

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 16, 2009

**Lowly Second Lieutenants:** During World War II, second lieutenants in the Army of the United States (as opposed to the regular U.S. Army) were given jobs no other officers wanted. Despite this less-than-esteemed rank, which I held for 16 long months, it was a very good deal compared with not receiving a commission at all. What a change it was after that day in early June 1944, when my serial number changed to 087-1244 (who cares?).

My first orders as an officer, issued on 5 June, 1944, stated: "Report to Commanding Officer, Roswell Army Air Field, Roswell, New Mexico, with 10 days delay en route." This meant a furlough or leave of 10 days was allowed, in addition to travel time from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Roswell. I took my orders seriously and tried to report to the C.O. at Roswell on the morning of June 24. It turned out the C.O., a full colonel, had no thought of seeing all the new officers (or enlisted men) who were assigned to Roswell. All other bases were the same, I'm sure, but I was naïve enough to take the orders literally. A sergeant checked me in without fanfare, somehow I was assigned to a room in an officers' barracks, and my new duties and a hot New Mexico summer were up and running. Two other new weather forecasters, fresh out of meteorology school (one from the Univ. of Chicago, and one from New York University), arrived at Roswell when I did.

All new second lieutenants had to draw a duty called "Officer of the Guard." This required duty between 11 P.M. and 7 A.M. about one night a month and had to be worked in so that it didn't conflict with forecasting schedules. I guess it was necessary, but I'll never know. A corporal would pick me up in a jeep, and I'd strap on a belt with sidearm (handgun) attached in case of trouble. We would ride around the air base "checking things out." About the only thing we accomplished was taking the coins out of the soda machines all over (and there were a good many), making some sort of accounting of our deposit before going off duty, and turning in our belt and sidearm. There was a better job called "Officer of the Day," but this was assigned to first lieutenants. That position entailed slightly more authority and probably even less work.

One of the most useless things I did was to censor enlisted men's mail after arriving on Guam in June 1945. With the Pacific war only two months from being over, censorship was not very important by that time, especially letters written to loved ones back in the states (which we called "stateside"). New second lieutenants in our squadron were given that censoring job. We read the personal letters before they were approved for transmittal to the addressee. It was none of my business, but I couldn't believe what some of those letters contained. A man might be writing the same letter confessing love and devotion to three young women, one of whom was his wife. He would promise each the same thing. Never having been exposed to the ways of the modern world, I couldn't believe what I was reading, but there was no reason to censor it, so all the letters were approved and presumably went through. Our job, at least in the summer of 1945, had very little to do with preventing the Japanese from bombing the West Coast.