

Rowan Makes Long Journey To State Department

By HENRY KEYS
United Press International
Washington—From Congress street, McMinnville, Tennessee, to Ita-Kaivoutisto 21, Helsinki, Finland, is a few thousand miles in point of distance.

But in point of time the two were 20 years apart for a young Negro boy who in 1943 revolted against the boredom and squalor of life in the Negro section of a small, middle-Tennessee town.

The boy, now a man holding high rank in the State Department in Washington, had no conception 20 years ago that he would one day be chosen by a president of the United States to occupy the U.S. Embassy on Ita-Kaivoutisto as U.S. Ambassador to Finland.

Nonetheless, 1943 was the beginning of his long journey. The new ambassador-elect to Finland, Carl Thomas Rowan, vividly recalls the year in his book, "South of Freedom," a factual account of what it meant to be an American Negro living in the American South.

Writes Account
To appreciate the epic achievement of Rowan's journey it is important to read his own account of its beginnings. "I remember 1943," he writes, "as the year of the 'great rebellion.' For it was in the summer of 1943 that my mind, heart, and soul rebelled and ceased being part of a green, small-town Negro youth, well-schooled in the ways of his native south."

"For nearly eighteen years, practically all my life, I had lived in McMinnville. I had mowed lawns, swept basements, unloaded boxcars of

coal, dug basements, hoed bulb-grass out of lawns and done scores of other menial tasks that fell to Negroes by default. Until 1943, I did these jobs because all McMinnville Negroes did such jobs; the community expected it of us.

"One morning in late October I was ordered to active duty (by the U.S. Navy). On October 30, 1943, my second-hand clothes in a borrowed suitcase, I boarded a Jim Crow train and left the past and present of a life that I had begun to abhor.

Rolls Back Time
"In 1951, nearly eight years later, I returned to McMinnville. It was the opening of old wounds. It was like rolling back time. I found that Negro youths still leaned against the First National Bank building, where I once leaned hour upon hour. We had no place to go, nothing to do except wait for a white man to come along and offer twenty-five cents an hour for whatever job had gone without white takers."

"There was the colored section of town. It was the same squalor, the same unpainted dwellings huddled close to narrow, hole-filled streets. There, on Congo street, was the little frame house in which I had lived. To the rear of it was a row of privies, and in front of it had been a junkyard. I recalled hot summer days when I sat on the rough oak front porch with my brother and sisters. On those sultry afternoons we would watch the mountains, waiting for them to belch up the rain that we knew was coming. As the downpour rode across the distant fields like a wind-

driven silver wave, we young dreamers would pretend that this was a magic puff of rain that would cleanse McMinnville of junkyards and privies, pave Congo street and give it a new name, and transform our frame house into a stone mansion with a huge brick chimney."

Rowan Changed
But even if McMinnville had not changed and the frame house had not been transformed into a stone mansion, Rowan himself had changed in those eight years. His call to duty with the navy had taken him to an officers' training school at Washburn university, Topeka, in Kansas, to join a training unit of 335 sailors, 334 of them white.

"I reached the campus and stared up a long, tree-lined driveway at the university buildings. It was a warm night, with the kind of breeze poets write of, and sailors and their girls lined the driveway like Burma Shave signs. I saw that they all were white sailors, and I wondered, as I walked toward the nearest building, where the back road was. Because of my background, I thought they must have reserved another road for Negro sailors and their girls... the looks on a few faces made me feel as if I had barged into a ladies' restroom. I paused under a street light and re-read my orders... I was at the correct school."

No Back Road
A new life had begun for Rowan. There was no back road for Negroes. From Washburn, Rowan went to midshipman school at Fort Schuyler, in the Bronx,

New York City, renamed then as "the laundry" because it washed out so many candidates.

But Rowan was not among those "washed out." He emerged from Fort Schuyler with the rank of ensign, one of the first 15 Negroes ever to be raised to officer rank in the navy. He saw service in the Atlantic in the last years of the war aboard fleet tankers, rising to the rank of lieutenant, junior grade.

The next turning point in Rowan's life came in 1948, when he joined the Minnesota Tribune. By this time the spirit that characterized him independence of mind and today had taken firm hold. He walked into the Star and Tribune personnel department and asked for a job, "the way any other applicant would have done. I wanted the same kind of job that any other applicant would expect... I would work for the Tribune were that I just be another newsman, that I not be a specialist in so-called Negro news."

