

U.S. Army Material Management Agency, Europe (USAMMAE) September 1972 to January 1976.

September 1972 - August 1974: Transportation Movement Officer

Following my tour in Viet Nam (June 1971 to September 1972), The Department of the Army assigned me to the USAMMAE Headquarters in Zweibrucken, Germany. USAMMAE managed theater-level supply, maintenance, and warehousing support for the United States Army, Europe (USAREUR). (A short history of USAMMAE, to include its predecessors and successor, is at the appendix below.)

My wife, Margarete, my daughter, Evelyn, and I moved into an Army contracted house in Contig, about seven miles from the USAMMAE HQ at Kreuzberg Kaserne. We preferred to live on Kreuzberg where there were dozens of housing units, but none of them were available at the time. Our household goods, which had been warehoused in Virginia during the tour in Viet Nam, arrived without damage or missing items. And with the purchase of a cocker spaniel puppy, Trustworthy, we settled in for the next three years.

Major Donald Dillon, the Chief of the Transportation Division within the Logistic Directorate's Supply and Storage Division, welcomed me to my new job. He led an office of about eleven people: four Department of the Army (DAC) civilians, six soldiers, and one or two local nationals. Each of them knew a lot more than I did about strategic-level logistics systems, and each performed their assigned tasks with relative ease. Major Dillon, sensing my initial unease, pledged to teach and guide me during after-duty hours, but he never had enough time to do it. Within a few months, however, I (painfully) grasped the fundamentals and could reasonably converse about the idiosyncrasies of MROs (Materiel Release (and Confirmation) Orders), UMMIPS (Uniform Military Movement and Issue Priority System), TCNs (Transportation Control Numbers), FMS (Foreign Military Sales), and the myriad of other such acronyms and systems. I also assimilated knowledge about the USAMMAE structure and the people working there. And as I achieved some semblance of efficiency, Dillon assigned me tasks of increasing responsibility, such as the planning and arrangement for the movement of thousands of major end items, mostly trucks, from USAMMAE-run depots in Germany and Italy to Greece and Turkey. He also got me a position on the USAMMAE Inspector General (IG) Team which conducted inspections of the USAMMAE depots and maintenance plants.

In February, 1973, Major Dave Percival replaced Dillon, who had been selected for promotion and moved to another job in USAMMAE. Percival soon assigned me the mission of facilitating the movement of commissary goods from Germany to a newly-established U.S. Army commissary in Tehran, Iran. Up to this time, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) had operated a small commissary at the embassy, but it couldn't support the ever increasing American troop population. When the Army's Troop Support Agency (TSA) relieved the embassy of the commissary operation, a series of problems arose and had to be overcome. One was the lack of movement data

for items being transported from Ramstein Air Base, Germany, through Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport to the commissary. Basically, the newly assigned commissary officer in Tehran, an Army lieutenant colonel, didn't know what items were being sent to him nor when the products would arrive.

Being the intermediary between the U.S. Air Force and the commissary officer turned out to be easy. With a few telephone calls I could determine when a commissary flight (usually a large C5 cargo plane) would leave Ramstein and arrive in Tehran. I got the plane's cargo inventory before departure and telephoned the information to the commissary officer. He subsequently sent specially equipped trucks to the airport to pick up the frozen, chilled, or non-perishable cargo. His warehouse staff, in turn, received and accounted for the items before placing them on the commissary shelf. This simple, telephone-based coordination system proved to be efficient until TSA's automated communication system became operational a few months later. When my task ended, the commissary officer invited Margarete and I to visit him in Iran as gesture of appreciation. Well, we couldn't refuse that offer. In August, 1974, we flew "space available" on a C5 airplane full of...commissary goods. (The Iran adventure is recorded at the appendix of this chapter.)

August 1974 – June 1975: Special Projects Officer

In August, 1974, I moved upstairs (in the same building) to the Directorate's Storage Division and became a "Special Project Officer". This isn't an enamoring term in the military, but the transfer suited the needs of all concerned: my replacement apparently knew more about theater-level transportation systems than I did.

