

Lagos, Nigeria, Africa 2002

Personal Journal of Eric R. Willman

15APR2002

Everything has gone as planned for my airline flights. I arrived in Lagos, (lay-goss) Nigeria about 20 minutes late, but have nothing to report about the flights, other than a few very short delays. All the planes took off and landed without any problems.

16APR2002

The flight from Atlanta to Paris was completely full. I tried but could not get a bulkhead or exit row seat, so it was just a matter of settling in for an 8+ hour flight. I watched two movies on the personal viewer in the seat. Between the movies and the meals, there was little time left to sleep. Now I am in a mode of only having a few hours of sleep in the last 2 days.

On the flight from Paris, I had a seat in the very rear for the aircraft, so I was one of the last people off. This meant that I would be last in line to pass through immigration. There were no problems and it was on to get my bag. Sure enough my two-dollar suitcase from Goodwill arrived without a scratch. (My one hundred dollar suitcase was destroyed last year.)

As soon as I passed through all the checkpoints, and walked past all the customs agents, I headed outside to find someone looking for me. I quickly noticed Jerry looking for me and we hooked up. Then we had to find our driver. That took about 20 minutes, but after that it was a short 3 minute drive to WATS.

It was raining slightly and it did nothing but get heavier over the next few hours. After I thought about it, I realized that it is the beginning of the rainy season so I should expect that it will rain everyday from now on. It will begin raining earlier in the day and last longer into the evening.

Upon arriving at WATS, they did not have any power. The commercial power has been up and down due to the power folks switching lines to eliminate overloads on an already overloaded power grid. To add some encouragement to the whole situation, there is a high voltage wire broken off the pole in front of WATS so I would expect that we could go the better part of the week with no power here. There are two generators running, but they are far from being able to handle much of the load. One of them has been setup just to run the phone system and a few lights.

The humidity here is SOOOOO high. It is very uncomfortable to be doing anything. You sit and sweat all the time, even when just breathing. Plus I think my body still may be in winter mode, because I am doing a lot of sweating. It seems that there is no chance of anything drying by hanging it up.

Dinner consisted of a very small grilled chicken breast and a few fried potatoes. We ate by the light of a camp lantern and then went in to make my bed with a flashlight. Our cook, De'opolis, has spent some time as a chef somewhere. Every dish is presented with not only a taste appeal but a visual one as well.

I guess I didn't realize that being close to the airport has its good and bad. For one thing it wasn't much of a drive to get from the airport to the compound, but on the other hand, WATS is directly downwind of the main runway. When planes are taking off the noise becomes very difficult to miss. Actually at times it is downright uncomfortable. Just about the time you are thinking to yourself, "man that sucker's loud," you realize that it is still getting louder and the plane is just passing overhead. If you look up, you can see the plane and read the numbers on the tail wing. After the thing passes is when the real noise starts. The concrete floors and the ground shakes. I can assure you that this is way over the EPA's noise limits for just about everyone. I figure it is pushing 120 decibels when it passes by. At least landing isn't as bad

I am ready for bed tonight. There is a Baptist church next door that is very proud of their sound amplification system. Between that and the sounds of the public street out front, it sounds like a war zone. The car horn is apparently a normal part of driving the car. People honk their horns continuously. Plus there are always people in the streets; and I mean a lot of people. So even if only half of them are talking or making noise, you have a lot of people making a lot of noise. I think I am going to put some earplugs in and call it a night.

17APR2002

The day starts at about 630am with breakfast being ready at 7. Today we each had a rather small omelet with tomato and onions inside and fried potatoes. It was rather tasty, but the portion was small. I came back to the room and ate one of the Barry's Bagels that I brought. The only soft drinks here are Coke and Fanta orange. I made another insulated water bottle that I will take with me to work and drink from it all day. It is a liter and a half and I need to drink that much in a day, if not more. Each night I fill it with drinking water and place the whole thing in the freezer overnight. Hopefully by morning I will have a big block of ice that will keep it cold most of the day.

Much to my surprise the power was on in the morning and the downed high voltage line is repaired. I also found out that my room has an air conditioner in it that actually works when the commercial power is on. I went out back to look at their incoming power system and I couldn't do anything but shake my head and take pictures to bring home. Not only is it dangerous looking, it really is dangerous.

