

Rex's Story *(The Autobiography of Rex Melton and Memorial Tributes)*

I was born in Ozark, MO, on December 4, 1921, fifth of the six children of Reuben Ephriam and Nellie Bly White Melton. We lived on an eleven-acre farm about one mile southwest of the Ozark square. Dad was a rural mail carrier; he used a horse and buggy for some years. In the winter he used a buffalo robe and heated bricks for his feet to keep from freezing. At some point in my early years he switched to a car.

In addition to his postal service job we had a small herd of dairy cattle, a large flock of chickens, two horses, and domestic rabbits in several multi-tier hutches. We also always had a very large garden.

My older brothers, Max and Roger, helped with the milking and other farm chores until they left home. When I was about three years old, I can remember going to the barn to watch the evening milking, and Max who was ten years older, would squirt milk from a cow's teat into my mouth. I usually had milk all over my face in this process. I soon learned to take a glass to the barn for a treat of warm foamy milk.

I have been told that in good weather I wandered about the countryside with my dogs, Penny and Wolfe. When someone called for me, Penny, the white one would bark and start herding me toward the house. I can remember spending lots of time wading in the spring branch catching crawdads and codamollies in the watercress. We had a large spotted Arabian draft horse named King that was used mostly for cultivating the garden and cornfield, however, Max often rode King out to the pasture to drive the cows into the barn lot for milking. Sometimes he would let me ride behind him. King had three gaits, a slow walk, a bone jarring trot, and a fairly smooth gallop, which I thought was great when I had Max to hold on to. Eventually I coaxed Max into letting me ride King by myself. All riding was bareback, as we didn't have a saddle for this workhorse. On my first solo ride out around the pasture King decided to gallop down the little hill along the fence toward the corner of the orchard. He turned the corner, but I didn't, and I landed on my face in the grass.

In these early years of my life, my paternal grandmother, Mary Francis Handy Melton, lived alone in a small house at the northeast corner of our farm. I stayed with her quite a bit. She had a large loom on which she made rag rugs with fringed ends for sale. I can remember playing under the loom as she worked the foot pedals, and slid the shuttle filled with rag strips back and forth between the colored string lines

above my head. Sometimes she would give me some spooled string ends to hand weave into a rope through a small spool with four nails in one end. She made wonderful fried pies from peach butter or apple butter, which she had made and canned.

Eventually she was no longer able to continue living on her weaving earnings and she moved in with us; her little house and a small lot were sold. She helped with all of the garden and house work while she lived with us. She was one of my most favorite people for as long as she lived. She lived as a widow for about forty years. I never saw my paternal grandfather, William Henderson Melton, but my dad's older brother, Martin, visited us from his home in Quincy, IL almost every summer. He would arrive in his grand touring car with his wife, Edith, and two or three of her sisters, Hattie and Carrie Womelsdorf. They always brought a supply of good stick candy, which they doled out one piece at a time. Later I learned that this Womelsdorf family had Pennsylvania ancestors for whom the town of Womelsburg was named. Martin and Edith never had children.

Dad also had a sister, Sarah, who married Lilburn DeLile, a rural mail carrier. They had four children, William, Aggie, Florence, and Lenville, who were much older than me, so I never got to know them well.

I have no recollection of my maternal grandparents, Knox and Ida White, but their children, my Aunts Elsa and Edna, Uncles Arthur and Myron all had children about my age or younger that I enjoyed playing with at family gatherings at the home farm, or at a riverbank camping outing at the junction of Finley and James Rivers west of Highlandville. These first cousins were Aileen Cloud, Kathleen and Hal Brown, Jack and Pat White, Alvin and Robert White. Myron's son, Robert, still owns the farm owned by his great grandfather. The first White reunion was held there in 1924, and continues to this day.

Max and Roger were gone from home by the time I was five, and I started milking some of the more gentle cows. I also got to help bottle the milk, crank the cream separator and set milk and cream bottles on customer's porches. After bottling the milk and cream, it was taken to the spring house to be cooled by the cold flowing spring water before being delivered.

Our home was a two-story house with four rooms on each floor. Heating was by wood burning stoves; one in the living room and a large kitchen range for cooking, heating water, and heating flat irons used in ironing clothes. We had running water at one sink on the lower floor; this was pumped from the

spring by a hydraulic ram. Toilet facilities were a privy perhaps 100 feet from the house at the back end of the chicken yard.

Light came from coal oil lamps and candles for several years, but we did get electricity when I was three or four. Electricity meant we could replace the old RCA wind up phonograph and also have a radio.

At some point I picked up chores like feeding the chickens and keeping the wood boxes filled. I was also responsible for splitting the wood for the kitchen range and stacking it in the smoke house to dry. If the size of the split wood didn't suit my grandmother Mary Francis, she would be out splitting wood.

In the summer of 1926 when I was 5 ½, I was put on a train with a neighbor and his ill wife to be dropped off in Kansas City to visit Max, who worked in a hamburger joint there. Max was to meet me at the train station, but he went to the wrong train station. The neighbor who was looking after me was staying on the train to take his wife to a hospital in Topeka, KS. I knew the name of the hamburger joint where Max worked, so the man put me in a taxi; the driver knew where the place was. The owner of the joint served me my first cheeseburger, and I was sitting on a stool at the counter eating my burger when Max got back. He was pretty shook up about not finding me when he finally got to the correct train station

I spent two weeks in K.C. with Max, and part of the time with a married couple from Ozark that I knew, who were Ruth's schoolmates. I rode a greyhound bus back to Springfield, but on the way the bus driver gave my suitcase from the top of the bus to a woman who got off at a town near the Osage River. As we went on down the highway I noticed that the roadside shadow of the bus indicated there were no longer any suitcases on top of the bus. I immediately went up and told the driver my suitcase was missing, because I had watched him put mine up there. At the next stop he checked the bus top and found that indeed there were no suitcases up there. Then he found one exactly like mine on an inside rack, and opened it only to find some woman's clothes in it. Several days later the bus company sent my suitcase to Ozark.

From Springfield I rode a combination limousine /bus delivery service to Ozark. When I reached home I found a baby brother, Dale, who was born on July 29, while I was away.

