

6. Henry vs. the Army; return to Pomona

Henry: So I guess they had a barracks or a day room or someplace for people in my position who were waiting for assignment to just sit around and read magazines or whatever; and we all had what they call an MOS which stands for Military Occupational Specialty, and mine wasn't much of a specialty; it was O55 which stood for Clerk General. And they didn't even mention the fact that I had some skills as a typist so I had no idea what they would do with me; and those of us who were sitting around waiting would tell stories, that is those of us who had any experience with the Army before would tell tales about how the Army seemed to take a delight in assigning people to jobs for which they were not qualified. There were some very uproarious stories, some of which may even have been true. (Laughter). Like people who had been a blacksmith, I think I remember one such anecdote, who was assigned a job as a cook, and things of that sort.

All of this was in the latter part of May of 1946. I'm trying to recall; I may have waited around as much as two weeks and then I got the call that I was to report to the Office of the Inspector General and I knew nothing about the job of the Inspector General, although Danny Kay had made a movie called the Inspector General which was kind of a spoof of the institution in Czarist Russia. But I gathered as time went by that it was a sort of equivalent to what later became known as an Ombudsman to whom one could take complaints. I think it also had broad powers, if the IG wanted to use them, of inspecting malfeasance and nonfeasance and misfeasance on the part of anybody within his jurisdiction. For example, when I was in Basic Training in North Fort Louis we heard rumors all the time and they were so persistent that I think they must surely have had some kernel of truth in them, about head cooks making off with quarters of beef in the trunks of their cars, and stuff of that sort. And I would have thought that that would have been the sort of stuff that the IG would have been empowered to investigate if he had wanted to. But apparently he didn't want to.

So I reported for duty in the early part of June, and I found that the staff consisted of the so-called Inspector General who was not a General, in fact he wasn't even a full Colonel, he was a what they call a Leaf Colonel (he had an Oak leaf made from silver on his shoulder rather than a silver Eagle).

David: Where was he located?

Henry: He was in the main Fort; the main Fort in Saint Louis Washington consisted of brick buildings, permanent buildings. The North Fort where we took basic training was in temporary barracks. And as I found out, there was also a South Fort. He was assisted by a First Lieutenant, and a Staff Sergeant. And I, the Clerk General. I was taking the place of a civilian woman who

had been there as a clerk typist, but I gather that they had to decide to get along without her because I think she was a boozier. They didn't have that problem with me.

Well, I soon found out that as a practical matter 80 or 90% of the cases that the IG was supposed to deal with consisted of men from South Fort Louis, which was in fact a ghetto reserved exclusively for negroes, as they called them in those days. And this was something of a revelation and a shock to me because I had never seen it in actual practice, and it hadn't occurred to me to wonder why they didn't have any negroes taking Basic Training with us whites. Well, they had their own separate Basic Training in South Fort Louis. And that's also where they had their barracks if they had a permanent job on the post; and they found those jobs were exclusively limited to the most subservient of things to do like collecting garbage and working in the Post laundry, and stuff like that.

And the reason that they came to the IG and complained is that they had enlisted after the war was over; they had been talked into re-enlisting for three year periods by a recruiting sergeant who was in fact a kind of bounty hunter I think, who was paid a commission for everyone he signed up for a three year enlistment. And he promised them that they would be assigned to the European theater which of course they would have much preferred even if they would have – regardless of the type of work they were to do there – at least they wouldn't be discriminated against by the surrounding community. Because almost all of these guys came from the South, and when it came time for them to file a complaint they were at a serious disadvantage because of their lack of education in the so-called separate but equal system that they had in the South.

Well, the practice that the woman before me had followed was to simply let them write down whatever they could and then copy it down on her typewriter without any changes at all in spelling or grammar, and many of them were almost incoherent. And I didn't think that was right, and so I began the practice of asking them to describe to me their problem and then ask them to write it as best they could, making little changes to make a story out of it that would really explain what they were complaining about. I didn't do very heavy editing but I did a little; let's put it that way.

Well, this was something of an epiphany for me. I've already mentioned in one of my earlier meetings that I had an epiphany when the news began to come out about the Nazi death camps and the millions of Jews they had gassed, and what a profound impact that had on me. And this was another profound impact, because we had just finished the war against Nazi Germany and the ideology of the Nazis of course was based on their theory of racial superiority, and here I saw before me feelings of racial superiority being acted out every day by the whites who ran Fort Louis Washington. Even though it was the farthest North of any major military

installation in the country, where you would think they might have been a little more enlightened than they were in the South.

