

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CAJUN COUNTRY WITH CAJUN CUISINE

INTRODUCTION

In the latter part of January 1975, I grabbed a plane and headed for New Orleans. Both Esther and I realized there would be a family separation until school was out, which neither of us looked forward to. Our lives were centered in the family and there was little joy in

crawling slimy and squiggly critters in her home, let alone one her table. Only time would tell what her reaction would be.

The first order of business, after arriving in New Orleans, was to get a comfortable grasp of my new job. Besides going over various office routines, including an engineer exam or two, Will

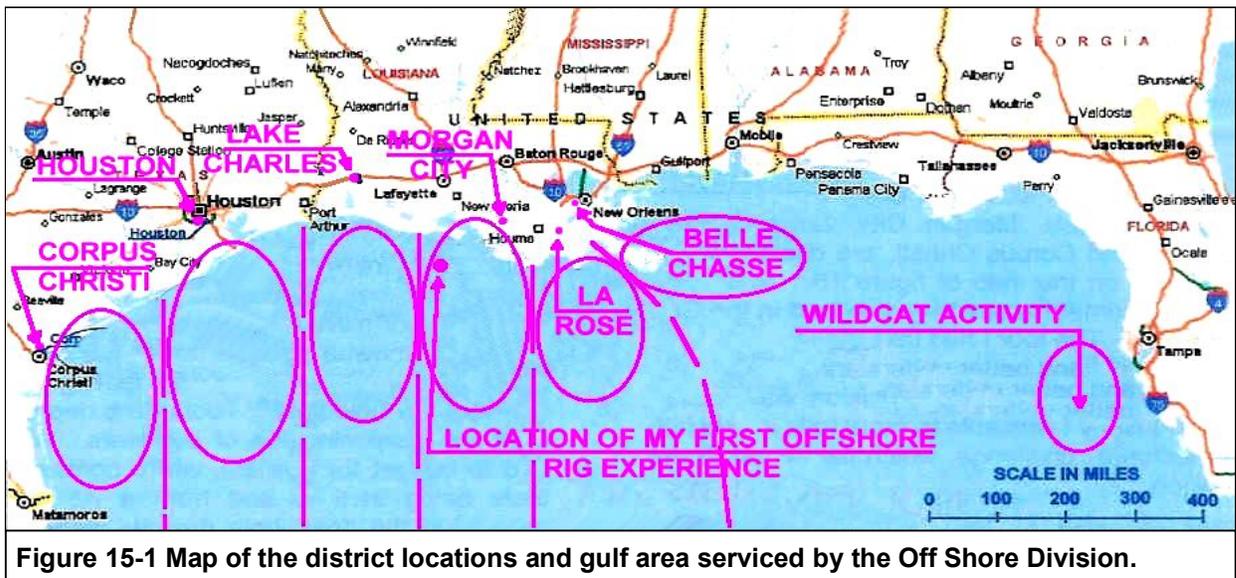


Figure 15-1 Map of the district locations and gulf area serviced by the Off Shore Division.

the prospect of being separated for the next 4 months. However, it was an inescapable part of the livelihood I had chosen to support my family with. The time would pass relatively fast and soon we would be together again undergoing new experiences, including a new ward, new friends, new geography and even new cuisine. The latter item meant more seafood including shrimp, crawfish and various kinds of regular fish from the gulf as part of our diet, as well as a few grits, red beans and rice, Cajun style. Of course, at this point in time Esther had no idea of the impending change about to take place in the family diet. She wasn't one to particularly resist change, but neither was she one to accept

and I toured the division. In addition to various introductions involved, I got a feel for the type of operations being run and the magnitude of the same as well as the associated equipment requirements. There were well over 100 drilling rigs in the gulf at this time and they were growing in number. As I remember, the number reached the vicinity of 150 during my tour in the division. The cost of an operating rig, just setting idle, was in the vicinity \$1,000 to \$2,000 per hour. A typical trouble free logging operation might consume 24 hours or more depending upon the services ordered. Obviously logging time was a large part of the total cost of such an operation. Consequently

lost time, due to tool failure, was unacceptable and had to be minimized to keep logging costs under control for the customer.

In recognition of this fact, every offshore operating crew carried two sets of equipment for each service called for, which provided on site back up should a failure occur. It had been well established that tool failures resulted primarily from shock while moving equipment between the rig and Schlumberger location. Various methods of minimizing shock during transport were employed with limited success. Thus, tools were checked at the location before being sent to the rig as well as at the rig prior to the logging operation. Such checks consumed a good deal of time, which, in addition to the waiting and operational time, made the total trip time for an average job some 3 days or more.

The time requirement per job and number of operating rigs necessarily made each Schlumberger location very large, in terms of both equipment and personnel. The number of dispatch or loading ports for work in the gulf also influenced both the number and location of Schlumberger districts. The six offshore districts, i.e. Belle Chasse, Larose, Morgan City, Lake Charles, Houston and Corpus Christi, are designated by blue dots on the map of figure 15-1 along with the approximate areas they serviced in the Gulf of Mexico. The tour I had taken with Will helped me visualize and better understand the nature of the service problems the division was facing. Consequently I was able to more fully appreciate the technical challenge, laying ahead in my job.

After returning to New Orleans with my predecessor, Will, I checked back into the Sheraton Hotel for the next week or so, until I found more reasonable accommodations. Even though the hotel was reasonable, the cost of room and board mounted rather quickly. The amount of expenses covered by the company in such a move was limited and I had to find something more economical to last until I picked up the family in early June. It didn't take long for me to find a little furnished kitchenette apartment on the West Bank. It was furnished with only the bare necessities but I was able to rent it by the month with no minimum time requirement. A rather stark home atmosphere would be the least of my worries during the wait for my family

and I settled in for the 4 months of bachelorhood still facing me. However, I soon got tired of TV dinners and found myself eating in restaurants a good deal of the time because they provided a better choice of food and a little company. However, I continued to eat what little breakfast I wanted at the apartment and maybe half of my evening meals, as well. The savings over the Sheraton were significant.

EARLY SCHLUMBERGER EXPERIENCES

THE TECHNICAL BUDGET

One of the first problems I faced was revising the technical budget for the division for the year 1975. I was responsible for that type of planning in the Rocky Mountains as a division engineer as well. The process wasn't really new to me but the

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magnitude was. I had budgeted cable for maybe 25 trucks in the Rockies and was now concerned with some five times that many. Similarly, cable life in the Rockies was 3 or 4 years, whereas cable life offshore was more like a year to 18 months due to both the environment and frequency of fishing jobs. Cable was amortized or paid for over its expected life of 18 months. In the Rockies, we kept one tool of each type per truck for those services run on a regular basis. Offshore, each logging job required two of every tool type ordered to cover potential tool failure. In addition, tool travel time between location and rig was somewhat greater than that of a field crew. Thus, we budgeted something like 2.8 tool sets per field crew. Tools were depreciated over their expected life of six years. We also had to budget tool pallets, which contained the tools being sent to and from a rig. Those containing the down-hole devices were of one type, while those containing surface panels, another. They were expensed or paid for immediately. Of course, the open-hole sales manager derived a realistic number for the average number of drilling rigs expected and the cased-hole manager a similar figure for completion and work-over rigs.

At this point in my life, all the various budgeting details are rather dim in my mind because of time and a sharply declined interest. However, I do remember the process as being complex and time consuming. Each district first submitted a proposed budget. The division then compiled and adjusted the submitted budgets to meet the expected offshore activity and submitted the

same to Headquarters for their approval. Invariably, the submitted budget was cut by some degree at Headquarters to meet their budget for the company and returned to us for our revision. Discussions were held with the districts and activity was reassessed. The necessary cuts were then made to match that approved by Headquarters. As you can appreciate, the process required a lot of phone time and travel time to develop as well as time to review the final product. Even then, such a budget wasn't firm. That is, if activity didn't develop as had been forecast, additional cuts had to be made. This was more common than were unexpected increases in rig activity because rig information gained from operators in the gulf tended to be optimistic. The point is; budgeting was not just a yearly activity but also an ongoing activity, which peaked maybe a couple of times a year. The problem was further complicated by actual delivery time of equipment as opposed to budgeted delivery.

THE FIELD OPERATION

Though I had a good deal of field experience on land, my offshore experience was severely limited and dated as well. It had been some 20 years since I had made an offshore job. Frank suggested that I not only tour some rigs but also make an actual job so I could experience the life of an offshore crew. This would help me better understand the technical problems involved. Needless to say, I agreed and made arrangements to make an open-hole logging operation out of Morgan City, Louisiana.

Within a week or so, I found myself heading for a drilling platform about a hundred miles out in the gulf. The approximate location of the rig is shown in figure 15-1. In many cases, the crew will be transported by helicopter while the tools travel by workboat. In other cases, the crew travels by crew-boat. In either situation, the required crew time is always less by some 30 or 40% and the travel somewhat smoother and more comfortable. In this case, I elected to travel out to the rig on a workboat and return via a crew boat so as to experience that part of the operation. I would have plenty of time to travel to a rig on a chopper.

The rig was located approximately 100 miles offshore as indicated in figure 15-1. The boat trip was about 12 hours in length, which included negotiating the Atchafalaya River for several miles to its mouth and then the hundred or so miles of open water to the rig. It was the wee

hours of the morning as we arrived at the rig, which is illustrated in the photo of figure 15-2. It's a beautiful sight sitting in the blackness of the gulf as one draws near to the platform. In fact, it is visible for some time before the boat actually comes along side of it, as are the many other platforms scattered around that general area of the gulf. We had passed by several platforms during our travel to the chosen site. All look the same at that time of night and only map coordinates establish which is which. Obviously, good navigation is essential in picking out the right platform in the wilderness of the Gulf of Mexico.

As we tied up to the rig, a ladder of sorts was lowered into the back of the workboat, which the pilot kept in a proper position relative to the rig by applying power as needed. Once on the rig structure, we had several flights of stairs to climb before arriving at the drilling deck. The Schlumberger engineer, whose name I can't recall, checked in with the platform office where

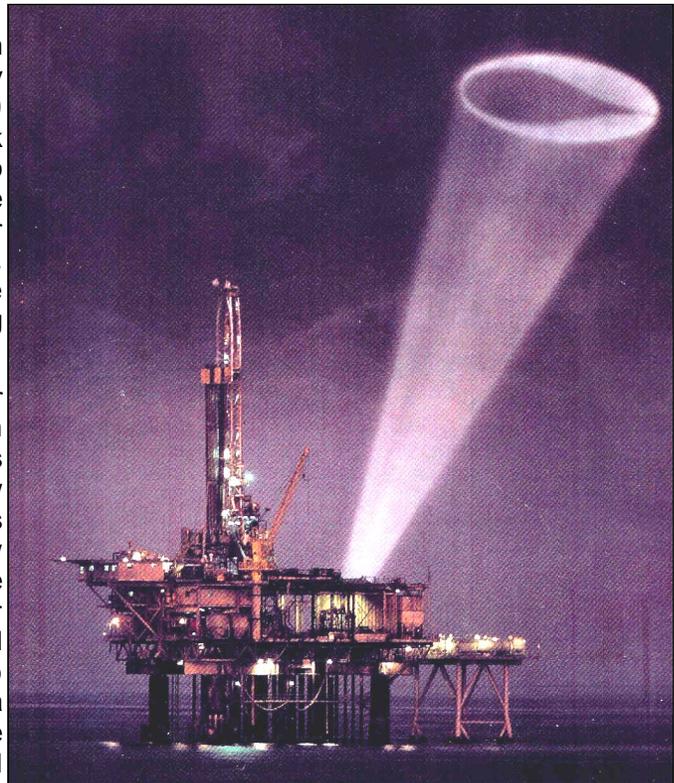


Figure 15-2 The platform of the offshore rig I visited early one morning in February of 1975.

we were assigned bunks in case we wanted to catch a little sleep. We then went to the kitchen for a little breakfast while waiting for the tools to be unloaded. I wasn't too hungry because the

boat ride had made me feel a little nauseated. Even so, I managed to get a little breakfast down before going back out to watch the unloading process, an activity, which I deemed important to my understanding of the impact of transportation on our tool problems.

I had returned to the equipment deck as the platform crane operator began unloading the tools along with other equipment. You can see one crane near the derrick and a second one at the extreme right of the platform. You might also notice the heliport at the extreme left of the rig. Helicopters arrive at various intervals throughout the day and night as rig workers and contractor personnel arrive and depart. Within an hour the pallets holding the Schlumberger tools were in place without a serious mishap. That is, the pallets weren't dropped or banged unusually hard against the rig structure during this particular unloading process.

The engineer had the operators begin connecting tools together and started checking tool operation. In this case, the job called for a Dual Induction log, a Formation Density log, a Sonic and a Dipmeter as well as some sidewall cores. Each tool type has to be connected together on the catwalk and fired up to assure its proper operation. That means two sets of every service must be checked out because the backup tools must also be validated. It took several hours to accomplish the job. Once the pre-checks were completed, the tools were set aside out of the way so they wouldn't interfere with the rig activities. Schlumberger personnel would now wait until the rig was ready to log. Some 24 hours had now elapsed since we climbed aboard the crew boat in Morgan City to begin the trip.

Soon the company geologist, whom our engineer would interface with, arrived via helicopter and verified the services to be run. The engineer, whom I'll call Bill for ease of discussion, got the necessary book work done including the number of field prints the geologist would want. He was ready whenever the rig was. In the meantime they would catch a little sleep. The geologist would notify them when the rig was out of the hole. After another 8 hour wait or so, the rig was ready and the Schlumberger crew went to work. Bill was experienced and went about his job in a

professional manner. The five services ordered required some 30 hours to accomplish even though the job was trouble free. Thus, it was late the next evening when the job was finished. The crew took showers and hit the sack. They would catch as much sleep as possible while waiting for the crew boat, which would take us back to Morgan City.

It was early morning, some 2 ½ days since our departure from Morgan City, when we climbed aboard the crew boat. This boat is designed to carry various types of crews from roughnecks to contractor crews to and from the rig. Quite often Schlumberger crews are fortunate enough to travel both ways by helicopter, which cuts down their time but has no effect on tool trip time. The crew boat is a high-powered motorboat, which can seat 20 or 30 people and travel at maybe 25 knots. This particular boat made an intermediate stop at another rig to pick up another crew before going on to Morgan City.

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I won't forget that because, my stomach had been fine until he tied up at the second platform. The waves tossed the crew boat up and down for the thirty minutes or so we were tied up. I was definitely feeling seasick when the pilot finally left the rig and headed for town. The boat would hit the waves head on, which made the ride rough but it didn't seem to upset my stomach. Our trip in took about 7 hours as opposed to 12 or so coming out. The crew time for the job was right at three days and the tool time would be another day or so. A Schlumberger flatbed truck would then be sent to pick them up after they arrived. Available engineering and operator staff would then check them out to be sure they were operational for the next job. Depending upon their status, they would be green tagged as operational and placed on a ready rack or red tagged as defective. If the latter situation occurred, an instrument technician would remedy the problem before placing them back in service with a green tag. Though the trip had been informative, I was glad to be back on shore and decided I would travel by air in the future.

HOUSE HUNTING

The first free weekend I had, I began to look around the city for a suitable place to live. Most of the engineers in the office lived on the West Bank with which I was somewhat familiar, so I began driving around that area. A little later,

Fred Williams put me in touch with a realtor he had used and she began showing me several houses on the West Bank in the area illustrated in figure 15-3. Actually, the area of interest extended a little further south and east from that, which is outlined. She was very helpful and I found several houses, which I thought would suit us but I was uneasy about living in such a congested area. I mean, it was definitely a big city atmosphere and Esther would be uncomfortable to say the least. She would prefer more of a small town environment if one was available within a practical commuting distance. I also had some concerns about the choice of schools in this area. Wyoming had good schools, in fact, among the best in the nation and I wanted the best available in the area for Tom. Private schools were available and apparently the best choice, but expensive. Public schools in and around New Orleans were not well thought of by other Schlumberger engineers in the though many utilized them

one-way price of 50¢. The causeway proper is 24 miles in length and isn't exactly an interesting

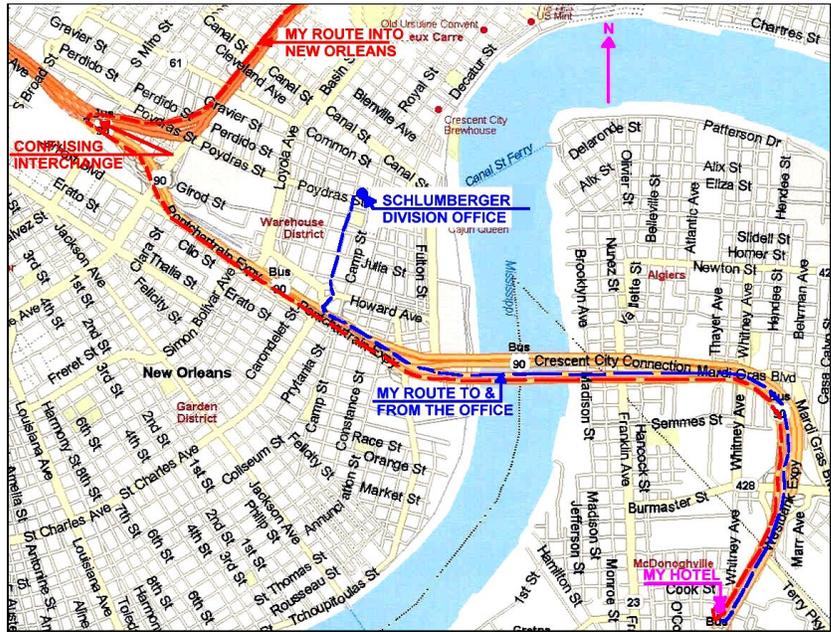


Figure 15-3 Map of New Orleans, illustrating the area on the West Bank where most of the Schlumberger engineers lived.

I guess I expressed my concerns to my real estate agent because she suggested I might want to look on the north side of Lake Pontchartrain near the small towns of Mandeville and Covington. The public school system there was considered among the best in Louisiana, whatever that meant. Well, I wasn't in a hurry but I did want to pin point at least a couple of areas to choose from before Esther came down to finalize the hunt a little later. I decided to use the next weekend to explore the area north of Lake Pontchartrain. My real estate agent put me in touch with an agent covering that area.

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Figure 15-4 Map of the areas surrounding Lake Pontchartrain.

Before I contacted the agent, I wanted to simply look the area over. The following Saturday I got up early and headed north across the causeway to Mandeville. It's a toll bridge with a

Saturday, the lake areas near the shores were full of sailboats. Obviously people were taking

advantage of a beautiful day and engaging in one of the more popular recreational pastimes of the area. One could also see fishing boats of various sorts throughout the lake with people gathering oysters, I supposed, or maybe engaging in a little Saturday morning fishing. In any case, it was a pleasant drive, interrupted only by the rhythmic staccato of the tires passing over the cracks, which separated the concrete sections of the bridge.

This was a noise that would soon punctuate my daily commute during the next 5 ½ years of my life. In later trips and with little else to do, I went so far as to count the number of cracks or concrete separations in the bridge. No, I didn't actually count everyone but I did count the number per mile and multiply by the number of miles taken to the closet tenth. I don't remember the answer but that will leave each of

shore of the lake, as outlined in figure 15-4 by the ellipse. My primary concern was to look around the area and decide if living conditions were worth the commute I would be faced with on a daily basis. Of course, the trip across the lake could probably be accomplished fairly fast; a half hour or so, while the remaining few miles from the south shore to the office would take that long again. I spent the better part of the day driving around Covington and Mandeville, through what sub-divisions I could find and getting a general feel for the area. Covington was the bigger of the two towns but the more attractive sub-divisions were in the Mandeville area. There were schools for grades 1 through 12 in both towns. Both were in St. Tammany Parish and had better than average reputations for Louisiana schools. As mentioned earlier, I worried about the schools because of Tommy. I

didn't feel we could afford a private school and consequently, wanted to find the best possible public schools.

I drove through three sub-divisions, which I found and illustrated on the map of figure 15-5. The areas in red were covered with woods, southern pine that is. I wasn't sure of the price range at this time but pretty well wrote off Tchefoncte Country Club because of the house sizes I observed. Both Covington Country Club and Belle Terre appeared to have at least some houses in my price range. While cruising around Covington, I checked the phone book to see if there were any LDS wards or branches in the area. There was a branch, which met in Covington but only the Branch President's name, address and phone were listed. I called and found their meeting times with Priesthood being at 9:00 AM followed by Sunday school at 11:00 AM. There was an hour cushion in between the two to allow the men to go home and get their families. Sacramento was in the evening at 7:00 PM, as I remember. The branch president's wife gave me this information. Her husband wasn't at home but she felt sure I would find his first counselor, by the name of Ketchum available. He lived near Mandeville in



you something to do should you ever have the opportunity of retracing my steps.

About an hour after leaving the hotel, I arrived in the Mandeville – Covington area on the north

the Covington Country Club sub-division on Bertel Drive. I wrote down his address and decided to stop by on my return to New Orleans. It was on my way and I wanted to check out that

sub-division again as well as the house in Belle Terre. I stopped by the latter sub-division first and made a second circuit through the various streets. Then I moved on down to Bertel Drive and found the Ketchum's house without any problem. After circling the sub-division and noting there was maybe a half dozen houses up for sale, half of which looked interesting, I decided to stop and meet the Ketchums.

I had known a family by the name of Ketchum several years earlier in the Denver area, though we weren't close acquaintances. I was almost floored as I recognized Ernie Ketchum, the counselor, as being the same person when he answered the door. He was as surprised as I and, after a little explanation of how we both managed to be in Louisiana, we sat down and talked for a while. He was in the specialty food business and traveled the southern U. S. selling to major grocery chains. He filled me in on the area including the schools, which, in his opinion, were significantly better than those in New Orleans proper. He also spoke of an older man by the name of Barton who was a member of the Church and lived several houses nearer the main road. In fact it was right next to one for sale, which he thought I might like to look at. The location of the available house, which we later bought, is shown in figure 15-6, as well as those of the Ketchums and the Bartons. I stopped by but it was empty and locked. I circled the house and peeked in a couple of windows to get an idea of its size and layout. If the price was right, it would be an interesting prospect. With my newfound information about the area, I decided to attend services at the branch the next day rather than in the New Orleans ward that I had attended previously.

Sunday found me up and on my way by about 7:30. I wanted to attend all three services to get acquainted and help me in my later decision-making. Of course, I was welcomed with open arms by the members. I'll admit to being a little dismayed at their meeting place, which was a section of a building in the county fairgrounds complex. My arrival was early enough to include my participation in cleaning the place up as well as setting up chairs for the meetings. This was apparently a weekly procedure, made necessary by the activities taking place the other six days

of the week. Even so, I was impressed with the friendliness of the people and realized we could be a real help to them should we settle in the area. Also, I felt Esther would be more at home in this environment, i.e. small town atmosphere, than she would ever be in New Orleans. Needless to say, the members of the branch twisted my arm in an effort to encourage the

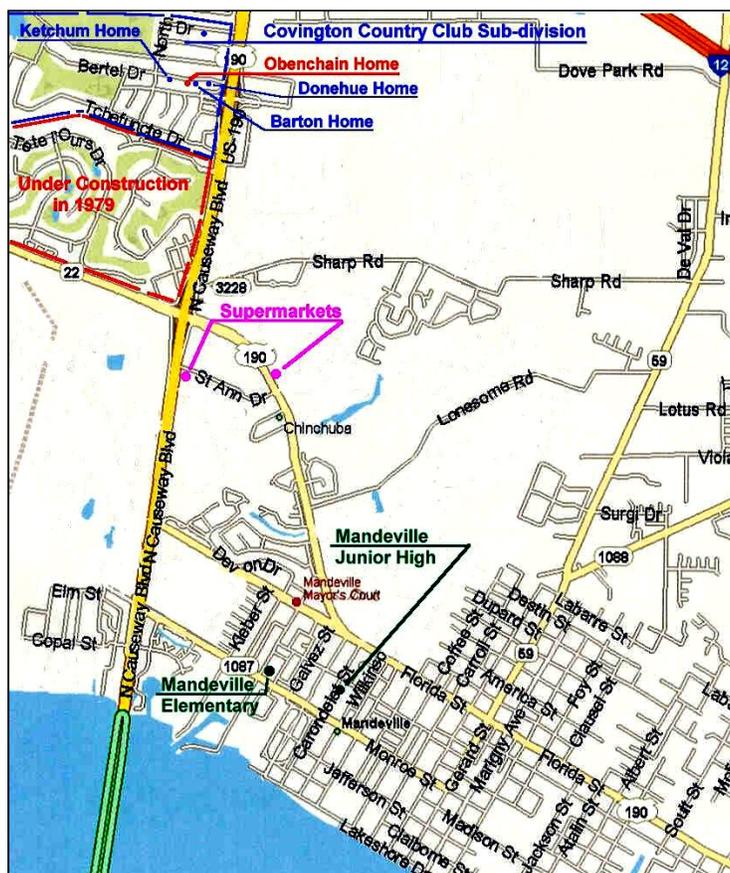


Figure 15-6 Map of Mandeville, Louisiana area, illustrating pertinent house locations, schools & stores.

right decision, at least in their eyes. Of course, I told them there would be no decision until Esther had looked the various areas and houses over. As for myself, I was leaning towards settling in St. Tammany Parish on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

ESTHER COMES TO TOWN

I don't remember the exact date that Esther came down to look at houses with me so we could make that fateful decision but it was probably in early March. I was still in the Hotel Sheraton but was making plans to vacate. In any case, she spent a couple of days with me as I showed her the city of New Orleans including the West Bank. She didn't like the idea of

settling in the big city, so to speak, even though she liked a couple of the houses we looked at. The traffic and business of a metro area frightened her. Though she had existed in Denver and probably could in New Orleans, it wasn't something she looked forward to. I had suspected that reaction but felt it important for her to see the city before going north of the lake. On the West bank we would be attending a church ward rather than a little branch as we would in the latter case. That didn't seem to bother her.

The second day we went north of the lake. I had contacted a realtor earlier and had seen several houses. One was in Belle Terre and three in the Covington Country Club. I even looked at one in Tchefuncte Country Club but it was definitely out of my price range.

