

# USCG Loran Station ESTARTIT, SPAIN

May 1973 - June 1975



## Chapter 5

### **SPAIN, THE THIRD TIME AROUND USCG LORSTA ESTARTIT .....May 1973 – June 1975.....**

In January 1973 I was released from my banishment to a remote, isolated island in Alaska and allowed to return to civilization and the welcoming arms of my family. After I had my leave time in Florida (a real opportunity to thaw out), I had to leave again to go to CG Base Governor's Island to attend a familiarization course in the Loran equipment that was in use at the Loran Station at Estartit, Spain. This equipment was of an earlier design than the timers and transmitters I was accustomed to. After this course I returned to Florida, oversaw the packing of our household goods and the sale of our house in Hobe Sound Shores.

On the subject of the household goods shipment...MedSec had told me to definitely make certain that the shipping destination was Estartit, Spain. I conveyed this info to the Storekeeper in Seventh Coast Guard District Office, but he ignored this and our possessions were shipped to Naples Italy. More on this situation later.

We set out to drive our car to New Jersey so we could have it shipped to Spain. We were scheduled to fly to Spain on Pan Am out of New York. We diverted to go via Asheville, NC so we could have a brief visit with my parents. After this visit we resumed our trip, and we were only an hour on the road when my 1968 VW Type 2 fastback blew its engine. I guess I had worn it out running between Jupiter and the CGC Hollyhock in Miami for 14 months! I gave the car to my dad and we continued our trek on a commercial flight. I guess our trip was starting to be under less than auspicious circumstances.

In due time we did arrive at the International Terminal in New York and we were finally on our way. Keep in mind, Pat & I were traveling with Lisa (just turned 12 years old) and Debbie (almost 6 yrs old). We knew we would be living in a hotel for several weeks until our household goods arrived, so we had to have a considerable amount of luggage. In fact, we had a total of 14 pieces of luggage.....at least half of these were carry-on pieces. I would hate to attempt this trip now with all the security precautions in air terminals. I sort of assigned each member of my party several pieces of luggage to be their personal responsibility and at frequent intervals had a luggage count to make certain that none had strayed, kids or baggage.

As I said above, we flew out on Pan Am to Madrid, and from there we took a train to Barcelona. From Barcelona we continued the trip via taxi cab to Estartit. When we did get to Estartit, I found that we had been booked into a small family-owned hotel in Estartit. Pat & I had one room and the girls were in another. Estartit itself was a small beachside town, very tourist-orientated. In the winter, the town had a permanent population of approximately 500-800 people. In the summertime the population rapidly grew to 10 times this number. Estartit was a vacation destination for a lot of Scandinavian, German, and English tourists. Most came for two weeks, but some stayed on until they ran out of money. The single troops at the station that had apartments in town generally opened their apartments as a haven to various girls who came on vacation and needed a place to stay after their hotel reservations ran out. Here we have another example of American military personnel going the extra mile to lend assistance to people in need!!!

The station itself was located on a rather flattened-off mountain above the town, overlooking the Bay of Rosas. When I saw the buildings I realized that the station was built to the same design/plans as was LorSta Estaca de Vares. The barracks and quarters was almost the same, except there were

two barracks wings instead of the one at Estaca de Vares. The messdeck was larger, as was the galley and storage area. The Signal/Power Building was larger to accommodate the Loran C equipment and was the mirror reverse of what had been built at Estaca. The crew was twice the complement that we had at LorSta Estaca de Vares, but this was to be expected as Loran C operation requires more personnel. The station also had a small exchange where many personal items were for sale. There was a small number of retired US Army and Air Force personnel living in the region that used our exchange as a source of American cigarettes, toiletry items, candy, etc. The days of a log flight by CG C-123 were in the past. We had a monthly logistics trip by a contract refrigerated truck that brought our commissary & exchange supplies from Torrejon Air Base in Madrid. In Feb 1974 I became the Exchange manager and held this position until I rotated back to the States.

The dependent wives were allowed to purchase from the station commissary as well as place special orders for favorite food items. Many of the wives also bought fresh produce, dairy products wine, & bakery goods on the local economy. I was rather leery of local meat, so in our case, Pat ordered our meat through the commissary. However, we had no qualms about eating local food in the restaurants.

I found my duties would be more in the department admin area, as Chief Alvord did not enjoy paperwork, and preferred to work on the equipment. This was his second or third tour at Estacit and he was very familiar with the equipment, whereas I had no real experience with this older generation of timers and transmitters. I was put into the OOD rotation list with the other first class and senior second class petty officers.

The second year our CO decided to have the dependent children attend school on station in lieu of the long taxi ride that they had been taking. Also, the number of dependent children was growing so it would be necessary to lease several taxis for school transportation. Mr. Orchard offered his (and the XO quarters) to be utilized as a school and my wife, Pat, was hired as the school teacher. She had a three room school house to teach grades K-8 and had about a dozen students. The Calvert School curriculum went only thru the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the dependent children entering the ninth grade were expected to be sent to the Air Force dependent boarding school at Zaragoza Air Base. This most definitely ended any thoughts we had of extending our tour for a third year as I was not about to even think of sending a 14 year old daughter to reside on a distant Air Base alone in a boarding school situation.

There was no real playground area so the students were allowed to go into the fenced tennis court area to play tag, dodge ball, and other games requiring physical activity so they could work off some energy. Some of the kids had roller skates (the old-fashioned kind that were strapped onto ordinary shoes). One particular day when they went out to play there was a pretty stiff wind blowing. Debbie was about the youngest of the school students and the older kids were trying to teach her to skate. She had learned to stand up and as long as she did not move could remain upright. As she was standing in the middle of the tennis courts waiting for her instructor to pull or push her along, one of the boys shouted for her to open her long coat she was wearing. She did so and a strong gust of wind treated her as if she were a sailboat. She went zipping across the court area at a healthy speed, without the vaguest idea of how to stop and none of the other kids were close enough to grab her. She wheeled along until she reached the new sidewalk on the end where the deck force had just filled the forms with fresh concrete. SPLATT !!!! Fortunately, there were no injuries beyond her pride.

