

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 1, 2008

A Wartime Trip in My '40 Packard 110: As has been mentioned before, I was commissioned as a weather forecaster at M.I.T. in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on June 5, 1944. A few days prior to that, my orders were received to report to the Army Air Field at Roswell, New Mexico, with 10 days delay en route. Not realizing I was 20 years of age and soon-to-be a commissioned officer, I wrote to my parents asking for permission to drive my car (which had been in dead storage 16 months) from Yorklyn to Roswell and have it there during my stay. I fully expected them to say "no." When they consented, to my surprise, I needed to go to the Ration Board in Cambridge to see if they would give me enough gasoline coupons to make the trip. For some reason, this could not be done until my commission was in hand, and I recall going from the commissioning ceremonies in Walker Memorial Hall on a beautiful late-spring morning to the Ration Board on Massachusetts Avenue near Central Square. They gave me enough coupons for 2,100 miles at 15 M.P.G., which was considered average mileage for those days. When traveling on orders, a journey of 200 miles per day was permitted; it was usually possible to travel farther than that and thereby get more time at home.

Clifford C. Ham Jr. of somewhere north of Boston accepted my invitation to ride along as far as I could take him, as he was destined for an airfield in Arizona. Cliff came by train from New England to Wilmington on Friday, June 16, slept at Auburn Heights, and we took off in my '40 Packard 110 (six cylinder, 122-inch wheelbase) sedan on Saturday morning. I had planned to travel the southern route as that would be new country to me. The first day we went down the old Route 40 to Baltimore (the route went right through the city in those days) and on to Frederick, Maryland. Then we passed through Harpers Ferry, Charles Town, and Front Royal, before getting on Virginia's Skyline Drive. Traveling down the Skyline as far as it went at that time, we got off and spent the night in an old hotel in Lexington, Virginia. Before the war, roadside restaurants were not noted for excellent food, and with wartime rationing, choices were even more limited. I can't recall a really good meal on the seven-day trip.

On a warm Sunday, we continued southwest through Roanoke, stopped at Wytheville for a banana split in a drug store (40 cents), and on through Bristol and Knoxville, spending our second night in a very hot city of Chattanooga, down between the mountains. The next morning we climbed Lookout Mountain and visited Rock City and the site of the Civil War Battle above the Clouds. Traveling west, we went through northern sections of Alabama and Mississippi, having our dinner at either Corinth or Tupelo, Mississippi, before bedding down in a second-rate city hotel in Memphis. A long stretch of road in northern Mississippi was unpaved, even though it carried a U.S. route number (I think it was 72), and white supremacy billboards were numerous.

Traveling west across Arkansas before Bill Clinton was born, we ran alongside a steam passenger train on the Rock Island Railroad between Memphis and Little Rock, then stopped for lunch at Hot Springs. Here European counts and dukes were enjoying the spa and its baths while Americans were fighting the war and supporting the war effort. That evening we had dinner at Texarkana, and spent the night in a hotel at Greenville, TX. The place had been recommended by Duncan Hines, but it was not good, and I wrote the Hines organization, telling them it should be removed from their directory. They replied that it had already been deleted. Cliff Ham wanted to visit a friend at Love Field, just north of Dallas, so we made a brief stop before having lunch in the railroad station at Fort Worth. The hot wind from the south burned the driver's left arm as our car continued to Abilene, Texas, where my cousins, the Mancill twins, were undergoing the last stages of overseas training. One of them was on an overnight bivouac and the other on KP, so we slept in their bunks until 5 A.M. The next morning, now Thursday, Cliff took a bus westward toward his Arizona destination, and Alan Mancill and I went to the movies in Abilene, before I said goodbye in the afternoon and drove the 40 miles to Sweetwater, where I spent the last night on the road. Stopping at a tiny store near Tatum, New Mexico, the proprietor drove up in his old pick-up truck and asked if I would take a short ride with him, and I obliged. He told me his son had just been killed in Europe, and he needed a service man to talk to. Arriving in Roswell late that afternoon, I spent the first night at the Nickson Hotel before checking in at the air base the next morning. I had covered 2,140 miles in seven days, and although the 35 M.P.H. wartime speed limit was enforced in some places in the East, no one paid much

attention to it for most of our trip. There was virtually no traffic, and the small Packard cruised nicely at 50–55 M.P.H. but barely averaged 15 M.P.G. Gasoline was about 20 cents per gallon.