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“Dear Folks”: The Webster Letters from Arabia 1944-1959

14 July 2008 | [comments \(2\)](#) | [In Search Of Oil](#) | by [Aramco ExPats](#)

Chapter 15: King Saud Visits Dhahran; Aramco Produces a Million Barrels of Oil Per Month; Saudi Government Introduces Paper Money; Polio Outbreak in Camp; Military Brass and Diplomats Come to Call; Judy Enjoys ACS in Beirut While Her Parents Begin Reviewing College for Her; Susan Prepares for Swiss Boarding School; Mildred and Ken Visit Riyadh and Jubail.



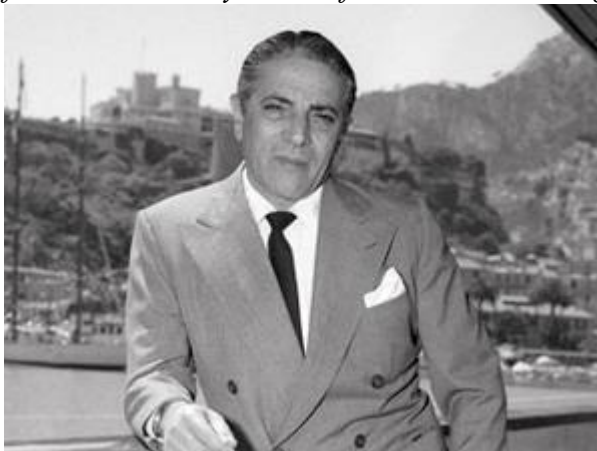
The Webster family poses in the living room at 1423 King's Road in Dhahran, circa 1954. From left, Judy, Mildred, Ken and Susan. (Photo courtesy Judy Webster Bauer.)

Newly crowned King Saud arrives in Dhahran for an extended stay during the first week of January 1954, followed by a long hunting trip throughout the Kingdom. Dhahran District Manager Ken Webster reports on His Majesty's visit in detail and continues his regular family correspondence describing daily Aramco operations and newsworthy developments. Judy Webster thrives at the American Community School in Beirut. Mildred Webster prepares her younger daughter, Susan, for boarding school in Switzerland. And life continues to be hectic and exciting for all concerned in the thriving company towns.

The year is yet another of notable happenings in world history:

- *The foreign ministers of the U.S., Britain, France and the Soviet Union meet at the Berlin Conference to begin discussions on the separation of Eastern and Western Europe.*
- *The first mass vaccination of children against polio begins in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*
- *Boeing unveils the prototype of its 707 and takes it on a maiden flight of 90 minutes. The 707 was the first jet aircraft to be commercially successful.*
- *Gamal Abdel Nasser is named premier of Egypt early in the year and then becomes president after Mohammed Naguib is deposed.*

- *Four Puerto Rican nationalists open fire in the United States House of Representatives chamber and wound five; they are apprehended by security guards.*
- *The Geneva Conference divides Vietnam into North and South, laying the groundwork for the Vietnam War.*
- *President Eisenhower creates the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado.*
- *First issue of Sports Illustrated is published.*
- *First national TV broadcast of the “Miss America” pageant.*
- *Actress Marilyn Monroe weds baseball legend Joe DiMaggio.*
- *The first Godzilla movie is released in Japan.*
- *Senator Joe McCarthy finally goes too far in his Communist witch–hunt, when his committee attempts to investigate the U.S. Army. The Senate condemns him for “conduct that tends to bring the Senate into dishonor and disrepute.” The vote is 67 to 22.*
- *Harvard Medical School successfully completes the first kidney transplant operation.*
- *The US Supreme Court, in the case of Brown v. the Board of Education, rules that segregation is unconstitutional*
- *Academy Award for “Best Picture”: On The Waterfront.*
- *Nobel Prize for Literature: Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea.*
- *Bill Hailey & His Comets record, “Rock Around the Clock,” often referred to as the first commercially successful rock ‘n’ roll song.*



Greek shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis in the 1950s. (Internet photo.)

1954 also is the year in which King Saud partners with Aristotle Onassis to ship Saudi oil. From the November 22, 1954 edition of Time magazine:

*“Ever since Aristotle Socrates Onassis signed an agreement with King Saud Ibn Abdul Aziz to form a company for shipping Saudi Arabian oil, the Greek-born tanker tycoon has found his scuppers awash with criticism. Other shipping men attacked the deal as a step toward monopolizing the shipment of Saudi Arabian oil; the British and U.S. Governments both protested to Saudi Arabia that the deal would squeeze out shipping companies now carrying the oil. (Under the Saudi deal, Onassis would ship only 10% of Saudi Arabia’s oil at first, but the percentage would be stepped up over the years.) And **Arabian American Oil Co. (Aramco)** complained that its interests as a producer were endangered. . .*



The late King Ibn Saud, left, with his oldest son, who became king upon Ibn Saud's death in November 1953. The new king paid a long visit to Dhahran and the Eastern Province in early 1954. (Photo from Ken Slavin's personal copy of the Aramco Handbook.)

Ship owner and broker Spiridon Katapodid [charged] that Onassis...landed the contract only by paying high Saudi Arabian officials more than \$1,000,000. Katapodis, who said that he was supposed to get \$1,000,000 himself for being Onassis' go-between in the deal, announced in Paris this week that he was going to sue Onassis for reneging: Onassis, he claimed, signed the agreement with him in ink that faded out. . . Katapodis said, 'Onassis told me ... he would play an important role in the development of natural resources in Saudi Arabia which . . . would make him . . . the most powerful man in the world.''' Onassis said, 'The charges are completely unfounded.' (Courtesy Time magazine's free online archives.)

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

January 8, 1954

Dear Folks:

As predicted we had a busy week, as the King arrived Wednesday and the Company declared a holiday for all employees except dining hall, utilities, oil operations, transportation, medical, etc.

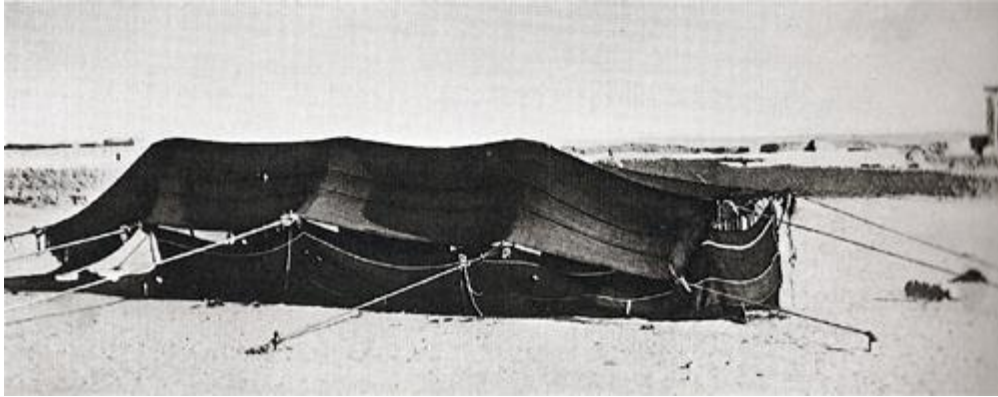
He arrived by his personal Budd car [via the new railroad] at noon, at the Dhahran Station, which is just outside our main gate. We had built a reviewing stand facing the station to seat the King and main retinue and local government and religious people and a few very top Company officials. He walked from the train about 1,100 feet through archways covered with white and green muslin between two rows of bleachers seating some 1,000, standing groups of some 4,000 and Aramco Americans totaling some 1,100 standing just inside the gate, sitting on bleachers along the road entrance to the gate, and up on trucks, platforms, high trailers, etc.



Crown Prince Saud in 1952, about a year before he became King upon the death of his father, Ibn Saud, in November 1953.

He had his own military band in bright new blue uniforms, hordes of soldiers, a 21-gun (mortar) salute, and it really was a three-ring circus. Speeches by local village groups, company officials, songs by Arab schoolchildren, etc., took until almost two, along with the usual fruit juice, coffee and tea. All the company streets from gate to Hamilton House set aside for His Majesty had arches, posts with flags and emblems, etc. It was a royal greeting for fair. He and his group have 23 family houses, the former hospital composed of six family units and three portables (the latter buildings used exclusively for 50 young princes age 4-14 and their servants), over 200 tents in various locations, and two 13-room concrete servants' dormitories for his transportation personnel.

Wednesday night was for visiting with high company officials, high government officials, and groups of local merchants. Thursday he visited nearby places, but not until last night, Thursday, was there a large function. The local Amir, Saud bin Abdullah bin Jiluwi, Governor of Al Hasa Province [in which Dhahran is located], gave a dinner for him in a new just finished guest house at Dammam. We sat and had tea and coffee, listened to speeches from various groups, then went to large dining room (800 capacity) and had dinner. There were sheep, whole roasted, and at least one whole camel and cow, and the sheep count varies from 168 to 400. I counted 168 personally but there was an outer hallway with tables, and a great spread outside for the general public. The entire town was decorated with flags, arches, lights, banners, etc., and it was like approaching a huge stadium for a night football game.



A picture of a traditional Bedouin tent, 1950s. It was a portable shelter that provided maximum shade and ventilation. (From Ken Slavin's copy of the *Aramco Handbook*.)



A traditional Arab feast was on the menu during King Saud's visit to the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in 1954 – and it included dozens of whole roasted sheep and camels. (Pictured here is a whole roasted camel.) Ken Webster and other Aramco officials attended the feast in Dammam, hosted by the governor of the Al Hasa province. Ken reported in a letter to the family back home, "There were sheep, whole roasted, and at least one whole camel and cow, and the sheep count varies from 168 to 400. I counted 168 personally but there was an outer hallway with tables, and a great spread outside for the general public." (Internet photo.)

The noise in the streets was terrific but went down and back without incident. The streets for nine miles were lined with soldiers and the traffic was something. After the dinner, we had more speeches, more tea and coffee, then home. En route I stopped to see the Director of Kings Transportation, Eed bin Salim, who gave me the gold watch last time. Also visited with Abdullah Ali, the head of the King's private FBI. Drank more tea and coffee and had a fine talk. The last coffee was with cardiman seed, which I like, but the dinner coffee was with saffron as was the rice with the chickens, and I don't think I would ask for it again if I had a choice.

Today I attended an Arab luncheon by the Arab welders for an assistant foreman who is retiring. It was a very good meal, but far too much. At 2:00 picked up Allyn and Lynn and then Mildred at Hobby Farm, and drove to Khobar to see the decorations we had heard about. [Along the] entrance to the two main streets were arches three blocks long with lights and palm branches. The main street about a mile long, had flags, banners, archways, bunting, etc., on all store fronts, and the entire length covered with Persian rugs. We drove by the big tea supposed to start at 3 p.m. and thought the King had already left for home. We started back and met him halfway from Dhahran, he being one and one half hours late. We stopped at the hunting party encampment of about 140 tents

and 2,500 soldiers and took pictures of some 22 hunting falcons, some hooded and some not, and were glad they were all tied to their perch. One Arab picked some up and fed them, but we were glad to go on our way!



Traditional Arab coffee pot and dates. According to Arab.net, "The preparation, serving and drinking of gahwa — Arabian coffee — are each individual rituals derived from Bedouin hospitality; traditions that are still bound today by the same ceremony and etiquette which have ruled for centuries...To be served a cup of this unique beverage is more than just refreshment, it is unfailing proof that the guest is still revered and honoured in Saudi Arabia. In offering a cup of gahwa the host is saying Ahlan Wa Sahlan, welcome." (Internet photo.)

Picked up Susan at the Hobby Farm and came home as I must dress for a seven PM dinner by the company for His Majesty, at our dining hall, and just as I came in, Susan was on the phone with an invitation to me by the local government officials, to attend a tea at 9:30 AM tomorrow for His Majesty. There may be a dinner tomorrow, Saturday, then we are done, I think, with festivities. In a few days or a week, the group are supposed to go north on a hunting party and to visit the Pipeline Stations, then circle west and back to the capital at Riyadh. We have more than 2,000 extra to feed, plus those who prepare their own [meals] at nearby hunting encampment to serve in one way or another, and though we like our King, we shall be glad to get back to normal soon.

Interlude one hour.

Have just come back from the dinner, which was served and cooked in good old American style. We had fruit baskets, assorted relishes, iced celery. Then chicken breasts supreme in aspic with stuffed tomato. Then roast prime rib au jus with fresh asparagus, fresh peas and carrots, and roast potatoes. Then huge portions of Long Island duckling with rice (many Arabs near me took two servings), above with rolls and butter, nuts, custard with the meal, cookies and then old fashioned strawberry shortcake followed by ice cream pastries and assorted cheese and crackers with the coffee or tea. Fresh fruit juice was [the] final course. Before the meal, the King sat with the group and had juice. After the meal, Mr. Davies, [Aramco] board chairman, spoke for the Company. Then after the King's band played him to his car, we had a cigarette.

One of the dining hall men made five large ice figures as table decorations and a model mosque about four feet by six feet and two feet high from 26 pounds of sugar. The trees around it were from pipe cleaners on which were glued pencil shavings.



Arab soldiers outside a tent on one of the King's visits to Dhahran in Aramco's early days. During the January 1954 visit of the newly crowned King Saud, approximately 2,500 soldiers accompanied His Majesty, according to Dhahran District Manager Ken Webster. (Photo from Ken Slavin's personal collection of Webster papers.)

We are all ready for bed and will advise the rest of the week's activities in the next letter. The past weeks have been cold at night, down to 55, and up in mid 70s in daytime.

Hope that 1954 will be a very best year for every one of us.

Love from all, Ken

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

January 17, 1954

Dear Folks:

Can't remember just where I left off in last letter, but had several more receptions with His Majesty. One day four of us went to a reception given by the school children of Dammam at their school, and were told to be there at 9 AM. About 10:30 we saw no sign of the King, so drove around town to see the new school being built by the Company. (We are building 10 for sons of employees.) And then to the site of the next reception. Returning to the school and finding that the King had decided to stop first at another place, and actually hadn't left his house yet, we took off for lunch 10 miles away at Dhahran. Arrived back at school at 12:30 – and King beat us by ten minutes!



