

TITLE: Notes from Niger  
AUTHOR: Christopher D' Amanda MD  
LOCATION: Niger  
TIME PERIOD: 8 – 22 January 1969  
ROLE: SMP vaccination assessment

NOTES: Written in Ouagadougou in 1969; edited in Philadelphia 2006 for the 40<sup>th</sup> reunion of the West Africa Smallpox/Measles Program

---

## FOREWORD

I was asked to join other members of our program in Niamey, capital of Niger, between January 8-22, 1969 to assist in an assessment of SMP vaccination efforts for the country. The notes I wrote during this period have no special significance except that they belong to a specific, measured moment in the continuing dynamism of life in West Africa. There was to be a beginning and end and these are rare here, not because beginnings cannot be identified nor because nothing is ever completed. We who do not belong to this continent can appreciate pauses in the flow of life because our culture has provided the leisure to isolate them, even if briefly, in the course of daily commerce. There is no leisure here, however, because the irreducible requirements of survival do not permit it. The activities of the African cannot be halted. They are determined, in uncushioned confrontation, by the ever-present challenges posed by nature.

For the sympathetically disposed stranger, the full significance of millions of people existing by subsistence farming is lost before their gentle grace, their simple dignity, their physical beauty. But as the stranger watches and works here he learns and becomes admiring of the toughness required to survive. He grows tough too and is surprised to find that the strongly muscled African often tires before he does, there being insufficiently nutritious food to supply whatever energy produces staying power. The stranger becomes deeply impressed by the driving discipline which keeps these people moving despite all they do not have. There is no urgency of rising expectations for them, and they know it. Then the stranger knows it too and it is hard not to become discouraged. Finally, the stranger begins to long for the leisure that cannot be had here, and he knows, even as he does so, that he has become a devotee of the special non-leisure that is Africa. He has become “zombie”,<sup>1</sup> the word used by French colonials to describe what happens to Caucasians venturing forth to inhabit, even briefly, the Dark Continent.

---

<sup>1</sup> In voodooism, a person believed to have been raised from the grave by a sorcerer for purposes of enslavement. P2365, The Columbia Encyclopedia, Third Edition, 1963.

9 JANUARY

Up at 6AM in the Grand Hotel of Niamey, where we had arrived yesterday from my home in Ouagadougou, to review assessment forms, pack while having a *café-au-lait* and *brioche*s with reasonable strawberry jam and arrive at the *Service de la Santé* by 0700. Last minute instructions and off with the army our counterpart, Issoufi, felt we needed. I had arrived with my Ouagadougou chauffeur, Amidou, and was then supplied another chauffeur, a *mainoeuvre*, and an interpreter, expecting we would secure local guides as we went along—a routine part of traveling *en brousse* during campaigns. I had expostulated to Issoufi that six people to do the work of two seemed extravagant, but as usual with that most charming man, it did little good. So it seemed best to go off for the two days of our trial effort to see just what having my army along could mean.

Arrived at the *bac* (ferry stop) to cross the Niger River and had to wait a bit for it to return across a very windy, not so sluggish expanse of water. The *bac* seemed little more than a great steel barge, maybe 35x10 feet with a small conning tower on one side, from which protruded numerous small and large gear handles, all being actively manipulated by the smilingly nonchalant pilot. Amidou trundled the Dodge on board and were off across the choppy river. We were swept downstream, maintaining sufficient power to arrive on a diagonal course at a small opening in the midst of a large marsh protruding into the river. The cumbersome craft was expertly maneuvered through the opening and then down a winding channel through the marsh to a landing, where our difficulties began. I learned that the *bac* had no reverse gear. The profusion of gear handles supplied two motors, one set forward and one set backward. Reverse required one set to be placed in neutral while the other set was engaged. Somehow our bow propeller failed to engage after our aft propeller had been put in neutral. Sufficient momentum carried us nicely past the landing stage, parallel to it, with the forward propeller thoroughly fouled in marsh grass. I thought we were at a very early impasse—we could get off but the Dodge could not. In what seemed a very short time, someone had reached down and around the forward propeller to unfoul it and the imperturbable pilot neatly swung his craft 370 degrees so that the bow arrived absolutely at the middle of the landing stage.

A virtuoso performance for which I warmly congratulated the pilot. He was charmed to know we were on our way to Tera because that was his home village. We told him we would return for another ride the next day and took off down the road.

