

A TRUCK FOR EMMAUS HIGH SCHOOL

Sometime in the summer of 1977 I received a letter from Billy Kaurtei, the principal of the high school for boys on Koror, in the Palau Islands. Palau is now the independent nation of Balau. These islands are located a few hundred miles north of New Guinea.

Addie Leah and I first met Billy in 1970 on the island of Koror. He was then a college student. Subsequently he made his first trip to the US via Guam, and when he first arrived there he thought there had been some mistake, and that he was already in the US! He attended Asbury Seminary, became a minister, and returned to Palau as the principal of the Emmaus High School. He had spent some time with us in Los Alamos, and still called us Mom and Dad.

Billy's letter explained that the school desperately needed a truck. Clearly, he was expecting me to provide one. The need probably requires a little explanation.

The biggest Island by far in Palau is Babelthaup. It is about 40 miles long. But Koror, an island immediately south of Babelthaup, is where the action is, and evidently always has been. It has the shape of a big X--lots of shoreline, but little land. It served as the headquarters island for the Japanese Navy prior to and during much of WWII, and was of course the objective of the American Navy-Marines during the latter period of that war. The island still serves as the seat of government, commerce, and tourism. For example, there is now a five-star hotel there, built of, by, for, with and about Japanese, with, for, and the object of, YEN. Of course, the island is also the site of the public schools, and of Emmaus High School. The latter was founded by German missionaries prior to WWI, when the Germans pretty much ran that part of the world. They were supplanted by the Japanese after WWI; but the German missionaries came back after 1946. The original Missionary group was supported by German Christians in the eastern part of Germany. Most of them fled to the west from the Russians, and eventually many of them found their way to New Jersey. It is there that their missionary efforts are now headquartered. Emmaus' heritage was, and still is, German. And that is why Emmaus is pronounced E-mouse, not E-may-us.

The two main islands, Babelthaup and Koror, are separated by a narrow part of the sea--waters absolutely filled with many species of marine critters, and swarms with countless numbers of fish. The minds of Kansas fishermen would be boggled at the sight. These waters were traversed by a ferry boat.

There being no place to have a farm on Koror, the school had one on Babelthaup. Getting to and from the farm was a real chore. Up early, off to the dock, a slow ferry that was casually run (and one that cost money besides), followed by the need to hitch-hike some miles to the farm, tend and harvest available produce, then make the long journey back--these duties were good outings for the boys, but was a wildly inefficient way to farm. Also, since all commercial products suffered from the same difficulties because only Babelthaup had room for an airstrip, there was naturally a plan to build a causeway and cantilevered bridge (it was to be the largest cantilevered bridge in the world, so maybe one should not say "naturally") between the two islands, and across the fabulous waters so filled with fish. When the bridge was completed, and if Emmaus had a truck, then it would be possible to take the boys directly from the school to the farm and back whenever necessary. Farm production would go up, food costs would go down, and efficiency--a German and an American concept--would triumph!

When the letter arrived, we were just preparing (!) to send Chip and Elimelek off to college. I had no money for a truck. I could also guess that it would have to be purchased in Japan, then shipped, and the cost would run about \$40,000, even for a pickup. This was an amount that I was not capable of seeing as an incremental cost for the family budget. So my response was made orally. I lifted my eyes heavenward, and said "Lord, you will just have to find some other sucker to get a truck for Billy. I can't afford it, nor do I know anybody who can. So, I'm putting this out of my mind!" And I did.

In early February, 1978, I was on Johnston Island, located about 750 miles west-southwest of Honolulu, serving in the capacity of the Scientific Advisor for Safeguard C. I had started wearing this hat in 1970, first for the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), then the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA), and subsequently the Department of Energy (DoE). I believe it was still the ERDA in 1978. Safeguard C was a promise of the Executive branch of government to the Congress that we could return, promptly, to nuclear testing if the Limited Test Ban Treaty should ever go sour.

I made frequent trips to the island, a principal part of our program, constantly struggling to see if this promise could be kept.

On this particular occasion, I was about to leave the ERDA cottage (swank accommodation for that environment and those times) when Bill Stanley, the ERDA representative on the island, said “Brownlee, you have done so much for us, is there anything we can do for you?” “No”, I said, “I don’t know how you could do anything for me. But thanks, anyway!” Then Bill repeated the offer, amplifying a bit as to why he felt indebted. Again, I had no request to make, and thanked him. A bit later, we rose to catch the Military Air Command flight that was to return to Honolulu in a few minutes. Bill made the offer again, this time in the “if ever you--” mode. At that moment, and to my own surprise, a thought flashed to mind. “As a matter of fact, I need two trucks!” “What for?” asks Bill. “For Palau”, came the reply. It had instantly come to me that I should ask for two trucks, and that such a request was easily justified. If there were two identical trucks, one could be pillaged to keep the other one running. Any observer in the entire Pacific knew that one of anything was always waiting for a part before it could be used! Two identical trucks might have been a magnificent idea, and the only proper one, but even so it was an outrageous request.

A quick explanation to Bill, and he understood the problem perfectly. He promised to see what he could do. Without any real thought, I committed myself to supply the shipping costs for trucks from Hawaii to Palau. Really, I would probably only need the money for just one truck, that being most likely. But Bill said he would see if he could get two surplus trucks from the military somewhere. This too was a great idea.

A couple of weeks later, Bill called me in Los Alamos, saying that he had found two surplus trucks, but they were piles of junk, and of little worth. My reply I recall precisely. “Whatever would we do with two worthless trucks?” They could never be made to run in Palau. Bill agreed, said he would keep trying. Since this was really the only expected result, I dismissed the whole matter one more time.

