

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

PAUL R.NIXON

What follows is based on an interview of Paul R. Nixon by Ned A. Smith, a WWII veteran himself, representing the National Museum of the Pacific War, in Fredericksburg, Texas. It was done in the oral history room of the museum.

Paul has added details using letters in his possession that he wrote to his parents each week. Also he has a copy of the army newspaper Stars and Strips in which the Arabian Project was discussed. He and his fellow surveyors were mentioned by name.

Here is Paul Nixon's story:

I am an example of the wide range of backgrounds and experiences of people who served in WWII. I grew up in a foreign culture and was inducted into the U.S. Army overseas. I received no basic training before going on duty, and my entire time in the service was spent overseas.

MY LIFE IN KENYA

I was born and raised in Kenya, East Africa, which at that time was a British colony. My parents were American missionaries. Up until my teen years we were stationed in a semiarid, sparsely populated region where the Kamba tribe kept livestock and cultivated small plots of land using hand tools. Their diet was supplemented by wild animals they hunted with bow and arrow.

The mission station on which I grew up consisted of two white families, and two single ladies, one a nurse, and the other a schoolteacher. At one time my sister, Jean, and I were the only white children in Kitui District, an area of 10,000 square miles. I grew up being trilingual, speaking Kikamba because my African playmates spoke no English, Swahili because you needed it with all the other tribes, and English. However, it wasn't until I was doing government conservation work that I got a working knowledge of Swahili.

At age seven I was sent to boarding school so as to be taught in English and learn of western culture. At that time the Rift Valley Academy (RVA) which was run by the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) had about forty students ranging in age from first grade up to high school.

WWII broke out in Europe about the time I was entering high school. Wartime conditions disrupted life in many ways. When the Italians entered the war on the side of the Axis they invaded our country from Ethiopia. Our boarding school was closed and we were sent to be with our families. Fortunately the invasion didn't get very far before the British and South Africans pushed the Italians back and ultimately brought about their surrender in East Africa.

At the school there was a shortage of teaching staff. I was the oldest child at school and received little attention because I was the only one in my class and there was no one in the class immediately below me.

The war was not yet half over when the British in Kenya were already preparing for what to do when victory was ultimately theirs. One preparation was to develop an agricultural short course for returning servicemen who would want to go into farming. I applied for and was accepted on full scholarship as one of three students in their development of a "learning by doing" curriculum. We three students were Danish, Irish and American. British chaps were either in school or in the military. This meant that I dropped out of high school in what would have been the start of my senior year.

Following the short course, I took a job during wheat harvest. This was at a farm on the floor of the Great Rift Valley. My job was to supervise African operators of wheat harvesting machines, keeping the machines in top performance, and supervising crews cultivating land with disk plows drawn by teams of oxen. I got around on a moped and had an adjustable wrench for fixing the harvesters hanging from my belt by a leather thong.

After that job I was hired by the Kenya Soil Conservation Service. The duties consisted of supervising African surveying and construction teams who worked on European-owned farms in the Kenyan Highlands (6000 to 9000ft. elevation). Most of the work involved preventing soil erosion from rainfall. In those colonial days I was boss because of my white skin. A few of the Africans I supervised were older, more experienced and better educated than I. Two of these in particular were good friends of mine.

My job for more than two years with the Soil Conservation Service was a wonderful experience working on numerous farms, usually one farm at a time. Invariably the European owner or manager of the farm on which I worked would invite me to stay with him and his family. Staying with various families was an

extraordinary opportunity to observe different lifestyles. The families ranged from English blue bloods in a lovely home to a young German Jewish family who were recent immigrants living in a mud and wattle structure with dirt floor and a thatched roof. Typically I stayed with a family for a couple of weeks, and then went on to the next job, and new hosts. By the way, it was not anticipated that I would receive such hospitality. I had been issued an officer's tent with the expectation that I would live under canvas with my men. When not supervising conservation tasks I lived in my three-room adobe house at the Plant Breeding Station at Njoro. My salary though small was enough to hire an African man as cook--house keeper.

Some of the farms on which I stayed had areas that were not yet developed and supported wild animals. I took advantage of this and hunted with my 30-30 carbine to provide meat, if not for my hosts then for my workmen. Bush buck were the usual quarry.

MILITARY SERVICE

American men of military age living overseas were also subject to the draft in WWII. In Kenya we were to register with the American Consul, or my dad who was authorized because he was field director of the AIM. There were many American missionaries in that mission. I chose to travel to Nairobi and register with the American Consul. If I went to war and got killed I didn't want my dad to feel he had anything to do with it. Although, he would have been proud that I had done my duty.

It was over two and a half years from the time I registered until I received my "Greetings" instructing me to report for service. When I told my boss about this he got the director of the Soil Conservation Service to request deferment from the American Consul. The American Consul said he had no authority to do so. Then it was suggested that since I'd been born in a British Colony it would be a simple matter for me to declare myself British. A deferment from British service would be arranged because my work was essential to the war effort. It was a tough decision. I loved my job, and thought of someday owning a ranch in Kenya.