Of all the houses I had looked at, I preferred the one next to Mr. Barton at 121 Bertel Drive. It was the one I had circled and peeked in that first day on the north shore. The price was about the amount we expected to get from our house in Casper. It had 3 bedrooms, two baths, a living room, and a dining room as well as dinette area in the kitchen, a den and a pantry. Additionally, it had a two-car garage. About the only negative, in my opinion, was the lack of convenient storage space. The

attic, which was accessed in the garage, was fairly roomy but difficult to get things into and out of. Even so, it would do, in my opinion, because

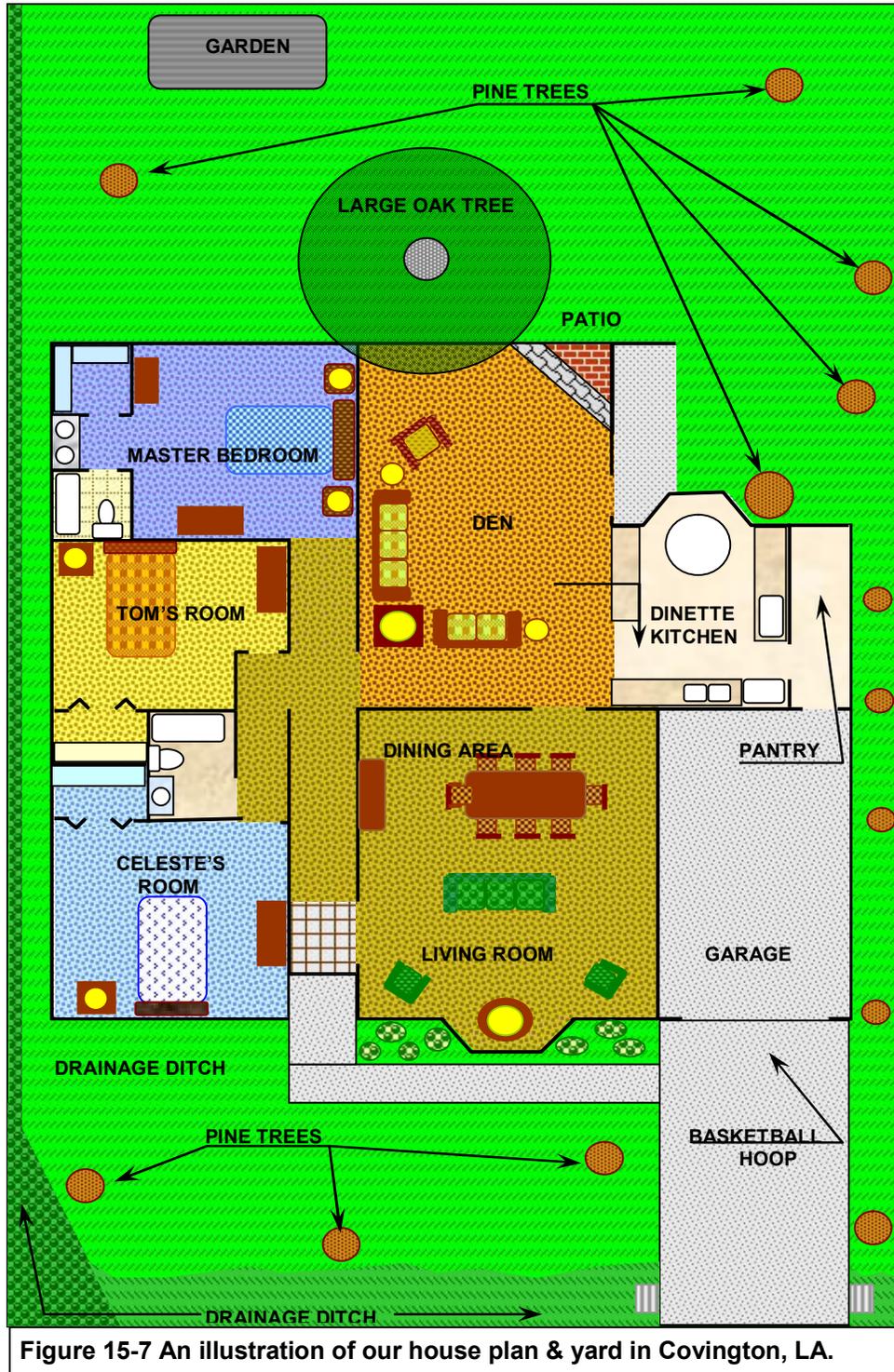


Figure 15-7 An illustration of our house plan & yard in Covington, LA.

I would only place things in there that would be used once a year, which would be Christmas decorations. I could suffer through that, at least if I managed to get in the Christmas spirit.

The realtor took us to the house in Belle Terre, which was two stories and had a nice yard. Esther thought it was nice but was anxious to see more. We then stopped in Covington Country Club and looked at the three houses that I had shown interest in there. She fell in love with the one of my choice because of the single level, the relatively large rooms and the general layout. I have illustrated the floor plan in figure 15-7. I had Esther's housing ideas pretty well pegged after 25 years of marriage, which by the way, were pretty close to my own.

The plan shown isn't to scale but gives a pretty good idea of the layout. The bedrooms were all relatively large compared to what we were used to out west. Even Tom's, the smallest, was probably 12x15. Esther especially loved the master bedroom with the walk in closet, something new to her, as well as the dressing area separated from the bath. Except for storage, as mentioned earlier, this was by far the nicest home we had had to date. We thoroughly enjoyed it during our 5-year stay in Louisiana. Figures 15-8 and 15-9 provide glimpses of the front of the house from two perspectives. Of course, we toured the Mandeville and Covington areas so as to acquaint her with the available shopping areas and the schools.

With Esther's approval, I closed the deal on the house after she left for Casper. It was, of course, contingent upon our selling the house in Casper. Schlumberger still had no system, other than paying the realtor's fee, for helping out with the sale of a residence upon an employee's transfer. I was, however, quite optimistic of a sale by early June, our scheduled moving date. Within a couple of days after Esther's departure, I moved to an apartment as explained earlier. Life went on and time passed rather quickly as I immersed myself in my work. I spent long hours in the office as well as on the road to Houston or visiting the various districts. I had been challenged to bring about improvement in our overall service to the industry, which seemed to hinge on three areas, namely engineers' technical ability through proper training, suitable transportation to and from the rigs and tool maintenance. Such improvement should manifest itself in a larger percentage of the

available market. A more immediate measurement was lost time per job but it didn't factor in the customer's reaction or satisfaction



Figure 15-8 Our Covington home from the northwest illustrating trees and basketball hoop.

with our service. Only time provided the answer to that through the customers' choice of a wire line service company. Once chosen, it was next



Figure 15-9 A more complete view in black & white of our home with our old Dodge wagon and my company car.

to impossible to get a customer to change. The process was time consuming and costly. Only extreme dissatisfaction with service could cause such a change but he might well punish the service company involved by placing a competitor's unit on a new platform. That punishment represented millions of dollars of

lost revenue for the wire line company involved. Consequently, service was a key issue.

MOVING DAY ARRIVES

Along about the middle of April, we got a suitable offer on our house in Casper with a convenient closing date in early June. Having to have the money invested in the Casper house for a down payment, I set the closing date in Mandeville about a week later. I also scheduled the moving van to arrive the day after we closed in Casper. In early June, I headed north by plane in a rather excited mood. Soon I would have my family back, which for me, was the primary joy in living. I even looked forward to my commute across Lake Pontchartrain because it meant being together again.

We finalized the closure in Casper and the next day North American showed up to load our belongings. It was a cold, rather windy day with a light snow falling. The loading went smoothly and by nightfall we were cleaning up the remains. Esther prided herself in leaving a clean house. In that sense, I've never known anyone so thoughtful of those about to take over other people's real estate than Esther. The house was impeccable when we headed for dinner and the motel, and we, of course, were bushed. The thought of a nice shower and a good bed became our primary motives. We would get an early start and, hopefully, make it to Colby, Kansas the next day, roughly a third of the way.

After dropping off the last house key with the realtor the next morning and grabbing a little breakfast, we headed south to Denver some 300 miles away. It was another 150 miles to the Kansas line and Colby was about fifty miles beyond that. We would arrive a little late because of a slow start and muddling our way through Denver. The big Dodge station wagon was loaded to the hilt with necessities while we waited on the movers in Covington. Besides Esther, Tom, Celeste and myself we had two dogs, namely Cuddles and Pepper. The latter one, Pepper, was only a few months old, having been acquired while I was in New Orleans. We had to stop every little bit to let him out to tinkle and smell the surrounding countryside. We cruised along without any trouble other than the usual potty breaks and were approaching Burlington, Colorado when Pepper began nosing around the car. Keep in mind, he was just a little

He paused on the back of my neck and the kids said, "Isn't that cute"? About that time I felt a warm streak going down my back.

pup and cute as a bug's ear. Esther said, "I think he needs to potty" and I replied, "We aren't too far from a gas stop in Burlington. We'll let him out there". It was dark and cold outside and I didn't want to make unnecessary stops. Well, he climbed around the car over one person and then another finally ending up on the back of the front seat. He wobbled over to me and climbed along my shoulders, apparently heading for my left shoulder next to the door. He paused on the

back of my neck and the kids said, "Isn't that cute"? About that time I felt a warm streak going down my back. The little devil was peeing all over me as if to emphasize, "I told you I

had to go and you wouldn't stop, so take this". Needless to say, I wheeled over to the shoulder of the road and took him out pronto. The kids and Esther got a bang out the so-called accident, as they said. "Accident, baloney, he was making a point", but I must admit, his fluid response had left me with a warm feeling one doesn't get every day. Well, I had Esther soak up the evidence with some Kleenex and after being sure both dogs were relieved in every way, we continued on to Colby and a motel. From that moment on, I kept an evil eye on Pepper and if he even winced, I would pull over and make him pee. It might take a few extra minutes, some of which were unnecessary but those precautions proved worthwhile the next couple of days. The last thing I wanted was another shower, no matter how warm and pleasant.

The next morning we headed east once more to Salina, Kansas and then south on 81. Interstate 135 was only in the planning stages at that time and I-35 to Oklahoma City was still under construction. Kansas isn't exactly an awe-inspiring state in terms of scenery and the kids' comments reflected their boredom. I knew the landscape of eastern Oklahoma and Arkansas contained more hills and trees and assured them of a better tomorrow. This knowledge or hope of a better tomorrow seemed to satisfy them and temporarily ameliorate the situation. I wasn't, however, aware of the show Mother Nature had prepared for the afternoon. As we approached the Oklahoma line, a real nasty looking storm cloud reared its ugly head, placing us on a collision course with it. Though not an expert, I had seen a tornado in Texas as well as in news portrayals of photos and television reports. In my view, this cloud had all the

earmarks of such a storm except no visible funnel at this point. I watched intently, as we drew near, almost expecting one to pop up at any instant. I didn't say anything to Esther or the kids, not wanting to frighten them unnecessarily. Within minutes the cloud was on top of us with the rain and hail coming down in buckets. I could hardly see the road and turned the headlights on while slowing to 5 or 10 miles per hour. Several cars were pulled off alongside the road but I saw no point in doing that. As far as funnels were concerned, our fate lay in the hands of the Lord and my chances were just as good moving as stationary.

I nursed the old wagon along at a snail's pace, hoping the downpour would ease in a few minutes. Unfortunately, it continued for some time, maybe a half an hour, before letting up to a point where I could bring our speed back up to something approaching the speed limit.

I kept wondering all the while whether an imbedded and unseen tornado would suddenly lift us up like Alice in Wonderland and carry us off to some place in the far reaches of Kansas. As it turned out, my concern was the closest we came to a tornado, even though there may have been one or more associated with the storm. However, by the time things returned to normal, it was dark and we still had 100 miles yet to go before arriving at our projected motel site in Oklahoma City. I breathed a sigh of relief and didn't even complain about the areas of construction, which popped up all along the way. At least they weren't funnel shaped and only produced a little bouncing as we negotiated the terrain, which they dominated. By the time we checked in and ate, it was about time to retire, where we replayed the day's events in our dreams.

We got an early start out of Oklahoma City and headed east on I-40. Soon we were in hill country and trees began to dot the landscape, as I had promised. At some point, which isn't clear to me at this time, we angled south to intersect I-20 in east Texas or Louisiana. The map isn't too helpful because the roads have changed so much in the intervening 30 years. As I remember, the east-west interstates were pretty well completed but those going north and south either weren't started or were still under construction. In any case, I remember arriving in Shreveport and angling southeast to Baton

Rouge on Louisiana 1. Though the rolling hills had disappeared, the piney woods continued with scattered open areas along the way. Just west of Baton Rouge we intersected US 190 and then I-10. On the south side of Baton Rouge we headed eastward on I-12, completing the last 60 miles of a long day to Covington. There we found a motel where we crashed and stayed until the arrival of our furniture a few days later.

Before going back to Casper for the move, I had purchased new furniture for the master bedroom and the den as well as a new side-by-side refrigerator. These were in place when the other furniture arrived and before we knew it, the place was just like home. Tom made friends with a kid across the street as well as David

I kept wondering all the while whether an imbedded and unseen tornado would suddenly lift us up like Alice in Wonderland and carry us off to some place in the far reaches of Kansas.

Ketchum who lived a few houses down on Bertel. We became well acquainted with the Bartons, our next-door neighbors and Esther began to negotiate the surrounding territory for groceries and

household odds and ends. Before a week had passed, we all had callings in the local branch of the Church. Besides the Ketchums and Bartons, we met other fine people there including Roy and Ellavieve Jenkins. By the time we left Covington, we had become good friends with them. Celeste stayed with us until August before leaving for BYU as a junior in college but was now less reluctant to leave than in 1973.

CHURCH RELATED ACTIVITIES

As it had been in Casper, the Church played a major role in our lives. As most members know, small branches always seem to be friendlier than big wards. Everyone knows everyone else and all seem to have one or more callings in which they serve. Covington was no exception. Before long, we felt right at home. I continued to serve in the Branch Presidency as a counselor with Ernie Ketchum and President, Johnny Bankston for the full time we lived there. Esther began teaching in Primary, as I recollect. I also functioned as the Young Men's president for a time and she was later called as the Relief Society President, a demanding calling for any woman. At that time, Primary was held on Tuesday afternoon with Young Men/Young Women programs on Wednesday evenings. I know we always had a couple of callings along with our home and visiting teaching. Sacrament was still held on Sunday evening with

Priesthood and Sunday school in the morning. Church callings and frequent socials of one kind or another seemed to dominate our social life.

You may have noticed in figure 15-5, that there are three locations designated respectively as LDS Church 1, 2 and 3. I have mentioned the meeting place, LDS Church 1, in the fairgrounds when I first arrived. We continued to meet there for about a year making the best of some very poor circumstances. In the summer of 1976 Johnny Bankston managed to lease an old church building from a Pentecostal group. It wasn't great but definitely head and shoulders above the facilities we were in. We probably stayed there two years before getting a building of our own approved or LDS Church 3. The church had owned the land for the latter for some time but the branch was unable to raise sufficient funds to justify building on it. We were meeting in the second location when mother, Madeleine, Delight and Connie stopped by on their way home from Washington D. C., as I remember. I'll have more to say about their visit and how much we enjoyed it later.

CHURCH OUTINGS AND SOCIALS

As I indicated earlier, the people of the Covington Branch were extremely friendly and made every effort to socialize and become better friends as well as carry out the work of the Church. Socials occurred on a regular basis, about once a month as I remember, and generally consisted of a potluck held at the meetinghouse. Of course, when we were still housed in the building at the fairgrounds, such was not possible because of the limited use we had of their facilities. In those early days, we had such socials at the Bankstons whose home was situated on the north side of Covington. We also had such a social at the Ketchums' home nearby, a sister's house in Folsom, which is northwest of Covington and even at a single brother's home, Bobby Landrum, northeast of Covington. The latter social occurred the first summer and consisted more of a picnic and associated games and activities. I point out the varied locations to demonstrate the involvement of the members, even though they were few in number. We were a close-knit group. Once we moved into the old Pentecostal church building, we had room to hold potlucks there.

At times, in good weather, various socials were held at state parks and other available facilities where the kids had room to play and work off some of the energy they had stored up. A

couple of such outings were held in the Riverside State Park whose location is identified in figure 15-5. The park wasn't heavily used, at least during the times we were there, and the facilities were top-notch. Another state park, called Fontainebleau, lay just to the east of Mandeville, bordering Lake Pontchartrain. It had campsites available as well as picnic sites. The primary organization and the young men-young women organizations held some day long and overnight events there as well. All in all, such activities were a definite success because of member participation considering the limited membership of the branch.

A FATHER SON OUTING

Father and son outings, which typically take place in May on the weekend commemorating the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, were always a source of great fun for Tom and me. Though the best times seemed to be in Casper according to my memory, we had one particular outing while in Louisiana, which was memorable. I believe it was in May of 1977 when we spent a Friday night and Saturday in Mississippi with the Aaronic Priesthood of the branch. Unlike Casper, the branch was on its own. That is, the other units and stake

Another state park, called Fontainebleau, lay immediately to the east of Mandeville, bordering Lake Pontchartrain.

organization didn't participate. We traveled to the northeast of Covington some distance into Mississippi to an area where one of the members had grown up. We were deep in the piney woods with nothing but a couple of very small towns in the area. Looking at a map of Mississippi, I would assume the area involved was in the De Soto National Forest, which is in the right direction and about the right distance away. In any case, the campsite was on a ridge overlooking a nice little creek but, of course, the water wasn't safe to drink. We hauled our own water along with other camping supplies. Tom and I had a little tent for our sleeping bags, which kept the worst of the bugs out as well as the rain. Actually, I don't remember any rain coming down that night but the area was muddy from a recent rain storm. It would be risky, to say the least, to camp out without a tent because rain along the gulf coast is very frequent and often heavy as well. It can come with little warning and turn a day of scattered clouds into a gully washer.

That evening, each family had to fend for themselves, as far as dinner was concerned, or join with someone else. Later, we had a campfire, sang a few songs and told stories to round out the evening. The next morning, we had a community breakfast with the branch presidency doing the cooking. I began cooking the hotcakes. As my kids know, I like my batter rather thick so the pancakes will rise to a nice light consistency but Ernie Ketchum didn't. He preferred a real thin batter, which produced crepe Suzette or thin leather like cake, which he would then roll up with jam or fruit inside. He kept trying to add water to the batter and I wouldn't let him. I told him as long as I was cooking the batter would be according to my design. After most of the kids had eaten, I fixed my pancakes and left the grill. I noticed almost immediately that Ernie went over, thinned the batter down and cooked himself and his kids some crepe Suzette he considered so good.

The kids spent the morning exploring the area. There was a deep gully to one side of us that led down to the creek. It had no running water in it but was plenty muddy and steep. Anyhow, the kids were a mess in a short time and tried to negotiate the steep sides of the gully, which were like grease. When they came back to camp, they looked like they had submerged themselves in a mud hole. Luckily, most everyone had a change of clothes and were able to clean up a little.

Later, we all hiked down the ridge along a trail to the creek. It was a clear and pretty little stream running along a rock and sandy bottom. It surprised me because every stream I had seen

A phase one building would cost about \$240,000 at that time (1975) and the branches part, as I remember, was \$72,000. Of that, some \$50,000 was in the bank.

before in that part of the country was slow moving, lazy and so muddy a person couldn't see bottom anywhere. All the kids had a ball splashing and generally raising cane. It wasn't deep enough to swim in but they managed to get completely soaked. The adults simply enjoyed the beautiful day and the surrounding scenery. It was a beautiful place to spend the afternoon. Sometime later, about three, I would guess, we hiked back up to the cars, loaded up and headed back for Covington. That part of Mississippi is beautiful because of the rolling hills and greenery but too moist for me.

We arrived home, tired and ready for a good home cooked supper. Esther had things going

and we didn't have to wait long. It was a fun day and overall outing but camping in the southeast isn't anywhere near the quality of what we experience out west. The humidity is too high making summertime a bear. If one camps out in that part of the country, it better be in the spring, fall or in an air-conditioned travel home.

FINAL BUILDING FUND RAISING

During the seventies, a given church unit had to raise 30% of the cost of a building before Church Headquarters would approve its construction and kick in the remaining 70%. Buildings could be built in phases, which allowed smaller branches to build a facility meeting their needs and expand it as membership grew. Such was the situation in Covington. They had acquired a nice piece of land, designated as LDS Church 3 in figure 15-5 but the fund raising efforts seemed to have stagnated. A phase one building would cost about \$240,000 at that time (1975) and the branches part, as I remember, was \$72,000. Of that, some \$50,000 was in the bank. People were asked to make a monthly building donation to make the building become a reality. In fact we were asked to make a yearly commitment, which we paid by the month. During the first couple of years we were there, the fund grew to roughly \$60,000. People wanted a new building in the worst way but in general, the average income of the members was too low to expect any large donation. I suspect the Obenchain family was among the better off families attending there. In any case, it

seemed the realization of a building was still 3 or 4 years away. We talked the problem over in our branch presidency meetings and decided to

hold a special meeting with the members to see if anything could be done.

Members were asked to fast that particular Sabbath and attend a special meeting right after Sunday school for the express purpose of discussing the building fund. President Bankston conducted the meeting and gave a summary of the building fund efforts and status. Several people followed President Bankston and made remarks regarding the efforts that had been made to date as well as the need for a "building of our own" so to speak. This input along with an unusually spiritual prayer at the beginning of the meeting seemed to invite the Spirit to be with us. Someone stood, bore

testimony of the sacred nature of the work we were involved in and committed a definite amount of money to the fund. Others followed, each giving as much as they thought they could. One single sister, who lived alone, had planned to have her little house painted with money she had saved. Her house had been in bad need of paint for some time. She stood and committed the amount required for labor, some \$700, if members would help her do the painting. Almost immediately the young men's president volunteered to get a group together and accomplish the task. Others then stood and committed definite amounts with comments about what they had been saving for. It seemed every adult member present stood and committed an amount of money, which was commensurate with their financial ability.

The meeting went on for a couple of hours and ended with President Bankston's concluding remarks. He had tallied the commitments made and announced that some \$10,000 had been pledged towards the fund and when collected, we could request authorization to begin building our own meetinghouse. What a wonderful day that was. I have never been moved more strongly by such a spirit of sacrifice coming from people of every walk of life, except, I suppose, the well to do. There were no such individuals among us and it was apparent that everyone was making a sacrifice to make their particular contribution.

Well, the money was raised and authorization to begin building was given soon thereafter. Plans were provided by the building committee in Salt Lake regarding its floor plan, placement and associated parking facilities. The men and youth of the ward spent a couple of Saturdays clearing the land and marking trees we wanted to keep as part of the landscaping. Within a year or so, we were moving into the building with obvious pleasure on the part of all. This effort had really brought the people of the branch closer together, which resulted in an even friendlier atmosphere, if such were possible. Of course, the building was completely paid for and dedicated, as all meetinghouses are, before being occupied.

A PERSONAL CHURCH SERVICE EXPERIENCE

I include this experience, which occurred in the spring of 1978 if my memory is accurate,

because it seems related to a later health problem of mine diagnosed in Denver in 1982. The new building was complete and we had moved in some time before, probably in the fall of 1977. The priesthood was engaged in a cleanup project of the Church property surrounding the building but outside the landscaped area. It involved cutting out brush, small trees and even felling a few bigger ones. I felt normal in both mind and body when I left the house for the project on a Saturday morning. I won't say I was full of vim and vigor but I certainly hadn't noticed any signs of sickness.

In any case, I began participating in the brush cutting and associated piling up of the same for later burning when I began to feel dizzy and weak. It surprised me because I had been involved in similar projects earlier as well as some relatively hard labor around my own house without any such symptoms. I went into the building and got a drink of water before resting a little to get my strength back. I realized that there was no reason for such weakness in terms of the physical exertion I had put forth but wrote it off as some sort of bug affecting me. Soon my strength seemed to return and I felt okay again.

One single sister, who lived alone, had planned to have her little house painted with money she had saved. ... She stood and committed the amount required for labor, some \$700, if members would help her do the painting.

After returning to the work area, I don't believe I had worked more than five or ten minutes before the same experience was repeated. Once again I

made my way to the building and repeated my previous actions. However, this time I didn't return quite so quickly. After about a half hour I went back out and very carefully went about doing a few things here and there that didn't require any significant exertion. I managed to stick around most of the morning, leaving just before the project wound up. Whether anyone noticed my minimal contribution or not, I suppose I will never know. I never told anyone including Esther because, I didn't want to get her worked up. From that time on until the summer of 1980 I never had a similar occurrence, at least to that degree but I do remember not feeling really up to par. I also remember fighting sleep at the office most afternoons following lunch unless engaged in conversations or activities, which tend to keep a person mentally involved. It wasn't unusual for me to get out of my chair and walk around a little before going back to concentrate on a problem. Such an effort seemed to revitalize me for a period. I

decided my age was finally getting to me even though I was just fifty and didn't bother to go to a doctor. I would begin exercising more because I needed to lose weight, as well.

Looking back, I realize my failure to check in with a doctor was rather stupid but I had always been healthy and didn't believe in doctors' visits unless I couldn't whip some bug or infection myself. In the summer of 1979 I went to the doctor for some reason, which now escapes me and was diagnosed as having high blood pressure in addition to the bug I was carrying. I made a mental note of it but did nothing. To cap this little story off, I was diagnosed and treated by our family doctor, this time, in Denver for hypertension (1980), which occurred, once again, in conjunction with some sickness.

In 1982, I was diagnosed as being a diabetic and after learning about some of the symptoms, realized I had experienced at least one of them while in Louisiana. I had noticed a kind of tingling in my feet and a small amount of numbness, probably caused by poor circulation. When I became diabetic, I don't know but that problem along with the hypertension diagnosed earlier undoubtedly contributed to the general lethargic feeling I had been experiencing in the last few years. Whether the incident at the church building was also related to one or both of these conditions, I don't really know but such is certainly possible. If there is a moral to that story, it must be, "Wake up and use your head stupid; avoiding a doctor won't prove you're still healthy and virile but may, instead, prove to be the death of you".