Most of what we ate at home we grew or raised. In the fall we butchered hogs, cured hams and bacon in the smoke house, made sausage and canned it and other meat. The fat was rendered into lard;

most of the lard was stored in five-gallon cans and used for cooking, however, grandmother used some of it in making soap with liquid lye leached from the ashes from the wood stoves. We ate a lot of chicken and rabbit, fresh or canned vegetables from the garden, and various fruits from our small orchard. Grandmother had two colonies of bees in the orchard that made all of the honey we could use.

The poultry end of the farm enterprise had several facets while dad was alive. There were two incubators in the upstairs hallway outside my bedroom, which were used to hatch our birds. When the chicks reached a size to distinguish pullets from cocks they were separated. The pullets were raised to become laying hens to stock one hen house. The old laying hens were culled and sold or eaten, all good layers that were one or two years old were combined, and they stocked the second house.

The young cocks were partly grown into fryers for eating or selling, and the others became capons. One of my jobs was to hold each young cock absolutely still, while dad made a slit in the skin under the wing, then slid the skin up and made a slit between the ribs and removed the bird's testicles with a tool made for that purpose. When finished, the skin slipped back down over the inner incision. These castrated males then grew rapidly into large fat roasting capons for sale at premium prices. Surplus eggs were sold to grocery stores or produce houses.

This life style came to an end in 1934 when my father died of pneumonia at the age of 44. This left my mother, aging grandmother, younger brother Dale (6) and me (12) with little means of support. Mother's youngest brother, Myron White, bought the dairy cows and took over the milk delivery business. His farm was ten miles away from Ozark and neither he, nor the man he hired to deliver the milk, knew the people in Ozark, so I was pressed into service to teach them where the customers lived. Later that summer I went to live with him for a while, and continued milking and driving a team of horses to cultivate crop fields and tend crops. I went back home when school started.

Prior to 1934 my summer days were spent driving the cows to graze along the country roadsides for a few miles south and west of our house. We had only two small pasture fields for twenty cows. For a few years I did this on foot, but dad finally bought me a horse named Topsy. She was blind in one eye, but was a good riding horse and she made my cow herding somewhat more enjoyable.

In the summers after 1934 until 1939, I worked when there was work available on various farms around the territory. I would walk two or three miles to get to work to plow corn, shock wheat or whatever

there was to do until five o'clock, then walk home. One summer I got a job in Ozark at the most prominent soda fountain/ice cream parlor. My pay was 20% of the popcorn sales, but I could eat or drink whatever I wanted. They had great chicken salad and tuna salad grilled sandwiches. I probably consumed more sandwiches, milkshakes, malts and fountain drinks than I was worth, but I did lots of work serving customers too.

I spent part of one summer digging the basement for the house Max was getting ready to build in the southeast edge of Ozark. By this time he had returned to Ozark, married, had one child, and worked as a timekeeper for a WPA crew. Along one edge of this excavation I encountered limestone bedrock about fifteen inches above basement floor level, so a dynamite man was engaged to help me finish the job. He taught me how to hold and turn the drill bit as he struck it with his sledgehammer. Eventually he decided he could trust me to swing the sledge while he turned the bit. I think I was fifteen that summer. He did the blasting when I wasn't there, but I shoveled the fractured rock out to finish the job.

Mother did laundry for a couple of families, and rented the north half of our house to get whatever little income that brought in. The first renters were a family of five, named Hammond. Pauline was about my age and had two older siblings. They were from Greenmound ridge, and they bought firewood from Pete Maddox. This started mother buying wood from him too; this eventually led to my meeting Margie.

During one of the summers, my older brother Roger got me the entry job in the Nixa cheese factory where he worked. This job was nailing together the wooden boxes for five pound brick cheese loaves. I was paid five cents per box, but I could do a day's quota in a short while, since most of the cheese was cured in 12-pound longhorns, 25-pound daisies, and 80-pound cheddars. The rest of the day I spent learning the laboring tasks involved in cheese making: dumping 10 gallon milk cans into the vats; cutting and chipping the coagulated green cheese into curds so the whey drained off; turning the salted curds; filling and pressing the cheese in the various molds; removing day old cheese from molds and dipping each unit in melted wax vats, and loading them on carts to wheel into the curing room. The top shelf on the cart was slightly above my head, the cheese had to be turned frequently in the curing process, and it was about all I could do to turn an 80-pound cheddar upside down on the top shelves. While I worked in the cheese factory, I lived with Roger, Lucille and Janet, and they lived with Lucille's parents in Nixa.

After a few weeks of this I grew disenchanted with working so hard for so little pay (never as much as a dollar a day). One day Margie's dad was at the factory to get some cans of whey for his hogs. I told him how I felt about my job, and he said he could use a pole woodcutter at a dollar a cord. He thought I might be able to cut a cord a day. I went home with him that day and cut wood for a few weeks. Sometimes Margie would give me a ride on her horse from the house to the woodlot. I got pretty good with an axe that summer.

In the winters I earned a little money on weekends with my 22 rifle. The local produce house would pay ten to twelve cents for cottontail rabbits if they were shot in the head only. I also cracked and picked out black walnuts, which brought forty cents a pound at the same produce house.

At school, I had 7th and 8th grade teachers that I really disliked, and I didn't care much for the first two years of high school. For some reason I don't recall, I decided to drop out early in my junior year. A friend of mine told me what a great time he was having in the vocational agriculture course and the Future Farmers of America (FFA) program. So after two weeks of boredom out of school I went back. The vo-ag teacher let me enroll in both the sophomore and junior courses. These really caught my interest and the teacher was just the kind of person I needed. I quickly became a fairly good student. Max signed a note to allow me to borrow \$100 to purchase and feed a Guernsey heifer, and a small flock of sheep for my FFA project. James Scott and I went to a noted regional Shropshire breeder and purchased registered rams. I bought six grade ewes at an auction and hay for the winter; I also had to buy oat grain for feed. The spring lamb crop was good and with the wool sheared from the adults I paid off one-half of the loan, and enough was left over to finance plowing and planting an oat hay crop in the five-acre tillable field on the farm. The other fields were in pasture for the sheep and a Guernsey heifer I had bought.

The next year James and I both took our rams to the Empire District Fair held in Springfield. My ram won Best in Age Class, and then Grand Champion Shropshire Ram over the entries of the breeder we had bought our rams from. That was a proud day for me.

