

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 2, 1962

The Bear Flag Flies In Nigeria

"Just received the Bear Flag. It is creating a sensation. We are living out in the bush in grass huts and I have the Bear Flag on a pole in front of mine. All the British boys salute it when they pass by."

The above is a quote from a letter received from our nephew, Ralph T. Hitchcock, at present in Jos, Nigeria, associated with an engineering project constructing 200 miles of road through the bush in that country.

He reported that he had a difficult time even, explaining in England that most states in the United States had a state flag and what our Bear Flag looked like, so he very much wished for one small example. It was sent and now he wants several more, including one for his desk in London.

"After returning from London a few days ago I found that the white ants had eaten half of the Bear Flag. I want a replacement and several more to give to our Nigerian boys who are quite taken with it."

Ralph is a graduate of Hartnell College in Salinas an engineering graduate, from the University of California at Berkeley and he reports that he amended a get together of California alumni in London with about 30 in attendance. One of the men who was in Cal in 1908, is a retired director of the London Zoo. "He was very interesting. We were also entertained with movies about California."

"Yesterday we went for a drive in our Land Rover. It was over 400 miles of bush road. On the way I got a picture of a woman with one of those plate mouths. We had to cross two large rivers. To do this we rounded up about 30 natives and they completely surrounded the vehicle and actually manhandled it across, lifting it about a foot or so each time, until we were across. When we reached the other side, they all cheered. It was the biggest excitement they had had in a long while, they see so few white people.

"Jos, where our main base is, is 4300-foot elevation and the weather here is really nice - similar to Santa Barbara and it looks much like it, too. They have cactus corrals. The cheapest and just about only wood available is mahogany and they make everything out of it. We just wanted a bid for a couple of water tanks (steel oil

drums) - they were mahogany. A 1 inch 12-foot costs \$1.80.

"We spend most of our time in the bush, but we have a house in Jos which we return to on weekends.

We have a cook and a steward. We don't even pour our own beer, they do everything. Buhha, the highest paid, gets \$5.00 a week. He makes great curry. We are really spoiled with all the service.

"Down below on the south end of our road it is very hot and humid. There is a big river called the Benue where I have seen numerous crocodiles. There are also hippos, but I have not seen them. I have seen one herd of about 30 baboons and numerous monkeys. The cattle around here are similar to Brahmas. They are very tame and follow the herdsman around as they travel 1,000 to 2,000 miles a year, the herdsman on foot.

"I had a day in Kano which was very interesting. It is one of the largest market towns in Nigeria. They have camel caravans straight from the Sahara. They even have a camel market as well as a large cattle market. It is a very ancient walled city.

"Down here in the bush is a very strange and beautiful flower of which I got a real good colored slide. They look somewhat like a lavender orchid, but the strange thing is they bloom right out of the ground with only the flower - no stems, or leaves! It is about three inches in diameter."