In Spain, there is a National Police organization known as the Guardia Civile. They answer directly to the national government in Madrid. They live in a barracks type situation with their families. They are discouraged to become friendly with any local citizens. To this end they can not ever be

stationed in their home province. As a result, they often became friendly with the American military personnel assigned in their area. This held true in Estartit. The "Teniente" that was the area commander was a frequent visitor to the station, to the extent it became almost a routine occurrence for him to come by the station at about 10 PM as he made his rounds through his area of responsibility. We generally just "happened" to have several steaks marinating in the refrigerator, so the OOD always invited him to join in a snack. His driver generally hinted that he would not be averse to looking at the latest issue of the forbidden *Playboy* or *Penthouse* magazines. We got them thru the US mail as subscriptions, but on Spanish territory these were very illegal. The Teniente also enjoyed Kung Fu movies, so we always tried to have one available to put on the projector for his entertainment. He spoke very little English, but the movies had very little dialogue necessary in order to follow the action. All this paid off when one of our crew ran afoul the law, or when knowing the "Top Cop" in the area was a handy thing.

Our station had no government weapons, but several of us had brought our personal weapons with us. I was no exception; I had arrived with my favorite Ruger .22 - .22 magnum single action revolver. We had set to a target range and I had several of the crew on the range where we were plinking at tin cans. This was unofficial target shooting to keep our hand in so that when we returned to the States requalification would not be too difficult. The Teniente saw what we were doing and challenged us to a target shooting match with his pistol team. I explained that we would like to accept the challenge, but we had no weapons. Not to worry, we could use their pistols. Just great.....we would be upholding our national and service honor shooting with totally unfamiliar guns with no opportunity to practice with them.

However, when the contest ended the Coast Guard team won overwhelmingly. Our lowest scorer had a higher score than the entire Spanish team combined. The Teniente then challenged us to another shoot-off.....with their rifles!!! Again, he came up with a whole new team. After the scores were added up the American team once more thoroughly humiliated our opponents. Again, our lowest scorer had a higher score than the entire Guardia team combined. One of my most treasured souvenirs of Spain is a Guardia Civile key chain the Teniente had bought as a prize to the highest score. The following week EL Teniente returned with a third team, this time armed with submachine guns. There was no offer of a contest; instead, they just demonstrated what they could do with their "pocket" machine guns!

When we had dental or medical problems we had to go to the Air Force hospital at Zaragoza, a drive of about 8-10 hours. The Coast Guard decided to purchase a locally manufactured Ebro van for station transportation. The thinking was that by having Spanish-built vehicle maintenance and repair would be simplified. However, this was not the case. The van was poorly designed and assembled. It had with a very noisy diesel engine in the cab area, separating the driver and front passenger seats. It was so loud that conversation between the driver and front seat passenger was impossible except by shouting. I recall that on one of these trips we discovered the engine was leaking fuel and diesel fuel was sloshing all over our shoes in the front seats.

I took the annual servicewide exam for Chief in Sept '73 for the December promotion cycle and when the results were posted I was number 23 on a list of 67, but the cutoff was number 12. Then in Sept. of '74 I took the exam again, but felt that a promotion was not in my immediate future so I was STUNNED when I was informed that as of 1 Oct, 1974 I was a Chief Petty Officer; having been promoted off the "straggler list" from the 1973 exam list. Mr. Koehler (the XO) contacted friends in Coast Guard Activities Europe Office in London and obtained some CPO collar brass for me. MKC Dave Johns donated a spare khaki cap for me and I send out a SOS to my parents to go immediately

to Sears there at home and purchase a several khaki shirts and work pants for me until I could get some proper ones from Lighthouse Uniforms Mail Order Company. I believe I was one of the very last of the "khaki" chiefs as I was given a partial allowance to buy khaki work uniforms, The new chiefs that were promoted off the Dec '74 list did not get any clothing allowance as by then the new universal uniform was fully adopted. I did order immediately a khaki windbreaker. In my mind, this particular uniform item signified most the office of "chieftom". When it arrived, I proudly wore it to work. As luck would have it, I had to inspect the antenna guy wires. The ET gang had greased them the day before and we wanted to be certain that it had been done properly. I went out to the antenna field and a gust of wind whipped a gob of new grease off the guy wire and splattered it all over my brand new jacket. I was sick.....it would be a while until I could afford to replace it and the "shininess" was off my promotion. It was sort of like the first ding on your brand new car.

Now that I was a CPO I was off the OOD duty list rotation, but as there were relatively few senior petty officers I still pulled OOD as a fill-in. One evening when I had the duty I wandered down to the timer room and relieved the watch so the watchstander could go up and fix a snack. I was idly passing the time communicating with the other stations on the teletype circuit when the watchstander at Simeri Chrichi, Italy asked how we were able to communicate on the TTY. I explained how his signal went out on the Italian telephone system wires to a junction station where the signal was put onto an underwater cable that came to Spain. Once the cable came ashore the signal was put onto the Spanish telephone system and it came out on my printer. The young man thanked me for my explanation, and then he noted that the **NIK** TTY call sign was new to him; was I new to the station?

"No", I explained, I had been here for over almost a year and a half, but I normally did not stand watches. He then asked what my friends called me.

**C H I E F**, I typed in response.....then the TTY circuit was silent until I was relieved by the assigned watchstander when he came back from the galley and resumed his duties. For some reason, no one wanted to chat with me any more!!

As a senior petty officer living off station whose primary job was admin, I had very little interaction with the crew, so most of my memories are family orientated. I do recall having to deal as a liaison with the local authorities to resolve one incident. It seemed that some of our younger petty officers had gone on liberty into Estartit and had become rather intoxicated. They did not want to walk the several steep miles up the mountain to the station, so they took a taxi back. Normally, this would have no problem, but the taxi cab they took did not have a driver!!! The CO assigned me to be the investigation petty officer. I contacted the cab owner and had him to drop the charges if he was reimbursed for the loss of income that evening and was paid enough extra as a "tip". This was agreeable for all parties concerned, especially as our Coasties did NOT want to deal with the Spanish courts and justice system on charges that were the equivalent of Grand Theft, Auto. I then asked them just what in the world went thru their pickled brains to pull a stupid stunt like this.

