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Paisano Campground And Baptists
Have Shaped Each Other For Years

By Dick Davis

ALPINE, Texas (BP)--Pancho Villa, Gen. Blackjack Pershing, George W. Truett and H.L. Kokernot have a shared connection in Baptist history.

Their common link is Paisano Baptist Assembly in the heart of the Davis Mountains in far West Texas. Don't feel poorly educated in Texas and Baptist history if you've never heard of it because it is not a household word like Glorieta or Ridgecrest. The 1,200-acre campground is not owned by the Southern Baptist Convention or the Baptist General Convention of Texas but it has definitely had a vital part in shaping the lives of thousands of Baptists for more than 60 years. And Baptists have shaped the campground.

The assembly began in 1915 when seven West Texas ranchers got together to see if it would be possible to hold an old-fashioned camp revival meeting in their far-removed and somewhat remote area. The ranchers, all Baptists, had moved to West Texas from East Texas and other eastern states.

There was no preacher to lead worship for them and their families on Sunday so they gathered near the foot of Paisano Peak to discuss the possibilities. The next year the men bought the 1,200 acres for the campground but because World War I broke out, the first meeting did not take place until 1921.

Truett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas and already a major figure in Baptist history, was the first preacher, traveling to Pecos by train and completing the journey by wagon. The campground filled with tents and people as local ranchers and their families came to hear Truett preach and to enjoy fellowship with each other.

H.L. Kokernot was 15 when the seven ranchers gathered to discuss holding a camp meeting and 21 when Truett preached at the first one. He's now 82, a veteran of 61 annual Paisano camp meetings. He has served as chief cook and bottle washer during the entire span, having learned the cooking chores from his father. Now he is passing along what he has learned and the cooking chores to his grandson, Chris Lacy.

Cooking for 1,300 people is no easy chore. Preparing three meals per day requires 26 cooks, 2,000 pounds of beef and 500 pounds of potatoes. It costs about \$20,000 each week but visitors are not required to pay a fixed sum for the meals. At the end of the week they simply donate what they think the food was worth and the camp does not lose money.

Meals at Paisano are served chuckwagon style on heavy tin plates. Coffee (as stout as it comes), tea and water, along with the regular beef, beans and salad round out the main courses. The finishing touch at each meal is "Paisano Pie," which is nothing more than light bread soaked in syrup.

The preparation of the food is where the connection between Paisano, Pancho Villa and Pershing is found. Beans and coffee are prepared on two large mobile cook stoves called "casons." The iron stoves are on wagon wheels and are more than 60 years old. These two particular stoves were used by Pershing's army during the time he was chasing Villa through Mexico in 1916. Pershing's army never did catch Villa but, like the folks at Paisano each year, it ate well.

Kokernot and his family have operated the famous .06 Ranch, a 400-square-mile spread near Alpine and Fort Davis, since they moved to West Texas from Holland 99 years ago. He is a throwback to earlier times and to those ranchers who came to Paisano in its early days because of their thirst for good preaching and Bible study.

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Lots of things have changed over the years including the camp itself. Many churches and individuals have built cabins and the old tent which was big enough to house hundreds of people during preaching services has been replaced by a large, covered, tabernacle-like building. Although there are still many ranchers who come to Paisano, now preachers, missionaries and lay persons are regular visitors.

Featured preachers this year were Robert Naylor, president emeritus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and James Flamming, pastor of First Baptist Church, Abilene, Texas.

Some visitors such as Mrs. L.H. Beckham have been coming for years. She first began coming as a child in 1926 with her father C.M. Caldwell, a trustee for Hardin-Simmons University (affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas) for years. Mrs. Jack Dean first began going to Paisano as a young girl also with her ranching parents. She and husband first met during a camp meeting. Jack, who has taught music at Southwestern seminary and Hardin-Simmons, now regularly plays piano at the camp.

Baylor University has on its campus Kokernot Hall named for H.L. Kokernot. George Stokes, speech teacher and voice of the Baylor Bear football team for years, is a regular at Paisano. There are a lot of HSU and Baylor people who have long had active parts in Paisano, but the camp itself has never been owned or operated by any Texas Baptist school or the convention. "We gave the camp to the Baptist General Convention of Texas once," Kokernot points out, "but they gave it back to us."