To join the American army one choice offered was to report to the draft board that had called me. It was in Forest Park, Illinois, as I had used my grandmother's address. The other choice was to report to a place designated by the government at their expense. I chose to do that. The first step on the way was to report to the American Consul at Nairobi.

In preparation for leaving I packed my few possessions and shipped them to Machakos where my parents' things were stored while they were in America on

furlough. A problem was what to do with my dog Pal and the 30–30 Winchester that I had on long-term loan from a missionary named Norman Johnson. My school friend “Chai” Teasdale said he would take my dog. He lived with his family at the Kijabe Mission Station where RVA is located. And Norman Johnson said I could leave the rifle at RVA for use by the older boys for hunting.

After saying goodbye to friends at the Plant Breeding Station, I walked to the main road less than a mile away. I planned to hitchhike the 80 miles to Kijabe where I would leave my dog and rifle. I stood at the road with Pal by my side, the rifle slung on my shoulder and a small valise in my hand. I was wearing khaki clothes made by an Indian tailor in his storefront stall, one-piece underwear made by my mother of thick American cloth, and shoes made by an Indian shoemaker. The valise contained a change of clothing, a shaving kit and a few other items. It also contained all the cartridges that I owned for the 30–30 to give to the RVA boys. Ammunition for that civilian caliber could no longer be purchased during the war.

I estimated there would be three to six vehicles per hour heading “down country” on this main road made of dirt and gravel. I began to wonder about my assumption after waiting more than half an hour with no traffic. But the first vehicle that came along stopped. The two British Tommies in a military truck gave us a ride all the way to where we had to leave the main road for Kijabe.

I expected we would have to walk the six miles or so to the mission station on this little-traveled road. But the first vehicle that overtook us stopped and gave us a lift for the last two miles. The driver was an African traveling alone.

At the Kijabe mission station I introduced Pal to the Teasdale family and left him there. I spent the night at RVA. The next morning Paul Lehrer, the house master, took me to Nairobi. There I reported to the American Consul and was told to wait for a U. S. Air Corps plane that was expected in a few days. I was put up at the Norfolk Hotel. When the four-engine Douglas Skymaster arrived from South Africa it took me on to Khartoum, Sudan. After several days I got a plane headed to Asmara, Eritrea. There, a few months under 21 years of age, I was inducted into the U.S. Army at a Signal Corps station. The station's mission was to relay radio messages from one theater of operations to another.

As part of the induction into the army I had to have a physical exam. It interested me how the army doctor went about it. I hadn't seen much of doctors in my life even though I'd had a number of bouts with malaria while growing up. These bouts with malaria were not usually attended by a physician. I ask the doctor a lot of questions as he was conducting the physical exam, inquiring as to what he was looking for. When it was over he asked me if I would like to be his assistant. When I said yes, he said he would request that I be assigned to him.

The Colonel in charge of the station asked for my Kenya double-layered felt hat as a souvenir. But I kept it, as well as my khaki clothes from Kenya which I wore when surveying in the desert of Arabia six months later.

The commander of the company in which I was billeted was a woman. A woman was an unusual sight at this station. I wonder if her assignment might have come about because her first name was similar to a man's name, Maurice. I was the envy of my fellow soldiers when one evening she invited me to her quarters--to read the Articles of War.

ASSIGNMENT TO AVIATION ENGINEERS IN EGYPT

As the doctor's request was working its way up through channels, headquarter had already decided that I would be an engineer. I received orders to travel to a large U. S. Air Corps base near Cairo, Egypt. When I reported to Camp Huckstep I was assigned to the 1927 Engineer Aviation Company. It was made up of seasoned men who had constructed airfields across North Africa. I did not receive any basic training. Because of overseas induction my serial number of 30000540 was in a different series than the other GIs.

Soon after arriving at camp Huckstep I spent an evening at the Enlisted Club. There were about 100 GIs milling about and a scattering of Wacs (Women's Army Corps). I remember thinking "So these are Americans. I like them."

The Captain in charge of the 1927 Engineer Aviation Company asked me what I would be interested in doing. I said to be an instrument man on a surveying team or learning to be a draftsman. Fortunately for me the company's instrument man was about to be shipped back to the States. So I got to use a transit in Egypt and Arabia. My first assignment was to work with an Egyptian civil engineer doing surveying at the base. The jobs involved laying out foundations for buildings, fence lines, roads to be paved and small maintenance and upgrade jobs. Laborers came after us to do the actual work. We had an Egyptian driver who checked out a weapons carrier or command car at the motor pool each day. While the engineer and I were surveying, the driver would prepare strong Egyptian coffee on a one burner gasoline stove.