A CALLING TO THE STAKE HIGH COUNCIL

About the summer or fall of 1979, Johnnie Bankston was released as Branch President and Ernie and me as his counselors. Right now the names of our replacements escape me, as do many other things at this age. About this time Ernie and his family moved west to Arizona, I believe. As for Johnnie and me, any ideas of a life of ease, in terms of church service, were soon obliterated. Within a couple of weeks we were both called to the New Orleans Stake High Council. For the uninitiated, the council consists of 12 Melchizedek priesthood holders serving under the direction of the stake presidency, which is made up of a president and his two counselors. They have a variety of duties in the Church, including speaking assignments in the various wards and branches as well as training assignments and supervisory assignments of

the various stake organizations. The calling is somewhat less demanding than that of a bishop or even a branch president in most cases but it does include two meetings a month, in our case on Saturday mornings and frequent travel to other stake units. We met at the stake building located in Metairie, Louisiana on the south bank of Lake Pontchartrain, a distance of 26 miles from my house. The stake included units in the New Orleans area primarily, with one outlying branch in Morgan City. Generally we attended our home ward or branch once a month and other units the other three Sundays. Thus, it meant quite a bit of time away from the family on Sundays. I wasn't thrilled with the calling because it meant speaking at a different unit each month, an activity I still wasn't exactly comfortable with. In my home ward I wasn't really too nervous but speaking before other units, with anywhere from 50 to 200 people present, definitely taxed my confidence. However, I considered it a learning experience and struggled, as usual, to turn in an acceptable performance. I held this calling until my transfer back to Denver in the summer of 1980, a period of about 8 or 9 months.

LIKE POSTMEN OF OLD, RAIN COULD NOT DETOUR US FROM OUR APPOINTED DUTY

As a kid I used to hear the old adage that "The postman always makes his appointed rounds regardless of the weather". Some of that commitment must have rubbed off on Johnnie Bankston and me, as demonstrated by the following experience and illustrated in the map of figure 15-11.

Rain is a regular occurrence in Louisiana as even one such as I, reared in the desert climate of the west, could well imagine. However, I wasn't really prepared for the 16+ inches we received one spring in a period of just 24 hours. It began to come down Friday while I was at work and created havoc with the evening rush hour. I left for home a little early fully realizing the trip time would be lengthy. Such a drive typically took a little over an hour even though I negotiated some side streets in the New Orleans-Metairie area to avoid freeway traffic. This night I decided to stay with the freeway because of the rain throughout much of the day. One never knew just what to expect in the local neighborhoods, in terms of flooded intersections but the freeway would at least be high and free of that problem. Of course, the freeway was more crowded than usual and we proceeded at

a snail's pace all the way to the causeway. As a result, the commute home was especially tiring but hardly boring. As I remember, I walked in the door about 7:00 PM that night.

It rained all Friday night. I got up about seven and looked out on a lake in my front yard. The slab for the house was, of course, on high

highways being higher than the general terrain, we felt we could make it all right. He would pick me up about 9:00 AM.

Soon Johnnie and I were on our way to Metairie. As he had predicted, the highway sat up out of the water and we sailed across Lake Pontchartrain without a hitch. There, things

changed rapidly. Causeway Boulevard was high and dry but as soon as we turned on to Esplanade Avenue we were in trouble. The map of Metairie in figure 15-11 illustrates the streets under normal conditions and after the rain. Johnnie cautiously made his way west on Esplanade along the north side of the canal. The canal proper was probably 10 feet deeper than the roadways on either side. Fortunately, some weeds between the canal and the road stood with their tops out of the water. These, where present, marked the edge of the canal. Johnnie stayed well to the right side of the road and moved slowly west towards Richland Avenue where the stake center was located. We probably moved about 5 miles an hour along Esplanade. I made the remark to Johnnie that I hoped the water had receded by the time the meeting was over because the bridges across the canal were only marked by the railings sticking out of the water. A person crossing the same would have to have faith that they were intact because the floor was under water. I should clarify things here by telling you that the two roads on either side of the canal constituted a boulevard with each one being a one-way street. Well,

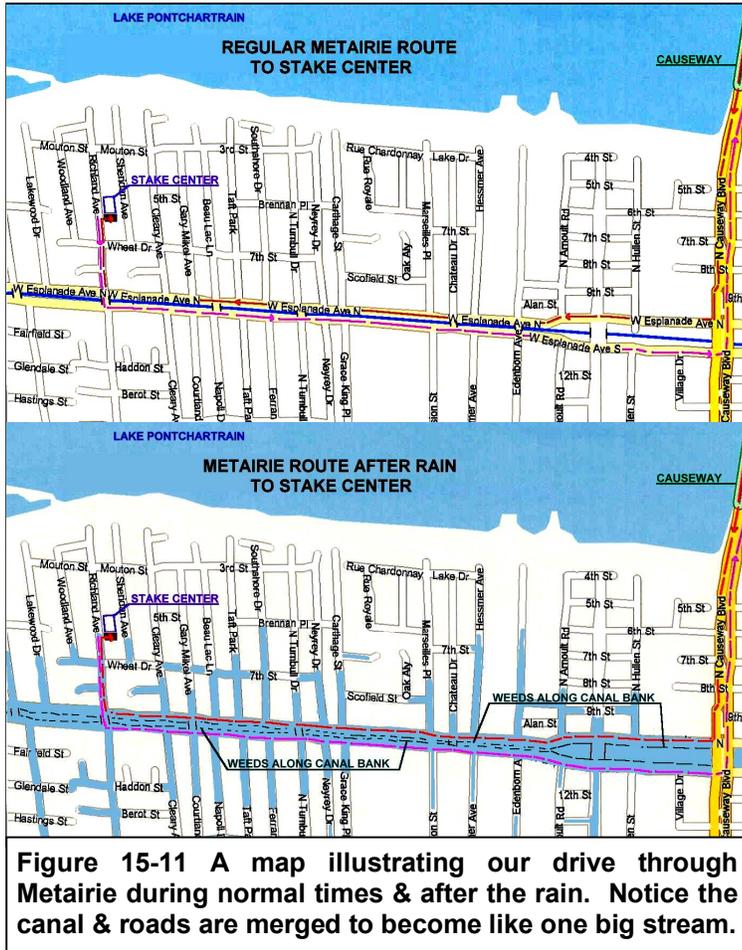


Figure 15-11 A map illustrating our drive through Metairie during normal times & after the rain. Notice the canal & roads are merged to become like one big stream.

ground by design. There was a little grass showing next to the house in front. I walked to the den and saw about the same thing. The drainage ditch to the east of the house concerned me, so I checked it by looking out of the window from Tom's bedroom. The water was right up next to the slab on this side. I went outside where I could get a better look and observed that we had about 4 inches before it would begin seeping inside. Fortunately, the rain seemed to be letting up. Hopefully, the worst was over. Esther and I were having breakfast when the phone rang. It was Johnnie Bankston. After talking for a while, we decided to go ahead and try to get to our scheduled high council meeting at the stake center. With the

Johnnie agreed and we continued on to the stake center.

Well, no one was there. Obviously, they had canceled the meeting but no one had bothered to let us know. Of course, the phones may have been out around the city. In any case we started back for Mandeville with our big challenge being our return to the causeway boulevard. Arriving back at the intersection of Richland and Esplanade, we had to make that crossing we had talked about earlier. Johnnie inched his way up to the bridge in the center of the railings and we stopped to see if we could tell anything about the condition of the bridge. We didn't want to get out of the car because the water was from 12 to 18 inches deep. Each of us looked at

the flowing water and agreed that it appeared to be flowing across the floor of the bridge. That is, there was a little turbulence in that part of the stream. He edged the car out on to the bridge and everything seemed normal, so he moved on across while we both held our breath. We had the windows down; ready to swim out of the car if the bridge gave way. Soon we were securely on the other side and heaved a big sigh of relief. From here, we knew we could slowly make our way back to the Causeway Boulevard and home without any trouble. It was about noon when Johnnie dropped me off at the house where I shared my experience with Esther, while he went on home.

FAMILY VACATIONS AND OUTINGS

During our five and a half years in Louisiana, we had the opportunity to take several different vacations in the southeast as well as our trips out west to reunions and such. Some of these included Celeste when she was home from BYU and in one case Valerie as she waited to join Jared in Germany. I'll recount them as accurately as I can but they may not be in chronological order.

The New Orleans area was really new to all of us. Though Esther and I had spent 4 years at Biloxi, Mississippi just 75 miles to the east, we were only in New Orleans once, that being when Esther arrived from Idaho in the early fall of 1951. Consequently, we had much to explore and a lot to learn regarding history, cuisine and Cajun people. We often took advantage of any spare time and drove around the area, stopping to eat at some out of the way place. We might ride a ferry, visit an antebellum home or simply check the local sights, which varied from the floral beauty of the area to river bridges and the oil rigs, which were being prepared for the gulf.

CHALMETTE HISTORICAL PARK

The historical park, which commemorates the Battle of New Orleans in the war of 1812; is located in Chalmette, LA just east of the New Orleans' city center, as illustrated in the map of figure 15-12. We decided to visit the battlefield one weekend, as well as give Tom his first ride on a ferry. After heading south across the causeway, through New Orleans and across the Mississippi River Bridge to Algiers, we traveled

due east to the ferry, as illustrated on the map. I remember explaining to Tom and Esther how we were really traveling east to get to the west bank of the Mississippi. That always causes a furor. Everyone thinks the river flows north to south but the general trend in the New Orleans area is west to east with some meanders flowing north. It's somewhat like mom's joke she loved to tell us, i.e. "Blackberries are red when they are green". You may remember that the mighty Mississippi flows north at that particular point as described earlier and illustrated, once again, on the map. We talked about the majority of the City of New Orleans being below sea level and the fact that numerous big pumps were used to move the rainwater and other waste into the river. Only the areas near the river, especially in the bends where the current slowed, were actually above the normal river level. These resulted from seasonal flooding with its resultant silt deposition and formed natural, though broken, levees. Of course, man, i.e. the "Corp of Engineers", have now supplemented the natural levees so as to control the river. In the

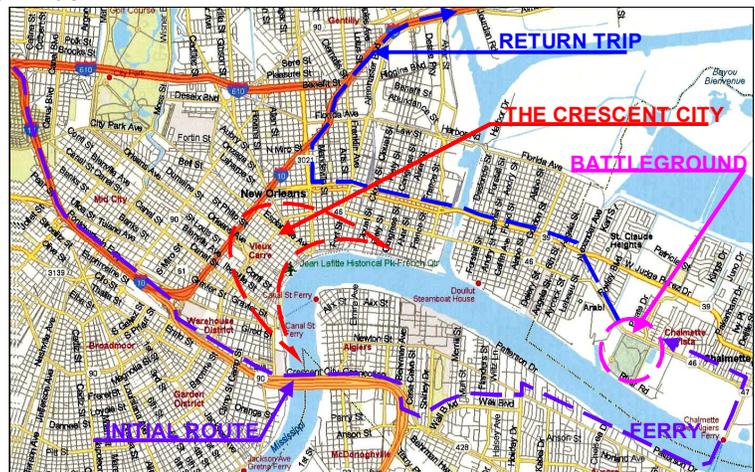


Figure 15-12 An illustration of our trip to the Battle of New Orleans Battleground and the original crescent city.

early days, however, natural high ground in the form of a crescent existed at each curve in the river, as outlined in red in figure 15-12. The land further away from the river was nothing but mosquito infested swampland, lying below sea level with periodic flooding by the river and the sea. It has now been drained and protected by dykes or levees on all sides and constitutes the majority of the modern city. However, the original city of New Orleans was built on the crescent of land shown in figure 15-12, which earned it the nickname of "The Crescent City".

In that part of town, you will find the “French Quarter”, including the Cabildo, which was the seat of Spanish municipal government. It was built in 1795 to 1799 and was also the site of the signing of the Louisiana Purchase Transfer in 1803. Next door or actually just across Pirate Alley to the northeast, is the St. Louis Cathedral of similar vintage. Jackson Square, a park, lies in front of the cathedral between Chartres and Decatur streets. The photo of figure 15-13 was taken from the riverbank looking towards the cathedral with the Cabildo and its tower appearing to the left. The map of figure 15-14 is an enlargement of the crescent area seen in figure 15-12. It identifies the locations of the landmarks discussed as well as a few others, which I’ll ignore for the time being.

While discussing the topography of New Orleans, we crossed the Mississippi River Bridge and made our way eastward to the Westbank landing for the Algiers – Chalmette ferry. We had to wait a while until the ferry returned, so Tom and I stood on the landing watching the river traffic. Good sized ships were going and coming on the river to the port of New Orleans as were a couple of paddle wheel steamers carrying tourists. Before long, we recognized the ferry returning and walked back

rather wide eyed as he took in all the sights. The crossing itself couldn’t have taken much more than 5 or 10 minutes but the loading and unloading lengthened our time considerably. However, we were soon disembarking on the



Figure 15-13 A view from the Mississippi River looking across Jackson Square towards the St. Louis Cathedral & the Cabildo’s tower on the left.

Chalmette or east bank of the Mississippi just east of the battlefield.

After stopping for a little lunch, we made our way to the Chalmette Historical Battlefield, which was

supposedly the site of the final battle for control of New Orleans. Although the battle, wherein the British were defeated, occurred on January 8, 1815, the peace treaty was actually signed on December 24, 1814. I guess, communication between command centers and field forces; wasn’t that swift in those days. The battleground is interesting, providing a restoration of the American defenses as well as the story line for the battle, which occurred over a period of a few days. I have included two different illustrations of the battle in figure 15-15 as depicted by artists at some later date. I also included a photo of the re-enactment of the battle in figure 15-16. The brother of our ancestor David Collins, whose name was Benjamin, fought in the battle. He also marched to and from

Kentucky under the command of Jackson for the honor of such participation. In terms of comfort, I suppose, the only thing in their favor was the time of year, which at least eliminated the sweltering humidity and maybe some of the bugs that dominate Louisiana’s environment.

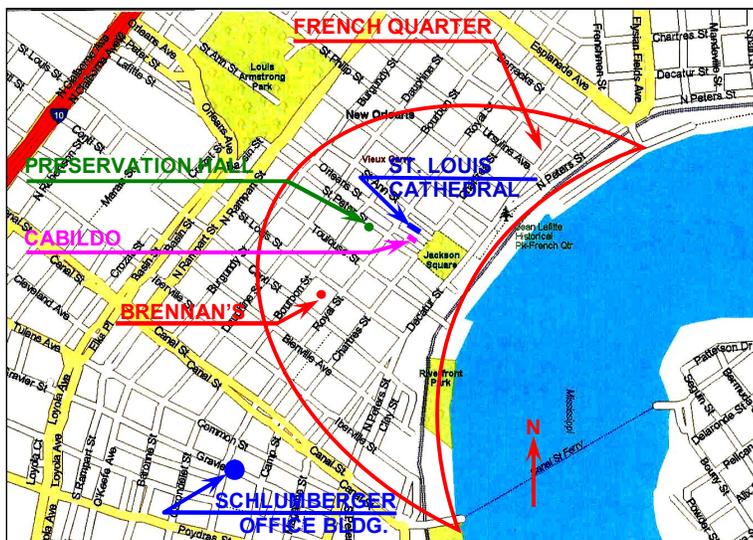


Figure 15-14 A larger scale map of the French Quarter or the original Crescent City with some landmarks.

to the car as it approached the dock. After loading on, we walked around the ferry, peering into the wheelhouse while observing our progress. The river is probably a mile+ wide at this point and obviously deep enough to accommodate good-sized ships. Tom was

As I remember, we spent a couple of hours between the visitors' center and the American defenses before heading home via an alternate route around the east side of Lake Pontchartrain. Upon reaching Slidell, one could swing back west to Covington via I-12 or US 90, which was a two-lane road. We usually took the slower scenic route on US 90 unless we were in a hurry.

A NAVAL AIR SHOW

In those days, Tom was excited about seeing anything of military interest from battleships to armor and particularly air shows. He began lobbying for a family outing to include the event when he heard the "Blue Angels would be performing in the annual air show being held at the Naval Air Station in Belle Chasse. I don't think Esther was too excited with the idea but I liked it because of the precision flying and various stunts, which would be held. It didn't take long to convince Esther that such an effort would make a good Memorial Day outing. I have included another map of the Belle Chasse area in figure 15-17, which identifies the Naval Air Station as well as our maintenance center nearby. I'll refer to it now for the air show and maybe later, as well, for my trips to and from the maintenance center.

Being the end of May, the weather was becoming hot and the humidity was already 110%, if that is possible. The 10% may be an exaggeration but it always ran near 100% after May first. Living in New Orleans was much like, sitting in a giant sauna bath, with the realization

We lived in air-conditioned houses, rode in air-conditioned cars and worked in air-conditioned

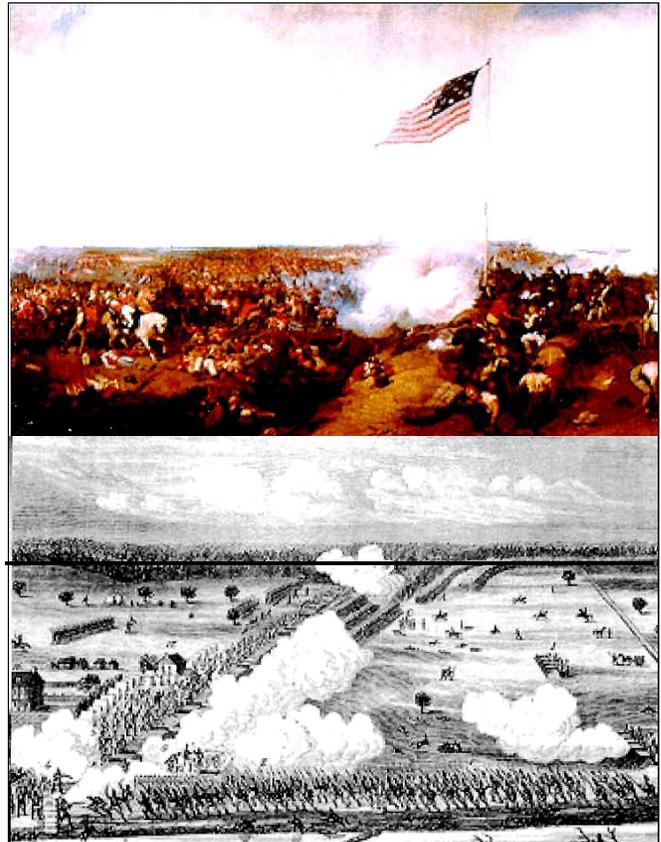


Figure 15-15 Two illustrations of the "Battle of New Orleans" depicted by artists at a later date.



Figure 15-16 A re-enactment of the Battle of New Orleans at the Chalmette Battlefield.

that there would be no cold plunge to follow. Of course the ice-cold plunge of the Finns was replaced by the air conditioner in New Orleans.

offices. Movement between these places represented the sauna bath, which no Yankee could relish. We did, however, tolerate the bath, as part of an outing such as the air show and so it was this particular Monday or Memorial Day.

We arrived at the Naval Air Station field around noon, I believe, with the show set to begin at 1:00 PM. Initially, we were able to get up close to various naval aircraft from amphibian types to those bombers and fighters used with an aircraft carrier. Even the planes flown by the Blue Angels were on display. Esther had about as much interest in the planes as I would in a display of crocheted or knitted fabrics. She was a good sport, however, as Tom and I ood and ahed over the various aircraft. There were no bleachers on the tarmac but we did find a little shade and waited for the show. Out of desperation and fatigue, we finally sat on the pavement until the action began. Needless to say, it was hot as Hades sitting on the tarmac even in a shaded spot.

I've always enjoyed the Blue Angels or their air force equivalents in the several shows I have been to in past years. Their low passes over the runway in tight formation along with their sudden vertical ascent before separating in four directions always gave me a thrill. Of course, their trails of smoke made it all the more dramatic. Their part of the show may have gone on for 15 minutes or so, maybe even a half hour and followed some preliminaries, which included parachuting and stunt flying. It being Tom's first such experience, he was spellbound.

They had some foolish flying, so to speak, wherein the pilot in a small plane looked as though he was going to crash but never did. Such stunts vary from show to show. The one that stands out most vividly in my mind took place, I believe in a show at Boise. At the beginning of the show everyone submitted a number for a drawing. Supposedly, the winner of the drawing would be given a free airplane ride. Late in the show, the winner was

and as he headed back to the plane, it began moving. The announcer yelled, "Hey, she has released the brakes and apparently hit the throttle", because the plane began to gain speed. It was headed straight for a hanger but just as it was ready to hit it, the plane lifted up and over the building. It wobbled as well as gained and lost altitude as it circled around the field. The announcer told everyone to take cover if it came towards the crowd. In the meantime, they were trying to talk to the old lady but she couldn't fathom what they were telling her. The plane continued around the field in a variety of stunts just barely avoiding a crash here and there. That went on for five minutes or so before the old lady, a stunt pilot, suddenly leveled the plane out and brought it in for a smooth landing. Of course, the announcer then let the crowd know the truth and those who hadn't suspected a trick realized they had been had. That and similar stunts have always been the highlight of an air show for me even though I thoroughly enjoy looking over the various types

of planes on display as well as watching the Blue Angels perform their intricate routines.

Well, it was a fun afternoon but the humidity and hot sun, as well as all the standing around, took their toll on us. We were thoroughly pooped as we made our way back to the car. As you can appreciate, it took some time for us to fight our way back through the traffic on the two lane Belle Chasse highway to the interstate but we made it safe and sound, though a little on the crabby side. Fighting traffic never was one of my virtues. I considered myself quite successful in handling typical traffic problems in such situations if I got through it without hitting my horn even once because of the antics of some aggressive, selfish or even downright stupid driver, whom I chose to classify in one category of "KNUCKLEHEAD". Today I was successful, or at least,

that's the way I remember it.

VALERIE RETURNS FOR A SEASON

Within the New Orleans metro area, at that time, two bridges spanned the mighty Mississippi. By far the most heavily used was the one between the city and Algiers, which I knew as the Mississippi River Bridge. It was only four lanes, as I remember, but it may have been six with

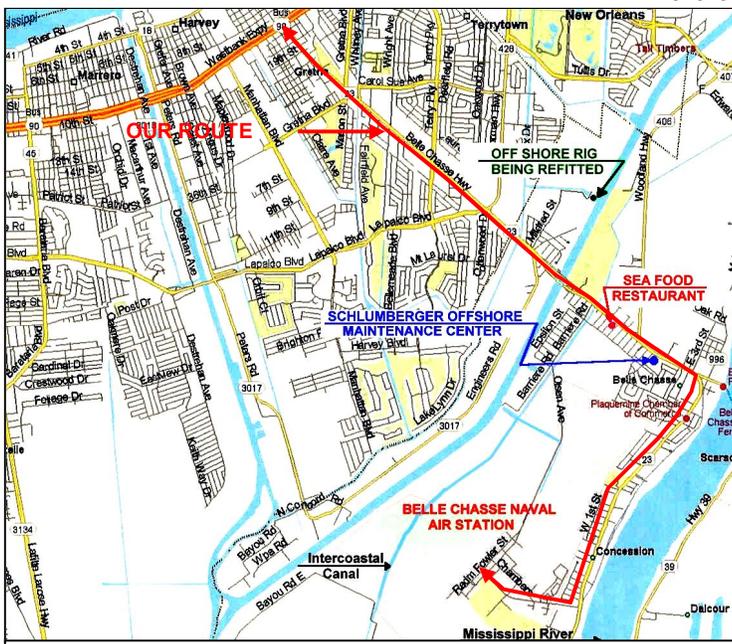


Figure 15-17 A map depicting our route to and from the Belle Chasse Naval Air Station for the air show.

announced and, purely by chance, happened to be a lady about 75 years old who was game enough to take the ride. They made quite a deal out of the ride by showing her being helped into the plane. Of course, she could hardly walk and after some time they had her in the plane. Just as the plane began to taxi to the runway, the pilot realized he had forgotten something and stopped. He jumped out and ran over to a trailer

three in either direction. At any rate, it was loaded beyond the capacity for which it was designed and created a bottleneck during the rush hour. Now, they have built a parallel span, which added to the old span, provides at least four lanes in each direction and possibly more.

A bridge just up river a ways, probably 6 or 8 miles as the crow flies, was known as the Huey P Long Bridge and connected western New Orleans or Jefferson Heights with Bridge City on the west bank. The two bridges in their relative positions are shown in figure 15-18. The Huey P. Long Bridge has two lanes in either direction with a two track railroad in its center. This bridge also carries most of the truck traffic or did, as I remember. It may well be the highest roadway in the New Orleans metro area. Such an arch had to be the closest resemblance to a hill any Cajun ever saw. At least, it was higher than any hill I ever saw in Louisiana. In becoming familiar with the area, we sometimes went to the West Bank on one bridge and returned on the other.

In the years we were there, we made many trips to and from the West Bank and I often crossed either or both of the bridges on business trips. However, with my tale I'll include an experience we had one time when Valerie came to town and spent a couple of weeks with us, just before flying to Germany to join Jared. Of course, she had to see the sights of that historical area.

Valerie and Jared had been living in Huntsville, Alabama where Jared was going to an army school. You will remember; I had dropped Valerie off there on my first trip to New Orleans in early December of 1974. I'm not sure of the date he shipped out but it had to be the following summer because several of our weekend trips involving her and Jared Jr. took place in the summer. He was born on Dec. 16, 1974 and was thus 7 months old or so when Valerie stayed with us for a short period of time. New Orleans was new to Valerie and she was game to see and do anything we could cook up. Of

course, we had to show her the mighty Mississippi with its boat traffic, take a ride on a riverboat and even cross the various bridges, which spanned its 2300-mile course. If one includes the Missouri with the Mississippi, the waterway is over 3700 miles in length. I'm not

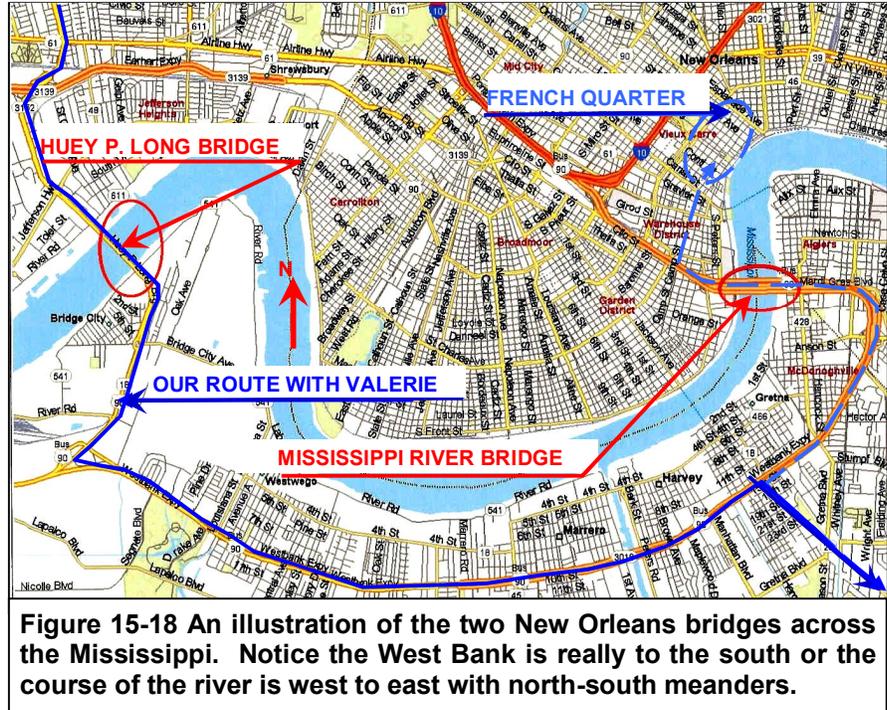


Figure 15-18 An illustration of the two New Orleans bridges across the Mississippi. Notice the West Bank is really to the south or the course of the river is west to east with north-south meanders.

really sure of the chronology of the events that day or even if a couple of separate trips were involved but we saw numerous sights and had a great time acquainting Valerie with the Crescent City. It seems we headed to the West Bank across the Huey P. Long Bridge, which is somewhat of a thrill in itself. One can see a good distance from its crest as it rises over the river. Of course, there is no place to stop along the arch of the bridge, so the driver is left with the exclamations of the other passengers to frame his mental image of the scenery below; supplemented, of course, by an occasional glance of his own as he negotiates the traffic pattern around him.

