



Sojourn in Mission

...Alvin James Stevenson

By: René Holvast

Arrival – May 27, 1896

Departure – May, 1906

Death – 1913



Alvin Stevenson, with (probably) Carrie Wheeler

Picture: C&MA Personnel File Stevenson

1896

The Canadian Alvin J. Stevenson was part of a group that was to open a 'chain of missions' into the interior of the Congo ('this glorious campaign').¹ 'They expect to be placed as the pioneers of a great advance movement commencing at Matadi (...) to Lake Tanganyika'. There they are 'away from European traders', on a higher plateau with a healthier climate, in 'unoccupied land'. The stations will be established 'twenty-five to 50 miles apart'.² The group had their farewell meeting on April 20 in the Gospel Tabernacle in New York. The group

arrived in the Congo on June 1, 1896. The arrivals were Winfield Macomber, Noah Hess, William Roth, Claude McKinney, A.H. Jamieson, E.P. Miller, Hugo Schielde, Frank Avery and Alvin Stevenson.³

The group arrived on Ngangila Station on June 4, where they started a language learning class.⁴ Every morning from 7.30 to 8.30 they translated the Gospel of Luke together Kifioti into English. Every evening they studied the Kifioti grammar together. Each day they had to translate a verse of the Gospel of John into Kifioti.

They were only 'a few days' in the Congo before a group of four departed on an exploratory trip on the south bank: William Roth, Thomas Louttit, Fred Soderberg and Alvin Stevenson. The trip took 'almost three months'.⁵ They started from Ngangila, around the second week of June. After nine days walking 'seeing nothing but waste', Thomas caught 'a bad fever',

¹ Kuvuna 1984, 166-172; Niklaus List(a).

² CAFMW March 27, 1896(a), 289; CAFMW March 27, 1896(b), 301.

³ CAFMW May 1, 1896(a), 420.

⁴ CAMA February 26, 1897(b), 211.

⁵ CAMA October 27, 1897, 432.



which kept him sick for a month. The missionaries – all new to Africa – had frequent problems with carriers. Four of the missionaries attracted ‘African fever’ during the trip. The group reached ‘our destination’, of which we do not have a name. In the town in question they sent for permission of the State authorities to build, but they did not receive any reply. In addition they were told by the villagers that the grass for the roofs could not be cut, since during this time of the year grass had been burned already. This would have to wait till next year.

The carriers abandoned the missionaries and they were stuck in the town. The State could not furnish the missionaries with carriers, ‘as they were forcing every able bodied man to carry for them’. The local chief did not prove much of a help: ‘The natives with whom we were, did not wish us to leave, therefore the king would not give us men’. The missionaries resorted to prayer: ‘(...) in a few days fifty men presented themselves’, without mediation of the local chief. They departed with these men, which was not without risk: ‘The State had issued an edict that no one was to gather carriers under penalty of a fine’. After four days walking they met carriers of a French trading company. They had been waiting for many days for a cargo that had not shown up. They risked to return empty handed. ‘This was an opportunity of a thousand’. With these new carriers they walked another four days and reached Manianga at the Congo River. Here it was the same problem again. All boats had been monopolized by the State. Nevertheless the team found a transport possibility and they sailed southward and landed on a place from where it was a ten hour walk to ‘one of our up-country stations’, which was perhaps Vungu Station.⁶

During his work in the Congo Alvin suffered often from African fever. Later he was remembered as a man with the heart of an evangelist. The Executive Committee, convening in Mazinga on September 14-17, 1896, stationed Alvin in Maduda.⁷

1897

It seems that Carrie Wheeler married Alvin Stevenson upon arrival in the Congo in July 1897. This means they had been engaged already, when Alvin arrived in the Congo in 1896. The couple was stationed at Vungu Station.⁸

1898

The Executive Committee of June 22, 1898, decided that the Charles and Elisabeth Ave and Alvin and Carrie Stevenson were to be transferred to Maduda Station.⁹ In July the Stevensons moved from Vungu to Maduda.¹⁰

⁶ CAMA April 30, 1897(c), 427.

⁷ Executive Committee, September 14-17, 1896.

⁸ Executive Committee, August 4, 1897.

⁹ Executive Committee, June 22, 1898.

¹⁰ Vungu Logbook 1898-1903.





1899

The September 22, 1899, the Executive Committee meeting recommended to the Home Board that Alvin and Carrie go on furlough in March 1900.¹¹

The health of one of them must have deteriorated fast, because they departed in November 1899 already. Carrie was pregnant as well. On their way to Boma, they spent a night in Vungu on November 15, 1899.¹²



Alvin Stevenson, standing back row, second from right.

Picture: Niklaus, Sawin and Stoesz 1986, 18

1900

Alvin and Carrie arrived in the US in January 1900.¹³ Alvin was a conference speaker at the Boston Convention on February 8, 1900.¹⁴ 'After four years of service they returned much broken in health on account of the terrible fevers of that climate. Soon after their arrival in this country a little one was born to them'.¹⁵

The years 1900 and 1901 were characterized by a struggle about the future of their baby: 'Then came the conflict. They knew it would be fatal to take that young life back to the Congo climate (...)'.¹⁶

1901

The couple spent most of the year 1901 in the United States. Alvin represented the Congo Mission at the C&MA Annual Conference in the US in April 1901.¹⁶ Their furlough was longer than the normal one year period: '(...) and after a fearful struggle which only a mother can

¹¹ Executive Committee, September 22, 1899.

