

MAY 5, 1977

## TEXAN IN AUSTRALIA PONDER NUMBERS THEY CAN'T MATCH

MOUNT GAMBIER, South Australia- We are two days from Melbourne on the south coast of the Indian Ocean. Australia needs to be resurveyed. Miles here stretch farther than camel trails in Africa.

I can't tell you too much about the city of Melbourne. We flew there from Tasmania. The moment we landed, the dame Meat Board staff that's been guiding us rushed down to the Wool Corporation headquarters. I had to borrow a necktie. On the itinerary it said we were going to visit the world's largest wool house. Translated from Australian to English that meant we were going to put on a suit and eat lunch with the directors that run the largest wool house in the world. Not only do these folks speak incorrect English, they can't even write clear English.

Borrowing a necktie wasn't enough to meet the style. The wool Corporation building is a Dallas bank-looking layout full of people that are dressed like they were on the way to Dallas. A right sharp publicity lady met us in a foyer as big as an old time hotel lobby. Two brisk young men acted as guides on the flank. Nobody bothered to introduce me. I'd have given \$15 cash money to rent a wool suit that'd fit a man twice my size.

We spent the first hour in a projection room seeing a film on the wool industry in Australia. Different specialists made short talks. Fashionable clothes flashed across the screen. One narrator said that their fashion experts had to stay six months ahead of the trends in the States to assure the style-conscious Americans were pleased. I think she just added that to make me feel worse.

Outside the projection room, they had a style show that must have lasted an hour. I wandered around looking at big window-height displays of woolen goods. Unusual displays of woolen goods. Unusual products like airplane upholstery, and wool wallboard that was a stunning piece of work. I also watched the American women in our group build up high cases of shopping fever at seeing all those new dresses. As a conservative estimate, I'd say that the 60 minute style show cost every husband on the trip that had his wife along about \$4 a minute.

Before lunch, we went up to the tenth floor for cocktails with the directors. All states of the Commonwealth have representatives on the board. The Wool Corporation serves the same function as the other commodity boards. Back in Texas, the flicker of one of these boys' cigarette lighter can affect our wool market five cents a pound in a day's trading. I don't know whether a simple majority rules. I do know whatever a board does that has an eight percent override on about 450 million pounds of wool a year is capable of making us Texas shepherders do a toe dance that'd break up a ballerina act.

Lunch was served in a penthouse dining room. Seating arrangements were staggered so that the Americans and Australians could talk. I tried to think up a line that'd mention that I owned a suit of clothes. However, once I go to talking to the old boy on my right, I just realized he'd worn more blue jeans than he had town clothes.

We exchanged coyote stories and dingo dog tales. I suppose he had a nice sized outfit. He said he'd built a dog proof fence around one pasture that took 200 miles of

fencing. The net wire, he explained, was five feet above the ground and turned under on the inside 18 inches. He wanted to know why we didn't build fences to keep out the coyotes the same way. I had a hard time making him understand that to use fences on our coyote problem would first take a chain link fence around a place called Washington D,C.

We left Melbourne in the same flurry that marked all departures. Everyone was tired. The scenery for miles was open dry plains like the New Mexico lowlands. Cattle had dried out summer look. Sheep were in fair condition. Camera straps had put a crisscrossed rope burn on my neck for the borrowed necktie to rub against. Women fretted about their hair styles. An American agriculture attaché that had joined in Melbourne straightened a dark blue suit that made him look like he owned a chain of tailor shops.

Boredom of the plains broke into a descent to the sea, to forestlands so untouched that I couldn't believe they'd been discovered. An area that receives winter rains that turn the thick undergrowth to rain forests of ferns and wild flowers in the summer. Heavy rains that fill big rivers that appear to be uninhabited. Then around a curve in an amphitheater of white houses built on a high slope facing the ocean was the lovely sea town of Loerne. Next a hotel. A hotel with a shower to run cool water over numb tissue and wornout nerves. One that had a single room with fish net curtains blowing from the sea breeze onto a soft bed spread. That's what I wanted and that's what I got.

After dark, we went to a small cafe that resembled the family restaurants in Spain. Beyond a swing door, the cook grilled fish such as red crayfish, white flounder, and there was a big stainless bowl of yellow butter to pour on broiled oysters.

Meat board members brought wine from a shop down the street. Dark toned people waited the table. Mediterranean origin, I'd guess. Salad makers and fish cooks. That'll do for their race. The meal was so superb we had the cook out for a toast. I walked a mile back to the hotel, along a coastline shadowed by tall trees on one side and lighted the seaward side by a moon that illuminated the waves.

I had breakfast on a balcony overlooking the sunlit ocean. Maps show Loerne in on the Bass Strait between the Tasman Sea and the Indian Ocean. Sailind ships, the travel folder says, once had horrible wrecks in these shallows. High water less than 200 yards away crashed into huge brown rocks. The sun arose, reflecting yellows and greens on the water.

Loading back on the bus was hard. I do think my countrymen could have been kinder than to ask if I was going to have to borrow a necktie when we got to the big meeting in Adelaide.