So, I did my best to try to see that these guys got justice, which in theory the Inspector General was empowered to do. But as time went by it began increasingly to become clear to me that the Inspector General did not take that aspect of his authority seriously. He disposed of these cases – I think I’ve got it written down here – he notified the complainants by letter that the complaint had been referred to the proper authority, meaning in the case of somebody who had been promised deployment to Europe the responsible agency would have been something called Classification and Assignment, so the IG would pass the buck.

And if somebody filed a complaint, which occasionally one of these fellows did, that they were being fed slop in the mess halls of South Fort Louis, or as one of them put it “food fit only for dogs and hogs” (I must confess I refreshed my memory; I have a file here of about a hundred cases that I myself had something to do with). In such a case as a complaint about food, it would have been referred to the Quarter Master Corps, because they handled that sort of thing, so the Inspector General actually didn’t resolve anything, so far as I could tell.

And furthermore, as time went by, it seemed to me that the other three staff members of the office found it more and more convenient – since I was taking over the handling of these cases – that they could go to the Officer’s Club, in the case of the Colonel and the first lieutenant, and the NCO Club in the case of the Sergeant; and I would be there all alone for much of the day, with the burning desire to see justice done, but without any ability to actually get it done. So that was very demoralizing, and I didn’t take it well. I’m not good at dissembling. And the fact that I didn’t basically respect these other fellows I’m sure I was not able to hide; you know how that goes, you betray your feelings by your tone of voice or by your facial expression, and it is not taken well by the other party.

So, to make a long story – not a very long story, I don’t think I lasted more than about six weeks in that job, and that is a pity in a way, because in some ways it was an ideal job in which I could really deal with the nitty gritty of racial discrimination rather than as an abstraction. If I could have I would have stuck it out, but I just wasn’t psychologically capable of it.

So it didn’t really come as a surprise to me when I was told by the Sergeant one day that they were going to have to make a change. Now, this gets to be somewhat interesting because at this time there were three other fellows from Paly High who were all there at Fort Louis at the same time, two of who were juniors when I was a senior, both of whom were quite good friends of mine. And the third was none other than Dick Jennings, who kept turning up everywhere that I was. And lo and behold, one of the fellows who had been a junior (his name was Jose), was also a clerk typist or clerk general/whatever and I guess there weren’t too many

of us with that qualification in that entire fort, so he was picked to be my replacement in the office of the Inspector General. And in fact he filled it very successfully, because he was a very cheerful fellow who didn't have any deep feelings about social causes, which apparently is required in the bureaucracy.

I went back to the waiting list and by now I was really at war with the Army, so to speak. I was disgusted by the whole institution, and began rebelling against it in ways that I could. For example, the post commander, a brigadier General I think, issued an order every day for the uniform of the day and there were basically two uniforms possible; one consisted of wool and was called olive drab, and the other consisted of cotton and it was called suntan. And it was completely arbitrary apparently as to which he chose on any given day.

And there came a day when it was warm, quite warm which is unusual for that area of the country, and he ordered olive drab uniforms, meaning that they were all wool. And I sweated it out as best I could during the day but during the evening I thought it was silly, and there was an event that I wanted to attend at the post gymnasium where there were going to be amateur boxing matches between enlisted men one of whom was my friend from Paly High Jose Rayal (sp?), who was a lightweight – and these boxing matches were with pillows in effect, so nobody got hurt, it was just for entertainment.

So, I wanted to see this match, so I wore the olive drab trousers but I wore a suntan shirt which I covered up with a jacket of some approved variety, and a military policeman spotted me on the way in and wrote me up. So when I got back to the company I was put on KP. And there were other things, I can't even remember all of them, but there were days that went by when I and others who were awaiting assignment were just sitting around twiddling our thumbs reading the magazines or whatever and the whole day would go by with nobody being called for assignment. So, my old friend (well, sometime friend I should say) Dick Jennings, had some sort of a cushy job – some sort of administrative job in the motor pool I believe it was – where he was able to duck out for hours at a time with nobody raising any question. So, he asked me if I would like to play golf with him. Fort Louis of course, like all major installations, had its own golf course. So, I thought I could get away with it for two or three hours and we did play a round of golf – I think I shot 100, which wasn't too bad.

But there again, when I got back I found that there had come a call for somebody with my MOS and this time I had to fabricate some excuse; I didn't want to implicate my "friend" (quote, unquote) Dick Jennings, and so this time I was restricted to the post for a weekend or two; and to make sure I didn't wander I was given the job of manning the company office, to handle any visitors that might come by and make sure that I kept my nose clean. Well, I didn't keep it totally clean, because I discovered in the company commander's desk a stack of blank weekend passes, and I helped myself to one of those blanks (laughter). For future reference. I can't

remember the exact sequence of events. There came a time when I did fill out this pass to enable me to go to Seattle for a weekend; when it came time to sign the company commander's name I had a failure of nerve and I asked Dick Jennings to sign it for me, and he did.

