

## Thoughts on the 18th anniversary of 9/11, and more...

Erwin Franzen  
September 9, 2019

NEW YORK, NEW YORK  
TUESDAY, AUGUST 16, 1977

The News World



ARANYAPRATHET, Thailand—Thai artillery men fire their 105-mm howitzers toward Khmer Rouge positions from this artillery base. Entrenched Khmer forces held a mile deep strip of Thai territory here last month after six months of quiet infiltration and a few days of bloody fighting.

AUG. 1977

### Thailand: a nation under siege

By Aaron Stevenson  
NEWS WORLD FOREIGN STAFF

BANGKOK, Thailand—Refugees coming from Laos into Thailand in recent months have repeatedly told of how Vietnamese troops, with the help of more than

indicate that there must be other reasons for their presence. The radar network seems to be designed for an obscure purpose, too. From the mountainous interior of Laos it must be able to "see" deep into the lowlands of eastern Thailand across the Mekong. At least 12,000 Communist insurgents

Thai colonel out of Aranyaprathet district on the Cambodian border illustrates the fact that the government of this country is under a lot of pressure from its Communist neighbors. The reason given for the transfer was that Col. Prachak Savangjit had ordered artillery crews to open fire on Khmer positions inside Cambodia after

Bay of Bengal

ANDAM ISLAND (TO INDIA)

Tha  
the  
don

*One of my early articles in The News World under my pseudonym Aaron Stevenson*

### Diary Thursday 12 September 2019 [continued on 20 September]:

Yesterday was the 18th anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, when 2 towers and one large building collapsed, killing around 3,000 people. As usual, the anniversary (9/11) was marked around the world with ceremonies in which people expressed their support of the great USA.

I want to take stock of my feelings for that USA, which I long regarded as a second homeland.

My father always professed to hate the USA -- though by no means all of her people or even the culture. He watched plenty of American movies, for example. He used to say the US were dominated by "Jews," who were an ethnocentric tribe of money-grubbing Shylocks, in his mind.

His view of "Jews" was colored by his involvement with Nazis in World War II, when he was a mechanic in the German Air Force, the Luftwaffe, in which he had enlisted because he loved airplanes and had hopes of becoming a fighter pilot [he was not accepted for that special training as he was past their age limit of 28 at the time].

I don't think he ever knew any real Jews. They were mostly just caricatures in his mind, I think. So, to him they were all one kind, all the same, with the same Shylock-type attitude.

I don't know now if my father's feelings about the Jews and the USA influenced us his 6 children in any way. Perhaps the only one really affected by this is my brother Gilbert -- but in an opposite way. Among all of us Gilbert was the one most in opposition to my father's ideas and visceral impulses. So Gilbert has become a very ardent supporter of the USA and Israel, and the Jewish people in general -- whom he almost completely identifies with Zionism.

So what about me? I don't think my father's expressed feelings about the USA and the "Jews" affected me very much. Like most kids my age I was fascinated by many aspects of American culture and by the USA as a whole.

The assassination of President Kennedy and the mystery surrounding it affected me, though. I was close to 13 years old (12 y. 9 mo.) when it happened in November 1963 (actually, the day before Gilbert's 11th birthday). I remember staring at the large black and white pictures in the German magazine "Stern," which my father used to read. I found it hard to believe that Lee Harvey Oswald was shot dead by Ruby right after he was nabbed by the police. Somehow the assassination itself and the aftermath, followed a few years later by the murders of Martin Luther King and Kennedy's brother Robert, seemed totally sinister, evil -- and in my mind a cloud descended on the rosy image I had of the USA.

When I saw pictures and film of what the US were doing in Vietnam I even joined a protest march to the American Embassy in Luxembourg City once; I think that was in the winter of 1968-69. However, this did not mean I hated the American people or the culture. Around the same time I met Ben Barker in Clervaux (Luxembourg), my first American friend. He was a middle-aged itinerant evangelical preacher and puppeteer, on a bicycle tour of Europe. We corresponded for a few years after that, though I never saw him again.

In school, where I started learning English from the age of 16 (February 1967 -- in the Lycée de Garçons/Esch-Alzette), I tried to speak the language with what I thought was an American accent -- to the displeasure of my teacher, who spoke the purest Oxford English.