Virginia Pirkle remembers when B.B. McKinney was the song leader at Paisano and when Perry Webb Sr. was the preacher. O.B. Carson and wife Mabel, who've seen the camp when it had no indoor toilets and/or running water, return year after year because they receive a mountaintop experience. "It just fills me up to come here every year," Mrs. Carson says. "It's like a homecoming for us. We've come here so long that when we come back we meet people we've known for over 50 years."

Leona Cook and her husband visited as youngsters then began courting at Paisano. After serving on the mission field, the Cooks returned to the camp this summer to renew old acquaintances. Sue Langley attended the 1922 session and was a regular until 1942. This summer she returned after a 40-year gap. Alley Brown returned this year after missing the last 20 summers. Hazel Ray, who this summer visited for the first time, has been hearing about Paisano for years.

Anyone who wants can participate in the meetings. Adults enjoy a full day of activities including Bible study, missionary hour, music and preaching. Young folks from infants to college students enjoy activities directed for them. Counselors conduct youth and children's camps and a nursery is provided for the youngest visitors.

At Paisano you rub elbows with cowboys, ranchers, missionaries and preachers and can participate in Baptist and Texas history alongside visions of Pancho Villa, Blackjack Pershing and George W. Truett.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Baptist Press
(Dick Davis is public relations director for the Louisiana Baptist Convention)

Wash.

Southern Baptist Leaders
Praise Reagan Peace Bid

By Stan Hastey

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WASHINGTON (BP)—Southern Baptist leaders are reacting favorably to President Reagan's call for a new peace initiative in the Middle East.

The President, who outlined his proposal in a nationwide television address Sept. 1, staked out a middle position between demands from both Israel and the Arab world over the key unsettled question of the future of the Palestinians.

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Reagan, pledging his plan is built on the framework for peace agreed to by Israel and Egypt in the 1979 Camp David accords, proposed that the Palestinians be granted political autonomy in association with Jordan. He said the United States would not support an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip, nor would the U.S. favor annexation or permanent control of those areas by Israel.

"There is, however, another way to peace," the President said. "The final status of these lands must, of course, be reached through the give and take of negotiations. But it is the firm view of the United States that self-government by the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan offers the best chance for a durable, just and lasting peace."

Southern Baptist Convention President James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas, said that while he believes some key questions regarding the Palestinian issue must be answered before peace is achieved, Reagan's call for peace negotiations is likely to receive support from American Jews as well as other citizens.

"I applaud President Reagan's call for both sides to sit down and negotiate," the newly elected SBC head declared. "President Reagan has taken a courageous step in reaffirming U.S. support for Israel while at the same time recognizing the dignity of the Palestinian people."

Draper added, "I am a preacher, not a politician, so I cannot comment on the particulars. But it is a positive step to reduce the tension and needless hostilities. I think it's a good first step toward peace."

He called on Southern Baptists to join in prayer "for all parties to the negotiations."

Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville, Tenn., called attention to Jesus' blessing of peacemakers and asserted his belief that the people of God are to seek peace in personal, church, national and international relationships.

"In this light I commend President Reagan for taking the initiative in suggesting an outline which may bring about peace in the Middle East," he said.

Bennett said events in Lebanon and particularly Beirut "have been of deep personal concern to me." Reports from Southern Baptist missionaries in the region, he said, have been "sobering."

"I know that there has been little peace in the Middle East from the time of early history but I pray that God in some miraculous way will bring peace to Israel, Lebanon and the homeless Palestinians."

Although he acknowledged initial opposition from Israel and some Arab nations to Reagan's announcement, Bennett said he hopes that "in the give and take of negotiations the suggested peace outline will be fleshed out and a peaceful solution can be found for the Middle East."

He also said that while it is easy to express concern for peace, "I also pledge my personal prayer support for God's peace in the world."

Foy Valentine, whose SBC Christian Life Commission is charged by the denomination to deal with issues of war and peace, commended Reagan and two former Southern Baptist U.S. presidents, Harry S Truman and Jimmy Carter, for seeking peace in the Middle East over the last generation.

"I honor President Harry Truman's memory for his just and courageous leadership of the United States in standing by the birth and guaranteeing the existence of the modern state of Israel," Valentine said.