Aramco Chairman of the Board Fred A. Davies, standing in business suit, far left, meets with King Saud, seated, during one of his visits to Dhahran in the 1950s. (Internet photo.)

The program was all given by school kids, in Arabic, except one speech, and lasted until 1:15. Down to the next place we went, listened to the local merchants praise the King, then at two all arose we thought to leave, but it was only intermission as we moved 200 feet to a large tent for cake, juices, fruit, etc. Back to the Mejlis for another hour, then headed for home as the day was over for us.

Arrived at office at 3:30 and found invitation to 5:45 PM tea at Khobar. Couldn't take it, so drove Mildred only to see the arrangements, which as usual, were large covered stands, rug covered grounds, lights, banners, etc. Came home and didn't know until next day that the King was delayed until 9 PM the previous night.

The next day there were meetings, but no more parties involving us, just for the local Arabs. The large hunting party started leaving Monday night, continued all day Tuesday and Tuesday night, as the King was to leave Wednesday AM. Instead, he did depart Thursday, but the fifty odd princes didn't go until last night, Saturday. In the meanwhile, I visited several times with my buddies Abdullah Ali and Eed bin Salim. I drank more tea and coffee in that week or so than all the previous year, I think.



King Saud, right, at an elegant seated dinner during one of his visits to Dhahran in the 1950s. (Internet photo.)

It was fun, spectacular, picturesque, and his visit won't be forgotten for a long time.

Ever since he arrived, I have been calling daily on the King's private secretary who is convalescing from an auto accident occurring when he was driving to the airport to come here with Royal party. He has been here over a week and I find him very interesting. He speaks English well, went to the USA twice, attended AUB [American University of Beirut] for awhile, and is very close to the King. We talk of many things, mainly personal experiences, and [he] will dine with us some night this week. I take him magazines and books, and yesterday he gave me a large box of candy for Susan, as apparently such is proper, but not to my wife. He told me of many difficulties in seating arrangements at large dinners as he would not personally know which of 25 to 35 sons were oldest, and the King resolved it for him by saying each of them knew, so just leave enough seats on the King's right, and let the sons pick their chair. In large dinners of wives of both Arab royalty and high visitors, the lineup is arranged the same way, oldest nearest the Queen's right, but if a mistake is made, and an older one is placed way down the table, she doesn't complain, as she likes to be thought younger!



A Saudi Arab in King Saud's hunting party holds one of King Saud's falcons. While driving just outside of Dhahran, Ken and Mildred Webster happened on a group of these men and their falcons and they allowed Mildred to snap some pictures. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

I am making a list of common English words...derived from the Arabic, and will mention some [in] each letter. One is 'Admiral', which comes from 'Emir of the Sea'. Sheik Abdullah is letting me have a book which lists 5,000 such words. Another thing he read me today from an Arab book, which states that recently some documents and maps have been found in China and the Philippines which substantiate that Arabs discovered America before Columbus did, as they landed in California from the Pacific after traveling eastward from here, through India, China, etc. He said it will ultimately be a proven fact.

We are happy the main group has gone, but glad they were here, but 2,500 to 3,000 guests at one time are quite a problem. The cavalcade leaving here for the hunting trip and visit to the Pipeline stations up to 900 miles north of here, totaled 380 cars as it left here, but probably will have 150 additions from local villages along the route, as all the Emirs, etc., will want to see and help their King. He will travel in the air-conditioned trailer made in Tulsa, have his own long-distance radio station, have food and water, etc., for the whole party, and in addition, we sent 14 Americans, 80 Arabs, and 25 large trucks and cars with doctors, nurses, etc. It would be very exciting to go, but I turned down the chance, as roughing it that way even with Royalty would only be for me if I had to.



A view of several of the King's falcons, watched over by a Saudi Arab. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

No other news. Susan has been in with a cold for two days, but goes back to school tomorrow. Everyone else [is] fine. Went to Consulate General Friday to meet new [American] Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, George Wadsworth. He is a very fine person and we enjoyed meeting him and a new Admiral to Persian Gulf. He was a classmate of my admiral friend at Harvard, and we had some fine talks. **(Editor's note: Wadsworth was a career diplomat, specializing in the Middle East. He was the first U.S. ambassador to Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. He later served as ambassador to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Czechoslovakia and Yemen. According to Wikipedia, while in Turkey, Wadsworth "began a practice that would be one of the hallmarks of his diplomatic career. He raised money to establish a golf course in Ankara, which became a 'social center' for diplomatic circles. Throughout the remainder of his career, he raised funds to set up nine other golf courses in the Middle East. He died of cancer in 1958, aged 64, less than a month before he was scheduled to retire on his 65th birthday.")**

Thursday [we] went to a birthday party for Roll Cundall and Daisy Cooper, with the old original gang from the Ras Tanura days, plus General Grover and wife from the airbase. Had a good time and were in bed by eleven. Sure have shorter parties in these days of no liquor, although we did have a weak punch. Sang the old favorite songs, ate a good dinner, and talked of the "Old Days" when we were first in Arabia.



A close-up view of one of the King's falcons. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

Love from all, Ken

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

January 22, 1954

NOTE: NEW POST OFFICE ADDRESS IS BOX 2287

Dear Folks:

Just came in from the Hobby Farm after spending almost four hours watching the GYMKHANA, Hindustani for "Games on Horseback", or look it up in your encyclopedia.

Susan won the barrel race last time and lost this time by four-tenths of a second, being second this time. The races were singles, doubles, marching drills, holding eggs in spoons while racing, etc., and were enjoyed by a rather large group of visitors. . .

Thursday, yesterday, was a payday Thursday, and we didn't work in the afternoon. At 12:30 I took Mildred and Susan to lunch with Sheik Abdullah Ballkhair, private personal secretary to the King. He is convalescing from an auto accident, and he and I have had many visits in past two weeks. Two Syrian doctors working for the Saudi Arab Government were calling on him when we arrived, and we all lunched together. The two doctors did not speak English, but we had excellent conversation and delicious food for two hours. Then we came home and rested for an hour, then I took Susan and a girlfriend to Hobby Farm, and then we went to a barbecue for two assistant foremen retiring this month.



Susan Webster on her horse, Nejma. Susan was a champion barrel racer, regularly beating the adults in the Gymkhana events. She established many speed records at the Hobby Farm in the 1950s. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

At five-thirty we went to tea at Najati Abu Khadra's for Sheik Abdulla Ballkhair, and at seven went to dinner at Sullivans' for the Plummers, who are going on long vacation and upon return will live in Abqaiq. It was a long afternoon and evening, but fun, especially the afternoon tea, where we met some Palestinian refugees who are now Saudi Arabs, as the King gives them citizenship faster six months, as they have no country – whereas foreigners have to wait a minimum of three years. These boys have all been educated in England or Turkey and had many experiences to tell. . .

Love, Ken et al.

February 2, 1954

Dear Folks:

It has been a long time since I wrote a letter, but there were so many things happening that Ken could really tell you about. He is always right in the middle of things and knows much more about them than I. The place has settled down after the King left, but he certainly is a fine man and already has started so many improvements in his country. There are hospitals and schools in the villages already under construction and plans for many other constructive changes.

We have been on the run, though, since Christmas and before for the Holidays. This last week I had several things here – Susan had 18 for 'sit-down' dinner for her birthday [January 27] – they went on to the movies then back here to dance for a while. On Saturday we had 14 in for tea for Sheik Abdullah Balkhair – all Americans. I was a bit apprehensive about it as I had never had one of that nature before, but he is such a delightful and charming person it went off beautifully and everyone had a good time. He is the one who is the personal and private secretary to His Majesty the King and was for the old one for several years. He is only 39 – has traveled a lot and speaks perfect English with a nice accent. Very handsome, too! He had us to lunch – with Susan, too – and has been so nice to her. He sent her a big box of candy for her birthday.

Sunday night we had 20 for Ken's birthday [on January 31] and had fun. We had one bottle of rum left and made it into a punch – was only a couple of drinks around and that

was practically the swan song. We had our own gang of old-timers and the ones we always have for this particular party, so it was a good one. Lynn made one of her beautiful angel food cakes for him. Louise Classen's birthday is the 30th, so they have celebrated together for four years.

Judy is fine and still busy as a beaver – but has kept on the honor roll – and doing fine. They went to the Cedars [of Lebanon] for skiing this past weekend. Susan is happy her best friend, Judy Austin, is back – they haven't seen each other for seven months. We left in June and they left in August so Ed [Judy's father] could go to Harvard, then he was in the New York office for a while. They [Judy Austin and Susan] are two of a kind – horse crazy. Both Austins ride, too.

The weather has been perfectly beautiful – coldish and clear. . . soon, though, we may start with shamaals.

I have been fixing hems for Susan – she has grown inches since we returned. Also made over an evening dress for Judy for the Valentine's formal – will send it up this week by a friend. She is keeping her new one for the prom. It has been very cold in Beirut – lots of rain and much snow in the mountains. I don't think it actually ever snows in Beirut.

Francis [the Websters' cook] left the middle of January, but Louis [houseboy] and I are making out fine. He isn't a cook, but is very interested in learning, so pours over the cookbook and has turned out some nice things. One nice thing about it is that he has nothing to unlearn! All of our cooks have had British training and have to learn American ways. I don't mind the cooking, especially when I can depend on him to finish it up and serve and even cook many of the meals. He is a very nice fellow.

Must run along now and do some shopping. Hope all is well with everyone.

Love, Mildred

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

February 5, 1954

Dear Folks:

Friday again and the weather was too nice to stay home, so we let Susan go to Hobby Farm with Austins and we went to take small birthday gift to Verdel Renfer and return an item to Shultzes, but arriving at Renfers found the Shultzes and Allyn Websters [Ken's brother and sister-in-law, Lynn] there, ready to go look at a major new construction item at Qatif about 20 miles out on the desert. We went along and enjoyed the ride.

The work consists mainly of installing a temporary pump station to obtain 25,000 barrels [of oil] a day more through present lines, until the new permanent station and pumps re installed about next September. The new pumps and caterpillar drivers are being flown out in two special KLM DC B's at a cost of about \$125,000 and a smaller pump will be flown in our own Oryx, a DC-4. The men there were welding night and day since Tuesday, the concrete foundations are poured, and we hope to have the system in operation by February 15th. The whole job will cost about \$220,000 and will be paid back in less than 10 days. This is one of the results of not being able to estimate

worldwide crude oil needs, and our share, and we are shipping over a million [barrels] a day now. Last month we averaged 946,000 barrels, and will expect a high movement February and March in excess of January. It is necessary to have much higher rates some days than the monthly average, in order to take care of days when tankers do not arrive and when they bunch up. Some days the weather at Sidon, Lebanon and Ras Tanura does not permit loading. . .

We have been doing a lot of thinking about suggesting a college for Judy, and spent the last few evenings reading up on all USA schools. We want to avoid large schools and large cities, and have her attend school [as] convenient to you folks as possible, and not out of the way for us on vacation. We did think of Middlebury, Vt., but are definitely inclined now to Tulsa University. It has a mighty fine rating, good campus, good weather, changing climates, and well located regarding all visits to you folks, as she would only be six hours from New York City, four from Port Arthur [Texas], and at our designated company destination on vacations. Even if she stayed only one year, and then decided on a course that was given more to her liking somewhere else, she would have been re-grounded in USA after nine years and we would feel better about leaving her home to know she was near some of you. The dormitories there are reportedly good, there are sororities, etc., and from personal checks made when were in Tulsa last summer, the type of students is far better than at most city schools and many other schools large and small. We shall talk about this to her in Easter vacation, and shall get brochures from Tulsa, so she can decide.



Lt. General William H. Tunner, who visited Dhahran in early 1954 when he was commander in chief of the U.S. Air Forces in Europe, a post he held four years during the buildup of the Air Forces of NATO. He is most famous for organizing the Berlin Airlift from June 1948 to May 1949. Source: Air Force Link, online. (Photo from the Internet.)

No other news, all well and happy, and as I am still on the management committee, am home more hours per day than ever since I started working.

Love to all, Ken et al

February 18, 1954

Dear Folks:

We slipped up on our letter this last Friday – but if I mail this today you will get it almost as fast.

This past week has been a dilly! Funny how things gang up at times and there is a steady stream of visitors. We have had military hot shots this week. [Lt.] Gen. [William H.] Tunner – Commander over all of Germany, Egypt and Arabia – was here with his group, including the head medical director of the Air Force and others. Of course, our new Ambassador, Mr. [George] Wadsworth, was over, too. He is a darling – has been 20-odd years in Middle Eastern countries. He is a widower and as bouncy, chatty and sweet as can be. Smart as two whips, too.

We went to the Consulate Tuesday night, last, for dinner . . . to Hamilton House Saturday night in honor of Wanda Jablonski, oil columnist for the New York Journal of Commerce. She is also the daughter of one of the directors of Socony Vacuum. Very interesting and so young to have such a job. She had spent a month in Iran on her way here. Also that night we had Admiral Beecher and party.



Noted oil industry journalist Wanda Jablonski with an unidentified Arab, 1950s. She visited Dhahran in February 1954. Ken and Mildred Webster were guests at a reception in her honor given by Aramco officials at Hamilton House. (Internet photo.)

(Editor's note: According to Wikipedia, "Jablonski began her career as the oil editor at the Journal of Commerce, where she made her mark with a 1948 interview with Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonso, then the Venezuelan oil minister, which cleverly synthesized the developing nations' viewpoint, in those days rarely heard in the west. She moved to Petroleum Week in 1954 and cemented her reputation, speaking on equal terms with oil ministers and company chairmen. A rare woman in a man's world, she was known throughout the oil industry simply as "Wanda". She then founded Petroleum Intelligence Weekly in 1961, which came to be known as the "bible of the oil industry", and ran it until 1988. She is credited with arranging the 1959 meeting of oil ministers Abdullah Tariki, Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonso, and others to sign the 'Gentleman's Agreement,' a precursor of OPEC.")

