
CHAPTER FOUR

THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE YEARS

BASIC TRAINING

In chapter two I alluded to my entry into the United States Air Force in May of 1951 after leaving graduate school due to a shortage (to say the least) of funds. I was newly married, about six months, with no children on the scene or in the making as yet. The following four years, to which I committed, proved to be rather significant in that two daughters were born to Esther and me, introducing us to parenthood and helping us become somewhat better adjusted with one another. Though relatively short, time wise, that period of our lives provided a number of growth experiences for both of us and seems worthy of its' own chapter in this autobiography. Because of the time element, the chapter may prove to be a little short, in pages that is, but maybe not in interest and, of course, may be seen as excessive in terms of my rather questionable humor. So, off we go into the wild blue yonder, to my fate, in that longhorn state, namely Texas.

OFF TO LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE

I reported for duty on May eighth 1951 having received the necessary physical and testing a little earlier along with my serial number of AF28640913. I, along with others reporting, was then placed on a slow train to San Antonio, Texas, home of that U.S.A.F. basic training Mecca known as Lackland air Force Base. I had been assigned to the 3720th Basic Military Training Group. Little did I know what the ensuing weeks would bring or why the base had received the name of "Lackland". Needless to say, I rather quickly found out, upon our arrival there but I'll spare you those details for the time being. Some preliminary experiences that must come first, like getting there and my means of survival while in such a place of distinction.

I was newly married, about six months, with no children on the scene or in the making as yet.

MY FIRST TRAIN RIDE

The train ride was a slow one to say the least. We traveled coach, which wasn't all that bad and we even got to eat in the dining car. What a treat that was for this small town boy who had never been on a train. We had real cloth napkins and so many different utensils I couldn't figure out what to do with them. Boy oh boy, Bear Valley was never like this. Not only that, but a colored waiter took our orders and treated us like we were real gentlemen. That took some getting used to but I managed to do so. The food was good though somewhat fancier than I anticipated or for that matter, even cared for. My only real complaint was the amount of food we could have. Sufficient, I'm sure, for the normal inductee but you must remember I was not only 22 years old but also used to some rather filling meals all those years in the woods. Even so, my stomach adjusted adequately having been toughened up by eight years of batching with the forest service. The dining car quickly became the highlight of the trip for me because the rest of the time we read or sat staring out the windows at the rather boring landscape. The ride to Denver proceeded smoothly and relatively quickly on the good old Union Pacific. Generally the track was rather straight and we seemed to travel at a good clip, arriving there the following morning.

THE DENVER AND RIO GRANDE

After arrival in Denver, we transferred to the Denver and Rio Grande railroad for the ride on to San Antonio. Things seemed to slow down from that point on. We wound along the foothills of the front-range in Colorado for what seemed to be an eternity before entering Texas via, I guess, Oklahoma. I sat in the club car much of the way, which was last and simply watched the

scenery go by. Every little bit it seemed we would pass a train going the other way. Eventually I realized that train was our engine winding along the foothills on a track that must have been designed by a snake. We surely covered at least twice the line of flight distance between Denver and San Antonio.

In those days a reasonable grade for a train was accomplished by following the topographical contours of the landscape with the track. The tremendous cut and fills of the highways and railroads of today were hardly dreamed of then, I suppose. In any case even the smallest hills were negotiated through the use of numerous curves. I was amazed that the grand old state of Texas was hilly enough to maintain that kind of track construction right up to the station in San Antonio. Then again, San Antonio is located in what is known as the Texas hill country. Well, the track might have straightened out for a few miles a time or two but, if so, it didn't make much of an impression on me. We finally pulled in about three days and two nights after leaving Boise and I was ready to have a change of scenery.

ARRIVAL AT SAN ANTONIO

When we arrived in San Antonio, the Air Force personnel were there in goodly numbers to herd us on to busses for the ride to Lackland AFB. That didn't take long and we soon found ourselves lining up in formation by the bus to await orders and baggage at the base. We were divided up into several different "flights" which made up a squadron. As I mentioned, my assigned flight was 3728. The drill sergeant along with his assistant, a corporal, then took over to march us to the barracks. He was a loving sort of fellow who used nothing but the best of the "Kings English". I believe it went something like this. **"Did you hear me, yo wuthless, no good *&#%#@ chillen of an ape. Ah said yo all straighten up and get yo feet in step. Left, right, left, right, get in step yo numbskulls or I'll kick yo butts right up 'twixt yo shoulder blades., hup, hup, left, right and on and on. Well, you never saw such a rag tag bunch of recruits carrying a bag or two, trying to stay in step without knowing for sure their left from their right foot. We arrived at the barracks still intact but a little shaken up by the sergeant's friendly chatter. After being assigned bunks, taken over to clothing issue and given**

Of course, good old sarge didn't show up for ten or fifteen minutes unless, of course, you failed to fall in at parade rest.

enough clothes, duffel bags, etc. to at least get started, we were told to make up our bunks and get ready for inspection. There wasn't much of a wait before that same friendly fellow came out of his room and started yelling and tearing things apart. **Airman, did yo mother teach you to make yo bed like that? Well, if'n she did yo got a lot to learn. I expects to bounce a quarter on that there blanket so's yo betta start a practicing. Look see at them thar wrinkles, they looks like the Texas foothill country. Hows come yo %\$#@ shoe lace is a floppin around like a fish off a hook, an what's this here dust a doing on this here bed rail,** and on and on and on. Gosh, how I learned to appreciate his loving ways and visits.

LIFE OF THE NEW RECRUIT

I'm not sure of the sequence of events after those first few hours but they included being assigned to certain squad within the squadron, being marched off to the mess hall, receiving shots, having any and all hair cut off, etc. The latter was no problem for me because I was already wearing a crew cut. We also quickly learned to come to attention when the sergeant or anyone, other than recruits, came into the barracks. You fell in at the end of your bunk and stood there at attention until the visitor said "at ease". We also learned inspections of all kinds were as frequent as were meals. Within the first couple of nights we were awakened at about 2:00 AM with a loud **"fall out, you've got five minutes to be in formation in front of the barracks"**.

Of course good old sarge didn't show up for ten or fifteen minutes unless you failed to fall in at parade rest. If you were slouching around or trying to relax, you would hear a voice of encouragement out of the dark kind of like

this, **"Obenchain, I thot Ah said 'fall in'? That don't mean a standing round with yo thumb in yo nose or sittin on yo butt or some other &+*#%\$@ thing. Do yo understand? And the rest of yo no good flea bitten excuses for airmen, didn't I tell yo that yo betta snap to attention when ah come out?"** And on and on and on. Oh what motivation that is at two in the morning. Surely he had a graduate degree in interpersonal relations. How grateful one becomes for such stalwart leaders with their kind understanding chatter. When they finally say, "fall out and hit the sack", you find yourself calm,

relaxed and with almost instant ability to drift off to sleep not knowing when the next pleasant call to attention will come. It was after about a week of such experiences that I understood the base's name. Surely Lackland was the "land that lacked" any semblance of civility, that is, and had been appropriately named by a very insightful person.

A TYPICAL MORNING

Reveille was at 5:30 AM, which, though kind of early, wasn't all that bad. It was the things that occurred during the night or followed later that ruined the day. We had until 6:30 for all the flight members to shower, shave, dress and get their beds made up properly. Then we heard the corporal or drill sergeant scream, "fall in". That was our breakfast call. Everywhere we went, including the chow hall, we marched with the sergeant and corporal nipping at our heels like a dog chasing a car. Their endearing language was the equivalent of an acid pill (not anti-acid) for our poor abused stomachs. Once inside the chow hall, they left us alone until the allotted time was up. We'd grab a tray and fall in line to get our share of the rather questionable fare for the morning. I stuck to scrambled eggs and bacon with toast. That was hard to ruin though they made a remarkable effort. I still remember the airmen breaking eggs preparatory to scrambling them. They'd crack them two at a time, one in each hand, and open them with the associated fingers. Not being particularly dexterous, about 25% of the shell went in too. Did that bother them? Not at all, they simply whipped them up with the egg. After all, a healthy airman needed his calcium for strong bones and teeth. I suspect I satisfied the USDA minimum daily requirement for calcium for life during that particular 12 weeks. There was one benefit, at least I could have all the food I wanted due, partially, to its availability and partly to a declining appetite. The latter is significant when you consider a typical meal in Bear Valley.

With breakfast completed, we'd march back to the barracks and spend the next hour or so, on detail around the area. A couple of guys had to clean the latrine, a few more would swab out the barracks and the rest would be assigned to police the areas around the barracks and across the road at the community rest room. If you were unlucky enough you were selected to swab out a magnificent edifice dedicated to the welfare of all airmen's innards in the area and, of course, re-supply the same. Heaven help the

airman who tried to take time out for nature's regular call. One had to time their innards so that call came during a break or during off duty hours. I remember getting caught one time by the corporal who asked, "What do you think you is doing sittin on yo fat \$#@%&* fanny." I said I thought it was rather obvious but I'd be



Figure 4-1 Yours Truly just after graduation in basic training and an atypical smile.

happy to explain if that was necessary. He didn't take to that too kindly and I found myself swabbing the place down by myself the next morning but at least it wasn't for a week.

SWEAT, TEARS AND SALT TABLETS

About nine AM we started our training regimen for the day. There was no fixed order but it consisted of classes, calisthenics, much marching, rifle range, etc. Figure 4-1, taken off duty of course, illustrates typical dress for our normal activities. I'll pick out a few rather typical experiences that come to mind to help you appreciate the flavor but first a few words about the delightful Texas climate in June and July. We had begun our training in May but the last 75% occurred in June and July. Temperatures at Lackland run around a hundred that time of year with very low humidity. Though you sweat like a pig, the perspiration evaporates from skin

and clothes about as quickly as it is formed. The clue to its magnitude is the salt encrusted in ones clothes at the day's end. Fatigues, which we wore most of the time, would be white in appearance particularly on the back. We were warned to take at least two salt tablets a day which were available almost everywhere. I started to follow that counsel but became nauseous every time and quit.

Well, that was a mistake. I lost my appetite, which had been struggling with the questionable

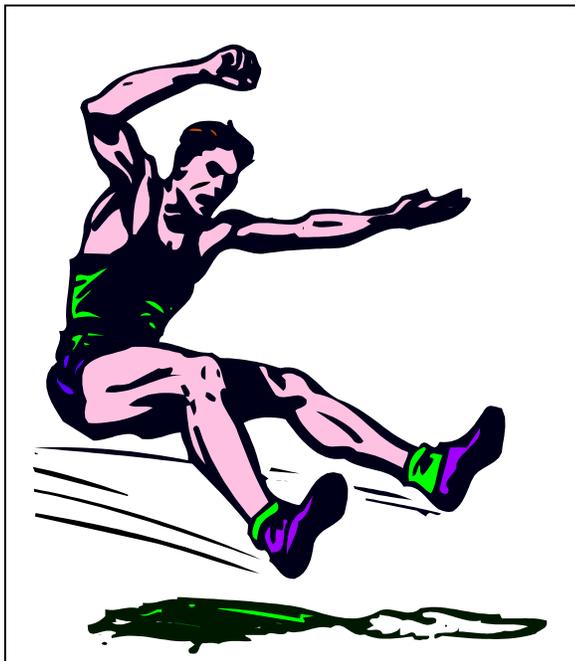


Figure 4-2 Atlas could leap tall buildings with a single bound and expected the same from each of us poor puny airmen.

air force food anyway and my weight followed in a downward spiral. I knew I had to get some food in me to keep up with the physical training and finally found I could drink a glass of salt water without ill effect. Thus, I would dissolve two tablets daily in a glass of water and quickly chug it down. My appetite returned, to a degree at least, and I was able to keep up physically. I blame the rest of its loss on the food, which, though composed of quality ingredients, somehow degraded to a rather tasteless mass of chow. Unfortunately, I became better acquainted with that process during KP assignments, which didn't help. I had entered basic at about 190 pounds and completed it at around 165 or 170. In any case, I was basically a skeleton with a little skin covering my frame but with just sufficient energy to compete. I will

guarantee you there was no flab on me. This may have been the only time I have been under the federal guidelines for weight versus height.

