there.

By the time I arrived in Huntington Beach, North Vietnam had overrun all of the South Vietnam highlands (Banmethuot, Kontum, Pleiku) and was putting pressure on Hue. Therefore, after conferring with George Cowan, Ben Elson and Al Pence [executives for SIL], and because the situation looked grave, I canceled my plan to continue on to Highlands, NJ, where Kay was, and booked for immediate return to Saigon. I arrived there on Tuesday, March 25, as North Vietnam occupied Hue.

SIL branch administration and membership had decided to leave Vietnam and had set Tuesday, April 22, as the final date for the last members to leave. On Friday, March 28, the remaining seven of our members in Nha Trang were able to leave there for Saigon on the last scheduled orderly departure flight from that city. Two days later there was anarchy in Danang, and by Monday, March 31, there was disorder at the Nha Trang airport. Wednesday, April 2, when the last US officials left, Nha Trang was in chaos. South Vietnam had relinquished control of two-thirds of the land between its northern border and Saigon in three weeks.

Since more than one million refugees were streaming out of the highlands and down the coast toward Saigon, and since ugly scenes were being reported as people tried to crowd onto final flights out of cities being overrun, I was concerned about possible problems if/when the Saigon airport should be threatened. I therefore requested on Monday morning, March 31, without consultation with anyone, that the scheduled SIL final departure date of April 22 be moved up to April 8—two weeks sooner than originally planned. Though this put a great deal of added pressure on already heavily overworked members, the decision was accepted in silence and incredibly tight schedules were ratcheted even tighter. Dick Watson sent his pregnant wife Sandy and their three with the

last of the mothers and children on the plane for Manila Tuesday morning, April 1, and taught his last class at the University of Saigon on Thursday, April 3.

The last seven members were able to leave Saigon on scheduled flights on April 8, two bound for Bangkok, five for Manila. On the preceding six days, thirty-four others had left, a few each day—all on scheduled flights. Packing and shipping had been rushed as had the securing of proper documentation, but all was accomplished on time. As had been decided much earlier, all linguists and support personnel sent all national assistants safely to their homes to be reunited with their families before the expatriates left the country.

Even on April 8 there was a problem. An airplane bombed the presidential palace in Saigon while Dick Watson and Milt Barker were still in town handling last minute details. Miraculously, they were able to get through the suddenly imposed curfew and back to the group house in time to leave with the rest of the seven that afternoon. Those bound for the Philippines were received at the SIL Manila guesthouse, where the Weavers welcomed them into the SIL reception and administrative center.

- April 17, Cambodia surrendered.
- April 29, the massive, desperate helicopter evacuation of the last US personnel from Saigon.
- April 30, South Vietnam surrendered.

### ***Evacuation Afterthoughts***

The next days were given to restructuring what had been the SIL Vietnam-Cambodia Branch. The Philippines Branch invited the SIL Vietnam visitors who elected to remain in the Philippines to take up temporary residence at Nasuli on Mindanao Island. Clearances were secured from the Huntington Beach home office for a change of name. In November 1975 the group was approved to be Mainland Southeast Asia Branch. They were already looking at possibilities for language work in Thailand and Malaysia. After several days in Manila, Pittman flew to California to make contact with the home office.

Some considered Pittman's overriding decision unnecessary. Others believed it to have been vital. Not debatable were his intentions and the results.

Watson wrote years later when asked about those days:

My title had been “Director,” but in our kind of democracy, I was really just chief coordinator.

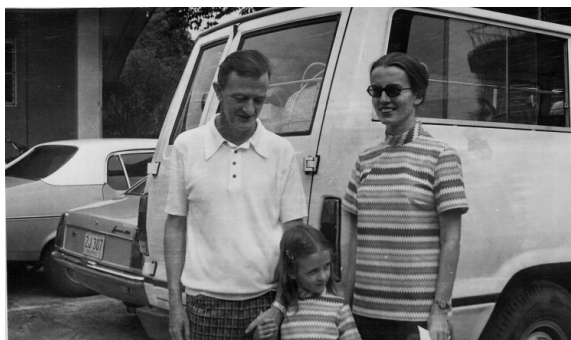
With regard to my “optimism,” few, if any of us, were very optimistic about the war, but we had seen the country kept open for seventeen years instead of the six months many kept predicting.

We felt confident that we would know when it was time for us to leave. When Dr. Pittman made the April 8 decision, I was already planning for the last of us to leave on April 12. So when the time came, we did know, and began an orderly evacuation. Although it was difficult, it turned out well.

The last of the mothers and children departed Saigon on April 1. By April 6 all the women had left except Dot Thomas who even made the beds with fresh sheets for refugee pastors and their families coming in from the provinces. April 8, the last of us departed. Dave and Dot Thomas flew to Bangkok then Manila. Ken Gregerson, Milt Barker, Bob McKee, Dick Pittman, and I waited at the Saigon airport until 8 pm for the plane to arrive for our scheduled noon flight to Manila.

We understood Dr. Pittman’s anxiety but felt that we were right on course without any need for panic.

It is noteworthy that at the very time of withdrawal and in later days, Pittman negotiated communications with the North Vietnamese government inquiring as to the whereabouts of the captive Millers and requesting their release. He also made contact with the North Vietnamese representative in the United Nations to this same end. In both of these contacts his letters carried no accusations, only polite address that included a hope that in the near future the return of SIL to the minority tribes might be made possible. No word ever leaked out as to why Millers were released after nearly eight months’ captivity. Perhaps the Pittman requests entered into that decision. The Banmethuot 14 that included the Millers were released on October 30, 1975. The complete story is recorded in Carolyn Miller’s book *Captured!*



John, Carolyn & LuAnne Miller in Manila enroute from Hanoi



Carolyn Miller, spokesperson, for the POW Banmethuot 14 at release

### *End of an Era*

Richard S. Pittman, Ph.D., had been director of SIL's work in Asia and the Pacific from the initial language survey in 1951 through twenty-five incredible years of growth and language development. He was the one called upon in 1973 to accept for SIL the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award<sup>e</sup> for International Understanding (an Asian recognition similar to the Nobel Peace Prize – see pictures at the end of [chapter 1](#)). Pittman was a welcome visitor in State and Education Departments in nations throughout the Pacific. He was a person known for his compassion, his diplomatic acumen, and for his great tenacity of purpose. The results of his efforts and dedication are evident to this day. His successor as area director humbly mused, “Pittman was the guiding light and mentor to us all. He opened the Asia and Pacific areas for SIL, and all that have followed have, at best, just built on his good work.” With the end of 1975, Richard Pittman's quarter century of leadership of SIL into Asia and the Pacific also drew to a close.