A number of us GIs were serious types, not frequenting bars, but interested in hearing lectures on varied subjects. There were resource people on the base who were well informed, albeit on subjects of limited military value. For example, we heard from an enlisted man who had taught organ at college. We also had guests from off base such as a member of the Chinese Legation in Cairo. We took field trips to museums. Pompously we called ourselves the Academic Club. I did a lot of reading in my free time and was nicknamed professor.

Off base I was a member of the Anglo Egyptian Friendship Club. We went on field trips such as to an agricultural experiment station and a visit to the Egyptian parliament. I took other sightseeing opportunities such as a Red Cross trip to the pyramids.

Twice while I was at camp Huckstep I pulled guard duty. It involved going on duty for two hours, off four hours and on two hours, until 24 hours were up. My first assignment was a water storage tank in the desert. The other time I was a guard at the Base Finance Office. When I was standing outside the door of the building a General came by showing the base to King Faruk of Egypt. I wasn't sure what I should do. Probably I should have saluted. Instead I just held the door open for them. I noted in a letter to my parents that the king was a merry fellow with a hearty laugh.

I took a three day pass to Alexandria and stayed at the Red Cross Club. I visited a beach ten miles from Alexandria where American missionaries vacationed. There I met Dr. Bailey who was dean of Asyut College. He invited me to visit him and his wife at the college.

Once the Egyptian engineer and I were given an assignment of laying out a radio antenna array in the desert. It was to be laid out precisely, not just by corrected compass reading. This involved establishing a baseline aligned to true north. For this we would have to set up the transit at night and take a reading on Polaris, the North Star. Ahmed said we should wait for a moonlight night to do this, although it made no difference to me. I think he was afraid of being out in the desert at night.

We snapped into action when we were told that the Colonel in charge of all engineering units in the Africa – Middle East Theater (AMET) wanted the antenna array laid out NOW. So that night even though it was dark, we established a baseline. The next day we set out the antenna configuration in relation to the baseline.

A week or so later I was told to report to the same Colonel. The door to his office was customarily open so I rapped on the door post and announced myself. At that the Colonel said, "Nixon go back out and as you come in give me a smart salute." Which I did.

Then he said that there was a theater wide effort to get more soldiers to buy War Bonds (U.S. Saving Bonds) by having the money taken out of their pay. He wanted me to be salesperson for the engineers. The salesmen who sold the most War Bonds would get all expense trips to Palestine or Cypress, as they preferred. The trips would not be charged against the winners' leave time, and they would receive spending money. When I said I was relatively new and didn't know a lot

of people, he said to do my best. He would twist the arms of his officers and send them to me. Thanks largely to the efforts of the Colonel I was one of the winners. I had a wonderful time in Palestine.

I marveled at the Jewish collective communities called kibbutzes. Their agricultural activities made the desert bloom. What interested me was that how some recent immigrants from Germany and elsewhere had left prominent positions and were now cheerfully doing menial work. I was glad for the opportunity of seeing many locations mentioned in the Bible. The tour was organized by the Red Cross and consisted of American soldiers on R&R. We traveled around the country in two 6X6 army trucks. A young American woman with the Red Cross did a wonderful job of showing us points of interest and telling the Bible stories that went with some of them. What a treat it was to have fresh vegetables and dairy products that had been grown on kibbutzes. I remember making a pig of myself getting my fill of ice cream topped with pineapple jam.

Some of the time at Camp Huckstep I hung around with two Jewish boys originally from New York. They and their wives were living in Palestine when they were called up. Upon hearing that I was going to Palestine they loaded me down with stuff from the PX to take to their wives. I looked up one of the wives at her apartment in Tel Aviv and delivered the goodies.

SOJOURN IN ARABIA

The last big project done by the 1927 Engineer was building a large air field at Dhahran, Arabia, on the Persian Gulf. The vanguard surveying party went there several weeks ahead of the construction people. The party consisted of Captain Morrison, three GIs including me and an American civilian. I was a couple of days late in joining the survey party because I'd been enjoying Palestine. As soon as I got back from vacation, I traveled by a C46 transport plane from Cairo to Bahrain Island in the Persian Gulf. On the way we delivered freight at Teheran, Iran, and Baghdad, Iraq. I was the only passenger. I got a ride to Dhahran on the mainland by a launch belonging to the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO).

The site where the airport was to be built was near the oil company headquarters. Our survey party was billeted in ARAMCO air conditioned facilities. VJ-Day occurred while we were laying out the base designed for 400 personnel with a 7000 foot runway. The decision was made to go ahead with building the airport even though the war was over. (The strategic importance of oil?)

For a time we worked long hours, seven days a week. We enlisted men decided to take a Sunday off. When Captain Morrison came to get us for work we said we

were going to have a day of rest. He didn't say much but soon returned with a Colonel. The Colonel had recently arrived in anticipation of the construction troops coming by ship bringing construction machinery and building material. Rather than chewing us out the Colonel sweet talked by telling us what a great job we were doing. But would we please continue working hard so to have everything ready when the construction workers arrived in less than two weeks? That way construction people could go to work immediately doing various jobs at the same time, such as the water and sewer systems, electric lines, roads, constructing the runway and the numerous buildings that were called for.

