From the Bottom to Top of the World
and
Arctic Ice to the Moon and Back

"MUZZYGEEZY"



ARCTIC ICE TO THE MOON AND BACK

Autobiography of an Icebreaker Sailor & Space Pioneer

Glenn Devell Smith

“MUZZYGEEZY”
Copyright © 2022 by GLENN DEVELL SMITH

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the author.

ISBN: XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Printed in the USA by 48 Hour Books (www.48HrBooks.com)

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wife, the former Katherine Oliver, who as my young bride traveled with me from top to bottom and side to side across the United States from Florida to Alaska. Our life together began with a Bendix-paid two-year honeymoon in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, Spain, where I was assigned to the NASA Tracking Station as the Antenna/Servo Engineer in support of the Apollo program.

That was the beginning of a 31-year career in support of launch and orbital operations to all Apollo, Apollo-Soyuz, Skylab, Space Shuttle, Space Station and scientific missions as chronicled in Sonny Tsiao's book, "READ YOU LOUD AND CLEAR," published by NASA in 2008. Furthermore, Katherine was my partner in planning and coordinating eleven reunions of my ship, the icebreaker USS Edisto (AGB-2). Without her support I could not have written these memoirs. As the words in the song so aptly describes, ***"She is the wind beneath my wings."***

TABLE OF CONTENTS

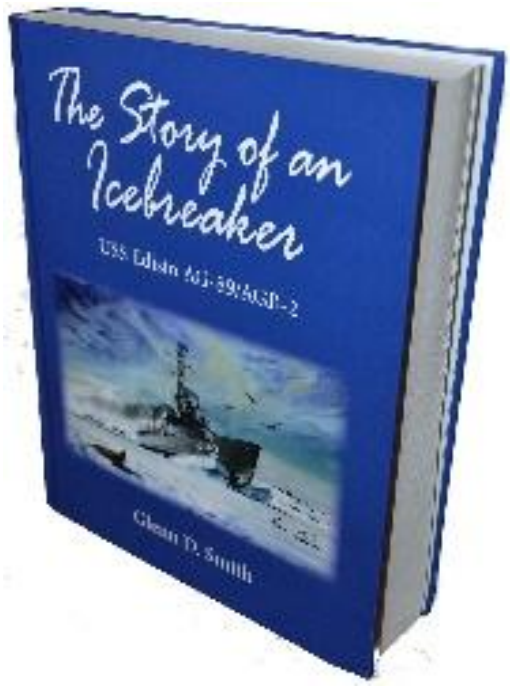
Preface	**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Chapter 1 – 1937 Wheeler, AR	6
Chapter 2 – 1942 Fayette, AL	13
Chapter 3 – 1943 Fayetteville, AR	16
Chapter 4 – 1944 Sycamore, AR	18
Chapter 5 – 1945 Holland's Holler, AR	23
Chapter 6 – 1947 North and South Carolinas	29
Chapter 7 – 1948 Clarksville, TN	31
Chapter 8 – 1949 Fort Campbell, KY	33
Chapter 9 – 1950 New Providence, TN	37
Chapter 10 – 1951 Cunningham, TN	39
Chapter 11 – 1952 New Providence, TN	43
Chapter 12 – 1954 Fort Campbell, KY	45
Chapter 13 – 1955 Lake Charles, LA	52
Chapter 14 – 1956 Homestead, FL	60
Chapter 15 – 1959 San Diego, CA	68
Chapter 16 – 1959 Treasure Island, CA	72
Chapter 17 – 1960 New London, CT	77
Chapter 18 – 1960 Boston, MA	79
Chapter 19 – 1960 USS Edisto Arctic cruise ‘60	84
Chapter 20 – 1960 Antarctica Deep Freeze ‘61	87
Chapter 21 – 1961 USS Edisto Arctic Cruises ’61 & ‘62	98
Chapter 22 – 1963 Deep Freeze ‘63	102
Chapter 23 – 1963 Jacksonville, FL	107
Chapter 24 – 1966 Greenbelt, MD	115
Chapter 25 – 1967 Canary Islands, Spain	117
Chapter 26 – 1968 Ascension Island, UK	124
Chapter 27 – 1968 Kennedy Space Center, FL	128
Chapter 28 –1978 Barstow, CA	138
Chapter 29 – 1980 Fairbanks, AK	143
Chapter 30 – 1983 Edgewater, MD	153
Chapter 31 – 1986 MILA/PDL Stations. FL	165
Chapter 32 – 1997 Retirement	175
Chapter 33 – 2004 Reunion Planner	182
Chapter 34 – Hobbies Fishing & Pool	190
Chapter 35 - Highlights & Milestones	200
Chapter 36 - Year of the Mask	209

PREFACE

On my 77th birthday, a great deal of memory was lost because on that day my mother died at 96 years old. When any of us needed information, she was always there with her outstanding memory, so I thought this was the time for me to use what little memory I have left and write my story.

My desire to write manifested itself while in High School when I discovered that I enjoyed writing poems to entertain certain young ladies and as I grew older my urge to write grew stronger. After attempting at least two novels while serving in the US Navy, I succeeded in writing only short stories that amused my friends and coworkers but soon learned that Readers Digest didn't feel the same way. They gave me my first and only rejects. This didn't deter me from writing, but it did cause me to stop sending any more stories to Readers Digest or to any publisher for that matter.

In recent years I began writing again, starting with ***The Story of an Icebreaker,*** a history of the icebreaker USS Edisto (AG-89/AGB-2) that served the US Navy for 19 years before it was transferred to the US Coast Guard. The book is a monster two inches thick, 604 pages and weighs 4.2lbs.



After two printings, copies are no longer available, but books may be found in the Washington DC Naval Yard Museum, the office of the Navy's Chief Archivist and in South Carolina at the Edisto Island Museum.

To satisfy the urge to write again, I've decided to begin with my birth in 1937 and move forward chronologically through the years of growth, marriage, career and moderate success as a sailor, fatherhood and one of the many space pioneers that helped put a man on the moon.

With that said, I'll admit there may be a few holes in my story, and some are probably intentional or caused by a lack of memory or dimmed with age. Either way, I stand by both the lies and the truth because this is my story and the only one I have.

CHAPTER 1 – 1937 WHEELER, AR



1937 Smiths

Once upon a time, long ago in the faraway land of Wheeler, Arkansas, a son was born to Jerry Primrose Smith and Anna Josielee Holland. They named him Glenn Devell, a name that has stuck with me all the years since. Born in 1937, I was the first child of the Smith family, adding one more to the growing population of the small and booming metropolis of Wheeler.

Despite my mother's intentions, the attending physician misspelled my name on the birth certificate using only one "N" vs. two which was and still is a common practice by most name spellers Thus, my birth certificate is spelled Glen Devel vs. Glenn Devell.

When I was old enough to begin spelling my name, Mother made it perfectly clear that she intended my name to be spelled with two "Ns" and two "LLs" and that is the way that the rest of the world has known me for eighty-four plus years.

Speaking of my birth certificate, I recently had to show it to renew my driver's license. I was given a new license without any problems but the next morning the DMV called and asked if I had a voter's registration card. Yes, I did. I was asked to return to the DMV and bring my voter registration card and my new license.

Upon my return to the DMV the same young lady that issued my driver's license the day before asked to see my license and voter registration card which I promptly surrendered to her.

After a few minutes of studying my new license, my voter registration card and her computer, she walked to another booth and became engaged in a long discussion with a fellow employee. In a few minutes she returned and said there was a problem because my birth certificate had only one "N" for Glen and my middle name had only one "L' and my Driver's License and Birth Certificate had to agree.

Mind you, she is still in possession of my new license and now she is about to issue me another license with a name change to Glen Devel so I'm beginning to get a little perturbed and was about to lose my cool because they were about to deny me a license with the only name I've ever had despite them having seen copies of my DD-214, my Passport, voter registration, marriage license and every other piece of evidence proffered to show proof that my name had two N's and two L's.

She didn't appear as though she was about to give me back my new license, so I raised my voice a tad and threatened to bring a lawyer to the DMV to straighten things out.

At this point there was considerable deliberation among the staff who eventually decided that they needed to discuss this problem with the supervisor who then determined that it would require the approval of some office in Tallahassee. After a phone call lasting several more minutes, the mystery office in Tallahassee approved so it was decided to allow me to use the new license they had just issued me.

Now if I live that long, I may have to go through all this once more when it is time to renew. I will have to produce all the same paperwork and documents required but nothing to show that I have the approval of some office in Tallahassee, FL.

Pity the poor soldiers that weren't dubbed with a middle name because they were being processed by administrative staff that would type in "NMI" which stood for No Middle Initial.

I've heard drill instructors call out a sailor's name as John "Nim" Doe or one DI once called out John No Middle Doe. You gotta have a middle name or you just can't win. Just look at the people you know that are called by their middle name instead of their first name.

Quite often it is the individual's choice to use their middle name or a nickname but there are occasions when someone decides what you should be called. In any case, no one wants to be called by NMI or NO Middle instead of their first name. The military has got it right when they use only the surname. In fact, a sailor could serve for years and only the Yeoman would know his full name.

Many years later as a manager, when I introduced a new employee to what would be his or her coworkers, I would ask the person what they wished to be called before introducing them because that name would stay with them forever.

Lest one should forget the importance of a name, I was often reminded that my middle name could be pronounced two ways; Devell or "Devil." Devil wasn't used under normal circumstances but there were times when I could sense Mom's displeasure when I was hailed by the name "Glenn Devil," and it generally meant I was in trouble.

Now that I'm older, only a few close friends, the girl at the DMV, my doctor's office, Social Security and the Voter Registration office know my middle name...and the Red Cross, Blue Cross, DNC, RNC and everyone else soliciting funds and of course General Knokitoff, of the Nigerian Army.

As a young boy, I may have occasionally been called by my proper name, but my nickname of "Eli" was used most often. Now to be truthful, I don't recall who or why I was given that nickname but all of us boys had one. Gerald the Squirrel, Mousey, Rabbit, Snotty Nose and Eli. In addition to our new identities, we also had a secret password of Muzzygeezy and when yelled out anywhere in Wheeler, or even the vicinity of Fayetteville, one could always expect a reply from someone yelling out Far-ray-do!

The first few years of my life were spent in Wheeler, so I have only vague memories but my recollection of those years and the many to follow were idyllic. It was a small community of houses, a few gardens here and there and fields of purple sage grass that were the focus of many of us kids during the late Autumn when the days were sunny but cool enough to require a jacket.

We would lie down in the sage grass out of the wind where it was warm and stare at the billowing clouds as they floated overhead and try and name the many different shapes that passed overhead in the blue sky.

No doubt we were poor as for income and how wealth is measured in finance and material things, but we didn't know that. Never did we consider ourselves poor and would have found it difficult to imagine a life much better than the one we had at the time. We were rich in so many other ways and don't recall envying anyone else. There were no iPads, computers, cell phones or television to broadcast world events. Nor did we kids have bikes, skateboards or roller skates. Besides, roller skating would be tough on dirt roads.

In addition to a church, Wheeler boasted a canning factory and a few scattered homes, but the most important community structure was a Post Office and grocery store owned by one Miss Ada Hodges. Ada's store was the nexus of Wheeler's social life. It housed a Post Office and sold groceries, books, newspapers, magazines, feed & seed, tools, plows, and other equipment and dished out an equal amount of gossip from the folks that shopped there.



Ada's General Store

Ada's store sat tightly in a curve of what was once a gravel road that bears the question of which came first, the road or the store? The curve is so sharp that one must blow the horn and proceed with caution whereas in the earlier days, the dust from the unpaved road could advertise an oncoming vehicle from the other direction. Situated as it were, to a young kid, the store was huge and seemed to be almost as big as today's Wal-Mart but it may have been about the size of a large 7-Eleven. Across from the store sat Ada's big house on top of a hill overlooking the store and Wheeler in general.

Wheeler now sports a Fire Station and numerous houses and businesses that weren't there when I was a kid. According to Wikipedia, the Post Office itself was established in 1873 and closed in 1996. Now the building appears to be a residence. Mom once told me that my birth house was a small place on Weir Road (SR 94) that was nestled at the bottom of a hill that ran down into Wheeler.

Some years later that hill became known as Canning Factory Hill. It got its name from the stench of stewed tomatoes when the old Model 'A' truck used to haul the cores and peels lost a tie rod causing it to run off the side of the hill dumping its load in the trees.

As I was growing up, we lived in at least four different houses in Wheeler as well as two houses in Fayetteville and there were times when we lived briefly with my grandparents Hugh Herbert and Ora Jane Holland. My earliest recollection of my grandparents, when I was about four years young was when Mom and I lived with them temporarily while my dad looked for work in Kansas.

My Granddad was old school. He was a tall, thin, rawboned man and stooped slightly from years of hard work and he had the stubbornness and iron will of the mules he kept. He was never known to have worn anything but coveralls (unless it was long underwear underneath), and long sleeve shirts. He always wore a wide brimmed hat to shade him from the sun. Underneath his old sweat stained hat, without which he was rarely ever seen, Hugh had dark penetrating eyes and a set jaw that gave him a determined look that characterized the pioneer that he was, as were his father and grandfather before him. On back of the photo at right, he wrote "This is the best of me."



Hugh H. Holland 1945

My mother recalls that when she was young, Hugh had a team of horses and a covered wagon in which he took the family from Mulberry, AR to Indian Territory in what later became Enterprise, Oklahoma. He bought a place across the river from what once was the home of Belle Starr, the infamous outlaw. Of course, Belle Starr was already deceased at that time after someone had shot her. I very much doubt it was a drive-by shooting but it is still a mystery as to who shot her and what the reason may have been. A falling out of thieves? Who knows.

Dimmed by youth and partially erased with time, now more than a half-century later the important encounters with my granddad are still alive. It's these wonderful memories that compel me to include his story that he so badly wanted to share with others.

He told stories to all those who would listen and took pains to write down his thoughts and in particular, write of the days when he and his family moved westward from Arkansas to a homestead in Oklahoma.

Like his father, who was somewhat a poet and possibly a writer as well, Hugh liked to write. He wrote about things that he witnessed and how they affected him and the country around him. I feel very fortunate to have a few copies of Hugh's letters as well as some of Great Granddad Luther Holland's poems as well. While there are more of Hugh's stories, I will share one that gives the reader a sense of his character and the things that affected him. The grammar and spelling is just as he wrote with no changes.

This is a Story of My Life, Nov 2 day of 1974"

I was born near Stone Rock and Crow Mountain near Russellville, Ark., Sept 2, 1890. When I was 8 years old, my one sister, Nellie, my mother and father, his brother Dot Holland and his 2 children Bert and Lillie; a family named Peat Eles, his wife and their 2 girls; my father's sister married to a Norris from Lime, their 2 grown boys and the grandmother; a family named Knapp, husband, wife and their 1 girl all left Russellville, Arkansas in a wagon home pulled by oxen teams except my grandfather. He had a team of horses and a team of mules. We drove some cattle and some horses and spent 1 year wintered above Enterprise, OK on Brooken Mountain.

Above Enterprise, the Indians had not yet been allotted their land. You had to settle in timber, clear land, build a log house and make rails for the fence around the land you cleared. Enterprise, Brooken and Hoyt were inland towns. Freight in wagons came from McAlester and Fort Smith. They were two railroad towns.

My Grandfather, Father, Dot Holland and Pete Eles, all settled on a ridge, a high bluff on the south side of the river. This was called Sand Ridge. Hoyt was east 1-1/2 mile. Brooken was west 1-1/2 miles and a Ferry crossed the river at both Brooken and at Hoyt. To the south 4-1/2 miles was Enterprise and White Field was another 8 miles south. All were inland towns so freight was hauled from Fort Smith or McAlester.



Across the river was the home and burial site of Belle Starr the woman outlaw. And also, just across the river was Younger Ben. All these places are just below Eufaula Dam. You can stand on the dam and see the farm and tomb where Bell Starr is buried. On the tombstone is a gray horse brand, a little school bell and a star. The tombstone read: "Bell Starr was born in Carthage, MO on February 5. She died on February 3, 1889."

When folks settled up there across the river from her place, most of the country was Indians and old English. Living close by was Tom Walls. He was the Collector for the Indians. A $10 tax per head was charged on all white men 21 years and older. He was collector for the Choctaw Nation. The Choctaw, the Creek, the entire Indian Nation came to Belle Starr bluff.

Later on, a railroad came through 115 miles south of Sand Ridge and was called Midville RR. A year later a railroad came through south of Enterprise, so Enterprise tore down and moved close to the RR and is now called Quinton, OK. In 1908, (OK actually became a state in 1907) Oklahoma became a state. Now both railroads have been taken out.

Quinton had shallow gas wells and, in some places, the gas was spewing out of the ground. Wells were drilled and with plenty of gas and coal, a smelter was built and zinc ore was shipped in from Joplin, MO. It ran for several years, but the last account I had a few years back, they were putting in a 24-inch gas line to ship gas to other places. I lived there when Rockefeller put his oil pipe lines across that country. He set up pump stations every 25 miles. They were loading heavy pipes onto boats and running them across the river. To reach across the river, they were forming a lot of barrels and built the boats on the barrels to pipe across the river.

In the meantime, people built a school house and hired a teacher to teach children for 25 cents a week per head or 5 cents a day per head. In my first week of school there was only 2 scholars ....and I was one of them. The second week there were 17 scholars to fill the house. The teacher was making big money then. There we were farming, raising corn. No one to hire. Didn't need money much. When we had a load or a bale of cotton or potatoes, we hauled to McAlester and stayed all night. Sell our load then buy coffee, sugar, salt and meat...grew their own potatoes. 'Bring rest back in money. Women made clothes on spinning wheel and weaved them. Men bought power in bulk and made their own shells. It was good when families wanted meat. They would ail bunch up, take a wagon and dog and catch and kill meat for the bunch. Do that every time through winter and salt down for summer. The hogs go fat on the moss and nuts. Were no market for hogs them days. Lot of wild turkey, wild goats, deer and bear for fresh meat all summer.

After state hood, the land became Oklahoma. We paid tax as we do now and had free schools and before the Indians got their entitlements to lands, several white men married Indian girls so as to get in on the land and later, when it became a state of Oklahoma and had free schools, a lot of half-Indian children went to school in the same class as I. Those mixed Indian children, some were good looking and if they like you, they could not do enough for you. They seemed to learn fast. One time at school, I had an Indian women teacher. Her name was Miss Drew. If you missed a day, she kept you in at recess and you got the lesson that you missed the day before. Her scholars went through a book.

Later the RR came through Stigler. Father moved to Stigler and bought land. Set out orchard, did some truck farming and raised mules and Poland China hogs. Mules was in good demand. He raised 3-4 mule colts every year, but in 1911, he sold out and moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas. Bought a place just south of where Wheeler is now and that year the RR came through where Wheeler Post Office is now and where Bo Rudolph built a Canning factory. In 1914, Wheeler became a town and had a depot, canning factory, an apple dryer, Black Smith shop, 2-star Post Office, several camps, and housed 9-10 residents at that time. There were a lot of apple orchards and there were a lot of strawberry fields.

Every other farmer had 3 or 4 acres, some 8, some 20, Rudolph 40 acres. Strawberries took lots of Hands shipped in here to pick strawberries and then farmers started growing tomatoes for canning factory. Factory contracted during the World War L Tomatoes $8.50 per ton.

Later years, war was over, losing money on canned tomatoes. I had patch at $8.00 per ton. Factory contracted more than they could handle so only got crate to haul in. I took a load of feed for Team one Sunday night. At Sunup I tried to be first so I could make another load that day. Just as I drove up, man with a load was setting on scales at daylight next morning. There were 27 wagons behind me. That Monday, I got second load back but it set there til Friday. I tied Team to bushes, fed and watered and let wagon stay there. Else somebody would unload a head of you.

Times changed and people quit tomatoes. So in 1973, I sold tomatoes at $5 a bushel at my house. Some buyers sold for $10 and $12 a bushel. Well, back in 1913 - and 1914 - we cleared land, cut heater wood for 40 cents a rick. Stove wood 60 cents. Fayetteville was burning mostly wood, some coal. Now this is 1973. Wood is selling from $10 to $14 a rick and at my age I could not cut a rick. And many years back, I have cut many ricks, 2 and 3 per day. Now country has gone to grass, bushes and chicken, cattle, riding horses.

Just this 1974 -I turned back to working horses. More work in stock on account of fuel shortage - and trains will take over hauling and let some truck in coal for fuel. Going back to more farming as less goods and more people try to grow a living---as they once did.

I was in the Chrysanthemums growing, reading up on every different state before I knew 600 normal varieties and EVER color could be mixed. I have grown 400 varieties myself. Learned there was more money in 1 acre of flowers, if I have a market as I have, than 10 acres of cotton, corn or tomatoes clear. But I don't believe that anyone can sell as many as I have in 1 day or fall as 1 have over past 10 years.

I had not learned this till I become too old to produce all that I could sell. Took me several years to learn this and varieties were growing in different states and the fastest way to sell is a place where people help self and carry off, pay for them faster than I could get them there. If I had known this 10-years sooner, I might have had 10 acres of them, but now not able to do much work.

Go back to 1908. I worked 4 months for Ed Green for $10 per month. Then board free 'til Fall. Then picked cotton by hundred most of the time. 50 cents a hundred that Fall. People hard hit. There was a money panic. Could not sell cotton. People traded on credit `til Fall. All the merchants would buy is on the debt you owed them. Corn worth 50 cents. But no one had money to buy after debts were paid. If you were able you picked cotton. Baled it. Farmer built a warehouse and stored the cotton. Then in 1909, people planted corn and oats. he next year oats sold for 15 cents a bushel, corn 15 cents. Lots of farmers bought hogs to feed it to. Several had no money to buy the hogs.

Then in World War I, I was working for a man, Todd Lewis in Mulberry. Hobert was a baby there. Cotton went to 48 and 50 cents a pound. Bank loaning ton of money on crops. The war ended. The following Fall, cotton went down - 7 and 8 cents. Corn from 30 to 25 cents. Farmers went broke. I had 4 bales cotton and 100 bushels of corn. But working part time for Mr. Lewis, I did not owe my crop for that Fall. I bad half interest in 115 bushels. Lot of Irish potatoes worth $12.50 a bushel and 3 hogs to feed. Corn too.

So I come through way head of the big farmer. They made their crop with borrowed money. Crop would not nearly pay money back so they went broke. 'Gave us people the cotton to pick and it paid for rent. Just after it, I had open winter. I picked a lot of cotton that winter. Made out of it 50 to 75 cents a day. Bought corn with it after it was gathered and put it in the barn. 1 year later, I recovered 25 cents a bushel.

Other than that, I farmed last home stock and hoed to keep English mules and the like to carry on to farm with them next year to try and get out of debt. Lots of them never did turn in what they had. They gave up their homes that was mortgaged and went to other places. There was no work. No relief or aid. No where them days.

Train was loaded with Hoboes going somewhere looking for a handout or work. Some Brakers would let them all ride because no man had money. Depot stayed open all night so the Hoboes could stay at night. Lots of hungry Hoboes died. They left family at home to go look for something to do to live.

The rail roads were good to let them ride free and leave depot open for them to keep warm. People them days did not steal, but if hungry, they would ask for a meal. People that had would give you a handout. It was 2 or 3 hard years.

After that, in 1933, a drought in Arkansas. Very little was made. The government paid little for stock. Had them killed or burned to save buying feed. It was so scarce, I sold a dressed hog for 5 cents a pound to get money as bad as I needed to keep hogs.

I know if I live this year, it will never be as bad like those.

Signed: <u>Hugh Holland</u>

With America recovering from the great depression, it was hard times and like many other men, Dad worked at whatever jobs he could find from harvesting grapes, wheat, hay, corn and any type of crop. There were times when he was hired as a truck driver. These jobs often meant he would have to leave his family behind in Arkansas.

In the meantime, the fighting going on in Europe had not yet extended to America and with Dad working away from home, Mom and I moved to Steele to live with my grandparents in a small two-room house. Mom was eight months pregnant with sister Sue and in early October 1938 while at the Steele house, sister Sue was born. Now Mom had two toddlers to care for. It was many years later that Mom told us Granddad was not happy about Dad leaving us behind and was certain that he had abandoned us and was recommending Mom get a divorce.

As it happened, it wasn't long after Sue's birth that Dad returned to Arkansas and found odd jobs locally that helped to put food on the table. Then in 1940, we moved to Mt. Comfort where both Mom and Dad found work on Bradford's Dairy farm. A year later, we moved to Fayetteville where Dad worked for a produce market. Dad rented house on Gregg Street and it was here that Sister Sue developed pneumonia. Sue recovered eventually and as a reminder of how near death she was, for the rest of her life she carried a scar from surgery that left a hole in her back where a tube had been inserted to drain her infected lung. As we got older, it was wonderful opportunity for a young entrepreneur to charge admission to get a peek at the hole in her back but Sis wasn't cooperative at all, even with the offer to share the proceeds.

After sister Sue's recovery we moved to another house in Fayetteville on Leverette Street and again Dad left Mom and us two kids to find work in Alabama and it wasn't long before we three moved back to Steele to live with our grandparents. This time Hugh was certain that Mom and us kids were left for good and was again urging her to divorce Dad. I can only guess that she got tired of Granddad's nagging about getting a divorce and decided to move out so late 1941 we moved back to Fayetteville into a house on Cleveland Street while Dad remained in Alabama trying to find work.

I soon turned five and Sue wasn't far behind. It was then that Dad's sister Myrtle Lucas paid us a visit in Fayetteville and provided moral support. Over the years she was always good to come when needed or to show up unannounced to visit. In later years Mom said that if Myrtle hadn't found us in Arkansas, she would have gone on her way to visit someone else. Aunt Myrtle was always welcome and urged to stay as long as she liked and I suspect Mom was pleased to have her company as we kids were.

In the meantime, Dad and his friend Ray Hubbard had found work in the coal mines with Dad driving a coal truck in the city of Fayette, Alabama. His tale is that he sent money to Mom and us kids but Mom says, "She never got any of it."

When summer arrived, we moved from Fayetteville back to Steele to live once more with Granddad and Grandma Holland. I remember the house was small and had an even smaller barn and both sat on the hill not far from what was then called the Steele School house. No improvements were made to the house since we were there last when sister Sue was born. It still had only two rooms and a barn.

Now that we were a larger family, there wasn't sufficient room in the little house so it was necessary for us to make space in the barn. We three found a place in what some might call a Tack Room which may have served as a stable at one time or another.

The Steele house was setting a record; first Sue was born there and four years later we are back with Mom pregnant again. This might cause a person to think there is something strange about the little house in Steele.

Shortly after receiving the news that Dad and his friend Ray Hubbard had found work in the coal mines, on February 3, 1942, a day after Mom's birthday, Dad summoned us to Fayette, Alabama where he had a job driving a coal truck.

CHAPTER 2 – 1942 FAYETTE, AL

In March 1942, a month or so after our arrival in Alabama, Mom gave birth to brother Jerry. His birth took place in Fayette County, in a house situated between the cities of Winfield and Fayette. When Mom spoke of this in one of her stories, she said the house was owned by Jeff Hubbard.

We must have stayed in Fayette for the better part of a year then moved to Birmingham where Dad went to work for the Alabama Power Company. I was about six years old and recall that Dad smoked Lucky Strike cigarettes back then and there were times when he couldn't afford to buy "store bought", so he would bring home Prince Albert tobacco in the can. He purchased a cigarette rolling machine which Sue and I used to roll his cigarettes. When twenty or more cigarettes were rolled, we would insert them inside an empty Lucky Strike package to give the appearance they were store bought.

Another great memory was when Dad and I would fly kites made of old newspaper and sticks held together with paste made from flour and water. There was an area near the house that was ideal for launching a kite and I could be found there on most windy days.

There was also a hill on which many of the colored folks lived and we were warned not to go up that hill. Of course, that would be like telling two kids not to eat ice cream so naturally Sue and I had to explore that hill to see what was at the top and as it happened, we were caught going up the hill. An older black lady corralled us and brought us back down to the house and suggested we not go back up the hill.

I know it was a time of segregation but as kids we still didn't understand the concern and I seriously doubt anything would have happened to us. The kind lady was just looking out for the welfare of two snotty nosed kids who were merely curious as to the residents on the hill.

In the meantime, we were reminded that there was still a war going on. The effect of the war was felt more by Mom and Dad than on us kids because of the Government's rationing of food, gasoline, and other products. Our awakening was the air raid sirens.

At first, it was a scary situation but eventually when the sirens went off, we dutifully snuffed the lamps and pulled down the window shades and then sat and waited for the ALL CLEAR to be sounded. But of course, no bombs were dropped on Alabama.

There was a bombing however in the USA. It so happens that in1942, Japanese aviator Nobuo Fujita flew a floatplane launched from a submarine sitting off the Oregon coast. His mission was to drop balloon bombs in hopes of starting fires, but the mission as planned failed. However, one such balloon was dropped in Brookings, Oregon where a balloon exploded killing a woman and five neighborhood children as they were attempting to bring it out of the woods.

Soon Dad's friend, Ray Hubbard invited him to work for Ray's dad who owned a peanut farm. It meant that we would be leaving Birmingham and moving back to Fayette County. As it happened Ray had already moved his wife Lulu, their daughter Betty June and son Harold to Fayette so it was nice to have another family living nearby.

Dad rented a tiny two-bedroom house that had an outside toilet and no running water or electricity and was on a small hill making it difficult to carry water from the creek. I wasn't quite old enough to do that myself, but my mother did that a couple times a day. She would haul enough water to bathe baby Jerry and cook during the day and late afternoon she might go again and get more water for washing up dishes, etc.

Daily baths were out of the question. If anyone wanted to take a daily bath, I suppose they would've gone down to the creek but not us kids. Of course, the thought of washing in the cold water of the creek was much less desirable than the warm water of a No 2 wash tub even if you were second or third.

Mom heated enough hot water to bathe Sue and I although the one who bathed last rarely had anything but warm water. I don't recall the exact order but baby Jerry got more frequent baths around dishwashing time. Now you know from whence comes the old saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the dish water."

On one of Mom's water trips, I was entrusted to watch little Jerry. Sister Sue never needed much watching but Jerry, being the baby, did need tending on occasion and this was one of those times.

He had wet his drawers and having seen Mom change his diaper many times, I sat about doing that. The only problem was that I wrapped it around his little bottom like a skirt and it turned out he wasn't finished yet. You get the picture. He was doing more than just wetting his pants.

It was in that little house that I recall Sue and I being on the receiving end of some of the old home remedies even if our sickness was questionable. For example, if one of us had a cold, a spoon full of sugar and a touch of coal oil (Kerosene) would relieve a cough. Dangerous as it may sound, it works.

No one who has ever experienced the wonders of the magic elixir that cured most pains and other indescribable illnesses, providing you could swallow it down, will ever forget the taste of Castor Oil. This is the one and only time that you were permitted to drink coffee, hot chocolate, orange juice, milk and anything else that would disguise the taste of castor oil. Yuk. Nothing ever disguised the horrible taste of castor oil and remember we had an outdoor toilet! Some might say that it was one form of punishment after another.

Our brief time in Fayette generated experiences that are not easily forgotten. Diaper duty, Castor oil, sugar and kerosene and the taste of raw peanuts. It was here that as a young man I began to discover the exciting sensation of romance. Yes. There were three Hubbard girls living on the farm ranging in ages thirteen, sixteen and eighteen, and me approaching adulthood at age six going on ten and the only boy except for Harold who was too young to participate in the more adult pursuits of us older kids. Anyway, I won't bore you with the details because there were too many new experiences for a young boy to recall in one setting.

For instance, hog killing time. It became a wide-eyed experience for this young lad to see the hog killed, lifted into a 55-gallon drum of water with a fire under it. The hog was dead of course before all this was happening.



It was strung up by its hind legs tied to a single tree and using a rope and a pulley so it could easily be lowered into the 55-gallon drum where awaited the scalding water. Evidently this maneuver was to remove the hair or make it easier to scrape the hide. A not very pleasant sight to see or smell.

The women were tending a large pot under which a fire was built. It was filled with lard, lye and Lord only knows what else, but the end result was a hardened mess that would be cut into bars to use for laundry and bathing. When it came to bathing with this lye soap, some of it could be a little rough on the skin.

Back in Arkansas, it was customary for neighbors to load up and go to another farm and help during hog killing time. Granddad Holland was one of those men who liked to go off on these jaunts and cut grapes or help other farmers in some fashion or another and in some cases, it was an opportunity to make a few dollars.

Another time it might be helping a farmer get in a crop of hay or wheat during harvest time and if he went to a farm close to home Uncle Gerald and I would jump at the chance to go with him just to ride in the wagon.

One of my fondest memories was a visit to my Uncle Walter and Aunt Nellie Cox who was Hugh's sister. It was late when Uncle Walter and Grandad finished work and the ride home was unforgettable. The bright moonlight, the dusty road and the noise the wagon wheels made on gravel, coupled with the smell of horses, is not easily forgotten.

The moonlit night made it easy for Gerald and I to walk behind the wagon for a time then when we tired, we would jump up on the rear of the wagon to rest a while. There was another time when he let me ride with him and the spirited team of horses were pulling the wagon with rubber tires. That was a whole new experience and certainly a more comfortable wagon ride.

CHAPTER 3 – 1943 FAYETTEVILLE, AR

It wasn't long before Arkansas was calling the family home again and near the end of summer 1943, the family moved back to Fayetteville where Dad had a job driving a truck. I was old enough to start school so I began my first year of school at Leverette Elementary in Fayetteville. It is during this period that events are somewhat hazy but I remember walking two or three blocks to school but can't recall the name of any teachers or exactly when we left to move back home to Wheeler or the reason why. This time we moved into a house near Clear Creek which wasn't far from Sycamore School. It was here that I finished First Grade, went through Second Grade and part of Third Grade.

It was an old farmhouse that we shared with the Hubbard family who had previously moved back from Fayette. I must assume that Dad and Ray Hubbard were working together again for Mr. Porter who owned a farm and a good amount of property in and around Wheeler and he owned the house that we shared with the Hubbard family.

It was a small farm just around the corner from Ada's store and though it was large, it was now occupied by nine people: four adults, four juveniles and one baby. A lot can be said for getting to know your neighbor. It was near Sycamore School, so rain or shine Betty June and I walked the mile or so to Sycamore school where I finished the remainder of my First-Grade class while she was in a class ahead of me. Harold and Sue were still too young to start school that year.

We were still living in the old farmhouse with the Hubbard family when on March 10, 1944, Dad was inducted into the US Navy while Ray went into the Air force to fight in WWII. They joined many other men who were leaving families behind to fight in the war. In this case, Dad was leaving behind a family of four while Ray was leaving a family of three behind. Dad was sent to Farragut, Idaho for boot camp. Afterwards he was able to make a quick trip home before shipping overseas to the Philippines. His military records indicate that he was on the USS General J.C. Breckinridge (AP-176), a troop transport used to shuttle soldiers to and from the war.

He may have served also on the USS Hector (AR-7), which was a repair ship before serving on the USS Orvetta (IX-157). The Orvetta was a barracks ship that provided service to forward based personnel in the Pacific arena. Many years ago, I discovered a website for the USS Orvetta (IX-157) that was created by a WWII veteran of that ship. **http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~ddorsey/military/orvetta/**

The website contains a roster of men who served on the ship so I sent him a photo and short bio of Dad's career which he posted on the site. Dad is found on the Memorial page.

In the meantime, we used the summer of '44 to explore the small farm where outbuildings stored plows and other farm equipment but no farm animals. There were buildings with bins of corn and wheat and musty lofts where potatoes were drying. These were all magical places for young lads and lassies to explore. In addition to the wonders of the outbuildings there was a large Mulberry tree that seemed to always have fruit. The Mulberries could be gained by climbing on top the tin roof of one of the storage buildings.

Once on the metal roof, we would lie back and watch the clouds scuttling by while eating mulberries. We kids always had blue tongues and stained clothes as telltale signs of eating those berries. Hazel nuts could also be found growing in the ditch alongside the road where the grader plowed and I never understood why they favored that ditch where it was always dusty from vehicle traffic.

Another feature of this farm was an old oak tree that had the largest acorns that one would ever see. I mean these were really giant acorns! Larger than a golf ball in size. It is doubtful that another tree like it existed in Arkansas or at least anywhere near that part of the state. We kids would hunt for these acorns and have Mom or Grandma fill the hulls with yarn to make colorful decorations for Christmas or whatever.

I've spoken of these acorns over the years and on one of our many trips home, Kathie and I drove to where the old tree should've been but it was gone. We did however find part of an old acorn and hull that was sufficient to show Kathie how large the acorns were.


Chinquapin Nut

And who can forget the thorny Chinquapins? A menace to our bare feet. The nut was delicious but one had to really work to extract them from their hulls which were a bundle of sharp cactus like thistles. In most cases a rock was a handy tool to sufficiently bash the hulls into surrendering their fruit. There was the delicate task of picking nuts out of their hulls but that didn't stop us from gathering them at every opportunity. I suppose one could say that they were editable raw but were so tasty when roasted.

Thinking back, I can recall the farm and nearby woods yielded several wild products that included mulberries, strawberries, crab apples, plums, Chinquapins, hazel nuts and black walnuts to name a few. If the season wasn't ripe for picking any of these, then we could always grab a turnip. Sometimes it was a climb up into the potato drying shed to eat raw potatoes. There wasn't anything better to feed an appetite like eating a big cold biscuit and a raw potato and sometimes a sweet potato could be found. If the truth be known, even onions would taste good with a cold biscuit.

The wheat bins were another fun place to play but frowned on when caught and almost always led to a whipping. On the other hand, if we didn't get caught, the chaff discolored our hair and choked our youthful lungs. There were times when violent coughing or a bad whopping would clear the passageways. Yet, we went back at the first opportunity that looked safe.

About a half mile behind the farmhouse, Clear Creek ran and where it had a bend, it created a deep hole that served as a good place to swim. It was like having your own swimming pool. On one outing accompanied by Mom and young Jerry, Sue and I were swimming when she stepped off into a deeper part of the creek and quickly learned she couldn't swim. At first, I thought all her flailing and hollering was merely her playing. But the second time she went under she didn't come back up. All I could see was her long black hair floating on top of the water and first thought that she was merely faking.

When I realized she was in distress, I quickly half swam and half splashed out to where I could grab her hair. I grabbed a hand full of hair and pulled her back up to shallow water. Clearly, it wasn't the best lifesaving method like we see on TV or in a movie, but it worked. Fortunately for us, unlike Florida, there were no alligators in Clear Creek and I doubt any could be found anywhere around Northwest Arkansas.

CHAPTER 4 – 1944 SYCAMORE, AR

An important chapter in my life was Sycamore school where in 1944, I finished the First grade, part of the Second grade and part of Third grade. No, we didn't move in every case, but I will explain later.

Sycamore was a classic one size fits all school that sat on the southern bank of Clear Creek. It was a one-story building with a tall belfry housing a large bell that rang to signal the start of school and end of recess. It was a real treat to be selected to ring the bell but a child had to be tall enough to pull the long rope. If sufficiently strong the boys would ring the bell vigorously trying to stir the wasp.



Sycamore Elementary

If that didn't work, a rubber gun often hit its target. This was especially attractive during the cold and rainy winter months when no one wanted to go outside and play. To my knowledge, I don't recall any student having an allergy to wasp stings nor do I know anyone that hadn't been stung.

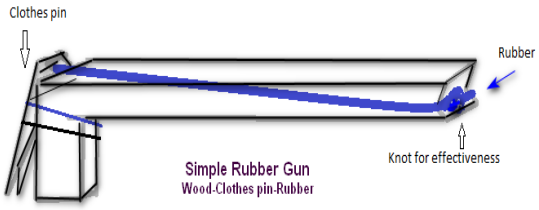
I suspect that a welt on someone's arm or a knot on their head would be taken in stride. Although not particularly a desirable experience, it was accepted as a cost of living in this beautiful country.

There were several students attending classes ranging from First through Eighth grades being taught by one tough lady. I have fond memories of Second Grade under the tutorship of Mrs. Weir. She was a large lady that ran the school like a military post but one must remember she was teaching students in eight grades and some of the eight-graders were approaching manhood.

In the middle of the schoolhouse was an aisle that ran the length of the room in which sat a large potbellied stove. On the right were lower grades and higher grades on the left.

The stove was intended to heat the entire school room but if it was hot enough to reach the exterior desks, then it was too hot for those sitting near the stove. I recall that the rows up front were for the First Graders.

The grades were arranged to ascend as one moved to the rear. In front were the First Graders with Second Graders in the next rows and so on until the last row where Harold and I finished up the Third Graders. On the left side of the room were the upper grades where one might find ages ten to seventeen or maybe older. The joke was that the older boys were held back a few grades until their fathers completed the eighth grade. Totally untrue because some fathers may have never graduated from elementary school.



There are some great memories of Sycamore. It was a time when we boys carried rubber guns which were our weapons of choice to use at recess. Some of the older boys (Eighth Graders) had real guns in their trucks. Most of the boys from Third Grade to Eight Grade had rubber guns because they were simple to make.

All we needed was a block of wood, a clothes pin and a strip of rubber from an inner tube. Then it was simply a matter of demonstrating our craftsmanship to make it pretty or lethal or better yet, make it both. Now that was a sign of skill.

Back then there weren't any radial tires - only bias ply - so there was a good supply of old inner tubes to cut up for rubber. Some of the guns were sophisticated. For example, I once made a rifle that used a long rubber from an inner tube and when an opponent was shot there wasn't any argument whether they had been hit or not.

When hit by the rubber from the rifle, it would leave a good welt on one's arm, especially if a knot was tied in the center of the rubber and a fence staple inserted in the knot. There was no argument about who was hit or not. But that was dangerous and was only used a few times like shooting at the wasp nest in the Belfry.

Of course, the situations that generate good memories can be the source of not so good memories as well. Take the Boys and Girls outside toilets for example.

The Girls toilet was not too far from the school and sat near the Clear Creek riverbank. I mention this because during a storm the creek flooded and swept away the toilet. It floated downstream until it encountered a steel bridge a mile or so away. I don't know if it got reset properly but I do know the boys didn't fare so well when it got turned over.

The boy's toilet was situated near the main road at the beginning of the driveway to the school and was much further away – it's anybody's guess why that was – so it took longer to get there if one was in a hurry. To complicate further, the story goes that on one Halloween night, some older boys on horses rode down and lassoed the toilet and pulled it across the driveway blocking access until it was moved. Whatever the reason or how it happened is a moot point but when restored to its resting place it sat at about 75 to 80-degree angle giving birth to considerable bathroom humor. One must remember that these days were long before Television, Tablets, I-pods, laptops and Smart phones so most anything would entertain us for at least 5 minutes, especially bathroom humor and that leaning toilet was the source of many jokes.

Most of us had never seen an actual football or baseball game and certainly not in Wheeler so we improvised in our sports. If we weren't playing with rubber guns, we played baseball with a String ball which is made up of many yards of thread or yarn and whatever was used as the core which was generally some type of material. As the yarn and string were wrapped, glue was added to hold the material together until it was about baseball size. Though it was sometimes a little on the hard side, it made for a pretty good substitute for baseball. We all sought the distinction of being the last batter to hit the ball and watch it unravel before anyone could catch it.

Another game we played in the winter was called "Shinny" which was a poor boys form of ice hockey. Each boy possessed a favorite stick of some type and would dig holes in the ice one hole short of the number of players. Each would select a "goal" to guard while the boy without a hole to guard would use a tin can for the puck.

The object of the game was for him to put the can into one of the guarded goals and if successful, he would then own that goal and the loser would then have to set about trying to secure a goal. The game would continue until the recess period was over or someone got hurt bad enough to bring the game to an end. The name "Shinny" comes from getting your shins hit so many times when defending your "goal."

The older boys seem to have an advantage over us younger ones because they hit harder and had fewer hits to their shins. Or so it seems. Who knows if they had a few scars hidden under their britches' legs and who is going to ask them? Not me. But my guess is that the older boys had knots on their shins also.

There was another game of sorts which was to strip the leaves off what we called Horse Weeds. They were tall and straight more like bamboo stalks, a characteristic that made them ideal for use as spears or arrows but not so dense and hard that one could use them to penetrate much of anything. As I said, they were just weeds. There was one exception, however. My uncle Gerald "The Squirrel" Holland and his team were playing against me and my cousin James Knight, aka "Mousey." The weeds were 5-6ft tall so it was easy to hide in them. One might compare it to a game of Battleship where you try to determine the enemy's location. We all were using sling shots to shoot the Horse weeds into the air to where we thought the others were hiding and they in turn were trying to pinpoint our location. Unfortunately, Mousey was about to shoot his arrow up into the air when one came down and hit him in the eye. We had seen broken arms and other injuries but this was a terrible sight! No pun intended.

We steered him to the schoolhouse and had him lie down on a bench in the back of the school building while his brother Bobby bicycled to Ada's and called for an ambulance. It was obvious that James had lost his eye. We never played that game again. As he grew older, it was rumored that he was a master at marbles. It was alleged that he would pop his eye out and shoot it like a Taw and take all the marbles. If true, then I wonder how many glass eyes my uncle had to buy when James was a teenager.

Looking back, my second-grade behavior wasn't anything to brag about. I didn't get a whipping every day but often enough to keep Mrs. Weir's box of switches full. When anyone did something that led to discipline, for girls that generally meant sitting in a corner – now called Time Out – but for boys it almost always led to a whipping.

She had a peculiar method of spanking that began with the recipient going out and cutting his or her own switches. However, when I think back, I don't remember a girl ever having to get a switch.

The twist is that she required us to go out and cut three switches. You can bet we always got decent switches because if you ever made the mistake of getting brittle switches, you never did again. When the first one breaks, then she uses the other two on you or delves into her stash until she finds one that doesn't break. Yep, we were allowed to have pocketknives back then which we used to cut switches and play Mumblety-peg.

There are multiple ways to play Mumblety-peg but the way we played it most often was the use of a knife that had at least two blades which we opened 90 degrees apart. A peg would be driven into the ground with about 2 inches or so sticking up.

We would then flip the knife in the air hoping the long blade would stick in the ground. If it stuck, then using your knife, you got to strike the peg twice driving it further into the ground. If the short blade stuck in the ground, then you only got to hit the peg once. Then your opponent had his try and the peg was driven deeper. When one misses, then as a loser, he would have to remove the peg with his teeth.

There are many variations of this game, many of which can be found on Wikipedia. Some of the games can be dangerous, particularly the one that involves throwing the knife as close to your feet as possible which is one of the original Mumblety-peg games. Now that I think back, maybe it wasn't all that dangerous because most of us went barefooted and I don't recall anyone missing a toe unless it was genetic. Not from Mumblety-peg anyway. Although I do recall one kid having more toes than the rest of us. At least that is what it looked like. Yes, should you think it, we did know how to count at that age.

There was a time when Mom took advantage of a sale on corduroy pants for me. I didn't like them and swore I wouldn't be found dead in them. But there came a day when the only clean pants I could find to wear to school were corduroy and the first day that I wore them I expected to get ridiculed by the older boys. Jeans, even with holes in them, were the style if there was such a thing back then.

We certainly had never heard of designer jeans or anything like that. The term "stile" meant it was stairs going over a fence or maybe a turnstile but nothing a designer would wear.

One day I won a whipping and I was wearing the corduroy pants which were heavier than my worn-out jeans. I really don't recall what magic I had performed but regardless, I had earned a whipping. To my great surprise, those switches didn't cut through the corduroys like my jeans and right then and there I became a fan. Of course there wasn't a need to wear them every day, just on those days when I had a whipping.

We all have heard the expression, "my life flashed before my eyes." That can be true even if a person hasn't lived all that many years. It happened to me one cold winter day when it was basically study time for us older kids except for the first graders who were being read to by Mrs. Weir. She was pacing back and forth reading to the first two rows and when she reached the potbellied stove, she would turn and go back the other way. This went on for the better part of an hour which meant if you looked around the room you would see a lot of heads nodding.

Well on this day as she turned with her back to me, I was showing off and pulled my rubber gun out from my desk and pointed it at her large backside. To my horror and to the delight of the older kids on the other side of the room, the rubber slipped out of the clothes pin and hit her right in the ass. Muzzygeezy!

To the most casual observer, she hadn't felt the rubber but since my life was flashing before my eyes and everything else was in slow motion, yeah, she felt it. However, the most amazing thing happened. She made the slightest hesitation in her reading out loud which confirmed she knew she had been hit but not with what and continued her pacing. When she turned and got back to the stove and the rubber lying on the floor, she merely stepped over it and kept on pacing. Yes, as I can attest, there is life after death.

It may have been a blessing that we moved to a house on Highway 16 which meant we would finish the last part of the school year at Mt Comfort Elementary. We still had a long 45-minute two-mile walk to school through the woods and that was a shortcut. For me it was the last half of the second grade.

Those days are not easily forgotten because in the wintertime we had to wear shoes to school and for many of us it meant wearing shoes that had holes in the soles. I venture to say that there are many my age that put cardboard in their shoes to keep the small gravel from getting in. As for getting wet from rain or snow, the best thing one could do was to carry a dry piece of cardboard for the return trip home.

After the school year ended, we moved back to Wheeler where it was time to enjoy the lazy summer. There was a slough not far from the house where little brother Jerry and I would go fishing. He may have been a little small to hold a fishing pole but he was a good companion and quick to back up my story when I boasted about my catch and Jerry was good about fetching things and wasn't afraid of anything.

On one outing, while we were fishing at the slough, something fluttered down from the trees into the water. At first, I paid no mind because it looked like a leaf had fallen but then I noticed movement and thought it strange.

It sort of fluttered on top of the water which made me think it was a bird that had fallen so I asked Jerry to check it out. He did. He wasn't afraid of anything so he waded into the muddy slough and picked up the strange bundle and returned to shore where I was standing and the darn thing bit him on the hand.

We quickly recognized it was a bat. I'm sure it didn't have rabies or anything dangerous except for its sharp teeth but it might explain some of Jerry's behavior these past 70 years. One just never knows, do we. Besides, I think if Jerry had rabies, he was supposed to start foaming at the mouth and he never did any of that, at least not that I could tell.

The summer days flew by rapidly and Sycamore school was back in session. Sue was attending Second grade and I was entering Third grade. I believe the teacher was named Ms. Cox. She was younger than Mrs. Weir and had a four- or five-year-old son that accompanied her most every day. He had the run of the school. One interesting habit of his was to follow the girls to the toilet, no matter the age. I never knew if this was a problem for the girls but each time they were excused to go to the toilet, he would jump up and accompany them outside to the toilet and neither the girls nor the teacher protested.

On one fine day, Mrs. Cox and one of the older boys got into it. She was going to discipline an Eighth Grader named Bobby. No telling what crime he may have committed but Ms. Cox was intent on administering capital punishment and to his credit, he had dutifully gone out and cut switches but apparently rebelled at getting a whipping and said that he would switch her each time she hit him. The battle was on. I didn't see him hit her but one could assume that he had because he began running down the aisle towards me and my desk mate Harold with her fast in chase. Just as the two neared our desk, she lashed out to hit Bobby but he grabbed our desk and spun the two of us in between them. Her switch came down and hit the tip of Harold's right ear and blood went everywhere. He must have been a bleeder and blood meant panic.

There are many stories about Clear Creek and Sycamore School but the most memorable is the premature ending of my third-grade school year. It was canceled not long after the switching caper and just as school was getting interesting. Our teacher departed about three months into the school year for unknown reasons . One rumor was that she was fired, another was she quit because she wasn't getting paid. No matter the reason, Sister Sue and I were among those students that did not pass and would have to retake the 2nd and 3rd grade respectively. If the truth were known that didn't bother me a whole lot because we didn't look forward to walking forth-five minutes to an hour to and from school, especially in the wintertime. In fact, there were times when I would have liked to skip a year or take the grade all over again. However, in the years to come, we moved frequently and, in most cases, it meant a new home, a new school and new friends.

CHAPTER 5 – 1945 HOLLAND'S HOLLER, AR

In 1945 we were still in Wheeler and a lot of things happened in Dad's absence. In late 1944 with him off to war, we four left the farmhouse and the Hubbard family and moved into the old Littrell place. It was only temporary because Granddad Hugh Holland became sick and we moved in with them so Mom could help tend to him. At the time of Hugh's illness, they were renting a house at the top of Canning Factory Hill. Again, we had a house full of people with Hugh and Ora, Aunt Deon, Uncle Gerald, Mom, me, Sue and Jerry. I don't think I missed anyone.

Dad sent money home that he had won in a poker game so Mom used the money to partner with Granddad to purchase 38 acres of land from Mr. Shirley. Granddad took 20 acres and Mom took 18 acres and this is what we began calling Holland's Holler where Granddad built a small 2-room house.

He later built a lean-to type of bedroom on the side which was used in later years when our family returned on vacation. Uncle Gerald and I slept in the storage shed where Hugh had laid in tobacco to dry and cure. It made sleeping difficult with the strong acrid aroma.



Granddad Hugh Herbert Holland's Place

My grandparents' home had a combination bedroom/living room, a kitchen with a large range, no running water and an outdoor toilet. A 3-holer if my memory serves. To this day I can't ever remember having to share an outside toilet with anyone even if we had the runs and doggonit, there never seemed to be any comfort in knowing there were more holes in the toilet than the one you were using. I mean it's not like you are going to have a party in an outside toilet. And if the aroma didn't get you, let it be wintertime with a little bit of cold wind that seemed to find every crack in the toilet's siding...brrrr. No pun intended.

The console radio and associated battery took up some of the room's space but there was room for Granddad's bed and 2 or 3 pallets. Grandma slept on a bed in the kitchen. We kids could always sleep on a pallet in the add-on or sometimes in the living room where we would fall asleep listening to the battery-operated Crosley radio. The radio dial sat on WXYZ so long that it could have rusted there because that was about all we ever listened to. The Detroit station aired The Green Hornet, The Lone Ranger and many more great radio shows while we listened to the Amos and Andy show on WGN. There were also the Fibber McGee and Molly show and a mystery called Inner Sanctum and a big favorite, Grand Ole Opry. I don't know if we got any more pleasure out of Television when it came on the scene as we did that radio.

We kids weren't allowed to touch the radio dial so it was a wonderful experience to curl up on our pallets and let Granddad select our evening entertainment. We almost always went to sleep before the shows were over. Besides, the radio had to be used sparingly so as not to run the battery down. When we weren't listening to the radio, Granddad Holland was a great storyteller so if it wasn't the radio entertaining us, it would be his stories. In particular, he liked to tell a ghost story where we were hanging on every word and then he would suddenly yell or do something to scare the snot out of us. He always had an audience that consisted of me, my uncles, aunts and cousins and it seems to me that the age didn't matter because the more listeners he had, the better his stories were.

So many memories were created in Holland's Holler. Mom's baby sister Aunt Deon and baby brother Uncle Gerald the Squirrel were older but still close in size and age to be good playmates, especially Uncle Gerald. One pastime was to bend a Prince Albert tobacco can into a "U" shape and nail it to a tobacco stick or something similar in size and shape. The tobacco can would be bent to form a saddle that allowed us to roll a hoop like those found on the hub of a wagon wheel. My guess is that we probably ran twenty miles a day rolling that hoop on those old country roads. We had the run of the place although Granddad seemed to find plenty of chores for us to do.

We were taught to identify every berry, plant, weed, vine, flower and tree that grew in the Holler and learned to pull weeds, feed chickens, draw water for the house or livestock and since there wasn't any electricity or ice, we made trips to the spring to get butter and milk or put a jug in to cool. I learned a little about horses, mules, cows, pigs and chickens. Enough to not want to make a living raising cows or pigs. On the one hand they were nice to have around when it comes to bacon for breakfast or fried chicken on Sunday. Speaking of Sundays, on those days Granddad would select a chicken by taking his dog Sport into the pen and throwing a piece of corn at the one or two hens that he chose for dinner. Like a shot Sport would get each of the hens that were hit with the kernel of corn.

I've often wondered if the rest of the country experienced a fried chicken Sunday. It was an exciting event and almost a ritual where aunts and uncles and cousins would visit Hugh's Holler. We looked forward to those Sundays because most of the cousins were near our age.

When it comes to livestock, I learned they could be quite ornery. One example was an old mule that would try and bite Granddad any time he got near him and there were times when he succeeded as the bruises would testify. When it was time to put a harness on him or the occasional saddle, he would turn his head and bite whatever he could reach, either Granddad's arm or leg.

Although covered up, both appendages had to have bruises where the mule had bit him but that didn't stop Granddad from putting a saddle on him. Instead, it brought out Granddad's terrible temper that often manifested itself in a rawboned fist to the mule's head, if the mule was lucky, otherwise, it might be something harder than a fist. More aggravation was when the mule would get out once in a while and try to escape but old Sport, Granddad's dog, would go after the mule and chase him back to where he got out which enabled Granddad to repair the section that the mule tore down. It almost seemed like a game between the three of them.

When building his house Granddad had picked up a lot of rocks from around the perimeter of the house and loaded them into his wagon. The wagon had rubber tires vs. steel rims that you would normally see on wagons. However, the weight of the rocks was causing the tires to slowly lose air and to help move things along, Sport would race out and grab one of the tires. Amazingly, Granddad never bothered to correct or discipline Sport. Eventually the dog was successful in chewing the rubber off all four wagon wheels so we all concluded that Granddad Holland enjoyed seeing the dog's performance and did nothing. The wagon sat there with rocks for years.

This was before the era of radials so keeping the tires inflated might have been a chore, they did provide a nice comfortable and quiet ride. I have memories of riding in the wagon with both steel and rubber-tired wheels. One in particular was a ride to Fayetteville behind a pretty matched pair of horses pulling the wagon with rubber tires. What a ride. Muzzygeezy!

World War II was still raging with Dad, Mom's brothers and men from Wheeler were still overseas fighting. Mom's older brother and family were Jehovah's Witnesses and refused to enter service because they were conscientious objectors. I've no objections for them not wanting to go to war but I believe every young man or woman should serve their country for two years in some capacity.

I'm convinced that a two-year stint in some form of service would allow time for a young person to grow into adulthood and possibly help them decide on a career.

I, along with Dad, my brother Jerry, and my uncles are all veterans. I cannot accept the decision not to do anything for their country. In some countries, conscientious objectors can perform military duties that do not involve carrying a rifle. I say, do something for one's country.

The gravel road was extended from Granddad Holland's place to the 18 acres that Mom bought and circled around a small hill and then swept up to the top. It was here that Mom, Granddad Holland, Uncle Bee Holland and Ora – yes, Grandma Ora Holland - built our house. That road has since been named Clark's Road and now circles all the way back to Wheeler Road.

The small farm and one-room house were almost as magical as the farmhouse in Wheeler. There were woods to roam and an old homestead that was part of the property Mom had purchased that had stuff to explore. One attraction was a big crab apple tree. They were larger than a golf ball and sour as a lemon. They didn't taste so bad with a little salt and one of Grandma Ora's biscuits. But they would give us the runs. No need for castor oil here.

Water being the precious commodity, no matter if it is carried in or delivered, it is best to have it pumped into your house, but we had no electricity or water. It was at this new house that a new well was planned and the drilling started. The Rig drilled for days and drilled down 200ft or more but came up dry. All that came from this drilling was cold air. A decision was made to go even deeper but the drilling yielded only cold air blowing up through the hole. Eventually the rig was pulled and the spoils dumped back into the deep hole. Gravel, rocks, dirt and anything else that one could think of was thrown down the deep hole and then a cover was put on top. A few weeks later dust could be seen blowing out of the well where air had found its way back up. And to think, no one thought of piping the cool air into the house to provide air conditioning. It would have been a simple matter to run a stove pipe from the well into the house. Instead, another attempt was made to close the well.

In the meantime, since we didn't have a well at our house, we carried water from Granddad's place up to the house. Based on critiques that visited his house and drank from his well – a must for all visitors – his was the best water in that part of Arkansas. Remarkably, it was always cool and would almost hurt your teeth to drink. If you had any…teeth that is.

Granddad with our help put in a crop of corn, tomatoes, onions and sugar cane on the few acres that were tillable. There may not have been many jobs that he would have us do but one thing we did often and that was weeding. It was hot, nasty work but something that had to be done. Or else.

On 2 September 1945 the war was over. Hallelujah. That meant that Dad and some of my uncles would be returning home. I recall how handsome he looked in his Navy uniform. After kissing Mom, he hugged Jerry and Sue, then swatted me on the rear and said that was just in case, then hugged me too.

As stated earlier, the house sat on a hill and the driveway, such as it was, circled around the house and with a running start Dad would goose the old Model A and shoot up on top of the hill alongside the house.

Dad or anyone else driving a car would park at the top of the driveway and when departing, they merely let it roll downhill, release the clutch and the car would start. If it didn't then you would have to get out the old crank. You certainly can't do that in today's automobiles.

On one occasion we kids were playing out in the burns that were created when a controlled burn got out of control and dang near burn the house down. It seems that Granddad and a couple neighbors decided to burn some sagebrush and other small stuff, but the wind came up and they lost control. I guess that makes it an "out of control burn." When it was all over, the fire had given birth to all new plants and bushes and especially to our favorite, the Huckleberry.

One day while out picking Huckleberries, I was carrying my favorite stick. Everyone had to have a stick horse. My stick was hand carved with perfection. It had my initials and some rings and other magic insignia that made it different from anyone else's stick. It was an identity.

Anyway, as I was picking huckleberries, I pulled down on this stem of berries when I suddenly discovered the wide-open mouth of a Cotton Mouth and it was ready to strike. I reached down and picked up the snake with my stick and carried it to the house with sister Sue tagging along behind.

Dad hadn't yet made it home from work at the time but Mom was particularly upset. When she saw what kind of snake it was, she demanded that we take it back to the woods or kill it. I'm not sure she knew it was poisonous but a snake is a snake.

We decided to do the latter so we dropped it in the middle of the driveway and piled lots of rocks on it. All the while keeping in mind the warning that if the snake's belly is up, it will rain. We liked the sunny days too much to want it to rain. What we didn't plan on was Dad coming home to a hill of rocks in the driveway. He had to goose the old Model-A to get it up the hill so he was accelerating coming around the hill when he hit the rocks.

Fortunately, no serious damage was done, the radiator was okay and no one got bit by the snake. In fact, it was gone. We removed all the rocks and not a sign of the snake could be found. Better yet, it didn't rain nary a drop.

Since the well drilling rig didn't find water but only cool air instead, Dad decided to try his luck and set about digging his own. This was a tough job and anyone that has ever been to Arkansas can testify that it is a state full of rocks.

My granddad once said that if you dig through the six feet of rocks you will find soil as fertile as the bottom of the Mississippi river but most people didn't find the Mississippi. In this case Dad removed several layers of rock but no soil or water was found and it looked like he would have to dig a long way to reach China.

When Dad finally gave up digging as a lost cause, we had a large hole about 10ft deep and 8ft across and no Mississippi river was found, not even a trickle. I hadn't been much help in digging this hole except being a gofer for Dad but covering it up was something else. One day we had gone down to throw some more rocks and dirt in the great dig and discovered a small copperhead snake at the bottom of the dry well.

I was about to throw down some rocks and dirt on the poisonous snake, but Dad saw a King snake lying near the edge of the well. He walked over and with the toe of his boot slid the King over into the hole. It was like sitting in an arena watching the two snakes fight but in the end the King snake won.

Granddad had taught us kids that the Kings were predators towards copperheads and rattlers but never had Dad and I saw anything like that before. We kids knew there were poisonous snakes in the woods but that didn't stop us from playing. The only snake bite I'm aware of was Uncle Gerald the Squirrel who was bitten when he was young. He had picked up a rock that a copperhead was lying and it bit him on the ring finger. Later we learned it just made him meaner. Not the snake, but Uncle Gerald the Squirrel.

When it came time to harvest the sugar cane, my job was to tend to an old mule that we hooked up to a sorghum mill which was nothing more than a grinder where cane was fed into the mill and juice ran out. The mule was tethered to a long pole that basically was a handle that turned the mill when the mule walked around in circles. I can still smell the sorghum and recall the sweet taste of chewing on the cane sucking the sugar out. It doesn't take much to overdo it and soon the smell and sweetness would make one gag and there comes a point when you think you will never want to taste or smell that sweet sorghum again.

An interesting thing about that old mule was that he was easy to manage until noon when it was time to take him down to Granddad's well and give him water. After he had his fill, he would fight me to return back up the hill. He was strong enough that he could pull the reins from my hands if I wasn't prepared. One day I had taken him to water and he broke loose and began running down the road. To my surprise Dad came roaring by in the old Model-A in the direction the mule had taken.

Of course, there was only one way out of Holland's Holler and one way back and only Dad and the mule know what happened but it wasn't long before the old mule was running back with Dad close behind in the car. Dad slowed down enough to allow me to jump on the running board and ride up the hill where the old mule waited at the sorghum mill. He never ran away again.



Dolly

It wasn't long afterwards that Granddad found a large draft horse named Dolly and talked Dad into trading the old mule for what Mom called a Percheron breed which are very large draft horses. Dolly was almost as wide as she was tall and was very comfortable to ride to take her to water. There are several breeds of Draft horses but from what I found through research, the Percheron came from France and was one of the most widely used Draft horses in the USA. Her color said that she was a mixed breed.

Unfortunately, Dad wasn't much of a farmer but he liked to hunt and fish so we managed to get out in the woods during hunting season though I don't know how concerned folks were back then about a "season." Hunting and fishing were more of a necessary chore and another way to put food on the table, albeit a pleasant one. Fishing is the easiest and the most fun for me and the entire family.

As for fishing, I mentioned earlier in the story about making minnow traps. Dad showed me how by first being selective about the jug you pick. It had to be clear glass and have a handle to which you could tie a rope to. The trick was to wrap a thin piece of cloth soaked in kerosene around the neck of the jug and set it on fire. When the fire had made a ring around the neck, Dad would strike it with a knife blade and it would cut the neck off smooth as if it had been made that way.

One day while making a trap, the cloth had been wrapped and the fire set but when Dad struck the neck, it flew off and hit me just below the left knee. My skinny knee just about got wrapped by the circular piece of glass that was once the neck of the jug and cut me to the bone and blood flew everywhere.

It was a deep enough cut that I may have bled a lot but like most injuries of that time, you merely sterilize the best you can, wrap it up and go about your play. In my case, I have a 3-inch scar below my left knee that may be used for identification if necessary.

Back in those days, a doctor or emergency room was out of the question because only serious injuries like broken limbs or severe medical issues warranted a hospital and more often than not, it was a dusty ride in an auto or truck rather than an ambulance to travel miles of dirt roads to the city of Fayetteville.

Now I buy my own minnows when I go fishing. But for those who wish to make a homemade trap, all you need is a large plastic bottle of some type, cut the top off, place bread or other bait inside the container, invert the top and place it back into the bottle creating a tunnel that minnows will swim into to get to the bait. Believe me, it works very well.

We grew up with guns. Dad was a crack shot. Don't know if he was always good or was taught to be a marksman by the Navy or later in the Air Force but however it came about, he was good.

My brother Jerry was a crack shot, rifle or pistol. He and I always had guns and as we grew older and had an occasion to bring the families together, there was an inevitable shoot off with .22 rifles.

The contest began with maybe a small can and then reduced to a fifty-cent piece or even a quarter. The idea was to just barely see the target. Dad still had a good eye and Brother Jerry had become a very good shooter so it was difficult at times to determine the winner because we all performed well. As the old saying goes, "anyone of us could shoot the eye out of a squirrel."

Years later I learned that brother Jerry practiced a quick draw in front of a mirror and in all honesty, it paid off. I was the sucker that wanted to see how fast he could draw so he bet me a dollar that I couldn't clap my hands before he drew his revolver. Did I say he was fast? Did I not say that it cost me a few bucks to see him draw? Like I said, that is another story but if you want to see for yourself how fast he is, despite his age, I suggest you take plenty of money and make damn sure the gun is not loaded.

CHAPTER 6 – 1947 NORTH AND SOUTH CAROLINAS

Dad decided quickly that farming wasn't his cup of tea and after the crops were in, he sold the farm and everything that went with it to Mr. Ruth Carney and bought a 1931 Ford Model A 4-door Sedan for us to travel in. You can't imagine the excitement of riding the narrow two-lane winding road of Hwy 71 in 1947 that took us up and over Boston Mountain and down to Fort Smith where we picked up Hwy 64 and headed east to Wade, NC. If you travel the Interstate I-49 to Fayetteville or drive the new and improved Hwy 71, you can see patches of the old highway and be thankful that you were not driving a Model-A.

I spent a lazy summer in Wade playing with a black boy my age that lived nearby. It was here that I suffered my first real bodily harm when I fell climbing a lumber stack and dislocated my right elbow. The joint distension was so great that doctors first thought that it was broken in two places but X-rays revealed that it was only badly dislocated. Of course, to me it felt like it was broken.

Soon the summer was over and a new school year was about to begin. I had just received my seat assignment when the school door darkened and it was Dad. He beaconed me to get up and follow him. As it happened, we were packing up again and heading south to Charleston where Dad's older brother Harold promised him and W.L., Harold's son, a job painting ships.

Dad and his nephew William Lonnie, aka "WL" for short, were both hired but in later years W.L. told the story many times, that on one particular day in 1947 when the two were on their way to work, Dad said he was going in to see Harold and demand a pay raise. W.L. asked, "What if my dad says no?" Harold's answer wasn't what they wanted to hear because they both joined the Air Force, September 30, 1947.

I have memories of Charleston and our many visits to another of dad's brothers, Uncle Dewey, Aunt Ellen and Cousins Buddy and Hazel. Buddy and I were about the same age and were in the same 3rd grade class at school that I had to repeat. The name of the school eludes me but I recall there were two or three bullies that waited for us after school.

Buddy was faster and he could outrun us all so I would try and fight because I was older but outnumbered and it only resulted in me getting my butt whipped. There came a time when even the bullies got tired of beating me up.

It was these visits to Uncle Dewey's house that caused me and Aunt Ellen to bump heads. To begin with, she had a nasty habit of dipping snuff and the spitting that goes with it. However, the real friction between us was when she cooked – and she was a good cook – she would serve us kids on the same dirty plates that the adults had used. There were times when it was difficult to even look at a dirty plate, much less eating out of it.

I refused to eat off the dirty plate. God Bless our mother because she didn't approve of us kids eating on dirty plates either and would get up and wash our plates. I don't recall Aunt Ellen's reaction but it was probably best that she didn't interfere with Mom.

Another memory was my girlfriend Tululu. How could I ever forget a name like Tululu Gongas? She had long dark hair, dark eyes and was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen...in Charleston anyway. More importantly, her father owned the only grocery store in the neighborhood. We would sit in Hampstead Park and she would let me put my head in her lap where I could lay back and watch the clouds scuttle across the sky. This had to be true love.