Well, a few more weeks went by and the company commander called for a shakedown inspection of the barracks. I don't know what they were looking for; maybe it was a routine matter, just a matter of following protocol. But we had to stand by our beds and we each had a foot locker and they went through the contents of the foot locker with care, and then they asked to see the contents of our wallets. And lo and behold, I had forgotten to dispose of the weekend pass to Seattle which was now obsolete, but it did bear the signature of the company captain. And, since he was conducting the inspection, of course he recognized that that was not his true signature; and being a good soldier I couldn't rat on my sometime friend Dick Jennings, so I took the blame for it and this time I had a court-martial.

It sounds more serious than it is – there are different gradations of court-martial, this was not a very formal proceeding. It was heard by one fellow company commander, and there was only one witness and that was my company commander testifying that this was not his signature. So, I was reduced in rank from private first class to plain private, sometimes known as a buck private, and I was also fined a couple of months pay which wasn't very much in those days. But I was afraid it was going to go on my permanent record, but when it came time for my discharge I was given an honorable discharge.

Now, back to the subject of the assignment that I was eventually given, it was in the, I guess the very bottom of the barrel of the entire world of general clerking – and that was in the filing section of their records – as you may or may not have heard there are an awful lot of memorandum constantly circulating in bureaucracies, perhaps more in the military than any other area. So, these would flow in daily to be filed in some particular place; and so that was my job. And by now I was through with trying to defeat the Army at its own game; I couldn't outsmart it and so I began diverting myself to reading these memoranda and I became particularly intrigued by the possibility that there might be a loophole somewhere that would entitle me to a discharge.

And I couldn't figure out how that might possibly be, but eventually it did seem as though by combining the time that I had spent in the inactive service attending Stanford University and my active serviced at Fort Louis Washington, that I could qualify for discharge. And I began writing to various levels of the bureaucracy to pursue this possibility, and eventually, by golly, it enabled me to get a discharge on November 30th of 1946. Which I much later found was not such a smart idea after all, because it represented a little bit less than a full year equivalent to active service and when I got my discharge I was dismayed to read in the fine print

“recommended for further military duty”, which later came back to bite me. But for the time being it did enable me to get back to home in time for the holidays.

Now there’s one other epiphany that took place during this period at Fort Louis Washington. When I was awaiting my discharge around the end of November, I was reading magazines as I often did in the post library; I can’t at this date remember for the life of me the name of the magazine itself, it might have been Newsweek, it almost certainly wasn’t Time magazine because at that time it was edited by Henry Lewis who was very conservative. This was a favorable or sympathetic or at least objective treatment of an article about an organization called Student Federalists, founded by a high school kid named Harris Wofford back in New York. And the object of the organization was to try to modify the United Nations into something more effective because it wouldn’t permit a veto power by the Soviet Union or the United States or China or Britain or I guess France – which was written into the United Nations’ charter. In short, the Student Federalists advocated a world government, which was a really effective government in all respects including a legislature and an executive and a judicial, and I thought that made eminently good sense. So I remembered that, and as years went by acted upon it to quite an extent, an even more active extent than I did my pursuit of racial justice and what I considered to be justice for the Jews.

So, I returned by train from Washington to the Bay Area and dropped in unannounced to surprise my brother who was working in downtown Palo Alto at that time at a photo shop, and then the two of us dropped in on my mother who was living in Los Altos (in the middle of a five acre apricot orchard). She had left the nursery school and was now getting by on having a couple or maybe three kids at a time in this big old house in the Los Altos hills.

I tried to get back into Pomona College in the middle of the school year, but found that that was not possible. So then I looked into the situation at Stanford, and because of the fact Stanford was on a quarter system and Pomona was on a semester system, I was able to get into Stanford under the GI Bill of Rights, beginning in January of 1947. And I was very much at sixes and sevens as to what I was going to major in. When I had been a freshman at Pomona I had thought I was going to be an Art major, but since I became interested in social causes I was in a sense radicalized by my brief stint in the Army, so I gave up any idea of spending my life as a painter.

Among other courses I took at Stanford was Introduction to Sociology; well, that further radicalized me, even though the Professor was no radical in any usual sense of the term, but at least he opened my eyes to all kinds of possible alternatives to established politics. I believe I mentioned last time that at Pomona one of my suite mates had been a very active Republican, and I was so young and malleable at that time that I was influenced by him. But that was all taken out of me by the time I was at Stanford in the Spring of 1947. As a hobby I continued to

do some painting; I took a course in short story writing and had a fair success at that, although the instructor was a very tough grader.