Pittman had been asked to forgo his own personal goals in Latin America and had led SIL from nation to nation around and beyond the Rim of Fire – and into the fiery trials of the infamous Vietnam War where he oversaw unprecedented linguistic and translation production among the minority language communities in spite of the risks and sacrifices. He had established SIL's work and reputation throughout Asia and the Pacific.

The Board of SIL is made up of leaders from several walks of life. They are thoughtful individuals who, without payment or other compensation, seek to serve God through SIL. These directors saw the quarter century expansion of literacy for the minorities in the Pacific as evidence of God's blessing on the total program. Pittman

had been a superb leader. He had the reputation and record of giving his life and decision-making to God and seemed to receive day by day the equivalent of divine coaching. The evidence for this is not just the almost unbroken series of successes but the establishment of a leadership pattern of godliness and service. There finally came the time for others to take leadership in Pittman's place.

The dominance of Pittman's twenty-five year record was great. Pittman was and is in a class by himself. He trusted God, took directions from Him, and accomplished what the Lord permitted him to do—and it was magnificent.

The preceding may justify space for the writer to say that no mortal is in a position to render fitting tribute to SIL veterans. These folk often move into a realm of risk and service and love and sacrifice and deprivation and life-in-death that is indescribable. For an almost trivial, yet typical of the time, example we might imagine ourselves alone in a grass hut on a jungle mountain with a sand firetable for a stove, no running water, no electricity, no conveniences. In our creaky, rustling, leaning "residence," we long for someone from home to drop in to share the hissing of our pressure lamp, listen to our stories, and maybe to care. The jungle is noncommittal to our yearnings and the rain incessant. We amuse ourselves watching the house lizards stalk little moths attracted by the light. And we think, for this we studied all those years? What are we doing here?

Who is fit to reward that army of heroines and heroes? No one. These people, the Pittmans among them, await the word from the only One who knows the whole story. The promise of the Scriptures is a word from Him, "Well done, faithful one."

### ***Next Challenges***

With the exodus from Vietnam and the work across Asia and the Pacific in the hands of competent branch directors, Pittman was eventually able to join his wife Catherine in Highlands, New Jersey, where she had located to care for her aging mother. Francis "Bus" Dawson, one of the original twenty-two SIL linguists in the Philippines, was appointed Director for Asia and the Pacific in 1976.

While the Pittmans were living in New Jersey, Dr. Kenneth Smith, Director of the new Mainland Southeast Asia Branch, asked Richard to find any material available on the languages of Sabah (one of the Borneo states of Malaysia), where Smith hoped SIL could undertake research. Because the Pittmans' Highlands residence was just one hour

from the campus of Princeton University, Dr. Smith's request was quickly satisfied. A short time later Smith asked Pittman to join him in making an approach to Malaysian authorities. Pittman made the journey and the presentation. In such a capacity, Pittman's expertise remained available to the SIL leadership in the Pacific areas and in mainland Asia. In 1978 SIL began research in Sabah, Malaysia.

Left largely to his own initiative, Pittman's curiosity and penchant to explore possibilities continued. He had heard of a Mongolian Kalmyk refugee settlement in New Jersey. A large number of Kalmyk people had been drafted into the defense of Stalingrad by Russian army forces. Those Kalmyks captured by the Germans were taken back to Germany. With the collapse of the German military, some of the Kalmyk POWs appealed for refugee status and were given opportunity to start a new life in the United States. A significant number of these entered the building trades in New Jersey.

By way of Catherine Pittman's uncle, a builder, Pittman heard of this Kalmyk settlement and, most significantly for him, he learned that they spoke a difficult Mongol tongue. Shortly after this he was introduced to a fine, aged Kalmyk gentleman. A warm friendship developed as Pittman, the linguist, began to learn the language.

September 27, 1977, Catherine's mother died, just six weeks short of age 99. She was alert until the end of her life. In May 1978 Townsend asked the Pittmans to move to Waxhaw, North Carolina. Waxhaw had become the center for JAARS, the aviation, radio, and technical support operation for SIL and Wycliffe. The Townsends had built a home within walking distance of the center and asked the Pittmans to come take their place at JAARS, hosting dignitaries and international visitors while the Townsends were in Russia exploring possibilities for SIL work there. The Pittmans first moved into a rental house, but in 1981 thanks to a small inheritance from Kay's mother, a builder friend from Wheaton, and the assistance of others, they built a modest home within a mile of the JAARS center.

For the last decade or more of his life, Pittman held the title Director of International Relations at JAARS. Joyce Gullman, his assistant in that department, remembered:

In those days ambassadors from the United Nations and from Washington, DC, as well as other dignitaries from foreign countries, and linguists such as the groups from China were hosted at Dallas (where they learned about SIL International), at Washington DC (where they visited embassies and were hosted



by SIL International Relations), and at JAARS (where they learned about technical operations, ate meals in the homes of staff, and toured the Alphabet Museum, etc.).

Dick wonderfully performed the duties of Director of International Relations at JAARS: 1) He had me check on all his preparations before the arrival of the guest, including informing JAARS personnel about the specific protocol to be observed. 2) He personally met the guests at the Charlotte airport (and had the cars washed and vacuumed!). 3) Always brought them to his home for the first meal. 4) Went with the guests on each tour given. 5) Presented them to the JAARS staff in the auditorium, had them speak, and gave them gifts.

### ***Alphabet Makers Find a Home***

After Pittman had returned from the Sabah venture and while he and Catherine were still caring for her mother in New Jersey, Townsend approached him with what seemed an out-of-the-blue idea. “What do you think of founding an Alphabet Museum at the JAARS Waxhaw Center?” To the linguist whose leadership was responsible for the formation of custom-made alphabets for language communities across Asia and the Pacific, the proposal had a natural appeal.

To Townsend’s alphabet museum proposal, Pittman had two reconcilable reactions. The first: What in the world would an alphabet museum look like? He had visions of letters from all languages spread over the walls. Why get tied up in such a tangle? The other reaction: “Townsend is a genius for hitting on ideas that are worth exploring.”

Result: He began study.

In Pittman’s earlier relationship with Princeton University, he had learned that Dr. William Moulton, a friend since their days at the University of Pennsylvania, was the head of the Princeton Modern Languages Department. Moulton welcomed him and extended the privilege of auditing any class in that department. The Princeton facilities were thus opened to him. Pittman attended classes in Chinese and in Arabic. With the Townsend suggestion ringing in his ears, he advanced on the library.

