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## Marvin Klemme — A Flair for the Eventful

By Dee Ann Ray

Some people live long, uneventful lives, staying among family and friends in one community. Others strike out to make a way for themselves and see the world, living many years among strangers, laboring for the good of many countries, and yet retaining their native roots. Marvin Klemme of Bessie is a citizen of the world who finally came home. He has seen much, been involved in some of the major events of this century and continues to contribute to the growing good of the world.

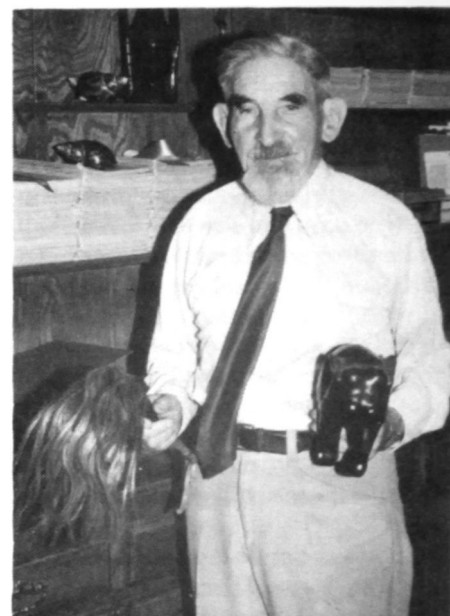
You've perhaps seen him. He stands out in a crowd. He's neat and trim looking; he has piercing eyes that appear to use x-ray powers on whatever they behold. His powers of observation have been of great help to the causes of American land management, grazing, and forestry projects in a large number of foreign countries. His latest project is the establishment of the Marvin Klemme Youth Ranch west of Bessie. The thousand-acre ranch is to be managed by the Windsor Hills Baptist Church of Oklahoma City but operated as a non-denominational home for children.

Marvin Klemme is a courteous man whose intellectual pursuits haven't robbed him of old-world charm. He's an individual. Although a sickly child, his

good health is obvious now. He hasn't taken a pill of any kind since he left the foreign service in 1965. He took only necessary medicines then to prevent malaria and other diseases prevalent in the countries in which he worked. "I like to keep fit. I go out to the ranch and walk several miles a day. I feel good when I come home," says the soon-to-be 84-year-old man. "On December 7, I'll be 84. I was the oldest person to participate in the recent Crop Walk in Clinton. When I made a trip to Tibet two years ago, the guide told me the only other person near my age to make the trip was a man who was 79." Actually, Marvin Klemme is ageless. He is one of those persons to whom the years are kind although he has lived in the backward countries of the world under harsh conditions.

When asked to smile for a photograph, the unpretentious Mr. Klemme replied, "I never like to smile for photographs; it creates a false impression." Being an honest man, Mr. Klemme is inclined to "tell it like he sees it."

A native of Missouri, Mr. Klemme came to Oklahoma with his father, Henry. Marvin is one of eight children. Only four of the children from Henry's first family are still alive. Henry married Glendora on March 10, 1898. To their union were born Milton,



Although Klemme says that smiling for photographs leads to creating illusions, there's warmth about his face and eyes that reveals an interesting and caring individual. Traveling around the world since 1921, he has collected a number of souvenirs of the countries in which he has worked. (photo by Dee Ann Ray)

Marvin, Ben, Dovie, Jessie, Gloria, James, and Paul. Milton, Jessie, and Paul all died before they reached the age of one. Glendora died on May 2, 1911.

Henry Klemme's second wife was Anna Rhodes. To their union were born Samuel, Ruth, Naomi, and Esther.

Of the first family, Ben, Gloria, James, and Marvin survive. Of the second family, only Ruth and Naomi are alive. Ruth lives in Weatherford, and Naomi lives in Indiana. Ben lives in Oklahoma City, and James lives in Clovis, N.M. He retired there after having managed the Klemme farm west of Bessie for years.