THE AIR FORCE OR INFANTRY

Our flight was composed of about 70 men. Several flights made up a squadron and each flight consisted of 4 squads or columns. As we marched around the base, we kept that configuration. Believe me we marched. I thought I had somehow ended up in the infantry and had to check my orders to be sure I hadn't made a mistake. The drill sergeant would be on one side barking orders and the corporal on the other looking for slackers. Eventually their threats gave way to various songs used to keep the cadence or simply counting cadence. We'd go out on the drill field and practice all types of maneuvers and actually became quite proficient, at least for airmen. All of this practice was to prepare us for a review before the base commanding officer after completion of eight weeks of training. It was about this time I began to realize that all such marching along with various work details and their associated vocal expletives were used to teach us to follow orders without question even if we didn't understand or agree with the purpose. Such is essential for any branch of the military and even desirous in many facets of business. I'm glad the marching effort had a deeper meaning than just preparing for review because such a thought was really a letdown. On the designated day, several squadrons, I suppose, were assembled on the edge of the parade grounds to await their chance to pass in review. We stood in formation at parade rest until our flight was called. We then fell in behind the preceding flight and marched past the reviewing stand where the designated officers were standing. Of course there was some military music and as we past the stand we did an eyes right and saluted. The salute was returned and as we made our way a few yards past the stand we were given an eyes front command. That was it. We marched back to the assembly point and that completed the big show. Likewise, our marching practice now became a thing of the past, thank goodness. Orders had already been cut and we were all given our assignments with dates of departure. Mine, however, was destined to be postponed by air force decree, as will be described in a later segment of my story. Although I didn't understand why at the time, the postponement was due to training schedule conflicts at Keesler Air Force Base, which would be my next post. It

was the air force training center for radar of all types, airborne, ground control approach of aircraft and ground control interception.

ATLAS LEADS THE WAY

Calisthenics experiences fit nicely in here. Although we got plenty of exercise daily, including marching in double time, each Sunday we were taken to a large assembly area composed of dirt with a large platform of maybe 10 feet in height located in front of us. Several flights would be in attendance. Two airmen, not recruits, were on the stand stripped to the waist rippling their muscles, thus giving us a hint of what was to come. Obviously, they had the ideal physique, one that the average airman should also have, so they supposed. They could leap tall buildings with a single bound and promised us the same if we would but follow their lead. Such is depicted in figure 4-2 by selected click art. We did all manner of calisthenics from pushups to squat jumps with our Mr. Atlas's demonstrating the proper way. Of course 50 pushups never fazed either of them, as did none of the other exercises. In doing 50 pushups they would do 25 with one arm and then the next 25 with the other making most of us feel rather puny as we struggled to get 50 in with both arms.

Naturally we tried to employ a few stress releasing moves such as leaving our bellies on the ground while doing pushups and simply lifting our shoulders.

Naturally we tried to employ a few stress releasing moves such as leaving our bellies on the ground while doing pushups and simply lifting our shoulders. In so doing one had to listen closely and keep as wide a view as possible for the drill sergeants and their assistants because all were circulating through the group to catch and stop such antics. When they would get close my back was straight and I had perfect form while performing pushups but let the voices fade away and my belly began to drag the ground along with those of everyone else. Similarly my squat jumps became crouch shuffles, etc. Well, we did get a work out but I'm not sure how much good it did physically, let alone psychologically. Mostly I came away realizing how puny I was compared to the two Adonis's performing on the stand.

COASTING WHILE ROASTING

Required classes, by and large, were boring, to say the least. Oh we learned a little about rather important subjects but unless the subject had a field application, it basically went in one ear and

out the other. The classrooms weren't air-conditioned and in 100-degree heat were like ovens inside. It was hard to keep focused and most people snoozed or day dreamed paying just enough attention to pass the rather simple exam at the end. When it came to breaking down rifles and preparing for practice on the range, however, attention improved. We knew we might have to apply that knowledge which made a world of difference. All in all, however, I didn't count the classroom time as very beneficial nor did anyone else I knew of.

KITCHEN POLICE

We served KP duty about every couple of weeks. It made for a long day. We were called out about four AM and marched to the dining hall. There we were given assignments for the day, which varied from washing pots and pans through serving food to mopping or cleaning garbage cans. My favorite duty was in the supply room but only two airmen were so assigned. I think I got that duty once. It consisted of simply getting

the necessary supplies as ordered by the cooks and delivering them to a window where they were picked up. Garbage detail was the worst and everything else fell in between. The thing that impressed me the most was the constant harassment by supervising NCO's. After meals were served, tables cleared and the place thoroughly mopped, we might try to sit down a bit and rest our weary feet before the next meal. Usually we couldn't get in more than 30 seconds before we heard, "**on yo feet airman, ya'll came here to work, not sit on yo butts. Now yo all get yo &*%@\$ fat fanny a moving, ya hear.**" Knowing we could never sit down, we finally resigned ourselves to spending the time holding on to a mop and moving it just enough to give the impression we were working and particularly so after the place had been mopped following a meal. There was no point in getting your work done quickly because make believe work, if nothing else, would surely follow. By nine that evening, we were finally allowed to return to the barracks and my feet would be killing me. That's a 16 to 17 hour day on your feet, all of which took place on a concrete slab. My feet would be killing me, more so than with the 13 hour days I spent in grocery stores on Saturdays as a teenager. Hiking in Bear Valley was never like this. I would even prefer marching in the Texas heat to KP.

THE BELT BUCKLE INCIDENT

Along with our standard daily regimen, we would be given special assignments from time to time for a day, separating us from the flight. One such assignment was barracks guard duty wherein we were stationed at the entrance to a given barracks and required to identify all who tried to enter. If an officer were involved, we would call the barracks to attention unless, of course, there was an officer of higher rank already in the building. About four weeks into basic I received that assignment. I dressed in



Figure 4-3 My graduation picture from basic, July 1951, clad in suntans, the summer dress uniform.

my suntans as required and went to my post at the appointed time. Figure 4-3, taken at graduation, illustrates the required summer attire, at least on the upper half of the body. All was in order as I took my place near the barracks' door. Knowing I might have visitors of rank, I had carefully checked my dress to be sure it met the required standards. There was a

short bench next to the door, which we were allowed to sit on when no one else was in the building. There I had taken my place waiting for some kind of action. Little did I realize what was about to occur. What a surprise was in store for this grossly unseasoned airman as our squadron drill sergeant approached the door followed by a captain, no less.

BLIGH ARRIVES WITH THE CO

About 10:00 AM I heard footsteps outside and stood up quickly mentally reviewing the probable activities that would follow. The door opened

and in came my drill sergeant followed by a captain, our squadron CO. I stood at attention, saluted and, after calling the barracks to attention, went through the usual inquiry with visitors. I no sooner got the words out of my mouth than good old sarge (we had coined his name as Sergeant Bligh) stepped forward, grabbed my belt buckle which was hanging loose and thundered, **"Airman, don't you know how to dress yourself?"** I quickly responded, "Yes sir". He retorted, **"Then, would you mind explaining why your belt buckle is hanging loose?"** I said in rapid sequence, "it was buckled just a few minutes ago, sir." His response was. **"And I suppose it unbuckled itself, airman."** "No sir", I replied. **"Then you must not have buckled it, is that correct?"** He shot back. "No sir, it was buckled," I replied once again. In apparent disgust he shouted, **"Let me get this straight, you buckled your belt and it didn't unbuckle itself but here it is hanging below your belly as loose as a #\$\$%@*& goose. Are you insinuating some elf or ogre or some other figment of your ridiculous imagination slipped up and unbuckled it?"** By now I was somewhat rattled and muttered quietly something like, "I don't think so, sir; that couldn't be." **"Then you better tell me, airman, why it's hanging loose"**, he thundered once again. "I don't know, sir", I heard myself say in a meek and somewhat quivering tone. **"Well, airman you better have an answer when we get back from inspecting the barracks. Do you understand?"** "Yes sir," I whispered, being completely intimidated by now. The sergeant wheeled around and followed the captain who had moved into the main body of the barracks. Undoubtedly, he carried a big smirk on his face as he observed old sarge carrying out his duties

according to, I suppose, some protocol but not according to a new airman's comfort.

I DREW A BLANK WITH A LESSER RANK

I sat back down on the bench, somewhat shaken, to say the least, and began trying to figure out just how the buckle came undone. Could Sergeant Bligh have done it as he grabbed it? That would be just like him to have something to chew me out about. I tugged on the fastened buckle and decided that couldn't be because it held too tight. I continued to ponder the problem for a few minutes, hoping to have an answer when Old Bligh returned. All at once the door opened again and in stepped a lieutenant who was, I suppose, staff for the captain. I jumped to attention, saluted and shouted "BARRACKS, ATTENTION", so all the world could hear. Almost simultaneously, I looked down to check my belt buckle and, would you believe, it was unbuckled again. As the lieutenant dropped his salute, I dropped mine and quickly refastened the buckle once again. He said nothing and headed back to find the CO for some purpose.

OLD BLIGH, WHAT A NASTY GUY

About that time Old Bligh came through the doorway to see what high-ranking officer had entered. Seeing no one but the lieutenant he bellowed, "**Airman, did you call the barracks to attention for lieutenant so & so while captain whatchamacallit is on the premises?**" "I guess so, sir", I responded. **Do you know airman that you called the captain to attention for a subordinate officer**": Came his thundering response? By this time I was completely unnerved and said, "I didn't think, sir". "**You bet you didn't think, airman. In this man's air force you're paid to think and not pull some #@%\$&* crazy stunt like this. I have a half a mind to have you repeat basic so you can get it right. Do you understand**"; came his less than civil retort? I struggled to collect my thoughts as I answered, "yes sir." Then the thought flashed across my mind, "Well, he got something right. At least he knows he's only got half a mind." I managed a weak smile as I tried to regain my composure. He screwed up his face with an expression that matched his last remark, saying, "**Airman, is there something funny about all this that I'm missing?**" "No sir", I assured him". The captain was now ready to leave, having answered an inquiry by the

I jumped to attention, saluted and shouted, so all the world could hear, "BARRACKS ATTENTION!"

lieutenant. His movement towards the door saved my tail, I suppose. As Old Bligh followed through the door he gave a parting shot, saying, "**I'll see you again, Airman, and we'll get this straightened out. Did you hear me?**" I simply answered, "Yes sir" but the real feelings that welled up inside me were more like, "what an unreasonable, no good idiot Old Bligh is. I wonder if he'll really come back".

As I sat back down still shaking from my experience, I watched the buckle on my belt. As the tension was removed from the belt going slack, the buckle slipped open letting the belt drop out once again. Ah, I had the answer! How I'd like to set him straight. It was defective air force equipment and he had no right to treat me like that. Boy, I'll tell him a thing or two. I'll explain to him how the cow ate the cabbage, just wait and see. Then reality set in and I knew I was fortunate to even know the reason for the buckle incident and it was better that I shut my mouth and hope he forgot all about it. I did and he did and never did the twain meet during the remaining weeks.

GETTING OUR LAST INOCULATIONS

I can't remember exactly how many times we were given shots but they occurred when we arrived and near the end of basic for sure, the latter being preparation for other assignments. We marched to the infirmary and lined up outside to await the inoculations. I was directly behind our squad leader who was a big strong colored fellow, built like a brick out house. He was a fine guy, very friendly and helpful and I basically admired him. He loved to strut his stuff, when marching and put his whole self into the program. I feel sure that was why he was a squad leader. Additionally, he looked as though he could do those pushups, I spoke of earlier, one arm at a time like the guys on the stand. In any case I noticed as we neared the medic giving the shots he became noticeably nervous and acted, as though he didn't feel too well. They were giving two simultaneous shots, one syringe in each hand, as the airmen passed by. The medic was real good. He hit a guy's arm with both needles at the same time and you couldn't really tell whether you were getting one or two shots. The airman right in front of our squad leader hesitated after receiving his shots and the medic said, "Move on airman". "I thought we were to get two shots", the answer

came back. "You better move on or you'll have four", the medic replied. About that time our squad leader began to stagger a little and in a couple of seconds fell flat on the ground, passed out like a sailor on shore leave. I couldn't believe it, a big strong guy like him passing out. We had wimps in the flight that didn't seem to have any trouble, how could he? Surely he wasn't afraid of a little needle. I learned that day that such problems aren't related to physical strength or courage for that matter but are more like carsickness and, I would suppose, are related to genes or something else in your physical makeup. In any case, a man with the physique of Atlas himself had taken on the appearance of a wet noodle as that needle came into focus before his eyes. What a contrast of images.

A SHARPSHOOTER, NO LESS

I suppose there would be a small chance an airman going overseas would find himself in a situation where he needed to use a rifle. In any case we received training on breaking down a rifle, cleaning it and reassembling the same. We also were taught safety and spent three days on the rifle range as I remember. Of our flight of 70 men or so, about a third of the airmen were sharpshooters, another 50% marksmen and the rest unqualified. I had a score of 166 qualifying as a sharpshooter. The highest score was 176 but I'm not sure where the break over point was between marksman and sharpshooter. I never was too interested in guns, however, and was probably lucky to receive that rating.

In researching my air force papers, I came across the air force order listing all the scores and associated ratings. I found other orders and pictures I hadn't looked at since discharge, which were primarily associated with my stay at Keesler Field in Mississippi. I may refer to some of them as I get into that period of service. I owe their existence to Esther. She was very fastidious when it came to important papers and the like. Come to think about it, she was also fastidious about keeping many things I considered of little importance, such as all the kids' schoolwork. The existence of many pictures which are being used in this somewhat less than monumental work are also available because of that particular characteristic of Esther's. Had she not saved them, there would

be no real history of grandpa for you to savor but only his bodacious remarks for flavor.