Preliminary surveys of the rich Princeton resources soon brought Pittman to, what was for him, a revelation: It’s not “history of alphabets” that I am after, it’s “history of alphabet makers.” These were the pioneers in whose path the SIL Townsend and Pittman-led linguists around the world were following. Thrilled with that insight,

Pittman's view of the project was revolutionized. The proposed museum would focus on those who formulated and spread all systems of writing.

From reading David Diringer's two-volume work, *The Alphabet*<sup>f</sup>, he gained another perspective that proved vital. Others had doubtless come to the same point of view, but it was to Diringer that he attributed his realization that virtually all alphabets have a common origin. He also accepted Diringer's conclusion that the "original source" of alphabetic writing could be traced to the Semitic people of the Sinai Peninsula.

Confronted by the mass of detail he accumulated over three years of study, Pittman groped for a philosophy of display. This concept drifted down on his desk: "Not artifacts that happen to be available," but "stories first"—better yet, "storied persons first"—artifacts will be duplicated as needed. Then Townsend asked Katherine Voigtlander, an artist and linguist, to plot the displays. He could not have found a more valuable colleague. Over ten years the two planned, sketched, organized, built, painted and altered. The original plan called for a thousand square feet of display. The end product is a four thousand nine hundred-square-foot labyrinth. Over two hundred-fifty volunteers invested their talents, time and energies to complete the monumental task.



The Richard S. and Catherine M. Pittman Museum of the Alphabet at JAARS in Waxhaw, NC

The Richard S. and Catherine M. Pittman [Museum of the Alphabet](#)<sup>g</sup> is a fitting tribute to a couple whose leadership brought alphabets to countless language groups first in Mexico then across Asia and the Pacific. It provides a context in history for the work to which SIL is dedicated.

One enters to find a brilliant maze of alcoves and corridors. Each nook, recess, niche or passage proclaims a variation on the history of the “alphabet-makers” theme. Sprawled flat against a high wall, Rawlinson, the archeologist, copies the Persian-cliff inscribed boasts of King Darius; Champollion deciphers the Rosetta Stone; and a schoolboy learns to write in cuneiform. The work of Ulfilas goes forward once more, laboriously he unites Greek and Roman symbols with Visigoth runes to construct an alphabet and then he goes on to produce the Bible for the West Goths. The scholar Alcuin of York drums into the heads of the monk copyists, “It is not every copyist for himself. Uniformity is an absolute!” Alcuin would have appreciated today’s copying technology.

The bewildered visitor struggles against the dazzle of novel data. Expecting a humdrum set of letters, the viewer beholds the root, stem, leaf, bud and bright flower of his own commonplace ABC’s.

The emergent lesson from the museum is that word symbols will unlock any culture and make its own rich resources available to any other culture. That is the vision: Each nation and tribe and people stating its own identity and language clearly with access to knowledge of others as well, enriching the world.

SIL seeks to provide every culture with its own key to self-recognition and to make available to all the highest wisdom literature of the ages. By this transaction (offering writing and wisdom literature), SIL would make available to all people everywhere opportunities not otherwise available and the precious gift of choice.

A curious matter – the museum visitor discovers his own childhood tracings in the experimentations of Alphabet Makers. The viewer’s own childish scribbles were anticipated by the ancients who turned letters every which way, wrote backwards AND forwards and around and up and down, who wrote with sticks on stones and with knives on hides. Over in that corner a child at play crushes reeds. Someone accidentally sits on them. They dry in the sun. The child’s mother finds the compressed mat and draws a picture on it. Perhaps the invention of early paper wasn’t exactly that way, but it might have been.

The visitor’s brain swirls: Arabic flowing script, pictographs, Braille, a knotted-string computer—all clearly, graphically, artistically linked, and all attached to the day the visitor first learned to read. One almost feels flattened into papyrus on which history has just been portrayed.

A voice calls from the ceiling: “Now proceed to the Indic alcove on your left.” The visitor confronts a quiz box asking, “What have you learned so far?” The onlooker works his way through the ages and nations from centers of culture to the rich lore of the remote Tausug peoples. Climaxing the whole is a broad sweep of today’s SIL endeavors to enable remotest people groups to identify and preserve their own culture and to reveal to the world how their identity is part and parcel of the DNA of humankind.

The Museum of the Alphabet is a remarkable presentation of human achievement in writing, but it is also an experience that may instill in the onlooker the challenge to reach all minorities wherever they are and provide them, too, with the power of choice.

Other alphabet exhibits exist but the Pittman-Townsend-Voigtlander display may be the only one solely devoted to the alphabet makers. It was this Alphabet Museum through which Pittman at eighty years of age was still personally escorting international visiting dignitaries at the JAARS center south of Charlotte in North Carolina.

### *Epilogue and Tribute*

The Alphabet Museum at the JAARS center in Waxhaw, North Carolina, is an eloquent tribute to the lives and scholarship of Richard and Catherine Pittman and their family. Both husband and wife brought to their union the rich gifts of strong family ties that communicated respect for the Creator and His universe and love for one another and endowed them with health and resolution to carry through their rigorous pilgrimage. As has been witnessed more often than not, the families of the prominent either make or deface the parental performance. Where they support their elders, they are estate-sharers. In the Great Depression the Pittmans lacked almost any material assets. Together they shared in the deprivations of that era. As an expatriate family enduring many privations, their share of suffering was increased. Of course there were tears, but the Pittman-mode-of-survival called for a sense of accountability to the God they served that is shared by all members of SIL.

Giving is costly, and it costs more to give out of poverty. The Pittmans knowingly gave to those who had still less than they. They dedicated their lives, talent, and careers to provide literacy and access to the Wisdom of the Creator to those without these. The Pittmans accepted life in difficult circumstances and paid dearly in terms of separation

from one another and from their children. They learned that great causes demand great sacrifices, but a great cause is a treasure. The Bible states clearly that giving and receiving are inseparable companions and that those who give also will receive. Conversely, those who withhold lose, lose even what they think to retain. One would suppose that when the Pittmans and those other thousands of SIL givers share with others what they have not, they move into a privileged realm – sharing in the uplifting of people and communities who then become capable of serving still others.

That high, studied, and practical purpose took the Pittmans, thanks to the generosity of families and friends, to the Tetelcingo Aztec people of central Mexico. With the Aztecs they thought to remain. They would gain expertise in the Aztec languages and familiarity with the subtleties of that culture. They would teach literacy and translate practical and wisdom literature.