¹² Vungu Logbook 1898-1903, November 1899.

¹³ Annual Report C&MA 1897-98, 87; C&MA January 20, 1900(a), 41.

¹⁴ C&MA March 3, 1900, 140.

¹⁵ C&MA October 18, 1902, 213.

¹⁶ Annual Report C&MA 1901, 43.





understand, Mrs. Stevenson decided to leave her babe and go back to her chosen work. The hour came when they kissed the babe goodbye and left it in the care of Mrs. G., matron of the home in which she herself had been reared'. Alvin and Carrie had their farewell meeting in New York on November 3 or 4, 1901, and sailed for the Congo.¹⁷

1902

The Executive Committee meeting of January 13, 1902, appointed Alvin and Carrie to the 'new station' of Lolo, near to the former station of Mazinga. The Stevensons were made responsible for the out-schools at Kikianda and Mazinga as well.¹⁸

At January five 1902 the Stevensons arrived in Vungu.¹⁹ On January 24 Alvin and Fred Soderberg left Vungu for Lolo 'to look over that country to select a site for a new station', which they accomplished on February 18. The new site was about a mile from the old Mazinga station site'.²⁰ In March 13 Alvin returned to Vungu and on March 18 Alvin and Carrie departed from Vungu for Lolo'.²¹

On May 30 Carrie died on the new Lolo Station: 'Mrs. Stevenson joined her husband about six weeks later, but unfortunately for him and for the work her labors were short, and on May 30 she passed to her reward'.²² Her death was considered 'a great loss'.²³ Alvin arrived in Vungu on June 6 and continued his way to Boma on the 9th. He returned to Vungu on June 14 and left for Kinkonzi on the 18th.²⁴ Alvin continued his work in Lolo. Alvin became member of the Executive Committee and attended its meeting in Kinkonzi on September 29.²⁵

1903

Alvin remained stationed in Lolo in 1903²⁶. He preached at the C&MA Vungu Convention of January. He remained a member of the Executive Committee.²⁷ In March 1903 Alvin requested to be relieved of the responsibility for the station, and Fred Soderberg was placed in charge in his place in April.²⁸

¹⁷ Annual Report C&MA 1902, 164; CAMA November 9, 1901, 260.

¹⁸ Executive Committee, January 13, 1902.

¹⁹ Vungu Logbook 1898-1903, January 1902.

²⁰ Annual Report C&MA 1903, 100, 101.

²¹ Annual Report C&MA 1903, 101; Vungu Logbook 1898-1903, March 1902.

²² Annual Report C&MA 1903, 104.

²³ Executive Committee, May 31, 1902.

²⁴ Vungu Logbook 1898-1903, June 1902.

²⁵ Executive Committee, September 29, 1902.

²⁶ CAMA April 4, 1903(a), 181.

²⁷ Executive Committee, January 20, 1903.

²⁸ Annual Report C&MA 1903-1904, 153.





1904

‘There have been three missionaries at Lolo during the year. Mr. Soderberg is in charge of the work; Mr. Stevenson has been associated with him (...)’.²⁹ In June 1904 Alvin married a missionary from the neighboring Swedish Missionary Society (SMS). ‘About that time Mrs. Stevenson came to Lolo from the Swedish Mission’. The wife in question was former C&MA missionary Mathilda Kohm, who had come to the Congo in 1896 with the C&MA and had joined the SMS, probably in 1899. The Home Board Secretary, Rev. Albert E. Funk sent instructions regarding the coming of Mathilda from the SMS mission to be married to Alvin Stevenson. From now on Mathilda was to function under the C&MA Congo Mission and that her allowance should pass through the same.³⁰ Alvin and Mathilda attended the C&MA Convention at Lolo, on July 14-18, 1904.³¹



Alvin Stevenson with Agnes Killer and Josephine Harris, probably around 1905

Picture: Alliance Weekly September 23, 1959, no. 19, 12

1905

In 1905 Alvin remained member of the Executive Committee.³² According to Mathilda Stevenson the Lolo Station had ‘a fine view over the hills’. Mathilda made trips for evangelism, all ‘on foot’ and ‘in most of the towns I was the first lady to visit them (...)’. ‘Wherever we came the people were friendly, though not always eager to hear the gospel message’.³³

In another town we found a woman sick. She previously been to the station with some sores and found help and healing. Now they had broken out in other places, and as the people well know that this sickness is in the blood and will break out again, even if she would get well for a season, they refused to bring her to the station. I told the women of the great physician: Then her face lighted up and she said: ‘My only trust is in Him. I am praying to God and have burned all my idols.’

²⁹ Annual Report C&MA 1905, 59, 60, 61.