The Klemme family traces back to Germany. Marvin has made a study of the family and has written a family history book which is available in the library through his generosity. His great-grandfather was Christian Klemme, a tailor by profession. Christian brought his wife, Sophia, and four daughters to America in the fall of 1845. They settled in Southeast Missouri (near Cape Girardeau).

August Klemme, a son, was born to Christian and Sophia on April 1, 1846. August fought in the Civil War, serving as a bugler and captain's orderly. He married Augusta Feuerhahn in June of 1869. They had eleven children—eight

boys and three girls; three of their children died in infancy.

One of August's sons was Henry, Marvin's father. A brother named George came with Henry to Oklahoma for the first time in 1897, with the first threshing machine to work the wheat fields around El Reno. Off and on for several seasons, the brothers operated the threshing machine, moving it to a spot near Parkersburg (west of Clinton).

August Klemme decided to follow his sons and moved his family to Oklahoma in October of 1900. Henry also moved, selling his Missouri farm land in 1901. Until then, he came to Oklahoma only during the threshing season and then returned to Missouri for the rest of the year.

For several years, the Klemme family migrated back and forth from Missouri to Oklahoma, selling out completely and resettling at times. They often visited back and forth as well.

After his mother's death, Marvin and the other children spent the summer of 1911 with their grandparents in the Bessie area. After his father's remarriage, the family lived in Missouri until 1915, when they returned to Oklahoma to stay. In 1914, Marvin's uncle George Klemme was elected a county commissioner in Washita County.

Marvin worked hard during his growing years. He attended only eight years of school and describes them as "poor" educationally. He worked for his Uncle George at the cotton gin at Braithwaite, west of Bessie. He often got only half of his pay because his father received the rest of the money.

Farming was a way of life; but in 1920, the bottom dropped out of farming and prices fell drastically on all crops. Realizing that farming was going to get rougher, Marvin gave his land and equipment to his father and joined the Marines. He wanted to enlist for World War I, but his father wouldn't let him because he was too young and was needed on the farm to aid in the war effort to produce more food.

The Bessie farm boy got his first taste of foreign travel in the Marines in 1921 and 1922. He was sent to service in Santo Domingo in a holding action and to keep down revolutionaries. He says actually even then the seeds of the present unrest in Central America were being sown. Although he was on the island of Santo Domingo, U.S. Marines were seeing service in Nicaragua and Central American countries.

It was in the Marines that Marvin

got his first taste of forestry work. The Marines were trying to reclaim some land around Quantico, Virginia, where there's a large Marine base. Marvin signed up for the first trial project and liked the work.

"I also owe the Marines a debt for the opportunity to study and better myself educationally. That's what I did in my off-duty time. It enabled me to prepare myself for entrance to college, although I lacked a high-school diploma," says Klemme.

"When I was discharged, I went to Oregon. I wanted to get in the U.S. Forest Service, but you had to pass written and oral tests which necessitated a college education. I entered the University of Washington Forestry School and graduated in 1930. During the summers, I worked for the Forestry



Klemme served in the U.S. Marines twice. The first time was in 1921 and 1922 in Santo Domingo and the United States. In this photo, made during World War II, he was serving as a recruiter.

Service as a Forest Guard. I think I developed my good health during those years. Living up on a mountaintop, I breathed fresh air and worked hard. I became very strong."

Marvin passed the forestry test before he graduated from the university, but he had a job waiting. He worked in ranger districts in Colorado and other western states. At times he was given special assignments like a tree survey along the Mississippi River. He spent the slower winter months studying as well as doing maps and reports. He continued learning all he could. He helped to set up the grazing districts

after aiding in the passage of the congressional legislation to establish such districts.

Because of his outstanding achievements in the Forestry Service, Marvin was encouraged to enter Yale and earn his Master's degree, which he did in 1935.