The Colonel said that when we were done with surveying, including a smaller job in the interior of the country, we would be given R&R in India. We should have said, "Sir, please put that in writing." We never did get R&R in India.

Ships brought 120 aviation engineers, 60 American civilians of the Construction Division and 900 Italians laborers. At this point we surveyors had to give up our air conditioned quarters at ARAMCO and joined the tent city on the desert. Food was cooked on field ranges at the old ARAMCO landing strip and transported to the camp. The weather was hot and there were swarms of flies to contend with, and sometimes swirling sand. Latrine facilities consisted of trenches out in the open, narrow enough to straddle. A hazard was that the sides of the trench dug in sand could collapse at inopportune moments.

The surveying team now consisted of:

Capt William Morrison, Chief of Party. He was a practicing engineer in Michigan before the war.

T/Sgt George Youngmeister, Note Keeper and Mathematician. George's father was a colonel in the Czar's army in Russia at the time of the Bolshevik revolution. The colonel, his wife and young George made their way to Egypt. There George grew up *persona non grata*. Not having a passport was a problem but he was able to study engineering in Belgium before the war. Then George worked in oil exploration with Standard Oil in the Middle East. When the American army made its presence in Africa he saw volunteering to serve as a step toward U.S. citizenship.

T/5 Jim Sears, Rod Man. Jim had graduated in forestry from the University of Michigan (or was it Michigan State ?)

Pfc Paul Nixon, Instrument Man

GI Surveyors in Arabia



Paul Nixon, Arab Soldier, Jim Sears, George Youngmeister
(Photograph taken by William Morrison)

The three of us enlisted men shared a square tent with pyramid-shaped roof. We got lumber and made a wooden floor several inches above the loose sand. We kept the walls of the tent rolled up to provide circulation. To avoid the pesky flies we cut up mosquito nets and screened in the entire tent. We did this knowing that we would have to pay for the damage to government property when it was time to turn in equipment. At times swirling dust settled on every surface including our canvas cots.

Parts for a 30,000-gallon water tank on a 60-foot-high tower were delivered to the site where it was to be erected. Unfortunately instructions for assembly of the tank could not be found. Jim Sears and I were assigned the task of developing instructions. It took us a day to measure and sketch parts that were spread out on the sand. Some parts looked similar but were not exactly the same as other parts. It took us another day to figure out how the parts should be put together. We were pleased when the work crew successfully assembled the water tank on its tower.

It was now time for the surveying team to proceed to the interior and lay out an emergency airfield and communications center. It was to be located about midway between Dhahran and Cairo, along a proposed oil pipe line from Dhahran, on the Persian Gulf, to the Mediterranean Sea. ARAMCO geologists were already camping at the proposed site. They had drilled a borehole that provided water.

The surveying team and two geologists were the passengers on a C46 two propeller airplane. In addition we had our tent, supplies, truck parts and tires, an electric generation plant, drilling equipment and other things. The pilot estimated the weights and said the plane was overloaded. So we removed twenty gallons of water. But we were still overweight. Furthermore the sandy surface of the ARAMCO landing strip which had been treated with crude oil was not ideal. But the pilot decided to give it a try. On take off, if the plane did not "feel light" well down the runway, the pilot planned to abort by shutting down the engines. Thankfully we had a good takeoff.

The navigator did a good job. The geologists at camp would not have needed to make a column of black smoke by burning old truck tires. The plane landed nicely on the firm surface of the desert.

We pitched our tent near the geologists' and pooled our food. Their Arab cook served all of us. The Arabian government at that time said that American troops could not have weapons with them, except shotguns. The shotgun we were to have had was stolen from the construction office at Dhahran before we left. We did have, somewhat illegally, a .45 caliber sidearm and a .30 caliber carbine with a missing magazine.

The Arabian government provided two of their soldiers to be bodyguards for the six geologists, and two for us. They were to inform any Bedouin tribesmen we would encounter that we were there with the blessings of King Ibn Saud.

The surveying at Duwaid was routine but it did take time to lay out every detail. We worked seven days a week except when we heard by radio that a plane would be bringing in supplies, mail and our laundry which we had done at the Dhahran camp. We took this day off to go hunting. It was not stalking game on foot the way I liked to hunt as a boy and young man in Kenya. Stalking was impractical in the desert area devoid of cover except occasional small shrubs less than two feet high.

What we did was chase gazelle in a vehicle and shoot them with a shotgun when they were within range. We borrowed a shotgun from the geologists. Our heavy weapons carrier vehicle with relatively narrow tires traveling over gravelly soil could not catch up with the gazelle. We borrowed the geologists' modified Ford V8 sedan which had four wheel drive and flotation tires. We bagged seven gazelle, one for us and the others to send back with the plane to provide fresh meat at base camp.