We drove west on a road marked on my map as “impassable during rainy season” to arrive in Tera just before noon. The Commandant was not at his office so we went to search him out at his home. He suggested we go back to the office, which we all did, and there, and only then, we discussed our business. (The commandants in Upper Volta—now Burkina Faso—are rather more casual and hospitable. In a similar situation there, we would have been invited to sit down around a table, beer or Youki soda would be served and messengers sent hither and yon to take care of whatever details were required. Not in Niger, or not with this Commandant.)

I was surprised to have him talk through an interpreter to the fellow who was to be our guide, wondering if the man did not even know the language of his constituents. This could have been possible because

these functionaries are moved all over the country and not necessarily to regions they know. I discovered later that, in fact, he was showing me an exquisite bit of tact—he talked French through the interpreter to the Djerma guide so that I could follow all that he said to the guide! That would not have happened in Upper Volta. With all arranged, we bid adieu and made off to the market for lunch

The boys were a bit uncertain about just what I was prepared to eat, telling me somewhat nervously that there were no hotels in Tera. I assured them I was prepared to eat what they did, within reason, and in any case, did not require much. I was prepared to have a *gâteau* and bottled water or beer. A *gâteau*, African style, is like a solid *beignet* made with bean flour, fried in cunning pans, having separate circular indentations for each “cake”, and seasoned with *piment* (hot pepper of varying intensity)—very filling and tasty. The market included a meat section, with numerous boys each tending a hillock of sand on which a small charcoal fire burned, surrounded by a stockade of meat *brochettes* being roasted to order. They smelled delicious but I was not tempted, having learned the African way of economizing included all organs of whatever animal was being prepared, which were generally more present than the few and usually tiny bits of meat. We did get a slab of what we were told were sheep ribs, but Amidou insisted came from goat. This was cut up in chunks, *piment* and salt sprinkled over, and the whole wrapped in a scruffy bit of brown paper, along with a nice slab of liver as *cadeau*. We repaired to the home of Maiga, the Djerma guide, and ate our lunch, I was offered and refused some *bouilli* (the Mossi term for a nourishing sort of gruel available throughout West Africa, made from the local starch—millet, bean, etc., flour with added sugar and *piment*, the whole diluted with local water. It was this last, I surmised, that had done me in with a very nasty gastritis after sharing a meal with Mauritanian silversmiths I had done business with during a Christmas visit with the Helmholtz’s in Dakar two weeks earlier.) A few pieces of tasty meat and liver washed down with water I had bought from Ouaga and we were off.

Two hours later, having traversed gently rolling “dead dunes”—ones which no longer move with the wind but are stuck in place, presumably by covering vegetation—and great expanses of sand requiring first and second gear, we arrived at Teguey, the first village of our pilot survey. The chief was a doddering obese fellow who insisted there were only fourteen family heads, each averaging 3-4 wives, leading at most to a population under 250. The village had been officially listed at a population of 954 and I thought this was probably a low number after walking about. Trust is not easily come by and who knows what our advance notice had been, even if there had been any, and as any careful chief might consider, the safe course is one providing the least information. We chatted briefly with the old boy and then went on our way.

It turned out to be a rather impressive village, composed of fifty large compounds, each containing 10-15 housing units, each with an individual family unit of husband, two or more wives, and varying numbers of children. Three hours of tramping about with our forms and questions and we were done.

Into the Dodge and back to Tera with a stop along the way because Amidou had made a connection to purchase a sack of millet for 1200 CFA (\$5.00 US) *en brousse* compared with the going rate of 2250 CFA (\$9.00 US) in Niamey. (The comparable rates south, in Upper Volta, are 750 CFA (\$3.00 US) *en brousse* and 1500 CFA (\$6.00 US) in our capital of Ouagadougou) The commandant had directed us earlier to the *campement*, where we found that all the beds were taken. I was perfectly comfortable in my well-designed Bean tent and settled in quickly. Small boys appeared with chickens at 50 CFA (twenty cents US), so I bought three and had the *campement* cook prepare them with tomato and *piment*

sauce. They were quickly devoured by me and my army. I finished off with a swig of water to down the pills I am still taking for the blessedly asymptomatic gastritis and off to bed. That is, I roll myself up in a blanket and stretch out on the floor of the tent pitched over a comfortable patch of sand

#### 10 JANUARY

Awoke early feeling quite cold and decided that a single blanket was insufficient cover against the near-desert night cold. Now in possession of three blankets and I feel prepared to sleep well anywhere. On the road by 0800 toward our second village, stopping long enough in the sandy courtyard of the local sous-préfet's house to have a hearty breakfast of fried igname (a tuber not unlike white potato but sweet like a yam) with the usual *piment* sauce served from the customary bit of brown paper.