Jerry and Sarah are still working on the phone jacks in the offices and I started working on the telephone switch. Things were rolling along and about 830 the power company turned off the power. It took about 20 minutes to get one of the generators fired up, but the area that I am working on the switch was connected to a different generator. About a half hour later I walked out to get some air and cool down some. I watched as one of the workers came up the steps with a battery. One of the guys tried to start the generator with the crank, but quickly gave up on that. They started the generator and carried the battery back down the steps to re-install it in someone's car. About 45 minutes later, the lights in my area came back on and most importantly, my fan. We ran on that generator most of the day.

They brought my table for the switch and I installed all the circuit boards into the unit and got it configured the way I wanted it. I continued to work on the backboard, installing all the connecting blocks and cables that will connect to the switch. Everything went really well and I was able to get all 10 cables terminated before lunch at 1pm. Lunch consisted of about 4 ounces of beef and more fried potatoes, this time cut like french fries. After lunch I took a short nap. I am certainly not used to this humidity all of a sudden and it had already been a long day.

By about 3pm the lights in my area were not working too well. The belt on the generator is loose and it began to stretch out again. This is the third belt that has been on the generator this week and it looked like number 4 was not far off. Sure enough, they stopped the generator and the belt was all chewed up from not being tight enough. As the load on the generator increases, so does the amount of force required to turn the generator. After they replaced the belt again and got it started up, I decided to try and power up the switch. The Panasonic power supplies are really the weakest link to the whole phone system and sometimes they don't travel real well. We had 3 here, so hopefully one would work. As I began to plug things in, I noticed that the outlet strip had a red light on that said "unsafe voltage." I got my meter out and tested the voltage. It should have been 220 volts and the meter read 335. After it goes through the transformer, what was supposed to be 120 was really closer to 165. Way too much. I asked them to slow the generator as it was putting out too much voltage and they reluctantly did as I asked. I got it to 250 and 125 for the switch.

They only have one phone line for the entire compound and it was broken this morning so I couldn't connect it to the switch. All of the power supplies worked and it seemed like this was going to be good. I cleared the memory in the switch, set the date and time, and configured it for the cards installed and everything was fine. They promised us that the switch would have uninterruptible power so I decided to go looking for it. I went up to their computer workshop and it was laying in pieces on the floor. They told me that it didn't work and when I asked what was wrong, I didn't get an answer. They told me that they didn't really know what it was doing wrong, so I got my meter out and started testing. After the thing shocked me twice, it appeared that the batteries were good, but the unit did indeed have a problem. As they were "testing" or perhaps screwing around with it, one of the guys stuck his screwdriver in the wrong place and shorted out the battery plant, before the fuse. There was a huge explosion and if it wasn't broken before, it definitely is now. I declared the screwdriver and the UPS as junk. I decided to use the batteries with the back-up system that was shipped with the switch. I think they will get much longer service out of it this way than with the UPS. Now we are just going to use the case of the broken UPS as a battery holder.

Dinner was pasta and chicken with some type of alfredo sauce. It was really good, but again, it was gone quickly. Dessert was a small slice of watermelon. I was just about ready to try and get CNN on the satellite dish when the power went off again. They got the generator started and so I decided to take a shower in the bathtub with the lights flashing on and off as the generator was trying to stall and without the hot water heater. Since the compound has its own water tower, and since it is made of steel, the sun creates a natural water heater. The water was cool, but not overly cold for a shower. I wouldn't want to shower that way all the time, but it worked.

At about 930pm, I can hardly keep my eyes open, so it is off to bed.

--For some reason I am not always able to sleep straight through the night. One of the problems is when the power goes off in the middle of the night, the ceiling fan and air conditioner obviously stop. You find yourself waking up at some point later in a puddle of sweat and unable to get back to sleep with absolutely no air moving whatsoever. Another problem is when you become thirsty and decide to get up for a trip to the fridge for some water. Tonight I walked in the kitchen and turned on the light, and upon retrieving a glass from the cabinet, I looked down at the counter and saw something the likes of which I had never seen before. I have seen some big roaches, but if this was a roach, well I didn't know what to think. It had antennae about 2 inches long and was red. I debated about smashing it, but I looked around in the room and saw several more. At that point I was afraid that they could get me surrounded, so I opted to leave it be. I still don't know what it was, but I do know it was big.

