

Radarmen Survive Storm

RESCUE AT "PINETREE"

Gerald E. (Jerry) Goodson



640th Aircraft Control & Warning Squadron emblem

This is a true account of a life-saving rescue that took place during my tour of duty at the 640th ACWRON, Stephenville, Newfoundland, during the winter of 1963~64. Anyone that has experienced the wrath of a winter storm, as a resident of "Pinetree," will appreciate the validity of what I am about to relate. Some of you who actually survived that event will recall vividly the terrifying experience of that cold, stormy evening. My purpose in writing of this experience is to recognize the quick thinking and selfless, brave action of then Major Loring B. Smith, Radar Operations Officer, and the team that participated in this rescue.

I was stationed at the 640th from April 1963 through April 1964. I was a young twenty-year old A/2C when I arrived at "Pinetree" in the spring of 1963. After a short stint in radar operations as a "scope dope," I was assigned the full time additional duty as mail clerk and courier for the site. I performed this duty for the majority of my assignment there. I made daily runs down the mountain carrying outbound mail and distribution to Earnest Harmon Air Force Base, located adjacent to the small town of Stephenville. I would pick up incoming mail and distribution and transport it back to the radar site.

Access to the site was via a steep, narrow, treacherous, one-way gravel roadway carved into the side of Table Mountain. Traffic was controlled by a security policeman, on duty around the clock, from a small guard shack located at the entrance to the site atop the mountain. There was an unmanned station at the bottom of the mountain, where all traffic was required to check-in by phone or two-way radio prior to beginning the one-way ascent. This was critical, as there was only space for one vehicle to traverse the approximate three mile section of narrow roadway. A bull dozer (from the site) and snow blowers (from Harmon AFB) maintained the roadway, attempting to keep it clear of drifting snow during the winter months.

Upon returning from my run to Harmon AFB, one late winter afternoon, I noticed a storm was moving in. The wind speed was rising and blowing snow was beginning to reduce visibility. I could no longer see the radomes atop the mountain. I had driven an all-wheel drive, nineteen passenger bus that day, as I often did to accommodate troops from the hill for their laundry and BX runs. By the time I arrived at the check-in point, at the bottom of the "hill," the storm was

rapidly intensifying and visibility was deteriorating due to the blowing snow and approaching early winter darkness. I checked in by radio with the security policeman on site and advised him of the deteriorating conditions and low visibility.

Meanwhile, two other vehicles (all-wheel drive "six-packs" as they were called) arrived on scene headed up the "hill." I listened on my radio, as the senior director on duty in radar operations and others in our convoy of higher rank than myself discussed the situation. The senior director on duty had access to real-time radar imaging, as well as current weather and forecasting. He was in the driver's seat as to the decision to close the access road or have us make the ascent.

We were directed to proceed up the mountain. The senior director would send the Caterpillar dozer down to clear the road and escort us to the site. It could negotiate a 180 degree turn on the roadway. Dick Gaudet, the dozer operator and a local civilian employee, put his own life at risk that day. I applaud his bravery.

By now the storm was turning into a full-fledged blizzard. Snowfall was becoming heavy and the wind was whipping it into a condition we referred to as a "whiteout." The temperature was already below freezing and the wind chill was below zero and falling rapidly.

It was decided that one of the "six-packs" would lead the way, with my vehicle second. The other "six-pack" would follow me. With great reservation, we began the ascent. The lead vehicle had a two-way radio enabling the two of us to converse. The truck following me had no radio. As we crept up the road, struggling to see the roadway and each other, we eventually saw the lights of the "cat" slowly making it's way down toward us. Upon sighting our vehicles, he turned the dozer and began to crawl back up the road.

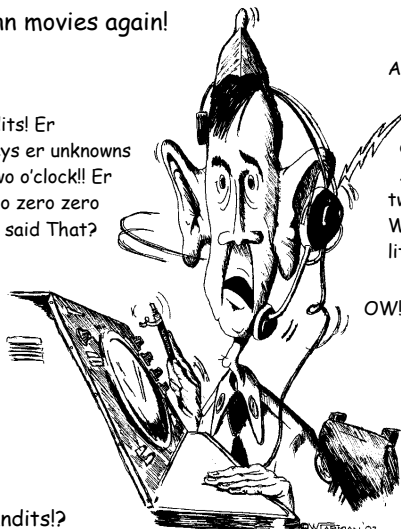
The higher we went, the worse the conditions became. I could barely make out the truck that was no more than six feet in front of me. Suddenly, the lead vehicle came to a stop. The driver informed me, over the radio, that he had lost sight of the "Cat." We were now stranded in a total "white out" North Atlantic blizzard, unable to go forward or backward.