Through working with the grazing districts and continual study, Marvin began to want to know what other countries of the world were doing about land management and use. He could see that the United States had literally worn out great areas of land and thought that perhaps other countries could give ideas about what should be done to better conserve the land.

In 1939, with the blessing of the United States Government, Marvin was off on an around-the-world tour to study land uses. He spent almost a year touring the world, visiting some thirty countries.

The year 1939 was an eventful one in world history. Japan was already making inroads in colonization by military force in the Far East. Germany was rattling sabres in Europe and a war-weary world was gearing up for the next fight.

Everywhere he went, Marvin not only traveled back into the hinterlands to study land use and methods of raising cattle and grazing them, but he saw a world going to war. He stood on the rubble of a bombed Shanghai. He was regarded with suspicion by most foreign countries who questioned his seemingly harmless mission, wondering if indeed he was a spy.

In the introduction to the book he wrote about that trip, entitled *THE AMERICAN GRAZIER GOES ABROAD*, Marvin warned other travelers that such a trip involved some primitive living conditions, but that visiting the rural areas was necessary to view the true conditions of the country.

With insight gained from his 1939 odyssey, Marvin, in the closing statements of the book, related the problems of the world as he observed them. Interestingly enough, the problems then are still prevalent. Even time doesn't change some conditions.

While Marvin was in Turkey in 1939, war broke out in Europe as a mobilized Nazi machine began to roll across the map. Traveling became a problem and a hazard. Marvin and another American on tour traveled steerage on a Besarabian ship to reach

neutral Greece and then made their way home.

Having maintained his home in Oregon, Marvin returned there and wanted to get into the war effort. He was assigned to the job of recruiter for the Marines and spent his war years doing that until returning G.I.'s were assigned to the job and older men were retired.

Out of the Marines in 1945, Marvin went to Washington, D.C. to find a government job which would keep him involved with overseas duty. He became interested in a new organization called UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration). Although he had some doubts about the political connections of some of the folks working for the group, he was interested in the mission to aid the displaced persons who would flow out of concentration camps once the war ended.

After some brief training, Marvin was issued his gear for UNRRA which was very military-like and shipped out for his first assignment in Europe. During the trip over, the war in Europe ended. The event was celebrated on the ship with a special dinner.

For two and a quarter years, Marvin worked with the displaced persons program. He aided in processing and handling the skeletons which crawled out of the Nazi concentration camps. He and the other UNRRA workers lived under almost impossible conditions, but they felt the importance of what they were doing.

For part of the UNRRA assignment, Marvin used his forestry training. He organized the displaced persons into work crews which chopped the wood needed to warm Europe during the cold winters of 1946 and 1947. He proved that, given proper incentives, the displaced persons were motivated to aid in their own survival.

When UNRRA ended its mission in 1947, Marvin returned to Oregon and worked in politics, serving as campaign manager for Cordon's race for the U.S. Senate. He became acquainted with many political figures who were working on farm legislation. He also wrote the story of UNRRA in a book titled *THE INSIDE STORY OF UNRRA, AN EXPERIENCE IN INTERNATIONALISM*.

When the Korean War started, all thoughts of the importance of a farm program for the U.S. were abandoned by the Congress, which took up national defense. Marvin found there was little for him to do in the way of working on



In 1939, Marvin Klemme traveled around the world surveying land-use management. He is shown here in Columbia with coffee plants. His odyssey took almost a year and ended in Turkey as war broke out.

farm legislation, and he looked around for a new cause.

"Sometimes I have thought I spent more time working for other people and countries of the world, and I probably should have done more here in my own country," remarks Marvin, thinking back on his years of foreign service.

In 1950, Marvin went overseas again with the Marshall Plan, which has changed its names over the years but is still in operation with varying projects involving development for foreign countries.

