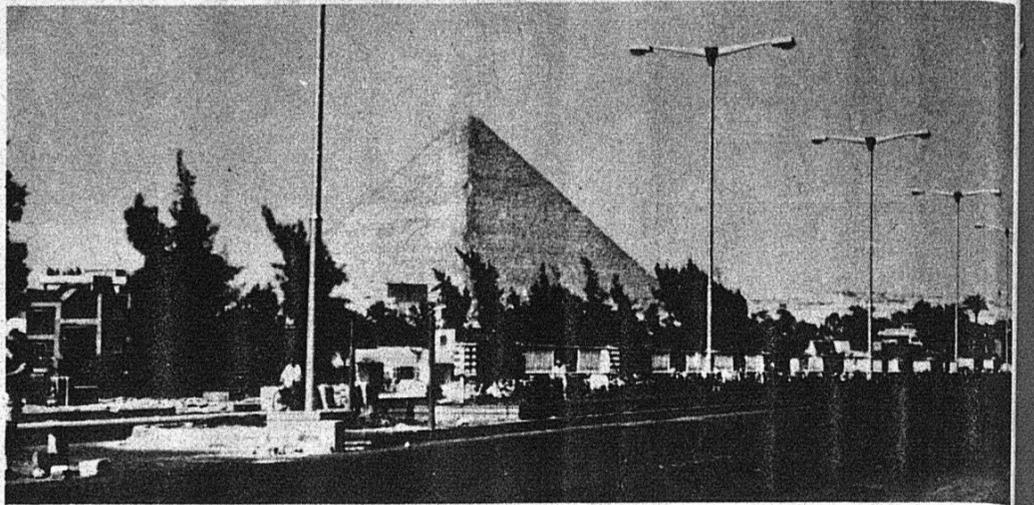


Doug Elves was one of the two U of A participants in the 1975 research seminar in Egypt sponsored by the World University Service of Canada.



Near the southern mouth of the Suez Canal, an Israeli cannon bunker (bottom right) delivered part of a general bombardment upon the civilian town of Port Taufiq (below) just across the canal, before being destroyed itself in the Egyptian invasion.



The Cairo suburbs now extend to, and beyond, the Great Pyramid.



Israeli military hardware still lies strewn about in the Sinai desert.

Gentle but not peaceful

The Egyptians are a gentle people. Of the forty million crowded inhabitants of a nation whose ancient glories arouse in them little nostalgia and less inspiration, "warlike" is no more apt an adjective than is "fecless," a misnomer too easily brought to the lips when the myopic western mind compares the Egyptian way of life to the Teutonic-like ardour and efficiency of the Israeli war machine.