I played basketball and softball in high school. I was a guard on the basketball team. My scoring contributions were mostly set shots from outside the 1/4 court line. In softball I alternated pitching with two other players. In any game that I didn't pitch, I played center field. My harmonica playing started when I was in fifth grade, but I didn't stay with it very long at that time.

My vo-ag teacher, Chester McKinney, encouraged me to think about college, and he took a carload of his best students to visit two colleges in the spring of 1939. We visited Springfield Teachers College (now SWM State University), and the University of MO at Columbia. I was much more impressed by the campus and the people we met at Columbia. I applied for admission without having a clue as to how I could manage to finance a college education.

Lawrence was a county extension agent, and he arranged for me to get a room and board situation with one of the Columbia based extension specialists. I lived in their basement, fired the coal furnace, washed their dinner dishes, mowed the yard, and did much of the house cleaning. After selling my sheep and paying off the balance of my loan, I had nearly enough to pay the \$30 tuition for the first semester, which went well enough. Mom, Max and Mildred scraped together another \$30 for the second semester tuition, plus a few extra dollars for used textbooks. I hitchhiked the 200 miles home to Ozark twice that year. Max let me borrow his car to go see Margie while I was at home

After the second semester was over I found a job as assistant manager of an ice cream store in Columbia. The pay was thirty cents an hour and I worked 40 hours a week. I also could eat all the ice cream I wanted. I ate quite a bit. About half way through the summer the manager, also a student, left for another job and I became manager at 40 cents an hour. I left my room and board job for another basement room, only much closer to the university and the ice cream parlor. For this room I only fired the furnace and mowed the yard. I also put in my application for a job in the university creamery.

A life insurance salesman stopped in the ice cream parlor one day. He gave me some information that showed me how to manage the financing of the rest of my education. Of course the plan required a life insurance policy, but he let me mow his yard for his commission portion of the first year premium. The plan was based on the university's willingness to lend students money for tuition, but only if the student kept a life insurance policy in effect and signed it over to the university until all loans were repaid. The plan worked for me. I saved enough that summer for tuition and books for fall semester, borrowed for the spring semester. Sometime during that year the cleanup job at the university creamery opened and I got it. I resigned as manager of the ice cream parlor. The creamery job also carried eating benefits while on the job. I consumed lots of milk, cheese, buttermilk, and ice cream so my expenses for other food were small. This job started at the creamery at 6:00 a.m. to wash the cans after the milk from the dairy barn was

dumped into the processing system. I also washed and sterilized the glass milk and cream bottles. I would return for an hour or two later in the day to clean the homogenizer, pasteurizer, pipelines, and the ice cream machines and cheese vat if they had been used, and of course to eat some more.

One of the dairy department faculty members liked the way I worked, and he recommended me for a job with Swift Company in Springfield for the summer of 1941. I worked in all of their plant operations, in their cheese, ice cream, popsicles, and a short time in the poultry department. I roomed first with some of Margie's acquaintances from Greenmound, but mostly with brother Roger, who was now in Springfield working in a meat processing plant, and had use of a house of some friends who were away for the summer. I dated Margie quite often this summer as she was living in Springfield working as a waitress at the restaurant in the bus station.

That summer I saved enough to pay off my previous loan from the university and pay my tuition for fall semester of junior year. I found another basement to live in but had a roommate that I soon couldn't stand to be around, so I moved into an apartment with several other students I knew, where we took turns cooking real meals and washing dishes. This only lasted a few months because three of the crew left school for the armed forces, and the rent for the apartment was too much for the three left. I moved into a much smaller apartment with the guy who had been manager of the ice cream parlor when I started to work there.

Back at the university creamery, I was being assigned more work when some of the other workers were drafted. Before spring semester was over I was the only experienced person left, and I was student manager of the milk processing plant.

Sometime early in 1942, Margie came by bus to visit. She stayed with a married couple I knew about a block from my apartment. It is my recollection that we decided to get married, but she felt she had to go home first. She came back and we were married on March 31.

Shortly after we married the Army Air Force recruiters came to campus. I applied for cadet training. When I went for my physical I had been at work several hours, then rushed to get there. My blood pressure was so low they almost rejected me, but told me they would check me again if I could get some rest before coming back. I made it this time, and was sworn in and told they would mail me a

confirmation to protect me from being drafted. However, the draft board called me for a physical before the confirmation arrived, but it did arrive before they called me up to go into the army.

We continued living for a while with Bob Goodnight. The general manager of the creamery lost his upstairs apartment renter to the service, and offered to rent it to us. His house was just across a narrow field from the creamery so we moved there, but Margie disliked living there. I was hired to work full time in the creamery in the summer of '42, so I processed the milk, made cheese (mostly cottage and Neufchatel), ice cream, and cultured buttermilk, bottled and delivered milk to campus dining rooms and opened the retail sales room for a few hours each afternoon. I would go to the creamery early in the morning, get the raw milk into the pasteurizer, and then go to the salesroom to make my breakfast (a chocolate malt sometimes made with whipping cream rather than milk). For the fall semester I got a new young student to do the cleanup work, and I scheduled a normal course load.

We found a basement apartment available for firing the furnace and moved. Between work at the creamery, classes and a cantankerous furnace, I didn't keep the upstairs renters very happy.

Roger, who was divorced, had enlisted in the navy and was sent to Columbia for some kind of training. He met Berenice while there and sometime later they married.

About this time Ruth convinced mom to sell the farm and come live with her and Bennie in St. Louis. Sometime earlier grandmother had gone to live with her daughter, Sarah DeLisle; she wasn't happy there, but I believe they treated her well. Sarah's husband was a rural mail carrier and they had a small farm on the hill north of Ozark.

Max had got a civil service appointment to work at the Springfield, IL Armory, so he took mom and Dale to St. Louis on his way to the new job. They stayed overnight with us in our small basement apartment. Now I can't imagine where all six of them slept.

Shortly after I had started classes in my final semester, I was notified to report to Jefferson Barracks, near St. Louis, to begin training. Margie lived with Ruth and mom while I was at Jefferson Barracks. After indoctrination and getting outfitted with army clothing and mess gear, my group went to Michigan State University at East Lansing, MI for thirteen weeks in a college training detachment. Margie joined me there, and I think we both enjoyed being in Michigan. She rented a room about half way to

Lansing and we could get together on weekends. I got eight credits while there, and I was selected as a squad leader so had to march my squad to classes, dining room, etc.