Also, in 1968 or 1969, I applied for a scholarship offered by the American Field Service that would have allowed me to study for one year at a high school in the USA. I wrote an essay for them -- I think it was about American-Luxembourg relations -- and was accepted. The only problem was that my parents had to pay for my air ticket to the US and give me some money for expenses, as I did not have any except in a special savings account that could not be debited until I was 21 (1972) [I had already earned a small salary in 1966-67 when I worked as an apprentice fitter in the ARBED Belval steel mill for about 6 months -- but that money mostly went into the savings account]. My parents could not afford to pay, so I had to cancel my application for the AFS scholarship.



*Syria and US visas 1972 -- I didn't use the US one until 1975.*

By 1972 I was desperate to get away from Luxembourg, so I got my first visa for the USA from the same Embassy I had marched against a few years earlier. In my correspondence with my friend Ben Barker during those years I had learned quite a bit about America but we had a mild dispute about the US bombing of North Vietnam, which he supported but I abhorred. He wrote from different places as he moved often -- from Maryland, Virginia, Rhode Island, etc. He always wanted me to read the Bible and accept Jesus as my personal Savior. I still have 5 of the letters Ben wrote me, from 1969 and 1970.

In 1972 I also went to Brussels to visit the Canadian and South African Embassies and to ask what I

needed to do to immigrate to either of those countries. The Canadians said I first had to find a job in Canada, and for the South Africans it was more or less the same -- though they told me my qualifications were insufficient.

Between 1975 and 1982 I spent a total of just over 6 years in the USA, mostly working with the Unification Movement (Korea's Sun Myung Moon) and its offshoot companies, especially the daily newspaper The News World in New York City, which we launched at the end of 1976.

I never returned to the US after 1982 but worked for ABMC, a US Government agency, from 1992 until my retirement in 2016. ABMC (American Battle Monuments Commission) maintains the (WWII) Luxembourg American Cemetery where I was custodian-guide and associate those 24 years.

In my time in the US and later in the cemetery I got to know many Americans and learned a lot more about the USA.

In the Unification ("Moon") Movement in America we were very patriotic, very positive about the country and its role in the world. This was, of course, reflected in our newspaper. I edited and wrote many articles with a strong pro-American, conservative bias in those days, because like most "Moonies" I believed the US was the most important country, without which the world could not be saved from evil communism and socialism.

I shook off the unease and even horror I had felt earlier about what the US had done to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The USA had withdrawn from that region and now those countries had fallen to communism.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s I had been curious about the Soviet Union, and my father always viewed the Russians positively as a counterweight to the USA. I sometimes read a pro-Soviet magazine in German, Sowjetunion Heute, and found it quite interesting although I was not attracted to Russia nearly as much as I was to the USA. At one point in 1971 I visited the Soviet (USSR) Embassy in Luxembourg-Beggen to sign a book of condolences for the 3 cosmonauts killed in space during the Soyuz-11 mission. I received a free lifetime subscription to Sowjetunion Heute, which my father went on to keep after I left Luxembourg.

In October 1979 I crossed the Soviet Union by train on my way to Japan. The country appeared rather shabby to me, almost like a Third World nation, not at all like a great superpower that threatened the west. A few months later when I was living in Bangkok I heard and read about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (a country I had visited in March 1972 on a very memorable trip). I was shocked. I hadn't followed events leading up to the invasion -- at least not closely. In the newspaper in New York during 1978 and 1979 the Iranian Revolution dominated the headlines and our attention. Afghanistan seemed a sideshow. Now the Soviets, the "evil communist empire," had broken out of their underbelly and seemed poised to march to the shores of the Arabian Sea.

Later, during the 1980s when I worked for the Middle East Times, I wrote many articles about Afghanistan and traveled to some of its eastern border areas three times with mujahedeen from Pakistan. All 3 times I came under artillery fire from Afghan and Soviet forces. My articles were, of course, biased against the Soviets and their Afghan allies/"puppets." I was still very pro-American, keeping the mindset I had acquired during my time in the USA.

Yet I began to have some doubts. Actually it had already started when I was still in New York working for The News World. The first stirring of my doubts about what we were doing began when I was asked to write our top story of the day, under a banner headline, hailing the military coup d'état in La Paz / Bolivia led by General Luis Garcia Meza Tejada in July 1980.

At the time our company published a right-leaning, anti-communist Spanish newspaper, Noticias Del Mundo, whose offices were located one floor above our newsroom in our building -- the former headquarters (until ca. 1940) of the famous Tiffany and Co., at 401 Fifth Avenue (37th Street entrance).