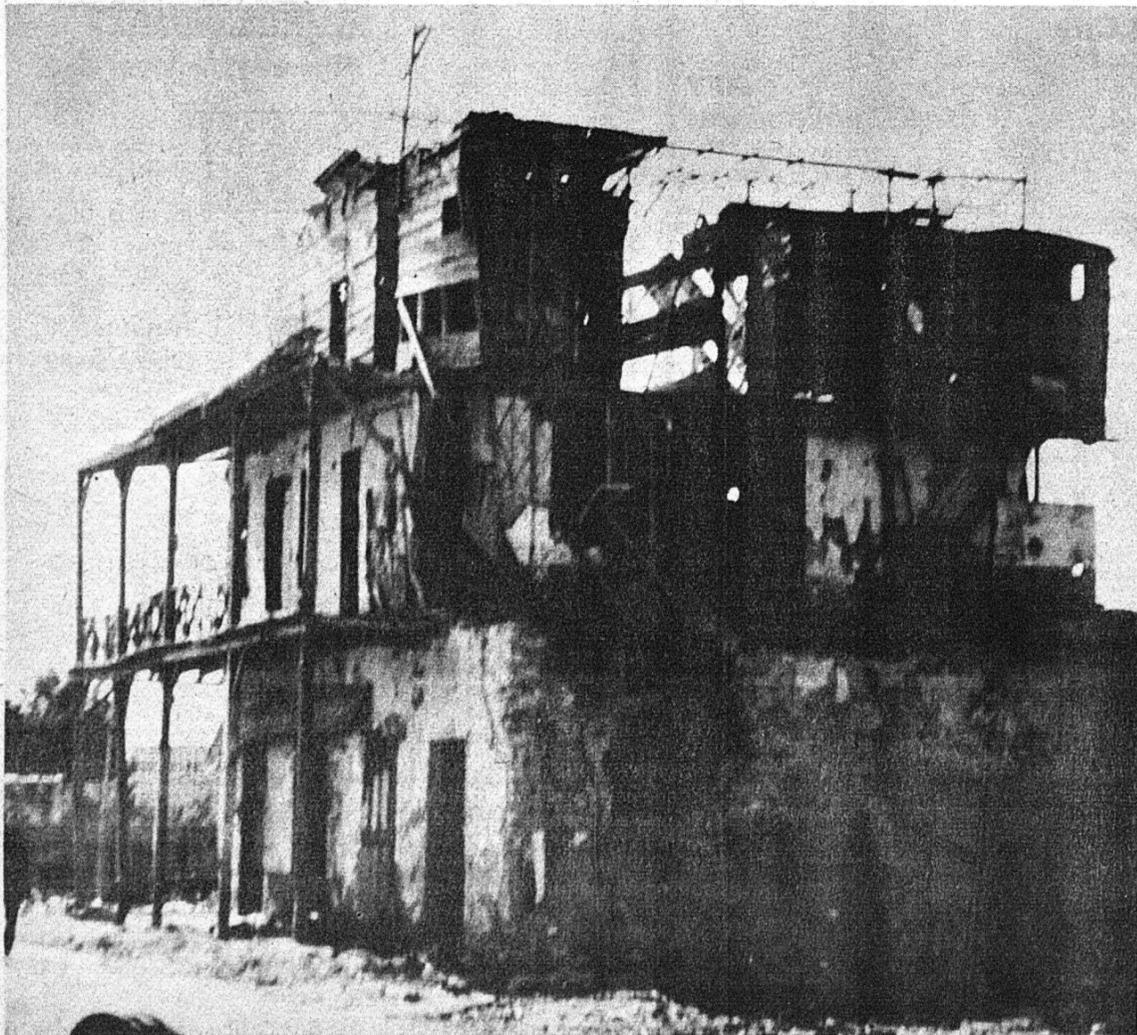
Whether when strolling down the Nile boulevard during a Cairo evening, or when conducted, by a colonel in the Egyptian army,

through the newly regained desert territory in the Sinai, the foreigner cannot incite a continuous anger in the Egyptians while discussing with them the Arab-Israeli conflict. They are surprisingly patient and conciliatory.

We were frequently asked our impression of Egypt, but they spoke of politics only if we insisted. There is too much else of the problem of life in Egypt to dwell on war, too much to endure and to mislay in the memory. The population growth has long outstripped the rise in production; almost half the people of Egypt suffer from bilharzia, a debilitating disease caused by a tiny mollusc which breeds in the waters of the vast irrigation system enabled by the High Dam of Aswan; the fertility of the land, ever enriched by the unobstructed annual flood of the Nile, fell as the High Dam rose to regulate the water; the wars with Israel cut off the revenues from the Suez Canal, the Sinai oilfields and much of the tourist trade, meanwhile draining the national treasury of funds needed for development projects; and the Islamic religion itself militates against sweeping but personal reforms.

To forget the situation of Egypt the fellahin, or peasants, resist change even more strongly and fall even more deeply into a fatalism as debilitating as their disease; the landless and insecure flock to Cairo, where they crowd the streets in the evening, seeking comfort in the lights of the night, and scratch a living by hawking a handful of petty wares; the government servants drift into corruption, removing an alarming sum from the public coffers, or worse, into negligence, convinced of the futility of their own actions; and the indolent Alexandrians stroll the Cornich and sit by the sea, watching, by turns, the strolling Alexandrians and the incessant waves of the sea.

by Doug Elves



Photos: Doug Elves