A TOUR OF BELLE CHASSE

After crossing the river, we took the West Bank Expressway in a general southerly direction to the Belle Chasse Highway and then southeast to the Maintenance Center so she could get a better idea of what I was doing for Schlumberger. Fortunately, along the way there were a couple of offshore rigs tied up in the Inter-coastal canal for refurbishing, which Valerie got pictures of. That seemed to be of

special interest to her because, I suppose, my job was closely associated with such machinery. Figure 15-19 is of the jack-up type and provides some idea of the water depth in which it can drill. Figure 15-20 is a deep-water floating rig, which is designed to drill wildcats and define the limits of a new field prior to building a platform.

From the canal we traveled on down to the Belle Chasse Maintenance Center and then had lunch at one of my favorite haunts for seafood. Both of these sites are identified in figure 15-17. The



Figure 15-19 Jack-up rig being refitted in dry dock near Belle Chasse, Louisiana.

restaurant wasn't fancy by a long shot but was typical Cajun and served very good food. In fact, they served some of the best bread pudding I have ever eaten. I was never very fond of that served at home while growing up but this stuff was first class. It contributed to my weight gain while living in New Orleans.

We often saw naval flight crews eating lunch at this restaurant, which also spoke well for the food. I remember one such incident in which we overheard the pilots' discussion about getting in their flying time for that month. They were based at the Great Lakes Naval Air Station and had come to New Orleans for lunch. They would return to their home base that afternoon. What a way to accumulate the necessary flying time while adding variety to your daily luncheon menu. I suppose they would also eat lunch in San Francisco or any other city known for its excellent cuisine. As for us less fortunate folks, any place nearby must do as long as it's not a greasy spoon and the prices are reasonable.

ON TO THE FRENCH QUARTER

After lunch, we headed for downtown New Orleans and the French Quarter. We would retrace our route to the West Bank Expressway and then take a right to cross the Mississippi River Bridge, as designated in figure 15-18. I've included a photo of the bridge in figure 15-21, which was taken later by Celeste from the deck of the riverboat Natchez. This is followed by figures 15-22 and 15-23, taken somewhere near Bourbon Street, as I remember, which illustrate typical scenes in the French Quarter. These differ somewhat from the scene one would see at night with the nightlife in full swing. When we toured the area one evening, we had to shield Tom's eyes from some of the antics going on. Our life style didn't exactly harmonize with what one was bound to observe in that area at night. We should have known better but, I'll admit, we did learn a little about the French Quarter and the type of nightlife being carried on, which may have some dubious value.

PRESERVATION HALL

Our objective that evening was to see the St. Louis Cathedral and the Cabildo, as illustrated in figure 15-13 in addition to taking in a session of the Blues at Preservation Hall. That was a treat we all seemed to thoroughly enjoy. Let me do my best to recount an experience we had there



Figure 15-20 A floating drilling rig in dry dock near Belle Chasse, Louisiana.

before getting back to our daytime visit to the French quarter with Valerie that day. I suppose I will always remember that event.

Preservation Hall was, quite frankly, just a little old dump of a building, which was apparently kept with its original atmosphere. It is a gathering place for a group of musicians who simply love to play the New Orleans Blues. I think we toured it with Valerie but it could have been other times. I know we went there at least twice and maybe more during our stay in the area. It was something we all enjoyed. There was no charge for listening. Only a couple of dozen people, I would estimate, could crowd into the place at a time. Early arrivals could sit in the front on roughly a dozen available seats. Later arrivals had to stand in the back. Music went on continuously except for an occasional break. We entered at the back and listened while one session was being completed. As people moved out during a break, we were able to move up and find a seat so we could witness a complete session. All of us really enjoyed it.

We also received a bonus in the form of an elderly gentleman who was obviously a regular attendee. I would guess his age to be about 65 to 70. The first clue was that he came in the front door and sat for a while with the group while they played. He sat there with an almost reverent expression of joy as they played with head and body motions keeping time with the beat. After a few minutes, he could obviously contain himself no longer, stood up and began to do a sort of dance. Actually, it wasn't a dance, per se, because he stood essentially in one place. However, now his whole body began to twist in an almost convulsive manner but in time with the beat of the music. His expression was one of deep satisfaction, pleasure and even joy for what he was feeling. It was then that I realized that people differ quite remarkably in their reactions to varying types of music. I obviously could not feel or even really understand just what that old gentleman was experiencing, let alone perform such rhythmic movement to the musical beat. Apparently he wasn't drunk or high on dope but simply in rapture over the sound he was experiencing. He added to the already excellent blues rendition with his obvious enjoyment.

A RIDE ON A RIVER BOAT

Before our little tour of the French Quarter, we had taken a ride on one of the stern paddlewheel riverboats, which I'll describe now. There was a choice between two different boats with one being the President and the other the Natchez. The latter happened to be ready to

load and became our choice because of the time element. The President is illustrated in figure 15-24 through a photo taken by Valerie from the deck of our boat that afternoon. Our boat, the



Figure 15-21 The greater Mississippi River Bridge as seen from the Natchez.

Natchez, is pictured in figure 15-25. The deck photo of Esther and me, in figure 15-26 on the boat proves the validity of my story. The various boats are rather similar in appearance, having multiple decks and a stern mounted paddle wheel, though there are distinct differences when side-by-side. The ride lasts about an hour, including boarding and disembarking. First the tour proceeds downstream, past much of the



Figure 15-22 A photo of the French Quarter in New Orleans, taken near Bourbon Street.

New Orleans Port facilities to the Chalmette area and then returns back upstream to a point about a half-mile up river from the Mississippi River Bridge before returning to the dock in the vicinity of Canal Street. Of course, it passes

several ships coming and going to the port facilities as well as others tied up at the different docks. This particular day was pleasant as you can see from the photos and we enjoyed the ride and associated sights immensely.

I suppose it was late afternoon by the time we got off the boat. In any case, we decided to get something to eat in the French Quarter. Valerie took a picture of the sidewalk café that we ate in as shown in figure 15-27. I suppose the food available in New Orleans impressed me as much as anything. I'm sure that won't surprise anyone who was acquainted with me as a youth. My one major talent in those days was eating. I think I made a few remarks about that back in chapter three, so I'll spare you any repetitive pain. One might say, "I never met a New



Figure 15-23 A typical scene for tourists seeing the sights in the French Quarter.

Orleans dish of food I didn't like". In fact, I stored several around my waist and it wasn't until some years later that I finally dumped them. Though it is delightful in every way to go out to eat in New Orleans, it is not conducive to weight loss or good health. That is the price one pays along with the price of the ticket. Even so, such foraging activities are among my favorite memories of the Crescent City and, in fact, the south land in general. Even today, I still get a hankering for 'red beans and rice – Cajun Style' along with a green salad and some hot bread. The sausage and seasoning give the beans a flavor that's out of this world. This, I can prepare myself with some store bought seasoning, but the various sea foods with their fattening sauces are not included in my limited repertoire of

cooking skills. I'm sure it is just as well or I would be sporting a larger tire size than presently rings my aging figure; it being added to through home cooking.

NEW ORLEANS CEMETERIES

At one point while Valerie was still visiting with us, we took her to a New Orleans cemetery.



Figure 15-24 A view of the President, another popular riverboat, underway as seen from the deck of the Natchez.

They are unusual to say the least. All burials are above ground in stone vaults with doors, which expose the crypt or whatever they call an



Figure 15-25 The Natchez, our riverboat, just before heading down the Mississippi and first leg of our tour that beautiful day.

above ground grave. As I understand it, such vaults replace the family burial plots, which are so common in other areas. Apparently, generations upon generations are placed in the

vaults as they depart this life. The decomposition and disintegration of their predecessors provides the necessary room for the new arrival. The photo of figure 15-28 illustrates such a graveyard and was taken in northern New Orleans.

Well, I don't remember whether we spent the evening around the French quarter or took another trip to experience it but I do remember having had a long day as we headed back across the causeway and home. Such tours were always interesting and fun but fighting the crowds and traffic always took their toll, physically and mentally.

GIANT OAKS & HANGING MOSS

Though there were many things I appreciated



Figure 15-26 Esther and I on the deck of the Natchez enjoying the Mississippi River and the surrounding view.

about the south, I suppose the beautiful old oak trees with Spanish moss hanging from their limbs were among my favorite. I loved to stop and simply view a stand of such oaks wherever I ran across them. The major limbs seem to travel for tens of feet along the horizontal with smaller limbs emanating sporadically in various directions to enclose the mass of the tree in beautiful greenery. I would stand in awe as I contemplated the strength of those limbs, which provided an overall shaded area several times that which I had witnessed around home in Boise. I have

included a photo (figure 15-29) taken near our residence in Mandeville to provide the reader with some idea of what they were like. It comes from a group of Valerie's photos. I have also



Figure 15-27 A New Orleans Restaurant wherein we apparently ate dinner with Valerie on our excursion that day.

added figure 15-30, a photo of the plantation Oak Alley, to further establish the reality of these oaks. Unfortunately, a photo can't do justice to the magnificent beauty of the trees but these two along with others taken at various Antebellum Homes we visited will help. I don't believe we had time to visit any of the Antebellum Homes during Valerie's visit but we made three or four such trips ourselves including one with mom, Madeleine, Delight and Connie when they visited with us one summer.

ANTEBELLUM HOMES

Louisiana is full of Antebellum or pre-civil war



Figure 15-28 A typical New Orleans cemetery with all burials above ground because of the below sea level elevations.

Homes, which have been restored and made available to the public for a small fee. Most are

situated along the Mississippi River, which constituted the primary means of access or the avenue of transportation to and from the plantations. We were able to visit a few during our stay in that part of the country and considered such trips one of our more interesting activities while there. The grounds surrounding the plantations were always beautiful, being lush with flowering plants and stately oak trees draped with Spanish moss. The houses were always beautiful as well as interesting. Kitchens were typically separate from the main house for fire safety reasons and each of the rooms usually had fireplaces to provide the heat necessary in the winter. They had to rely on high ceilings and open windows to combat the heat of summer.

I don't remember the names of all the plantations we visited, though a couple of them do stand out in this old bean of mine. One, which we visited with mom, Madeleine, Delight and Connie, stood on the banks of the Mississippi overlooking the river. The photo of figure 15-31, from Celeste's albums, was taken at a later date and pictures the San Francisco Plantation, which lies just up river from New Orleans. I'm confident it is the one we visited with mom and the girls because of the Captain's walk on the roof. According to the information we were given, interested parties would watch

their receipt of supplies as well as the distribution of crops, cotton being their number one export. Consequently, all the major



Figure 15-29 One of the beautiful oak trees near our home in Mandeville with my company car.

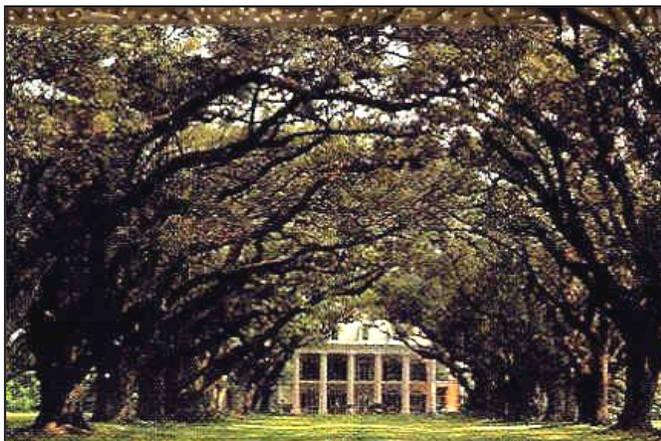


Figure 15-30 A plantation home called Oak Alley, a name whose origin should be obvious.

for the arrival of expected riverboats from the walk. The captains announced their arrival with a series of blasts from the steam whistle, which was an integral part of each ship. At that time, of course, the river was the only real avenue of transportation. Large plantations were necessarily located near the river to allow for

plantations lay along the Mississippi or some navigable tributary and the area from New Orleans northward along the river is still called plantation country. Figure 15-32 provides a view of another plantation, near the San Francisco, called plantation Ormond. Like all the plantations, it too overlooked the river, which provided the necessary avenue of transportation for commerce.

ROSEDOWN PLANTATION

A memorable trip we made one summer took us to the St. Francisville area just up river from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. As I remember, we visited a couple of plantations in the area but spent most of our time at one called Rosedown, which was well restored, having beautiful grounds to go with the magnificent house and a very interesting history. The main house is shown in figure 15-33. Because it is such a beautiful Antebellum Home and one, which we spent a good deal of time at, I will include a series of pictures, taken from Celeste's albums.

Rosedown was a large plantation, which utilized over 300 slaves during its hey-day just prior to the Civil War. I don't remember the name of the owners at that time but we Obenchains are tied to the plantation by an ever so remote set of circumstances, which should surprise you. It

seems worthwhile to deviate for a moment to describe an experience of mine, which brought these circumstances to light in the summer of 2003. It occurred at the blessing of Lethia's new granddaughter in Newnan, Georgia.

After attending the blessing, the family gathered in a reserved room at a local motel for dinner and an opportunity to visit. Lethia's son, Fred and the young lady he married are the parents of this beautiful little girl.

Fred's wife's maiden name was Catherine Jensen. Her older sister was married to a man by the name of Shipp. His family has ties to the

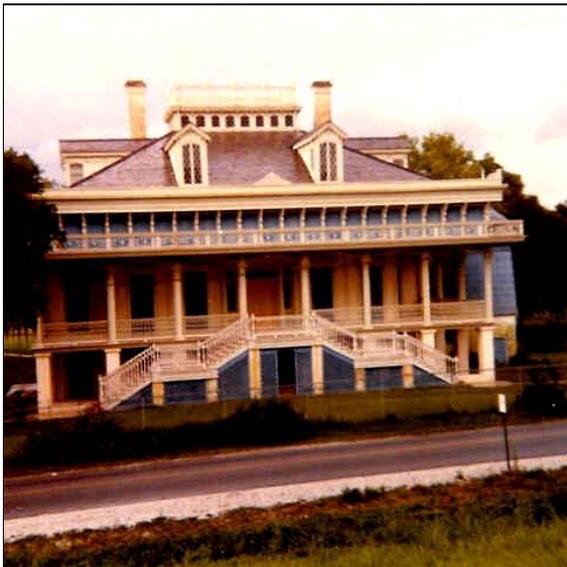


Figure 15-31 Plantation San Francisco, just up the Mississippi from New Orleans.

Shipp line, which our paternal great grandmother, Mary, descended from. Although we haven't as yet confirmed our exact connection, his ancestors came from the Carolinas and Virginia as did ours. One of his grandmothers, a Shipp by birth, married a descendent of the owners of the Rosedown plantation. Her children became heirs of the estate, which I understand was in the family for several generations. According to this Shipp, whose first name I don't remember, the upkeep of the estate became prohibitively expensive and they sold it to the state of Louisiana. It is now maintained as a state landmark. I would not hesitate to recommend to anyone in the vicinity of Baton Rouge to take time to visit the plantation. The pictures, which follow may help convince the reader that time taken for such a visit would not be wasted. I found its history extremely interesting.

In the days prior to the Civil War, Rosedown with its large population of slaves constituted a small town in and of itself. All the essential food was



Figure 15-32 Plantation Ormond, located on the river near the San Francisco plantation.

raised on the plantation along with the cotton and other exported crops. The plantation owners employed their own doctor or apothecary who made up and dispensed various medicines to any of the plantation staff needing them. It was apparently quite a sophisticated



Figure 15-33 A view of the plantation home on the Rosedown plantation north of Baton Rouge.

medical facility for those days. With its own source of food, clothing and medical care, the plantation was essentially independent, requiring only those items, which they couldn't raise to be

brought in via New Orleans. Such items were brought in by river boats on a regular basis.

The main house provided living quarters for the owner's family. The kitchen, which supplied the food for the owner's family and guests, was in a separate building. Apparently, the threat of fire from such a facility was real and it was consequently kept separate to prevent the family's quarters from being burned should a fire occur. The family was also insulated from the din of the work area. Slaves, of course, manned the kitchen and also served the family's dinners in the dining room of the mansion.

The lady of the house took great pride in her lovely gardens, which surrounded the main



Figure 15-34 A photo of part of the beautiful gardens surrounding Rosedown.

residence. One can get a rather good idea of the tremendous amount of manual labor required by observing the hedge lined walks of figures 15-33 through 15-36. Apparently, these gardens, as well as the lady responsible for their design and care, were well known throughout the area. Several of the slaves spent their days doing nothing but manicuring the grounds, which were her pride and joy. Of course, the grounds would be particularly beautiful in the spring when the azaleas were in full bloom along with other brilliant flowering shrubs. Though very pretty during our visit, the flowering shrubs were not at their peak.

The plantation covered several hundred acres, which was primarily planted in cotton. We toured some of the grounds beyond the gardens just to get a better feel for the operation. Celeste captured a nice view of the oak covered

lane approaching the front of the mansion in the photo figure 15-37, as well as one of Tom near a pond shown in figure 15-38. I remember some



Figure 15-35 A close up of the fountain with its beautifully sculptured shrubs.

old dilapidated buildings a little ways away from the house, which were slave quarters. The apothecary building, which I mentioned earlier



Figure 15-36 Esther and I touring the grounds. Notice the shrub lined walks.

was off to one side of the mansion along one of the walkways. It was a small one-room building, which was probably about 10' by 12'. It was furnished with some old dilapidated furniture and was lined with old cupboards, which I suppose, contained the necessary utensils and raw materials for the medicines concocted there. It

didn't appear to have been restored but was still in its time worn and original state. One could visualize the slaves lining up outside for treatment. I would suppose the family members received their treatment in the "big house".

I think I mentioned that Rosedown was located near St. Francisville, which lies north of Baton Rouge along US 61 near the Mississippi river. After our visit, we spent a little time touring and having dinner in the capitol, Baton Rouge before heading back home via Interstate 12. By the way, Louisiana State University is located in that city as well as several oil refineries. There is considerable river traffic plying the Mississippi, which can be observed quite handily from the big bridge as one crosses the river on I -10. Actually, refineries and other industries have facilities lining the Mississippi, which utilize the river traffic these days, having replaced the plantations. The river constitutes a giant interstate with modern ships replacing its usual 18-wheelers and all types of freight filling in for the cotton and supplies. The only paddle wheelers these days are those providing rides for the tourists as described earlier.

A VISIT BY MOM AND THE GIRLS

One summer or fall, I believe about 1977, mom, Madeleine, Delight and Connie stopped by after



Figure 15-38 Tom overlooking a pond on the grounds to the rear of the mansion.

visiting somewhere in the Washington area. They spent two or three days before continuing on to Boise. We used one day, a Saturday as I remember, showing them the sights around New

Orleans. We visited one convenient plantation, as mentioned earlier and which was displayed in figure 15-31. It is called the San Francisco and



Figure 15-37 The plantation mansion with its magnificent approach along an oak lined drive leading into it.

is located just up river from New Orleans. The owners were in the process of its restoration when we were there and we could only observe the outside and grounds. We talked about the Captain's Walk, visible in the picture and its use to observe incoming riverboats. One can imagine the excitement such an event would bring to the quiet life on the plantation, especially to the children of slaves and family. We wanted mom and company to visit Rosedown, our favorite but didn't have time to wander too far afield. You see, the girls also wanted to ride a riverboat and eat in a good New Orleans restaurant, if possible.

From the plantation we headed down river to the city, showing them the two bridges, which span the river. They really are quite impressive. Another view of the lower bridge, which I knew as the Mississippi River Bridge, is provided in figure 15-39. Valerie took it from the deck of the Natchez, I guess, since I found it among her pictures. In some ways, the Huey P. Long Bridge is more impressive. I believe its higher and has the railroad span through its middle.

THE FRENCH QUARTER

From the bridges we stopped in the French Quarter near the Canal Street wharf. I remember walking around the quarter for quite a

while seeing various historical sites including St. Louis Cathedral and other early American buildings. As we were looking for one building, which I can't remember the name of; Connie approached a guy on the street who looked like some kind of drug addict or at least an alcoholic. I'm not sure just what she said to him but he got up from the spot he was sitting in and started jabbering in nonsensical terms. I'm sure Connie was frightened and she headed back towards the rest of us while he followed about fifteen feet behind. I don't know what his intentions were but not taking any chances, I stepped between Connie and him to prevent any hostile moves on his part. He backed off while Connie and I caught up with the rest of the group. We decided we could find the place ourselves or ask some more reliably looking person. We did find the building or historical house because we went in and looked around. Beyond the incident with the drunk, very little comes to the fore in this aging mind of grandpa's. Maybe I was shell-shocked more than Connie.

ANOTHER RIVERBOAT RIDE

In the late afternoon we decided to ride a riverboat. We had ridden it a couple of times before but it was probably a first for mom and the girls. I believe we rode the Creole queen this time, which I've displayed in figure 15-40.



Figure 15-39 The Mississippi River Bridge as seen from the riverboat Natchez.

Once again we had a great time including me even though it was a repeat of earlier performances. I've included a couple of photos of typical sights along the river in figures 15-41 &

15-42. Valerie probably snapped them during our trip with her since I found them in her box of pictures. Even so, they typify the sights one sees along the river during any riverboat ride.

A NICE DINNER

After the ride, we were all getting rather hungry and decided to have a somewhat early dinner. I remembered the Commander's Palace located in the western part of the city just south of St. Charles Street on Washington Avenue. See figures 15-43 and 15-44. It is a five star restaurant, which I had attended a couple of times at company dinners. It was housed in an old but renovated two-story house with patrons seated in the several individual rooms. According to my information, it had been a house of ill repute in the early days of New Orleans but had now housed the restaurant for several years. We were ushered into an upper room by the hostess where several other guests were seated. Ours was a big round table complete with a white tablecloth, cloth napkins, real silverware, wine glasses, water glasses and coffee cups as well as padded comfortable chairs. There were a sufficient number of different sized plates and utensils at each place to confuse anyone but the most "sophisticated diner". The atmosphere was really first class. We were each given a menu containing everything from a wine list and appetizers to the



Figure 15-40 The Creole Queen, a riverboat we rode with mom, Madeleine, Delight and Connie during their visit.

main entrées and mouthwatering deserts. Dressed as we were, we might have felt out of place had it not been for other obvious tourists around us.

Each of us, including Tommy, surveyed the main entrées while we waited to determine just what tickled our palettes. Directly a waiter approached our table, introduced himself and asked if we were ready to order. He had a

definite French accent, whether real or cleverly fabricated, I don't know. He addressed the ladies as Madame and Tom and me as Monsieur. He began taking orders with Esther, who sat on Tommy's left and worked his way around the table in a clockwise fashion to me, sitting on his, Tommy's, right. The girls were determined to experience some of the best New Orleans food and we all ordered something different to broaden our experience, as I remember. With each order the waiter would say something like, "Very good Madame" and ask any necessary questions associated with that particular dish, all in broken English with a French flair or intonation.

Meanwhile Tommy continued to study the menu. When his turn came, the waiter said something like, "And you, young man. What would you like?" One could look at Tommy's face and discern that he was not impressed. He couldn't pronounce the words on the menu; much less understand what they meant. Finally, he looked up and said, "Have you got any hotdogs or hamburgers?" The waiter expressed his regret in that same broken English. "Just as I thought, there's nothing good here", Tom responded. Esther hurriedly translated a few menu options in words he could savvy and suggested some things he might like. She, knowing his taste, was the perfect person to help him decide. In



Figure 15-42 A cargo ship in port at New Orleans as seen from the Natchez.

the meantime, one could hear muffled laughs around the table as Tommy continued to make rather unsophisticated comments about the food

while the poor waiter stood patiently by. I don't remember just what Tommy and Esther finally



Figure 15-41 A U. S. Navy destroyer, as seen from the riverboat Natchez.

settled on but in time the waiter responded, "Very good Monsieur" but minimized any associated questions. I'm quite sure he was glad to see Esther come up with something Tommy would accept.

Needless to say, it was a delicious meal. I think all but possibly Tommy, were pleased with the experience, as we exchanged tasty bites of each different entrée. One had to admire Esther's ability to satisfy Tommy, because I believe, he was satisfied with the substitute hotdog.

After the meal, we went back to the French Quarter, parked and walked around to see the area at night. Of course, that's when it comes alive with all kinds of music and shenanigans one wouldn't want a child to see. There were several street musicians playing for whatever people would drop in their hats. After stopping to listen to them we dropped by Preservation Hall, described earlier and listened to a session of the blues. We also peeked into various bars and restaurants from the street to get a quick idea of New Orleans nightlife. Of course, it wasn't our style and we didn't hesitate long. We had had our fill after a walk along Bourbon Street, went back to the car and headed for home.

Sunday, we all went to church at our little branch, which was situated in LDS Church #2 of figure 15-5 or the old Pentecostal building. I

don't remember whether they flew out on Sunday evening or sometime Monday but probably the latter. In any case, we spent the remaining time at home just visiting and enjoying each other's company. I was so pleased to have them come out of their way to visit us.