AN EXTENDED STAY AT LACKLAND

I completed basic training around the 10th of July 1951 but was chagrined to find my orders for transfer to Keesler Field and an associated electronics school had been held up. Most of the rest of the flight had received their orders right after graduation and were on their way to bigger and better things. Why me, I thought. Did Sergeant Bligh have a hand in this? I received a temporary assignment in the squadron game room as an attendant. It was soft duty

but boring and besides, once I was settled at Keesler, I intended to have Esther come to Mississippi. I hated being alone.

I was able to move to a little better quarters for living and also received an NCO club pass since I was no longer in basic training. It wasn't of much value, however. I think I used it once during the extra month I spent there. My days were spent lounging around the game room, policing it, refilling soft drink machines, etc. I had little desire to go to town or the NCO club where alcohol and dancing were available because Esther was on my mind. Mostly I read, wrote letters and took in a few movies on base. How pleased I was when my orders finally did arrive telling me to report to Keesler Field on August 5, 1951 for radar technician training.

TRANSFER TO BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI

San Antonio was hot but dry, a summer climate I was somewhat used to. Having been raised in Boise, Idaho I was adapted to the dry climate and relatively hot summers. Boise's temperatures were typically in the 90's in July and August and breaking 100 wasn't all that unusual. I suppose San Antonio had generally higher temperatures and certainly for longer periods of time. Even so, I didn't find the heat difficult to endure even though I was uncomfortable at times. Those times were usually associated with marching as well as classroom sessions in un-air conditioned areas.

BILOXI AND A NEW CLIMATE

Biloxi, Mississippi was something different, however. We flew out of Lackland the morning of the fifth of August on a chartered flight in a Convair, I believe, and arrived at Keesler Field in

I had a score of 166 qualifying me as a sharpshooter. The highest score was 176 but I'm not sure where the break over point was between marksman and sharpshooter.

the early afternoon. My orders indicated I was assigned to the 3409th Student Squadron of the 3380th Technical Training Group of, no less, the 3380th Technical Training Wing. This was my first trip on an airplane of any kind and I was somewhat excited. Over east Texas and Louisiana the thunderheads loomed high in the sky and we negotiated a rather crooked path between them. What a wondrous sight that was to me. It seemed as though one could jump out the window into a puffy cloud and lie there without incident. I even imagined how I might travel from cloud to cloud with a few lucky jumps. The trip was without incident but little did I know the thunderheads were harbingers of a miserable August and September.

As I stepped off the plane at Keesler, the air was thick with moisture and I felt as though someone had grabbed me around the throat and I could hardly breathe. After grabbing our duffel bags we were marched off to our assigned squadron, the 3409th in my case. Following the necessary paper work in the squadron office, we were assigned barracks and a bunk and settled in. Soon orders were cut for school and I began a 110-day electronic fundamentals course.

FUNDAMENTALS OF ELECTRONICS

The fundamentals course was held in a pre-fabricated building and involved both lecture and laboratory. Airmen with futures in any type of radar (Airborne, Ground Control Interception and Ground Control Approach) were all part of this course. Besides fundamental electronic theory, we covered more specialized items such as magnetrons (radar transmitters), synchrosopes, klystrons (oscillators capable of operating at 3,000 to 30,000 megacycles or more), radar antennas, etc. The course was much more meaningful than any such training I had received in college because the practical was given as much or more emphasis than the theory. Labs in college were much poorer than these I now experienced. We had much more equipment to work with and much better quality. I suppose this surprised me more than anything else about the school. The instructors, though NCO's, knew their subject and were really better at communicating the essentials than were the professors I worked under in colleges I attended. A typical day included 3 hours of theory and 3 hours of laboratory work. I found the school

curriculum was both meaningful and rewarding as far as preparation for the more specialized schools to follow, were concerned. All in all, I was very impressed by the quality of all the schools I was privileged to attend during my four years with Uncle Sam. One incident in this basic school, which I'll try to relate, stands out in my memory.

KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THE AQUADAG

Our work in the following years would involve many varieties of oscilloscopes and synchrosopes. The latter were nothing more than oscilloscopes whose horizontal sweeps were synchronized with the incoming signal to be displayed. Such equipment was built in as an integral part of virtually all radar gear. Thus we were taught their complete principles of operation. They, of course, utilize cathode ray tubes, which we studied in detail. Such tubes require a high voltage on the conductive coating surrounding the glass shell to accelerate the electrons. At that time such voltages were in the 10,000 to 25,000 volt range in our particular scopes but were capable of delivering only a small current. Thus a short circuit would cause the output voltage to drop drastically if encountered. That was fortunate for us, because such accidental contact with these coatings was of little personal danger or consequence because of the low current involved. All of this foregoing explanation is simply groundwork leading up to my real story.

Our instructor this particular day was a staff sergeant whom I considered a capable instructor. He had lectured to us regarding the various circuitry involved and decided to emphasize the potential danger of the CRT voltage. Explaining as he

Whop, it got him and he either jumped or was knocked clear across the room as he let out a yell expressing both discomfort and surprise.

went, he slid an oscilloscope in front of the class and opened up the side of the case exposing the electronics and CRT. As he described the high voltage he said, **"Don't ever touch the aquadag surface of the CRT because it's like a loaded gun. You simply can't be sure the high voltage is drained off, even when the instrument is turned off."** With that, he put his hand on the CRT to point out the area of concern and sure enough, though the oscilloscope was off, he got the shock of his life. Whop, it got him and he either jumped or was knocked clear across the room as he let out a yell expressing both discomfort and surprise.

He wasn't hurt but was only embarrassed because of his boo-boo.

Actually, the class agreed it was probably the most effective demonstration we had seen or would yet see regarding repair safety. I didn't forget it and I doubt that any of my peers have to this day. Of course, it's not a recommended instructional activity because of the limited supply of instructors as well as the cost of training them. Of course, hospital and/or burial expenses also cause those responsible for the budget to frown on such activity.

MARCHING TO AND FROM CLASS

You might wonder why I would bother to talk about something as boring as marching to and from class. I would agree except that such experience involved some of my more unpleasant experiences at Keesler Field. Initially, Esther was still in Boise and I stayed with the other men in the barracks. These were not air-conditioned and consequently were usually wide open to allow the air and/or breeze to circulate. The air was extremely humid and it seemed as though you could cut it with a knife. At night we would lie on our bunks in a pool of perspiration and only sleep rather fitfully until the wakeup call came about 6:30. After breakfast we had a few minutes for personal use as well as a few assigned duties.

WAITING AT PARADE REST

About 11:00 AM we had to assemble in formation in front of the barracks to await our march to class. Typically we would stand there at parade rest or whatever we could get away with for about a half hour. We were dressed in sun tans which had to be neatly pressed much like figure 4-2. By the time our beloved leaders came out of their air conditioned quarters (maybe 11:30) to lead our march to class some twenty minutes away, we were pretty well soaked with perspiration from simply standing in the sun. A typical morning on the Mississippi gulf coast involved a thundershower and then semi-clearing about 10:00 AM. Puddles stood around the grounds and big cumulous clouds broke up the blue sky. You could virtually see the water rising off the puddles, making a return trip to the clouds, to fall once again that night or the next morning. I feel certain I experienced the same raindrops day after day as I struggled through this particular

Twice daily we would shower, coat ourselves over all affected areas with GI soap and stand around talking while it dried.

phase of my air force career. If any part of our uniforms were dry when the call to "forward march" came, it was soon obliterated by the physical effort necessary to propel one's self along the streets of the base to our class rooms about a mile away. Upon our arrival there, only our belt loops would be dry. We then listened to lectures or participated in labs for the next 6 hours waiting for our uniforms to dry in facilities cooled only by fans. About the time some semblance of comfort was achieved, the day's classes were over and once again we assembled in front of the buildings for our march back. The wait for action was usually shorter on this return trip and soon we were calling cadence as we marched back to the barracks. The primary difference was, I suppose, that we would be dismissed for the evening and could look forward to a shower and a little relaxation. Most of us, if staying in the barracks, would simply run around in our GI shorts to try to find some degree of comfort in that sauna bath in which we lived. Occasionally we would head for the PX or maybe drink a beer at one of the refreshment stops, while shooting the breeze.

HEAT RASH

Because of the humidity, our perspiration and the necessity of staying in soaking wet clothes all day, most of us broke out in heat rash over virtually all of our bodies. We showered at least twice daily, powdered ourselves with Quisana powder and let the air get to our skin as much as possible. The powder supposedly would alleviate the discomfort of the rash and also heal it. Neither was true. We even tried baby powder and various lotions, all to no avail.

Finally someone hit upon GI soap as a medication. Why or how, I don't know but it worked. Twice daily we would shower, coat ourselves over all affected areas with GI soap and stand around talking while it dried. After 10 to 15 minutes we washed the soap off, dried and went about our duties. Although not perfect, it helped immensely and a certain measure of comfort returned to our tortured hides. It took a full year for me to adjust to the humidity of Mississippi. Even in the winter months, if I exerted myself to any degree physically, I would begin to feel the prickly discomfort associated with the rash and, if sustained, it would break out once again. Even though my eventual adjustment to the humidity convinced me I could live there somewhat comfortably, I have no desire to do so.

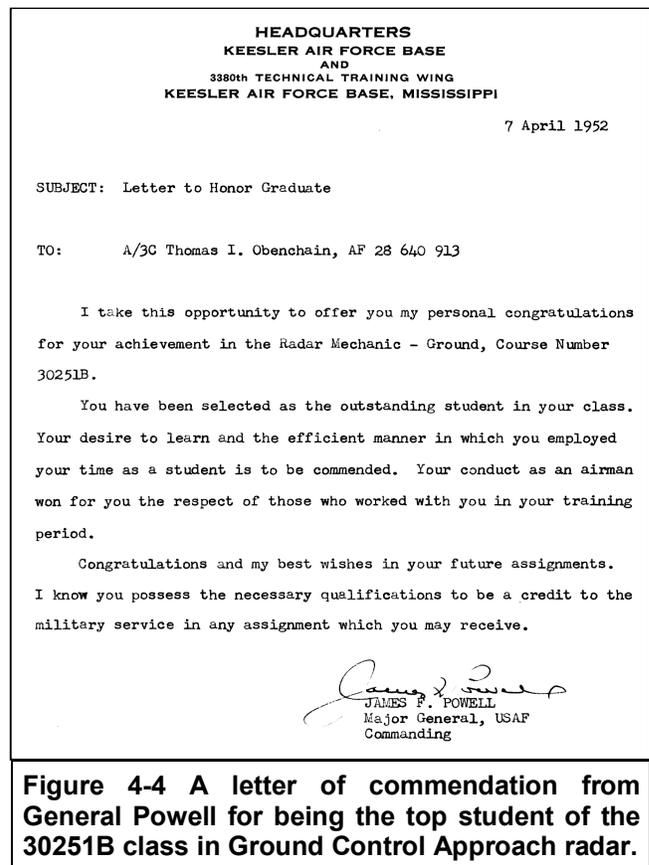
ESTHER'S TRANSFER TO BILOXI

As soon as I was settled in the 3409th student squadron at Keesler, I began to make arrangements to get Esther to come to Biloxi. First I had to get permission for off base housing since none was available on base and then I had to find a place to live. The latter effort wasn't easy. Houses were in short supply in Biloxi and particularly houses we could afford on a PFC's salary plus allowances. Esther received an allotment of \$85, I received about \$50 and off base allowance was about \$30, which gave us about \$165 per month to live on. I found a little place on Howard Street, 1512 East Howard to be exact, which had a bedroom and a little kitchen area partially closed off from the bedroom. The whole place measured about 10' by 20' at the most. The shower and commode were in a little community building maybe 50' from the house. There was one other house on the lot the same size as ours whose occupants shared the bath facilities as well. Travel trailers could be parked on the property for a fee and appeared from time to time. Occupants of the trailers also shared the bathrooms when there. The bathroom facilities weren't too bad, even though they were community in nature. We got to know the couple in the other little house, Ed and Georgina Tetaryck from Oklahoma. He was a buck sergeant at the time. Esther and Georgina became good friends and spent a lot of time together when Ed and I were gone.

I almost got ahead of myself. My orders to live off base were effective 3 October 1951. Although I don't have the exact date, Esther must have come down soon after that. I still remember going to New Orleans on the train to meet her. She had flown to that point and had to take the train to Biloxi. Gosh, how I had missed her. It was a real special time in our lives, to see and be with each other again after about 5 months of separation. That doesn't sound like much but remember we had only been married 4 months when I left. I guess we necked all the way back to Biloxi. Other people on the train could probably give you an eyewitness account of our carrying on if they were now available. Though generally self-conscious in public, I could have cared less what they might have thought. After all, the love of my life was with me once again and I tried to make up for all those hugs and kisses I had missed in basic and earlier Keesler life.

