

From Centre then you made the decision to return to Iran again?

Yes. I made the decision because there came--I've forgotten the name of the fellow. They had a man from the University of Chicago and he recommended to the board of trustees that they make a change in the administration. The majority of the trustees were on my side. But still I learned that that would be an uncomfortable situation, and so I just tendered my resignation.

At the same time, since I had been in Iran, there was this invitation to return to Iran as the head of an engineering college out there that at the time was under the jurisdiction of the overseas oil companies. It's a very complicated setup; I don't believe I ought to try to tell you about it here.

The idea was that within a five-year period this engineering college, which had been under the aegis of the oil companies over the years, should become an independent engineering college. I was there for four years. We never succeeded in accomplishing that. Right down to the Khomeini period they never succeeded in bringing that about.

We were trying to educate young Iranian engineers for life as engineers in Iran. From the day I arrived I was told by some of the British members of the company that there wasn't too much sympathy for this move. You see, the whole oil setup in those days was a kind of an appeasement arrangement. Britain had had the oil in its hands completely. Iran had thrown them out. Therefore, how to bring about a new arrangement that would be acceptable to the British and acceptable to the Iranians. And the Americans stepped in. Herbert Hoover, Jr. set up the arrangement whereby a whole new conglomerate took over the oil production. This thing of changing the engineering school into an independent college was largely supported by Americans. The British did not support it, and that was the fly in the ointment from day one there. I could spend the rest of the hour or more telling you about what was going on there.

However, in the four years that I was there we succeeded in putting out a top-flight group of young engineers. Within a very short time one of them was in the cabinet of the government. Several of them had organized their own engineering companies. An unusual number of them came to this country and completed their doctor's degree in engineering. Those fellows, unfortunately, are all back in this country now because of the situation we talked about earlier this morning. It's really pathetic when I think of that group in particular, the kind of work they were engaged in between 1962 and 1979; many of them were doing a remarkable job.

One of the personnel officers in Iran in the oil company said that our young engineers who did join the oil company were by far the most valuable that they had. We developed a course in general engineering. Now it wasn't the general engineering which we have in this country, which is usually a form of industrial engineering. But when we said general engineering, we meant that each of those young men had the basic engineering for civil, for mechanical, for chemical, and for electrical. And when they came to this country to do their Ph.D.s, they did it in whichever one of those four fields-- In other words, we had given them the ground work. So it was a very tough course of engineering.

But they were able to manage it because we had about a thousand applicants a year because it was absolutely a free ride. I told them, I said, "Every one of you here is on a complete football scholarship." They had free board and room, free tuition. I had a small lion on my hands when I insisted that they pay for their textbooks. Anyhow, out of that thousand applicants, we were only permitted to take thirty students. In one of our classes of thirty, we had nineteen top students in their respective high schools. So when we poured it on them, they were able to take it. One of them right now, down in Atlanta, Georgia, is a vice president of one of the biggest engineering companies, Lockwood Green. It's fantastic! I went in his office maybe seven or eight years ago in Atlanta, Georgia, and there was a journal on his desk, Editor in Chief, Feruz Israel (Sp.?) I said, "Feruz, how did you get this job wished on you?" He said, "You described it, Dr. Groves, it was wished on me." He was engineer of the year from Georgia a few years ago. This is one of these boys. Of course, he's outstanding; but with us he was a good B student. He wasn't the top man in his class.

You remained in Iran until--?

I remained in Iran then for four years and--let's see, yes, '57 to '61 and then from '62 to '64 I moved over. I had an argument with them out there. My British friends tried to change this engineering college into a technician school. I had such a run-in on that one that even the Persians became frightened of me. They were afraid I was going to start another revolution in Iran. I was surprised when one of my Dutch friends--you see the Dutch were involved in this undertaking--he and I became good friends. When I made the transition from the engineering school in Abadan to Baklavi (Sp.?) University in Shiraz where I was a kind of provost and vice chancellor, he told me when I met him; he said, "Walter, these fellows are afraid as hell of you." I said, "I don't know why; I'm no revolutionist."

But what had happened was, the revolution which kicked the British out started in Abadan. And it started right in this college which I was the head of for four years. The student strikes threatened the country two or three times. I dealt with the strikes in the way you would deal with them in this country. I called the students in. One time we had a delegation visiting us from Tehran University, and I learned about it. We had set up a student government, and I called the head of the student government in; and I said, "These fellows are coming down here to try to incite you to strike. What should we do about it?" "Well", they said, "we think the best thing is for you to come over at dinner time today at the dormitory and talk to the whole group." So I went over there and started talking and I told them; I said, "We know these fellows are coming. What shall we do?" Immediately they said, "We'll beat them up!" I said, "No, I don't--" Well, actually, they did come, but some of these fellows (our own students) knew who they were, and they went out and said, "Please stay away." And that was that. This wasn't the government's way of dealing with strikers, you see.