"Well, Chief, when we didn't see a driver we thought it was some kind of self-service taxi!!!" A most interesting interpretation, but they could not explain just how the taxi was supposed to return itself back to the originating point after the passengers were delivered to their destination. The CO imposed a few restricted weeks a punishment.

The station always threw a big 4<sup>th</sup> of July party, and an open invitation was extended to some of our local friends, but the one year a large contingent of drunken male English tourists showed up and proceeded to consume vast amounts of the food and drink that the morale fund had bought. I decided to go to the station PA system and played at full volume Johnny Horton's song, "The Battle of New Orleans" over and over again. Then some of our crew joined in with the chorus, shouting out

the words.....

*'We fired our guns and the British kept a'comin.  
But there wasn't nigh as many as there was a while ago.  
We fired once more and they began to runnin'  
down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico.*

The hint was taken and our uninvited guests drifted off.

One of our crew members, ET3 Robin Orr (AKA New Kid) had been engaged to a local girl and when they got married the reception was held at the station. Mr. Orchard got permission from higher command to allow alcohol to be served and the bride's family seemed to have emptied out the local wine wholesalers stock of fine high grade wine and champagne. Robin went on to attend OCS and I am told that he returned for several subsequent tours as the Station CO, later retiring as a Lt. CDR. His is truly a success story as when he arrived at Estartit he was a SNEW having been released from ET school.

The wedding reception was outstanding and it was truly a melting of two cultures. Unfortunately, I do not remember much after about halfway through the festivities as I did not realize the potential effects of mixing glasses of champagne with white wine chasers. When I awoke the next morning, I found myself leaning against the wall of the shower in the chief's quarters where I had been placed by my brother chiefs so I could be easily cleaned up if I had any ill effects of my overindulgence. This was the last time I overused alcohol..... And I made a promise to myself that I would never again embarrass my family or myself by getting drunk.

As our tour was coming to an end it was time to go through the tradition of filling out our "Dream Sheet" as to what we wanted for our next assignment. Dave Johns had been showing us photos of the Upper Peninsular of Michigan. It looked absolutely beautiful and as since we had never been in that of the country I listed it as my number one choice with Jupiter, Florida and some other Ioran station as my second and third choices. After I had submitted this form Dave showed me some other photos of one of the stations on the lake. One showed the boat dock covered with several feet of snow sticking out into the iced-over lake. I casually asked, "I assume this photo was taken in January or February". Dave took it from me and looked at the notation on the reverse side. "No, this was taken in late April or early May." I decided right then and there I had not been fully informed of the normal weather patterns of Upper Michigan and thought that if I got my number one choice I was going to be unhappy.

Not to worry, most likely when my requests were received in Washington the detailer must have looked at them, recognized my name from our past dealings and decided that in no way is this man going to get his first, second, or third choices.....He is an ET, let's send him to a small boat station, that is definitely something he did not ask for.

When my orders came in on 20 March, 1975, they read:

.....**U.S. Coast Guard Station Ponce Inlet, Florida**.....

Now, all I had to do is dig out a map of Florida and try to locate just where Ponce Inlet was. I rapidly discovered it was NOT a recognized town or city, Detailed examination revealed that the inlet between Daytona Beach and New Smyrna Beach was called Ponce Inlet. I recalled from my childhood days that there was a Coast Guard station at New Smyrna Beach where we used to take our vacations. This had to be the place.....A quick message on the TTY to the CGSta Ponce Inlet confirmed that I was right. (I sort of felt like Br'er Rabbit, "Don't throw me in that briar patch, Mr. Detailer!!!")

Our household goods were packed and shipped to New Smyrna Beach, Florida, and we once again were residing in the hotel, waiting for the day to catch the train to Madrid. All I had left to attend to was to get the VW bus shipped. This was a potential problem. I was eligible to have my vehicle shipped at Government Expense, but one little clause was troublesome: In order for Private-Owned-Vehicle to be shipped to the States I had to have had a car shipped from the States originally. I had not brought a vehicle with me, as my car had blown its engine on its way to the port; so I was ready to have to pay for vehicle shipment out of my pocket. My other viable alternate solution would be to sell the car to a fellow crewman. I decided to further explore my options and made a trip to Barcelona to talk to the Spanish shipping agent that handled our shipments and acted as a liaison with Spanish customs. I knew the gentleman fairly well as I had been dealing with him for almost my entire tour in my capacity as the "Electronics Department Admin Petty Officer". Early on, he had advised me that he could deal better with customs if he could offer them little tokens of appreciation for their efforts in the form of American cigarettes. Therefore, I always made certain that I had several cartons when I visited him. I spoke of my vehicle shipping dilemma and he said that he was the final arbitrator of vehicle shipping eligibility and as far as he was concerned, I met all the requirements.

WELL....I was able to ship the bus home without any personal expense and when I delivered the vehicle to him I made certain that I had several cartons of Pall Mall cigarettes in it to express my appreciation for his efforts on my behalf.

The following is a list of most of those who I served with.....though not all listed were at the station at the same times. I know I am missing a few names. For some reason I appear to have lost my 1974 Station Christmas card, which would have more names to refresh my memory.