Aviation cadet status didn't allow the subsidized money allotment to family, so I elected to train as an aviation student so I could provide allotments for Margie and mom. In our class, I think there was only one other A.S., but several others were married and for some reason preferred to be called cadets rather than students.

From Michigan we went to San Antonio, TX for thirteen weeks in classification and physical conditioning programs. Cross country runs in July in Texas on trails through mesquite brush wearing army fatigues and boots were something else. I qualified for pilot training, but several of my friends didn't, and they went to navigator or bombardier schools. Margie went to Oklahoma and got a job in an airplane factory. She did visit me one weekend in San Antonio.

We potential pilots moved across the road for thirteen weeks of preflight training; Morse code, aircraft identification, and flight regulations were things we had to become proficient in. At the end of the aircraft identification we had to make 80% correct IDs at 1/50th second screen flashes.

We then went to Pine Bluff, AR for primary flight training in the low winged monoplane Fairchild PT19. Our flight instructors were civilian pilots. Margie moved to Pine Bluff while I was there so we could be together on weekends, and wives were allowed on base for an evening now and then.

On to Independence, KS for basic flight training in BT-14s mostly, but in BT-13s or 15s for instrument flights. All were low wing monoplanes and the 14s were good for aerobatics like slow rolls, snap rolls, loops, immelman turns. On my first night flight schedule I was standing outside the briefing room watching planes flying the traffic pattern and making touch and go landings when I saw two planes on the base leg getting close together. One let down on top of the other, and they both spun in killing two students and two instructors. The base commander made every student fly that night.

At this base we had to request the type of advanced flight training we wanted—single engine or multi-engine. I didn't think I had the aggressive instincts necessary to make a top fighter pilot so I asked for multi-engine.

Pampa, TX was the place for the thirteen weeks of twin-engine advanced flight training in the Cessna UC-78. Margie moved to Pampa so we could be together as much as possible. Before completing

advanced training we had to state our preference for what combat airplane we wished to train in. The grapevine information was that most of us would fly B-24 Liberator, four engine bombers in combat; B-24 trained pilots would become airplane commanders, while twin engine B-25 or B-26 and four engine B-17 trainees would likely eventually be assigned as co-pilots on B-24 crews, so I asked for B-24 transition.

Upon graduation with class 44-D in mid-April, I received orders to report to Fort Worth, TX for B-24 transition after a thirty-day leave. The AAF advanced us our allowance for our first set of officer's clothing a short while before graduation. I purchased mine at a clothing store in Pampa.

The thing I remember most about the leave is sitting on my suitcase in the aisles of overcrowded trains. By this time Lawrence had enlisted in the navy, and we saw him in St. Louis, I think. At some point Ruth and Bennie moved to Quincy, IL and bought a two-story house on Broadway Street. Mildred and her four children moved into the second floor apartment of their house

Margie and I went to Fort Worth. As an officer, I could live off base and we soon rented a house with another couple. I had lots to learn to master the B-24, but it was a great airplane with four 1200 horse power engines, each with its own throttle and supercharger controls on the console between the pilot and co-pilot seats so either one could use them.

The dash is covered with instruments necessary to know what the engines and the airplane are doing. Two people go through a written checklist before a takeoff or landing to make certain that no critical operation is overlooked.

We did lots of flying in these thirteen weeks in order to learn to fly in tight formation for many hours at a time. One of our cross-country flights was to Miami, FL and we spent a night there. For a while an instructor pilot flew as co-pilot, and the ground crew chief flew every time his airplane went up. After the instructor was sure we were fit, we flew as two trainees with the crew chief. We alternated in pilot and co-pilot positions.

Upon completion of this transition training, we were sent to Lincoln, NB where crew lists were made up. I received orders showing who would be in each position on my ten-man crew, but I didn't meet any of them at this station. The orders were to report to Casper, WY Army Air Corp base on a specified date. One of my married pilot friends had a car and we traveled with them and one other couple to Casper.

The co-pilot I was assigned, Marvin Saltsman, was one of those people who wanted to be

a fighter pilot, and he had gone through single engine flight training, and had never even seen the cockpit of a multi-engine airplane. I had to teach him to fly the B-24, and I soon learned that having the responsibility of teaching a pilot to fly an airplane new to him was not an easy way to live. He didn't seem to want to believe he had to learn what all the instruments and control gadgets were for. He had flown only the AT-6 single engine advanced trainer towing targets for ground gunnery trainees after getting his commission and wings. As long as we flew together he never got so he could hold the wings absolutely level in straight flight. Even on landings he almost always touched the left landing gear down ahead of the right one. We flew day and night to get all crew members comfortable with their duties and ready for combat.

The planes we flew at Casper were nearly worn out, and most had one or more engines that were rebuilt. On two different night flights I had an engine fire develop, but was able to land and meet a ground fire crew to get the fire extinguished before it got out of the engine compartment.

The crew of gunners needed lots of practice; so part of our flying was to gunnery ranges where they tried to master the art of shooting a fifty caliber machine gun or turret gun while traveling at 160 mph.

The B-24 was armed with single 50s at each waist window, and twin 50s in four hydraulically powered turrets in the nose, tail, belly, and above the flight deck. The nose, belly, and tail turret gunners had no other duties, but the cameraman operated one of the waist guns; the radioman operated the top turret or the other waist gun, and the flight engineer had to be proficient at the top turret. The bombardier also needed practice using the Norden bombsight; so we dropped lots of dummy bombs on that range.

I had two training difficulties at Casper. First I had a strong reaction to a yellow fever shot and developed a fairly high fever. The second was a really stiff and sore knee from being kicked by a horse on a ride on Casper Mountain. In both cases the flight surgeon suspected I was trying to avoid completing the crew training and ruled that I was fit to fly. I suppose that forcing my badly swollen left knee to work the left rudder and left brake pedals helped it to recover quickly. The instructor who certified me for formation flying told me I was the best tight formation pilot he had ever ridden with.

Margie and I rented a small house in Casper. My bachelor officers and enlisted crew members came to the house at least once so Margie could get acquainted with them. Margie managed to get enough food to keep us pretty well fed with my ration cards.