Our apartment was in an old frame house at 21 Aiken Street that sat near the Northwest corner of Hampstead Park. The house had been divided up into multiple apartments and was situated on a street that sort of separated white residents from a predominately black neighborhood. Cooper River Bridge was half a mile away.

In those days, not all was harmony because segregation was in full force in South Carolina. I mentioned Hampstead Park earlier. As I recall, on Tuesdays the neighborhood black kids would assemble and enter the park from the south gate causing the white kids to move out through the north gate. This transition was made with little if any violence and they would take over the playground for the evening and the next day the Park would return to its normal inhabitants.

A couple of my playmates were black and lived on the next street behind us. One kid lived directly in back of us and he often joined me in climbing a tree in our back yard. It's surprising that neither of us were injured jumping and swinging from limb to limb in a pretty daring fashion pretending we were Tarzan.

This is the same kid that became my skating partner when I received a pair of steel skates for Christmas. He and I would skate around the neighborhood streets without straying too far from home. One day we had an argument about something that I don't recall but certainly must have been trivial.

Whatever the reason, I sat down on the sidewalk curb to pull my skates off but before I could say Jack Robinson, he had jerked a skate off and hit me in the head with it. Suddenly a big knot popped up on my head accompanied by blood and pain. However, that tiff didn't stop us from skating and playing together but we didn't fight anymore after that because I shad cared him and he had hurt me.



When these old iron skates were nearing their useful life on the bottom of shoes, some of the kids would make scooters out of them. There were always about a half dozen running the streets. Every once in a while, just before sundown, a police car would cruise down the street and go around the corner towards Cooper River Bridge before returning with 2 or 3 scooters.

Both men having enlisted in the Air Force, Dad and "WL" were being sent to basic training, so the family moved back to Arkansas.

CHAPTER 7 – 1948 CLARKSVILLE, TN



Depot House Last Seen

The Air Force sent Dad to Roswell, New Mexico in 1947 so we four moved back to Wheeler to live in a shack a mere stone's throw from Ada's store. Mom rented an old shack called the Depot House, which I suspect was a relic left over when the Railroad ran through Wheeler. It had no plumbing or indoor toilet but plenty of air conditioning with all the cracks in the floor and walls. Our needs were simple and sleeping arrangements were accommodated by a quilt on the floor. The pallet also helped cut down on the air coming up through the cracks.

We stayed in Wheeler long enough for us three kids to start school at Sycamore. Then one of our favorite aunts, Dad's sister Myrtle, came to visit. Over the years she visited us several times and was always welcome. Mom told a story about this visit when her and Myrtle were sitting at the table one evening when Myrtle looked up and whispered, *"There is that damn Jerry Smith."*

Dad had managed a few days of leave to visit us before he traveled to his new assignment to the Army 8th Air Force Base at Camp Campbell, Kentucky. The Camp was renamed later to Fort Campbell and the 8th Army Air Force became known as the Strategic Air Command (SAC).

Dad had a few days of leave to visit us before traveling to Camp Campbell, KY. It was a surprise visit because the last that Mom had heard from him was when he thought the Air Force might send him to Iceland or Greenland. He could stay only a couple days before he had to report to his new assignment and when settled, he said would send for us to join him.

The family moved from Wheeler to Clarksville, Tennessee and rented one half of a duplex. The other half was occupied by the Goosetree family. For years later Mom liked to tell a story about young Jerry who was about seven at the time, making a wolf whistle at Mrs. Goosetree while she was hanging up clothes on the clothesline. She looked around and saw Jerry sitting on the porch step watching her hang clothes. Mom always giggled when she would tell that story.

It was in Clarksville that Jerry finished up first grade. I can't recall the name of the school or the street we lived on but remember some eighth-grade boys played a prank on one of the teachers by picking up and bouncing his small car where it was wedged between two wings of the school. It was impossible to drive out but eventually the same boys removed it from its predicament. I don't know if the boys got into trouble for the prank but it was sort of funny. In fact, I think the teacher even got a hoot out of it. Nowadays, they would receive life sentences but only after some of the illegals were released to make room.

That Christmas I received my first bicycle. It was a brand-new bike and I believe it was a Schwinn with all the trappings. I rode it to school and back and recall that going to school was a breeze because it was downhill. Coming back up wasn't so much. But still, it was wheels.

We had a neighbor who was a couple years younger than me who became my main playmate. His dad may have been a veteran but however he may have lost it, he was missing one leg. It was replaced by a wooden one. On this one occasion when there were three or four of us boys playing with homemade helicopters that he had shown us how to make with a couple nails and an empty thread spool, then he suddenly stabbed himself in the leg and calmly went about making a helicopter. You can bet there were a bunch of wide-eyed boys who backed up in a hurry.

Those helicopters were easy to make. All one needs is an empty spool, some tin and a couple small nails and a wooden stick whittled to make a handle on which the spool sets. Two nails are driven into the top of the spool directly across from one another and the heads are cut off. Then tin is cut possibly from a tomato can and formed into a propeller.

Two holes are punched into the tin that match up with the nails and a cord or string is wound around the spool. When the cord is pulled rapidly, the propeller spins up and rises off the spool like a helicopter. It is a simple design but makes for an effective toy. I think all of us boys on that street made one to play with.



A toy that was favored was cutting a piece of cane and making a pea shooter out of it. We had a wild cherry tree growing in back of the house and I learned to cut a piece of cane from an old broken fishing pole that exactly fit the cherries and my pockets were always full of ammo.

Another exciting feature of our neighborhood was living right behind us. It was a pretty girl whose last name was Fuqua and who went to the same school as me. Her dad had a plumbing business if my recollection is correct. I decided that she was someone I should know.

My relatively new bike with a shiny bell on the handlebar and flags flowing out of the ends of the handlebar grips just weren't enough to get here attention. I thought the image of me racing downhill with no hands on the handlebars with my arms in the air was especially effective.

But she never showed the slightest bit of interest in the skill I was demonstrating on a 2-wheel contraption and to impress her further, I even made a helicopter for her and when that didn't help, I shot her with one of my pea shooters – not hard – but that didn't help either. No matter what I did to get her attention, nothing worked. She was really playing hard to get.

I suppose it is just as well that we didn't get a romance started because the family was moving again. This time we moved across the state line into Kentucky to live at the air base on Camp Campbell which was renamed later to Fort Campbell.

CHAPTER 8 – 1949 FORT CAMPBELL, KY

Fort Campbell was the home of the 101st Airborne Division, also known as the Screaming Eagles. When school was out in 1949, we moved from Clarksville into the Fort's airbase's family housing that consisted of four old tar-papered barracks that had been converted into rudimentary apartments. Back then the Air Force base sat remotely from the main army camp and there wasn't much to it. A runway, mess hall, airman's club, men's barracks and a few old barracks converted into dependent housing. The air base was reached by one road in from the Army's Fort Campbell and one road in from a secret facility known as the Bird Cage.

Moving from the city to this remote airbase into an old barracks was a big change but the family handled it with the same resolve as manifested in other moves. The barrack's interior was about as rough as the exterior and again no inside toilet. One might call it typical military construction. A common latrine was divided to provide half for women and half for men. One side was showers and one side was toilets. I didn't visit the Women's side but the Men's toilet had no privacy walls between the showers or toilets so it wasn't a place for bashful folks. And wouldn't you know, our family's quarters were on the far end of the barracks away from the toilets. It didn't matter much until it rained or worse, it turned cold. Even so, it was better than outdoor toilets.



1949 Fort Campbell Paper Boy

It was here at Fort Campbell that I used my bike most, a necessary possession since I was the Base's only paper boy and needed transportation to pick up my papers on the Main Fort, rain or shine then ride back to the base.

I tried to keep my bike in good working order but there was a time when Jerry stuck his foot into the spokes of the front wheel while he was riding on the front handlebars and fender.

I don't know why but he just had to fly off the handlebars and hit the road hard enough to make a knot on his head. His foot bent the spokes in my wheel. I don't recall how his foot fared but EMTs were called and they took the wheel off my bike to extract his foot. Nah, if you ask me, I don't think the knot on his head has anything to do with his behavior now.

On one of our visits to Arkansas, Mom talked about this caper and said that the EMT's brought Jerry home and he whimpered a little and carried on until his friend showed up and wanted to know if he wanted to play which caused him to throw off his cover and run out the door to play. Muzzygeezy.

Mom was pregnant at the time when we moved into the barracks and it was on December 29, 1949, that Sister Carla was born. It was also a time when the nation was reeling from a new threat called Polio. Sadly, our infant sister Carla became a victim of the terrible disease at a time when we saw images of victims being encapsulated in iron lungs. We feared the worst but fortunately the disease affected only her right leg causing it to be slightly shorter than the left. Throughout her young years, Carla wore oxford type shoes that were modified to make her right leg equal in height to the left so she wouldn't limp when walking and as she grew older it was less noticeable until there came a time when one couldn't tell that she had ever had Polio. I'm convinced that much of Carla's success is attributed to her determination to improve her posture.

As paper boy, the Base Commander was one of my customers so I had seen his young daughter often and would tease her playfully when she came out on the porch. She too came down with Polio at about the same time as Carla. I suppose the disease brought the two families together. His daughter wasn't as fortunate and had to be transported to Nashville where they had an iron lung to assist her breathing. The ambulance that was taking her to Nashville broke down so the Base Commander sat in the back seat of a State Trooper car holding the young girl.

It was described as a scary ride from Fort Campbell to Nashville but I don't recall how the young girl fared. There were so many that died from the disease before the vaccine was developed. We were thankful that young Carla survived the worst the disease could offer.

We had some nice neighbors living in the barracks under the same conditions as we were. One particular neighbor was the Ambruster's whose son Rusty became one of my frequent playmates though he was slightly younger and he was more interested in Sue than me. Another family had a son my age named Jimmie and we pretty much liked the same sports and other things in common but if the truth be known, I think he too had an interest in Sue.

Our favorite hangout was buildings that were built for skeet shooting but were no longer used for that purpose. There was a tall one that had an upstairs of sort that we kept leather goods for making wallets, etc., which could be obtained from Special Services. I suppose you could get most anything from Special Services but all we wanted at the time was wallet making supplies. Interesting enough, neither of us had much money to put in a wallet.

I also remember our base bus driver named Snodgrass. He was always friendly and good to us kids so it was always a pleasure to ride his bus. I think he too was fond of Sue. Not that he was a pervert or anything of sorts, it's just that he liked us kids and looked out for us. That was one of the advantages of a base so small that you get to know the airmen and they get to know you.

The airbase was isolated from the surrounding elements which made it a good location for practicing jumps. Adjacent to the base was a large field where the paratroopers were dropped along with tanks, jeeps and other armament. Fortunately, the heavy equipment was jettisoned before the young men jumped out of a perfectly good plane.

Jump Day was a real eye opener for a young lad as we stood in awe as the C-119's discharged their cargo. These planes were called Flying Box Cars and were not supposed to be able to fly. First there would be three large parachutes unfold attached to a tank followed by a jeep or two before discharging paratroopers. As they dropped out of the sky, we could hear the soldiers shouting back and forth and betting on who would be on the ground first. I always thought it was a wise plan to drop the jeeps and heavy armament first before the men. Even then some jumpers never made it to the ground but got tangled in the power lines instead.

Some slammed onto the roof of one of the barracks that was nearest to the field but none fell through a roof. It was always an exciting time to see a jump with all the men and vehicles pouring out of the Box Cars.

Our barracks were the only buildings anywhere near the jump field and power was cut off but they still managed to find a roof. Despite the erroneous landings, I don't recall any of them getting seriously hurt and if they did, I doubt we would ever know.

I mentioned earlier in this story about being the base's paper boy. The man that distributed the papers dropped them off at a location in Fort Campbell away from the airbase. He wouldn't make the drive to the airbase so rain or shine I had to bike into the Fort to pick up my papers. But on the bright side I had a good-sized paper route and the airmen stationed around the base made sure that I went home empty handed.

More often than not, it was the Airman's Club that generally took all the papers I had left so I made that my last stop. On one occasion, I stuck a spare quarter into one of the Quarter Slots and hit a jackpot. I think I won $2.50. Wow. What a prize. It was illegal for me to gamble but the bartender merely looked away. Maybe he was a paper boy once.

I was old enough and sufficiently big enough for the Camp bowling alley to hire me as a pin setter. Soon I was sitting four lanes at a time for the women but had to downsize to two lanes for the men's league. They bowled hard and fast and tipped well. The last ball thrown almost always had a generous tip inside the finger hole.

One Sunday when I was setting pins for a men's league on a lark, I purchased a Crook Cigar. It is a crooked dark tobacco rum-soaked cigar. As I continued to jump from one alley to another and set pins, I would take a puff off that cigar and soon found myself getting lightheaded. With the men bowling so fast, my transition from one alley to another got a little slower until I finally got sick enough to puke. Never again did I ever smoke a Crook cigar. Just the taste and smell of it would make me sick.

When I wasn't setting pins, I was upstairs putting on skates at a Quarter a pair. With a good tip, I sometimes made as much as a dollar putting on mother and daughter skates. When I finished putting on skates, I would move to the floor and skate.

In time, I learned to skate well, do dance steps and just generally show off. It might be hard to believe for some, but I was a pretty good skater. Maybe those days in Charleston skating on those old iron skates had something to do with my skill on the skating rink.

A secret enclave sat outside of the airbase and the Fort. The name given it by the locals was "The Birdcage." It was surrounded by 2 or 3 fences with a road between them to allow a jeep with armed men to patrol the perimeter. Usually, our awareness of the Birdcage existence was when they rolled down the only access road into the airbase blocking all intersections with tanks and gun-mounted jeeps. A truck or convoy of trucks would enter the base and drive to an airplane sitting on the tarmac. After their delivery, all would roll back and disappear down the access road.

One morning after an overnight camping trip of our Boy Scout Troop at Lake Taal, my friend and classmate Charles Steckle and I were walking home along the road that parallels the perimeter of the Birdcage when Charles suddenly jumped down into the roadside ditch. I should mention he was carrying a BB gun and had seen a crow flying overhead.

Anyway, we hadn't walked a hundred yards when a jeep came roaring up inside the perimeter of the fence. One man was sitting behind a machine gun pointing in our direction but not directly at us. Another armed man waved us forward to the fence and we complied because they had guns, big guns.

After a quick interrogation they decided we weren't an assault team and were harmless so they sent us packing. It didn't matter that Charles's dad was an Army Lieutenant or that mine was a USAF Sargent. It was scary and added to the mystery of the Birdcage.

Getting back to Lake Taal, it was the site of many family outings. We would all pile in the car with our jugs of water, sandwiches that Mom packed for us and of course, our fishing poles. Along the way, the gravel road was bordered by large sagebrush fields where we stopped to catch grasshoppers and stuffed them into Coke Cola bottles to use as bait. The Bass and Bluegills loved them.

During one of our stops to get bait, Dad and I waded out in the sage grass and when I reached down to get a grasshopper, I disturbed an underground nest of Yellow Jackets. Unlike bees which can sting only once before losing their stinger, not so with these dang wasps.

Wasp can sting over and over again but we managed to get inside the car before they hurt us too badly. Of course, it wouldn't be the first or last time we got stung. Despite the risk, the grasshoppers made good bait and didn't cost anything. Even today that would be good bait.

A great memory, Lake Taal. It was a favorite place for the family to go. Mom would carry a large quilt to throw down around the edge of the lake or the small stream called Fletcher's Fork that ran through the lake. She would put baby Carla down and sit in the shade while we fished and she would always make sure there were drinks and sandwiches to top off the day.

There was another location where the family would go to fish and picnic, but I don't recall the name but do remember it was a dam. Dad liked to fish at the bottom of the spillway because big catfish and other large fish liked that part of the dam. The river rock was bleached white and was smooth and round and with a heavy quilt thrown across the rocks, it made a good place to picnic and comfortable for baby Carla. Besides she wasn't about to crawl off that quilt onto those rocks.

With the new technology that Google provides, I took a look at today's Fort Campbell via the satellite view, and it shows a large city has grown up since we were there many years ago and I believe the lake has gotten smaller. But that could be the difference in the eyes of an adult versus that of a child.

CHAPTER 9 – 1950 NEW PROVIDENCE, TN

After the 1950 school year ended the family moved from Kentucky back to Tennessee where we rented a small house in New Providence on Preachers Mill Road right next to what is now Kenwood Baptist Church. I don't know if that was the name of the church back then but it still looks like the place we were living except, we lived in a small house in the back of our landlord, a retired Railroad Engineer.

The memory I have of our landlord was that he always wore coveralls to remind him of when he was an engineer or something associated with the railroad. He had to be a real engineer because he wore an engineer's hat. His house was at the front near the road and we lived directly in back of him. He hired me to do a job that involved digging a ditch so the water would drain from the washing machine out to the yard. It meant digging a ditch approximately 60 feet long and 10 inches deep to ensure that it would drain away from the house. After all these years I don't recall the wages but do recall that it was hard work but I managed to complete the job to his satisfaction.

The church was right next door so we went to church and Bible school every Sunday. The Preacher was quite young and if my memory serves me, he drove a Plymouth sedan and was criticized by the Elders at the speed he would drive on the gravel road. He was pretty much identified as the oncoming driver when a cloud of dust could be seen fast approaching at a high rate of speed. I think his answer to his critics was that he was safe because God was a passenger or some sorts.

Other than that, my memory of him was a baptism of me and Sue and some other young folks in the Red River. There was a bend where the road crossed the river and an ideal place to swim or be baptized. It was here that the preacher fully clothed waded out into the water to baptize us. What was unusual was all of the young people were dressed in bathing suits and he was fully dressed in jeans and a shirt. It was sort of awkward but we managed to get our heads immersed and he managed to stay above water despite the heaviness of his water-soaked clothes. Far-ra-do.

Another memory of the highway from Fort Campbell to New Providence was that it boasted a Drive-In Movie Theater where the family often watched movies. It was customary for all of us kids to fall asleep on the way home to the air base if we had managed to stay awake through the movie.

The highway out of New Providence to Clarksville goes down a hill and across a bridge over Red River and back up the hill into Clarksville. My recollection is that Acme Boot Company was on the left as you entered Clarksville but if one turned before crossing the bridge onto Quarry Road and followed the river it would take you to an old Mill.

Many years later Kathie and I visited Fort Campbell and New Providence and as we drove towards Clarksville, I turned at the bottom of the hill just before we reached the bridge and drove along Red River towards the old Mill. I was telling Kathie about a memory of our family going down that part of the river to the mill when we lived at Fort Campbell. As we tooled along on the dirt road, we rounded a curve and suddenly ran into a sheriff's car blocking and further travel down the road.

As we approached the vehicle, a deputy stepped out of the car and directed us to turn around. We learned later that we may have stumbled into the filming of a scene for one of Burt Reynolds's movies. As it stands, we have yet to watch one of his movies that contained any scenes like the one that we stumbled on or any movies that had anything that looked like the old Mill.

The mention of Clarksville and the Acme Boot Company remind me of a caper that occurred many years later when Camel Cigarette Company had a promotion that involved boots. The promotion offered a brown or black pair of quality Acme boots you could purchase for $10 and ten empty Camel cigarette packages.

At that time, I was working at the MILA Tracking station located on the Kennedy Space Center, FL and had a friend and coworker who smoked Camels who gave me the ten empty cigarette packs so I ordered a pair of black boots and after a year or two, they were broken in good.

One morning however I happened to read a headline in the Florida Today Newspaper about a fisherman who was stung by a Skate. He was fishing while wading in the Indian River when he stepped on a Skate lying on the bottom. Startled, the Skate hit him with its barb which left a nasty hole about the size of one's little finger. I imagine that he was in considerable pain since he had a hole in his foot and was standing in the water bleeding while the Skate's venom was doing its work. In hindsight, he should've been pleased that there were no alligators around because nowadays the river seems to be full of them.

That news article about the skate changed my way of fishing because I often went out on the flats and anchored my boat and climbed out to wade in the grass. It was one of the best ways to catch a lunker trout or a big Red. As a matter of practice, I always shuffled my feet to avoid stepping on one but I still changed my fishing habit. From that day on I wore those Acme boots when I went into the water. Nowadays, there wouldn't be too much protection against the many gators that have taken up residence in the areas where I used to fish. But life is full of changes.

Speaking of gators, I've heard it said by the know-it-alls that gators don't like salt water. That's like saying Otters don't like fish, or snakes don't come out at night. In fact, there was another story in the Florida Today where a young man was fishing in the Indian River and had waded out in the flats. His story was that he had waded out about 100 yards or more from the bank when he felt something pulling on the stringer he had trailing behind with the trout he had caught. His reaction was to grab the rope and yank it forward but to his surprise, he discovered a gator was enjoying his catch. Then it was a race to the shore with him pulling the stringer behind while tapping the gator on the head with his fishing rod. Fortunately, he made it to shore without injury but without his trout.

Don't believe the old wives' tale that alligators don't like salt water. The Florida Today Newspaper has printed many stories about fishermen in Indian River having to fend off a gator while wading in the river with a stringer of trout. Gators like trout too…and Blow Fish!

My friend Don Mason and I were fishing from his pontoon boat one morning in the Indian River when a large gator slowly moved towards the front of the boat where I was sitting. I tapped him on the nose a couple times with my rod tip to remind him not to try and come onto the boat with me. Apparently, it was used to being fed by some of the anglers. Anyway, he slowly moved off about 50 feet and I settled back down to fishing. Suddenly, we heard this splash and then a crunch, crunch, much like the sound of someone rubbing a ballon full of air. Then there was a terrible bang like a shotgun had gone off. We realized the gator had just eaten a Blow Fish. It gave us a whole new respect for alligators, especially that one.

Oh...now back to my story. It is now 1951 and we are about to move again. I had just started the 7th grade, Sue the 6th and Jerry the 3rd grade. My teacher's name I don't recall, but she was a large woman who owned a 1947 Plymonth coupe. Does this sound familiar?

CHAPTER 10 – 1951 CUNNINGHAM, TN

We stayed in New Providence about a month or so, just long enough for us three to start school before moving again in 1951 to Cunningham where we three finished the school year at Central High. We lived there long enough for me to complete the seventh and eighth grades, Sue the sixth and seventh and Jerry the third and fourth.

In Cunningham we rented an old farmhouse belonging to a Mr. Hargrove who gave me my first real job. He had a fair-sized farm and after learning that I could drive, he put me to work driving a tractor and harrow for $2 per day. It could be hot dirty work and it was sunup to sundown but what better job could a young man ask for and get paid too! It was working for Mr. Hargrove that I learned a little about tobacco and how it was grown. A good bit of the work I did was to plow a field and then pull a disc harrow over it to make it smooth and ready for planting. His chief crop was tobacco. I was never involved in building a tobacco bed but seem to recall that Mr. Hargrove used the steaming method which kills all the weeds, insects and any other foreign matter before planting tobacco seeds.

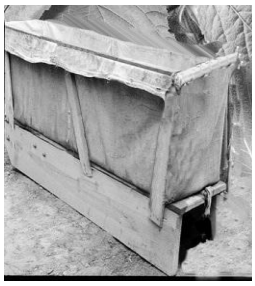
When plants were big enough, a black man named Tom and I would pull the plants and ready them for planting using a motorized contraption mounted on the back of a tractor. He sat on one side and me on the other with each having a platform in front of us loaded with tobacco plants.



Single Row Tobacco Planter

As the tractor pulled us along with our butt just inches above the ground, the device would dig a hole where he and I would alternate setting a plant. The machine would then close the hole and pack the plant in its new surroundings. The larger farms have much bigger planters, but the principle and the design are the same. When it came time to harvest the tobacco at Mr. Hargrove's farm, we used the stalking method which involved using a spike on the end of a tobacco stick and spiking the whole plant down onto the tobacco stick. These sticks would then be loaded onto a narrow sled built with a rack on top for the purpose of carrying a load of tobacco plants to the barn for drying.

Some years later the family visited my dad's brother Uncle Walter who owned a tobacco farm in North Carolina where I got to see how they harvest tobacco. Just as they were constructed as those in Tennessee, the sleds were built narrow so that a mule could pull them through the tobacco rows without any problems. However, Uncle Walter's sleds were used to carry just the leaves to the barn where they would be tied into "hands." They used the type of harvesting that was called Priming tobacco where only 2 or 3 high-quality leaves are taken from a plant. My cousin and I were each permitted to drive a mule with a sled while experienced "Primers" pulled the prime leaves and filled the sleds.



Tobacco Sled

After the sled was full it was taken to the barn where the ladies would tie a dozen or so leaves into what is called a "hand" then hang them on a tobacco stick. When a stick was loaded with enough hands the stick would be transferred to the barn where men who would hang them for drying.



Tobacco Hand



Stick loaded with Hands

Drying the tobacco leaves in this fashion was favored by many farmers to fetch a higher price. By contrast, on Mr. Hargrove's farm we stalked the entire tobacco plant, so he only got one harvest. While the harvesting method may differ, the tobacco barns are built pretty much the same.

This may have been the only time the family visited Uncle Walter but I have memories of that visit not to be forgotten. I don't know if it was the same visit or another but Dad and I visited Walter's Radio Repair shop. He was working on an old radio and first pulled the tubes and ran them through a tube tester. The tubes checked good so he began checking resistors and cutting out capacitors and soldering in new ones until he finally found a component that made the radio work. It seemed simple enough and I was impressed so that may have been when I decided to become an electronic technician.

Another memory of that visit was at the dinner table when we were eating collard greens that Aunt Brookie had cooked when Dad found a big fat green caterpillar in his greens. He stabbed it and laid it by his plate and kept on eating. I don't think Brookie ever forgave him for that.

Who could forget getting up early in the morning before dawn to eat a hearty breakfast and then set about getting ready for work. Mules had to be harnessed and an old Case tractor had to be started. It was hooked to a truck and pulled until it started and then it basically ran all day until the work was done in the evening. The next morning this exercise would be repeated.

At home I must say I did a pretty good job for Mr. Hargrove. There was an occasion however where I lost control of the tractor and dang near killed myself. I was dragging a disc harrow over this large field that had a swale with a telephone pole in the middle. As I approached the swale, I didn't realize that I was too close to the pole until the harrow slid sideways. It slid ever so slightly but just enough to prevent me from going forward. Fortunately, it didn't hit the pole hard because I had stopped quickly before any damage was done to either the pole or the harrow.

My problem began when I unhooked the tractor from the harrow with plans to go around in back and pull it away from the pole. As soon as the tractor was released from the harrow, the tractor slid sideways and started sliding downhill. It happened so quickly that all I could do was hang on while it barreled down a steep hill full of trees.

I managed to avoid most of the trees but eventually the tractor stopped abruptly when I hit a stump. After a long walk back to the farm, Mr. Hargrove and Tom came to the rescue. Fortunately, only a fender got the worst end of the deal. After seeing where the harrow was and the skid marks of the tractor tires, he understood what had happened. Phew. I still had a job.

One year he permitted me to use the tractor to plow a half-acre near our house so that we could plant a garden. The following year I planted Crowder peas and was surprised at the crop this plot yielded. We had Crowder peas coming out of our ears so I began bagging peas and selling them for $5 a bag. That was good money.

We were still living in Cunningham when Dad, a Sargent in the Mess Hall, suffered a back injury when he and another cook were lifting a large pot of potatoes onto a stove. His injury resulted in surgery on his back which never seemed to heal properly. Eventually the pain was so great that he wasn't able to make the long commute back and forth to Fort Campbell. So once again he went under the knife when it was discovered that his pain was caused by a piece of sponge that had been overlooked from the first surgery causing an infection. Now Dad was miles away in the hospital in Fort Campbell and we were living way out in Cunningham complicated things because Mom didn't drive and even though I was capable, I wasn't old enough to drive legally.

But I recall the first year we were in Kentucky when Dad traded cars with one of the airmen for a 1935 Pontiac sedan that had a long hood and spare tires mounted on either side. Looking back, we called it a gangster car. My recollection is that this was the first vehicle for me to sit behind the wheel but on his lap of course. He would let me steer and shift when he called for a gear because I was unable to reach the pedals. The steering wheel was huge and looked like it was made of ivory while the gearshift knob was a skull. This was a real treat but didn't happen too often.

Before moving to Cunningham, he traded the Pontiac for a lime green 1940 Plymouth sedan that he later loaned to a fellow airman who with two or three other airmen wrecked the car somewhere along the winding highway that skirts the Cumberland River. There were injuries (no seat belts in those days) but I believe they all survived but the car was a total loss. To replace the wrecked Plymouth, Dad purchased a black 1947 Oldsmobile sedan that we named Lucille. It was an automatic and so easy to drive but I still wasn't old enough to get my license. So once again Aunt Myrtle was called upon to help. She became Mom's driver while Sue and I took care of the younger ones.

I believe it was the winter of 1951 that we lost electrical power while Dad was still in the hospital and it turned bitter cold. The old frame house wasn't the warmest shelter but did have a big fireplace. It was merely a matter of having plenty of wood so that one big room could be heated. The kitchen was generally warm as a result of Mom's cooking but it didn't take long for that space to cool down so the family migrated to the big room where there was a fireplace. There came a day when we ran out of firewood so off to the back forty. I went with Jerry in tow to cut down a cedar tree. That wasn't difficult but dragging and carrying the wood back up to the house was the real chore but we managed. At night we actually slept between two mattresses. Jerry and I slept in one bed, Sue and Myrtle in one, Carla and Mom slept in another. Fortunately, after a few days of outage, power was restored and that part of winter didn't last very long.

We rejoiced when Dad was able to return home in time for his July 4th birthday. It wasn't until many years later that we learned his birthday was July 8th but we were happy he was back with us and would welcome any occasion to celebrate. For years we threatened to put a firecracker in his cake but never did. We thought it was prudent to drop that idea.

Having been in the Boy Scouts a short time, I always wanted to build an English Long Bow and decided that the heart of a Cedar tree would do the job. I cut down the tree, chopped and whittled until I had only the inner grain of the tree which was supposed to yield the greatest strength. When it was finished, it was a beautiful Recurve. Dad suggested I string it for shape and put it on top of the metal roof of the barn and let it cure. After months up there in the sun, I took it down and strung it, pulled it back to discover that the upper limb of the bow was too weak. It would shoot but eventually it broke.



Then there was a Christmas where Jerry and I each had BB guns. Mine was the fancy Red Ryder saddle gun and Jerry's was just a plain rifle. I think I had gotten mine a year earlier but what Jerry's gun lacked in style, it made up for it in velocity. It didn't take us long to learn this gun was a powerful sucker.

His gun would shoot so hard that the BB would stick in the wood on the barn where my rifle would merely bounce off. Since his gun had a higher velocity, we could shoot at smaller targets with a good bit of accuracy such as Mom's clothes pins. They made excellent targets.

He and I were shooting at them on the clothesline and doing a pretty good job causing them to break when Sue caught us and was about to run inside and tattle. That was when Jerry lowered his gun and shot Sis in the butt. He put another notch in his gun. Little things like this kept adding up until we were beginning to build a reputation of superb marksmanship. I think both rifles had a lot of notches on them by now. While my memory doesn't support the thought, but thinking back to those days, I wonder if Sue may have often been a target. Of course not. I may have only shot her once or twice. Jerry... on the other hand.

There was another time when I was shooting his rifle because of its accuracy and I talked him into holding a small tomato can lid in his hand. He knew how good I could shoot and as I said earlier in this story, he wasn't afraid of much. So, he held the lid in his hand and I, William Tell, shot at the can but missed and hit him on his thumb. Immediately a big purple knot popped on his thumb. It looked nasty and I'm sure it hurt. Luckily, he wasn't in possession of a rifle at the time.

One fine day while we still had our guns, Jerry and I were out playing in a field next to the house. This field was separated from the house by four strands of barbed wire that were strung as tight as guitar strings. We were playing a sort of cowboy and Indians game that involved circling around and shooting at bottles. I made one such shot that may have caused either a piece of glass or a BB to ricochet and hit Jerry.

Despite my protest, he immediately turned his gun on me but I was already running for my life and could feel the BBs hitting my backside but it would be much worse if I couldn't get through the fence. Fortunately, the fence had a corner post with one large post set at an angle as a brace for the corner post. I saw that as my opportunity to escape so I ran up the brace and over the fence and into the kitchen and kept running as fast as I could. When a couple of BBs came through the screen and hit the refrigerator, Mom got involved. Muzzygeezy!

There were other incidents that led to us losing our BB guns. One was when I was going down in back to the woods and wanted our dog Sonny to follow me. We had just got over the gate and were walking towards the woods when Sue whistled for Sonny to come to her. The dog hesitated and then decided to return to the house with her.

As Sue was climbing back over the gate, she had her back to me and her butt in the air and I just couldn't resist putting a sting in that butt. Another notch in my gun but things like that were adding up and eventually it led to dismantlement and the throwing of parts into the well. No more guns.



Papooses – I'm no. 4

At home the barn had a basketball hoop where Jerry and I could practice our shots. We couldn't very well do layups because of the wall but we could play Horse and other games to sharpen our shooting skills. Jerry was too young for basketball at school because he was in the 4th grade at the time. Even so, he was tall for his age and could shoot and rebound well enough when we played together on the barn.

All three of us kids were in a country school called Central High. Typical of most country schools, there weren't sufficient funds to support football but they had a good basketball team and baseball program. Both of which I played very well. Though I was assigned to First Base a few times because of my height, I was a much better outfielder and in basketball I almost always played in the Center position. Again, because of my height. How things have changed with today's extraordinary heights. I played baseball and basketball on the junior varsity team since I was too young for varsity.

CHAPTER 11 – 1952 NEW PROVIDENCE, TN

Now it's 1952 and once again school was out and we did what we did best. We moved. The family moved back to New Providence to be closer to Clarksville since I was entering High School as a freshman and it was the only High School for miles around and it was large. For someone who began school in a one-room schoolhouse and had only attended small country schools, this school was humongous.

Clarksville High had several floors as well as a basketball court and swimming pool int the basement floor. A basement swimming pool! While I can remember that feature, I don't recall much about the rest of the school other than my chemistry class. For some reason I struggled in that class but did learn a little about the Periodic Table of Elements, especially what H^20 stood for.

In fact, without having learned that bit of information, I would not have passed the test the teacher sprung on us right after a recess. There were only about ten written questions and then as if he could see who was struggling in the class, he gave us an oral question and said that the correct answer would result in a passing grade. I passed. The question was, "What is H-2-O for? I said for drinking.

I began my freshman year at Clarksville High with the intent of playing all sports. Football practice started in August with our first game in September after school started. Dummy me, I thought I wanted to be a Fullback because I was big for my age but didn't have the physical size and weight nor was I fast enough to make a running back. Since I had never seen a football game much less played in one, I had to learn the hard way.

My lesson came about one day in practice when the coach began singling out players for different positions. We pushed around some sleds and hung from the bars and generally loosened up our muscles in preparation for a good workout. We were told to form two lines on either side of two tires that left a small path through which to run.

Coach stood aside and threw the football to the lead player in one line whose job was to run between the tires while trying to avoid a tackle from the lead player in the opposite line. My turn came. Coach threw the ball to a boy named Potter who ran over me like a freight train. Needless to say, he became our Fullback and I switched to Defensive Tackle.

That wasn't the end of my football career nor was it the end of my injuries. Our first game of the season I believe was against Castle Heights Military Academy. It was also the first ever football game for me to see and I was in it. To be honest, I sat on the bench for most of the game and had no idea what I was supposed to do except tackle somebody on the opposing team.

On one final play I along with a couple teammates tackled this runner and somehow someone's cleat managed to miss my helmet and stuck in my left eye. Ouch! It hurt like hell in the beginning but after some bandages and pampering, it began to feel better. So much so that while mending at home, I decided to do some chores that I had put off, like cutting the grass in the backyard.

We had what was called a Lively Lad weed cutter. I'm not sure how it got its name, but it had a long handle and a sharp corrugated blade like the one shown on the right. It was first used in the 1920's, patented in 1925 and became a favorite tool for cutting weeds.



Lively Lad

I had sharpened the blade earlier before the injury to my left eye, so it was ready to use and I was bored having nothing to do but sit around. It was awkward to read with just one eye so I decided to cut the grass in the backyard. What I didn't plan on was losing sight in both eyes.

With my left eye bandaged, my vision wasn't very good and when I began cutting grass under the clothesline, the blade caught the clothesline wire and my down swing caused the blade to slide down the wire straight into my right eyebrow laying it wide open. When Mom got through bandaging my right eye, both eyes were covered and I was blind as a bat. By the time I could see again, football season had ended.

Another memory related to this New Providence house was the time when brother Jerry exercised his temper and kicked the edge of the sidewalk. I don't remember what he was trying to kick but hitting the sidewalk caused a big ugly purple knot to quickly form on his toe. It was horrible looking and it put him out of action for a couple days.

Then there was the day - yes, I could see with both eyes - when I happened to witness a disturbance at a bar located a block or so up the street from our house. It was patronized predominately by blacks and on this day, there was a lot of shouting and cursing and then BANG, a gunshot. When I heard the shot, I turned to look up the street and saw a man standing outside turn and shoot one more time into the door of the bar. This was real and not a movie.

Not long after the bar incident, the first semester of high school ended and the family moved once more. This time we moved back to the great state of Kentucky.

CHAPTER 12 – 1954 FORT CAMPBELL, KY

It is now 1954 and this time we moved back across the state line just outside Fort Campbell's Gate 6 where Dad purchased a house trailer in Braboy's Trailer Park. Once more this meant we had a new school to attend and new friends to make with some living in the same trailer park. We three kids still had a school year to complete.

As it turned out, one of my best friends at the time was one Jack Hollis and he and the other kids that lived in the trailer park went to South Christian High, a country school in Christian County, KY. The population of the high school was too small to field anything more than basketball and baseball. I discovered that Jack was a walking encyclopedia when it came to baseball but he was not a member of the team.

His love of the sport caused me to urge him to try out for our baseball team. After repeated evenings and sometime nights of hitting ground balls to him, he got the nerve to try out for shortstop. He was accepted immediately and was so quick that it was difficult if not impossible to get a ball past him. I believe his shortstop performance for the season was that he fielded one thousand. He wasn't a great batter but I learned in later years that after high school he played for a semi-pro team in Hopkinsville.

One day Jack discovered that he loved the game of Chess. So much so that he bought a Chess board and a book about chess games of great chess players and their tactics and a book in which he recorded all his games. He wanted to know when he played, with whom and how long and if he won or lost. At first, he didn't have many entries in the latter column because he was playing me and I had neither a chess board nor any experience with the game. But as the school year progressed, so did my skill at chess until I finally beat him. That was the beginning of many hard-fought battles that often lasted for hours and once or twice, lasted all night. My chess got better and his baseball batting average improved as well.

On a nice summer day, Jack, me and a third boy were all in a truck belonging to Jack's dad. We three had gone to a store and purchased a little gas for the truck and a pack of cigarillos. We each lit one of the small cigars and were about to drive away from the store when Jack, needing both hands to steer the truck, asked me to hold his cigar. In the meantime, I had sort of chewed on the end of mine and when it came time for him to ask me to return his, I gave him my cigar by mistake.

As soon as he put the cigar in his mouth, he spat it out and turned to fuss at me. Unfortunately, he turned the wheel when he did and off the road we went and rolled down a deep bank. Witnesses said we rolled two and half turns before coming to a stop upside down. Apparently, Jack and the other kid were thrown clear but with me in the middle, I wound up still in the truck with my leg wrapped around and under the steering wheel. I was in a good bit of pain but oddly enough, I couldn't straighten my leg out.

Then help arrived. A man in a pickup truck saw the accident and stopped to help out. I was having severe Charlie Horses causing my leg to draw up. The man that stopped placed a large truck tire on part of my leg to keep it straight which alleviated a lot of the pain while he drove me to the base hospital at Fort Campbell.

Fortunately, nothing was broken. It was merely a bad Charlie Horse that was causing my leg to draw up in a disfigured manner. There was little the hospital could do other than give me something to help until the pain subsided.

Besides the injury to my leg, the rollover bent the frame of the truck which was obvious when driving behind it and seeing it from the rear. It was very crooked when driving down the road and I learned later that this frame configuration was hard on the rear tires making it necessary to replace them frequently.

There once was a pretty young girl from Georgia who was visiting a family that lived in the trailer park. Her name was Inez and she liked to call herself a Georgia Peach. Both Jack and I wanted to date her but neither had succeeded until one day she ran into my sister and they agreed to double date. Inez's brother was Sue's date and the first part of the evening went well with a movie in Clarksville and afterwards a visit to Roy Acuff's Dunbar Cave where we decided to walk around the shore of the lake.

When we arrived at the Cave it was dark but there were enough lights in the park and lots of moonlight that allowed us to see to walk around the edge of the lake. Inez and I were walking up ahead just out of sight of Sue and her date. Suddenly we heard a big splash. We turned back to see Sue huffing up the beach and one could tell she was mad. At least I could because I had seen her mad many times.

Anyway, it seems the guy made an unwelcome pass and didn't take no for an answer, Sue having grown up with boys hit him. I think she said she hit him with her shoe hard enough to knock him in the water. There was no talking amongst us on the drive back home.

Another interesting tidbit about Braboy's is that Mom managed the laundromat that Mr. Braboy built for the park residents. I suppose it gave her extra money that we could surely use or it may have been a way to pay or offset the monthly rent. If I recall correctly, we had a 40ft house trailer with a family of six living in it. Braboy seemed to take a liking to our family and with Mom managing the laundromat, Brother Jerry and I were permitted to fish in his pond.

On one such fishing trip, I was casting a big plug and got it hung on some bushes out in the middle of the pond. I asked Jerry if he would go get it and he did. Remember, he wasn't scairt of anything. Unfortunately, after retrieving the lure, he managed somehow to get a couple of the big treble hooks in his leg. I suppose the adrenaline kicked in because I picked him up and hurriedly carried him across the field to the trailer park where he was driven to a Fort Campbell clinic where the lure was removed. That incident must have scared the fish because we never caught any out of that pond.

Once upon a time a Gypsy caravan pulled into Braboy's and wanted to park their trailers and set up their tents. We kids were agog with excitement thinking about all that we had read about gypsies and imagining what we could expect out of them. We imagined a campfire, music and dancing girls. Park residents were uneasy about the Gypsies staying there but Mr. Braboy decided to let them set up camp in the field adjacent to the trailer park with the nearest structure to their camp being the laundromat where Mom worked.

Park residents began preparations to batten down the hatches. Even my dad backed the car up against our trailer so that access to the gas tank was impossible. I'm sure there were a multitude of safeguards put into place before the evening was over but to my knowledge nothing ever happened. Maybe it was because of all the lockdowns and maybe not. We will never know.

We did get some of our expectations fulfilled when at night they would build a fire and began playing music and dancing just as described in books that involved Gypsies. The men played guitars while the ladies in long colorful skirts sang and danced. It was captivating to watch and listen to the music and sufficiently luring to make us want to clap our hands in time with the dance. I think the whole neighborhood was enjoying watching the evening entertainment but it wasn't always calm. There was an incident at the laundromat that involved Mom and some gypsy women.

It was one of those rare occasions when Mom got pissed. I mean really mad! Even Brayboy was smart enough not to interfere. Though she told us the story in later years and explained what happened, I can't remember all the details.

My recollection is that it was something to do with the gypsy women insisting on putting too many clothes in a machine at one time or something of that sort. Whatever the reason, it was one of those few times that you would ever see Mom mad enough to fight. It escalated to the point that Mom ran them out of the building.

After seeing how mad she was, Mr. Braboy let the matter slide and not long afterwards the gypsies pulled up camp and moved out and the Park residents went back to normal routine. No more cars pulled up against trees or trailers to prevent access to the gas tanks. Grills and other outdoor accouterments were rolled back outside and all was well.

I was now into my sophomore year at South Christian. Sue had just begun her freshman year and Jerry was in the sixth grade. The school had all the wonderful assets that you would expect from a country school. Home grown beautiful girls and handsome young men who were shaped by farm work. I'm not talking about me because I wasn't always on a farm.



Have you not seen baseball uniforms like these?

What Christian County produced were fine basketball and baseball players. We had enough players to make up both a JV and varsity basketball team called the Dragons. There were enough boys to make up a competitive baseball team but basketball was king. In fact, SCH had one of the best high school basketball teams in the state and I was No. 67 and proud to have played on the team.



1954 was a great year for South Christian's basketball team and coach Rochelle but more important for the number one star, Al Rochelle. His dad was also our coach and at the end of the year, both Al and Coach Rochelle were recognized as the best father and son team in Kentucky.

If you can ignore the uniforms our "baseball" team allegedly wore, we were a pretty good team. My best position was in the Outfield, mostly Center field and often Right field. Initially, the coach wanted me to try out at first base because we didn't have a lefty at the time but even then, I was better in the outfield than on first. I had a good arm and could throw the ball from center to home plate with ease. But of course, if I could play in the Left field behind Jack, I wouldn't have so many balls to chase.


Betty

One benefit of playing a sport, any sport, was girls. We all managed to have at least one girlfriend even if it was a strange relationship. For example, the Principle, Teachers and most of the students in the lowest grade were convinced that Betty Cunningham was my girlfriend. If the facts be known, we never kissed or went on a date. I doubt that either of us cared one way or another about what many in the school thought. Her best friend Kate Sewell was always by her side and anywhere Betty would be found, so would Kate. What I can't explain is how or when Kate and I began dating. But it was true love. It was magic.


Kate

If there was any doubt it went away after she and I went downtown to a theater in Hopkinsville and watched the movie Kiss Me Kate. So, I did! It was love at first kiss. We dated from that moment on and there was never a sign that Betty minded because she and I never dated anyway. It was just a matter of everyone else taking it for granted that Betty and I was an item and neither did she, Kate nor I bothered to correct them.

I was doing more driving now and seeking jobs in/around the Fort Campbell area. With the base sticker on the car, I could pretty much go anywhere on the base but jobs were scarce in the Fort. Eventually I was given a job by Staff Sargent Wright who owned a Fireworks store in New Providence. Bang! What better job could a sixteen-year-old pyromaniac boy have? And the bonus was his beautiful blonde haired English wife. I believe her name was Lilly and on summer days when we were closed for fireworks, we picked peppers and okra from the garden Sargent Wright had planted. During some of our breaks, Lilly would play the piano. I don't remember what my wages were, but it may have been the best job ever. Hey, money, fireworks and a beautiful lady playing the piano, what better job could a young man have.

It was a time when I had license to drive but didn't have a car so I hitchhiked from Fort Campbell into New Providence to the Fireworks store. It was fairly easy for a person to hitch a ride back then, especially a young man. Often there were soldiers hitching a ride back to the base and most folks were good about picking them up and giving them a ride back to Fort Campbell. Being somewhat large for my age, I generally got a ride not long after stepping out on the highway, though a closer examination would reveal that I wasn't a soldier.

On one sunny day I had closed shop and was hitching a ride back to the base when this convertible with the top down with a beautiful blonde behind the wheel. It was clear that she was older than me but only a few years my senior. No matter her age, she was very attractive…plus she was driving a convertible. This was likely the very essence of every dream any young male hitchhiker and it was me. Yes. Me!

Well as the good Lord would have it, she was wearing a loose type of skirt that air from a vent down in the floorboard would blow up now and again show a good bit of her leg. She did not seem to notice but I must admit, I did. And so it went for about the next 12 miles or so, I tried to act nonchalant and stare straight ahead at the highway and make small talk. She too talked but I don't remember a word she said. I do recall that she was wearing a wedding ring and had a base sticker on the windshield which was a good sign that she was likely married to one of the soldiers. If it was one of the 101st Airborne guys, I certainly didn't want any problem with one of them.

One afternoon when I was standing outside the Fireworks store there was a sudden bang followed by a whoosh sound then screeching rubber coming from more than one tire. I was startled and must have jumped 2 feet off the road and turned quickly to see an 18-wheeler bouncing down the street with tires smoking. I learned that his air hose had broken. The loss of air caused the brakes to lock up and the truck was crow hopping as it was about to go down the hill that would take it into Clarksville.

As time passed, I was permitted to drive the car more often, even on the days that dad worked. On weekends, if not going on a date, sister Sue and I were good at going to church, no matter the denomination. A church was a church. My first church was Pentecostal, next was a Baptist and now she and I were going to a Presbyterian church. I was baptized in two of them if not all three.

On one Sunday morning when snow was on the ground and ice not yet melted from sections of the roads, I was driving Lucille when I hit a patch of black ice. Zip and we were in the ditch. Thank goodness that we were not speeding but this was before seat belts and before I could prepare Sue, we hit the ditch. The impact caused her to go forward and hit her head on the windshield causing it to spider on her side. It may have left a small knot on her forehead.

I dated a couple girls before I began dating Kate. One girl lived about 20 miles northeast of Hopkinsville so I would drive 25 miles to "Hop Town" and 20 miles to her house, pick her up and drive back to Hop Town for a movie and then another round-trip of 40 miles to take her home.

Dating her was burning up 130 miles and wearing me out. On one occasion I had worked that day, then made this trek to her house and back and was returning home. We still had Lucille, the '47 Olds. What was scary is that I was so tired that I fell asleep between Hop Town and the house but didn't know it until a tractor trailer came roaring by shaking the car and woke me up. I calmly threw my arm across the back of the seat and suddenly sat up when I realized what had happened. The car was in Park, the Parking lights were on and I was sitting well off the road. Scary! An incident like that never happened again because I decided to look for girls that were closer to home where I didn't have to drive more than 50 miles or more.

I dated a girl that lived nearby though I was a lowly sophomore and she was a senior. Mom always thought she was sweet on me but nothing came of our dates but friendship. There was a time however that I discovered what a kiss was like. Boy, she could kiss and I suppose for me that set the benchmark for kissing in the years to come.

It wasn't long after the ditch caper that Dad traded the Olds for a 1950 Chevy. Bye-bye Lucille. The Chevy was a two-tone blue and white hardtop automatic.

There were three significant events that involved me and that very Chevy. The first occurred when going over a thrill bump at too high of speed. When the car settled landed back on the road, it landed hard enough to screw up the gasoline gauge to where it always showed near empty. That changed our driving habits because it meant we had to put gas in frequently whether we needed it or not just so we wouldn't run out. I know, I know, it could have been avoided. But the truth is we went over that bump several times after the gas gauge quit working. It was still fun though the gauge never worked again.

The next incident, so to speak, was during a cold winter night while going to pick up my Kate. I was a smoker at the time and was about to throw my ashes out the small side vent which wasn't fully open when I hit the glass instead. I ignored the slight burn on my fingers when the cigarette coals fell back on my hand. What I didn't know at the time was that coals from the cigarette had fallen on the seat between my legs. I didn't discover this until I began to feel heat between my legs and to my horror the hot coal had burned a hole in the seat.

The hole in the vinyl was about the diameter of my index finger and I didn't want to set the seat on fire so I did a stupid thing by quickly spitting a big gob of saliva on the end of my finger and sticking it down the hole. Dang! I put the fire out but as soon as I pulled my finger out of the seat, I watched the blister literally grow right before my eyes. Muzzygeezy! How stupid was that?

The final episode with the Chevy happened on a dark rainy night when we arrived at Kate's home. The dirt road was slippery wet but I managed to plow my way through the mud to her house.

We had been to some shindig at school that required us to dress up that night and as I pulled to the side of the road where I normally parked, the shoulder gave way and the car slid ever so slowly into the ditch. There were no lights of any kind but I knew I had to find my way to the house and wake her dad so that he could get the tractor and pull the car out.

The problem was I had no flashlight or any kind of light to guide me to where the small bridge crossed to the front of the house. This definitely was a case where it was so dark I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. It was like being in a box where no light could penetrate. It was so dark that even with the Chevy's headlights on, I was unable to see the bridge behind us and I'm getting pretty wet so I paced back to where I remembered seeing the bridge when we drove up.

After a few minutes of kneeling in the dark and feeling around in the mud I found what I was looking for. It had been right there all the time. Instead of crawling across the bridge, I didn't want to get any muddier so I stood up. As it happened, I stepped halfway on the bridge and halfway off and went plunging into the darkness and the ditch.

After crawling out of the water and stumbling around the yard, I found the porch and managed to wake her dad who got up and pulled the car out with his tractor. Afterwards I learned that she had cracked the window slightly just before we slid over into the ditch and some of the mud had entered messing up her hair.

Oh, what a night. I was never so happy to get that car home. I told Dad about the mud and just how it had happened but I don't recall him ever asking about the hole in the seat. Mud can be cleaned out but a hole in the seat…?

The time came when Kate and I broke up. I don't really know why I broke up with her nor do I remember anyone else in the picture. The best that I can recall is that the family was moving again because Dad was being transferred to the Chennault Airbase in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

No doubt there are so many good memories of South Christian that are not being addressed here. A classmate Norman Parson had a black '49 or '50 Ford coupe that he and his girlfriend rode around in. He and I became good friends and one image that is difficult to erase is him sitting in the corner of the car's cab, his left arm wrapped under the steering wheel and his body turned slightly so that he could see everyone in the car. Now that was cool.

Years later Kathie and I attended my 50th class reunion and the first to welcome us were my so-called girlfriend Betty and best friend Bobby Haile. The two had married and Dr Haile was now a dentist.

In the years that followed the family made every effort to return to Arkansas about every other year to visit my grandparents. I was still in high school when on one of our visits back to Arkansas, Uncle Gerald and I visited Fayetteville city square.

The design of downtown Fayetteville was of the familiar old design where a large courthouse sat right in the middle of a park-like setting surrounded on all four sides by shops. The difference Fayetteville has from most cities is that this city's square is on top of a hill and at each corner there are two streets that come up the hill, resulting in eight streets coming into the square from different directions. Gerald's idea was to sit on the Square and meet some girls and see if we could talk them into going to the Drive-in Theater. The plan was for me to find a date for the evening because Gerald already had a date with a girl that worked at the Drive-in.

The downside looking for girls on the Square was that every time I espied a pretty girl my age, Gerald would say, "She's your cousin." An hour or two of watching cousins walk around the shops in the square became boring.

There were a lot of attractive girls whether they were kin or not, but my luck changed when Gerald's date said she had a girl for me. It turns out this pretty little blue-eyed blonde was smitten with me and I her. It was true love.

When the movie was over, we took her home and I saw that she was living part way up the mountain in the wealthier part of town in a big two-story house. Even so we two kept our love alive through letters after I returned home to Kentucky. It was serious and the relationship had a lot of promise providing we returned back to Fayetteville the next summer after school was out. It lasted all of two months before she sent me a Dear John letter. Maybe she confused me with someone else. I never heard from her again nor did I see her on return trips to Arkansas. In retrospect, I should have sent her a letter telling her my name wasn't "John". Muzzygeezy!

What is memorable about this short-lived relationship is on the evening of the breakup letter, Dad and I were sitting on the stoop of our trailer in Braboy's trailer park when he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Son, you will get over this. Remember there are bigger fish in the sea." Wow. It was so profound. It worked then and may still work for somebody.

Let's face it. How many times have you heard that statement? An old cliché. Maybe it isn't what is said but when or how it is said. But the best part of that evening was what came next while sitting there staring at what was a beautiful Kentucky moon. It was so large and we remarked how visible the Man in the Moon was when Dad said, "Son, one of these days we are going to put a man on the moon." As the world came to know in the years to come, Dad was correct.

He was an avid reader of Science Fiction books. Not only am I very proud that his prediction came true but even more so that he lived to see me living a dream we both shared because in later years, I was part of the support team that sent a man to the moon while enjoying a career in NASA's space program with assignments in Maryland, Canary Islands, Spain, Ascension Island, UK, Florida, California, Alaska and Maryland again and finally back home in Florida.

It wasn't long after that doorstep meeting with Dad that he received orders to transfer to Lake Charles Air Force Base in Louisiana.

The timing was right as the 1955 school year was complete and we had the summer to move to Lake Charles. Once again, our family of six was moving. Dad had the '50 Chevy configured to pull the house trailer to Louisiana. It was a task for the little Chevy but we managed to coax it the750 miles or so to Lake Charles. This was before interstate travel so the family had to stop along the way and rest overnight.

The airbase was small but had all the necessary support functions that dependents needed such as a base supply, groceries, dentist and hospital. As it turned out, we seemed to find more use out of the base than Dad because not long after we relocated to Lake Charles, he received orders to transfer to Korea while we were to remain in Lake Charles.

Dad's new assignment was to the Air Force's Air Rescue Squadron. The Squadron provided rescue and other services to pilots and other personnel. A rescue squadron's main task was to provide both combat and peacetime search and rescue operations involving the search for those in danger or distress. He was at his finest because he loved boats and the duty that he was assigned to was on a rescue boat.

CHAPTER 13 – 1955 LAKE CHARLES, LA

The trailer park Dad had chosen in Lake Charles was owned by one Grandma Hebert (pronounced A-Bear) and populated by several Air Force families. Grandma Hebert's son Dallas had recently been discharged from the Navy and was not only a good mechanic but loved anything to do with water.

The summer of '55 was spent with Dallas and I spending a lot of time fishing, crabbing and water skiing at Moss Bluff, the Calcasieu River and in the local bayous, The latter was best for crabbing and Moss Bluff was an ideal place for us to water ski behind an old open fisherman boat powered by a 20 HP Mercury that he had rebuilt. It was at Moss Bluff and behind that boat that I learned to ski but could never master the single ski. I could jump up on skis quickly and ski well until I dropped one ski, then I too dropped.

It was fishing with Dallas in one of the bayous where I caught my first Sail Catfish. It was a foggy morning to the extent that we could not see the shoreline but with Dallas having grown up there, he knew the bayou well enough to slowly navigate the water without hitting anything. As the boat was slowly pushing the fog away, I was casting to what I thought was the shoreline hoping that I would snag my lure on the bank or on one of the many Cyprus knees that dotted the shoreline. Then suddenly, unseen by us, there was a big splash, and my line began singing off the reel. All we could see was a swirling disturbance in the fog but there was something most definitely stripping my line off the reel.

While I continued to struggle with my unknown catch, Dallas stopped the boat to let it drift and said that it might be a gator. Now that bit of information suddenly changed my intent. My first thought was to cut the line but then I reckoned that with the small 10lb test line the gator would certainly break it. Then a hole in the fog suddenly opened and it became clear that it was a fish. It wasn't until I pulled it near the boat that I could see that it was a catfish of sorts. I reached down with pliers and grabbed the top fin and lifted it into the boat. The fish was about 5 or 6 pounds and had a beautiful top fin that looked like a sail.

Dallas and I would go crabbing when Grandma Hebert and others in the trailer park needed a resupply of crabs. In this day and time, it would be hard to believe but he and I would go out on the river and catch so many crabs that we would stand up on the seats in the boat and fill it with crabs. On one crabbing trip we decided to dive down under the bridge to see why we were catching so many crabs and what we saw was unbelievable. The river bottom was covered with crabs.

When we had caught all the boat would hold without crabs spilling back into the water, we would hook the boat up to the trailer and tow it home. It didn't matter if a crab or two crawled out on the way home because we had so many. Upon our arrival back at the park, many neighbors would come out to help clean and sort into random quantities to fit everyone's needs. It was a tried-and-true process. An assembly line of sorts would form around a couple of wash tubs while a hose with hot water was dropped into the boat to cause the crabs to purge themselves and die. The first group pulled the outer shells off the crabs. A second group would then pull the legs and throw them into a tub where the third group would take over. This last group would use fingernail brushes to scrub the membrane from the crab and throw them into a clean tub where the final process was to wash and pack into milk jugs filled with water ready for freezing. A few weeks would pass before we went crabbing again and this whole process would be repeated.

This may be a good time to reveal another story about Dallas. When we moved to Florida in the sixties, Mom told me that she thought Dallas was living somewhere near and sure enough, I found him working as a Park Ranger in Sebastian Inlet. He said he was married to an Italian girl and they had a bunch of daughters.

He then asked if I wanted to go diving with him the next day, which was the opening of Lobster season. Despite our ages, he was still diving. I passed. A few years later the Florida Today newspaper had a photo of him holding a 14lb Florida lobster. The next time his name appeared in print was his obituary and I regret not seeing him while he was still living.

Getting back to my high school days, there was a pretty schoolmate named Sally Goins whose house we had to pass each day on the way to school. She and I became good friends and were in some of the same classes. One day when I was invited to stop by her house, her mother told me about a fox that was plaguing their hens and she had killed it. She said that she shot it and the kick of the 6ga shot gun hurt like hell. During our junior year, Sally and I wrote poems to one another which stirred the interest of our classmates who waited to see the latest.

My poem to her started it all.



OUT OF MY MIND

Oh, my Darling there are times when I'm blue,
Maybe it's because I'm in love with you.
I sit around all daydreaming of you,
What more is there for me to do?
Maybe I shouldn't say the things I do,
Maybe my mind is confused about you.
But if my mind should be,
Then Darling listen to my heart…not me.

Sally responded with this

MY DREAM MAN IS THIS

He walks down the hall with strides,
His arms swinging gaily by his sides,
His head is lifted and his nose is high,
Everyone stares as he goes by.
On the basketball court he is a whiz,
He's as fast and sure as anyone is.
He handles himself with fragile care.
Can you blame me if I too stare?
He talks and dances like a dream.
His smile is an innocent sunbeam.
The girls all envy his charms,
And wonder what it's like to be in his arms.

Sally left Lake Charles before our senior year started. I learned later that her family moved to California where she met a young man, got married and moved on.

The summer months seem to drag by and I had found some part-time work at a local service station not far from the house. The job brought with it an interesting development that involved a pretty girl who came to the station almost every day to purchase a coke from a coke machine.

She had a beautiful smile and when anyone said anything to her, she would smile and acknowledge your comment. That gave me encouragement to ask her name which again, only resulted in a smile and one day while I was trying my hardest to extract a conversation out of her, I just happened to catch my boss laughing behind my back. It was only then that he told me the girl was a Deaf-Mute. Dang it! And I didn't know sign language. Well…not that kind of sign language anyway.

She attended a school especially for students with these disabilities and often stayed at the school during breaks but decided to spend this summer at home. Once I knew what I was dealing with, I had a pad and pencil ready the next time she showed up and within minutes I had her name and had a date.

I will admit that there were times when things were a little dicey because I couldn't respond quickly enough with sign and pen and paper weren't always handy. Even so she and I managed to converse and share one another's interest. In particular was her interest in clothes. Mind you, not just any clothes but sexy lingerie. She had just about every item that Frederick's of Hollywood advertised in their magazine. I was curious as to how she could afford all this underwear and learned that her dad owned the local drive-in restaurant where most of us kids like to hang out.

In addition to a healthy allowance, she was also furnished with a fairly new Plymouth convertible in which she liked to drive us around town. I've never ridden with anyone that couldn't speak or hear so this was a new horrifying experience. Especially scary was when she entered an intersection that would cause a normal driver to put on brakes and use caution but instead, she would blow her horn loudly and blow right on through.

What she did then reminds me of many years later when Kathie and I were in Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain. Drivers there blow their horns before entering an intersection, which if first, gives them the right of way. Similar rules apply at night. Whoever flashes their lights first when entering an intersection has the right-of-way. Go figure. She would have done well driving in Las Palmas.

There came a time when I felt our relationship wasn't going anywhere and the start of her school was nearing so I tried to end it gracefully by having fewer dates. Then a previous boyfriend or someone she went to school with was trying to get her to return to school early. Finally, I quit calling on her altogether. It didn't matter because she would come roaring down the street and start blowing her horn about a block before she got to the driveway of the trailer park. She made quite a scene with the top down on her car, dark hair blowing in the wind and the horn waking up the neighborhood. She was pretty.

Finally, the day came when she came blowing down the street and I quickly stepped out of the house and hid. That way Mom could say with truth that I wasn't there. The last time she came roaring down the street with horn blaring I was lucky that my neighbor had just returned from working on an oil rig.

He had invited me to join him on a long weekend visit to his Cajun parents down in the Bayou Teche area. That was a great weekend though I couldn't speak French and they wouldn't speak English. Language was unimportant because food was the main course and I ate some of the best Cajun dishes with names that I couldn't pronounce.

After that trip I thought it was over but one day I was downtown Lake Charles when out of nowhere came this green and white Plymouth convertible with its horn blaring and bearing down on my front bumper. Fortunately, we both managed to stop in time without damaging the front end of our cars.

She was oblivious to the fact that she was in the wrong lane and had stopped traffic in one direction and threatening traffic in the other lane. It didn't matter. She could always fall on her sword and tell her aggressors that she was deaf and mute. As we sat there in the middle of town while everyone is looking at us and some blowing their horn which she couldn't hear, we had a brief conversation in which I was able to encourage her to go back to school and find a handsome boy that could converse with Sign. To this day, I'm not sure what I said that made her kiss me and get back in her car and honk at me for the last time as she drove off. She was pretty.

My dating activities fell off after that. Oh, I did have a few dates but nothing serious. A family moved into the trailer park that had a pretty blonde my age so eventually I asked her out. Mary Jane was also a senior and attended Marion High. Another young lady was Dallas' sister Wanda Hebert who was a couple years older than me, but I recall that I asked her to attend a school dance or something like that where I was escorted by her and Sue. That was a night some yo-yo crossed the wires on my car, a price I had to pay for not locking the doors but I had been under the hood of that Chevy enough times that I could rewire the six cylinders and get us on the road again. I seem to recall the evening didn't end so well when I accidentally brushed her dress leaving a small grease mark.

Across the street lived a schoolmate, Richard Middleton who was a high school senior also, and one who seemed to be sweet on my sister, but Sue was oblivious or didn't care much. He and his mother raised Canaries in a variety of colors. I recall there was one occasion when the door to the coop was inadvertently left open and many of the birds took the opportunity to fly out of the cage. Some were spotted later sitting in nearby trees and I offered to help but I doubt if they were able to recover many birds, if any at all.

At school I tried out for all sports, Basketball, Football, Baseball and Track. I excelled at basketball, but when it came to football, I was at a disadvantage because I had never played the game except for the short time in Clarksville. Most of my teammates had grown up playing football before High School and were already familiar with the different positions and other rules. I was willing to learn but this time I was smart enough to try out for a defensive position.

Richard also tried out for different sports, but I can remember him playing only football and track. In fact, he and I ran the mile together for which I'm thankful because had he not run, I would have always ran last. There was a time however, when I truly wish he had been able to run faster. One of our classmates owned a Model A Ford in which the rumble seat had been taken out. The result was a small space that allowed a couple of us to stand up behind the cab.

One day a few of us decided to take a ride in the car and Richard was invited to go as well. At some point, while we were standing and enjoying the ride, Richard stepped back and out of the car. Fortunately, we weren't going fast but not slow enough that he could jump back in and it resulted in him holding on to the bumper and being dragged along the road. When we got the driver to stop, Richard stood up and there were holes in his pants and blood could be seen on his knees. Ouch! Muzzgezzy.

There was another pastime that we seniors enjoyed and that was skinny dipping in the Calcasieu River. The beach was an excellent place to go at night. Just before going onto the bridge, a frontage road turned off Hwy 90 to the right and ran under the bridge then looped back along the beach side, an area used primarily to swim in the day and skinny dip and watch submarine races at night. There were, however, occasional visits by city cops that would drive along the beach and throw a spotlight on cars. To my knowledge they never saw any submarines.

Our football team had a young man by the name of Bill who had what I believe was Muscular Dystrophy or MD. Though his limbs always seemed to be out of control and he had difficulty walking, he managed to perform the duties of our equipment manager. Bill was well liked by all of us and was invited to about every gathering of us seniors. There was this one evening when we decided to go skinny dipping in the river and Bill was present. It just so happened that some of the girls from school were aware that we had planned to go swimming and after we were all out in the water, they snuck up and began grabbing our clothes.

Now for some of us, that wasn't such a big deal because we were able to run back fast enough to prevent the theft but for poor Bill, running was a struggle and the girl that had his clothes outran us all. We managed to salvage the evening by one of the guys having a pair of bathing trunks that Bill could wear. I only swam at night one more time and that was with the deaf-mute girl.

I should make it clear that during my senior year I was the man of the house. Mom was the boss but she looked to me to do a lot of things that had Dad been there, he would have done. We had a 1950 Chevrolet with its slip-along-power glide transmission. The best that could be said about it was it got us from point A to point B, sometimes not but more importantly when we really needed it, such as hospital and doctor appointments at Chennault Air Force base. Eventually the Chevy's reverse gear failed on the automatic transmission. We got in the habit of pushing it backwards with one foot out of the door or parking where we didn't have to back up. Mom told stories about sticking her leg out to push the car backwards.

My responsibilities at home were forcing me to take more time away from school and while I was being excused from some of my classes, that wasn't the case with Coach Camp and football because I was missing a good many practices, and when I did show up, he would work my ass off. It was one of those days when I told him that I would miss after school practice because I had to visit Mom in the hospital that he and I had a heated exchange. The end result was I was no longer playing football. In fact, if he had his way, I wouldn't be playing any sport…but I did. I continued to play basketball and baseball as much as I could, besides Coach Camp wasn't involved in any of those sports. I think if I had kissed his ass, he and I would have gotten along much better.

Another time I was called upon to miss school and drive to the airbase hospital was to take Jerry to the ER. He had been playing basketball and had a collision with another player's teeth causing a large gash on his forehead. I took him to ER and watched the doctor open the wound and about to insert a large needle into it. Bam! The next thing I was aware of was me trying to kick free of a large black man, a hospital orderly who was holding my legs in the air. I had passed out and hit my head pretty hard on the wall or the floor and he was reviving me by lifting my legs to get the blood back to my head.

Basketball and baseball were two sports that I had played in my previous schools so in these two arenas I excelled. Our coach was Anthony Kravchuck. He taught math and coached our varsity basketball team and he also became a friend and mentor to me. I don't know if that was because Dad was overseas or that he and I just hit it off because I liked Math. He also hired me to help build the foundation of the house he was building. That involved building a form and pouring a concrete pad on which was covered with tar paper and then swabbed down with tar. It was a hot and laborious job.

Mr. Kravchuck wasn't the only teacher that I became good friends with. One in particular was a Mrs. Violet Breed under whom I had an English class. She was about seven months pregnant and her husband was in the Air Force. She and Mrs. O'Conor, who taught the typing class, were good friends, which may be the reason why Mrs. Nelda O'Conor and I hit it off as well.

There were so many times I had to be absent from her class but she seemed to understand. Once she told me that when it came test time that I had to make a "C" to pass. Fortunately, I made the grade and the typing skill I learned has served me well these years since. So, thank you Coach Kravchuck, Mrs. Violet Breed and Mrs. Nelda O'Conor. Many years later Sue and I were looking at my senior yearbook and I remarked that I had played a lot of sports but missed a lot of the football and basketball teams photo ops.

I had forgotten but Sue reminded me that I was absent during many of the school photo ops because I was driving her and Jerry when they needed a ride and taking Mom to and from the hospital. We did note that she was in many of the school photos and there were some that I had managed to be present when photos were taken.