Saturday afternoon with us during which we showed him a few sights in the area, had dinner

Figure 15-45 is a photo of Tom and Cuddles sitting near the front window in our living room at Covington. This probably took place during mom's visit with my sisters. This particular chair was a favorite for Cuddles. She knew when I would be arriving home and would perch herself on its back, looking out the window while waiting for me. She would be the first to see me walk up the driveway and would give a little bark as she jumped down and ran to the door waiting for me to come in. There was no way I could sneak up on the family and slip in unannounced because of her vigilant watch. When I walked in, Esther would usually be on her way to the door to greet me as well. If not she would give a yell from the kitchen, saying something like, "I'm in the kitchen. Dinner is about ready. Usually, I'd slip into the kitchen with Cuddles on my heels and give Esther a little kiss on the cheek before washing up for supper. Pepper usually ignored the scene and stayed curled up in a ball somewhere in the den.

CARL DROPS BY FOR A VISIT

I don't remember the occasion that brought Carl to New Orleans during our stay there but it had to be some sort of technical meeting since Ginnie wasn't with him. He called from a hotel in the city one evening and asked for directions to our house after we had chatted for a while. If I'm not mistaken, I believe he was staying at the Marriot, which was located on Canal Street. In any case, I vaguely remember picking him up so as to save him the expense of a rental car and the trouble of finding his way across the lake. In fact, it was that effort on my part that brings the Marriot to mind. Though the details of his visit aren't clear, I believe he came out and spent a

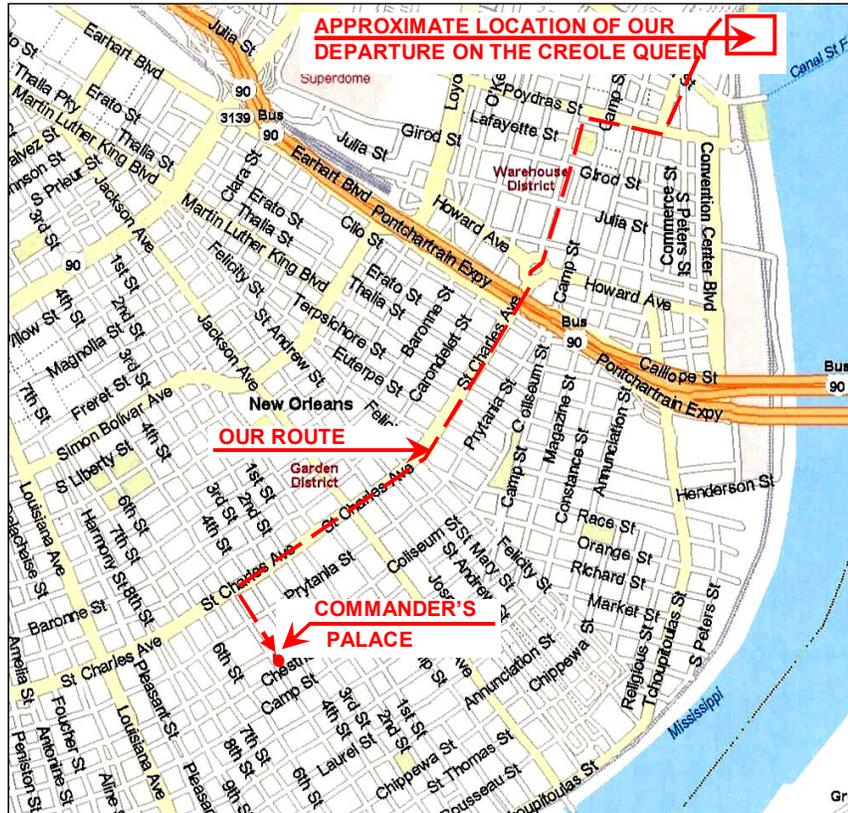


Figure 15-43 A map illustrating the location of the Commander's Palace relative to our riverboat ride on the Creole Queen.

and spent the evening chatting. The photo of figure 15-46 validates the event in that Carl and I are standing in front of the picture window of our



Figure 15-44 New Orleans street car on St. Charles Street, the primary street in our route to the Commander's Palace, a five star restaurant.

den. He had a flight out the next morning, as I remember and we made another trip into New Orleans that evening to drop him off at the

Marriot. With my daily commute to the city along with such extra trips, I really burned up the concrete on that bridge. It was 24 miles of nothing but concrete, expansion joints, a couple of elevated sections providing for boat traffic and water. What a boring drive. I even counted the expansion joints per mile and determined their total number one day to pass the time away. I don't know how accurate my answer was because I didn't check it out with the bridge authority. The drive did become thrilling in the fog. One wasn't sure just when he might come upon a slower moving car or maybe have a daring speedster bash your rear. Fortunately, few 18-wheelers traveled the bridge, giving a degree of comfort under such conditions.

WE VISIT BILOXI WITH VALERIE & CELESTE

When Jared had completed his tour in Germany, Valerie came home first with Jared Junior and spent a while with us. Celeste was home from the Y for the summer and we took a little time to show the girls their Biloxi roots. Both were born there during our air force days. Of course, they were much too young to remember anything about Biloxi and the visit was an eye opener for both regarding the early days of our marriage.

To begin with, neither I-10 nor I-110 existed as illustrated in figure 15-47. US 90, also known as Beach Blvd. in Biloxi, was the main east west highway in the region during those days. The wider red line indicates a bus route, as does the wider brown line. They provided my transportation while living in the houses indicated. They have no part of my present story nor does Keesler Field with the several buildings shown but I have made reference to the map in chapter 4, as an afterthought.

Though we had passed by Biloxi on our way to various locations in Florida for short vacations in times past, we had never stopped there to look over the places that were our old haunts while in the air force. This particular trip was for a day only with the express purpose of acquainting the girls with their origin in this world. Of course, we traveled I-10 to Mississippi but got off at exit 34 or US 49 to both eat and go on in to Gulfport. Gulfport is 12 miles west of Biloxi, so we took US 90 on towards the latter town. This enabled us to find the location of our last residence. It was located roughly 5 miles west of Biloxi proper at 2400 West Beach Blvd. and right on the gulf as shown. We knew the house had been destroyed in a hurricane, in the late fifties I believe, but felt we would recognize the location.

We had little trouble in finding it even though the only sign of the house was the footings. The park just to the west was gone, if I remember correctly but the apartment house, made of



Figure 15-45 Tom and Cuddles sitting by the front window in Covington, LA.

brick, across Beauvoir Ave. was still standing. It's shown in brown but not identified. The blue square was the location of our landlord's house, which was also gone, while the rectangle in pink is an apartment house where good friends of ours lived. Diezwicki was their name. Frank, the man of the house, was the one with the



Figure 15-46 Carl & me in our den during his visit of 1978 at Covington, LA.

weak stomach I described in chapter 4. The park where I often took Valerie to play if we weren't walking on the beach looking for shells, etc. is shown in green. We alternated for variety. Celeste was born on April 11, 1954,

while we lived in that house. The girls had seen a picture of the house and were able to get a feeling for how nice this latter residence was comparatively speaking.

After talking about the good times we had in that particular home, we moved on to Reynoir Street to see the house where Valerie was born. It was a wreck when we lived there and even more so now but it was still standing. Likewise, the house next door, which we moved into a year or so later, was still in one piece. Both of the houses were hardly more than a shelter to eat and sleep in but they were all we could afford. Valerie and Celeste looked at them with a mixture of disdain and disbelief asking, "You mean you actually lived in these houses?" At that time, I was a corporal or airman 2nd class and our net income was roughly \$200 per month, including the allowance for Esther, Valerie and off base living. We paid \$60 a month for the house, leaving \$140 for groceries, clothes, utilities and other odds and ends.

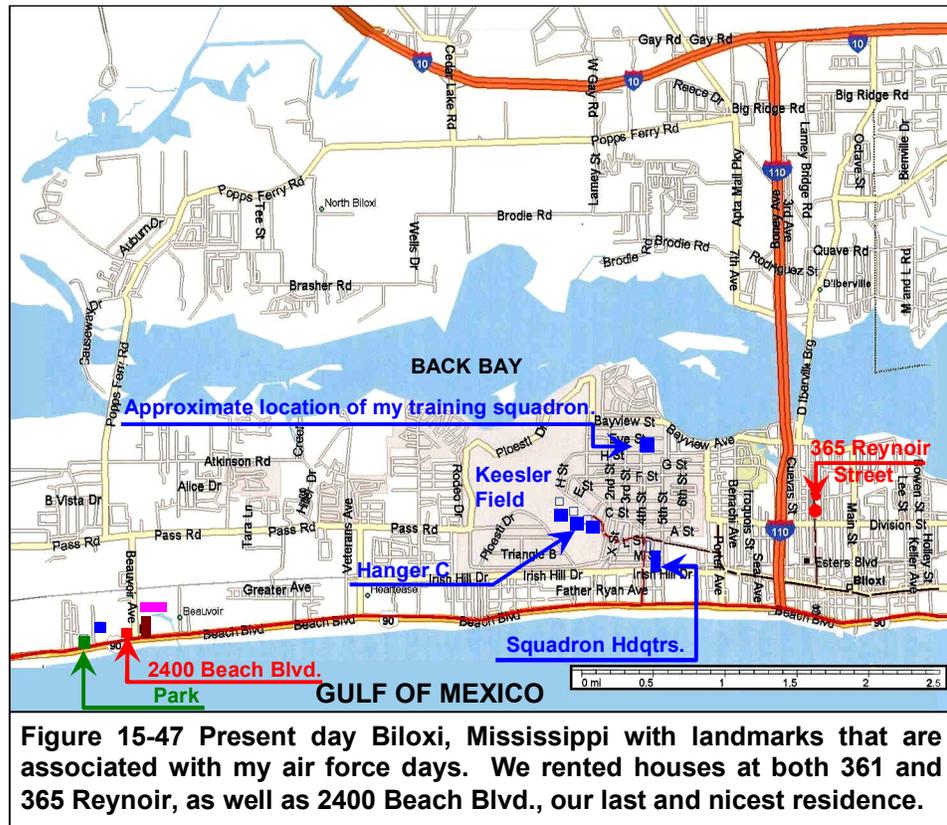
We moved from the latter house in the fall of 1953, a week or so before dad was killed. That move was a mistake, as you may remember from chapter

4 and we ended up at 2400 Beach Blvd. by November of that year. It was by the grace of God, a kindly lady, Esther's rather downcast look and a decision to sacrifice that enabled us to rent this last house. Likewise from chapter 4 you will remember that Esther talked the lady down from \$100 per month to \$80. Compared to our earlier rentals, it was easily worth the \$100 but the lady was so impressed with Esther, I guess, that she agreed to the \$80, which was the max we could afford.

As we headed out of town we went east on Howard Street, or the road shown with the brown bus route, to see if we could find the first

little dump Esther and I lived in, which we paid \$50 a month for. It was gone, which was just as well. At that location, there were two houses and trailer space with a community bathroom. We had moved from there as soon as we could, in the spring of 1952 I believe and made it to the bigger home at 365 Reynoir Street before Valerie was born on July 5th.

As I mentioned, Valerie and Celeste were shocked at our former rentals on Reynoir Street. They were now in the possession of the poor blacks or African Americans of the area. They



weren't much in our day but they kept us warm and dry. At that time the African Americans lived one street to the west and a big board fence separated them from the white neighborhood. Even so, Esther and I were happy, as our first child was born. Neither of us grew up with a lot and didn't expect too much in life. We had each other and, as it turned out, we were blessed with more than we anticipated in life. At that time we walked or took the bus everywhere we went. If we got a big load of groceries, we might take a taxi home. I think the frugal living did us both good because we continued to manage our money closely. We never built up any significant debt other than the

houses we bought and we appreciated our ability to have somewhat more things of a temporal nature than did dad and mom. Looking back, I realize more than ever that happiness has more to do with one's attitude or inner self than it does with material possessions. I suppose Esther and I were as happy in those days, as we ever were in later life.

We left Biloxi in late afternoon and headed back to Covington. However, first we headed east on US90 for a ways and crossed the bridge to Pascagoula where a shipyard was located. It was active during my air force days and had been, I suppose, for many years before that. After watching the cranes work for a short while, we took Mississippi 83 up to I-10, hung a left towards Louisiana and headed home, which was roughly 100 miles away.

TRIPS TO FORT WALTON BEACH & DESTIN

The Mississippi gulf coast has some beautiful man made beaches but they still offer a subpar environment for a vacation at the beach. Several islands lie between the coast proper and the main gulf, which limit the cleansing action of the waves. Being relatively close to Louisiana, it is also the victim of silt drifting in from the mouth of the Mississippi River. Consequently, the water isn't the clear blue-green that lays off the Florida panhandle but kind of a murky or muddy blue. Likewise the gulf floor out a ways from the beach is silt laden rather than being covered with white sand like the beaches. At least that was true in the fifties when I was there and it didn't appear to be any different while we lived in Louisiana. Consequently, we went the few extra miles (about 150) across Alabama to the Florida area to spend some time at the beach during our Louisiana stay. That made the total distance for such a trip something like 250 miles plus or minus a few.

OUR FIRST TRIP

We made at least three different trips to this area of Florida, which I'll treat as one to cut down on verbiage. We'll simply describe the high points of such visits and show the few pictures we have, which came from Celeste's cache of photos. In terms of relatively inexpensive vacations, it was the one place we found where we could relax and enjoy life without spending a bundle.

I became aware of the Destin, Fort Walton Beach area during an offshore managers' meeting before Esther and the kids had moved down from Casper. Our vacation trips to the beach were interspersed with trips to the west to visit the family and take part in reunions. I think our first trip to Fort Walton Beach may have been in the summer of 1976. Celeste was with us and we simply went over without having reservations anywhere. I remember going down through Pensacola on US 98 to Fort Walton Beach. We weren't sure just where to stop and simply surveyed the area and looked for places in our price range to stay near the beach. Being somewhat of a tightwad, this latter condition definitely limited the number of acceptable places. There are numerous resort motels and hotels available for the filthy rich but only a limited number near the beach for folks like us. Another limitation we placed on ourselves was the presence of two dogs. They were well house trained and seldom had an accident but that didn't help this particular evening. I found out later that only the rather sparsely furnished cabins would allow our canine friends, which we should have left in a kennel near home in the first place.

Valerie and Celeste looked at them with a mixture of distain and unbelief asking, "You mean you actually lived in these houses?"

We finally found a reasonable motel near the beach after dark but they wouldn't allow dogs either. What were we to do? It was getting late and we were all tired. We decided to sneak the dogs in, since the rooms were on the ground floor and rather well removed from the office. They never barked much and we could sneak them out to potty, since it was dark. Well, I believe I took Pepper under my jacket and Esther took Cuddles under hers. As we walked by some people sitting near the walk to enjoy the evening breeze, one or both of the dogs began to utter a low growl. We kind of shook them to keep them quiet and I simply said loud enough for the other guests to hear, "Boy my stomach is upset. Listen to it growl". Whether, they believed me or not, I don't know but they didn't say anything or report us. Well, we had enough junk food to get us through the evening and when people around us had retired, I slipped out with one dog at a time to let them take care of the essentials. Fortunately, they were quiet and no one around us was the wiser. The place was quiet and the dogs slept through the night without being disturbed or disturbing anyone else. Morning came and I repeated the process of the previous night while

only the most ambitious of souls were up. Once again the dogs were fast and I had them back inside in just a few minutes. I checked out after helping get the family and dogs to the car. I asked about the availability of cabins in the area near the beach and they said there were some a little to the east near Destin. We went over that way, found some cabins that allowed pets and got the necessary information for future reservations. We now had a reasonable place at a reasonable price where we could cook, sleep and enjoy the beach if we decided to come back. Actually, as you might guess, the decision had already been made; it being far superior to Biloxi beaches.

OUR SECOND AND THIRD VISITS

Our second visit to the area, as a family, involved only Esther, Tom and me in the spring of 1978, I believe. We made reservations for a couple of nights at the cabins just mentioned. We could relax in the cool of the cabin from the almost continuous breeze or spend our time on the beach swimming and walking. Esther couldn't take too much sun, so she spent most of her time in the cabin with the dogs. Tom and I, on the other hand played on the beach in and out of the water. It was great fun. One could see clearly down into the water as far as we could walk out from land. I remember picking up a lot of sand dollars, little shellfish, from the bottom. We could see them while standing still and would then dive down and grab them. Our only hazard, as far as we knew, was getting too much sun. One burns rather quickly, even on an overcast day, from the direct and reflected rays of the sun. They bounce off the water and the white sand, so the only escape is to go back to the cabin. In spite of our precautions, we both managed to get burned. The most painful areas of burn, as most people know, are the tops of one's feet and the back of your leg, particularly at the knees. I provide this description as preliminary for a second visit to the same area in the summer of 1979 with Celeste and a friend named Carol, who accompanied her from Salt Lake for a week or so.

Sometime in July of 1979, Celeste came home from Salt Lake for a short vacation. She had graduated from the Y in 1977 and was working in Salt Lake where she met Carol Stevenson. They became good friends and Carol accompanied her on the vacation. They are shown together near the front door of our home at 121 Bertel in the photo of figure 15-48. Carol

took a similar photo of our family as shown in the accompanying figure 15-49.

I believe we spent a couple of nights at the cabin we had stayed in the year before, which was known as Surfs High. It was definitely made for



Figure 15-48 Carol Stevenson & Celeste at our home the summer of 1979.

beach bums or maybe I should say beach folks. It had only the bare rudiments of what one would like in motel accommodations. As I remember, it slept six, having two bedrooms and a main living



Figure 15-49 Our family minus Valerie in front of our Covington home in 1979.

area along with the basic necessities for cooking. The floors were covered with vinyl, which made it easy to sweep out the sand that

was inevitably drug in by each and every person coming from the beach. Actually, one didn't have to go down to the beach to find the sand, just going outside would do the trick because the whole area was covered with sand and scattered grasses that typically thrive therein. However, the accommodations were fine for our purposes of relaxing and/or enjoying the beach. The cabin is shown in figure 15-50 with Celeste, Esther, Tom and me demonstrating our figures in figures 15-51, 15-52 and 15-53.

Our trip in 1979 was a lot of fun but we had one problem to crop up, which we hadn't experienced in the spring of 1978. Apparently,

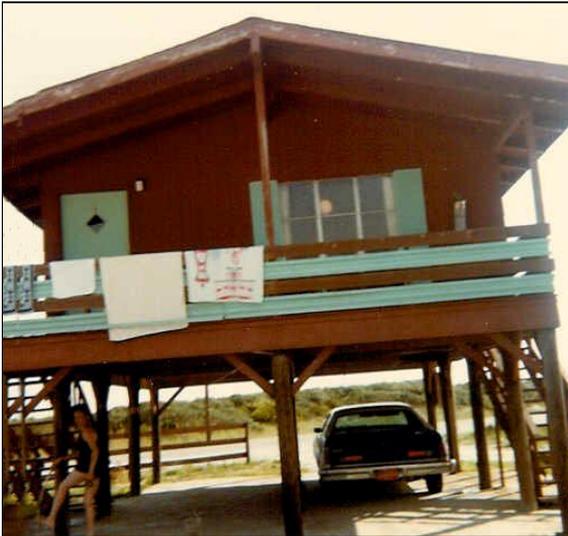


Figure 15-50 Our cabin on the beach near Fort Walton during the summer of 1979.

by mid-summer the jellyfish move in towards land and they guard their watery habitat rather jealously or maybe we should say jellysly. They are difficult to see and their long stinging filaments usually make contact before one sights the center or umbrella. Tom got tangled up with one and came roaring out of the water with surprise written all over his face. After figuring out what had gotten to him, we proceeded with caution, which kind of dampened the fun. As I remember, Celeste and Carol decided to stick to the sand or stay close to shore for protection but Tom and I continued to play in neck deep water. We collected a bunch of sand dollars, which I mentioned earlier, primarily for the fun of the dive as we searched the sandy bottom. They can be dried and used to make attractive ornaments if you have artistic talent, which provided our excuse for the collection. However, I don't remember making anything

beautiful, or ugly for that matter. As one would suspect, they just sat on the shelf.

VISITING BELLINGRATH GARDENS

A sight definitely worth stopping for, if one visits Alabama, (see figure 15-54) is the Bellingrath



Figure 15-51 Celeste on her way to the beach to enjoy a little sun, water and sand.

Gardens. We stopped there at least once and maybe twice. Celeste furnished the associated



Figure 15-52 Esther in a relaxed mode while preparing a little lunch or dinner.

photos, which were apparently taken on the trip to Fort Walton Beach with Carol and the family. We spent a couple of hours there enjoying the house and grounds. Celeste had several nice

pictures of the interior of the house as well as the grounds but I had to limit myself to figures 15-55, 15-56 and 15-57. They should provide a good idea of the mansions beauty as well as the spacious grounds surrounding the home. This man, Bellingrath enjoyed the good life and obviously didn't mind displaying it. Apparently, he was a philanthropist as well.

The family made their fortune with Coca Cola. It seems Mr. Bellingrath was an early stockholder



Figure 15-53 Tom and I debating whether to get wet while reconnoitering the beach.

in Coca Cola and provided the first bottling and distributing center in Alabama back in the early part of the 20th century. Needless to say his



Figure 15-55 The Bellingrath home and gardens near Mobile, Alabama in 1979.

fortune followed the early success of Coca Cola and he essentially became an instant millionaire.

As I understand it, soon after he gained his wealth, he built the Bellingrath home with its beautiful gardens. The most beautiful time of the year to visit the area is in April or May when the azaleas are in full bloom. In fact, this is true of the whole gulf coast area. Spring was my favorite time of year, March and April that is. The whole countryside blossomed or so it seemed. The humid heat of summer had not yet arrived, making life comfortable as well.

Figure 15-57 illustrates the beautiful dining room in the mansion. It is typical of all the rooms with their costly furnishings. I always thought I had a pretty good job until I visited the Bellingrath

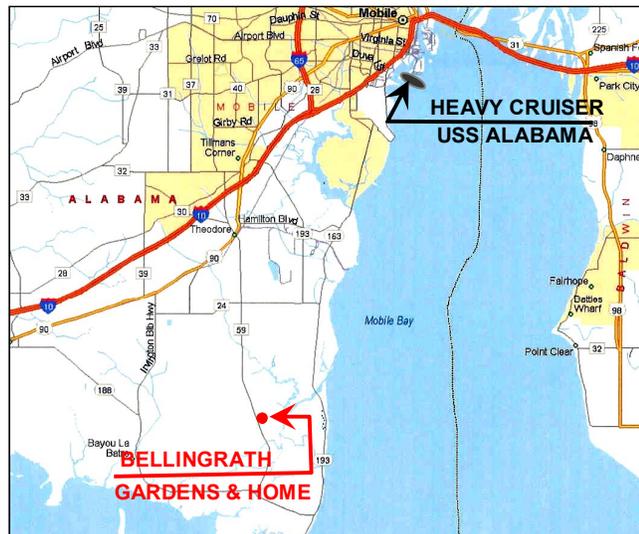


Figure 15-54 Map of Mobile Alabama area with locations of the Bellingrath Gardens and Home as well as the Battleship Alabama.

estate. The size, beauty and obvious cost of the place really took the wind out of my sails and made me realize what an average working slob I was. My main consolation was a realization that I would have felt completely out of place. Living in a home like that would be one thing while hob knobbing among society's rich would have been quite another. Given my rather introverted nature, I suspect I would have become a recluse, drinking my Coca Cola all by myself. Esther or someone else would have had to put on the lavish dinners that must have been commonplace in such facilities.

Figure 15-58 provides a nice shot of Tom posing between Esther and I. I'm not sure just who he was trying to impress but at that age, 15, he probably didn't really care. Apparently we are on the steps leading into the side of the house.

Figure 15-59 is a photo of the Heavy Cruiser USS Alabama from World War II. It has been moored in the Mobile harbor since sometime shortly after the war. Tom and I petitioned the others for enough time to tour it. Having done so, I'm now glad the Navy didn't accept me during the Korean Crisis. The bunks were too short and I banged my head more than once trying to negotiate the narrow passageways below deck. Life would have been miserable aboard that ship either above or below deck. When above, I suppose a guy like myself would be leaning over the rail and when below, my head would have taken a beating. I think I need the freedom of the wide-open spaces.

A VISIT TO DISNEY WORLD

You may have noticed Interstate 10 cutting across Mobile Bay in figure 15-54. It does so via tunnel rather than a bridge. I'm not sure just how long the tunnel is but I would say several miles. Of course, there are modern, well-lit two lane roadways in each direction. Our several trips to the beaches of Florida, as well as our trip to Disney World, took us through the tunnels. They prepared me, I suppose for my later trips to Europe and the tunnels in the Alps.

I would guess it was early summer of 1978 or maybe even school spring vacation when we decided to visit Disney World, as a treat for the family. Never having ever visited Disney Land in California, we thought this would be the time to take advantage of our proximity to this newest extravaganza of Disney's. At that time, the neighboring sites that now exist were not completed, so we confined ourselves to Disney World proper. Tom was, of course, wide eyed and, I must admit, Esther and I were also impressed. None of us had ever seen a theme park of this magnitude before. We stayed at a motel outside the park and spent just two days taking in what they had to offer.

The first day was spent riding a host of different kinds of thrilling contraptions. Esther rode a few but declined several that interested Tom. Consequently, it was he and I on most of the rides. I do remember getting her on one that was called Thrill Mountain or something of that sort. It sounded rather tame on the flyer descriptions that were available and we saw several older folks lining up to get on. Tom begged Esther to come along on this one and I assured her it couldn't be too scary, so she gave in. She and I rode in one seat and Tom in the one next to us. The ride was nothing more than

a roller coaster but it was in the dark except for a few dim red lights along the way. As the car careened around various corners and sped full



Figure 15-56 A portion of the grounds and pond at Bellingrath Gardens in 1979

speed towards the few beckoning red lights, Esther about came unglued. She kept muttering things like, "I'll get even with you for this. I thought you said it wouldn't be too scary" and "I'll never go on another ride with you guys



Figure 15-57 A view of the dining room in the Bellingrath mansion in 1979.

again". She also held onto me so tight that I thought I would lose an arm or a leg before we finished. Had she fallen out or met with any kind of an accident, I was sure to be involved. Of

course, Tom thought her reaction was really a blast and wasn't the least bit sympathetic. I'm not too sure how much sympathy I showed her either but I tried to act like it at least.