I continued to attend Stanford in the summer session of 1947; I was trying to make up for the time that I had been out of school in the Army. I did not want to lose an entire year, so then in the Fall of '47 I enrolled once again in Pomona – this time as a junior. I had made up enough credits. I wasn't able to get into an upper class dormitory, so I was sharing rooms in the same freshmen unit of Clarke Hall that I had occupied when I was a freshman and because of that proximity I met a young fellow named Bill O'Connell (sp?) who purely serendipitously I learned was very interested in the Student Federalists. So I got to know him and we got to talking, and decided it was time to try to organize a chapter of Student Federalists at Pomona College. And I was very reluctant about taking a leadership role because of the fiasco of my senior year at Paly High, but because I was a junior and Bill was only a freshman, he prevailed upon me to take the lead.

So I guess I put an article in the college paper that there would be a meeting to be held in the student union on such and such a date for anyone interested, with a very brief description of the purpose. And I suppose six or eight people showed up and I suppose that we felt that was enough to start a chapter. Oh, I remember now, the ground rules were such you could have a chapter at a high school or college of Student Federalists if you had ten members, so we signed up these six persons and told them to try to find three or four other people and then we would apply for a charter and so that's what happened. And I was appointed or elected or somehow or other became Chairman, and there I was again in a position of having to fill a very uncomfortable role, although I was a little better prepared than I had been at Paly High, I will say that. I was a couple of years older and learned a little about Robert's Rules of Order and blah blah blah.

So, we would hold meetings, have speakers; we organized a debate between a representative of the adult World Federalists in Los Angeles who was happy enough to debate somebody from the Pomona Poli Sci Department who was happy to say that we were all living in cloud Cuckoo land in so many words. We put on a radio program inspired by Orson Welles and his program on the so called War of the Worlds in which he put on a fake of an invasion of New Jersey by a space ship from Mars, and it created quite a stir in the 1930's. So we did something based on that I believe; I can't remember all the details, but anyway we had a thing going. I took a lot of courses in politics and international relations, history, because I guess I thought maybe I could go into the field of amending the United Nations or something of this sort. At the same time, I was taking all the sociology that I could, with an emphasis on race relations. So I guess I had kind of a double major. I continued to do a little art on the side, and during my summer vacations.

In '48, I believe, I took time out for a trip to Texas – another trip to Texas – I had been on one in '37 by train. This time my Aunt had driven out of Texas, her chauffeur was my cousin Jack, he was driving her brand new Buick and it enabled her to see Muir Woods and all of those sorts of things in the Bay Area, and then the four of us drove back together. And this time I had a chance to see what life was really like in a Southern town – the town of Sweetwater. And it was – I knew what to expect, but even so it made me mad. Because it was of course two towns with a railroad running between them, and on one side of the railroad there were no street lights, no sidewalks, it was just a third world.

And so I got into it with my poor Aunt who was living in a very nice house – she had sold her interest in her ranch, she was a widow by this time, her husband had been a very successful rancher. And, furthermore, oil had been – they thought they might find oil on that ranch property so they took out a lease for which they paid, and I don't believe they eventually did find oil, but the lease enabled her to leave the ranch in her declining years and she bought this very nice house in the best part of Sweetwater. And she had a colored maid come in every day and so forth. So there came a time when she and my mother and I were visited by her children, my uncles (?) I guess they were. And we got into a discussion of race, and it was – I'm sure it was just terribly, terribly embarrassing to my mother and to my Aunt, while the men and I had it out and of course neither of us convinced the others.

Well now – well I should say something about the five acres of apricots. I can't remember the exact summers, but the harvesting of those apricots was handled in different ways on different years. Sometimes, somebody from the Gerber baby food company would come around and make an offer; they would handle everything, they would harvest the crop and do with it as they will. And that was fine, but then there came a time when I thought that maybe we should try drying them, which is what some of our neighbors were doing. Apparently there was more of a market for that than for baby food. So we went down to the employment office in Palo Alto and found high school kids who were willing to work either cutting apricots for drying, and we hired a couple of girls for that, and we found a fellow who would be doing the picking; all of this to be done at piece (?) rates. And my brother built a little tar paper shack in which the trays of halved apricots at the end of each day's cutting would be smoked by sulphur as a preservative, after which they would be taken out into rows between the trees and dried in the sun.