My new boss, Mr. Wally King, held a middle-management GS (Government Service) 12 position. "Chuck," he said as he mused over a cup of coffee during my first day on the job, "we're in the process of closing the Boeblingen Maintenance Plant. We want you to speed up the process and shut it down next year, not in two years as originally planned. Don't worry, I'll tell you how to do it." My heart jumped. I knew nothing about closing an entire installation, let alone one as complex as Boeblingen. It was a government-owned contractor-operated (GOGO) site with about 1,200 contracted employees from Daimler Benz. It repaired and stored 7,200 major pieces of equipment (such as trucks, jeeps, and armored personnel carriers). The job seemed overwhelming. Still, Wally's relaxed down-to-earth manner buoyed me. Unpretentious, he exuded confidence. He had been a driver of a tank destroyer during World War II and experienced direct combat. Later, when the war ended, he got a job as civilian employee with the U.S. Army in Europe and then married a German woman. He planned to retire in Germany.

Coffee finished, he introduced the people with whom I had to work as well as the peculiarities of the job. He went on to explain the base-closure process and the optimum way to synchronize the activities of the USAMMAE staff and the contracting office at Boeblingen. "You've got to meet the expectations of the senior leaders in USAMMAE and also Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Highdecker, who commands the Plant and who heads the Army's contract team there. First of all, be aware that Colonel

(Robert) Kies (our Directorate Chief) has already told our senior leaders here that Boeblingen will close in one rather than two years. He's got the CG's (Commanding General) approval to speed things up. And he told everybody that you're in charge of this project. So, Chuck, make yourself known. Contact each of the seven Directorates and ask them to give you a point of contact (POC) with whom you can work. Then write a letter of instruction (LOI) which tells the staff what needs to be done to close the place next year. Write it in triple space and distribute it to your POCs within the next two weeks. When you get their feedback, type it in double space and bring it to them again. Following that, type it in single space, have the POCs initial it, then get their Director's signature. Bring it to the Colonel in the Resource Management (RM) Directorate last. He a nitpicker, questioning everything and signing nothing right away. Good luck." He didn't ask if I had any questions.

Remarkably, everything progressed according to plan. Even with the chief of Resource Management. "I need time to study this," he grumbled. "I can't review fifteen pages in just a few minutes. It's Friday and it's late." I pretended nonchalance. "No problem, sir. And I apologize. But it's got to go to Colonel Kies today because he's passing it to the Commanding General on Monday. (I lied). I'll tell Colonel Kies that your approval is ...pending. But, sir, if you notice, the other directors have approved it and so has your POC. Again, sir, I apologize for the inconvenience but if you give it your approval, everything would move ahead." The Colonel glared at me, "friggin' smart ass" written all over his face. Most likely he thought that I would tell Kies that "the Colonel at RM hasn't approved the letter yet. You know how *he* is." Perhaps he felt that Kies would nag him to speed it up, considering that so many others had already signed it. So, after a moment of thought and obvious distemper, he mumbled something incoherent, scribbled a signature and tossed the letter to me across his desk. I retrieved it and forced a "Thank you, sir," while unsuccessfully trying to repress a smirk.

I returned to Wally's office in triumph and watched him scurry into Kies office with the letter. "Good job," he commented. "Now go to Happy Hour (at the Officer's club) and celebrate. Round Two (execution of the LOI) starts on Monday."

The club flourished during Friday evening's happy hour. The USAMMAE HQ formed a rather tight-knit organization, both professionally and socially, and the ambiance of the club offered a great place to mingle. Private (home) dinner parties were common. At one Halloween party, for instance, Margarete came in costume but I showed up with only my street clothes and a brown paper bag. The host, Captain John McDonald, immediately tagged me as the party pooper. A little later, I secretly changed into the costume which Margarete had designed. Voila! Out came the baby wearing a diaper, a T-shirt stained with spaghetti sauce, a bib, white tights for my legs, unlaced white sneakers, and a tiny baby hat. A bottle of beer with a nipple attached rounded out the outfit. Guess who won first prize! About a week later, while shopping in the Post Exchange, I met the hostess and her three-year old daughter. The girl couldn't take her eyes off me. Later, I was told, she pulled her mother's sleeve and excitedly asked, 'Mommy, is that the big baby?'

Overall, the personnel at USAMMAE HQ enjoyed a relaxed work environment while doing their jobs in a professional manner. Anyone who disturbed the peace, like screamers, chest-pounders or bully boys, were marginalized. USAMMAE's leadership practiced good organizational management within the headquarters itself and with the depots and maintenance plants which the headquarters controlled.