They were well on their way towards these goals in their first decade of residence. Then came the “one-time-only” assignment in Australia followed by a “side-trip” to the Philippines and then the quarter century career described in the preceding pages. The mandate of creation operative in this instance is this: The Pittmans passed up their choice for personal fulfillment and instead enabled scores of other linguists and remote communities to accomplish similar objectives throughout Asia and the Pacific. After that Aztec chapter of his history was closed and his scholarship dream had been converted to a career of mind-boggling statesmanship, the Pittmans helped produce the Museum of the Alphabet, a monumental feat of scholarship and a major contribution to documenting and making known the importance of practical, pioneering, minority-benefiting linguistics to the world.

### ***A Serendipity***

1990. For the Pittmans the splendid and harrowing days of crisscrossing the Pacific were over. The net had been cast and was being drawn in. They had invested heavily in the magnificent drama of engaging with local men and women to produce written language and literacy for minority communities of Australia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific “Rim of Fire.” Their share of the adventure was ended. Younger leaders had taken over the challenges.

The Pittmans, after 1978, made their home in Waxhaw, North Carolina, near the JAARS Center for aviation, telecommunications, information and computer technology, purchasing and shipping, construction and maintenance, vernacular media and other

support services. En route to and from his office, Pittman passed the increasingly famous Museum of the Alphabet. His last days were largely invested in corresponding with government and academic friends in Asia and the Pacific. He shared in authorship and helped produce a book each year for over a decade. Additionally, he and Catherine entertained dignitaries from around the world and hosted scores of linguists for whom JAARS is a port of call.

All was well tucked in, and yet Indonesia was on his mind.

In a sense, Indonesia was unfinished business with Pittman. His first visit there had coincided with SIL entering Vietnam. The Vietnam work thrived right up to the end of the Vietnam War. Multiple other “Rim” programs were in prime productive order, but SIL’s program in Indonesia was in transition. He felt that he had not fulfilled all that he might have done for that land which he loved.

Pittman’s Indonesia stories were rich, filled with laughter and promise, but they were mixed with lament. This is how matters stood on the day in 1990 when Pittman answered a telephone call from Jakarta from James Swartzentruber, a good friend, who was director of SIL work in Indonesia at the time. “Would you and Catherine be willing to come to Jakarta to share with me in another approach to Indonesian officials?”

The Pittmans assigned their responsibilities at JAARS to others and embarked for Indonesia. The Swartzentrubers welcomed the reinforcements. Pittmans once more gazed over that beautiful city that meant so much to them.

The approach, Pittman learned, would not be to the Ministry of Education as in the past but to the Ministry of Social Affairs. Pittman was filled with misgiving. So much time had passed that he doubted his capacity to meet the challenge of diplomatic exchange. Yet it was good to be with his friend and to be an authentic expatriate once more.

They called at the appointed hour and were ushered into the office of the Minister of Social Affairs. She greeted Swartzentruber. Then, in a flash, she turned her complete attention to Pittman. “It’s so nice to see you again,” she said, extending her hand. Pittman was almost startled out of composure. He had not the slightest memory of having ever seen this dignified woman before. To his immense relief, she did not pause. “I met you when I was an assistant to the Dean of the Faculty of Letters who signed your first contract.” That signing had taken place in 1971, almost twenty years earlier.

Off to one side, Swartzentruber congratulated himself on his choice for a companion while Pittman regained his balance. The old touch was still there.

The Minister was a marvel. Her former supervisor had, back then, assessed the worth and work of Pittman and had come up with a hearty endorsement. She remembered that enthusiasm and determined just now to assist in any way possible. She accompanied the visitors to meet her superior, a member of the inner cabinet. That authority listened to their proposal, nodded, and then stated flatly, “I think your work in Indonesia should continue.”

Together the group next called on the Vice President of Indonesia. He gathered his aides, and all sat down around the gleaming conference table. Swartzentruber and Pittman presented the purposes and history of SIL and listened to the Vice President. Forty-five minutes were given. Then came a moment of quiet when it might be expected that a signal would be made for adjournment. A thought flashed into Pittman’s mind. Facts and figures are not enough. This is the time for a story.

“Perhaps you would be interested in something that took place in your Garden of Eden of Irian Jaya just last year,” he said. The story, slightly abbreviated, ran like this: “One of the Tause men of the Lakes Plain jungle saw, as he was trotting along a path, a disturbance in the rank growth along the trail. He hesitated and then stopped. The ground had been broken open. What could that mean? Maybe a turtle laid some eggs . . . a bird. Is this a nest? He was thinking of food.

“The earth was so soft that he easily scooped back the soil. He felt resistance, tugged, and pulled out a bark ‘package’ and a tiny, living, newborn girl.

“He knew that families that could not provide for a child might abandon it in the forest. However, he thought twice. A family of outsiders living in his village had once saved a Tause girl even though they already had four girls of their own. They might be interested, he thought.

“The ‘outsiders’ were with the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Mary Jane, the wife, was indeed ‘interested,’ took the baby, and cleared the dirt from her eyes, mouth, and ears. The infant had a wound across her nose and was too weak to cry or suck, but she was breathing.”

The Vice President and his associates leaned forward.

“Mary Jane washed the child and dressed the wound. Then she found a nursing mother who would help her. For the rest of the day that young woman patiently expressed and dripped her own milk into the child’s mouth. By nightfall (Would you believe it?) the baby was feeding on her own!

“Word of the foundling being cared for by the foreigners spread quickly. The very next day other mothers came to take turns in feeding the baby. One week later a couple came, watched, and whispered to one another. Then they stepped forward: ‘We are the parents. We have changed our minds. We have decided to keep the child’.”

The Vice President relaxed, sat back and smiled. The others nodded their delight to one another. Pittman said no more. The story had completed the scene and become like a fragrant perfume. “A proper story does not need a moral.”

Farewells were said. Swartzentruber and Pittman took their leave.

Some might say that the brief visit to Indonesia was a gift to the Pittmans inscribed, “The infant who was rescued from death is alive and well and beautiful. Your years of unreserved giving live on.”

*End*





## Appendix A: Pittman Family



### **Richard (Dick) Saunders Pittman, Ph.D.**

Born: Friday, February 19, 1915, in Streator, Illinois

Died: Friday, August 21, 1998

Buried: City Cemetery, Waxhaw, North Carolina

### **Catherine (Kay) Matthews Pittman**

Born: Sunday, January 25, 1914, in Highlands, New Jersey

Died: Thursday, May 20, 1999

Buried: City Cemetery, Waxhaw, North Carolina

### **Children of Richard and Catherine Pittman**

#### **Mary Louise (Marilou) Pittman Weaver**

Born: March 15, 1938, in Albuquerque, New Mexico

Died: December 23, 2012, near Waxhaw, North Carolina

#### **Margaret (Peggy) Ann Pittman**

Born: August 9, 1941, in Puebla, Mexico

#### **Robert (Bob) Matthews Pittman**

Born: December 18, 1944, in Mexico City, Mexico

All three Pittman children followed their parents into work with SIL furthering the same goals to which their parents dedicated their lives in service to God and others. In 1959 SIL membership reached 1000 including the first second-generation member, Marilou Pittman Weaver.

