

Chapter 2: A Man with a Mission

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If Dale thought the Canadian airplane opportunity presented conflicts relative to flying and girlfriends, it was minor compared to the situation introduced by his old friend “Nelts” Clayton, who had become the bishop of the Centerville Ward. One Sunday, shortly after Dale arrived home from Yellowstone, the bishop invited the young man into his office and said directly, “Dale, the Lord has called you on a mission. Will you accept this call?” Dale was shocked and reminded Bishop Clayton that most of the young men who had gone into the military had gone with the understanding that when they enlisted, they were ordained elders, and if they lived good lives and tried to live the gospel well, that would be their mission. Dale also said that he thought a bishop was supposed to ask how he felt about a mission. “No Dale, that’s not the way it works,” he responded. “I prayed about it and I received the inspiration that you are to serve a mission. Now the decision is up to you. Will you accept the call or reject it?”^[1]

Dale left the office heavyhearted. He had just spent four years in the Air Force and was anxious to get back into school. He was in love with Jeanette. And her father was upset about the prospect of Dale leaving Jeanette when he learned that this prospective son-in-law might be going on a mission. He sternly told Dale, “If you really loved my daughter, then you’d stay here and marry her!” Dale told his own father—now the stake president—that he was twenty-three and already four years behind in life and that when he returned from a two-and-a-half-year mission, he would never be able to catch up with his former associates. His father’s response was, “I promise you in the name of the Lord that if you will go and serve an honorable mission, you will not be one iota behind any of these other young men, according to what you want!” Dale did not know that this advice would be some of the last from his father in mortality.^[2]

Dale’s good friend Spencer Hatch had gone into the mission field as an older missionary. His letters were encouraging, and Dale had always admired Spencer for the good decisions he had made in his life. Dale concluded that he would take his large leap of faith and accept the call to serve a full-time mission, all the while praying that Jeanette would still be single when he returned home.

January 1948 found him in the Missionary Home in Salt Lake City, preparing to serve in Czechoslovakia. Another good friend, Richard Winder, was there. (Richard’s future wife, Barbara, would later become Relief Society general president from 1984 to 1990.)^[3] Like Dale, Richard had been called to Czechoslovakia.

It was the hardest thing in the world for Dale to say good-bye to Jeanette at the train station. He wondered if she would be married when he returned in the two years and six months it would take to complete a mission. That seemed like an eternity from his spot on the station platform. But with a longing glance at Jeanette, he stepped onto the train and into missionary life.

The train was slow, but the scenery was gorgeous and interesting. In New York the elders excitedly boarded a ship for France and the new experiences awaiting them in Europe. As the oldest in the group, Dale had been designated back in Salt Lake as group leader for the trip to Czechoslovakia.

Traveling through Switzerland, the group began to see advertisements for the world Olympics being held at St. Moritz. They huddled together and heard their leader saying, “Man, we should go to the Olympics if we’re this close!” (Anyone who knew Dale well heard him often prepunctuate with the word man for emphasis.) He tried to persuade

them, but they were as determined to get to their mission assignments as Dale was to see the games. “Come on. What difference does it make? I’ll talk to the president, and we’ll give him two days for every day we miss,” he countered. His military experience had taught him to negotiate special favors with promises of enhanced make-up. He was sure it would be okay with the mission president.

When the others still wouldn’t budge, Dale put Richard Winder in charge and got off the train at St. Moritz. [4] He enjoyed watching some of the Olympic events and was soon on the train through Austria bound for Czechoslovakia when he met an American army captain who, when he found out Dale was a missionary, told him, “I wouldn’t go through there [Austria]. There was a group of missionaries that just came through here, and some Russian soldiers took them off the train [in Linz, Austria].” Richard Winder would later report the terribly lonely feeling he had when they were taken off that train at night by the Danube and saw it pull out of the station without them. They were locked up for a day or two for trying to cross the Russian-occupied zone without the proper visas. They had to reroute and go through from the West. Richard had taken some Russian in school, but in the tense encounter could only remember how to say, [5] “I don’t understand Russian.” He wondered if maybe it would have been better to have gone to the Olympics.

Dale knew that the missionaries the army captain referred to were his companions, and he wished he were sharing the same fate with them if there was some kind of serious trouble. Doubling back through West Germany, Dale realized the Nuremberg trials were in session. German leaders were being tried for war crimes that included Holocaust atrocities. He could not resist seeing history in the making. Listening to those generals pleading that they were helpless in the face of Nazi commands and then hearing judges hold them accountable for their actions was nothing less than fascinating to the young veteran. It was an eye-opener for him to see how much of Germany was flattened—utterly devastated. He noted that most Germans were living underground in basements and shelters. He saw Americans giving them food and helping them with a variety of other aid. [6]

President Wallace F. Toronto had been appointed President of the Czechoslovakia Mission at the April 1936 general conference, to succeed Arthur Gaeth. Soon after World War II, President Toronto was again called to be mission president in Prague. He was a seasoned leader of missionaries when he met Elder Tingey at the train station. “Where is the group that you were in charge of?” he asked. Dale was stunned. Adopting his best military demeanor, the young missionary responded, “What do you mean, where are they?” He was getting frightened. Dale asked, “Don’t you know where they are? I sent them ahead.” The president responded, “What do you mean, do I know where they are? They were sent with you. You’re supposed to know where they are!” Pressure was building, and President Toronto was not letting Elder Tingey off the hook on this one. [7] “Where . . . are those missionaries?” he demanded in a commanding tone.