Fortunate for me, LTC Highdecker agreed to the LOI and appeared glad to have me as his "insider" in the HQ. He passed his USAMMAE-related staff issues to me and expected that I would work congenially with all concerned to get his problems fixed. My responsibilities included the enforcement of timelines, coordinating closure-related solutions amongst the staff and the Boeblingen contracting team, keeping my supervisors updated, and getting them to engage in problems which I could not resolve. Admittedly, I cajoled the USAMMAE staff to do things on time, otherwise I'd threaten to bring the matter to COL Kies's attention. The fact is, I had to keep only three people happy: Wally King, COL Kies, and LTC Highdecker. The four of us got along well together and worked in harmony towards the accomplishment of the goal. I didn't *have* to please others, and sometimes did not. But that's how it goes.

The work turned out to be routine. I wrote weekly progress reports that passed through Wally to COL Kies, and assumed that the reports went to the commanding general. I occasionally attached an envelope marked "for the eyes of Mr. King and COL Kies only." This alerted them to anyone who refused to cooperate with "the plan" and who needed a "friendly" word or two from my superiors.

On one occasion, near the end of the project, Highdecker needed disposition (movement) instructions for three Honest John rocket launchers. The issue was relatively simple, considering that most of the 7,200 pieces of major equipment (wheeled and track) had already been moved or junked by this time. The Honest John rockets were no longer in the Army inventory and Highdecker feared that the disposition of the rocket carriers "might fall through the cracks." The item manager at USAMMAE HQ told me not to worry about it, but nothing happened for several weeks. I then decided to take action, bolstered by Wally advice: "COL Kies and I are busy. Don't give us problems which you can solve by yourself." Actually, this small problem paled in comparison to others. For example, the USAMMAE Engineering Directorate couldn't decide what to do with the Army-owned equipment which had been installed in the buildings at Boeblingen. Should they be left in place, junked, or retrieved and reused somewhere else? The items could also be moved to another installation until a decision had been made. Hmm! I hesitated, then decided to send to COL Kies my 'eyes only' envelope. Wow! Like magic, the problem disappeared.

Well, with a clear conscience (though quite a bit of subterfuge) I took the rocket carrier's proper description and Federal Stock Number to USAMMAE's Directorate of Automation. A friendly woman at the reception desk agreed to create an 80-column punch card, using the data I provided, and to process it immediately. She put the completed card into a large computer. Buzzzzzz...gmmmmmm...done! A quick call to Highdecker suggested that he get the just-released Materiel Release Order (MRO)

and quickly move the carriers to the nearby Germersheim Army Depot. By now, we had cultivated enough trust between us that our respective suggestions took the form of directives. Everything was going nicely. A week later, however, the item's manager within the Directorate of Inventory Control (DIC) squelched my ego with a nasty telephone call. "Captain Seland, who moved those launchers? Did you?" I mumbled something disjointed before he continued. "What you did is illegal. You spent government money to move them. I'm running this up the chain of command. You're gonna pay for this." Slam. Silence. I scurried into Wally's office and explained the problem. He immediately went to inform Kies.

Several days later I met COL Kies in the hallway as he returned from the weekly meeting with the Commanding General (CG) and principal staff. "I hear some rocket carriers were moved from Boeblingen," he said casually. "Yes sir," I responded, my heart beginning to beat faster. Did I put my military career on the line? Jeez!. "Is Highdecker happy,"? he asked dryly. My "yes sir" response seemed to have no impact. "Well", he said, "Keep him happy. And," with a hint of a smile, "stay out of trouble." He then went into his office. Of course he would probably phone his contemporary at the DIC and tell him that "due punishment has been given to Seland. He won't do that again!"

Okay, I broke the rules and got caught. But my trustworthy bosses could claim plausible deniability while appreciating my success and handling it accordingly. I learned that taking a prudent risk can only be done if superiors encourage "out of the box" thinking and have the courage to accept adverse consequences.

In June 1975, as the project neared completion, Highdecker off-handedly mentioned that there had been 7,500 vehicles in the depot, not 7,200 as we had reported. "Well, sir," I asked, "How the heck can you suddenly discover 300 more?" The vague answer prompted me to go to Wally King's office right away. "Who cares." Wally quipped, "Nobody notices exact numbers. Keep reporting 7,200. Only the bean counters will discover the differences, and they're only technicians. Everybody else is happy to have the place closed and they won't nitpick about the numbers. Besides, if you change the figures now, then every number you reported will be suspect. So, stick with the original numbers." I did. No one asked questions and Highdecker "cooked the books."