One thing I noted is that I was wearing a shirt that Mom had designed and made for me. There was also a cupid shot of me and Margie Thibodeaux who I was dating at the time I suppose you could say that after two dates, we were serious but what most people didn't know was when I dated Margie, I was taking her mom out too. Yep. Three IS a crowd especially when you are having to buy tickets for the mom too.

My first inkling of this arrangement was on our first date when her mother began looking at the newspaper to see what movies were on and if she liked any of them. After a few dates, her younger sister and her boyfriend were permitted to join us. Wow. They were the two that needed a chaperon. I think they later got married.

As for me and Margie, we always had a chaperon, but I got so I didn't mind so much, especially if it were her sister and boyfriend. Better to have them along than with Margie's mother. In Louisiana, it was a common practice for young girls to have a chaperon who may be a mother, dad or grandparents even or all of them. This was especially true at some of the dance clubs that a friend and I went to.

Obviously, dating wasn't everything. There were so many good times to be had at Marion High. Just to see our Chemistry teacher Mr. Burns do the Paso Doble with one of our teachers was fantastic! He was an ace and she was grace. The rest of us sitting in the bleachers were mesmerized by the beautiful dance that is supposed to emulate a Spanish bull fight.

Another highlight of school at Marion was when Sue and I were commissioned to design and construct the décor for the Senior Prom. The theme was the Deep South with old plantations, trees with hanging moss and buggies with beautiful women in their crinoline petticoats and gowns. She and I decided on a huge mural that we would paint on a large poster-like cardboard wall rather than painting it on the gym wall.

Sue was very good at drawing women and their gowns while I drew the buggies, horses and other images. It turned out to be a very nice prom. Thinking back, I can see that both Sue and I attended several junior and senior proms at Marion High. As a sophomore she was invited to my Junior Prom and later attended her Junior and Senior Proms. She also attended my Senior Prom. As a Sophomore I was also invited by a senior to attend the Senior Prom at South Christian High. I was just a prom going guy and I bet it was because I could dance.

On the night of 28 February 1955, just as I had arrived home from a date or some other outing, I was about to take my jeans off when I heard this unusual sound from a B-47E Stratojet bomber as it was on a final approach into Chennault AFB.

Since the trailer park was in the flight pattern of the airbase, we became accustomed to the sound of the jets when they were either taking off or landing and, in this case, it did not sound good. Instinctively, I pulled my jeans back on and stepped outside just as our neighbor Jack appeared and climbed into his Pontiac convertible. He saw me and motioned for me to climb in as the car was already moving. It was clear that something was amiss.

We could hear the sound of the crash and what sounded like ammo going off and were the first on the scene and observed that the plane had crashed into a trailer park after hitting a small home where two newlyweds died in their sleep. Wreckage from the bomber was strewn for a mile or two in the woods and all throughout the trailer park and there were fires everywhere.

To compound matters, the number of rubberneckers had grown to the extent that traffic on the two-lane road was at a standstill preventing emergency vehicles from responding but it wasn't long before the airbase wreckers and other emergency vehicles arrived and if cars didn't get out of their way, then they just pushed them off the road. When all the damage was accessed, we learned that the house where the young couple was killed was completely obliterated and a wheel had cut like a knife through a trailer right under bunk beds where two young boys were sleeping.

Had the wheel bounced, it would have cut the boys in two. It was a sad time with the loss of the crew and the two newlyweds. It was tough on Jack because he may have known the crew because his job was to fly in the tail bubble and position the boom to refuel the bombers in midair. Being associated with the Air Force, it was a long time before the trailer park residents got over it.

As time passed, there were more surprises in store for me. One occurred when we were playing Starks in basketball. Starks is located west of Lake Charles near the Sabine River which forms the border between Texas and Louisiana. It was during the one particular game that I kept eyeing this raven-haired beauty in the bleachers who turned out to be the sister of one of our opponents. The stares turned into flirting and as soon as the game was over, I went to her and introduced myself. Her name was Jeanette and she was beautiful. I guess there are a couple ways to describe her, a dark-haired Texas filly or a raven-haired Cajun beauty. Either would describe her beauty. I quickly turned the introduction into a date and not long afterwards I visited her and her brother where they lived outside of Starks near the Sabine reserve.

It turns out that her brother and some of his friends were capturing some of the wild ponies that populated the Sabine region and were breaking them to make riding ponies. A tough job. We got along okay as did his sister and I but that came to an end in an unlikely way.

One night when Marion was playing basketball against a local school, Jeanette and her brother just happened to ride over to Lake Charles to watch the game with the intention of surprising me. It turns out that she picked a seat right next to my sister and Margie, the girl that I was also dating at the time. It didn't take long for her and Sue to introduce themselves and shortly after, she met Margie. Bingo. My relationship with Jeanette went up in smoke. Besides, it was a 40-minute drive to her house in Starks and another 40 minutes to a movie in Lake Charles so by the time I did all this, I was beat. Margie was closer to home.

I was in my senior year when Dad returned home on leave from Korea and was able to watch a couple of my basketball games before the season ended. There was this one game in which I was high scorer for the evening which didn't happen often. I really had a hot hand and couldn't miss anything that I threw towards the basket. To this day I believe it was because Staff Sargent Smith was sitting in the bleachers in his Air Force uniform. When the game was over, Dad tossed his hat in the air and it almost landed on a girder. We may have never gotten it down.

Senior Prom signaled the end of a school year and good things to come. Believe it or not, this was the third or fourth prom that I had gone to. One at South Christian and now three at Marion High, Lake Charles. Who knows, I might have made another prom before we left Louisiana but if so, I don't recall. When my high school years are summarized, I managed 4 years of basketball, 2 years baseball, 1 year football, 2 years class treasurer, 2 years 4-H club and 2 years on the school newspaper Pow Wow staff as a writer.

Dad went back to Korea and now that I was out of school, it was time to find a job. I was a soda jerk at a Drive Inn where black car hops each had a cardboard with a number on it that they sailed onto the windshields before the cars entering the Drive In could park. The one whose card landed first was the one that waited on the car. It was showmanship that customers came to see and a system that worked and it's my guess the tips were good.

One of the car hops was an elderly black man that had a Plymouth for sale that looked immaculate inside and out where he had babied it since he purchased it new. It was a baby blue and sparkled like a gem with all the chrome trim and chrome hub caps. It was like a lure and I took the bait. Wanting to upgrade my ride, I relented and took it for a test drive on my lunch break. I should mention that this Drive In was situated on top of a big hill. When going to the restaurant, one drove up a hill before dropping down to enter an intersection with a traffic light where the road crossed over a railroad track and went straight up to the top of the hill where the Drive In was located. An easy climb for most vehicles but low gear was almost necessary to get up the steep hill.

On this day while test driving the Plymouth, I came up the hill behind a 1954 Green Pontiac with a woman driver and a small girl in the passenger seat (before seat belts). As I approached, I hit the brakes and the pedal went straight to the floor. Nothing. I pumped the brake pedal again and again and it went straight to the floor. Holy Toledo, no brakes! It happened so fast, but I jerked the steering wheel quickly enough that I only grazed the corner of the left rear bumper before shooting over into the yard of a house that sat on the corner of the intersection. I went down the other side of the lawn across a ditch and into the highway without hitting a single car or being hit.

I was downshifting and using every other trick I knew to slow the car and when it came to a stop I got out and kissed the street. There were several witnesses to all that happened and as they drove by, they honked their horns and gave me the thumbs up sign though they couldn't have known that I had no brakes. The lady in the Pontiac checked her bumper and said that all was well and no damage had been done. My next delicate chore was to coax the Plymouth up the hill to the restaurant and tell the owner what happened before he tried to drive it home after work. It was a scary event.



Chuck Wagon

Not long afterwards I changed jobs to work at a burger joint called the Chuck Wagon. The Chuck Wagon was just that. I was the grill king. Our menu was simple; we served Spokes, Hubs and Wheels. Spokes were regular hot dogs,

Hubs were regular hamburgers and Wheels were larger hamburgers and of course we had regular fountain drinks. Our largest order was a mixture of about 300 hamburgers and hot dogs for a birthday party.

At some point during the summer months, I met a guy named Toe Boy. He was a Sears Appliance Mechanic and was very happy in his job, much to the chagrin of his parents. His mom and dad hoped so much that he would get tired of the Sears work and come back home to work the ranch. To my knowledge he never did what his parents hoped for but his younger brother Guy took over when the elders were no longer able to manage.

Toe Boy and I traveled to cities in Texas and locations all around southern Louisiana in a 1939 LaSalle that he had discovered by accident when trying to locate a transmission for his car. The old man that owned the LaSalle had it up on blocks in his barn and after some dickering, Toe Boy bought the car or should I say, the Tank. I think describing the LaSalle as a tank is appropriate because it was made out of steel and weighed a ton, but unlike a tank, it was pretty luxurious on the inside. The LaSalle was made by General Motor's Cadillac Division so it had many of the characteristics of the Caddy.


1939 LaSalle

There was an incident one night while at a Drive Inn Theater when we decided to leave near the end of the movie so we could beat the other cars out of the theater. Unfortunately, in our haste we forgot to replace the speaker back on the stand before Toe Boy drove off. The speaker was hanging on the door rather than the window so when he rolled off the mound, the speaker ran out of wire. You guessed it. It began pulling the pole out of the ground before the speaker broke and all the audio in the Drive Inn went out.

Toe Boy just kept going because the only thing left was the speaker in the back door. We were on our way to the Drive Inn Restaurant where many of the young folks our age would be hanging out and we hadn't gone but a couple miles before the city police pulled us over. I think the car may have matched the description the Drive Inn Theater had given the police.

There was a good chance that it was the only car like it in all of Louisiana. No matter, the cop kept looking towards the back seat but he couldn't see any glass and the speaker was down on the floor where I had taken it off the door. He finally let us go.

We drove the LaSalle everywhere and most frequently to some distant nightclub where we would listen and dance to a band called Classy Ballou and the Tempo Kings. Classy became a legend in Lake Charles and other parts of Louisiana. Classy Ballou was born in 1937 and is my age and is still going strong. Playing Zydeco and Blues he still draws a crowd at his performances. His story and his music can be found on You Tube and throughout the Internet.

The clubs would always have beautiful Cajun girls but along with them were their mom, dad, grandma and who knows how many kin were there to chaperon the young ladies. We drove to a lot of places in southern Louisiana like Cameron, Gueydan, Lake Arthur, Kaplan and others. It was on one of these outings that Toe Boy asked this girl to dance and discovered that she was as tall as him. He was smitten. When the dance was over, he hurried over to me with her in tow and introduced her as Long Tall Sally and said this is the girl he was going to marry. And so he did. My recollection is that she was from New Iberia, LA.

CHAPTER 14 – 1956 HOMESTEAD, FL

Dad returned from Japan in 1956 and we gypsies were on the move again pulling a 40ft house trailer towards Florida where Dad had received a transfer to the Homestead Air Force Base. Before departing Lake Charles, he purchased a 1956 Chevrolet with a V8 engine so there was plenty of power to pull the trailer and the six of us and all our belongings. Imagine the comfort of this 24-hour trip. In the front seat were Mom, Dad and Carla and in back were me, Sue and Jerry. We were squished and there were no seat belts back then.

Not very far outside of Biloxi, MS I fell ill with a bad case of what we believe was the flu. At some point the congestion in my chest was causing me to cough a lot and have trouble breathing. My temperature reached a dangerous level, so Dad pulled the trailer under a big set of trees full of hanging Spanish moss and I was moved inside the trailer.

Mom set about creating another home remedy, a mustard pack. I can still remember the smell and feel of the mustard pack on my chest but more important, it worked. My temperature broke and the congestion in my chest began breaking up. Though there were times when I was delirious, I believe the family spent the night under the trees and by the next morning I was feeling much better and able to travel again. To this day, I don't recall being that sick again.

Once more we were on our way to Florida. Occasionally, the miles of boredom were broken when the wavy two-lane highway caused the trailer to bounce causing the front-end of the car to bounce, making the steering a little dicey. Any driver will tell you that steering is best when both front wheels are touching the road.

We came down the western coast of Florida on US 93, what is now I-75, to the infamous Alligator Alley that was a long stretch of road through the middle of the Everglades Swamp. Unfortunately, by the time we had driven that far south, it was dark. It was real dark. There were no houses or stores of any kind that might provide some light. There was nothing but darkness.

About halfway across Alligator Alley, it became clear that we were running low on gas and we hadn't seen any buildings much less a gas station. With most of the family asleep there wasn't any need to cause concern so Dad drove on. Then like a ghost rising out of the swamp, a building loomed. It had a gas pump! I believe it was on or near the Miccosukee Indian Reservation.

At that late hour the station was closed. However, the gas gauge was showing near empty. I suppose the alternative was to spend the night parked in front of the gas pumps but Dad began knocking on the door until the owner woke up. He opened a window on the top floor and Dad explained how important it was for him to be at the Homestead Airbase so the man came down and turned the pump on so we could gas up and continue on to Hwy 27 or Chrome Avenue where we turned south and drove to Homestead. Do you reckon a store owner would do that now?

Not a chance. A tank of gas and many more miles later we arrived in Goulds, a small city just 10 miles north of Homestead where Dad rented a space in a trailer park. Goulds was not far from the Homestead Air Force base and was home to many of the servicemen who were stationed there.

This is as good a time as any to explain how we eventually arrived in Florida. I've written about the early years up to the time Dad enlisted in the USAF but it's important to look at his entire military career. I believe I mentioned earlier that at 17 he ran away from home and joined the Army but was discharged when his father found him. I never learned who may have signed for Dad to join the Army in the first place but if I had to guess, I would say it was his older sister Myrtle. A few years later he took off for Arkansas and eventually married our mother but then he was inducted leaving behind Mom, Me, Sue and Jerry when the United States entered WWII.

Dad's service assignments meant a relocation for the family and new schools for us kids. I think we can agree that these changes enriched our lives and allowed us to gain new friends and expand our knowledge of the states that we lived in. It was one of his assignments that took us to Homestead Florida.

In Florida I was still living at home when I got a job at a Southern Oil gas station owned by Ray Mooney. The station was on US-1 and wasn't far from Goulds so if I didn't have a ride, I hitchhiked. Those were the days when a Service Station was just that. All customers got serviced. At 25 cents a gallon, gas was pumped, windshields were wiped, tires checked and occasionally a pretty girl would have her floors vacuumed.

A man named Melvin stopped at the station almost every evening not to buy gas but just to visit since he managed a gas station in Homestead. He lived in the same trailer park as our family and liked to stop on his way home. After many such visits we began to look forward to having him stop by because he had a speech impediment. He stuttered.

It may have been the reason we found any conversation with him to be entertaining. We believe that had he not been the father of a small child he would divorce his wife, which is very likely to happen when the child got older. I don't recall him every saying a nice thing about his spouse but instead complained about her being too fat and slovenly. Or that may be just what it sounded like when he said it.

On one such visit while Ray and I were busy with other customers an older man and woman stopped to get directions. Melvin kindly walked up to their car and asked if he could help and learned they wanted to know if they were going in the right direction for Homestead. He replied, "iff yoooo gooo straaaigght dooownnn 2 2 2 2 miiiles..." Then he suddenly blurted out without stuttering. "Hell, if you go straight for a two miles you will get there before I can tell you!!!" Now I don't need to tell you that we found that funny.

There was an occasion when a small carnival came to Goulds and set up in the predominately black neighborhood and Ray learned that Melvin had never gone to a carnival before. So, we three closed shop and drove up to carnival and watching Melvin was all the entertainment anyone needed. He was like a child and mesmerized at all that he saw. When we went into a tent where some nude ladies were dancing – one lady who may have recently had a baby was dancing in front of us and I noticed Ray was nudging Melvin closer to the stage and I think maybe this lady could see that he was awed by what he was seeing.

When Melvin got close, she aimed one tit and squeezed milk into his face. I honestly don't think Ray saw that coming and wouldn't have moved him forward had he known what Melvin's reaction would be as if he had been squirted with acid and we didn't understand a single word he was uttering. But in all fairness Melvin talked about that encounter for days afterward if anyone could stand still long enough for him to stutter the story out.

One elderly man came in regularly about every two weeks to get his truck serviced. It was easy to spot his truck before he turned into the station because it was the only white truck that had a round clear spot in the windshield just large enough for the driver to see the road ahead. He did two things very well. He tipped good and always laughed hard when we asked him how he got so many bugs on his windshield.

There came a time when he drove up with a 55-gallon drum in the back of his truck and asked if he could fill it with water. But of course, Ray agreed. When asked what the water might be for, he laughed and said it was to water his corn. While we were waiting for the drum to fill, we three began talking about windshields and bugs and where you might find that many outside of the Everglades.

One day he gave Ray and I a small bottle of moonshine and told us a story about making shine. He said that as a young man he had got caught making shine and was sent to prison. He said some people go to college to learn a profession but his education was in prison where he learned to really make good moonshine and how to protect himself and not get caught but most important was not to get greedy.

He made only enough each month to buy gas for his truck, pay for electricity and groceries and other needs that he and his wife might have. I suppose his story changed the way I felt about the chore of scraping the bugs off his windshield. It merely was his way of earning a living.

I might add also that I'm not a good judge of moonshine. It was crystal clear and strong and you could burp it up for a week. I've never been much of a fan of moonshine, but I imagine it would make a good fire starter or maybe a paint thinner. I had much rather buy a bottle of Jim Beam or better yet, Jack Daniels

There was a short period during the winter of 1956 when it was cold enough to generate snowflakes in Homestead or at least at the gas station. I was pumping gas when I saw what I first thought was ashes from a fire but then discovered it was snowflakes. When I caught a snowflake in my hand, it would quickly melt.

There came a time when Ray sold the station to his older brother Claude Mooney. I agreed to follow Ray and work for him at a new Southern Oil station that he had purchased near the Hialeah Racetrack in Miami. Unfortunately, business was so poor that Ray could barely pay for the cost of the Grand Opening so it wasn't long before he decided that it was best to close the station and cut his losses. We both were out of a job.

After we closed the station, I moved back to Goulds, bought a suit and accepted a job with Thom McAn shoe store in Homestead. It was what Thom McAn called a Gold Line store where women, children and men's shoes were sold as well as handbags and other accessories. There was only me, the manager and a Hosiery lady who was also our cashier that worked at the store. Extra help was hired during holiday seasons such as Easter and Christmas when the shoe business picked up.



Maybelline

Across the street from our trailer lived a young airman who owned a 1935 Ford with Maybelline written across the back. Grass had grown all around the car which was an indication it wasn't running or hadn't been moved in some time. One day after getting my weekly pay, I walked over to his house and asked if he was interested in selling it. He told me that it ran but needed a battery before it would start. At first, he wanted $50 but when I offered him a dollar for every year, he took it.

My next move was to get a battery but I didn't have enough money at the time so I went to Brother Jerry and asked him if he wanted to make an investment for half ownership. He dug into his savings and lo and behold, he and I owned a car together. Surprisingly, with the new battery, Maybelline cranked right up and allowed me to drive it up to the highway where I purchased gas and oil and pumped more air in the tires.

This car could best be described as a dream car. It had no top to speak of because it had rotted so I removed all the fabric and all that remained of the top were wooden ribs. My plan was to remove those eventually and install a Plexiglas sunroof. It never happened. Besides, Jerry liked to stand up between the ribs and shout at the wind. Instead, I tied a plastic tablecloth over the top to keep the rain out since I was now working for Thom McAn and wearing a coat and tie so I needed to look my best.

On one such day I had just pulled out onto US-1 and headed south down the highway towards Homestead when I saw a Florida Highway Patrol car behind me. I hadn't quite left the speed limits of Goulds so I thought I was being careful of my speed but he turned his lights on anyway.

When I pulled over, he walked up to my car and said that I was doing 50 in a 45 MPH speed zone – which I probably was because it was a '35 Ford Maybelline. Anyway, while the trooper was advising me about Florida speed laws, the mating of turtles and other trivia about Florida wildlife, a small T-storm blew up. A sudden gust of wind caused the plastic tablecloth to fly off my car and land on the hood of his car. He looked back at his car then at me, who was now getting wet and decided to give me a verbal warning before walking back to his car.

He pulled the tablecloth off his car and drove off down US-1. I guess he figured my day was ruined anyway since I was getting soaked without my plastic roof. I was just happy that the storm hadn't come sooner and blew off the top onto his windshield. There was a good chance that I wouldn't receive a warning then.

Despite the absence of a top, I continued to drive the car to work but it was missing more than a top. The muffler was rusting out and was beginning to sound louder each time I started the car. Another malady was a missing seat on the passenger side. One had to sit on the metal floor but it wasn't often that I had passengers.

The driver's seat wasn't much better and wasn't bolted down and if sudden stops were to happen, the seat tended to pitch forward some then rock back. Other than that, it was a dream machine.

One morning when I arrived at work late in the morning, the cops drove by and suggested that I either get a muffler or not drive the car into the small shopping center because it was disturbing the other businesses. I tried arriving earlier than the businesses and staying later after they closed.

There was this one occasion when Jerry was in town and was going to ride home with me when I closed the store. He and I walked over to the town's record store where he met a young girl with whom he went to school. The girl's older sister was the manager of the record store and we volunteered to take them home since their house was on the way to Goulds. When the time came to close the record store and the shoe store, we all met in front of Thom McAn's and were about to climb into Maybelline when I threw the keys to Jerry.

Although the seat was a little low for him, he managed to get situated and we all piled into the car with Jerry's schoolmate in between and the older sister sitting on my lap on the passenger side. Jerry did great for first 50 feet before driving off in a ditch.

At that hour there were no streetlights and it was difficult to see the road, much less the culvert that he ran into. The headlights on Maybelline weren't very bright at approximately two-candle power and was never a problem until you needed lights. At night for example, and I won't even mention how effective the mechanical brakes were. But together we four managed to push the car out of the ditch and get on the road again. Soon we were on our merry way to Goulds.

Jerry did a good job of driving up US-1 and dropping them off at their house without any further mishaps and don't forget, we had an open top with a balmy Florida night above our heads. Far-ra-do!

A big highlight of my short career at the Homestead store was the day that I could take my sister Carla's shoe size and slip on a pair of plain white patent flats. Until that moment, all she had ever worn were oxford type shoes with one shoe built up to correct for the difference in leg length. And as she grew older it became less obvious that she ever had Polio.

One morning as I entered the vestibule to unlock the store, I espied a small alligator lying in a corner. After opening the store and letting the cashier in, I took a small box and put the 2ft gator inside.

After a few minutes thinking about what to do with the gator, I took it to the back of the store and put it in the restroom. Did I fail to mention that my boss was an alcoholic? One of the first things he did in the mornings was to go the restroom and shave and maybe change into a clean shirt. I figured it would jump start his day if he saw a gator in there with him.

The hosiery lady and I waited for about a half-hour but nothing happened. The manager came out to the front of the store, clean-shaven and acted as though nothing was untoward.

The first opportunity I had a chance to check on the gator, I found it curled up into a corner behind the commode where it wouldn't be seen unless someone sat down on the commode. Or perhaps, if it had moved or made any kind of noise, it would have been spotted.

By this time the hosiery gal could hardly contain herself and I thought she was going to give things away so after some deliberation, I decided to move the gator into the Hosiery and Handbag storage room. I placed it near the handbags and tied it up so it couldn't wander. Then we found a reason for the manager to go to the storage room to check on a supposedly missing purse.

It is important here to describe the backroom of a Thom McAn shoe store. Behind the wall of the store is a hallway much like an alley that stores shoe boxes all the way to the ceiling and the way the shoes can be reached is by ladders. You may have seen this type of ladder in libraries where they were needed to reach the higher shelves. These ladders have wheels on the bottom so that you can roll them up and down the back hallway and the bottoms can be pulled out to the desired angle.

These ladders were also fastened to a rail at the top of the ladder such that the ladders could either be rolled down the hallway or pulled out at different angles. At this particular store, I believe we had four such ladders and despite the desire to have the ladders flush against the wall they were almost always staggered because we didn't store them properly after use. As it happened, the manager knew right where to find this handbag and as he entered the room he flipped on the fluorescent lights and walked straight to the bag. I was directly behind him when the fluorescent lights came on.

Just as he bent over to pick up the handbag the lights flickered on and there was the gator. The first sound I heard was Ahizzzzy from the gator and the second sound was Bahaaaaaa from the manager as he turned and ran over me. I tried to grab his waste and tried to explain but he was gone in a flash and all I could hear was a crash here and another there as he ran down the hallway hitting ladders that should've been stowed.

Now I have to admit that I had to stop a time or two to get my laughter under control and it didn't help when I got out front and saw the hosiery girl was doubled up and laughing uncontrollably and pointing at the door. When she finally could talk, she told me that he had run out the door calling for police. When the police did show up, I had already put the gator back in the box. It wasn't until the next morning when we opened the store that we saw the manager again. I don't suppose that incident helped his drinking problem either.

At that time Thom McAn printed a magazine with news and other company info and distributed it to over 850 stores nationwide. My gator story appeared in the next issue of the magazine. It is a shame that they didn't know the whole story.

Not long after the gator incident, I was asked to go work at the Thom McAn store in Jacksonville. It was to be a temporary job to fill in for a couple months. The Jacksonville store was larger and much more interesting than Homestead and the more I became familiar with the city, the better I liked it.

Jacksonville was colder than the southern part of Florida and it even snowed while I was there. The shoe store was located on Beach Boulevard in the Southgate Plaza that was host to several stores but the ones that I frequented most were a cafeteria, drug store, men's clothing store and a corner bar. I became friends with one of the salesmen at the clothing store where I bought my Van Heusen shirts and ties. Since we both worked at the same shopping center and had roughly the same working hours, we decided to rent a two-bedroom apartment together.

At the same time, I was attending a catechism class held by one Father McCann. No relation to the shoe store. It was a new experience but I still remember some of the teachings. Thinking back, I seem to have been baptized as a Baptist, Presbyterian, a Baptist a second time and now I've added a sprinkle by Father McCann. I don't recall if Kathie and I were baptized when we attended the First Christian Church in Titusville but hopefully one of those others will work.

Most Sundays were our day off work so after an early Mass, we would each purchase a BBQ chicken and split a case of beer before heading to the beach. What better way to spend the day than beer, sun and the beach.

Well, there was one thing better and that was a Sunday night social where young Catholics would meet with more drinks and members of the opposite sex. I believe it was St Paul's Catholic Church on the beach but can't be positive because of the many years that have passed. After one fine day of beer and chicken and lying in the sun, I went to sleep and only when the tide began lapping at my feet, did I wake up. My roomy had moved the car so that it didn't get stranded but decided to let me sleep. The result was the worst sunburn I had ever gotten before or since. The blisters were so severe that I had to find a store that sold shorts in enormous sizes so that when I put them on, they wouldn't touch my legs. I was wearing a tent!

After a short visit by Rulee Thieneman whom I had met and dated before leaving Homestead, I decided to quit Thom McAn and return to south Florida. Now that I was back home, I paid a visit to my old work site and learned that Thom McAn had charged the manager with embezzlement. I was told that he had been under investigation for some time. The story was that the money he was taking from the store was supporting his alcohol addiction. Today, they might have treated it as a disease and handled the issue differently. Possibly require him to undergo some type of corrective treatment and put him on probation. True or not, the story goes that he was sentenced and sent to Florida's Raiford Prison. He was a likable guy and I'm sorry that it came to those ends.

I was again looking for a job and was soon hired as a Plant Manager with the Kendall Packing Company. Goulds, FL. Don't let the title fool you. What it really meant was I was a truck driver whose job was to get a crew to and from the planting fields.

The men were from Bahamas and made up a crew for planting new orange trees. There were about a dozen in the crew and most had done this job before. Any knowledge I had wasn't much and I had learned that from my father-in-law. And although my job was to supervise the planting, I was a much better driver.

Besides their speech which had the British accent, they were entertaining with their jokes and good humor. The young ones were more rambunctious and at lunch time, they like to "Dosh" one another. I eventually discovered that the word was Dash, not Dosh which described a form of wrestling where they would try and throw the opponent to the ground – or "Dosh him down."

One day a young man who was born in Homestead was added to my crew. His dad was one of the foremen for Kendall Packing Company who had wrangled a job for his son who – besides me - would be the only American in the plant crew.

On or about the kid's second day, one or two of the young workers asked the American kid if he wanted to play "Dosh." The kid made the mistake of agreeing to play and soon found himself on the ground. Then two other boys wanted a chance to Dosh him. I had to put a stop to the game.

It seems the object of the game was to draw a circle and remain standing while throwing your opponent to the ground, or in other words Dosh him to the ground. Soon the other young workers wanted the kid to play Dosh with them so it wasn't but a couple days and the kid was gone, never to be seen anymore. I don't think his dad was very happy with me.

There came a time for weddings. Sister Sue had met and fell for this sailor, Bob Martin, and soon the two were married. All of us Smiths were there to witness the vows but there was another event about to happen.

Dad and I were arguing who would be the first one home after the two said, "I do." He was driving a '57 Ford Fairlane and Jerry and I were in 'Ole Maybelline. When the priest said, "You may kiss the bride…" I turned the ignition key and stepped on the starter. It sounded like a bomb went off.

Dad said that the noise caused him to jump out of his seat and head for his car but he had to wait for Mom but Jerry and I were gone like a rocket and with no muffler it sounded like it. We hit US-1 heading north in all our fury with brother Jerry standing up through the top.

Mom and Dad were coming up a distant second and somewhere behind them was Bob and Sue trying to catch up. We were about an eighth of a mile from the trailer park when a terrible sound came from the engine. It was a metallic sound like a tin can or something falling on the highway but Jerry said he didn't see anything.

Then the engine quit but we had just enough speed to turn into the park and drift to a place in front of the trailer. We arrived first but old Maybelline was unable to go anymore. I suppose this is where the story ends for Maybelline. She had been kicked out of Homestead for making too much noise and removed from a football game by the police and now she will be towed to the junk yard.


1958 Wedding

As Rulee and I continued to date, it became obvious that we were in love and we soon decided to marry. In keeping with her way of doing things, it was to be the biggest wedding Homestead had ever seen. Her dad tried to talk her out of it by offering something different. He said that he would put money towards my tuition to whatever school I would like if she would have a smaller event. Instead, we had a big Catholic wedding bigger than Homestead may have seen at the time. I think maybe that was the idea. What I remember most about it...I was a handsome dude.

We were fortunate that her parents had allowed us to move into a small house they owned. It was surrounded by avocado groves that sat in the middle of a one-mile square area off Naranja Road. Not far from the grove was an attraction called the Monkey Jungle. It was just north on the next road and at night the peacocks and monkeys would make horrible sounds, enough to keep one awake. If you have ever heard a peacock cry, I doubt you will ever forget the sound.

The Attraction's slogan was that Monkeys run wild and the people are caged. I can attest to the fact that some of their monkeys ran loose because one night we were awakened by screaming monkeys pounding on the screens. There were only two or three monkeys, but I suspect they were making enough noise to wake everyone in Homestead.

I quit Kendall Packing Company and took another service station job at a station located in Goulds which happened to be near my parent's home. One night while on the evening shift, two young black men walked up to the pumps and wanted gas but it was a subterfuge to rob me at gunpoint. The clues to what they were about to do weren't that obvious.

Afterwards I began reconstructing what happened in hindsight. Unaware that they intended to rob me, my actions didn't fit with their plan so they had to wait until I finished a phone call before going inside to deposit the cash in the register. The event happened not too long before closing time when the two came up with a small gas can. I pumped in a dollar's worth which about filled the can. One handed me a dollar while the other stuck out a five-dollar bill but was a tad late because I had already taken the dollar from the first guy. Thinking about it later, I inadvertently foiled their plan again because they wanted me to go inside and make change.

Then the pay telephone rang so I walked to the booth as the two men disappeared in the darkness. When the call was completed, I hung up the phone and went inside to deposit the money in the cash register. Just as the cash drawer opened, suddenly my ribs were rammed on both sides by a gun. It seems they had waited just out of my sight until I opened the drawer to deposit the money.

After giving them the money from the register they began ordering me to open the floor safe but I convinced them that I neither had a key nor knew the combination if that was the type of lock on the safe. Finally, they grabbed me and took me into the garage area arguing about taking me to the woods in back of the station where it was dark and out of sight of any onlookers. I was beginning to balk though I still had a gun in each rib and I had decided that at first opportunity I would bolt and take my chances outside where there were lights.

The two were still arguing when one asked me to hand over my wallet and was about to ram his hand into my pockets and I resisted. The next thing I knew, I was on the floor lying in a small pool of blood from a head wound. One or both had pistol-whipped me before running out of the station into the woods.

I could hear them talking while I was on the floor, I couldn't really understand anything they said which made me realize that I had been unconscious if only a short time. I made calls to my parent's house, to the police and to Rulee letting them know what happened. Brother Jerry came to the station to help however he could and wait with me until the police came.

While waiting on the police, there suddenly came a blast of sirens from many cars flying down US-1 headed in tour direction. At first, I thought, I must really be special to have that many cops but they kept going to Homestead. When a Metro police car finally showed up, I learned that there had been an incident at the Homestead Jail where it was first thought it was an escape and a hostage situation. It turned out not to be the case because the secretary crawled out of a window while the father of the young man talked him into giving himself up to the police. The men that robbed me were never caught.

I had purchased a Cushman Eagle from a guy who had built it with parts from all different models and squeezed as much horsepower as one cat get out of the small engine. It was painted a sporty black with white pin stripes and had a tan leather seat and chrome exhaust. It was a nice contrast in colors and a pretty fancy ride and the cheapest transportation I could find. Gas was cheap so a quart would last me a week.

There was a time when Rulee tried to ride the scooter but during a turn she burned the calves of both legs. Before the week was over, I was getting phone calls about the scooter and learned that she had put an ad in the paper offering it for sale. It sold quickly.

Eventually I realized that with a new wife and a new life, I needed to find a more rewarding career so I enlisted in the US Navy for a 4-year hitch. The day I decided to enlist, April 22, 1959, I went to the recruiting office in South Miami.

The recruiter told me that I would be sent to Great Lakes, IL for boot camp. Though I hadn't any idea as to the locations of the Navy's training centers, I declined and said I would only go to a warm climate, then drove back home.

The next day I received a call from recruiter Ed Clanton, a First Class Bosun Mate, who asked if I would reconsider if he could offer me San Diego, California. I accepted and the next day, April 23, 1959, I enlisted on my 22nd birthday and swore that I would honor the US Flag and the Constitution of the United States.

I was one proud Navy recruit. Bosun Clanton handed me my orders along with the orders of 3 or 4 younger sailors and said I was in charge and was instructed to take them to San Diego. Since I was much older than the other recruits, they called me Pops.

CHAPTER 15 – 1959 SAN DIEGO, CA

The overall flight from Miami to Los Angeles was uneventful and a pleasant experience for those of us who hadn't flown before. The trip from LA to San Diego was a different flight. The plane flew almost directly over the coast and low enough we could see the beaches below and occasional beach goer but before we could get a better view of a sunbather, the currents over the surf caused the plane to quickly drop down or bounce up 10-15 ft. If none of us got air sick on that flight, there would be little chance of getting seasick.



1959 Arrival at San Diego NTC

Upon arrival at the San Diego Naval Training Center, we dismounted from the bus with the only possessions that we brought with us which wasn't much more than a duffle bag. We were met by this nice man, Chief Bosun Mate, James Weir.

BMC Weir introduced himself as our Company Commander. If there was any doubt, his first command was, "You bunch of pussies drop your bags and line up and sound off when I call your name!"

After roll call, we were told that we were now members of Company 187 and were taken into a processing center where we were all marched to a supply room where clerks asked us for our sizes in pants, shirts and shoes. We received clothes that didn't fit, hats and shoes that were too big and various other essentials like soap, shaving material, etc.

Next, we were marched to a barracks where bunks were assigned depending on physical height and any phobia about sleeping on a top bunk. I recall that I selected the top bunk and remember that a recruit named Long chose the bottom bunk. He was from Oklahoma and a former Marine who decided to try the Navy. One evening he told me that he was tired of this shit and the next morning it was discovered that he was gone and never returned nor did we hear what may have happened to him.

Now that we had a place to sleep and given a new identity, Company 187, we all were wearing floppy white hats, wrinkled white uniforms and the same black shoes, it was time to make us less like individuals. First, we were given a razor and those with beards had to shave it off. Next, they gave us a comb and asked us what hairstyle we liked before cutting it all off. Then we sailors were given a toothbrush with some having teeth pulled but the final straw for one sailor was when they began handing out Jock Straps. He went AWOL. Can you blame him? Muzzygeezy.

One of the first lessons was how to make up our bunks. They had to be just perfect and meet the critical eye of Chief Weir. If not, then the bunk was stripped and we had to do 100 push-ups or some such punishment and then remake the bunk again. Right away some of us sailors were developing our biceps.

It's not surprising that we learned quickly how to make our bunks look like every other sailor's in the barracks. The same was true about our lockers. They had to be neatly organized. Then it was time to wash our whites and they had to be spotless or more pushups were in store. The white uniform was accomplished using a bar of soap and a scrub brush that had bristles so stiff that after many scrubbings on a concrete table, we worried that we would scrub a hole in our jerseys before we graduated.

But on the bright side, they were white and no longer smelled like mothballs. Then when all the Company's whites were hanging to dry, we had to post guards at each clothesline. Now what idiot is going to steal our clothes? Even if there was such a clown, what is the guard going to do? All he has is a dummy rifle – oops – a "piece."

When we were issued our weapon, the Company Commander holds up the rifle and says, "Don't forget this is your piece…" then grabs his crotch and says, "…and this is your gun!" If anyone forgot and called it a gun or rifle, then the punishment generally meant you slept with your piece and then maybe did a few rounds of the 16-count manual of arms. The latter was an exercise that we all had to perfect and do it in unison with as much synchronization as possible. I don't recall how much the piece weighed but can testify that when you do the 16-count manual a few times it gets pretty dang heavy.

I was appointed a Squad Leader which meant that I was to lead many of the training exercises such as rifle practice, whale boat racing, 16-count manual, synchronized marching and many other activities leading to competition among squads and most definitely against other companies.

All the companies were in pursuit of the Meat Ball Pennant, which signified the company with the best overall performance. It was more of a benefit to the Company Commander than us recruits. There were classroom training, tests and shooting practice with our pieces. My squad were pretty good marksmen and could compete with most any of the companies. We were not so good at whale boat racing, however. I was coxswain and was pretty good at hollering Stroke! Stroke! Then there was our exposure to tear gas. We cried like babies. Muzzygeezy!

Our Company had a celebrity of sorts, or at least he thought he should be treated as one. First off, he was a Filipino and for some that could mean he was from Russia or some sinister place like that. His story was that he was once Mr. Philippines. Someone thought it was a beauty contest. I don't know that any of us knew what that meant and even fewer gave a damn.

Whatever the reason, he didn't take a shower every evening like the rest of us and he was beginning to stink. I mean really stink. Anyone who has been through Boot Camp will tell you that after a day of intense physical exercise, you will need a shower. But after a week, you will need a GI shower.

After repeated warnings after 2-3 days of him avoiding the shower, some of the guys decided it was time to hold a field day. Now Merriam-Webster defines a field day as this:

a: a day for military exercises or maneuvers
b: an outdoor meeting or social gathering
c: a day of sports and athletic competition
d: a time of extraordinary pleasure or opportunity

The Navy's definition of a field day is not quite the same as Merriam-Webster's because it entails a day of soap, brooms and scrub brushes. Barracks are scrubbed clean from top to bottom. It also meant that we should be clean, ergo, Mr. Philippines. Some of the guys caught him in the shower with their scrub brushes and had a field day.



Basic training wasn't all fun and games. One of the Navy's favorite pastimes was seeing how many lines we could form. We lined up for almost everything we did. Toilets were in a line. Showers were in a line, we stood in a line for just about everything. If we weren't running or marching, then we were standing in a line. Our day started with Reveille, fall into formation, double-time to the chow hall, form a line, eat, then we walked back to the barracks…but quickly.

Especially exciting was shot day. We formed another line and serially walked up to a counter where two or three corpsmen were waiting with a needle in each hand. Bang. We got shots in both shoulders and blood drawn from our arms. Afterwards you felt like a pin cushion. Who knows what all we were given to protect ourselves except for real bullets. They must have saved the penicillin for later use when the sailors became infected with gonorrhea, better known as the Clap. With so many infected men and women given penicillin to cure the STD, it has been reported that penicillin is losing some of its effectiveness. No doubt the sailors around the world were instrumental in helping to create that situation.

Another event that required us to stand in line was what the Navy called a Parade. That was where all the companies marched to the Grinder and stood in formation in front of a podium and bleachers populated by guests and Navy brass. We all received a caution not to lock our knees while standing at parade rest for an hour or so because standing in the heat on the concrete grinder with your knees locked may cause you to pass out. When that happened, it was telegraphed by the sound of the piece hitting the pavement. The protocol was the men standing on either side of the man who passed out would each grab an arm and carry him out to a designated shaded area. You guessed it if you thought all of us hoped the guy next to us would pass out. As it happened, I never passed out nor did I ever get the chance to carry anyone off the grinder.

Starting with my induction and all during Boot Camp, any time I was asked anything or took a test I asked for electronics training. Finally, one day as we approached graduation, I received the good news that I would be transferred to Treasure Island to attend Electronics "A" school. Hallelujah!

We were near graduation from boot camp and were at a point where we were given a short liberty in San Diego so a handful of us went down to Mission Beach where there was a large amusement park with a wooden roller coaster, bars and tattoo parlors where sailors would first get drunk then get a tattoo. I didn't experience either but did go with a couple other sailors to see an old-time burlesque show. You can take my word for it, the show was not worth the money. Maybe I should have spent the money on a tattoo.

I had earned some leave so I caught a bus and headed for Homestead. It was a long hot ride to Florida, especially when traveling through Arizona and Texas. We were in the middle of nowhere in the desert between El Paso and Austin when the bus blew a tire or had some other problem. I guess it couldn't stand the heat either.

The driver pulled over about 100 yards from what looked like a gas station but we didn't need gas. We needed tire air, water and air conditioning. I was in my white uniform and after Boot Camp the heat wasn't bothering me as much as it was other passengers. Whatever the reason, the driver couldn't resolve our issue so we sat for a couple hours waiting on another bus to come and get us. I think we may have bought out everything in that little store. Maybe they are the ones that put nails in the road??

Upon arrival in Homestead, I was reunited with my wife Rulee. Now we had been married for the better part of the year and it was a relief not to have to get up and get dressed and stand in line at the chow hall. No doubt it was during this leave that Randall Scott Smith was conceived because he was born April 7, 1960.



Eastern Airlines Super Connie L-1049G

After my leave was up, I was due to return to California but my next destination this time was Treasure Island which was just outside San Francisco. I decided to fly back to California and as it turned out my father-in-law worked for Eastern Airlines and had done so for a number of years. He knew people and as a result I was given a letter written on Eastern letterhead that granted me permission to fly on unscheduled flights such as maintenance flights. For this flight, it was a Super Connie on a special flight to Long Beach, CA to pick up the Eastern's new plane, the McDonald Douglas DC-7B. The pilot was none other than Mr. Eddie Rickenbacker, WWI Ace and CEO of Eastern Airlines.

The plane wasn't loaded but carried several passengers whom many were female. Apparently, they were wives of some of the men onboard and some were employees of the airlines. No matter their relationship with the men onboard, one thing some may have had in common was experience as a flight attendant because they served champagne and canapes with practiced ease.

Once the Super Connie was at flight altitude, Mr. Rickenbacker turned the controls over to the copilot and came back to the cabin to visit. He couldn't help but notice the only sailor in uniform and it was his letter that allowed me to fly on this plane so it gave me an opportunity to say thanks. I learned that all the food and drinks were for the return flight to Miami in the new aircraft they were picking up.

I don't remember what happened to the letter that allowed me to fly on Eastern but I never used it after that one flight from Miami to Long Beach. Instead, most of my travel was by bus and on a rare occasion I took the train.

CHAPTER 16 – 1959 TREASURE ISLAND, CA

From Long Beach I rode a bus to San Francisco where I was able to catch a bus to Treasure Island (TI) located in the middle of San Francisco Bay about halfway between San Francisco and Oakland. Treasure Island and the Navy base is accessed by taking the Interstate-80 bridge across the Bay and getting off at Yerba Buena Island. Treasure Island was to be my new home for the next eleven months.

The US Navy had a large presence in San Francisco and a good-sized training facility on Treasure Island. I don't know what other schools were being taught but here I attended several technical schools beginning with Basic Electronics followed by ships Air and Surface Search radar schools. In the meantime, I used every opportunity to volunteer for Submarine School.

There came a time when we volunteers were all subjected to a few rounds of physicals that included eye and dental exams, chest X-rays, prostate finger pokes, tongue depressors (not with the same finger) and a myriad of other tests to certify that we were of human descent. I was beginning to feel more like a guinea pig but was happy to endure it all for submarine duty.

The first time I was given an eye exam I really screwed up because someone - I don't remember who - had told me that they would try and fool me. They said that those administering the test would try and trick me so I went into the exam suspicious of what I might be subjected to.

The Navy was using the Farnsworth Lantern Test or FALANT which is basically three lights, Red, Green and Yellow. However, in the back of my mind I was remembering that they may try and trick me to see if I was color blind. That memory set the stage for what was about to happen next.

I got the first two colors correct but they were trying to trick me on the third and I don't recall what color I gave them. Next, they switched the order of the lights when they flashed them. I knew then that they were trying to trick me. They were no longer giving me Red then Green, but now the order was White, then Green and Red. Muzzygeezy!

My performance on the lantern caused me to be sent to an eye doctor. Three of us were scheduled for an eye exam as part of the preparation for submarine school and were scheduled to take the exam at the same time. One volunteer was a sailor whom we called Speed. Not sure why the nickname but Speed wore glasses and it was common knowledge that his vision wasn't all that good but he was well liked among us students and had become friends with me and Scott so we decided to do what we could to help. We thought the best way to help him was to memorize the smaller lines on the eye chart. I would take one and Scott would take another and pass them on to Speed. Our memory wasn't all that great so it didn't turn out as planned but what Speed did was even better.

When asked to cover his right eye and read the chart, he put his right hand over his right eye and read most of the chart. When asked to cover his left eye, he took his left hand and put it over the right eye and read the chart. Unfortunately, we all were given another eye exam later on and this time Speed was caught red handed…no pun intended.

Afterwards we three were moved on to the next test which was called the Ishihara Test. It is a color perception test for red and green color deficiencies. It is designed to check for color blindness or the ability to distinguish different colors. A Petty Officer brought out this little book full of colored dots and asked me what I saw. I told him that I could see a lot of pink dots. Did I see anything else? I did. I told him I saw a blue "22". There may have been other numbers but that was the one that was most prominent to me. Still in doubt he turned the pages and again asked me what I could see.

This page had a bunch of blue dots and he asked me again if I saw anything. I wasn't trying to be smart but, in this case, I said blue dots. And there were more colors and I saw more numbers that he didn't see. As more pages were turned, he began to be more convinced that I was merely seeing things and guessing at the numbers. Finally, he decided to put an end to this test by calling the eye doctor and pointing out two or three pages and repeating my answers. The Doc looked at the book and lo and behold he repeated the same colors and numbers that I saw. I passed the test.

I continued to volunteer for submarine school every chance I got so after completing Electronics "A" school, we graduates were given a choice of ETN or ETR rating. I chose the latter and was promoted from SA to SN and enrolled in Radar school which was supposed to be the most difficult to learn, whereas the class we just completed was pretty much about radio transmitters and receivers.

I must not forget to mention this caper involving a student who I believe had already graduated and most likely assigned to a ship by now. Anyway, his last name was Bird. We learned that every desk had "Bird Lives" written on it. Of course, those same desks have multiple "Horses" written on them as well. A horse got its name from a list of test answers. If you picked the correct horse, you might get all the answers correct. The key word here is "if." Anyone who used a horse and failed the test could rightly suspect the instructor wrote it. I'm pretty sure there were plenty of those.

Getting back to Bird Lives. It was reported that Bird Lives was written on almost everything in the classroom. I should say classrooms since he hit them all and seemed to direct most of his attention to one instructor that was more of a target than others. This instructor was tall and the way he would stand to address the class caused us to call him "Slew Foot." I think most men recognize the physical characteristics of a slew foot by the way they stand or walk. However, he was well liked by all his students.

As I said, Slew Foot was a target of Bird. Anything that could be written on carried the slogan Bird Lives. Chalk, erasers, pointers, desks, blackboards, chairs, books and it was reported that his coffee cup even had an inscription. It wasn't so much as to what carried the slogan as much as it was a mystery how these items got on them without being observed. I personally suspect that once started by Bird – who was long gone - other students or possibly other instructors were doing the work for him. Another interesting fact about Slew Foot was his skill at throwing chalk from the front to the back of the room with unerring accuracy. He could stand at the front of the room, turn and throw the chalk and hit a dozing sailor in the head sitting in the back of the room. Rarely did he miss. Believe me, it would wake up a sleeping sailor. In today's Navy, this behavior would likely be considered abuse and the instructor would face a Captain's Mast or some form of punishment.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention a student called Gedunk, a Navy term for a snack bar. He got his nickname from always having a candy bar in his mouth or in his hand. He was really a nice guy who somehow failed to lose any excess fat during boot camp as most of us did. Maybe he managed to put on those pounds immediately after graduation. Either way, he was a tad obese. Students learned they could barter with Gedunk by waving a dollar or two or better yet, a chocolate candy bar such as a Baby Ruth or Butter Finger or any kind of candy would render the same results.

As it turned out, Gedunk's parents gave him an older Chevrolet coupe. He decided to sell it, so after a few rounds of negotiations a handful of guys came up with $300 to buy the car. I don't think anyone actually purchased the car from Gedunk because no title or registration ever got exchanged.

Since we had wheels, Scott and I joined by Speed and a couple other sailors purchased some inner tubes and would drive up to Greenville. an unincorporated community in the Russian River Valley. We would each get our tubes and a six pack of beer and drive up to Guerneville and float down the river. The river was cold and managed to keep the beer nice and cool as we floated down Russian River.

In a matter of weeks, it seemed like tubing became a popular sport on Russian River as more locals could be seen on the river. We only managed to enjoy the outing for a few days because our school was soon over and the summer up there was short.

I suppose any of us could have borrowed the car but two guys in particular used it most often and both were native Californians, one from Los Angeles and the other from San Francisco. One night after they had borrowed the car, we learned that the car had been abandoned on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge just before the turn-off to Yerba Buena Island.

The Navy towed the car down to the base and impounded it but not before we saw that the driver's door was missing. There was a lot of guesses as to how but only two men knew. Poor Gedunk. He was still the owner. There was much speculation as to how the door became missing but we never found out but did learn about their night out. The rumors were that when the two went on liberty, they liked to have gay men (Queers) pick them up and take them back to their apartment where the two sailors would rip them off. Some might call them criminals.

Anyway, one evening they returned to the base with their clothes all torn up and eyes blackened and one can only guess what other injuries they had sustained. It seems that the gay community had spread the word about these two and planned their revenge. After two guys picked them up and took them back to their apartment, one locked the door and the other turned and said the only thing he liked better than sex was to fight sailors and the two proceeded to kick the shit out of the two sailors. They stopped picking up gays.

While we were in Electronics school, we didn't have too many inspections but we did have them often enough so we wouldn't forget how. There came a time when we learned that Five Day Deodorant pads would make our shoes look like glass. We shined our shoes to make them look as nice as possible then wipe them down with the deodorant pads and they shined so good that it made the shoes look wet. Unfortunately, we discovered a problem with this method of shoeshines.

During one inspection when our company lined up, we all really looked sharp, especially our shoes that were all nice and shiny. Then it began to sprinkle rain. Just a drop here and there but when those drops hit our shoe, it left a white spot. You would have thought a pigeon shit on the shoe. That pretty much was the end of us using Five Day Deodorant pads. Try it. You'll like the results but don't get the shoes wet.

Most sailors have a shipmate who they form a friendship with and pal up with for liberty. In my case I became good friends with a sailor named Scott who also was in Electronics School. I don't remember Scott's first name if he ever had one. I just recall he was a southerner hailing from North Carolina.

The one thing that stood out about Scott was his right eye was slightly askew. When he was looking straight at you, the right eye might be looking elsewhere...which was mostly the case. It was especially obvious when he was up to some kind of mischief but also very helpful when he was playing poker.

His poker face was random eye movement such that you couldn't tell if he was bluffing or not. He won a lot of money with that wandering eye and I learned to never play poker with him at the table. In fact, there were occasions when I would give him the little money I had and then split the winnings and he almost always won a little money.

Like I said, he was full of mischief or what some would call crazy. After a few beers one evening we took the Powell-Mason trolley up and over Nob Hill to the Bay area. It was here that we came across a young man selling newspapers.

I was once a paperboy so we decided to help the boy with each grabbing a handful of papers and hawking them to pedestrians telling them that they were helping a crippled young boy. We sold a lot of papers and began to wonder if he would ever run out until we learned we were selling papers that he was getting from other paperboys. We quit our sales job.

Another ”helpful” thing Scott liked to do was help the trolley driver spin the car around on the turntable which meant he would push the trolley just a little too far. That meant the driver would walk around to push the car back in alignment with the tracks and again, Scott would push just a little too far. By this time the driver will have discovered that he is getting unwanted help and run us off.

The trolley was the only way to go in San Francisco. Our motto was if you couldn't get there by trolley then you needn't go there. One of our haunts was Columbus and Broadway which is where all the action took place. There were bars and entertainment and lots of tourists and it would be hard to tell if there were sailors because most would be wearing civilian clothes. There was one bar in particular that Scott and I liked because it rarely had any trouble from patrons, drunk or otherwise. The owner was a veteran in a wheelchair who knew we were sailors and became friendly with us.

One challenge we had was a large sign on the wall behind the bar that read “IITYWYBTHAD” and no matter how many times we guessed, we were not able to decipher the meaning of the sign and we didn't want to buy the house a drink. However, on one Halloween night we visited the bar and it was so crowded that it was standing room only. Around 10 pm that evening there was a loud noise and the crowd parted to let what appeared to be two women on a scooter. They rode the scooter up to the bar with everyone staring, some whistling and then one of them said in a very deep masculine voice, “Give us two beers.” Surprise!

That night the owner was in a good mood and again we were once more trying for the umpteenth time to figure out what the sign meant. And so many times had the owner said, “If I tell you, will you buy the house a beer?” and just as many times we said no. However, on this night he reached under the bar and brought out a glass jar filled with dark pills with a sign on that said, “Smart Pills, 25 cents.” Like dummies we forked over a quarter each and he gave us one of the pills. It was licorice and as we chewed on the pill he again said, “If I tell you, will you buy the house a beer?” Duh! That is what it meant all along. The smart pills worked! We can't imagine how much money he made off that sign.

The two female impersonators on the scooter reminds me of Pinocchio's Club on Stockton Street which was a speakeasy in the '30's but later moved upstairs and became a female impersonator club. There was a black doorman that Scott and I befriended and when on Stockton Street we would stop by and pay him a visit. We learned too that he generally had a pint of whiskey in that topcoat of his so after a time he would allow us to mind the door while he slipped away for a drink or two. That meant one of us would have to put on the man's long topcoat and usher people upstairs. I venture to say that it wasn't necessarily what they were expecting when they got upstairs.

After 28 weeks of basic electronics school, Radio Detection and Ranging (RADAR), school was entirely different. First, we were locked in a vault to study. No pencils, paper, notebooks or anything other than our bodies were permitted inside the enclosure. I don’t remember if it was a confidential or classified setting. but it definitely was a protected subject on special circuits related to Radar. There was also Long Range Navigation (LORAN) equipment to study and learn to repair.

Upon my graduation from ship's radar school, I was pleased to learn that I had been accepted as a candidate for submarine school so I was now enrolled in Submarine Radar which meant I would spend at least two more weeks on the island. In all I had spent more than 7 months in school.

The building where the class was held had dark shades and two full radar systems. At the beginning of this class, the instructor said he was going to make technicians out of us and teach us what we should have learned all these weeks before. He was right. He taught us how to read an Equipment Manual and how to troubleshoot and to test our skill, the final exam was to detect and correct a simulated failure of the radar onboard a submarine.

We soon learned why the windows had dark shades on them. The shades could be pulled down to turn the room into darkness to simulate a darkened sub as much as possible and the working conditions that we might find ourselves in. On the day of our final test we went inside the school room and everything was dark so we had to find battle lanterns, turn them on and begin our troubleshooting of the radar assigned to me and another technician.

We quickly discovered the radar was not powering up. Yeah, that was a clue. It took us the better part of an hour to find a light, turn on the power to the radar – which it didn't – and conduct an inspection of the power source and it was dark. After checking all the power circuits, we found a blown fuse in a power supply. Wallah! It was with great satisfaction to turn the power on and see the Radar come up in an operating position. We passed and now were assured that we would be going to New London, CT and submarine school.

I decided that now that I had flown a couple times in my life, it was time to take a train ride. I booked passage on the City of San Francisco. The train ride would take the better part of a week to get back to the East coast.

It was a long but pleasant ride from Frisco to Ogden, UT then to Chicago, New York and finally New London, CT and Submarine School.

As luck would have it, I was on a car with a preacher, a soldier, a schoolteacher and another guy who all liked to play poker. My old classmate Scott wasn't there to screw things up so I managed to win a few dollars but not before I learned that the preacher was able to see a couple of the player's hand in the reflection of the coach's window. When the train arrived in Ogden, Utah, our elementary school teacher disembarked which reduced us to four players and it wasn't long before we lost another player causing us to lose interest in poker.

For me it was quite an experience to arrive in Chicago and then continue on to New York and Penn Station, a place that I had only seen in movies or read about. After getting an eye full, I caught a train to New London, CT and the Naval Submarine School (NSS). Now I must remind you that I left California and arrived back on the East coast to cold weather and snow on the ground.

CHAPTER 17 – 1960 NEW LONDON, CT

It was March 1960 and as luck would have it, New London was cold. There was about a foot of snow on the ground and everything was dreary looking and very little activity was visually present in the city which was quite a change from San Francisco and San Diego. I reported in and submitted my orders before the Master at Arms assigned me a bunk and got me settled. There wasn't any more luxury here than we had at Treasure Island, which was none.

New London was teaming with nightlife. There was a USO where a sailor could get a free doughnut and a cup of coffee and maybe even a magazine. But best of all was a Polish Polka Club where one could always find friendly people and good Polka music to dance to. That was it.

I don't recall finding a place where one could get an alcoholic drink. The Polka club was almost like a speakeasy in that someone would open a small flap in the door to see if a member was asking for entry and it seems a sailor in uniform was always welcome. At least I was the couple times I visited there. Until then I hadn't heard much accordion music, but one could say that in New London I learned to appreciate the sound of an accordion.

About three weeks into training when checking my mail, I discovered something that I failed to mention earlier that happened in Electronics School at Treasure Island. Another sailor by the same name was a few weeks behind me. He and I opened and read one another's mail over a period of many weeks but never met one another. I never found out his middle name to see if it was the same as mine. It was ironic that he too was in Sub school and once again, we are receiving the other's mail.

Thinking back, I believe he was the reason behind a mystery that wasn't resolved for some time after I left New London. This was long before cell phones and for that matter, calling cards or credit cards, so in order for me to call home I would have to go through a long-distance operator.

It seems there weren't many operators on night duty in New London or wherever there call center was, so it wasn't unusual to get the same operator and after a few calls, she knew our names and what city we were calling. That is where the other sailor with the same name came in. Evidently, he was making calls about the same time in the evening – as most of us did – but calling another city.

One evening when I was about to make a call to Homestead, she wanted to know why I wasn't calling Atlanta. I explained that I didn't know anyone in Atlanta but she insisted that she knew my name was Smith. After a few sparring words, I got her name – Operator 2 – and she got mine. She said she already knew my name and that I was 19 and single, etc., etc. That may have been my last phone call to Atlanta while single because I was soon to leave New London and transfer to Boston as a married man. I hope Operator 2 wasn't too disappointed.

One morning I received instructions to lay down to Sick Bay because the doctor wanted to see me. When I arrived, there was a Chief and an LTJG in the waiting room who had arrived before me. It was a day when all three representatives of Navy rank (a Grunt, a Chief and Officer) got their notice that each of us were being dropped from school because of irregular lung X-rays or some other physical ailment.

I believe we three had the same diagnosis that prevented us from taking the buoyancy test. The spots on my lungs were attributed to possible calcium deposits which diagnosis meant that no matter what I did in the rest of the school, I would not be permitted to take the buoyancy test. That was the fate of the other two men as well.

The test is in a 40ft tall water tower that simulates conditions that a submariner might experience during an escape from a submarine. Candidates are expected to ascend without the aid of scuba tanks or other breathing apparatus.


Buoyancy Ascent Tower

The exercise is relatively safe for one with good lung capacity but it's been said that if you see mermaids on the way up, you are in trouble.

The structure was constructed after the Navy lost several sailors from a sunken sub and apparently the Navy decided to screen candidates for any irregularities of the lungs and prohibit them from taking the test because of the risk of causing breathing difficulties that could lead to serious injury. No Dolphins for us three sailors.

While waiting for my disposition, I was assigned as a driver and a gopher for the Admiral (COMSUBLANT), who one day asked if I was happy in my job. I thought it best to be truthful and told him that I would prefer a job in electronics and somewhere warmer so he said he would get me an assignment.

Soon my orders came in for the USS Edisto (AGB-2) and after seeing the classification AGB, the Admiral said that I would be happy because it was an auxiliary ship and they rarely went to sea. He failed to mention however that it was in Boston and that it was an icebreaker. Actually, I don't think he knew what an icebreaker was.

Maybe as a submariner, he hadn't seen many surface ships except through a periscope but then I'm reminded, he was an Admiral. There was a time when I thought I should write the Admiral and tell him he didn't know a damn thing about the Auxiliary Navy because the icebreaker USS Edisto (AGB-2) didn't stay long in a port.

CHAPTER 18 – 1960 BOSTON, MA

In the early part of the year, Edisto was resting on keel blocks in the floating dry dock of the Bethlehem Steel Shipyard, Boston, MA, when workers of the Bethlehem Steel Corp. went on strike. This action stopped any yard work so Edisto remained in the strike-bound yard until 20 March when she passed through the water-borne picket line and tied up at the South Boston Annex of the Boston Naval Shipyard. Not long afterwards, on 14 May, I reported aboard the ship and on 28 May 1960, she was declared ready for sea and we commenced storing supplies and refueling for an Arctic deployment under the command of CDR Robert A. Martin.

I picked out a top rack just across from a metal door that led to the officer's quarters where midshipmen and civilians were bunked when aboard and the next day, I reported to the small ET shop to find Al Hudson who had just received his promotion to a new rate ET2. Al asked if I would drive his car to retrieve his jumpers that he had left with a seamstress to sew on his new Second Class crow. His car was a brand new 1960 Chevrolet Impala with big fins on the back giving the impression that the car was much wider in the back than in the front. I wasn't afraid to drive it but was very conscious of the fins.

The Seamstress' shop was reached by a one-way cobble stone street that ran straight under an elevated track of the Boston El. The tires made a good bit of noise on the cobble stone street and the roar intensified as I neared an intersection ahead where cars were coming directly at me. Just before I reached the intersection with the anticipation of a crash, the cars turned right and left and above me the noise was deafening which was caused by a train on an elevated track running overhead. That was the last and only time I would drive his car. It was a land yacht and probably shouldn't be on the streets. The scary part was driving on Boston streets. Much later I was told that not even New York Taxi drivers liked driving in Boston, which was something I could believe. Then there were the infamous rotaries where the best advice I ever received about driving in Boston was to not ever hit your brakes while in the rotary.

In the meantime, I began to familiarize myself with the equipment and where it was located and I learned there were basically three work areas requiring the most attention. They were the Bridge, the Combat Information Center (CIC) where the radar controls and PPI scopes were in use and finally the Radio Shack.

The Electronics Division was headed by a First Class ET named Castleberry. Al was our ET2, Crane was our ET3 and I was the ETRSN or Electronic Technician Radar Seaman. As it turned out I was the super tech amongst us all and many times I gave thanks to the Submarine Radar Instructor for what he taught me. My skill and confidence served me well in my career and I had to draw on it many times to effect repairs to the old VJB Radar Repeater which had been jury-rigged by my predecessor. It was ancient but I managed to discover that it was no longer wired according to the instruction manual. Oddly enough it still worked...at times. Other times not.

Much of Edisto's equipment was made in the 1930's for the US Coast Guard. To use it onboard the Edisto the equipment had been battle hardened to make it seaworthy, which served its purpose in the ice because the whole ship took a pounding at times. A sample of our equipment that we were responsible for maintenance and repair were the AN/SPS-10A Surface Search and AN/SPS-6C Air Search Radar, and corresponding Plan Position Indicators (PPI). A PPI is a circular scope with a rotating sweep that represents the radar antenna as it rotates 360 degrees. The ship's position is represented by the center of the display with the distance drawn as concentric circles. Each circle on the PPI represents a variable range marker which tells the Radar Tech the direction and distance of the object from the ship. The later model PPI's and radar controls were located in the Combat Information Center (CIC) which was located strategically a half deck below the Bridge. Only one PPI, the VJB Repeater was installed on the Bridge and was an important navigation tool.

There were Radio Receivers and Constant Wave (CW) Transmitters, Air to Ground Transceivers, Sonar, Fathometers, and Ship to Shore Radios, Radio Direction Finder (RDF) and IFF & SIF (Identification Friend or Foe and Selective Friend or Foe).

I don't recall anyone but me working on the radars, radar antenna or the IFF & SIF equipment but that was my specialty rating and there was an occasion for me to perform maintenance on the surface search radar while tied up in South Boston. I was at the very top of the mast where the antenna is located and happened to observe two men climbing the mast on the aircraft carrier USS Wasp (CVS-18). It was tied up not far from the Edisto and while I watched them climb, I observed a very dark cloud approaching and thought to myself, how dumb they were to go up with that storm approaching because they were flirting with danger.

As I stood there and continued to watch the men, I thought about trying to signal them somehow but before I knew it, BAM! My head tingled, I saw a bluish light and then my ears popped and I heard a loud noise. A bolt of lightning hit the mast where I was standing and ran down a guy wire and jumped an insulator before hitting the deck right behind the Officer of the Deck (OD).

A normal posture of many of the OD's was to stand with both hands behind their back holding the symbolic telescope of command. When the lightning strike hit, the OD unconsciously flipped the telescope so high that I could almost reach out and catch it. But I didn't and it landed back down behind the OD. It was heavy brass so maybe they got it back together again.

I can tell you that it didn't take long for me to shinny down the mast to the deck below. I might note that I don't know what happened to the two guys on the Wasp's mast but I did learn that it isn't necessary for a storm cloud to be directly over you in order for lightning to strike elsewhere. In fact, I've heard that lightning can strike without a cloud in the sky.

The ship was preparing for an Arctic trip and supplies were being brought onboard and ammunition was being returned to the ship. Ammo transfer was an All Hands working party. Only the infirmed and high-ranking officers were exempt except I'm sure some of the officers stepped in at one time or another. I don't know which was the hardest on our hands, the cans that held several rounds of 40mm shells or the heavy 5-inch shell which could mash a finger if not careful when putting it down. Carrying a 40mm can in each hand helped balance the load while we cradled the 5-inch shell like a baby. My arms and hands were in bad shape when I finished the first time, but I hoped to be smarter the next time.

One thing for certain, if you carried the 40's your arms would be useless when it was over. On the other hand, if you were in the 5-inch line, you would have a couple of sore fingers from being mashed when you put them down on other rounds. If my memory serves me right, I may have only had to carry ammo no more than twice during the four years of service.

It didn't help either when the old gunner's mate talked about magazines going up. I think that by the time that I might likely be called to haul ammo, I had ET strikers working under me that got called and I had to stand watch in case any of the electronic equipment went down. Oh, such is the life of a petty officer.

As we prepared for an Arctic cruise, Rulee brought baby Randy to visit me in Boston. Anyone know how difficult it is to rent a room with the name Smith while in a Navy uniform? It helps to have a baby handy. Their stay was a little longer than one night so I rented a small upstairs apartment in a frame house across the harbor in Winthrop.

It provided a nice view of the Logan Airport and surrounding area. Getting to and from the ship required taking the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MTBA) to Maverick station, which was the last stop before taking a bus to Winthrop.

With supplies and ammo loaded the ship was nearing its preparation to sail to Norfolk, VA where it would take on a helicopter crew and more supplies for the trip north.

However, before Edisto was ready to get underway for SUNEC 60, there was an incident with a disgruntled sailor that occurred just before the ship was to depart Boston for her mission to support the annual Arctic Resupply Operation SUNEC 60. This incident involved the ship's postal clerk who had just returned from liberty late one night and wanted to see the ship's Supply Officer, to whom he reported to. Despite efforts of the ship's on-duty Watch, the sailor insisted the messenger go wake the officer. The Petty Officer of the Watch intervened and insisted the sailor go sleep it off. Instead, the Postal Clerk went and retrieved his .45cal pistol.

The following describes Chief Deming's report and his involvement in an incident where a Pistol Packing Swabbie invaded the Officers Wardroom and how it was resolved.

Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Deming's report

Shortly after midnight, 1 June 1960 before we were to sail north, the ship's Postal Clerk came aboard from a night's Liberty and went straight below decks and soon returned to the quarterdeck. He asked the Messenger of the watch to get the Supply Officer out of bed and to meet him in the Officer's Wardroom.

The Messenger asked the Postal Clerk if it was important, at which time the Postal Clerk pulled out a .45 caliber pistol that he had had hidden under his jumper. The Petty Officer of the watch did not see the gun but had overheard the conversation.



Pistol Packing Swabbie

He told the Messenger and the Postal Clerk that he, as Petty Officer of the Watch, and only he, would order the Messenger off the quarter deck as necessary. The Postal Clerk then fired one shot into the air and demanded to see the Supply Officer. The Petty Officer of the watch dispatched the Messenger to wake the Officer.

The Postal Clerk then pointed his gun at the Petty Officer of the watch and demanded his gun who complied. Then the Postal Clerk went into the Officers Wardroom, a pistol in each hand demanding that he see the Supply Officer.

The Messenger, instead of waking the Supply Officer, had gone in search of the Junior Officer of the Deck (JOOD) and found CW0 Deming just outside the Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Mess on his way to the quarterdeck. Upon learning the circumstances, the JOOD sent the Messenger to wake the Command Duty Officer (CDO), LTJG Morris. The JOOD then returned to the quarterdeck and phoned the Officer of the Deck. While this was going on a majority of the crew were still asleep in their racks.

Believing that the Postal Clerk wanted to shoot the Supply Officer, the CDO immediately woke him up and hastened him off the ship to safety. The CDO then phoned the Base Security Police and one officer arrived at 0055 local time.