18APR2002

Today was a huge day! A lot got accomplished today. The day started the normal way, except Sarah did not feel good. Something about yogurt covered raisins didn't agree with her. From the sound of it, I could have suggested against it.

Anyway, we got to work about 730 and started working on the UPS batteries for the phone switch. The power went off around 9am, as planned and I worked in the dark for about an hour waiting for the generator to get started. It finally did and I continued from there. Jerry had the cable pair assignments completed, so I crunched that into an Excel spreadsheet and began my programming for the system. I powered the switch up shortly after lunch, and it is up to stay now. The battery pack is complete, we have a power conditioner on the line, and everything is looking fine.

Everything ran along fairly smooth until about 1130 when the generator stalled. I figured it ran out of fuel, so one of the guys attempted to start it again. It wasn't the fuel, so they tried to crank start it with no luck. Then they went to get a battery from a car and when it started going dead, it

appeared that there was some type of major problem. Fortunately for us, the commercial power came back on shortly after lunch. It now seems that they have an overabundance of generators, but a major shortage of engines to drive them.

Later in the afternoon I started installing cross connect jumpers to activate the jacks in the offices. Aina, (eye-nah) their chief engineer was looking over my shoulder and I pulled him in to do some training. After about 15 minutes he was doing everything, and he even found one of my mistakes in the spreadsheet and we fixed that together. He was making good progress until he got stopped. More on that in a minute...

We were rushing around because all of the directors of the school were going to eat dinner with us and have some social time. We were preparing to be ready for dinner at 6. Our cook was preparing a great feast for all. However, that didn't happen. At about 4:45pm, 2 guys wearing t-shirts and jeans showed up at the school and identified themselves as the police. There was about a minute of confusion and I thought they were there because of a problem with our visitor papers. I envisioned being hauled down to the station for questioning, but it was much worse. They were there for Aina, the chief security officer and the director of personnel. The police were there to charge the three of them in the death of a person from the city. Seems that 2 or so days ago, someone fell into a "pit" outside to compound wall, but still on school property. This person died somehow as a result of the fall. According to Nigerian law, they felt that these people were responsible for this death, and they were there to arrest them as representatives of the property. So all of the directors were down at the police station trying to arrange for the release of their people. They were unsuccessful and they were held until at least tomorrow. Jerry, Sarah and I had a great dinner, but not the fun that we expected.

After dinner, we all went back to work with the energy we had left and spent a few hours getting things complete. It seems that Jerry and Sarah are leaving tomorrow morning at about 8am. I am not very happy about this because it puts A LOT of pressure on me to not only complete the installation and do most of the training on the telephone system, but also teach and finish the wiring system, which I didn't install, work with, or even learn because of time, and install and test phones in offices and rooms that I have never been in before. To make matters even worse, we have had a lot of problems getting phones to work when plugged in because the jacks are wired different/wrong or just not complete yet in some fashion. I don't see how all this is going to get done, but I'll do the best I can.

We have been searching for several days for some phones that were allegedly shipped, but can't be found. One person says that they were here, another says no way. These are the system phones that have all the buttons and features, and will be very tricky for the customer to install without one being here to follow. I can't hardly train someone for a phone they have never seen or touched, and probably won't for at least several weeks or more. Just part of the pressure...

It poured down rain tonight and the air is so humid you can't hardly stand to be outside or anywhere that is not air conditioned. I am so glad that the commercial power has been on tonight and the air conditioner has been running in my room. It is fairly cool and I am ready for bed.

I didn't sleep real well last night, but I have taken different steps tonight that should help. My bed mattress is a very thick piece of sponge rubber. After you lay on it for a while it tends to make a channel that takes sometime to release back to normal. At least you don't roll out of bed since you are stuck in the groove.

By the way, the outside phone line still is not working. They sent someone to the phone company 2 days ago and no one has been out to fix it yet. Hopefully they will come and fix it tomorrow.