## Appendix B: Excerpts from the Archive Collection

Included here are selections from Dr. Pittman's talks at JAARS in 1989 and 1993–95 on the history of SIL in Asia and the Pacific. These excerpts add to some of the topics covered in this book. Transcripts of Pittman's talks and other important papers reside in the Pittman Special Collection of the SIL International Language and Culture Archives, Dallas, Texas. For information on the collection go to: [www.sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives](http://www.sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives)

*Dr. Richard Pittman, in his own words — June 14, 1989, speaking about Vietnam, SIL at the University of North Dakota, and his family:*

In order to help you understand the situation a little better, I need to explain that I was simultaneously Asia-Pacific area director over Vietnam and director of SIL at the University of North Dakota. Now that may seem to you to be too much, and it was indeed; I shouldn't have had both positions, except that it was ideal for my family.

Most of the time [as area director for Asia-Pacific] Kay and I were separated from our children because we were overseas and they were in school in this country [USA], but each summer was a reunion time for them and us. We were all together at North Dakota SIL for the summer. They loved it, we loved it; there was plenty of activity and work for them to do. It was a lifesaving thing for our family, for us all to be together there in that lovely, ideal location in the summertime.

So although ordinarily I would not recommend that a person try to carry two large jobs like directing a summer school and being an area director, I felt that it was ideal for me and for Kay. Also, this was an ideal opportunity for me to do recruiting, because I had personal awareness of needs overseas in the wintertime; then I could from personal experience tell the students at North Dakota what our needs were in the summertime. I recruited a lot of people for the work in Asia; in fact, I had recruited most of the people who were serving with us in Vietnam at North Dakota SIL.

Now that gave me more than just a casual, incidental feeling toward them. In other words, I wasn't just an outsider looking on to what was going on in Vietnam; I recruited the students in the summertime, then I helped to allocate and to orient them in the wintertime in Vietnam. I was deeply, personally involved with them right up to the end.

*And later Dr. Pittman (2/1/95) on Vietnam, winter of 1974–75:*

Our principal translation center had been moved [from Kontum] down to the coast at Nha Trang after the Tet Offensive of 1968, and everyone was hoping that the coastal cities would be able to remain intact and not be overrun. But in March 1975 the American authorities advised all in Nha Trang to leave in an orderly manner and without serious delay. They weren't saying leave immediately, but they were saying leave, and leave while the leaving is good.

We had forty people there, both adults and children. Our main children's school was there in a very beautiful location on a beach. Our people immediately got the children, schoolteachers and house parents out real quick; it didn't take long to be serious about that. The beauty of it was that the Philippine Branch was totally cooperative, totally supportive in providing facilities for our schoolchildren, teachers and house parents to move right into Nasuli. They moved over there and took up schooling again; they hardly missed a tick! It all went beautifully and smoothly. We were very, very thankful for that.

But then, of course, some men had to stay behind in Nha Trang to close up shop, because this was our main translation center. They set a date for leaving Nha Trang, as the American authorities had requested them to do, and were proceeding in a smooth manner to do that, when one day the American consul in that city called and said, "We have a plane going out this afternoon. You had better leave on that plane. I can't promise you anything else after this afternoon." Our man said, "Three of our men were planning to leave tomorrow." The consul said, "We can't offer you any help if you don't go today." So they accelerated their departure and sure enough, though it was painful having to leave important equipment behind, our last men in Nha Trang were able to get to Saigon in an orderly manner. That was on Friday, March 28.

Well, of course all of us were trying to second guess the North Vietnamese, and trying to envision what would happen next from day to day. I was building up a heavy level of anxiety. We had the women and children out, nearly all, except for a few single ladies who were still helping in Saigon, and some women without children like Dottie Thomas. But still there was an enormous amount of work to do in Saigon to close down. In fact, we still had to get every kind of paperwork; every departure from the country had to go through the usual red tape of government permissions, exit permits, all this sort of thing. That involved endless trips to government offices. All of you who have lived abroad know what that's like!

Well, in the midst of all this anxiety, my thoughts were going like this —and I'm going to dwell on this a little bit because it may be in the long run the place at which I could be most clearly criticized. When we started in Asia, I was very sad about leaving Mexico. I was very happy in Mexico. Our children were all very well in the Indian village where we had lived. The Indians were good to us; we loved our Indian neighbors. It wasn't easy at all to be sent off to Asia, virtually all alone. At first nobody else was assigned to Asia except Kay and myself.

But I was comforted by one passage of Scripture which you translators will appreciate. There's a passage in Luke which is left ambiguous in all English translations that I know of, but it is not ambiguous in Greek. The Greek is very explicit. This was the command of Jesus to Peter and the disciples. He said, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." You translators will remember that the imperative, launch out, is singular, but the imperative, let down your nets, is plural. Of course that doesn't come through in English at all; all of us miss that in every English translation. So you have to expand the wording there to make it clear. It would come out something like this: "Peter, I am talking to you (singular). Launch out into the deep. The rest of you fishermen, I am talking to you (plural), go along and you (plural) let down your nets for a draught." So they did it, and you know the outcome. That sort of encouraged me at the start of our work in Asia.

Well, now in Saigon in those days of great anxiety, when the country was tumbling down in ruins on our heads, I seemed to have the feeling that the Lord was saying, "Head home" in contrast to the "launch out" of years before. Whether it was the Lord, or only my opinion, who knows? I decided that I was not going to put it up for a committee vote! You know, the advantage and disadvantage of committee decisions is that you can hide behind the committee decision and always blame the outcome on somebody else. But if you make the decision all alone, you are the singular one to blame for whatever the consequences are, whether it goes right or goes wrong.

So, for better—and I suppose, and for worse—I made the decision all alone that we would leave two weeks sooner than had been originally planned for departure. Now the decision to close down at Nha Trang was urged on us by US government authorities, and we were so thankful, because our fellows came out on Friday. Monday—that was just three days later—scenes were already ugly. There were airplanes flying from Nha Trang to Saigon, but there was panic. They were having to kick people off those airplanes; they were trying to crowd on as the planes took off, running and hanging

onto the doorway or whatever. Americans were kicking the Vietnamese off, because the airplane couldn't hold them all. You can hardly imagine how thankful we all were that our fellows had left on that Friday, when it was still orderly. They left without that ugly panic that had been there just the Monday after they left on Friday.