Meanwhile CWO Deming entered the wardroom, turned on the lights and found the Postal Clerk seated on the couch with a loaded pistol in each hand and insisting on talking to the Supply Officer. At that time the Base Security Policeman Richmond entered the door and the Postal Clerk snatched up the guns again. Richmond tried to talk to the Postal Clerk but only made him more nervous so he was asked to leave the room by CWO Deming who followed soon afterwards. *The Postal Clerk was now alone and decided to fire a shot. It was now after 0100 and most of the crew were still in their bunks asleep.*

*A call to the Charlestown Navy Yard Marine Barracks brought six armed marines to the ship. All accesses to the wardroom were guarded by armed men and all personnel were removed from adjacent spaces and ships at nearby berths, (USS Atka, AGB-3 and the USS Providence, CLG-6), were told of the developments by telephone and to use caution. The South Boston Annex duty officer was also notified. By 0200 more Marines and some Armed Forces Police had arrived and three squad cars of Boston City Police were on the pier***.***

End of report .

The ship was under a siege by armed men. I repeat, most of the crew were still asleep in their racks. Then it occurred to someone that the Postal Clerk might go down one deck below to where the midshipmen and civilians were provided temporary quarters when onboard. I think I mentioned earlier that I had taken a top bunk directly across from these quarters which was separated not by a hatch but only by a standard metal door.

If the Postal Clerk decided to enter that compartment and shoot through that door, the slug would easily penetrate the metal door and hit either me or the middle rack or God only knows who else might have been hit. I was awakened suddenly at 0200 by a sailor standing over me with his face almost nose to nose and he said in an urgent voice, “Smith! This is urgent! Get up and go forward fast!” That’s what I did immediately. I ran up the ladder and began running through the mess deck at what I thought was top speed until I tripped over an arm that was being stretched out with a gun in the hand. Now I was running at top speed.

It was a marine who was just stretching out on the floor between the mess tables when I came running through. Timing couldn’t have been worse for either. It’s a wonder that he didn’t fire his gun, thinking he was being attacked. As for me, I didn’t have the foggiest clue as to why a man with a gun was lying on the mess deck. Now I was running faster than top speed. When I got to the forward passageway that runs port to starboard across the ship, there were other men standing in their skivvies just like me. Having no idea what was happening, one of the sailors asked me if I knew and I turned and saw the Logan International Airport strobe lights going off like rockets and said, “We are under attack!” Muzzygeezy!

The Boston Police did not come aboard, but they did supply some tear gas. The exact total number of these personnel at the scene is unknown but is estimated at twenty-five. CWO Deming fired two tear gas bombs through the lower panels of the locked wardroom door. Afterwards several shots rang out from inside the wardroom following the firing of these bombs. Finally, at 0220 the Postal Clerk opened the after port on the starboard side of the wardroom and tossed the two pistols out on deck. The ammunition clips had been taken out of the guns. He crawled out of the after door of the wardroom and collapsed in the passageway outside. He was then dragged out on deck by CWO Deming and a Marine where first aid and oxygen were administered. Upon revival the Postal Clerk was transferred by ambulance to the Chelsea Naval Hospital.

During the Postal Clerk's siege in the wardroom, he fired several shots from his pistols. The number of shots heard by observers varies from eight to eleven. Subsequently eleven empty shells and two unused bullets were found in the wardroom, and one empty shell on the quarterdeck. Since there were seven bullets in each clip, the number of shots taken by the Postal Clerk can be fixed at eleven in the wardroom and one on the quarterdeck.

Evidence of this whole incident and the number of shots fired in the wardroom may be seen by holes in the couch, room dividers, chairs, and bulkheads and the empty tear gas canisters. It was a war scene.

What may have triggered the Postal Clerk’s outburst was his request for special pay had been denied by the Supply Officer, mainly because Payday was the very next day.

Evidence of this whole incident and the number of shots fired in the wardroom may be seen by holes in the couch, room dividers, chairs, and bulkheads and the empty tear gas canisters. It was a war scene. I repeat, most of the crew were still asleep in their racks.

Investigative Officer Mr. Tom Harper reviewed all the facts and Chief Demings report with these comments. This affair should have resulted in the following:

1. Commendations for CWO Deming and the others involved in bringing this matter to a safe resolution.
2. A supply of tear gas for Edisto and other ships
3. Better controls established for firearms.

It so happens that I, Petty Officer Smith, would like to add my own personal recommendations to that list.

4. Medals for us sailors who set new speed records running through the mess deck.
5. The Navy should copyright the origin of the phrase, “Going Postal.”

In preparation for the ship's departure, Rulee packed up and she and 2-months old baby Randy returned to Homestead and I released the apartment back to the landlord.

Now it was a matter of getting our electronic equipment ready for my first of three Arctic cruises, Operation Support Northeastern Command (SUNEC 60).

CHAPTER 19 – 1960 USS EDISTO ARCTIC CRUISE '60

On 5 June 1960, Helicopter Unit Det 2 (HU-2) and one HRS (Horse) Sikorsky helicopter and one HUL (Bell) were loaded and on the next day under the command of CDR Robert A. Martin, the Edisto sailed for Hamilton Inlet, Labrador on Operation SUNEC 60, my first cruise on a Navy icebreaker. For two weeks we remained in the Hamilton Inlet area, during which time we escorted the USNS Greenville Victory and USNS Bondia through the coastal ice belt into the Inlet.

Our sister ship, the USS Atka (AGB-3), suffered some ice damage on 16 June, so Edisto took her USNA Midshipmen detachment aboard and became the first icebreaker to conduct a midshipmen training cruise. A week later Edisto was ordered to proceed at best possible speed to aid in the rescue of the crew of a Danish motor vessel which had been sunk by heavy ice. However, after a day's steaming the word was received that the crew had been saved by aircraft and Edisto returned to Hamilton Inlet.

On 28 June we proceeded to the Straits of Belle Isle to rendezvous with USNS Redbud, which was drifting in shoal water with all propulsion disabled. On 29 June rendezvous was made and we took the Redbud in tow and proceeded to the Gulf of St. Lawrence (50 000N, 58 30°W), where on 30 June, the tow was transferred to the USS Preserver (ARS-8).



Realm of the Arctic Circle – Blue Nose Certificate

Edisto then sailed for Upernavik, Greenland, where on 6 July we rendezvoused with the USCGC Westwind (WAGB 281), USNS Point Barrow and USS John McKay. Afterwards. with Westwind in the lead, the group proceeded in column to Thule, Greenland, arriving there on 8 July. On the way up we stopped long enough to initiate all of us Red Noses into the Royal Domain of the Blue Nose. I am here to tell you that crawling through that chute of freezing water smelling that stinking "stuff" and kissing the Royal Baby's belly is an unforgettable experience.

Thule – now called Qaanaaq - is located 750 miles north of the Arctic Circle and a little more than 900 miles south of the North Pole. We crossed the Arctic Circle (66-32 North latitude).The Danish now call Greenland "Kalaallit Nanaat" which I cannot pronounce and wouldn't be able to spell without looking it up. Thule Air Base was built in 1951 as a secret project called Operation Blue Jay. It has been renamed Pituffik Space Base. Thule construction was managed by the Army's Corp of Engineers and involved over a 100 ships and thousands of men experienced in cold weather construction.

Those wishing to learn more about this secret project may find several videos on both the Internet and YouTube.com. In 1952 the Army decided to make the base construction public by producing a film and making it available in theaters. Some videos made by sailors involved in Operation Blue Jay may be found also on YouTube.

Like most USAF bases, Thule had a Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) Club that boasted gambling and entertainment and was called "The Top of the World Club." This being our first visit to Thule, most of the crew joined the club. If my memory is correct, it cost a whole dollar to join in 1960.



I don't know if it was because we were sailors or if everyone had to buy a membership. Either way, it was a unique place in the world but Thule isn't exactly what a sailor expects as a liberty port but then it had alcohol, slots and entertainment. I am likely the only sailor that has the distinction of being thrown out of the club and I am neither proud nor upset by that fact because there is a simple explanation that led to my extraction.

The entertainment was being provided by an all-girl band and some of us sailors were sitting at a long table in front of the stage and I happened to be sitting on the end with my back to the stage. It was apparent that the stage did not have sufficient electrical outlets for all their instruments so a cable ran across the stage and over the edge to an outlet directly behind my chair. That shouldn't have been a problem but since the power cord stuck out some, it was just enough for one of the sailors to brush against it when going to the bar. This caused the power to be interrupted during one of the songs. Ok, no big deal. Power was restored and the girls finished the song.

A couple of songs later and another sailor walked by and once more power was interrupted during a song. That was when the Club's bouncer came and asked me to leave. I tried to explain that while I was sitting near the stage with my back to the band, it wasn't me that was hitting the power cord but they escorted me out and said I was no longer welcome in the club. As an aside, somewhere in all my memorabilia I may still have my Top of the World membership card.

There was one major side effect from visiting the Top of the World Club and that was a headache. After a couple hours or so of drinking, then stepping outside into the brilliant northern sun it hits you in the eyes. Wow. After downing beer all afternoon, you experience sudden blindness and a bad headache and out loud you tell your shipmates that you are never going to do that again. But of course, tomorrow it's the same club, the same beer and the same sun. On 11 July Edisto departed Thule escorting USNS Point Barrow through light ice and detaching her that same day at Sabine Island, Melville Bay, thence returning to Thule and detaching the midshipmen the next day.

July 19th was spent in very heavy ice west of Sabine Island with Edisto continually having to turn about and break out the two merchant ships. By evening favorable winds released the two ships and we arrived in Thule on 21 July. There we unloaded the Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) Alfa and nine NROTC midshipmen.

Our primary objective for this cruise was to provide ice escort to Goose Bay, Labrador and establish a shipping lane for ships that were in route from the states. When we weren't providing an escort to a ship, then we were breaking or moving ice to keep the shipping lane open.

The Edisto along with the USS Westwind provided escort services to and from Thule to Kulusuk, Greenland and we supported the Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) Alfa whose task was to clear the beach and conduct survey operations in Kulusuk. And as with all cruises, another major objective was to conduct bathythermographs (BTs) at multiple stations around the Arctic. Finally, our mission was to provide training to nine ROTC midshipmen and to another nine USNA midshipmen who were originally scheduled for the USS Atka but for some reason they were sent to the USS Edisto instead. I'm sure the midshipmen along with our own crewmen learned a lot when we towed the USNS Redbud from Camp Island, Labrador to a rendezvous with the USS Preserver (ARS-8) then had to respond to an emergency to aid a sinking Danish motor vessel. The Edisto was a day away when the mission was aborted after the crew was rescued by aircraft.

Now for most of the crew this was our first trip to the Arctic and when it was over, we could call ourselves "Ice Water Sailors." We had seen big icebergs, small bergy bits, growlers, ice flows, pancake ice, seals, polar bears and Eskimos. To add to these "firsts" one night we ran upon a large fleet of Russian Trawlers that allegedly were fishing. However, electronic analysis of their "fishing gear" revealed a lot of sophisticated electronics onboard. Enough said.

This first cruise afforded the opportunity for me to become better acquainted with the Operations crew which consisted of the other Electronic Technicians, Radiomen and Radarmen. I maintained and repaired the equipment that the other men operated so it was only natural that we get to know one another and become friends. After all, we worked together, ate together and our bunks were in the same compartment. Apparently, this was true of the other Divisions as well.

The men of the Deck Division hung around together as well as the Electricians, Commissary men and Engine Snipes and when in Port they went on liberty together with some hailing from the same town or city. The cruise acted as a bonding agent for friendship and helped to form relationships that carried over into civilian life. The camaraderie experienced by servicemen, be it Army, Air force, Marines or Navy is not normally found in civilian life.



While still in the Arctic on this cruise, I received the news that I was promoted to Third Class Petty Officer, Electronics Technician Radar (ETR3). The insignia is an eagle and orbiting electron but some sailors referred to it as a crow with a tangled ass hole.

With Operation SUNEC 60 complete, we arrived in Boston, 21 August, and began preparing for the lengthy cruise to the Antarctic as part of Task Force 43. This cruise would be in support of the U.S. Antarctic Research Project. On 17 September 1960 the ship entered the Bromfield Shipyard to prepare for her fourth visit to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze '61.

CHAPTER 20 – 1960 ANTARCTICA DEEP FREEZE ‘61

In addition to the food, fuel and ammunition supplies necessary to the operation of the ship itself, the ship loaded several cryptic boxes of scientific gear, a Bathy-Thermograph (BT) team, and the now familiar compatriots of HUTRON 4 and their gaudy flying machines.

Day after day the slab-sided gray trucks rolled to the side of the ship as working party after working party was called away to cope with the influx of stores. The Officer-of-the-Deck (OOD) was forced to deal with angry division officers who saw their whole department leave on a working party. In reply to the queries, the OOD could only say, "This stuff has to come aboard."

Finally, the last truck was emptied and there was no more to take its place. This signaled the end of the preparations and it was during this period that Edisto got more than a face lift but she got a new skipper as well. On 27 October 1960, a day before we were to set sail for Antarctica, a change in command ceremony was held where CDR Robert A. Martin was replaced by CDR Bernard G. Fold.

Once more we had an all-hands working party to load ammo in preparation for the trip south. It was then that I learned how important the VJ-B Radar Repeater was to the bridge and the skipper. It may not have been the oldest piece of electronic equipment, but it was old and to make matters worse, the technician that last worked on the unit made a few wiring changes. I quickly learned our new skipper expected the VJ-B Repeater to be operational before we entered the waters off Cape Hatteras where treacherous waters off the coast of the Outer Banks are known as the Graveyard of the Atlantic with over 600 ships as victims of shallow shoals, storms, and war. Shifting sand ridges hidden beneath the turbulent sea off Cape Hatteras has never promised safe passage for ships.

Much later I learned the sailor was a good technician but had a tendency to jury-rig equipment to make it work. The technician following him hadn’t any idea of why the equipment continued to work with all the unauthorized changes but it often did.

Under those circumstances it meant starting all over and rewiring the equipment per the schematic before you could begin troubleshooting the problem. It was a lesson learned and from that point on I approached a lot of the equipment problems with caution knowing he may have worked on them.

I had to call on all my skills but I managed to rewire the Repeater so that I could troubleshoot the equipment and find the original problem which turned out to be a shorted pin in the tube socket. The tube always checked as good but when it was inserted in the socket it caused the circuit to fail. That experience accelerated my electronics skills tremendously.

Early on the morning of 28 October 1960, members of the engineering department were already hard at work getting the ship prepared to sail. She remained shackled, however, to the unfamiliar land only by her doubled-up morning lines. Soon these too were reduced so that only six single strands of manila held her. At 1010 local time on that sunny New England morning, before a crowd of friends, relatives, and idly curious, the last line was hauled aboard and stowed.

The ship, even in those calm harbor waters began a gentle rolling motion which told those of us who had sailed her before that Edisto was truly underway passing Boston Lightship serenely to starboard, rounded Cape Race, and steadied on a southerly course towards Panama and the Canal. Soon Edisto began to plunge and rear in the troughs of the open Atlantic and it soon became obvious to the neophytes that finding one's sea legs was a matter of survival, not a mere whim. For late that first night the stormy North Atlantic gave the crew a taste of what was to become routine.

This too was an important exercise for me because the Skipper made it clear that when we entered the waters of Cape Hatteras, NC he wanted the VJB PPI radar scope working. It was older than the other PPI scopes but in easy view of the Captain's chair.

Another event that became routine was being awakened in the middle of the night by a Klaxon horn sounding a General Quarters alarm which demands that all hands man their battle stations. This was not a drill but a fire in the stack where soot had built up in the stack and had caught fire, something that seemed to occur when new engines were put online. Whatever the reason, it wouldn't be the last time the crew responded to a call to General Quarter.

My next new adventure was with tube sockets during a General Quarters drill. When the klaxon sounded the crew scrambled to occupy their stations. My station was the Radar Transmitter room which was located behind the bridge. It housed the transmitting tubes for the surface search and air search radars and was also the normal approach to the ship's mast and upper rigging.

The day before I had been working on the radar and still had some unfinished work and decided to use this opportunity to complete during General Quarters. I pulled the drawer out that I had been troubleshooting and was still a little drowsy from having been awakened in the middle of the night so I leaned back on the bulkhead behind me. It was at that moment directly behind me that the Twin 40 MM on the Port Gun Turret went off and I was shot right in the belly!

After finding no blood on my chest or stomach, I espied a tube shield lying on the floor near my feet. Apparently, I had not fastened the spring-loaded tube shield down when working on the chassis and when the 40 MM guns went off, the vibration caused it to fly off and hit me right in the stomach. Muzzygeezy.

05 Nov 1960 we arrived at the Panama Canal and dropped anchor in Limon Bay to allow the Panamanian officials to come aboard to inspect Edisto's papers and cargo. The Edisto also permitted a group of students and instructors from various South American military academies to come onboard. With our decks filled with visitors, the ship had a festive look about her.

Eventually we were permitted to enter the Gatun Locks which consisted of 3 locks that lifted the ship up 85ft to Gatun Lake, a freshwater lake created when the canal was built in the 1900's. Once we were on the lake, Swim Call was ordered for all hands which was a nice break from all the salt that had accumulated over the past weeks.

At the western end of the lake, we entered 3 locks to take us back down 85ft to the Pacific Ocean where we docked at Rodman Naval Base to take on fuel and supplies and to grant Liberty in Balboa before heading south to New Zealand.

You can imagine the crew's surprise when on 14 November we learned that we were being mustered to witness another change of command ceremony. It had only been a mere 18 days since we had left Boston and now CDR Bernard Fold was being relieved by CDR Griffith Conrad Evans, Jr., a seasoned ice water sailor. It was rumored that CDR Fold had made it clear that he wouldn't go to the Antarctic with this ship and crew so he was replaced by CDR Evans.

In the months to follow, it became quite clear that putting Captain Evans onboard as our skipper was a lifesaving move on the Navy's part. It was his experience that saved the ship and crew from a severe Antarctic storm.

While the crew was enjoying a protracted liberty in Panama, a call went out for volunteers to donate blood to aid a Panamanian mother who was hemorrhaging following childbirth. When the call reached the ship about 3 dozen sailors loaded a bus and went to the hospital to give blood. Ample blood was donated to aid the mother and provide a supply to accident victims that were injured in a recent bridge collapse.

Just before sunset, 22 November, as the ship crossed the Equator, Davy Jones slid in through the port hawse pipe, hailed the O.O.D and said he had a message for the captain.

When the Captain went forward, he was informed that King Neptune Rex had heard that a ship full of slimy, crawly "Polliwogs" was heading into his domain. That on the 'morrow he and his royal party would board the EDISTO to investigate. In the meanwhile, all "polliwogs" were to wear their shirts reversed until further orders and follow the Plan of the Day.

The very next day we were invaded by King Neptune Rex and his Krewe and despite the extended liberty in Balboa, Edisto sailors were enamored by the comely maidens if only one could ignore the hairy legs.



King Neptune Rex

All along the Shellbacks had been preparing for this crossing and the arrival of King Neptune Rex by making shillelaghs out of canvas stuffed with cotton or other material. This bat-like device was to inflict punishment when a Polliwog ran the gauntlet that was one of the obstacles where Shellbacks formed a corridor in which Polliwogs had to run through.

The idea was that when hit with the shillelaghs it would be felt but they were not hard enough to break bones or leave lasting scars. There might be a few bruises, however.

But first, I should mention that a Polliwog was prepared for this initiation before meeting the King by “beautifying” him. What this really meant is the Royal Barber was going to cut all your hair off. Then you had to crawl through this chute full of a rancid concoction that smelled like shit and felt like it when you crawled through the tube. The tub full of warm water at the end was a blessing – if you got in first.



Royal Baby

Only the mess cooks could tell you what some of it was or how long it had been fermenting in the reefers. This concoction not only stunk but it soaked into our pores so that it took a lot of scrubbing and sometime days passed before we could get it out of your nostrils.

Friendly advice to any future Polliwog that might cross the line is to make sure you go through the chute first or as near to the front of the line as possible. That way you hope to avoid the puke of any guys ahead of you. I suppose I should say any persons ahead of you now that both males and females are onboard ships. Surely, there must be some adjustments to accommodate the other sex and now there may be real maidens.

When you have endured all the obstacles, you are next given some Royal Jelly, which is the nastiest long-lasting taste of pure garbage that you will likely experience in a lifetime. Then you are required to kiss the Royal Baby’s belly which also has its rewards. Nasty stuff.

Finally, we were hauled or crawled to the feet of King Neptune Rex who bestowed the title of Trusty Shellback upon us and from that moment on, be it known to all sailors, landlubbers and the like, that we are a member of the Royal Domain of King Neptune Rex.

For me that served me well because I was to make another trip to New Zealand and to the Antarctic and McMurdo on the USS Glacier, not as a Polliwog but as a Shellback. I think it was more fun as a Polliwog than as a Shellback.

Mid-December we arrived in Port Lyttelton, New Zealand which gave us about ten days of liberty in Christchurch, a sleepy little town on the southern island. The Heathcote River flows slowly through the city with its banks adorned by parklike settings all along the river, making it one of the most picturesque rivers in the world.

No doubt the city has grown considerably since that time but in those days, Christchurch was deemed to be slow and easy, Wellington on the North Island was considered to be a faster pace and Auckland was much faster and was even described as being more like an American city. I think that was because the city had grown much larger and had many of the same problems as an American city that size.

While most of my liberty was in Christchurch, I did get a chance to visit Wellington more than once. The first was a dry dock visit by the icebreaker USS Glacier to have broken screws replaced and the second time was to accompany a Chief Corpsman to visit his friends by taking an overnight ferry from Port Lyttelton to Wellington.

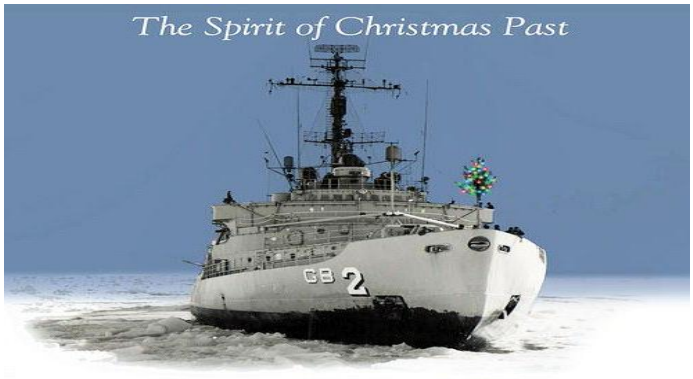
Christchurch was only a short train ride through the mountain that separates Port Lyttelton and Christchurch. If not the train, then it was a matter of catching a taxi and going up and over the mountain which took much longer to get to town.

The "white hats" quickly learned the language of the locals and sought out the pubs. They soon learned that the pubs closed at 1800 (6 pm) but like the old "speak easy's," a knock on the door or a walk around to the back entrance would result in admittance, especially if you were a Yank and in uniform.

If going to a hotel bar to drink, it was best to go early before they closed their doors because afterwards, they would move the bar to the back of the hotel. If you were inside when that happened, they would permit you to stay as if you were a guest. I'm sure the Bobbies knew what was going on but I don't recall a sailor ever being harassed for an after-hour drink. I discovered a small pub that didn't have much more than a dirt floor – or it was just a dirty floor – and a really nice quality dart board. The beer was not what we were accustomed to in the USA but it was cheap and it was luke-warm.

The patrons were friendly however, especially if I was buying the beer. There were only men in the pub and one Yank. Me. Soon I was beginning to like the warm beer and the darts but I was losing the latter. The loser had to buy the other players a round of beer which was basically everyone in the pub including the bar keeper. Fortunately, the beer cost only a few cents a glass so I could afford to lose without doing much damage to my wallet, only to my ego.

After loading 64.4 tons of cargo, we set sail for the Antarctic and I carried with me a genuine horsehair dart board and about a gross of darts. Almost every day I practiced. I practiced throwing darts when the ship was rolling and when we got into the ice where the bow bumps a bergy bit or rides up on the ice shelf, I still threw the darts and became quite good. I was ready for the pub, but we were still in the ice so beer and darts had to wait.



Icebreaker USS Edisto AGB-2

We arrived in McMurdo about mid-December and spent Christmas and New Year's assisting the USCGC Eastwind and the USS Glacier (AGB-4) in mooring cargo ships and maintaining a clear ice channel. Throughout January 1961, we provided escort to USNS Alatna (AOG-81) to McMurdo, USNS Private John R. Towle (AK-240) and then rendezvoused with New Zealand's HMNZS Endeavour and transferred more than 13,000 gallons of fuel along with 9,125 gallons of water.

We later rendezvoused with USNS Greenville Victory (TAK-237) and escorted her to the McMurdo turning basin and held her in place until her deadmen froze in the ice. We transferred an additional 10,000 gallons of water to the Endeavour while our damage control men entered the tanker YOG-34 and de-iced the interior spaces and pumped her dry so she could be used to store fuel for McMurdo.

Then high winds caused the Greenville Victory's deadmen to pull loose from the ice breaking her from her mornings so we stood by until she could straighten and finish her unloading. The high winds continued so we towed her out to the end of the channel.

On 6 February we saw a pile of brass come aboard. The first was Commander Task Force 43 who presented our Captain Evans with a commendation for Deep Freeze 60 for his work as skipper of the USS Burton Island (AGB-1). Then CDR Thurman came aboard with his staff and off we went to Little America V arriving on 8 February 1961 and saw that the ice shelf was 60ft high and badly crevassed. The more solid ice was even higher. It was decided that blasting a ramp to shipboard level was out of the question.

The ship's helicopters flew those of us in the working party to the top of the berg where Little America V was encapsuled under several feet of ice and snow. A passageway was excavated to allow entrance to the camp and the real work commenced. Sailors began loading bedding and other material the Commodore wanted us to carry to McMurdo while the cooks fired up large ranges and began thawing beer and food stuff to make Antarctic goulash.

While this work was going on down under, my job was outside manning the radio communications to the helicopter. It required me to be out on the ice when the helicopter was landing but afterwards, I could go into the camp where it was warm and maybe even have a beer. However, as good as it was, it turned out to be not so good of an idea because my facemask allowed the moisture from the beer to freeze on my mustache.

As the day wore on, flights became fewer and the time to make the roundtrip to the ship and back were increasing longer as the crew were having to de-ice the Helo's blades each time it landed on the ship. As the day progressed, so did the weather until we began to experience near whiteout conditions. This caused even further delays in the roundtrips the Helo was making and it was taking fewer crew members each time until it eventually limited the load to the pilot and two sailors.

I found some comfort by waiting in a halftrack which shielded me from the wind that was beginning to rise with the whiteout. My lifeline was the radio and I felt that as long as I had it, I was okay. After what seemed an eternity, the Helo returned, I climbed onboard to join the pilot. Only two of us were flying in this big old helicopter that was called a Horse. An image I will not forget is when we fell off the top of the berg into nothing but white stuff, it was scary. Then as we got lower in altitude and visibility improved slightly, a small spot could be seen on the water. What a relief. It was the USS Edisto. As soon as I got inside where it was warm, I ripped off my parka and foul weather clothes and removed my facemask. Ouch! After hours of exposure to freezing temperatures, I came very close to getting frostbite to my upper lip.

After three days of work, using helicopters to fly cargo from Little America to the ship, 15 tons of beds, mattresses, tools and other equipment, including 2 cargo sleds, were brought onboard and taken to McMurdo. There, CDR Thurman and his staff left the ship and we pumped another 5,140 gallons of water to Endeavour before she departed McMurdo.

On 19 February, high winds broke the YOG-34 from its moorings, so we took her in tow. Edisto used her two small craft in an attempt to return the YOG to Hut Point but winds were preventing the smaller craft from positioning the tanker so she had to be returned by Edisto.

While tending to USS Arneb as she unloaded her cargo, Edisto was taking soundings and bottom samples of Moubray Bay and providing technical assistance to Hallet Station for repair of their evaporator and reefer. Finally, high winds and surf caused us to pull alongside the USS Arneb and offload 500 drums of fuel for the helicopters to transfer to the Hallet Station.

The USS Eastwind showed up and in a couple days of flying, the fuel was transferred to the Hallet Station. Before the job was complete, more than 7 tons of frozen and dry goods were flown over and we transferred 3,200 gallons of water to the station. Our job was done. We were released from Antarctic duty and it was time to go home. We arrived back in Port Lyttelton on 17 March 1961 for some R&R before heading back to Boston.

After a few short days of liberty in Christchurch, all hands were mustered and preparations made to get underway again. Once more we were bound for the ice despite winter closing in down under. It was unusual to go back into the ice this late in the winter so we were all wondering what was so important to take us back down to the ice and were told that the YOG-34 had broken loose from its moorings and we were to tow it back to McMurdo. This was second time the YOG had broken loose from its anchors so Edisto was dispatched to replace sister ship USS Staten Island (AG-5) which had run into difficulties that required her to return to Port Lyttelton.

The concern was the storm that battered the Staten Island had caused the tanker to break loose from its moorings. The YOG-34 was carrying 200,000 gallons of fuel presenting a hazard to the shipping lanes. Our mission was to capture or sink it. It sounded simple enough. After all the ship did have a UDT unit who were explosives experts and there was enough TNT onboard to blow up Mount Erebus and for added firepower we had a five-inch gun and twin 40MM guns mounted on port and starboard wings. Surely, we could blow her up if unable to get her in tow.

No US Naval ship had ever entered the ice so late in the Antarctic season. As Edisto headed south, we hit some extremely heavy winds and rough seas and the winds were causing some severe icing conditions on the superstructure. The ice began forming popcorn balls on the long wire antennas and was beginning to cover the radio whip antennas and as the ship went further south, the more severe the weather causing the ice to build up all over the top of the ship. Radar antennas failed to turn and the tall aluminum whips were loading up with ice threatening the glass insulators to break.

On 25 March, EDISTO encountered 45 knot winds and green water over the bow that was freezing quickly as it landed on the superstructure and by March 30th the winds averaged 60 knots with gusting to 90. Steep swells 60 feet high added to the icing conditions. All exposed surfaces forward had at least 4 feet of ice cover while cavities, such as behind wind screens, had more than 6 feet. The area from the 5-inch mount to the top of the pilot house was a bumpy slope entirely filled with ice. All of the pilot house windows were covered with ice making it necessary to continually dig out the pilot house windows for the only vision possible. The ship's Navigator used NAVSHIPS Cold Weather Handbook to calculate that more than 650-700 tons of ice had accumulated on this 6000-ton vessel.

The ice was making the Edisto stiff and sluggish and seriously unstable. Handling was becoming difficult and steering slow and sometimes dangerously unresponsive. Then the storm increased strength and damage to the ship began. Popcorn ice adorned all upright rigging and wires making it easier to break them in the high winds.

The forestay parted, the forward antenna mast was broken, the air search radar antenna snapped, all of the installed helicopter blades were cracked, 4 pilot house windows were cracked, the forward starboard lifeline was carried away and 5 wire and whip antennas were snapped.

Six days later, 31 March, the winds moderated to 40 knots and the crew began deicing procedures, but stormy high seas still raged with Edisto experiencing 56-degree rolls. Suddenly she lost her starboard propeller assembly.

Unable to establish communications with the outside world and no rescue possible, it was a grave situation for the ship and crew. After a day or two of working between rolls, by 3 April the crew was able to remove some of the ice and attempted to restore a couple radio antennas.

Eventually we were able to get one radio antenna working that allowed the Edisto to contact New Zealand. In the meantime, the Navigator was able to get outside to use the sextant to determine our location. We were within 58 miles of Cape Hallet but the storm prevented us from going any further south. An air search failed to find any signs of the YOG so it was assumed it sank and the Edisto limped its way back to New Zealand and safety.

In addition to the locals turning out to greet the Edisto, we were welcomed by Derry's Brass Band playing marches, nautical tunes and popular numbers. Rear Admiral Tyree, Commander of the Navy's Antarctic support force was the first man to come aboard. He was greeted by Edisto's Skipper, Commander G.C. Evans.

After a week of well-earned and well-savored rest and recreation in Lyttelton, we departed on 17 April 1961 for Pearl Harbor. With one screw missing and the other shaft bent, it was a long thump thump ride to Hawaii arriving on 29 April 1961. soon entering dry dock in Pearl where all storm damage was repaired and the missing screw replaced. This was the first time the for the ship and for most of the crew to visit the Hawaiian Islands. Oahu was beautiful and was everything that we had seen or read about Hawaii. It was quite a contrast from what we had just been through with Edisto sitting in drydock and not rolling and there wasn't any ice to be seen anywhere.



Dry Dock at Pearl Harbor

This visit enabled me to see Diamond Head and the beautiful Oahu beach and I even managed to visit the Waikiki Beachcomber and catch legendary Don Ho's show and his famous song, *Tiny Bubbles.* I'm glad I didn't have to pay.

With essential repairs made to the radio and radar equipment, we were back in the water 23 May and on our way to Panama and the Canal.

We arrived 6 June in Balboa for a couple days of liberty and then on to Mayport, Florida arriving 13 June. We offloaded our helicopters and took on some brass who conducted an administrative inspection while on our way to Norfolk, Virginia. On 17 June 1961, the Edisto was back at her berth in South Boston.

Edisto's itinerary since leaving Boston and returning 17 June 1961

28 Oct 60 Departed Boston

05 Nov 60 Panama Canal

21 Nov 60 Crossed Equator

09 Dec 60 International Date Line

13 - 19 Dec 60 Port Lyttelton, NZ

25 Dec 60 Crossed the Antarctic Circle

29 Dec - 06 Feb 61 McMurdo Sound, Antarctica

08 -11 Feb 61 Little America

12 Feb - 11 Mar 61 Hallet Station

28 Mar 61 Ross Sea Area

09 - 17 Apr 61 Port Lyttelton, NZ

30 Apr - 23 May 61 Pearl Harbor, HI

08 Jun 61 Transit Panama Canal

13 - 13 Jun 61 Mayport, Florida

15 Jun 61 to 15 Jun 61 Norfolk, VA

17 Jun 1961 Arrive Boston, MA

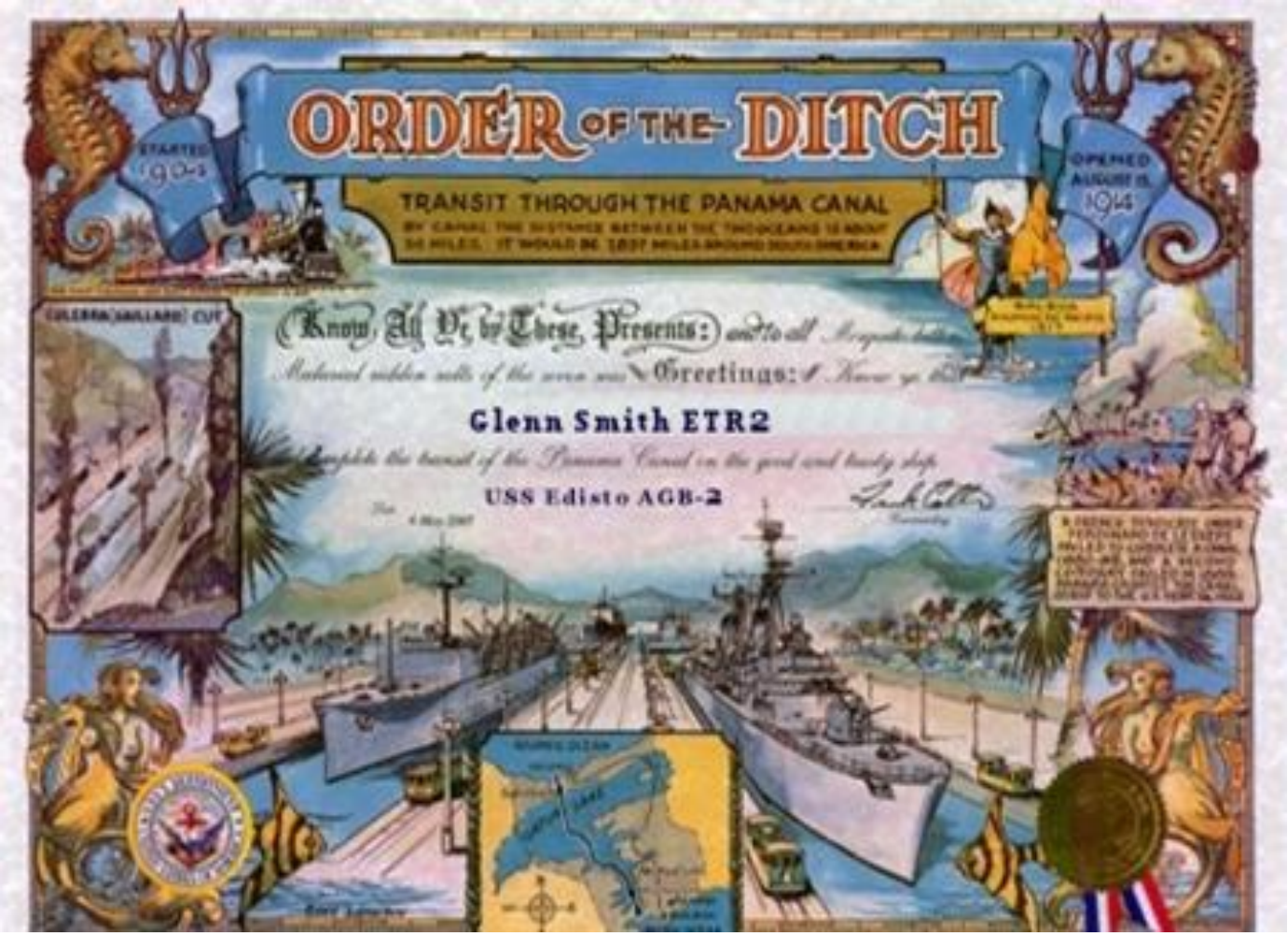


Service Medals & Ribbons

The Edisto pulled into a South Boston pier where it was met by a large crowd of wives, girlfriends, journalists and Navy dignitaries to welcome the crew back to the good ole USA. It had been a harrowing near death experience. At long last, after a long journey to the end of the earth, Edisto is safely tied up in her home port in South Boston Harbor.

The following are some of the awards and commendations that we received for our mission performance during Deep Freeze 61. I was awarded the Order of the Ditch four times after going through the Panama Canal twice on the USS Edisto and twice on the USS Glacier.

The first transit was on the Edisto on our way to Antarctic in 1960 and returning in 1961. The next Canal transit was on the Glacier going to the Antarctic in 1962 and returning to the states and our home port of Boston in 1963.



Ancient Order of the Deep

NEWS RELEASE

ADMINISTRATIVE RFMARKS
SHIP OR STATION USS EDISTO (AGB-2) at Boston

The following message received from CTU 43.1.1 is quoted below for inclusion in your service record.

CTU 43.1.1 MSG 112150Z of March 1961: Upon your departure from the Ross Sea Area, I wish to say well done to a fine crew and a fine ship. Your services were invaluable to operations in Antarctica. I particularly want to thank you for the good show at Little America Station, for recovering the YOG and the vertical assault and back door approach which contributed so greatly in the success of the battle of HALLETT. Sorry we had to keep you in the area so long. Your hospitality is without equal.

RADM D. M. TYRE

NEWS RELEASE

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

DIRECTORATE FOR NEWS SERVICES
Washington 25, D.C.

SERVICE JOURNALS April 10, 1961 N-78-61

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand, April 10 (DELAYED) after nearly a week of battling violent Antarctic storms, the Navy icebreaker USS EDISTO returned to Port Lyttelton, New Zealand on Sunday afternoon.

The EDISTO experienced a week of 40 to 60 foot seas and winds up to 90 knots. The EDISTO's commanding officer, Commander G. C. Evans, Jr., USN, said that the seas and winds were worse than any typhoon he had ever experienced. He likened his position to being in a street of towering buildings, all of which "were falling down on us."

After six days of battling the storms, the EDISTO lost her starboard propeller. Because of the lost propeller, Rear Admiral David M. Tyree, USN, Commander of Operation DEEP FREEZE, ordered the battered ship to return to New Zealand, and abandon her mission to recover a fuel storage tanker adrift in McMurdo Sound. The tanker was loaded with 200,000 gallons of aviation gasoline.

The seas smashing over EDISTO covered her with ice that in places was over six feet thick. It is estimated that her load of ice weighed over a 1,000 tons. The weight of the ice carried away a radio antenna and some of the rigging.

EDISTO will remain in New Zealand for a week of rest and repair and then will go on to Hawaii for major repairs and replacement of her propeller.

End of Message

NEWS RELEASE

ADMINISTRATIVE RFMARKS
SHIP OR STATION USS EDISTO (AGB-2) at Boston

The following MSG received from CTF 43 is quoted below for inclusion in your service record:

CTF 43 MSG 080104Z of April 1961: Congratulations upon completion of your successful penetration of Antarctic Circle and Ross Sea and your valiant attempt to recover the derelict storage tanker YOG 34 subsequent to the normal operating season on the frozen continent. Except for drifting (Aurora) do not know of any ship operating this area as late as this. While encountering heavy seas with winds reaching up to 90 knots and with extreme topside damage from icing, you pushed forward in your endeavor, only after the adverse elements of nature proved too great a risk to life and ship did you reluctantly head north. Your contribution to science by gaining firsthand knowledge of late March and early April conditions while operating in Ross Sea in itself is a major achievement. Well done on your gallant efforts carried out in the highest traditions of the Navy.

RADM D. M. TYREE



Domain of the Golden Dragon

22 November 1960:

This is to certify that Glenn D. Smith has been gathered into our fold and duly initiated as a TRUSTY SHELLBACK having crossed the Equator and invaded my realm while serving aboard the U.S.S. Edisto (AGB-2) on this date at Longitude 86.45W.

A. Rachap LTJG USN

Asst. Personnel Officer

By direction of Commanding Officer

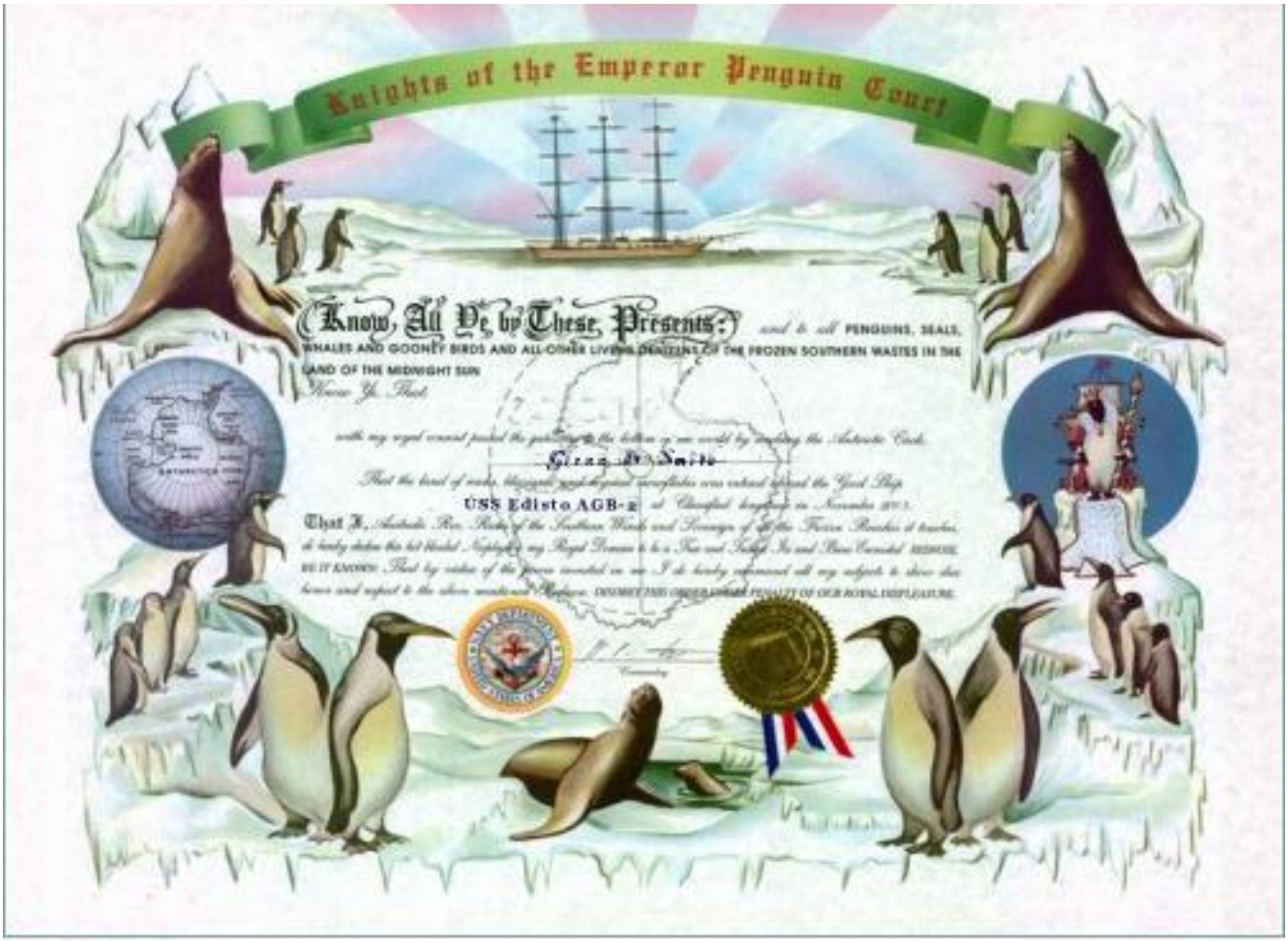
SACRED ORDER OF THE GOLDEN DRAGON

9 December 1960: This is to certify that Glenn D. Smith has been duly inducted into the Silent Mysteries of the Far East, having crossed the 180th Meridian while serving onboard the U.S.S. Edisto (AGB-2) this date and is a member of the Sacred Order of the Golden Dragon.

Rachap LTJG USN

Asst. Personnel Officer

By direction of Commanding Officer



Ancient Order of the Penguin Court

ROYAL ORDER OF THE PENGUIN – RULER OF ANTARCTICA

25 December 1960: This is to certify that Glenn D. Smith has duly inducted into the Royal Order of the Penguin, Ruler of the Antarctica having crossed the Antarctic Circle this date while serving onboard the U.S.S. Edisto (AGB-2).

A. Rachap LTJG USN

Asst. Personnel Officer

By direction of Commanding Officer

It's unfortunate that over the years with all the relocations, all but one of the beautiful certificates have been lost. I suppose I could have them replaced but then I wouldn't know what to do with them. I have very little room to hang photos or display certificates so it is best that I save my money.

CHAPTER 21 – 1961 USS EDISTO ARCTIC CRUISES ’61 & ‘62

After a short recuperation period and repairs to the ship, we were back at sea again leaving Boston on 25 July 61 headed for Argentia, Newfoundland for SUNEC 1961. We were to rendezvous a couple days later with the USS Atka. After meeting the Atka, we proceeded on to Argentia where we stayed only briefly before sailing to Kulusuk, Greenland to pick up UDT Bravo.

On 3 August we rendezvoused with the USNS Greenville Victory and escorted her into Kulusuk Harbor. A couple days later civilians from the U.S. Hydrographic Office came aboard to conduct oceanographic operations on the East and West coasts of Greenland. Again, one of our primary missions was to perform BT drops throughout the Arctic waters.

The month was devoted to providing escort service to the USNS Greenville Victory, USNS Redbud and the USNS Chattahoochee in and out of the Kulusuk Harbor. Near the end of August, the three ships were escorted out of the Kulusuk Harbor and the weather conditions turned nasty so we sought refuge in Scoresby Sound.

This quite time was used to hold an initiation into the Royal Order of the Bluenose. There were 100 Red Noses transformed into the royal domain of the Blue Noses. Having experienced an initiation last year crossing the Arctic Circle, I enjoyed the privileges of a Blue Nose. Any sailor initiated into the domain of the Royal Order of the Blue Nose will testify to freezing temperature of the ice water they had to crawl through. It is also the first time they get to smell or taste the Royal Jelly and kiss the Royal Baby. Yuk!

After the Oceanographers took some BTs, I was dispatched by helicopter on 15 September to Cruncher Island which sits at the mouth of the Davis Straights that takes you into Sondrestrom, Greenland. I was sent to repair an unmanned radio beacon used for navigation. It didn’t take long to determine the cause and get one-half of the system working so I rewarded myself by stretching out on the Lichens and getting some sun before calling for a ride back to the ship.

We departed Thule 24 September 1961 and headed south to the U.S.A. via the Belle Isle Straits and arrived in Boston on 7 October where we enjoyed almost a month of rest and relaxation before getting underway again. This time we sailed to Norfolk for an administrative inspection by COMSERVRON FOUR and to receive some work from the tender USS Vulcan (AR-5).

Before returning back to Boston, I was able to use that short time in Norfolk to visit my cousin Sylvia, one of Aunt Myrtle’s daughters who was now grown and working as a nurse at a Norfolk hospital. I had not seen her since we were kids during our visit to North Carolina in 1947. She was a few years younger than me and was the love of Uncle Jesse’s life. Wherever he went, so did Sylvia.

I recall that during our visit to his farm he took me and young Sylvia into town in his old Model A Coupe. It seems the car’s transmission would not stay in 3rd gear and to prevent it from jumping out of gear he used a piece of wood cut to the correct length with a notch in it so that after shifting to third gear he would prop the board between the gear shift and the dash. He had taught young Sylvia to insert the board after he had shifted into high gear. Genius!

We spent Christmas and New Year’s in our home port of Boston waiting for access to a shipyard so that Edisto would get her bi-annual overhaul in preparations for another trip to the Antarctic for Operation Deep Freeze 63. After the overhaul Edisto was destined to make one more trip to the Arctic. We went north in support of SUNEC 62, the annual resupply to Thule Greenland. Performing BTs and providing escort and rescue services to the maritime fleet were becoming a routine duty for our crew. These annual missions were critical so supplies could be delivered to those regions.

Liberty in Thule took a couple exciting twists this time. The first was when the USAF Base Commander demanded that any sailor that left the ship for liberty must be clean shaven. No beards. That pissed off a lot of sailors including our Skipper and the XO. As a result, about half of our crew did in fact shave off their beards and the other half chose to remain onboard and save their money.

The next event was when I got thrown out of the Top of the World Club and my membership was revoked. I was told that I shouldn't bother to rejoin. Whoop ta Do. I wasn't broken up about it because I was pretty sure that this would be my last trip to the Arctic and especially Thule. It was an accident. A sailor walking behind my chair kicked a power cord that was being used to power an amplifier for an All-Girls band. Of course, they were right in the middle of a song so it was a room full of Boos. Even a little finger pointing in my direction but the power was restored and civility returned to the club.

Then it happened again. No one was walking by nor did I hit it with my chair or knock it out of the socket but I got blamed for it. I think what may have happened is when the sailor that tripped on it the first time and plugged the cord back in, it wasn't seated all the way and any vibration around it caused it to lose the connection. Because the outlet was right behind me, I got the blame.

Another unexpected event is when I was the duty Petty Office on a morning watch when our ship's barber came up on deck with his duffle bag. He was returning to the states. I was surprised that he was leaving from Thule and I made the smart remark, "It goes to show, it's not who you know but who you blow." He grinned and walked off the deck to catch the bus for a ride to the airfield. I found out later that he and another sailor had been caught in the same rack. Muzzygeezy.

One final thing that proved to be more than a ride in a truck to the airfield was when a member of the UDT asked me to join him on quick run to an ammo dump. Sure, I'll go and jumped into the bed of the truck with him while two other UDT members were up front. We drove up the runway to a bunker type facility and hauled out a bunch of hoses with metal caps.

When we got back in the truck and were sitting on these things, I asked him what they were and he told me they were explosives. Hmm. I asked him if it was safe to sit on these things bouncing and vibrating like they were. He said not to worry; they are set off by transmitting an electronic frequency and just as he uttered those words, a shadow covered us as a small airplane flew overhead coming in for a landing on the air strip.

Over the noise of the plane, I asked, "What about the radio frequency from the plane?" He replied, "Nah, I don't think so." Yes, there isn't any need to ask, it was tight. Anyway, the plane rode up over us and down on the runway and we got the hell off as quickly as we could but it was unlikely there were any more planes landing.

Upon return to Boston, I summed up my third Arctic cruise as a very successful one. Now that the year 1962 was nearing an end, I didn't have many months left on my enlistment, I was looking forward to shore duty where I expected to relax and milk the last few months of my Navy life.

Oh boy, was I wrong! It had now been almost two years since Rulee and I had seen one another. I don't know if she had found other interest or not, only that she needed money and by now I had accumulated almost a month of leave time so I planned a trip to Homestead. There was a Navy plane headed to Norfolk, Virginia and I was told that it would be easy to catch a military flight out of there that would take me south. We could use military flights at no cost by showing our ID. It helped if we were in uniform too.

The flight out of Norfolk was a passenger plane with lots of brass onboard on their way to Patrick Air Force Base in Cocoa Beach, Florida. On this particular flight the plane was carrying a Captain or Admiral and his staff along with me and a Chief.

The seats in this passenger aircraft faced the tail of the plane so we couldn't see who the brass might be or what rank he was. What was obvious is that all of the men on the plane were officers but for me and the Chief. Once we reached our cruising altitude the steward made fresh coffee and handed it out to the officers before serving me and the Chief who were sitting in the seats close to the cockpit.

Suddenly the plane hit turbulence and I noticed the Chief setting his coffee on the floor between us so I followed suit. I soon learned why because the next big sudden drop of the aircraft saw coffee going to the roof before descending down on those khaki uniforms. The Chief and I received nary a drop and when the plane settled down again, we finished our coffee. It's probably a good thing that the officer's back was to us so they couldn't see the smiles on our faces.

We landed at PAFB about 3AM and I was offered a ride to the main gate at A1A. The staff car was going north and I was going south so they sat me out on the highway and drove off. Once I could no longer see their taillights, it was dark. I mean really dark. No Street lights, no moonlight and no car lights. I sat down on my sea bag and lit a cigarette and began to wonder how long I might have to wait for a fisherman or surfer going south that might be inclined to pick up a sailor in uniform.

After about an hour or two of sitting and listening to the Atlantic surf hitting the beach and waiting without a single car going south, I saw the glint of what looked like headlights coming my way. When the car stopped in front of me, the first thought was that it was a gay guy looking to pick up a sailor. Even so, I really wanted to get off A1A and get somewhere that I might get a ride to Homestead.

As it turned out, this guy was a soldier just returning from active duty and was on his way to Miami. He said he had made a wrong turn off US-1 onto A1A and was now trying to get back to US-1. Of course, I-95 did not exist then.

We learned more about each other's plight and it turns out that he was a Dade County Sheriff's deputy who had been urged by fellow deputies to join the National Guard so that he might not be drafted to fight in Vietnam. Soon after he enlisted, his unit was called up for active duty. I gave him a short story of my Navy experience on an icebreaker and kept him awake for the drive to Miami.

It was early morning when we arrived so I had him drop me off at a Royal Castle so that I could get coffee and breakfast. I offered to buy him breakfast but he was in a hurry to get home to his family.

I had to wait for a couple hours until the buses started running but then I learned that I couldn't get one that would take me near Homestead. Now it was later in the morning and I knew Rulee or someone would be up so I called to ask if someone would give me a ride. Rulee wasn't there but her mother agreed to come and pick me up. After a half hour ride and all the greetings had been exchanged between me and Meme I asked where Rulee and Randy were and learned that she had an apartment in Miami.

That was news to me but it had been almost 2 years since she and Randy had left Boston before my first northern cruise so one might be correct to say we were a little estranged at the time. It was decided that her mother would drive me up to see Rulee and Randy who was now about 18 months old.

Upon arrival at her new address, it was becoming clear to me there was much about her life that I didn't know nor did she know much about my Navy life. For instance, I didn't know that she was not at the grove but living in an apartment in Miami and I would not have been able to find her if I hadn't gone to the grove first.

We hadn't traveled far when I noticed that we were going back to the area where I had been earlier that morning. Upon arrival her mother stayed in the car while I walked to the door and was met by Rulee who wouldn't open the door to allow me inside to see Randy. Instead, we talked through the screen and agreed that to speak further, we would meet at the Royal Castle, the same Royal Castle that I had waited a couple hours in earlier that day.

Soon we were sitting across from one another at the Royal Castle, but it didn't take long before it became clear that this meeting wasn't going to end well. I learned that she had taken a job as a dance instructor at an Arthur Murray Dance Studio and was making a new life for her and Randy and short of going AWOL there wasn't anything I could do about it. We finally ran out of words without much satisfaction for either of us, so I asked Meme to take me back to the grove.

During lunch, little was said. I had only been home one day but I was quickly beginning to see that it was a mistake. The only other thing to do was to go back to Boston.

After lunch I called the Homestead Air Force Base Operations Center and learned there was a plane going back north to Norfolk but I had to get there within the next half hour. Mr. Thieneman said he could get me there. Sure enough he drove his Volkswagen as fast as it would go to the airbase where I was told that I had to get a parachute before getting on the plane and was given directions where to pick it up. It was beginning to look like I wasn't going to make that plane.

When I ran inside, I guess the Sargent had been warned because he had a parachute pack sitting on the counter. All I had to do was sign. I did and grabbed the bag to run out when he said, "Careful. Don't grab the D ring…" Poof! It sprang out in front of me as one would expect from a parachute. Embarrassed, I quickly gathered it all up and carried it back to the Sargent and asked him for another just like it. To clarify, I said I wanted one that works as good as that one. He didn't seem very happy.

Next, we were back in the Operations building where I said goodbye to Mr. "T" and hopped on a jeep to be taken to the runway where a C-119 was already warmed up and ready to take off. As soon as we rolled up to the open door where the Flight Sargent stood, he grabbed my sea bag and pulled me in after it and I hadn't settled in my seat and buckled up before the plane started rolling down the runway.

I sat alone in a web seat in this big old wide empty box car with the vibration increasing such that it was literally teeth jarring but when we reached altitude, things smoothed out a bit but still not a pleasant ride.

I was trying to get settled when the Master Sargent climbed down out of the cockpit and motioned for me to come forward where I was ushered into the cockpit to sit in the Flight Engineer seat. Once I had been given a headset so I could hear what was being said and could communicate with the crew, the ride was so much nicer. Quiet compared to the empty rear of the plane and the view was spectacular.

After being interrogated I gave them just the highlights of my trip and the captain offered to let me fly with them to points west and eventually back to Norfolk. The entire crew was very nice and was basically offering me a ride that wouldn't cost anything but since I was a short timer I declined and returned to Boston and the ship.

A "Short-Timer," is a sailor that has only a few months or days remaining on their enlistment signified by wearing a short chain with as many links as the sailor has left before the end of a duty assignment or discharge. Each day or month that passes, a link is cut off the chain. I was a short-timer with only a few months left of my enlistment and I was looking forward to shore duty until my discharge next April. Three or four weeks after my return to the ship, my transfer orders came in.

CHAPTER 22 – 1963 DEEP FREEZE '63

Now I was about to leave the ship that had been my home for almost three years and while I hadn't been in every nook and cranny, many times I had visited every place on the ship where there was electronic equipment.

I could only imagine where the Navy would send me to while out my last few months of duty. My last Arctic cruise resulted in a promotion to Electronic Technician Radar, Second Class Petty Officer (ETR2). It was also accompanied by transfer orders effective 12 September 1962 to the USS Glacier (AGB-4)



USS Gl

I had made a lot of good friends among my shipmates and one being a yeoman who was delivering my orders. Others volunteered to carry my sea bag, an old Navy custom reserved for good friends.

When all my stuff was loaded, I climbed in the truck with the Yeoman who still had my orders. We drove down the pier about 100 yards and stopped in front of the USS Glacier where he said he had to make a delivery. What he did was hand over my orders to the Petty Officer of the watch and then he carried my sea bag and sat it on the quarter deck.

There had to be some mistake or it is one last joke being played on me. I knew this because I was destined for shore duty to while away my last few months of Navy service. Unfortunately, it wasn't a joke nor was it a mistake. I was now assigned to the USS Glacier (AGB-4), the Navy's Flagship icebreaker. It had the largest capacity single armature DC motors ever installed on a ship and was capable of breaking ice up to 20 feet thick, and of continuous breaking of 4 feet thick ice at speeds of 3 knots. On the other hand, Edisto could break about 12 feet of ice with its reinforced double hull. The heavy bow rises up on the ice until it breaks. If not, then you repeat it until it does break.

After signing in with the Watch the first thing I did was to find out what the cutoff date was for the upcoming cruise because the Glacier was scheduled to depart soon for Operation Deep Freeze 63.

Thank goodness, I had beaten the cutoff date so I requested an audience with the Executive Officer and explained my good fortune. He said he would take it up with the Captain and get back to me.

In the meantime, I was learning that I had a large ET shop and three technicians to help maintain the electronic gear which was ample. In the short time that I had been onboard, the Chief Petty Officer of Operations, a Radioman and I had become friends so when the ship was asked to provide men for Shore Patrol (SP), he volunteered the two of us to perform that duty. Now I might suggest that this is Boston, home of the Irish cop.

Although it was a short assignment, the SP duty was one of the most interesting assignments I had in the Navy. We were assigned to a Boston cop who would normally walk a beat by himself. When we asked why he wasn't partnered up with another cop, he said they had no fear because if any citizen caused harm to a cop, he would be arrested and taken to the precinct station where he would be introduced to other Boston cops.

The Shore Patrol (SP) officer in charge was a Chief Petty Officer, a black man that was well liked by all that had worked under him. He was a straight shooter. One day while in his office a sailor in custody was sitting down waiting to be taken to a cell while the arresting SP officer was doing the paperwork. The Chief asked him if he had searched the sailor and the response was no. A look from the Chief told the sailor what he should do next and it turned out that a search of the arrested sailor produced a .45 tucked in his waistband at his back. The SP had driven him around in the patrol car without doing a proper search.

I'm sure there were hundreds of other stories that could come out of that office but one does come to mind and that is the SP officer that liked to use a sleeper hold on rowdy sailors. I understand that he had been warned several

times not to perform this hold, especially on drunken sailors because there had been some serious injuries as a result. We happened to be in the office the day the Chief was reaming this guy out.

A week went by and I didn't hear anything. Then another week ran into another. Finally on the morning of 17 September, I woke up to the sound of engines running and black smoke coming out of the stack.

Yes. You may have guessed it. Within hours the Glacier was underway heading out of Boston. By now it was clear that I would be going south on this Antarctic cruise and was expected to mentor the men in the ET shop.

After a few days at sea, we received a message that told of the death of the Shore Patrol Chief. The story had it that he was killed by his longtime girlfriend. After several years of living together she asked him if he was ever going to marry her and he said not. So, she poured a pot of scalding hot water over his head killing him instantly and stabbed him several times for good measure.



After transiting the Panama Canal we crossed the Equator and stopped long enough to initiate the Pollywogs on ship. It was an interesting initiation as I was now a Shellback. We had a group of midshipmen onboard who made it clear that they were not going to be subjected to an initiation.

What they hadn't planned on was our UDT members were all Shellbacks and saw this as a challenge so when the Middies locked themselves in their quarters where they were safe, or so they thought, the UDT busted the metal door down and went inside the compartment where the Middies had barricaded themselves.

There was a lot of grunts and groans and the end result was hogtied Middies being carried out to the mess deck. They had to lie with their hands and feet tied behind their back while we Shellbacks ate steak. Their initiation couldn't have been worse.

As a Pollywog one could expect a bad haircut and could only hope it grows fast enough to look presentable when you pull your first liberty. Otherwise, you might want to wear your hat every day while on liberty.

Which brings me to the story where one sailor managed to escape the party. In fact, he was absent the next day at muster. A full search of the ship was ordered and it was believed that every nook and cranny was explored but the sailor hadn't been found. Then one morning just after dawn someone spotted movement in the Crow's Nest which is way up near the top of the mast. A bosun climbed up the mast and found the missing sailor. The Crow's Nest is used by lookouts or by Navigators seeking a lead through the ice.

Now to be clear, this sailor was now the ONLY Pollywog on the ship because now there were over 200 Shellbacks. I might add also that he did get an initiation by some of the newly crowned shellbacks but unlike them, his records did not reflect that he ever made the crossing. Plus, his haircut was so bad that he had to shave it all off before going on liberty which made him stand out among the ship's sailors whose hair was beginning to grow back out.



The Beautiful Island of Bora Bora

After the Equator we sailed on towards New Zealand but first we stopped for R&R in Bora Bora, part of the Society Islands, French Polynesia. The best description of Bora Bora is that it was something right out of the movie South Pacific. All we needed to complete the scene was someone singing the song Bali Hai. This was the first US Navy warship (we had guns) to enter the atoll. We were met by an armada of outrigger canoes loaded with girls wearing leis and men wanting to trade carved trinkets, grass skirts, sandals and mother of pearl necklaces for cigarettes.

Several of the men and young ladies were permitted to come aboard and drape their leis around the Skipper and some of the other officers while we white hats were bartering with the small fleet of canoes for the wares being offered for cigarettes.

It cost me a whole carton ($2) of Pall Mall cigarettes to barter for a grass skirt, a pair of grass sandals, a mother of pearl necklace and beautiful outrigger canoe made of teak wood. Its dark ebony color with big white sails was a site to see. Of course, all of this was mistakenly thrown away years later and I can only hope that someone recovered this stuff.

We hadn't been there a full day before my friend the Chief Radioman came to me and said he had volunteered the two of us for shore patrol. It seems that a couple sailors had a few too many drinks and were causing a disturbance at this upscale hotel on the other end of the island. The ship's jeep was off loaded and he and I slipped on our SP armbands and off we went. The dirt road was ringed with palm trees and shone bright in the moonlight as it ran around the edge of the beautiful island of Bora Bora.

With the moon shining on the water as we drove along the edge of the lagoon to the far end of the island it was magical and when we reached the end of the road there was a beautiful hotel overlooking the ocean. It was owned Tahitian lady by the name of Marie whose husband was away in New York. She told us that she had met her husband when she was a young Tahitian dancer in a Hollywood movie. They married and he later purchased this hotel.

We discovered the hotel had several Americans staying there, two of which we met. They were two middle aged schoolteachers who had read about Bora Bora and decided to take a vacation there. It wasn't cheap. First there was the airline cost and second, each bungalow was separate from the others and the daily rates were expensive. But the ladies said the service was outstanding.

The Chief and I had only one incident and that was on the second night when driving down the road when we saw a lot of white movement in the trees near what was left of an abandoned house. We stopped to check it out and sailors started running in every direction We stepped inside the house and against a wall was a young lady with no bikini bottom and a towel full of cigarette lighters, coins, knives and who knows what else. She was a working girl.

We left Bora Bora 6 November and continued on south reaching the edge of the fast bay ice of McMurdo Sound a week later. After a few weeks of prayer and pounding thick ice breaking a channel into McMurdo Sound, we broke one of the screws and had to return to Wellington, NZ for repairs. If the truth be known, crew members that had sailed before on the USS Glacier had started their prayers to break a screw as soon as we left Port Lyttelton, NZ. Wellington had a dry dock that could make the essential repairs to the Glacier. Since they had made these repairs before, it was a homecoming for some of the crew.

One night as sailors were coming back to the ship after liberty, one of our First-Class Petty Officers staggered up to the gangway, turned and saluted the Flag and was about to step onboard when the OD stopped him because it was obvious that he was carrying something under his jumper.

The OD said, "Ray, you know you can't bring that booze aboard so I'm going to turn my back and look elsewhere for a moment." Shortly afterwards there were two big splashes and when the OD and the Messenger of the Watch turned around, Ray was gone. The crew found out later that Ray had thrown his shoes over the side and smuggled the whiskey in his jacket. There is always a way.

As the lead in the ET shop, I was responsible for the day-to-day supervision and guidance to three other technicians. I had two seamen and one third-class petty officer. All were good technicians and between us, there was nothing that we couldn't troubleshoot and repair.

While in dry dock, I decided it was a good opportunity to perform preventive maintenance on much of the equipment. One of the Techs decided to work on the IFF & SIFF gear which entailed removing the protective shroud from the antenna. A sudden burst of wind blew the shroud off the deck and into about 100 feet of water. The same Tech that was working on the IFF & SIFF was a certified diver so he was permitted to go down and retrieve the shroud, which he did. That was a close call.

One of the yeomen was a good friend and before we arrived in New Zealand, I believe it was he that started the rumor that when we arrived, I was going to be flown back to the states until discharged. It didn't happen. The next rumor was that upon arrival in McMurdo that I would be flown back to New Zealand and then to the states.

Glacier was again churning through McMurdo Sound towards McMurdo Station by 31 December 1962. There waiting for us was Mail Call. I might add here that my friend Wilson was the ship's photographer whose lab was right next to the ET shop. Since he didn't have sufficient room to store much but chemicals, I permitted him to store some of his stuff in our overhead storage bins. Well, it turns out that Wilson married a New Zealander from Christchurch and while we stopped for R&R, he would mail himself a case of scotch. It was well wrapped in plain brown paper and delivered with the other mail to the ship by helicopter.

We always had plenty of room to store the scotch in the overhead bins of the ET shop where no one ever looked. It could be hidden by the balloons the Aerologist used and the test equipment that was stored up there. In the evening between chow and movie time, two of my ETs would get their guitars out and turn lights off except for a battle lantern which they had wrapped in red cellophane making the shop take on an air of a smoky joint. Wilson would join us and the scotch was retrieved and drinks were served. It was never in excess, but just enough to enjoy the music and make it last for the duration of the cruise.

This was the Plan of the Day until one day when we were all enjoying the entertainment and a key rattled in the door. Only one other person had a key to the shop. It had to be our Electronics Officer and it was too late to do anything but get caught. Sure enough, it was him. He walked in, closed the door behind him and then turned and said, "I'll take one of those." Wilson poured him a drink and that was that. When he finished, he left without further ado. Of course, we all knew we were headed for a court martial but nothing ever came out of it. I figured that if he knew what we were doing in the evening, then someone else knew. But who? My suspicions were confirmed when the captain called me in for my shipping-over lecture.

First, he told me that he was pleased with my work and the ET shop's performance and said he would recommend me for reenlistment should I desire. Then without batting an eye, he said he wasn't going to waste his time trying to get me to ship over because I had acted like a civilian since I came aboard.

One day the Skipper summoned me and said I would be sent to aid a ship that we were escorting. I was to see if I could repair their radar so I was motored across to the cargo ship and taken aboard where I was met by the First Officer and taken to the radar room. It may have been the only time for me to see a Raytheon Pathfinder radar much less repair. After studying the manual and troubleshooting for an hour or so, I was able to discern the problem and get the unit back online. The ship's captain was pleased and said I could have anything special I wanted to eat. Dinner was excellent. A big juicy steak, a glass of beer and a Cuban cigar afterwards. Then to my surprise, he gave me what was left of the box of cigars.