The editor-in-chief of Noticias Del Mundo was an Argentinian journalist named Rodriguez Carmona, who I believe had ties to his country's intelligence service under the bloodthirsty dictatorship of Gen. Jorge Videla. Rodriguez Carmona provided the information based on which I was to write my article. I was reluctant because I had doubts about the character of the coup plotters in Bolivia. In the end I wrote the story as suggested by my editor, Robert Morton, and it was published at the top of our front page under my pseudonym byline (in the paper, whenever I was in New York City, I always wrote under the name Aaron Stevenson, which was chosen for me in early 1977 when my first story appeared, due to concerns about my status as an illegal alien; when I worked for the paper out of Washington DC in June 1979, for some reason, my real name Erwin Franzen was used with my stories).

I was not happy about that story on the coup and it became one of the reasons I quit my job temporarily a month later (late August 1980) and returned to Luxembourg for 4 months until I got fed up there again

and came back to New York and The News World at the beginning of 1981.



Noticias Del Mundo newspaper, 1982. It was launched in 1980.

Bo Hi Pak, our publisher and our founder Rev. Sun Myung Moon's interpreter, and my editor Morton and most of our staff welcomed the Garcia Meza coup because it kept Hernan Siles Zuazo from gaining power as he would have in fair elections. We regarded Siles Zuazo as a dangerous leftist. Pak and some of our members went to Bolivia and were well received by the coup leaders. They were enthusiastic about the prospect of being allowed and even encouraged to teach Victory Over Communism (our anti-communist doctrine) in schools there and to establish chapters of CAUSA International -- our church's new anti-communist political organization, which focused mainly on Latin America and Hispanics in the USA.

From the beginning it was clear that the Bolivian coup was backed by Videla's dictatorship in Argentina, and some of our people were happy about that because they were regarded as staunch anti-communists.

Soon, however, it also became clear that those nice, friendly anti-communists were torturing and massacring opponents and even anyone who could be labeled a leftist or human rights activist. The coup leaders also enjoyed active support from some Nazis such as Klaus Barbie, the "butcher of Lyon" in World War II, who was responsible for the murder of thousands of Jews.

Garcia Meza and his henchmen were also deeply involved in cocaine trafficking. When Ronald Reagan became President early in 1981 his administration learned from the FBI about the Garcia Meza regime's involvement in drug trafficking, and quickly began to distance itself from them. Articles about this drug business appeared in American newspapers, and soon La Paz became isolated.

We also ended up having to distance ourselves from them. But the episode taught me that our stance of almost blindly supporting anyone who professed anti-communism was at least very naive if not outright dangerous.

I began to have doubts about US support for dictatorships like that of Pinochet in Chile and Videla in Argentina. Jimmy Carter had emphasized human rights and tried to push some US allies to improve their record in that area. Under Reagan, however, human rights violators were only criticized and punished if they were leftist or communist, or did not submit to US pressure. Our members whole-heartedly agreed with this idea, and I tend to believe a majority of them still do even to this day.

[For more on this see my earlier post: [Fighting the Good Fight – or not ...](#)]

**Continued on Friday 20 September 2019:**

During the 1990s I was somewhat ambivalent about America's role in the world. The Soviet Union had

collapsed and it seemed the US now regarded itself as the ultimate power in the world. A first glimpse of this emerging reality was, in my view, afforded by the 1991 Gulf War.

While it is true that the GHW Bush administration consulted with Soviet leader Gorbachev at the time, it was clear the US was in the driver's seat. There was already no doubt in anyone's mind that the USSR was crumbling, dying. And China was still mostly a Third World country, though, like India, equipped with some nuclear arms.

I certainly didn't like Saddam Hussein but I felt the crisis in the Gulf when he invaded Kuwait should be resolved by diplomacy, not war. When the US built a coalition of military forces to attack Iraq I did not like it because I felt it was not necessary and could lead to great disaster. I remember Bush sought advice and support from evangelist Billy Graham before he launched the assault. I did not like that at all. It seemed like a Christian leader gave his blessing to a war of choice, not a defense of the United States. The US was not threatened by Iraq, and everybody knew that country would not stand a chance fighting America -- with or without a coalition of other powers.

Then the inevitable happened. Iraq was devastated, leading to vastly more death and destruction than it caused in invading Kuwait. Then there was the so-called "highway of death," what US airmen called a "turkey shoot." American bombers totally butchered hundreds or thousands of Iraqi soldiers who were retreating from Kuwait. That was absolute, wanton mass murder and a war crime in my book. Yet I gave the United States the benefit of the doubt.

