

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

A New Mexico Christmas, 1944: As mentioned last year, 1944 and 1945 were the only two Christmases I did not touch down at Auburn Heights. 2008 will be the third one. In 2007, I described Christmas on Guam in 1945. The year before, I had been commissioned for six months and was becoming a senior weather forecaster at Roswell Army Air Field, 3600 feet above sea level in southeastern New Mexico. Roswell was still a B-17 training school and most of the instructors were pilots who had come back from the European Theater after their tours of duty (usually 25 flying missions from England over the Continent).

When I was assigned to Roswell, I thought it might be the end of the world, but it turned out to be a most pleasant place, and many good friends were made during my 8-1/2 months there. Recently I wrote about my trip from Yorklyn to Roswell in my '40 Packard in June '44. The food in the officers' club was very good, and the captain in charge of the club had excellent Hollywood connections that brought the top big bands and comedians to the base. Perhaps the most outstanding had been Bob Hope with his entourage for his weekly radio show.

As Christmas approached, decorations appeared in several of the buildings to remind servicemen of Christmases at home, and Christmas songs played from the radio or from 78 r.p.m. phonograph records. Irving Berlin's "White Christmas", sung by crooner Bing Crosby, was the favorite, as it was for many years thereafter. In the weather station, all our reports came in by teletype, and it was the job of one of the men on the roster to keep the teletype in good working order. I was on duty on Christmas Eve, and mixed with the serious messages from stations all over the southwest came one: "Santa Claus sighted at 5,000 feet". Less than 24 hours later, enough snow fell to cover the ground, the only time I saw white (except on mountain tops) during my stay in "The Land of Enchantment".

A quick quiz: What does the holiday season have in common on the following years: 1920, 1932, 1952, 1960, 1968, 1976, 1980, 1992, 2000, and 2008?

One of our most wonderful mysteries is the legend of Santa Claus. He is so improbable he is completely believable. He takes children far into the unknown. We adults have our unknowns, too, although we don't want to admit it. A year ago, could anyone have known what was to happen in 2008: the setting in of a depression rivaling the 1930's, and crude oil prices dropping to less than 1/3 of their recent high? Did we really think an African-American could be elected to the top job in the land? Santa Claus is still here, and will do his best, even in these tough times. It has been 186 years since Clement Moore wrote "A Visit from St. Nicholas". Let's give Santa our blessing, and wish him well for another 186 years.

A festive evening occurred last Thursday for our final work session before the holidays. Rose Ann Hoover outdid herself in providing a small railroad display, all edible, which included a railroad complete with rail and cross ties, a station, a tunnel, P.R.R.-type signals, and a steam train with two locomotives and six or seven passenger cars, all made from delectable Christmas goodies. Fortunately Butch Cannard took some pictures before it was consumed by those in attendance. Despite the festivities, a lot of work got done, too, on one of the locomotives, on one railroad car, on two Stanley burners, on the two cars being taken apart for restoration, and the installation of a new hot water heater for the garage/apartment.

Activities will slow down for the holidays, and the next regular work session will be on Tuesday, January 6, 2009. Many thanks to all who have made possible the dream of perpetuating Auburn Heights and the things that have been done there. May all of you have a very happy holiday season.

Tom