While on this cruise I received a letter from Rulee in which she described a dire situation where she hadn't sufficient money to live. Since I was unable to send more money because her allotment was maxed out and I was receiving very little pay, I did the only thing I knew to do and that was to turn the letter over to our ship's chaplain. He in turn contacted the Navy Personnel Office who in turn contacted the Red Cross who in turn paid a visit to Homestead and explained that I was sending all the money the Navy would allow plus extra money out of my own pocket.

The Red Cross also noted that the situation she had described in her letter to me wasn't all that dire. Apparently, the Red Cross's visit embarrassed the family and pissed a lot of people off, one person in particular. Needless to say, the chasm between us was growing larger each day. We didn't know it at the time but the rift would eventually lead to a permanent separation.

All the months of rumors of when and how the Glacier was going to avoid extending my enlistment by sending me back to the states wasn't anything but a morale issue that the whole crew enjoyed. Instead of going to Boston, the Glacier pulled into Rhode Island, dropped me off and my discharge was processed there. Now that I was a civilian again, I caught a bus to Boston and retrieved any personal items I had left behind and then headed south.

I had two sea bags of prized possessions that I obtained in Bora Bora and New Zealand, all my clothes and certificates documenting all the circles I'd crossed at the top and bottom of the world and the International Date Line. In the meantime, I had filed for a divorce and it became effective April 22, 1963, the same day I was released from active duty from the Navy.

CHAPTER 23 – 1963 JACKSONVILLE, FL

Now that I had served my enlistment, I was now homeless, I left Boston with my worldly possessions that consisted of two sea bags and traveled to 208 North St, Elwood City, Pennsylvania to visit my sister Sue who was now a single parent with three small children: one boy and two girls. I learned upon arrival that the kids were in the care of a babysitter and Sis was working at a local cafe so I decided to go to the cafe and surprise her. It was me that got a surprise. When she came out of the kitchen holding plates in each hand, I almost didn't recognize her and was shocked to see how much she had gained. The sister I had grown up with was a tiny five feet, two-inch package that weighed a whopping 110lbs wet. Now she was almost as round as she was tall. It was a big change.

After visiting with Sue and her children, I traveled to Jacksonville, Florida where my younger brother Jerry was stationed at the Mayport Naval base, which is situated east of Jacksonville, aka "Jax." He was assigned to VP-62, a photographic squadron that primarily flew off the aircraft carrier Enterprise (CVN-65). While stationed there, Jerry married Jeannie, a girl from Jacksonville.

Although my original plan was to return to Homestead, I stopped in Jacksonville and never got started again, taking odd jobs here and there, but always looking for work that would require my electronic skills.

I took a door-to-door sales job selling Grolier Encyclopedia of Knowledge which is obsolete now with the introduction of the Internet. This turned out to be an interesting line of work though one had to be a good salesman to generate an adequate income.

To begin with, I was assigned to a crew whose leader, along with a trainer, would teach you the sales pitch they expected you to use. The rule was if you knocked on enough doors, you would make three sales pitches and sell at least one library. The sales pitch was perfected over time and was always the same. One memorable line was, "Look at it this way, I'm sure you will want to keep your library up to date and it cost less that a pack of cigarettes...only pennies a day.

One week I took my crew to Tallahassee and dropped the men off in the suburbs in what appeared to be an affluent neighborhood. I reminded them that if they knocked on enough doors and gained entry to three homes, they would sell a set of encyclopedias. I too was canvassing a neighborhood that was further on the outskirts of town as the street I was working gave way to a dirt road. That didn't bother me so much so I walked up onto the porch of an older home and knocked on the screen door. An older lady appeared and I was about to go into my spiel when she interrupted me and said she wasn't interested. About the time I was going to respond, I heard this low growl behind me and turned to see this large dog standing between me and the steps.

The old lady was still behind the screen but told me not to worry. She said he lets people get on the porch but then he doesn't want them to leave. Well, that was a fine and dandy explanation to my predicament. I said, "Does he bite?" She said only if she tells him to. So it was sort of a Mexican standoff until she finally called the dog off. It wasn't over yet cause when I walked off the porch, the dog followed and as I walked down the road back to the car, the dog paced along behind the bushes growling all the while. I was very relieved when I made it back to the safety of my car without having to fight a dog.

I quickly changed location to an area that had paved streets and much larger homes. As it happened, I walked up to the front door of this stately looking house and knocked on the door. I was greeted by an attractive elderly lady. When I introduced myself and told her of my purpose, she said apologetically that Mr. Chiles wasn't home. Mr. Chiles??? It seems that I had stumbled on the home of Senator Chiles who later would become our Florida Governor "Walking" Lawton Chiles. I thanked Mrs. Chiles and hurried back to the safety of my car where I made the decision to call in the crew.

As I drove around the neighborhood where I had dropped off members of my crew, I came across a police car and stopped to ask if they had seen any of my salesmen. Yes, he had. It turns out they all had been gathered up by the police and taken to the police station where they sat waiting or me to bail them out. Actually, there wasn't any bail, only a request from the cop in charge to take the men back to Jacksonville or anywhere out of Tallahassee. It seems that I was remiss in not obtaining a permit to conduct door to door sales. I didn't bother to find out if one permit would suffice or if we each had to obtain one. Instead, we loaded up and went back to Jacksonville.

Theoretically, as a leader, I could make more money running a crew because I would receive a commission on the sales they made, but I preferred working alone. As it happened, one of my crew excelled and moved up through the ranks from crew leader to what was called a national trainer position. He had completed his third year of college and was supposed to get married after graduation but his success at sales earned him salesman of the year and a new MG convertible and a wife. The last that I heard was he had quit school and he and his wife were vacationing in Europe.

So now I was back working alone and one day I decided to go north to Amelia Island and sell my books. The first house that I stopped at, I was met by this gentleman who I learned was an attorney. He invited me to his study where I saw nothing but bookcases with rows and rows of books. Right away I thought he likely wouldn't be interested in the books I was selling. However, I did manage to mumble my sales pitch and to my surprise, he said he would buy the library. Elated, I turned around without visiting any other houses and drove back to Jacksonville. That was my last sales trip and soon afterwards I quit the job because I couldn't afford the gas.

Since I was broke most of the time I decided to go back into shoes sales and took a job with Beck Shoes in Southgate Plaza. It was in the same location as the old Thom McAn store. Then I learned that the May Cohen store downtown was looking for an experienced shoe salesman so I hired on and worked the men's shoe department. It was here at May Cohen that I met and began dating a young lady by the name of Mary Ann who worked in the Women's department adjacent to Men's shoes. We dated for a year or so before breaking up. She was a student at Jacksonville University and I being divorced wasn't what her catholic family hoped for. So it was that I finally concluded that it was best for us to break up and go separate paths.

While at May Cohen's store, the shoe department assistant manager offered to sell me his '55 Oldsmobile convertible for a price I couldn't refuse. It was two-tone, pink and white and had beautiful upholstery inside and out. The rag top was in good condition as well. He had spent a good bit of time and money to make it look this nice. However, what he didn't fix or tell me about was when you stomped on the accelerator, the car would starve for gas. This was most likely the reason that he was selling the car and the price was very reasonable. I quickly learned that as long as I drove at a moderate speed, everything was just great.

When I first encountered this problem, I took the car to my brother Jerry's service station in Five Points to see if he might be able to help. We were looking at the engine and discussing this problem when an elderly gentleman that frequented the station said for $2, he would fix it. I gave him $5 and he departed only to return a short time later with a short piece of hose and the change from my $5. He was right. It seems the problem was caused when accelerating, this small piece of hose in the gas line collapsed restricting gas to the 4-barrel carburetor. With the new piece of hose installed, the car was a monster.

One night, as I was about to leave work I received a call from Jack, my roommate at the time, who also worked for May Cohen. He was at a bar out on Timuquana Road and needed a ride home and I agreed to go out and get him and as we were returning home and talking about our workday, we were approaching a small strip mall on the right when a car backed out across the highway then turned towards us. I was doing about 50 mph and was just reducing my speed when the car suddenly turned in front of me and hit the left front fender/headlight.

This was before seat belts, so the impact caused Jack to fly forward and hit his head on the rear-view mirror whereas my head went into the left corner post of the car. His injury was more severe but mine looked worse because of all the blood from my torn left ear. I managed to get out of the car when a young lady ran up to check on us. Soon there were police and ambulances on the scene and EMTs were tending to the driver in the car that ran into me. In the meantime, Jack was still bent over in the front floorboard.

The young lady offered me a cigarette and as we stood leaning against my car door, I saw these two headlights bearing down on us and I quickly grabbed the girl and pulled her into me. The car went whizzing by missing us both by inches and ran into two cars parked at the bar from whence the guy who hit me had just backed out of. A cop ran over and pulled this Navy Chief out of the car and asked him what the hell he was doing. There were red lights and blue lights from all the police and ambulances but the Chief was drunk and could hardly stand up. He said he was blinded by bright lights behind him but the cops looked down the road and couldn't see another car insight for miles. The Chief was arrested.

I lost a beautiful car because it was totaled. The insurance company wanted to settle right away but we had lost a few days' work and Jack suffered a concussion but he was in a hurry to get money so he could return home to Texas. I got a couple bucks from a settlement and Jack returned to Texas.

I worked for a Television Repair shop for a short time and likely would have worked longer but I quickly learned this guy was a real crook. I had a friend who owned a TV repair shop and I helped him out from time to time. After we had been friends for a year or so he finally invited me to see a secret project he was building in a back room of the shop. A spaceship. Yep. A flying saucer or something like that. I still remained his friend but didn't visit him as often because I didn't want to interfere with his work on his spaceship. I figured that if I went by there one day and the shop was closed, it meant he may have finished building his spaceship.

I continued to look for jobs in electronics and my next job was with A&M Distributors selling CB Radios, Sound Systems and T-1 Intruder Alarms, which were microwave transmitters that served as motion detectors. It was the same company that sold 8-track tape players that could be used in conjunction with the alarms or other switching devices.

Not making much money with 8-tracks, I moved to repairing radios with Dale Andrews, Inc., who had the Delco warranty repairs. I worked alongside another Tech named Jim Trucks. There were only two of us to perform bench repairs to hundreds of Delco radios that were under warranty.

There was also the occasional installation of a Reverberator which was the poor man’s stereo and the worst installation was installing the system in a land yacht called a Lincoln Continental. The delay line assembly was installed in the trunk and the radio in the dash but to install it we had to remove the entire dash and then hope that we get it back in place where every light – and there were many – lit up on the dash panel. I don't know of a single installation that didn't require the removal and re-installation multiple times to make sure that every light on the dash panel worked.

The bench work gave us plenty of time to discuss current events, explore world crisis and solve the personal problems of our friends and acquaintances but most important the bench repairs provided us the perfect opportunity to compose and polish Jim's opening for his country music band.

His introduction would go something like this: “Hi. My name is Jim Trucks. You may not know me but I'm sure you are familiar with members of my family. You know my two brothers Peter and Mack for example. Then there is my sister who many know by her nickname, “Pickup.” Of course, a song Jim liked to sing was “Mary Ann, down by the seaside sifting sand.” No matter that she and I were no longer an item.

While returning repaired radios to John Diehl Chevrolet I learned that they were hiring so I applied and was hired as a new car salesman. I only sold a couple cars but I bet I had more fun than the other salesmen. It was here that I met a young lady for the first time by the name of Kathie Oliver who was a cashier for the dealership. I seem to recall that she and I may have dated once while I was working there and that was to escort her to a Women's Garden show or something similar.

Much like the door-to-door sales job, I was also broke as a car salesman but learned that Welex Electronics was hiring technicians to work in St Augustine repairing equipment on the Navy's P5M Marlin aircraft. I was hired immediately. It was a commute from Jacksonville to St. Augustine but another man Jim Barnett hired on who lived also in Jax so he and I carpooled. At the time I had a '59 Triumph TR-3 which with its cutaway side doors was cold as a witch's tit. I guess. I've never seen a witch.

Then we learned that another employee, a somewhat older lady, lived in Jax and wanted to ride with us. I remind you that I had a Triumph TR-3. Anyway, we three began carpooling. Can you imagine three grown people stuffed into a '59 Triumph? It can be done with a shoehorn. Did I not say that I sold shoes? It was a sight to see with both Jim and I measuring up to 6 to 6-1" and I dare say the woman was a bit on the plus side but with all the weight it gave the car good traction.

Always on the lookout for something better, Jim and I noticed that Bendix had placed an ad in a Sunday newspaper in which they were hiring engineers and technicians. We both contacted Bendix and within a couple weeks Jim was called for an interview. I, on the other hand, had applied for a position at NAS Jax as an electronic laboratory technician and was called for an interview the same day Jim was hired by Bendix. As luck would have it, each were interviewed and hired about the same time except Jim went north to Maryland to work for Bendix and I went to work for NAS Jax as a civil servant in what was called the Digital Timing Section.

I went hunting the day before I was to report for work at NAS Jax and on the drive home, I had removed my boots and as I was getting out of the car, my 410ga. shotgun slipped from my hand and mashed my right big toe. Ouch! That evening, I was awakened from a sound sleep with a throbbing pain in my foot. It got so bad that I got my hunting knife and laid it on a stove burner until the tip of the blade was red hot. Aah... it is difficult to describe the relief I felt when the knife burned a hole in the toenail. Afterwards I slept like a baby.

I reported to work as required but around 11AM my fever was so high that I didn't know where I was or what I was supposed to be doing so my boss released me to go see a doctor. A nurse friend called another friend and the next thing I knew I was getting my toenail removed. What a relief. I still had the Triumph TR-3 and I don't actually recall driving from work to the doctor. I would have thought the clutch and brake work would have been difficult...but I don't remember.

There were two retired Navy Chiefs that worked in the Timing Section and they took me under their wing. I was the new guy and too skinny for their liking so they insisted that each Friday we three would go to the Chief's Club for lunch where they would buy a pitcher of beer trying to fatten me up. Retired Chief Raymond Kuzy and I became good friends and when in Jacksonville I kept in touch until his death. I think we hit it off because I had the balls to mess with an old fart in the next cubicle who would turn the radio from our country music station to a religious radio broadcaster called Dr. Carl McIntire.

He would preach that if you sent him $20, he would send you a piece of this magic rag. Allegedly this rag was where he wiped the sweat from his forehead and stuffed it in a bottle with other pieces of cloth. The sweaty rag was to impregnate the other rags and for $20 you could buy one. For $50 you could get a genuine blown up 8x10 photo of him in living color and a healing rag. What a deal.

Many years later I heard his name again when I learned that a change in the space program saw real estate prices go down and he obviously had enough rag money to buy what was once the Cape Canaveral Hilton and open it as a Bible College of some type. Evidently his religion and the sweat rags didn't sell so well here on Cape Canaveral, so Dr. McIntire closed shop and moved back to Cape May, New Jersey where it originally started.

For most of 1966 I was a Civil Service employee but all during the year I was receiving telegrams from Bendix with a request to call a number regarding employment. They started soon after I took the job at NAS Jax but I decided to commit to a year of Civil Service employment before I took any other job. I suspect my friend Jim Barnes may have had something to do with getting Bendix recruiters to send me the telegrams.

The only thing I didn't like about the job at the Cal Lab was the Time Clock. I would get there early but wasn't allowed to clock in so I would get to working and forget to clock in at the allotted time. This required my supervisor to initial my timecard to authorize the time. If I showed up a few minutes late, though not very often, he would have to do the same thing. Sometimes my timecard looked like a piece of art with all the signatures. That was the only place in my career that I had to use a time clock.

One day, to my surprise, my supervisor accompanied by a navy lieutenant came into the shop area where I worked and asked to speak with me. In a matter of minutes my head was floating in the clouds. It seems that the coach for the NAS Jax Fliers basketball team had been transferred to a new duty assignment and somehow – my resume maybe – they were asking for volunteer coaches and wanted to know if I was interested. Hell yes! As it turned out, I was selected for the job and was provided with a large greyhound type bus and driver to transport the team.

I knew basketball at the time (not today's however) but had to learn how to schedule and what teams we could play. As it worked out, we played military teams all over Florida and a couple junior colleges that agreed to put us on their schedule. One college in particular we liked playing was Bethune Cookman in Daytona Beach. They were an all-black team where our team was mostly black but with a few white players. If I recall, we played them twice with each winning a game.

About all the teams we played were military and contained both black and white players and we never gave it a thought about segregation which was still present in many southern states. Not so much in all of Florida but some hotels were the focus of segregationist, one such was in St Augustine where a hotel manager poured muriatic acid in the pool where blacks and whites were swimming. Someone took a photo of that act and it went around the world.

Mine and the team's uncomfortable event certainly left an unforgettable impression on me and the team. This was before I-95 was built and we were driving from Daytona Beach up US-1 on our way home to Jacksonville after having played Bethune Cookman. It was late so I decided we would stop that evening in Bunnell, at what is currently named the Southern Table to get a bite to eat. I can't remember if that was the name back then but it is the same restaurant. The team emptied the bus and pretty much filled the dining room and after a long wait, a lady came out finally and said they weren't going to serve us. Now *that* was discrimination.

Anyway, I remembered us passing a club that had the look of a black dance hall so I asked the driver (who was black) to turn around and take us back down to the club. Sure enough, it was a club with what appeared to be blacks only so I had the driver pull up in front of the door and the bus emptied out. Now I can't tell you what age the youngest player may have been but it didn't matter. All of us were invited to join the patrons to eat, drink and dance or just listen to the band that was playing. I'm sorry the team had to experience the bad side of Bunnell but our stop at the Club was memorable. As it happened our record for the year made the team eligible to receive an invitation to the 1966 playoffs. Unfortunately, I couldn't go because I received a job offer from Bendix in support of the new Apollo program and decided to accept. At the same time, I proposed to Kathie and we got married December 23, 1966, and drove to Maryland. The Jax Flyers beat the Marines to win the 2019 Championship in Colorado.

In the years past, when driving up US-1, Kathie and I have stopped in the restaurant a time or two on our way to Jacksonville and each time the memory of that evening comes back when the team was denied service. The old building that was once a club looks as if it still stands right near the highway and is now a parts and service company.

That was a pretty good year. I saw more of Jerry and Jeannie and dated a few girls but none in particular since I had broken up with Mary Ann some months before. Jerry and I were spending more time in the doghouse...well he was anyway.

It all started when I was to keep him busy after he closed his service station because Jeannie had a surprise birthday party planned. I agreed to help her so I took him to the Office Lounge where he preceded to celebrate his birthday a little too soon. Way too soon.

No doubt he will tell this story differently but at the time I had a VW and as we were driving home, I had to stop quickly at a Red light. Being slightly inebriated he wasn't prepared for the sudden stop and his head spidered that side of the windshield. Later on in retribution, he reached over with his foot and slammed the brakes on causing me to spider my side of the windshield. He denies it. I know he likes to tell a different story and I'm sure Jeannie has one too but I did my job and got him home in time for the party but he may have fallen asleep in the car. My memory is a little vague so I can't recall exactly what happened after we got home. I seem to remember that Jeannie was pleased that we had made it home safely and in time for the party.

But he forgets little things like the day he and I had ridden out to the beach on his motorcycle. We had a couple beers and were on our way home riding double when we had to stop at an intersection. I was flirting with a girl or girls in a car next to us when the light changed to green. He hit the gas and left me sitting in the middle of the intersection. As I fell off the seat the license plate cut a big hole in my jeans and my leg. I'm sitting there in the middle of the road stopping all lanes while he is tearing off down the highway before he decides to come back and get me.

But the interesting thing is that having flown over Mathews Bridge doing about 95 mph, it was when we slowed down and turned to go up on a ramp that the rear tire blew. The bike wobbled every which way and then threw us all over the road. No casualties here. Just two drunks.

As brothers we had a good time together. He made a deal to trade my Triumph for a 55 Chevy which we began racing at the Thunderbolt Drag Strip. We would run it one night and then spend the rest of the week trying to fix it.

The transmission was a weak link. And there was the time when he exchanged the 4-barrel for a carburetor six pack which turned out to be way too much carburetion. You could actually see gallons of gas being sucked up in the clear tubing to the carburetor. It was good that he had a service station. It didn't work as we had hoped so we went back to the 4-barrel. We never won any money but I did rack up several trophies which were lost over the years during our many moves.

Jeannie would get behind the wheel and race too. I seem to recall that she raced both the Chevy and the Buick Grand Sport that Jerry had purchased in what we called the Powder Puff matches and she did pretty well. To her credit, she drove either car fast down the track and was known to burn rubber pretty good too.

Before the Buick, they had this little Chevy Corvair in which the three of us decided to make a visit to Arkansas. The front-end was loaded with our suitcase so the headlights were basically pointing into the highway and that was before Interstate. All was good with the two wrapped up like pretzels asleep in the backseat when I came down this hill and into a curve where there was nothing but people and red and blue lights and a car off the side of the mountain and a cop standing in the middle of the road. I quickly downshifted, blew my horn and did everything I could to avoid hitting the cop and that woke the two in the back. By then we were long gone from what could have been a second accident.

Our next stop was a restaurant in the mountains that had just opened and on the radio came the song, “Dang me, they ought to take a rope and hang me” by Roger Miller. The first time we heard that song.

It wasn't long before I began dating Kathie and as we continued to see more of one another, I would often sit with the family and learn as much about them as I could. I learned that her dad Jim and I wore the same size shoes. One evening I noticed that he had a new pair of shoes that he had bought for church so just to screw with him I managed to slip them on and wear them home without him noticing. I had left my old shoes behind, and I understand there was a lot of cussing when he found out his new shoes were missing and my old tennis shoes were left behind. I doubt that he wore my shoes to church.

Late October 1966, I got another telegram wanting to set up an interview in Mobile, Alabama and I accepted. Neither I nor Jerry was confident that the Chevy would make it to Mobile and back, so Kathie and I decided to leave my car with her dad and take her little Buick instead. Besides it was easier on gas and more comfortable for a trip like that. It sounded like a good plan so off we went to Mobile for my interview with Bendix while leaving my only possession behind with her dad Jim and her brother Chuck.

Her dad and brother were going to a Halloween party or something that required them to wear a costume so when we departed Jax, the last we saw of them was Chuck was dressed like a girl and Jim driving with his tie flying out the window. I learned later that they took the Chevy to I-95 that was partially constructed at the time and ran the car through its paces. I suppose we should have expected that with Jim being a master mechanic and him and Chuck both into cars.

Kathie and I drove to Mobile where I had the interview the next day and right afterwards, we headed back to Jax that afternoon. It had been a long day and we both were a little tired until we came around a curve in which a car was blocking the highway. There were four or five young black men around the car pushing it and to this day, I don’t know how I succeeded in avoiding the car or the men. It happened so fast but one thing for sure, it scared the pee out of all of us and we two were wide awake from that moment on.

Soon after we returned to Jacksonville after the interview in Mobil, I received an offer to work as a Field Engineer for Bendix Field Engineering Corporation (BFEC) as an RF & Optics and Antenna Servo Engineer. If the job title had been any longer, I might have been able to ask for pay equivalent for two people. The job would also require that I travel to the corporate office in Owings Mills, MD, to complete processing as a new hire.

I soon learned that BFEC had won a contract with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to provide maintenance and operations support to the Manned Space Flight Network (MSFN) which consisted of tracking stations located in the US and around the world and control centers at Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC). We didn’t know it at the time but the job was to turn into a long career supporting NASA and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) spacecraft.



December 23, 1966

I accepted the position and on December 23, 1966, Katherine and I got married in the Mayfair Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL, surrounded by good friends and family. Brother Jerry was Best Man and Kathie’s best friend Audrey was her Bridesmaid. After a long day we retired to my apartment with the intent of getting up early and packing for our trip to Maryland

However, there wasn’t much sleep to be had by us newlyweds because that dang brother of mine continued to dial the rotary phone so it rang and rang. It continued to ring late into the night. It was before cell phones so the phone was hard-wired and the only way to stop the noise was to yank it out of the wall. Since it was a rental apartment, I didn’t feel it appropriate to tear the phone wiring out of the wall.

We tried leaving it off the hook but then we got that buzz to indicate that the phone was off the hook. Then we buried it in pillows but we could still hear it when it rang. We must have worn ourselves out trying to hush the phone and it had been a long day so eventually we were able to sleep and put the day behind us. Besides, we needed the rest because we were to begin a whole new life in the morning and a long trip to Maryland ahead of us.

Before departing for Maryland, I traded my ’55 Chevy for a '59 Pontiac sedan and we honeymooners loaded our worldly possessions and headed north to Owings Mills, Maryland to the home of my new employer BFEC.

On our way to Maryland, we ran into a snowstorm just south of Virginia and the further we went, the worse it got so we began looking for a motel. However, exit after exit, the motels were full until our next to last exit the owner said that he knew of a motel that had rooms and would call ahead. When we got there, we saw a line waiting to see if we were going to check in. After getting into our room, we felt bad because it had 3 or 4 beds but that feeling didn’t last long because we had a long day and were very tired.

CHAPTER 24 – 1966 GREENBELT, MD

We arrived at Owings Mills on December 30, 1966, where we began a career with BFEC. I was processed as a new hire and issued a badge along with orders to report to the Network Test and Training Facility (NTTF) located just outside the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC). Here I was introduced to the Apollo Space Flight Program and the ground network that was going to track the Apollo spacecraft. After that I was enrolled in the Antenna/Servo/RF & Optics class that prepared me for an assignment in Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain.

Having no knowledge of Greenbelt or the surrounding area we acted on someone's recommendation and rented an apartment in Landover where my commute to school was a real chore. It was still snowing and was deemed to be the worst storm that the District of Columbia and surrounding area had seen in many years. To compound things, there were so many students in the introduction class that we were split in two groups. One group went from 4am to 4pm while the other was 4pm to 4am. I was in the early morning class which meant that I would have to leave the apartment by 3am to get there by 4am if all went well. And it didn't always go well. There were times when the road graders had not yet cleared the Beltway in our area so I had to plow through it.

Then I had to turn onto the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and it was just as bad. But one does what one has to do. I must confess that the old Pontiac scraped many railings to assist the turns. Once the bumper hit the rail the car would slide around the off ramp until it was time to straighten up. This maneuver worked best going off the BW Parkway down the ramp and onto Greenbelt Road. Piece of cake.

We were still honeymooners so we adapted to the rigors of the winter and adjusted to living with one another. The commute to the early classes was a pain but the school itself was interesting and almost always amusing.

One example was our instructor. There were too many students in a class for which he was ill-prepared to teach. There was nothing that he wanted more than to tell a good joke and amuse the class but sadly, he never seemed to remember the punch line or screwed it up. Another example was a test that someone gave him that went like this but he never seemed to have grasped the joke. The question: If a plane is flying along the US and Canadian border and crashed, on what side would they bury the survivors?

Years later we had another instructor who I will call Mr. Ski. He too had difficulty telling a joke so one day he stopped a friend of mine in the hall and asked him why his class never found his jokes funny.

He was aware that Hank always had a good joke for the day and his students found them funny so he asked Hank to give him a good joke that he could tell his students. Hank says it reminds him of a joke about a guy going to prison. Before the first meal, the cellmate gave him a sheet of paper with jokes written on it but each was numbered. He was told that they couldn't talk at dinner so they memorized the numbers and would call them out. So, the newbie memorized the numbers and during the meal he stood up and called out number three! Nobody laughed. Later, one of the inmates called out number three and everyone laughed.

When they got back to their cell, the newbie asked why no one thought his joke was funny and his cellmate said, "You know, some people can tell a joke and some can't." Well Mr. Ski was about to walk away when he turned and grabbed Hank's arm and asked, "Hank, what were those numbers again?" True story.

It was in these apartments that one weekend we were probably watching football or some kind of sports when Kathie and I decided to go down to a strip mall and get some food and drinks. From the apartments we had to walk through the snow down a bank and cross a road and go down another bank to enter the parking lot of the mall. It was a slippery slide to navigate down to the store.

On our way down, about halfway we met one of the BFEC guys that I was going to school with. He was coming up the bank and had on a T-shirt, a pair of shorts, flip-flops and a case of beer on his shoulder. His name was Don Wolfe and he was getting ready for the ball game. From that moment on and for more than 59 years, Don has been in our lives. He is apt to pop in and out of this story as the years go on and now that his name is mentioned he and his wife are likely to show up before the year is over.



Don Wolfe 2024

While living in Maryland, Kathie and I used this opportunity to see as much of Washington DC and the Smithsonian Museums. The problem was so little time and so many museums. We were young and physically able to run through the floors of the museums because there was so much to see but we quickly learned that it would take days or even weeks to see all of them properly.

CHAPTER 25 – 1967 CANARY ISLANDS, SPAIN

Finally, it's Spring of 1967 and all my technical classes were finished so we returned to Florida to say goodbye to her parents before flying down to Miami to meet Rulee and Randy because we arrangements had been made for young Randy to accompany us to Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain.

From Miami we three flew Iberia Airlines to San Juan Puerto Rico and on to Las Palmas. It was a great flight with outstanding service. One thing that isn't easily forgotten is the flight service. We had Flight Attendants offering us food about every hour or so and we were given sandals to make our feet comfortable. It was truly a comfortable flight. Upon arrival we checked into the Hotel Las Palmas in downtown Las Palmas where we were met by some BFEC employees who came to welcome us to the island. Our per diem allowance lasted only so long and after a couple weeks we began looking into cheaper accommodations and discovered the Mira Louz Hotel.



1967 Canary Islands, SP

The hotel sat right on the edge of a cliff overlooking the city and the ocean and was owned by George and Minn, an English couple who had spent years in field service to the Queen. His favorite position was behind the bar serving El Tropical Especial a local beer made from bananas if I recall correctly. It isn't quite like Budweiser, but you get used to it. Of course there were other varieties such as Heineken, Tuborg and other imports. The island was an interesting place to see and learn a lot of new customs and a new language.

Randy picked the language up quickly and also liked to explore so we had to keep an eye on him. The local water was a no-no so I drank nothing but Fir Gas or El Tropical or Heineken when I could get it. Kathie on the other hand drank the local water right out of the tap since the first day we arrived on the Island. I tried to warn her. Unfortunately, it was me who was doubled up in bed with a severe bellyache while she pranced around like nothing was bothering her. As for Randy, I don't know how he was being affected because he didn't complain much but he probably drank the island's water and wasn't affected.

We continued looking for an apartment at every opportunity and discovered six new ones were being built at 5 Calle Zuloaga in Tafira Alta a few miles further up the mountain. Since we were the first to inquire, we got the first apartment as soon as it could be occupied. They were nice two-story, two-bedroom furnished apartments with a balcony and small garden in back. BFEC employees rented the remaining apartments.

One of the apartments was rented by a height challenged employee who purchased a small MG Miget that was admired by most of the residents in the area and a magnet for the young kids in the neighborhood who would often walk down to admire it. The most the kids would do is rub their hands over the top and maybe polish the hood, but they would never harm or cause damage to the car. However, this attention by the kids was way more than the height challenged owner would tolerate and would result in him running out to the car and chasing off the kids. Despite advice to the contrary, he thought the kids would do harm and he continued to run them off but there came a time when the kids no longer had any interest in the car but one day he was inspecting the car and discovered a small slit in the top. Did the kids leave a message?

Up the street a block or two was a park surrounded by a barber and butcher shop, several nice casas and a grocery owned by Miguel and Marie. Instead of going all the way downtown to the barber shop where one could get a manicure, pedicure and a razor cut, I decided to give the old guy some business at the butcher shop. The shop was a simple little two room establishment. One room had a chair sitting in the middle for cutting hair and the other had a sink and rabbits and sides of pork hanging from the ceiling.

The first thing that hits your senses is that he hasn't yet bathed for the week...or month. Next you learn there isn't any hot water to shave you with. Only cold water and there were times when you wondered if his razor had been sharpened after cutting meat. But to his credit, he was a good barber and cheap. One just had to get used to the occasional dull razor, the cold water and the smell of meat in the next room.

One evening we missed Randy about dinner time. We didn't get too concerned at first because he was generally good about returning home at that hour and usually found playing with the neighborhood kids until dinner time. But on this day, he was late, so I began looking for him.

We didn't have a car at that time so I walked to the park and around the village without finding him. Just about the time we were going to report him missing, he staggered in looking bedraggled. We learned that he had seen some men all dressed in black walking in a group, so he joined them and down the mountain they went. It turns out it was a funeral possession. It was a long walk back up the mountain that wore him out.

Near the end of summer Randy returned to the States to live with his mother so we began to look for a smaller place and found a nice penthouse apartment to rent atop the landlord's home.

One day in December Kathie happened to be buying groceries and the conversation turned to rabbits since Marie's husband was planning a hunting trip and rabbits were their quarry. When Kathie mentioned that I missed hunting that time of year, they invited me to join them.

It turns out our landlord owned the big mansion that sat alone way up above Tafira Alta at the highest point on the mountain. On the morning that we planned to hunt, he and I stopped at a Pan factory and bought a whole bag of fresh bread to take with us. When all the other hunters – about 6 men – had gathered we had breakfast and planned the day. I didn't speak much Spanish so those that could speak English translated.

Then the owner came out of the backroom with a shotgun and asked me if I could handle it. It was a JC Higgins 12ga. Of course I could. As it turned out I didn't shoot very often and may have only shot one or two rabbits because this was their day. Something they looked forward to every year.

Canary Islands are not named after Canaries but named after big dogs. There is some that think the "dogs" were actually the large seals that inhabited the islands which had dog-like heads. Much is written about the so-called dogs, but the truth is that the islands were not named after birds but after these dogs.

The dogs we were hunting over were prized animals and could cost a lot of money. They were long-limbed stream-lined much like a Greyhound and they were fast. They would chase rabbits into tunnels if they could fit and would fight to see which one could get the downed rabbit and take it to its owner no matter who shot it.

The mountain was volcanic so there were plenty of holes and tunnels. The men had a solution for that, a Ferret. It had a muzzle, but when it was turned lose in a tunnel, the mountain shook with rabbits running everywhere. When they came out, bang, one dead rabbit and the dogs went after it. At the end of the day, the hunters divided the day's kill and I took home a rabbit.

As it happened, the same storeowner Marie gave instructions to Kathie on how to cook the rabbit. To make a long story short, I made the mistake of taking the lid off the pot that had been marinating for a week or so and it damned near caused us to look for another apartment. The smell was so rancid that it would almost make you puke. But of course, a Heineken would change all that.

The story I heard, true or not, was that after the Spanish Civil War when Franko became Spain's dictator, the Count was offered any part of the island as a reward. The Count went up into the mountains, looked in all directions, then said he would take the southern end of the island which is where NASA ultimately built the first tracking station on the beach.

Just before some of us BFEC employees arrived, the Count had given NASA orders to move the tracking station, which at the time was right on the beach. There were plans to build a big development for tourists that included a golf course and we had only a few days to move everything up the hill to a new location that NASA had previously surveyed. Anything that remained would belong to the Count.



The staff at Canary Island about 1967. Standing: John Adams, Chuck Rouillier (Station Director), Tom White, Percy Montoya, Matt Harris, Ed Bender, Ed Crough. Sitting: Clay Krugman, Dick Kelly, Roger Lee, Glenn Smith, Russ Lutz. (Photograph courtesy of Gary Schulz)

NASA enlisted author Sunny Tsiao to write the story of NASA's Spaceflight Tracking and Data Network (STDN), titled "READ YOU LOUD AND CLEAR." This voice communication was the response heard around the world as Houston called each tracking station to get a radio check. In his book Sunny included the photo above in which me and other members of the CYI crew are present

At the early stages of Apollo and manned space flight, NASA created a network called the Manned Space Flight Network (MSFN) which consisted of several stations situated around the world in equatorial positions to track the spacecraft and provide commands and data to Houston Control and other NASA facilities. This network consisted of stations at Antigua (ANT), Ascension Island (ACN), Bermuda, (BDA), Canberra, (HSK), Canary Island, (CYI), Carnarvon, (CRO), Corpus Christi, and (TEX). Goldstone, (GDS), Grand Bahamas (GBM), Guam, (GWM), Guaymas, Mexico (GYM), Hawaii, (HAW), Madrid, (MAD), Merritt Island, (MIL), USNS Huntsville (HTV), USNS Mercury (MER), USNS Redstone (RED) and USNS Vanguard (VAN).

Our new CYI S-band building was just about complete so that equipment could be moved up on pickup trucks. As the Antenna Servo Engineer, I helped the Collins team with the new 9 Meter X-Y antenna installation, 110ft collimation tower and all the inside S-band RF equipment. This experience was invaluable and served me for all the subsequent years of my career.

My job was to position the antenna to the correct position on the horizon where the spacecraft was expected to ascend and then select the Auto-Track mode after acquisition of signal (AOS). The problem was that NASA had not yet refined its computer-generated predictions so we didn't accurately know where or when the spacecraft would be coming over the hill. Our first mission was Apollo 4 (Saturn V rocket, AS-501) launched 9 Nov 1967 to demonstrate the S-IVB ability to restart and to test the heat shield at re-entry speeds.

Next was Apollo 5, a 1B AS-204 Saturn rocket, launched 22 Jan 1968, the first flight of the Lunar Module (LM) and to test fire the descent engine and demonstrate the landing abort test.

As with most remote tracking stations, transportation was provided by the site. In some cases, it may have been a van driven by one of us employees and in others such as CYI, it was a fleet of station wagons driven by local Spaniards. We rode five to a vehicle and no one wanted to ride in what we called the suicide seat, the front passenger with the driver who may or may not speak or understand English. And our Spanish was so good...yeah right. Sign language was the only way to go.

There are a lot of good stories about our stay in Las Palmas and Tafira Alta but too numerous to include all of them in this story. One example is when I purchased a 1962 MGA-1600 and parked it in front of the apartment.



MGA-1600

It was a black beauty with four-on-the-floor, a beige top which we rarely put up and maroon seats. Evening after evening, I would come home and the car would still be sitting in the same place because Kathie hadn't driven a stick shift. However, one day I came home and the car was gone. Did she sell it? No, she got up the nerve that day and went visiting friends.

Now the reason I'm telling this story is because you have to imagine living in the mountains with narrow winding roads and no guard rails to prevent falling a couple thousand feet and no experience driving a 4-shift stick. But the car was gone and she was gone. She was determined to drive the manual shift and since then she has been able to drive anything we owned regardless of the transmission type. I was really relieved that day when I heard the roar of the car as it drove up in front of the house. And from that day on she has driven anything that had wheels and many years later she added the Alaska-Canadian (ALCAN) Highway to her driving record.

There is one experience with this car that I feel compelled to relate and it involved a very scary trip down the mountain from Tafira Alta to Las Palmas. As usual we had the top down and were enjoying the evening as we barreled down the mountain as fast as we could safely go when suddenly we rounded this curve and were shocked to see a jeep with a machine gun blocking the road. Standing in front of the jeep was a Guardia Civil officer holding up his hand signaling me to stop.

I slammed on the brakes and downshifted as fast as I could and did everything but drag my foot on the ground to avoid running into the man. We came to a screeching stop just a couple feet from the officer, and it was then that we noted a man above us on a rock with a machine gun pointing at us. No doubt had we hit the officer, we would have been riddled by the man above us or the one on the jeep. I was so relieved when the brakes worked well enough to stop. It would have been a good time to wet our pants, but we had shopping to do.

We learned they were looking for a prisoner who escaped the Guardia Civil when the ship made a temporary stop in Las Palmas. It seems that the island was the prisoner's home, and he wanted to visit his family before going to prison. The Guardia Civil combed the island looking for him and eventually found him visiting his family.

It was reported that only one guard was watching the prisoner because it was unthinkable that a person would attempt to escape from the Guardia Civil. But then again, it was an island so how far could he go without being captured at some point. Still, it took some nerve to walk off the ship.

The story about the MGA reminds me of a car story involving one of the engineers that had been on the island since the Mercury program. He owned an Austin Healy and only drove it when he was drunk. And he only had wrecks when he drove it. Now most of the local police knew all of us Americans but especially Russ because he had been there a good while and had wrecked his car often. So it was that it happened so often that when the police spotted his car in town, they would have it towed to his house then mail a bill to him for the towing cost. One mechanic said they had rebuilt his car so many times that they could do it blindfolded.

A typical practice at many of the overseas sites was for the site personnel to throw a “going away” party for an employee transferring out. Not long after our arrival in Canaries I was asked to attend one of these events and it was on this occasion that I got to see my first bull fight. On the other hand, I should say that I got to participate by fighting a bull - two bulls actually - but I should explain how I got in the arena to start with. Ok, to start with…I strongly suspect it was alcohol. Maybe too much vino?

I'm not real clear on how it all began other than it may have been at the bar where we had all the beer and tapas we could possibly eat and drink in one sitting. There were plenty of each to go around so it should be said that we were slightly inebriated when a small group of us found ourselves at a bull arena.

I'm still not sure how I was encouraged to get into the arena with a cape and sword but that is exactly what happened but I'm sure that my friend Clay daring me to go and maybe the group of young people that kept offering me wine from a goat skin bota had something to do with it. All one had to do was tip it up and let it rip but apparently the wine and the beer didn't mix too well. I might also add that just days before, I had purchased a new watch and I had it on at the time.

First, I was very surprised at the weight of the cape and sword because they were much heavier than they seemed when a matador is swinging them around. The cape is wrapped around the sword to make it easier to swing when the bull makes a pass.

But to my surprise and that of the crowd of people in the arena, I handled the cape well when the first bull came out and made a pass. One pass...then two and then a second bull entered the arena. I don't know how it got in and it doesn't matter because while my attention was on it, the first bull ran me over like a freight train. Both young bulls were heifers and had horns and weighed between 800-1000 lbs. Like I said, it was like getting run over by a car or train.

Fortunately, I haven't been run over by either but I sure as hell was run over by a bull. The second bull wanted a piece of me too, but I was scurrying as fast as I could towards a gate while a picador attempted to corral the bulls. This may have been a time when I was exceeding the speed that I recorded on the USS Edisto when a sailor went postal. Clay had come down from the stands and joined me as I ran into the entrance corridor, and we were both running when one of the bulls escaped before they could shut the gate behind me. Now we were in a closed corridor with a bull and a picador and his horse chasing the bull. As we ran for the stairs to go up to the street, I recall Clay hollering Stampede!

If you can imagine a set of stairs that start wide at the bottom and continue to get narrower as you get near the top, which is what these were coming out of the arena. Clay was ahead of me and as I watched him climb, I could see that he was stepping closer and closer to the edge of the stairs. Finally, he missed a step and fell with his chin hitting a step above. Blood went everywhere. A short time later he added to that by falling out of the Taxi as it wound slowly around a sharp curve. Clay decided to open the door to puke. I kid you not, he fell out. But like I said, the car was going really slow.

When we got home, I could hear Clay's wife in the apartment next door raising hell wanting to know where he had been. It was about that time that Kathie wanted to know why I smelled like cow shit. And to make matters worse, I discovered the next morning that my brand-new watch was gone. Believe it or not, the next day I was pleasantly surprised when my supervisor brought my new watch in minus the cow shit. A local Spaniard had found the watch in the arena and brought it to the site to give to me. What a wonderful deed. Since my knowledge of Spanish was limited, the only news I got was from my supervisor who was married to girl from Madrid and spoke fluent Castile as well as the Spanish dialect in Canaries. From him I learned that the crazy American bull fighter had become somewhat of a local hero. Yeah, right.

Clay wasn't through beating himself up nor was his wife. It was one of those sunny days when he and a handful of fellow employees had made a visit to a local establishment and had a few beers. The story goes that he made a misstep, tripped and fell into the cactus that made up the landscape around the club. The downhill slope was blanketed with cactus, much of which became embedded in Clay as he rolled down the hill. Once more we heard the musical voice of Clay emanating from the apartment next door as his wife Monica pulled barbs from his body.

Our transportation to and from the site along with a driver was provided by the site and there could be 4 or 5 people in a car. Peugeot station wagons were the most common. We would pile into the car after a long day of working in the sun and heat when performing the installation of the new 9M S-band system and a stop on the way home for a beer was most refreshing.

Unfortunately, too often it turned into what we called a wayward taxi because we might make too many stops along the route home. Since we mostly drank Heineken, there was a slogan, "Keep Spain Green" uttered when empty Heineken bottles were thrown into the same gully along the highway home. Believe it or not, there was so much glass in the gully that it truly was green.

It was about this time that we learned that Kathie's mother was pregnant. There were twenty plus years between Kathie and soon to be her youngest sibling. We decided that she return home to Jacksonville to assist her mother and I would transfer to NASA's tracking station in Ascension, an island in the middle of the Atlantic in order to protect our overseas Tax status.

We flew back to the states via United which took us through Madrid to New York then down to Jacksonville. There was plenty of room on the plane so that we could find us a seat, move the arm rest and get a nap. After several hours of flying, we were surprised to see two USAF jets pull up alongside the plane and fly with us for a few miles. It had all the looks of an escort as we approached New York.

When we got to the airport instead of stacking us, our plane was directed straight into the runway and then we were quickly deplaned and zipped through customs. It was rumored that we may have had a Spanish dignitary flying with us. No matter who it was, we could use more of that.

On the way to Jacksonville, we hit one of those bad east coast T-storms that tried it's damnedest to blow us out of the sky. We dropped and then bounced back up just as fast and to keep things in perspective, a Navy Chaplin and I kept the Wild Turkeys coming.

After visiting her family for a few days, Kathie and I got on another airplane and flew to Fayetteville via St Louis, MO. That was another good ride. Because we had flown so much in the past couple days, I called Frontier Airlines and decided to upgrade to First Class but was told that all Frontier Airlines were First Class. That should have been a clue because every mountain between St. Lo and Fayetteville had a runway and we stopped at each one. Sometimes they were nice runways and sometimes one would have thought we were landing on dirt roads with potholes and maybe we did but since we never got off the plane, we couldn't verify that. The currents over the mountain would cause the plane to fly sideways to the left for a while then shift and do the same for the right. Then it would drop 25-30 feet before bouncing back up to its previous altitude.

Everyone in the cabin was sick but me, Kathie and the Stewardess who was busy handing out Wild Turkey to me and barf bags to others. That flight made us reconsider our plan of flying back to Florida so we decided to drive rather than fly. It was an easy decision so we went car shopping and bought a new 1968 California Grand Sport.



1968 Buick Grand Sport

This was long before Interstate I-10 was built so the road we were on was two lanes that ran east and west and would eventually take us to Tallahassee and on to Jacksonville.

We were winging our way to Florida – actually, we were driving - when we met a lumber truck going in the opposite direction and as our two vehicles were approaching each other, about 100 yards before we met, a tie strap broke loose and a long 2X4 came hurling at us like a spear. You can imagine its speed as he was doing at least 55mph and I the same which would make it about 110 MPH. Kathie and I ducked knowing that it was going to take out our windshield and God only knows what. I can still recall what it looked like coming at us. It was if a big fluttering arrow was shot straight towards our car hitting the corner post of the windshield just in front of the driver's seat. It did a good bit of damage, yet it didn't break the windshield. Had it been one or two inches towards the steering wheel, it would have come straight through the windshield and through me if I was unable to move in time.

After a short visit in Jacksonville with Kathie's family, I made all the preparations to depart for Ascension Island with Kathie driving me down to Patrick Air Force Base (PAFB) in our brand-new car. She dropped me off at the hangar where I joined BFEC employee Bob Higginbottom whom I had worked with in Canary Islands. We two, along with other men, boarded a Lockheed Starlifter, the US Air Force (C-141) for a 3-hour flight to Antigua. When I entered the jet's cabin, I suddenly experienced a feeling of Déjà vu.



US Air Force C-141

When seeing the rows of canvas seats as it reminded me of the seats in the Fairchild C-119 Flying Boxcar I flew out of Homestead many years before but I surveyed the cabin and chose a middle seat in the very last row where beyond the plane was filled with cargo. I saw that I could rest my feet on the cargo which should make for a comfortable flight as it would be many hours before we would arrive at Ascension, plus we had two stops in between. It wasn't until takeoff that I began to question my choice of seats because when the engines hit full bore the cargo moved about 6 inches towards the back of the plane causing my feet to hit the floor. To say the least that much movement got my attention because now I'm questioning if the Cargo Master properly secured the pallet. But after a few hours of flying, I forgot all about the cargo until we landed in Antigua. This time the cargo moved in the forward direction pushing my knees up towards my chest. Now I'm wondering if this was a good idea.

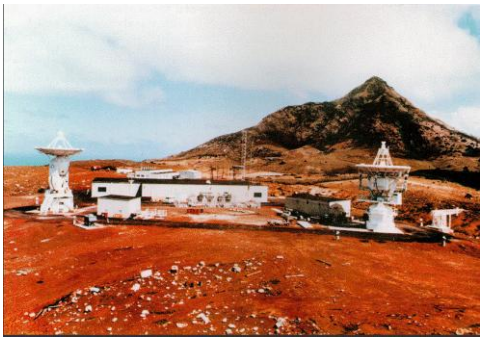
I mentioned this to the Flight Sargent but as we took off for a second time, there was still movement of cargo and the same could be said of our landing in Recife, Brazil. By the time we took off the next morning I was pretty much convinced that the cargo wasn't going anywhere but when we got to Ascension, I was glad that I didn't have to fly any further with that load. I learned later the cargo was a spare engine for the plane.

It was a brief stopover in Antigua, just long enough to disembark those that worked in Antigua and pick up a few that were going elsewhere. Maybe Ascension or South Africa. While waiting, I bought a soda and sat back to watch the activity of the airport. Most entertaining was the landing of a small 30 or 40 passenger jet that, unlike other aircraft, used very little of the runway to land which allowed the plane to stop right in front of the terminal. As soon as it stopped, stairs were quickly pushed up, the door opened and passengers quickly deplaned as if there was a fire onboard. Fifteen minutes later, passengers ran up the stairs, door closed and stairs rolled back and the jet took off using the rest of the runway. It reminded me of the Keystone Cops.

Our next stop was hours later in Recife. After booking a hotel room, Bob and I decided to walk out to the beach and have a beer. After observing other patrons carrying their drinks outside the bar, we too walked out to where onlookers had gathered to watch an old lady with Bob moving near the front so he could see better. It was an old lady scratching a stick in the grass. Suddenly, she slung the stick back and a snake just barely missed Bob's head. Having some knowledge of Spanish, Bob understood enough Portuguese to learn that it was a black Mamba or some poisonous snake. A close call because a little lower and it would have wrapped around Bob's neck.

CHAPTER 26 – 1968 ASCENSION ISLAND, UK

Unlike the C-130 4-engine Prop, which rarely spent one night in Recife, the C-141 Jet always kept its schedule. There were a lot of stories about Recife and the C-130 flown by the National Guard pilots who needed to record some flight hours. It had a history of leaving Recife but always turned back before the halfway point due to engine failure or some sort of trouble that would keep the crew and passengers another night or two while the engine would be replaced. BFEC guys assigned to Ascension that had little if any vacation left would often try and avoid the prop job so they wouldn't be docked pay for the days spent in Recife.



Ascension Island Tracking Station

In the old days, Ascension was used by mariners to obtain wood and restock their burners. The British also established a garrison to prevent the island from being used as a staging point for Napoleon supporters that might like to free him from his prison on St Helena Island, some 800 miles away.

Over the years it has been a strategic island for the British in WWII and in later years as a staging point during the Falklands War. And for NASA and the Air Force, it was an important location for their tracking stations during rocket launches.

It is still serving the US with a Meter Class Autonomous Telescope (MCAT) which is used to track potentially hazardous orbital debris that could damage spacecraft and harm our astronauts.

During the time I was there, there were two barracks that NASA had built but only one was being used by us BFEC troops. RCA, the base contractor, was permitted to use the other barracks for its employees. However, the convenient location of the NASA barracks was right across the street from the Volcano Club. We could walk out of our barracks, cross a narrow street and walk into the small grill for a sandwich or go next door to the bar. Both were favorite hangouts for the NASA troops. If you didn't find a BFEC employee in the Grill, then he would be in the bar.

If you recall I mentioned going to school with Don Wolfe back in Maryland. After school was complete, Don went to Ascension Island at the same time Kathie and I went to Grand Canary Island, Spain. Don was still working at the NASA tracking station when I arrived at my new assignment. He and I renewed our friendship and from him I learned where all the clubs were that served beer and darts. He seemed to have spent a good bit of time in an English Pub in a small establishment called Two Boats. The members welcomed us into their fold and since we weren't members, we couldn't buy a drink. The only way we could pay them back is to invite them to the Volcano Club and buy their drinks. Eventually, the Club members voted to allow Don and I to join the Two Boats Club. As members, he and I could buy drinks, so we each hosted the bar for about a month as pay back for all the drinks they had bought us.

He and I were invited also to join the Plumbers Club which was made up of men mostly from the Cable and Wireless Communications Company that pretty much ruled the island. The rules were no women. They were permitted to serve food and drinks but couldn't join in the conversation, which probably was about women. We were each given a stainless-steel Plumbers Emblem for mounting on a car's bumper but I have yet to install mine.

Don wrote to Budweiser and explained the absence of a suitable representative on the island though there were plenty who drank their beer. Budweiser acknowledged his letter by sending a care package that contained straw-like hats, buttons and other paraphernalia that advertised Budweiser and he wore it proudly and promoted Bud every chance he could get which was often.

To assist in this effort, when buying a case of beer from the Volcano Club at $3 a case, all we had to do was give the club the names of eight members which constituted a party of members and the second case was free. FREE. Needless to say, most rooms in the barracks of BFEC employees were stacked with beer since we received $9 a day per diem and we made sure that everyone at the site joined the club. That made it easy to list eight names when buying beer. Where else can you get two cases of beer for three dollars?

It was during one of our promotional outings when we BFEC men were playing the English wives in softball. Don and I had a couple of 55-gallon drums iced down with beer. One was Bud and the other was Heineken. When it came time for me to bat, I only recall a crack and blue flashing lights. I was told the first crack was when I hit the ball and the second crack was my left knee that had refused to turn with the rest of my body. It hurt tremendously for the first 5 days but Heineken cures a lot of ails. Eventually, 50 years later, I had to have my left knee replaced.

Before my knee injury, Don and I used to run from the base down to Georgetown and then around the coastline to where we reached a point below the barracks and had to climb the cliff to get back up. It was a good workout. At other times we would drive to the BBC hut and throw darts with some of the English that were on the island.

Another favorite haunt was the Bachelor's Tent where a large number of workers lived and of course drank beer and threw darts. One could find a good dart board and some good dart players most anywhere on the island. If not, then it was lacking. I'm pretty sure that Don and I were welcomed at about every place that served beer and had a dart board and while there were many places on the island to drink beer and throw darts, we still had work to perform. My task was to prepare the antenna and the associated hydraulics as well as the electronic control equipment to a state of readiness to support the Apollo 6 mission.

This is a good time to mention Don Wolfe again. All site employees but Don had ridden down to the base to eat lunch when Goddard called ACN up for a pass. Don answered the call and began preparing the site for support. Just as we returned and entered the building, we heard Don say, “Ascension has AOS!” Single handedly he had configured the site to support the TETR satellite.

This may have been a practice run because I learned many years later that during one of the Apollo missions, once again Don found himself alone on the site when ACN was called up to support a lunar orbit and without hesitation he configured the station, positioned the antenna to acquire the spacecraft and supported as though all positions were manned

Our next mission was Apollo 6 (AS-205) which was a Saturn 5 rocket launched on 4 April 1968. It experienced some engine problems and only lasted about 10 hours. This mission was part of the testing for the trans-lunar injection that is needed to send a spaceship to the moon.

After about six months on the island, I had some vacation time, so I made a quick trip to Florida where Kathie met me at PAFB. We stayed the night at Cocoa Beach before going on to Jacksonville to see her parents Jim and Martha. It was on this trip that our first son Gregory was conceived.

The return flight to Ascension was on the US Air Force C-141 but when we departed Antigua, we went straight to Ascension instead of going through Brazil. It wasn’t the best flights sitting in the web seats especially when carrying spare engines and other large cargo but this time the cargo didn't move.

Some years later a C-141 jet was ferrying passengers from Wake Island when the pressure door failed causing both petal doors to separate from the aircraft. Baggage, aircraft equipment and loose debris were blown out and fell into the ocean below. The pilot immediately began a rapid descent and within four minutes they had dropped 10,000 feet before dropping to a lower altitude to assess the damage and check on the crew.

Some of the old “Range Rats” as we called them who had worked downrange for many years had friends in Recife and in some cases, families.

It seems that some were supporting prostitutes and their families and when they went back for R&R, they had a nice apartment and housekeeper for the duration. A lot of these men had no other families in the states or anywhere else but Recife and no doubt they enabled a lot of families to have better living conditions.

Not long after I got back, a technician named Rex who worked on the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) equipment that was co-located with the Apollo operations, informed me that Snoopy, our site mascot, was in jail. The Sheriff of Nottingham had arrested him for killing a sheep.

Nothing new here, Rex would go down and pay a fine to bail Snoopy out. There was much speculation as to how much bail money that Rex and other BFEC employees had paid to get Snoopy out of jail.

Ascension was an example of a simple Eco system. In the early 1900's when ships stopped for wood, rats infested the island, so cats were brought in to kill the rats. Eventually the cats overran the island, so dogs were brought in to kill the cats and tend to the sheep.

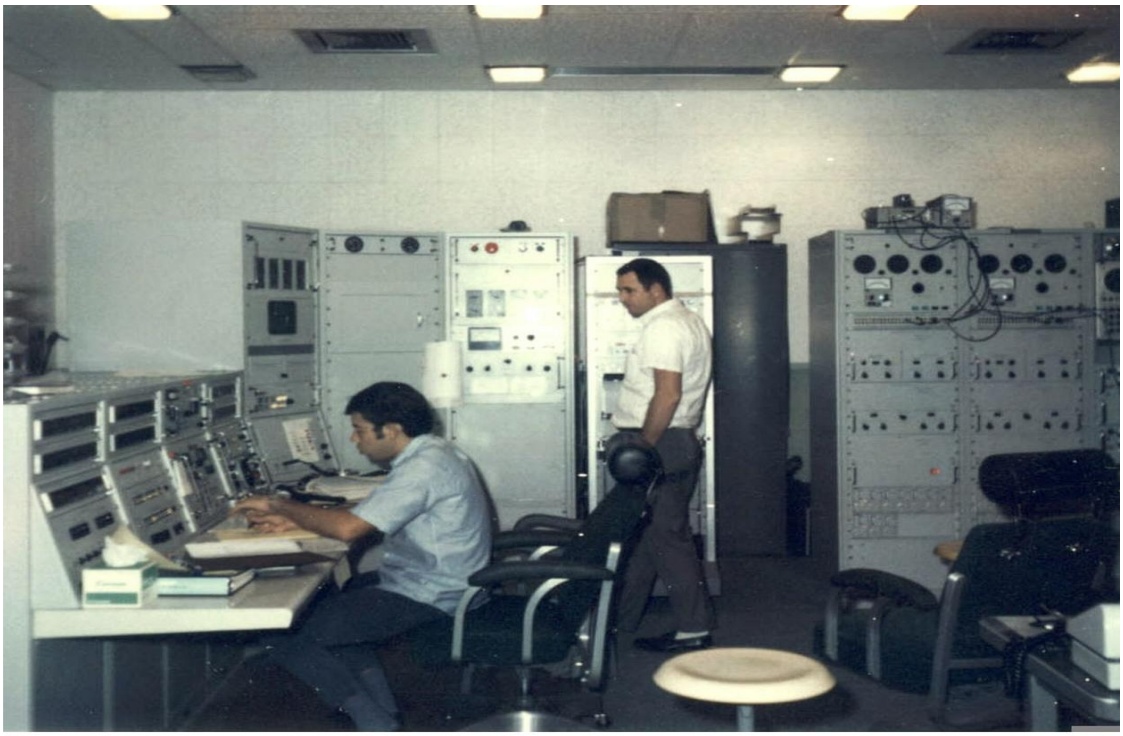
The problem was Snoopy and his brother liked sheep better than cats. I never knew how many times Rex bailed Snoopy out but I'm sure it dipped into his daily per Diem. And it wasn't his dog.

If the truth be known, Snoopy belonged to everyone and could be found sleeping in any room but he seemed to prefer Rex's room most of the time. It might be because Rex was the one that was always bailing him out of Sheriff Nottingham's jail.

Another site mascot was a donkey that we named "JJ" which stood for the teletype header that we used to direct the TTY traffic to the correct destination. JJ liked almost all fruit and cigarettes. It didn't matter what kind of cigarettes. One or two of the employees would have fruit for her when we arrived on the bus and this one guy would have a cigarette. This was repeated every morning.

There was one employee however, Marsden Wolford, who she would bite without hesitation and she looked for him to get off the bus every morning. As soon as JJ spied him, her ears went back and she went on the attack and would even go into the bus looking for him.

The first stop was the Generator Bldg. where Marsden would normally get off but he would hide and ride up to the Ops Bldg. and she would race up there and wait for him to get off. Instead, he would hide and ride back down to the Generator Bldg. He teased her and in return she would try and bite him.



1968 Ascension - I'm teaching an Antenna/Servo class to Marsdon Wolford seated at control console

After our successful support of the Apollo 4 mission at Ascension, I conducted a training class for the Antenna/Servo and RF Optics in which Marsden and two other employees attended. When the school was complete, Marsden showed the most promise to replace me so I went to the Site Manager and said that I had found my replacement and I wanted a transfer. My thinking at the time was to transfer to Corpus Christi, Texas but when the NASA Station Director heard this, he advised me to go instead to the Merritt Island tracking station.

As our mission preparedness moved along, Goddard was scheduling stations to support a Test & Training Satellite that was orbiting the earth which would sites to sharpen their acquisition skills.

Part of this training consisted of a NASA Super Connie airplane loaded with electronic equipment to simulate the electronics that would be on an Apollo spacecraft. The aircraft was manned by BFEC employees who formed a Test and Training Simulations team. The plane would fly circles around a station to simulate an orbiting spacecraft while the station personnel would conduct two-way ranging and communications with the aircraft just as if it was a real Apollo capsule. The plane came to Ascension shortly after I returned from R&R. After we did our 2-3 days of exercises, the night before the team was to depart for Canary Islands, we all gathered at the Volcano Club.

On this occasion the BFEC team from the site and the men from the NASA aircraft drank all the cold beer from the club. In particular the first to run out were Bud and Bud Light beer. Then the group started on Heineken and finished it before the club closed for the night.

The group moved to the patio where existed two vending machines full of 25 cents beer. It so happened that Don and I each had a Crown Royal bag that contained a stash of quarters which was the coin required for the beer machines on the patio. He and I broke out our quarters and at daybreak a good bit of our money was gone and both machines were empty. Afterwards we carried the team down to the Super Connie and waited until they had engines running and eventually took off down the runway. Wideawake runway has a dip so the aircraft disappears momentarily so you hold your breath hoping the plane will reappear climbing in altitude. This plane did but not without difficulty. I'm no pilot but I suppose it's like a bird in that the faster the wings flap, the faster and higher it goes. We learned that once they were at flight altitude, the pilot put on the autopilot and he and the copilot stretched out in the aisle telling the Test team to wake them up at the sign of any trouble. I was told none of the BFEC team slept until they reached Canary Islands.

The station was built atop a cliff overlooking the ocean and sat along the edge of a large chasm called the Devil's Ashpit. Later when BFEC was directed to clean up the site, one of the first things they found was the carcass of "JJ" the mascot donkey that had been buried in the empty well that was on the property. There were other stories about all the junk and material that they had to remove from the Devil's Ashpit including an old Fire Truck. I'm surprised they didn't find some of the dozen lawnmowers that our Facility Supervisor ordered to mow the volcanic gravel and 10ft x 20ft grass plot that he planted in front of the manager's office.

Many years later Ascension Island was a strategic airfield during the 1982 Falkland War which was an undeclared war between Argentina and the British over the Falkland Islands. The Brits expanded Wideawake's runway to accommodate heavy bombers that were used to bomb Argentina who surrendered on 14 June 1982.

As the tracking stations were closed around the globe they each had unique stories related to their closure. For instance, the Hawaii (HAW) tracking station was located in Kokee Park on the island of Kauai. The site sat near the edge of Waimea Canyon and one building could be seen looking up the canyon so NASA was required to paint that side of the building Green so it would blend with the natural surroundings. Other sites followed; Bermuda (BDA, Guam (GWM) and Goldstone (GDS). Eventually with the end of Shuttle in 2011, Merritt Island (MIL) and Ponce De Leon (PDL) were all closed and plowed under. This was an end of an era, what was once called the GSTDN was no more.

CHAPTER 27 – 1968 KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, FL

The Merritt Island Launch Annex (MILA) is a Goddard-owned tracking complex that was situated on property of the Kennedy Space Center (KSC). Built in 1965, its primary support before Apollo was to rockets launched from Cape Canaveral. When KSC pads 39A and 39B were completed so the huge Saturn V rockets could be launched, Apollo missions became the primary role for MILA. The site was staffed with sufficient personnel to provide critical prelaunch, launch, orbital and trans-lunar operations to the Apollo moon shots.

September 1968, Kathie drove down from Jacksonville and met me in Titusville where we began to look for a place to stay. In the meantime, I reported to MILA to work as an Antenna/Servo/RF & Optics Engineer. As it happened, I was one of two Antenna operators authorized by the NASA Station Director to support the Apollo launches.

Events in 1969 brought big changes in our lives. The first was a small house we purchased at 440 Eloise Ave in Titusville. It was here that our family grew by two more. Both Greg and Doug were born in the old Parrish Hospital and spent their early years in the little house on Eloise Ave.

The second was the death of my little brother Keith Alan who died at age 10 from a birth defect. We were scheduled to close on the house on Eloise when we received the news that Keith had died. It wasn't entirely a surprise as there was a history of travel to and from hospitals that consumed most of my mother's attention during those times. So the house closing was postponed until we could return following his burial in Arkansas.

The third was the birth of Gregory in April 1969, and next was the Moon Landing, July 16, 1969, and a few short years later was the birth of our second son Douglas in 1974. Now we had men landing on the moon and three sons: Randy, Greg and Doug.

Things changed drastically at work when the IBEW Local 2088 was voted in and the contract required an equal amount of job distribution so each of the three shifts had a man for each position. That also meant fewer people and it prohibited management from making arbitrary reductions to staffing. Before the Union came in, the NASA Station Director (STADIR) preferred that only me and one other technician operate the Antenna/Servo during launch operations but that changed. Now unionized, four shifts were formed so each shift had an operator for each piece of equipment. However, I was often called upon for my technical knowledge of the antenna/servo system because of my experience with the CYI antenna installation and tracking operations at CYI, ACN and now MILA.

With the four shift operations, whichever operator was on duty, that was the person that operated the antenna, be it a launch or otherwise. Yes, there were errors and a learning curve but eventually we had a crew capable of supporting any operation.

In early '70s, shortly before a vote to have IBEW Local 2088 represent MILA employees, there was talk of a walkout among a handful of employees. It was also at a time when MILA was providing critical support to a Count Down Demonstration Test (CDDT) for an Apollo launch. The test was a success and signified that the vehicle was ready for which MILA would provide launch and orbital support.

Then one evening at shift change, a couple hot heads decided that they would walk out and within hours the site was on strike. It was the first strike or walkout for the Business Agent of IBEW Local 2088 so he was inexperienced and not sure what we should do. The walkout was ill-timed and of course ill planned. We had just completed the CDDT for this launch, which meant the rocket and the rest of the support facilities were ready to support the mission. Even more surprising, for whatever reason I was named the Strike Captain, something I had trained for my whole life. Yeah, right. Not knowing what I should do and not having someone who could advise me, I placed pickets at each of the three KSC gates and one at the entrance to Cape Canaveral so all four accesses to KSC had pickets.

However, I soon learned that posting our pickets at all the gates did not set well with NASA or the Air Force but little did they know how inexperienced I was at this game. In fact, I don't think there was anyone in our group who knew what we should be doing. I sure didn't. Nor do I believe anyone had been on a strike before so I kept doing what we started and that was picketing every gate that led into KSC.

Mr. Harold Gooch, the NASA Bargaining Guru, informed me that I couldn't post pickets at all the gates. I reminded him that I had done so, however NASA was becoming persistent in their effort to get me to restrict the picketers to the Main Gate and to the main entry road to MILA. No doubt we were causing a disruption to the traffic into the Center with pickets on al gates.

It was also inconvenient to MILA employees who lived on Merritt Island and the Cocoa Beach area because they could drive to the site on Ransom Road which was at the rear of the site. Now they had to drive the long way around to get to the main entrance.

With the planned launch date looming, BFEC sent down technicians and engineers to augment MILA salaried employees, sufficient to run the site and support the upcoming launch. Then one night a picketer was accused of spray painting a car when it crossed the picket line. Tempers and frustration were manifesting themselves when another incident involved a picketer who was accused of hitting another employee on the arm when he crossed the picket line. If my memory is correct, the striker was charged and had to appear in court. He had been a POW during the Korean War and had a short temper so I was very relieved that it didn't escalate into anything more.

Then there was the KSC patrolman who was on duty one night and ran over an alligator on the main causeway. He told a story about hitting the gator hard enough to tear up the frontend of such it had to be towed to a garage for repairs. A week or so later while the strike was still on, he had his car back and was on patrol at night when he happened on another gator on the causeway. This time he stopped before hitting the gator and got out to see if it was the same one he had run over before. Whether it was the same one or not, he tried to shoo it off the road but this time the critter ran him up on the hood of his car. He said he felt foolish sitting up on the hood of his car but eventually the gator crawled off into Indian River.

In subsequent meetings with Mr. Gooch – who I learned to like and respect – I agreed to pull all pickets at outer gates and station them only at the entrance to MILA. This move allowed the KSC employees to resume their normal traffic patterns. This event eventually led to new KSC protocol that restricted pickets only to specific gates.

One day it was all over and we were back at work. We had lost a lot of pay and had even lost some of our workmates. Our walkout went down as the first for the Kennedy Space Center during the Apollo era. To be frank, we weren't all that proud of that distinction and I'm not convinced that IBEW, BFEC or MILA employees learned anything.

As the station was adjusting to new shift operations, to my surprise, BFEC switched me back to a salaried position. Far-ra-do. With it came a promotion to Shift Operations Supervisor for a new tracking system that had been located previously in Fort Myers, Florida. Besides the Manned Space Flight Network (MSFN), there was the Satellite Tracking and Data Acquisition Network (STADAN), which tracked scientific satellites.

In 1972, NASA decided to combine the two networks into one and called it the Ground Satellite Tracking and Data Network (GSTDN). Not all STADAN sites remained open or they were moved to other locations. That was the case with the Fort Myers station. It was moved to MILA to continue its tracking operations. We were a small crew, but it necessitated that we have a receiver, transmitter, recorder and communication tech on each shift.

Eventually all satellite tracking operations at MILA and elsewhere were consolidated into GSTDN which conducted command, data, ranging and tracking operations with the same S-Band systems that were designed for manned spaceflight. The STDN was now supporting both manned spaceflight and unmanned scientific spacecraft.