The small village of Saya was finally located and our assessment quickly completed. We were waiting for the *bac* at 1215 and floated off without incident down the channel and across a calm river to the landing stage on the home side. Back at the Grand Hotel by 1330, cleaned up and down to a self-indulgent luncheon of crudités, steak, and lovely bottle of chilled Muscadet by 1400. Observed the passing parade on the river and about the hotel swimming pool. That evening we all gathered for a pleasantly noisy supper at the home of Tony and Elaine Masso, Niger's SMP operations officer and his wife.

#### 11 JANUARY

Very early we were sent north to Ouallarn with Rafe [Henderson] to rescue Fred Rubens (sent out from Atlanta to join the assessment). Fred did not know French, had never been outside the US, and was hardly accustomed to any variety of back country in West Africa. He nevertheless had managed sufficiently to be off completing his two villages by the time we arrived. Emmou (with [*Direction de la Médecine Préventive et des*] *Grandes Endémies*, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, also a participant observer) and Issoufi offered to check on his progress. They did so after some demur from Rafe, but none from me. Rafe, Ilze, and I headed back to the Grand Hotel to relax.

That evening I took the Hendersons, Emmou, his boisterous friend Zeilani, and Issoufi off to eat *brochettes* and drink: beer at the Roniers, a most pleasant restaurant outside Niarny situated on a bluff overlooking the Niger. A short and uninteresting stint afterward at Harry's Bar (a long way from Venice in more ways than geographic) and a night club called "HiFi" and we were all quite ready to return to the hotel. L

#### 12 JANUARY

Before a meeting to go over the trial effort, Issoufi came by at 0700 to take me out to his village where I met his most charming and dignified parents and saw his "plantation" of eggplant, green beans, peppers, tomatoes, and various fruit trees. I marveled that anything would grow at all in what looked like pure sand. Issoufi presented me with a colorful blanket woven in his family compound—one of the nicest ones I have seen.

At the meeting I learned that the "army" I had been saddled with had really not been Issoufi's doing at all, and his insistence that I accept the group was his effort to save face in what was a delicate, and

classic, case of over-zealous assistance. His full title is Director of the Smallpox Program of Niger, the only African (vs the usual French *militaire*) to have this prestigious and responsible title in Francophone Africa, and he deserves it. Tony, our energetic and cautious operations officer, had arranged for the heavy personnel contingent for each of the six teams without informing Issoufi. Further, he had hired them for the full assessment period. Issoufi wanted them no more than I did, having his own chauffeur and not likely to need an interpreter in his country of origin. But he could hardly tell the large group of assembled fellow citizens that they were not needed, nor that he could vouch for their extra salaries. So the party line was maintained to cover the trial and individual team decisions were to be made for the formal, country-wide assessment. The burden was shifted from Issoufi and left for Tony to figure out. At least three of the six teams will not use the extra staff. Such are the slack lengths of line so unobtrusively taken up by the sophisticated African “counterpart” for the foreign “expert”. In this case I thought I detected the fine hand of our own sophisticated and adroit Rafe, a man for all seasons in this fascinating world of assistance to developing countries. We worked over the events of the trial, discussed options and suggested improvements and generally had a stimulating and exciting time, gearing up for the big push on the morrow.

### 13 JANUARY

Only a fair amount of running about in the morning and then finally off for the great adventure by 1055. Logan Roots, SMP Medical Epidemiologist for Niger, had graciously given me his assignment to go out to Maradi—a good long way to the east, where I was eager to see real desert and new terrain. I had originally been assigned to Dosso, an area near Niamey, which promised little more than I had already seen on earlier trips to Niamey as well as the similar country of northern Upper Volta. Maradi was not far from Zinder and I determined to get done as early as possible so I could visit there. For some reason the name Zinder conjured up all sorts of romantic images for me and I was eager to see it. I would have preferred to get to Agadez, part of the trans Saharan trade route, but that was stretching too far.

An hour down the asphalt road and we were through Dosso and on to laterite. The French call these roads *l'escalier* (staircase), but I would opt for whatever the term is for washboard—a very bumpy ride which if engaged at too great a speed allows the tires to touch only the raised portions, resulting in rapid loss of control and imminent danger of ending up in the landscape and possibly overturned.