Around this time USAREUR HQ solicited their subordinate commands to nominate individuals to receive recognition at the annual USAREUR Incentive Rewards ceremony. Nominees had to be personally responsible for saving or avoiding substantial costs which would otherwise have been incurred. USAMMAE selected me--without my knowledge. When the narrative passed the USAREUR' review, I was invited to Heidelberg (the location of the USAREUR's HQ) to receive the award in front of a large assembly of senior leaders, including the USAREUR commanding general (CG) and the USAMMAE CG. They emphasized that my work saved USAREUR \$2.9 million in one year (\$13.5 in 2016 dollars). Following the ceremony I called Wally to thank him for pushing the award through the various layers of bureaucracy. His voice remained, as always, serene and controlled. He accepted my thanks without admitting that he

wrote the nomination. All he said was, “You deserve it, Chuck.” Then, as usual, he offered a bit of advice: “News of the award has spread and I’ve heard a lot. Half the people (here) think you deserve it, the other half think it should have gone to someone else. Enjoy the award but be modest when you go around.” Actually, I believe that the “someone else” was Wally himself.



General George S. Blanchard, USAREUR Commander, myself, and Major General Arthur H. Sweeney, USAMMAE Commander

Closing Boeblingen wasn't that demanding in terms of time. During the project I travelled twice to AFCENT (Allied Forces Central Europe), a NATO Headquarters in Brunssum, the Netherlands. During both of these two-week tours, I facilitated the resupply of materiel to U.S. Army forces engaged in major NATO exercises. I didn't know much about NATO logistics procedures, but relied on my contacts at USAMMAE HQ to help me make the right decisions and to undertake the proper actions. I learned a lot.

August 1975 – November 1975: Staff Officer for REFORGER 1975

Following the closure of the maintenance plant in August, I participated in NATO's annual REFORGER (Return of Forces to Germany) exercise. REFORGER assured our [NATO](#) allies that the United States could quickly deploy forces to West Germany in accordance with NATO's strategic defense plan. NATO other armies also moved to their assigned defensive positions during this premiere exercise.

Our ad hoc team of fifteen soldiers, officially titled the Assembly Area Control Group (AACG), arranged the community support for the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) which had been ordered to deploy into Germany from Fort Hood, Texas. The Regiment (“Brave Rifles”) would arrive at Ramstein Air Base, in the area of Kaiserslautern, withdraw their equipment from nearby Miesau Army Depot (MAD), and then move to the exercise area near the East German border. I wrote and staffed the Operations Plan which synchronized the ACR’s support requirements with the Kaiserslautern Community’s support capabilities. The plan established the AACG as the official intermediary between the Community and the ACR. It included maps, telephone numbers, and (expanded) hours of operation for medical and dental care, land-line communications, on-post transportation services, legal counseling, barber shops, Post Exchange, commissary, fire fighting, trash collection, property disposal, and environmental matters.

The AACG set up the Initial Unit Assembly Area (IUAA) for the incoming troops; a 150-tent cantonment area in the forest of the Kaiserslautern Training Area. When the thousand or so ACR troops arrived at Ramstein, we quickly transported them to the IUAA, about ten miles away. During the next few days we bussed them back and forth to nearby MAD, where they withdrew their equipment from the humidity-controlled warehouses, validated the equipment’s serviceability, then loaded it onto trains being sent to the exercise area. Most of the ACR soldiers flew to the exercise area from Ramstein, while others accompanied the trains. When the exercise ended the reverse process took place. This time, however, the soldiers stayed at the Final Unit Assembly Area (FUAA)—troop billets on Kapaun Barracks in Kaiserslautern. Once they received their in-coming equipment at the MAD rail terminal, then cleaned and serviced it before returning it to the warehouses. In increments, proportionate to the amount of equipment returned to the warehouses, the troops redeployed from Ramstein to Texas.

Start 1 Major Edward Murphy, a USAMMAE staff officer, had been tasked to be the AACG’s immediate supervisor. LTC Robert Caulfield, the Miesau Depot Deputy Commander, became our senior supervisor and oversaw our operation as an additional duty to his regular job. MAJ Murphy proved to be a good leader, but it was Caulfield who excelled in leadership skills. Both of them never got loud, abusive or unhinged, even when the most bazaar problems surfaced. Caulfield, however, had with a unique flair for common sense and sound judgment. “At the Army School in Murnau (Germany), I teach Army senior leaders how to improve their managerial skills,” he once quipped. “You guys are about to get the course for free.” He wasn’t kidding. “I could run this operation from home,” he once remarked. “If there’s a problem, tell me what’s going on, keep at it, and do what you can. If you must contact me, give me your suggestions to solve the problem. Maybe I’ll accept them and maybe I won’t, but I want to hear them. The key is that you earn my trust and that I earn yours. Trust is earned, folks; it doesn’t come natural. And if you make a mistake I’ll back you up. If I make a mistake, well, don’t worry, I won’t blame you. And finally, tell me who isn’t cooperating with the Group and I’ll straighten that sucker out.”

