

Latin America Collection

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Paul W. Fleming & Cecil A. Dye

In 1943, a group of ten men set out to South America with hopes to spread knowledge of Christianity to indigenous communities. The team called the New Tribes Mission (currently Ethnos360), founded by a pastor turned factory worker, traveled to Bolivia and encountered the Ayoreo people of the Gran Chaco region in Bolivia.

Westerners had first attempted to contact the Ayoreo in the mid-eighteenth century, though shortly abandoned until the mid-twentieth century with the start of the Chaco War, bringing over 100,000 Paraguayan troops to the Gran Chaco region. Moreover, the expansion of the railroad in South America allowed for greater access to the Gran Chaco region, ensuring accessibility for explorers and missionaries.

The founder of the group, Paul W. Fleming, was raised in Fort Wayne, Indiana as a Christian. Fleming strayed from his religion until he was twenty-five, dedicating his life to Christianity. In his early adulthood, Fleming worked at a refinery in Los Angeles, California. He desired to become a minister at his beloved church in Fort Wayne. Yet, his occupation prevented the change. He was inspired to pursue more from a career, to create change in the world by spreading the word of the Bible. Fleming hoped to leave the country within the year bringing alongside his fiancé, Cherrill. After their marriage in June 1936, the couple traveled to British Malaya seeking individuals to adapt to Christianity.



Paul W. Fleming with individuals of British Malaya, circa 1942

During their time in the British Malaya, Fleming contracted malaria and struggled with consistent fatigue and fevers. He was advised to return to the United States in order to make a full recovery. Upon returning and recouping, Fleming turned to making inspirational videos urging missionaries to seek trips of their own. Once again, Fleming was ready to plan for a new mission, including a devout group of



Christians. The target for the mission was the Ayoreo. The addition of Cecil A. Dye, a young man from Detroit, Michigan aided to the orchestration of the plan.

Dye gained a pilot's license in 1942, one calendar year before the trip. Dye was raised Christian, attending religious centered school and university, though was not as committed as he would have liked to be. After an appendectomy, Dye met a nurse, Dorothy who would soon become his wife with the ultimatum that they would get married if and only if she agreed to travel as a missionary with him. Dorothy did not hesitate to agree.



Cecil A. Dye, 1943

With a plan in place, Fleming, Dye, and eight additional men traveled to the Gran Chaco region. Upon seeking the path to find the Ayoreo, the men ensured their wives and village people to search for them if they have not made contact in a month's time. Before their departure, missionaries warned they would not leave the region alive. The group assured them they would have no issues befriending and spreading gospel to the Ayoreo.

Over a month had passed and no contact was made between the group and their families in the village. A search party set out with hopes to find the men alive and healthy. Quite the opposite held true as the men were murdered and buried by the Ayoreo in November 1943.

Eventually, the widows and children contacted the Ayoreo, who confirmed they murdered the men assuming they carried weapons. After one individual from the Ayoreo community apologized to a widow for killing her husband, she replied, "It was worth my husband's death to see you come to know Jesus Christ."

Sources:

[Ethnos360 | Stories | You Won't Come Back Alive](https://ethnos360.org/Stories/You-Won't-Come-Back-Alive)

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