After that ride, she pretty much stayed on the sidelines while Tom and I took in other thrills. She did take a boat ride through a pirate cave. There were animated characters all along the way, which were very realistic. The ride was rather tame, which was right down her alley and she seemed to enjoy that ride.

The second day we spent most of our time at a manmade lake of varying depths, lined with sandy beaches, slides, waterfalls and rocky places to dive from. The setting was well done and appeared very natural. As I remember, we picnicked on the shore, lounged around in the sand and swam or took advantage of the various water-associated gimmicks, as we felt so inclined. I know Tom and I spent quite a bit of time going down a water tube, which not only dropped rapidly but also had a host of twists and turns to negotiate before being spit out into about five feet of water at the bottom. There was also a rather high-simulated rocky ledge from which we could jump or dive, according to our talent, courage or lack thereof. Esther and I enjoyed the second day more than the first but Tom, I think, preferred the rides. Even so, he didn't complain about the day on the lake. By



Figure 15-59 The Heavy Cruiser USS Alabama, moored in the harbor at Mobile.

the way, you have undoubtedly noticed the dearth of photos for this particular trip. The reason is because our cameraperson wasn't along. Celeste has furnished the bulk of the photos I have included. Where she was absent,

so are the photos. If a picture is worth a thousand words, she has said more than I with all my verbosity. Of course, Valerie has also furnished a significant number of pictures but she was absent most of the time after we left Casper, which limited her involvement.

CELESTE'S GRADUATION

Celeste graduated from the Y in the spring of 1977 with a degree in business. We attended



Figure 15-58 Esther, Tom and I on the grounds of Bellingrath Gardens in 1979.

the graduation exercises with mother. I think we combined our trip to Provo with a vacation trip to Boise, though I can't remember the details. A photo of Celeste in her graduation robes is displayed in figure 15-60. We spent the day around the campus visiting between her dormitory and various buildings including the Student Union. Of course, I remember the latter clearly because we ate there.

Actually, another incident occurred there as well, which surprised mom and tickled the rest of us. As we walked up the steps to enter the Student Union, there was an elderly gentleman standing near the door. Celeste, Esther and I recognized him almost immediately, having seen him during conferences on TV. It was LeGrand Richards, one of the Twelve, who wrote that outstanding book, "A Marvelous Work and a Wonder". He was in his 90's at that time and died a few years later at 96. He stood there and smiled as he held the door for us to enter. All the time his daughter, just inside the door, was saying,

“Come on father, we have to hurry” but it didn’t seem to faze him. He continued to stand there for several more minutes holding the door and greeting people as he had for us. His daughter’s words seemed to fall on deaf ears. What a marvelous person he was. Mom smiled and said thanks when she entered, as did the rest of us. What an experience! It made our day very special.

Figure 15-61 is obviously a photo of all the family who was present for the occasion. It was taken at her dormitory across campus from the Student Union. I suppose one of Celeste’s friends did the honors of taking the picture. The photo of figure 15-62 once again attests to the presence of mom for the event. The color contrast between it and 15-59 is interesting, considering the fact that they were taken the

great, great, great grandfather whose name was Benjamin Collins, marched with Jackson from Kentucky to New Orleans. He apparently fought and survived the battle because he later lived and died near Quincy, Adams County, Illinois.



Figure 15-60 Celeste decked out in her graduation robes near the Student Union.

same day at the same location. Maybe the sun was brighter or something in 15-60.

VICKSBURG AND THE NATCHEZ TRACE

One summer, don’t ask me when, we decided to visit the military park at Vicksburg, which celebrated that long siege during the Civil War. I remember reading about it while in school but that comprised about all of the knowledge I had ever gained on the subject. We also wanted to visit the Natchez Trace, which had been described to us by some local people of Covington. The Natchez Trace was the original wagon road leading from Kentucky to New Orleans and was used by Andrew Jackson to march his army to that city to defend it in the War of 1812. A brother of our father’s maternal



Figure 15-61 Celeste’s Graduation day from the Y with mom, Esther, Tom and I.

He is buried with his wife Phoebe in the Cook family cemetery east of Payson, Illinois along with David, our third great grandfather.

We detoured on to the trace just east of Vicksburg and drove several miles along it. It’s



Figure 16-62 Celeste, mom & me at the Student Union the day of her graduation.

a beautiful drive along the section we visited. We stopped at an old church, as I remember

and at a rest stop. The trace is paved and in good condition, serving as a historical feature. It is narrow and rather winding, at least along the ridge we were on. I suppose that's true all the way in that such roads or trails sought the high ground to minimize problems with mud and water. It is defined on modern road maps and one can get on the trace anywhere from Louisiana to Kentucky, I suppose. If one is in the area, it's worth taking time to visit a portion of it just to enjoy the quiet scenery along its way. It's quite unlike the modern interstates and even regular highways because of the lack of development along its route. I suspect that the Trace was included, at least part, of the route that Benjamin Collins marched with Andrew Jackson in 1812 for the Battle of New Orleans.

After enjoying the trace for a while, we went on into Vicksburg and got a motel. I think we did a little visiting of the battlegrounds that first night but had to take another day to complete our visit. One can certainly get a feeling for the misery the soldiers on both sides must have gone through by reading the historical sketches



Figure 15-64 Tom & I posing as rebels with Lt. Francis Obenchain at Vicksburg.

that are located at each significant site. The second day took us around the southern perimeter of the battleground where, much to our surprise, we came across a bust of one Lieutenant Francis G. Obenchain (figure 15-64). He was instrumental in maintaining the defense of the southern perimeter of Vicksburg during the siege. I can't read the plaque (figure 15-63) with these tired old eyes but, as I remember, Lt. Obenchain assumed command of the unit after

Capt. Johnson was either killed or wounded. It will take another trip to the battlefield to verify that statement, however. I have been unable to



Figure 15-63 A plaque describing the role of the Botetourt Artillery, Stevenson's Division of the Army of Virginia. Capt. John Johnston with Lieutenant Francis G. Obenchain commanded the unit.

tie Francis G. into the family with what genealogy I have but considering the way he spelled his name; it is probable that he was



Figure 15-65 Esther & our cabin in summer of 1978 on Payette Lake's east shore.

closely related to John Obenchain, my generation's paternal great, great grandfather. Sooner or later, we will undoubtedly accomplish that particular connection and can then brag about our relative's civil war effort. Of course,

we will have to come up with a story that somehow justifies Grandpa Zemmer being a Yankee. Maybe those genes coming from both sides explain why I have difficulty making up my mind and ended up marrying both a Yankee and a Rebel. I'll let you decide that one.

WESTERN VACATION TRIPS

The year after Jared and Valerie returned from Germany, we began to make regular trips to the Provo, Utah area to see them because he was going to school at the Y. We now had two daughters living in that general area. Celeste was in Salt Lake and Valerie and Jared in the Provo area. They lived in several different places during his school years and I can't keep track of where they were living at any specific time. I vaguely remember them living in a trailer, two different apartment houses, the basement



Figure 15-67 Tom & dad enjoying the lake in a more practical motor powered boat

apartment of a home and later, a home by themselves. That doesn't count a home in Price after we had moved back to Denver. I'll highlight a couple of trips we made from Louisiana in 1978 and 1979 that come to mind but only because they might produce a few chuckles.

The summer of 1978 would have been their first summer back in the states. I suspect Jared came back in early summer because he had joined the service in the summer four years previously. According to Celeste's journal, Valerie preceded Jared by 30 days and stayed with us until he arrived. I vaguely remember her time with us but have some trouble separating it from her visit before leaving for Germany. The previous discussions regarding Valerie may well

have taken place in either time frame. She, Celeste, would obviously know a lot better than



Figure 15-66 Tom and Celeste enjoying the lake in a leg paddle boat in summer of 1978.

I; she being younger and considerably smarter and that doesn't count the journal.

FUN AT PAYETTE LAKES

During the summer of 1978, the year of their return, we made a couple of visits to Utah and Idaho. During the summer we stopped by Linden, Utah, just north of Provo, visited with



Figure 15-68 Esther relaxing on the beach at Payette Lakes in the summer of 1978.

Valerie and Jared and then went on up to Idaho to visit family. Being an even year, no family reunion was involved. However, we did go up to

Payette Lakes and rent a cabin for a week or so. Figure 15-65 is a view from the lake towards our rental cabin with Esther in the foreground. We thoroughly enjoyed our week there as attested to by figures 15-66, 15-67, 15-68 and 15-69. We got up when we felt like it, we played on the beach a good share of the day, swam and rented a couple of different boat types. I wasn't too impressed with the leg-powered paddleboat, which is shown in figure 15-66. Probably my legs were too long and the net effect was fatigued legs with periodic cramps. I had a picture of Tom and me in the contraption but opted to use the more comfortable outboard motorboat. Besides, I noticed in that particular photo, I seemed to be providing all of the power and didn't want to advertise that I was being outsmarted by my 13 year old son.

Tom and I rented a couple of saddle horses one afternoon before leaving McCall and took a ride up the mountain to the east of the lake. We had a picnic lunch and spent the better part of a day on the ride. Tom sits astride his bronco in the photo of figure 15-70 and I in figure 15-71. You can tell we are real cowboys by the way we are



Figure 15-70 Tom astride his trusty cayuse just before we headed out on our ride.

dressed and that relaxed natural looking slouch in our posture or should I say posteriors.

We had spent some time in Boise visiting with family as we always did. In fact, Phil, Connie or maybe Larry and June put us on to this particular group of cabins. Such visits with the family were always enjoyable. We usually stayed at Phil's or Connie's since they seemed to have room but managed to bum a few meals

off everyone. Actually, they typically had at least one or two get-togethers with potluck type meals wherein we enjoyed an evening of talk and

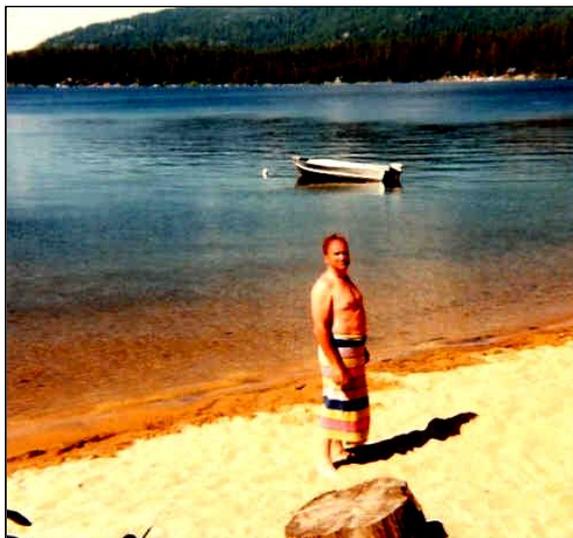


Figure 15-69 "Yours-truly" enjoying the beach in a pretense of Hawaiian kingship.

plenty of laughter. As a family, we have always gotten along well. I remember few if any incidents where quarrels occurred or even where anyone had their feelings hurt. Of



Figure 15-71 "Yours truly" ready to hit the trail with Tom up the mountain near McCall.

course, the latter situation regarding feelings may well have been covered up. Even so, having experienced numerous other situations wherein family relations were discussed during my lifetime, I realize the kind of compatibility we have isn't all that common. I feel bad for such families and in so doing; have developed a deeper appreciation for my own.

VALERIE, JARED'S AND THE ALPINE LOOP

We, of course, returned to Valerie and Jared's and spent some time there before departing for New Orleans. In fact we always seemed to overstay our planned departure and ended up with a tortuous drive the next couple of days. I believe Jared went to school summer and winter to try to speed up his graduation date. He also

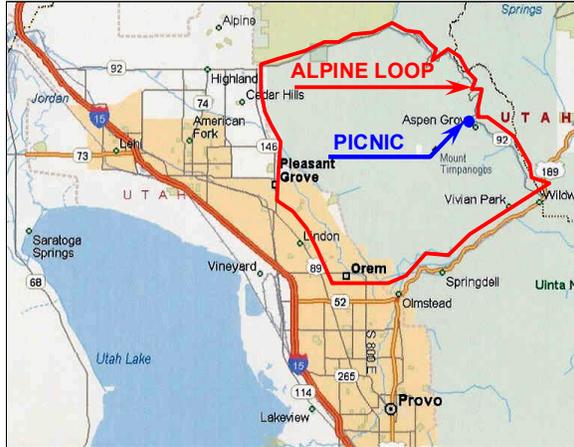


Figure 15-72 Map illustrating the Alpine Loop area & picnic with Valerie & Jared.

worked nights, as a guard wherein he had time to study as well as earn a supplement to his GI Bill. I have often given Jared a hard time, usually in fun but I would never be able to



Figure 15-74 Esther, Valerie and young Jared enjoying the cool clear stream.

accuse him of being lazy. The guy works like a beaver at one thing or the other all the time. Of course, Valerie lives her life in the same mode. Together, they seem to have a dozen or more

irons in the fire at any given time. Their house is always buzzing with activity with never a dull moment. If Esther or I wanted rest, we had to leave for home.

Of this particular visit, I remember spending a Saturday in the Wasatch Mountains in an area called the Alpine Loop. The loop road is illustrated in figure 15-72, as is the approximate location of our picnic. Even though the hillsides near the Salt Lake valley are barren, there are some beautiful pine covered areas up high on the Wasatch Front. The alpine Loop is one of those and is located behind or to the east of Mount Timpanogos. The group, minus Jared, our cameraman, is shown in figure 15-73.



Figure 15-73 Our family, as comprised then, posing along the Alpine Loop.

Notice young Jared who would have been going on 4 years old at that time. Of course, Joseph was yet to be born on the following April 23.

We really had an enjoyable time that day. It was cool at that elevation as compared to the valley below near Provo. From the series of pictures Celeste has in her album, it would seem that everyone spent most of their time near or in the little mountain stream, which was flowing nearby. It was clear and beautiful as such streams are throughout the west. I can't help but contrast them to the streams along the gulf coast, which are usually lazy and slow as well as being silt laden. However, as one gets up into the Appalachians, they become faster and more beautiful, somewhat like the one shown in figure 15-74 with Valerie, Esther and young Jared. What a difference a little topographic relief makes in the beauty of a stream. I guess one could say "It provides relief for the soul"; Ha ha.

I'm not sure just what is going on in the photo of figure 15-75. Everyone seems busy doing their own thing with mine being resting. There's

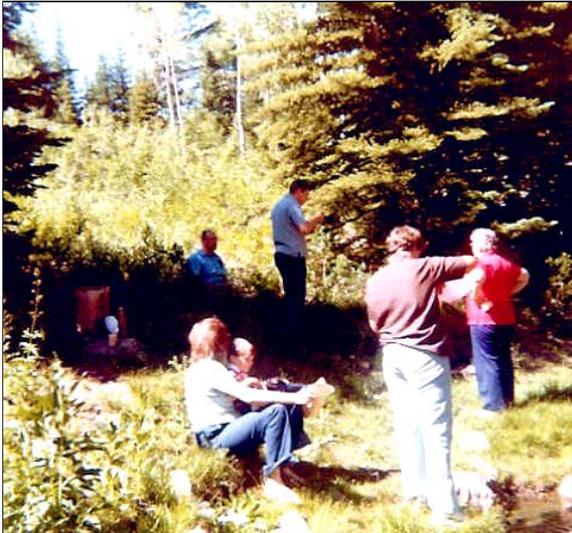


Figure 15-75 It looks as though Celeste caught us all in a myriad of activities.

nothing quite like sitting in the shade on a nice day in the mountains and simply enjoying the surrounding beauty. You can see that I'm



Figure 15-76 Celeste enjoying a few moments with little Jared at Alpine Loop.

making the best of this relaxing situation and show little pretense of activity.

Celeste has always enjoyed her nieces and nephews and particularly so when they are little. She tends to shower them with attention, which Esther and I couldn't compete with or at least we

didn't make the effort. Actually, Esther liked to spoil her grandchildren by showering them with gifts more than attention and Celeste seems to have acquired a portion of that trait in her relationship with the little critters. Of course, they love her for it. One can get an idea of that relationship from figure 15-76, which shows her with little Jared sometime during the picnic.

As I remember, we stayed an extra day at Valerie's. That is, we had one day less to get back to New Orleans because I had some pressing work to take care of. I often drove for long sieges while in the field with Schlumberger to make a given job or jobs. Well, the weather was good and I was in a hurry. We headed southeast through Farmington, New Mexico to Albuquerque and then due east to Amarillo. There, one heads southeast again about 300 miles to Dallas. From Dallas we would pick up the interstate, I-20, and head east to Shreveport, Louisiana another 180 miles. Tom and Esther slept most of the way and I seemed to get my second wind around Wichita Falls, Texas. I was getting kind of sleepy and we stopped to eat breakfast. That seemed to refresh me and we went on to Shreveport before I gave in and got a motel. We had traveled about 1450 miles in roughly 30 hours with 600 miles of that being two-lane road. It was dark and raining during the last 100 miles and I had about all I could take. We would have to finish the last 350 miles the next day. We did and pulled into the driveway at home on Sunday afternoon around 4 PM. What a trip!

A CHRISTMAS TRIP

Less than 6 months later, Valerie and Celeste began pestering us to spend Christmas in Utah. Basically, I'm against spending Christmas anywhere but home. However, refusal, in this case, would have me pitting my desires against those of the rest of the family. Admittedly, we would miss the girls if we stayed home for the holidays but driving to the Salt Lake area at that time of the year would be a bear. Of course, I had driven many snow and ice covered roads during my field days with Schlumberger. My rather pitiful excuses didn't seem to fly and as mama or maybe someone else said, "Son, always swim with the current. It's a lot easier than swimming upstream, unless, of course, there is no other choice". Needless to say, I gave in and a few days before Christmas we headed back through Dallas to Amarillo and Albuquerque and then northwest through Price

to the Provo area. The roads were dry going out except for Soldier Summit. However, it had been plowed and sanded, so we sailed along with no trouble. The clear cold air even gave the tires a degree of grip in the snow-covered areas and travel was no worse than in the summer.

Of course, we had a good time and once more overstayed our time. Valerie was expecting Joseph and was roughly 5 months along. Esther hated to leave and Valerie wanted us to stay as long as possible. To make matters worse, several people came down with the flu or something of that nature. Celeste had also lost her job at the TV station. I had taken her back to Salt Lake, helped her sign up for unemployment and left her, as I remember. She got another job rather quickly at Ernst and Whinny where she worked until moving to Denver in the spring of 1981. I believe we spent one more night at Valerie's after dropping Celeste off in Salt Lake.

The trip back to New Orleans was a lot tougher than going out. Soldier summit was about the same and the roads were OK until we got between Farmington and Albuquerque. It began snowing and we fought snow packed roads all the way to Amarillo where we stayed the night. The next day we headed for Dallas and encountered black ice over almost the full 300 miles. I counted 25 or 26 vehicles along the way that had spun out of control and ended up in the median. In some places I could accelerate to 65 or so but shortly I could feel the rear fish tail a little. That was my tell tale sign that we were encountering black ice again and I had to slow down. I suppose we averaged around 30 miles per hour and it was a long trip to Dallas. Throughout those two days, I often thought what a knucklehead I was for agreeing to a Christmas trip to Utah. I only got what I deserved, compliments of Mother Nature. I believe we spent another night in Dallas or maybe Shreveport before taking the last leg to New Orleans or actually Covington and home. Once again, as I have learned over the years, the best part of the trip was getting home.

SCHLUMBERGER EXPERIENCES

Most of my business experiences during those 4 years were office type activities and offer little that might be of interest even to the dullest of readers. I might summarize them by repeating the challenge of my new assignment, which was

It began snowing and we fought snow packed roads all the way to Amarillo where we stayed the night.

to help bring about an improvement in the level of service offshore and thus improve our competitive position. You see, each offshore rig carried a wire line unit as a semi-permanent part of its equipment. It was a lot of trouble for the operator to change one out and they would do so only for the most troubling conditions. As long as the assigned wire line company offered a reasonable level of service, they logged all the wells that particular rig drilled. Essentially, then, when we were able to convince an operator to place our unit on the rig, we obtained 100% of the logging and in some cases, the perforating business as well from then on. Wells were drilled rapidly offshore, even though those on platforms or permanent installations were directional in nature. A well might be logged two or three times before it reached total depth. It was then cased and the necessary completion services run. The wire line services involved could easily gross several hundred thousand dollars per well. Thus, replacing a competitor's unit on a rig or losing one to a competitor was serious business and Schlumberger did all they could to maintain and increase their share of the wire-line market. Areas influencing the operator's choice of wire line companies included such things as the types and quality of the logs he wanted performed, as well as service or the required rig time to perform those operations. Of course, price and the sales effort required to influence his decision were also part of the equation but good service was essential.

THE TECHNICAL CHALLENGE

As previously mentioned, my part of the marketing effort was to help bring about a level of service significantly superior to our competitors, thus saving our customers money spent on rig time and justifying our somewhat higher prices. This service quality was dependent upon the availability and reliability of equipment as well as engineer competence. Schlumberger equipment was known for its superior design manifested through more accurate measurements and better reliability, even though we kept an ongoing effort to define weaknesses and correct them. We also recruited engineers of the highest quality and provided extensive training programs to assure their competence. On land we provided our own transportation of equipment to and from the rigs and could assure proper handling procedures as well as a mode of transportation that limited

shock with its resultant damage to fragile components. The offshore operation necessarily placed the transportation of our equipment in the hands of people who transported all types of supplies and equipment to and from the rigs via so called workboats. Consequently, we lost control of some critical elements, which were fundamental to equipment reliability, i.e. handling and transportation. Consequently, achieving and maintaining an expected higher level of service quality really became a matter of properly managing all these factors.

By the time I arrived on the scene, the offshore organization had gained many years of experience, resulting in a rather effective system of doing the job. It involved engineer training and testing, equipment operational checks, back up equipment and packaging of equipment to help assure its safe transportation to and from the rigs. Even so, improvements were necessary to prevent any further erosion of our market participation. I understood that my job was to look for and institute ways of improving the factors basic to high-level service quality and thus improve the products we were offering to our offshore customers.

FAILURE THROUGH TRANSPORTATION

The offshore operation is tremendously expensive for the oil companies in all facets of

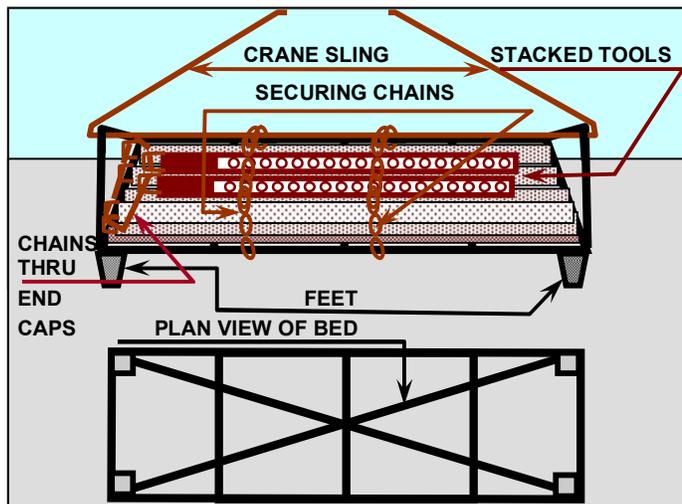


Figure 15-77 A drawing representing one type of pallet used for transporting down-hole equipment.

the operation. Although variable by rig types, the cost of shutting down the drilling operation for services such as logging could easily run \$2000 to \$3000 per hour. Consequently tool

failure at the well site was a very serious problem. In an effort to minimize the impact of such failures, wire line companies always sent two sets of equipment to the rig for each service ordered. Typical logging suites involved at least three services and often four or five making up to ten sets of logging equipment a rather normal requirement for a given well. These had to be checked prior to their shipment to the well and again upon the arrival of the logging crew at the well site to assure operational reliability. Even so, a device may fail during a logging operation and have to be replaced with the backup set of equipment. Having such a back up on site would limit lost time to two or three hours, which though expensive, was at least tolerable. Without an operational back up at the rig the service would have to be canceled or else rescheduled for a later time, each of which events were undesirable to the customer and Schlumberger.

Shock, during transport, was the single greatest reason for tool failure. The equipment sets taken to and from a rig were transported on pallets or steel frameworks to which the individual pieces were secured. Examples of their appearance are illustrated in figures 15-77, the down-hole equipment and 15-78, the surface equipment. The pallets, once loaded with equipment, could then be hoisted by crane to and from the transporting workboat at the dock or rig as depicted in the drawing. As can be seen in the representation, the pallet consisted of a steel framework comprising a bed whereon the tools were laid, short legs to keep the frame off the ground and a supporting frame to which the crane cable could be secured for hoisting.

The down-hole tools were secured to the framework by chains, some of which were run through the end caps. The latter chain would keep a tool from sliding out in case the pallet tipped at a rather steep angle. In some versions of the pallet, the legs included a shock absorbing spring, which decreased any shock to the tools when the pallet was set down. The panel boxes, within which the surface panels were placed for transportation, were watertight and also carried some shock absorbent material. All of this was designed to protect the electronic components from shock and the surface panels from the saltwater spray and/or rain during the trip. In spite of all these precautions, tools did fail at a rate higher than the customers liked. Sometimes pallets

were dropped when a sling broke or came loose and even lost in the gulf. This usually occurred when rough seas were being experienced.

PRE-DEPARTURE AND RIG SITE CHECKS

All tools were given operational checks when returned to the shop. On land, this was easy enough. Each set of equipment was assigned to a truck and the engineer responsible for that truck checked the equipment upon return to the shop and before going home. Offshore this procedure wouldn't work. The equipment typically arrived back at the dock some 24 to 48 hours after the engineer and crew returned. They might well be on another job with a different set of equipment at that time. As a result, any available engineer and crew were used to check out arriving equipment to be sure it was operational. Engineers did not have ownership of a given set of equipment, which tended to lessen their commitment for thorough operational checks. On land, engineers knew they would be using the same equipment on the next job and consequently checked it thoroughly for their own benefit. Offshore, they would seldom get the same equipment and tended to be less thorough. Even so, any problems, which were found, were corrected by instrument technicians prior to the equipment being tagged as ready for use. The engineer and crew performed monthly calibration requirements and posted the calibration data in a designated place where other engineers could obtain it. When operationally checked, the equipment was placed on the ready rack and tagged with a green tag indicating that it was ready for the next crew being sent on a job. In theory, such equipment was operational.