Starts at Desk
Rowan started on the copy desk of the Tribune, but his bent and interest was reporting. Three years later, after a short stint in the usual run of general assignment reporting - covering fires, police courts, speeches, meetings and the small time things that come the young reporter's way - Rowan proposed to the Tribune the assignment that was to alter the course of his life dramatically. He should return to his native south, travel through it and report what it was like to live as a Negro in the south.

The Tribune agreed. Out of that journey came a series of articles that drew a flurry of letters to his paper and resulted in his first book, "South of Freedom."

Rowan's in-depth approach to the problems of his time did not go unnoticed. In 1954, he was selected as one of "America's 10 Outstanding Young Men of 1953" by the United States Chamber of Commerce.

In 1954, too, the State Department asked him to go to India to lecture on "The Role of the Newspaper in Social Change" as a measure to help interpret America to Asians. That assignment took Rowan backwards and forwards across India for 10,000 miles in four months.

Writes Books
Out of his Indian assignment and subsequent travels through southeast Asia - Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, South Vietnam, The Philippines, Pakistan - Rowan produced another book, "The Pitiful And The Proud," which also was ranked among the best books of its year.

Two other books are "Go South To Sorrow," and "Wait Till Next Year," a biography of Jackie Robinson, the first Negro to break the color bar in professional baseball in the United States.

Professional honors have been heaped upon Rowan but few of them match the call that won him away from his beloved newspapering.

Rowan tells it simply. "I was in bed in Pasadena, Calif., where I had gone to cover the New Year's Day football game two years ago. My phone rang. A high official of the Democratic party was on the line. He asked me if I would consider taking a

Foresters Schedule Grants Pass Event

"Helicopter Logging" will be discussed at a meeting of the Siskiyou Chapter of the Society of American Foresters at the Josephine county courthouse, Friday, March 1.

John O'Leary, associate professor of forest engineering at Oregon State university, will speak. He will use movies and slides to illustrate his lecture.

O'Leary spent some time in New England states gathering information about helicopter logging during the past year.

Members of the Siskiyou Chapter, foresters and other interested persons are invited to attend.

Ribicoff Asks for July 4 Bell Ringing

Washington—Sen. Abraham A. Ribicoff (D - Conn.) asked Americans today to ring out on July 4.

He introduced legislation that would urge Americans to ring bells on Independence Day as a reminder that the Liberty Bell was sounded 187 years ago in Philadelphia.

KING PLEDGES EYES

New York—King Hussein of Jordan has pledged his eyes to an eye-bank he opened recently in Jerusalem. It was announced here Wednesday. The Jordan eye-bank was the first such overseas facility set up by MEDICO. Post-mortem eye donations will be used in corneal transplants.

top job in the State Department.

"I said I would be glad to consider it.

"I had other calls, too, including one from Senator Hubert Humphrey, majority floor leader in the Senate. "Then came the offer - deputy assistant secretary for public affairs.

"I did not really want to leave newspaper work and it took me two weeks to make up my mind. But I'm glad that I accepted because it has all been a tremendous education for me, an education and experience which will be invaluable to me when I return to newspapering."

Rowan, today, has no doubts that he will return to his profession, but when he does not know and will not guess.

Although far from satisfied

with the advance toward integration, Rowan says there has nevertheless been progress.

"Even the most militant Negro must admit that Negroes have come a long way in the last 20 years," he says.

"Nowhere has the change been more dramatic than in Washington. Ralph Bunche once refused to come here because of Jim Crow racial discrimination. And that was only a decade ago.

"When I came here 10 years ago, I could not get into a first rate hotel or restaurant. I could not even buy something to eat at a simple hot dog stand.

What has happened in Washington is one of the great social revolutions of our time, but this does not mean that

there are not still problems, or that there are no bigots. But Washington is a shining example of what can be done in other communities.

"You know, this whole racial issue is the key problem we live in, if we are going to live in any kind of world at all."

President Kennedy's selection of Rowan as Ambassador to Finland came as much of a surprise to Rowan as the phone call which led to his job in the State Department.

It followed a three-month stint at the United Nations from September to the end of December last year, assisting U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Adlai Stevenson.

Stevenson recommended his appointment as U.S. Ambassador on the trusteeship council with the rank of ambassador.

"It was a position for which I did not think I was cut out," says Rowan. "I doubted that I was the best man to argue racial and colonial questions there.