Dale blurted, “To tell you the truth I don’t know. I sent them ahead.”

“What do you mean you sent them ahead? You were the one in charge,” demanded the president, giving no leeway. The young elder was beginning to realize some differences between military and missionary responsibility.

“Get in the car!”

“Fine!” Elder Tingey replied.

“Now I want to get this straightened out; I want to know what the deal is here,” urged President Toronto. Not much was said during the rest of the ride to the mission office, and once inside the President continued, “You’ve come without the ones assigned to you and I just feel like sending you home.”

“Go ahead,” Dale said. “That’s just fine with me. I have had a nice trip, and I wouldn’t mind going home right now.” The false bravado caught the old president off guard, and he thought for a moment and said, “You’re on a mission and you’d go off like this?”

Dale continued, “Look, what difference does it make? I’m going to give you two days for every day I missed.”

The president began to relent, “I wouldn’t send you home. You came here to serve a mission, and I expect you to do just that.” He then had the missionaries come out of a back room. Dale learned that they had had a tough experience when the Russians pulled them off of the train. Accusing them of being spies, they made the missionaries stay out all night in the rain. [\[8\]](#)

After that, President Toronto and Elder Tingey became dear friends. The young missionary became more and more impressed with his spirited mission president who seemed fearless, especially during the Russian takeover of Czechoslovakia after World War II. He would tell Russian soldiers right to their faces what he felt about their actions. In 1950 all of the missionaries and their mission president would be evicted from the country, and the dark curtain of communism would prevail for the next thirty-plus years until the demolition of the Berlin Wall. President Toronto later confided to Dale that he had been one of his best missionaries, and Dale was invited to speak at the president’s funeral many years later.

Dale loved his mission, and he loved the Czech people. He described them as a refined, gentle, and kind people. Their brutal treatment at the hands of both the Russian soldiers and the German occupation forces bothered him. But he also noted how appreciative the people were of Americans. When the Czechoslovakians realized the missionaries were from the United States, they would almost always invite them in; the people wanted to show special appreciation to them.

One cold winter day, while Dale was tracting with companion Allen Sperry, a friendly Czech woman invited the missionaries in and offered them some tea. Czech tea was not like American teas, being more of an herbal tea, so missionaries would drink it when offered. As he began to drink, Dale could feel his tongue start to get thick and tingle all over. “Sperry, I don’t think this is real Czech tea,” he whispered. “Well, drink it. Its good, isn’t it?” responded his companion. When they were done, Dale asked her what kind of tea it was. “Americans,” she addressed them, “I could not give you that rotten Czech tea. It’s true Russian tea with a shot of Vodka in it.” He recalled that he seemed to enjoy tracting a little more that day, but they never dared to go back to visit the lady again. [\[9\]](#)

Much of missionary work in those days involved tracting. Missionaries did not have a teaching plan. Much time was spent in giving out leaflets and pamphlets they called tracts and inviting people to meetings they would set up. Interested persons would be invited to see a slide show or hear a presentation about the Church. There was also some English teaching, which put the missionaries in proximity with the people where they could interact and perhaps interest some in the gospel message. Conversion was expected to take months. [\[10\]](#)

The cold caused Dale to layer his clothing. Some would laugh at his multiple shirts and outer garments. He always felt the Czechs were tough when it came to the cold. They would just wear a thin coat and warm scarf. Missionaries ate rations just like the locals, but they yearned for butter rather than the “goose grease” that everyone had on their black bread.

As the Russian noose tightened in Czechoslovakia, investigators and members began to fear trouble and would tell the missionaries they loved them but just couldn’t meet with them any more. Earlier, over one hundred people were attending the branch in Prague, but as political pressures mounted, numbers began to decline. Dale felt that over time, half of the members stopped attending church as the Communists consolidated their control. The missionaries were even being tailed as they went about their work. President Toronto was being watched all the time, and Dale was astounded at his directness with the Czech soldiers who were following Russian orders. He would blast them, choosing words that he felt they would understand. Dale thought at times they might shoot him, but the president knew they would not harm an American. In spite of his efforts, the Russians started expelling missionaries a few at a time. There were only about thirty to thirty-five missionaries serving under President Toronto at the time, so expulsions seriously reduced missionary numbers.

One time, as they went about their missionary work in Domazlice, Dale and fellow missionary Richard Winder were picked up by the secret police. The officers alleged they were spies and attempted to take them to police headquarters in Prague, but as they were being escorted by train, the mass of travelers at the rail station allowed them to

slip away and get back to their apartment. They never heard from the secret police again, but they certainly became more wary than before. Soon President Toronto was directed to send home missionaries who had been serving two years or more, like Elder Tingey. Those who had served less time were transferred to other missions. The president stayed on to assist members in organizing themselves into units that might possibly survive without the presence of missionaries. Dale was one of the last eight missionaries in Prague when he was finally required to evacuate the mission.