It took many more years before I finally changed my mind. When Clinton later bombed Serbia in 1999 I thought he and NATO were fully justified because of what I had heard and read about what the Serbs had allegedly done to Bosnia and Kosovo. I would change my mind about that only much later when I learned more about what happened from non-western points of view.

In the cemetery where I worked we always held ceremonies to mark Memorial Day and Veterans Day, and often on other occasions as well, such as the anniversary of the liberation of Luxembourg (10 Sep. 1944) and the start of the Battle of the Bulge (16 Dec. 1944). We always had American general officers or top diplomats speaking at these events. Invariably they would equate what American military forces were doing around the world at this time with what the GIs did in World War II -- defending the US and Europe against the forces of evil.



*Reception office of the Luxembourg American Cemetery -- my workplace for about 24 years.*

They also always portrayed the deceased soldiers as heroes who died on the battlefield for a great cause. One word that I missed in most of their speeches was peace. I also missed it in our agency ABMC's publications and in the instructions given us for guided tours of the cemetery. Our motto became: "Time will not dim the glory of their deeds," taken from a statement by Gen. John Pershing, the founder. The

emphasis was always on "glory." The soldiers rested "in honored glory." Their deeds in war were "glorious." So that meant in a way war was good, because it brought glory to those who won, who defeated their enemies, anyway.

But I took very many family members and close friends or war comrades to the graves of their loved and cherished ones over the years. The family members and buddies clearly felt sorrow over the loss of those young men (and one woman, among over 5,000 dead), not glory. They did not say they were happy that their loved ones rested in "glory." I think they mostly wished for peace, that almost forbidden word / idea. Most said they hoped there would never be another war like World War II, no conflict in Europe or -- God forbid -- in America.

I felt there was a major change after 9/11, a hardening of the attitudes of many Americans towards people of other cultures such as Muslims. There was also a big change in our agency, ABMC. Whereas in the 1990s we had struggled financially and our mission was not considered especially important, after 2001 the US Congress greatly increased our budget, and our work was given a major impetus. But the idea of peace was buried ever so deep, it seems to me. America was at war and had to continue in this state indefinitely. So those who had fought in the world wars of the 20th century were honored even more than before, because they had made America not only great but the greatest of all the major powers of history. [See More on This Below]

I read several books and a lot of articles on the Internet that gave me insight into unsavory aspects of American history, and foreign and military policy, of which I had hitherto known very little. In recent years I have become almost totally disillusioned with the USA as I have observed how they strive to put a stranglehold on the whole planet with their enormous military and economic power and their gigantic intelligence apparatus, which they use to destroy, to coerce, to lie and to cheat others.

In my opinion the US use by far the largest proportion of their power and their wealth to dominate or crush other countries, and only a comparatively puny share to help and support those in need. I believe Russia and China and Iran, and other potential rivals or foes of the US build up their own military forces and intelligence capabilities as much as they do because they feel rightfully threatened by the US.



*Partial view of the Luxembourg American Cemetery in deep snow*

**Addendum:**

**Excerpt from my diary Sunday 22 July 2012:**

.... I have also thought about the meaning of my job in the cemetery [Luxembourg American Cemetery – WWII].

The US government agency I work for, ABMC (American Battle Monuments Commission), has received a lot more money than we used to get before the so-called 'Global War on Terror' was launched by the US in response to the Sep. 11 (2001) terror attacks.

We are spending a lot on renovation but also especially on promoting an agenda of shoring up support for the US in Europe and elsewhere by emphasizing and advertising how US military forces brought freedom and democracy to the world in the two great wars of the 20th century. We have built big new visitor centers in various places and plan to create many more, where people are taught about the great sacrifices made by the US when it sent its soldiers to fight overseas in order to liberate other nations from oppression.

The idea is to make other people feel they owe a debt of gratitude to the US and thus should support US policies and military activities overseas today. Our agency does not state this explicitly but it is patently obvious that this is the real goal. There is no need to promote a certain interpretation of history and to advertise our cemeteries if it is not to serve an agenda that is really focused on gaining friends and allies for the US and strengthening existing bonds at a time when people everywhere increasingly doubt the validity of Washington's claims that the US has to defend itself by bombing people in many other countries and sending its troops to impose its will by force.