

SEPTEMBER 22, 2008 F.A.H.P. NEWS

Army Air Force “Meteorology A”, 1943-1944 (continued from Sept. 8): In late September, 1943, about 175 of us who had survived “Meteorology B” at Brown University, settled into the dorms behind the Walker Memorial building at M.I.T., along with a like number of “B” graduates who had been at M.I.T. since March. We were to embark on three 11-week accelerated terms, and if we made it through, we were to be commissioned in early June, 1944. We carried a new rank of “Aviation Cadet”, upgraded from our buck-private status, and our monthly pay went from \$50 to \$75.

We were separated into 6 units called “flights”, and the rigorous academic and military plan was designed to “wipe out” about 30% of the 350 cadets before graduation. While we still adhered to military discipline, such as marching to classes and to meals in the Walker building, and had to endure at least one military lecture per week, we had more leisure time than at Brown, and our evenings were free to do as we wished, so long as we were back in our rooms before “taps” were played on a bugle outside the dorms at 11 P.M., 6 nights per week. The lure of the theatres and other attractions of nearby Boston was great. We could walk a short 3 blocks to Kendall Station on the subway system, and a 5-minute ride put us at Park Street in the heart of downtown. Most of the theatres, restaurants, and other attractions were within easy walking distance. It was hard to think of homework, but there was a lot.

We had 44 hours of required work per week, 39 of which was class work related directly to the study of meteorology. A typical day went like this: a wake-up bugle blast at 6:50, fall in (military formation) outside the dorm at 7:00, march to breakfast in the Walker building, fall in again at 7:50, and march to the main M.I.T. building for the first lecture in the large lecture hall starting at 8:00, which lasted until 8:55. The first class in a smaller group (less than 50) was at 9:00, again 5 minutes to transfer at the end of the hour to the second class on another subject from 10 to 10:55. Then the military part took over from 11:00 to 12:00, but once in a while it was fun. We did calisthenics, marched at double-time around the Charles River Basin on very cold mornings, had 5-minute basketball games in the armory across Massachusetts Avenue, ran an obstacle course set up in M.I.T.’s front yard, and as spring developed, played softball in the field between the main building and the dorms. Lunch was at 12:00, and sometimes we had ½ hour to relax before our 4-hour map-drawing session began daily at 1:00. On some days, however, they seemed to feel it necessary to throw in a ½-hour military lecture to fill the time slot between 12:30 and 1:00. Saturdays were like week days until noon, but after that we were free to go until 11 P.M. Sunday night.

There were at least three courses with “meteorology” following the adjective, one of which was Dynamic Meteorology. The other courses were heavy on calculus, vector analysis, and math of all kinds, and we used a slide rule many times a day. Exams were usually open-book tests, but we were told that if we put the decimal point in the wrong place (easy to do with a slide rule), the whole question would be marked wrong. On tests with 4 questions, if you missed 2 you failed. For our map-drawing sessions in the afternoon, we sat at large drawing tables in a

temporary building just behind the main building, and drew for 8 months. Like in our other subjects, we were graded on the peculiar M.I.T. system: H was an A, C was a B, P was a C, F was a D, and you could forget about anything worse than that. With the shortage of professors during the war, we had some older men, called back from retirement, some foreign teachers who spoke very broken English, and for the map-drawing, half civilian and half recently-graduated Air Force lieutenants. Dr. Karl T. Compton, President of M.I.T., walked past the dorms daily as he came and went from the president's house just to the east. He would always smile and speak to us; we had no idea what a heavy wartime burden he was carrying.

I fared poorly at the start. Uninteresting homework had given way to the attractions of Boston. At the end of the first 11-week term just before Christmas, I was sure I had "washed out". On December 27, after a week at home, they gathered us in the big lecture hall, and alphabetically read off those who had failed and who would be re-assigned, in many cases to the Infantry. I sat on the edge of my seat, but for some reason they passed "Marshall" without reading it. I resolved then and there that in no way would I come that close again. Trips into Boston were limited to Saturday nights and Sundays, and not always then if homework got in the way. A smaller number were washed out at the end of the second term about March 10. While we didn't know it, the cadets who had made it to the third term were "home safe". Something like 225 cadets got their commissions, as I did, on June 5, 1944. Five other Army Air Force meteorology schools graduated like numbers on the same date. If forecasters had been scarce before that, they were a dime a dozen thereafter, and within 3 months, a number had been transferred out of weather forecasting, but they had their commissions intact.

Last Tuesday, Bill Schwoebel conducted a class on the Auburn Valley Railroad, particularly for those involved in running it. There were 14 attendees. Earlier that day, our annual boiler inspections were done by John Esch of the State's Division of Boiler Safety. On Saturday, Anne Cleary had a second operating session with Locomotive 401 and its train, and at least 8 "students" attended. I did not hear of any problems, and we expect to have two trains running as usual on September 28. Jim Personti plans to have the bushings replaced and the side rods back on Locomotive 402 before the weekend. Today, Catherine Coin worked with Libby Odle, who will handle electronic bookkeeping and accounting work as a part-time office assistant. It is expected that she will work about 10 hours per week.

We've had good work sessions with attendance ranging from 15 to 20. The cars that went to the Hagley Show have been cleaned up and the two resident centenarians are ready for their third 100th-birthday celebration next Sunday. Tuesday night will be devoted to normal maintenance, and Thursday will be the final clean-up and Museum preparation for Sunday's event.

Please pick up and distribute flyers and posters advertising our upcoming fall events, especially that of September 28. Richard Bernard, general chair for the event, will be filling in the volunteer slots so that all jobs will be well-covered. Please let Richard know your intentions- I hope you will be able to help out. Sign-up sheets will be on the bench in the garage this week. Many thanks to all.

Tom