I learned a lot during these 90 days. I not only got a great education, but a great officer efficiency report from Murphy and Caulfield.

November 1975 – January 1976: Another Special Duty

The Department of the Army (DA) extended my tour at USAMMAE in order to allow me to attend the Transportation Officer Advance Course at Fort Eustis, Virginia, in February. During the interim I received another special project: accountability for commissary stocks.

The computerized inventory system for commissaries in Europe had just been transferred from the automation facility at Nachbollenbach Army Depot (NAD) to a computer at Germersheim Army Depot (GAD), about 200 miles away. Wally had advised the command to keep back-up data at Nachbollenbach in case the transfer failed, so computer printouts of the stockage and various other data were made...just in case. When the transfer failed, the print-outs became the source documents for all of the stockage, to include the reorder criterion.

When the commissaries ran out of many items, customer complaints sky-rocketed. Dozens of angry letters were sent to the Stars & Stripes newspaper, the Army Inspector General (IG), and to various congressmen. Officers in charge of each commissary did their best to satisfy customer demands but they simply couldn't reorder stocks as quickly or accurately as the computers. And although USAMMAE HQ fixed the problem in a few weeks, the root causes had to be investigated and subsequent replies to Congress and the IG had to be made. To do this, a Task Force was mobilized which included myself and a civilian staffer from the USAMMAE HQ. The two of us had to examine all of the stock shortages in all of the commissaries and determine if alternate items were available at the time of the shortage. For example, if a commissary lacked Campbell's Pork and Beans, were other brands of pork and beans available?

The task initially seemed overwhelming since Europe had dozens of commissaries and thousands of stocked items. Nevertheless, within two months we had researched everything in detail. In most cases, substitute items were on the shelves or arrived at the commissaries within a few days. Only one or two items puzzled us--"Danish Boy" and "Swedish Boy." Of course we had to call the bakery in England which produced them. "These are very tasty pastry rolls," boasted the bakery supervisor, "and filled with lots of national jellies." (Whatever that meant.) Although initially ordered by several commissaries, low customer demand resulted in their being dropped from the inventory altogether. Anyway, we found that similar pastries, such as German "Berliners," were available when the "Boys" were absent.

When we finished the study, the USAMMAE command readily (and happily) used our data to mitigate the overall problem. We highlighted only one item which could not be moderated--animal food. Did you know that individual dogs and cats eat only one kind of food? The food they have been served for years. Period! Nothing else will do. Regardless of the availability of substitute items, pet owners, we learned, are hyper-

protective of their pets. They are a “take no BS” lot. And if the Germany economy didn't have the exact item which the commissary lacked (which was normally the case) then the animal owners whined that their pets were the innocent victims of a bungled commissary system. Now, pet owners love their pets, mind you. But I don't think any dear ones starved to death. Actually, the nagging pet owners proved a bit much for my taste.

This “special project” wrapped up during the Christmas holiday season in December 1975. Perfect timing. Colonel and Mrs. Kies invited several staff officers and their spouses, including Margarete and I, to their home for a holiday dinner. Since we had never been in a colonel's home before, we felt rather privileged. Once there, the fifteen or so guests followed the normal etiquette of having a few drinks while making small talk. Later, when Mrs. Kies asked everyone to sit down for dinner, Margarete and I ambled to a place near the end of the table, conscious that most of guests outranked me. “Chuck, you sit to the right of my husband,” she suggested. “And Margarete, you sit to Bob's left. You're the guests of honor, you know.” Well....okay. So, with starry eyes we sauntered to the head of the table where we were treated like royalty. How, I tried to reason, could this tour start on such a shaky note and then end up like this? I had not worked very long hours, and any other officer, within reason, could have accomplished my tasks—probably even better. I mentioned this to Wally a few days later. “Well Chuck,” he said with his soft-rumbling tone, “it's not so much what you did but how you did it.” A stoic glance and curt smile ended the conversation.