When our crew training was completed all the crews entrained for Topeka, KS to get our overseas combat assignments. While there, the parents of Kearney and Schueller came and treated the whole crew and Margie to dinner one night. This was in the fall of 1944, and somewhere along the train ride after we left Kansas we woke up to find the train just creeping along and water was up to the railroad bed on both sides. Telephone poles and a few trees were all we could see in any direction sticking up out of the water.

When we left Topeka we weren't told where we were going or when we would get there. The train left us off at Hampton-Rhodes, near the Newport News, VA port of embarkation, and we boarded a ship, which turned out to be a French luxury liner pressed into service as a troop transport. We were soon out to sea in a seven troopship convoy with navy destroyers and smaller destroyer-escort ships showing up well ahead, or far out alongside now and then. Officers bunked in fairly crowded, but comfortable staterooms on deck, enlisted men were in much more crowded rooms below. In addition to the enlisted men of the many air crews, our ship had a lot of men going to the 34th infantry division, which was operating in Italy.

Officers on this ship ate at the captain's mess. I haven't much recollection of breakfast and lunch, but we were served seven course dinners by the French chefs and crew who were with the ship when it operated as a luxury liner. On Thanksgiving Day they served us the ultimate turkey dinner.

There was total blackout at night, and I enjoyed going outside on deck and watching the phosphorus light streaks in the ocean. We would see porpoises frequently in daytime.

The trip to Naples, Italy took seven days. We passed through the Strait of Gibraltar at night. On the way over, I played poker quite a bit and was lucky in the early games. At one point I was \$700 ahead and everyone I had been playing was broke. After a day of boredom I heard of a game going somewhere else on the ship; so I went there. These players were serious poker players and in a couple of nights they had about \$500 of my seven. I quit at that point.

Our convoy arrived in Naples one morning, and the air crews from all seven ships in our convoy debarked and reloaded onto one large English troop transport ship which had previously been a mail/cruise ship between England and Africa. Our accommodations and food on this ship weren't so great. We slept

on hammocks hanging from the ceiling over dining room tables. About all I remember of the food is cold cooked oatmeal for breakfast.

As soon as we were all on board, this ship took off south in the Mediterranean to take us around the toe of Italy to our staging base at Gioia Del Collie (town of the dog). We passed through the Strait of Messina at night and could see some red volcanic activity in Mt. Etna.

In Gioia we promptly received orders to travel to the 739 Squadron of the 454th Bombardment Group-Heavy near Cerignola. After an early breakfast, each crew member with all our gear, loaded into the back of a canvas covered stake body truck. It rained all day and the roads were rather rough in the mountain terrain. We had no food and did not arrive at the 739th until about midnight.

The mess crew got out of bed and fried some Spam for us. I learned to love Spam right then. There were no tents ready for us to move into; so we were each taken to finish the night with a resident crew. At about one o'clock I was assembling an army cot in the officer's tent of Patrick Walsh's crew. Of course this woke them all up and disturbed their rest, but they were nice about it even though they were flying a mission the next day and would be up before daylight.

The next day I was issued two tents and shown where to put them. The whole crew spent the day erecting the tents and installing the heating systems, which was a cut off oil barrel in the center of the tent with a contrived fire pot into which dripped oil brought in by a fuel line from a fifty-five gallon drum on a stand outside the tent. Our crew tents were side by side. The four officers occupied one, and the six enlisted men were in the other. Our base was in an olive grove on a farm about five miles out of Cerignola. Our mess hall was in the sheep barn. We could get water in our canteens from a tank truck parked by the mess hall. We had one kerosene lantern for each tent, but usually preferred to read by candlelight. The 454th Bomb Group was one of six groups of the 304th wing of the 15th Air Force. The wing headquarters was in another building on this same farm.

There were two parallel runways 5000 feet long, with 1000 feet of steel matting at each end with 3000 feet of graveled surface between. The 455th Bomb Group was across the runways from our area. We had only one control tower for the two groups and it was on the 455th side of the runways. Each B-24 had a graveled hardstand to park on and taxiways were graveled, but were often muddy. The 5000 foot runways

were just barely long enough to take off a B-24 with a full load of fuel, bombs, and ammunition; when landing, you needed to touch down real quick after you reached the beginning of the steel mat.

By December 1944 there were enough air crews to permit having each new airplane commander fly co-pilot with seasoned combat crews for five missions before taking his own crew. Most other members of new crews would also get a few missions with experienced crews. My pilot log book shows that I made six flights from this base before my first combat mission. These flights were for various purposes, but probably scheduled by the squadron operations officer to make sure I got the hang of getting my plane off the runway.

My first combat mission was on December 29, flying co-pilot with Leo Venable. We carried a load of eighteen 250# general purpose bombs and dropped them on railroad marshaling yards in Landshut, Germany. This was an eight hour mission at high altitude, and I learned what cold and uncomfortable really means.

The B-24 has a small heater mounted high up in the cockpit, but mostly they don't work, and they didn't put out much heat at best. We wore electrically heated suits with gloves and boots. They kept us from actually freezing, but just barely. The plane is not pressurized; in climbing to altitude you put on an oxygen mask at 10,000 feet and wear it until back to 10,000 feet on the return home. We stayed above 10,000 until we were back over the Adriatic Sea, because the Germans moved anti-aircraft guns around on rail cars along the Italian and Yugoslav coasts. The cold and clammy oxygen mask clamped over your mouth and nose for several hours gets a bit irritating. Then there was the problem of getting your ear pressure equalized as you come down.

Just getting in and out of the B-24 in full altitude flight gear is a problem. People stationed in front of the bomb bay bend over real low and slide under the bomb bay door then stand up and step up onto the catwalk through the central longitudinal axis of the bomb bay. From there the cockpit and flight deck people step up to flight deck level and squeeze through a narrow bulkhead doorway. The bombardier and nose turret gunner crawl under the flight deck and cross over the open nose wheel opening. People stationed behind the bomb bay can go in through the bomb bay or up through a trap door hatch near the belly gun turret. At the 6.00 a.m. mission briefing, the intelligence officer said that Landshut had twelve 88mm, anti-aircraft guns. They put up lots of flak, but the bursts were above us and I never heard that any

of the twenty-eight planes in our group formation received any damage. When the ground gunners weren't exploding their shells in our formation it was largely due to chaff dropped by a fighter plane just ahead of the bomber formation from the initial point of the bomb run to the target. Chaff is aluminum strips like Christmas tree icicles, and they float down slowly and provide response surfaces to confuse the radar readings used to sight the guns.