Sunday night dinner at Hamilton House for Gen. Tunner, et al, and Wadsworth. Ken spent the day with them next day and had lunch at the Base with them – and that night we went to the reception at the Officers Club for them and on to a small dinner party at Brig. Gen. Grover's. I was lucky as I drew Mr. Ambassador for a "dinner-taker-inner." He is cute as a button. Tuesday a tea and we stayed home that evening, Humdi'llah!



Steven Bechtel, chairman of Bechtel Corporation. Ken and Mildred Webster attended a dinner for him and his wife, Laura, in 1954 while the couple was visiting Saudi Arabia. (Internet photo.)

Last night we went to a bridge dinner and I had a chance to practice some of my lessons – did all right, too. Tonight we go to dinner at Austins’ for the president of Kenworth Trucks and his wife. Tomorrow night a reception for Steve and Laura Bechtel, Bechtel Corp., who arrive tonight from Aden. **(Editor’s note: Steve Bechtel headed Bechtel Corporation, today the largest engineering company in the United States. The company partnered with Aramco to build the Trans-Arabian Pipeline in Saudi Arabia, which at the time of its completion in 1950 was the world’s longest pipeline. Bechtel also built large parts of the modern infrastructures of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, including airports, seaports, and oil refineries. SOURCE: Wikipedia.)** This noon is the Women’s Club Founders Day Luncheon. Saturday I expect to go in to a decline! Fun, but gets tiresome. I do like to meet the interesting people whom I probably would never have a chance to even see, at home.

Judy’s birthday is Sunday. She will be up at the Cedars over the weekend on the Junior Ski Trip, but will be back that night. I have had the school order a cake for her to have Sunday night. Was lucky to have someone take up her birthday present and some candy this week. They have had a lot of flu there but, so far, she has escaped.

A picture taken at The Cedars in Lebanon on one of Judy Webster’s ski trips while she was attending ACS in Beirut. (Photo courtesy Judy Webster Bauer.)

We had a tragedy this week. A young wife whose father is here, too, either shot herself or her husband shot her. It hasn’t been settled yet. They have two small children – one 7 months old. They lived in Abqaiq and I didn’t know them, but know the father.

Well, I must go roll up my nether locks and go mail this. We had three days of rain this week. Everyone is flabbergasted as this is 6.7 [inches] — .03 over the previous record in 1941. Guess our climate is changing along with the rest of the world! **(Editor's note: Given the concern today about global warming and climate change, this remark is rather humorous and/or prescient!)**



Loading up the ACS school bus on a Cedars ski trip. (Photo courtesy Judy Webster Bauer.)

Bye now . . . hope all are well – enjoy your various notes and letters.

Love to all, Mildred.

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

March 5, 1954

Dearest Folks:

First let me wish Dawn and Dick [Ken's niece and nephew] a very happy birthday for today and tomorrow. I can't imagine them being eighteen, but as time must go on we have to expect young people to get older and the older people to stay younger.



During her junior year at ACS, Judy Webster helped campaign for the winning design of the 1955 senior class ring at the American Community School in Beirut. Note the cedar insignia. (Photo courtesy Judy Webster Bauer.)

This past week was quiet for me but Mildred had a few usual coffees and bridges and canastas. Last Sunday night we had friends in for dinner, just a party of eight, our [Aramco] president and wife, George Ray and wife from Wilton [Connecticut], Daisy [Cooper] (as Bill was in London) and Al Singelyn. It was a fine family affair, starting off

with cranberry punch and tortillas cut in strips and dropped in deep fat. After too many formal parties, we were determined to have an informal one, and all seemed to enjoy it.

Wednesday we had a barbeque at Hobby Farm as going away party for an airbase boy who has been teaching the women and girls to ride and care for their horses. He is just a kid himself, about 22, comes from Plymouth, Mass., and has two more years in the service and then wants to work for Aramco here. We gave him a Leica camera and light meter, which at prices here through connections was only \$200, but at home would be once again as much, if not more. Thursday we stayed late at Hobby Farm, then home for dinner and visit to hospital to see friends, then the flower show to pick up Mildred's exhibits. She didn't win a prize, but there were many beautiful flowers and vegetables shown, and you wouldn't believe we could raise them here. Early to bed, as we were tripping this Friday.

Left home at eight-thirty with Sam and Mim [Shultz] to visit an Arab village, Jubail, about sixty miles north of here on the coast. It is one of the oldest towns in Eastern Arabia, but doesn't have much to offer, as you may guess when neither Mildred nor Mim bought anything. It was clear and cool across the desert and we ate lunch along the road, getting back here at 2 PM.



Field Day at ACS, March 1953. This is a photo of the sophomore class. Caption reads, "We won!" Judy Webster is sixth from left in the back row. (Photo courtesy Judy Webster Bauer.)

The King's hunting trip is finished and the Americans and other Aramco people who went with him are home, together with the 50-60 pieces of automotive equipment we loaned him. Altogether there were always nearly or over 400 cars and trucks, and they traveled over 3,000 miles in six weeks and two days, hunting and visiting all villages and tribes north and west of here. They used 12,000 gallons of gasoline a day, for a total of over 500,000 gallons, and we had a fleet of tankers making deliveries from here over 600 miles across the desert, and some of it was rough country. There are no roads as we know them in the area traveled and the Americans were happy to be home. Maybe he [the King] will expect to take the same group on future trips. Of course, he pays for everything and I suspect the trip cost him about \$2,000,000 as he gave gifts of money totaling they say over \$1,000,000.

No word this week from Connecticut, but hope nothing wrong. We are all well and happy but we think Judy has been sick, as we have had no word from her in two weeks. She will be home April 10th for Easter vacation and the last three months at

Beirut are months of good weather. She has done excellently in getting good grades, and we want her to have a good time as well.

Mail service is bad lately, so I don't know when this will reach you, but we still write every Friday with few exceptions, even when we have little of news.

Love to all, Ken



Saudi Arabia, as it looks today. (Internet photo.)

A view of Jubail,

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

March 12, 1954



Susan Webster's eighth grade class at Dhahran Senior Staff School, 1954. Bottom: Craig Miller, Raymond Huber, John Kessinger, Mickey Haynes, Gordon Wilson, Leslie Biggins, Neil Irving, Richard Fulton, Marilyn Ensinger, Martha Skidmore, Judy Austin, Susan Webster, Lynne Hartley, Ann Galleazzi, Sandra Wood, Maryl Erlenmeyer. Top: Mr. O'Donnell, Terry Sutherlin, Mike Ross, Bruce Landis, Jim Hill, Kelly Rodieck, Gene Colgan, John Hora, Bob Stone, David Page, Frank Piersol, Larry Fitzhug, Robert Thielhelm, Jim Johnson. (Photo from the 1954 Scimitar yearbook, courtesy Susan Webster Slavin.)

Dear Folks:

Seemed as though no mail would ever come from Connecticut or Beirut, and then a fourteen-page [one] from Judy dated February 14 arrived and today at 2 PM we received

letters from Norwalk and Greenwich. Keep them coming, folks, as we worry when none received and we'll try to always write each Friday as in the past.

You all are much busier than we are with work, problems, and every day affairs, but we appreciate just a note. Judy's letter took almost three weeks to arrive, [a distance of] about Chicago to New York, and then it wasn't mailed but brought down by someone. It costs more to send her letters [in Beirut] than it does for us to send them to USA. . .

The most important change [this week] was for me to finish the special assignment and return to my regular job as District Manager. I "visited" the district yesterday afternoon and officially start in tomorrow. I'll be glad to be active again in daily operations instead of the day-long meetings on the Management Committee, but gained lots of good dope and had a pleasant three months away from the madding throng. Full days of office work are not to my liking, even though I get more and more as I get older. I'll never be as happy inside as while in and out having a hand in the affairs of people.



The Dhahran Senior Staff School pep club. Susan Webster is seated in the front row behind the banner, fourth from left. (Photo from the 1954 Scimitar yearbook, courtesy Susan Webster Slavin.)

Will have further talks with Judy in April, but so far no certainty she will go to Tulsa or Middlebury, and as there will be doubt of acceptance until late Spring next year, will apply to three places, will have to think of another to add to the list. Maybe Yale if for nursing, but if for other courses, don't know if Yale accepts girls. If at some New England university, she might well see Dick and his friends for social affairs. We intend to let her do the deciding and no doubt will change all minds a dozen times before she actually goes away.

Had to stop this and go get Susan at Hobby Farm to rush her to a barbeque birthday party. Then we went to dining hall for buffet dinner. Each Friday a buffet is served, with every kind of cold cut, meat and fowl, fish, salads, relishes, etc., a regular Smorgasbord type. It costs \$2.17 each and you eat all you can hold. Then to the show, seeing "Ivanhoe" with Robert Taylor, Liz Taylor, Joan Fontaine, etc. Good entertainment. Then home at nine. Susan isn't home yet and I return to my writing without news of consequence.

Temperature was 82 most all day in the shade, but in the sun was actually hot and little breeze blowing. We shall test out our air conditioning plants this week and be ready to start them up as hot weather is just around the corner.

In one month, Judy will be with us for two weeks and then will be gone for two months more.

Have no answer yet from Switzerland school [for Susan], but should hear soon. It is Brilliantmont, or something like that, in Lausanne, and several of our girls are there now. It will be rough to lose both the girls so soon, but we think it is fine for [Susan]. Look for news of trips to Switzerland for Mildred to visit next year, and name your Swiss purchases for her to get you all. It is beautiful country and all classes given in French, so [Susan] should learn to speak like a native. Such is the lot of Foreign Service people.



This photo and short "blurb" appeared in the 1954 Scimitar, the yearbook for the Dhahran Senior Staff School. (Courtesy Susan Webster Slavin.)

Will write again soon. Love to all from us all.

Ken

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

March 20, 1954

Dear Folks:

A Hobby Show was put on Thursday and Friday, and the hobbies shown were very interesting, ranging from paintings, knittings, linens, weavings, clay and ceramics, photography, stamps, toys, embroidering, etc. It goes to show what people can do in their spare time.

Earlier there was a fashion show by the Women's Club. I did not go, but Mildred said it was excellent. They not only modeled stateside clothes, but also some from Arabia, India, Turkey, Africa, Lebanon and Italy. It was interesting to see what could be made

from materials bought locally and the ideas women can get when they make their own clothes. Every conceivable material was used, including furs from Africa, and you would have thought you were in a Fifth Avenue store.

Dramaramco [the company's theater troupe] puts on another play tomorrow, which we want to see. It is "The Moon is Blue." They are all good and some people partly professional, as Guy Kibbe's son, Jack. They are always entertaining and we try to see them all. **(Editor's note: Guy Kibbe was a well-known character actor under contract to Warner Bros. Pictures. His son worked for Aramco in the 1950s. The senior Kibbe was featured in many classic films of the era, including "Fort Apache," starring John Wayne.)**



Movie character actor Guy Kibbe, whose son, Jack, was an Aramco employee and appeared in several Dramaramco presentations in the 1950s. (Internet photo.)

Windy this last weekend so we stayed at Hobby Farm only a few hours for lunch and to groom the horses. Not too warm yet, only about 85 in afternoon, but we are starting the air conditioning units anyway to get ready for the soon-to-be-warm days. It was needed anyway in the new hospital which is designed for all year 'round forced ventilation. The new American side for bed patients and two wings for outpatients of all nationalities opened in Dec. and Feb. Now the Health Center is a \$7,500,000 establishment and two more wings to cost about \$4,000,000 will, we hope, complete our part, as we are hopeful the local communities and government will build for public and ours will be only for employees and their families.

Mohammed is doing quite well with our lawn and shrubs and hedges, and the vegetables, onion, carrot, radish, peppers and soon tomatoes, are a pleasure. Still getting about eleven eggs a day from fourteen hens, and [we] have added 6 six-week old American pullets to the flock. They are almost pan size now, and if they don't look like egggers, will be excellent fried. Maybe I told you about them before – I forget.

Judy writes infrequently but is happy and Susan talks all the time about school in Switzerland next Fall. Hope all our plans come through. While in Switzerland [I] will

try to find a watch for Vince at right price and did I tell you my latest watch gift [from the King] was an Omega Seamaster automatic, but sells in local suks for \$80?

No other news, all are happy and healthy, guess I'll hang up.



A gold 1950's Omega Seamaster watch, similar to the one given to Ken Webster by King Saud in 1954. (Internet photo.)

Love from all, Ken

March 26, 1954

Dear Folks:

While Ken was on the Management Committee he had so much more leisure time, he enjoyed writing the weekly letters – seems a long time since I wrote.

He is back in the District now and already busy as a bee! This is his weekend on duty, so he has been up and out since quite early, considering that it is Friday.

Judy Austin spent the night with Susan and so we were up early. She has to take her test and give herself her shot a certain time before she can have her breakfast. She is the diabetic friend...

School was out Wednesday for the April vacation period. They get 5 weeks this time for some reason. Judy will be down April 10th.

There is a three-day campout for Susan's Scout troop the 7,8,9th. They are going to Ras Tanura this time. We should get lots of "Farming" done [caring for the horses at the Hobby Farm], but was quite warm last week until last night when it cooled off some. Guess we will have to go early in the mornings or late at night – should have the lights up down there pretty soon.



Susan Webster's best friend, Judy Austin, rides Susan's horse, Nejma, at the Hobby Farm, 1954. Looking on is Ken Webster. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

We have visitors – Mr. and Mrs. Duce and daughter. He is [Aramco's] VP of Government Relations. They live in Washington. Went to Keyes' [Aramco president and wife] last night for dinner in their honor – I've seen them at various things in the daytime.

The play Sunday night was excellent – Tuesday night we were out to dinner – American T-Bones from the Base! – Next night we went to the Base to Lt. Col. Warrens' to a "Fish-Fry" and the fish was wonderful – cooked outside. It was their farewell as they are transferred to Rabat, Morocco. Delightful couple. I played cards twice and went to one committee meeting for the Women's Club Spring Tea next month. I have to do the Tea Table.

I have been doing some sewing – two dresses for myself. We have beautiful materials in Khobar right now...