19APR2002

Today is Friday and everybody is looking forward to their weekend. Jerry and Sarah left this morning about 830 and they are on their way to the Central African Republic to work on a job there. I was left with all of the work to complete.

The day started with Jude as he began finishing wiring that I thought was already completed. He has had minimal training, knows how to hook up phones, but not what to do if he runs into trouble. He ran into trouble very early on. He found several lines that had no dial tone and they were supposed to be working. So we spent the next hour and a half learning how to troubleshoot wiring troubles. It was good that it happened because I needed to teach him how to do that anyway. He seemed to understand what we were doing and I think he learned a lot from the experience. I checked on him later in the day and he had already completed 8 installations, including one that I thought he might have trouble with. I was very proud of him.

Right after lunch I sat down with several of the people that are going to be the programmers of the system. They probably won't do any wiring, but we spent about 2 hours talking about features and operation. I even showed them how to do a database back-up (which takes about 25 minutes to complete) and the power went off right in the middle of that. The system batteries worked great, but the computer didn't without power.

It was about this same time that Aina showed up in yesterday's clothes and had just been released from his "cell." We were all very glad to see him. We set up a time tomorrow to meet and go over things that he still wants to learn. I went out front to try and get a glimpse of the "pit." The area has now been barricaded off and it lies under a very large water puddle, so it is understandable how someone could have fallen in. It is part of the sewer system. The security guards were pretty upset that I was walking around in the area. There seems to be a lot more security today, for the whole place.

As for the generator woes, I found out today that the main generator engine has already been dispatched away for the needed repairs. I saw that the engine was gone, but didn't realize that it was at repair. The back-up, back-up generator was unable to be started due to the fact that the pull rope was broken. It too was dispatched for repair. The back-up... (well lets say the third generator) that stalled yesterday and wouldn't restart was fixed yesterday with a minor adjustment, so I requested that it be started and put on-line. It worked great for about 15 minutes, then the lights started to flicker, the engine sounded funny, and a strange odor began to be noticed. If you didn't already guess, the belt was smoking and ready to come apart at any moment. That generator was stopped and this belt had literally melted and so we just waited it out. The power came back on (for the second time today) at around 6pm.

I was late for dinner tonight because one of the guys wanted a picture with me and he wasn't going to be around tomorrow. So all of us jumped together for pictures with everyone's cameras. Dinner was a tasty breaded chicken with onions, green peppers and a spicy sauce. It was complimented with pasta and cabbage.

Overall I would say the day went fairly well, but there is still a lot of work to be done, and most of it will not be done by the time I am ready to leave on Sun. I think the guys are getting the gist of the concepts and they should do rather well when I am gone.

20APR2002

Even though it was Saturday, the day started normal with breakfast at 7am. De'opolis made an omelet for me today with extra pieces of toast. He has learned that I ask for more toast everyday. He also seems to be serving larger portions. Perhaps since I practically lick the plate clean he has figured out that I am a rather hearty eater.

I had plans to meet with Topea (toe'-pay), Aina, and Jude this morning at 8. They were all ready to continue learning. Topea works in the computer workshop and was one of the people that I trained yesterday on the system programming. He is a hardware guy and wanted to learn more about the wiring side of things.

When I arrived at the switch this morning, I noticed that Topea had installed Office on the computer and had taken the Excel spreadsheet and copied it to the programming computer. I spent about an hour and a half with Topea teaching him the hardware side of the system. As we were talking, I noticed that he was moving through the program screens very easily and even was doing some of the advanced things I showed yesterday. I feel confident that he understands the basics of the switch.

Jude is actually a student here and has a degree in engineering. He was called into ministry several years ago. Before Jerry left, he spent time with Jude showing him how to use some of the tools to test wires and install phones. When Jude came back to the switch area after installing a few phones, he told me that he still had some questions about how the wiring was done on the backboard. I looked at Topea and told him that I have gone home and he has to explain it to Jude. They worked together and Topea explained things probably better than I could have. They got confused at only one point and I made them think it out and figure out where their error was. They learned an important concept in the process that they needed to understand for the future. I felt very proud during that time because they were learning from each other and interacting in their own way.