³⁰ Executive Committee, September 5, 1904.

³¹ C&MA October 1, 1904, 280.

³² Executive Committee, January 16, 1905; Executive Committee, August 7, 1905.

³³ C&MA March 18, 1905, 168.





At the C&MA Vungu Convention Alvin was twice conference speaker.³⁴ In April Mathilda took over the work of Fred Soderberg:

At Lolo Mr. Soderberg had charge of the work until he left for home, on furlough in April, and was assisted by Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson. Then Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson took over the work (...). Mr. Stevenson has made a number of extensive evangelistic trips, some into the French Congo, having spent about 140 [days] during the year on these trips and visiting the out-schools.³⁵

The Stevensons were in regular correspondence with other SMS missionaries. Lolo was close by the area of the SMS stations of Diadia and Kibunzi. A personal letter of Wilhelm Sjöholm shows a warm relationship. Wilhelm had heard that the Stevensons were to leave the C&MA and Lolo and had planned to transfer to missionary work in East Africa: 'Are you not to join them?'³⁶ This may have been a foreshadowing of the Stevensons' transfer to missionary work in the Kasai in 1910.

For most of the time the Stevensons worked alone in Lolo. Josephine Harris and Agnes Killer came to Lolo to assist for four months. Alvin made 'a number of extensive evangelistic trips, some into the French Congo (...)'. In total he spent 140 days in 1905 on the road, while visiting out-stations as well. This left Mathilda alone in Lolo for much of the time.

In 1905 Lolo had a day school, ten out-schools, with a total of 370 students, 12 persons baptized and 7 candidates for baptism.³⁷

In December 1905 Elmer Crist and Alvin Stevenson made an exploration trip into the French Congo, 'further north than our missionaries had yet gone'. They met in Lolo on December 29, and left from there 'with our little caravan of natives'. Three days out of Lolo they met 'people who had never heard of the gospel'. 'Usually when we came into a town the people ran out into the bush and hid themselves'. '(...) the only white people they have known are State officers and traders, who do not love them, but only want their labor and goods'. 'We did not find many people in that part of French Congo, as most of them had died from sleep-sickness, so the people told us; but they did not tell us what we already knew, that many died from poison, which they give to kill off the witches'. On the way back they traversed the Cabinda enclave: 'This is thickly inhabited with fine people, and not one witness for Jesus'. The Lord had laid it upon our hearts to open a station among them'.

1906

In 1906 Alvin remained member of the Executive Committee.³⁸ Alvin Stevenson took pictures of the Lolo and Sanga out station work in 1906.³⁹ In June the couple departed for furlough from

³⁴ C&MA November 25, 1905, 745-746.

³⁵ Annual Report C&MA 1905-1906, 108.

³⁶ Sjöholm 1905.

³⁷ C&MA May 5, 1906(b), 272.

³⁸ Executive Committee, January 22, 1906.

³⁹ C&MA July 14, 1906, 433.





Lolo: 'From this station two left on furlough in June, Mr. And Mrs. Stevenson'.⁴⁰ They may have visited Sweden in August during the summer time. By the end of September 1906 the Stevensons were 'expected soon' in the US.⁴¹ Beginning October they had arrived in New York. Alvin and Mathilda Stevenson were speakers at the New York Convention on October 10, 1906.

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1907

Alvin Stevenson spoke at the Old Orchard Convention, on August 2-12, 1907.⁴³ In October 1907 the Stevensons were mentioned as sailing for the Congo 'after about a year of rest at home'.⁴⁴ Alvin and Mathilda were stationed in Kinkonzi in October.⁴⁵ They came back to the Congo with 'an infant child'.

1908

In 1908 Alvin became member of the Executive Committee again.⁴⁶ He was one of the conference speakers of the Boma Convention of August 6-12.⁴⁷

1909

In 1909 Mathilda gave birth to a second child: 'We had one welcome arrival in the month of July, Little Miss Anna Gertrude Stevenson, who is getting along nicely'.⁴⁸ During this third term, Alvin's health 'began to fail' and they went back to the US.

After some time Alvin and Mathilda joined the CIM: 'The Congo Inland Mission was looking for an experienced man to open up some new tribes on the way to Lake Tanganyika'. They were released by the C&MA board. They returned to the Congo, where they founded two stations and where Alvin died on the Upper Kasai River' in 1913.⁴⁹ George Pardington wrote in 1914 that Stevenson's widow, Mathilda, survived him.⁵⁰

⁴⁰ Annual Report C&MA 1907, 144, 147.

⁴¹ CAMA October 6, 1906, 220.

⁴² CAMA September 22, 1906, 190.

⁴³ CAMA July 13, 1907, 22.

⁴⁴ CAMA October 5, 1907, 5.

⁴⁵ Annual Report C&MA 1907-1908, 134-135, 211, 212.

⁴⁶ Executive Committee, August 7, 1908.

⁴⁷ Young 1987, 8.

⁴⁸ Annual Report C&MA 1910, 170.

⁴⁹ Alliance Weekly 1913, June 14, 169.

⁵⁰ Pardington 1914, 203.