Conversation crackled on the radio, between our little convoy and the senior director, as to what our next move would be. Discussions included staying put and waiting out the storm. We soon became aware that would not be an option. The storm was huge, with winds gusting over one hundred miles an hour. It would rage throughout the night and early morning before subsiding. The "cat" eventually arrived back on site, alone. The operator related the terrible conditions

(Continued on page 2)

The Surveillance Tech's been watchin' too many of them Erol Flynn movies again!

Bandits! Er
Bogeys er unknowns
at two o'clock!! Er
twooo zero zero
Who said That?



Avast Me Harties!
Bandits!
Bandits at about two
o'clock!!
...No yafruitcake the other
two o'clock!
Why is he drawing them
little aeroplanes on there?
OW! Yer steppin' on my head!

Bandits!?
Bandits at two o'clock!!

© 2002 Warren Carman

Ah-h-h! The excitement of it all
(Time for plotter rotation...)

New Echoes

Your newsletter keeps evolving, in its continuing effort to serve the membership. Readers see the new masthead across the top of page one, slightly different layout and more graphics. This issue is also available in color, on-line only: <http://www.radomes.org>.

Our new masthead was exclusively designed by a Radomes member who is a highly talented, professional artist: Warren Carman. He is retired from the U.S. Air Force and is now the Graphics Chief of the Navy Warfare Development Command, Newport, RI. During Mr. Carman's 25 year career with the Air Force, he held five AFSC's.

Mr. Carman served a remote tour at Rockville, Iceland, as an AC&W radar operator with an additional duty of providing graphic support to HQ Air Forces Iceland (AFI). Christmas, 1973, saw him decorate the plotting boards with carolers, using the available grease pencils. Thirty years later, Mr. Carman adorns our publication not only with a new masthead, but a cartoon.

Radomes, Inc., The Air Defense Radar Veterans' Association, is a member-supported non-profit corporation.

Our mission is to preserve the history of the defense of North America from enemy bomber or missile attack during the Cold War period. Memberships are open to U.S. and Canadian citizens, veterans and non-veterans alike.

Headquarters: Radomes Inc., 9976 Stouderstown Rd., Baltimore, OH 43105.
Newsletter: Echoes, P O Box 220, Desert Center, CA 92239.

Echoes is the official newsletter of Radomes, Inc. Entire contents is copyrighted under U.S. law and all rights are reserved. *Echoes* is published four times each calendar year (Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall). Submissions for possible publication (without monetary compensation) may sent to the editor at the above address. Send electronic submissions to: echoes@radomes.org. *Echoes* is grateful for all submissions.

Radomes, Inc. founders, Gene McManus and Tom Page.
Editor, Larry Litteral.
Masthead, Warren Carman.

©copyright 2003 Radomes, Inc. All rights reserved.

RESCUE AT "PINETREE"

(Continued from page 1)

and stated that he was lucky to find his way back. Major Smith then had operations advise us that he was bringing a rescue team on foot to bring us in.

At least two hours had passed since we began our attempt to reach the site. Total darkness now engulfed us, as the storm raged outside our vehicle. The temperature outside plunged and snow was beginning to drift over the hood of the bus. I would open the door, from time to time, to prevent the drifting snow from blocking our way out.

There were some eight other persons on the bus with me. I remember, in particular one friend, A/2c Woods. He was wearing fatigues and low quarter shoes. He had his parka, but no other cold weather gear. No one in the convoy was fully prepared to venture into these harsh conditions afoot. We all knew this was going to be rough. We could only wait for the rescue team. I wondered if they would even find us in this blinding storm.

Approximately another hour dragged by. The wind howled and shook the bus. The temperature inside was falling rapidly, even with the engine running and the heat at maximum. Conversation dwindled. A strange silence fell as the reality of our situation became evident. We waited.

Suddenly there was movement and a loud banging on the door of the bus. I opened the door and there stood someone in full arctic gear, yelling "Let's go." We put on all the cold weather gear we had, leaving everything else behind and stepped out into the raging storm. Major Smith and four or five volunteers had made it to us. They had a long heavy rope, which we were told to grab onto and not let go for anything. They didn't have to worry about me. They also had flashlights that were all but useless for more than two or three feet away.

We began the laborious trek up what we hoped was the roadway. The snow had already drifted several feet deep. With every step you would sink to your crotch. I wasn't wearing my "iron pants." However, I did have my thermal underwear on underneath my fatigues. I was wearing my combat boots and thermal socks. I zipped my parka up fully, which left only a "peephole" through the fur on the hood.

It was an exhausting effort. I remember someone crying and saying they couldn't make it. Those of us that could helped others that were struggling. I know I had no feeling in my hands and feet. I just hung on. After what seemed like an eternity, we could see the lights and structures of the compound. We made our way into the mess hall and fell exhausted to the floor. Thank God! We had made it.