<b>CO</b> LT R.M. McAllister relieved by LTJG J.T. Orchard	<b>XO</b> CWO3 G.C. Koehler relieved by CWO R. Hayden
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<b>OPERATIONS</b>	<b>ADMIN &amp; DECK</b>	<b>ENGINEERING</b>
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ETC	G.E. Alvord	CS1	R.M. Jones	ENC	G.H. Lochner
ET1	R.L. Nahikian	CS1	relieved by	ENC	relieved by
ETC	as of 1 Oct '74	CS1	E.S. DeGuzman	ENC	D. Johns
ET2	C Ramirez	HM1	E. Garcia	EN1	Kirkowitz
ET2	R.J. Hurd	HM2	relieved by	EM1	S.J. Mckerley
ET2	O.J. Lopez	SK2	E.C. Hill	EM2	relieved by
ET2	J.T. Simpson	SK1	J.L. Peterson	EN2	J. Samonte
ET3	M.O. Robertson	BM3	relieved by	EN2	N. Gray
ET3	G.M. Ross	SN	R. Parsley	EN2	T.E. Atwood
ET3	W.W. Shaw	SN	R.J. Geismar	EN2	D.E. Sohlstrom
ET3	P.E. Middlekauf	SN	B.M. Edwards	EN2	G.A. Novak
ET3	V.D. Click	SN	G.C. Higgs	DC2	D.E. Lily
ET3	J. Hartzell	SN	K.W. Marrow	EN3	P.S. Hill
ET3	"Weasel"	SN	A.D. Andaya	FN	J.T. Engerson
ET3	R.H. Orr	SN	L.L. Couchmam	FN	T.F. McKinney
SNEW	Later made ET3 & then retired as a Lt.Cdr	SN	S.G. Smith	FN	R.W. Paul

<b>CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES</b>
Alberto Batalla Jose M. Muns Juan Turro Cesareo Quintana Juan Martinez



## Life on the local economy in Estartit

We found a house that we could rent and I checked with the station Storekeeper as to the approximate delivery date for our furniture. I was shocked to learn that no one in Med Sec office in Naples knew anything about my furniture. We would be staying on in the hotel until it could be located and delivered!! Later, I found that when the 7<sup>th</sup> District Office in Miami ignored the instructions to ship the HHG directly to Estartit, the shipment was sent to the US Navy in Naples. They did not know what to do with it as they did not know who I was or even more importantly, where I was. One man in the warehouse asked a CG buddy at the Air Station as to what to do with it. He was told that maybe I was stationed in Rhodes, Greece, so my shipment went there. When my HHG arrived in Rhodes, they knew it had been misaddressed, and thought that I must be at the other Monitor station, so my HHG were reshipped to the CG Loran Monitor Station on Sardinia. When they received it they contacted ComMedSec office in Naples and found out where I was assigned. Our furniture had quite a tour of the Mediterranean region. After almost three months of hotel living we were finally able to move into our home. The hotel was nice and the staff very friendly, but while I was going to work daily Pat and the girls had almost absolutely nothing to do all day long except to walk around in the small tourist-oriented village of Estartit. Fortunately, it was the summer season, so they did get a lot of beach time in. Pat also discovered a small used book store that had paperback books in many languages (including English) for sale.

Meals were included in our hotel stay (paid for by the Coast Guard), but Pat and the girls were tiring of a non-American fare. It was easier for me as I could eat breakfast and lunch at the station. Debbie was especially disgruntled. This five year old seemed to think that frozen waffles was the epitome of fine breakfast cuisine. Ever tried to explain what a waffle is in broken, highly inadequate Spanish? The nearest I could do is sort of describe it as bread with holes in it. This made absolutely no sense. They even tried to please her by serving her a small personally-made cake one morning. We did get them to do our egg frying in butter in lieu of their customary olive oil. It also took us a while to get used to the schedule that the evening dining hours did not start until 8 PM. I would return from work at about 4:30 PM and sort of sit in the lobby watching TV. (We had no TV in the rooms. Our room furnishings consisted of beds, dressers and a couple of chairs. This was a hotel designed to be a place to sleep at night after the tourist had spent all day and evening "touristing" in town or on the beach. It most definitely was not a place for extended living. The permanent staff consisted of the owners, their two married daughters and sons-in-law. They all were extremely thoughtful and tried to do all they could to make our stay pleasant.)

As I sat in the lobby with nothing to do but to stare at the TV or read a locally purchased second-hand paperback they would bring me a large pitcher of the house *sangria*. It was very good, but they would not share their recipe with me. We also tried to get across the concept of fried chicken as the Spanish only roast chickens. These were delicious, but we would have liked a variation in fare. Again, my effort at expanding their menu was a failure. They served fantastic *paella*, the local variation featured seafood as an ingredient. It was here that we discovered *calamares*. When we saw them being served we thought they were French-fried onion rings and ordered some. Our first bite was a surprise, but after the initial shock we found them to be delicious. Other *paella* variations featured snails as an ingredient. I learned to eat them, but had to block out my mind as to what I was putting in my mouth. I will not tell you that they tasted "just like chicken". They didn't. Another menu item we enjoyed was *catalonis*. This was a local variation of a shepherd's pie.

At long last, we were told that our HHG had been delivered to the port in Barcelona and would be delivered as soon as we ready. The house we rented was about halfway between Estartit and Torrella. It was in a developing subdivision. Our landlord lived in a small apartment while we had an apartment on the second floor. There a first floor bedroom that Lisa occupied down stairs while we

had two bedrooms, a bathroom, small living room and a large kitchen upstairs. There was also a relatively large balcony. Heat was furnished by a fireplace in the living room. There was a tankless gas (butane) hot water heater located in the kitchen. When the hot water was turned on the heater "fired off" and the water pipe ran through the flame to become rather lukewarm. The hot water pipe to the bathroom went out through the kitchen wall, ran halfway around the house and reentered into the bathroom.

Needless to say, in the winter, this water was not hot, or even warm. By the time it went outside and reentered it was rather cold. Bathing required that water be heated on the stove in large pots and carried to be poured into the tub. Spain may be referred to as "Sunny Spain" and this is true, but in the winter, Spain is cold!!!!!!!!!!

Morning routine was interesting to people who know only central heat. The alarm clock goes off and I get up from under plies of blankets. At night we always extinguished the fires and heaters to prevent fires and the possibility of carbon monoxide poisoning.