After an early breakfast, flight crew officers went to a mission briefing by the group commander and his staff. We were told what the day's target would be, bomb drop altitude, initial point for the bomb run, bomb run heading, weather and cloud cover to expect, and exactly how we were to rally off target area after bomb release to get out of flak as quick as possible. We were also told where each plane would fly in the squadron formation; where our squadron would be in the group formation; where our group would be in the wing formation; where our wing would be in the 15th Air Force, and what we could expect in the way of escort by fighter planes from fighter squadrons from either the 15th or 9th Air Force.

Each squadron was given a definite time for the lead plane to start his take off roll. Planes two through seven would roll at about one minute intervals. The lead plane would start a long circle with each succeeding plane circling a bit shorter to take up position in the formation before heading for the rendezvous point for joining the other squadrons in the group. We then had to rendezvous with other groups. Often the entire 15th would cross the Adriatic coast line at the same place after a medium bomber dropped fragmentation bombs on any real or suspected anti-aircraft gun emplacements. Our heavies would still be struggling for altitude as we reached the coast, and an 88 could easily disable some planes.

While the officers were getting briefed for the mission, the enlisted men were busy getting needed items to the airplane: parachutes, flak vests, steel helmets, ammunition, C-rations for lunch, etc. The bomb load was put in by a crew of armament specialists during the night. Pilots could only use backpack parachutes, as the chest pack type would be in the way of handling throttles and the control column.

My second mission was as co-pilot for George Pappas, on January 4 to drop ten 500# S.P.s on a railroad bridge at Verona Porto Nvova near the southern end of the Brenner Pass in northern Italy. This target area had more anti-aircraft guns and their shells were exploding in our formation and just under us. We had several flak holes in the airplane and the bombardier caught a fragment in his right eye.

Mission four was to Vienna, Austria on January 15, the target was railroad rolling stock and the marshalling yards. Vienna had 421 guns, mostly 88s that exploded with a black smoke; but also some 108mms that made a huge gray cloud of smoke. Two groups were ahead of our formation and could see the sky ahead of us filled with explosions and a huge cloud of smoke. Somehow we flew into that hell in the sky, dropped our bombs, and flew out with only a few holes in the airplane.

Mission five was on January 20 to Linz, Austria marshalling yards. Linz had 192 flak guns and they were exploding their 88s in our formation even though we were flying at 28,000 feet. One burst between the nose of our plane and the right inboard engine. Fragments made a large hole in the windshield directly in front of me; two of them went into my upper right arm and two others were stopped by my flak vest over my stomach area. The thermometer on the dash registered minus 52 F, and I was catching a 160 mph breeze through the windshield hole. As soon as we were out of the flak the engineer and navigator got me out of the cockpit and covered me with blankets on the floor of the flight deck. The cold kept me from losing much blood.

The plane was rather badly damaged and one engine lost oil pressure and was shut down. We lost track of our group formation. Leo Venable was the pilot, and he was able to fly that damaged plane back to our base, but we arrived late and found that we were already listed as shot down over the target. Someone in the crew fired a flare as we approached the base to get an ambulance to our hardstand. When I stooped down to get out of the bomb bay I saw Hoffman, my crew photographer fall on his head out of the tail section belly hatch. The ambulance crew immediately got me on the way to the field hospital in Cerignola. I later learned that Hoffman had just spotted an oxygen bottle that was just inches from his head over the target now had a gaping hole in it; he fainted and was just in the right location to drop through the hatch when he fell.

The surgeons showed me the x-ray of my arm before they started the sodium pentothal IV. The shrapnel pieces had carried fabric and fiberglass insulation from my B-15 jacket into my arm. They made an incision all the way between the entry wounds to clean out the debris, and an incision in back to remove the scrap iron pieces. They put me on penicillin at three-hour intervals and left the incisions open for a week. When they were satisfied that I wasn't getting any infection in my arm they put me back to sleep to stitch up the incisions. The tissues had shrunk considerably by this time, and when I woke up I had real

pain in the stitched up stretched skin. They kept me in the field hospital another week for observation and shots of penicillin; my thighs and buttocks were really painful from all the injections.

The plane I was in on January 20 was identified as Miss America '44, and it was one of the originals when the 454th group was formed and flew to Africa as a base until enough of Italy was liberated to permit setting up airfields there. At the end of the war in Europe Miss America '44 had logged more missions than any other in the 15th Air Force. (115 if I remember right). On the January 20 mission she returned to base with more than 100 flak entry holes scattered over the fuselage, wings, and engine nacelles. I piloted this plane on a few later missions.

In 1990 at a reunion of the 454th Bombardment Group Association, Margie and I met the widow of Joe McAllister, the airplane commander who flew Miss America '44 to Africa and on to Italy. She had a picture of the plane with the buxom lass nose art in her album she had with her.

Shortly after getting back to our air base the flight surgeon decided that I might as well recuperate for a week on the Isle of Capri. So that I would have some company, he sent Saltsman, my co-pilot along. They sent us over the mountains to Naples on a plane, and then we got a small ferry to Capri. This was in mid February and the weather wasn't too great, but most afternoons were warm enough that we managed to get to the ruins of Tiberius' castle, take a guided trip in a glass bottomed row boat to see the blue grotto and observe some of the other critters and features. Our guide caught a smallish squid that he said would provide his family's evening meal. There were lots of citrus trees along the pathways on the slopes of this island.

Back at the base, I made some check flights on February 25 and 26, then flew my next mission with my full crew on February 28. The bomb load was six 10,000# bombs for a railroad bridge in northern Italy. Missions 7 through 11 were fairly routine, always some flak, but there was little or no damage and no injuries. Mission 12 on March 15 was to oil refineries at Moosbierbaum, Austria. Flak was heavy and accurate and two of our engines were damaged. One lost oil pressure quickly and I shut it off and feathered that propeller. The second one was losing oil pressure slowly so I could keep it working at low speed most of the way home. I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for that mission. Mission 15 on March 25 was to tank and gun factories in Prague, Czechoslovakia. This was my longest; nothing terribly unusual

happened on my later combat missions, and number 24, my last before the European war ended was on April 24. I had been promoted to 1st Lt. on April 5.