Arrived at Birni N’Konni for luncheon at the raggle-taggle *Bar Vietnam, Au Carrefour [Crossroads] de l’Afrique*, a rather surprising claim but admirably enterprising. I was not at all certain what to expect in the way of nourishment and asked tentatively for some nems, one of my favorite Vietnamese foods I had learned of in Abidjan. Rather pointedly, the stubby, bow-legged mistress of the kitchen, and the establishment, responded that chicken and rice would be quite good. I agreed and was served shortly with a large plate of partially milled rice and several pieces of chicken which had clearly been in a pot for a considerable period. Washed down with a Heineken, it was all quite palatable.

We found the *campement* with some trouble, not having been alerted to its location outside the town limits. It was, however, well set up and managed to provide a good dinner of fried chicken, French fries, which, with bed, sheets, blanket and mosquito netting plus bucket bath including soap (a generally unheard of luxury), came to the munificent sum of 500 CFA. For those not familiar with the delights of a bucket bath, it is conducted as follows. One is provided a bucket of hot water before which, in

squatting position, all folds and orifices are soaped after small splashes of water. Then, the entire bucket is emptied over the head, washing off soap and accumulated grime, leaving one pleasantly clean, refreshed and ready for sleep after brisk toweling dry.

## 14 JANUARY

Plans for the day upset by finding a flat tire in the morning, which, with the one from the day before, made for two needing repair before we could get to our first village of Tessaoua. Amidou assured me he could get them done in an hour and a half, which, as I was rapidly learning about him, was more than wishful thinking, it was plain fantasy. I left him to manage and took off to find the *préfet*, Maradi being the central town for the eponymous *département* in which the *arrondissement* of Tessaoua is located.

I was impressed to see a Mercedes 220 of recent vintage outside the *préfet's* office. No similarly placed Voltaic could afford such luxurious transportation. I waited a short few minutes to meet the *préfet*, a suave, self-important little man, not bothered much by foreign technicians. He was gracious and distant except for determining just how long I was to be in his jurisdiction and how long had I already been there. I had the distinct impression that I had satisfied his sense of protocol by wasting no time to make my presence known. My mission explained and my *ordre de mission* delivered, I went straight to the hospital to check out possible useful information from the doctor in charge.

He was out, but I was told to come along to meet his *adjoint*. I was ushered down several corridors, through various doors and abruptly into an operating suite where the *adjoint* was in the middle of abdominal surgery. I halted at the door, but having previously been impressed by the casual concern for antisepsis at the central hospital in Ouagadougou, remained in the room and explained my mission. The *adjoint* chattered away, continuing his work, scalpel in hand as I backed out of the room. Smallpox was not a matter of great concern to him and no information was forthcoming.

The tires were finally done and we got on to Tessaoua by 1400. I had hoped to have least two villages done but there was no hope for that because we had to next visit the local *sous-préfet*. This was both for the ever-essential needs of protocol and to have him supply us with a guide. We ended up doing our business with his *adjoint* who was most helpful. When the *sous-préfet* finally appeared at 1630, he seemed relieved that all had been taken care of and we headed off to our *campement* for the night.

This *campement* was less elegant than the one in Maradi but the fine old cook managed to come up with three squab for dinner, a most pleasant surprise. After supper a young gendarme I had chatted with earlier in the day came by to offer a visit about town. Off we went to what became a detailed tour of several brothels where my new friend, Yahaya, was well known and greeted warmly by the strapping girls who were, I was told solemnly, *méchantes vagabondes*. He explained further that Tessaoua was a very small town and even with a wife and children there was little for a man to do but visit the girls. He was most eager that I treat one of his friends for gonorrhea, but having no penicillin at the ready, I suggested she go to the *dispensaire*. That proved an awkward option in that the girl was married to the *dispensaire*, who was not aware of her problem and apparently not its source. The situation was dropped and we ended up at what turned out to be the intended goal of the tour, a local bar where I learned there was none of Yahaya's favorite wine, but there was beer. Beer was orderd—at 130 CFA, exactly twice what it costs in Upper Volta. I was told by the pleasant proprietor of the bar, nothing more than the outer room of a house in a compound, that the beer came from Dahomey (now Benin), thus the extravagant

cost. The degree of luxury this represents is easily appreciated by comparing the price of *brochettes* (15-25 CFA) or a packet of igname (5-10 CFA), which are the common fare. The proprietor, Boukary Garga, had been a cook in France for several years, and became my guide back to the *campement* after it became clear that Yahaya had become too inebriated to manage. It was something of shock when Boukary said in perfect if hesitant English, referring to Yahaya who was stumbling along behind us, "He drinks too much, he talks too much, he is not wise." Not only did his shift of language indicate a nice consideration for Yahaya but it seemed a most succinct characterization as well.

