

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A U. S. Expert**

Introducing Ralph Hitchcock. We are very proud of this young man for he is our grandnephew and we wish to share with our readers his letters from Europe, which we think are a bit different from most of the letters written by travelers. At present this steady Salinas hand is helping to sort out the world's worst traffic tangle: London, England.

Ralph Hitchcock, a graduate of the Salinas High School, Hartnell College and the University of California at Berkeley, is a charter member of what the London Evening News has called (in an 8-column front page banner) the team of "American Experts" involved in a "huge probe" of the city's traffic crisis.

Ralph is the son of Mr. and Mrs. James Hitchcock and grandson of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Hitchcock of Salinas. He is 29 years old and a licensed civil engineer who graduated from the Salinas High School in 1949, Hartnell College in 1951 and California in 1954.

In July of 1960, after building roads and bridges for two California counties and one private industry for more than six years, he set out for Europe to test the English job market and to find out whether "the grand cheap tour" of the continent could still be made.

Ralph wrote from London "This is the most interesting city I have ever seen, and the best town if you are broke. I have never seen so much free entertainment. After a good long look at the museums, art galleries, stage plays, the London Symphony Orchestra and England's best soccer team, the Tottenham Hotspurs, I wound up in Hyde Park, where they have the soap box orators. That place was unbelievable. I stayed seven hours. Best free entertainment I have ever seen. There must have been 1,000 people there, all split up in different listening groups. An inventor claimed he had invented a machine gun that shortened World War I, and that the war office did not give him any credit. A safecracker stripped to the waist and completely tattooed, even on his bald head, told about safecracking; anti-nuclear bomb speakers, pro and anti-speakers, evangelists, everything. "There is so much red tape connected with getting a job here. The whole thing is worked through the Ministry of Labor, and it is quite time-consuming."

It is mostly just waiting around, but back in England after a two month hiking tour, Ralph discovered that he had a job. "It was really funny when I came to the office. I had hitchhiked down from Saffron Walden and was in my wranglers and deer stalker's hat and pack. They were sitting around addressing cards and just being happy. There were no electric lights in the office and here we were sitting on top of the biggest job in the history of engineering. It was a rather incongruous beginning."

In the meantime, Ralph, by his own admission was doing "no engineering but gaining valuable experience. I was promoting with various governments. Kind of public relations."

"I am scheduled to give a lecture on traffic engineering at the University of London's West Ham Technical College. I am known as an American expert. It is surprising how easy it is to be an expert on traffic engineering over here if one has an American accent."

The young American, by reason of his brief stay in the British Isles, can't quite qualify as an "English expert" yet, but his letters suggest that he hasn't missed much. "Weather certainly doesn't stop these Englishmen. Of course, if it did, they would never do anything."

Finally, Ralph went west and ended up in a beautiful little village called Whitechurch in Wilshire. "There I was bosom buddies with everyone from the gamekeeper to the village vicar."

"At the American Express in London they have a file of bank officers' signatures. I cashed a check here from the Monterey County Bank. Imagine bankers from Salinas having their signatures on file here in London.

"My landlady is in a Tennessee Williams play and I have been coaching her in an American accent."

Ralph expects to return to the United States in about two years, when Wilbur Smith and Associates (his firm) has completed the traffic survey.