In other words, my experience both at Centre College and Iran with students was identical. I laughed at the students here at Centre when I started teaching. They wouldn't have a paper ready on time, you know, with all the usual excuses. I said, "You just sound like a bunch of Iranians to me." Human nature is human nature regardless of where it comes to light.



Anyhow, then I had two good years at Shiraz. I had my problems there. That was supposed to become an American type university. It was again supposed to become an independent university. It never quite made it. The fellow I was working with, the chancellor, he was a character. He was the poet laureate of Iran, a real scholar and a real poet, but the worst administrator that ever happened. My struggle with him-- We were good friends. He had been educated in England. I was in Tehran when he came back from England as a young man with his Ph.D. I guess his Ph. D. first was in economics and then it was in literature. He told me that he had told them that he would only accept the chancellorship of this university if I would join him to help him do the job. So he and I could fight beautifully because we knew one another. He was anti-American in his way. His wife was British, and yet both he and his wife and my wife and I got along really beautifully. They'd amuse us by their criticism of Americans, you know, when we talked, because we'd just laugh it off.

And finally U.S. AID got into the picture, and they caused the Shah to dismiss this fellow. And so I decided it was time for me to go, too. I wasn't getting anywhere. That was when I did leave and returned to this country in '64. But I had a very interesting two years there.

I could tell many a yarn; one just quickly:

On my own, my wife and I drove out into the country just for a picnic on a Friday (Friday is a weekly holiday). We came back and was having dinner when some Persian friends (young men) in town there asked where I had been. I told them. They said, "Oh, Dr. Groves, what did you ever go for? You're lucky you came back alive." Well, as it turned out, the reason we came back alive--a little kid asked for a ride. We took him for a ride and took him to his village. It was a village which the Iranians in Shiraz were afraid to death to go to that village. They were tribespeople. But here I was giving one of their kids a lift, and so we got away with a whole skin. I was completely ignorant of where I was and what I was doing. But so it goes.

Did you retire then when you came back in '64?

I came back and worked for a year with my friend Hutchinson in Philadelphia in studies for higher education. Our oldest son, who was here in Danville, died. I had a kind of a breakdown. They told me to retire for good, which I did in '65.

Just briefly, what activities have you been involved in since your retirement?

We had been in Albany, Georgia, for a year and a half; and they had engaged a young man in this country to be the pastor of the community church in Abadan. I had attended that church, and the Presbytery knew about it. He couldn't go for nine months. So I said, "Well, I'll go for nine months until he gets out there." I got out there and they said, "Well, can you spend an extra nine months so he can study Persian before he takes over?" So we were there for eighteen months, and I was the interim minister for this community church there. We came home.

Meantime a move was started to develop a women's college in Tehran, a development out of our mission girls' school there. So once again they asked me to go back and help the president of this new women's college. I was back there for two periods: the first time for about six months, the next time a year, helping get this college started.

Meantime, with the help of a former missionary colleague who had been our chemistry professor in Tehran, we put together a board of directors for this new college, an American board. That organization still exists. We had been meeting during this period once a year in the hopes that there'd be some turn-over and the college could be restored. One way or another we were able to raise for that undertaking, I guess, not less than \$3 million. Now don't misunderstand me, that was not--well, it was done in part by this board. We arrived on the scene of AID--Agency for International Development of our government--just at the time there was a new administration of this U.S. Aid for Schools and Hospitals Abroad, which is a part of AID. I'd better not say this aloud--all that aid was going to Israel, and this fellow felt that that was not fair. As he said to me, "Our department is here to--what is it?--make friends and influence people. We sure don't have to do that in Israel. We are giving them umpteen millions." So he was looking for ways in which they could really spread the efforts wide. They ultimately gave us, I don't know, a million and a half or two million dollars for a library building which has gone by the boards now. The oil companies gave us an initial grant of \$200,000 through this Dutch friend that I described a moment ago. A couple of foundations in this country also gave some aid. So all in all-- And the Iranian oil company gave us the land, a very valuable piece of land. Did we actually get?-- We started in '68, yes. We just about got--'72--we got four or five classes of graduates before the Khomeini government just took it over, lock, stock and barrel. It's not used as a college at all nowadays. Beautiful location, beautiful buildings. The architects were the same people that built the fine arts building here. They designed our buildings for us.

I don't have any additional questions except to--

Well, I'd better run because I'm supposed to be in Perryville now.

Thank you very much.

Tape 2, Side 1 (Part 3) Dr. Walter Groves Interview (concluded)  
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