

JANUARY 21, 2008, F.A.H.P. NEWS

“Weather Finale” Roswell, NM: An E-mail from a REAL forecaster was received in response to my forecasting stories from World War II. Ron Curry, the son of steam car collector and Stanley Museum Trustee Lynn Curry, is a weather forecaster on his third tour of duty in Iraq, and his father had shared my E-mails with him. Ron was here briefly during the week of our Steam Car Tour last June. It makes me humble, indeed, to relate some of the fun times at Roswell in 1944, when I realize that someone who really counts today is reading these stories. Thank you, Ron, for what you are doing for all of us.

My overall experience at Roswell was good, indeed. The worst thing I can remember about it was trying to sleep in the barracks after working the night shift that summer, when the official temperature reached 106 degrees several times. Harrison Munro had a room that connected with mine, but we never worked the same shift. Personnel changed frequently at the weather station. As I said earlier, Captain Miller, officially head of the station, was “always” away taking a course of his own choosing. Fred Pomeraning, acting head, was transferred late in the summer, we thought temporarily, but we never saw him again. Roland “Rollie” Lundquist of Colorado Springs was transferred from Carlsbad to take his place. Goldman was transferred out of weather forecasting by the end of the summer, and Clyde Martin left in late fall. When Lundquist was finally transferred away, there was no one left in rank between Miller and his two recruits with six months’ service, Munro and I. Miller came back for a few weeks to run the station, and during this time the base commander informed us the weather station was to be moved into a new building that would include base operations next door. I also asked Miller, who had just been promoted to Major, to request a transfer to overseas duty. He said “Don’t you have it good enough here?” I had it very good, but that was not the point. I didn’t think he had honored my request but I learned later that, if requested, he had to.

Major Miller disappeared again, and a month before my 21st birthday, I was acting head of the weather station. I had to supervise the move to our new quarters, to determine the layout of the facilities, to oversee the building of special displays, and to do all this without missing a weather map or a briefing session. The top brass would come by, but they never gave us a hard time. The 25 men then at the station were wonderful; they all pitched in to help and I was so proud of them. By February 1, 1945, the move was complete. I had requested my first leave since becoming an officer to coincide with my 21st birthday, and had a reserved coach seat on *El Capitan*, the Santa Fe’s all-coach streamliner, from Las Vegas, NM, to Chicago and return. Then my orders came through that I had been transferred to a Weather Reconnaissance outfit that would train at Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma City, with a 10-day delay enroute (the same as a “leave”). Previous plans were scrapped, my railroad ticket refunded, and I missed my birthday at home, but my request for transfer had come through.

As in life as a whole, luck plays an important role, and I was very lucky in the service. Harvard Wilbur of Massachusetts, a freshman classmate of mine at M.I.T. who undoubtedly got better marks than I, applied for the wrong meteorology program and ended up as a buck private weather observer at Roswell when I was a commissioned forecaster. Anthony Rippo of San Pedro, CA, knew a lot more about weather forecasting than I, but was only an observer with a rank of sergeant. John Kelly of New York was a slow-moving but solid observer who was fun to talk to. Vince Sadowski (mentioned previously when he rode with me to Albuquerque) hitch-hiked all over the southwest on his days off, attempting to satisfy his curious mind. One Sunday afternoon, I was on duty at the weather station when we got a phone call from a rancher who lived about 40 miles from the air base. He said he had noticed an unusual phenomenon: he looked up and saw a Piper Cub flying backward. These one or two-passenger single engine planes had an air speed of less than 100 m.p.h., and where he was flying there was undoubtedly a head wind of more than that (not unusual in the southwest), but it puzzled the rancher.

Bob Hope came to Roswell in August to broadcast his weekly radio show from our theatre on the base. There were about 3,000 men, and a few WACS, then at Roswell and the theatre held only 300. I was working when Hope's plane, probably a C-47 (DC-3), landed and he and his troupe that included Jerry Colona, Frances Langford, Virginia Mayo, and Skinny Ennis and his orchestra, were loaded into staff cars and were parked for 15 minutes right outside the weather station (their quarters must not have been ready). Since so few could attend the radio show in the theatre, following that they entertained the entire population of the base in an empty hangar for over 2 hours. Hope was humorous on the radio and in the movies, but he was incomparable in person. After this larger show, with the hour approaching midnight, they moved to the Officers' Club where they unofficially entertained for another 2 hours, with Ennis and his orchestra playing for the dance. The next morning, they were off early, entertained at the air base at Fort Sumner, NM, in mid-day, and were scheduled at the Hollywood Paladium that night. Bob Hope looked tired, but he lasted another 59 years.

I left Roswell in my Packard, accompanied by another officer going east, in late afternoon about February 25, 1945, and drove all night 500 miles to Tinker Field, OK, from which place I hitchhiked home by military aircraft for my 10-day delay enroute. You've heard much more about Roswell than you needed to know, and I promise I am now finished. Tom