Again, some weeks pass. Then wonder of wonders, Bill reports that he has found a couple of identical and very good trucks, with brand new tires, excellent mileage, etc, etc. They can be shipped immediately! He does not yet

know, however, what the shipping costs might be. I told him that I would start raising money.

The costs were going to be these:

1. Stevedore costs for loading the trucks onto a ship in Honolulu. Expensive, no doubt.
2. Transportation from Honolulu to Guam. Also expensive.
3. Off-loading the trucks in Guam. Unknown Cost.
4. Perhaps, storage costs in Guam. Unknown Cost.
5. Stevedore costs for reloading trucks. Probably costly.
6. Transportation to Palau. Probably costly.
7. Off -loading costs in Palau. Probably Inexpensive.

When I first realized that there might actually be trucks, I immediately embarked on a many-faceted money raising scheme. I went to the church mission board, and asked them to intercept and/or divert whatever contributions might be ethical to a “truck fund” for Emmaus. (Since I had previously made a couple of pitches for the school, and some money occasionally arrived, this seemed to be another good idea). I made known to friends at work that I was going to need money. When they asked how much, I didn’t know, but promised to keep them informed. For a few people, I merely said “I have you down for \$100!” They said “OK”. One of my friends had probably never given a dime to anybody in his life, but I hit him up anyway, making a plea that was so emotionally moving that even an old Scottish Presbyterian would cough up something. He gave me \$5.00. I noted that thereafter he took a personal interest in the cause, and, being a good administrator, asked repeatedly for progress reports. Truly, where your money goes, there will your heart go also.

Meanwhile, Bill calls. He has arranged to have the Army keep title to the trucks so they can be returned if anything falls through. And now, he has learned that there is a government ship that sails on occasions from Honolulu to Guam, and if they would happen to have any deck space, they would be willing to take trucks that belonged to the Army to Guam for free!! Should he go ahead and ship the trucks commercially, or should he wait to see if there was any deck space! “Wait!” I cry!

The loading costs must still be found. I called a friend who was the president of

an old AEC contractor company. He had work, and people, and offices in Honolulu. Could his company pick up the stevedore costs in the Honolulu port? He groaned, and said Yes. Cost 1 is OK. If there is deck space, so is cost 2. And there was!!

For the first time since the original letter, I communicate with Billy. I am expecting to send two trucks to him, and I need to know his costs when they arrive in Palau. As I noted above, this cost was expected to be the least of any so I was relatively relaxed about it. A few days later I got a phone call from a friend of Billy's in Guam who said that Billy had told him to call me and have me send him \$1400. I thought that was a bit high, but I made the rounds, called in money as promised, counted the take, and had as I recall \$1420. So I send \$1400 to Billy, sighing about how much more was going to have to be found, from where I knew not. But anyway, Cost 7 was covered.

Funny thing happened on the way to Guam. The instructions, ownership papers, etc., had been attached TO the trucks. The ship encountered several big storms, and the papers had all washed away! When the ship arrived in Guam, nobody knew quite who they belonged to, or what should happen next. There being nobody to bill for costs, the trucks were off-loaded to the dock, where they sat, and the ship sailed away. So much for costs 3 and 4.

Now Billy had heard that the trucks were coming, and he had \$1400, but he had heard nothing else. (Neither had I!) It is at this moment that he receives a letter from the High Commissioner of the Trust Territories. The HC wants him to attend a meeting in Saipan, and encloses an air ticket. Of course it is not possible to fly directly from Palau to Saipan. It is necessary to spend the night in Guam. Billy arrives there, is met by a friend with a car. They drive to the docks, and there sit two trucks. Whose are they? Nobody knows. Billie claims them. Then he goes to the US Coast Guard Station, and asks to see the Admiral. He does this because the Coast Guard has a LORAN station in Palau, manned by the Coast Guard, and there are sailor types there. They have adopted the boys at Emmaus for ball games, and baseball caps, etc., and the Admiral is proud of the whole works, and on one occasion has told Billy that if there is ever anything he can do for them, to let him know. So, now, Billy does!

The tag end of this story is easy to see. The Coast Guard loads the trucks on their ship, sail to Koror, and off-load them there. (Costs 5 and 6 AND 7) Billy

now has \$1400 in cash!

Guess what! The trucks arrive just a few days before the bridge opens! That event was to have happened long before, and of course it had been unavoidably delayed. When the bridge did open, there was a huge formal ceremony, with a line of cars filled with officials and dignitaries waiting to cross. When the ribbon was cut, the entire population surged onto the bridge to fish. There was no vehicular traffic for hours.

Billy had had the boys praying for a truck more than a year. The general community became aware of these prayers, and the kids from the public high school were making fun of the Emmaus boys. Obviously, anything that had not happened in a year would never happen. Then TWO trucks, big Army ones at that, arrived on a Coast Guard Ship! The reputation for prayer was secure. The status of the boys had been dramatically enhanced!

Believers, rejoice!!

Non-believers, we welcome your silence!

Postscript: When the trucks arrived only one of them had a carburetor. Somewhere along the way, someone was amazed to see just what he needed. So his prayers were also answered.

Another postscript. Sometime around 1996 or so the cantilevered bridge was inspected, given a clean bill of health, and shortly thereafter it fell into the ocean. The entire economy of the nation was destroyed. Ultimately the bridge was replaced, but Japan footed the bill. This happened because it had something to do with all those fish! On our trip to Palau in 2000, one truck was still doing yeoman (so to speak) service, just the plan we had in mind.

Now for the required commercial message; I write this story as a confession that when I gave the Lord my original quick response, I had not been very receptive to the message. While I had instantly felt that the burden had been laid on me, and that I did not deserve it, I had failed, as usual, to remember that I am never asked to do *everything*, only what I can. If I do my part, others will do theirs. I am embarrassed to admit that I have to relearn this lesson repeatedly.