Between May 18 and May 24, I flew five supply missions to northern Italy for the British 8th Army. The cargos were cheese, tea, howitzer ammunition, and gasoline in five gallon cans. The strips I had to land on there were just grass.

I was assigned one of the squadron planes to fly back to the United States, but before we were to leave, Myers and Kelsey of my crew, went to Rome for a week's R&R leave. They were late in meeting their return flight so stayed another night. They caught a flight from another squadron the next day. This plane developed a tail flutter, and the A.C. ordered all to bail out. Kelsey had a bad landing, and severely injured his back. He was hospitalized in Rome with no discharge date in sight. Since I then had no navigator for the flight home, my plane was given to another crew who left about June 1.

From May 27 to June 3 I flew four times to check various airplane and instrument repair operations. The last plane of the 739th Squadron left our field about June 4. My crew and a few others were there with little to do but read or otherwise try to avoid boredom. A month later I got a break. I received orders to catch a flight from another squadron to Gioia to pick up a plane that had been released by a colonel group commander, who decided to transfer to Germany for some other kind of duty. At Gioia I was also assigned a navigator from a crew that was breaking up; his name was Edwin Georgi, and had never flown a combat mission. I flew the new plane back to Cerignola, picked up the rest of my crew and belongings, and flew back to Gioia for briefing for the flight back to the U.S.

On the evening of July 5, I was reading in my quarters when an air corps officer wearing insignia showing he was a major stepped into my room, and snapped into a salute. I got off my cot and returned his salute, but felt really puzzled by his behavior. He soon explained that he was the head meteorologist for the 15th A.F., and he and four of his associates were to fly back to the U.S. with me, that in his briefing had been informed that as airplane commander I was in charge and they were to follow any orders I gave. His name was Norman Pate and his weather crew was a 1st Lt. and three sergeants.

The next morning we took off for Marrakech in North Africa. The second day took us southwest to Dakar on the western most point of the African continent. On day three we crossed the Atlantic to Fortaleza, Brazil, very near the easternmost point of South America. Fuel was in short supply at Fortaleza;

they only gave us enough to reach Belem, which is on an island where the seventy-five mile wide mouth of the Amazon River empties into the Atlantic. While getting some lunch at the PX in Belem, I bought two pairs of Wellington style boots for \$6 each. After eating and getting the plane gassed up we flew on up the coast to Atkinson Field near Georgetown, British Guinea. Day five we made it to Borenquen field at San Juan, Puerto Rico. When I warmed up the engines for take off from Borenquen the left magneto on one engine was cutting out, so I scrubbed the flight and told Goldberg to get with the base maintenance section and see that the magneto got repaired. The next morning at warm up the same mag was still cutting out. Some of the crew were all for getting another night on the town. I wanted to get home, so we took off knowing there was little likelihood of the right mag failing, but the plane would fly well on three engines with the light load we had. We landed at Savannah, GA on July 12, and learned that this plane and all other B-24s were going to be parked in a vacant field and abandoned.

The mess hall treated us to the first steak and fresh milk we had seen since the previous November. My orders were to report to a base in northern Illinois, use my accumulated leave time, return to that base for reassignment to White Sands, NM for transition training into B-32s in preparation for transfer to the Pacific theatre of war.

I called Margie that night and told her where I would be in Illinois in a few days. The following morning all of us heading for Illinois were loaded in a B-17 and flown to Charleston, SC, then by troop train to Rockford, IL. Margie met me in Rockford and after a short stay we went to Quincy, where we spent most if not all of my leave.

While on leave we heard of the atomic bombs hitting Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and suddenly WW II was over. When I got back to Rockford, my orders were changed to report to the Sioux Falls, SD demobilization center. Margie went with me to Sioux Falls for a while, and then went back to Quincy. Things progressed very slowly in Sioux Falls, which resulted in lots of boring days just waiting. Word was posted on bulletin boards that local wheat farmers needed help in the wheat harvest. I volunteered and went with several others to a nearby farm. I was the only one with farm experience, and the farmer gave me the best job available—driving the tractor to haul wagon loads of wheat from the thrashing machine to the storage bins. All the others worked in the dust and chaff around the thrashing machine. I was glad to make the extra money and get away from the boring waiting routine for several days.

I finally received orders to report to Truax Field at Madison, WI for discharge. I was released on October 1, but separation leave put my official discharge date on Oct. 25.

I quickly went to Columbia to see if a late registration was possible. I had to get permission from the professor of each course I wanted to take. They were all agreeable, but said I would have to catch up on the two or three weeks of material I had missed. By that time I had more credits than I needed to graduate, but I had one required course to qualify for the B.S. in agriculture.

I had decided to get into the field of forestry; at that time U of MO did not offer a forestry degree. However, there was a forestry professor offering a few courses and advising students interested in the field. I carried 14 credits that fall and made 4.0 in 11 credits, 3.0 in my engineering drawing course.

While in Columbia that fall, Margie and I rented a room from Berenice's mother, and also boarded there. Jean Doran roomed there, and Berenice and young Skipper were living with her mother waiting for Roger's discharge from the navy.

I applied for admission to a masters in forestry at the U of MI, and was accepted to start in the spring of 1946. At the U of MI, I had to attend summer camp in the wilds of northern Michigan in the summer of 1946. I bummed rides with friends to get there and make a weekend trip or two back to Ann Arbor. At camp we lived in fairly good log cabins, four to six per cabin. On one trip to Ann Arbor I bought a new style bass lure. Back at camp, I quickly got out my casting rod and went down to the boat dock to cast this lure and watch its action as I retrieved. Carroll Hall, my best friend and part time cabin mate followed me to the lake; he watched me retrieve a cast or two, and then asked to try it himself. On his first cast a huge largemouth bass hit. Carroll wanted me to take the rod and land the fish, but I refused and he landed a 6 1/4th pound fish. His wife Dorothy was renting a nearby cabin, so they had me and another friend to their cabin for a fish dinner the next night.

At MU a student had to meet all requirements for the B.S. in forestry to be eligible to receive the masters. I was taking undergrad and grad courses each semester, and got my research project started in the fall of '46. I had finished the undergrad requirements in spring semester 1947, so asked for and received my B.S. diploma. I completed my research and thesis in the summer term, so I have B.S. and M.F. diplomas dated about three months apart. This was possible only because I had the B.S. in agriculture, and most of those credits transferred toward the B.S. in forestry.