"I honor President Jimmy Carter's just and courageous leadership in personally engineering the Camp David accords seeking peace with justice in the troubled Middle East."

"And now I honor President Reagan for his just and courageous leadership in insisting on behalf of this nation that the displaced Palestinians be guaranteed a place to exist and some form of self-government."

Underscoring the link between the biblical concept of justice and the search for peace, Valentine added: "As justice calls for the Israeli people's guarantee of deliverance from the threat of annihilation by violent terrorists, so justice calls for a home and self-determination for the Palestinian people, who now for much too long have been unjustly compelled to wander in sad exile. I welcome this proposal as a necessary step in the direction of justice, for justice is always the mother of true peace."

R. Keith Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, declined to comment on the merits of Reagan's proposal, noting that the board maintains a non-political stance both in the U. S. and abroad.

But he welcomed the peace effort, urging Southern Baptists "to pray for President Reagan and for all persons who may eventually be involved in efforts to bring about a lasting peace in the Middle East."

The Foreign Mission Board, the world's largest Protestant missionary-sending organization, has missionaries both in Israel and in a number of Arab countries.

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Draper Champions Bold Mission,
Seminary, Cooperative Program

By Norman Jameson

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President James T. Draper Jr. challenged students at Southwestern Seminary to lose themselves in missions.

Draper, preaching in Truett Auditorium Sept. 2 with students standing around the entire room, said plenty of people are willing to preach from a big pulpit but pointed out "if Bold Mission Thrust is going to mean anything, there are going to have to be students come out of our seminaries who are willing to go to Canada, to foreign missions, to the Northeast and lose themselves in missions," Draper said.

Bold Mission Thrust is the SBC's program to present the message of Jesus Christ to every person in the world by the year 2000.

SBC first vice president John Sullivan, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., and Fred Wolfe, president of the SBC Pastors Conference, also participated in the chapel service, a part of Southwestern's 75th anniversary observance. Draper, Sullivan and Wolf are Southwestern graduates, as is Gene Garrison, SBC second vice president who was scheduled to appear but could not for health reasons.

"Everybody wants to preach in the big church," said Draper, pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas. "You'll say 'That's easy for you to say, you're in a big church.' Well, to tell you the truth, it's never been that big a deal. I had a student come up to me the other day and say, 'I'm ready to preach for you anytime.' I said 'I bet you are.'"

Draper made no reference to denominational controversy, instead preaching a 10-point sermon from Hebrews 11 which was received with a standing ovation. "I've used the tools I learned in this seminary every day of my life," said Draper, a third generation Southwestern graduate. "Study hard. Learn your lessons."

Draper told the students in the end it is not their cleverness or ingenuity that pleases God, or the size of the church they lead. "God is only pleased by faith," he said.

In a meeting with seminary officers and deans, Draper and Sullivan pondered the value of resolutions at the SBC annual meeting and indicated they will try to clarify the resolution process. Draper also said he plans to make several committee appointments in the next month and will release all his appointments before the next annual meeting in Pittsburgh.

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Draper voiced strong support for the Cooperative Program, saying "I don't like everything in my church budget, but I still support it." He indicated Southern Baptists who don't agree with every aspect of the convention's unified budgeting process ought to consider the same attitude.

Sullivan, who ran against Draper for the presidency in June in New Orleans, said he has found Draper to be "open, honest, responsive and responsible." John Newport, vice president for academic affairs, told the SBC officers, "We need to develop trust. We have different lifestyles but we need to learn to trust and live with each other."

Draper's grandfather was in the first Southwestern class to meet in Fort Worth in 1910. Draper's father began classes there in 1936 when Draper was one year old. Draper began classes as a student in 1958.

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Hammet Will Join
Historical Commission

BSSB

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)-- Leisa Ann Hammett, 22, has been named director of communications for the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

She will be responsible for developing a total communications program for the Historical Commission, including interpretation of programs, news, public relations and marketing of materials.

Hammett, a native of South Carolina, earned her bachelor's degree in communication arts from Carson-Newman College in May 1982. As a student, she was public relations assistant in the Public Relations Office and earlier in the same position at North Greenville College.

Hammett became director of communications for Baptist Ministries at the World's Fair in Knoxville, Tenn., in January 1982.

Hammett's employment marks the first expansion of the Historical Commission's professional staff since 1973.

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