Dr. Paul Maxwell and a Military Client

Norman Rozeff

Most of this account was compiled in 2006 after an individual, who had been delivered at the Maternity Hospital in 1934, inquired about Dr. Maxwell and the hospital. Recently, a second individual, Fred Dickinson, made a similar inquiry and offered some memories. Dr. Maxwell's, and his wife Leah M., presence in Harlingen is first documented in the 1931 telephone directory for the city. He is listed as a physician and surgeon (bone specialist). His offices are on the third floor of the four-year old, Rio Grande National Life Insurance Building. At nine stories it is the tallest building in Harlingen and the Valley too. It will remain so into the 1960s.

In 1934 he is also apparently assisting in a newly-opened, specialty Maternity Hospital. This is a spacious two-story clapboard building located at 705 N. 1st Street, about five blocks north of downtown Harlingen. This building still exists. The old hospital is dilapidated and has been subdivided into three low-rent apartments.

By 1937 the Maternity Hospital had moved to 1117 W. Harrison Street where Dr. Martin Bernfield appears to have been in charge as he was also likely at the adjacent Valley Clinic at 1115. By 1939 both hospital and doctor are gone.

Dr. Maxwell by 1938 has moved his offices to the fourth floor of the Baxter Building, so called because of its builder's name and who was the founder of the insurance company for which it was later named. Maxwell remains there along with numerous other professionals.

In the years 1941 through 1948 neither he nor his wife are to be found in the Harlingen phone directory. It is possible that Dr. Maxwell may have practiced elsewhere or even that he was serving in the military in this period as a military officer/doctor.

In 1949 he is once again listed in the Harlingen phone directory with his offices in the McClendon Building, downtown at 305 E. Jackson. He is listed here through 1952. There is no 1953 directory on file and in the 1954 directory and thereafter Dr. Maxwell is no longer to be found.

In the early 1950s when the Harlingen Air Force Base did not medical facilities for dependents, Dr. Maxwell attended the births of Air Force wives. One husband recalls a small white building used as a private maternity facility. It was supposedly somewhere between the base and the high school on Marshall Street but has not been pinpointed as of this time.

The doctor apparently did not practice at the major hospital in Harlingen, the Valley Baptist Hospital on F Street, or, if he did, no record of it has come to light.

The Maxwells moved their residence quite frequently while in Harlingen. Most were modest homes as far as can be determined from existing structures. In 1931 they are at 802 W. Lincoln. This may have been the most luxurious house in which they lived. It is a large two-story Spanish style white stucco building with red tile roof and separate garage. In 1935 they have moved closer to downtown into a small yellow-brick veneer cottage at 1006 E. Filmore Avenue. By 1937 they reside at 1018 E. Taylor in an attractive red brick one-story house. The location is on a street nicknamed "Silk Stocking Row" for its fancy homes. In 1939 they are at ¼ Mile Rio Hondo Road, a somewhat countrified location at the time. In 1941 prior to their departure from the scene they are listed in
rooms at the Madison Hotel on Van Buren Street. This large-three story building is Harlingen's second best hotel and provides suites for permanent residents. Upon their return in 1950 the Maxwell residence is 1014 E. Taylor, a quite small yellow brick house now in considerable disrepair. Dr. Maxwell's wife is now listed as Jeanne. If this is correct, either his first wife, Leah, has died and he has remarried or he has divorced and remarried. In 1952 they live at 404 Dan Moody (Arroyo Drive). This is now Arroyo Avenue. This house right on the Arroyo Colorado is an attractive, nicely-maintained cottage set well back from the street with a spacious lawn.

Recently retired career Air Force man, Fred Dickenson, wanted to provide his children information on the doctor who delivered them. After being contacted, I gave him the above information on Dr. Maxwell. Fred then related some of his history and how he had been stationed at the Harlingen Air Force Base.