FINANCIAL FACTS OF LIFE

I don't believe Esther was too impressed with the housing I had procured but she was practical and wasn't used to any more than I was in life. She adapted well and we were quite happy even though paupers in a monetary sense. With the \$165 we netted each month, we paid \$25 on a school loan I still owed for about a year. We also paid \$50 for the house, which left \$90 for food and other necessities of life. Needless to say our life style was somewhat subdued with entertainment being a Saturday evening card game, hearts or pinochle, with Ed and Georgina. I took the bus to and from the base. We bought groceries together and took a taxi home once a week. Esther used a washboard to do the



laundry and hung it out to dry. We bought an ironing board and used an iron Esther had brought along. On weekends we would walk around the area just to see it and get a little exercise together. The whole environment was new to us. Heavy rains made it difficult to get to and from the bathroom but Esther was a good sport. One time the water was so deep I carried her back and forth splashing through puddles six inches deep. We both had a good laugh over

that. In general, however, one might say we weren't too happy with the facilities but made do and were constantly on the lookout for something better. I was graduated from the fundamental electronics course the 20th of December 1951, was given 12 days leave and assigned to a ground control radar school the 12th of January 1952.

THE MPN-1 GCA RADAR

GCA or Ground Control approach radar was used to guide planes to a safe landing in stormy weather. A GCA unit was composed of a search system designed to survey the area out about a hundred miles, in addition to a so-called precision system used to guide the pilot on his approach to the runway. The MPN-1 was the original design, I suppose, in that it was almost obsolete when I arrived. However, there were

seen about a fifty - fifty split between operational theory and hands on, in both alignment and repair. I found I had a real penchant for such work and thoroughly enjoyed myself. We finished the course in early April 1952 and I found myself first in the class of 10 airmen. That may not have been too much of an accomplishment, being only 10 men involved, but at least I got a letter of commendation from the commanding General of Keesler Air Force Base, Major General James F. Powell. I have included a copy of that letter as figure 4-4. Figure 4-5, our mug shots, is also included for your examination.

PARENTHOOD BEGINS

By this time Esther was very pregnant with Valerie who would be born on July 5th of 1952. I would be shipping out prior to that date and she would have to return to Glenns Ferry or Boise. However, I was in luck because they issued a request for qualified airmen to apply as instructors in the course I had just completed. It didn't take Esther and I long to decide that was the thing to do and so, I applied. I was accepted and orders were cut to have me attend 40-day instructor's course (#75100) beginning April 22, 1952. We then began to look for a bigger better and house. Our options were rather limited, considering our budget and the amount set aside for rent. I received my corporeal stripes at that point, which added a few bucks to our monthly income but things were tight, economically speaking.

635 REYNOIR STREET

I don't remember the exact date but soon we found a bigger and a little better house at the above address. We were moved into our new abode well before Valerie was born. There we began our training as parents with all its associated joys and worries. Little did we understand that important role nor how unprepared we really were. None-the-less we moved forward with optimism and a glad heart.

VALERIE ARRIVES

There couldn't have been two more proud parents than Esther and I when Valerie was



Figure 4-5 Class graduation picture from GCA/MPN-1 30251-B course, April 1952 at Keesler Field, Mississippi.

still many such units out in the field. As a matter of fact, the majority of the field units were of this type. Thus, its operation, maintenance and repair continued as the basic course of instruction for air force personnel involved. The course was some 70 days in duration.

The MPN-1 course known as 30251-B involved learning all the theory, alignment and troubleshooting associated with that unit. Again we

born. Esther was a wonderful mother and took pride in keeping her children neat and clean, even cleaner than her house. I learned the nasty chore of changing diapers, sloshing them out in the john and dumping them in a bucket with treated water. Poor Esther, she had to wash them out by hand using a washboard as necessary. She never complained and kept Valerie spotless; almost that is, considering the fact she was a very active little girl. I have a few pictures of that period of our lives which I'll include as I continue to describe our rather frugal but happy existence in Biloxi. They cover primarily our family but a couple more of my air force achievements are included as well.

MOONLIGHT SERANADES

I was a light sleeper and was up with Valerie almost as much as was Esther. I would often sing her back to sleep, Valerie that is, after a midnight or early morning bottle. She probably would have gone to sleep faster if I hadn't tried my hand at singing but oh well, I had a captive audience, so to speak. I would sing *Coming for to Carry Me Home*, *Camp Town Race Track*, *Oh Susanna*, *The State Song* (you know, What did Ida ho boys, etc.), *The Tennessee Waltz* and several others. Sometime later my neighbors described to me a mysterious crooner whose voice interrupted their sleep at odd times of the night. They had been puzzled about the origin of these tunes wafting along the midnight breeze before figuring out it was me, their neighbor. They never did complain though, probably because we were their renters who were reliable with payment even though poor as church mice.

AN INTRODUCTION TO TERMITES

I completed the instructor's course soon after our move to Reynoir Street. The only thing unusual about the course was an invasion of termites during class one day. I had never seen a termite and barely knew what they were. As we sat in class this particular day, all at once a winged ant lit on my arm. As I looked around the room, a few more appeared and then more and more until the room was filled with the dad burned things. We had to fight them off with our hands to keep from being smothered. Needless to say, class was dismissed for the day while the proper base personnel got things under control. They must have accomplished their task appropriately because we were told to return to the same building the next day. This we did the following day without incident and continued until the course was complete.

A ROACH CAME TO ROOST

One time just prior to Valerie's birth, Esther and I were at the table eating supper. All at once this big bug (about the size of a sparrow) flew through the kitchen and landed by the door leading to the next room. Esther screamed and wouldn't go near it. I walked over and found it was a big tree roach about an inch and a half long. She had seen a few smaller roaches since coming to Mississippi but nothing like that. What a rude surprise that was for her. She wasn't enthralled with roaches anyway and this one

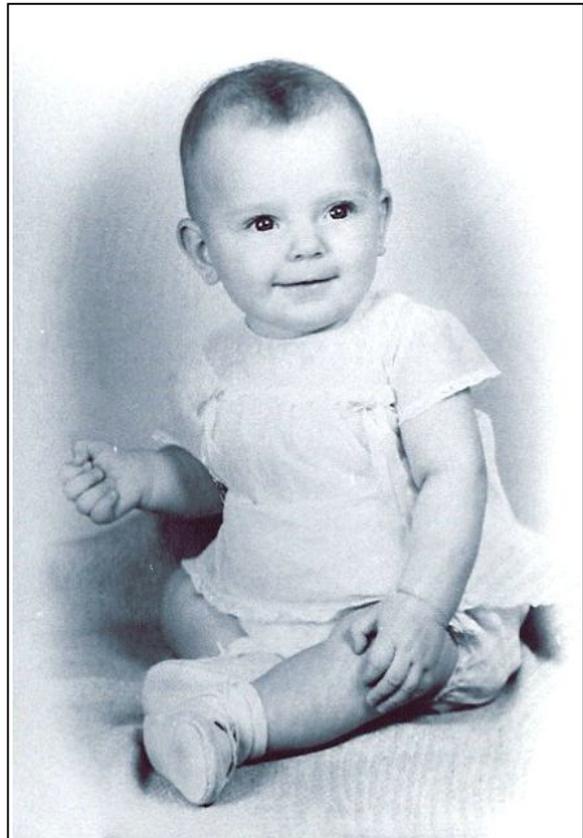


Figure 4-6 Valerie Lynne at about 10 months, taken on Reynoir Street in Biloxi

looked big enough to carry off the baby when she was born. Esther never learned to like the bugs of the south, even though we spent some 10 years of our married life there. Her defense mechanism evolved into, not only a clean kitchen, but also placing any opened food in sealed bottles. In so doing we had little trouble.

MOVING ON TO BETTER QUARTERS

We weren't satisfied with our second house either but it was the best we could find at the time and, I might add, afford. It was a little small having only one bedroom, a living room and a

kitchen. The house next door, in somewhat better repair with essentially the same room and price, became available and we moved into it by year's end. Our landlord owned them both so she was happy. I had to walk about four blocks to Howard Street, where I caught a bus to the base each day. The pictures I spoke of were taken primarily at that house, I believe.

A PROUD PAPA

Figure 4-6 is of Valerie at about 10 months. She was already walking and was healthy as could



Figure 4-7 Valerie at about 6 months, showing off with her daddy on Reynoir St.

be. Boy, were Esther and I proud of her. Figure 4-7 is that of a proud dad showing his daughter off a little. Maybe this activity is what produced such an independent and determined housewife and mother she eventually became. Does anyone really know? She was somewhat younger in the second photo, maybe 6 months or so but she obviously accepted all challenges placed before her.

FROM WASH BOARD TO WASHER

Somewhere during the time interval we spent on Reynoir Street, Esther and I decided we really needed a washing machine for the family. Not only were Valerie's diapers a problem but also my uniforms and even Esther's clothes. It was hot and humid and consequently clothes were frequently changed. I approached Sears & J C Penny's about a charge account with no luck. As an airman 2nd class at that time I was, quite simply,

The Air Police checked my leave papers along the route and asked if I was from Virginia, telling me there was a bunch of Obenchains living there.

too big a risk. Finally I went into a little local store and managed to get sufficient credit to buy the washer, probably at a premium price.

Now this washer wasn't like the ones folks are used to today but rather a wringer type with a good-sized tub and agitator driven by an electric motor. After washing the clothes and wringing the water out she still had to rinse them in another tub and repeat the wringing process before hanging them out on a line. Even so, you would have thought she was in hog heaven. It was so nice compared to what she had been doing. That may have been the most appreciated gift I ever gave her and it really wasn't meant as such. Her desire to keep clothes washed and pressed as well as a neat home made the washer a most useful device. In those days there were no such things as wash and wear. Everything had to be pressed which seemed no challenge for Esther. I always found my uniforms ready to go, pressed and hanging neatly in the closet when needed. Yes, keeping a neat home was definitely Esther's forte, a skill she learned from her older sister.

OUR ONE VACATION

After paying off my college loan and a small loan from Esther's brother, Art, we began to save for a visit to our folks, our only trip home in the whole four years we were in the service. I don't remember the train fare for two of us but it was significant considering our income. By July 1953 we had put enough money aside to make it and I took leave for thirty days beginning July 6th. The train route at that time was through Alabama and northward into Tennessee and Kentucky. Reaching Indiana we finally turned west through Illinois and the plains states to Idaho. It was a long tiring trip but enjoyable because everything was new to us. The Air Police checked my leave papers along the route and asked if I was from Virginia, telling me there was a bunch of Obenchains living there. It wasn't until later that I learned Virginia was the place of our roots in this country. That trip proved to be the only time dad got to see Valerie and she to see him because he was killed the next fall in a hunting accident. Of course, we thoroughly enjoyed our visit and returned home a month later, very happy but poor as church mice. However, that was the life style we were used to and we paid it no-never-mind because it would soon be over.

MOVING TO A FOURTH HOUSE

Esther visited the base doctor upon our return and was pronounced with child once again. We needed more room and got busy looking for something bigger and better. It seemed we were always doing that in our first couple of years. Soon we located a nice little house in our price range near the gulf but back a ways in the woods. It had a kitchen, living room, bath and two bedrooms, just right for our growing family. We moved in about the first of September and all seemed well. In early October we heard some strange noises like squirrels in the attic but didn't think too much about it. After all, how much trouble could squirrels be? They needed a place to winter just like us.

EMERGENCY LEAVE

I still remember learning that dad was shot in a hunting accident near Crouch, Idaho and wasn't expected to live. The news came by telegram, as I remember, because we had no phone. I'm not sure at this point whether the telegram came from mom or someone else in Boise or if they had contacted the U.S.A.F. who in turn contacted me. In any case, I remember after reading the telegram, I broke down and sobbed for some time. How I loved my dad. Words could never express my feelings. I couldn't believe this could have happened to him. He was always so careful and had instructed me many times about clearly seeing my target before pulling the trigger. In an almost prophetic manner, he said, "Such a mistake could be fatal. You'll never get a chance to take it back".

She told me dad never uttered a critical word about the man and seemed to hold no hostility.

THE TRIP HOME

At that time, I had no details other than being asked to come home as soon as possible. Needless to say, I applied for emergency leave immediately and was granted 15 days on orders cut the 13th day of October 1953. Having spent all extra money we had saved for a leave in July of that year, my only choice was to hop an air force flight going my way. I didn't have to wait long before I was on my way to Idaho via Roswell, New Mexico. There I grabbed another flight headed for Mountain Home Air Base. I'm not sure how many days were involved from the time I got the news until I arrived home. As I remember, Art Spencer, Esther's brother, met me and took me on to Boise, though the details are now rather foggy.

TOO LATE TO SEE HIM

Upon my arrival, I found out he had passed away a day or so earlier. Needless to say, I was heart-broken, as were all my brothers and sisters. His death was so unexpected. Esther and I had just seen him that summer. Valerie was just a year old and dad seemed to love her so, even as he did all his grandchildren. I was extremely grateful for having seen him those few months previously because it was the last opportunity he and I had been able to visit. I realize now how much I enjoyed his company. Those times we talked or played cribbage were really choice. He was usually quiet, optimistic and never seemed to get excited or raise his voice in anger. He really was my role model also but in a different way than Joe Ladle.