The Webster horses at the Hobby Farm, circa 1954. Nura is on the left, her mother, Nejma, on the right. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

THREE HOURS LATER

We went to the Hobby Farm. The horses are shedding their winter coats and when you curry them, you get enough hair to stuff a mattress. Nura is as big as her mother, now, and gives evidence of being a much bigger horse. . .

It is a gorgeous day. We had a drove of locusts this week and they practically ruined the garden – we have a very good gardener now and the yard looks so nice. Had to take out a

big tree which was ruined in the wind this winter and they replaced it yesterday with one almost as big. Palo Verde trees.

Must go now – have things to do . . .

Love to all, Mildred, et al.

**Box 2287 Aramco
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
April 2, 1954**



One of several large hibiscus bushes planted alongside the Webster house at 1423 Kings Road in Dhahran. Ken and Mildred brought them back from their first trip to Beirut and they tended them for the rest of their years in Arabia. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

Dear Folks:

April has arrived and in one week we shall have our Judy with us for Easter vacation. Doesn't seem possible Easter is almost here, but next Friday is Good Friday.

Spring is here also, although the temperature has only been 91 in daytime and still coolish at night around 56. The glads are about on their last legs, but the periwinkles and oleanders are blooming and the hibiscus still have dozens of blooms each day. The vegetables are as told before, except that the tomatoes are really developing. The Italian species grown in clusters like a bunch of grapes, and the number per plant is unbelievable . . . The six young pullets are double the size of two weeks ago, and with two hens dying of old age, will probably keep the young ones for layers. Still getting eight to nine eggs per day, 20 to 25 dozen per month, and enjoy every one of them instead of the local or Australian ones.

Last week [we] were visited by soccer team from Jeddah on the Red Sea, who had a team of semi-professionals from Mecca, Jeddah, and Cairo. They beat our team 4 to 1, but we had all Saudis, who are not yet too game minded, but getting better. Over 15,000 spectators at our Sport Center, with many local high officials of the Government. It was a fine day and a good game to watch. Our Arab softball team is playing its second year, and they take well to this game. This is but one of the many ways Aramco Americans are changing this country.



View of a Gymkhana at the Hobby Farm, 1950s. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

Spent this afternoon at the Hobby arm to see the Gymkhana, and saw Susan beat all previous records in the Clover Leaf Barrel race, including her own, which was best previous time, and second prize in the Gretna Green Race, where a boy and a girl, each on a horse, hold hands while racing a given distance. She and Nejma act as one, and I think Nejma knows what to do and knows when she wins!

Had a reception for Captain Reiber, former Chairman of the Board, Texas Co., who is retained by Iran for settling the oil dispute as it pertains to what to do, how much it will cost, and how to get the oil flowing again if the American and other oil companies do get together. He is 72 and we enjoyed being with him. The next day I took him and his daughter all around the District, and was regaled with tales of when he was running the Texas Co. at home and abroad.



Riders preparing for barrel races at a Gymkhana at the Hobby Farm in the 1950s. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

For months of Jan. and Feb., Aramco averaged 937,629 barrels a day and for March in excess of one million. We ran over a million shipped several times for a week or so, but this is [the] first time any oil company ran over a million for a month. Our average for first three months is over 959,000 per day and puts us way up in first place in world production. Doubt it will last, but good while it goes. Funny that Stateside papers are full of poor business, layoffs, unemployment, etc., but the stock market is riding high and

crude oil is in such high demand. Germany is back in business and on her feet, and foreign affairs are booming. I can't explain it.

No other news, we are living quietly and calmly, no troubles here, everybody healthy and happy. Keep us advised about all of you.

Love from all, Ken

April 9, 1954

Dear Folks:

Another Friday rolls around – Ken went to the office about two hours ago – and I have been busy seeing that things are in order for Judy when she arrives tomorrow – Happy thought! Seems a long time since Jan. 2 when they went back to school. Next year I will be expecting two of them on holidays.

The King is supposed to arrive today for only a couple of days. He is on his way to Pakistan and Bahrain. It always throws the whole community into a furor getting enough housing for them. He travels with an army of people. It entails a tremendous amount of shuffling and supplies of food, plus being responsible for him while he is here. He brings his own soldiers, too.

My biggest event of the week was the Spring Tea. I was on the committee and we surely worked hard on it. The comments make it worthwhile and it really was a lovely one. "Along Fifth Avenue" was the theme and we had show windows made of Saks, Bests, Altman's, Bonwits and Lord & Taylor – decorated by us and with live models – in two shifts – one set in and one set out walking among the guests. The stores sent wonderful advertising material – matches – lipstick match folders and all sorts of literature. Everyone said it was the nicest so far! We served over 400 women – it was in the Dining Hall.

...Attended a dinner for the Italian Ambassador Tuesday night. Played bridge two afternoons – go to an Arab dinner tonight in Dammam, which I could cheerfully skip. Sunday we attend the reception at the Consulate for our new Consul General and wife.

Susan left Wed. for Ras Tanura where the three Girl Scout Troops from here had a Camp Out – on the beach. They will be back this afternoon late. It has been perfect weather for them.

We went to the [Hobby] Farm last evening. We are on daylight saving time now, which gives us grand long evenings with light for baseball, the Farm, etc. Nura keeps growing and seems a very healthy, sturdy animal – full of mischief.

In the four Gymkhanas, Susan has won four blue ribbons and three red. That is good, since I won't let her enter the races – much to her disgust – but the course is soft sand in spots and there are too many horses. I have perfect confidence in her handling her horse, but it is the possibility of Neji falling in the sand going at such a break-neck speed – Guess I am a sissy!

I've been sewing – made myself a Tootle Linen dress and have another one cut out – also a skirt to make. Fixed some dresses for Susan and two for Judy. She will probably arrive with several things to be done. I bought her a darling grey and white polka dot taffeta – sleeveless.

The weather has been just like a resort, except for last Friday when we had a shamaal. Still isn't too warm, but it is right on our heels.

That covers all – take care of yourselves. Happy Easter Egg!

Love to all of you, Mildred

NEWS FLASH FROM ARABIAN SUN & FLARE: *“The first Little League baseball game in Saudi Arabia got under way April 15 [1954] with Dhahran District Manager K.R. Webster tossing out the first ball in the Dhahran opener. Mrs. Geraldine Turner, representing the Ras Tanura Women's Group, did the tossing in the refinery town opener.”*

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

April 18, 1954

Easter Sunday

Dear Folks:

Just came home from church service with our two girls and the attendance was large, as it should be. Judy arose at five something and went to sunrise service also. A wonderful day, although slightly warm in afternoon, as the days are almost 100 now and evenings still cool at 65.

I am so glad to have Judy with us. She arrived last Saturday the tenth. Mildred is busily sewing for her, and we see her quite a bit, although there are parties, etc. She will leave next Sunday and then we won't see her until late June, unless we take a quick trip to Beirut if I can work up some “business” there. . .

On Saturday not only did Judy arrive, but also the King came to visit for one night. We only had to house 120, provide tents for 150 more, and feed 1,200. Then he went to Bahrain Island for three days and then to Pakistan on an official visit. At the last minute he asked for our DC-6 Camel and one Convair. Consequently, the Camel was two days late leaving for New York. We had to paint the Aramco insignia out and paint Saudi Airlines on, also the King's insignia, then repaint Aramco, etc., before we left for New York. He is due back in two weeks or so and we don't know if he will stop with us or not. Rhamadhan, the month of fasting, starts about May 4, and he may (hope-hope) go right on through to Riyadh. . .

Love to all, hope you had a good Easter. Ken



A group of Aramco "brats" gather on the Webster lawn at 1423 King's Road in the mid-1950s. Judy Webster is in the front row, third from the right, wearing dark glasses. (Photo by Mildred Webster.)

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

April 23, 1954

Dear Folks:

Summer has started with temperatures [this] past week of 107 in daytime and still cool at 66 at night. Today was noticeably warmer and we can expect the day from now on to soon be hot. The air conditioning is good, so we shouldn't worry about hot weather.

Judy [is] having fun and home quite a bit, but parties have taken her time, both at home and in the other districts. She leaves day after tomorrow for school and we won't see her for two months, unless we go to where she is – and we may, if business takes me.

She ran a cake sale for raising funds for [the] junior hop, and it was quite successful. In fact, [they] could have sold twice the number of cakes, as the bachelor boys and girls buy all they can get.

Seems like the past two weeks have flown, as usual, and next Fall will see us with only Grey Boy [the cat] for company. That is life, but hard to get used to.

Judy checked in with the Medical people and is promised a job in laboratory work next summer at 75 cents per hour for 40 hours per week. We hope she will have added information to help her decide what course she wants to take at college.

We saw "Roman Holiday" with Greg[ory] Peck and Audrey Hepburn and thought it good – a comedy. . .

Had a fine Easter, flowers from Holland, Easter Egg hunts all over town for the little kids, church at night, and altogether a fine day. Of course, we worked all day, as Sunday is but another day, but the women and kids had a good Easter and we hope you all did too.

Our Palo Verde trees are blooming in gorgeous yellow and we must take some color shots at once. Oleanders and periwinkles are profuse and the glads are all gone. Still getting onions, carrots, peppers and wadjid tomatoes from the garden, and each day I look at the six ten-week old chicks, I can taste them frying, but Mildred says no, we need them for laying. Our "farm" is doing okay with Mohammed's skilled fingers, and lots of water,

and all in all we are happy. Windy hot summers are not to Mildred's liking, but a trip to Switzerland should help that in mid-September.

Love to all, Ken

May 7, 1954

Dear Folks:

Susan and I were up early and to the Farm. Ken off to the office to do some work. The weather is holding, much to our surprise – gets pretty warm in the middle of the day and afternoon, but the evenings have been very nice.

We have been trying to make most of the ball games and they have been extra good this season. Last night was one of the most interesting. It was between the two Dhahran Small Fry teams and believe me, they are good. Score 8 to 8.

School started Saturday amidst groans from all sides – the last session for Susan. (Editor's note: Susan was preparing for school in Lausanne, Switzerland for the coming term.) Only hope we are doing the right thing – but after much cogitation, we believe so. Don't know what I will do with neither of them here – sure will be lonesome. I am sort of used to having Judy gone by now.

Our Francis arrived back the first – sick – so that night Ken took him to the hospital. He wasn't at the house, just in his room in Domestic Camp. They have been doing tests and the last we heard they were pretty sure – 90 percent – that it was typhoid. Anyway, he will be off for several weeks – poor guy. No danger to us. We have so many typhoid shots and others, [we] don't see how we could get anything!

We were out to dinner twice this week – I to several things daytime – played bridge once and Canasta once.

Susan and I both had our eyes checked and need changes in lenses. None of us did last summer. I felt I did now, as I have had too many headaches.

Bought two pieces of wool this week to make skirts for Susan. We have beautiful English woolens here, but it is high — \$10.50 a yard. Sure wish I could run up to Blustone's. (Editor's note: **This is presumably a fabric store back home in the States.**) Have several blouses, shirts and cotton skirts to make – also some flannelette gowns. Will have slips to make, too. Can't buy anything [Susan likes] here in her size. Ken is terribly busy and I don't like him to work so hard. He is under such a lot of pressure most of the time – so much going on and he has to keep his finger on it all. It is Rhamadhan, too, which makes for touchy tempers and adjustment in work hours, etc.

Ken just came in and is out picking tomatoes – we have jillions of them – but the heat is getting them fast. Our six new pullets started to lay yesterday and we got 18 eggs – from 18 hens. Not bad and sure nice to have our fresh eggs.

Guess that covers all the weekly news.

Love to all, Mildred.

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

May 14, 1954

Dear Folks:

Hardly a bit of news this week – haven't been anywhere except one night out to dinner with some six other couples, and after dinner we played "Pig", which is a dice game. . . Mildred has had the usual coffees and a few bridges, while Father has sat, after a day at the "salt mines."

Have produced in excess of one million barrels per day for first twelve days of this month. We are way out in front now of any crude oil producing oil company, and only worldwide conditions will determine how long we run this much or when we increase it. We have the oil, publicly admitted equal to or greater than the USA, and can produce all the sales department can sell.

Haven't heard from Judy since she went back to school April 25th, but mails are slow and no doubt she is busy. Next fall, when Susan goes off, we shall really be haunting the Mail Center for news.

Airplane tickets cost the same price for trip here to Madrid as only from here to Switzerland, and we are trying to talk ourselves into a Spain week, then two in Switzerland. Too good a chance to miss and we can the plan on Scandinavia only for several weeks enroute to the States in 1955. So many are planning local leaves to Europe now that we are getting itchy feet, too.

Love to all, Ken

May 21, 1954

Dear Folks:

We were so happy to hear that Dick was accepted to Yale – that is wonderful and being the only boy in the family, it is doubly nice that he can follow in his grandfather's footsteps. **(Editor's note: This refers to Dick Jenner, son of Ken Webster's sister, Alice. Ken and Alice's father, Frederick Webster, graduated from Yale.)** Francis [our cook] was released from the hospital today and came by a while ago. Poor old fellow – he looks thin as a rail and shaky, but can come back to work next Tuesday. He was really very ill and in the hospital here three weeks. Was sick the whole boat trip up from Bombay and the four days in Bahrain – acute dysentery, mostly. With no liquor and consequently so much less big entertaining, we could easily get along with just Louis, but it would break the poor fellow's heart to let him go. We may, though, after both the girls are gone, but not through this summer, anyway.

The Company has a new deal now and will bring any college boys and girls out once a year free. It was only up till 19 before. Haven't heard from Judy recently, but know she is busy. The big dance festival is tomorrow – all the schools in Beirut and is held on the [American] University [of Beirut] campus. A friend of ours is in charge of it this year and I know it will be beautiful with all the colorful costumes. She hopes to get pictures. The ACS group are doing square dances –and the girls are wearing bright coral

(Judy), blue and green circle skirts with white peasant blouses, and the boys blue jeans with bright yellow shirts. . .

I have just finished the first roll on my new camera and will see how I made out. Have to send color out to Paris or the States to be developed. The 35 mm will be slides, I guess.