Here is what he had to say: "I was one of the first initial cadre at the reopening of Harlingen AFB on 1 April 1952. I was only 21 and my dear wife (now deceased) was 20. Our hometown is Beeville, Texas. I enlisted in the United States Air Force 15 September 1950, just a couple of months after the Korean War began on 25 June 150. After a short basic training (2 weeks) at Lackland AFB (where there were 55,000 of us crammed into tents with dirt floors, no mattresses on iron spring cots, where teeth were pulled without Novocain, etc) in San Antonio, I was sent to Francis E. Warren AFB, Cheyenne, Wyoming for Clerk Typist Training. Afterwards I was sent to Ellington AFB, Houston, TX and we were married in Beeville on 18 June 1951. In April 1952, When Harlingen was set to reopen, I volunteered. My wife was pregnant with our first child, so I drove down to Harlingen, leaving her with her Mother in Beeville so I could find us a place to live. Lo and behold, I found an apartment at Le Moyne Gardens right across from the Base, and it was relatively new, clean and adequate. Went back to get my wife, and we drove back down to Harlingen. I did find that a Dr. Paul Maxwell would take cases like this and since there was no where else for us in the Air Force to go or anywhere near, she saw Dr. Maxwell. Less than 2-weeks later little Marjorie Ann was born on 22 April 1952 at the small Medical Arts Hospital with Dr. Maxwell doing the honors. Later, on 22 July 1953, our little son Fred, Jr., was born and again Dr. Maxwell was our physician. I get a laugh every time I tell folks about those births as each only cost $75.00 plus since I didn’t have much money in those days, I had to go the First National Bank in Harlingen to borrow the monies. The laugh comes a lot louder when I mention that I told the Banker I did not know what Collateral was, but when he explained I jokingly asked if he would take a baby as collateral. Of course, he said no but loaned me the money. Even though my dear Mary Ann died 11 Dec 2002, I still have fond memories of Harlingen and our time there (we left in 1958 – but I had also been sent to Northern Canada Remote in 1955 leaving my family to survive alone ---- finally was able to get back in 1956 and left for Randolph AFB in SA in 1958. Have been back several times as I am now 79 years old, a Retired Chief Master Sergeant (highest enlisted grade in the AF) but have been doing volunteer work helping other military retirees/dependents/survivors for 17 years. I operate an office at Brooks City-Base (old Brooks AFB) and provide assistance to about 10,000 of our folks from mid-SA, down to Corpus and on down to Brownsville/the entire Valley Area plus over to Laredo. I have a Satellite Office (Military Retiree Activities Office) in Harlingen located in the Naval Operations Support Center, 1300 Teege St, where the U.S. Navy is our Host in their Reserve Training Center. I also am on the Air
Force Retiree Council representing State of Texas with nine (9) of these offices scattered all over the State where we provide assistance to about 80,000-100,000 retiree military/their dependents/survivors. I know you didn’t want to hear all this historical information, but have so many fond memories of Harlingen and the Valley area, just get a little wound up at times telling all. I guess I feel that we grew up there. Would you believe that way back in 1952, there was nothing but sand on South Padre Island? We had good times there too in the old days. If you have no objections, will try to give you a call the next time I come down to Harlingen. Anyway, really appreciate the research on Dr. Maxwell and will pass it on to my daughter (now 57) and my son (now 56).

Respectfully, Fred K. Dickinson, CMSGT, USAF (Retired) (32 years of continuous Active Duty, having retired 1 July 1982, but “STILL SERVING”).

In a second e-mail he went on to relate "Harlingen has many memories for me as I went there as a 21 year old Buck Sergeant (3-striper) Air Force. The Marine Military Academy at the old Air Base always brings back memories. The MMA Museum for instance was the original building that was the 3610th Aircraft Observer Training Wing Headquarters, with Colonel James F. Olive, Jr. as Commander. As far as Le Moyne Gardens is concerned, I have no idea either who for or why it was named. The housing existed when we arrived in April 1952, was in very good condition (looked very new then), and we lived there from '52-'58, when I transferred to Randolph."

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**Harlingen History**
Monday, February 20, 2012 2:00 PM
From: 
"Brian Maxwell" <BMaxwell@millcreekcap.com>
To: 
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Mr. Rozeff:

For some reason I have been thinking about my family history recently. But mainly on my mother’s side. Nonetheless, I googled my paternal grandfather’s name – Dr. Paul Maxwell – just to see what I would find. He has been deceased now since the mid-seventies and I only met him a few times. I am not even sure of his middle name.

It took 2 attempts, but I found your story [http://cameroncountyhistoricalcommission.org/Dr.%20Paul%20Maxwell%20and%20a%20Military%20Client.htm](http://cameroncountyhistoricalcommission.org/Dr.%20Paul%20Maxwell%20and%20a%20Military%20Client.htm). Wow!

I am not sure of the chain of events, but Leah was his first wife and my grandmother. There are three sons; Gerald, Richard and David from this marriage. My father is Richard and he is now 78 years old living in Pittsburgh. He is a retired dentist. His health is weak, so maybe that is what has subconsciously caused me to be curious about our heritage. My brother (also a dentist) has my grandfather’s old mortar and pestle. We had his old doctor’s bag for years growing up. It was filled with old, scary looking drugs and equipment.
I believe there is a daughter – Paula – from the second marriage and I know there is a son – Jamie (presumably James) from his third marriage to Margaret (Peg).

I have heard many country doctor stories and about early days in Texas. There has definitely been talk about living on a farm or ranch. My Dad had a pet Chicken (probably dinner one night) – perhaps this location is “¼ Mile Rio Hondo Road, a somewhat countrified location” that you mention.

I have never been to Harlingen, but it is interesting to know some of these places still exist. My grandmother and her sons moved back to Ohio after the divorce. Her maiden name was Shelt.

Anyway, I thought this may be of interest to the history page.

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