First assignment was Greece and he remained there for almost four years. From then until 1965 when he retired, Marvin roamed the world working in Africa in a number of underdeveloped countries, as well as Iran, India, and South America as a consultant in agriculture and grazing. He also often

helped in forestry projects. Always he was assigned to the rural areas of the countries and lived under primitive conditions. He had ample opportunity to observe the customs and way of life of the countries.

Every two years, Marvin came back to the United States for thirty days. Part of that time he spent in Oklahoma. "I had the family keep watch for land for me. When I came home, I closed the deals. I kept buying land all those years. My family looked after my interests," relates Marvin.

Marvin's last overseas assignment was Saudi Arabia. He traveled first to Rome and prepared his final report. Then he took "the long way home" around the world. He started east traveling through Pakistan, India, Nepal, Cambodia, etc. He arrived in Viet Nam just before the Tonkin Gulf



During the 1930's, Klemme (far left) worked in the Western United States, but sometimes drew special assignments--such as this tree-survey trip down the Mississippi River.

affair. "I wrote a lot of letters home telling people about our being in Vietnam. We had no business there. We are just different from those people. We can't solve their problems because we don't understand anything about the way they believe or live."

Even in 1955, Marvin could see the inroads Communism was making in Southeast Asia. Everywhere he went, he saw the unrest and move toward revolution.

Once back in the United States, Marvin went to Oregon and cleaned up his business affairs and moved to Bessie to make his permanent home.

"James, my brother, was still managing the ranch at that time, and I occupied myself with conservation measures. I did a lot of dirt work, building ponds and dams, etc. I kept a room at the Calmez in Clinton and often stayed there. The Hamms were operating the restaurant at that time, and it was excellent food."

Keeping active is a way of life for Marvin Klemme. When he isn't building fences and reservoirs, he takes trips and attends meetings of his various professional organizations.

Since retiring, he has taken at least one trip overseas every year. He has been to Europe, the Holy Land, Central America, three trips around the world, to Antarctica with a scientific expedition, Russia, and Tibet. "We were the second group allowed into Tibet since the Communist takeover. I was with

Society Expeditions, a group of scientifically trained people. We did some climbing which amazed our guide because he hadn't seen someone my age doing that."

For some years, Marvin was vice-president of the Republican Party in Washita County. He is active in the Washita County Historical Society and a contributor to its museum. Two years ago, he received his fifty-year pin from the Society of American Foresters. He also belongs to the American Society of Range Management, and he's a member of the Clinton chapter of the National Association of Retired Federal Employees.

Last year, Marvin decided to donate land west of Bessie to establish a youth ranch. "I want to help orphans and give them a good home. I made arrangements for the home to be non-denominational although operated by the Baptist Church. The children should be allowed to make their own religious choices. I'm managing the land until the church can raise the money to establish the home and get it operational. Up to now, all they have done is build a road in there and they have done some testing for water wells. They need a big donation, I think."

If Windsor Hills Baptist Church doesn't succeed in establishing the youth ranch, the Klemme land will revert to Marvin and his heirs. Marvin hopes it does get going because he would like to see the land serving a

useful purpose.

Recently, Marvin made a generous gift to the University of Washington to aid in their forestry program. He enjoyed his visit to his Alma Mater because he liked what he saw in the educational line. "I have never liked the hippies. I am concerned about the lack of respect for teachers among the students of today. I think there must be discipline in life, and it begins early."

It is probably the discipline which Marvin has exercised in his own life that has enabled him to pack so much into the space of only 84 years. He has done much, been a part of all he saw, and still is. That discipline was born out of growing up in a time when everyone in the family worked to aid the common good of the family. Times weren't easy. Marvin can remember when things were much different than they are today and life was much less easy.

Marvin's Western Oklahoma roots have stood him in good stead, and they have brought him home to Bessie where he is now laboring for his own country as he often thought he should.

Although he is a modest man, when Marvin can be encouraged to tell of his exploits, there are surely some interesting stories. One of a breed of true individuals of whom we see little in these modern times, Marvin is a credit to his country.

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