On June 29, 1979, my family and I left New York City for JFK Airport bound for The Gambia, West Africa. My family included my wife, our two daughters, ages 17 and 21, and our 13-year-old son. The day had finally arrived when we would depart for the USAID assignment for which I had been selected more than a year prior to this time. I was the soil scientist member of a three-man team chosen to establish a Soil and Water Management Unit in the Government of The Gambia.

We arrived in Dakar, Senegal, on June 30, and after 1 night in Dakar and some uncertainties as to whether we would proceed to The Gambia, we made the 50-min flight from Dakar to Yundum Airport in The Gambia. United States Embassy personnel met us at the airport and loaded our 11 suitcases into the Landrover. Our temporary quarters were two rooms at Bungalow Beach Hotel. These were to be our quarters until our houses were finished in about a month.

In mid-August our two daughters left The Gambia to return to the USA to complete their schooling in Texas. In the 1st week in November we moved from our “temporary quarters” into the newly completed compound (house). This was our first indication that events did not always happen as scheduled. In the first part of December we moved into our office.

During this time I made field trips to study the soils. A soil association map of The Gambia, at a scale of 1:250,000, had been prepared by a British team. There were 24 soil associations of The Gambia. I found this soil map to be quite useful in conducting my initial investigations. Soil boundaries were generally accurate. The map had been produced primarily through photo interpretation. Some ground truth and field investigations had been conducted.

My investigations throughout the 2 years were mainly on the uplands. Most of the soils on the uplands have loamy sand or sand surface layers and sandy clay loam, clay loam, or clay argillic horizons. The loamy sand or sand surface layers range from 25 cm to more than 100 cm thick. Subsoils have weak to strong structure and clay skins. The British team had classified most of the soils on the uplands in the order of Oxisols.

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