As his mission drew to an end, Dale thought it would be great to visit Jerusalem, since it was so close to eastern Europe. Many Jewish families in Israel were sending their children to universities abroad at that time. Dale had met some of these students in Czechoslovakia. He was impressed with their dedication and desire to return to Israel to build up their nation. While his companions' only desire seemed to be to get back to their homes in America, Dale's experience in the military, combined with his being a little older and having a particularly adventurous spirit, fired him with enthusiasm to go to Israel. The idea of going to this newborn state seemed only natural to him, so he set out by himself after his release.

I couldn't persuade the others to go with me [perhaps they thought of their scrape with the Russians at the outset of their missions], so I went alone. I caught a boat down to Italy, buying the cheapest passage possible, which was a mistake. I ended up with a bunch of Arabs, and they wanted to know where I was going. I told them that I wanted to go over and see what was going on in Israel with the Jews. I didn't know an Arab from a Jew then. When we got to Lebanon, the Arabs put a guard on me and wouldn't let me go anywhere. They wouldn't even let me off the boat—they thought I was a Jew. It was a beautiful place from the boat. They thought I was an Israeli and a troublemaker. I was headed for Egypt. ^[11]

Earlier, while in Italy, Dale had met a Jewish boy who told him to visit his family if he ever made it to Egypt. Dale was sure he would never be in Egypt, but took a card the young man pressed him to give to the father if he ever saw him. When Dale got to Egypt, he looked up the father. He lived in a large and elegant mansion with several servants. "My kids have gone crazy," he said. "They have given up all this to go back and live like peasants to try to reclaim the land [of Israel]." ^[12] After Dale had stayed with him for a few days, the father helped him get a flight on a small airplane.

Getting around Palestine was not easy. Arab transportation entities would not deliver passengers to Israeli destinations and vice versa. But Dale befriended the pilot, who dipped low over Mount Sinai before dropping his passenger off in Jordan. In a day or two he found a taxi driver willing to drive him into Jerusalem with a group of Arabs, and from there he was able to see the sights connected to the Savior and the events of His life in both the Arab- and Jewish-controlled parts of the city. He, like everyone, found that in several cases there seemed to be two places claiming to be the original site from the biblical accounts, and he strained, trying to feel which of the locations might have been the authentic spot. He enjoyed being "on the ground," seeing a new nation struggling to get established, and he wondered about Israel's future. The experience satisfied his natural curiosity regarding people and nations and what made them tick.

Having quenched his thirst for the novelty of being in a strange land, Dale now longed for home and family. He could not wait to greet his widowed mother and walk the dusty farm fields again. He was excited at the prospect of crossing the Atlantic by air instead of enduring another tedious ocean voyage. He needed to get to London, where he would fly to New York and then on to Salt Lake City.

From Jerusalem, Dale found a taxi driver willing to add him to a list of people wishing to travel to Beirut, Lebanon. He had found out that to get around in the Middle East, one needed to find a taxi driver with other passengers who wanted to reach a particular destination. Sometimes it took a day or two to fill the vehicle, but it was relatively cheap travel for someone with American dollars. Dale later marveled at his never being mugged while traveling alone through foreign territory. He found a ship that took him back to Italy, and from there train travel took him to Paris.

In Paris, Dale attended Church and met an Elder Stevens from Ogden. When he asked the missionary if he knew Jeanette Dursteller, the young man responded, “I’m engaged to her!”^[13] Dale was devastated. He had only thought about marrying Jeanette and no one else. In despair, as he headed to the coast toward England, he threw her pictures out of the train window and settled into the idea that perhaps there were other fish in the sea for him.

^[1] Tingey, “Called to Serve,” 5.

^[2] In mid-June 1948, while Dale was serving his mission in Prague, Czechoslovakia, President Wallace Toronto informed Dale of his father’s death back in Utah. Dale said, “President Toronto said if you feel you need to go because of your mother. . . . He offered me that, but he didn’t mean it. He says, ‘We set our hand on the plow and you don’t look back. Let the dead bury the dead.’” His mother told him when he finished his mission that his father would have wanted him to stay out in the field as he had done (interview with author, 15 November 2000).

^[3] *Deseret News 1999–2000 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1998), 107.

^[4] Tingey journal, 17. Dale had dated Rosalyn Pack, from Centerville, whose sister, Evelyn, had married Alf Engen, the great Norwegian skier who played a major role in developing Utah’s premier ski industry. Alf participated in the Olympics in St. Moritz as a co-coach of the United States Olympic Ski Team. For more information, see lib.utah.edu/spc/mss/acn006/acn006.html.

^[5] Richard Winder interview, 5 December 2001, interviewed by author.

^[6] Tingey journal, 18.

^[7] Tingey journal, 19.

^[8] Tingey journal, 19.

^[9] Tingey journal, 21–22.

^[10] Winder interview, 5 December 2001.

^[11] Tingey journal, 24.

^[12] Tingey journal, 25.

^[13] Tingey journal, 29.