When a crew was dispatched to a rig, the equipment was probably already on site waiting to be checked. As soon as a crew arrived at the rig, they set about operationally checking the equipment. Sondes and cartridges were connected to the cable and surface equipment set up inside the unit. As each set of equipment was checked, it was set to one side as being ready for use. A job calling for four different services required an engineer and crew to check eight sets of equipment, which was a massive job. Many did it; while others checked only four sets and took the chance that the second set would work if required. When the first set failed and the second set didn't work, Schlumberger heard about it. Admittedly, checking all equipment was a big job but it was necessary if

one wanted a reasonable guarantee of a successful job. Engineer commitment was the key to legitimate checks at the well site. A crew could easily spend eight hours checking eight sets of equipment. When the checks were complete, the crew could sleep in an assigned bunk, grab a meal or just relax. It wasn't

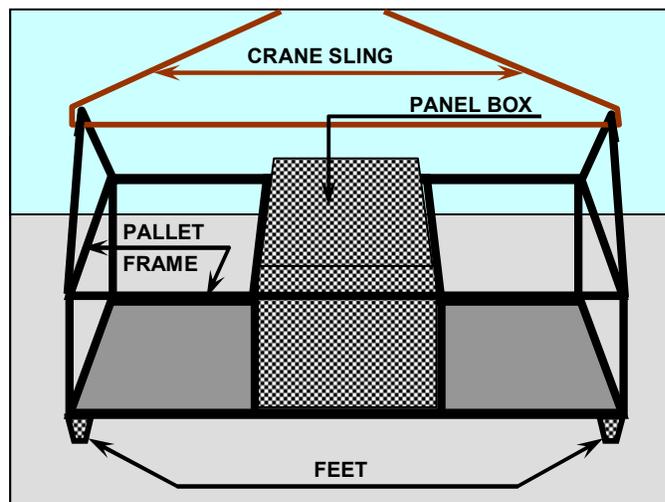


Figure 15-78 A drawing depicting a pallet designed to carry surface panels in water tight boxes.

unusual for a crew to be on site 12 to 24 hours prior to the actual operation.

ENGINEER TRAINING

New engineers were given the title of Junior Field Engineer and trained at the offshore training center located at Bell Chasse, Louisiana. They were taught the theory of the various devices Schlumberger ran, as well as given hands on experience on a training well. Though the well was shallow, they were able to run real tools in a real well and practice running a real log. They were also taught to recognize

The exact time frame required for an engineer to achieve the Senior Field Engineer or General Field Engineer level varied with his dedication towards advancement

typical problems as well as to interpret the logs they ran. They practiced a certain amount of trouble-shooting in which they had to correct the problems encountered. The course was basic but intensive. After completing the course, they were sent back to their assigned districts and assigned to ride with an experienced engineer. If I remember right, the training center experience lasted eight weeks and then they spent the remaining portion of their six-month

training period with that assigned engineer. At the end of six months, they were expected to pass a test at the division office, which covered tool theory, operation, trouble-shooting and interpretation. The district, of course, did all they could to help them prepare because the expectation was success in passing the exam. Several of us sat in on such tests and critiqued their performance. I was mostly involved in the safety and hardware portion of the exam while the sales managers were more involved with the interpretation. Assuming the junior field engineer passed, he was promoted to Field Engineer, given a raise in pay and sent back to the district to operate on his own. There, he was assigned to work with a field crew where he gained further experience on the job. Sometimes such experience was painful for the engineer and Schlumberger.

In reality, training continued for a period of three years. The new field engineer was given certain training objectives to complete in addition to carrying out his duties as a field engineer. The experience he gained as a field engineer helped him move towards this training objective but he also gained additional theoretical and practical knowledge, which included additional devices as well as a deeper understanding of the basic tools and their application. After roughly two years of employment the engineer was expected to pass a more comprehensive test at the division office, which covered all phases of his job from tool theory and practical operation through the application and interpretation of those measurements in providing the answers our customers were interested in. Some field engineers had specialized in cased-hole services during the first two years and others in open-hole services. Thus, the test involved covered their particular area of expertise. Upon successful completion of the test, they were promoted to Senior Field Engineer with an appropriate raise in pay.

The final phase of an engineer's training lasted another year, ideally in which he would cross train as either an open-hole engineer or a cased-hole engineer such that he was familiar with all the various types of services Schlumberger provided to the industry. Such training, basically, gave him the background necessary for future staff and management positions. Once again he would be tested at the

division level to assure consistency and, if successful, would be promoted to the position of General field Engineer. He could then be assigned to either cased-hole or open-hole duties as deemed necessary and appropriate by the location manager.

The exact time frame required for an engineer to achieve the Senior Field Engineer or General Field Engineer level varied with his dedication towards advancement because such preparation occurred along with his other field duties. The field engineer job is not only difficult but also time consuming, which requires commitment and dedication on the part of the field engineer in preparation for the future tests. They, of course, are encouraged and aided in the effort by management who also has an interest in their progress. Some engineers achieve the advancement goals in the minimum time required and others take somewhat longer. The time required provides a measurement of their commitment to the overall job.

EQUIPMENT AVAILABILITY

An oil company, utilizing a drilling rig with a cost of \$2000 or more per hour, does not want to wait on the availability of equipment. Like all service companies, wire line companies have to be able to respond immediately to the request for equipment and personnel to service a rig. As indicated earlier, the wire-line unit proper was installed on a rig before it left port or at the time

... the equipment would be sent out via a workboat 24 to 48 hours before the rig was to be ready for logs. Consequently, equipment round trip time was two to three times that of the crews.

a platform rig was being erected because of the difficulty of such an installation. The operating crews maintained it during each visit to the rig with supplemental maintenance visits being made by a certified mechanic. Each time a rig was brought into port for refurbishing, the wire-line unit, if owned by Schlumberger, was removed and refurbished at the Belle Chasse Maintenance Center. Salt-water and other types of damage were repaired or items replaced as necessary and the unit repainted. This included the cable or wire-line, which was replaced with a freshly marked drum of cable. When the process was complete, the unit was essentially in new condition. The maintenance center kept a stock of units ready for delivery to rigs, which were being outfitted for the gulf.

Logging equipment was subject to more types and frequency of failure than was the unit. It also required more intensive maintenance,

calibration and repair. Thus, both panels and down-hole equipment were necessarily brought back to the district after each job. As was noted earlier, the equipment would be sent out via a workboat 24 to 48 hours before the rig was to be ready for logs. Consequently, equipment round trip time was two to three times that of the crews. The operating crews maintained the logging equipment with the aid of electronic technicians, as problems were encountered. Districts had to have sufficient operational equipment on hand to answer the customers' requests. Such a supply was a function of the number of sets owned and the equipment turn-around time between its departure and return to the dock, as well as the repair time required by electronic technicians. The repair time and number of sets owned were under the direct control of Schlumberger managers with the division staff supporting them. Each district hired and trained their own technicians, receiving support, as needed, from the division staff.

Location managers made a budget for their equipment needs annually through interface with customers and division staff. The annual budgets were adjusted with periodic updates, as events changed. The district budgets were then compared with the predicted budget of the Offshore Division and adjusted as necessary with the approval of the Division Manager. The Offshore Division budget was then submitted to Houston Headquarters for approval where it might well be adjusted again to meet production capacity and scheduling. Obviously, there was a great deal of interfacing between the Offshore Division and Houston as well as between the Offshore Division office and the districts to assure realistic budgets and to procure the equipment necessary for our districts to meet the market's expanding needs.

In terms of responsibility, the sales departments developed predictions for the number of drilling rigs expected during the coming year, as well as the expected date of activation. My staff and I, on the other hand, had to budget wire-line units and equipment sets in numbers, which would harmonize with their predictions. In addition, I was expected to keep on top of deliveries as well as revised delivery schedules. It wasn't unusual for production to be rescheduled because of some supply problem or delivery destinations to be changed due to a reordering of priorities. This could create a need to redistribute existing resources to cover equipment

needs coming on line. As one might imagine, the overall process of budgeting, including day-to-day adjustments being made, occupied a large part of my office time. Noel Boudreaux, the Division Engineer, and I spent many hours poring over budget revisions to meet the reality



Figure 15-79 A floating offshore drilling rig used for deep water wildcats or defining an offshore field prior to setting a platform.

of Houston production or that of the deliveries from our Paris facilities. Each had their problems meeting commitments.

In the late 70s, the CSU or Cyber Service Unit began to come on line as new equipment. This unit, as you may remember from chapter seven, was one in which the surface operation was computerized. The CSU was part of the logging unit, which eliminated the need for panel transport. Down-hole equipment remained essentially the same, though it was moving towards telemetry communication with the CSU. New equipment became much more expensive as well as versatile. Consequently, capital investment multiplied with budgets running many

millions of dollars. Of course, CSU units cost the customer more because of their improved versatility and product quality. More computed products were also now available at the well site. Thus, income from rigs utilizing CSU units increased considerably. These new units were gradually phased in over a period of years and the transition was yet to be completed when I left New Orleans to return to the Rocky Mountains. The system would eliminate the need for panel transportation and consequently, may well have improved overall equipment reliability. However, the jury was still out on this one when I left.

TYPES OF OFFSHORE RIGS

Figures 15-79 through 15-84 are photos of typical rigs on site at various locations in the Gulf of Mexico. Figures 15-79 and 15-81 provide good views of the rig deck or a plan view, having been taken from directly above the rig. The five photos taken from the air clearly identify the helicopter pads where choppers with rig visitors such as ourselves would land.

FLOATING RIGS

Platforms are expensive to construct and are only used during field development. This is particularly true in deeper waters. Obviously, there must be some sort of evaluation made of return on investment to justify such an installation. Consequently, so-called jack up rigs are used in shallower water for exploratory drilling and floating rigs where water is deeper. The drawing of figure 15-82 is a poor man's illustration the jack up rig, which we'll describe in more detail later. It will also illustrate some pertinent points in a later experience of mine.

Floating rigs are anchored over a drilling site, with the latest positioning systems being controlled by satellite, at least according to my limited understanding. They differ in design and means of maintaining rig position, or so I suppose. The general principle of maintaining the rig position follows, as I understand it. The supporting columns, pictured in figures 15-79 and figure 15-80, extend some distance beneath the surface of the water to improve the stability of the floating platform. Each column apparently has an automatically controlled motor driving a suitable propelling system, which, in turn is controlled by the positioning system. Power is applied to each as necessary to correct for any drift of the platform from its predetermined position. The wellhead with its control system

rests on the sea floor and the drill-pipe, casing and other devices are guided to and from it via cables and/or temporary casing extensions. If I knew more about such systems, I would try to draw an illustration. However, my limited understanding will save you from having to witness the results of such a misguided effort. Instead, I will attempt to illustrate a jack up rig, commonly used in shallower waters as mentioned earlier because I couldn't find a photo of one. It so happens, that such a rig is part of my later story.

THE JACK UP RIG

A jack up rig is much simpler in a technical sense than the floating deep-water rig.



Figure 15-80 An aerial view of another type of floating drilling rig for deep water.

Consequently, it can drill wells in shallower water much more cheaply than can the deep-water rigs. Basically, as I understand the system, the body of the rig is a floating platform with three massive legs, which can be independently jacked up or down. With the bottom of the legs jacked up even with the hull, the unit floats allowing it to be moved to the desired location. Of course, the derrick is in a horizontal position, providing a more stable floating unit. Once on location, the legs are jacked down until they rest on the sea bottom. Continued jacking raises the hull or drilling floor to a safe distance above the water level. The independent control of each leg allows the unit to be raised in a level attitude, even with an

irregular sea floor. Once the drilling floor is properly positioned, the derrick can be raised in preparation for drilling. Figures 15-81 and 15-82 are photos of actual rigs I ran across after all my labors trying to draw a reasonable facsimile of such. Note that the helicopter pads set on top of a stand behind the leg furthest removed from the derrick. On one rig we visited, the pad was actually on top of that leg furthest from the derrick. In such a case, the top of the legs and thus, the height of the helicopter pad above the deck, obviously depended upon the water depth or the length of each leg extending below the surface. If I remember right, such rigs were designed to drill in up to 300 feet of water. I'm not sure just how deep the water was on the rig we visited but I would guess the legs or the helicopter pad were at least the height of the rig's derrick or 125 to 150 feet. I know because I walked down and also back up those stairs leading to the pad on the leg. Though I'll admit I was out of shape, it had us all huffing and puffing by the time we climbed back in the chopper. In addition, my leg muscles were really sore the next few days.

PLATFORM RIGS

Once a field is discovered and evaluated as to its extent and productivity, a platform is normally positioned and installed. It provides space for the rig and its associated equipment needed for developing the future field as well as the space required for the production facilities. The photos of figures 15-83 and 15-84 are examples of such rigs. Note the 3 decks. The upper deck contains most of the drilling equipment as well as the facilities for all of the various people necessary for the operation. The second and third decks contain the well control equipment, the production equipment and any necessary storage facilities. These photos provide a good idea of just how crammed full of equipment the drilling platform is. There is no wasted space.

The platform proper must not only support the weight of such gear but also be able to withstand the forces of the most intense hurricanes, category five or greater. As

described back in chapter five, a single platform may provide the space for up to 64 wells even though 24 to 36 may be more typical. At the surface such wells are a matter of two or three feet apart whereas their bottom hole objectives may well cover an area of 10 square miles. Some platforms utilize two drilling rigs to develop the reservoirs in question and contain two clusters of wellheads and programmed wells. Obviously, the platforms vary in complexity, depending upon the number of wells anticipated and the water depth. Shell Oil Co., in 1978 had a display or mock up of their

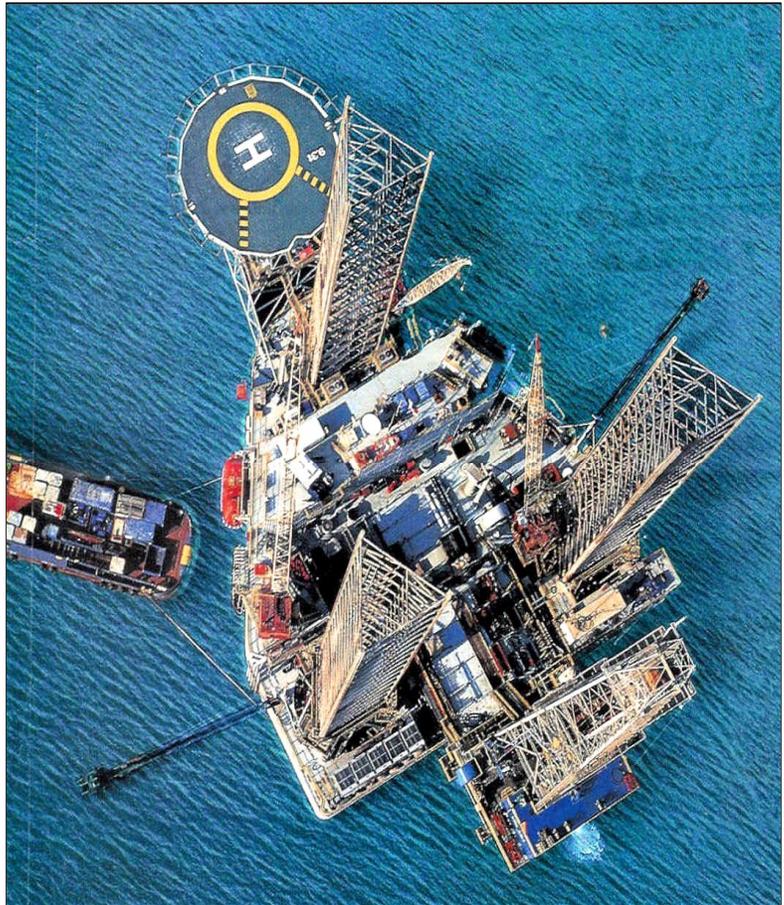


Figure 15-81 A jack-up rig, which demonstrates the limited space and crowded conditions offshore rigs.

relatively new platform, which was then in place in 1000 feet of water just south of the Mississippi River delta. Since then, I know of at least one other platform situated in the same area. The Shell display revealed the fact that the total height of the platform and two rigs was significantly higher than the Empire State Building. The cost or capital investment of platform and rigs approached one billion dollars. Drilling and completion cost of the anticipated

wells approached another billion dollars. Thus, one can see the necessity of solid reservoir information and projected revenue prior to setting a platform.

On one trip offshore I had the opportunity of witnessing a small portion of the installation process of a neighboring platform, located a couple of miles away. I had often wondered just how they anchored the platform legs to the sea floor. Though there may be a number of ways to accomplish the task, in this particular instance they were using a giant steam pile driver to drive large casings or maybe solid steel rods through the platform legs into the floor of the gulf. How deep these casings or rods penetrated the floor,



Figure 15-82 Photograph of a real Jack Up Rig in shallow water (note the legs).

I can only guess but obviously they are a prime factor in assuring the platform can withstand hurricanes. Keep in mind these platforms house the production facilities and will remain in place for the life of the field. If you have seen them drive pilings for the foundation of a large building, you have an idea of what I witnessed that day. However, the steam pile driver in the

gulf was much larger and was located on a giant barge setting next to the platform along with the necessary cranes and casing or rod material. Of course, it also contained living quarters for the operating crew or crews because such work must go on around the clock to maximize the efficient use of the expensive equipment necessary to accomplish the job.

Figure 15-85 illustrates a simplified plan view of the well configuration that exists in a typical offshore platform developed field. This was made mention of in chapter 5 but is repeated here for the convenience of the reader, demonstrating, once again, my compassion for any readers who have struggled this far.

As you can see, the apparent oil pool spreads over about nine square miles. Thirty-six wells have been drilled from the platform. The well



Figure 15-83 A view of a platform rig in the gulf from an approaching helicopter.

spacing, i.e. 160 acres, has been dictated by the oil gravity and the reservoir permeability. The wells are in two groups, having been drilled from two different rigs on the platform. Lighter gravity oil or natural gas might be drilled on a 320-acre spacing or even a 640-acre spacing because the pool could still be efficiently drained. Each well is drilled straight down to some pre-determined depth and then deviated in the direction of its bottom hole destination. Both well azimuth and

the depth at which the deviation process begins are pre-planned to prevent interference between wells. Though this is a very simplified sketch of a platform well configuration, it is meant only to present to the reader an idea of the complexity of the exploitation process of an offshore oil or gas field. Incidentally, it also happens to be the depth to which I am qualified to explain it; since any expertise I might have lies in the area of wire-line logging.

OFFSHORE TRIPS

During the course of my work in New Orleans, I had occasion to make several offshore trips. All were made by helicopter after my initial trip, which was described earlier in the chapter. In comparing the two modes of transportation, there was little doubt as to my preference.

These occasional offshore rig visits were made to get a feel for the maintenance quality being given to the installed unit and to also get a better idea of the conditions our equipment was being subjected to. With no one on site at all times, our equipment could be cannibalized to meet some rig need or some critical part might be taken to satisfy someone's curiosity. Whatever the reason, crews sometimes found units inoperative because of such thievery. We, of course, had to adjust for the reality of the situation and make necessary changes in order to accomplish our job of providing more reliable wire-line service for the rig.

The visits I made were in the company of the district manager responsible for a particular area of the gulf. He, of course, wanted to be aware of any potential problems as much as I and often initiated such visits. The visits were made via helicopter because each one involved only a short time at a particular rig. Of course, we also wanted to see as many rigs as possible during a given day's trip.

One such visit out of Lake Charles took us to a jack up rig as pictured in figure 15-81. We landed on top of one of the rig legs as I mentioned earlier and walked down to the deck. That particular jaunt wasn't too bad but I remember feeling the strain in the calves of my legs from the many steps traversed. I suspect the distance down was equivalent to a ten-story building or so. After introducing ourselves to the Drilling Superintendent, we made our way to the Schlumberger unit. We noted the condition of

the unit, as left by the last crew using it. We also verified the unit itself and its external equipment hadn't been tampered with. John Fowler, the location manager, listed the findings he found pertinent. As we headed back to the



Figure 15-84 A platform rig as seen from an approaching workboat in the Gulf of Mexico.

chopper, the distance back up the stairs seemed considerably longer than it had coming down. The steps were steep and I found myself blowing like a whale just coming to the surface.

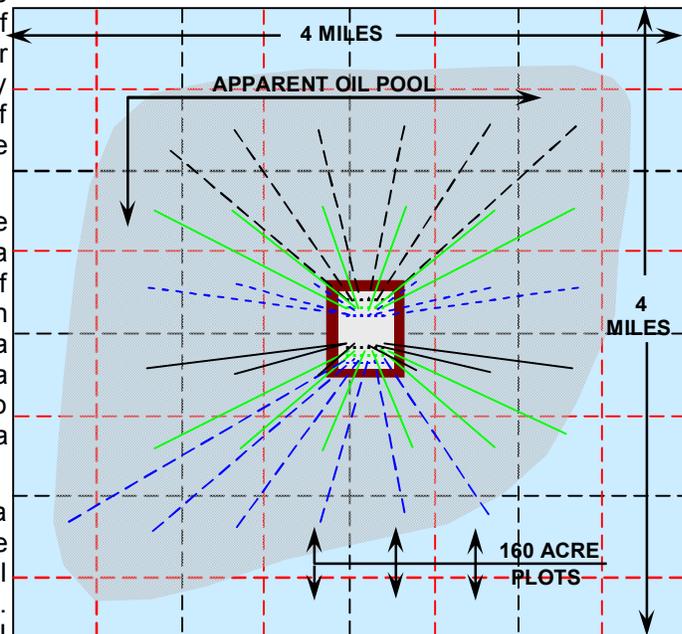


Figure 15-85 A plan view of the azimuths of the various well bores with their relationship to both the platform and the apparent oil pool.

It reminded me of a fire drill I had gone through in Denver wherein the elevators were shut down and we had to walk down some 12 flights of

stairs. In that case, we didn't have to go back up but my leg muscles were sore for several days afterwards. The results were sure to be the same after this episode. Well, I made it back into the chopper and was glad to feel the engine doing the work as we lifted off and headed for the next rig, some fifty miles away. Such incidents are grim reminders of one's advancing age or declining physical condition.

On another scheduled trip out of Lake Charles, I got a telephone call from Esther telling me that Celeste, who was on her way back to BYU, was extremely sick and was staying at Teddy and Bill Stewman's house in Dallas. She had been traveling back after Christmas vacation with a group of kids with whom she had come home but began to experience severe abdominal pain as they neared Dallas. Luckily, she knew the Stewman's, telephoned them and was able to stay with them until I could pick her up. In any case, I cancelled my trip offshore and headed for Dallas, a distance of 350 miles. They lived in Plano, Texas, a northeastern suburb of Dallas. It was around 9 AM when I left Lake Charles and I arrived at Bill and Teddy's in the late afternoon. The return trip to Covington isn't too clear. I believe we drove straight through, which was another 500 miles. In any case we had Celeste at the doctor the next day. She was diagnosed as having a cyst on one of her ovaries. I know she spent a few days in the hospital after having it removed but you will have to ask her regarding any details. Needless to say, I wasn't interested in them. I only cared that she was all right and paid the bill without even whimpering.

On another offshore trip out of Houston, we visited several rigs again. In the early morning there was considerable fog blanketing the gulf but the pilot headed in a beeline for the first rig. Even as it began to clear, one could see nothing but water. Without instruments and navigational expertise, it's easy to see how someone could get lost. Every direction looks the same, i.e. hazy blue water merging into a hazy blue sky. There was little to see other than an occasional ship. The first rig was about a hundred miles out in the gulf. It was a floating rig very similar to that illustrated in figure 15-79. We went through the usual introductions and checks without observing any particular problems. We took off and after checking the units on two or three rigs; the manager got a call from the district telling

As we headed back to the chopper, the distance back up the stairs seemed considerably longer than it had coming down.

him that one of the field crews was having trouble. They had run all the logs but the FDC/GR. They could get neither set to work. The rig was reasonably close and we landed there in short order. After talking to the engineer and ascertaining the various symptoms, it became apparent that each complete set did, indeed, have problems. I don't remember too much about the incident except that I had him interchange cartridges and sondes of the two sets. He fired them up and they worked like a charm. We stayed long enough to see him come up logging from TD and took off for Houston. Besides checking some rigs, we had defused a potential customer complaint. It was a successful day with the time and money well spent.

SPECIFIC EFFORTS TO IMPROVE SERVICE

As I have already indicated, there are many aspects to good service including properly trained personnel, well designed and maintained equipment, sufficient available equipment and the interpretation of results. It also includes personnel who carry out their assigned tasks. I add this last comment because some field personnel fail in this area for several reasons and the result is a drop in service quality.

One of my first efforts after moving to New Orleans was to toughen the technical standards for engineer promotion at all levels. This seemed to be accomplished because feedback from districts supported its reality. Engineers were sent back to their districts for further preparation in some cases and word soon got around that the division standards were real. As time went on, we found engineers better prepared for their exams.

We have already talked about the need for checks at both the rig and the district to assure the equipment is operational. Unfortunately, this wasn't always done, for several reasons. Engineers were paid bonuses for each successful field operation. Checking equipment in either case didn't pay a bonus. Checking double sets of equipment was a time consuming task, which could involve several hours when 4 or 5 services were involved. Consequently, some crews would short change the system and provide inadequate checks. At the shop, they knew they probably wouldn't get the set of equipment they checked for their next job and

thus had little motivation to do it properly. At the rig, some engineers would only check the first set when it appeared operational. They would play the odds that they could run the job okay and wouldn't check the backup set. Thus, when the first set failed in the well, the second set wasn't necessarily operational and the service might be canceled or considerable rig time lost. Such checks were essential because equipment transport either to or from an offshore rig could and did damage the electronic components involved from time to time. As I have indicated through my own experiences in earlier chapters, the field engineer's job is difficult and requires long hours. Though it may be human nature, under such conditions, to take short cuts, experience has proven such actions are detrimental if not disastrous to service quality and thus customer satisfaction.