Jude asked me if I would come to his residence (dorm on the compound) so that we could share pictures. I knew that he wanted a picture together, but I didn't realize that he also wanted to share his pictures with me. He spent almost a half hour this afternoon sharing his life with me. Jude is 29 and has a long history with WATS. His wife was also a graduate from WATS several years ago. He showed me their wedding pictures, and pictures of him in various settings, and the pictures from his wife's funeral. She died of complications during delivery of their son. He is alone now, but has an incredible faith and happiness from his commitment to the Lord. It was really encouraging to hear him speak. Since he was an engineering major, he is spending this year of school getting caught up on the theology classes he needs to enter into the graduate program here. That means that he has another 3 years here to complete his masters. He's not sure he wants to be a pastor, but he knows he wants to serve the Lord. Before I left, he took 2 pictures of himself out of his photo album and gave them to me to take home.

Aina was in class all day today, but he wants to meet with me tomorrow to talk through a few more things before I leave. He offered to drive me to the airport, so that will work out well. I might ask him to drive me through Lagos before we get there. So far this trip I have not been off the property at all.

As expected, the power was disrupted right before lunchtime. Other than that, things have been rather stable today. I am hoping for another night of uninterrupted power so that I can sleep well. I will be able to sleep in tomorrow. The cook has the day off, so he has already prepared tomorrow's meals and they are in the fridge. Plus chapel doesn't start until 10, so that means some extra time of sleep to get caught up before I leave and travel for a day.

I spent a major part of the afternoon watching from the building at a team of police officers with rifles standing along the street and stopping cars. There were 7 officers total in black uniforms standing in the sun directing cars to pull over. I initially noticed that it seemed as though they were stopping only newer, clean, expensive cars. Later, they stopped other, not so nice cars. They were checking papers from the drivers and occasionally looking in the trunk. I asked Jude what the papers were and he told me they were driver's license papers, but that the police were actually taking bribes. I learned this *after* I discretely took a photo from the third floor. Sure enough, I

watched for it and I saw several of the drivers paying the police so that they could leave. Jude told me that they would stop after they got enough money, or if the chiefs showed up. My initial thought was that the chiefs would break it up, but actually the officers will allow the chiefs to get what they want, then the officers will come back later. They were out there stopping cars for 4 hours. An example of free enterprise, I guess.

A new couple showed up tonight and is staying in the flat with me at Dr Maxey's place. They are from Indianapolis and he is going to be teaching here for 2 weeks. I told them where I was from and they knew right away.

I saw the "pit" today since the floodwater had receded. Apparently Aina had the hole dug to catch storm water and reduce the flooding. I don't totally understand the concept, and I don't think it works too well.

21APR2002

I decided to attend church on the compound rather than risk it and go elsewhere. I figured this was the safest because church services can last anywhere from 2 and a half to 5 hours in length. Almost everyplace would certainly not be air conditioned and so it would be risky to leave the compound. I ended up being "fashionably late" to the chapel service and it lasted 2 and half hours as I figured. Sometimes it can be difficult because the singing is usually loud, can be in any language and be in multiple tempos and musical keys, all at the same time. The sermons can be difficult to understand the words and they usually pack 20 minutes worth of material into 1 hour. It was a very mild day outside, the humidity was lower and all doors to the chapel were open so the service was very pleasant. Visitors to any church in Africa is a big deal and everyone wants to know your name and a little about you. At the end of the sermon, the preacher acknowledged that a visitor came in late and he asked me to stand up and introduce myself. A very welcoming attitude, but one that perhaps encourages folks to arrive on time.