I start the fire in the fireplace, go into the kitchen and turn on the gas stove and oven to start taking the chill out of that room. Then I light the kerosene-burning heater in the bathroom. (Often, the surface of the water in the commode was frozen, so I have to break up this thin ice). I also light the portable butane heater in the living room, placing it so the girls can stand between it and the fireplace to get dressed. As a result of standing between this butane heater and the fireplace, all of our bathrobes, etc had scorch marks, burn marks from sparks, and melted areas.

Our neighbors were an eclectic group. Next door we had an English couple with three children, a daughter about a year younger than Lisa and two sons, both older than Debbie. Another couple nearby was comprised of an English wife and a Catalan husband. This was a multi-lingual household. Both the husband and wife had been employed as UN translators in Geneva. They had several boys about the same age or younger than Deb. Deb was quite a tomboy and soon took over as the "Leader of the Band". I was hoping she would learn Spanish by the "Total Immersion Method", but instead the local children used her to perfect their English. Later, we did enroll her in a local parochial kindergarten, but this was a fiasco. She is left-handed, and the nuns were determined to change this. Also, the locals did NOT speak Spanish. They spoke Catalan among themselves, so Deb did not flourish in this environment. After a week we decided this was a poor idea.

The manager of RADIO LIBERTY, Mr. Phillips, extended an invitation for the American dependent kids to attend the school his company operated in his estate in Llafranch. The study materials were from a correspondence course offered by the Calvert School. Radio Liberty provided the class room area and paid the salaries of the two teachers who helped the students. Our dependent children traveled the 20 plus miles one way trip via taxi. This was an expense that the Coast Guard covered.

The eldest Phillip girl was a year younger than my oldest daughter Lisa, while the younger girl was very close in age to my youngest daughter Debbie. The two Phillips girls were multi-lingual. Mrs. Phillips was of German descent, and spoke read, and wrote fluent German, English, French, Russian, Italian, and Mandarin Chinese. In the home the language until 8 AM was English. From 8 AM to noon they spoke French, noon to 4 PM German was spoken, and Spanish was used from 4 PM until 8 PM. They spoke the local Catalan when in town. I was always amazed to watch these young girls switch flawlessly from one language to another, depending on who they were talking to. I am told that all school assignments the girls had were done in English, French, Spanish, and German.

When we went shopping "on the local economy" we generally went into the larger town of Torrella de Montgri. Torrella had the many shops required for daily life. Refrigeration in a Spanish home was not too common, so a housewife had to purchase foodstuff almost daily. The stores were very specialized; meat was bought in a *carneceria* (butcher shop), bread came from the *panderia* (bread shop), pastries were found in a bakery, but I do not recall the Spanish word. Vegetables came from another shop, while fruit came from still another. Wine was a separate shop, and dairy products were found in a *lecheria* (milk store). For the serious gift giver there was a *joyeria* (jewelry store). There were clothing shops for men, for women, and for children. Shoes were found in a *zapateria*. We did not buy many of the local clothes, as styles and sizes were not very suitable. We relied on the Sears catalog and mail order system.

Every sizable village or town had a "*Mercado*". This is a market day, very similar to a farmers market here in the States. Booths were set up on the central square and the traveling merchants put their wares on display. The local farmers also were selling their produce. In December there was a special Christmas Market Day, specializing in toys, gifts, and decorations. The Spanish had not fully accepted the custom of decorating Christmas trees as we do, and they leaned more towards the elaborate Nativity scenes. Santa does NOT come on Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are recognized as days of worship only, with no exchanges of gifts. The Three Wise Men arrive on Jan 6<sup>th</sup> to distribute rewards to all well behaved children.

I noticed that the American kids quickly latched onto the idea of Jan 6<sup>th</sup>/3 Wise Men, but they also thought that Santa should continue to come on Christmas Eve; sort of "Double your pleasure, double to your fun". TWO days of gift receiving is a much better idea than only one!!!!

One thing I always enjoyed when in town was the opportunity to buy *churros*. These were a sensibly designed doughnut affair, fried battered dough covered with sprinkled sugar. They were about ¾ inch in diameter, but instead of being round with a center hole, they were about 8-9 inches long and much better designed for coffee dunking or simply eating.

For family entertainment we attended movies at the station (when what was offered was acceptable for under 15 year old viewers), but we mainly played board and card games in the house in the evenings. We had no television, and even if we did have one, the programming was in Spanish, naturally!

Lisa spent a lot of time with the other dependent kids in her age group, while Debbie played with the neighborhood kids. Language did not appear to be much of a barrier, as most spoke a bit of English. The dependent families often had picnics and we played modified softball and volleyball. The younger local Spaniards sometimes joined in these ball games. They did not really understand softball, and when playing volleyball they sort of turned it into some kind of soccer with a net. returning volleys by hitting the ball with their heads, shoulders, knees, or feet!!!

As often as we could, we made trips to local attractions, visiting medieval castle ruins, ancient monasteries, medieval villages, pre-Roman Phoenician and Greek settlement ruins, Roman ruins, etc. Many of these sites were being restored.

My daughters did learn a bit of Spanish.....On one occasion we were eating in a local restaurant and I ordered a menu item named *Mono en Caballo*. Lisa recognized the word Caballo and was horrified that I was ordering some kind of horsemeat. I had to explain that the dish was a slang term; "monkey on horseback". In an American diner the waitress would have brought a steak with fried eggs on top of the meat.

In later years (many years later) I found out how Debbie and her little band of locals traveled from our house into Torrella or Estarrit. There was no public transportation, so they hitched a ride on the back of the garbage truck!!!!!! Here I must explain that in Spain children could wander just about anywhere in perfect safety. Everyone sort of kept an eye on the playing children and the dangers we have here in modern American of predators preying on children was totally unheard of there. If such a thing had occurred the perpetrator would have been sentenced to a grisly form of execution. For a heinous crime the death penalty was carried out with the garrote...an iron band placed around the neck with large thumbscrews that were slowly tightened by hand until enough pressure was applied to break the neck. Executions were carried out very soon after the trial and sentencing .....None of this nonsense of years of appeals on grounds of legal loopholes....