A number of camel caravans passed through our area. Oil company men said they do this when the rains are near and grazing will become available in another area.

When the job was done, the others were to return to Dhahran by air. I was ordered to go overland with an ARAMCO convoy. I was to take special note of branches in the trail because I would be responsible for guiding a construction team back to Duwaid. Jim Sears wanted to see the country and got permission to go with me. I was glad for the company. The 630 miles trip took three and a half days.

Back at Dhahran we were waiting for tank trucks to come off a boat before the convoy of construction workers could go to Duwaid. The original plan was that GIs would build the runway and the associated structures. We were told that because the war was over, Italian civilians would be hired to do the job. It finally came down to an Arabian contractor with Arab workers.

I was given the job of supervising Arabs loading the vehicles that would make the trip to the interior. I knew the loads must be secured well because of bumpy sections of the route. Using English, my Kenya Swahili (which has a lot of Arabic in it) and hand gestures I got my instructions understood. We nailed and braced things in place.

Finally all was ready for the 23-vehicle convoy to move with a party of six Americans and 44 Arabs. We spent eleven nights on the road covering the same 630 miles covered in three nights coming. It was now late December and some

mornings, as we had slept out under the stars, there was frost on our cots. It was slow going at times when we crossed sandy areas. It got to be a routine unloading the D8 Caterpillar tractor from the flatbed and dragging the 4X6 eight ton Mack trucks through one by one. Also the convoy stopped several times a day when the Arabs spread their mats on the ground and prayed facing Mecca.

A couple of us went hunting during some of the delays. I got a gazelle, several game birds, a duck and a fox. Thus the convoy was supplied with fresh meat.

BACK TO EGYPT

After a few days at Duwaid I said goodbye to the others and got a C46 ride to Cairo. Since my old company had broken up, I was assigned to the 2753 Engineer Service Company. I was given a crew of Egyptians to do construction and maintenance on the post. I divided them into work groups. Time went quickly as I ran around in a truck from one group to another. An example of the variety of jobs is what had gone on the day I wrote about to my parents: the men built a mess kit washer, cleaned out a culvert, put asbestos on the exhaust of an engine at the powerhouse and put up road markers.

I took up Dr. Bailey's invitation to visit him and his wife at Asyut College. The invitation had been made when I met him on a three day pass to Alexandria, before I went to Arabia. Contact with him indicated the invitation was still open so I got a week's pass. I bought a second class rail ticket leaving Cairo at 8:00 a.m., and sent a telegram to Dr. Bailey telling of my arrival at Asyut at 2:30 p.m. I shared a compartment with five Egyptians for the trip up the Nile River valley.

I was put up in a nicely furnished flat with a sitting room, bedroom and bath. What a luxury it was to soak in a tub of warm water. It had been many months since I had enjoyed that luxury.

Dr. Bailey showed me around the 22-acre college campus until dark. In the evening we played indoor games with Mrs. Bailey.

The next day I went exploring. While I was looking at the flood control dam on the Nile River with its 112 gates, a well dressed Egyptian approached me speaking English. He invited me to go with him to his village ten miles away. He was an accountant in the tax collection department.

Riding in the horse drawn carriage he had at his disposal he took me around to meet the town treasurer, an architect in his office, and judges at the courthouse. Each of the stops meant a cup of coffee or tea and small talk. By the time we had visited a school I realized I had missed lunch at the "Club" where I took my

meals. The "Club" was where white single people working at the various mission institutions took their meals.

The next day I visited a private museum I had heard about. When I went into Khushaba Pasha's office he said he would be delighted to show me the museum. He locked the office and with his assistant took me to where all the items were stored in a separate building. All the items had come from tombs on the bluffs of the river valley. The kindnesses of the recent days are but examples of the friendship shown to me by many Egyptians.

Later I visited the Priestly Memorial Institute (PMI) which is a girls' school with about 600 students from kindergarten through high school.

On another day I visited Miss Thrasher's orphanage of 900 children and some widows. They were almost self sufficient growing vegetables and fruit but having to buy grain. I also saw the American Mission Hospital. It was well furnished with modern equipment, some used in research. I had tea with student nurses in their living quarters on the third floor of the hospital.

The most interesting part of the trip was an outing to the bluff area on the west side of the valley. The party consisted of several young American women who taught at the PMI and British soldiers stationed in Asyut. The soldiers provided safety in numbers that was needed in entering a restricted area which required a permit. It was known to harbor robbers.

We saw large man-made caves, some of which had been tombs. There were bones lying around on the surface and a number of mummies, or it least what was left of them after being plundered. One corpse which had been stripped of its cloth covering was in good condition. Our guide held it up beside him. I wish I had had a camera and would have posed with it.

The front of one of the man-made caves had eroded exposing a large room in the side of the bluff. According to tradition this was one of the places where Joseph had stored grain during years of plenty. A mile away was a cave of irregular shape where Coptic Christians had worshiped during times of persecution.