I left Susan at the Farm – got too warmish for me, but she loves to live there all day Friday. She is growing so and growing up in many ways – seems much more mature since Christmas. She seems very excited about going off to school. Hope I can get all the things done in time, but guess I will.

Ken gave me – or rather the girls, too – a beautiful Bavarian bone china coffee set – demitasse cups (12), pot, creamer and sugar bowl. It is white with gold design – very lovely – for Mother's Day. He never forgets!

Our social life has slowed down – but the weather has been grand. I keep busy – play cards usually twice a week – do APAR work on Mondays – the usual coffees and teas – also keep up my office in Scouts, as Treasurer. With in between trips to the Hobby Farm, don't have any lagging time. Ken, of course, is always busy. Seems I have been sewing since Christmas – made myself two linen dresses and numerous things for the girls.

So glad everyone is coming along fine at home. Bye now.



Judy Webster, right front, with ACS friends, circa 1954. (Photo courtesy Judy Webster Bauer.)

Love from us all, Mildred

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
May 28, 1954

Dearest Families:

Windy, blowy, sandy, warmish day, 100 in the shade and more in the sun. Just finished watering shrubs and flowers and cleaning up the outside, gathering eggs, picking a few

more tomatoes (only a couple of quarts more), Susan is away at the show, we went to the village at Al Khobar this A.M., and now sit down to write. . .

The Company announced this week that about July First, we shall only work 42 hours for shift men, and 44 ½ for day workers. That will mean off every Thursday instead of every other Thursday, will haul Arabs to their villages every week, and this is the first step toward a much shorter week for all. This is pioneering in the Middle East oil business, and [there] should be [a] favorable reaction.

Rhamadhan ends we think on June First, if the new moon is seen then, and the thirty-day fast will be over. This has been the coolest and quietest fasting period since I arrived. If Tuesday night is the new moon, we get Wednesday and Thursday off, and of course Friday also, and then start again with we hope everyone happy and working well as hot weather appears.

The [Saudi] Government announced the use of paper money starting tomorrow, which will be a blessing to all. Our payroll each two weeks in silver totals many tons, and carrying silver to the Arab towns for American shopping has been a real chore. We have had coupons for use within town, but now there will only be paper money. Progress is being made, but it is awful slow seems like to us. **(Editor's note: According to Wikipedia, "In 1953, the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) began issuing Haj Pilgrim Receipts for 10 riyals [1], with 1 and 5 riyals following in 1954 and 1956, respectively. These resembled banknotes and were initially intended for use by pilgrims who exchanged foreign currency for them. However, they became widely accepted in Saudi Arabia and largely replaced silver riyal coins in major financial transactions.")**



Front and back of the 1954 10 riyal note. The Saudi Government announced the switch from coins to paper currency that year. (Images from the Internet.)

Judy wrote she has been invited to join a group to tour Europe from June 26 to August 22. Boat from Beirut to Venice, then train, bicycle, boat, etc., to Paris, Germany, Austria, Trieste, Venice and Beirut. We had planned on her working in the hospital here for aiding in deciding on college course next year, but may let her go. She will miss our trip to Switzerland when we take Susan, and we won't see much of her this summer, but it

does sound like a good trip for her. Headed by two couples who teach in ACS and will have some boys and girls from States as well as some from Judy's school. We'll see.

No other news . . .

Love to all, Ken et al

**Box 2287 Aramco
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
June 4, 1954**

Dear Folks:

Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it – so said Mark Twain years ago. Ours has been good all May and the best May since I came here...but past two days very warm and humid and very windy.

Just came from Al Khobar where Mildred bought a Persian bowl for flowers, and could hardly see the road for the sand in the air.

Our former [Aramco] president, W.F. Moore, living in Beirut, has been elected to board of Federal Bank of Lebanon. We visited them on Long Island last summer. He is an expert business consultant and favors regional system communications and transportation to develop Middle East countries, and very much favors international trade. We should hear more about him.



A Saudi Arab coffee pot. (Internet photo.)

Tuesday ended Ramadan and feasting began, and we all had a two-day holiday, which with Friday, made a three-day weekend. Over 500 Americans left Arabia for many other spas, but most of us stayed here. I took our local government relations man and two Arab interpreters and visited the local police group, deputy of public security, director of customs, deputy finance minister, etc. In four hours I was stuffed with Arab coffee, tea,

fruit juices, cakes and candy. It is their Christmas and everyone visits everyone else and says, “Edackuum Mubarrack,” just like we say “Merry Christmas.” The food and tea were fine, but the coffee had too much cardamom seed in it, but fortunately only a tablespoonful is offered at one time in a cup smaller than a demitasse.

In the afternoon, Mildred and I visited an Arab family, he is Sudanese and she Palestinian, and they have the cutest six-month-old twins. I also visited many of the Arabs I knew on the job and at home, and I guess everyone is glad it is all over for another year.

The religious head, or “Gadi” of this area, Sheik Suliaman Obeyi, told us the Arab year is not ten or eleven days shorter than ours, but exactly ten days, fifteen and one-half hours, five minutes and 3.6 seconds. With all of the science knowledge at hand, Saudi Arabia is the only Moslem country left that starts and stops the Month of Rhamadhan by actually seeing the new moon. All others use the calendar. The jump from camel to Cadillac for most of them is a very trying period, but they are changing fast and becoming modern and Westernized whether they realize it or not. I am glad to be a part of making the change occur, but there are many frustrations due mainly to [the] language barrier.

No other news, everyone here is fine, had a fourteen-page letter from Judy and she is fine and very busy. She will be here about June 25th. As it is her last summer before college to be with us here, we decided she should spend it with us, and not take the European trip through countries most of which she has already seen. Instead, we shall take her to Switzerland with us when we take Susan, and possibly Spain for a week.

All our love to all of you, Ken



Junior prom night at the American Community School in Beirut, 1954. From left, Jack Mandaville, son of the president of the American University of Beirut, his date Dale Penrose, Judy Webster, and her date Paul Hare, son of the former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia. (Photo courtesy Judy Webster Bauer.)

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

June 20, 1954

Dear Folks:

All happy here, Mildred and I go to Beirut, 1,100 miles north, Tuesday – while I attend meetings with Trans-Arabian Pipeline and she shops. Judy is due back Thursday and we may keep her a few days if plane transportation Saturday will be available. It will be our first time away since arrival last September, and we both are looking forward to it.

Nura is 16 months old and almost ready to ride, and a real pleasure to see, as most young fillies are. Susan is still crazy about horses and very impatient to start school in Switzerland. We may send her in August so she can have five weeks of French to prepare her to do all her schoolwork in French.

More later after our Safari north.

Love to all, Ken

June 20, 1954

Dear Folks:

Friday before last we went on a marvelous trip. We were invited to go with the Management Committee on the last inspection trip of the railroad before it was officially turned over to the [Saudi] government. We went in the [air-conditioned] Budd car of the King – with a lounge compartment with couch and easy chairs – besides the regular seats of the car. Attached was another Budd car as diner.



Ken and Mildred Webster were invited to join the Aramco Management Committee on the final inspection trip for the new railroad before it was turned over to the Saudi government. They traveled in the King's air-conditioned Budd car, similar to this one. According to Wikipedia, "The Budd Rail Diesel Car or RDC is a self-propelled diesel-hydraulic rail passenger car. In the period 1949–1962, 398 RDCs were built by the Budd Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These cars were primarily adopted for passenger service in rural areas with low traffic density or in short-haul commuter service, and were less expensive to operate in this context than a traditional locomotive-drawn train. The cars could be used singly or several coupled together in train sets and controlled from the cab of the front unit." (Internet photo.)

We left at 5 o'clock in the morning and soon after we started were served a lovely breakfast – ruffled petunia bouquets on the table – bowls of fresh fruit – and juice – scrambled eggs, ham and coffee. We stopped at all the stations where the men looked over the bulk plants and transmission centers. We saw everything, too. At Al Karj [the King's farm] we went through the farm and saw all the stock – milk plant, etc. Had wonderful fresh milk and iced watermelon. Dinner aboard of half a chicken each with all the trimmings – and at about every 20 minutes they served juice, cookies, coffee, fruit and doughnuts. We took pictures all along the way – I with my new Retina LL A camera. Saw a huge caravan of camels at one place.

The trip without stops is 8 hours, but we arrived at Riyadh at 4:30. A bunch of sedans were there which took us on a good hour and a half drive about Riyadh. We really saw so much more of it than I expected. Much of it is closed to outsiders, but we didn't miss much. Drove by the new King's palace and could see inside the lovely gardens. Saw the

old King's palace and various homes of the sons and daughters – new hospitals and schools. Drove to the airport where we left on the Convair at 6 o'clock – tired, a bit dirty and quite warm – but that was all over as soon as we took off. Circled back over many interesting places and arrived back here [in Dhahran] at 7:15.



The walls of Old Riyadh, mid-20th century. (Internet photo.)

I never expected to even get there, much less see so much. We brought back watermelons from Al Karj. It definitely was a deluxe tour and a wonderful way to travel over the desert. We went across the Dahanas (?) – the stretch of orange sand and dunes.

This Friday we went to Ras Tanura to spend the day with friends and had a very good day – went swimming in the Gulf and had a wonderful dinner.

Tuesday morning Ken and I go to Beirut for four days. He has a business trip and I am hitching a ride. It is the last week of school up there and Judy will probably come down on the school flight Thursday. Allyn and Lynn will stay in the house with Susan and will meet Judy. I am so anxious to go. Will be able to do some shopping for Susan and also for other things. Graduation is Friday night and Sam and Mim and Inez Wasson will be up there, too. We should be able to DO the town!



A view of the center of old Riyadh in the early 20th century showing the main mosque and part of the "suk" (market). (Internet photo.)

Received letters from all of you this week – neato!

Bye now. Love to all, Mildred, et al.

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

June 30, 1954

Dear Folks:

Didn't get the usual Friday letter off on Friday as we went to Beirut last Tuesday on company business. Mim and Sam [Shultz] went along, too, taking local leave so as to be with their daughter when she graduated from American Community School.

Took the New York flight company plane but were delayed several hours in take-off due to faulty magneto. Arrived Beirut at 1 p.m. Beirut time, had a snack and incidentally a beer or two, and then downtown shopping for me while Mildred popped out to the school to see Judy. Judy was preparing for last exams, so we old folks had a night out on the town.



Dhahran Senior Staff School, 1954. (From the 1954 Scimitar yearbook, courtesy Susan Webster Slavin.)

Next day I went to Biblical Sidon with a Trans-Arabian Pipeline group for inspection tour, firefighting demonstration, etc. That night we had dinner as a group of young and old, nine altogether, with Inez Wasson, daughter, and son Don, who also was graduating [from ACS]. Early to bed and all day meeting again with Tapline people on operating problems of the 1,160-miles 30-31-inch pipeline carrying average of 336,000 barrels per day to Mediterranean. Dinner that night at a cool open garden nightspot halfway up Beirut mountain called "The Garden." Good steaks, good floor show, and fun. Friday we shopped, visited friends, and went to open-air graduation at 6 P.M. at the school. Only twenty graduated, and eleven were children of Aramco employees. It was a very nice graduation.

All this time Mildred was helping Judy pack, and she has as much junk as though she had been there for years. Some we packed to leave for next year, other things we put in footlockers and suitcases for the trip. Aramco sent one Convair up Thursday for those not graduating, and on Saturday a DC-3 for the graduates and Judy.

We grownups came down on the New York flight DC-6b, leaving at 1:30 A.M. Arrived 9 A.M. tired and happy to and glad to be home. I napped until noon, then went to school board meeting all afternoon and rushed to airport to get Judy at five. Now we are all together again as a family, Susan is talking all the time of leaving August [first] for

Switzerland for summer school in French, and we will plan to visit her Sept. 15 to arrange for the other school in same town, Lausanne.

It has been a busy week...Mildred has had her usual routine, the phone rings constantly for one or both girls, Susan is getting ready for end of school July 18th and a parade on July 8th to celebrate the Fourth, as she and some fifty others will ride their horses in the affair.

Love to all, Ken



Dhahran Senior

Staff "First String" Girls' Bowling Team, 1954. Front: Betsy Ford; Back: Maryl Erenmeyer, Susan Webster, Marilyn Ensinger, Cynthia Witter, Linda Jane McCarthy. This photo, taken from the 1954 Scimitar yearbook included the quote, "Bowling's still all-around favorite. Teams were established for second season of inter-district competition. Sportsmanship and fun were by-words in this rivalry." (Photo courtesy Susan Webster Slavin.)

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First Trip to the K.S.A.: Chapter XVIII – Saudi Arabia Here We Come

7 July 2008 | [comments \(0\)](#) | [In Search Of Oil](#) | by [Aramco ExPats](#)

The next day, February 2, 1956, we left New York Idlewild Airport on the Aramco company plane. That flight was nice, too. We were assigned a compartment from the first, so we had privacy and extra comfort. The weather was ideal all the way, although cold in spots. It was 6 degrees above zero in Amsterdam, where we spent about 24 hours. The canals were even frozen over. The Nored's girl babysat again while we all went out to eat at an Indonesian Restaurant called "The Five Flies". Flying on to Arabia in our compartment the next day, we played bridge at times with Peggy & Jerry while Keith & Vicky slept. Flying just didn't get any better than that. So, it was on February 4, when we arrived safely back in Dhahran, then took a taxi to our house in Ras Tanura.

The kids took up right where they left off, just like they had never been gone. At the house, they played with their record player or went out to the playground to play. However, Vicky rode Keith's tricycle off and left it somewhere. She also took off her shoes and socks, and we looked and looked, but couldn't find them any place, either. I would have to get her some more in that size if we couldn't find them. I could get her something in Al-Khobar, but they wouldn't be as good. They would both really miss that tricycle, too.

On the plus side, my houseboy came back to work for me the second day we were home. It was really good to see him and have him to do my work, as I had hurt one of my fingers while home. He was glad to see all of us, too, I think. Also, our neighbor, Lynn & Ken Cobb, gave us a dinner party that evening and all our friends came to welcome us back. So we took up right where we left off, too. It wasn't long before we were playing bridge and "42", going out to various dinner parties and giving them. That was one thing that kept my weight down to 130 and 1/2 lbs when we returned, and it's no wonder we got rather restless at times in the States.