This was my first experience with the death of a loved-one and I still remember how difficult it was. Up to that point, I hadn't really thought consciously about my love for my parents whom, I suppose, I thought would live forever. It just didn't occur to me that dad wouldn't be around when I was discharged and returned to Boise. I had a good deal of time to think during those fifteen days, particularly while on the planes or waiting for them as I flew each way. I think I began to understand how fragile life is and how thankful we should be for health and well being in addition to life itself. I also began to appreciate family more, as well as understand my own dad's commitment to his. Did such reflection make me a better father and husband? Who knows, but I want to think so.

DETAILS AS I UNDERSTAND THEM

I was given the details of my father's death after my arrival, which I will relate here. I'm sure others in the family have a clearer understanding because mine was obtained piecemeal as mom and various others of my siblings shared with me their views of the matter. Mom included a small reference to the incident in her "Past Tents" which follows in italics. I will then include some additional comments, which may not be correct, but come to the forefront of this old bean as I ponder the incident.

"My precious husband, and my children's father, passed away in the fall of 1953. He was shot while deer hunting in the mountains near Crouch, Idaho. He had spent the night at the Vern Miller ranch and the following day he set

up in the mountains as some of his boys were going to meet him for the weekend hunt. He loved to be in the mountains. He said he felt so close to God when he was on the top of a mountain. “

THE SHOOTING INCIDENT

I'm not sure which of the boys were going to meet dad that weekend. Having occurred in 1953 I would guess it was Carl and Ted who would have been 18 and 16 respectively. The day of his death must have been Friday or

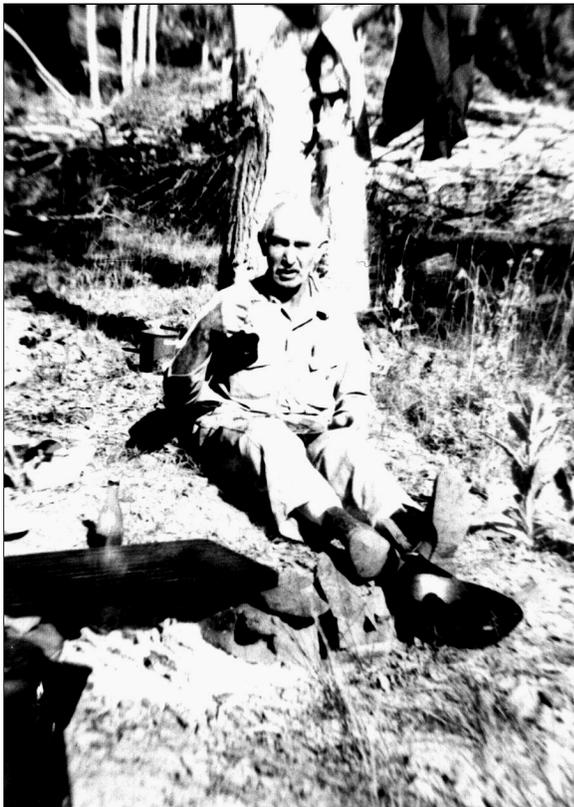


Figure 4-8 Dad's last fishing trip in Sept. 1953. How he loved the out of doors.

earlier because he was still alone when the accident occurred, according to my recollection. Apparently he was walking a hillside when a hunter from another party heard whatever noise he was making. Without seeing him, the hunter shot at the noise and the .306 slug struck dad somewhere in the body. The man, who was from Cascade, ran for help after realizing what he had done. Dad lay there for some time before help arrived at which time he was carried out. His heart had apparently stopped, at least once, but had been restarted by a doctor from Cascade. Whether he was taken to Cascade first or if the doctor was part of the rescue party,

I don't know. In any case he was taken, from Cascade into Boise to St. Lukes Hospital where he died from kidney failure prior to my arrival. How I wanted to see him just one more time even though, I'm sure, he had suffered long enough as his time on earth finally expired.

FORGIVENESS IS DEVINE

I remember mom telling me that the guilty hunter visited dad once but she never heard from him again. She told me dad never uttered a critical word about the man and seemed to hold no hostility. Mother made no effort to collect anything in the way of compensation, to my knowledge, because she said, "the man had little in the way of assets or income and could never provide any meaningful help. I have no desire to prosecute him because such action would only hurt his family." Although I may not have all the details correct, these attitudes of both my parents burn in my memory and have generated a deep respect for their Christ like reaction to a terrible accident. That I could react similarly, should the situation arise, is a deep desire of my own but one, I must admit, of questionable probability. What great examples both of our parents have set for all their nine children, as well as grandchildren.

A LAST PICTURE

I decided to include a picture of dad in his favorite environment, which I understand, was taken in September of 1953, about a month prior to his death. I suppose he was out fishing because deer season wasn't open then. Dad didn't care whether he was hunting or fishing as long as he was able to camp in the woods. He loved the outdoors and remarked, as mom said, he felt closer to God there than anywhere else. I suppose mom might have been with him and snapped this photo as shown in figure 4-8, though it might have been someone else. Dad would have been just over 61 at this time. He shows his years somewhat and I am reminded by the picture of how hard he worked to support our family, not to mention remodeling our home on 17th and Irene. He was a family man and I think his greatest joy was spending time with one of us or with his grandchildren; particularly on a camping trip. His greatest love seemed to be family and the great out of doors.

THE RETURN TRIP

I was taken back to Mountain Home Air Base to hitch a ride back to Keesler. There was a lot of activity and once again I didn't have to wait too

long. Again I was routed through Roswell and then on to Texas and Biloxi, Mississippi. I was a little more observant on the return trip and remember distinctly flying over southern Utah with its desert climate and many canyons. We were on the equivalent of a DC-3, which bounced around like a rubber ball as the thermals dribbled us across the landscape. I didn't get airsick but I still remember how uncomfortable I was as we approached Roswell. In that approach we came in across an oil field with numerous pump jacks waving a fond welcome to that part of New Mexico. How glad I was to get my feet on the ground for a while and let the queasy feeling inside me subside. The ride on to Keesler was uneventful other than observing the high billowy rain clouds along the gulf coast. Once again, the beauty of such clouds impressed me, as did the pilot's ability to negotiate a rather crooked path while keeping out of their way. One consolation was a somewhat less bumpy ride across Texas and the gulf coast as compared to that among the thermals of New Mexico with a second one being I was almost home.

BACK WITH FAMILY AGAIN

When I returned, Esther was fit to be tied. She had seen a big rat run through the house a couple of times which even brushed her feet once. They were also getting into the food so it wasn't just her imagination. She was ready to leave even if it meant camping out. I was busy at the base and told her we would look the next weekend. She took it upon herself to look before that time. In talking to a good friend whose last name was Dieuwickiez, she learned of a duplex on the beach near that friend's house (figure 4-9). Anyway they went to look at it together and of course it was just what Esther wanted, a big front yard, a living room, a bedroom with bath and a kitchen. In addition there was a little space near the kitchen where we could put a bed for Valerie once the new baby came. Additionally it was in beautiful condition and very well furnished. She just had to have it. Unfortunately they were asking \$100 a month for it and we were currently paying \$60. She knew we couldn't afford it and

She had seen a big rat run through the house a couple of times which even brushed her feet once.

tried to get the landlady to come down to \$80, hoping I would agree to that. The lady listened to her and offered \$90 but Esther knew we just couldn't handle that. She left down hearted and when I came home she was really feeling bad. We talked about it and both of us agreed there was no way we could pay \$90 per month. We would have to forget it and look some more but we would find a rat free home.

Well, to make a long story short, Esther must have made an impression on the land lady



Figure 4-9 Our favorite and last place of residence in Biloxi, Mississippi. Esther and Valerie are out for a stroll.

because she got in touch with us and lowered the price to \$80. Now we had a decision to make because going from \$60 to \$80 per month rent was really stretching our budget. To do it we would have to make sacrifices in other areas but Esther was so determined I agreed to give it a try. Believe it or not, Esther had essentially moved us by herself before the week was out. She wanted to get away from those rats in the worst sort of way and moved us about the middle of October 1953.

It was a delightful house for us and we stayed there until my discharge in May of 1955. I spent time in the yard keeping it mowed and even weeded the flowerbeds. I did it because I

enjoyed such work and my schedule at the base wasn't that tough. However, I guess my work along with Esther's housekeeping impressed the landlady because she later told us how glad she was that she had rented the house to us. She then expressed her appreciation for the way we kept her property. Of course, we were a little surprised because we were simply keeping the house like we wanted it and didn't believe we had done anything particularly special. This is the first time I remember being aware of a landlord's problem obtaining decent tenants.

Well, I've gotten a little bit ahead of myself regarding our air force living accommodations including a preview through the end of our tour of duty. It's time to go back now to the summer

Attendees were carefully selected from the more capable line personnel who had proved their ability in radar troubleshooting and repair in the field as well as certain foreign personnel, sailors and future instructors such as yours truly. It was a 100-day course from which we graduated on November 10th 1952. Because I spent the majority of my air force career teaching the maintenance and repair of this particular type of equipment, I will provide a little more insight into the course as well as some stories (some humorous) which occurred over the last 3 years of my air force experience. Figure 4-10 is included here so I can brag just a little about being the top student once again in this particular course. People, such as I, have to make the most of these types of opportunities

because they don't pass our way very often. I had a little more competition this time, however, because all students were either instructors or came from among the better and more experienced radar repair technicians working in the field. Figure 4-11 is our graduation picture from the same school, which contains 5 Frenchmen, 4 sailors and 11 airmen. I suppose one might say the class was multi-cultural. I still remember the Frenchmen being surprised at our drinking milk with lunch or maybe with a doughnut. They insisted that milk was just for "babies".

SCHOOL OVERVIEW

THE SEARCH SYSTEM

The school whose duration was 20 weeks was divided into 6 so called phases, each lasting three or four weeks. The first two phases involved the search system transmitting and receiving equipment in that order. You may remember that the search system was used to identify aircraft positions out to about 100 miles from the landing field. It was similar to

GCI or AC&W early warning equipment in that its function was to simply identify approaching aircraft and chart their speed and course in preparation for guiding them into the range of the actual landing control radar or precision system of the CPN-4.

As usual the time spent on hands on alignment, trouble shooting and repair was about equal to the time spent on the theoretical aspects of the gear. Besides weekly quizzes, we were given a final quiz for each phase in both theory and

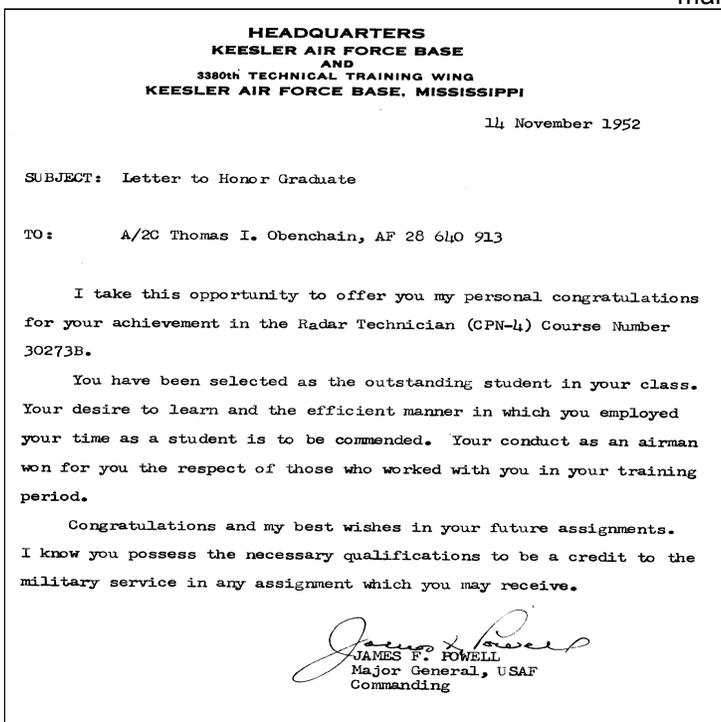


Figure 4-10 Letter of Commendation for the CPN-4 GCA Radar School (302730 from General Powell, Keesler Air Force Base Commander.

of 1952 and my continuing training in radar equipment at Keesler Air Force Base.

THE CPN-4 GCA RADAR SCHOOL

After completing the instructor's course about the first of June 1952 I was assigned to teach the MPN-1 equipment course. That didn't last long in that I received orders to attend the 30273 course covering the CPN-4 equipment beginning June 14, 1952. This was the advanced or so called 7 level course in GCA equipment.

laboratory work. The latter might involve the alignment of some portion of the system or the location of a bad component. Such tests were 20 minutes in length with a one on one student/teacher ratio. If you knew the system, twenty minutes was enough to complete the required work. If not, a person was in trouble and could completely blow the test.