Back at Camp Huckstep I volunteered to be custodian of surplus American army property in a town in Turkey. I might be the only American, military or civilian, in that town. I would live in a hotel and hire local people. I would release property upon instructions from Ankara. In essence, I would live like a civilian. In due course I received orders to proceed to the job and was issued a laminated identification card. But on the eve of my departure the order was canceled, as it was for three other GIs on similar missions. The fellows who had been in the

army for some time told me that nearly everyone experiences canceled orders at one time or another.

Things were winding down at our camp. Our unit was declared surplus and we were moved to the casual section. Reassignment to a new duty station was slow in coming. In the meanwhile we had no jobs. It was then decided to toughen us up. We were moved from barracks to living under canvas. We had daily calisthenics and marched in the desert. We often sang as we marched. With my sheltered upbringing some songs seemed risqué, such as "Roll her over in the clover, lay her down and do it again." I was amused with songs like "Horse shit, horse shit, it makes the grass grow green" which we also sang.

GERMANY

Finally we got word that about 600 troops including us would be shipping out, by train to Alexandria, and then by the troop ship *USS Sea Witch* to Le Havre, France. Only a few quays were in use at Le Havre but there was a lot of work going on repairing war damage. Our ship pulled up to a temporary prefab one. Here, as in Alexandria, we saw sunken ships partly exposed above the waterline.

From the ship we boarded trucks to take us to the rail freight yard. Our destination was Namur, Belgium. Most troops were assigned to second and third class coaches, six guys per compartment that slept four. I was assigned with fifteen other fellows to one of eight "40 or 8" boxcars designed for 40 men or 8 horses. The boxcars turned out to be a good deal because there was room for all to stretch out full length on the floor. By pooling and sharing blankets we had six blankets under us and two over us. We made space by piling all our luggage in one corner. A coal fired stove provided heat and came in handy for warming canned food. By the way, we had been provided with a generous supply of C-Rations.

The rail system in Europe had not yet been completely restored. This meant we were sometimes shunted onto sidings, and at times had long waits for go signals.

Twice during the 26-hour trip the train stopped at sidings where GIs served hot meals, and there was time to wash up. The meals were served on the usual metal trays. The plan was to scrape leftover food into a garbage can at the end of the meal and drop the tray and silverware into a tub of soapy water. But instead of scraping food into a garbage can, we were asked by local men to put the left over food into containers they were holding.

We did not need all the C-Rations so we had fun throwing items to people who stood along the tracks. At level crossings where groups of people were waiting there was a mad scramble for the goodies.

I wrote to my parents that the trip to Namur, Belgian, was very enjoyable. The rolling green farmland was a treat after being in the desert so long.

At Namur we were taken to what had been a Belgian cavalry station. We were told that a week was the average waiting time for assignment, many to Germany or Austria, but some to the liberated countries.

After 72 hours of quarantine they started giving out passes, a portion of the troops at a time. I remember one evening looking down on a street from a grassy knoll. I was impressed by the sight of a Belgian woman washing the cobblestone street in front of her house. We hadn't seen this degree of cleanliness in the Middle East.

My assignment was Bad Nauheim, Germany. Lucky me. Bad Nauheim had been spared from war damage and still retained an upscale resort atmosphere. Before the war many people vacationed here, some to enjoy bathing in warm mineral water that issued from the ground.

The U.S. Army took over the best of everything. It was made headquarters for the Continental Base Section. Because it was a resort town there were plenty of hotels to put up the troops. Germans were hired for housekeeping and to prepare and serve food for the GIs. In my hotel, The Sprudel, we were four or six to a table in the dining room. The tables were covered with white tablecloths. A five-piece German orchestra provided music at the meals.

I had not yet been assigned to a unit when I visited a Sunday School held by GIs for about 110 German children. There I met a chaplain who said he was looking for an assistant and would request me.

So that is how a couple of days later I came to report for duty to Chaplain Captain Harold Schulz of the 1126 Combat Engineers. It turned out that this engineering unit existed only on paper. It now consisted of eight officers and me, the only enlisted man. The captain said I would have a unrestricted pass which meant I would not have to abide by the 11 p.m. curfew. And I would be responsible for a jeep which I would park at my hotel and drive a few blocks to work each day.

My duties involved being an assistant to the chaplain, running errands for the other officers of the 1126 and meeting visiting officers at the train, showing them around and taking them to their quarters. Not long out of my teens, I greatly enjoyed having "wheels" that the jeep provided.

I really don't know how much help I was to Chaplain Schulz. If nothing was going on I manned our office which was a small building which we alone occupied, at the entrance to a city park. I made appointments for the chaplain, okayed selections made by a German organist and professional singers for their

part in the Protestant Sunday Service that was held in the large Lutheran Church after the German service had been held.

Working with the German children on Sunday afternoons was very enjoyable. The Bible lessons were taught in German by young German women who helped us. We GIs had fun taking part in outside games with the children.