My twenty years was almost up and we briefly considered the notion of retiring in Spain. I knew we could live fairly well on just my retirement. Spain was very friendly towards US retired Military. They allowed us tax free cars, no income taxes, and we had full use of all US facilities such as the Base Exchange, commissary, medical and dental. The drawback was that we would be (in effect) cutting ties with our families. Also retiree foreigners could not engage in any business or they would lose all foreign resident retiree benefits. In my case, I had a way around this. I could not own anything, but my eldest daughter, Lisa, had dual citizenship! She had been born when I was in the Air Force in Zaragoza, Spain. This meant that she could own a business and I could work for her as an unpaid consultant!!! I thought that the most investment return for the least amount of outlay would be to open and operate a campground. However, to remain there was not a practical idea. I that the Phillips girls knew very little of their American heritage and I wanted my daughters to come to adulthood in the State. As imperfect as the U.S. of A. is, living here is better than anywhere else.

In July of 1974 Pat & I decided we would take an once-in-a-lifetime vacation trip. We would take 15 days leave, pack up our VW bus and visit Europe. Our itinerary would be to cross the border into France, head to Switzerland, then into Bavaria. From Bavaria, our next destination was to be Vienna so Lisa could see the Lipizzaner Stallions at the Spanish Riding School. (We did not know that tickets for the show required that reservations made months in advance, and admission costs would exceed several months pay.) From Vienna we would drop down into Italy, pay our respects to Venice, drive across northern Italy, through Monaco, along the French Riviera, and return to Spain.

We intended to camp the entire trip, and to replenish our food supplies at the various U.S. Army base commissaries in Germany as we needed to. To this end, I checked out the station's camping equipment (sleeping bags, etc) and the morale tent. This was a huge, heavy canvas affair that was big enough to park the VW Bus inside if there had been a large enough door. We threw in a small catatonic heater in case it might be chilly some evenings when we were in the mountains. I also insisted that Pat pack her heavy winter coat. She protested, as it was July.....why should we take up space for a heavy coat??

We actually managed to follow our plotted course and did get to all our desired destinations, plus discovered some delightful places along the way that we were unaware existed until we found them.

We crossed the border into France, pulled into a camp ground and set up our first camp. When the sun set we did not realize that we would NOT see it again until we returned to Spain. I also made the acquaintance with the European coo-coo bird. Until this moment I had thought they were a cute lil' ole thing that resided in clocks. **WRONG**, they live in trees (in this case, a tree that was over our pitched tent) and they coo-coo non-stop sun down to sun up. I did not sleep a wink that night.

In France we were treated to some of the most bizarre driving incidents I have ever observed. In one city we were in the middle of three lanes, stopped at a traffic light. Ahead of me the left lane ended and traffic in it was to merge right. The right lane was blocked by a big truck making a

delivery. The light turned green and the cars on either side of me zoomed forward and came respectively left and right into my middle lane. They did indeed merge.....into each other!!!!!!

At another light, the woman driver in front of me got out of her car and went into a shop, leaving the door open and the engine running while she made a few quick purchases. She was delayed long enough that the light went through two cycles before she returned. Of course, traffic was blocked and all drivers were displaying their annoyance by blowing their horns until she completed her shopping and returned to her car.

Our first stop in Switzerland was on the shores of Lake Geneva in Lucerne. We drove along the lakeside highway and discovered the Castle of Chillon. We spent almost a whole day exploring this well restored and preserved site. We went up into the "Bernese Oberland" around Interlachen and again spent several days exploring the region. We were glad that we had the heater and Pat found her heavy winter coat was a welcome addition to our clothing supply. The weather was constant overcast with frequent rain. One morning we awoke to actually find a light snow had fallen during the night! With this steady diet of rain our heavy canvas tent never had a chance to dry out. It just got heavier and soggy every day. Also, the camp grounds were getting muddier and muddier, and our tent's floor was reflecting this. The tent was carried on the roof luggage rack and each time we struck camp to move on it became more of a struggle for me to get it loaded up. Pat tells me that on one occasion she would have given anything for a movie camera as I performed an impromptu ballet trying to place/throw this large, heavy, awkward, muddy, soggy bundle of canvas on the roof rack.

We soon developed a routine for setting up the evening camp. We would pull into our assigned space, I would off-load the tent and then Lisa & I would erect it and she would put our sleeping bags in the sleeping areas. Meanwhile, Pat and Debbie were in the VW bus preparing our evening meal. I set up the space heater in the tent to take the chill out of the tent and to hopefully dry out the interior. (Of course, all of this was accomplished in either a steady downpour of rain or a steady drizzle. We never seemed to dry out or really warm up.)

We fell in love with Switzerland. It was absolutely beautiful and most definitely awe-inspiring. One thing I found interesting was that on weekends the sound of gunfire echoing up and down the valleys was almost continuous. It seems that practically all Swiss males between the ages of 18 and 45 (?) are members of the army reserve, keep their issued weapons at home and target shooting is very popular (especially with the government providing the ammo!!

Another impression I had of Switzerland is that everything is always clean and sparkling. The mere idea of trash or debris along side the road is unheard of. In the cities one would never see a cigarette butt on the ground, or trash thrown away, or even an overflowing trash receptacle. I was also impressed by the friendliness and cheerfulness of the Swiss people; I never once saw the slightest example of rudeness.

