

The long way to Triangel, Germany

Both my parents were from teacher families, both from small villages in central Germany near the town of Hildesheim, a city like almost everything in Germany smashed to pieces by the Great War. As I only came to fully understand later, my father came from the era of the German Kaiser, before World War I, before the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, ingrained, like most of his generation, with the extreme values of honor, duty, and obedience that so disastrously played into the hands of Adolph Hitler. Like most of his generation he wanted to go into the German colonies in Africa, only to wind up a soldier in the German navy, with the navy sitting in port most of the time, not good enough to engage the British, but not bad enough to scrap. World War I of course stripped Germany of her colonies.

After a short study in Berlin he worked in Sweden using a newly invented "torsion balance" to find iron ore. It was an instrument using two large metal balls suspended from a cross member, which was in turn hung by a thin quartz thread. By timing the oscillations one got a very precise measure of the force of gravity in the area, which in turn depended on the heavier mass of the ore one was looking for.

In 1926 came employment, again by a German company, to use the instrument to find salt domes in coastal Texas and Louisiana, with oil usually to be found at the edges of such domes. After several trips back to Germany (by boat of course) he talked my mother into coming over and join him. As I was told by my mother many a time, she came by freighter, it touching port first in Mexico, then loosing a rudder, but finally arriving in Houston, and the authorities not allowing her to get off until they found my father, who did not know when she would arrive. After the two were married by the captain, they let her off.

My mother dutifully followed her husband as he tramped all over coastal Texas and Louisiana, living in tents, house boats, or whatsoever, getting stuck on muddy roads. I remember many stories by my father about farmers intentionally creating mud holes on the roads, then miraculously showing up to pull cars out of their creations, and of the crew crossing bridges by pulling the planks out behind the car, and putting them down in front.

Next of course came the crash of 1929 and the great depression, with no work. My parents took their savings and chose to spend most of their time to see the country, Colorado, Yellowstone, Yosemite, the Grand Canyon and other national parks, all before anybody ever even talked of overcrowding.

Then as things picked up again, he latched up with a Houston real estate salesman turned oil wildcatter and found him a few oil fields in the Galveston area, and having made enough money by 1938 at the age of 38, decided to go back to Germany to retire. I had in the meantime been born in Houston in 1936. So he bought himself one of the new Ford V-8 cars, drove it to New York, had it shipped by boat, and off we were to Germany.

Exactly why he picked Triangel I do not know. It was a sleepy little village of about 200, out in the boonies in the flat land of North Germany. Maybe he wanted to get away from everything. Maybe it was the huge villa with its five acres which had been built for the director of the peat industry neighboring the village, with the company having gone bankrupt, and nobody having the cash or wanting such a castle out in the boonies.

The war of course broke out in 1939 with the German invasion of Poland, but the effects inside Germany were minimal until perhaps 1941. I have numerous pictures of us visiting across Germany taking our big German shepherd dog with us.

Of all this I of course knew or remembered nothing, being under two years old as we settled down in Triangel. For all I knew, I was born there, and I was a German, and spoke only that language.