A second effort instituted under my direction was service quality contests wherein the winning district each quarter would be rewarded with a

Though it may be human nature, under such conditions, to take short cuts, experience has proved such actions to be detrimental if not disastrous to service quality.

steak fry provided by the division. Service quality was measured in terms of lost time per job. The standard had been set over the years as being ten minutes per job. A given job might accrue a couple of hours lost time but most would be trouble free and the average then, in the neighborhood of ten minutes. Unfortunately, the engineer reports his lost time. There is no independent measurement available from each customer each time a well is serviced. Thus, we rely on the engineer's honesty. Though we knew this measurement to be weak, we felt it would have equal reliability in each district. It had been used universally throughout the corporation ever since I had been working for them. After a couple of years in New Orleans, the service seemed to be improving, at least as far as we could measure. Lost time per job had dropped to around 8 minutes per job. However, we continued to get numerous customer complaints and it appeared the improvement might be fictitious. In fact the sales department said the service contests were no good because the engineer could doctor his reporting. I couldn't argue with that point but it is interesting that sales departments, corporation wide, had been using similar contests in spite of the

obvious doctoring that went on. After some discussion, we dropped the service contests as ineffective.

Under my direction, monthly district engineer meetings were instituted. Each district offshore had a technically inclined engineer assigned to oversee technical quality for the district much as I did for the Rocky Mountain Division. This was necessary and reasonable because each district had about the same income as the Rocky Mountain Division. The engineers came to each meeting armed with problems being experienced in the their district. We discussed these and other equipment problems including design and maintenance; the idea being to come up with appropriate solutions through group discussion. Each engineer went back to his district with recommendations to institute, which the group felt would improve service. Discussion at later meetings gave us an opportunity to evaluate them. I felt these discussions were helping but there was no way to measure their actual effect.

TECHNICAL MEETINGS IN PARIS

I had the opportunity to attend two different technical meetings in Paris during my time in New Orleans. Our Houston Corporation Offices constituted headquarters for all the operations in the western hemisphere, whereas Paris was headquarters for oil field operations throughout the rest of the world. Both had engineering design and manufacturing departments with different responsibilities, which prevented duplication of effort. For instance, the Houston facility built the induction, sonic and density devices while Paris designed and built the high-resolution dipmeter, the laterolog and the Microlaterolog devices. Engineers made frequent trips between the facilities to provide instruction and carry out other related business. There was some interchange of managers, particularly at higher levels. This provided a broader experience for the individuals involved and promoted international cooperation. Our trips to Paris constituted a part of that effort.

TRIP NUMBER ONE

My first opportunity to attend a technical planning meeting in Paris occurred in the spring or summer of 1977. It required about a week for both travel and meetings. I added an extra week of vacation prior to the business trip to visit with Valerie and Jared who were still stationed in Germany. Although Esther would have loved to come with me, our circumstances prevented it

and she elected to stay home with Tom. It seems to me that school was still in session although I can't be sure of the exact reason after these many years.

MY TIME WITH THE KIDS

Figure 15-86 is a map illustrating the tour I took with Valerie and Jared while visiting them. This was my first trip to Europe and I found each and every day not only interesting but also exciting. The scenery was absolutely gorgeous with quaint little towns scattered throughout the countryside. By and large, we avoided the big cities, passing through them only when necessary. I'll try to take you on a chronological review of the trip. Though it may not be totally accurate, it will outline the high points of those few wonderful days.

Valerie and Jared picked me up at the Frankfort International Airport and we traveled back to

morning. Second, many, if not all, of the German women were hanging their bedding out on the apartment balconies or windows to air. I guess this was a morning ritual. As I remember, Jared spoke in German to several of the people as he passed but I, of course, couldn't say much more than good morning. I was apprehensive about even saying that because they might say something back and I would be a dead duck. Jared was right at home, having learned sufficient German to at least carry on a conversation. He bought several loaves of bread for the trip as well as some cheese and a few other things. I believe we stopped at a small store for everything but the bread. In any case, we had the essentials for our lunches.

We left that morning, headed for Switzerland. I was totally lost, being unable to read the signs and had to place my trust in Jared. We had traveled an autobahn from Frankfort to or at

least near Ramstein. It's unclear what our route was that morning. I'm quite sure we passed by the Frankenstein Castle, which was across the river from us. Jared pointed it out. I have since learned it is located about 7 kilometers from Darmstadt and have placed it on the Rhine next to that city. I remember getting quite a ways out on the trip and realizing I had left my wallet back at the apartment. We backtracked and I believe took a little faster route the second time. Anyhow, we made it down to the Karlsruhe area that day and I think we stayed somewhere near there that night. I remember spending a little time in Karlsruhe walking around. We knew the Abendschöns had originated somewhere near there and checked the phone book. Sure enough, we found several Abendschöns listed but neither Valerie nor I had the courage to call. Schwaigern is a little northeast of Karlsruhe, as indicated on the map of figure 15-86.

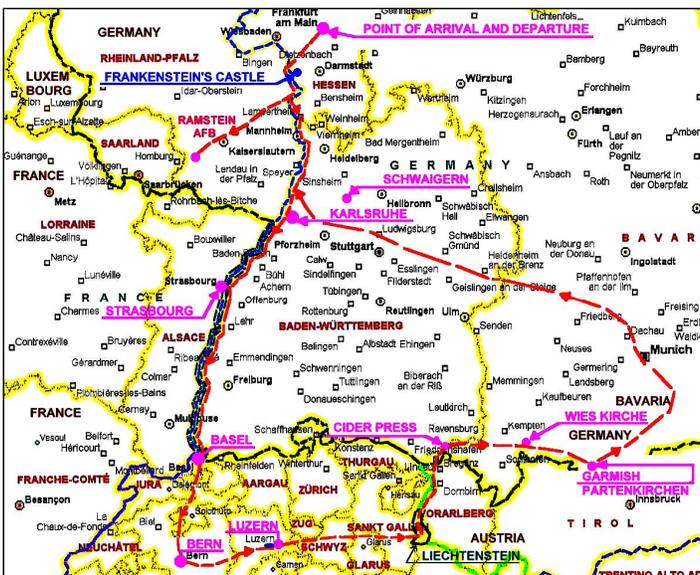


Figure 15-86 A map of portions of Germany, France, Switzerland, Austria and Liechtenstein, which illustrates the general route we traveled.

their apartment near the Ramstein Air Force Base. He was in the army and stationed some distance away but apparently, this was the closest available housing. In any case, they lived on the third floor of an apartment building in which several Germans lived as well. I remember getting up the next morning and walking down to a bakery nearby to get some bread for our trip. Several things still stand out in my mind about the experience. First, the little village or town they lived in was immaculate. In fact someone was out cleaning the streets that

The next day we headed south along the Rhine River. As we approached Strasbourg, which lies across the river in France, Valerie suggested we stop there to look for Abendschöns. She knew there was a historical library of some sort there, which kept many of the church records on file. At that time, I don't believe we realized the Abendschöns had originated from the Schwaigern area. Anyhow, we found the library, went in to the library and asked if we might look at some of the old church records for the Alsace and Lorraine areas. The lady that helped us

spoke perfect English and was most helpful. I suppose we spent about an hour without any luck. Finally, the lady asked what church we belonged to. When we said the LDS or Mormon Church, she replied, "People from your church came through a couple of years ago and copied all these records on to microfiche. You can find them at home". After talking to her a while, we decided to move on because we had quite a distance to go that day. We wanted to make Bern Switzerland where, at that time, the only LDS Temple on the continent was located.

We arrived in Bern and stayed the night. The next day we went through an endowment session. The temple was serving primarily Danes that week and we sang some hymns in Danish while we waited. The tunes were familiar and we had the words in front of us as well as Danes all around us. Consequently, we felt right at home. After leaving the temple, we headed for Luzern or Lucerne as we spell it. There is a beautiful lake there named Lake Lucerne of all things. We took a picnic lunch and found a spot along the lake where we could eat and enjoy the view. I don't believe I have ever enjoyed cheese and bread as much as I did that day by the lake. The Europeans really know how to bake bread of all kinds. We then headed on to the little kingdom of Liechtenstein. You will see it outlined in lavender on the map. I remember fighting a lot of traffic in the area and it took a while to get on into Austria. It would have been nice to stop for a while but we had to make some more miles before stopping for the night. I remember passing an apple press alongside the road.

I remember passing an apple press alongside the road. -----Jared stopped, bought a couple of gallons of cider and chatted a few minutes.

Possibly, we were back in Germany by that time but we might have been in Austria. Jared stopped, bought a couple of gallons of cider and chatted a few minutes. We enjoyed the cider along with some more bread and cheese as we drove along. It seems to me that we made it to Garmisch-Partenkirchen that night and found a place to stay but I can't be sure. We may have stayed somewhere west of there that night, which was our third night out.

We spent some time at the Weis Kirche or white church whose approximate location I have shown on the map. It's a small church but is immaculately kept in terms of repair, paint and general cleanliness. The inside was beautiful with all kinds of heavenly scenes painted on the ceiling and various figurines carved in the

moldings around the chapel. Apparently, one man of great artistic talent spent his life painting the scenes and carving the figures. He was truly dedicated to the project.

We either went to Garmisch-Partenkirchen after the Weis Kirche or retraced our steps to see the latter. We spent some time in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which was apparently a place many of the servicemen got a little R & R. As I remember there was a big skiing resort associated with the area. I also remember some kind of big hall we visited. It may have been some sort of lobby for the service men's hotel. I believe Jared had been there before for some reason. He seemed familiar with the place. We didn't have time to go on to Innsbruck and settled for our time in Garmisch.

It seems we took a two-lane highway out of Garmisch and passed through several small towns. The countryside continued to be magnificent and I thoroughly enjoyed one surprise after another. I remember coming up over a small summit and finding ourselves amid a bunch of hang glider enthusiasts. Some were along the highway, others in the air and still others waiting on a nearby hilltop for their turn. We watched a few of them make their descent over the valley before continuing on with our journey.

The route back to Ramstein is unclear to me. I vaguely remember traveling on an autobahn. It seems we were pressed to get back by Friday night. I had a little shopping to do before continuing on to Paris. As you can see by now, my recollections of the whole trip are rather vague. Even so, I remember having a great time.

Before leaving, Valerie took me shopping. I wanted to buy some nice crystal for Esther and maybe some memorabilia for others in the Spencer and Obenchain families. I got Esther some really nice crystal glasses as well as a beautiful crystal candy dish. I felt bad about Esther staying home and I suppose, tried to compensate with the crystal. Lethia and I still have the crystal with us in Georgia. I had the gifts for family members shipped from the store to save import duties. I have always been a tightwad, you know. Besides, they would have been impossible to take with me and it was questionable as to whether they would survive. Thus, I took the easy way out.

It must have been a Monday when Valerie took me to Frankfurt so I could head for Paris. Jared wasn't with us and I can only suppose he had duties to perform at the base. Even in those days, the lines were horrendous and I had trouble catching my plane. In fact, I was the last one on and had to run down the entry ramp. It seems I had gone to the wrong gate at first and had to run for the right one. In any case, I flew Lufthansa into Paris, landing at the Charles De Gaulle airport. I grabbed a cab and was able to get to my hotel room, which had been reserved. I say able because only the cabbie's limited understanding of English provided the necessary communication.

PARIS EXPERIENCES

Our Paris office had made the hotel reservations and I found myself in a very nice facility located in the heart of the city. Even though the building was apparently quite old, it was in excellent condition. After walking around the nearby area I settled in for the evening. Luckily, I had brought some reading material because I found nothing available in English. There were no TV channels in English nor did I find a newspaper I could read. I did have a French-English dictionary, which provided some key words that helped. Unfortunately, my pronunciation was such that the few people I tried to talk to simply stared in disbelief. Even so, I was able to order a sandwich and a coke for dinner. Later that evening, I was reading in my room when a maid knocked and then entered without waiting for me to answer the door. She said something in French and then proceeded to turn back my bed. She then left a couple of mints on the pillow, said something else in French and quickly departed. Turning back the bed was a nightly ritual it seems but one that was usually completed before I returned in the evening.

I decided to order breakfast in my room and chose milk and a glass of orange juice as beverages. The next morning there was a knock at the door. When I opened it, breakfast was there on a tray along with a newspaper, which I couldn't read. As I ate, I realized the orange juice was at room temperature and even more surprising, the milk had been heated and was quite warm. I couldn't drink it, though I did manage the orange juice. I grabbed a coke from a little refrigerator provided with the room. It contained various wines, a few French sodas, some bottled water and the coke in the old 6-ounce bottle we knew as kids. On the

associated price list, the wines were cheaper than the sodas with the water somewhat more expensive than the coke. That evening, with the aid of my handy dandy little dictionary, I ordered cold milk. Well, the result was milk at room temperature, which was hardly an improvement. Apparently the French don't refrigerate milk and the use of ice is still waiting to be discovered.

After breakfast that first day, I went down to the lobby where I ran into Bob Shay, the corporate equipment manager from the states and we proceeded over to the Schlumberger city office, which was located a few blocks away. There we met another guy from Houston who knew his way around Paris. He offered us a ride to the Paris Headquarter facilities located in extreme southeast Paris, according to my understanding. Of course, it could have been in Timbuktu, for all I knew. I was thoroughly lost and had to depend on those who knew their way around.

Paris Headquarters is a large facility, similar to that of Houston with engineering, production and management sections. The meeting was held in a large conference room with 50 or 60 people present. Various technical aspects of our business around the world were discussed, none of which I can remember now except the priorities set for the production and delivery of equipment. We ran a lot of dipmeters offshore and delivery of new equipment was critical to that effort. Consequently, we pushed for early delivery in that area.

At the close of the first day's meeting a Frenchman, whom I'll call Pierre, offered us an invitation to dinner and a ride to the hotel.

When the light changed, he put the pedal to the metal, charges into the intersection and whips back into the proper lane, just missing the oncoming surge of traffic.

Needless to say, we accepted. We followed Pierre to the parking lot where we all crammed ourselves into a little French car. He obviously knew Paris and took a completely different route than we had followed out. He whipped that little car in and out of traffic, taking side streets to avoid the worst congestion and had us back to the city center in record time. At one light, he pulled a stunt, which I'll never forget. The line of traffic, between the red light and our car, was about a block long. Rather than take his place in line, he pulled into the oncoming lane and zooms up to the light facing the cars on the

opposite side of the intersection. When the light changed, he put the pedal to the metal, charges into the intersection and whips back into the proper lane, just missing the oncoming surge of traffic. Of the several harrowing experiences of the afternoon, that one stood out. We went to a Chinese restaurant, of all things, to have dinner. The streets were narrow so everyone parked on the sidewalks. We did the same and made our way through the parked vehicles to the restaurant. The food was good but typical Chinese, which we could have gotten in the states.

Bob and I spent a little time together in Paris during the one day of free time following the meeting. I remember walking along the Seine River, riding the underground transit system, visiting the Arc de Triomphe and riding the elevator up the Eiffel Tower. We walked along the Avenue des Champs Elysees where we had lunch at McDonalds. Prices there were more in line with what we were used to stateside. I had paid something like 18 francs, about \$13, at the hotel for a burger, fries and a couple of 6 ounce bottled cokes. The next morning we took a cab to the Charles De Gaulle International Airport and departed for Houston.

TRIP TWO

I made a second trip to Paris for a similar meeting a year later, flying out of Miami and landing at a different airport in the Paris suburbs. I took a bus into town and met Bob and others at the hotel. Nothing stands out about the meeting, i.e. no wild rides or other earthshaking experiences. However, I did have an interesting experience trying to buy some shaving cream. The morning after my arrival, I realized I had failed to pick up some shaving cream on the way to the airport in New Orleans, as I intended. I figured I could buy some in the hotel lobby area but no such luck. I would have to find a drug store. I returned to my room, picked up my handy dandy French-English dictionary and left the hotel looking for a drug store. I finally found one a couple of blocks away and went in. Two French ladies made up the sales staff and neither could apparently speak a word of English. I rubbed my face and said shaving cream in French but to no avail. I then made motions like I was shaving and repeated my word for shaving cream. One ran and got me a

razor. I shook my head and repeated shaving cream again. I began to realize that my French word wasn't understandable to them. I suspect it sounded more like Chinese or maybe some dialect from deepest Africa. Who knows? Next, she then brought back some razor blades and finally some lotion. After what seemed like an eternity, the lady came back with the shaving cream. I smiled and said thanks before leaving. She seemed overjoyed that she had finally taken care of this bumbling American who couldn't even say shaving cream in French. I was happy to get the ordeal done with and she, I feel sure, was happy to see me leave. I may well have been the topic of conversation that night at their dinner table.

The second night, we did have a nice dinner near the River Seine at a French Restaurant with a group of French engineers and their wives. They spoke limited English and I spoke no French. I remember straining all evening trying to understand them. It made an otherwise pleasant conversation

difficult. All of them lived in apartments and were somewhat envious of our being able to have affordable houses with yards in the United States. Apparently, land values are out of sight in France. They were curious as to why I wouldn't drink wine. I explained that my Church was against drinking alcohol. They wanted to know just what church that was. When I said the Mormon Church, it seemed they had never heard of it. Even so, they did respect my views.

After the meeting, I traveled with the head of Houston Electrical Engineering to Amsterdam to visit an offshore location and compare notes with our operation. No important differences stood out to me. Their activity level per engineer was lower and the equipment had to pass customs each time it went offshore. Thus, equipment travel time to and from the rigs was longer. I suspect, a lower demand on equipment and people was the main factor in their higher service level. Later, we walked around nearby portions of Amsterdam. Many of the buildings were built in the 1600s but were still in use. I noticed that some of the outside walls were leaning and, if not buttressed by another building, would surely have come crashing down. I was amazed that they still stood after so many years. Obviously, the Netherlands is not earthquake country.

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ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Throughout my Schlumberger career, our job performance was evaluated annually. The immediate superior of an employee evaluated him or her according to a standard format wherein important parameters related to the overall job were listed. Once complete this written evaluation was then sent to the next higher level of management for their comments before being discussed with the employee involved. During the discussion objectives for the coming year were set, which included those areas where performance was less than desirable as well as areas important to an employee's future advancement. Making such evaluations began with the field engineer who rated the operators working on his truck and continued on to all levels of higher management. Their value lay primarily with the sincerity and objectiveness of the evaluator and his ability to communicate the results to the employee in question. Obviously, this particular function was part of the field engineer's training and his expertise improved with experience, as did one's tolerance or ability to undergo such an evaluation. I don't know that anyone looked forward to them.

Over the years, my evaluations varied somewhat with my boss at the time and the type of work I was doing. In the early years of my career such evaluations were always superior or of the highest level. It related primarily to my technical expertise and my work ethic, which, if I do say so, was indeed superior to most field engineers. I passed my engineering exams in the minimum time required and my job performance definitely exceeded that of most field engineers. I seemed to manage my crew appropriately and interfaced with the customer well enough; even though I was somewhat introverted. I was aware of my shy nature and faced it head on by accepting uncomfortable challenges, doing the best that I could. The first job I was given, which truly made me feel uncomfortable, was that of a sales engineer in Billings, Montana. I described that to some extent in chapter eleven. I suppose my rather poor social skills were adequately compensated for by my commitment and effort to carry out the job. I say this because I was promoted in less than a year to Station Manager, which included both sales and

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managing activities. Additionally, I was promoted in less than another year to Senior Sales Engineer in Farmington, New Mexico, a job I took with some reservation. I knew my talent lay in the technical realm. I was good at running services, defining and fixing tool problems and in the interpretation of the products we offered the customer. I could visit a customer, offer advice on logging suites and interpret any logs he might have but I was as clumsy as an elephant in a china store when it came to simply socializing with that same customer. Soon after moving to Farmington, I joined the LDS Church, which further inhibited my social abilities through the word of wisdom. I had agreed to live this doctrine and give up drinking any kind of alcohol as well as coffee and tea. Thus, I had to settle for soda or water when taking a client to lunch, while he might have a mixed drink or a beer as well as coffee. This obvious abstinence in such things may not have bothered the clients but it did seem to amplify my own uncomfortable feelings and ability to engage in small talk or any conversation other than the details of business. Had I been an extrovert, I suspect I could have handled the problem quite easily but my timidity now became my own worst enemy. Even so, I suffered through some four years in that position and was eventually promoted to District Manager. My reviews during those sales years were quite good but I would have to rate my performance as average, at best. I probably disguised my social weaknesses with my strong work ethic.

My years as a district manager were good years. Once again I did, what I thought, was an excellent job. Sales contacts were part of the job but mine were always business related; that is related to specific wells or jobs. I did little of a social nature because it wasn't really necessary. I feel sure it would have helped shake my rather introverted nature but I had no time or interest in such activities. At that particular level, any weakness in managerial skills was sales related and not technical or management.

Frank O'Brien recognized my technical skills and promoted me to Division Engineer in 1969. I think I excelled at that job because managerial and sales requirements were minimal. In the six years I served in that capacity, many people in the corporation recognized my talent. My

solution to the ongoing sonic problem discussed in chapter 14 brought me additional recognition and was probably the single greatest reason for my promotion to Offshore Technical Manager. Higher management hoped, I feel sure, that I could bring about a solution to the technical problems offshore. At this point any readers I have must be wondering what all this has to do with the offshore story. Well, it summarizes the reasons why I was in New Orleans and lays the base for ensuing events.

A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW

During the first couple of years offshore, my performance reviews were okay. They were administered by the Division Manager and reviewed by the Vice President of Operations. I apparently wasn't recognized as a rising star but then, neither was there any indication that I was failing. The third year, Roy Shourd, the VP of Operations, inserted a comment that I was too nice and wasn't tough enough in my style of management. I think what he really meant was that I wasn't aggressive enough. Well, I couldn't argue with that but I wasn't sure how I could change it. My nature was rather peaceful and I preferred to get things done through discussion. I'll admit that I seldom pushed my point if it raised a lot of controversy.

Well, the fourth year the same comment appeared. I had also been asked to accompany the head of electrical engineering on a trip to The Netherlands after a conference in Paris to observe their offshore operation, as described earlier. Later in the year he also made a trip around our division with me looking at the problems involved and, I suppose, considering possible solutions. I realized these activities were motivated by Roy Shourd's concern over service quality and the resulting loss in offshore business. About the same time, the division engineer, who reported to me, was replaced with two division engineers. One was assigned to handle cased-hole problems and the other open-hole problems. I could see the handwriting on the wall but wasn't sure what to do. I felt my replacement was also imminent. No one could fault me for not working hard enough, nor could they fault my technical understanding. They could and they did fault my management style. I can't argue with the decision. They had moved me in to solve the service problems and, though I had made some progress, it was insufficient. Customers were complaining and we were losing rigs to our competitors. I had been given

about four and one half years to prove myself but had not delivered the results the company expected. Without a doubt, Roy Shourd made the right decision. It was a bitter pill for me to swallow. Failure in any assignment was unacceptable to me and my ego had been completely deflated. Well, they offered me a job as the training manager, which would keep me involved in engineer training. I might have resigned but I had 23 years invested and decided to stick it out until retirement.

A Frenchman by the name of Robert De Fleurier replaced me as technical manager and I reported to him. He had extensive experience overseas in offshore work and seemed well qualified for the job. The transition was smooth enough. He seemed to respect my technical ability and relied heavily on me in technical training. He was a real extrovert and aggressive as they come but I had no trouble working for him. His aggressiveness became abrasive at times and consequently, he never seemed to acquire a lot of fans. Of course, the only required fans, in such a situation, are those of higher management, which he seemed to have. One thing I can say about Robert, he wasn't afraid to recommend a solution, even if it was costly. I, on the other hand, having been reared in the frugal atmosphere of the Rockies, was cost conscious to a fault. In fact, in hindsight, I believe such frugality limited my perspective in my search for technical solutions. However, Robert, after some study, jumped right in and recommended streamlining the equipment checkout procedures in the districts. He recognized the need for effective checking of equipment returning from the gulf as well as the engineers' tendency to do a halfhearted job. His solution involved making the job of checking equipment at the shop somewhat easier. I'm not aware that he addressed the halfhearted checkouts at the rig but he probably got the most critical one. In any case, he recommended extensive remodeling of the instrument areas in each district and it was approved. I suspect several hundred thousand dollars were involved if not millions because the plan included building additions. However, I had no real knowledge of the cost. How well it worked, I'm not sure either because I returned to the Rockies before the system was in operation.

A RETURN WITHOUT HONOR

I worked under Robert for the better part of a year as the Division Training Manager, a job I

seemed well qualified for. However, I would be less than honest if I said my mental outlook was upbeat. It wasn't that I disliked my new job but more that I had great difficulty getting over my failure to deliver. In this capacity, I would prefer the Rockies with its open atmosphere and began looking for opportunities to return. I didn't expect any advancement in the future, regardless of where I worked and expected to retire in another 8 years or so. I wanted to be in the best possible location when that happened. In the spring of 1980, I learned the Rocky Mountain Division was looking for a training manager. I applied, was accepted and was asked to report for that assignment in Denver in early July of 1980.

In June of 1980, Esther, Tom and I flew into Denver on a house-hunting trip. We were looking for what, quite probably, would be our retirement home and decided a ranch style with a full basement would be most suitable. I wanted brick to minimize outside maintenance requirements. We spent a couple of days looking in the Littleton area where we had lived in the early 1970s but found nothing we liked in our price range. Upon the advice of Bill Troxel, a good friend of mine, we turned to Arvada on the northwest outskirts of Denver. There we located a house, which seemed to meet our needs. It was a white brick ranch with a full finished basement. Being 15 years old, it would require some fixing up. The basement floor had also settled and I was rather dubious about buying it. I hired a structural engineer to look the house over and give me advice on the basement floor problem. He felt the house was sound and no further settling would occur. He also said I could have the floor moved back into position with a so-called mud jacking process for \$500 to \$1,000. I negotiated what I felt was a fair price and right or wrong, we signed on the dotted line. We would close and take possession on July 1. After painting the entire inside prior to furniture arrival, we would lay new carpet throughout. With those improvements we could be happy in the house. Within a week, we were back in New Orleans preparing to move.

We packed the majority of the boxes for the move. Esther had learned that anything, including the garbage, might show up at the other end if she allowed them to do it. It was a big job and to make matters worse, the air conditioner went out. We spent 3 days with nothing to cool us but fans. Those who haven't experienced such humidity won't appreciate our

level of misery but we did survive. It wasn't fixed until the last day before the moving truck arrived.

Our move took place right after the eruption of Mt. St. Helens in Washington. In fact, the truck from the moving company we hired showed up with volcanic dust strewn throughout the undercarriage. The driver had been in the Seattle area when the mountain blew and one can only imagine how thick the dust must have been to collect throughout the undercarriage. I believe Tom collected some dust as a memento. During the last week of June, we said goodbye to friends and headed northwest to Denver. It was a time of mixed emotions. Esther and I were glad to return to the Rockies but knew we would miss the many fine friends we had made.