From Switzerland we crossed over into Germany and explored the Bavarian Alps..... Again, the scenery was spectacular, but somehow not as awe-inspiring as was the Swiss Alps. Pat best described it as that in the Swiss Alps the valleys are narrow and you are constantly looking upwards and seeing the high mountains towering over you, whereas in Bavaria the valleys are broader and wider so there is space between you and the mountains. As with the Swiss, the Bavarians are friendly and courteous to visitors, very cheerful and outgoing. It was in Bavaria we discovered King Ludwig, or rather his castles and tried to visit them all. We did get to three of them, **Neuschwanstein**, **Linderhof Palace**, **Herrenchiemsee**, and the family castle of **Hohenschwangau**. We did not see the one in Munich, as we were trying to avoid most of the large cities. We checked into the U.S. Forces Recreational area at Garmish and explored the area. Here we deviated from camping and actually took hotel accommodations so we could sleep in a real bed, dry out, get warm, and take real showers with lots of hot water!!!!!! We also took the opportunity to eat out and enjoy American

hamburgers, French fries, etc. We took advantage of the commissary to refill our larder chest with familiar brands of American canned goods.

We all enjoyed walking around Innsbruck, and the Alpine Zoo was a hit with the shorter members of our party. They featured ONLY native regional wildlife in their displays. Pat & I also enjoyed the old medieval part of town.

We visited **Oberammergau**, the site of the world famous Passion Play. It was a delightful place and many of the small shops were filled with beautiful wooden hand-carved items. We could afford none of them, but it was a treat just to see them.

As we drove around the area sightseeing and exploring the road frequently crossed over into Austria. At each point we had to go through the formalities of customs, but the Austrians merely looked at our passports, checked my leave orders and examined our vehicle records to ascertain that we had insurance. I did have one incident where the Austrian customs/border guard asked me a question in German. I replied (in English) that I spoke no German, did he speak English.

"Nein, parley vous francis?"

"Non", I replied, "Hablo espanol?"

"Nein", he replied and waved me thru, after we both had independently concluded the other party spoke no civilized language.

Later, when we crossed back into Germany the border guard spoke English, but appeared to harbor latent resentfulness from the 1942-45 incident between our countries. He made me unload the VW bus so he could examine every article. He especially griped me when he seemed to think that each and every can of food in our larder had to be minutely inspected to (maybe) ascertain that they had not been opened and cleverly resealed after being refilled with contraband items. Outside of France, this was about the only display of rudeness we encountered.

Throughout the alpine area I enjoyed seeing the private homes with the elaborate murals painted on their exterior walls. Many followed a theme of illustrating the Grimm's Fairy Tales, but I was amused when some used the Disney interpretation in their drawings.

Now we headed east into Austria, crossing over the border in the vicinity of Salzburg. I would have liked to explore here (I especially wanted to see the salt mines that had been in use since pre-historic times) but the rain was too hard and steady to make us want to get out of our VW bus.

My overall impression of the Austrians was that in personality they were very similar to the Bavarians. Their attitude towards visitors was one of very welcoming. I did note that the standard greeting was "**Gross Gott**" (God is good) in lieu of the Swiss and German "**Gutten Tag**" (Good Day).

We arrived in Vienna with some partially clearing skies and set up camp. We wanted to spend several days to see the many sites in the city, but the highest item on our list was the Lipizzaner Horses. We did find out that to see the show was impossible, but we could (for a fee) watch some practice sessions. This we did, I would hate to think that we had especially driven this far to see them and not do so. After we saw them we also visited St. Stephens Cathedral and the Schonbrun Palace. The palace was a highlight, but the girls enjoyed the grounds/gardens and the extensive zoo far more. I think that at this point Debbie sort of summed up her impressions of the trip..... "NOT ANOTHER CASTLE!!!!"....

We also saw the world famous gigantic Ferris wheel (from a distance) but none of my party (except the driver/guide) wanted to ride it. This is the largest Ferris wheel in the world.

From Vienna we went south, driving along side a mountain stream towards Italy. I noted that as we traveled along this pleasant, tumbling waterway, it appeared to be fresh and sparkling. We

crossed over the border; the stream went through the first Italian village and emerged brownish and drab! This sort of set the tone for my Italian impressions, brown, drab, dirty, run down, shabby, etc. After Switzerland, Bavaria, and Austria, I sort of compared (maybe unfairly) the rest of what Europe I visited to those standards.

By the time we got to Venice the rains had resumed. We pulled into the parking place in Venice and it was raining so hard I could barely see out my windshield. Pat, Lisa, & I had a quick council and discussion. (Deb was not invited to offer her input....it would have been "Not another castle". In her mind practically all of the historical buildings, even museums and cathedrals were "castles".) Our unanimous decision that in no way were we going to walk around Venice in rain so hard we could almost think we were standing under a waterfall. I turned our vehicle around and we departed, heading eastward towards Milan.

Milan was just another highly polluted industrial city, but we did find a camp ground to spend the night in. The next morning we continued eastward and I had an opportunity to observe the typical Italian driver. They were good (they had to be good or they would be dead), but drove fast and recklessly. The road was their own private preserve and everyone else should stay out of their way. The horn was the second most important part of their vehicle, ranking just under the accelerator. The third most used item is the bright headlight switch, used to emphasize that they are blowing their horn to claim right-of-way.....please yield so they can get around you and get on with their life.

The rains had slowed up to a steady drizzle, but the heavy air kept the polluted air close to the ground. When we were circling the mountains around Genova we almost were forced to hold our breath and our eyes were constantly watering. When the highway entered a tunnel it was even worse.

We crossed out of Italy and drove along the Riviera towards home... By now the rain was gone, only overcast skies.

One memory I have of this stretch is of Debbie sitting in the rear set and telling us that she was seeing elephants, lions, giraffes and other exotic animals in some of the fields bordering the highway.....

Our response was that the very bored child was letting her imagination run amuck, and she was admonished to cease that activity. She kept insisting that she was seeing these assorted animals and I was getting a bit annoyed over her direct disobedience of me. Then Lisa said that Debbie was right, she was also seeing African animals in some of the fields.

Great, now I had a car full of people suffering from mass hallucinations. Then Pat stunned me by saying that she was seeing them also. I stopped the car, and looked for myself. Now I had caught the contagious insanity. I saw an elephant!!!! Roaming loose!!!! In Southern France!!!