During an Apollo launch my job as Antenna/Servo operator was to track a small rocket mounted on the nose of the larger Saturn V rocket. This small rocket was called the Launch Escape System (LES) and in an emergency, it was designed to lift the Command Service Module carrying the astronauts away from the Saturn V rocket to safety.

Fortunately, there was never a launch in which we had to track the LES nor was there ever a time when we had to practice tracking it but I'm sure it would have functioned perfectly had it been necessary to launch it and I'm absolutely confident that I could have tracked it without any problems should an emergency arise.



I supported all the Apollo launches and remember supporting a couple missions that garnered headlines but not the likes of the Apollo 11 moon landing. “The Eagle has landed” was heard all around the world.

On that spectacular mission, I was the antenna operator and tracked the rocket during launch and then switched to the Signal Data Distribution System to capture the voice and data coming from the astronauts, the LEM and the Lunar Rover.

The two other dicey missions were Apollo 12 launched on Nov. 14, 1969, into a cloudy, rain-swept sky and Apollo 13 in 1970. Apollo 12 Launch Controllers lost telemetry contact at 36 seconds, and again at 52 seconds, when the Saturn V launch vehicle was struck by lightning, twice.

While the astronauts were having severe problems with warning lights and horns going off in the capsule, I was struggling to keep the antenna tracking the vehicle through all the fog and clouds that were obscuring the rocket. Additionally, their loss of power had killed the downlink and without a signal for the receivers to lock on, I was unable to select the auto track mode.

On most launches we received tracking angles from radar at KSC as a backup but they were having their problems too. Our own Antenna Position Programmer (APP) operator shouted in my ear not to select him as an input and the Mark 51 Gun site tracker on the roof said he couldn’t see the vehicle either so don’t use the Mark 51 as a source. By staying calm and relying on my years of experience, I successfully manually tracked the vehicle through the clouds. I shouldn’t say that I was tracking the vehicle since I was unable to see it in my TV monitor but I continued the manual rate. Then suddenly the crew restored power to the Command Module giving us a signal that allowed me to select the auto track mode. Just as I selected the auto track mode, a hole opened in the clouds and dead center in the TV monitor was the vehicle. Phew. What a relief.

The second dicey mission was about six months later with Apollo 13. It was launched April 11, 1970, and has been called a “successful failure,” because the crew never landed on the Moon, but they made it home safely after an oxygen tank exploded crippling their ship, depleting oxygen and causing almost all of the power of the command module to be lost. The crew was forced to use the lunar module as a lifeboat but they came home safely thanks to the teamwork of many individuals and mission control.

At MILA we spent many days tracking the vehicle’s path to the moon and the slingshot return to earth. It was a thankful ending to this mission. The subsequent Apollo missions didn’t get the same press coverage as Apollo 11 but they all completed their mission successfully.

I found it interesting that many years later I searched online to see what year the strike at MILA occurred and there was no record of it. To make matters more puzzling is the search revealed that the first strike was in 2008 by the International Association of Machinist. Hmmm…then I saw it was AI generated. Whatever happened to actual historians?

One summer I was tasked to go to the Bahamas and remove an S-Band transmitter and other equipment and have it shipped back to MILA for use in the installation of a second S-Band system at MILA. A last-minute decision for another employee to accompany me was made by one of the shift leaders.

Of course, I didn't expect much help from the guy but it wasn't my decision that he go with me. Besides, there was another engineer coming down from Maryland to assist me as well as get some equipment that was needed elsewhere. I will identify them merely as Tom and Dave.

Tom flew down to Bahamas from Columbia and Dave and I flew over together from Florida and had booked rooms in the same hotel. When I walked up to the desk and identified myself, the young lady apologized and said the room I had reserved wasn't ready but she would put me in a room temporarily until my room was ready to occupy. I told her that I understood and would it would be perfectly okay with me and took the key she offered me. Then Dave's turn came next and she gave him the same pitch but he wasn't having it. Again, she apologized to both of us and said that it was only temporary and she was unable to give us the rooms we had reserved because of plumbing problems or some such malady. Dave wasn't too happy so after mumbling something that neither of us could hear, he took the key she offered. It was later that we learned she had given Dave the room right next to the elevator. Maybe he should have been a little nicer because neither she nor any of the other desk personnel gave him a different room.

When I opened my room, I discovered a very nice King that faced east with a balcony providing a beautiful view overlooking the pool and the beach. At night it was spectacular with lights in the palm trees and a beautiful moon coming up over the ocean. It was all that you would expect to enjoy on a tropical island.

One morning Tom and I were waiting on Dave to come down from his room when we noticed he was accompanied by a young black man. Dave wanted me to drive to the guy's home and drop him off, which I did, and when he was about to get out of the car, he asked Dave for the money he owed him but Dave denied owing the guy any money despite the man's insistence. He said he paid Dave's bar bill at a nightclub. Again, Dave denied everything which caused the guy to slam the door angrily and stood outside glaring at Dave. He said Dave had too much to drink and had become unruly.

The man alleged that he had saved Dave's life and paid his bar bill. Further, he called a taxi and accompanied Dave to the hotel. All of which Dave continued to deny except we did learn that the man slept in the second bed in Dave's room. One could tell the guy was pissed and said something threatening as we drove off.

Tom and I started in on Dave wanting to know the whole story and it seems Dave went to one of the big nightclubs frequented predominately by blacks. Most were locals and tourists. He denied everything the man had said except we did learn that the guy slept in the second bed in Dave's room.

That gave me and Tom an opportunity to screw with Dave's mind a little but first we had to learn more. As the story unfolds, Dave went to the club, had a few drinks, exchanged some words with someone in the club and this guy came along and intervened. Dave denies that the guy paid his bar bill, but he admitted the guy drove him back to the hotel so he let him stay over in the extra bed.

As Dave told his story, he suddenly reached for his pocket and said that man stole his wallet. Tom said, "Why would he ask you to reimburse him for the bar bill if he stole your wallet?" I added that if he got your wallet, he probably has a key to your room also.

By the time we got to the work site Dave was really anxious and it didn't help that he was still hungover from the night before. He wanted the keys to the car because he had to go to the hotel and see if he had been robbed but we learned later that Dave found his wallet stuck between the mattress and the wall. But Tom and I never let up.

Between the hotel where Dave and I were staying and a little nicer more expensive hotel, there was a large vacant lot along which a path led from one hotel to the other. It was basically a dirt sidewalk and it was dark. We often walked to the other hotel for dinner and of course it would be dark.

Anyway, Tom and I continued to work on this caper as much as possible when I asked Dave if he had seen the guy again. He hadn't. In fact, he said that he had been staying close to the hotel except for walking up to the other one for dinner.

I reminded him that it was a dark walk at night and that everyone on the island knows we are here and where we are staying, especially the guy you owe money to. Tom and I could see that our perceived threats were beginning to work on Dave's head and it wasn't long before we learned that he wasn't going out for dinner anymore, especially to the other hotel. In fact, he was eating from candy machines and room service.

Trust me, it made for a more pleasant working environment for Tom and me because Dave finally decided to return to MILA sooner than planned. When comparing our notes to what we heard from Dave, we believe the guy was truthful when he said he saved Dave's ass and paid for his bar tab. That particular club was inhabited mostly by locals and tourists who were black also. Dave with his pale skin and Red hair would have stuck out like a deer in headlights.

Back at MILA a decision had been made to install a second S-band 9M system to provide redundancy to launch operations. This posture would provide MILA support to any direction of the Space Shuttle's trajectory over the space coast as it returned to the Shuttle Landing Facility (SLF) at the end of the mission.

Eventually this second antenna was moved directly east of the 9M-1 and rotated 90 degrees so that its Keyhole (Y-axis mechanical limit) was East-West vice the North-South orientation of 9M-1.

Since I had gained considerable experience in Canary Islands working with the Collins crew that installed the S-band 9M system, I was assigned to assist the two Collins employees who were sent to MILA to install the second antenna.

In the meantime, I had become good friends with one of the men that worked in the S-band RF section. His name was Bob Rabon who was a pilot also of small aircraft. Sometime in the early '70s he and I decided to form a company to repair aircraft electronics. Both had technical skills and it was planned that I would handle the marine equipment and Bob the aircraft industry.

We had given our company a name, Merritt Electronics, and had business cards made and planned to open a shop at the Merritt Island airport. Unfortunately, in 1974, before we could get the business going, Bob and another instructor were killed in a small plane crash into the Indian River while practicing touch and go landings. His death was a big loss to MILA tracking station and to his family and friends.

During the 70's Kathie's dad had taken a job with Owing-Illinois (O&I) glass company as chief mechanic on Andros Island in the Bahamas. His job along with other mechanics was to keep the logging trucks, large forklifts and other equipment working. O&I furnished the Oliver family and some of the other employees a nice house on Morgan's Bluff.

We were fortunate that we could fly out of West Palm Beach on the company plane over to the island and spend a long weekend. The cost was a day or two of comp time or vacation and $3.00 per head when we went through the Bahamas Custom. I shouldn't forget the cigars it cost me when the customs guy went through our luggage. He would dig through all our stuff until he found my stash and take 3 or 4. I began putting the bulk in my tackle box and leaving some out where he could find them easier but not so easy that he wouldn't continue to look further.

Soon after I had said my Hellos and hugged everyone in the family, I would go down to the dock with my fishing equipment where I spent almost all the weekend. It was absolutely beautiful. Father-in-law Jim would check on me after he got off work and would sometimes bring me something to eat. Eventually he began taking more interest in fishing and after dinner he would come down and join me and the other men fishing from the pier. No matter if fish were caught or not, the nights down on the dock were spectacular.

On one of those nights Jim and I were fishing when one of the men caught something on a handline that was quite large. The water was clear so we could see that whatever it was it was a big fish. I had asked earlier what size line he was using and he said that it was 200lb. monofilament.

When it became evident that he and his friend needed help pulling the fish in, Jim stepped up and grabbed the line and I followed. He was on the front with me behind and as we four men pulled to bring it in closer, we could see that it was a big shark and when we pulled it up next to the pilings that were 12 feet apart, we could see that this shark was almost that long. Then the unexpected happened. One of the men had a homemade gaff and reached over and struck the shark while we other three were holding it up next to the pier.

When the gaff hit the shark, it dove straight down causing the line to break making a sound like a rifle shot and hit Jim in the face knocking him out momentarily. I felt him falling forward and grabbed him to keep him from falling in the water. When we got him under the light, we could see that his face was a bloody mess where the line had coiled back cutting his face and eyes.

In the weeks that followed Jim suffered double vision, making it necessary to return to the states to see an eye doctor because the damage to his eyes was pretty severe. He was very fortunate not to have lost an eye. While he continued to go down to the pier and fish or just visit with the men fishing down there, he never volunteered to help pull in any big fish after that.

Some of the perks of them living in the Bahamas was Kathie's mom picking up recipes from a local islander that included land crabs and conch salad. She also cooked fried turtle. We ate like a king when on the island and when they visited the states, they brought all the lobster we could eat.

It was at MILA that I worked with Chuck Bounds and Don Mason and became good friends for life and our families grew close. Chuck and I hunted and fished together and I went on many fishing trips with him and his boys. Don has been and still is like a brother with whom I've fished, played pool, gone shrimping and spent a good part of 40 years doing things with him and his family. We still manage to get together on occasion but my fishing days are about over.

There are too many stories about either Chuck or Don to relate here but it was a well-known fact that a fishing trip with Chuck was an experience of a lifetime. In fact, to say the least it could even be life threatening. I dare say that anyone who has ever gone fishing with Chuck has their own unique story to tell.

What is so remarkable about this is that we all have lived to tell our own version of the fishing trip and if there were more than one person, then each has a slightly different tale.

One trip in particular began in our house one evening after several of our friends had all gone out to dinner and had gathered at our house in Mims. At some point the stories got around to fishing and especially fishing trips with Chuck. It was decided then that some among this group did not have a Bounds story so they planned to go out the next day to the big pond and the next morning they went out of Port Canaveral in Chuck's boat and at some point on the return home the motor broke. By now there had been a beer or two consumed and Chuck figured he could fix it so over the side he went with tool in hand. In the meantime, his son Greg is fishing for sharks with cut up fish. I don't recall if it was a part or tool that Chuck dropped but whatever it was, the motor was inoperable and they didn't have a spare.

Eventually they called a fellow employee that worked at MILA who had a big boat who could tow them back to the Port. The only problem is that it was getting near dark and this fellow learned that the locks were closed and he couldn't get out of Banana River into the Port. Finally, it was decided that it was necessary to call the Coast Guard and have them rescue them.

As they were on the radio calling the Coast Guard and giving them their position, the Coast Guard said whatever you do, DON'T SHOOT A FLARE! Unfortunately, just as this order was being delivered, his son Greg pulled the trigger on a flare. This caused everyone that lives on the Atlantic Seaboard from Daytona Beach to Fort Pierce to call the Coast Guard and report the flare. The switchboard was wiped out. Yep. They each have a story though some differ from others. It would depend on where they were sitting in the boat or it might be how much beer they had drank cause if it was Chuck's boat, then beer was onboard.

During the winter months I was doing a lot of hunting in St Johns County. On weekends we would go to Jax to visit her family and while Kathie visited her parents, I would take one or both of her brothers and go to a farm out west of St Augustine to hunt deer with a small party.

These were the same folks that I started hunting with when I worked for Welex Electronics in St Augustine. One or two members lived in Jacksonville but most lived in St Augustine or in St Johns County.

Over time, the hunting party grew smaller as members dropped out for different reasons and on one morning when I was to meet another member, his wife called and said while putting on his boots that morning he fell out of the chair dead.

That was the last straw for me so I returned home and sold all my hunting equipment and concentrated on fishing with my friend Don Mason who was interested in a boat I had put up for sale. We went out on South Lake for a demonstration and some fishing. As it turned out we did more paddling than fishing or demonstrating.

We had gone all the way across the lake and was about to return now that I had shown him what a nice craft it was. However, the motor wouldn't start and we had to paddle all the way across South Lake which was of considerable size back then. He didn't buy the boat.

Another time on South Lake we were flying across the lake at Mach 1 (he never went very slow) in his boat when we hit a "log" causing a ding ding sound from the prop and of course the boat immediately slowed down with a bent prop. I told him there were no logs in this lake.

Sure enough, about 5 minutes later a big 8 or 10ft alligator came to the surface where we had hit the "log." No doubt he had a knot on his head and Don had a prop that looked like a pinwheel. I spent a lot of time on the lake and that was a first at the south end because I only saw gators in the north end of the lake, especially at night when wrapping up an evening fishing trip.

Since I'm on the subject of brother Don, I should write about one of our many fishing trips. We were in his boat and had finished a day of fishing and as was our usual custom we came flying into the Parrish Park Marina. It goes without saying that there was a small amount of showmanship for the onlookers that stood in the park watching us come in. If you are a boater then you would know what we expected to happen...because it always did...before. When the throttle is pulled back quickly the back wave grabs the boat and suddenly pulls it backwards like a brake or that is what normally happens. Not so much on this day.

As we approach the landing at tenth to the ninth power, I am generally standing up to catch a piling to throw the rope around and secure us to the dock. Well not this time because as we came roaring in at Mach 1, I began to stand up and Don pulled back the throttle but we never slowed down. I immediately dropped down below the left console while he had quickly moved between the console/windshield walk-through to exit the boat. Suddenly we hit the ramp at naught 60. Don went flying through the console over the bow and kept running as hard as he could to his truck. He climbed in, cranked it up then backed down to the boat which we quickly hooked up and took off while onlookers were agape at this wonderful show of boatmanship. Then just as we were pulling onto the highway the boat fell off the trailer. Now THAT really gave them something to stare at. It put a good-sized ding in his boat too. I can't remember us trying that maneuver again and I don't think he ever got that hole in the bottom repaired.

I mentioned an encounter with a gator on one of our fishing trips in South Lake so this is a good place as any to tell about the one and only lifetime observation Don and I witnessed one morning at the Railroad Bridge in Indian River. He had a small pontoon boat at the time and this one big gator came up to the front where I was sitting looking for a handout. I kept tapping him on the nose to keep him from thinking that he could come up on the deck...which I'm sure he could. Anyway, he finally moved away from us and then we heard this thrashing sound and a noise much like one makes when you rub a balloon. Then came a real loud Boom! He had eaten a Blow Fish. It gave us a new appreciation for alligators.

When September 1978 rolled in, I now had been at MILA for 10 years with a very contentious relationship with Rulee over Randy and child support. The real root of the differences is that she wanted more money than I could afford to pay. And maybe if that had been the only difference, we might have worked something out.

She was also claiming back pay that I didn't owe and I had canceled checks to show it. As we sparred back and forth, it was mostly a meeting with a General Master that Dade County or the State had authorized to hear arguments. Unfortunately, he wasn't hearing mine nor did he want to see whatever evidence I had to the contrary, and each time he ruled in her favor. I know several of my friends have seen some of the letters that I wrote to the General Master and may have wondered why I wasn't in jail.

I had been driving my 1972 Gran Prix to and from Miami and while it was the most pleasant car to drive, it was really tough on front tires. Despite having the front end worked on and multiple alignments, it continued to be an expensive proposition to keep tires on the front. Finally, I decided to sell it and purchase a '72 Mercury station wagon that was large enough to pull my 19ft. boat. Additionally, I bought an old '64 Ford Falcon station wagon for $200 that I would use for work and fishing. It was mechanically sound but the top at the rear of the wagon was rusted out. When it rained, it drenched the rear of the station wagon but it was an excellent vehicle for our fishing gear.

One afternoon while the Mercury was in Sears getting new tires or something or the other, Kathie, young Doug and I were on our way to pick up the Mercury when a man pulled directly in front of me and the car in the lane next to us. He was blocking both southbound lanes on US-1 and never once looked north towards us. I was in the inside lane and had nowhere to go so we hit the guy in his left rear wheel well.

The car on my right had moved over some enabling me to move to the right otherwise we would have hit the driver straight into his door and he would have suffered serious injury. As it were, I was able to put my arm out before the impact and restrain Doug who was kneeling in the back of the station wagon. The Falcon was a total loss.

Afterwards I replaced it with a 1970 Datsun pickup truck with a camper shell on it. It was a patriotic truck with white paint and red and blue stripes with a topper to match. I also sold the big '72 Mercury Station Wagon to a coworker because the truck was so much cheaper to drive and we decided we could reduce our expenses by having only one vehicle.

Our first trip in the truck was a visit to Kathie's parents in Lafayette, Georgia. We were sitting around the dinner table when I surprised her and the boys by asking if they wanted to go to Georgia. It wasn't long before we were packed and on the I-95 heading north.

After crossing over to I-75 the boys had fallen asleep and things seemed normal until I began to smell antifreeze and noticed the temperature had gone up. A quick check of the hood revealed a busted radiator hose. I had lost a good bit of water so to be on the safe side, I made a call on my CB radio and soon was given a lift by a semi up to the next exit where there was a gas station. Just as I walked across the highway to the station, the lights on the pumps went off.

I could see a man behind the desk and knocked on the door to get his attention and told him what I needed but he refused to unlock the door. No amount of pleading would he give me any help. When I walked back to the island, I saw a can used to wash windshields so I filled it up with water and started back to the truck.

I was in a hurry because I could hear truckers going north talking about me having a wife and 2 boys stranded back down the highway. That made the south bound truckers start looking for me. Suddenly I realized that in my haste I had taken the frontage road instead of the I-95 ramp south. The fence was too tall to try and climb with a bucket of water so I had to run back up and around to the on ramp. By this time, I was really huffing and puffing. Thankfully a trucker stopped and gave me a ride. A temporary fix of the hose and a couple gallons of water and we were northbound again.

It was on this trip that we first learned of the backfire the Datsun would emit when loaded down going up a hill. In this case a long incline over a Georgia mountain.

We had been riding all night and the boys had gone back to sleep and Kathie may have been in the back with them when near the top of the mountain I shifted gears. There erupted a sudden blue flash and a loud shotgun blast that woke me and the rest of the crew up. Never had we heard anything so loud.I think it being dark and on a small one-lane road made it even more impressive and I can tell you, no one was asleep the rest of the trip. When dawn broke, we were pulling into driveway of Kathie's parents where breakfast was waiting.

Soon after our return from the Georgia trip I heard from down south again and it was the final straw. I received a letter from the General Master threatening me because I hadn't shown up for an appearance before him.

We learned that her lawyer was tasked to send out a notice of the hearing but neither me nor my lawyer had received anything from her attorney or from the General Master. Seeing how bad I was being treated by the Miami Court system, my lawyer gave me the best advice ever. I requested a transfer and accepted a position of Staff Engineer at the Goldstone (GDS) tracking station in California. The site is out in the desert a few miles from Barstow, located near the Army's Fort Erwin. It is where the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) has several antennas used in support of the Deep Space Network.



On the road to Barstow

Before our trip I removed the back glass and fitted some padding so that we could communicate with the boys in the back. It was not quite as nice as a camper would be but it was economical to drive and the longer we owned it, it provided us with a good deal of driving pleasure.

As it turned out, this modification worked out well when we relocated to California. Plus the boys learned that their bean bags were ideal for sitting and lying in the back of the truck. Kathie and I learned that too as we traveled a lot of miles in that little truck and one of us would ride back there while the other one drove. It was a long trip from Titusville to Lafayette, Georgia to Barstow, California.

One memory that we four will likely remember for a long time was on that journey to California, we had crossed the Mississippi River on I-40 and ran up behind a long convoy of trucks heading west. I had the CB radio on when one trucker announced to everyone listening that he had written a love song and would become famous. He asked if anyone wanted to hear it and truckers quickly received affirmatives. So he started singing and for more than 40 miles he sang "O Baby." He sang the same words over and over for 40 miles. He obviously had an amplifier on his radio because it was so strong that other CB'rs were unable to talk over him. About the only thing that could be heard above his voice were squeals from too many carriers trying to get a word in edgewise.

For a good part of an hour he provided entertainment for us as we drove west on I-40 until we turned off on Hwy 71 and drove north to Fayetteville, AR to visit my parents before continuing on to California.

It was an adventurous ride across the USA. We were all seeing things for the first time and were recording as much as our memory would permit. On some occasions we were driving on the famous Route 66 when I-40 gave out and we had to drive a few miles before getting back on the Interstate.

We drove on through Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico to about 18 miles west of Flagstaff, Arizona where we stopped at a rest area just as it was getting dark. When Kathie returned to the truck, she wasn't feeling well so I decided to get us a room for the night then drive up to the Grand Canyon in the morning. I don't recall the name of the hotel but it was a nice Mountain Lodge on the south side of I-40 before you get to Hwy 64. Like the rest area, it may be gone by now.

The lodge was nice and friendly with a huge fireplace in the suite we rented. I was concerned about her but she said she would be okay but needed to get warm and lie down so I got the boys to bed and we all crashed. The next morning, we were on Hwy 64 headed to the Grand Canyon. Kathie was still sick but the boys and I were in good shape looking forward to seeing the canyon. But first, we had to stop for lunch in the park where two things happened.

First, my friend Chuck Andrews might chuckle to learn the first use of the knife he had made especially for me was to spread mayonnaise on our sandwiches. The second event was seeing the largest Ravens ever. Those birds were huge. They didn't seem to fear humans as they would walk up to our picnic table and beg for scraps. Never more. Never more or something like that.

I believe it was in New Mexico where Greg got sick and vomited all over things in the back of the truck. We stopped at the nearest city and found a car wash where we emptied the back and hosed him and the bean bags down and then took the hose to the bed of the truck. He was one sick little fellow. It may have been something he ate or a stomach virus that Kathie came down with later on in Arizona.



Grand Canyon Explorers

While Greg, Doug and I took in the views of the Canyon, Kathie did not feel well and decided to remain in the truck while me and the boys acted like the tourists we often see in Florida. Poor Kathie stayed in the truck unable to enjoy the visit. However, a couple years later on a trip back to the east coast, I made it up to her because she missed the first visit by stopping again at the park so Kathie could see the wonders of the Grand Canyon.

Our next road experience was arriving in Needles, CA and crossing the Colorado River and entering the Mojave Desert. We could see nothing but miles and miles of cactus, sand and heat and mountains ahead of us. I guess I failed to mention that the little truck did not have air conditioning. Ah... but the pass-through window did help with the topper windows open.

It was a smart move driving into Barstow while it was dark so Kathie and the boys weren't able to see anything until the next morning. Oh, what a surprise my family got when they opened the curtains the next morning. Had anyone in Florida ask me where we would be in 1978, the last place I very much doubt that I would tell someone it would be the California desert.

CHAPTER 28 –1978 BARSTOW, CA

We rented a house in Irwin Estates at 36828 Almaden Avenue, Barstow, California. It sat on the north side of the Mojave River on a mountain opposite the city. It was a nice neighborhood and at our elevation we didn't get the sand that many of the valley residents got from frequent high winds. Often, we could look south across the Mojave River valley towards Barstow and all we could see was a wall of sand blowing west to east. We joked and said there goes Lenwood which was 6 miles west of Barstow.

After we got settled in our new home and at work, Kathie's sister Julie flew into Los Angeles to visit us in Barstow and at the same time my cousins Beverly and Rolland flew into Ontario from NW Arkansas. Now not only did we have a truck full of kids but a house full. While they were all there together, I decided to take them up to Big Bear in the little Datsun truck and use the winding road SR-247/18 that took us up the back of the mountain. When we began climbing around the 2000ft. level up the winding road, it was just a little more than the little truck could manage and I had it in first gear with my foot to the floor. The little truck was laboring and was so slow that the kids could get out and walk as fast as the truck could go. We were near 7000ft when we reached the city and the reward was the sight of beautiful Big Bear Lake.

My cousins flew back to Arkansas and a short time later we were on our way back east to visit Kathie's parents and take Julie home. I forgot to mention that the truck would make a tremendous backfire when the engine was loaded up. My attempts to correct it failed and visits to the Datsun dealers also failed. It was something that was never fixed. I mention this because Kathie was driving at this particular time with Julie up front with her. We were going up the long hill in Albuquerque, New Mexico and passing an old man who was about to blow his nose.

When Kathie was even with his car, she shifted gears and the loud bang that followed almost caused the old man to run off the road and certainly interrupted his nose blowing. Their story has it that he wiped snot all over his face.

The dangerous part was Kathie and Julie laughing so hard that it was difficult for her to stay in control. Not long after that incident we got caught in a bad dust storm that rolled in behind us. Those two up front were still giggling which woke me up then I looked out the back door and saw the headlights of a semi right on our bumper. I put my head back down and tried to go back to sleep.

A project that was especially exciting was working with Dryden Research Facility located inside Edwards Air force Base in preparation for Shuttle's first test flights on a modified Boeing 747. It was exciting times and exciting work. My part of the task was to assist two young Air Force Engineers as to how the Launch Trajectory Acquisition System (LTAS) was used at KSC and MILA as a backup system so that it could be adopted at Dryden during the 747/Shuttle flights and during the real landings that the Shuttle Orbiters would be making at the end of flight.

The NASA tracking station was located in the desert near the Army's Fort Irwin and situated just above the dry lakebed Goldstone from whence the site was named. Strategically situated in and around the mountains were other tracking complexes owned and operated by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL).

Transportation to and from these sites were by minivans that were driven by employees. It was always a tough 1-hour drive coming off mid shift with a van full of sleepy employees including a sleepy driver. I recall trip home while riding in the front passenger seat when I was awakened by a stomping noise. It was the driver who had fallen asleep and was stomping on the gas pedal. We were rocketing down Ft Irwin Road on a roller coaster road that ran alongside a large dry lakebed. The hills were such that the road could sometimes hide a full convoy of military vehicles that wouldn't be seen until you came over the rise and dropped down with them. In this case we were very lucky that the road was straight and that his stomping woke me up.

There were several avenues with which to improve the Site operations by training the Link Controllers and other operations personnel because I had gained the confidence and trust from the NASA Station Director and the Operations Manager. In large part, the fact that I had come from MILA was viewed around the network as the benchmark for Operations. It was true that we at MILA had established a lot of the protocol that would be used and the 642B Cam operations used by Link Controllers at other stations.

Another perk of my position was being able to schedule and enroll myself in schools back at Goddard's Network Test and Training Facility (NTTF). That enabled me to plan our visit back east to visit both families. Kathie and the boys stayed with her family while I attended school on equipment that we used or would be using at Goldstone (GDS).

As Staff Engineer I pretty much could select the tasks that I wanted to do and for the most part were things that needed to be done for the betterment of the Site operations. One thing that needed doing was to train the Operations Controllers in how to configure the station in a contingency. This need was brought about when I discovered that the Wire Room had refused to cross patch equipment to replace a failed Unit because their supervisor had given instructions to never reconfigure the equipment. This is basically the same as hard wiring equipment which prevents flexibility in the Station's operations.

With that discovery I began training Link Controllers and the rest of the technical personnel involved in the operations support how to quickly reconfigure the systems when a component failed. It was during this time that I became good friends with Tom Pennell, an Ops Controller. He and Linda had two boys and the two families began spending more time together fishing and picnicking at Big Bear.

I am reminded of another Datsun story when Kathie had to go to San Bernardino to have a skin cancer removed from her forehead. She was in surgery a long time but the boys and I managed to stay occupied while all this was going on. When she was finally released and came out of the doctor's office, her head was encased all in white in a mummified manner that looked like a football helmet. The boys weren't quite sure who she was or what to make of this person where the only thing that could be seen was her eyes.

We loaded the truck with Kathie and me up front and the two boys in the back and headed back to Barstow. Now mind you, we had 25 miles of incline on I-15 just to get us up and through Cahon Pass and another 60 plus miles to Barstow. I mention this because just as we got on to I-15 the truck faltered. This wasn't the first time that this had happened and despite all that I did to make the truck go faster, it just poked along. We learned that if you let the truck sit for a few minutes, it would crank up and go as though it had never happened.

Our low speed made it dangerous to stay on the highway with everyone honking their horns and blowing past us so I pulled over to the side of the road and parked at the first wide spot. We had only 24 miles to go up this incline then it would be downhill from Cahon pass to Apple Valley. A nice thought. Kathie was hurting and the boys were still enamored with the headgear so I tried starting the truck and fortunately the engine fired up and ran fine all the way back to Barstow.

However, at some point I recall her saying that she would burn the truck up at first opportunity. I remembered there was a time when Kathie and one of the boys had driven to the store at night and it quit when she was down in the Mojave valley along the railroad where it was dark. I mean really dark. After it sat for a few minutes, she started it and the truck ran okay. I decided I had better do something to fix the truck.

The next day I purchased a carburetor kit for the truck and sat about overhauling it on a Sunday. It was a typical sunny but cool day so I spread out a large white sheet and placed all the parts on it in the order of removal so I could reassemble the carburetor. Small parts were put in a cigar box. As evening fell the temperature had dropped to 10 degrees above zero and it was miserably cold but I managed to get everything back together around midnight.

I was very tired but feeling good that I had everything back together and decided to do one last thing and that was to crank up the truck. It started quickly but flooded and gas could be smelled everywhere. I had to work the next morning so gave it up for the night but went back to work on the truck Monday after getting home from work.

I went through everything again looking for anything that looked like a missing part and discovered two things in the cigar box. One was the jet that I had failed to put back in and the second item was a small black piece of rubber. That is when I realized that it was the cause of all the problems in the past. Evidently when the fuel filter was replaced and the short rubber hose that came with the filter was cut to fit to the carburetor, a small piece of the hose got inserted in the intake fuel line. When it clogged the line, a few minutes of settling and a decrease in fuel line pressure, the truck would get fuel and run normally.

I once made the mistake of telling this story to my good friend Don Mason and afterwards, anytime anything mechanical went awry, he would use the opportunity to suggest that it "may have been a small piece of rubber."



Calico host Town Miner

We used the weekends as an opportunity to explore some of the interesting tourist attractions such as Calico Ghost Town and Rainbow Basin. On other days we just drove out in the desert or as I mentioned earlier, we would drive up CA 18 to the back side of Big Bear.

On one trip up we stopped at about the 3,000 ft. level and let the boys explore the woods. One thing I noticed was the extreme amount of pine sap hanging from the limbs which explain the fires that California experiences.

Living so close to Las Vegas we were tempted to visit so the family loaded up with more "stuff" than we had money but we were looking for a fun drive across the desert and interested in seeing what Vegas looked like. I think we can all agree that it was a beautiful site to drop off the hill on I-15 and see the night lights of Las Vegas after dark. Now I'm reminded that was back in 1979 and we know that the skyline has changed drastically with all the new hotels. Still, it was a nice visit with our first stop to fill up the truck with gas and then get a motel. That way all would be paid up should we not have any money left. Then we headed for Circus Circus which had a casino downstairs and games for kids on 2nd floor. I would win and give some to the boys to play games and some to Kathie to gamble with, which she would promptly lose. In the end, we lost our money but it was a fun family outing.

There was another occasion that took me to Las Vegas when flying to BWI to visit our corporate office. I was told by friends at work where a good motel was to stay and if I chose to do so, it was also a place to gamble before my flight. As it turned out my gambling ran into most of the night because I was winning at the dollar slots. Around 3 AM I felt it was time to get a couple hours sleep before heading to the airport so I put in a wake-up call at the desk and retired to my room. When the alarm went off it was most difficult to wake up and get dressed but I had a plane to catch.

When I had time to count my winnings, I discovered that I had won a little more than $400 so I decided to go shopping once I got to Columbia, MD. One thing that Kathie needed badly that we hadn't found in Barstow was a nice winter coat. The desert might get well above a hundred degrees in the daytime but at night it can get bitter cold. Now that I had a few dollars to spend, I went coat shopping and used the winnings to buy her a beautiful long coat. Upon my return to Vegas, I still had a few dollars left from my previous visit so I decided to try my luck one more time and gamble some before making my way back to Barstow. The first big hotel I came to was the Flamingo so in I went and straight to the dollar slots. I walked to the nearest cage and asked the young lady working inside if she would point me to one that was ready to pay. She pointed at a machine in which I plugged in the maximum dollar play and hit sevens three times, each paying $60.

A few more wins and I had over $300 so I cashed in and tipped the young lady handsomely and started towards the exit but before I got to the door, I discovered that I still had a few coins in my coat pocket and there was a dollar slot machine near the entrance. I dropped my remaining coins in the machine and pulled the leaver and I turned toward the entrance and was about to walk away when I heard a small buzzing sound.

Then I noticed there was a bunch of sevens had come up but not straight across as I had hoped, yet there was that buzzing sound coming from the machine and while I was trying to figure out what the buzzer meant and wondering if I had won anything, my arm was grabbed suddenly from behind.

I'll admit that it startled me when I saw it was a security guard. However, he was just making sure that it was me that started all this and also holding me secure until 2 or 3 other guys came up to join us. One man leaned over and looked at this small counter on the right side of the machine and read off the numbers and apparently, I had just won $1800 dollars.

They did some calculations on a note pad, discussed it amongst themselves and then went to the cashier. Meantime we just stood there. Me and the guard. A man came back and paid me eighteen one-hundred-dollar bills. Wow! So now I have about $2100 in my pocket and I felt that everyone in the casino now knows that I'm loaded.

Now I'm hungry. I recall these same men that told me about the hotel also told me about gambling and eating at the Silver Slipper. It was supposed to have one of the better buffet dinners in town. It also advertised 97% payback on slots. Yes, I stopped. When I walked into the place there was an elevated cage right where you enter and the machines were dollar slots.

My hands were still dirty from the coins at the Flamingo so I asked where the restrooms and restaurant were located. She pointed one way for the men's room and the opposite for the dining room. So I said give me $100 in coins. Again, I asked the cashier in the cage to point me to a machine. She did and before I quit, I had won another $300.

That is when I decided I had enough of Las Vegas so I quickly exited the casino, got in my rental car and headed for Barstow. I was hungry so I stopped at a service station at the state line and got a sandwich. When you come into that amount of money in such a short time and in such a busy place with so many walks of people everywhere you look, it makes you nervous and even paranoid. You imagine that everyone in Vegas knows you won and how much and where you are keeping it on your person so I did the unexpected. I stuffed many hundred-dollar bills all throughout the pockets of Kathie's new coat.

Before making a trip back to Maryland, I sold the little Datsun truck to an employee at the site and purchased a Pontiac Bonneville from another BFEC employee who was TDY at Goldstone to conduct depot level maintenance on the antennas. Hey, for $300 I thought it was a smart move.

We had a good ride until just before dark as we were about to cross the river into Wheeling, WV. I was passing a car when the engine emitted a loud bang. Fortunately, I looked up in time to see a Holiday Inn sign so I immediately took the exit and drove up the hill into the parking lot. The car barely made it to the top of the hill and was making some nasty sounds when we pulled into the hotel. As far as I know, that was the last time the car ran so the next day I sat about finding a car salesman and this one gentleman from a local car dealer responded. I explained our situation and he sat about trying to find us a used car to no avail. In the end, he agreed to take me into Wheeling, WV where I could rent a car.

While we were having lunch a bad T-storm blew up and a lightning strike hit the hotel switchboard. The clerks were in a state of shock so I jumped over the counter and put out a fire in the switchboard where the lightning apparently hit. My problem grew larger because I had made all these calls to outside numbers and left the hotel's number but we soon learned that damage to the switchboard would permit outgoing but not incoming calls.

One outgoing call was when I made an appointment with a car salesman who was kind enough to take me to a service station that had car rentals and he even waited on me until I had a car. That wait became hours instead of a few minutes because the owner of the Service Station was waiting for the car to be delivered. When it came time to sign for the car and make a deposit, he declined and took only a copy of my license and handed me the keys. Only in West Virginia because anywhere else they would want a credit card, which I didn't have. In return for his assistance, I gave the salesman my keys and the title to the Pontiac and departed for Greenbelt, MD where I put Kathie and the boys on a bus. When she got to Georgia, she purchased a '79 Mercury Marquis ("The Pickle.") from her cousin's dealership. That car served us well taking us to Alaska and back to Maryland, a 5000-mile trip and eventually back to Titusville, Florida.

On one such trip from Barstow back to Goddard to attend a school on a Shuttle TV system that was going to be installed at Goldstone, I decided to visit several of the people I knew in Building 12. During one of those visits I spent a few minutes visiting with Phil Johnson who was managing a project that would later become BFEC's Space Network. The Space Network (SN) would eventually be the support network for the Tracking Data and Relay Satellite (TDRS) program. Most of the SN operations were going to take place out in White Sands, New Mexico.

At some point before my technical class was due to finish, Kathie and the boys drove up to Maryland in the new car she had just purchased. This trip was a little different than one she made earlier in the Datsun truck when it still had an Alaska license plate. Greg and Doug can best tell this story when a state trooper stopped her for speeding. It had something to do with the trooper telling her that he had never seen an Alaska tag before and the two states did not have reciprocal agreements which meant that he would have to take her to jail. To hear the boys tell it, that brought on an onslaught of tears and a story about her husband being in Maryland waiting on them...etc.etc. The trooper finally let her go with a warning.

On the morning that we departed Greenbelt, two things got us off on the wrong foot. First, it was Kathie picking up a suitcase and injuring her back, making her uncomfortable to sit. The next event was when the "new" car failed to shift out of 2nd gear. I eventually got it to shift up to higher gear, and it was scary for a moment but we were soon headed across country back to Barstow, but first, we had to make a stop in Northwest Arkansas to visit my parents before driving on to California. This was our second trek across the states within 2 months. The first was coming back east on a northern route through Nevada to Denver and across to Wheeling, WV where the mishap occurred with the old Pontiac. Now we were driving back again via I-40 and Route 66 with planned arrival in Barstow before school was to start the Monday after Labor Day, 1980.

Soon after our arrival home, I got a call from John Gale, Manager of State-side Tracking Stations and wanted to know if I was going to go to work for Phil Johnson. I informed him that I had not heard anything like that and I hadn't been offered a job with that group. John asked me if I would be interested in going to Alaska as Operations Manager. You bet I would, and as soon as I could buy airline tickets, I was on my way to Fairbanks to visit the Alaska (ULA) station. After a week's stay, I returned to Barstow and told the family to start packing. Soon movers were loading our housewares and we were on our way to Fairbanks via California where we drove through the San Joaquin Valley where all the roses and other flowers are grown and on up to San Francisco where we visited the Pier 39, visited some shops and had lunch before continuing north across the Golden Gate Bridge. Night was closing in but we decided to stop anyway at the H. Dana Bowers Memorial Vista Point to look back over San Fran. Afterwards we continued north to Sacramento where I had planned to spend the night.

So far it had been a very good drive from Barstow to this point so it was safe to find a motel and get off the road. Our next destination was Seattle, Washington where we planned to meet my nephew Jim Martin and his family. We left Washington and drove into British Columbia then Canada where we arrived at the beginning of the ALCAN Highway. We plan to make it a leisurely trip driving the old '59 Mercury, aka "The Pickle.

CHAPTER 29 – 1980 FAIRBANKS, AK



Dawson Creek, British Columbia



Start of Alcan Highway

The Milepost magazine documents every mile of the Alcan Highway from Dawson Creek to Fairbanks. We spent one night in Dawson Creek and planned our trip to arrive at the next city before the sun went down. The next day it was about 5 hours to Fort Nelson, then about 7 hours to Watson Lake, Yukon Territory, next a 13-hour drive to Whitehorse, YT and another 8 hours to Tok, AK and another 4 hours to Fairbanks. The driving times are estimated and likely were longer between towns because we were traveling in September and many of the small stores, gas stations and such were closed for the winter.

Contrary to what we heard during the three years in Fairbanks, the ALCAN was not "almost paved all the way." In fact, most of it was a dusty gravel road. There were places where permafrost had melted and turned the road to mud and in one place at the bottom of a hill it was so bad that a dump truck was almost buried in mud. All we could do was wait but the work crew finally decided to bury the truck all the way so that we could drive over it.

We were the lead car going north and there were other cars stacking up on the other hill that were coming our way but since we had been there first, the work crew waved us on. I will admit that I was a little tense because the mud was deep and I wasn't confident that the Mercury would pull its way up the hill. But despite the mud being deep enough to reach the bottom of the doors, the old Pickle pulled its way through.

Our next hazardous encounters were tractor trailers that owned the road. One truck came roaring off a hill coming directly at us at 50mph or more and throwing rocks everywhere. We could see an aurora of rocks around each tire and what we feared most, actually happened. As the truck approached us, a large rock came off the Semi trailer's left rear tire and came straight at us. It hit the car with a crack but we were never able to find where it hit.

As we began going up a hill a large truck appeared at the top and started down at a high rate of speed when a large rock came shooting straight at us causing Kathie and I to duck down below the dash. It made a terrible noise when it hit the car. Amazingly it didn't hit the windshield or break a headlight and I never found where it hit the car. Another hazard ere potholes large enough for a tire to drop all the way to the frame. I know because we experienced it. I was on a stretch of road that wasn't quite gravel or mud but more like a marl service so my speed was a little higher than usual when I suddenly hit a pothole. The car framed out on the right front tire and the hubcap flew off into the blue yonder down into a ravine.

I stopped and went after the hubcap though it was down in a small valley. I found two other hubcaps which I brought up to the side of the road. I put my hubcap in the truck but my mistake was not taking the others off and putting them in the trunk because when we got to Fairbanks, we only had the one hubcap in the trunk.

Almost every bend of the road there was beauty and we continued to point out all the wonderful sights to Greg and Doug but after a few hundred miles, they rarely looked up from whatever they were doing. For a while I could get their attention when I mentioned that we might see a moose as we rounded a corner but even that began to fall on deaf ears.

Suddenly there it was. Our first moose, but it was dead. Several hunters were gathered around a truck watching a big moose being winched into the bed of a pickup truck. The next wildlife we happened upon was about five bears. We were about to cross an iron bridge when we saw a family of bears walking across the bridge. They didn't seem to be too disturbed by our car so we sat and waited on them to exit the bridge.

But then there he was. A big monster of a bull moose was standing in the middle of the road. I did everything I knew to do to avoid hitting the moose. Brakes were on, the Pickle was sliding almost sideways with horn blowing and we all were staring through the windshield. Suddenly, the moose glided into the woods with ease which was as thick as a fence but he moved through the trees like a shadow despite the big rack of horns. We could only set and watch with awe at how easily he went through the trees without getting hung up.

Surprisingly the "Pickle" tackled the ALCAN quite well. Despite some of the hazards we had encountered the Mercury got us to Fairbanks with little or no damage. Not even a busted headlight, only the missing hubcaps. We recommend anyone who may wish to travel to Alaska on the Alcan, buy a Mile Post Magazine. It is updated almost every year and has everything that a traveler needs to know about the road to Alaska.

Upon our arrival in Fairbanks, we checked into the Maranatha Inn which used to be a Whore House. It housed a swimming pool indoors and all rooms were red velvet with gold trim on rails and everything metal had a gold look. I've heard some doozy stories about that place before it became the Maranatha which means Born Again. The hotel wasn't the best accommodation for us needing a permanent place to live and we soon found a place to rent temporarily in Wedgewood Apartments where we could use as a base of operations while searching for a house to rent.

We found a house to rent at 1625 Washington Dr which was shared with a young lady named Ramona who rented the smaller lower floor of the house. This house was fairly new and was owned by a man named Oscar. I believe he was from South America or somewhere in the southern continent. He pronounced his name as O'Scar and we learned there was a black cat by that name also. To whom it belonged, I don't know.


Trophy Elk

The house also came with a trophy he had mounted on the living room wall. It was a huge rack of a caribou. It was a monster and took up much of the wall and was little use except serve as a hat rack or conversation starter. But since I didn't shoot it and knew very little about it and wasn't able to contribute much except to point and say, yeah, it's really big.

It was in this house that I almost found out what freeze-up means. I had come home and was reading the paper while Kathie cooked dinner and it seemed to me that it was getting colder in the living room so I turned the thermostat down. Eventually Kathie agreed with me that it was not getting any warmer so I went down to the basement and discovered the furnace was not working. When I tried to call a heating technician for a service call, they were all busy. After calling every fuel oil and heating company in the phone book my last call was answered by a man who was in the business but was laid up with a broken leg. It seems the refinery had given the fuel oil companies the wrong fuel for that late in the winter.

This guy owned Paul's Burner service and guided me through the steps to get the furnace back on the air and promised that when he got back on his feet, he would come and perform a service call. It seems that I had already taken the necessary steps but it was comforting to learn what caused the problem and that I had taken all the correct steps to get heat back on in the house. And boy did we get heat. All the fuel that had gathered in the furnace was now burning and it was a long time before things got back to normal. We hadn't got naked yet but it was really getting hot in the house.

Later on, we moved into a duplex at 2133 McCullam Ave that had a basement with a heated garage. The garage was a bonus during winter but it was dicey driving down into it as you had to be perfectly aligned when you started down the driveway or you hit the edge of the door. It didn't take much to slip sideways enough to leave a scar. The important thing was to drive straight enough to enter the garage but over time the Pickle left its mark on the garage. Both sides of the garage door had chips taken out from errant descents into the basement.

On the other side of the basement was our pool table, which gave us plenty of enjoyment in all kinds of weather, rain or shine and the objective of the game was to beat Dad. There came a time when Greg finally won a game but not many. Even so he became a pretty good shot.

Now if one Googles the address, one can see that the apartment on the right where we lived is now painted Grey and the basement garage has been closed in. Our next-door neighbor Merlin planted a garden in the back on his side of the duplex and the almost overnight growth of the vegetables was amazing.

The 24-hour sun caused the garden to grow overnight. Cabbage was huge and likely weighed close to a hundred pounds. The size of turnips, onions and marijuana – yes marijuana – plants were extraordinary. The latter had grown so high that the plant was pushing on the eaves of the house. One morning I happened to mention to him that the kids had spotted the marijuana plant so by the afternoon it was harvested.

One of the best stories I have of the duplex was when I came home one evening during the winter and it was dark and cold. Just as I arrived at the top of the driveway, Merlin had just got out of his truck and started towards his house when he heard me honk the horn and started walking back to my car. The horn was a signal to Kathie to open the garage door for me but he thought it was me signaling him to come back to my car.

Just as Melvin got to the car, I rolled the window down and said that I was merely waiting for the garage door to open. When I said that and the door begin to open, Merlin got all excited because the landlord hadn't given him one and wanted to know when I got my automatic door opener.

I told him it was in December 1966 and about that time Kathie became visible pushing up the garage door. I decided another vehicle would be handy to have so that Kathie and the boys would have the Pickle so I purchased a 1970 Datsun King Cab. I put an 80lb bag of sand in the bed over each wheel well which provided a good bit of traction that I would not have otherwise. It had a topper but no air conditioner, which wasn't all that important in Alaska.

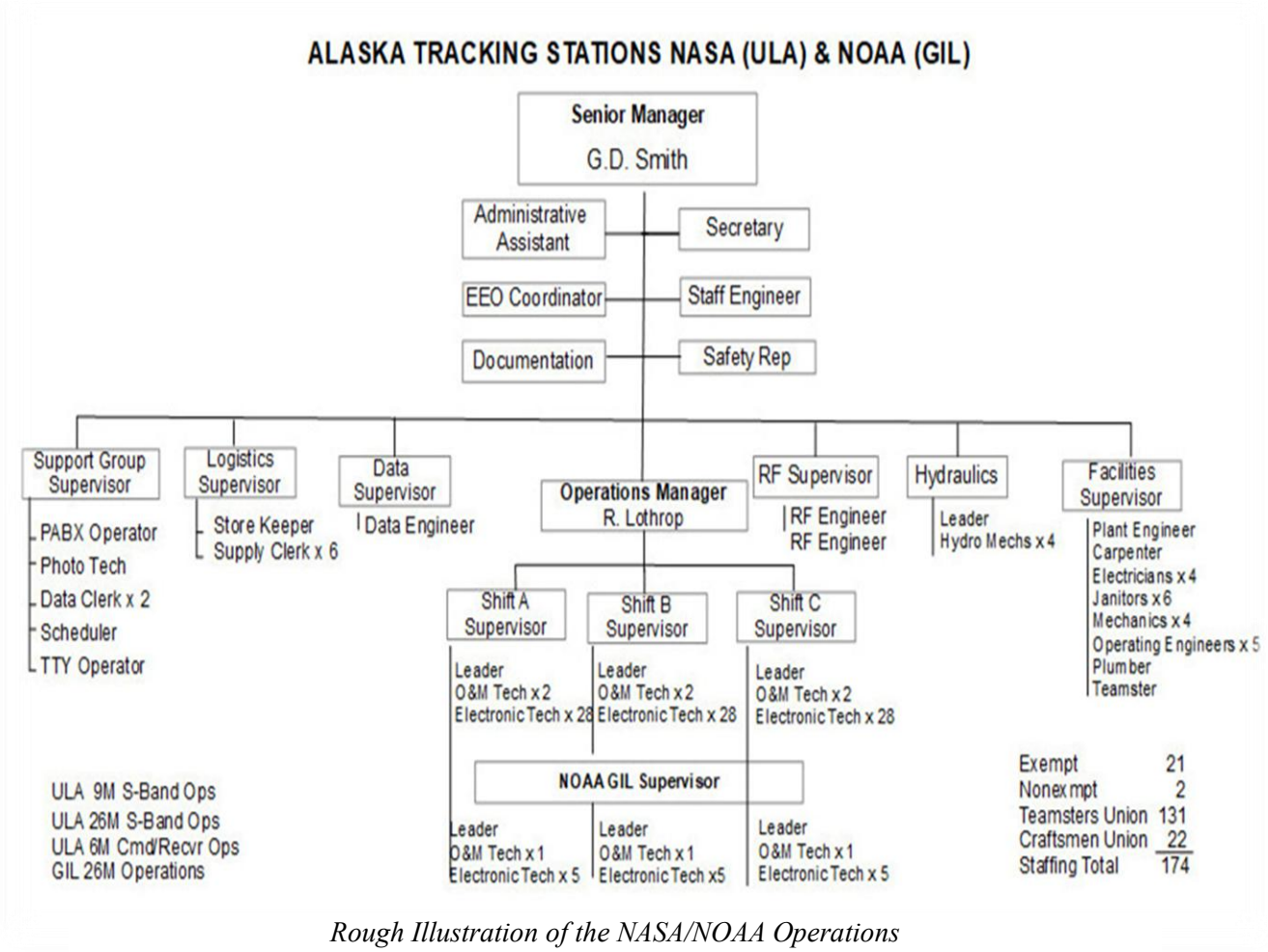
It was time to take a breath and take stock of our surroundings. I had moved my family from sunny Florida to the dry California desert and now to cold Alaska where I had a new job, a new house and a new city. The NASA/NOAA tracking stations were a large complex maintained and operated by Bendix technicians represented by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) and the Joint Crafts which was a union comprised of Carpenters, Janitors, Electricians, Mechanics and Operating Engineers.

Soon after my arrival in Alaska I was moved from Operations Manager to the Senior Manager's position where I learned that with the arrival of Bendix that succeeded RCA, the technicians voted in the Teamsters Union and soon there were over 2,000 grievances filed. Anyone who has worked with unions can tell you that money solves most grievances. Once all the grievances were settled, I can truly say that my three years working with the employees at the Alaska complex was very rewarding.

There came an opportunity to promote one of the shift supervisors to Operations Manager while transferring in a replacement from Goldstone. The entire site was happy about the promotion but after a few months in the position, it became apparent the new Ops Manager wasn't performing the job as well as expected. I noted also that my NASA customer wasn't all that pleased either so I replaced him with another employee who had worked at Alaska a long time as well but was known by the operations personnel as "Ricochet Roger." It was reported that Roger was quick to injected himself in every situation that arose on his shift. He was respected but the crew thought he bounced from one issue to the next. Quite frankly, the Teamsters thought I was out of my mind to promote him.

A couple months later I was approached by a couple of the union stewards and asked if I would join them after work for a drink at a local roadhouse. I agreed but called Kathie before leaving the site and told her I was going to meet the stewards and no doubt, this bit about the two teamsters that had surfaced was on both of our minds. After a few beers and small talk, the Chief Steward stood up and toasted me and thanked me for promoting Roger. The stewards said they were wrong. I had made a good decision to promote Roger. My customer thought so too.

After settling in the job, I learned that our so-called "Carpenter" was drawing big bucks from our insurance plan when he asked the Workers Compensation Board for more money. His alleged injury and subsequent claim was before my time but he was supposed to have injured his back while doing work at the tracking station. When the board contacted me for approval, I sent our Health and Safety Engineer down to the Carpenter's farm with instructions to verify his prolonged injury. The result was several candid photos showing the Carpenter lifting 100-pound bags of feed into his truck and other photos where he was lifting heavy objects seemingly without a struggle.



Rough Illustration of the NASA/NOAA Operations

The photos along with my disapproval were given to the presiding Board and his request was denied. Further, all future requests for money were denied with the threat that he may be prosecuted for a fraudulent claim. He was the last we heard him. There were instances where it appeared that a couple of employees may have been considering a workers compensation claim but after the incident with the Carpenter, word got around and we never had any more complaints of injury. The station was in fact a safe place to work.

We experienced a lot of "firsts" in Alaska. One example was the glacier control the Facilities crew devised to prevent Gilmore Creek from building a glacier that would damage the NOAA Operations Building if not push it off its foundation. It involved designing and building a torch that could be fed by diesel fuel and laid out on the ice where it would burn a hole for the water to go under the ice instead of building up on the surface and creating a glacier.



26M Counterweight Replacement

Another example of Alaska ingenuity was when a counterweight broke loose in the 85ft antenna. To repair it would require nothing short of a Depot Level Maintenance crew to perform the task but the site's Hydro Mechanics developed a plan that met the approval of me and the NASA Station Director.

To accomplish this task, the antenna would have to be tied down substantially to prevent it from tipping off its axis. It would be a dangerous repair effort. As it were, the mechanics succeeded in the repair effort saving NASA tens of thousands of dollars.

The competence of the Alaska employees was again demonstrated in the dismantlement and removal of the Goddard Range and Range Rate (GRARR) antenna consisting of two wheelhouses weighing many tons similar to the weight of the 9-meter S-band antennas that Collins built for the Manned Space Flight Network.

The cost to NASA to have a crew travel Fairbanks to accomplish the work would have been considerable. The efforts of the men in Alaska earned the station a lot of kudos and the prestigious Larry Jochen Award for Excellence.



GRARR Antenna

Their work earned me greater recognition and ultimately a promotion to Manager of NASA's Ground Spaceflight Tracking and Data Network (GSTDN) which was comprised of dozen tracking stations strategically located around the world. It also meant relocating back to Maryland.



Alaska was a great place to raise our boys who liked soccer and loved to fish, cross-country ski, snow machines and the outdoors in general. While hunting and fishing were very good, we didn't hunt but concentrated on fishing for anything that we could catch but Grayling was the most abundant.

A month after we arrived, Doug couldn't go fishing until he had his tonsils removed but he and a buddy pretty much made up for lost time after his throat healed.

Greg, the tall kid, was goalie on a Soccer team and played very well. He was tall for his age and as long as he could keep his glasses from fogging up and clean from the mud, he did a good job of defending. Doug too played on a soccer team.

What is remarkable is that no matter the age, the kids on the soccer teams played in T-shirts and shorts while we parents and onlookers were wearing parkas. Or in my case I learned to wear my snowsuit to keep the mosquitoes from biting.



Soccer Boy Doug

During the summer months we went through a case of Off Mosquito Spray as quickly as someone with a dose of salts. About everyone you encountered smelled like Off. Unless of course you used Avon Skin So Soft which we often did.

The use of Skin So Soft came about after I read where an old Cajun was asked what he used for mosquito repellent. He said he used Avon Skin So Soft "because it smelt good and din't ruin the blue'n on his gun." That was good enough for me. Now I think Avon makes a bug repellent.

Contrary to what some people think, Fairbanks had a temperature swing of 150 degrees or more. In the winter it might be minus 60 whereas the summer could reach as high as 90 degrees or more. This made it tough on equipment and especially electronic equipment that was exposed to the elements. One thing that I never heard from any of the Alaska employees was that it was too cold to work.

I never heard any complaints of that sort and there were times when the weather was neither fit for man nor beast but if operations were dependent on making repairs out in the cold, so be it. The work got done which is something I admired in the Alaska crew and don't know if I can say that about other stations that I worked at.

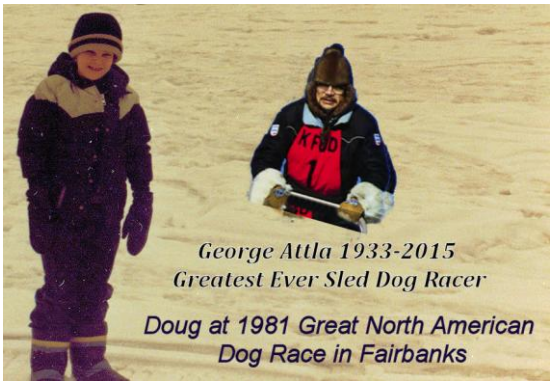
On one hot night with temperatures in the 90's Kathie and I were unable to sleep nor could the boys, so I got dressed and went downtown to JC Penney that was having a moonlight madness sale on fans. While there I also purchased a 5-man inflatable rubber raft and a half-inch ratchet with a spark plug socket. I might add that the beautiful Chena River ran through the city of Fairbanks. One day we took the Pickle down to the west end of the city then carried the raft in my Nissan truck I had purchased to the east end of the city. We inflated the raft and we four piled in. Ouch! The water was very cold and it wasn't long before our butts became numb enough not to notice.

A couple hours later we had drifted down to the middle of the city where a Boatel was situated at a point that was easy for us to pull in and get a drink. Afterwards we drifted down the river and came upon a sandbar where Kathie threatened to get out but the boys wouldn't let her.

There were too many good things that occurred in Fairbanks to address them all so I will touch only a few that were important to me and the family. It was a great place for the boys to go outside and play and not too far from the Chena River where Doug and his buddy like to fish for Grayling and all they needed was an ultra-light rod and a fly that looked like a mosquito. I would often drop them off on the banks of the Chena River with their fishing gear and a sandwich or something to eat and they would spend the day walking the banks of the river. Those two boys were so quiet that they could fish all day and not say much more than a dozen words to one another. They didn't need to.

I wondered how they could stand the mosquitoes that lay over the water like a 2 ft. blanket. The only thing that disturbed them was when a Grayling came up to grab one or when the boys line cut through them to get to the water. They were so thick that one would think a light line would just lay on top of them.

An exciting big event in Alaska is the great Iditarod 964-mile dog race from Anchorage to Nome and another is the Fairbanks Great North American Sled Dog Race is known as the "Grand Daddy of them all."



It is the longest running dog race and would have marked its 75th race this year but for COVID-19. Kathie and Doug attended the 1981 North American Sled Dog race and got to see the legendary race champion George Attla. He won ten Fur Rendezvous Championships and eight North American Open Championships.

Books have been written and movies (Spirit of the Wind) that were made about George Attla's career. He was eight when he got bone tuberculosis and underwent several surgeries that left him with a limp. George died in February 2015. He may have been the greatest sled dog racer in history and his record is not likely to be repeated. Want more? Look him up on Google.



Falkland War Gunnery Sargent

One year of the Great North American Race in Fairbanks, a decorated Falkland War veteran won a Smirnoff Vodka Make-a-Wish contest in London. His wish was to enter a sled dog race in Alaska. With only a few dog handling lessons, he did quite well and finished in the top five.

Another great race is the 1000-mile Yukon Quest that runs from Fairbanks to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. And finally, the Yukon 800 Marathon which is a River Boat Race that runs from Fairbanks to Galena and back. There are three crew members in a 24ft or longer river boat powered by a stock 50 HP outboard. Prizes vary but there used to be silver for the first to reach Galena and gold for the winners when they reached Fairbanks. Current rules and information can be found on the Internet.

One of the early contestants and a winner worked at the site. His name was Jerry Evans and he was always good to assist new racers with their boats, engines and whatever else to make them competitive. He helped one new employee of the site get outfitted and he placed 5th in his first race. Interesting enough, the top five boats all came in within 5 minutes of one another.

We learned that whatever the Alaskans set their mind to doing something, they did it in a big way. Evans was an Athabaskan Indian and like many of his ethnicity, he was soft spoken and measured his speech. One day during the winter several employees were taking a lunch break and were remarking about the sun entering a notch on what we called Command Hill when Jerry walked in.

The conversation was about this being the last day the sun would be seen until spring when the conversation shifted to Jerry who was well liked and respected by all employees and he was a good storyteller that could command the attention of anyone in earshot because of his soft voice, characteristic of many Alaskan natives.

That day there were several employees in the dining room when someone asked Jerry what kind of winter was in store for us. Jerry looked around to see if he had everyone's attention and in a soft voice said that he visited his grandpa and asked him what kind of winter we would have. "Grandpa looked at me, took a puff on his pipe and said", *"Grandson, I'm sorry to say but we are going to have a long hard winter."* Jerry said he asked his Grandpa, how did he know that? His grandpa took another puff and said, *"Grandson, I have been reading the signs."* Jerry asked his grandpa, "What kind of signs? " By now each of us were hanging on every word and syllable when Jerry said his grandpa took another puff off his pipe and looked up at the sky and said., *"Grandson, the signs say the White Man is laying in a lot of wood!"* He had us all hanging on to that last word and the place erupted with laughter.

I began thinking about a picnic and how to have one where all three shifts could participate. Another issue that had to be resolved was location because at that time the Teamsters were boycotting all products related to Odom Distributors, a company based in Seattle. In fact, that is where it all began when Odom Distributors and the Treasurer Jesse Carr, Local 959, couldn't agree on a contract that involved one Teamster. As a result, Jesse directed all of Alaska Teamsters to picket the shopping centers and any place that sold Odem products, which basically were all brands of alcohol. This meant grocery stores too.

The station Teamsters protested but eventually things were worked out. I should make it clear that Jesse Carr was one of the most powerful men in the Western United States. As Treasurer of Local 959, he had control and lots of power that he exercised from time to time. An agreement was made to allow the station Teamsters to pay someone to picket in their place. A big reason is that the lost hourly wages were far more than paying someone to take your turn on the picket line.

One big product that Odom distributed in Fairbanks was Miller Light and when I started planning the picnic the strike was still on so I went to see one of the technicians that owned a bar. I asked if he could furnish at least 5 kegs of beer, preferably Miller Light. He said he could and he did. One of the Union stewards asked what kind of beer it was and when I told him Miller Light, he spat it on the ground. However, I did see him go back to the keg when I wasn't looking.

The first ever Bendix Picnic was held in Pioneer Park and ran for four days, beginning Friday and running into Monday so all three shifts had an opportunity to attend. At the same time, I had Mom and Dad fly from Arkansas to spend a few days to celebrate their 50th anniversary. Dad had retired from the Air Force in Anchorage but they had never made the trip to Fairbanks all the time they were in Alaska and this was a good time for them to visit because we were having 24 hours of sunshine. Mom and Dad were able to join us at the picnic while shift after shift were able to participate. My dad found a partner to play horseshoes with. He and John Slone took over the horseshoe pits and were almost impossible to beat. The four days gave everyone at the site a chance to attend and plenty of opportunity for Dad and John to hone their horseshoe skills.

As the winter approached, it was becoming more difficult for the Teamsters to shop for Christmas gifts because they were not supposed to visit the shopping centers. Finally, an agreement was made to permit the Teamsters to shop at one shopping center and those stores only. I don't know if they were permitted to shop in Anchorage or not but that was an all-day drive and 360 miles to the south.

That first winter of our arrival in Fairbanks we made the long drive to Anchorage. Not to shop but to visit friends who were fellow BFEC employees, the Krugman's that we first met in Canary Island and last saw in Merritt Island, Florida. The last we heard of Clay and Monica was that their home had burned and they had left for Alaska. Of course, I would never have guessed that one day we too would be in Alaska. But here we were. I looked Clay up in the telephone directory and sure enough he was living in Anchorage. Both he and Monica had found jobs in Anchorage.

Clay was working in logistics for a big communications company while Monica was driving a forklift for another. They invited us to visit during the long weekend so Kathie and I and the two boys left Fairbanks in the Pickle with a minus 50-degree temperature and snow on the road but we had all our warm clothes inside and snacks to keep us on the road for the 360 miles to Anchorage. The drive was uneventful except once Greg happened to notice the temperature was going up on the car. The outside temperature was too. But then I remembered that I still had cardboard between the radiator and the grill. Problem solved.

It was a great visit and we had no problems with our trip in either direction. There is an old Alaska saying, "There are two types of drivers; those who've been in a ditch and those who are going in a ditch." You guessed it. Before the year was out, I was one of those that had been in a ditch. I ran into some black ice and zip, I was immediately in the ditch running through snow that was 2ft higher than the Pickle.

What really concerned me was somewhere along there the Alaska Pipeline crossed that ditch I was in so I turned the wheel and shot out onto the road. Unbelievable but the Pickle pulled right out of the ditch. Later I heard employees talking about someone leaving a tunnel in the snow. The one surprising thing is that the Pickle endured three Alaskan winters without serious damage to the interior. When purchasing a nice car like the Mercury one would never think that it might one day be driven in Alaska so Naugahyde seats weren't a concern. But minus 60 degrees was hard on plastic seats and interior.

As recommended by the Milepost and others, I had taken all the precautions such as engine block heaters and battery blankets but the one thing that served its purpose was the 1200-watt heater that I had on the inside of the car. When we plugged into the electric hitching post all the heaters went to work, otherwise the seats would harden and feel like glass. Years later the effects of the cold temperatures could be seen on the edge of the driver's seat where the Naugahyde was cracked. Sitting outside in the cold for 8 to 10 hours did a number on the tires too. Most of us ran radial tires which held up in the cold and gave us good traction. For the most part Fairbanks and the surrounding boroughs used gravel on the road in lieu of salt.

There was a day when my left rear tire lost air. It wasn't noticeable because the cold caused the ground side of the tires to be slightly flat and they didn't become fully circular until you had driven them a few miles and warmed them up. The rough ride to town wasn't cause for concern as it was more normal than not but I made a quick stop at the drug store. When I came out, the flat tire was obvious. What a pleasure it is to have to change a tire with the temperature at minus 50 degrees with all your foul weather gear on.

During the summer of 1983 I made an administrative visit back to Corporate HQ in Columbia, Maryland to discuss preparations for a new bargaining contract with the Teamsters and a new contract with the Joint Crafts. Our president of BFEC at that time was Murray Weingarten who had been looking at the wages we were paying the union employees who were averaging a 56-hour work week.

He saw a disparity in the wages of our salaried employees and mine in particular. He expressed his appreciation for the work that I had been doing and said I should get a pay raise. He also said he had never gone to Alaska and he made it clear that he never would. Not long after I returned to Fairbanks, I was excited to learn that I was to receive a promotion to Manager, Ground Satellite Tracking and Data Network (GSTDN) and a 40% raise which meant a move back to Maryland to work for Phil Johnson, Vice President Space Operations.

Before leaving Fairbanks, I prepared the Pickle by installing a tow package just in case it became necessary to tow the truck during the long trip back to the lower forty-eight. As it turned out there came a time when I was pleased that I had done so because Kathie fell ill and didn't feel well enough to drive so we had two vehicles but only one driver. With the truck hooked to the Pickle and it raining hard, we ran into roadwork where the road was muddy and had an 8ft ditch on the right side with no guard rail. It was scary navigating the road hoping neither vehicle would slide over the side, but despite some slipping and sliding we managed to get through safely.

With each driving a vehicle, in all of the 5,000 miles, I lost sight of Kathie only twice. Once was when we were approaching a curve on the gravel road and dust was flying when around the curve came a large tractor trailer blowing dust high into the air. It was so bad that even with the Pickle's' headlights, I could not see her behind me nor could I see the road ahead. I made my best guess as to how the road curved and continued on in hopes she was still behind me and hadn't hit the truck or the ditch but when the dust allowed us to see, she was right behind me. For 5,000 miles she stuck to me like glue.

There was another time I lost sight of her when she got caught by a red light while driving through Calgary, Canada. Fortunately, our CB radios in the vehicles kept us in touch and we met up at a Pizza restaurant.

We went through Mitchell, South Dakota and visited the Corn Palace then on to Mount Rushmore where we ran into a large crowd of bikers who likely were in the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. The Sturgis event is held each August and attended by motorcycle riders from all over the United States and from other countries.

We were right in the middle of the tail end of the rally and when we arrived and pulled into the parking lot, many of the participants were bikers that were visiting Mount Rushmore Park along with us. There appeared to be thousands of motorcyclists at the park and about all the parking spaces were full of bikes but for two empty spaces near the center of the park.

Since the parking spaces were closer to the entrance and there were no cars to see anywhere around, I pulled into an empty space and Kathie followed with the Pickle. Our two vehicles were parked in the middle of hundreds of bikes.

We went through Mitchell, South Dakota and visited the Corn Palace then on to Mount Rushmore where we ran into a large crowd of bikers who likely were in the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. The Sturgis event is held each August and attended by motorcycle riders from all over the United States and from other countries.