So this was also in my mind when I said we would accelerate departure from Saigon by two weeks. Well, people gulped and swallowed and agreed, whether they liked it or not. Of course this made everything much harder in the close-down, because there was so much to do. To move it up by two weeks from what they were planning was not easy. But everybody pitched in with a marvelous cooperative effort, including most especially our Vietnamese employees. Every one of them should have been given a medal of honor for the marvelous way in which they worked together, without whimper, without complaint, without rebellion of any kind. And so we did make it, that is, we managed all to leave on April 8, and without panic, without any of the ugly scenes at the Saigon airport which there had been at the Nha Trang airport shortly after our people left.

But ugliness was beginning already on the date that we had originally set for departure, which would have been April 22. By then Dalat had been occupied by the North Vietnamese. There was almost nothing between them and the Saigon airport. In fact, there was heavy shelling of the Saigon airport just six days after the date we had originally set for our departure. You've all read of the panic at the US Embassy the last few days of that period, when helicopters were flying Americans off the roof of the US Embassy. But Vietnamese were crowding in, trying to get onto the helicopters, and there was enormous trouble of many, many kinds, which I feel sure some of our people, at least, would have been caught in if we had stayed to the original departure date which had been set.

On Saturday night, after the fellows arrived in from Nha Trang, a prayer and fellowship meeting was called for all of us. By that time everybody left in country was in Saigon. So we all met on the roof of our headquarters building, which had been constructed under the supervision of Ken Gregerson. It was a beautiful building, a beautiful location, and we met at sunset up on the roof. I had never been up there so I didn't realize how beautiful the view was from there, especially at sunset. It was a very emotional time. We knew that we were saying goodbye to all our friends, Vietnamese and tribal friends. One of the most beautiful details of our closedown was that every single one of our co-translators, meaning tribal people working with us, had been

reunited with family, both immediate and extended family, in their villages before we left. We didn't leave even one of them stranded in a headquarters city, or a Vietnamese locality, out of touch with their own family. So that was a matter for great praise.

Just before this happened, all of this, I need to explain that we had both Dan and Marilou Weaver and Bob and Linda Pittman [two of the Pittman children and their families] in the Philippines at that time. Bob was a teacher then a principal at Faith Academy, so that kept him in Manila. Dan was branch director for the Philippines. So each time I went through Manila, I was with family.

One day I was out walking with Ray, Bob's oldest son, and that morning I had been reading Psalm 47:1 that begins, "Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with songs of joy." I was trying to work that into a tune for my grandson Ray. I finally realized what to do is to put the names of the specific language groups in place of that word "peoples." You can do it, no matter how many syllables there are, so that, for instance, if you want to have a one-syllable word, you say "Clap your hands, all Bru people" (the people with whom John and Carolyn Miller worked). If it's a two-syllable word, you say "Clap your hands, Roglai people" (with whom Ernie Lee worked). If it's a three-syllable word, you say "Clap your hands, all Cashibo," and if it's a four syllable name you just drop out the "all" and say, "Clap your hands, Machiguenga." So this clicked.

That evening, on the rooftop of the Saigon building, which was our last big meeting all together, but very memorable because of the time and place, we sang that simple tune with a great deal of feeling for each of the people groups of Vietnam.

*Editor's Note: The previous selections are typical of many detailed and touching accounts from the Pittman Collection which the author used in writing this book. In the course of confirming the accuracy of details in Dr. Lynip's manuscript, I forwarded portions around the world to SIL colleagues who were involved in the various events. Typical of the responses were confirmation that Pittman's memory for detail was incredible. And as for his character, this came from one who served in Vietnam: "Dick was a wonderful man and area director. I rejoice in his being honored with publication of this book." The Richard Pittman Special Collection is now located at the SIL International Language and Culture Archives in Dallas, Texas.*

*This editor also received in response numerous additional stories about Dick and Kay Pittman (Richard and Catherine, as Dr. Lynip refers to them). The following accounts are*

*from Alice Davis who with Richard and Edith Hugoniot were early SIL linguists in the Araku Valley in India.*

Dick Pittman arranged an opportunity to spend several days visiting the two teams working in Araku Valley. Besides seeing for himself how things were going, he was always eager to encourage people in their analysis of a language's structure. Hugoniots and I [Alice Davis] had been living in villages in two neighboring language areas for just over a year. Jennifer Williams had joined me in the work only a few weeks earlier. That was no hindrance at all. Dick guided even her through some simple investigations so that by the end of his visit, he had enabled the four of us to produce several short linguistic papers on two languages.

India and Nepal were young entities, there were few support workers, and office equipment was sparse. Every trip Dick and Kay made to South Asia, they seemed to be carrying with them a portable typewriter or two. They used these for their own correspondence and work while they were there, then made a habit of donating them to the South Asia office or individuals when they left the country.

My mother lived almost across from Wheaton College so whenever Dick Pittman was in that area, he would pay her a personal visit to give a report on how things were going in South Asia. What a thoughtful and encouraging thing it was for her to have an International Area Director come to her home and report to her in person on the welfare of the work and of her daughter.

On one of these trips Dick met with Rochunga Pudaite at his office then based in Wheaton about SIL cooperating with a group in India to provide linguistic and literacy training for Indian young people. When the discussions about the training course were finished, we went downstairs to see materials packed, labeled and ready to be sent to India. With his natural curiosity, Dick looked at the names on the top of several of the stacks. It was not long before he was exclaiming, "Oh, I know this person!" or "Just last week I sat in this man's office!" That was Dick Pittman, friend of all the world.

## Appendix C: Resources and Bibliography

### *Resources*

The primary sources used in writing this book were Richard Pittman and his personal papers. Those papers today reside in the Pittman Special Collection of the SIL International Language and Culture Archives, 7500 W. Camp Wisdom Rd., Dallas, TX 75236-5629, USA. Among those who deserve special thanks for preserving the Pittman Special Collection are Joyce Gullman, Vurnell Cobbey, Calvin Hibbard and Jeremy Nordmoe. Contact: [archive\\_dallas@sil.org](mailto:archive_dallas@sil.org)

Sincere thanks are also due the Library/Archive team of SIL Philippines for helping preserve and provide access to language and literacy resources produced in SIL's sixty years in the country where Pittman's work in Asia began.

Contact: [archive\\_philippines@sil.org](mailto:archive_philippines@sil.org)

The SIL Bibliography, now part of the SIL Language and Culture Archives, is a corporate treasure and references 40,000 resources by SIL, its staff, and others. The web version is indexed by author/contributor, country, subject, domain, and language. Special thanks to David Irwin, longtime SIL Bibliographer.