THE PRECISION SYSTEM

Phases three and four involved the precision system and were similar in format to the search system. However, the equipment was completely different, being operated at a much higher frequency, i.e. 30,000 megacycles as opposed to 1500 megacycles for the longer-range search system. This provided a much higher definition of aircraft and other signals as well as accuracy necessary to land a plane. Even though this was the most advanced radar for this particular job at that time, the equipment was designed around the vacuum tube. Transistors, let alone integrated circuits of today, had not yet come into the picture. Thus circuits were rather big and bulky, at least by today's standards. The only type of solid state device that I remember being employed in the set were a few diodes used as detectors which were built of silicon and a so called cats whisker. The antenna system employed on the precision system was more complex than that of the search system. Whereas the latter utilized a rotating dish, the precision system employed a series of dipoles so spaced and fed that the apparent direction of the resulting beam moved back and forth across the runway. Actually, there were both an azimuth antenna and an altitude antenna, which were similar in nature but mounted at 90-degree angles from one another. Thus one beam swept across the runway identifying the planes horizontal position while the other swept up and down establishing the planes elevation. Both systems had a so called MTI or moving target indicator which

allowed the radar to differentiate moving targets (planes) from stationary targets (ground clutter



Figure 4-11 Our class graduation picture from the GCA/CPN-4 (30273) course in Nov. 1952 at Keesler Field.

of various kinds) and thus help reduce the confusion that might result on the operator's scope. It wasn't perfect, however, and other moving targets, such as some clouds, could still muddy the picture.

PHASE 5 GENERAL SYSTEM ASPECTS

The complete operating system, search and precision systems, were housed in a trailer maybe twenty feet in length by eight feet wide

while the power unit, diesels and air conditioners, were housed by themselves in a second trailer of similar size. It was a

very complex system and the principles involved as well as the operation were extremely interesting or, at least I, with my love of technical things, thought so.

The fifth phase involved the power trailer with its generators and air conditioning systems. The latter system was designed for the comfort of the equipment and not the personnel, although we

Transistors, let alone integrated circuits of today, had not yet come into the picture. The only solid state device I remember being employed in the set were a few diodes used as detectors which were built of silicon and a so called cats whisker.

profited because of the need to keep the equipment cool. The power consumed by the CPN-4 was enormous in terms of its function because of its reliance on vacuum tubes. Even the miniature and peanut size tubes, then employed, consumed large amounts of power compared to any solid-state device. Consequently the student was taught principles of the diesel engine, various generator types (single and three phase generation) as well as those of air conditioning. Such instruction concentrated on the proper operation of the equipment and electrical repair because any necessary mechanical repair would be placed in the hands of the motor pool, I suppose.

PHASE SIX

The sixth phase involved the integration of all the equipment of the previous five phases. Consequently, it was my favorite phase to teach and the most interesting as a student as far as I was concerned. The first half was devoted to tying all of the previously taught principles and theory together and the last half to hands on application of that theory and those principles. It allowed the students to visualize the CPN-4 as a series of interconnected blocks. With proper observation of symptoms, they could isolate a problem to a major block and then a series of lesser blocks until the actual component at fault was identified. The unit was designed with a number of checkpoints from which observations could be made quickly and efficiently. This usually allowed a repairman to isolate a problem to a single drawer or chassis and sometimes a sub chassis within that drawer. Only then did he have to pull the chassis, hook it up on extension cords and make observations within the suspected area. One might then change a tube or, in more complex cases, trace a signal to its point of extinction to isolate a bad resistor, capacitor or coil. All of this design and instruction was utilized to make it possible to bring a failed unit back to operating status as quickly as possible, which meant minimum interference with the operation it supported.

RADAR REFLECTIONS

STATIC ELECTRICITY

In preparation for the test, the last half of phase six, we continually placed problems in the unit and required the students to find them. Thus, they were intimately familiar with all aspects of

the CPN-4 by the time the final came. Some students were so good that they would find the problem in five minutes and we could spend more time installing and removing problems than the students did finding them. Consequently, we instructors were constantly looking for new and more difficult failures to keep such airmen busy.

We concealed the problems in a variety of ways, each of which required the isolation to be by instrument and not simply a lucky glance. For instance, I remember using a wool cloth to disrupt a search CRT display. The CRT was housed in a console with a plastic front grid for protection. The grid was simply for reference and had nothing to do with the unit's operation, per se. However, it could disrupt it. We simply rubbed the plastic with the wool cloth, building up a static electricity charge until the CRT sweep began to separate as it came near the charged area. The sweep would be normal for 3/4ths of its pass around the tube face and

We simply rubbed the plastic with the wool cloth, thus building up a static electricity charge, until the CRT sweep began to separate as it came near the charged area.

suddenly it would separate into two pieces as it came by the charged area. What havoc that created among the students and

it was one no one ever found without help. It was the exception, however, and we were constantly disassembling circuit boards, cutting and splicing wires, shorting out components and, yes, even putting in bad or simply weak tubes. I believe we could simulate any practical problem a man could run into on the airstrip. We were supposed to remove all problems after the class was completed so the following shift could start clean. Sometimes this wasn't done, which seemed to raise havoc with the maintenance organization's workload and hence, our relationship with them.

THE COAXIAL CABLE STUNT

Another stunt we pulled with students was shorting out or sometimes opening the coaxial cable between the unit and remote monitors. Such a problem could be easily diagnosed by observing the signal being sent to the remote monitors. If I remember correctly, an open cable produced an in phase reflection while a shorted cable would produce an inverted or out of phase reflection. A person could deduce the distance to the short or open by measuring the reflection time. With that information he could physically examine the cable in the suspected area for the problem. An open meant we had to uncouple

two spools of cable and that was readily seen once it was suspected. However, a short could be produced by running a pin between the outer shield and center conductor of the coax with the advantage of being difficult to see with the naked eye. In our set up, a half dozen 1000 foot rolls of coax were stored in a cable room and used to produce the remote effect even though monitors and equipment were close together. Thus, we would slip into the cable room; run the pin in a roll of cable in a way that allowed us to hide it and “viola”, the student had a problem to occupy him for a while. The principles involved were easy and the problem validated the student’s understanding of them. Furthermore, he had to be confident of his analysis or he would give up as he hunted for the proverbial needle in the “cable stack”. You can be sure the pins were always on the backside of a given roll of coax and completely out of sight.

THE FINAL EXAM

The final practical exam for the course was a failure in the unit for which the airman was given twenty minutes to locate. He didn’t know which system the problem might be in, i.e. search system (transmit or receive), precision system (transmit or receive) or some auxiliary system. Needless to say, a good deal of stress would build up among the students while they waited their turn to isolate the problem. It was interesting to watch a good student come in and methodically dissect the unit in his mind as he checked the various available signals and control systems. Within five minutes many of them would have pulled the drawer at fault and began making checks within it. A top student would typically find the problem, which was never visible, in 10 minutes.

It had to be defined by synchroscope or meter. In fact we quit placing bad tubes in the circuit because they were too easily found. Rather we would remove a circuit board, cut a wire behind it or short out some component and then carefully replace the board so the installed fault wasn’t visible in the open drawer. Consequently, a student had to define the problem through signal disappearance, a lack of voltage or maybe a continuity check with a meter. With that he could properly conclude which component was defective. Such trouble shooting obviously required an understanding of the circuit involved as well as the proper use of

all the various test equipment available. If he passed the final exam, there was little question as to whether or not he was capable of diagnosing and repairing failures in the radar field systems. He had demonstrated his ability. The student definitely left the school well versed in the complex system of the CPN-4.

RAIN DROPS, QUEASY STOMACHS AND ELEPHANT HOOVES

Coffee break for instructors and students occurred morning and afternoon when a junk food truck came around with coffee and assorted goodies. Everyone took fifteen minutes to refresh and relax.

AN APPROACHING STORM

One beautiful clear day we were working in the CPN-4 unit just outside the hanger we were assigned to. As I observed the search scope while guiding a student through the alignment, I noticed a good-sized rain cloud moving our way. It was big enough and moving fast enough so that I got curious and determined its ETA over our hanger. The course led it right over Keesler Field and the speed put it on us at 2:30. About then I heard the bell for the goodies truck and exited the trailer. It was 2:15 and there wasn’t a cloud in the sky.

Noticing this, I made a remark to a fellow instructor that it would be raining cats and dogs inside of fifteen minutes. He looked around, laughed and said. “You’re crazy, I’ll bet you a buck we won’t see a cloud in that amount of time”. Who could pass up such a bet? I had measured the speed and course of a significant rainstorm and, unless the good Lord intervened, I had him cold. We shook hands on the bet and sipped our coffee as we watched the sky. Within five minutes clouds began to appear, in ten they were over us and in less than fifteen

Within five minutes clouds began to appear, in ten they were over us and in less than fifteen minutes we were running for cover.

minutes we were running for cover. As we stood in the shelter of the hanger looking out at the deluge Mother Nature had dumped upon us, he muttered; “How in the world did you know that rain was coming? There wasn’t a cloud in the sky.” “Well”, I said; “that search system on the unit we are in helps a little, you know. It sees out in the gulf about a hundred miles”. “Obenchain, you dirty dog”, he yelled, “You sand bagged me!” Well, I guess I did but he was adamant with what little information he had when the bet was made and,

of course, so was I. He didn't bother to ask me just how I knew but simply chose to oppose me. Anyway, I felt justified in taking his measly buck but I must admit, my being able to sand bag him so easily provided even greater pleasure. He would have done the same, given half a chance.

BE CAREFUL WHO YOU PLAY WITH

I had two really good friends while instructing at Keesler. One was a big Dutchman from Pennsylvania named Chuck Blocher and the second a friendly Polock from New Jersey named John Dieuwickiez. The latter individual's wife was the close friend of Esther's who helped her locate the \$80 residence I spoke of earlier. Anyway we spent a lot of time together at the base and even off duty as couples. John was noted for his queasy stomach while Chuck could probably eat a dead rodent without flinching. Chuck usually ate breakfast on base just prior to our tour of duty and I as well as John often joined him with a cup of coffee. John might get something to eat as well, like a couple of donuts or toast and jam,

decided to get back at him one morning. Chuck was eating ham, eggs and grits along with his toast and coffee. John simply ordered coffee and sat down with us. Soon he began making some rather unappetizing remarks about Chuck's food. Well, that didn't faze Chuck. He simply joined in and did John one better with statements like, "Look at this, just like snot dripping from a snot nosed kid," as he held up the runny whites of his over easy eggs and let them drip off his fork. Another choice remark regarding his grits mixed up with butter and soft egg with some peanut butter on the side was more than John could take. He couldn't finish his coffee, jumped up and left the cafeteria. The poor guy should have known better than to take on the man with the cast iron stomach. Needless to say, John seldom joined us for coffee in the morning after that.

JOHN HAD HIS QUIRKS

As you might have suspected, John was picky and then some when it came to food. Esther and I often ate dinner with John and his wife on Friday or Saturday nights, alternating at each other's residence, and then spent the remainder of the evening playing pinochle or simply talking. John used to irritate Esther a good deal because she had to call his wife and review the menu prior to dinner so John would be sure to eat. Being good friends helped alleviate the problem a lot and Esther gradually accepted his finicky ways as part of our relationship.

John believed in early preparation too. He planned to become an electrical engineer after leaving the air force. Consequently, he began collecting deeply theoretical books on such things as wave-guide theory, antenna design, etc. We asked him why, telling him he probably wouldn't use those particular books. His comment was, "maybe not but I get them for half price and I can't pass up a bargain like that."

SMOE FEET OR ELEPHANT HOOVES

Blocher was a humorous sort of guy, if you haven't already figured that out. He was always teasing someone in a good-natured sort of way. One day He went with me to the base clothing store so I could get some boots. They didn't

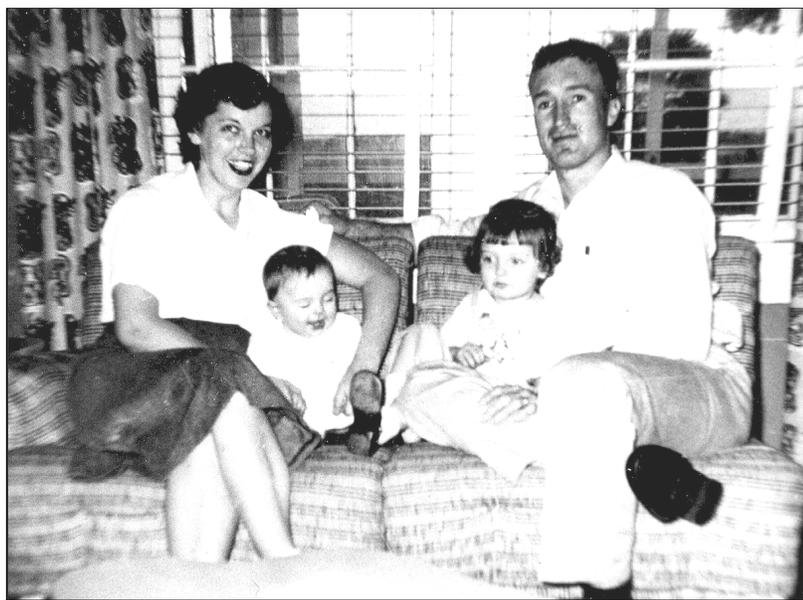


Figure 4-12 Esther and I with Celeste and Valerie sitting by the front windows and enjoying the breeze in our beachfront home located in Biloxi, Mississippi in the spring of 1955.

etc. Knowing of John's queasy stomach, Chuck would often make some comment that apparently produced nausea and John would push his food aside and even leave the table at times. The situation became kind of a game to Chuck and he would see just how long it took to talk John out of eating his donuts or whatever. John got a little fed up with the situation and

have my size, 14AA, which was no surprise but he thought it was funny and began to razz me about my long skinny feet. I weathered it somewhat better than John and he finally let up. Even so, he continued from time to time to poke at me if an appropriate opportunity came up.

