

My Tour At Forbes

Robert H. Goss also known as Hondo

Following Bomb/Nav School at Lowry AFB, I reported in at Forbes AFB about June 17, 1954 and was assigned to the 55th Armament and Electronics Maintenance Squadron (AEMS. Shortly before arriving at Forbes, the last of the previously assigned RB-50s had been flown out and upgrades to the flight line and construction of a new and longer runway was underway. Much of our time was spent in walking up and down the flight line looking for construction debris as that would damage a jet engine if sucked into it.



The author with snake charmer in Morocco.

I was assigned to the Bomb/Nav Field Shop and spent the summer of 1954 unpacking and assembling mockups. After they were unpacked and assembled, we had to install modification kits or cable replacements to the junction boxes to match the version of Bomb/Nav equipment that we would be maintaining. Later we cut stencils and painted black mobility markings on each box. I think we had a total of four sets of mockups. In September, the first of the RB-47s began to arrive and we finally got into the business of repairing "black boxes".

We lost RB-47H tail number 4283 to a crash in Rapid City, SD while I was still at Forbes. A parallel to that crash was printed in the Readers Digest as an account of a fighter pilot who crashed on takeoff.

Access to the flight line was controlled by badges that were worn outside our fatigues. Initially the badges were buttons, were round, and had our photos on them. These were replaced several times by oblong badges that had our photo on them with restricted area codes punched out.

Our first alert sounded around 4:00 Am so we all jumped out of bed, not knowing what to expect. One of the old-timers told us that it was just an alert and that we should go back to bed for an hour then go to work. Of course, we eager beavers got dressed and rushed up to the flightline only to find the gate locked. We waited around for about an hour until the Air Police got there to unlock it and admit us to the flight line. About that time, the old timer walked up and made us feel silly. I have often wondered if the public would have appreciated our rapid response.

In January 1955, rumors began to circulate that our wing and the 90th SRW would be assigned TDY so that the runway crossover could be completed. One of the wings would go to Morocco, the other would go to Alaska. Since everything was considered classified, we could only speculate and were cautioned not to talk about it. Late in April, we were told that the 55th would be going to Morocco. Of course by that time we knew our destination as we had already been told to purchase aviator sunglasses at the Base Exchange and had been issued pith helmets. Before we went on TDY our wings had to be classed as combat ready.



Adams, Barton and Luttrell

Ben Guerir AB was situated about 36 miles north of Marrakech and was in a flat, rocky plain with desert-like conditions. I have since learned that Ben Guerir, which was abandoned by SAC in 1962, is now an alternate TAL (Transoceanic Abort Landing) site for the Space Shuttle. Housing was in 32 foot by 16 foot plywood shacks called huts. Latrines were concrete block buildings and were almost always flooded. We had to wade through six inches of water to get to the showers, then stand on planks resting on concrete blocks while showering. In later years I learned that my brother-in-law visited Ben Guerir as a civilian techrep. By then, there were permanent buildings.

While at Ben Guerir, there were three siroccos or sandstorms.

One learned that when the ugly brown cloud on the horizon appeared, one needed to wet a towel and wrap it around your head to filter out the dust. I imagine the air crews must have hated them as the sand got into everything. Attached is a photo of one of the siroccos. The other photo is of ----- Adams, ----- Barton, and Lonny Luttrell, our Adjutant. Adams and Barton were in Camera Repair.



Moroccan Sand Storm

We would work until 11:00 AM and would quit as it got too hot to run equipment. We did not have air conditioners to cool the equipment. Afternoons were spent sleeping or drinking as there was no swimming pool on the base. Movies were held in an outdoor theater after dark. Another pastime was to turn rocks over looking for scorpions. One day we borrowed a thermometer from the hospital and measured the temperature in the Bombardier=s position. It measured 157 degrees Fahrenheit. That night in the outdoor theater the temperature measured 50 degrees. A swing of 107 degrees in one day. That was the desert for you.

One morning around 2:00 AM, I woke up feeling something on my face. I yelled and brushed a big rat off it. We turned on all the lights and finally trapped it and killed it. Fortunately I was not bitten and had been given typhus shots so I didn't have to worry about getting Typhus.

After my return to Forbes I was assigned to the Periodic Docks as the Bomb/Nav and Autopilot inspector. Initially we were located in an old hangar but later moved to a new four story hangar that had been built in anticipation of B-52 aircraft. One day we witnessed an RB-47 from the 90th SRW make a hard landing, crash, and burn. Fortunately the crew managed to get out of the burning aircraft uninjured but the plane was a total loss. A downdraft at the end of the runway was determined to be the cause. While still in the old hangar, we came to work one Monday morning to find that one of the offices had been gutted by fire. Someone had forgotten to unplug the coffeepot and it boiled dry and overheated. The office was a mess and it took us some time to clean up the mess.

It was also our job to "swing the compass". Unfortunately the compass rose was next door to the engine runup area. We were issued the small rubber earplugs and I think this was the beginning of my loss of hearing in later years. One evening around the 1956-57 time while returning from the compass rose, we waited for the green light saying it was OK to cross the active runway. We waited but no light was seen so we figured the tower operators were sleeping. After starting across, we discovered an RB47 bearing down on us. Our driver had quick reactions and we got out of the way. Needless to say we got several red flashes and very quickly. Perhaps one of you former crew members reading this will remember that incident.

I remember hearing of the time the Mayor of Topeka came on base complaining that off duty Air Force personnel were causing problems in the city but were not contributing to the economy of the city. Next payday we were paid in two dollar bills. That event was followed by the complaint that we were flooding the city with two dollar bills. I think the Mayor got the point.

Our Wing Commanding Officer was Col. Olbert F. Lassiter. If you see the movie Strategic Air Command with Jimmy Stewart and June Allyson, you will see Col. Lassiter listed in the credits as Technical Advisor. This movie does not represent SAC at all. A better movie to see what SAC was like is the Rock Hudson movie, "A Gathering of Eagles". This movie is very realistic and I watch every once in a while to get re-inoculated.

While in Kansas I never did visually see a tornado but watched one on radar. It appeared as a bright "J" on the screen and disappeared about 3-1/2 miles from the base. Later it was confirmed by the base weather station that I saw a tornado. On May 20, 1957, a tornado touched down near Williamsburg, KS, skirted the southern edge of Ottawa, KS, and wound up near Liberty, MO. It cut an 80 mile path of destruction and was said to have multiple funnels. I visited the area soon after and saw trees that were twisted off about 6 feet off the ground. While the tornado was doing its damage, I could see storm clouds to the south of Forbes AFB that were an ugly green-black in color and knew something was happening. This was the storm that did so much damage to Ruskin Heights, MO.

I left Forbes in September 1957 and re-enlisted at Pease AFB, NH. While at Pease, I was the first to pass the pre-qualification test for the PME (Precision Measurement Equipment) program. My one PCS assignment in my ten years was to Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico, the former home of the 55th. I put in ten years total before leaving the USAF for a civilian job in the USAFE depot in Chateauroux, France. While at Chateauroux, my wife (from England) and I were married by the Mayor of Deols, France. Our first son was born in France.

I worked for 23 years as a programmer for IBM then ten years managing the computer department for a small sports equipment manufacturer.