[www.sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives](http://www.sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives)

A second SIL treasure is the *Ethnologue*. The online version reports languages by country, language name, and language family.

Lewis, M. Paul, Gary F. Simons, and Charles Fennig, eds. 2013. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 17<sup>th</sup> edition. Dallas, TX: SIL International. [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)

Visit [www.sil.org](http://www.sil.org) for links to additional resources, history, information, services and training provided by SIL, and other topics covered in this book.

### *Richard Pittman*

SIL International: Pittman Bibliography [www.sil.org/resources/search?](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=search_api_combined_3%3A16134)

[f\[0\] = search\\_api\\_combined\\_3%3A16134](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=search_api_combined_3%3A16134)

SIL Mexico: Pittman Biography [www.sil.org/~tuggyd/tetel/bio-i-pittmanrichard.htm](http://www.sil.org/~tuggyd/tetel/bio-i-pittmanrichard.htm)

SIL-University of North Dakota: Dedication to Pittman

[arts-sciences.und.edu/summer-institute-of-linguistics/work-papers/1999-dedication.cfm](http://arts-sciences.und.edu/summer-institute-of-linguistics/work-papers/1999-dedication.cfm)



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### ***Pittman Colleagues***

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Makil, Gaspar: Felicia S. Brichoux. 1970. *Gaspar, the Second King*. Grand Forks, ND: Summer Institute of Linguistics. Gaspar Makil at his death in Vietnam in 1963 was honored by the President of the Philippines for “a life dedicated to the service of others.”

McKaughan, Howard: Tribute [www.sil.org/asia/philippines/piakandatu\\_hpm.html](http://www.sil.org/asia/philippines/piakandatu_hpm.html)  
Loren Billings and Nelleke Goudswaard, eds. 2010. *Piakandatu ami Dr. Howard P. McKaughan*. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines and SIL Philippines.

Miller, Carolyn: President, SIL International (1999–2008)  
[www.sil.org/sil/roster/miller\\_carolyn.htm](http://www.sil.org/sil/roster/miller_carolyn.htm)

Miller, Carolyn Paine. 1977. *Captured!* Chappaqua, New York: Christian Herald Books.

Thomas, David: In Memoriam [www.mksjournal.org/thomas.htm](http://www.mksjournal.org/thomas.htm) Tribute to David Thomas (1930–2006), founding editor of the *Mon-Khmer Studies Journal* and distinguished, longtime SIL linguist in Southeast Asia.

### ***SIL in Asia: Philippines***

SIL Philippines website [www.sil.org/asia/Philippines](http://www.sil.org/asia/Philippines)

Atherton, William. 1989, 2003. *In God's Time and Ours*. Philippine Branch History: A Narration 1953–1983. Manila: SIL Philippines.

Dekker, P. Gregory, and Jean Lieffers; Geoff Hall, director. 2003. *By Word & Deed*. Manila: SIL Philippines. DVD.

Lieffers, Jean. 2000. *Celebrate! SIL Philippines: Fifty Years*. Manila: SIL Philippines.

Lieffers, Jean, Austina McFarland, and Mafe Quimba, comps.; Jean Lieffers, ed. 2003. *Twelve Stories for Twelve Stamps & Words of Wisdom: A Cultural Anthology of*

*Traditional Literature from the Philippines*. Manila: SIL Philippines.

Lieffers, Jean, and Diana Stuhr. 2006. *By Word: 31 Days of Literacy & Language*. Manila: SIL Philippines.

Johnson, Rex A., Grace O. Tan, and Cynthia Goshert, comps. 2003. *Bibliography of the Summer Institute of Linguistics Philippines 1953–2003*. Manila: SIL Philippines.  
[3300 entries for 94 Philippine languages]

### ***SIL Series by Richard Pittman***

During the final decade or more of his life, Richard Pittman edited for publication, on average, a book each year. The first series of books are Pittman's compilations of stories and encounters pertinent to international relations. In his typical humble style, Pittman gave posthumous credit to Cameron Townsend "and others" as author. Indeed many of the speeches and letters were Townsend's but were included by Pittman with his own accounts and those of SIL colleagues.

### ***International Relations Series***

1987. Townsend, William Cameron, and others; Richard S. Pittman, ed. *One Ship Sails East*. Waxhaw, NC: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

1988. Townsend, William Cameron, and others; Richard S. Pittman, ed. *Best of Both Worlds: A Handbook for International Relations*. Waxhaw, NC: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

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1990. Townsend, William Cameron, and others; Richard S. Pittman, ed. *Given a Heading: The Symphonics of International Relations*. Summer Institute of Linguistics.

1994. Townsend, William Cameron, and others; Richard S. Pittman, ed. *Bridge Builders*. Waxhaw, NC: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

1996. Townsend, William Cameron, and Richard S. Pittman. (edited reprint of 1975 edition). *Remember All the Way*. Papua New Guinea: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

1998. Pittman, Richard S., ed. *Back from the Brink: Sixteen Accounts of Ethnic Renaissance*. Waxhaw, NC: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

***Alphabet Makers Series***

1991. Pittman, Richard S. *The Faculty of Letters*. Alphabet Makers 1. Dallas, TX, and Waxhaw, NC: Summer Institute of Linguistics and Museum of the Alphabet.

1993. Kennicutt, Wally, and Richard S. Pittman. *The Old Lamplighters*. Alphabet Makers 2. Dallas, TX, and Waxhaw, NC: Summer Institute of Linguistics and Museum of the Alphabet.