At the conclusion of the service, a man in the back row asked if he could talk to me privately. He had a tough looking face, with many scars and his voice was very high and weak. I agreed to meet him in the flat after he tended to the day's offerings. He arrived shortly later and asked me if there was anything that I knew about, medically, that could help his voice. I assume that since I was a white person, he equated that to being trained and educated, perhaps a doctor. After asking him some questions, I learned that his condition has been that way for 10 years. He really wanted to be healed but didn't have the financial means for treatment. I didn't really know what to tell him, but I agreed to pray with him and he liked that idea greatly. I laid hands on him and it became obvious that his faith was strong

Apparently the police didn't get enough money yesterday because they were back today. After they left, I went outside the compound wall to take a few pictures. The rest of the day was spent resting, answering last minute questions for Aina, Jude and Topea. All three of them wanted to ride along to the airport to see me off. Around 7pm we finished last photos and packed into Aina's Nissan for the short trip to the airport. I don't frighten easily as the passenger in a car, but this was an exception. The windshield was completely smashed from what looked like multiple impacts. I was certain that we bought the farm twice with U-turns. Remember the car horn comment earlier, well I heard a lot of horns. If you don't like the path of the road, you create a new one. In order to use the overpass quickly, Nigerians simply hop the "curb" and turn around. They don't allow trucks to use the overpass because they "want it to last" according to Aina. To this end, they have placed steel barriers at about 7 feet high to discourage trucks from using the overpass. The entrance is still intact, however the exit barrier lays in pieces on the side of the road. They stayed with me at the airport for about an hour and there was an emotional send off. I proceeded through the numerous checkpoints on my way to the gate.

I will have to say that Air France is serious about security. The plane travels with about 8 extra security officials. When the plane arrives, they get off and screen passengers before they board. 2 goons inspect your passport, then the gate agent takes your boarding pass, then 2 more goons inspect every carry-on bag going down the jetway. After that, another goon is waiting to wand you with a metal detector. Upon arrival in Paris, 2 police officers carefully inspect your passport prior to entering the airport. It does take some extra time, but it's not that big of a deal.

My seat on the Air France flight had a technical problem because it would not stay in the full upright position. This caused numerous problems for me. The gentleman directly behind me was upset because my seat was reclined during the meal and when I tried to sleep, the fully reclined position added some tension to my neck that I knew was bad. The only way I could keep the seat from reclining by itself was to not put any pressure on it. That, however, was not a real practical solution.

It was all I could do to stay awake in the Paris airport. As a matter of fact, I think I did fall asleep for a short time sitting in the waiting seats. I was hoping that the Delta flight would be empty and I could find a center row with no one in it so I could lie down across the seats. However, this flight was almost full. On the way over I scoped out my seat location and determined that it was an isle seat in the last row of the center section, 58G. It didn't look too bad, so I decided to stick with it. It is a good thing I did because it was one of the few rows that only had 2 persons in it.

22APR2002

Well the journey is nearing its end. I have only a few hours remaining in the flight from Paris to Cincy. I was finally able to get some real quality sleep on this flight, but the flight hasn't been without incident.

As we were taxiing out to the runway an obviously panicked voice came across the overhead paging speakers, "I need a doctor!! If there is a doctor on board, please notify the crew!" One of the flight attendants in business class leaned over to stow a bag under a seat and pulled a muscle in her shoulder and was in extreme pain. The aircraft stopped on the taxi way and there was a few minutes where we weren't sure if we would have to return to the terminal. I can just imagine what type of trouble that would create, after all you don't just drive a Boeing 777-300 up to just any gate, it has to be a big one. It ended up that she stayed on the plane and we taxied out and took off.

I fell asleep waiting for the meal to be served, since I was in the last row I would be last to eat. One of the flight attendants woke me up and asked me if I would consider moving to another seat so the injured flight attendant could lie down across the seats. I accepted and while I was waiting for the galley cart to clear the aisle, they aborted that mission and I returned to my seat. One of the passenger's from first class came back to the last row of coach and she took his seat. I was able to settle in and received probably about 3 uninterrupted hours of sleep. That was a major help to my system.

Perhaps the most frustrating part of the trip was my return to the US. Security here seems to be a joke and I got frustrated rather fast. The government is so concerned that someone will file their nails on a flight that we had to take our shoes off to get x-rayed before we can proceed to the gate. Then I got "selected" for random screening on the way to the plane and had to take my shoes off again for some idiot that wanted to look inside. I was the last person to get on the plane, in the last seat, in the last row, and it was off to Toledo. I already knew that my suitcase did not arrive in Cincy, so that would make the arrival process much faster because I could go right to the ticket counter and start the search paperwork.

Overall the trip was very productive and I'm sure the new phone system will greatly enhance the operation of the seminary.