Returned to the *campement* to find that dear Amidou, having decided that my room was too dark, and in attempting to light the gas lantern I had thought was a fool-proof item (for me), had managed to break the glass shield and quite nicely burn his entire right forearm. There was no point in asking why he wanted to light an empty room, knowing I usually carried a flashlight. I could only hope that I was not in for having to manage an open burn in the bush. For now, only a large, bullous blister formation.

## 15 JANUARY

On the road at 0730 in a displeased frame of mind. Amidou's forearm has become almost twice its already formidable size with a swollen, fluid-filled blister, which will probably break soon and I have no Furacin gauze, just plain bandage. Also, he failed to tell me that there had been a leak in the rear gas tank and all the gas was gone, close to 40 liters. This translates to 200 less kilometers we can travel. If I had not noticed a wet spot under the rear of the truck that morning we would have gone off and found ourselves stranded 200 km short of a gas station. I was furious that he had not had the wit, nor sheer survival instinct, to tell me. I endeavoured to impress upon him that observation without communication was a dangerous habit under the chancy circumstances of road travel in Africa.

We got to MaiKongo, our first village, after an hour, all of 39 km. I was glad to find that even with our hesitant interpreter, Abdou, the sample needed was finished within an hour, which included chatting with the chief to explain our business. The guide provided by the *sous-préfet* turned out to be a much better interpreter and was certainly dressed for the part. He was a sizeable fellow, dressed in a grand *boubou* which had been made from the flag of Niger, wide stripes of orange, white and green with the orange dot on the white stripe placed squarely in the middle of his broad back. His head was swathed in a bright red turban, one turn of which he had draped casually under his chin.

After visiting two other villages we were back at Tessaoua for lunch. For me that meant a large Heineken and card punching. I bandaged up Amidou's arm as best I could. The damned fool had not followed my instruction to leave the blister uncovered, apparently embarrassed by it, and put on his coat which was all his traumatized skin needed to open up the blister to the raw flesh beneath, at least no more than second-degree damage. So here we are, *en pleine brousse*, with a large, open burn and nothing but gauze pads and strip bandage. I contemplated open vs closed technique and opted for the latter, considering the constant dust and my patient's modesty.

Finished the afternoon villages and back at Tessaoua by 1810 where my friend, the *campement* cook, had prepared a nice bucket of warm water for my bath. By this time I had become an adept. Earlier I had been too prodigal with the wetting phase, leaving too little volume for the final rinse, which I had done in the squatting position, thus leaving soap along the back of my legs. No such problem this night as I luxuriated in the cascade of warm water in the standing position. Wrapped in my beach towel, I then

repaired to the privy carrying my roll of toilet paper. The privy was nothing more than a small courtyard with a three-foot wall around a hole in the ground within the larger courtyard behind the *campement* building. In a land of very few chairs and extremely rare toilets, one develops rapidly enough the necessary elasticity of hip and knee extensor tendons to be quite comfortable squatting. It was not at all unpleasant to be in this little courtyard in the silent, black African night looking at the stars, which did not seem at all distant. I had once again lost the Big Dipper and was trying to put Orion together. I had his belt but not the rest, even after Rafe's help back in Niamey. Dressed into clean clothes, I sat down to a good meal of meat stew and roast chicken with the invariable *piment* condiment. Coffee and card punching and to bed by 2300.

## 16 JANUARY

This was a classic day of what Africa can do to the best-laid plans of even an organized D'Amanda. Having decided yesterday to head for Korgom because of our limited gas supply, I had to change the itinerary with the discovery of yet another flat tire at 0700. Of course my happy Amidou had not thought to have the tire of yesterday left at a garage for repair, so that with only one spare I was not willing to go far. I organized nearer villages for our sample, expecting to leave the tires for repair in a large village on the way and hoping to get gas there as well for the Korgom leg tomorrow. We bid fond farewell to Tessaoua and headed off, left tires at Gazaoua and proceeded to our little villages, spending much time in second gear through the sifting sand, but still able to finish by 1300. No one cared for lunch so we headed toward the third village. More second gear and four-wheel drive, interrupted by a broken brake line, clogged carburetor, and finally a halt when the guide explained that the village, which "wasn't far" an hour earlier had suddenly become "very, very far away". We did not have the gas to fool about with that degree of imprecision, so we did an about face and headed back to Gazaoua. There, it seemed the young man engaged to repair the tires had found the job too difficult and simply vanished, leaving one tube patched but not in place and one tire totally untouched. Further, there was no gas station in Gazaoua. Another retreat took us on the road back to Tessaoua and relative civilization. My only hope at this point was a quiet place to punch cards and sip a beer, but I was not even allowed that reward. I sent Amidou off with the tires while I waited to use Administration *Bons* for BP gas. (These are worth gold because they can be used for any mark of gas, including the *-préfet's* stock; I was not eager to use them but felt I had no other choice at this point.) Problem one was discovering that Amidou had gone off with the *bons*, which interpreter Abdou retrieved. Then the gas pump died at 100 liters and we needed 130 liters. We managed to find the difference and then discovered that Amidou had also carried the Dodge ignition keys with him—Abdou again to the rescue. The easy hour I had counted on for cards and a beer had dwindled to 10 minutes by the time the ever-cheerful Amidou returned, smiling because he had finished one tire.