And that's how that summer was passed, at least the bulk of it; the harvest didn't last very many weeks, but it was a major operation, and then at the end of it a neighbor loaned me a truck in which I drove the boxes of dried apricots to a processing plant in San Jose; I'd never driven a truck before but I managed and the whole thing paid about six hundred dollars. In spite of the fact that I felt so badly about these high school kids being paid at what seemed to me to be a pittance, and so every time it came time for me to punch a card, each punch representing

one crate of halved 'cots or one bucketful of picked 'cots, I would always sneak in an extra punch of two. Even so, I made money, and with the six hundred dollars I bought my first car, which I then drove down to Pomona for my senior year.

Let me see what time it's getting to be. About six thirty?

So, that brings us to my senior year. By now, the fat was in the fire and I had decided to major in Sociology, and I made a specialty in race relations. So I had a seminar in which I and another Soc major were to work together on a study of housing in the South Central section of Los Angeles. Which is now, I understand, occupied by Latinos but at that time was occupied almost exclusively by blacks (or Negroes or whatever they were called at the time). And I was still chairman of the Pomona chapter of Student Federalists and we kept chugging along. And I entered a contest awarded by the Department of Government called the Cordell Hull prize. Cordell Hull had been the Secretary of State under the Roosevelt administration. And I won that prize, even though I was not a Government major.

I have also neglected to mention that 1948 was a presidential election year. Now, in '44 I had not been able to vote – well I was far from 21, nobody in '44 was even thinking about lowering the voting age – in '48 the voting age was still 21, although I think that it was about to be changed to 18, but as luck would have it I was still one month short of being 21. So, I was still not able to vote although that was a really, really fascinating Presidential election if there had ever been one; I think there's never going to be another one like it.

Truman was President; he was running against Thomas Dewey for the second time, well the first time it had been Roosevelt and Truman and then Roosevelt died. People were mad at Harry Truman for all kinds of reasons. One of them, of course, being that he was too liberal, and I must say that Truman himself desegregated the armed forces after I had left Fort Louis, so I thought that was highly commendable. But on the other hand, he had instituted various kinds of cracking down on political dissent, as represented by the Communist Party and the Socialist Worker's Party and the Industrial Workers of the World, and so forth and so on. So the segregationists put up a third party candidate named Strom Thurmond who ran as a States' rights Dixie-crat, and the left wing ran a fourth party called the Progressive Party led by Henry Wallace.

It didn't appear that Truman had a chance, even if it hadn't been for these third and fourth party splinter groups; the fact is that Dewey was so popular that the polls all showed him ahead by 10 or 20 points, whatever it was. The pollsters, they stopped taking polls, it was so one-sided. And as you may know by now it was the biggest upset that I guess there's ever been. And the pollsters will never make that mistake again, they're going to keep studying it right down to

the final hour. But of course there are many other changes since then. I don't even want to think about what's happened to the political discourse these days.

In any event, it came time for me to start thinking about a graduate school. The best department of Sociology in the country was at the University of Chicago. And I applied there but with the requirement that I needed some financial aid. I was still entitled to some tuition under the GI Bill of Rights but I would have needed help with the room and board, and books and so forth. So, I suppose I could have gotten into the University of Chicago graduate school on the strength of my being a Phi Beta Kappa and so forth, but they didn't have any money. So, as a fall-back position I had applied to the University of Hawaii, which had only one thing really going for it in my universe of discourse, and that was they were quite interested in racial and ethnic relations. And lo and behold, they offered me a full ride as a TA, so even though I knew virtually nothing about the Hawaiian Islands, I accepted that. So, I graduated from Pomona in Spring of 1949.

Oh, if you've got a couple more minutes, one other big change in my life took place at Pomona during the period of time that we have covered. I took a course in music appreciation. I thought I appreciated music because I was familiar with all of the great tunes from Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff and others that had been made into pop songs, but in this course I learned that in fact all of those pretty melodies were in the original parts of a musical texture which was very much more complicated than anything dreamed of by Tin Pan ally, so I learned about Sonata form and Rondo form, theme and variations, etc. etc., and I found that I had a good memory for such things; the Professor's exams took the form of playing brief excerpts from the development sections of a Beethoven symphony, or Haydn or Mozart or whatever. And sometimes the theme on which the development was based was a little hard to pluck out, but I did very well.

And so the following year I was offered the job of being a kind of – well technically all I was supposed to do was play records for the students during certain hours of the day they were free to come in and listen to the works that were under study at the time – but I got into discussions with these students about the music as well as just playing phonograph records, so I enjoyed that very much. And I've been bemused ever since by hearing something played on the radio that I recognize from those days. A theme from the Surprise Symphony by Haydn, and so on and so forth. Anyway, that brings us up to the end of the summer of 1949, and this will be continued next week.