I didn't think much of it when one of the girls in her early teens asked to see my pass. It became clear on a Sunday preceding my birthday when she presented me with a beautiful bouquet of flowers. She had wanted to know my birth date. Three other girls also had flowers for me. Several of the children presented me with drawings, and nice sentiments by those who could write in English.

My best friends among GIs were the four fellows who helped with the Sunday School. We saw each other during the week, usually in twos or threes. Lovely frauleins from three families helped with the Sunday School. They were part of our clique and we saw them during the week. From time to time we were invited to their homes.

My roommate Homer Griffin and I helped a widow by paying her to do our laundry instead of using the army laundry. She was also a seamstress and made our baggy shirts more closely follow the profiles of our youthful bodies. Twice a week she and her preteen son delivered clean clothes to our room and picked up dirty laundry.

Sometimes other chaplains preached at Bad Nauheim. This gave Chaplain Schulz opportunity to conduct services at small army units that did not have regular services. I enjoyed being his driver and seeing the countryside. As far as that goes, Chaplain Schulz enjoyed viewing scenery. We occasionally had outings during the week. From time to time, I took fellow GIs for a spin after work hours during the long summer evenings. One time I took Homer Griffin to Wiesbaden near the French Zone looking for a friend of his. We found his unit but he was out.

Harold Schulz was a great boss. I wasn't working for him long before he had me promoted to T/5. As a gift to me he bought a pair of Florsheim shoes in the officers' clothing section of the PX. They went well with the Class 1 uniform, including tie, that all soldiers in Bad Nauheim wore in public at all times.

If you were driving an army vehicle in the American Zone you could fill the tank with fuel at any motor pool. All that was involved was entering the vehicle number and amount of fuel on a clipboard, and you were on your way. My gas station was the motor pool in Bad Nauheim. After I'd been using it for some time, someone realized that I was not a transient just passing through. They asked what outfit I belonged to.

Soon my boss was asked to explain how come the jeep was not being checked out and into the motor pool each day. Chaplain Schulz was the last person in the present 1126 who had actually served with it when it was operational. He had to admit that GI wartime ingenuity had written off the jeep from the books as "lost in combat." This facilitated unauthorized use and avoided the inconvenience of checking it in and out of a motor pool. Affable Harold Schulz got them to agree that we could keep the jeep just like always without checking in and out, but it would be put back on inventory.

I had an enjoyable three day R&R at the Niederwald hunting lodge in a forested area above the Rhine River. The lodge, like other nice places and things in the American Zone of Germany, had been taken over by the army for the benefit of GIs. I drove there in "my" jeep.

One day I checked out an M1 rifle and walked in the forest. A German in his late teens wearing part of a German army uniform tagged along with me. I think he wanted to practice speaking English. In late afternoon he showed me a deer blind on the edge of a clearing in the forest. Actually it was a well constructed tree house. I stayed there until dark without seeing any wildlife.

Another day I drove down to the village of Rudesheim on the Rhine River. A ferry ride took me to the other side where I climbed up to the Rheinstein Castle. Little did I know that someday I would have a connection of sorts with it. The castle was once owned by Prince Frederick of Prussia. He was a member of the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas. The society was made up of nobleman who put up money for the colony. The town of Fredericksburg, TX, was named after him, only its original name was Friedrichsburg until the post office changed its name in 1894.

Sometime after the R&R, I was struck by a small oil painting of the Rheinstein Castle I saw in the window of an art gallery in Bad Nauheim. The proprietor showed me a picture of the painting in an art catalog. I bought it for two cartons of cigarettes. I still have the painting.

There were plenty of opportunities for sports in Bad Nauheim. Although I am not the athletic type I enjoyed tennis, golf and horseback riding.

It was a sad day for me when Chaplain Schulz transferred to the 143 Ordinance in Karlsfeld near Munich. I helped him change duty stations by taking him in the jeep. The two-wheel box trailer attached to the jeep was piled high with his stuff. Chaplain Schulz had accumulated quite a bit of stuff in anticipation of civilian life. We stopped over for a night in Frankfurt where Schulz visited a friend. After getting Chaplain Schulz settled into his new post, he and I visited Dachau the first concentration camp set up in Germany by the Nazis. Here 238, 000

people were cremated. We saw the gas chambers, furnaces for cremation, rooms used to store bodies, a pistol range, the site of a gallows tree from which some were hung, and kennels where savage dogs were said to have been kept.

In great contrast we drove to beautiful Bad Wiessee and environs in the Bavarian Alps. After another night in Karlsfeld I bid farewell to my dear friend.

On the trip down we ran out of gas because of having to take a long detour around a bridge on the autobahn that had been destroyed and not yet repaired. The second vehicle that came along gave us gas. On the return trip I had a flat tire which didn't take long to change. But I did have to get a tow to Augsburg because of a broken breaker arm in the distributor.

My new boss Chaplain Finley was a lot different. In the vocabulary of the day he was more "chicken." He followed regulations to the letter, even in small details, always going through channels, etc.