Our friend, Dick Frossard, who worked in the Refinery with Oran, had started dating a single, female Aramco employee, May, almost as soon as she arrived in Arabia last year. It wasn't long before they began to join in a lot of our activities, mostly parties and dances, at first. Later they married and moved in to our apartment building next door, and we became great friends, too, and that lasted a lifetime. Mae also had been doing a lot with a couple of other single girls, Ruth, and Ann Saems. Ruth started going with Woody Woodslides and later married him. Ann started dating a single guy, Frank Serbeniuk, and they became an active part of our group, as well. It would be a very active and different year.

In fact, there was going to be another big company dance on the Surf House Patio on February 23, 1956, so we had a big group to our house for drinks prior including the new ones, as well as Pat & Guy Smyth, Peggy & Jerry Nored, Ken & Lynn Cobb, and Desda & Bill Hale. The Noreds had everyone to their house after. As usual, it was a fun evening.

Pat & Guy were going to be going on their home leave soon, so a round of parties and dinners started for them. The next week Jack & Vivian Hays gave them a dinner party and a couple of the guys, Les Mullins and Dick Kearns had a big wing-ding party. The week after that, I gave a Dessert Bridge for Pat at the Surf House Lounge and a poker party at our house. Before they left, other things were given by Desda & Bill, Peg & Jerry, and Ken & Lynn. They were a pretty popular couple.

Things slowed down for a while after that. Keith went to a birthday party for his friend Keith McPhillimy. I went to a Dessert Bridge, Baby Shower, and we went to dinner at the Persian Room with Desda & Bill and to a show after. Another couple we knew (the ones we had eaten with at Alfredo's in Rome) Norma & Roy Flink left Arabia for good and our friend, Joe Schmidt, went home on leave but wasn't coming back, normal happenings for over there, really.

There was a war situation brewing in the Suez Canal area that we were a bit worried about. The English & French were threatening to go to war with Egypt. We had heard rumors about being shipped out, and an American army unit being sent to Saudi Arabia, but both of those were false. The company was going ahead with construction and everything just like we were going to be there for many years to come, and we didn't think they would bother if they thought they would lose all that in the near future. So we didn't feel so bad after that, and went ahead with our lives there, as usual. I had really felt safer there than in the States with all the auto accidents, twisters, floods, etc.

The kids really enjoyed the beach now, and we took them there whenever we could work it in. For the first time, they would go out in the water, in fact, they went from one extreme to the other. Before, they were afraid of it, but now, they could even be knocked down by a wave, come up laughing and go back for more. We had to watch them more then, but it was a pleasure to see them getting such a kick out of it. They were both getting brown as bears already.



Oran tries his hand at golf.

By April 1, ours had really turned into a sports minded family. Oran was on the Golf Course almost every day. He had joined the Association and played in all the Tournaments. He came in second in one, which was excellent for a beginner. I went out to the golf course (outer course) one morning and enjoyed it very much, but I didn't have time to take it up seriously. There was a golf dance on the 5th and a golf barbecue dinner and party after at Jack & Vivian Hays on the 12th, which I did partake of and would enjoy those benefits of the game very much.



An Arab caddie watches as Oran lines up a shot on the outer course.

The Golf Course, located outside our camp off the main road to the north, left something to be desired, really. It was known as the outer course. As you can imagine, living in a desert, there were no trees, the fairways were nothing but sand and small rocks, and the greens were oiled sand smoothed into a round area with a hole placed somewhere inside that. Water hazards were marked off with a little fence, and each player carried a small square of AstroTurf to place the ball on wherever it had landed in the “fairway”. Later, the quarter mile area between Nejma and the business area inside our fenced camp was turned into a golf course. It was known as the inner course, of course. Diehard golfers seemed to love it, though, and took it very seriously.

The Spring Bowling Leagues had begun on April 7, and, as I’ve said before, that was my game. I bowled in the mixed Scratch League every Monday night and Oran in a Scratch League every Tuesday. We bowled together in a Handicap League on Saturday nights. Also, our new school gymnasium had been completed and a badminton tournament was in full swing. I entered the Women’s Singles and the Mixed Doubles and either played tournament matches or practiced several nights a week. It wasn’t difficult as we lived right next to the school.

Besides all the sports activities, there were other social get-togethers for the next couple of weeks. There was a Dinner Party at Ken & Lynns, a Bridge Luncheon for Marge DeSantis and Blanche Myers at the Surf House, a dinner at our house for Vivian & Jack Hays, with Peggy & Jerry Nored, Vic & Maurine Reis, Lynn Cobb and Robert Helms, and a dinner at the Noreds.

On April 26, Oran played in another golf tournament. His foursome included Dick Frossard, Erica Gates, Peggy Wagoner, and himself. He took our movie camera to record that occasion, and I couldn’t believe how windy it was out there. The girls wore long, very loose pants, and they were really flapping, but he also got some good shots of what the golf course looked like. Seeing is believing. Oran continued to play softball, as well. There was even a picture of him, “at bat”, in a game between the oil operations and administration teams in the May 2 issue of our weekly paper, Sun and Flare.

On May 4, my partner, Roger Hornsby, and I played in a Mixed Doubles Badminton Tournament and won. My name was mentioned in the Refinery Ramblings section of the May 9 issue of the Sun & Flare about winning that. We were beginning to feel like celebrities.

The footlocker from our shipment came by air, so we received it on May 14. If I had known it would get there that soon, I would have packed differently. It contained mostly winter clothes, which I no longer needed. After another 5 years in that country, I may learn how to pack for it. We hadn’t heard anything yet about the rest of our shipment.

I gave Keith a big birthday party on May 22, 1956, when he was 4 years old, and he was really thrilled and excited. There were 12 kids besides Keith and Vicky. I served them individual cupcakes with each child’s name on it, ice cream and lemonade. Oran took pictures, naturally. We got him a really nice, big, four-motored toy airplane, which he had been wanting for ages. He was getting very interested in airplanes of all sizes.

By the end of May, the weather was beginning to get pretty hot, so Desda Hale, Lynn Cobb and I decided to go to the beach frequently. We took Keith & Vicky and they always loved that. At other times, just Lynn & I went and she pushed her boy, Mike, there in the buggy. We were just down the beach a ways from the Surf House, and the company photographer, an Italian named Alberto, saw us, so came down with his camera to take advantage of the opportunity. We didn't mind, of course, and even obliged with some cheesecake poses, which we purchased later.

He took pictures at company functions – dances, women's parties, luncheons, meetings, etc., and was well known by all. Alberto had taken over from Ilo "The Pirate" Battigelli, who came to Arabia in 1945 with other Italians after World War II to build the Refinery and do other craft work. Ilo left in 1955 to settle in Salisbury, Rhodesia. He became famous among Aramcons of that time period for his photographs of the people of Arabia, Bedouins, the Arabian desert, villages and the sea. We all have some of his photographs to treasure.

I was glad I had been able to lose even more weight for the beach photos and the new round of parties we were about to have because Desda & Bill Hale were leaving on vacation. My scales showed 124 lbs. then, 10 less than when I left on my vacation. On May 30, there was a party at our single friends, Ann Saems Portable, 5-J-A-3. Before I could go there, though, I had to play the last ladies singles badminton tournament game for the championship. So, I went to the gym without much enthusiasm, which was soon evident, as I was being trounced badly. But I finally got my act together, came from way behind and won. So, I would get a trophy for that and a plaque for the Mixed Doubles Championship.

I felt much better and went on to Ann's party in a very good mood. It was already in full swing, and so was Oran. So he told a new single guy who had gone to work in the Refinery, John Barnes, to see to it that I had a good time. We discovered that we danced well together, so ended up doing that most of the night. Those single people really knew how to party.

The very next night, we went with Desda & Bill Hale to a dance at the Italian Club at the Air Base just outside Dhahran. That was sure different and fun. We went with some friends of theirs, Barbara & Dick Currins, who lived in Dhahran camp, then back to their house to an after party before returning to Ras Tanura. Then there would be dinner for Desda & Bill at Ann & Bob Gulovsen's, Peggy & Jerry Nored's and our house, a party at Jim Bevis and Les Mullins, a desert bridge for Desda, another trip to the Air Base Officers Club for dinner and Bingo and a Beach Picnic before they left on their home leave vacation.

The beach picnic was on June 15, at our favorite picnic table and grill. Jerry Nored and I had to check out the table by dancing on it. It's a wonder we didn't break our necks or something. Others there were Peggy, of course, Ann & Bob Gulovsen, Lynn & Ken, ourselves, Jim Bevis, and John Barnes. Before eating this time, we did something new. We played softball. We marked off bases and home plate, and the first base was the edge of the picnic table. No one ever got past that, but we all had a turn at bat and tried. That

was not easy, running in the sand, but fun. Oran took movies of all of us, and that was funnier to watch.

Afterwards we sat around the table, chatted, ate, and generally enjoyed the afternoon and early evening. The girls were all in shorts and I was a blonde. I had decided to try my hair like that for a while. It was a nice change, and everyone seemed to agree that I looked better that way – especially Pat.

There were a lot of kids' birthday parties, Keith & Vicky went to about that time, besides Keith's. Susie had hers on June 16, Steve Smyth had his fourth on June 27, and Bruce Tyler had his fourth on July 9. We got Keith & Vicky all dressed up in pretty, blue outfits and took pictures with presents before taking them to the parties. They were almost as active as we were.

The company would have a buffet picnic on the patio of the Surf House to celebrate the 4th of July. Oran was on the 3 to 11 shift, so I went with Pat & Guy, who were back from vacation. While we were in line filling our plates with food, the photographer took our picture, and it showed up in the next Sun & Flare – more publicity. The next night Pat & Guy fixed their delicious Mexican meal and we went to a dance afterwards on the Surf House patio. Oran was able to go to that.

Our birthday (Oran's & mine were on the same day), July 26, was coming up soon, so we wanted to do something to celebrate that. But there were already a couple of conflicting activities that night, so we planned ours for July 16, when Oran would have his days off. We cleared some of the furniture out of the kids' room, decorated it with crepe paper, Japanese lanterns and balloons, and put a record player in there so we could dance. The kids spent the night with some friends. There was plenty of good food for the 30 guests, and a good time was had by all.

We got a roll of movie film that we had taken while we were home on vacation, so we showed that and the Christmas ones again to ourselves, the kids, a neighbor and our houseboy. Some audience, huh? Keith & Vicky were thrilled to see all of their relatives again and kept naming the different ones as they appeared on the screen. They wanted to go back and have another Christmas and walk in the woods with their grandparents. Keith mentioned their names quite often when he remembered bits about our home leave, so I didn't think he would forget them. We showed the movie every now & then to make sure.

Dick & May had purchased a jeep and discovered a new beach area about three miles down the road outside our camp going to the terminal. It was on the Tarut Bay side of the Ras Tanura peninsula, on calmer water, most of the time, and easily accessible from our camp. So we planned a beach picnic and swimming get together with them, Pat & Guy Smyth, Ann Saems & Frank Serbeniuk, and Aim and Bob Golovsen, and went there on July 20. We all loved it right away. It wasn't crowded. We were the only group there. The water was calm & clear and felt wonderful to swim and play in, except for the small rocks on the sandy bottom and an occasional sea urchin with prickly skin that you might bump into. Guy tried to do some snorkeling, but came up soon, sputtering. I don't think he ever quite got the hang of it.

We inflated rafts and all the women started floating around on them. Oran was taking movies. The others started a game of “King of the Mountain”, in chest deep water, with the women on the men’s shoulders, pulling or pushing the other to make them fall over. It was quite a struggle and a serious “tug-of-war,” with Pat & Guy the last to be standing. I’m glad Oran was taking movies, as I could just continue floating around watching. The whole event was good fun, and I knew we would be doing more of that.

Our houseboy, Britto, left on vacation the end of that week, July 25, and was I ever lost for the next three months. For the past month, I had been sharing him with another family, Vivian & Jack Hays, and would do the same when he got back. We had decided I could do some of my own work then, and you know what, it felt pretty good for a change. I would still miss him, though.

The next night, our actual birthday, July 26, there was a party in the portable of another single, female employee, Francine, who was going with Fred Von Bieberstein, at the time. It was a going away for Robert Helms, who worked in the Refinery with Oran, too. Jack & Vivian had everyone to their house after, so we really did a lot that night.



Oran poses in front of the Refinery.

I thought everything was going very well, but about a week later Oran told his immediate boss that he was fed up with shift work, and he thought he would lose his health if he had to work it any more. Surprisingly, they gave him a transfer to the Engineering Department as an Inspector, with a straight day job, more money, and a chance for advancement. The first three months would be on a trial basis; however, as he had no experience or training for this type of work, but we were confident that he could do it. He would start there as soon as the Hydroformer was back on stream. They were having their yearly inspection of it at the time, so it wasn’t running. Oran would help start it up again, and that would be in about 3 weeks.



Robert Helms, John Barnes and Burl York join Oran for a photo in the Refinery's Control Room.

Since he wouldn't be working in the Refinery anymore, he wanted to get more movies of it, and the guys he had worked with. He took the camera there again and had his current crew all climb up to the first platform surrounding a tower, line up there for shots, then climb back down again. On that shift, there was Robert Helms, Burl York, John Barnes, Roy Boyd, and an Arab they called Bull. He then took some long shots of the Flare, Persian Gulf, the desert, the camp, other towers in the Refinery and the tanks.

We didn't do much for awhile after that except go to one other beach picnic, play bridge a couple of times, play badminton several times, and go to a movie or two. Sometimes there was so much happening we didn't have time to catch a breath, then there would be a lull with nothing much going on and we were in that lull right then. Of course, we were going through one of the hottest, most humid spells we had ever seen over there. That may have had something to do with it.

On August 14, we finally got our shipment from our home leave, and everything was there and unbroken, so we were extremely lucky. The things we bought really improved the looks of our house. We were very pleased with our choice of things, especially the two floor lamps. Everyone raved over them. The kids were as happy with their toys as when they originally received them, and we had all the neighbor kids around for several days after.