Margarete and I returned to the United States in January 1976.

Appendix

(1)USAMMAE: An Historical Sketch

Up to 1965, the supply and maintenance (S&M) mission for the U.S. Army in Europe (USAREUR) was accomplished by a collective group of eight technical services, or supply control agencies (SCA's), located mostly in France. By 1965 the SCA's merged into the United States Army Supply and Maintenance Agency (S&MA), headquartered in Orleans, France. S&MA supervised depot-level storage and maintenance missions of the United States Army Communications Zone, Europe (COMMZ-E). The concept of the S&MA was to consolidate and automate various logistics systems while maintaining peak logistic efficiency. In 1965 the U.S. Industrial Center, Europe, at Coleman Barracks in Sandhofen, Germany was discontinued. The four major rebuild plants at Mainz, Böblingen, Schwäbisch-Gmünd and Ober-Ramstadt, all controlled by the U.S. Army Industrial Center, continued as independent activities under the operational control of S&MA.

From March 1966 through May 1967, the U.S. relocated all military forces out of France with operation FRELOC. S&MA moved to Zweibrücken, streamlined its operations, and settled into its new garrison on Kreuzberg Kaserne, high on a hill-overlooking Zweibrücken.

On 25 April, 1969, S&MA inactivated and was replaced, in Zweibruecken, by the HQ, U.S. Army Materiel Command, Europe (MATCOM). In 1969 MATCOM expanded its operational base by receiving all of the depots, maintenance plants, and other wholesale supply and maintenance activities which had hitherto been assigned to the U.S. Theater Army Support Command, Europe (TASCOM), headquartered in Worms, Germany. In 1970, MATCOM realigned the depots: Nahbollenbach Army Depot (NAD) was placed under Kaiserslautern Army Depot (KAD); Pirmasens Army Depot (PAD) and Mannheim Depot Activity (MAD) were placed under Germersheim Army Depot (GAD), and the Giessen Depot Activity was phased out.

On 29 December, 1972, MATCOM inactivated and was replaced the U.S. Army Materiel Management Agency, Europe (USAMMAE). This new organization, aligned under TASCOM, remained at Zweibrucken and assumed the responsibility for Theater wholesale logistics. USAMMAE gained command of GAD, KAD, four maintenance plants, the 97th Quartermaster Battalion, and Burtonwood Army Depot (BAD) (BAD's command later reverted to TASCOM, but USAMMAE retained operational control.) The 60th Ordnance Group, part of the former MATCOM Directorate of Munition and Missiles, was incorporated into Miesau Army Depot as a subordinate element.

In 1975 USAMMAE reorganized. The Directorate of Inventory Control, Stock Control and Subsistence Management were inactivated, and the Materiel Management Center (MMC) was established to assume functions of the disbanded Directorates and to eventually replace USAMMAE. This reorganization involved the closing of the US Army Maintenance Plants at Boeblingen, and Pirmasens Army Depot; the realignment of stocks from Nahbollenbach to Kaiserslautern and Germersheim Depots, respectively, and the turnover of wholesale subsistence management to the Defense Supply Agency. Reorganization and realignments were completed on 1 July 1975.

In 1989, Congress directed DoD to conduct a study of the separate military commissary systems. Up to this time each service ran their own commissaries and ordering systems. The ensuing report recommended consolidating the service systems into one agency to improve service and save money. The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) was then established May 15, 1990. Source:

<http://www.usarmygermany.com/Sont.htm?http&&www.usarmygermany.com>

(2) Vacation in Iran, August 1974

Margarete and I managed to get standby seats on a C5 aircraft going from Ramstein Air Base to Tehran. Teheran's commissary officer, with whom I had established a good working relationship, had reserved a hotel room for us in Teheran and escorted us to local tourist attractions over the next few days. He also told us about a small U.S. Army aircraft which made bi-weekly round-trip flights from Tehran to Esfahan, in the middle of the country, and to Shiraz, further south. We could go on the plane, he said, on a space available basis, mindful that official travelers had priority and we would have no assurance of obtaining a return flight to Teheran from either Esfahan or Shiraz.