I had a week of R&R at a resort near Salzburg Austria. One outing was to Berchtesgaden, Germany where Hitler had had a mountaintop retreat. It had been heavily damaged. As a souvenir I removed a tile from the wall of Eva Braun's bathroom.

I took the "Mozart Express Train" to Vienna, Austria, which was in the Russian Zone of Occupation. Arriving there early on a Sunday morning I stopped in a large cathedral where mass was in progress. As I was walking through the city I met an American lieutenant. He and I stayed together the rest of the day. He was well educated in liberal arts and I enjoyed his comments on what we saw.

The day came when I headed for the replacement depot at Bremerhaven, Germany. In due course, I was on a Victory troop ship headed for good old USA. I got my discharge at Fort Dix, NJ. During the mustering out process soldiers were encouraged to join the Army Reserves. In my euphoria at being in the land of milk and honey I signed up. It was too late when I realized that the peacetime military, even part-time was not for me. I never attended a meeting and suffered a demotion, but they still gave me an Honorable Discharge when my three year hitch was up. Maybe it was just in time for me because soon after that the Korean Conflict started.

CIVILIAN LIFE

Following discharge I lived with my parents in Brooklyn, NY, where my Dad had taken a job as associate director of the AIM in their international office. My parents wanted to return to mission work in Africa but mother's ill health

prevented it. About a year and a half later the mission doctor approved of their return to Kenya.

Being a high school dropout, I could not get into college immediately. So I spent a year taking math and science courses during evenings at Brooklyn Technical High School. During the days I took odd jobs, but mainly spent time exploring the wonderful civilization called America.

Even though I didn't receive a high school diploma, my good grades provided what was needed to get into college. My first year was spent at Sampson College in upstate NY. Then I transferred to Iowa State University (ISU) to study Agricultural Engineering for which it was acclaimed. The GI Bill was a great help, but with only nineteen months of military service, I didn't have enough eligibility for the entire time. I married Erma Koch in my junior year.

Following graduation I worked for two years as an Agricultural Engineer with the Soil Conservation Service in California. Word from an ISU professor telling of an Alcoa Fellowship took me back to college. After getting an M.S. in Agricultural Engineering, I stayed on working with the department and taking courses.

This changed when a call from a person I had met in California when I worked out there told of a job tailored to my interests and personality. I took the job as Project Leader of a court-ordered study of the water yield of the Santa Ynez Watershed in Californian. Our son Jim was born at Lompoc, CA, where I was stationed. During this time I had the opportunity for a sabbatical at Stanford University where I received a M.S. in Hydrology--not bad for a high school dropout.

The first half of my working career was in California, the second half in Texas. In Texas I worked in remote sensing research with the U.S. Agricultural Research Service. We were using IBM cards to run the computers in those days. The job involved agricultural applications of satellites and aircraft data. Eventually I became Research Leader of 21 scientists and support staff at the Weslaco, TX, lab, and at times of three scientists stationed at the Johnson Space Center, Houston, TX.

An extracurricular activity I enjoyed was working with agricultural scientists and engineers in Egypt, India, Pakistan and Yugoslavia. It was called technology transfer. I visited my counterparts at their foreign locations and arranged study trips for them to the U.S.

Eight years after the war Harold Schulz and I met fortuitously at a church in Riverside, CA. He was visiting his mother. Mrs. Schulz invited my wife and me

for supper and an evening of chin wagging. Harold and I had a great time reminiscing and catching up on events of the intervening years.

I missed out on the camaraderie of soldiers had who had gone through basic training and deployment, and spent many months together overseas, then had reunions from time to time following the war.

My experience of about six months in Egypt, six months in Arabia and six months in Germany did not provide association with defined homogeneous groups. About half century following the war I wondered what had happened to some of my comrades. Using the Internet I tried to find them. The problem was that there were many people of the same name. For example, there were over 500 Jim Sears or James Sears.

An unusual last name made it easy. I found Stanley Wozencraft. I remembered that his family was in the logging business, and they still were. Stanley now owned two mortuaries in Little Rock, AK.

I didn't find George Youngmeister but I did find the address of Andrew G. Youngmeister. Sure enough, it was George's son. Sadly George had died a few years before. George became an American citizen as he had hoped. He had a distinguished career as the Chief Engineer of Harvey Aluminum. He was responsible for building a number of aluminum production facilities worldwide.

Andrew was pleased to have contact with me because I was the only person he knew who had been in service with his father. Andrew sent me a VHS tape he had had made from his father's 8mm movies. On it were scenes of the surveying team at work in Arabia. It included views of me at the transit and hunting. Andrew told his mother about me. Although she had never met me, George had told her enough that she was able to identify me in some photographs. She had copies made and sent them to me. She verified that Camp Huckstep did become Cairo International Airport.

I wish we could have war without killing. Instead wouldn't it be wonderful if all young people could experience as grand an adventure as mine while doing a year or two of military or community service?