The following afternoon, after the storm cleared, I took a team down the hill in a trackmaster to try to locate our vehicles. There was no sign of them. The road itself was indiscernible due to the deeply drifted snow. We knew they were somewhere below "J" curve, a tight dangerous curve near the top of the mountain. The snow had totally covered the bus and two trucks. We tried to estimate the location and using a long pole, as a probe, we searched for the vehicles. After some time, we finally hit something. It was the roof of

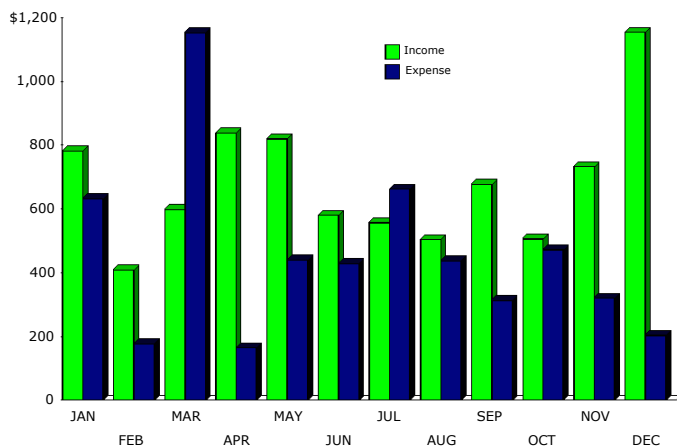
(Continued on page 3)

640th AC&W Sq., Stephenville, Newfoundland, Canada.

Which one is this?

RADOMES ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

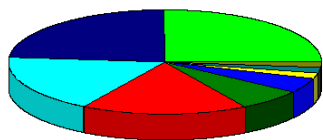
Income and Expense by Month January through December 2002



Cash In Bank

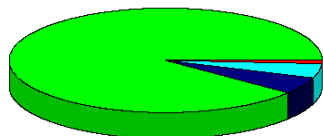
Savings: \$1,164.16
 Checking: 2,298.94
 As of 12/31/2002 \$3,463.10

EXPENSE SUMMARY January through December 2002



Office	% 25.22
Internet	23.51
Postage & Delivery	17.84
Cost of Goods Sold	17.32
Annual Meeting	6.83
Publications (Books & Other Publications)	4.65
Reimbursements	1.85
Bank Service Charges	1.85
Dues & Subscriptions	0.93
Total	\$5,401.80

INCOME SUMMARY January through December 2002



Sales	% 89.05
Fees	5.28
Donations	4.83
Reimbursed Expenses	0.84
Total	\$8,182.30

RESCUE AT "PINETREE"

(Continued from page 2)

the bus buried more than three feet beneath the snow. At that moment, I knew we had cheated death. It was an eerie feeling. Had Major Smith not made the decision to come to our rescue, all persons, approximately twenty men, would have perished on that mountainside that night.

Although some of the men suffered mild to moderate frostbite, we all recovered and lived to talk about the experience. "They" say that freezing to death is a somewhat easy way to go. Thanks to the heroic efforts of Major Loring Smith and the other members of that rescue team, none of the men involved in this incident experienced that phenomenon. I know I owe my life to them and I'm eternally grateful for their efforts. Thanks guys, wherever you are.

--Gerald (Jerry) Goodson served with the U.S. Air Force, 1959~1979, in the Aircraft Control and Warning field, retiring as a Master Sergeant. After a second career in teaching, Mr. Goodson



Dangerous "J" Curve on the road leading to the radar site near Stephenville. The aerial photograph does not indicate the elevation change (lower left of photo) to the top of Table Mountain (upper right of photo).

Courtesy of Gerald Goodson

retired again in 2001. He now resides with his wife, LaRue, in Panama City, FL, where he enjoys playing his guitar, golf, fishing and gardening. -Editor

--640th Aircraft Control & Warning Squadron was a USAF unit stationed at Stephenville (on the west coast of Newfoundland), Canada and was operational from 1953 to 1971. Local Stephenville residents, and personnel assigned to 640th, referred to the installation as "Pinetree." Technically, it was not a part of the *Pinetree Line* nor the *Pinetree Line Extension*. The site was not connected to the SAGE system either. For additional information visit <http://www.pinetreeline.org>. -Editor

Reunions and Upcoming Events

All Reunions/Events: Generally all previously assigned or currently assigned military/civilian personnel or members are invited. Check with appropriate contact person (or visit their web site) concerning spouses/dependents, latest updates and other details. Data is subject to change without notice.