Kennedy Ready
"But when I returned to Washington I found that President Kennedy and Dean Rusk were ready to accept Stevenson's recommendation.

"However, the President accepted my reasons for not wishing to accept the position.

"He asked me if I would be interested in a foreign appointment as ambassador and offered me Helsinki.

"I accepted gladly for many reasons, but chiefly because I hope and believe that the President and the secretary both believe that I will be a good ambassador, not because I am a Negro.

"I would not want to be just a Negro ambassador."

Family To Go
Rowan's wife, Vivien, and his two young sons will go to Helsinki with him and be followed in the summer by their 19-year-old daughter. After the summer vacation, Barbara, however, may return to the United States to complete her education. The boys will go to school in Helsinki.

Mrs. Rowan, an attractive young matron, is looking forward to her husband's Helsinki assignment with enthusiasm. To prepare for it, she is studying Finnish.

Rowan is a fanatical golfer and bowler.

"One of the first things I checked was whether Helsinki had a good golf course," he said. "It has. The boys wanted to know if there were bowling alleys. There are."

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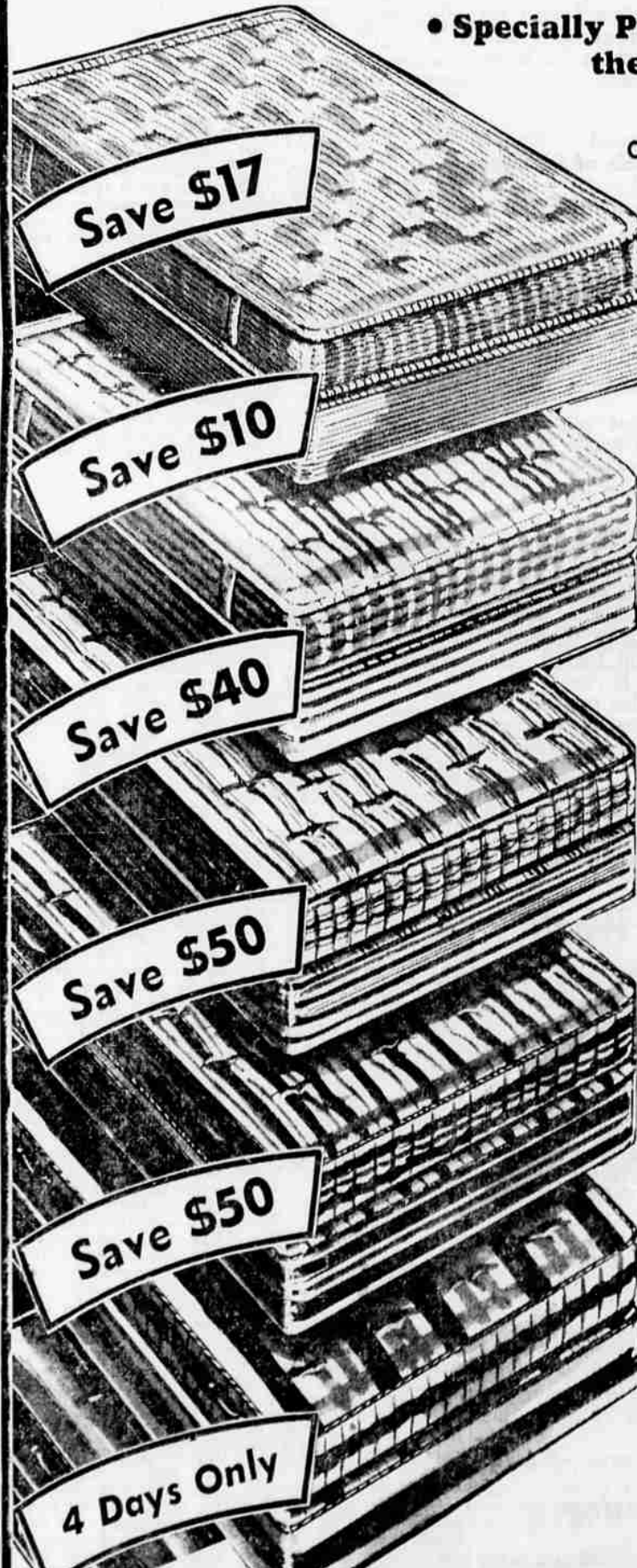


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