With this gracious offer, Margarete and I got to the airport on time and signed up for Space A. "Good luck," said the clerk who wrote our names on the stand-by list, "the plane has only seven seats., and two others passengers have priority over you. Oh, I notice that you want to go to Shiraz. Unfortunately, the plane is only going to Espahan today." Ugggg! Just then a vacationing U.S. Navy admiral, accompanied by his wife and military aide, arrived and signed up for Space A. When told that the plane wasn't going to Shiraz, he quickly went into a side office and "conversed" with the flight schedulers. A few minutes later a loudspeaker in the waiting room blared: "There is a change in the flight schedule. Shiraz is the final destination."

The two other passengers and some cargo got off the aircraft at Esphahan before we continued. Upon our arrival at Shiraz, a U.S. army officer quickly rushed over to us and announced, "We're come to pick up the admiral and his party." Well, okay with me. Once in our assigned car, we sheepishly told our driver, an Army Major, that we were not with the Admiral's party but travelling alone. His "you gotta' be kidding me" sour attitude continued until he discharged us at a convenient hotel in the center of Shiraz, which we toured during the next several days.

Celebrated as the heartland of Persian culture for more than 2000 years, Shiraz has become synonymous with education, poetry and wine. One of the most important cities in the medieval Islamic world, it became the Iranian capital during the Zand dynasty (AD 1747–79), when many of its most beautiful buildings were built or restored. It's a home to splendid gardens, exquisite mosques and echoes of ancient sophistication. The climate is mild, set as it is in a fertile valley once famed for its vineyards. It's really a nice place to visit (except at the humid height of summer or the freezing depths of winter). (See: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/iran/central-iran/shiraz/introduction>)

Our sighting tours were awesome, especially the one to nearby Percepolis. The city, now in ruins, had been founded around 518 BC by the emperor Darius I (522-486 BCE). Built on a natural terrace, the sprawling city was constructed on a monumental scale. Monumental, that is, until it was sacked by Alexander the Great in 330-331 BC. He and his men looted the treasury and allegedly burned the palace to the ground in an act of drunken destruction.

As we entered the Gate of All Nations, our tour guide pointed out the graffiti which had been carved into the stone by Henry Stanley (1841-1904)--the Stanley of 'Dr Livingstone, I presume?' fame. The guide commented dryly "from our American friends" as our tour group walked by.



Unable to arrange a flight from Shiraz, we travelled north by bus for six hours before arriving at Isfahan. We easily found a suitable hotel and toured the city for several days.

On 20 July 1974, just before we went to Iran, the Turkish Army had invaded northern Cyprus. "Operation Peace" had been launched as a [Turkish](#) military response against a coup which had been staged by the Cypriot National Guard against the Cypriot president, [Makarios III](#). On 14 August 1974, the day we arrived in Isfahan, the Turkish forces expanded their enclave in northern Cyprus with a military operation called "Atilla-II". (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_events_in_Cyprus,_1974). All international air travel in that area was suspended and Americans in Iran were advised to contact the American embassy. U.S. Naval forces, now evacuating U.S. citizens from Cyprus, considered a similar NEO (non-combatant evacuation operation) for Americans in Iran.

I informed the USAMMAE HQ of our plight and extended our hotel stay for several days. An American staying at our hotel graciously solved my dwindling money problem by lending me a few hundred dollars.

A few days later we took a bus to Teheran, contacted the American Embassy, and received an emergency flight ticket to facilitate our departure. The next day, when the American radio station announced our number, we got a taxi to the airport while lugging along with two duffel bags full of clothing, Persian carpets., and some miscellaneous souvenirs. The outbound flight processing at the Murabad International Airport went smoothly, although Iranian customs officials suddenly began to charge passengers export custom duties for items which had been purchased in Iran. With people already boarding the commercial aircraft, Margarete and I deftly moved to the end of the forward-moving line in expectation that the customs officials wouldn't have enough time to inspect and charge everyone. And anyway, our remaining twenty dollars wouldn't be enough if challenged by the Iranians. Right decision! When an American official shouted abruptly, "Let's go! Let's go!" the irritated passengers lurched past the customs officials, throwing their baggage on a nearby cart before clambering up the steps of the plane. Within ten minutes the aircraft was in the air--to the sound of mild applause.

When we arrived at Ramstein, I decided to take no chances with U.S. or German customs officials, if there happened to be any present. I quickly got off the plane, retrieved our white VW Beetle from the nearby parking lot, and drove to the cargo-handling section at the passenger terminal. While pulling back the canvas “sunroof,” I asked the baggage handlers to toss me my two duffel bags, which they did. Once loaded, Margarete and I drove back to Zweibrucken, feeling both elated and somewhat numbed by the experience.