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## Endnotes

### *Chapter One: The Context*

- <sup>a</sup> Ethnologue languages of Vietnam [www.ethnologue.com/country/VN/languages](http://www.ethnologue.com/country/VN/languages)
- <sup>b</sup> SIL Bibliography: Vietnam  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=field\\_reap\\_location%253Aname%3AVietnam](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=field_reap_location%253Aname%3AVietnam)
- <sup>c</sup> William Cameron Townsend [www.sil.org/wct](http://www.sil.org/wct)
- <sup>d</sup> Cakchiquel language [www.ethnologue.com/language/cak](http://www.ethnologue.com/language/cak)
- <sup>e</sup> SIL [www.sil.org](http://www.sil.org)
- <sup>f</sup> Ethnologue [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)
- <sup>g</sup> ISO is the International Organization for Standardization [www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)
- <sup>h</sup> SIL is designated by the ISO as the official registration authority for the ISO 639-3 [www.sil.org/iso639-3](http://www.sil.org/iso639-3) standard inventory of language identifiers.
- <sup>i</sup> JAARS was formerly the Jungle Aviation and Radio Service. The technical support provided by JAARS to SIL and others now includes information technology, logistics, and other technical services. [www.jaars.org](http://www.jaars.org)
- <sup>j</sup> Kenneth Pike publications  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=search\\_api\\_combined\\_3%3A15924](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=search_api_combined_3%3A15924)
- <sup>k</sup> Kenneth Pike linguist and leader [www.sil.org/klp/](http://www.sil.org/klp/)
- <sup>l</sup> Joseph Grimes publications  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=search\\_api\\_combined\\_3%3A16004](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=search_api_combined_3%3A16004)
- <sup>m</sup> Barbara F. Grimes publications  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=search\\_api\\_combined\\_3%3A16394](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=search_api_combined_3%3A16394)
- <sup>n</sup> Ethnologue history [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)
- <sup>o</sup> Robert Longacre publications  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=search\\_api\\_combined\\_3%3A16269](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=search_api_combined_3%3A16269)
- <sup>p</sup> J. Bendor-Samuel publications  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f%5B0%5D=search\\_api\\_combined\\_3:16975](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f%5B0%5D=search_api_combined_3:16975)
- <sup>q</sup> J. Bendor-Samuel tribute  
[www.sil.org/about/news/john-bendor-samuel-former-executive-director-sil-international-dies-age-81](http://www.sil.org/about/news/john-bendor-samuel-former-executive-director-sil-international-dies-age-81)
- <sup>r</sup> Sarah Gudschinsky  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=search\\_api\\_combined\\_3%3A16508](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=search_api_combined_3%3A16508)
- <sup>s</sup> Sarah Gudschinsky literacy consultant [www.sil.org/literacy/lit90/dedicate.htm](http://www.sil.org/literacy/lit90/dedicate.htm)
- <sup>t</sup> Richard S. Pittman  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=search\\_api\\_combined\\_3%3A16134](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=search_api_combined_3%3A16134)
- <sup>u</sup> A biography by David Tuggy  
[www.sil.org/~tuggyd/tetel/Bio-i-PittmanRichard.htm](http://www.sil.org/~tuggyd/tetel/Bio-i-PittmanRichard.htm)

### *Chapter Two: Pittman to 1952*

- <sup>a</sup> Streator, Illinois  
[libsysdigi.library.illinois.edu/oca/Books2008-05/storyofstreatorb00will/storyofstreatorb00will\\_djvu.txt](http://libsysdigi.library.illinois.edu/oca/Books2008-05/storyofstreatorb00will/storyofstreatorb00will_djvu.txt)
- <sup>b</sup> SIL at the University of North Dakota (UND)  
[arts-sciences.und.edu/summer-institute-of-linguistics/work-papers/1999-dedication.cfm](http://arts-sciences.und.edu/summer-institute-of-linguistics/work-papers/1999-dedication.cfm)

### ***Chapter Three: 1952—1956***

- a** SIL at the University of North Dakota (UND)  
[arts-sciences.und.edu/summer-institute-of-linguistics/index.cfm](http://arts-sciences.und.edu/summer-institute-of-linguistics/index.cfm)
- b** Wikipedia history of Mindanao State University  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central\\_Mindanao\\_University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Mindanao_University)
- c** SIL Bibliography: Philippines  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=field\\_reap\\_location%253Aname%3APhilippines](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=field_reap_location%253Aname%3APhilippines)
- d** Jarai is a Malayo-Polynesian Austronesian  
language [www.ethnologue.com/language/jra](http://www.ethnologue.com/language/jra)
- e** SIL Bibliography: Papua New Guinea  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=field\\_reap\\_location%253Aname%3APapua%20New%20Guinea](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=field_reap_location%253Aname%3APapua%20New%20Guinea)

### ***Chapter Four: 1957—1968***

- a** Hon. Carlos P. Romulo became the last living signer of the original United Nations charter. He held sixty-six honorary doctorates from eleven nations and served as an official advisor to SIL for almost twenty years.
- b** SIL Bibliography: Australia  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=field\\_reap\\_location%253Aname%3AAustralia](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=field_reap_location%253Aname%3AAustralia)
- c** Montagnard was the term used by the French for the minority people groups of the Vietnam central highlands.
- d** Many accounts like this one are taken from transcriptions of talks on the history of SIL in Asia given by Dr. Pittman at JAARS during 1989 and 1993–1995.
- e** SIL Bibliography: Vietnam  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=field\\_reap\\_location%253Aname%3AVietnam](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=field_reap_location%253Aname%3AVietnam)
- f** David Thomas [www.mksjournal.org/thomas.htm](http://www.mksjournal.org/thomas.htm)
- g** Web resources were used to confirm historical accounts of the Vietnam War and other information.
- h** Deccan College [www.deccancollegepune.ac.in/dept\\_linguistics.asp](http://www.deccancollegepune.ac.in/dept_linguistics.asp)
- i** Others report another early contact between this Vice Chancellor and SIL Board member Ben Needham who encouraged SIL to begin work in Vietnam and who helped develop the SIL center on Mindanao in the Philippines.
- j** Alice Davis, one of the early SIL linguists in India, remembered of Pittman: “When Dick visited our village in Araku, he took a little hike around an orchard and the surrounding hills with a local teenager as his guide. They did not have any language in common, but that was no hindrance to Dick. When they returned, Dick was pleased with what he had learned of the flora of the area and the beauties he had seen. His teenaged assistant reported to us that Dick had a ‘great big mind,’ illustrating with arms spread wide. How did he know this? Dick had asked him the names of a whole variety of trees, bushes, flowers, and fruit. Dick had remembered them all and pronounced them correctly! And he added that information to our growing dictionary of the language, of course.” Additional stories from Alice Davis are included in Appendix B.

## ***Chapter Five: 1968—1998***

- a** SIL Bibliography [www.sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives](http://www.sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives)
- b** SIL Bibliography: Pittman  
[www.sil.org/resources/search?f\[0\]=search\\_api\\_combined\\_3%3A16134](http://www.sil.org/resources/search?f[0]=search_api_combined_3%3A16134)
- c** Ethnologue [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)
- d** Carolyn Paine Miller was later President of SIL International (1999–2008). The story of the Millers' experience as POWs is told in her book *Captured!*
- e** Ramon Magsaysay Award [www.rmaf.org.ph](http://www.rmaf.org.ph)
- f** Diringer, David. 1968. *The Alphabet: A Key to the History of Mankind*, vols. 1 & 2. 3rd ed. New York: Funk & Wagnalls.
- g** Museum of the Alphabet [www.jaars.org/visit/museums](http://www.jaars.org/visit/museums)