Perhaps I spoke a little too soon about not doing much. Shortly after that, we took up a new sport, water skiing. Dick and May Frossard acquired a boat, so we went out with them, whenever possible, to the Tarut Bay beach area to swim, picnic and water ski. They taught us how, as we had never even tried before. It wasn't as hard as it looks, but it's scary, at first. I got up and going the first time I tried, but made a number of attempts after that before I could do it again. It took Oran several tries, but he was soon looking like a pro. We loved it, and thought it was a lot of fun.

Several people owned boats, then, large enough to be kept in the water, so the company provided a place at the Terminal end of the Peninsula to keep them. At least two others had large boats in those days, Frank Gates and Lincoln Eckburg. Later the Tarut Bay beach area was turned into a Yacht Club called Sandy Hook, and more facilities were provided as more and more employees acquired personal boats. But in those early days we pretty much had the place all to ourselves, and we took advantage of it often.



Jack and Vivian

Hays with their three children and Colleen Wilson with Vicky and Keith on the pier at the Terminal.

We had been entertaining quite a bit, also. I gave one dinner party for six and another for 12, including Oran & Myself. I served Lasagna both times. It was really nice using my new dishes, the coffee maker, silverware, and T.V. tables. It made things a lot easier. Since Britto was on vacation, I was using Pat's houseboy, Tony, whenever possible.

The Hydroformer inspection and startup was completed, so Oran started his new job in the Engineering Department on September 19, 1956 and liked it just fine. He came home every day for lunch, which I wasn't too hep on, but he was also home every night, which made up for it. We were able to slip in an occasional dinner out at the Persian Room, a dance or a bridge, as well as our beach activities.



Colleen, Vicky and Keith on one of the Navy ships that patrolled the Persian Gulf.

Other people had discovered our Tarut Bay beach, so the company decided to give an outing there for everybody in camp on Friday, September 21. It generated a lot of interest, so everyone who owned boats and skis brought those. The company brought out big umbrellas, beach chairs, tables, and lots of food from the dining hall to go on the

tables. Everyone we knew was there, as well as all the kids. We were there with Pat & Guy, May & Dick & Erica & Frank. People were swimming and water skiing, playing games in the sand, eating, etc. It was a beehive of activity.

I didn't participate that day, but Oran took his turn at water skiing. When he fell, he was pretty far out in deep water, but he told Dick just to go on back and let someone else ski and he would swim back to shore. He was an excellent swimmer, but soon discovered the tide was coming into the bay from the narrow opening at the end of the Terminal and was carrying him further up into the bay away from the shore, and keeping him in deep water. He stopped swimming then and just floated to conserve his strength. He knew eventually he would be in the shallow water at the top of the bay, but didn't know how long before that happened. It was a pretty scary situation.

Everybody else had been so busy with everything we didn't think about him for awhile, but finally did, and started searching the water. Finally, someone spotted him way off in the top part of the bay, so Frank Gates jumped in his boat and drove out to pick him up. He still hadn't reached shallow water, so was really glad to get that boat ride. The rest of us were grateful he knew what to do and didn't panic. That made everyone aware of the dangerous tide situation in that area after that.

But that wasn't the end of our outing that day. Dick & May decided to give one more boat ride to someone, so took Pat & Guy, their son, Steve and our son, Keith. The rest of us stayed on shore with the others. It was getting late so things were winding down. A lot of people were going home, and the company employees started packing all their stuff for the return to camp.

We were beginning to worry about Dick's boat, as it was getting dark and hard to see that far out on the water. Everyone still at the beach was searching the horizon of the bay, as Dick didn't have running lights on his boat. Then someone saw what they thought was a light across the water, so Frank Gates jumped in his boat and went out to it. To the rescue again, he soon returned towing Dick's boat, much to the relief of everyone.

His motor had stopped and they had been floating helplessly. After trying repeatedly to start it, he set a towel on fire, and that was the light we all saw from shore. Dick told us later that Keith kept asking the questions over & over, "What's wrong with the boat?", "Why don't you start the motor?" Dick jokingly said, "If he had asked that one more time, he was going to throw him overboard. We have joked and laughed about that together over the years, but it wasn't a laughing matter for any of us that night.

Oran's new job had generated some more social functions. We were invited to dinner on September 24, to the home of Oran's new immediate boss and wife, Paul & Elizabeth Merian. Then a week later, we had them to dinner at our house. Erika & Frank had the Frossards, Smyths and ourselves to their house for dinner on the next Saturday. Then we were invited to the home of Oran's big boss, William Boucher, in his new department for "Cocktails & Dinner" a couple of weeks after that. I was really beginning to feel like we were getting up in the world. It looked like changing jobs was going to have its rewards.

We weren't going to give up our beach outings, though. The weather was beginning to cool off nicely, but we knew the best would be around for a couple of more months, at least. On Friday, September 27, we drove to Al-Khobar and purchased a brand new Land Rover Jeep (Hard Top). It really wasn't very fancy, but for Saudi Arabia, it was the most practical thing, especially since we were doing things with boat owners, and going on so many picnics and swimming parties. It was made of aluminum so wouldn't rust in the humidity. I even learned to drive it, and I drove around camp some, but left most of that up to Oran or one of our male friends.

Keith & Vicky went to another birthday party for Bruce Rodarty and Peggy Wayman on October 4. That was 2 days before Vicky's 3rd birthday. I didn't give her a party but had a supper for her and invited Pat, Steve, and Valerie. There were the usual cake and presents, of course, and she seemed pleased.

There was another round of parties and dinners for the adults, as well. There was another dance, and Ed Wennesland and R.L. Sweeney threw a party on the fourth. A party was given for Ruth & Joe Mahon on October 11. He had been with us on the Hydroformer Training Program. The next night, Pat & Guy fixed their famous (for us) Mexican Dinner. Most all of our friends were involved in one or more of these, so we stayed very active for the first part of October.

The beach group decided to do something a little different, go fishing. Frank Gates' boat was best for that, so on October 19 we all drove down to a beach by the Terminal area. While Frank & Dick went to get the boat, the rest of us waited and they soon returned and beached the boat right where we were while loading everything, including us. They situated the fishing rods, the ice chest with water, cold drinks and nibbles on the boat, then lifted each one of us up on the bow and helped us to the deck. There were two swivel chairs positioned on the back of the deck from which to fish. We would take turns.

When everything was loaded, the guys pushed the boat back into the water and we rode out of Tarut Bay through the narrow opening into the Persian Gulf. It was a warm, cloudless day, the water almost as smooth as glass. We put on caps, sunscreen, and got relief from the sun occasionally in the cabin. There was a big, ocean going tanker ship loading at the pier we rode past and a small, Arab fishing dhow went by us in the other direction going back to his village. Oran took movies of all this and us.

Frank took us out a distance away from all that before we started fishing. The men started first, Dick & Frank, then Oran & Guy. The lines were baited, thrown over the back of the boat and allowed to trail in the water for a good distance. When a fish struck everyone else had to reel in until the fish was landed. Dick caught a good-sized Spadey right away. Pat & May & I took our turns with much anticipation. As it turned out, that was the only fish caught that day, but we had strikes, so we did a lot of reeling in. It was interesting, though, but tiring and even with the precautions, we got very sunburned. But I wouldn't trade anything for that experience of deep sea fishing in the Persian Gulf off Saudi Arabia.

At that point, I thought life couldn't possibly get any better, and how fortunate we were to be able to do things like that in a place I loved so much. But that was all to change.

Suddenly, Oran decided to quit his job, and we were scheduled to leave for home for good on October 30, 1956. What a shock. I don't know whether it was the war escalation in the Suez Canal, or a new job that wasn't working out as well as he had expected, or something else, but I had to accept his decision. They asked him to take a leave of absence, but he didn't even want to do that at the time.

I went around in a daze after that, with a heavy heart, going through the preparations to leave for good, the packing, the business to be taken care of, etc. It was quite a chore to dismantle a home you thought you were going to live in for many years. We did sell most everything, as people could not readily buy things there in Arabia at that time. So there were fewer things for us to actually have to make an inventory list for and ship home. We sold our practically new jeep to Jack Kurtz. Our houseboy, Britto's, contract would be taken over by Vivian & Jack Hays. He would not return from vacation before we left, so we wouldn't see him again. That made me sad, but I knew his job was secure and he would do well.

Thank goodness, Desda & Bill Hale had gotten back from vacation, so I was able to be with them again, and say goodbye to all my other friends, too, either individually or at the parties given for our farewell. I would see a number of friends over the years, and I was fortunate enough to return to Saudi Arabia in 1975 and 1980, but that's another story. I would never forget the special times I had with everyone or the special camp of Ras Tanura.

We went on a couple of more beach picnics, a dance, and a big going away party, but finally did leave on October 30, 1956. The British – French invasion of Egypt had begun and we flew over the Suez Canal on our way out of Arabia. Over the southern Mediterranean Sea we saw some English jets, some of them buzzed our plane, but that was all, and we landed safely in Amsterdam, Holland, then New York City, where we bought a car, drove on to Dallas, and the start of a new life.

THE END

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A Study in Blue and White

10 June 2008 | [comments \(0\)](#) | [In Search Of Oil](#) | by [Aramco ExPats](#)



An archway leads to the courtyard of an upper-class house in Sidi

Bou Said.

From the rising promontory of Sidi Bou Said, on the western flank of the Bay of Tunis, you could have watched the Roman destruction of Carthage, a few kilometers away, in 146 BC. In 19 BC, you could have observed the arrival of 3000 Roman colonists, dispatched by a decision of the emperor Augustus to rebuild the city.

From your vantage point near the top of the hill in AD 1270, you could have viewed the entire army of Louis IX of France camped on the shore, its tents stretching toward Tunis in the distance, as the king lay dying of a fever. Was it perhaps a lingering memory of these and other images of the ebb and flow of temporal power that led pious men to seek these heights as a retreat for meditation, to be able to contemplate the ways of the world from the physical and spiritual viewpoint they named *kursi al-sulh* – the seat of reconciliation? It's best to visit this Tunisian village yourself and let your own sense of history provide the answer.

Set on the uppermost point of the headland guarding the entrance of the Bay of Tunis, this village only 16 kilometers (10 miles) from Tunis itself has a distinct, traditional character and an architectural style that have been protected since 1915 by local ordinance. A strong community spirit, with a little persuasion where necessary from the municipal authorities, ensures that houses are painted as needed to maintain their fresh appearance. Brilliant white facades, with doors and some grillwork a striking, near-turquoise blue, or the darker, deeper "Sfaxian" blue, draw the eyes as well as the feet up the hillside toward the minaret of the village mosque.



The interior of the courtyard reveals a fountain, greenery, and a welth of decorative tilework.

This site was first settled more than 2000 years ago, but as suburb and fortress rather than as a principal urban center. Vestiges of Punic settlement dating to the fifth century BC have been found, corroborated by texts referring to the area as a wealthy suburb of Carthage. It is said that the house of Hamilcar, father of Hannibal, was on this hill, though there is no actual evidence of this. Since today's settlement covers the highest and most desirable part of the hill, it is likely that any confirmation of the site's early history will be revealed only slowly, as it is almost certainly underneath the present dwellings.

As the importance of Carthage declined, even after its resettlement by the Romans, and as the city of Tunis grew from the ninth century onward, Sidi Bou Said became too distant for those seeking nearby escape from a bustling urban environment. Settlement was reduced to small farmers and herdsmen, who used the land at the base of the hill. Some Tunisian authorities believe that because of its strategic importance overlooking the entrance to the bay, there must always have been a fortress of sorts on the promontory. But for centuries, settlement was limited.



The afternoon sun in Sidi Bou Said.

Thanks to the respect accorded Abu Said al-Baji, a local religious leader who died in 1236, the site became a place where Muslims might visit, learn and pray. Abu Said, from whom the village takes its name, lies interred at the base of the minaret of the mosque, toward which thousands of tourists annually make their way, but more to photograph the narrow, picturesque streets and to bargain for souvenirs than to pay their respects to the Muslim teacher. Indeed, non-Muslims are not allowed to enter the mosque – one of the few restraints on foreigners in tourist-conscious Tunisia. Two coffee shops adjacent to the mosque, with others beyond, soothe the disappointment.

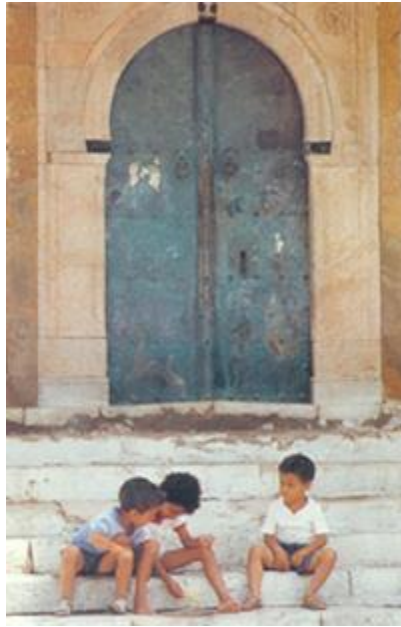


A cobblestone street leading to the Café des Nattes.

Some say that it is Saint Louis himself who is buried in the mosque, rather than Abu Said al-Baji, but there is enough historical evidence on both sides, Christian and Muslim, to refute this folk belief.

It was, perhaps, the increasingly military nature of the encounters with Europe which led the Hafsid ruler Abu al-Abbas (1370-1394) to construct a defensive fortification at Sidi Bou Said. The area nevertheless appears to have continued to serve primarily as a gathering point for pious retreats, with some sparse rural habitation, until the Hafsid

fortress was captured by Charles V in 1535. It was then occupied by the Spanish until 1574, at which point it passed to Turkish control.



Three boys play on stone steps.

It is to the Turks that we owe the present mausoleum in which lies the body of Abu Said, now called Sidi (a term of respect) Bou Said, and the present-day village traces its origins to the period of Turkish hegemony. The mausoleum's principal entrance was later closed and a portion of it was transformed into the café which today is the goal of most tourists, particularly in the summer months.