I took my cards and hightailed off to the bar where the beer had been nicely cold the day before. Today the refrigerator was out of petrol and a wick, so that the beer was almost warm. I didn't care.

The one recompense was that the nice cook managed to dig up three more squab for supper and he had heated the bucket of water to a fine temperature for my bath. Yahaya showed up to tell me had brought over some greens from his garden for my salad. I thanked him and avoided the bite he put on for a bit of money, continuing with my card punching. Tomorrow had got to be better.



17 JANUARY

Up at 0530 and on the road by 0630 after coffee and bread and washing the burn. The closed technique was not working, so, modestly affronted, Amidou was constrained to travel with his unsightly arm on display. Two small points of infection had already started and I had only a pair of small scissors and gauze pads for debridement. We finished off the village we had not found yesterday. It turned out to be only another fifteen minutes from where we had turned back, but there was no point in being upset by that. We charged on toward Korgom, where our last two villages were and where we were supposed to visit another two villages where smallpox had been recently reported.

The terrain became increasingly difficult, necessitating four-wheel drive continuously to go 12 km up and down dale covered with brambles, small trees and all-too-shifting sand. Finally, going up yet another hill on the way toward the paved road which was to take us to Zinder, the good old Dodge just stopped in its track. Amidou, with his accustomed bravado, leapt from the truck and dove beneath it declaring that the gas line must be plugged. I had noticed before, in Ouaga, after he replaced the incomparable Karim, who had a cool head and savvy demeanor, as my chauffeur, that he loved getting himself filthy grimy and then proudly declare that he had done a job which I knew did not require such display. Thinking of his arm, and quite readily smelling gas from within the truck cabin, I shouted to get the hell out from under the truck. He could begin by looking at the carburetor, which was certainly more accessible and, as far as I could tell, was being flooded out, not starved out, of commission. I remembered the Rambler I had owned years earlier developed a sticky float valve when overheated and did just the same thing. Amidou's feelings were hurt but he said that if I wanted him to look at the carburetor he would do just that. Of course, I had no idea what to do with the damned carburetor but the basic problem did seem obvious and I was not pleased with Amidou's professed mechanical ability if he could not recognize it. Much fiddling with the carburetor and 30 minutes later we were off. We had completed our eight villages and could afford to relax a bit. We still needed another hour, however, to travel the last 12 km before he arrived at the paved road at 2000 which would take us to Zinder.

Fortunately, the road into Zinder led us to the hotel which was our *campement*. It had taken another three hours to get here, the hotel looked too elegant and too expensive, but at that moment I didn't much care. Unpacked and into a room and then off to find something to eat. We closed out a bar where I bought all some well-roasted chickens, beer and a Youki soda for Amidou.

18 JANUARY

Amidou and Abdou went off to deal with the truck and whatever until noon. I started out to see Zinder, thinking such a large city would have taxis. There were none. As I was trying to choose which direction to walk I saw a Chevy truck stop across the street and an American get out. I hurried over, introduced myself and discovered I had found the Regional Peace Corps Director, John Garrett. Most opportune. Papa would have reminded me that D'Amanda luck is a force to be reckoned with.