All Units Not Listed -

Check with these on-line sources:

- <http://www.radomes.org>
- <http://www.vets.org/AirForce.htm>
- <http://www.thewall-usa.com/reunion/>
- <http://www.usaf.com/reunions.htm>
- http://www.reunionsmag.com/military_reunions.html

602nd AC&W Sq. (Det 1), 606th AC&W Sq., 6915th SS Gp., Hof AS, Germany -

Date: October 6~10, 2003.

Location: Las Vegas, NV.

Contact: Chuck Wilson.

Mail: P O Box 276883.

Telephone: 916 366-1811.

E-mail: HofReunion@aol.com

URL: <http://hofreunion.home.att.net/>

655th Radar Sq., Watertown AFS, NY -

Date: June 28~29, 2003.

Contact: Robert J. Korzuch.

Mail: 822 Emmett St., Watertown, NY 13601.

Telephone: 315 782-7848.

E-mail: rjk822@msn.com

707th Radar Sq., Grand Rapids AFS, MN -

Date: June 18~22, 2003.

(Continued on page 4)

Reunions and Upcoming Events

(Continued from page 3)

Location: Sawmill Inn, Grand Rapids, MN.

Contact: Barney Fisher.

Mail: ffisher@cinci.rr.com

763rd AC&W Sq., Lockport AFS, NY -

Location: Lockport, NY.

Contact: Leo Phelps.

Mail: 146 Sunset Court, Cicero, IN 46034.

E-mail: ljpmap@indy.net

798th AC&W/Radar Sq., Belleville, IL -

Date: September 19~21, 2003.

Location: Belleville, IL.

Contact: Vic Francoeur.

Mail: 409 N 5th St, Belleville, IL 62220.

E-mail: acervic@charter.net

799th AC&W/ Radar Sq., Joelton AFS, TN -

Date: October, 2003.

Location: Nashville, TN.

Contact: W C Clinton.

Mail: 210 Parish Ln, Minnville TN 37110.

Telephone: 931 668-8473.

E-mail: wcandnelma@blomand.net

874th AC&W Sq., Inoges AS Spain -

Date: May 8~11, 2003 .

Location: San Antonio, TX.

Contact: Bruce Shymanski.

Mail: 22 Kligen Gate Ln, Castle Rock, CO 80108.

Telephone: 303 663-8620.

E-mail: Inoges@earthlink.Net

552nd & 551st AEW&C Wg. & 553rd Recon Wg. -

Date: May 18~21, 2003.

Location: Silver Legacy Resort-Casino, Reno, NV.

Contact: 1)Tony Praxel. 2) Dean Boys.

Mail: 1) 3005 El Prado Way, Sacramento, CA. 95825.

2) RR 3 Box 193, Shelbyville, IL 62565.

Telephone: 1) 916 487-1975. 2) 217 774-4998, (toll free)

866 760-2143 or (fax) 217 774-4227.

E-mail: 1) tpraxel@aol.com 2) dboys@dean-boys.com

URL: <http://www.551and552-aewc.org/552/reunion/joint-reunion.htm>

All Great Lakes Radar Sites and Associated SAGE Centers -

Date: March 28~ April 2, 2004.

Location: Keesler AFB, Biloxi, MS.

Contact: Lowell "Woody" Woodworth.

Mail: 6172 Chambore Court, Jacksonville FL 32256.

Telephone: 904-620-9635.

E-mail: kathylowell@earthlink.net

URL: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GREAT_LAKESRADARSITES

USAF Radar Sites in Iceland (667th, 932nd, 933rd & 934th AC&W Sq.) -

Date: April 24~28, 2003.

Location: Dayton, OH.

Contact: William A. Chick.

Mail: 104 Summit Point Court, Chapin, SC 29036.

Telephone: 803 932-9596.

E-mail: littlechick@msn.com

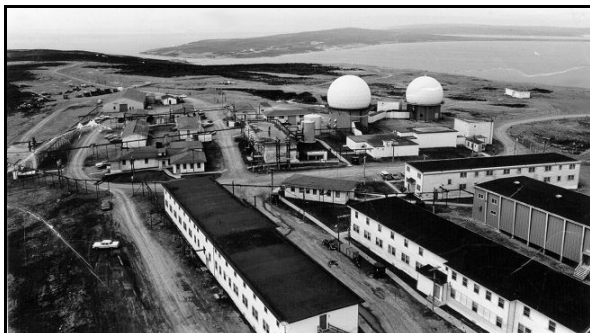
URL: <http://www.usradarsitesiceland.org/>

Radomes, Inc.

The Air Defense Radar Veterans' Association

9976 Stouertown Road

Baltimore, OH 43105



Courtesy of Gerald Goodson

Which site is this?

(Search inside for answer.)