We were right in the middle of the tail end of the rally and when we arrived and pulled into the parking lot, many of the participants were bikers that were visiting Mount Rushmore Park along with us. There appeared to be thousands of motorcyclists at the park and about all the parking spaces were full of bikes but for two empty spaces near the center of the park.

Since the parking spaces were closer to the entrance and there were no cars to see anywhere around, I pulled into an empty space and Kathie followed with the Pickle. Our two vehicles were parked in the middle of hundreds of bikes.

One of the bikers got up from the one lone tree in the parking lot and mumbled something we didn't understand but another biker saw our Alaska license plates and said something about Alaska and told the other biker to leave us alone. From there we had a good 100 yards to walk through hundreds of bikes to get to the Park entrance.

When we four finally found a place to view Mount Rushmore, we were in the middle of hundreds of bikers. There was this one giant biker who looked like a man that we've seen in movies where bikers are part of the cast. The guy had about a 100lbs of chain hanging all around his neck and shoulders like they were jewelry. I remember the look on Greg's face when he said he was going to the bathroom and turned around to find himself staring into this giant's belt buckle. Greg changed his mind. I don't blame him because I didn't want to go to the bathroom either.

We made a stop in Rockford, Illinois for a short visit to my sister Carla and her husband Bill since it had been a long time since Carla and I had seen one another. Soon we were on the road again to Chrisman, Illinois for another quick stop at the home of Brother Jerry. Again, our visit was short because I had plans to report to work earlier than scheduled and we had miles to go and needed time to find a place to live in Maryland.

CHAPTER 30 – 1983 EDGEWATER, MD

My promotion to Manager, NASA Ground Satellite Tracking and Data Network (GSTDN) was accompanied by a move from Fairbanks back to Maryland near BFEC Corporate and our customer, Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC), so we enlisted a Realtor to help us find a house. After looking at several houses, we purchased a house in Edgewater at 1633 Midland Road with the water of Plebe Bay behind the house separating us from Annapolis.



Our New House First Winter 1983



New look Summer 2018

It was here in Maryland that we went looking for a family pet and decided to buy a female pup from a mixed breed litter of Chesapeake Springer Spaniel and Black Labrador Retriever. The boys named her Misty. She was black like a Lab but with a touch of a white spot on her chest and feathers (long hair) like a Springer Spaniel.

She was without question the best dog that we could ever own. Soon after we brought her home, one of our neighbors got a mixed black Lab that he named Bullet. As the two dogs grew up together, they became inseparable. If she got a dog bone, Misty made sure that Bullet got his too. He would come to the back porch landing and Misty would pass his treat through the gate before she took hers.

As can be seen by the pictures of the house when we purchased it in 1983, there was snow on the ground. What was worse were temperatures that were near zero causing South River and Plebe Bay to freeze over. One afternoon after I arrived home from work and was about to sit and read the newspaper, I looked out and seen kids playing on the river ice. I turned and looked at Kathie and said, “Didn't we just drive 5,000 miles to leave all that behind?”

Edgewater was a beautiful quiet beach community with an Association formed to govern the use of the beaches and waterfront. No one owner could call ownership of a beach or the waterfront because it all belonged to the association of homeowners. At night we could look across the river and see the lights of Annapolis off in the distance.

Greg was enrolled in South River High School while Doug went to Edgewater Elementary School. My commute to my office at 10210 Greenbelt Rd was approximately 25 minutes using the back roads of 214 and 193. There was less traffic and it was deemed a snow evacuation route so the roads were generally clear of snow during the wintertime.

The Datsun truck that I had purchased in Alaska and driven to Maryland had no air conditioner so I traded it for a 1976 Monte Carlo. This was the car in which Greg learned to drive...and learned to hate. It had two things going for it. First, it was accident prone and second it required great quantities of gas, neither of which Greg could afford.

The first accident was when he and his buddies were on a rural Maryland road that was wet and covered with leaves. He went into the ditch. The next accident was in a parking lot where he alleged that a lady pulled out of a parking space and ran into his left fender.

The third accident was only minutes after he told me about the first two. He had just left the house and was passing the local Fire Station when an employee backed out of a parking space and hit the right fender. Now the Monte Carlo had a matching set of fenders and Greg now wanted to drive the Pickle. The word NO was issued in stereo coming from me and his mom.

The 8th floor of the Bendix Building where my office was located had unused rooms in which one fellow BFEC employee Dan Duffy moved into. Dan had once managed the NASCOM contract but had recently lost to a competing company and he now needed office space which I provided.

My office was comprised of an Assistant Manager, a Secretary, a Business Administrator and two or three other men that needed temporary work. Besides Dan Duffy, the other BFEC employees were in between contracts or needed to charge their time to my accounts temporarily so we provided office space for them as well. Eventually Dan and I became good friends when I learned that he owned a large boat and one weekend, he asked me to go fishing with him. It was not quite a yacht though one could live on it comfortably if necessary. I decided to take him up on the invitation and asked if I could take my son Doug who loved to fish as much as I did.

The water was rough on the Bay that day and the longer we stayed out the higher the swells became. In the meantime, Doug was tending the lines while Dan and I sat up on the upper deck enjoying a beer and listening to country music.

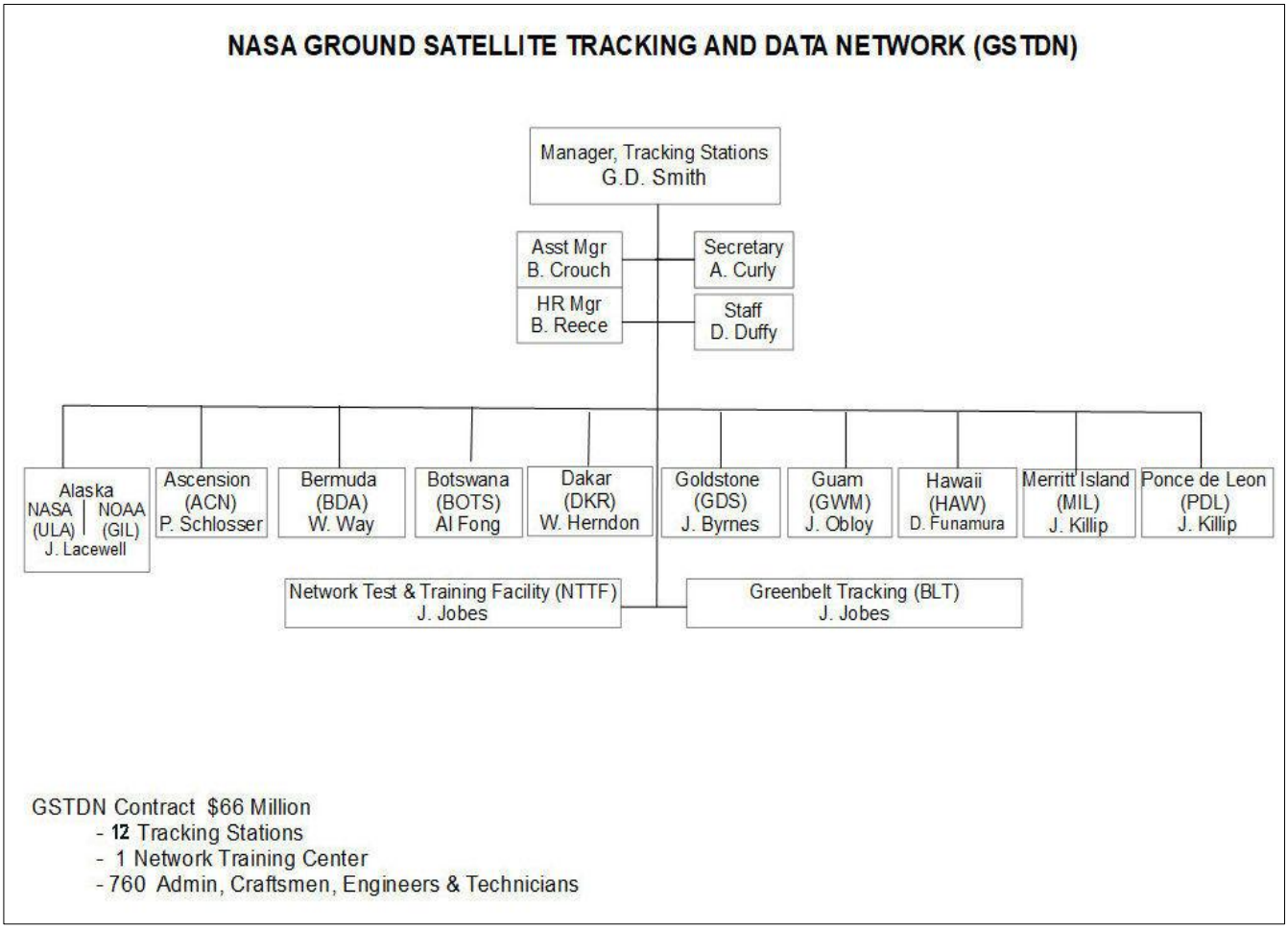


Doug & Blue Fish from Chesapeake Bay

Despite the large swells, Doug was pulling in the Blues. One minute he would be way down in the trough and the next minute above us as the swells lifted the boat up and down. Finally, it got too rough and we had to give it up but the results are in the photo. No doubt Doug's arms were about to fall off. He was very tired but happy to show off his catch.

As Manager of GSTDN, my responsibility was to manage a $66 million dollar contract with a thousand or more employees staffing my offices and 12 tracking stations situated strategically in both the USA and overseas. Stations were located in Alaska, Ascension Island, UK. Bermuda, Botswana, Africa, Dakar, Senegal, California, Guam, Hawaii, Maryland, Merritt Island and New Smyrna, Florida.

My job was very demanding with management oversight to eight network tracking stations and all in different time zones. Having managed a large tracking complex myself, I was intimately familiar with the duties and responsibilities of the Senior Managers at these facilities and a small part of my duties was to monitor the operations performance during shuttle launches and report to NASA Headquarters as to the network status and ability to support shuttle operations.



Other duties were to develop and approve policies and administrative guidelines for use by the Tracking Station Office, overseas tracking stations and corporate administrative departments. Many of these policies were adopted by other programs as well, especially those with employees traveling overseas. This document became the bible for both state-side and overseas facilities where BFEC – and later ATSC - employees were assigned.

By now I had 23 years of experience working with bargaining contracts having worked with the Teamsters, I.B.E.W, United Telephone Workers, AFL-CIO and multiple crafts to include carpenters, electricians, mechanics, plumbers, and operating engineers. I participated in negotiating six bargaining agreements that involved the Alaska Teamsters and Joint Crafts and the I.B.E.W. at Merritt Island.

I attribute my promotion to the extraordinary accomplishments of the Teamsters and Operating Engineers at Alaska who performed some outstanding jobs that resulted in significant cost savings to our NASA customer.

Now saddled with greater responsibility, my staff and I were responsible for providing administrative support, manpower and whatever assistance these stations may require maintaining operational readiness. Sometimes it might be a technician or craftsman that was needed to fill a critical slot or in one instance it involved chartering a plane to deliver a critical part to Bermuda for their Ranging system to enable them to go Green for a shuttle launch.

One important function of my job was management visits to these sites. In some cases, it was to evaluate the site manager's performance and other visits were to recognize employees for their service and present them service awards in the presence of their peers. There were other occasions where I would have an astronaut accompany me to boost morale. For me it was a 24/7 job since most of the stations were in a different time zone than mine.

My goal was to pay an annual visit to each tracking station but it soon became obvious that objective wasn't going to be met. I did however make trips to Alaska, Ascension, Dakar, Guam, Hawaii, Goldstone and Merritt Island, FL. I had plans to visit Bermuda but I already had a trip planned to Guam and Hawaii. During the three years I was GSTDN Manager, I regret not making it to Bermuda.

One of my early tasks in the new office was to fill the position I had vacated in Alaska. From several candidates, I selected John Lacewell who had bumped around the network for several years. I selected him because of his experience but if that wasn't enough, his swagger and genuine confidence were enough to get him through most situations.

There were a number of stories surrounding John and one I liked in particular was when he was selected to manage the Ascension Island station. Ascension did not have a wharf or a dock so when a ship came in, a smaller craft had to ferry people and freight onto the island.

It was said that when John arrived by boat, he was seen standing with one foot on the bow and a large white scarf wrapped around his neck blowing in the wind and looking like a conquering hero. It so happens that I have my own story about Lacewell. It was John that I selected to replace me as the Alaska Station Manager and I planned to escort John and his wife to Fairbanks to give him a proper introduction to our NASA and NOAA customers and to the station employees.

John was married to a beautiful girl from India and was as much the persona as described in the Ascension story. When it came time for me to escort him and his wife Jean to Fairbanks, I suggested he rent the car and pick me up at home in Edgewater. John said he would make the flight arrangements to Alaska and pick up a rental car to get us to the airport.I agreed and was willing to let him take care of these arrangements for the three of us but when he and his wife picked me up Sunday morning, I was surprised when he began driving all the way across Washington DC.

I questioned his sense of direction expecting to fly out of BWI where most all our flights originated or ended. No, he had made flight arrangements at Dulles Airport which was way over on the other side of the District and in Virginia. It was a half day's ride and when we got to the airport John said he was hungry and began looking for a place to eat.

We stopped at a hotel which was the only place to eat at the time and it being Sunday, all they had was Brunch and a very expensive Brunch at that. After leaving most of our wallets at the hotel, we entered the airport, checked our luggage and went to the waiting area where the three of us waited...and waited...and waited.

Finally at our scheduled flight time and no sign of anyone taking tickets at the gate, we learned the plane had been delayed at BWI. Six O'clock came and went and still no plane but it is now time for John's medication of some sort but his Meds were in their luggage which had already been taken to the luggage storage area. Before any discussion might persuade his wife otherwise, Jean talked to a security guard and then slid down the baggage chute, climbed over baggage until she found their luggage, retrieved his Meds and returned to the gate disheveled. Her actions happened so fast I don't know if anyone could have prevented it.

Then after all the time waiting because of the flight delay, to add insult to injury, the security folks tell us that we must leave so they can lock up the gate. Why??? Because it is their dinner time and the gate area had to be vacated while they ate. Besides the plane had been delayed until 8 pm.

When the plane finally arrived, it became apparent that this trip from hell wasn't over with yet because we were about to miss our flight from Seattle to Fairbanks. And we did. Upon arrival in Seattle, John and I started in on the young lady that was still at the now closed gate since the plane had been long gone.

We explained our situation and tried to arrange another flight to Fairbanks but to no avail as nothing was available until early the next morning. So, we requested that we be given some kind of compensation such as a meal ticket and a hotel room. That fell on deaf ears so we asked to speak to her supervisor and when she showed up John and I double-teamed her but again our efforts were futile. We either had to sleep in the lobby or get a motel. We finally gave up and called for a ride to the Red Lion Hotel and while eating an early breakfast, the waitress overheard us and said other airlines give out a $100 meal ticket and a room.

Service awards were celebrated by hosting a dinner for employees and their spouses. Over the years I hosted many such award dinners and one of my favorite things to do at these dinners was to see how many employees still had the original ID card that was issued by BFEC. Not surprisingly most of them did. Was it because the picture on the ID showed reminded us of what we looked like when we all had hair?

In addition to my travel to the tracking stations to conduct management visits or present service awards, it may have involved a promotion or at other times to address unsatisfactory performance. The visits I enjoyed most were the ones where I would conduct Employee-Management Communications Meetings or Comm Meetings for short.

This was always a great time to have informal talks with employees, present service awards or exchange information while briefing them on organizational changes and future company plans. A big part of my job as Network Manager was to boost morale be it through visits to the tracking stations and conducting Comm Meetings or arranging visits by an astronaut such as the visit to NASA's Network Test and Training Facility (NT&TF) by Robert Parker, a Mission Specialist on STS-9 and STS-35.



Me and Astronaut Robert Parker visit Greenbelt Tracking Station

These visits were intended to boost morale and provide an opportunity for employees to meet and greet the astronaut while providing the astronaut with a tour of the facility where he could see the equipment and personnel that provided operations support to his missions.

One of the most physically demanding trips I made was a management visit in 1985 to Hawaii and Guam. Departing BWI, I flew to Chicago and on to Los Angeles, then to Oahu, Hawaii and finally to Kauai, my final destination where I visited the tracking station and crew for the better part of the week.



Presenting Service Awards o Alaska Employees

It was always my intent to have the site's Business Administrator select the restaurant and invite the appropriate employees and guest in accordance with our company policy so on that particular evening I was given directions to this large hotel and upon entering the dining room I was hailed by a group at one large table. Then another table said Aloha, then another. I began to think that the entire station that wasn't working was invited. However, it was a special occasion that didn't happen very often.

I might add that my expense report for the evening was a whopper so I decided to slip it under several other files on my Vice President's desk. Even now he remembers having to eat the cost of that dinner but I was there to host a dinner and present a 25-year service award to the Hawaii station manager. There were other employees besides Dan Funamura who were celebrating many years of service also.

While on the island Dan gave me a tour of Kauai and spoke of some of the legends. There are about seven well known legends including the Naupaka flower. He told me some of the legends that involve lovers like Naupalca and Kaui. Naupaka was a princess who loved a commoner named Kaui. They were not permitted to marry so Naupaka stayed in the mountains and Kaui remained along the coast. Before they separated, she took the flower from her hair and tore it in half giving half to Kaui. Legend has it that the plants in the area were so saddened that they began growing flowers that have only half the blossom. In the mountains one-half of the Naupaka flower grows and the other half of the flower grows along the coast where her lover Kaui lives.



Naupaka Blossom



Presenting pin to Dan

Dan told me about the Menehunes and showed me the ditch that legend has it made by the Menehunes who are said to be dwarf-like people who live in the forests and hidden valleys of Hawaii and hide from humans. They are said to have lived in Hawaii even before the Polynesian settlers and were excellent craftsmen. A particular feat of engineering is the aqueduct called the Menehunes Ditch on Kauai, which was built prior to Western contact and is considered a masterpiece. This distinction is because the rocks are carefully squared and smoothed to create a watertight seal. It is said they built it overnight. True or not I have seen the ditch and it is truly remarkable.

There are more legends but one is unusual and interesting as the Naupaka flower and that is the curse of Pele, Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes. Tourists are warned not to remove the sacred rocks and sand because it will bring them bad luck. No matter if the legend is true or not, it is rumored that over the years many tons of rocks and sand have been returned to the Hilo Post Office by tourists who wish to change their luck.

After spending a week visiting the Hawaii tracking station, I caught the last flight of the evening back to Oahu where I had to wait about 3 hours until my flight to Guam.



It was about a 10-hour flight to the island of Guam but I slept most of the way since I had very little sleep the day before and not much sleep all week. Upon arrival around 3 AM or thereabouts, I was met by the Site Manager John Obloy who took me to the hotel where I was to stay and waited until I had a shower and a change of clothes before we drove out to the tracking station. The day began with breakfast and a meeting with the mid-shift employees before they left for home. It was a great meeting and a wonderful welcome from the station personnel.

On one sunny day the husband of one of the station's employees invited me to take a boat trip out to what I believe was called Cocos Island. Although we didn't do any fishing, it was nice to be out on the water. It was a beautiful boat ride and from what I saw of the island it had much potential for development but that was 36 years ago. Who knows, that dream may have grown into reality by now. As a token of my visit to Guam, the station personnel presented me with a beautiful wooden plaque that features Chamorro dancers with their coconut bras.

As luck would have it, I met up with a long-lost cousin who I had not seen since 1947 in Charleston, SC, when he and my dad joined the Air Force. During his years of service, he was assigned to Guam and after retiring from the Air Force he decided to stay in Guam. He and his daughter picked me up at the hotel and took me to dinner where we tried to bridge a memory gap of 38 years.

On my return flight from Guam to Hawaii, I arrived in Oahu early in the morning and my flight to Los Angeles wasn't scheduled to depart until late that evening so I was pleased to see Chris, our down range coordinator for that part of the hemisphere.

When we had personnel flying to or from Hawaii, Guam and other parts of that region, Chris was our go-to guy that would meet them at the airport and see that they got on the schedule flights in and out of Oahu. As a result, he charged half of his time to my program and the other half to various programs that had business in that area.

Again, I was tired and sleepy after an all-day visit to the station before getting on the long flight from Guam to Hawaii. Even so, the smell of the leis upon our arrival at the Oahu airport tickled the senses because the aroma of the orchards makes you feel alive and is something not easily forgotten.

Apparently, Chris recognized my physical state so he set about keeping me awake by taking me on a tour of the island. After all it had been fifty years since I was here in 1961 when my ship, the USS Edisto (AGB-2), was in dry dock for repairs after returning from our Antarctic cruise that damaged the ship so badly.

After spending most of the morning driving along the coast we decided to stop at a hotel and have lunch. Over coffee I began relating some of the stories that Dan told me about the legend of the sacred lava rocks. The hotel's waitress who was serving us overheard our conversation. She offered to tell us a story about her brother and the lava rocks.

Of course, Chris and I wanted to hear her story so she says her brother built a big house on a lot overlooking the ocean. He used some of the rocks to build his fireplace and not long after he and his family moved in, they began to have bad luck. As a native Hawaiian he was permitted to use the rocks and despite being told that the fireplace was in the wrong place by a Kahuna (Hawaiian Medicine Man), the brother built it anyway.

The family continued to experience bad luck so much so that the brother asked another Kahuna to visit the new house. The Kahuna said the fireplace was in the wrong location. She said her brother tore the fireplace down and moved it to a location suggested by both Kahunas and hadn't had any bad luck since.

Tourists to Hawaii often fall to Pele's Curse when they take lava rocks home as a souvenir. When they begin to have bad luck, they mail the rocks back to Hilo Post Office. Hawaii has laws that make it illegal to take rocks, sand and other items from the islands, but then there is Pele's Curse.

It has been reported a Karen Wade once visited Hawaii and took home some sand and coral as souvenirs. She mailed them back after a run of bad luck when her two dogs went missing, she lost her home and got a divorce.

For those who are concerned about Pele's curse, the state lists the addresses of five main post offices that rocks, sand, coral and other natural items can be mailed back to Hawaii. Many people have done so with some including a note that says, "Tell Pele I'm sorry."

Next on my list was a management visit to Ascension Island and I was looking forward to seeing the changes since my assignment in 1968. The primary reason for this visit was to conduct employee communications meetings and as luck would have it, I was invited to attend a celebration of the Queens' Birthday.



1985 Ascension Island Celebrating the Queen's Birthday

I made two trips to Dakar, Senegal. The first was a regular management visit and the second was to install a new manager who had been to Dakar before and needed no introduction. It was not a pleasant visit because I was replacing the current Site Manager who was from Hawaii and may have been overwhelmed by Dakar and its culture.

Frankly, I don't know how well I would have adjusted to Dakar or if I would have lasted as long as he did in that environment. Beginning with the arrival at the airport the cultural shock is instant as throngs of young children descend upon travelers who are obviously American or from other more affluent parts of the world. The children seek money or offer to carry luggage but it is wise not to surrender either.

When I arrived the first time, the station had already made hotel reservations and there was a person to pick me up and drive me to the hotel. We hadn't driven very far when we came upon a group of men in khaki uniforms standing in the shade of a big tree. An armed soldier stepped out into the road and ordered us to stop. He checked our papers and had us open the trunk where I was delivering several Christmas presents intended for the children of the station employees.

I learned that he and his group were Custom officers and that this was a frequent occurrence. The experience can be intimidating if one hasn't traveled outside the United States and especially to a country like Senegal. They stopped almost all cars coming from the airport and extracted some kind of toll. A few CFA francs would get you on your way. While it may have only been customs officials, it is a little intimidating to have armed men stop you on the road in a country that you are unfamiliar with, however this was Dakar and a scene that site employees were familiar with.

Reservations at the Hotel Ngor Diarama had already been made and I was told that I was in what the Bendix employees called the "Special NASA Room" which overlooked the pool. Although I never saw any people around the pool it was supposed to be the best place to see topless or naked French female sunbathers. There weren't any sunbathers but the special NASA room was full of surprises. Hundreds to be exact.

The room was full of Bed Bugs! Muzzygeezy. I was awakened one morning with my head itching like crazy and discovered I was being eaten up by Bed Bugs. I got up and marched down to the desk and woke the clerk up and had him change my room. To my knowledge that is the only encounter I've had with those nasty little devils and believe me, with my travels around the USA and overseas, I can honestly say that I have spent hundreds of nights in motel and hotel rooms and not seen nary a Red Bug. But then, I have seen other creatures that I prefer not to remember.

The ride from the Airport to the tracking station is an experience that one doesn't soon forget. The small towns, dusty roads with no streetlights and the donkey carts that can barely be seen at night with their single lantern hanging on the back of the cart. It was one of these carts that a site employee ran over one night on way to the tracking station. Injuring or killing a donkey could be far more serious than if a human was involved. There aren't any streetlights and the Donkey Cart had only a lantern – who knows if it was lit – hanging on the back of the cart.

He was unable to stop in time and rear ended the cart killing the donkey. A crowd gathered and saw the destroyed cart and dead donkey and the man barely escaped with his life since Donkeys have much higher importance than a man. It should be noted that the headlights on cars are dim yellow headlights that could barely be seen much less illuminating anything.

There were reports true or not, that when a native was run over, the gendarmes' would merely say that he or she shouldn't have been sitting in the road.



Senegalese Donkey Cart

There were a lot of things to see on the drive to the site such as the huge termite mounds and the strange, majestic Baobab trees that looked like they are growing upside down. Most impressive were the giant truckloads of peanuts. How did these trucks get this big of a load? It also explained why the trucks drive in the center of the road. This to prevent the trees from knocking the load off or causing the truck to turn over as one did while I was visiting. We were on our way to the site early one morning long before dawn for an early shuttle operation when we came upon a truck that had turned over.



Baobab Tree



Peanuts

Most impressive were the giant truckloads of peanuts. How did these trucks get this big of a load? It also explained why the trucks drive in the center of the road. This to prevent the trees from knocking off the load or causing the truck to turn over as one did while I was visiting.

We were on our way to the site early one morning long before dawn for an early shuttle operation when we came upon a truck that had turned over. There were bags of peanuts all over the road and several men cleaning up the site. The bags were quickly hauled off but the frame and cab of the truck were still lying on the road. By noon the truck had been removed. Nothing of value remains on the roadside very long

This was my first trip to Dakar and I was told that the hotel clerk would wake me up around 2 AM and someone would drive me to the airport for my return flight home. Around 2:30 AM I woke up with the fear that I had missed my flight. I grabbed my suitcase and ran down to the desk and woke the clerk up again but learned that the flight had been delayed due to a problem with the plane. It seems that the flight was looking at a delay lasting several hours because the Pan Am jet was experiencing a mechanical problem. Once more I was reassured that they would drive me to the airport in time for the flight when it was rescheduled. I returned to my room and managed to get a few more hours of much needed sleep without the Bed Bugs.

I went down mid-morning to get coffee and a bite to eat where I met some Pan Am workers having breakfast. We sat around drinking coffee and discussed the purpose of our visit to Dakar and the flight delay. I introduced myself and one of the men said his name was Gene Autry. Being a Smart Alex, I was about to say my name was Roy Rogers but decided it best not to.

We speculated that in such an event the shuttle would probably never leave Dakar and the longer it sat on the runway, the less of the vehicle would remain. It would be devoured much like a colony of ants devouring the carcass of a bug. Or maybe a Bed Bug. The native folks there never allowed anything to go to waste.

After much coffee and conversation, it was time to retire to my room and get ready to go to the airport but as I was about to get up from my chair, Gene Autry said he would like me to take a message to one of the stewardesses on that flight. I agreed to do so then he told me I shouldn't go to the Departure area but to the baggage area instead and tell this guy that Gene Autry sent me. When I arrived at the airport, I did as I had been instructed and went to baggage area.

The guy working there asked me to step over the counter and the two of us went through a series of backrooms until we were in the Pan Am private club. A few snacks and a couple stiff drinks and I was ready to board.

As soon as I stepped into the plane, a big 747, I sought out the stewardess and gave her Gene Autry's message. She grabbed me by the arm and steered me to First Class and sat me down in one of the seats. On those long flights I had been flying business class, which was nice but this was First Class, a nice change. Thanks Gene...and Roy and all the other cowboys.

As soon as we taxied up to a gate, we Americans were zipped through customs while the poor Senegalese and South Africans who had already spent hours in Dakar waiting on this flight to depart, were now being processed slowly by customs.

Now that I'm back in New York, I went directly to my gate for the commuter flight to BWI and soon afterwards we were airborne en-route to Maryland. Again, it was the same plane, same stinking coffee pot and same fog from the cockpit. My head was against the window and I was about to go to sleep when I felt a vibration when my head touched the glass. It was then that I looked up and saw the front passengers craning their necks towards the port (left) engine. Not long afterwards the captain issued an emergency warning and asked that everyone prepare for a crash landing. Muzzygeezy!

It could be said that we went in on a wing and a prayer. With the left engine shut down and no hydraulics it was a matter of landing on one engine and steering with brakes. Fortunately for us and the crew the Pilot was able to land the plane in a large grassy field, missing the runway by 100 yards or so. A bus came out and took us to the terminal and we learned that we were at the airport in Atlantic City, New Jersey. This was no time to worry about our luggage which was delivered later to our homes. We were just thankful that we were on the ground safe and sound.

After waiting around for an hour or so to determine what they were going to do with us, first to arrive was an 11-passenger van. The old man driving the van got on the phone and was cussing someone out. No idea what he was saying but if it was my guess, I would say he was telling someone in a few choice words that he didn't have room in the van to take both passengers and luggage. While this was going on I took the opportunity to congratulate the captain and crew for the safe landing under difficult circumstances. His skill and experience with the aircraft had enabled him to land the plane without injury to us passengers.

A few weeks later I was making another flight to Dakar and it was almost uneventful as far as the journey from BWI to New York to Dakar and back except there was no Gene Autry. I suppose I should have dropped his name a time or two but decided against it. However, as we neared New York the Captain apologized and said fog at JFK was causing us to be redirected to another airport. With that announcement groans could be heard all around the cabin but minutes later the captain turned the seat belt light on and said we were going in.

I was sitting at a window and as we descended nothing could be seen but fog. Instead of seeing an airport and runway, we could see nothing but white. Suddenly a hole opened up and the Captain literally dropped the big jet onto the runway, hitting it so hard there came a loud bang and we thought the undercarriage would come up through the floor.

Whatever the noise, we were on the ground racing towards whatever was ahead of us that we couldn’t see. Next, we were at the gate safe and sound. I didn’t stop to call Kathie at that hour but rushed to the gate of the connecting flight because it was due to take off any minute. Or so I thought. The pilot was waiting for the fog to lift enough to fly. Again, we were waiting.

I walked to the commuter flight gate and waited with other passengers for two hours or more before they decided to let us board the plane. The fog was bad. We sat on the plane for another hour waiting for any change in the fog but to the untrained eye, things still looked bad.

Then suddenly we were told that we would be taking off so the doors were closed and flight preparations began. First the Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) wasn't sufficiently charged to start the Port engine and once again, we sat and waited until the ground crew could go and rustle up another APU which took up more time. Once again, we waited.

When they located another APU and attempted to start the engine, the engine backfired and blew flame and smoke everywhere but didn't start. Finally, another attempt, more flames and the engine started. By this time there was considerable apprehension among passengers as to the airworthiness of the aircraft. Now we all knew what the left engine would look like if it caught on fire. I began to wonder if some of the passengers may have been on the same flight that made the emergency landing in Atlantic City.

So once more I was several hours late getting home beyond my scheduled time. It was distressing to Kathie because the airlines would neither confirm nor deny if I was on the Pan Am flight or for that matter, the commuter flight to BWI. All she could do is wait until I could either make a phone call or arrive home safely. As it turned out that was my last flight to Dakar.

My return to Maryland from Dakar was timed so I could be present at the Mission Management Area (MMA) for the January 38, 1986, launch of STS-51L. The MMA was where vice presidents, directors and managers assembled to monitor network status and view launches. It was during this very launch that the vehicle broke up during liftoff. It was so difficult for us to believe that we had just lost the vehicle and crew. It was a very sad day and the nation mourned.

It was here that while we were waiting for the Shuttle liftoff , our vice president Phillip Johnson asked me who was going to Florida to replace the retiring manager. I told him that the person I wanted for the job had declined for personal reasons so it would likely be me going back to Florida. To my pleasant surprise, he didn't protest nor did he seem to have a problem with my decision. With the failure of this launch, Soon I began preparations to relocate to Florida.

The timing of the current manager's retirement meant that I would have to travel alone while Kathie and the boys remained in Maryland until school was out and the house was sold.

In the meantime, I reported to MILA and began a handover with the outgoing manager while using my evenings looking at houses that we might purchase after our Edgewater house was sold and the family joined me.

During the interim I was fortunate that my good friend and fishing buddy Chuck Bounds allowed me to rent a spare room from him while waiting for the house in Maryland to close and have Kathie and the boys join me in Florida.

CHAPTER 31 – 1986 MILA/PDL STATIONS. FL



Mims Home before Hurricanes knocked down most of the trees

Before leaving for Florida, I sold the Monte Carlo and purchased a new 1986 Ford F-151 truck. It was a very nice ride with a small V8 engine. I drove it down to Titusville to conduct a 2-week handover with the outgoing manager of MILA/PDL before going back to Maryland to help Kathie prepare to sell the house and move when school was out. It's a shame that I didn't keep that truck because it was the last year for that model to be produced.

It was coming home again because Florida is where all three sons were born. Randy the oldest, was born April 7, 1960, in Homestead, FL while I was in the Navy. Middle son Greg was born April 8, 1969, and Doug the youngest was born February 8, 1974. The last two boys were born in Titusville at the old Parrish Hospital, when I was first assigned to the Merritt Island Tracking Station back in 1968.

So approximately 8 years after leaving for Barstow, CA where we spent two years, then three years in Fairbanks and three years in Edgewater, MD, now we were back in Florida where we purchased a country home just north of Titusville at 4155 Arlington Ave, Mims.

There were many Christmas gatherings, New Year's dinners and backyard parties held at this Mims home from 1986 to 2017. I put in regulation horseshoe pits and a basketball goal and both were used extensively over the years. It was a family home and it was a party house.



Thanksgiving 2001 Smiths, Olivers & Sizemores

It was a nice homecoming to MILA because most of men were the same that I had worked with in the 60's and 70's. Many of whom had tracked my career after I left for Barstow, CA and the Goldstone Tracking Station. Some even had photos and articles in which I had appeared while in Maryland as Manager, GSTDN. It was good for my ego.



Sky Ken Slattery

Also important was having Ken Slattery as MILA's Operations Manager. In my opinion, next to me he was the best Ops Manager in the network but I must admit that for Shuttle missions neither me nor anyone else could hold a candle to Ken. He was the best and had no equal when it came to launch operations. He was a pilot of small aircraft also and I had the good fortune to fly with him on numerous occasions.

He is a good pilot or at least in my humble opinion because if you get back on the ground safely from the air, then you got to be either good or lucky. Then if you go back up in the air a couple more times with the same pilot, he is either good or you are damn lucky!



Sky Ken

In fact, I enjoyed multiple flights with Ken, some to Vero Beach for Breakfast and another to Deland. The latter was the only flight where we experienced a problem with a plane. Fortunately, we were on the ground at the time and had just finished lunch. The plane wouldn't start.

Eventually it was decided to have Kathie drive up from Mims and bring us home. Ken would worry about the plane later. As it were, he was asked to fly up the next day and bring the plane back to Tico Airport. That may have been our last flight together as I don't recall another after that trip.



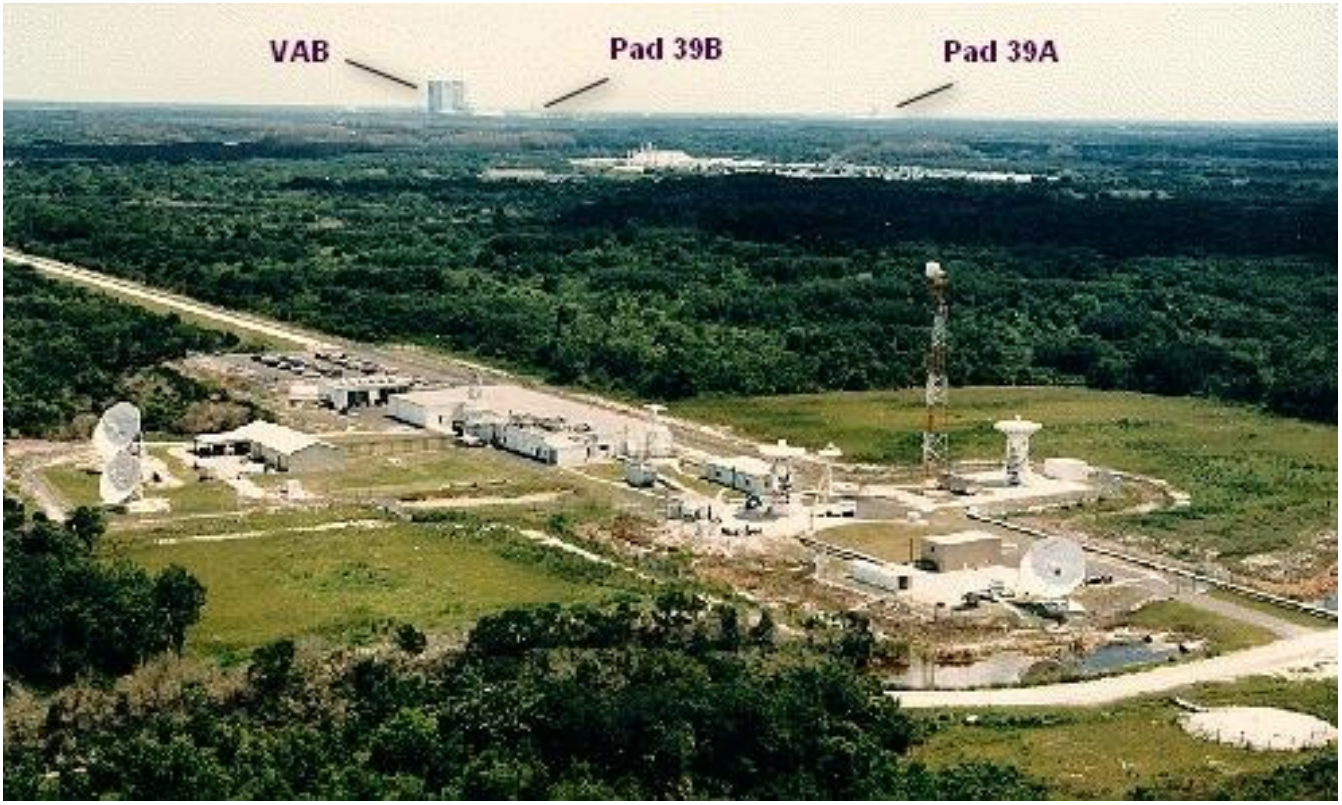
Nope...Problem looks good from here.

There was, however, one memorable flight that will be remembered for a long time and that was his nighttime flight that was required to get his license. He was accompanied by an instructor and I was invited to fly along with them.

We were directed by the control tower to fly directly over the middle of Orlando Airport (MCO). It was strange seeing all the big jets at their gates. We then flew directly over Disney World, made a circle before continuing to Lakeland airport where Ken did a night landing.

After a brief turnaround, we took off for home. No doubt 911 has changed things and this is not likely to fly over Disney again. Who knows, we might get shot down. But then again...it is Sky Ken.

MILA was a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) Tracking Station located on the Kennedy Space Center (KSC) in Merritt Island Florida. It was deemed to be a National Asset and classified as "Launch Critical." The name "MILA" is an acronym derived from the Merritt Island Launch Annex to Cape Canaveral.



Merritt Island Launch Annex (MILA) Tracking Station

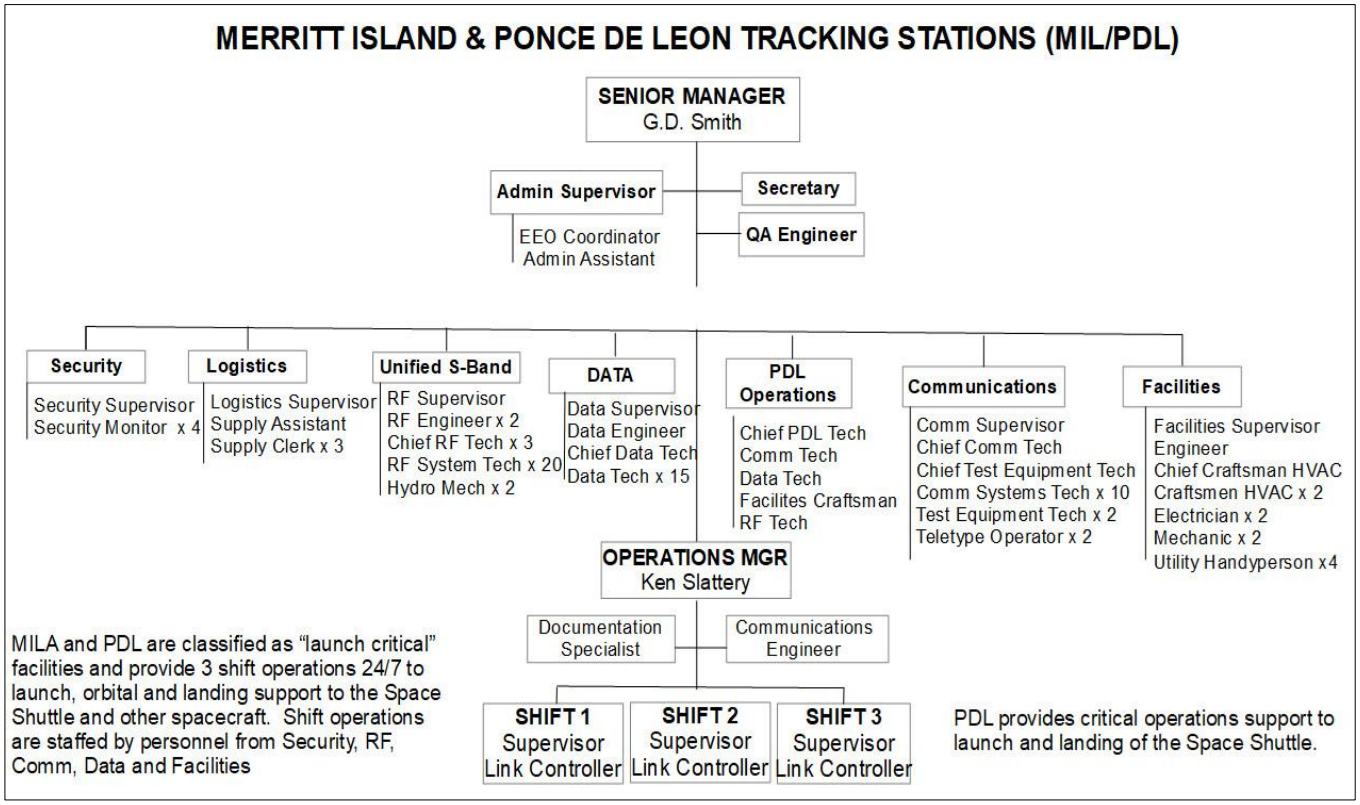
Built in 1966, MILA was an essential part of the Manned Space Flight Network (MSFN). Its role was to provide critical pre-launch, launch and orbital support to the Apollo program, manned and unmanned missions launched from Cape Canaveral and Kennedy Space Center until the end of the Shuttle program.

It was a mission-critical element during launch operations because all commands from Houston to and from the Apollo capsule went through the MILA and PDL stations. Its first mission was in July 1966 when receiving television via its S-Band system from the Apollo-Saturn (AS-203) mission. Shortly afterwards the station was equipped with remote-site flight controller consoles to train Johnson Space Center engineers during pre-launch testing of the Apollo Command and Service Module (CSM)and Lunar Module (LM).

These consoles were used until the end of the Apollo Program in December 1972. Software was written for the Univac 642-B computers which were controlled by the Station's Operations Personnel to support Skylab, Apollo-Soyuz, Apollo Lunar Surface Experiments Package (ALSEP) and Shuttle missions.

When S-band transmitters were added to NASA's Delta and Atlas/Centaur Expendable Launch Vehicles, MILA began to support those programs as well as continuing support for Apollo/Skylab and Apollo/Soyuz Test Project.

Years later MILA inherited the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) Deep Space Network Compatibility Station



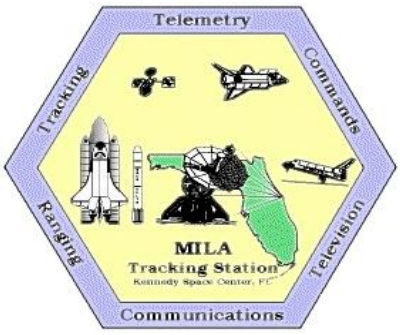
(DSS-71) at Cape Canaveral when it closed in 1974.

The equipment was relocated to the MILA station and renamed MIL-71. Its mission was to support planetary and deep space missions conducted by the Pasadena Mission Control Center. The first mission supported by MIL-71 was the Helios-1 sun probe launched on December 10, 1974.



Ponce De Leon (PDL) Tracking Station

During Space Shuttle launches, it was necessary to provide uninterrupted communications to the Space Shuttle but the aluminum percolate in the plume of the solid rocket Strongly attenuates high frequency S-band signals.



Logo designed by MILA Employees

A "wing site" tracking station was constructed in 1979 some 40 miles north of MILA at New Smyrna Beach's Ponce DeLeon Inlet (PDL). The PDL wing site communicates with the MILA base station via a three-hop microwave system with towers at Shiloh and North Wilson. MILA and PDL were deemed to be a National Asset and classified as "Launch Critical which meant that if MILA or PDL were unable to support during launch operations it would cause a delay in the countdown or a scrub altogether if unable to repair before the launch window expired. The history shows that MILA was always Green and Go for all Apollo, Shuttle and scientific spacecraft launches. Never was there a delay or scrub of a launch caused by MILA or PDL

Eventually the Tracking and Data Relay Satellite (TDRS) replaced all the ground stations except for the MILA and PDL stations. Alaska, Ascension, Bermuda, Botswana, Dakar, Goldstone, Greenbelt, Guam and Hawaii ground stations were all closed and activities undertaken to restore back to natural habitat.

Some years earlier Bill Agee, President of Bendix launched a hostile takeover of Martin Marietta but in turn Martin Marietta tried to take over Bendix. This was called the Pac-Man defense which was a popular electronic game at the time.

Then United Technologies stepped in and joined Martin Marietta in a hostile bid to takeover Bendix but along came Allied Corporation stepped in as a white knight and rescued Bendix.

Next Allied fired Agee and purchased the Signal Company which made connectors and electronic cables and other devices. Then Allied changed its name to AlliedSignal Corporation. This "new" idea was to simply join the two names without a hyphen.

Obviously, no one thought of the spell checker on computers nor did they foresee what the business sector would do, which was something they should have done in the first place. Separate the names! Yep. That is the correct name despite what your spell checker says. Most will try to separate or hyphenate the two words. We often joked and speculated about how much money AlliedSignal may have paid someone to come up with this new name.

I, along with many others, had to notify my customers at KSC and all the area contractors of the new name change. Invariably, any correspondence that we received from those folks spelled the company's name as Allied-Signal or Allied Signal but never did they marry the two together. One can only guess how much money it cost to change the name on all the Bendix and Allied stationery, logos and all the products that carried the Bendix name.

Then the new company purchased Honeywell and this time they appeared to be smart enough to keep the Honeywell name. Again, there was the expense to change the letterhead. I can imagine what it cost to reprint all the company documentation and stationary to incorporate the new logo.

Over the years MILA entertained many visitors including Astronauts, Center Directors, Launch Directors, Engineers, Technicians, Safety & Security Officers, Bendix and Allied-Signal Presidents and Vice Presidents and a host of corporate personnel who visited the Space Center. In October 1990, I attended the induction of Senator John Glenn into the Astronaut Hall of Fame. He was the first American to orbit the earth and at age 77 he was the oldest Astronaut to go into space. In later years more Astronauts were inducted to the Hall of Fame and in1993 we attended a Black-Tie dinner with Astronauts and in particular, my favorite, Pete Conrad.

It was a busy time and we never lacked anything to do. No...I did not own a tuxedo. I rented. Some of the bigger events were the Manned Flight Awareness (MFA) Program that NASA established to recognize personnel that did something extraordinary in support of space flight. The accomplishment could be anything from a technical design to improve equipment or some other feat that was above and beyond the norm.

Once NASA designated a Shuttle Flight an MFA event, facilities around the network would nominate candidates and once the MFA Board selected the honorees, we would bring them and their families down to KSC to wine and dine as VIPs for that particular launch. An MFA event was a fun thing with plenty of good food. It was even better when the launch went off without a hitch.

During MFA events my staff and I were called upon to arrange dinners and other accommodations for VIPs, the BFEC Honoree and his or her family. It generally involved a hotel suite with open bar and dinner at local restaurants. Some events were special affairs that include black tie receptions.



Manned Flight Awareness Event

There were MFA banquets, meetings with astronauts, visits to MILA and other arrangements intended to make the honoree feel special. On one of these occasions I invited two young, attractive astronauts, both had doctorate degrees but had not yet flown on a shuttle mission at that time.

They had been told that it was an informal dinner at the Cocoa Beach Pier so they showed up in blue jeans and here we were in suits or sport jackets. No matter, we took off our ties and jackets and quickly assimilated. Soon everyone at the restaurant had dressed down to make them feel comfortable.

It was a great treat for us to have these two astronauts join us and they seem to have enjoyed meeting the people that would be tracking them when they got their ride into space.

MARY ELLEN WEBER, PH.D.
NASA ASTRONAUT (FORMER)

PERSONAL DATA: Dr. Weber was born in 1962 in Cleveland, Ohio. Bedford Heights, Ohio, is her hometown. She is married to Dr. Jerome Elkind, who is originally from Bayonne, New Jersey. She is an avid skydiver and golfer, and also enjoys scuba diving. Her mother, Joan Weber, currently resides in Mentor, Ohio. Her father, Andrew Weber, Jr., is deceased.

EDUCATION: Graduated from Bedford High School in 1980; received a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering (with honors) from Purdue University in 1984; received a Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry from the University of California at Berkeley in 1988; and received a Master of Business Administration degree from Southern Methodist University in 2002.



CATHERINE "CADY" COLEMAN, PH.D. (COLONEL, USAF, RET.)
NASA ASTRONAUT
Pronunciation: **KATH**-rin "**CAY**-dee" **COAL**-men

Follow Cady on Twitter *Video Q&A with Cady*

PERSONAL DATA: Born December 14, 1960, in Charleston, South Carolina. Married to glass artist Josh Simpson. She enjoys flying, scuba diving, sports and music. As an undergraduate, she competed in intercollegiate athletics on MIT's crew team. Her mother, Ann L. Doty, resides in Dayton, Ohio. Her father's family resides in Vancouver, Washington.

EDUCATION: Graduated from W.T. Woodson High School, Fairfax, Virginia, in 1978; received a bachelor of science degree in chemistry from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1983 and a doctorate in polymer science and engineering from the University of Massachusetts in 1991.



There came a time when our support was requiring greater security and when the Government declared the Space Shuttle, JSC, KSC and MILA as National Assets, it became necessary to lock the site down. I began by hiring as our security officer a young lady that had been performing security audits for KSC. The second act was to install a security fence, a key operated turnstile and a security operations building to monitor the ins and outs and issue badges to authorized visitors.

Once the physical barriers were complete, we set up interviews for security monitors and hired four people so that each shift had a security monitor. Now that we had the site fenced in with razor ribbon and security monitors on duty 24 hours a day, it eliminated the outside traffic that we suspected were coming in during evening hours and using our break room.

There were many firsts and numerous other important accomplishments that boosted the Station's morale and I won't try to list them all. However, there are a few stories that should be recorded for posterity. In particular were our company picnics at KARS Park on Merritt Island. I enlisted some of the employees to help me plan the event which involved cooking some BBQ and of course, a keg or two.

Employees were asked to bring their family and kin and anything extra they would need. We had beer, horseshoes, volleyball, swimming, and games for the kids and one of those tubs where a person could be dunked by hitting a target with a softball. I think every employee wanted to dunk me before the day was over. One employee's wife was a practicing psychiatrist who happened upon my brother and I drawing a beer. She wanted to know if we two were brothers. I spoke up and said, "We are now." She asked what that meant and Jerry picked it right up and said in a slightly feminine voice something like this, "Well...you know I had a sex change but I'm getting used to being a boy." That bit of humor was immediately met by a request to make an appointment with her at the first opportunity.



Brother Jerry did it

Though he and I continued the role, we thought it best to decline her offer. Besides, her office was way down at the end of the county. It was my hope that once they got home her husband enlightened her about our humor. Then again, he too may have seen the humor and decided not to tell her anything.



TV Channel 9 interviewing me

During the period of the Shuttle STS-52 launch, I became a television star when Yvonne Martinez of Orlando's Channel 9 came to MILA October 22, 1992, to interview me and observe MILA operations during the Shuttle launch.

MILA was an attraction to many, especially to our astronauts who unlike most space workers, were very aware that voice, data and commands to and from Johnson Space Center (JSC) to the Orbiter came only through MILA.

There was a story that came out of a pre-shuttle program meeting in which all the NASA Centers were represented. KSC announced that they were going to build a new tracking station for the shuttle. Houston said build it but commands and data would only go through the MILA station. I'm sure it was for this reason that we drew a lot of interest from the astronauts and NASA VIPs who frequently visited the Station.



Glenn Smith Bob Crippen Tony Ippolito

Many Astronauts were pilots and when they visited MILA, they wanted most to see our Air-to-Ground equipment. About all the KSC NASA Center Directors visited MILA at one time or another. The photo on the right was taken when astronaut Bob Crippen, Center Director visited MILA. An example of other VIP visitors to MILA were Astronaut and former NASA Administrator Charles Bolden. Another was Astronaut Mario Runco. When one of our MILA employees earned a Silver Snoopy, astronaut Mario Runco, having flown on STS-44, STS-54 and STS-77 came to MILA to present the Silver Snoopy Award and silver pin to the employee.

When BFEC celebrated our 40th anniversary, I threw a party and invited Mario to join us as a special guest. He gave a fantastic presentation from one of his STS missions that showed the destruction of the rain forest in Africa.

In 1994, I was introduced to Flat Stanley, an imaginary fellow that was visiting elementary schools around the country and it so happens that Flat Stanley visited my niece Toni's young daughter Tracee. It was Tracee who stuffed Flat Stanley in the mail and sent him to me with a request for him to return to Oklahoma and report on his travels to Florida and the Space Center. The following is Flat Stanley's report to Tracee.

November 9, 1994

Well, here I am in Oklahoma again. I'm back from an exciting journey to Florida where I visited with Tracee Martin's Uncle Glenn with whom I watched the Space Shuttle Atlantis blast off into space. Before I get into the story about the space shuttle, I must tell you that it was a long and harrowing ride to get from Oklahoma to Florida. Trace folded me up in a letter that explains how I have managed to turn my accident that caused me to be flat into a positive thing. While it was a long trip to be folded up like that, who else can fly around the world for a mere 29 cents it cost to buy a postage stamp?

After arriving in Orlando, by mistake I was sent to a place called Disney World. Has anyone ever heard of such a place? Never have I seen animals like this before. In Oklahoma we have horses, cows, chickens and all kinds of animals, but this place had the oddest collection of animals I have ever seen. There was a mouse with big ears that answered to the name Mickey and he could talk. Can you imagine? And he had a girlfriend, Minnie, and lots of other animal friends that could talk as well.

After taking a few rides on the Merry-Go-Round, I was finally placed in a truck where I bumped around until they delivered me to a place in the country called Mims, Florida. Theta where Tracee's Uncle Glenn lives with Aunt Kathie, Cousin Doug and their dog Misty. Their house has lots of trees and an acre of land. Lots of grass to mow. And Cousin Doug has a lot of surfboards sitting around. He is a surfer and spends hours and hours at the beach surfing and saying things like, "Narley Dude, Nada" and "like hang ten.

Uncle Glenn works at the Space Center and for recreation, he likes to shoot pool and use his Macintosh computer. It's on his computer that I have been allowed to write this letter. He has a lot of trophies sitting in his computer room that are from shooting pool. In fact, ho won a 9-ball tournament the same day that I arrived in Mims.

Ho is a member of CompuServe and American Online computer services which allow you to get any kind of news or information that you want. You can buy games, toys or look up information on any subject. One day you might be able to read about me, Flat Stanley, and my travels on American Online.

Uncle Glenn manages the NASA Merritt Island (MILA) Tracking Station located at the Kennedy Space Center where all the space shuttle orbiters, Atlantis, Challenger, Discovery and Endeavor are kept and prepared for launch. The tracking station is called "MILA" for short and if you listen closely during the launch countdown you will hear the announcer mention MILA several times. MILA's job is to aim their antennas at the Shuttle Orbiter while it's sitting on the launch pad and transmit voice and commands from the Johnston Space Center (JSC) in Houston, TX and to capture the Astronauts voice and data from the Orbiters computer and send it back to the Johnson Space Center. It's like a relay team. JSC sends the voice and data to MILA, it goes from there to the Shuttle and when the Astronauts talk, their voice goes to MILA and from there to Houston. MILA also measures how far the shuttle is from earth at all times.

So you can see MILA is very important to the space shuttle program. Without MILA to provide communications between the Space Shuttle Orbiter at the Kennedy Space Center and Johnson Space Center, the astronauts could not talk to the ground and NASA could not talk to them so the shuttle would not launch.

So it was that I arrived just in time to travel out to the Space Center and MILA to witness my first Shuttle launch, STS-66. Early morning, Nov. 3, the day of the launch, Uncle Glenn placed me in his briefcase so that he could slip me past the guard checking badges to keep out unauthorized visitors.

After we got inside the Space Center, he arranged me so that I could see all the sights of Kennedy Space Center (RSC). First, we drove to the KSC Press Dome where Uncle Glenn had to again present a special badge to get in. The Press area is where all the television network news people work when televising and reporting on a launch.

We then visited the Joint Integrated Pres Center which they like to call by the first letters -JIPC - and is pronounced "Gypsy." At the JIPC we met some friends of Uncle Glenn and checked on the status of the countdown and the weather which threatened to delay the launch. As we departed from the JIPC and reached the main road near the Vertical Assembly Building (VAB), the largest building on the Kennedy Space Center, we were stopped by guards holding up traffic to allow a special convoy of vehicles to pass. This was the astronauts on their way to the launch pad where they would enter the Shuttle Orbiter Atlantis and prepare for launch. This always happens about 3 hours before launch.

Finally, we arrived at the MILA Tracking Station where everyone was hard at work. Many men and women were at antenna controls, computer consoles and some were running large tape recorders and talking on headsets and telephones. Since Uncle Glenn is boss of MILA, he didn't operate the computers or any of the equipment but walked around and checked to see if everything was working properly. Then the time for launch drew near.

While the countdown clock was counting the seconds down to the launch time, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6 .and you could tell by everyone's face that the time for lift was here. When the clock got to zero, Uncle Glenn and some other people watched the engines ignite on a TV set just like you would watch at home. Then when all the engines were lit and the exhaust turned to blue flames, the mission announcer said, "we have ignition" and you could see the top of the shuttle move a little.

This movement is called the "Tang" and is caused by all three shuttle engines trying to lift the rocket off the pad while it is still bolted down. Then just as quickly as the shuttle rocks back, the two large boosters ignite and now there is no way to stop the shuttle orbiter from lifting off the pad.

Lift off is a tremendous amount of noise and smoke. The ground vibrates and the shock waves travel across the wetlands and rattle windows in ell the buildings around. And then there is a deafening roar of the 2 solid rocket boosters and the 3 shuttle main engines ell burning together as the space shuttle hurtles into space. If one word could describe a shuttle launch, it is AWSOME!

About 8 minutes later it was all over for KSC and MILA. The shuttle orbiter was in space and orbiting around the earth. The Tracking Data Relay Satellite was relaying the data and voice from the shuttle to the ground station in New Mexico and on to Johnston Space Center. It was a long but important 2 days of launch countdown for Uncle Glenn and MILA, but now they had to turn their attention to the next space shuttle orbiter getting readied for the next launch. So with my souvenirs, I was packed and mailed back to Tracee in Oklahoma. I had a FANTASTIC trip and now I'm dreaming about the trip I may take one day aboard the space shuttle itself.

Flat Stanley

Another event that I'm proud to have been involved with was the implementation of ISO-9000 at MILA and PDL. Two years earlier AlliedSignal decided to implement ISO-9000 but realized later that their program would require MILA and BDA to participate in the program. Although we were two years late, we hit the ground running. I decided that whatever we learned and/or developed, we would share with Bermuda.

After one year of difficult work and long hours, both MILA/PDL were fully certified as ISO-9000 facilities. MILA was the first complete ISO-9000 facility at Kenned Space Center. What we learned, we shared with Bermuda. It was a proud moment to hoist the long banner on the front of the operations building signaling to everyone visiting the site that we were ISO-9000 Certified.

As NASA's budget for the Shuttle program got smaller, it was being felt by AlliedSignal and we were being squeezed to come up with cost reductions. Unfortunately, the most cost that could be achieved always involves reducing the labor force.

Our problem at MILA was that there was a direct correlation of staffing to the equipment that needed to be operated simultaneously when supporting a shuttle mission. The best way to achieve that was through cross-training and designing new equipment that required fewer people to operate.

Over time we managed to achieve both feats but it wasn't easy. First AlliedSignal wanted all employees to attend Total Quality Awareness (TQA) training while managers and supervisors were expected to attend Total Quality Management (TQM) training. All were part of preparations for the soon-to-come staffing reductions.

When I arrived back in Florida in 1986, MILA, PDL and MIL-71 staffing were near 160 employees but with numerous changes made over a 10-year period, staffing dropped to 72 and mission requirements had to change accordingly.

Without question, I had a fantastic and very successful career with Bendix working with the engineers and technicians of the NASA Tracking Stations and working for a great boss in VP Phillip Johnson.

CHAPTER 32 – 1997 RETIREMENT

I decided in 1997 that after 31 years in the business it was time to retire. We interviewed several candidates before deciding that MILA's closure was soon to come with the end of the Space Shuttle program so we opted not to replace me. Before leaving I left a staffing plan that would reduce the current level of 72 down to 52 personnel provided the new equipment would operate as designed with fewer technicians. This was a big change from my arrival in 1986 when there were 162 positions operating MILA, PDL and MIL-71.

Looking back at the jobs in my career and specifically at my time at MILA, as a technician, I operated the 9M USB antenna console for many of the 161 launches from KSC and as well many orbiting satellites passes too numerous to count.

The following summary is NASA's final report on MILA Closing

November 21, 1997 Vol. 36, No. 23

Spaceport News

America's gateway to the universe. Leading the world in preparing and launching missions to Earth and beyond.

John F. Kennedy Space Center

MILA manager retires after 31-year career in the space program

MILA (Merritt Island Launch Area) Glenn Smith retired Oct. 31 after a 31-year stint in the space program.



Smith

Smith was one of the early Manned Space Flight Network (MSFN) space trackers, beginning his career in 1966 at Owings Mill, Md.

He then worked at a variety of locations both in the continental United States and overseas, including Canary Island, Spain; Ascension Island, United Kingdom; California and Alaska.

He moved to Florida for a second time in 1986 and most recently served as senior manager for Allied Signal Technical Services Corp. at MILA, which provides voice and data communications capability between the Shuttle and Mission Control during ascent. His responsibilities also included the Ponce De Leon Inlet Tracking Station.

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS



At NASA's MILA tracking station, a 30-foot antenna was slewed for the last time during a closing ceremony. *(NASA/Kim Shiflett)*

NASA closes MILA: Apollo antenna station tracked every space shuttle launch

July 30, 2011 — With no more radio signals to relay from space shuttles in flight, NASA parked a radio dish used to track launching and landing orbiters for the last time. The antenna is one of two steerable 30-foot dish antennas at NASA's Merritt Island Launch Annex, or MILA, tracking and data station at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Its final reorientation from the horizontal to the vertical on Thursday (July 28) came as part of a ceremony to close the station after 45 years of service.

With that final move, the MILA station — which was first established for the Apollo program and was responsible for tracking radio transmissions from every shuttle launch for 30 years — became a part of space history.

"I understand MILA is going to be decommissioned after this flight," Chris Ferguson, commander of the final shuttle mission, STS-135, radioed through MILA's antennas on July 16, five days before landing the winged spacecraft for the last time. "For all the folks who work there and for all the shuttle missions that you've supported throughout the years, we thank you very much." With that in mind, senior NASA officials came together on Thursday with many of the current and past MILA workers to mark the station's closing. In addition to pointing the dish antenna away from Kennedy's landing facility where Ferguson landed shuttle Atlantis on July 21, the ceremony included remarks delivered by representatives from NASA Headquarters, Kennedy and Goddard Space Flight Center as well as the lowering of the U.S. flag that flew over the station for a final time.

MILA's mission for Apollo

Although MILA is located at the Kennedy Space Center, for most of its history it served as a Goddard Space Flight Center operation. The tracking station was originally established in 1966 by Goddard, which itself is located in Maryland, as part of a global, ground-based data network of 17 tracking stations that provided support to the Apollo moon landing program and Earth-orbiting scientific satellites.



The Patrick Air Force Base Color Guard lowers the U.S. flag for the last time at MILA's closing ceremony. *(NASA/Kim Shiflett)*

MILA's first active mission support was the reception of television signals from the Apollo/Saturn-203 (AS-203) mission launched July 5, 1966. An unmanned flight of the Saturn IB, the mission studied the performance of the liquid hydrogen fuel in the rocket's S-IVB stage to verify its on-orbit restart capability.

Shortly afterward, the station was provided a complete set of remote-site flight controller consoles in order to train Manned Spacecraft Center (now Johnson Space Center) engineers from Houston during pre-launch tests of Apollo command and service modules and lunar modules. These consoles were used until the end of the Apollo program in December 1972.

With the transition to the shuttle and the deployment of the Tracking and Data Relay Satellite (TDRS) network of communication satellites, the use of most of the ground stations gradually phased out. But MILA remained operational, serving the 30 years of the shuttle program.

Seven-and-a-half minutes **for 135 missions**

From the very first space shuttle mission (STS-1) in 1981 through the final flight (STS-135), the MILA station served as the primary voice, data and telemetry communications link between the shuttle and the ground from launch until 7 1/2 minutes into the flight.

"It's a combined effort between the Mission Control Center [in Houston] and the Launch Control Center [in Florida] getting together. The interface to those facilities is MILA, because it gets them their data they need to make [their] decisions," said Gary Morse, station director for MILA, in an interview published by NASA the day before the final mission launched.

"We're getting command to the space shuttle, we're getting telemetry from the space shuttle, we're getting TV from the external tank, which is looking down at the leading edges of the wing surfaces to see if any foam or ice comes off. We are getting tracking data as soon as we lift off from our signal and sharing that with the flight dynamics facility at Goddard as well as the Mission Control Center in Houston."

MILA was activated when the shuttles landed at Kennedy, relaying communications beginning about 13 minutes prior to touchdown.

As a result of these upgrades, MILA supported the missions of several scientific satellites, including the Hubble Space Telescope. But some things remained the same up until the end as they did for STS-1. The same pair of 30-foot, S-band dish antennas still tracked Atlantis as it launched on STS-135. These antennas also supported Atlantis' landing 13 days later. Live on-orbit television was frequently provided from these same antennas.

In addition to providing support during launch, MILA helped the Kennedy, Johnson and Goddard space centers as well as the Jet Propulsion Lab in California in making sure that communication systems on the orbiters, space station elements, scientific spacecraft and other payloads received and transmitted information correctly through their antennas before launch. In a typical year, the MILA station provided through Kennedy more than 10,000 hours of data between spacecraft and data users. ### End of KSC Article ###

A year after my retirement from Allied Signal (aka Bendix), I was asked to take a job as a consultant and go to Alaska where I was to observe the implementation of an automated tracking station at University of Alaska's Poker Flat and mentor a young man that could be promoted to manage the facility.



NASA Alaska Station (ULA) is now NOAA Gilmore Creek (GIL)

It was great to be visiting Fairbanks again after 15 years. I drove by the old site and saw that NOAA had taken over the old NASA complex and built several new antennas on what was called Command Hill. Before my job was complete, we experienced our first snow. It was enough to make the work a little more difficult and the roads treacherous.

Snow at this elevation also meant the road would be slippery going over and down Cleary Summit so I decided to return to Fairbanks early and quickly learned that the rental car I was in wasn't the best vehicle for driving in these conditions.

As I cleared the top of Cleary Summit and started down the mountain, the little car began sliding even after downshifting to a lower gear. It quickly became clear that brakes and lower gears were not enough to keep the car from sliding so my only recourse was to shift to a higher gear that prevented the tires from sliding and steer it downhill like a luge. There is a sharp curve halfway down the mountain and I thought this was going to be a wipeout but fortunately the gravel on the edge of the road caused the little car to straighten up and rocket down the highway without hitting the guard rail.

The rest of the mountain road was somewhat straighter so I let the little car have its way because the only control I had was the steering and I managed to keep in the middle of the highway until I got to the bottom. All the while a truck that pulled out behind me at the top of the mountain had followed me all the way down and had witnessed the whole thing. When we arrived at the bottom, I let the truck pass and the men in the truck gave me the thumbs up. The first thing I did upon arrival in Fairbanks was to swap the car for a 4-wheel drive Jeep. Muzzygeezy.

Winter was about to set in and temperatures were beginning to drop so there wasn't much more that I could do but recommend that Wallops promote the young engineer to site manager so I returned home for Thanksgiving and was soon asked to go to MILA to assist in the transition to a new contractor because the new management had caused a stir with the Union by offering jobs to people with less seniority. After educating the new company on the current bargaining contract and resolving the dispute, I retired from consultant work...again.

There came a number of small employment opportunities to keep me busy in my so-called retirement days. No... none involved becoming a Wal-Mart Greeter. After the stint in Alaska, I planned to stay close to home and my first job after quitting the consultant work involved what is called a Reset in the Home Depot stores.

It was presented by the owner of the contract that he was looking for people with supervisory experience to manage resets in multiple stores throughout Florida. For training I was assigned to a crew that was doing a reset in an Orlando store. The plan was to perform a reset of crown molding and it was back breaking work.

Our "supervisor" was a young man that hadn't performed the job before and he kept the floor design and drawings close to his chest. The fact that he didn't wish to share with the rest of us what and how it was to be accomplished made things more difficult. Had any of us on the team been given information as to what the reset would look like when finished, it would have helped immensely.

