JANUARY 7, 2008 F A H P NEWS

Forecasting Weather in New Mexico, 1944: On June 17, I left Yorklyn in my 1940 Packard Six (110) to drive to Roswell Army Air Field in New Mexico, a trip of about 2,100 miles. It was my first assignment since graduating from Meteorology School at M.I.T. on June 5. Since I had orders to go to New Mexico, I picked up enough gasoline ration coupons in Cambridge, MA, to make the trip, based on 15 m.p.g. Clifford C. Ham, Jr., a recent classmate from Massachusetts, took the train to Wilmington and accompanied me to Abilene, TX, on his route to a base in Arizona, his first assignment. The wartime speed limit was 35 m.p.h. It was observed rather strictly in the East, but once we headed southwest from Maryland, people paid little attention to it. I drove about 50 m.p.h. for most of the trip. The "service" allowed moves in location to proceed at 200 miles per day, so if you drove 350 miles, let's say, you could leave later and have more time at home. I spent 6 days making the 2,100 miles.

My orders said "Report to the Commanding Officer, Roswell A.A.F." and since I knew no better I tried to do that upon arrival. The C.O. had no intention of seeing his new officers; an orderly checked me in and assigned me to the barracks. Meteorology programs at six locations graduated weather officers on June 5, and I was one of three assigned to Roswell. Harrison Munro had come from Chanute Field at Rantoul, IL, and a fellow named Goldman had come from the University of Chicago. Captain Miller from upstate New York was in charge of the weather station, but he was almost always away taking a course (a lot less responsibility), and Fred Pomeraning of Trenton, MI, was acting in his absence. Clyde Martin from Oklahoma, who had graduated 4 months before the three new recruits, ranked in between. There were also two non-commissioned weather forecasters then at Roswell: Robert Betts, and Andy Stockhausen. They were much better forecasters than those of us with more education. In addition, there were about 10 weather observers, and three or four other enlisted men needed to keep records, do the daily report, and keep the teletype machine in repair. I soon "fit in" as well as anyone and began to learn about weather forecasting in the southwest.

Roswell was a B-17 school, where Flying Fortress crews were trained for overseas missions. Colonel Coddington was a seasoned pilot and head of the base. If he wanted to take off for somewhere, the weather had little to do with it; I've seen him take off and disappear in fog before the plane was off the runway. He was nice enough to deal with at the weather station, but he seldom heeded our advice. Only those serving under him had to do that. The forecasters and the observers worked shift work- the weather station was never closed. On the 11:00 P.M. to 7 A.M. shift, there would be only one of each. Each hour, the observer went outside and checked wind velocity and direction, recorded the temperature, looked up to see if it was clear (or otherwise), reported visibility (in feet or miles), and calculated relative humidity by first taking the dew point with a wet-bulb thermometer. He also sent up something called a "ra-ob" attached to a lighter-than-air balloon, that sent back radio signals with basic data. The observer then had to sit in front of the teletype machine every hour and when Roswell's turn would come in the sequence, push a button to send the pre-typed data from his most recent observation. He would also plot one of three daily weather maps of the U.S. based on data received from stations all over the country and even from some ships off shore. A good observer was essential to forecasting, and we had some excellent ones, none of whom were commissioned officers.

The forecaster on the early morning shift had to draw the map from the observer's plotting (locate the frontal systems, color the storm areas, draw in the isobars (lines of equal barometric pressure), and be able to explain what was going on to pilots as they planned their training missions. About 6:30 A.M. as his shift ended, he would take the completed weather map to the briefing room, and tell the pilots what he thought was going to happen for the next several hours. Through the fall and winter at Roswell, the late morning and afternoon weather was near-perfect most of the time, but the fog bank from the Gulf of Mexico, moving northwestward from South Texas toward the Rocky Mountains, was very tricky just before daybreak. The airfields in West Texas would gradually be "socked in" and we would sweat it out as to whether the zero visibility would reach Roswell before dawn. Sometimes the visibility would go from unlimited to less than 100 feet while we were walking from the weather station to the briefing room; sometimes Roswell would become "socked in" right after we had told the pilots we thought visibility would be fine. To a weather man, "CAVU" was the best of all worlds: "Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited". When the sun came up, the fog would soon burn off. We would work 3 nights on one shift, then move up for 3 days on the 7:00 to 3:00 shift, and finally move up to the 3:00 to 11:00 evening shift. After two days off, the cycle would start over. (If the reviews on this story are satisfactory, it will be continued in a future edition).

Catherine Coin expects to begin her new job with us on Wednesday, January 9. The Division of Parks and Recreation has hired Dan Citron to be the Interpreter/Manager of the Auburn Heights Preserve. He will be transferring from a similar position at Fort Delaware, and will be dividing his time between here and there for a few weeks. The Events Committee will meet on Tuesday, January 22. Our Stanley Model 71 is supposed to move in to the Philadelphia Auto Show on January 31. Details on Committee and Mechanical Work will be forthcoming from other members. Thanks to all. Tom