As Tunis expanded in the late 18th century, princes, ministers and senior officials began to take a new interest in Sidi Bou Said. They sought escape from the cramped, urban conditions of the capital, which – because of its low location between two hills – suffered from high summer temperatures and still air. By the middle of the 19th century, Sidi Bou Said had acquired its character as a desirable retreat for the upper classes, who availed themselves of its pleasant breezes and cooler temperatures. Many extensive palaces and country residences date from this period.

Within 50 years of this 19th-century construction boom, the ordinance of 1915 stabilized the village, stylistically if not structurally, at something resembling its present appearance. Although many houses fell into ruin with the passing of the era of the Ottoman upper classes, others were adapted to new, modern uses as restaurants, cafés, and hotels, profiting from the village's growing reputation as a picturesque site that captures, in cameo, the atmosphere of the Tunisia of the 19th and earlier centuries.



A snack salesman welcomes a customer.

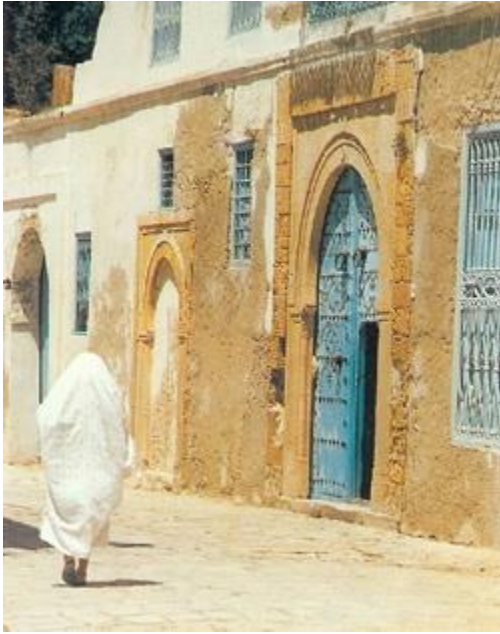
An example of this is the budget Hotel Abou Faris, which holds the coffin of the Hafsid Sultan Abou Faris Abdulaziz (1394-1434) in one of the dozen rooms opening off its interior courtyard. Another is the Café des Maures, actually another mausoleum, which offers one of the best vantage points for looking down on the site of Carthage, the Punic Ports, the Bay of Tunis and the capital beyond, while enjoying a soft drink or a cup of tea. After a half-hour here, in this beautiful site, one understands the origin of the name, “seat of reconciliation.”

One of the pleasures of walking the streets, narrow and cobblestoned, and enjoying the many pleasant views of the village and the bay, is that Tunisians themselves are likely to be as numerous as foreign visitors – and they give the coffee houses at least as much business. A dozen varieties of candy, the local doughnuts, called bambaloni, or cups of sweet tea with pine nuts floating on the surface are all for sale, tempting families of any nationality out for a pleasant afternoon or early evening walk. Except at religious sites, where non-believing visitors are generally considered out of place, the Tunisian tolerance of tourists, their cameras, and their dress demonstrates the general open-mindedness of the people toward foreign ideas and presence.



With 3000 years’ experience in dealing with the Mediterranean economy and its various cultures, Tunisians have concluded that they know how to profit from such exchanges. Sidi Bou Said is only one of the features of modern-day Tunisia which demonstrates that the foresight to preserve one’s own culture and tradition assures benefits, material and intangible, to both present and future generations.

More about Abu Said al-Baji



A woman passes by old, arched doorways typical of Sidi Bou Said. The town's architectural style has been protected by local ordinance since 1915.

Thanks to the respect accorded Abu Said al-Baji, a local religious leader who died in 1236, the site became a place where Muslims might visit, learn and pray. Abu Said, from whom the village takes its name, lies interred at the base of the minaret of the mosque toward which thousands of tourists annually make their way, but more to photograph the narrow, picturesque streets and to bargain for souvenirs than to pay their respects to the Muslim teacher. Indeed, non-Muslims are not allowed to enter the mosque—one of the few restraints on foreigners in tourist-conscious Tunisia. Two coffee shops adjacent to the mosque, with others beyond, soothe the disappointment.

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***Charles O. Cecil** was director of the U. S. State Department's Arabic Language Field School in Sidi Bou Said. He is now assigned to Abidjan. Cecil is required to state that*

“the opinions and vieivs expressed are the author’s own, and not those of the Department of State.”

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Makhulah the Camel

27 May 2008 | [comments \(0\)](#) | [In Search Of Oil](#) | by [Aramco ExPats](#)

Once upon a time in Ain Dar, my family had a female camel called Makhulah. It was a beautiful creature and also a natural leader.

Now, usually we keep the camels hobbled, but one time, my father forgot to retie Makhulah’s rope and so, she left Ain Dar – and took all the herds with her!



Qurian Al Hajri shares a story about his family's beloved camel, Makhulah.

Well, we waited for them to come back, and then we waited some more, but they didn’t come back. Then my father said, “Pack up your things; we’re going to get the camels.”

“But we don’t know where they are!”

“I do.”

“But, father, how can you know that? The desert is so vast!”

“Oh, Qurian, my son, it’s simple. Makhulah was born near Sahaf, wasn’t she? So that’s where we are going to find her.”

Now, the village of Sahaf is nearly 200 kilometers away. We drove straight there and arrived at 4 PM. “We’ll go to the drinking trough,” said my father.

We went there and saw plenty of camels, but none of ours were among them. But my father said, “They will come, you’ll see.”

So we spent one night there and nothing happened. By the next night, none of our camels had yet appeared. But then, at midnight, my father came to me. I was asleep near the car. He said, “Pst, Qurian, wake up, wake up!”

I said, “What’s up, father?”

“Come, I’ll show you.”

Now he took me a little ways away and there in the distance I could see the shapes of many, many camels. Now Makhulah knew my father’s voice very well, so he started to call: Ma-khu-laaaah! Ma-khu-laaaah!

Then he went and hid underneath the car. And Makhulah appeared in the dark and she went over to the car and leaned over and kissed my father right where he was. And my father began to cry. He was so overcome that it seemed his lungs were going to burst.

“I love you, Qurian,” he said, “but I love this camel as well.”

And I began to cry too.

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First Trip to the K.S.A.: Chapter XVII – Another Scheduled Home Leave

13 May 2008 | [comments \(0\)](#) | [In Search Of Oil](#) | by [Aramco ExPats](#)

Then, on November 11, 1955, we left Arabia again to go on our scheduled home leave after two more years with Aramco. We flew to Amsterdam, Holland, spent one night there, and then flew on to New York City. We spent another night there, then flew to Dallas, Texas, the next day and checked into the Adolphus Hotel. Coincidentally, we ran into a couple from home, Dot Sala & her husband, who lived in Dallas then. Small world! The next day, Oran bought an aqua & white, new Oldsmobile, which we drove to my parents’ home in Turnertown in East Texas. It was good to be home again, too.

We did spend a few days there while we looked for a place to rent, get over our jet lag, and see other family and friends. We had brought home a German Coo-Coo clock Keith had pulled off the wall in a friends home that broke into what seemed like a million pieces. We bought it, and were going to try to have it fixed by an old college buddy of mine who worked in a local store, but, alas, it was too far gone. After a short period of time, we did find a fully furnished house to rent on the northeast edge of Henderson.

We couldn’t believe our luck. It was in a wooded area with a small lake, including a small fishing boat, but just about a mile from a business area of the town itself. Not only that, there were lots of trees, and they still had their leaves with bright fall colors. It was perfect for us and we loved it. We got settled in, bought groceries and other necessities and started really enjoying our vacation (home leave). Each morning, Oran got up and went out on the lake fishing until I got breakfast ready. I conveyed this to him by yelling out the kitchen window, and then he rowed back in to eat.

The kids loved it, too, and got their share of boat time and did some fishing, as well. They also loved walking in the wooded area and across the small dam at one end of the lake with their grandparents and us. They visited us often, as it was just about 10 miles from their house. They still had us to their house for some meals and I cooked for them, as I had hoped to. Some of Oran’s sisters, brothers and families were able to come round, too. So it was the first time, since our wedding, we really felt like we had a home in the States. It was a good feeling.

We did have Thanksgiving with my folks, and then started doing some shopping. We would be sending a trunk shipment back as well as a footlocker to Arabia, as well as buying new clothes for all of us, and this time – Christmas presents. That would be at my parents home, too, with other family members. My sister Jolene & husband, Bill, with children, Johonna & Paul; my brother Ben & wife, Frances, with son, Paul; Aunt Abbie and Uncle Verl Davison and Aunt Jo Hayes from Tulsa, Oklahoma would be there. My sister & brother, Jerri Sue & Bill were still young, 13 & 11, so lived at home. We were glad our children would be exposed to all this family.

There were the usual decorations, with a real, live, cut in the woods, Christmas tree, much more than we ever had in Arabia. I helped Mother hang cards around the door and on the Venetian blind slots at the window, a tradition I still carry on today. A nativity set was on top of the television set with angels floating on cotton clouds over that, cleverly held by strings from the ceiling. We didn't have to worry about restrictions then, as we were in the United States.

Christmas Eve we all gathered in the living room around the tree to open presents after the homemade, traditional eggnog. It was always crowded and hectic, but my favorite part. There were serious gifts, but the fun ones, too. My father received a harmonica so he immediately played it, or tried, and danced to the rhythm. He also received a homemade barbecue apron, with a special area to wipe your hands, which was the envy of everyone. Fireworks topped off the evening to everyone's delight. We were in the country, so there were no restrictions there, either.

The next day, after seeing what Santa had brought, the women returned to the kitchen to work their culinary magic under the direction of my mother, and another outstanding Christmas dinner was produced. I had missed my mother's home cooking. After the naps and our family card game of pitch, we went back to our little "home" in the woods. It had been a wonderful Christmas.



Pat and Guy Smyth with their children, Steve and Valerie.



The cover art for the Cobb's and Smyth's Christmas cards.

We had received picture Christmas cards from three friends and their families in Arabia. The Smyth's card showed an Arab on a camel in front of the Refinery with Merry Christmas across the top, the four of them, Pat, Steve, and Guy holding Valerie, sitting on the couch and the message: "Wish we could join you for the Holidays. Have fun!" They had just gotten a letter from us. Lynn & Ken Cobb's card showed the same Arab on a camel in front of the Refinery, and a picture of the two of them sitting on chairs in front of their window drapes, holding hands. Lynn had on a pretty, white maternity outfit.



Nona and Lou Tyler with their children, Ross, Bruce, Gail and

Wayne.



The cover of the Tyler's Christmas card.

The third card was from Nona & Lou Tyler, their children Ross, Bruce, Gail, and Wayne on their couch in front of drapes. The Christmas picture was different. It said: "A Dry Desert Christmas. Anyway, Seasons Greetings, Saudi Arabia, 1955." It showed a decorated, open refrigerator with an animated Donald Duck in nightshirt and cap looking at a note inside which said, "No Beer or Whiskey, Dear Partners, Signed X (the King to you)". It was clever and cute.

The last day of the year, 1955, was spent quietly, contemplating what the next year would bring. There were no big parties, singing and dancing in the streets (ha), just a Happy New Year kiss before bedtime. During the month of January 1956, we continued to enjoy our house and lake in the woods, as well as our families.

We also seriously shopped for our shipment items for our trunk and footlocker. That was always a chore and time consuming, but we all pitched in and soon had what we wanted. We had done all the paperwork, made the inventory lists and sent them on their way. We would look forward to receiving them in Arabia, and be glad we went to the trouble. It was just part of our life there. We received another letter from Lynn & Ken that announced the birth of their son, Michael. So, we would have something else new to look forward to when we got back to Arabia.

It was soon time to head back that way, so we gave up our house in the woods, packed, and moved back in with my parents the last night of January. We had to make a decision about our car, so my father purchased it from us at a good price. My parents were driving us to Dallas to catch a morning flight to New York, so we got up in the wee hours and started out. It was still dark, so the kids were sleeping in the back seat with my mother, and my father, Oran and I were up front.

Things were going fine until we had gone about eight miles west of Tyler. Then I saw a big mule crossing the highway in front of us and yelled out, "mule". Oran had seen it about the same time, so slammed on the brakes hard, but didn't get the car stopped before we hit it. The bumper must have caught him low on the legs, though, because he flipped right over the car, but a hoof broke the windshield. There was a round hole on the far left side, and of course, the car was out of commission. We were all in shock, but soon

learned that, miraculously, no one was hurt, not a scratch. A car stopped immediately to help us, so we asked him to call the police and Oran's sister in Tyler as soon as he reached Canton. It was a very dark, wooded area, and several lights did come on in small frame houses along the mostly deserted highway, but no one ever came out.

The police arrived before we knew it, and were very pleasant. They checked on us and then looked for the mule, all up & down the highway, but, surprisingly, never found it. Oran's two nephews, Freddy and Jimmy, arrived about that time in separate cars, so since everybody was okay it was decided that one nephew would drive us to the airport and the other would drive my parents back home. My father wasn't too happy, but Oran assured him he would make everything right pertaining to the car, and he did.

What a way to say good-bye to your parents when you were going back to Saudi Arabia for two more years. But we did and took off for Dallas. Jimmy drove so fast I thought we'd never make it alive, but there was little traffic, and when we walked in the door at the Dallas terminal on Lemon Avenue, they were making the first call to board. We told them what had happened, so they held the plane and gave us all four seats up front that face each other because there was almost no one aboard. That turned out to be an excellent trip. We fed the kids, then put them in a double seat apiece to sleep, which they did almost all the way there. Then Oran & I leisurely ate our breakfast and relaxed. It was really nice.

A few hours later, we checked into the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City and ran into Peggy & Jerry Nored, who were taking the same plane back to Arabia. Their daughter babysat Keith & Vicky while we went out to supper (that's all, we wanted to get a good night's rest). Once, while we were there, I caught Vicky with the telephone receiver to her ear, saying, "Hello, Myrt". It was really cute.

- See more at: <http://www.aramcoexpats.com/articles/category/in-search-of-oil/page/15/#sthash.1GiduRen.dpuf>