Knowing the final reset would have sped up the job immensely. As it were, it was a hard 14 hours of steady work. When I arrived home that evening, I was so exhausted that when I entered the door I just fell onto the floor. I can never recall being that tired and worn out. That was my one and only reset. In the meantime, Jason, the husband of Kathie's niece landed a lawn maintenance contract for all of the Gates Gas Stations in Jacksonville and six other stations located in New Smyrna, Deland, Altamonte Springs, Lakeland, Lake Placid and Sebring. To service these six stations, it meant the loss of four men and equipment for two days while they could be better used on the Jacksonville accounts.

After several failed attempts to get either of our sons to do the work, Kathie and I decided to help out providing he brought down the equipment we would need to do the work. It wasn't long before Jason delivered a trailer with a mower and all the lawn maintenance equipment we needed to tend the lawns at these Minute Market and Gas Stations. At the time I had a sporty Ford F-150 Crew Cab to pull the trailer with. The only drawback was the truck's inability to pass a gas station and there was the cost of truck and trailer to go through toll stations.

We planned our work so that we could do two stations a day. New Smyrna and Deland in one day, Altamonte Springs and Lakeland the second day and the distant Lake Placid and Sebring on the third day. I need not mention the Ford truck would not pass a gas station. It was hard work for two old folks and with our gas bill and toll fees, it soon became too costly for us and for Jason.

Next, I took a temporary job working at the local hospital Parrish Medical Center where I worked for about 18 months in Patient Transport. I worked evenings with another gentleman and found the work to be very rewarding and generally involved transferring patients from the Emergency Room to Diagnostics or to a hospital room.

During the day, patients were moved in the other direction from their room to diagnostics and back. I met a lot of nice people and liked the work but I couldn't let it interfere with my reunion planning activities. Besides, I knew of others in the hospital who wanted to move into the transport section for job improvement and possibly more pay. Our manager knew that I would not be coming back and I am pleased to know that he acted on my recommendation to hire employees who were working in housekeeping and the cafeteria who were full-time employees and seeking a better job with more pay.

My next job was in an embroidery shop. As it happened, I entered the shop to have some hats embroidered for our ships store to sell at an upcoming reunion and walked out of there with a job. After some small talk with the owner about computers and graphics, he offered me a job where I could embroider my hats while helping him with a big job for a automobile dealer that wanted 3,000 hats to give away during a big sales promotion. So I set about studing the machine as well as using the Internet to learn more about the embroidery machines and the type of work they were capable of performing. It wasn't long before I had learned the basics of changing needles, loading thread, framing shirts and hats to prepare them for embroidery work.

Is was about this time that I had taken up shooting pool again at the Senior Center here in Titusville. About 14 of us seniors were shooting pool twice a week. A couple of these players talked me into joining them to work for the Brevard County Elections Supervisor at the Elections Support Center (ESC). I was hired as a driver and assigned the North Brevard area which consisted of 132 precincts to which me and my helpers would deliver supplies.

Another pool player who worked at the ESC was a gentleman and a good friend, the late Richard Moon. Richard was one of my helpers and the longer we worked together the closer we became as friends. Our work ethic was such that when an election was over, the other workers were discharged and Richard and I were retained to work on preparations for the next election.

Our work involved preparing the voting machines and supplies that each precinct would require on election day. In the week prior, we loaded the truck with supplies for as many precincts as we could deliver in one day with the goal of having all the precincts done by the end of the week. Each night during the election week we collected the completed ballots and delivered them to the Elections Supervisor's Counting Department. The job was to be temporary but ran into several years with the last couple years where I was doing only computer work.



Preparing ballots for upcoming election

The first year I started work as a driver of a 26ft Box truck in which me and two helpers were to deliver voting machines and supplies to 132 precincts in North Brevard County. I discovered that the information a driver needed about a precinct was all on multiple spreadsheet pages.

It was unmanageable and surprising to me that drivers had been able to use these spreadsheets to accurately deliver materials to a precinct. I decided to develop something better using FileMaker, a database program that contained all the information that was available for a precinct. From that a single sheet was created that could be printed with all the information a driver needed to properly supply a precinct. The single printed sheet for each precinct contained contact info, the number of voting machines and all the materials that would be required on election day.

There came a time when I decided to give up work at the ESC and spend more time shooting pool but I was called back to aid in implementing new software. The new software was to replace what I had developed in FileMaker Pro and do what the Driver's Sheet did and then some. It involved warehouse tasks and other elements all wrapped in the software that was being developed. To be honest, I found that it was far more an in-depth application than what was needed at the ESC. Additionally, the two developers had not completed the software and one was on maternity leave, making it even more difficult to apply it to our work.



gent Orange so the VA accepted him as a candidate for surgery. After weeks of deliberation Richard decided to have the surgery performed. which was performed in Gainesville and though the surgery was deemed a success, he died from post-surgery complications. With Richard's passing, I decided to quit working for the ESC and find something else I could do closer to home.

CHAPTER 33 – 2004 REUNION PLANNER

About a year after retirement, I began thinking of my days in the Navy and the time I spent on the icebreaker USS Edisto (AGB-2) and the icebreaker USS Glacier (AGB-4).

As stated earlier I had a short but great career in the Navy and was very fortunate to have taken three Arctic cruises and two Antarctic cruises. All but one cruise was on the Edisto whereas my last cruise was an Antarctic cruise on the USS Glacier and I discovered the USS Glacier had a website and was planning a reunion but we were unable to attend.

It was this discovery however that caused me to look for my first ship, the icebreaker USS Edisto to see if there was any information on the Internet. Wallah! I found a website so new the ink was not yet dry. I signed on the web page and learned that a handful of men had been looking for me for the past couple years.

I soon learned that three or four shipmates from that dastardly Deep Freeze '60/61 cruise were looking for the 234 men that survived a devastating storm that threatened the ship and the lives of the crew. Having good computer skills, I offered to help locate all the men who served on the USS Edisto but it seemed the group's interest was focused on only the men in our crew at that time.

However, a couple weeks later I received an email inviting me to help find the men that sailed on the ship at one time or another. It was this '61 crew that was paying for the website and other services needed to find shipmates. Therefor we decided to order all 19 reels of film the Navy had stored rosters of all the auxiliary ships which included the icebreaker Edisto and other icebreakers.

From those reels I scanned the Edisto rosters into my computer and after studying each slide carefully – the film was sometimes difficult to read - I built a roster of several hundred men who were were onboard the Edisto at one time or another, and some at the beginning when she was commissioned in 1947 which distinguished them as Plank Owners.In 1965 she was transferred to the USS Coast Guard.

As my database grew in size, we began calling likely candidates until we had located a number of them. For many it was an emotional reunion and I was often asked when the next ship's reunion would be held and eventually, I got tired of answering in the negative and selected Charleston, SC, home of the Edisto Island for which our ship was named. This became the first of eleven reunions. We did reunions in two different cities in Louisana, two different cities in Tennessee and two reunions in Charleston, South Carolina.

The Charleston reunion was held September 2004 at the Airport Radisson Hotel with 145 shipmates, wives and guests in attendance and consisted of a 4-night, 5-day event. It included dinner, entertainment, election of officers, a visit to the Citadel Military College, a river tour with dinner and dancing and a visit to Patriots Point which housed the carrier York Town (CV-5).



Aircraft Carrier York Town (CV-5)

In the evening we took a river cruise for dinner and dancing. Unfortunately our Admiral dropped his camera into the river as the group was about to go on board the river boat. Fortunately, it could be seen in the water so he climbed down and retrieved it and we learned later that he was able to salvage the images on the SD card.

When it was decided that we should organize and elect officers, I suspect it was because of my frequent contact with the shipmates when planning the reunion that influenced them to elect me as the first president. And as president, I was given the task of incorporating our association which I did upon my return to Florida.

In May 2005 we incorporated as a nonprofit organization in the State of Florida and subsequently I filed with the IRS and obtained tax exempt status from Federal Income Tax under section 501 (c) (19) of the Internal Revenue Code. From this point on I was expected to plan more reunions, which I did with Kathie's help. Our next reunion was planned for Biloxi, Mississippi but as we were examining the proposals I had received from the Biloxi hotels, we also were watching hurricane Katrina move up the gulf towards the Mississippi and Louisiana coast. We watched the storm as it moved into the coastline from Biloxi to New Orleans destroying houses, causing the levies to break and flooding most of the city. It was complete devastation. It would not be our reunnion destination.

We changed plans and held our 2006 reunion at the Chattanooga Choo Choo Hotel in Chattanooga, TN. I selected the hotel because it was built in the old train station and had train cars and multiple swimming pools, banquet facilities, beautiful gardens, restaurants, shops, and entertainment.



Chattanooga Choo Choo

The Station House restaurant was normally closed on the first night of our reunion but we had sufficient numbers that generated enough revenue for them to open for our group. We learned that the Wait Staff were all very talented singers and would break into song after serving your meal.

Many of the staff had voices that were of professional quality and some had successfully obtained contracts in the music industry. Another interesting feature of Chattanooga was the electric buses that departed from their depot at the Choo Choo every 15 minutes and made a large circuit around the city. No matter where you were in the city's main streets a bus would come along every 15 minutes and the ride was free.

Our group toured all the famous attractions such as Look Out Mountain, Rock City and Ruby Falls. The latter was an interesting tour where an elevator takes you down about a quarter mile into the mountain, then another mile walk through a cave to the falls. Every few minutes the lights come on so you can see the Ruby Falls pouring out of the mountain. Then it is another long walk back through the cave to the gift shop before getting on the elevator and going back up to civilization. It is difficult to imagine the founder Leo Lambert crawling through this cave and later taking his wife spelunking that far back into the mountain to show her the falls that he named after her. This was long before a passageway was made to permit visitors to walk without hitting their head on a stalactite or tripping over a stalagmite. Even now there are still places along the path where visitors have to walk around stalagmites.

Our closing was a memorial service with a color guard, banquet and twenty-piece brass band called the Sweet Georgia Sound. The band all came dressed in tuxedos with their brass instruments and provided us with an outstanding performance and plenty of music to dance to.

Our third reunion was held in 2008 at Oyster Point, Newport News, Virginia which enabled us to tour Norfolk and visit the Nauticus and the Battleship Wisconsin (BB-64), tour the USS Monitor museum and the village of Williamsburg, VA where one can step back into the colonial days. A river boat tour gave us all the information on the Navy's fleet that was docked at the Norfolk Naval Base which was much more than what can be obtained from a bus tour of the base. Previously we were given a windshield tour of the Naval Base by a young sailor who was a comic and entertained us all with his humor. However, the trip consisted mainly of views of houses where the brass stay when in Norfolk.

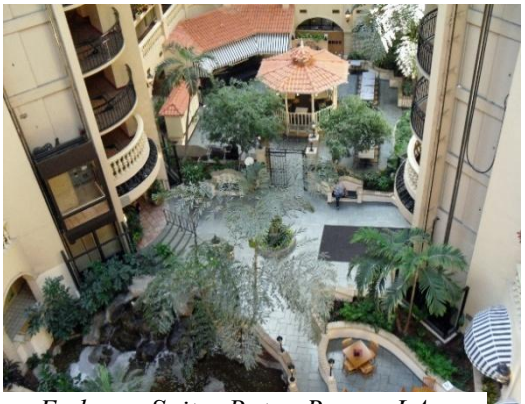


Omni Hotel at Oyster Point, New Port News, VA

As for the ships that were in the harbor, we were advised that we were not permitted to take any photos, however, on our riverboat tour, the guide told us the name of the ships and about every detail that one might think of asking. He was well informed.

The Fourth Reunion was held in 2009 in Baton Rouge, LA. The hotel I selected for the reunion was an Embassy Suites Hotel. It was unquestionably the best reunion hotel we had stayed at. This picture is the best description of why it was the ideal setting for a ship's reunion.

One advantage of this hotel was when shipmates were riding either of the two elevators they could see what shipmates were having breakfast and could join them or maybe it was shipmates relaxing in the atrium.



Embassy Suites Baton Rouge, LA



Cpl Helen Pullin

An extraordinary guest was our very own Kiwi Helen Pullin who flew in from Australia to attend our reunion. As a young soldier in the NZ army, she and her mates would give any drunk sailor a ride to the ship before the Bobbies picked them up. Helen was adopted by our group since many of us have traveled to New Zealand on on the way to the Antarctic ice and who knows, there may be some among us that got picked up and driven to the ship. To this day she remains in touch with some of our shipmates.

We toured the USS Kidd (DD-661), a Fletcher-class destroyer anchored right downtown. The hospitality of the museum's director, the late Mr. Maury Drummond and his staff were outstanding.

I arranged to have a memorial service on the USS Kidd and asked shipmate Howell Purvis to play Taps. The shipmates and their guests were startled when suddenly there were three loud cannon shots I had previously arranged for the memorial service.



Helen Pullin addresses the group while Mr. & Mrs. Drummond looks on



A few years ago, I was in my car listening to a radio call-in talk show and the topic of the conversation was that of whether it was proper for people to burn the American flag in protest or if it was a protected individual freedom. During the talk show, someone called in and said they didn't understand what all the controversy was about over *"just a piece of cloth."* The image struck me immediately of the Marines on Iwo Jima with their faces down in the volcanic ash and looking up at Mount Suribachi to see the flag being raised. Surely, they didn't consider it to be just a piece of cloth.

When I arrived home that evening, I put the following thoughts down on paper and I believe that expresses my beliefs and my feelings of who I am and the love that I have for this country. I entitled it:

"JUST A PIECE OF CLOTH"

I was with Colonel Parker and the Minutemen at Lexington and Concord
to hear "The Shot Heard 'Round The World" that began the American Revolution.
I was with General Washington when he crossed the Delaware
and suffered with his men in the harsh winter at Valley Forge.

Did they fight and die for just a piece of cloth?

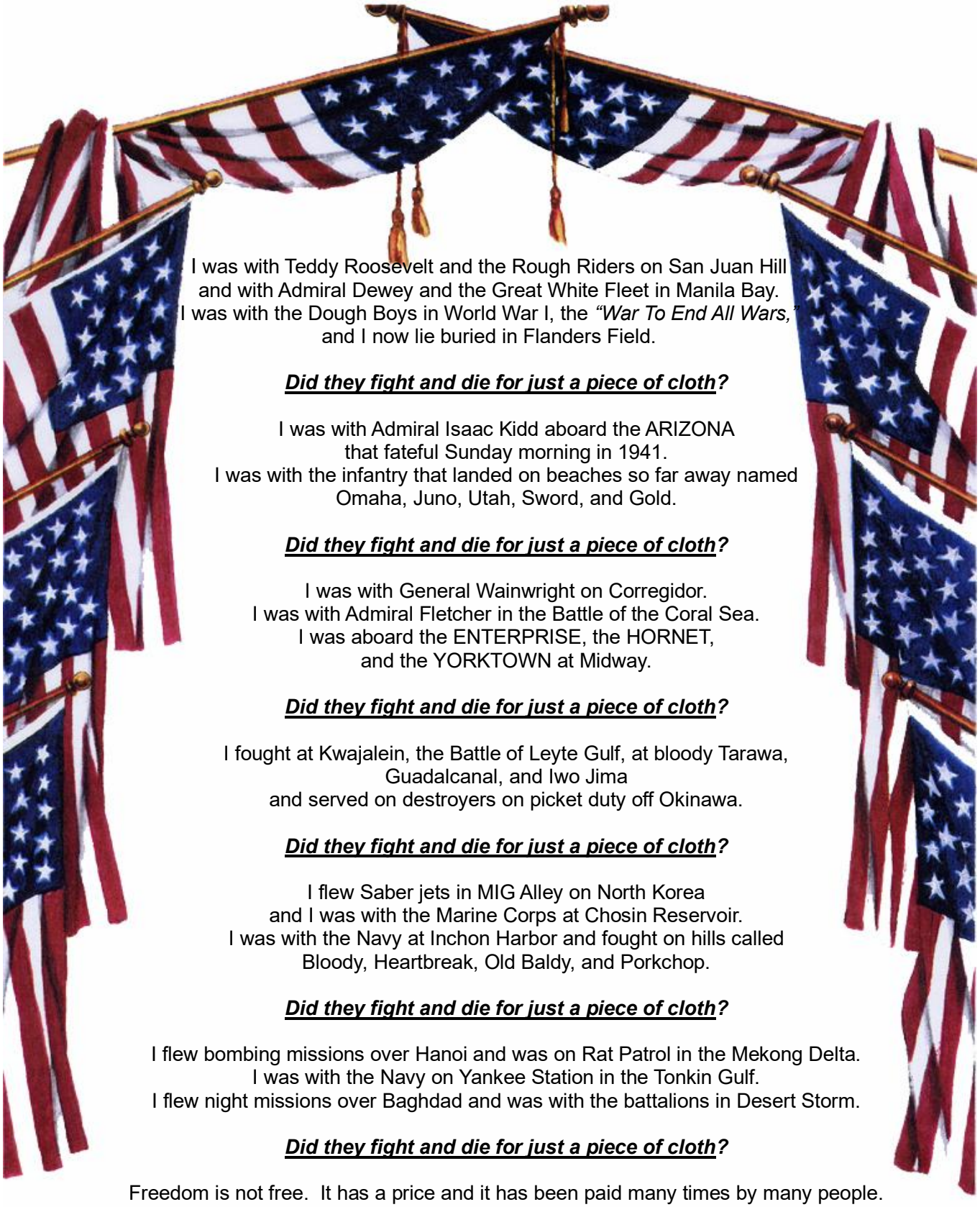
I was with Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys at Ticonderoga
and with Washington, Hancock, and the Marquis de Lafayette to accept
surrender terms at Yorktown with the British playing that old European tune
"The World Turned Upside Down."

Did they fight and die for just a piece of cloth?

I was with Andrew Jackson and Jean Lafitte at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815.
I was with Lee and Longstreet and all the Boys in Gray at Gettysburg
and I was with all the Boys in Blue with General Mead and Colonel Chamberlain
on Little Round Top.
I was with Grant in the Wilderness and at Vicksburg.
I was with both the Blue and Gray when our country was healed at Appomattox.

Did they fight and die for just a piece of cloth?

Presentation at Tin Can Sailors Association Banquet at the annual conference in Las Vegas, Nevada ,on February 06, 1996



I was with Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders on San Juan Hill
and with Admiral Dewey and the Great White Fleet in Manila Bay.
I was with the Dough Boys in World War I, the *"War To End All Wars,"*
and I now lie buried in Flanders Field.

Did they fight and die for just a piece of cloth?

I was with Admiral Isaac Kidd aboard the ARIZONA
that fateful Sunday morning in 1941.
I was with the infantry that landed on beaches so far away named
Omaha, Juno, Utah, Sword, and Gold.

Did they fight and die for just a piece of cloth?

I was with General Wainwright on Corregidor.
I was with Admiral Fletcher in the Battle of the Coral Sea.
I was aboard the ENTERPRISE, the HORNET,
and the YORKTOWN at Midway.

Did they fight and die for just a piece of cloth?

I fought at Kwajalein, the Battle of Leyte Gulf, at bloody Tarawa,
Guadalcanal, and Iwo Jima
and served on destroyers on picket duty off Okinawa.

Did they fight and die for just a piece of cloth?

I flew Saber jets in MIG Alley on North Korea
and I was with the Marine Corps at Chosin Reservoir.
I was with the Navy at Inchon Harbor and fought on hills called
Bloody, Heartbreak, Old Baldy, and Porkchop.

Did they fight and die for just a piece of cloth?

I flew bombing missions over Hanoi and was on Rat Patrol in the Mekong Delta.
I was with the Navy on Yankee Station in the Tonkin Gulf.
I flew night missions over Baghdad and was with the battalions in Desert Storm.

Did they fight and die for just a piece of cloth?

Freedom is not free. It has a price and it has been paid many times by many people.
I am a product of my past. I am what you have made me. I am an American and I am free.

H. Maury Drummond
Ex. Director, USS KIDD Veterans Memorial
Baton Rouge, LA Past President, Historic Naval Ships Assn.

The plan worked perfectly which was to fire three ship's cannon shots followed by shipmate Howell Purvis with his trumpet. When the echo of the last shot died down, Howell began playing taps. It was a very moving ceremony and brought tears to many of the guests eyes.

After a day on the USS Kid the group toured the beautiful Nottoway Plantation before going to Bayview on the Bayou where we dined on alligator, toured the swamp and danced until exhaustion.



USS Kidd (DD 661) Baton Rouge, LA



Nottaway Plantation



Boys will be boys

The Nottaway Plantation is one of the oldest in the country and largest antebellum plantation left in the south. It's large at more than 53,000 square feet, 64 rooms, 7 staircases and 5 galleries A most remarkable mansion on the Mississippi River.

For the fifth reunion in 2010, Kathie and I visited the hotels in Salem, MA and surrounding areas of Boston but most of the hotels were either too expensive, too congested or undesirable for other reasons. Of course, not all hotels are appropriate for our type of event and some don't want our business anyway. We decided on the Crowne Plaza in Warwick, Rhode Island as it was the nearest that I could get to Boston and keep our room rates reasonable. I chartered buses to take us to Boston, tour downtown and visit Old Ironsides museum. One day we toured Battleship Cove and had lunch and memorial service on the Battleship Massachusetts.



Old Iron Sides

The sixth reunion was held 2012 closer to home in Melbourne Beach, Florida with the hotel right on the ocean. Our tours consisted of a visit to the Kennedy Space Center and the next day we took a ride on the Victory Casino out of Port Canaveral where I won $300 on slot machines. Then the next smart thing I did was to give the cash-out receipt to my wife.



The Dave and Daphne Show

The seventh reunion was held 2013 in Nashville after Kathie and I had made an earlier site visit, where we saw the Grand Ole Opry and Vince Gill celebrating his 20th anniversary at the Opry.

For our Nashville reunion, I hired Dave and Daphne to entertain our group and they gave us a great performance. At the end of their show, we received a bonus when shipmate Howell Purvis brought his trumpet.



Howell on trumpet, Dave on guitar

Howell pulled up a chair and surprised all with another hour of music with Dave backing him up on guitar. As for his trumpet, Howell has a reputation of carrying his trumpet everywhere and playing Taps at 570 funerals and will continue to perform that service where veterans are involved.

His background is extraordinaire as a Naval officer and helicopter pilot on the icebreaker USS Edisto. In 1957 Howell along with another ship's pilot performed heroic rescue operations to Uruguay during a devastating flood in 1957. Many years later an Ambassador from Uruguay tracked him down to present the country's highest award to Howell and the other pilot for saving many lives. After his Navy service he served as a Special Agent Secret Service to several presidents and was among Lady Bird Johnson's detail. He now resides in his hometown of Purvis, MS and we remain in frequent contact. I think you would agree when I say he should take the time to write his memoirs.

Our eighth reunion was held 2015 in Reston, VA. We wanted to get near Washington DC but like Boston, room rates and cost for parking were too high so I selected a hotel in Reston, VA. Our tours consisted of a tour of Arlington Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Museum which houses about every type of aircraft known to man including a SR-71 Blackbird and the Space Shuttle Discovery.

Our ninth reunion was held 2016 in San Antonio, Texas where I contracted with the Holiday Inn Riverwalk. Our tours consisted of a nightly river cruise of the Riverwalk and a stop at a wild seed farm for lunch and a visit to former President Lyndon B. Johnson's ranch.

I received a surprise presentation of the Quilt of Valor by Sandra & Val Patarini at the San Antonio reunion. The quilt was made by Marie Mac Dermid, a shipmate's widow whose late husband was a photographer on the USS Edisto. She couldn't be there so she asked the Patarini's to do the honor. The following is her letter.

To Glenn D. Smith,



Quilt of Valor Presentation

This Quilt of Valor comes to you with prayers and a sincere thank you for your years of service with the United States Navy from 1959 through 1963. You received your basic training in San Diego, CA and at the electronic school in San Francisco, CA.

You served on the USS Edisto from 1960 - 1962 and on the USS Glacier from 1962 - 1963. When you were honorably discharged, you retired with the rank of ETR2, [E5]. Today we also recognize your initiative in taking the helm for all the USS Edisto Reunions:

2004 Charleston, SC
2006 Chattanooga, TN
2008 Newport News, VA
2009 Baton Rouge, LA
2010 Warwick, RI [Boston]
2012 Melbourne, FL
2013 Nashville, TN
2015 Reston, VA [Wash. DC]
2016 San Antonio, TX
2017 Charleston, SC
2019 New Orleans, LA

Your authorship of "The Story of an Icebreaker'" was a remarkable achievement. The USS Edisto Association, Inc. has honored you as a Permanent Life-Time Member of the Board of Directors.

This quilt pattern and the blue colors represent the oceans of our world, Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Arctic and Antarctic. Marie Mac Dermid pieced this together in her sewing room in Plymouth, CT.

The flag-backing was donated by Bill Heering from his campaign offices. The machine quilting of stars was done by Cindy Lewis of Hamden, CT. This quilt then had the binding and label sewn on by Marie. The quilt and the batting are all cotton.

Quilts of Valor (QOV.org) is a foundation established in 2003 by Catherine Roberts, formerly of Delaware. Her hope was to be able to cover those touched by war with a Quilt of Valor.

Since 2003 over 141,000 quilts have been made and presented; some through the major treatment centers such as Walter Reed and Brook Army Medical, through smaller or more local VA centers and facilities or through personal contact.

We are hoping to someday cover all our service people who have been physically or emotionally touched by this war on terror and prior conflicts. Also, we hope to honor all veterans for their service.

It is our way to thank those who receive QOVs for their service and the sacrifices that they have made. We hope that wrapped in their quilt, each recipient will know that they are thanked and kept in the thoughts and prayers of 611 of us.

We hope your QOV will be passed on to another generation and be a part of your family history. Peace, Blessings and Love! Marie Mac Dermid of Plymouth, CT.

Presented at the USS Edisto Association Reunion in San Antonio, Texas September 2016. With appreciation to Valentino and Sandra Patarini for delivering and presenting the quilt as proxies for Marie Mac Dermid.

# # #

In 2017, we were back in Charleston, SC for our tenth reunion which was to be our last event but hurricane Irma changed all that. I had planned to have the Dave & Daphne show down from Nashville to play for us again because they were such a big hit with our group in Nashville. We learned that Dave was lead guitarist for singer Barbara Mandrell's show when she toured so we were looking forward to having him and Daphne entertain us again. However, the event was cut short because the storm was expected to come up the Florida coast and into Charleston.

Since hurricane Irma hadn't did as much damage as was predicted, it was still strong enough to disrupt what was to be our last event. We didn't think the reunion was a proper closing so I reluctantly began planning the eleventh and final reunion for Kathie and I.

For the 2019 reunion we selected the Four Points By Sheraton French Quarter in New Orleans, LA. The hotel is located on the corner of Toulouse and Bourbon Streets where all the action is. In fact, we learned that earlier in the week there was an LBGT parade planned and after that a naked bicycle parade but when offered the chance to join either of the parades, none of my shipmates wanted to participate.

The highlight of this reunion was a visit to the World War II Museum where Kathie was able to find information on the ships her dad Jim Oliver served on during the war. The museum is a fantastic place and a must for all to see, especially if you have family that served in WWII.

It turned out to be a great event with good attendance and entertaining tours. If one has nothing else to do, for a night of fun just sit on a balcony in the evening and watch the evening revelers stroll down famous Bourbon Street. Or for more excitement there is always a parade.

CHAPTER 34 – HOBBIES FISHING & POOL

In our early years of marriage after coming back to Florida to work at MILA, we purchased our first house at 440 Eloise Avenue, Titusville, FL. It was a small house that sat near I-95 without any structures to hinder my plans to put a kennel runway for the hunting dogs I planned to acquire. For whatever reason, those plans never materialized since I never got any dogs. I'm not exactly sure why I didn't follow through on that plan since I was hunting almost every weekend. I would drive to Jacksonville and drop Kathie off to visit her parents while I spent the days with a small hunting party to hunt in St Johns County then drive back to her parents for the night.

Hunting in St Johns County began when I worked at Welex Electronics in St Augustine where I became friends with a boy that lived in the city. He invited me to join a small party that hunted west of Saint Augustine out near the St Johns River. I began hunting with them and would take one or two of Kathie's younger brothers with me. The youngest brother Mark was with me most often and the two of us experienced some unusual events that we won't easily forget. One was when we left Jacksonville early one morning at our usual hour of 4am and were driving down I-95 in a VW Beatle that I had at the time. We were approaching Hwy 16 and were about 2 miles from the intersection when the car stopped suddenly. I checked the lights and saw nothing wrong so popped the hood and saw the fan belt was still on and nothing looked out of place. Then I checked the oil and it was dry as a bone. At first, I thought I had not properly inserted the dip stick but a second and third check confirmed there wasn't any oil on the stick.

I explained to Mark what I had found and we were puzzled that something like this could happen because the many times I had checked the oil in the past, it was always good and never burned any oil. We could see the lights of the gas station so I offered him some money and suggested he walk down to the intersection and buy some oil. No way Jose! He wasn't about to walk down there so I suggested he stay with the car and I walk down and get some oil. No way Jose! We were at a stalemate.

We sat there for another 10-15 minutes and in a bit of frustration I tried one last time to start the car. Caroom! The little VW cranked right up and I drove down to the gas station and put in FOUR QUARTS of oil while it was sitting at the pumps. I couldn't believe it. I drove the car the rest of the day without any problems and the first thing we did when we got home that evening was to park in a different spot and check for oil where I normally parked. None present. To this day we haven't a clue as to how it happened to lose that much oil or how it was able to crank and run 2 miles to take on 4 quarts of oil. It just added another notch in my affection for VW.

In another incident, Mark and I were motoring through the neighborhood early in the morning on our normal route when we rounded a corner and ran smack into a whole lot of police cars and armed cops pointing rifles at us. When they saw it was just a small VW and one was a teenager, they relaxed.

They tightened up quickly when a cop walked up to the door of the car and saw our shotguns in the back. It wasn't long before they considered us harmless so we were turned around and had to go the long way out to the highway. We learned later that two guys broke into a service station and the owner was waiting for them but they were armed and managed to kill him before he could do them harm.

There was another time when Kathie and I were on our way to Jacksonville in one of my VW's when I pulled off I-95 and drove into the woods as we entered St Johns County. My intent was to show her where our deer hunting party gathered each year. She was about 18 months pregnant with Greg at the time so there wasn't a lot of room between her belly and the dash and even less room between her and the steering wheel. However, I got the VW hung up on a berm from a plowed fire trail and it required her to get behind the wheel and drive it out while I pushed from the rear. We managed. It was one of those things I admired about the bug and about Kathie.

During hunting season that VW allowed me to drive through mud where 4-wheel drive vehicles got stuck and we crossed flooded branches that almost put us under. The current was too swift and water blew up in the air vents causing the side glasses to fog up and the inside of the windshield to be completely immersed. Just when we thought we were a goner, the car suddenly lurched forward and we found ourselves on the other bank. A couple guys heard us hit the water and came back to help by pulling us in.

This hunting arrangement continued for a number of years until Larry, who had invited me to join in the beginning, started missing a lot of the weekends. Then his stepdad quit driving down from Jacksonville and finally there were only 2 or 3 of us still hunting.

One fine morning I was to meet a member of the party but when he didn't show, I called his house and learned that while he was putting on his boots to join me, he fell out of the chair and died. I went back to Titusville and never went back to hunt again. Instead, I went home and basically sold all my hunting stuff and concentrated on fishing. We did however make one more trip to the farm and that was to take Kathie's dog Captain, a large German Shepard, to live with the family that owned the farm.

Afterwards I purchased a small Jon boat from Sears with a 3.5 hp motor which made an ideal fishing rig to fish in South Lake which was located a few blocks from the house. I learned there was a narrowing of the channel from Fox Lake to South Lake where I could catch my limit of bass before the sun was up good. By then we had two mouths to feed. Greg and Doug.

I think the first solid food the young guys ate was fish. I always took pains to de-bone and filet the bass, Blue Gill or any of the edible fish and Kathie would go through the filets before cooking and search carefully for any bones that I may have missed. They both learned to eat and catch fish at a young age.

Eventually I moved up from the Jon Boat to something larger and began fishing more in the brackish water of Indian River. I have caught a lot of big fish out of the Indian River, Haulover Canal and Mosquito Lagoon but there were some lessons to be learned.

Local lakes and rivers had plenty Bass, Blue Gill and Crappie and easy to catch and good to eat. We also ate a lot of Speckled trout from the Indian River. We ate Blue fish when they made their journey south to the warmer climate of Florida. On those occasions one could hardly find a place to fish on the banks of Port Canaveral because there would be so many fishermen throwing silver spoons.

The photo at right is an example. The quandary was what to do with such big fish. It was decided to make the long drive out to Port Canaveral where a man smoked the catch for half the meat. There was plenty of meat to go around but I decided then that it wasn't worth catching fish that big without letting them go back into the river. Something I have done ever since and I'm glad that now there are limits on what size Red fish can be kept. On the other hand, Bass, Blue Gill and Crappie any size are to be put on the table to.



Red Fish 16, 18 & 40 lbs caught at Haulover Canal

Or maybe some Speckled trout which we ate plenty of. We also ate Blue fish when they made their journey south to the warmer climate of Florida. On those occasions one could hardly find a place to fish on the banks of Port Canaveral because there would be so many fishermen throwing silver spoons.

On one occasion back in the spring of 1987, Mom, Dad and younger brother Mike visited us in Florida. We were still living at 440 Eloise Ave and I had a Plymouth Duster at the time and I decided to take Dad, Mike and son Greg to Port Canaveral to fish for Blues.

At that time there were numerous feral cats that ran around the Port and in and out of the rocks and one of them drew Greg's interest. I had warned him several times to be cautious around the anglers who were casting large silver crocodile spoons into the channel.

Despite all the caution, the little fellow jumped down into the rocks in pursuit of one of the cats just as I was in a back swing about to throw my lure forward when it caught the little guy in the head. It was such force that the 20lb mono-filament line broke.

For me it was absolute terror. I grabbed him and began running to the car while Dad and Mike hurriedly picked up our fishing gear. We tore out of Jetty Park and headed for Titusville via SR-528 which was a toll road at the time. Dad was holding Greg who wasn't making the slightest whimper and Mike was sitting in the back with his head stuck between the front seats (before seat belts). He was giving me speed updates which exceeded 100 mph down 528 and I barely slowed going through the Toll Booths without paying or stopping. One would think that we would encounter a sheriff's car or at a minimum a Titusville Police car but we didn't. I blew through Titusville like it wasn't even there. At Parrish Emergency Room the doctor removed the lure and said that it appeared to have hit him on the side of the head then moved forward and caught the corner of the little fellow's eye socket. We were so lucky that it wasn't his eye.

In the meantime, Greg barely whimpered and didn't complain at all. Phew! What a relief that the little guy wasn't seriously injured. Because of that incident, it was a long time before I went back to the Port to fish for Blues or any other fish for that matter. Now all that fish area has been turned into a county park and a fee is charged to enter.

One can view a list of vehicles at the end of my autobiography and see that I've had numerous cars and boats, so many that I'm sure I don't remember them all. There were many but like my cars, there are some boats that were special and made memories that won't be forgotten. The first was a 12ft fiberglass open fisherman, center console with a 25 HP Johnson with electric controls. A beauty to look at and a beauty to fish out of. I caught some nice Red fish with that boat.

The next special boat was Da Blue Bote. A small 12ft boat that I bought from my brother Jerry to keep it in the family. It was very comfortable to ride and fish out of.

Brother Jerry had the boat many years before I purchased it from him and I added another 16 years or so before selling it to a young couple wo said they liked to take their young toddler fishing with them.



Da Blu Bote



As promised, they sent me a picture of the boat they entered in the Christmas parade.

I've had no greater pleasure than fishing with my dad, my two brothers Jerry and Mike and dear friends and fishing buddies, Chuck Bounds and Don Mason. Having fished with the two men separately and together many times, I have fished with Don the most and consider him a brother. Some of the best times have been when the three of us, Jerry, Don and I, have gone out on Indian River for trout or to Lake Harney for Speckled perch.



A sample of fish brother and I caught from da blu bote



19 ft. Sportscraft

There is one more boat I should mention that gave us great pleasure and that was a 19 ft. Sportscraft powered by a 125HP Mercury Outboard. It had tall gunnels making it especially safe for young kids, an inside toilet and full canvas to protect from the elements.

We were living in an apartment at the Royal Oak Country club and one of our favorite pastimes was to load up the boat with lawn chairs, kids and a picnic basket and motor out to one of the spoil islands in the Indian River. Once on the island the kids could be turned loose to swim and play as they pleased without fear. We built some good memories.







Dejah's first fish



Aaron's first fish

Katy fishing

The memories are treasured. Aaron caught his first big trout in the Da Blue Bote. Granddaughter Katy overcame her fear of boat riding when I let her drive my boat for the first time.

While my oldest Granddaughter Dejah went out on a boat for the first time and caught her first fish, a fighting Lady Fish. It was Grandson Aaron's first boat ride and first lunker trout. Kathie has gone out with me many times in my boats and fished. Greg and Doug have fished from my boats.

My dad, my friends, brothers, my wife Kathie and our grandchildren have all gone out on my boats at one time or another. My belief is that if you teach a kid to fish, he or she will always be a fisherman...or a fisherwoman. If only our country, state and local governments will continue to protect the waterways and the marine habitat.

I may have mentioned it before but another pastime before and after retirement was shrimping. For more than 60 years I have fished the waters of Florida, most of which have been in Brevard and neighboring counties like St Johns River and associated lakes. I've also fished the big pond and spent many days in Port Canaveral fishing for Blues and whatever else I could catch.



Wife Kathie with catfish - Son Greg with Jack - Son Doug with Red

Our youngest two boys were fish eaters, which may have been the first solid food they ate as a child but something else we all liked and that was shrimp. I did a lot of shrimping in both the Indian and Banana Rivers.

It was simply a matter of charging the boat batteries, fixing something to eat and drink and driving to Oak Hill and launching our boats at Indian Mound. Most of the shrimpers went south in the Intercoastal Waterway towards the mouth of Mosquito Lagoon but I shrimped both north and south and can't say which is better.

After a night out on the water, it was a sleepy trip home but we had to remain alert going through Oak Hill because they were infamous at writing tickets to shrimpers who may have exceeded the posted speed limit. Once home I would hit the sack in preparations for work while Kathie would count and take the heads off the shrimp before freezing the catch.

Shrimping was one of our favorite activities. I think I must have shrimped from about every boat you can imagine including a friend's sailboat. Indian Mound in Oak Hill, FL was the preferred shrimping site but there were others such as the Titusville Pier, Haulover Canal and the bridges over the Banana River between Merritt Island and Cocoa Beach. My first shrimping was done at these bridges when a fellow employee talked me into joining him in Merritt Island. Later I used my boat and went north to Oak Hill to shrimp.

All one needed was a couple lamps – we used Coleman lanterns in the beginning – and a dip net or two. Plenty of coffee and something to eat. We would anchor out in the channel and hang the lights where the Intercoastal waterway was illuminated and watch for the shrimp as they swam north to the Ponce De Leon Inlet. On most nights there would be so many shrimpers the waterway would be lit up like Broadway. I caught a lot of shrimp in Oak Hill as Kathie can attest because she would do the cleaning after I got home not long after daylight. I would put battery on charge just in case, take a shower and go to bed so that I would be ready to go to work that afternoon. In the meantime, Kathie would behead the shrimp, count them and freeze them in water. The Oak Hill Reds were on the small side but sweet and tasty when fried. Although I had planned to, I never got up there with the Blue Bote which would have been perfect for all night shrimping.

The last time I attempted to go shrimping was with son Doug and Chuck Bounds. Chuck had a large boat and it was our intent to put in at Indian Mound. We had no sooner finished launching the boat and putting in our $2 for the ramp when a lady came running out and said we couldn't launch a drive on boat. Hmm. We had just done so. No matter, she gave us our money back and said we had to go. Since I had been the one to drop the boat in the water and park the truck, it was me that backed it up so Chuck could drive it back on the trailer.

After getting the boat loaded, I placed the truck in granny gear to pull it out but when I went to take it out of gear, it would not budge. It would only stay in granny so Chuck took over because it was his truck and he knew how to operate it.

Chuck tried without success. It just wouldn't disengage granny gear despite how rough he was trying to shift gears. It became clear that we were going to drive all the way to my house in low gear. Chuck would wind the RPMs up so high it would almost hurt your ears then push in the clutch and let it coast.

We rode like that for 15 miles back to our house in Mims and as Chuck pulled into our yard, we were quickly reminded that we had not lowered the top because when he turned into the yard under our oak trees, they took the top off. He wasn't done yet because as he pulled it into the back yard, I saw that he was too close to the well head on our pump and yelled for him to stop.

The boat's trailer tire was right up against the pipe coming out of the ground and with the truck locked in gear, he could not go backwards or forwards so we dropped the boat trailer sitting against the well head of the pump. The next day I used the tractor to pull the boat away from the wellhead pipe but the damage was done. I had to repair a leak by replacing the pipe and the check valve. Unfortunately, that was Doug's only time to go shrimping.

Boating always had unexpected events such as the time Don and I were in South Lake in his boat and as we were motoring across the lake at warp speed, we hit something hard enough to bend the blades on the prop. Don said we hit a log. Not so I said. Sure enough a big 10-12 ft. gator finally came to the surface.



Don Mason & Red

Another time was when we were coming into the marina at warp speed and unlike so many other times when the throttle is pulled back, the wake picks up the boat and it slowly settles into the boat ramp. But not this time. I could see the dock pilings coming at us at 60 mph so I quickly sat back down just as the boat hit the ramp which caused Don to go flying through the gap in the windshield. He kept on running and went over the bow with his body leaning forward about 45 degrees trying desperately to keep up with his head.

He ran straight to his truck with all the onlookers in the marina with mouths agape staring at this remarkable landing and with no hesitation Don backed the truck down and we quickly loaded the boat on to the trailer and headed out of the marina with many of the folks still gawking. They could tell we were experts.

Unfortunately, the show wasn't over because just as we were about to go onto the bridge the boat came off the trailer with a bang. One would have to admit that we looked pretty foolish but we had looked good up until that time. Oh, there were other exciting times and some were unique like watching and listening to an alligator eat a blowfish. It sounded like someone rubbing a balloon until it popped. Never again will we likely see or hear that but it gives a new appreciation of the gator. I'm saddened to report that he and I will fish no more as he and lady friend were hit head-on by a drunk driver and Don did not survive.

As for Da Blue Bote, I can recall only one fishing trip where we had a dicey boating experience. It was in Largo when the girls had taken a road trip to Tallahassee while brother Jerry and I stayed home and fished. On this day he and I had motored up north of the Clearwater Memorial Causeway and fished the water above the bridge until late. It was just after a Red Tide outbreak so fishing was slow and with night approaching, we decided to head home. Just as we went under the bridge and entered the rough water coming in from Clearwater Pass, a wave literally filled a 5-gal bucket that was sitting up front between my legs. Jerry quickly turned the boat around and we went back to the safety of the water on the north side of the causeway. We anchored on the west side of the causeway where it was calm and out of the wind. It was clear that it was too rough to try and attempt the 5 miles back to Belleair Marina so we prepared to spend the night.

Only those fishermen that have been in Da Blue Bote can appreciate what it was like for two six footers to sleep in the boat. Or we attempted to sleep. All night long there was a constant loud clang clang of turnbuckles hitting the metal post where the strong winds were blowing a flag. I believe it is called the Horizon House that sits on that point.

In concert with the clang clang of the flag, all night long vehicles with loud boom boxes would cross the causeway going to and from the beach. Then to add to the cacophony sirens from ambulances and other emergency vehicles ran back and forth across the causeway all night. Now I remind you, both Jerry and I are at or near 6ft and we both were trying to find room to sleep in the Blue Boat. It was a rough night with all the noise and rough water and It wasn't until Jeannie and Kathie returned home that we learned that a tornado had gone across our anchorage while we were sleeping.

In retrospect, I've had a wonderful life that included fishing, hunting, and shrimping and the best part of it was fishing with Kathie, my father-in-law Jim Oliver, her two brothers Mark and Chuck, her nephew Jared, my Dad and brothers Jerry and Mike, my two sons Greg and Doug, grandson Aaron, granddaughter Dejah and two very good friends Don and Chuck. I'm sure I missed someone but these are the people that I fished with most.

Billiards was still a passion of mine and some years earlier when Sparky's Family Billiards was open, Greg and I entered a Father and Son tournament and would have won it all except he scratched on the 8-ball to lose the tournament. That scratch beat him up for a few years until we once more entered another Father and Son tournament giving him a second chance to redeem himself. He did and we won first place.



Father and Son Tournament Winners



Team Sparky's 2nd Place

I've won a lot of trophies but that one is maybe one of the important ones as it meant a lot to Greg. Once upon a time I had a Bendix team at Sparky's Family Billiards that was made up chiefly of employees and spouses and we ended up 2nd place in league play.

On a personal level, I did well in Individual tournaments and won a few dollars with a lot of 1st and 2nd place finishes. In 1993 I once played 9-ball against Tommy "TK-FLA" Kennedy, a pro who won the 9-Ball Open Championship in 1992. The match was a race to three and I was ahead by 2 games, when I broke in the 3rd game and needed only to make an easy 9-Ball to win the match.

The room was full of friends and fellow players rooting for me and I was eating it up. So much so that I was hamming it up and delaying my winning shot. Finally, I bent down and shot the 9-ball in the corner pocket and along with it went the cue ball and rolled in the pocket right behind the 8-ball. A scratch! Far-ra-do! To make things worse, Tom gave me a copy of the next day's newspaper with a note on the top where he wrote "Scratch Ball Smith" and then signed it. Muzzygeezy. The last that I read about Tom and his ranking in the world, he was at 265 but that was about the time he won the 1992 US Open 9 ball Championship.



Both Randy and Greg have taken a liking to pool and both have a pretty competitive game and have beaten me a few times. I enjoy playing billiards with either of them. Randy is also an expert Gun Smith and a collector of sorts and is a computer whiz who was once employed by Sony.

What each son has given us are four great grandchildren and three great grands. Randy had a son, then a girl and Greg had a girl then a son in that order.

On the other hand, Douglas, our youngest son, hasn't shown much interest in pool but he is an excellent surfer and an accomplished fisherman among other things. He is also recognized as one of the best painters in the automotive industry in North Florida.



Randy Troubleshooting a PC

Over the years I have purchased McDermott cues because I like the workmanship, the balance and the overall designs that McDermott makes. My first cue was in the early 90's which was to replace a cue that I had stolen in a robbery at Sparky's Family Billiards. A year or so later I was in a pawn shop shopping for a used cue and came across the Rose made by McDermott. It had an extra shaft that had rarely been used and all of it was encased in an "It's George" Ostrich case which was a case sought after by collectors and professionals.

Randy had always admired it so I gave it to him. Of course, there were other nice McDermott cues and cases that I gave to Greg and there is one for Doug should he want it.



In the meantime, I had taken up shooting pool again at the Senior Center here in Titusville. A dozen or more seniors were shooting pool twice a week. One player is Henry Peter, a pool player, good friend and an established artist whose works are in galleries from Key West to all points north and rumored to be overseas as well. Henry's favorite subjects are Key West and Black Point Drive located on Merritt Island near Titusville. Kathie and I are very proud to possess two pieces of his art. It is recommended that should anyone wish to see a sample of his work, all one needs to do is go to the internet and type in the web address: https://www.henrypeterart.com/gallery-2.html.

There came a time when we were devoting more time to playing pool at the Senior Center. However, the more often we played pool the more we began to feel less wanted. First, it was a board member who complained about an exit door being unlocked – a responsibility of the Operations Manager who gets paid for that job.



Hustler Ken Slattery Professional Artist Henry Peter

Then what followed was the door was locked an alarm was installed to prevent us from using it so we had to exit through the rest of the Center. The Bridge players complained when we had to go through their tables to get to an exit and the Bingo players complained when we exited through their tables to get to the exit.

The last straw was when we struck an agreement with the Board of Directors in which we pool players would pay up to $500 to recover one of the two tables if the Center paid for the 2nd table. We collected money and arranged to have the tables covered and the job turned out to be approximately $750 for the two tables. We seniors paid our $500 as agreed, which left the Center paying about $250. We had $275 left over which we planned to buy supplies if needed, however, some members of the Board and staff began hounding the guy who was holding the money to hand it over to the Center.

Eventually he capitulated and handed over our money to the Center which checked another box so we quit going there, dropped our membership and started playing at Sandrift, a Brevard County Recreation center where we felt really welcome by the employees that work there. Plus, it was free. At the same time the Senior Center staff attempted to lure our group back but we didn't want anything more to do with the Center, besides we were getting spoiled by the staff at the Sandrift Recreation Center.

After many years of working together and playing cards on most Friday nights with Ken and his wife Doctor Slattery, for one of Ken's birthdays I gave him a case with a McDermott cue and a Sneaky Pete and invited him to join us seniors in pool. He has been shooting pool since.

One day I discovered that McDermott had a cue giveaway each month, I began entering daily or as often as I could remember to do so and in 2013 I got a surprise email from McDermott Cues informing me that my daily entry in June had paid off. I had won that month's cue, a G205C. It turned out to be a hot pink design.

When I told the other seniors that I had won a pink cue and would buy some pink gloves and maybe some shoes to match, they suggested I might find another place to play pool. I told McDermott how the pool players had reacted and asked if I could pay the difference and get a more manlier cue stick. Of course. I just had to pay the difference which was about $175 for a very nice cue with the McDermott clover leaf logo. In retrospect, I should have bought those pink gloves and maybe some pink shoes and taken them to Key West and sold it all for good money. Sadly, we only think of these things too late.

Another cue stick story is one in which the Postal Service managed to either steal or lose a valuable McDermott cue that needed refinishing. McDermott is know for refinishing cues if it can be determined that the finish was lacking the high quality associated with their product.

I sent a McDermott pool cue back many years ago because the original clear finish had turned milky looking. They refinished the cue to make it look like a new one again.

In this case, the missing cue disappeared somewhere between Titusville Post Office and Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. Orlando did not show as receiving it but the cue was supposed to go there then to Menomonee Falls but the post office there received only an empty box. No doubt someone along the line recognized McDermott as the intended recipient and the box it was in would serve as another clue.

Menomonee Falls Post Office cut the label off the empty box and mailed it back to me. This caused the entire postal system to record that the item had been returned to me but what I got was only a cardboard label. No matter the amount of documentation, phone calls, claims and letters to the Postmaster, none were successful. Did Postal thieves steal the cue?

Finally, as I close this chapter of fun, I would be remiss if I did not include the many hours over the 35 plus years that Kathie and I played Hearts with the Slatterys. We observed many New Years Eves at the dinner table followed by multiple card games.



Glenn *Kathie* *Darlene* *Ken*

CHAPTER 35 - HIGHLIGHTS & MILESTONES

This bio was initiated when I was asked a dozen times or more where was I born and where did I grow up and what school did I attend. Unlike most, I attended a dozen or more schools before graduating high school in Lake Charles, LA. The cities and states I lived in were just as numerous as the schools because my dad was in the Air Force.

In the order of my attendance, this is a list of 14 schools by city and state and the grades commencing in September 1942.

1st grade first half was in Fayetteville, AR.

1st grade second half was in Wheeler, AR.

2nd grade first half was in Wheeler, AR

2nd grade second half was in Mt Comfort, AR

3rd grade first half was in Wheeler, AR

3rd grade second half was in Charleston, SC

4th grade was in Clarksville, TN

5th grade was in Fort Campbell, KY

6th & 7th grades were in New Providence, TN

8th grade was in Cumberland, TN

9th grade first half in Clarksville High

9th grade second half in South Christian, KY

10th grade was in South Christian High, KY

11th grade was Marion High, Lake Charles, LA

12th grade was Marion High, Lake Charles, LA Graduated

1959 US Navy Electronics A School & Radar School

1973-75 Brevard Community College (BCC), Cocoa, FL Graduated

1974-75 Florida Technological University (FTU) 60 Hours

1975-76 University of Central Florida (UCF) 120 Hours

I know, I should have taken the last 3 hours for degree but discovered I didn't need it for the promotion I received.

A List of the Cities and States and the year of relocation

1937 Wheeler, Arkansas

1942 Fayette, Alabama

1942 Birmingham, Alabama

1943 Fayette, Alabama

1943 Wheeler, Arkansas

1947 Charleston, South Carolina

1948 Clarksville, Tennessee

1949 Fort Campbell, Kentucky

1950 New Providence, Tennessee

1952 Cunningham, Tennessee

1953 New Providence, Tennessee

1954 Fort Campbell, Tennessee

1955 Lake Charles, Louisiana

1956 Homestead, Florida

1958 Jacksonville, Florida

1958 Homestead, Florida

1959 San Diego, California

1959 San Francisco, California

1960 New London, Connecticut

1960 USS Edisto (AGB-2) Boston, MA

1960 Arctic cruise - Newfoundland, Labrador, Greenland

1961 Deep Freeze Antarctic cruise - Panama, New Zealand, Hawaii

1963 USS Glacier (AGB-4) Antarctic, Panama, Bora Bora, NZ

1963 Jacksonville, Florida

1966 Landover, Maryland

1967 Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain

1968 Ascension, Island, United Kingdom

1968 Titusville, Florida

1978 Barstow, California

1980 Fairbanks, Alaska

1983 Edgewater, Maryland

1986-2018 Mims, sold house and moved into Titusville

Life's Milestone

1937-Apr 23	My birth in Wheeler, AR
1938-Oct 12	Sister Sue born in Steele, AR
1942-Mar 22	Brother Jerry born in Fayette, AL
1949-Dec 29	Sister Carla born in Ft Campbell, KY
1957-Aug 08	Brother Mike born in Homestead, FL
1958-Sep 08	Marriage to Rulee Thieneman
1959-Apr 23	Navy Boot Camp San Diego, CA
1959-Jul 06	Boot Camp Graduation
1959-Jul 21	ET School Treasure Is., CA
1960-Mar 19	Sub School, New London, CT
1960-Apr 07	Son Randy born in Homestead, FL
1960-May 14	Duty USS Edisto (AGB-2)
1960-Nov 10	Brother Keith born in Homestead, FL
1962-Sep 62	Duty USS Glacier (AGB-4)
1963-Apr 22	Discharged from Navy
1963-Apr 22	Final Divorce Decree
1966-Jan 03	Civil Service NAS Jax, FL
1966-Dec 23	Marriage to Katherine Oliver
1966-Dec 30	Hired by Bendix Columbia, MD
1966-April	Duty NASA Tracking Station at Canary Islands, Spain
1968-April	Duty NASA Tracking Station at Ascension Island, UK
1968-Sept	Duty NASA Tracking Station (MILA) at Kennedy Space Center, FL
1969-Apr 8	Son Gregory born, Titusville, FL
1974-Feb 2	Son Douglas born, Titusville, FL
1975-Aug 5	AA Degree from BCC
1978- Sept	Duty NASA Tracking Station (GDS) at Goldstone, CA
1980-Sept	Promoted to Sr Mgr NASA/NOAA Stations, Fairbanks, AK
1981-Sept 27	Grandson Roarke born to Randy and Sylvia, Fort Myers, FL
1983-Aug	Promoted to Manager, NASA World Wide Tracking Network
1985-Jul 26	Granddaughter Dejah born to Randy and Sylvia, Fort Myers, FL
1986-May	Promoted to Senior Manager NASA Tracking Stations at KSC, FL
1992-May 31	Granddaughter Katlyn born to son Greg and Tina, Merritt Island, FL
1997-Feb 27	Grandson Aaron born to son Greg and Tina, Merritt Island, FL
1997-Oct	Retired from Allied-Signal (Bendix) with 31 years service, Titusville, FL
1998-Aug	Consultant to Poker Flat, AK
1998-Dec	Consultant to MILA, KSC
2004-Apr	Founded USS Edisto Ass.
2016-Feb19	I wrote and published The Story of an Icebreaker
2016-Nov 27	Great Grandson Oliver born to granddaughter Katlyn & Dean Renwick.
2016-Dec 10	50th Anniversary Party
2017-Jul 7	Great Grandson Damian born to granddaughter Dejah and Luis Malla.
2021-Jul 11	Great Granddaughter Bryna Sylvia born to Dejah and Luis Malla.

MY VEHICLES

1935 Ford Sedan-Black
1950's International Station Wagon-Grey
1952 Chevy Belair Coupe-Black & Yellow
1955 Chevy Belair
1955 Olds Convertible-Blue/White
1959 VW Beetle-Black
1959 Triumph TR3-Green
1960 Vintage VW - Blue
1960 Vintage CW-Rusty
1960 Chevy Corsair-White
1962 Pontiac Bonneville-Blue/White
1964 Falcon Station Wagon-Grey
1965 Nash Rambler-black
1969 Ford Truck-yellow
1969 New Ford Truck-green
1970 Mercury Wagon -Yellow
1970 Datsun King Cab, Alaska-Blue1
1970 Datsun Truck, w/Topper-White
1972 Pontiac Gran Prix-Coral
1972 New VW-Coral
1972 New Pinto Woody Wagon-Brown
1972 New Plymouth Duster
1972 Mercury Woody Station Wagon
1976 Monte Carlo White
1979 New Mercury Marquis
1980 Lincoln Town Car from Jerry
1986 New F151 Ford Truc-Gold
1987 Datsun Truck-Blue
1987 New Ford Taurus-Grey
1991 Ford Ranger-Maroon
1994 New Mustang-Blue
1997 New Dodge Van-Taupe
2001 Ford F150-Black
2004 New Nissan Truck-Green
2005 VW Super Beetle-Red
2005 F150 Ford Truck-Black
2006 New Santa Fe-Black
2009 New Santa Fe-Blue
2016 New Chrysler T&C Van-Red

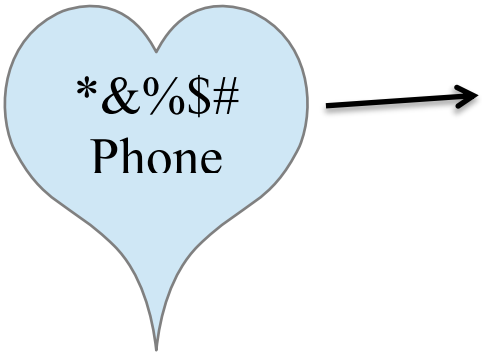
SOME BOATS I'VE OWNED

10ft Jon Boat
12ft Aluminum Open Fisherman
16ft Fiberglass Open Fisherman
12ft Gheenoe
16ft Center Console fisherman
12ft Fiberglass Center Console
19ft Sport Craft full canvas
4ft Cottage Craft "Da Blu Bote"

An addendum to this story is on our 50th wedding anniversary our good friends Ken and Darlene Slattery, Judy Girard, our boys and family members planned a party to celebrate our milestone. Nieces and nephews came from as far away as NW Arkansas, my boss Bendix Vice President Phil Johnson, our NASA customers George Jenkins, Tony Ippolito, my brother Mike from Indiana, brother Jerry from Largo, FL were all present as well as our three sons Randy, Greg and Doug.



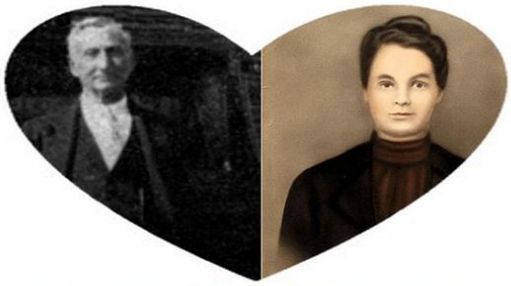
Family – Aaron, Tina, Jeannie. Morgan, Wendy, Linda, Jerry, Kimberly, Kathie, Glenn, Mike, Randy, Doug, Greg, Aaron, Sandy, Jim, Cathy





Brother Jerry & Jeannie's gift

SMITH LINE



William Pinkney Smith & Hattie Bell Warren



Jerry P. Smith & Anna Josielee Holland



Glenn & Rulee Thieneman



Glenn & Kathie Oliver



Randall Scott



Gregory Allen



Douglas Kyle



Glenn & Rulee

Randy & Sylvia



Roarke & Dejah



Luis & Dejah Malla

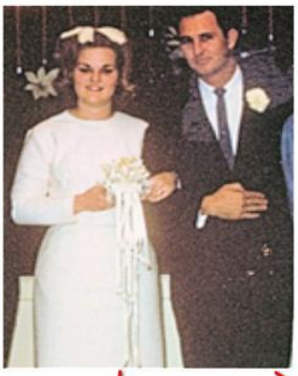




ROARKE & NEPHEW

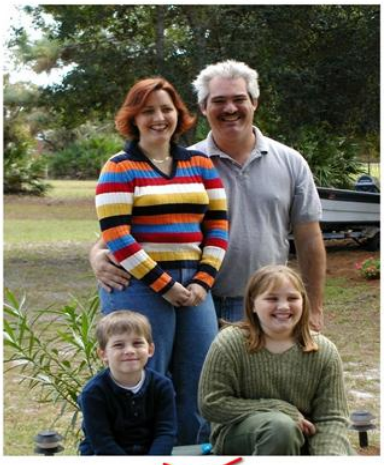


Damian Malla



1966 Glenn & Kathie

Tina - Greg
Aaron, Katlyn



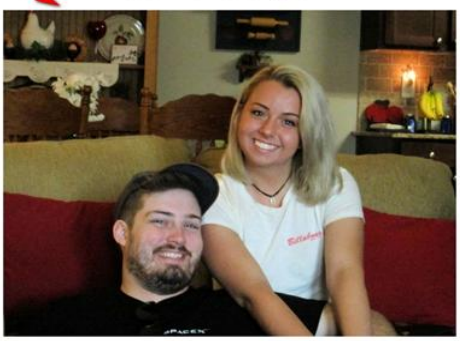
Douglas Kyle



Dean & Katlyn



Aaron & friend Reagan



Before



2018



Oliver Renwick

Great Grandsons



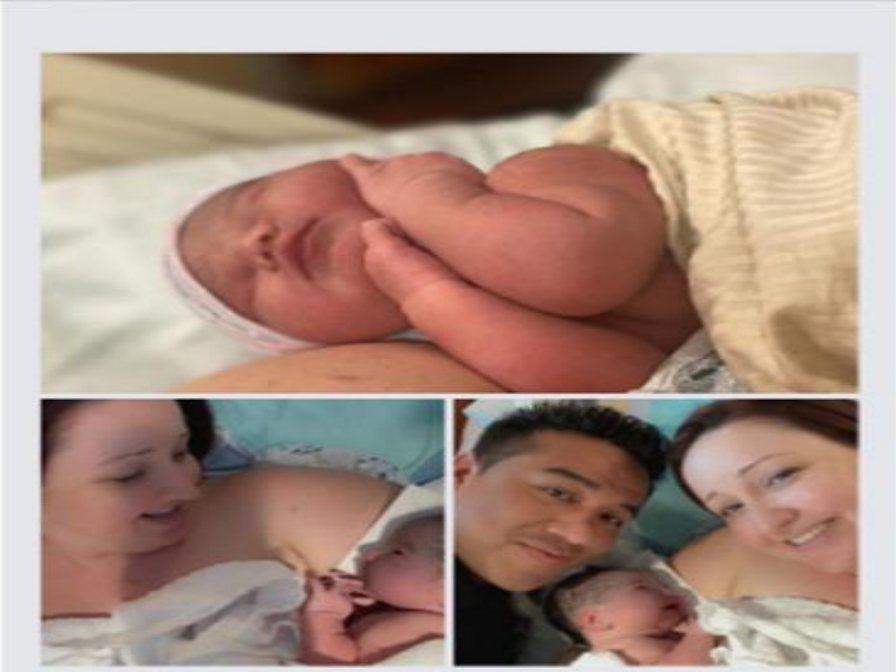
Damian Malla



Oliver Renwick

Dejah Malla is feeling blessed with Fernando Malla.

Our newest addition to the family.
Bryna Sylvia Malla
7/11/2021, 6:07pm
8lb 8oz, 21 inches





Grandparents Glenn & Kathie with Bryna 6 & Damian Malla 8

CHAPTER 36 - YEAR OF THE MASK

In the latter part of 2019, China was experiencing outbreaks and subsequent deaths from the COVID-19 virus. While China was trying to contain the spread of the virus they failed to tell the rest of the world which began experiencing cases as well. The virus spread rapidly throughout the world and began showing up in the U.S. as early as January and eventually all states were affected.

March 2020, Florida shutdown restaurants and other businesses except for essential workers and initially seemed to be doing okay but for concentrations in Dade and Broward which may have had more travelers from New York and other highly infected areas. The rest of the state had fewer cases than those two counties but when the State entered phase two which allowed Bars to open back up, the cases shot up to new highs.

We seniors were once shooting pool a couple hours each morning Monday - Saturday until March 14th and have remained in quarantine since then. It is a whole new ball game. People have clustered on Facelift, Snap chick and Zoomba and now there is a new app called Tick Tock which is reportedly made by the Chinese. Why not? They make everything else that we consume. Iphones, drugs, computers, apps, clothes, dinner ware, trinkets and for the person who has everything, COVID-19. In short, just about anything you buy at a Wal-Mart store. The Chinese bought Jack Daniels Distillery (sacrilegious) and Smithfield Hams. Smithfield is the city that our great great granddad donated the property on which the city is built. Sacrilegious! I just can't drink Jack Daniels and eat pork at the same time without getting sick.

Thanks to Doctor Anthony Fauci and China we now wear mask with our names on them so we know who we are talking to. We must resort to new barbers such as our spouses or self-administered haircuts. Cars are getting 3 months to a gallon. Crackers, Spam and Beanie Weenies are back on the menu. Socializing is out. We are no longer able to have grandkids and great grandkids visit. No more Friday night dinner and cards with friends. Did you ever think that having plastic bags, rubber gloves, masks and bleach in the trunk of your car would not be considered suspicious.

This period of sequestering has given rise to new pursuits. For many it is trying to find fame by posting on Facelift and getting hundreds of views or it could be a well-known artist like Henry Peter painting a whole new series called Pandemic. For authors such as myself, I decided to redo some of the book and republish my book The Story of an Icebreaker. I decided also this would be a good time to write my autobiography in which this chapter is included. I am amused at my own amazement.

Amazon.com has never seen such a banner year as 2020. The A-to-Z slogan is apt with purchases from Alcohol wipes to Ziploc bags. One can buy almost anything but masks. The latter must come from China or India. It seems that no matter who you order from, weeks later when they arrive, they are in the same blue bundle, look the same and stink to high heaven.

If COVID-19 doesn't get you, the mask will. I might also add that these masks are supposed to be one-time use and they live up to their design because the string usually breaks on one side when trying to use it the second time.

Ah….did I mention the ration of toilet paper? This was the year that Sears and Roebuck could have made a comeback. Fortunately, not all but many of the 3-holers are gone in America.

Our experience with these masks is all of the above but what is interesting is that I made 4 separate orders to 4 different sources and after 4 weeks with no delivery, my money was refunded. Two of the remaining three sources came in at different times and each was in a similar bag, the mask looked exactly alike, had the same stinky smell and each had a tag written in Chinese. The third order has not yet arrived though it has been months now.

We are living in an extremely divided country when it comes to politics. Actually, that isn't quite true. We are divided between Trump Haters and Deplorables.

Never in the history of our country has there been more vitriolic hatred towards anyone in our history as that shown against our current sitting president. Like the man or not, there is absolutely no respect towards the most prestigious office in the free world but if you have lasted this long and read this far, then I am much obliged.

Our experience with these masks is all of the above but what is interesting is that I made 4 separate orders to 4 different sources and after 4 weeks with no delivery, my money was refunded. Two of the remaining three sources came in at different times and each was in a similar bag, the mask looked exactly alike, had the same stinky smell and each had a tag written in Chinese. The third order has not yet arrived though it has been months now.

We are living in an extremely divided country when it comes to politics. Actually, that isn't quite true. We are divided between Trump Haters and Deplorables. And now we have a new social media party called Democratic Socialist of America (DSA) which is merely another name for a communist. The Democrats have came up with an excuse for this group stating that it is a big tent. I think they are going to find that this big tent they describe is going to collapse on the old Democratic party and it will be too later to correct.

Never in the history of our country has there been more vitriolic hatred towards anyone in our history as that shown against our current sitting president. Like the man or not, there is absolutely no respect towards the most prestigious office in the free world but if you have lasted this long and read this far, then I am much obliged.

It is a sad and dangerous state of the union that we find ourselves in with the current administration. President Biden is inept as many of us might be at his age, especially with the weight of the world on his office. He is sadly incompetent and America can only guess who is pulling his strings and writing his scripts. Whoever it is seems to have a desire to divide this nation.

Liberals want to GREEN everything which isn't a bad idea but at what expense? They want to do away with gas and diesel burning vehicles and go to electric. But do we have sufficient electrical power sources and EV charging stations? Currently, gas is now at its highest at $3.90 to $5.00 per gallon. Should one think the high gas prices are designed to make the EV more palpable?

Now we have learned that windmills are extremely costly to build and maintain and require large trucks to haul the equipment and a windmill farm requires a good bit of real estate and the parts are difficult to dispose of. Furthermore, it has been reported that they present a hazard to birds. Then there is the problem of determining suitable disposal of the old windmills. It is interesting to see one erected because it requires a large tractor trailer to carry one blade and the height of a large wind turbine is twice the height of the statue of liberty and as tall as the Washington Monument.

Meanwhile Canada is a major source of the minerals needed to make batteries for electric vehicles (EVs) and in particular they have Lithium. It has been reported that China has purchased the mine for this critical component. If my memory serves me correctly, it seems to me that our friend Doctor Slattery was working on some form of environmentally friendly energy source. No doubt the future holds new sources of energy.

In closing, I haven’t covered every aspect of my former life with my siblings Sue, Jerry, Carla, Mike and Candy – ah ha, that was just to see if you are paying attention. To my knowledge, there isn't a Candy in our family. Nor have I written much about my years with Rulee and Randy, nor mine and Kathie’s time together with Greg and Doug but I do hope that there is sufficient data to stir the gray cells and bring forth some good memories from all.

Rest assured there is something I hope you can remember about me and that is I loved the women I knew along the way and especially the two that I married. I love my three sons and my grandchildren and great grandchildren that they have given me. And finally, I love my siblings though I don’t see them as often as I would like.

I've often said that I believe the definition of Life is the choices we make beginning as a child and until our death. Our life is defined by the decisions we make every moment of every day and sometimes we make bad ones but overall, our lives are rich and filled with the good decisions we've made.

The Five most important decisions I made to define my life are:

1). My first marriage to Rulee leading to the birth of son Randy

2). Enlisting in the Navy and learning electronics

3). Marrying Kathie, wife of 59+ years and mother to Greg and Doug

4). Joining Bendix Field Engineering Corporation (BFEC)

5). Planning reunions for my ship, USS Edisto (AGB-2)

For me, my family, my siblings and the truly great friends that I've made over the years are where my most important decisions were made. It is these relationships that give my life a wholeness and I can truly say that I love the life I've lived and I thank you for being part of it.

All good things will eventually end so I will close for now but leave room for my obituary...should I ever need one.

The End