About a month or so later, I happened to drop into the clothing store again, maybe to pick up my boots. There was Chuck putting in a special order. He was tall, six foot or so, but was about as wide as he was high. Of course I got curious and went over to talk and listen in as he completed the order. What do you know; he was ordering boots as well. Of course his were short, about 8's but something like 5E in width. Boy did I jump on that. I said, "At least I got a foot. All you got is a stump or maybe an elephant's hoof. What kind of line did your ancestors evolve from?" Boy, did he quiet down about my feet, at least in my presence. He knew I would show him no mercy and in spite of my big feet, I probably had the better case.

BEACH FRONT EXPERIENCES

Our home on the beach proved to be ideal for us during the last 19 months of our hitch. Valerie was about 16 months old when we moved in and Celeste was born at the base about 6 months afterwards. Figure 4-12 pictures Esther, Celeste, Valerie and I enjoying our new home some 6 or 8 months after we moved in. What a great time we had that year in spite of limited income. Any sacrifice we made to make ends meet was well worth it because we were basically stay at homes and our lives centered in family and friends.

LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI BEACH

A GREAT FRONT YARD

From the photo of figure 4-9 you can appreciate the big front yard we had. I was young enough and had sufficient spare time such that I didn't mind keeping it up. Mowing on a weekly basis was relatively easy and I frequently spent time weeding the flowerbeds in front of the porch as well as the areas around the trees. I enjoyed working in the yard. Often there was a breeze coming in from the gulf and I could be choosy about where I weeded, i.e. in the shade as opposed to the sun. You can see in figure 4-9 that Valerie and Esther seemed to as well. Actually, Esther had to be careful or the chiggers would chew her up. They didn't seem to bother me. I could crawl around in the grass weeding all day and come in unscathed. Conversely she

only had to come out and talk with me a while to become their victim. I told her I smelled too bad and they wanted a sweeter meal.

I don't remember Valerie getting chewed up particularly and she loved to play outside.

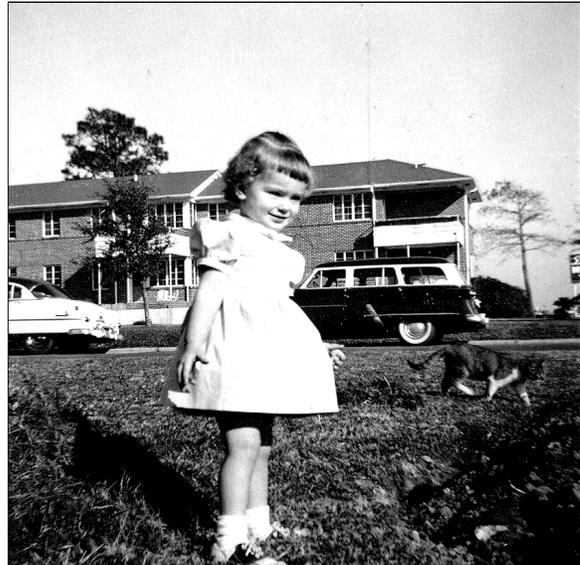


Figure 4-13 Valerie and a neighbor's cat on the front lawn of our beachfront home.

Figures 4-13 and 4-14 illustrate her interest in a neighbor's cat. She never did catch it even though she made a determined effort as you can



Figure 4-14 Valerie after that cat with her characteristic grin of impish anticipation.

see from the latter of the two photos. Little did I know at that time, this particular characteristic,

i.e. determination to accomplish, would be one of her identity traits during life. She still gets that determined little smile when engrossed.

BEACH BUMS AND PLAYGROUND RATS

I would often come home from work and take Valerie walking on the beach. We would hunt shells mostly but also saw small sand crabs



Figure 4-15 Valerie at about three years swinging at the park near our home.

scurry across the beach, a halibut washed up now and then and other odd and interesting



Figure 4-16 Valerie enjoying her second Christmas in our duplex on the beach.

things. We also walked over to a little park in the next block and she would play on the slides

and swings while I relaxed in the shade. Of course she wanted me to participate as well at times and so my relaxation was limited. I had to help with the teeter-totter naturally and also with the bars she tried to climb on without much success. Figure 4-15 shows her in one of the swings. All in all we had some good daddy daughter times and she looked forward to them. She would often ask me to “go walk” when I arrived home from the base in the early afternoon. She was ready for some daddy time.

Figure 4-16 is a photo of Valerie’s second Christmas, I believe, in the duplex on the beach. She would have been close to 2 ½ years old. Celeste would have been 8 months. As you can see, Valerie got mostly clothes with just a few toys. Much of that came from her aunt and uncles in Glenns Ferry whose hearts she had captured a year and a half earlier.

CELESTE, A LATE COMER

Esther had learned she was pregnant upon her return from vacation in early August. The physician she saw placed the delivery date at about the 27th of January 1954. I even found a document among our papers that states just that. Of course Celeste was born April 11, 1954 or 2 ½ months later. I’m not sure whether all this was due to a miscalculation of man or some unknown medical phenomena that occurs among certain unfortunate souls. I say unfortunate because of the associated stress on the expectant mother and its partial transfer to her spouse. Esther was doing fine with just the normal growling of any wife in late term discomfort as January 27th approached. However, as the due date passed her discomfort was magnified by leaps and bounds.

One week, maybe even two was acceptable but by the middle of February she became somewhat less than congenial. All she could think of was the birth of our new child. Why wasn’t she feeling any preliminary pains? Surely the doctor couldn’t be that far off. Succeeding visits to the base simply confirmed it would be soon, maybe a couple of weeks. Any soothing conversation I attempted was met with, “Oh sure, that’s easy for you to say. You’re not carrying this big stomach around. Your back doesn’t hurt and you don’t have to chase a year and a half old child all day”. I helped as much as I could when home which varied from fixing meals to taking Valerie for a walk and cleaning house but it didn’t alleviate her discomfort. Delivery of the child began to become as

important to me as to Esther. I too wanted life to return to some measure of normality. When the blessed event finally did roll around, I suppose it was that much more appreciated, if such is possible. Celeste's birth was marked by inflation, Esther's hospital stay being a full twenty percent higher than that of Valerie. I often teased Celeste by telling her she was our high priced baby costing a full \$5.85 while Valerie cost us only \$4.90. I'm not sure just what we paid for now, since the actual hospital stay and doctor costs were on the military but it was insignificant. At that time I believe a baby with normal delivery might cost a civilian couple \$350.00 or so.

AN IDEAL LOCATION

We lived just across the highway from the Gulf of Mexico though separated from the major body of water by only a few islands, one of which was the home of Fort Biloxi. I had made the trip out there on a tour boat prior to Esther's arrival and swam a little on the gulf side of the island. I still remember the warning we were given regarding a strong undertow there and even experienced it to a small degree. A couple of us swam out just a ways over our head and then back. In that short time we had been pulled some distance (maybe 100 yards) parallel to the beach. Needless to say we were plenty careful after that. The fort was only the remnants of the original, which the Spanish had constructed about the time St. Augustine, Fl. was established, i.e. 1565. Some in Biloxi even maintained Biloxi was founded prior to St. Augustine, which I doubt. The encyclopedia still credits the latter with that title. The town was named after a local tribe of Indians known as the Biloxis, so I was told. My experiences there convinced me the area should be given back to them. I don't know what they got out of the deal but at least they got rid of Biloxi. It was hardly a prize to be sought after as far as I was concerned.

BEACH FRONT BREEZES

I got a ways off the subject but anyway living on the beach was a blessing during the summer as long as there were no hurricanes. A breeze would blow off the water during the afternoon each day. Having no air conditioning then, we opened the house wide to let the air move through as much as possible. The breeze was pleasant and continued until about ten at night when it stopped as though a fan had been shut

off. We used to sit on the porch or in our living room with the windows open and enjoy its refreshing nature. Virtually all the houses at that time had attic fans, which were used at night to cool the house. When we went to bed we would

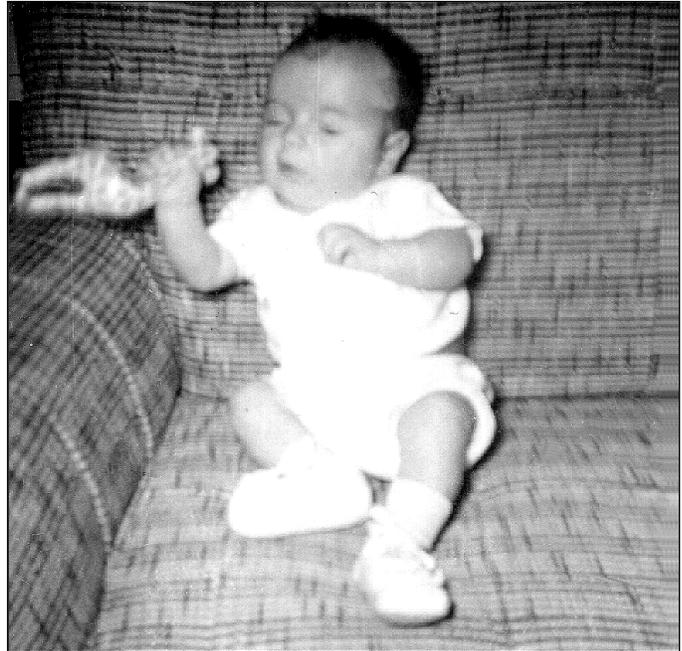


Figure 4-17 Celeste pretending complete innocence even though keeping her parents up

crack a window or two in each room, turn on the attic fan and retire. By morning the hotter air of the house was replaced with relatively cool



Figure 4-18 Daddy trying to help a determined Valerie of 2+ years hold her younger sister without inflicting permanent damage.

outside air. About six AM we would turn off the fan, shut the windows and thus keep the house cool for a part of the day. By mid-afternoon the house would be opened up again, as the

temperature rose. In earlier houses we just suffered the heat and humidity but after moving to the beach the breeze off the gulf made things much more pleasant. In the photo of figure 4-12 the windows behind us would be opened to capture the breeze. We could even look out to the gulf and see approaching thunderstorms.

AN AVID STUDENT

Our beachfront home was within walking distance of the base, in good weather that is. On a rainy day or when the weather was hot and

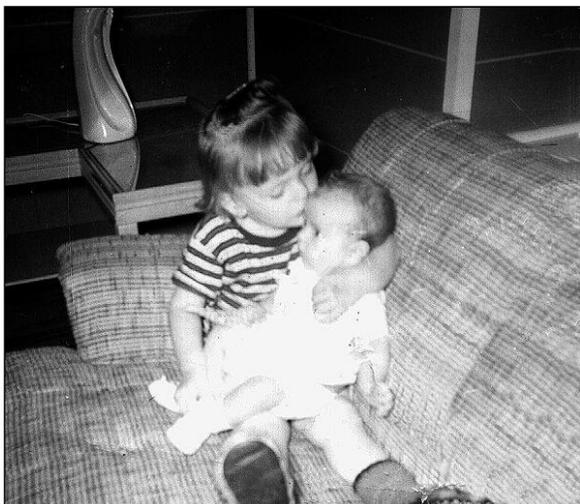


Figure 4-19 Valerie with Celeste in one of her more tender moments in Biloxi, Miss.

humid (all summer) I took the bus. At that point I was instructing the so-called 7-level or CPN-4 course from 6 to 12, five days a week. If I didn't draw any extra duty, I would leave the house about 5:30 AM and return by 1:00 PM. It was great duty and left me time for other things including various courses in the United States Armed Forces Institute. I found copies of certificates for television, frequency modulation, radio communications and a First Class FCC license. I remember taking a Calculus course as a refresher (I had taken it in college), radio communications II and a Capitol Radio Engineering course. The latter was a commercial course, which I had to pay for but it added to my growing knowledge in the electronics area. All of this was possible because of the relatively easy work schedule. Initially, I had to prepare lesson plans for all the six phases of the course but once completed, teaching was pretty much a 6 hour day plus travel time with occasional extra duty of some kind. Time was not a constraining factor. One might say I had a bird's nest on the ground.

NOCTURNAL NURTURING

Celeste finally agreed to make her debut on April 11, 1954 as I have indicated earlier. Thus we spent just over a year in our beach house with two children before discharge from the service. During that time, Celeste had somehow become confused about night and day. She would lie awake and play or maybe scream if a diaper needed changing or she was hungry. In any case, I was a light sleeper and even though



Figure 4-20 Valerie is determined to make Celeste smile but with little success.