Garrett took me off to see the *préfet*. We were now in another of Niger's departments. Still wondering if Ruben was doing well, I asked after him and was told by the *préfet* he had not been heard from. The *préfet* was not pleased when Garrett pointed out that Ruben must have passed through the city because one of the volunteers in a village further east had mentioned Ruben had been there. I rapidly talked

about newly arrived Americans not appreciating the necessities of African formalities and could have cheerfully wrung Garrett's neck. He did recognize what he'd done after we left the office but was a bit late. He and his wife Sue were most pleasant and I passed an agreeable time with them. At the Peace Corps office I called Niamey to say I was through and to check if there was further work needed. The smallpox I had heard about was reported from a town called Sassoumbouroum down south near the border with Nigeria. No one knew where Ruben was. I said I would go to investigate after our Dodge was in good running order and with its full complement of repaired or new tires.

I took the rest of the day to see Zinder with Marsha, the Peace Corps secretary. She told me that Zinder came from the German, Zinderhof, meaning Fort Zinder. I knew the territory had been hotly contested between England and France but had no idea what the Germans were doing here, believing they had stopped at Togo. I quite liked the Hausa name for the city, Damagarram, which means City of the Rocks. We went out to see them, a great pile just sitting, in an unprepared-for heap at the eastern end of the city. They were rather awesome and not a little silly; they had no business being there but they were very largely there. We went to a wonderful leather shop full of nice items to buy and then to a very confusing open-air wrestling match. There seemed to be at least ten different simultaneous matches, which at odd intervals would lose one opponent and take up with another from another match and then the odd bystander would leap in and have a go. There was great noise and shouting as well as several musicians playing stringed and horn instruments who were dashing in and out of the fighting area, presumably cheering on the contestants. We also went to see the Saiki of Zinder in his 400-year-old palace. He graciously showed us about, clambering up to the top of the mosque minaret where I took pictures of the city below. Once again in a main room, he was a superb sight, seated on three large cushions while we were properly seated on only one. He was a portly patriarch with many wives and children kept in strict purdah behind screened windows. About the room where we were seated was a superb miscellany of Africa—a large bundle of fetish charms hanging over his head, a girlie calendar, a Zenith transistor radio, electric cord tacked on to the 400-year-old wall leading to a modern French fixture, a telephone with cut wires on a small table, a large photograph with the French Minister of Colonial Affairs standing before the Palais Élysée in 1947. He was completely charming and chatted on amiably until we bid farewell.

## 19 JANUARY

We started off for the smallpox village, Sassoumbouroum, traveling 170 km south toward Nigeria, then west to the village, accomplished without difficulty. We managed to find the *adjoit* to the *infirmier* (who had left for the day) and he reported that instead of two smallpox cases, there were five. To my dismay, there had been no attempt at isolation and no thought of vaccinating the local population, I was assured that everyone in the village had already been vaccinated during an SMP visit the previous year. The *cas* where one of the patients had been placed was currently inhabited by a severely burned elderly woman who had been put there within a week of the putative smallpox patient's departure. She had been there over two weeks and showed no sign of smallpox. And, she had never been vaccinated. I began to wonder if the disease was smallpox. The *adjoit* guided me to one of the isolated compounds, some three kilometers outside the village where a patient still lived. An eight-year-old girl was found, covered from head to toe in all the right places, but in all the wrong places as well, with *taches blanches*, the mark left on black skin after a severe rash caused by any number of exanthematous diseases. From the description of her illness provided by her parents, I was quite certain she had not had smallpox but had

suffered a good bout of chicken pox. The *adjoint* assured me that the other patients had all been of similar appearance and had a similar rapid (one week instead of smallpox's customary three) evolution.

It seemed useful not to challenge the diagnosis publicly and to take advantage of it to make sure the village underwent a special vaccination effort. Off to find the chief only to be told he was absent and would not return for several days. His *adjoint* was a very tight-mouthed individual and would give no information, nor would he permit me visiting the various compounds of the village to do a scar survey as an estimate of the background level of immunity. There was no vaccine available at the dispensary, so I reassured the *adjoint* we would send some out from Niamey within the week if he would promise to tell the chief to organize the village for a grand session of vaccination.

We were only four kilometers from the frontier with Nigeria and I had not seen my good friends the Hogans for over a year, after they had left Abidjan to take up SMP work in Kaduna. The city was only 450 km down the road and I knew the roads in Nigeria were all asphalt.

## THE NIGERIA CAPER

19 JANUARY (CONTINUED)

Remained the problem of whether I would have difficulty at the frontier. I had a visa, obtained in Niamey, for the SMP meeting in Lagos later in February, but one never knows what can happen at a frontier. I decided to go to the police post and say I very much wanted to visit friends in Kaduna, but, if there were to be any difficulty, I would not go. This I did and had the good fortune, again, to meet a customs official who was eager to go to Kano, the largest city in northern Nigeria and more than halfway to Kaduna. Everyone at the post said there should be no difficulty. The customs man said he would see to all the necessary procedures at the frontier if I would take him to Kano.