At the next town I found an English speaking traffic officer and asked for an explanation. Very simple, some wealthy eccentric operated a retirement home for elderly circus and zoo animals. They did indeed roam freely on his acreage, behind strong, well concealed fences and barriers. (In Europe, it is customary for police officers to wear little flags on their uniform shoulders to indicate what foreign language(s) they speak, but don't look for an American flag. It is almost a universally held feeling that what Americans speak can not be English!!!)

When we crossed the border back into Spain the sun broke through and I felt we were back home....

## **Reflections on Estartit** **By Deb Nahikian**

Your account is pretty comprehensive and covers most of my memories. There are a few things I remember from my perspective.

I have fond memories of "movie nights" at the CG station. These were big deals because everybody got together and the events weren't that often. We watched the movies in the mess hall and the movies came in big reel to reels and were shown on a big projector. There was always an intermission while they changed the reels. I remember seeing "Bed Knobs and Broomsticks", "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" and my personal favorite, "Charlie and Chocolate Factory". For several months afterwards we would be singing and dancing the Oompa Lumpa song! Yes, Keri and Vicky Johns sang too, but I won't swear that David Johns did!

I also remember at least one or two occasions we had a big picnic or cookout at Mr. Orchard's farm house. We called him Mr. Orchard and did not refer to his military title. I remember the farm house was over 400 years old and the area around the farm house was lots of fun to explore. One of the cookouts involved a softball game and I remember my dad breaking his wrist demonstrating the proper way to slide into base. I am not sure if his demonstration was to show how NOT to do it, but either way, it was a show. By the way, if I remember right, I think my mom even pitched once or twice.

Dad did not mention the castle above Torrella. The castle was called Castillo de Montgri and I really don't know much about the history or background, only that the castle was very visible from the surrounding area. My sister Lisa, Michael and Bobby Samonte and Vicky, David, and Keri Johns and I went up there on several occasions. It was a lot of fun to pretend to be knights and play medieval battles within the walls of the castle. (Ed. note: the ruins dated from the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century)

Speaking of castles, one of my favorite toys while we were in Spain were the Lego-type castle blocks that were sold in kits and you could build all kinds of intricate castles and cathedrals. You could also buy medieval figures to stage battles and set up whole scenes. My favorite piece was a giant catapult that actually worked. Of course, my dad enjoyed my toys as much as I did. I am not sure, but I think he still has them in a box somewhere!

Not only did we have a castle practically in our backyard to remind us of ancient history, but we also had Spanish Civil War-era bomb shelter near our house. We would play in it and use it as a "headquarters" but it wasn't very pleasant. I remember lots of broken bottles so we didn't really hang out in it too often.

Since this was the 70's we kids had lots of unsupervised free time. For the most part the base kids and the kids in my neighborhood stayed out of trouble, but my group of friends in our neighborhood did manage to have a few adventures that I am sure adults would not have been happy about. Dad already talked about my garbage truck transportation system, so I won't go there. Soccer is a big sport in Spain and you need a proper soccer field to play in. To minimize arguments it helps to have white sidelines and goal lines. Lucky for us there was construction on some apartments in the front of our neighborhood and there were lots of sacks of concrete



mix that was perfect for marking soccer fields. It was also a fun game to jump from the second floor onto the piles of sand that was used for mixing the mortar. This could explain why I have ankle and back problems as an adult.

We did not go hungry while we were out roaming the neighborhood and playing. I remember eating almonds, pomegranates, and pine nuts called pinolas that were abundant. There were also fig trees, but we used figs mostly as ammunition in our war games instead of eating. We did learn the hard way not to steal grapes from a neighboring vineyard!

The only time there were any restrictions on my freedom were when the Gypsies were in town. I had been restricted to staying in our yard because of perceived danger when the Gypsies were around. I am not exactly sure what the danger was, but I was told that they liked to kidnap blond kids, but I don't think I really believed that. I do remember being very bored with the confines of our yard and got creative in my imaginary play. For some reason I decided to use the keyhole in our front door as a vending machine. This was an old door with a big keyhole you could actually put your eye up to and look through. I got one of the coins stuck in the hole and just forgot about it. Later that night when Mom went to lock the door (Dad had duty that night and wasn't home), she couldn't get the key in to lock the door. She questioned me about it and I have no idea why, but I denied having anything to do with it. Mom became convinced the Gypsies had put the coin in the door so they could come back later and rob us. I don't know how Mom figured it out, but I do remember getting in BIG trouble.

I did love to go into Torrella and go to the market and the different shops. It was a big deal when a modern grocery store opened up down the road from us toward Estartit. It had automatic doors and everything! It did make it easier for Mom to buy Bimbo bread and the chocolate spread that I learned to love and ate like peanut butter.

I have fond memories of Spain and enjoyed the time our family spent together. We made the most of weekends going picnicking at Lake Banolas, and visiting historic sites and ruins around the area. Dad covered our European vacation pretty well. I would love to go back and visit and see how much has changed.

## Two of King Ludwig's castles



This is the Alpsee from which we could look up and see the castles. We got a cloudy, rainy, chilly day for our trip but you can see how beautiful the scenery is anyhow



This is Hohenschwangau. It was the childhood home of King Ludwig II, the king of Bavaria who built Neuschwanstein as well as a several other castles.



And here are two views of Neuschwanstein.. Ludwig built it based on the operas of Wagner and the whole thing feels like a fairy tale castle. In fact, Disney's Cinderella castle is based on it. Ludwig's castle-building nearly bankrupted Bavaria and this castle was never finished on the inside. In the end he was pronounced insane and unfit to rule by a group of doctors who had never even seen him (although to be fair to them, he was a pretty strange guy). The next day he drowned in shallow water along with his own doctor and their deaths were pronounced to be suicide.

**Two more of King Ludwig's castles.....or rather Palaces**



**Herrenchiemsee**



**Linderhof Palace**

Schonbrun Palace in Vienna  
Home of the Hapsburgs



# Schonbrun Palace Grounds and Gardens



**Garden Maze**