Esther did the majority of the changing, etc., I would be awake. Often I helped Esther in one way or another because sleep was impossible with Celeste awake. Consequently, when the alarm went off I was somewhat blurry eyed and in a bit of a stupor. I got up at 4:30 AM so as to be at the base ready to go at 6:00 AM. When I returned that afternoon, Esther would usually tell me that Celeste went to sleep about 5:30 or 6:00 and slept through the day. Obviously she was preparing for another night of activity, which began about our bedtime. This conduct went on for at least six months and I believe more like nine. It's a good thing they discharged me because, I don't believe I could have survived much longer. Figure 4-17 was taken of her at play on the sofa at about 6 months. Probably it was taken about midnight or the wee hours of the morning because she seems content that daddy and mommy are doing their part in keeping her waking hours occupied with meaningful things to do, meaningful that is in her newly born mind, whatever that might be. I still find differences in meanings with her.

SIBLING LOVE

Figure 4-18 is a photo of Valerie, Celeste and me in the fall of 1954 when Celeste was about the same age, i.e. 6 to 8 months, I would guess. If you'll notice, I'm trying to smile but my lips are somewhat tight indicating my concern for Celeste. Valerie meant well but she often had little accidents like pushing her little sister down the front steps in her stroller. Yep. She did it. She had decided to take Celeste for a walk. Well, Celeste seemed to live through it but I wasn't sure Esther and I would make it through all her sleepless nights. Actually, they turned out to be good training for my future job as a field engineer with Schlumberger. None-the-less, in time she repented and daddy quickly forgave her of all that rest he missed. She became daddy's girl and we had some wonderful times together over the years.

Figure 4-19 seems to illustrate the natural mothering tendencies of Valerie at an early age. Unfortunately, as time passed by, she wasn't always this interested in Celeste's welfare. At times her impish nature got the best of her and she was more interested in seeing just how much Celeste could take before she got mom or dad involved. Valerie enjoyed taking advantage of her younger sister's fears in those later years and did her best to promote them. More about that subject, however, later on. Figure 4-20 is just a bit more realistic in that Celeste appears to be evaluating her existing situation a little differently than does Valerie who is determined to make her comfortable whether she likes it or not.

PICNICS AND OTHER THINGS

Because of finances, our recreation as a family was limited. It was definitely of the low cost variety, i.e. picnics with friends, an evening with other couples playing cards, just laughing and talking or maybe a walk along the water front checking out some antebellum homes, etc. Even so, we were happy and life was good in spite of limited means. Looking back on those times, I can only conclude that happiness is more a state of mind than it is one of finding such happiness in material assets.

We took one such picnic with the Tatarzycks and another couple along a slow muddy river near

Biloxi. The Tatarzycks had to furnish the transportation, I believe, because we only had our shoe leather to get us around. I remember the picnic area wasn't far away but I'm at a loss to say just where. We had a good time walking through the woods, playing in the river and, of course, eating typical picnic food. I remember



Figure 4-21 Celeste at about ten months flirting with the photographer. With her schedule, it must be midnight.

being aghast at the slow muddy water of the river. I was used to the swifter western streams which sparkled as they flowed over rocks and logs. Even in slower moving areas such streams didn't have time to pick up a lot of silt and one could easily see bottom in a four or five foot deep creek. There in Mississippi six inches of water carried enough silt to completely hide or at least disguise the stream bottom. We simply waded out in faith that there was nothing dangerous in it (snakes or crocodiles, etc.) and actually enjoyed the cool water. I must admit, however, a person had to be in deep need of a swim because one didn't feel really clean after such an outing and any pleasure was definitely limited to the immediate cooling off, which was difficult to find in Mississippi. Of course, beggars can't be choosers, so the old saying goes and we were definitely begging.

A MOTHER'S PRIDE

Esther was really proud of her girls and wanted real photographs of them at an early age in spite



Figure 4-22 Celeste at one year looking over our yard in Biloxi, Mississippi.

of our limited assets. Her efforts resulted in the pictures of figure 4-6 and 4-21, taken by commercial photographers. Of course, I had no such feelings and resisted strongly but was once again out voted by that two to one margin I spoke of in the preface. Even so, I must admit our girls were cute. Consequently, I decided our posterity, be they grandchildren or more distant members of our family tree, should see them as they were at that age. It will help them realize their parents, grandparents, etc. were once cute little tykes as well. Maybe such pictures will help them relate to aunts, uncles and others of the older generations in a more understanding way.

Of course, I have included several other pictures of Valerie already and so I'll add a couple more of Celeste to kind of balance out the scene. The photo of figure 4-22 is self explanatory and was taken just before my discharge. We returned to Idaho where the colored photo of Celeste was taken later that summer. Only Uncle Art had money enough to afford real color photos at that time and she won his heart. If a person looks at figures 4-21 and 4-23, they would get the impression Celeste is a talker. Pictures can lie, however, and either these do or Celeste did all her talking before she entered school. Not that she is an introvert like her daddy was but neither is she an extrovert. She just likes a little more peace and quiet than Valerie does.

GOOD FRIENDS

During the last year and a half we probably spent more time with the Dieuwickiezws than anyone else. They lived about a block away and we enjoyed each other's company. Chuck Blocher, however, was a good friend who remained single until the last year of our enlistment. He married a local girl who was nice enough, I'm sure, but as couples we didn't mix much. It was probably due to her local family and their demands on her and Chuck's time. We did go to their house once where I helped Chuck with a TV antenna, called a Yagi array.

WHITE LIGHTNING

Chuck wasn't a heavy drinker by a long shot but then again he wasn't against it either. We had a beer together from time to time but that was limited more by finances than anything else. One day Chuck was bringing me home from the base in his little MG convertible. Just as we were about to take off, he stopped and pulled out a gallon jug about a third full of a clear liquid.



Figure 4-23 Celeste in a somewhat boisterous mood expressing her opinion.

He said, "how about a shot of white lightning"? I asked him where he got it. He replied, telling me there were plenty of stills in the countryside

around Biloxi. "Here, take a swig," he said again. I wasn't too interested in that my experience in college with hard liquor was far from pleasant. Even so, I decided to taste it, taking just a small sip. Wow, I now understood the term "white lightning". Even that small taste seemed to burn all the way through me like I had been struck by the real thing. As I sputtered clearing my throat, Chuck said, "You can get a whole gallon of this stuff for less than five dollars." Do you want to get some?

I made no attempt to hide my dislike for that bolt from the blue, which had just about burned my innards up. "Who in the world would pay anything for a jug of that", I said. "They couldn't pay me enough to drink it". Chuck came back with, "Obenchain, you just don't have a taste for good liquor". Well, I suppose he was right and I muttered something about, "That's one taste I really don't care to acquire". That was the first and last experience I had with white lightning. I decided right then and there, I would join up with the so-called revenuers if I ever had to take sides. Surely manufacturing such stuff was a crime against mankind let alone against federal tax laws. At that time, however, white lightning was easy to come by in spite of the feds if one had such a hankering and malformed taste buds.

BRAGGING ON OUR YAGI

Soon after Chuck got married he bought a new TV set, Black and white of course, because color was still a thing of the future. He and his wife lived out in the country a ways and reception was terrible with rabbit ears. They were on limited income as were Esther and I and couldn't really afford an outside antenna. We knew a little bit about antennas, having covered such directional devices in our electronics training. I suggested we might build one out coat hangers if we could get a decent pole to mount them on. Well, it didn't take Chuck long to come up with suitable material which, though hardly professional, would probably suffice. We decided to build a five-element Yagi array, which had good directional characteristics and relatively high gain. It was composed of a main dipole with a reflector in back and four directors in front. The individual length of each element was determined by the frequency band involved; while the number used, established the antenna's bandwidth and gain. We had the necessary formula and set about cutting unfolded clothes hangers to length.

We then spaced them as necessary in front and behind the primary dipole and secured them to a cross bar which in turn was secured to a vertical pole about 25 or 30 feet high. I don't remember all the details of construction but the finished product was physically stable though hardly a thing of beauty. Next we ran 300 ohm ribbon antenna wire from the main dipole to his TV set and set about lining things up. Chuck watched the set while I rotated the antenna on the roof in the general direction of New Orleans, the primary source of TV signals around Biloxi. Voila, we had 3 channels coming in loud and clear and Chuck had saved himself \$75 or so. Everything was secured and Chuck was in business. I think we even protected it from lightning strikes by putting in the appropriate grounding mechanism but that part is a little fuzzy I must admit. In any case it was never struck during the time I was in Keesler. Needless to say, we were quite proud of ourselves having improvised with our newfound technical knowledge.

MISSISSIPPI HILLS

During my tour as an instructor at Keesler I worked with several civilian employees. These were generally men with strong electronics background who were a little older than the average airman. One such fellow and I became rather good friends. I believe his name was Shoemaker but I couldn't swear to it. He was a dedicated ham radio operator and convinced me to work towards my FCC first class license. He operated a so-called single side band rig and I used to spend a good deal of time discussing the relative merits of different equipment. My interest was in the equipment and not its operation. I couldn't see myself making small talk over the airways even though he seemed to love it. One day he invited Esther and I out to his house for dinner so I could see his rig of which he was quite proud. He gave me the necessary directions, which included the fact that he lived on the only hill in the vicinity, which I couldn't miss. It seems to me we rode the bus most of the way and had to walk just a few blocks once we got off. Anyway the directions were clear and I had no trouble until I got in the general vicinity of his house. I looked for the hill, expecting to see a reasonable change in elevation but to no avail. Knowing I was close, I began to read mailbox names until I came across his. I looked at Esther and said, "Do you see a hill"? She shook her head in the negative but we went on in. After dinner and a tour of his

radio equipment, he wanted to show me the place while Esther and his wife talked. As we went outside I said, "I thought you told me you lived on a hill"? He answered that he did and I countered with, "not so you can tell it. Everything looks level to me." He said, "Obenchain, come with me." As we walked around the house he carefully pointed out that the land sloped away in all directions meaning he was on top of a hill. It would almost take a surveyor's level to confirm it or at least a good deal of imagination. Anyhow, I laughed and said, "You'd need a magnifying glass to confirm it". He was a little chagrined that the hill wasn't more apparent to me and made some remark about my being raised in the mountains with little knowledge of the differences in plains and hills. After all, he didn't claim to live on a mountain.

RETURN TO CIVILIAN LIFE.

I received orders on May 2, 1955 that my discharge would be effective May 6, 1955. Esther and I had made plans for some time and began to prepare for the trip back to Idaho. We, of course, received mustering out pay along with my last check. The air force shipped all our belongings to Boise, which really wasn't much other than that washing machine Esther had been so proud of. We had planned our route through New Orleans to Kansas City, thence to Denver, Cheyenne and Boise. We had already decided, I would continue my schooling, having just a little more to complete for my masters degree in geophysics. After helping get Esther settled in with the kids in the apartment upstairs at our home on 17th street, I left for Colorado School of Mines with little more than faith we could make ends meet to allow my completion of at least a master's degree. Esther would work, temporarily at least, at St. Lukes where she had completed nurses training. Our plans didn't really gel, in that after completing summer school, I couldn't get the courses I needed that fall. Thus, I would have to stay out for a semester and begin again in January. Needless to say funds were short and I took to the streets with want ads in hand to find some kind of

After helping get Esther settled in with the kids in the apartment upstairs at our home on 17th street, I left for Colorado School of Mines with little more than faith we could make ends meet to allow my completion of at least a Masters degree.

employment that fit with my chosen discipline of geophysics. I interviewed a couple of seismic companies with no immediate luck. One might have an opening in a couple of weeks. Having read an advertisement by Schlumberger Well Services for field engineers, I decided to look into that. The interview went well with but with one hitch. They wanted permanent employees, not temporary. The job was certainly a type of geophysics and the outside work coupled with geology and electronics seemed right down my line. I decided then and there to accept the job, if offered, and continue my schooling at a later date. I was called back for a second interview in which they seemed to try their best to discourage me from taking the job. They emphasized the long hours I would need to put in and the difficult schedule I would work, i.e. 12 days on and 3 days off. That didn't scare me off. I was used to hard work and the job seemed extremely interesting besides having the outdoor element I felt was important for me.

I was accepted and asked to report to Beaumont, Texas for training effective July 26, 1955. I did so and the next thirty-one years of life follow in chapters five through sixteen, which constituted the major portion of my working life. Chapters five through eight are really an overview of the technical aspects of the job. I think they will provide the technical base (for those who read them) for all the Schlumberger experiences that follow in chapters nine through sixteen. Though I had some ups and downs and even difficult moments in my employment, I will always believe I made the right decision in accepting that job. I really wouldn't change the many experiences I had with Schlumberger. As I had been told, the field hours were often long but they were almost always interesting and added to my technical background. In later years, some of the positions I found myself in were challenging, to say the least. They weren't always part of my forte, causing me a great deal of stress, but even so, they did add to my overall experience and ability. Thus, they became a part of this character now constituting grandpa