I could not have been more willing. By 1300 we were in Nigeria and heading south. The customs man was as good as gold, pushing me ahead of the multitude waiting at the frontier as well as waving us through a couple of police check points set up along the route. He was a most garrulous chap, appeared to know everyone and was delighted to think: (from which impression I did not disabuse him) that I was heading to Kaduna to see a cherished girlfriend. The Nigerians, much as my only other experience with Anglophone West Africans, the Ghanaians, are delightfully outspoken and, often more than not, a little salacious. In both countries the citizens are welcome relief from the smoothly polite West African in Francophone nations. Progress toward a particular endpoint may take the same discursive length of time, but the journey is hilarious with the Anglophones, intellectually challenging and a tad tiresome with the Francophones. We left our customs guide off in Kano and then had a terrible time finding an exit from the city. The main road had been tom up for a new roundabout and the conflicting directions I had from six different people kept us heading [missing text] gave me some Texaco *bons* and made a simple but very nearly very costly mistake. He told me the Texaco station was on the way out of Kaduna (maybe I took a wrong turn), but as we drove on our way we passed only Esso stations and not one with a Texaco logo. Then I compounded the error by deciding I could fill the tank at Zaria which was not far up the road.

Of the three Texaco stations we came to, not one had any gas. I had no Nigerian money. There we were, rolling along on an ever-diminishing supply of gas, hoping against hope another Texaco station would

appear, this one with available gas. Bob had routed me around Kano so that I would not have to face that mess again. The only problem turned out to be that the new route led through lots of small towns separated by large expanses of countryside. About 1900 we arrived at the town of Malumfashi and I felt sure that if we left without more gas we would end up marooned in some field. No Texaco station, no telephone, no one at an AGIP station (naturally enough) to loan money nor buy a gerry can.

I headed off for the hospital hoping to find a sympathetic soul, and did, indeed. Dr. Ann Musson was just sitting down to her evening tea when I wandered on to her porch. She told me to sit down, not missing a sip of her tea, join her with a cup of my own, and she would hear my tale. Two large cups later she laughed merrily at my predicament and assured me she would either cash my traveler check or loan me 4 pounds to buy gas to reach Katsina, where we hoped a still-provisioned Texaco station was to be found. She took me off to the local bank director who was a neighbor, to find the correct exchange rate and I stumbled into another tub of lard. Chris, the director, and his wife, a delicate English beauty, asked us to join them over beer and sherry. Much pleasant conversation later, I said I really had to be on the way. Ann said she would loan me money and Chris insisted I should fill up the truck on his account at the AGIP station. I demurred but then decided I had better accept the offer. Warm farewells and I was off again.

Into Katsina at 2200 and no Texaco station was open. On to the frontier where we found a truck stop with great drums of gas standing about. Our tank was filled up for three pounds ten, leaving just enough for Amidou and Abdou to find some *brochettes* and bread at nearby stands. The frontier police passed us along and we continued to the customs building. I looked all through the building, shouted, honked the horn and got no response. Returned to the police and was told there would be no customs staff on hand until 0700 the next day. I had never found a closed frontier during other travels and was furious, having expected to be back in Maradi that evening and ignoring the time of one o'clock in the morning. Damn the Nigerians, said I to myself as I stretched out on the front seat of the Dodge and went to sleep.

## 21 JANUARY

Of course the customs men did not arrive on time and we were not done with all the forms and explanations until 0750 when we finally escaped to Francophone territory. We arrived in Maradi and went straight to the hotel to attend to Amidou's burn. It was not in bad shape but still was an unpleasant sight, the two infected areas still present and even a bit larger. I had been dousing Amidou with aspirin but the arm was obviously painful, so I decided I would drive us back to Niamey, some 760 km.

We stopped at Madaoua long enough to get some brightly colored straw rugs and then barreled on down the road, arriving in Niamey at 1945. I deposited the boys at their various houses, told Amidou to meet me early the next day at the Embassy for proper attention to his burn and then went off to the hotel.

Had a nice hot shower and a delicious meal of a dozen *belons* (a variety of oyster Hogan had introduced me to in Abidjan), salmon, endive salad, cheese and a proper amount of wine. The Hendersons showed up and we had coffee and liquors together as I recounted my adventures. Finally to bed at 0200, planning the trip home to Ouagadougou later in the day.