Sometime after the '46 summer camp, I saw an ad about a used car for sale at a filling station just a couple of blocks from our place in Ypsilanti. We bought it for \$200, I think. It was a 1938 Hudson Terraplane that had long passed its best days, but it ran o.k. and really had quick speed pickup. It used a quart of oil about every 100 miles; I soon learned to keep a five-gallon can of motor oil in the trunk. Margie worked as a secretary at the Kaiser-Frazer automobile plant, and soon was able to buy a Kaiser direct from the factory at a discount. Long before that, I had put my name on a waiting list for a Plymouth. We had about 6000 miles on the Kaiser when our turn came up for a Plymouth.

Shortly after defending my thesis, Dean Samuel Trask Dana of the School of Natural Resources saw me in the hallway one day, and asked if I might be interested in a position as instructor at the Forestry School at Mont Alto, PA. Forestry jobs were hard to find at that time, so of course I was interested.

I applied for the job and he sent a letter of recommendation to Victor Beede, who was head of the department of forestry at Penn State, and a long time friend of the Dean. I was hired without going for an interview. Beede then advised M.K. Goddard, who was the Director of the Mont Alto campus; Goddard sent me direction on how to travel to Mont Alto. I got there as soon as I could, but that was two weeks after classes started. This position was available because an instructor, who was expected to return for the fall semester had found a job he wanted, and gave them a very late notice that he wouldn't be back.

Margie remained in Ypsilanti for a while. When the Thanksgiving break came, I started toward Michigan to get her; I only made it to Scotland where my car slid off a rain slicked high crowned blacktop road on a sharp curve. I lost two front teeth to the steering wheel when the car hit a small white oak tree. The car was damaged enough so that I had to wait for it to be repaired before going for Margie.

When I arrived at Mont Alto, the only place I could quickly find to rent was in Blue Ridge Summit, which is about ten miles from Mont Alto. However, three other faculty members lived there, and we car-pooled back and forth. A few months after Margie arrived, we learned of a second floor apartment available in Mont Alto in the home of Ruby and Jim Fisher. We moved there and in September '48 Dawn was born in the Waynesboro hospital. My mother came to visit us for a short while when Dawn was six weeks old.

My salary the first year at Mont Alto was \$3000 per year; it went up to \$3300 for the second year, and to \$3450 for the third year. I shared a small office with another forestry instructor, and the math

instructor. My teaching load was 19 hrs. per week, but I only had to prepare two lectures each week. The rest of the time was spent in the woods: teaching dendrology, surveying, forest measurements, forest practice, and two hours assisting in botany lab. In the summer, I taught for eight weeks at the Blue Jay Forestry Camp on the Allegheny National Forest near Marienville, PA.

Richard Watt, the other instructor in forestry, took another job after the 1948 summer camp. He was replaced by Wilber W. (Wib) Ward. Wib and his wife Zelda soon became our best friends. Wib, Goddard and I did several consulting and logging jobs together on weekends to make a little more money.

1950 was an eventful year. Kay was born, we bought a house in Mont Alto, and I was promoted to assistant professor. My mother died in Quincy, IL in 1951. Karen was born in 1952.

In 1953, Goddard was selected to become head of the school of forestry; he moved to State College, and Wib was named director of the Mont Alto campus. At some time in the early fifties I became treasurer for the borough of Mont Alto. This netted me about \$5 a month for attending one evening meeting a month, writing the checks for whatever expenditures the borough council voted to approve, and keeping the financial records for the borough in shape to make the auditor happy.

For a few years Mervin Humphrey was director of the Blue Jay Camp, and Ronnie Bartoo was in charge of the forestry instruction program. Eventually Bartoo became camp director, and he asked me to take charge of the forestry instruction. The forestry students took four credits of forestry and four credits of civil engineering, so we had C.E. professors at camp.

One summer Bartoo decided to modify the old CCC barracks we had used as a classroom into living quarters for families of the three forestry professors (Bartoo; Ward, and Melton). Margie and the girls spent part of that summer at camp, and had their meals in the mess hall with the troops.

Most summers after camp was over, we would drive to Illinois and Missouri to visit family there. After returning to Mont Alto, I would work in the peach harvest for the Lowry orchards. I picked peaches for only a short while, when they asked me to drive a tractor to pick up and haul the bushel baskets of peaches from the orchard rows to the storage shed or transport truck-loading ramp. Three young men from Haiti, who did not speak English, were assigned to me for loading and unloading the flatbed pickup wagons I pulled. One summer the Lowreys put me in charge of the entire picking crew at one of their orchards. This crew was to spot pick just the peaches ripe enough to go to the Beechnut Baby Food factory. Later

that summer Margie's dad and Paralee came on a Greyhound bus from Missouri to visit us for several days. I was still working as a foreman in the main peach harvest; so they decided they would pick some peaches too. Some years earlier they had traveled to California in his stake body truck, and worked in harvest operations there. I believe they bought a house in Redland, CA.

In 1954, Goddard asked me to consider moving to Stone Valley to be in charge of the experimental forest. Margie and I traveled there to look the situation over, and check out the school. We visited with May Rigby, and she sent us to see Margaret Houck, who was teaching at the Manor Hill school. We liked Margaret, and thought our girls would be in good hands in her schoolroom; so I agreed to accept this transfer and went to Stone Valley immediately after the 1955 spring semester. I hired four married students from the Mont Alto student body to work with me on the forest that summer. Kerry Schell was one of them.

These students and I spent some time first in cleaning up the residence, finishing and insulating the second story. I then got Margie and the girls moved to the forest. The students set up their trailer houses in the forest headquarters area, and worked on the forest until fall semester started. Two students moved their trailers to State College, but Schells and Stutzmans lived on the forest through the year. Stutzman then moved, but Schells stayed on for another year or two.

In 1958 I was able to convince the university that the house we lived in at Stone Valley should be improved, so the coal burning furnace was replaced with an oil burner; the coal bin was made into a bathroom; the unfinished half of the basement got a concrete floor, and the screened-in front porch was closed in to become a dining room. I then moved my office from the small back corner room of the house to the basement. In March of 1959, Rex, Jr. was born, and the small room became his.

A large number of the timber stands on the 6300 acres of forestland were badly in need of salvage or improvement cuttings, or thinning. It took me a few years to acquire a big enough share of the pulpwood market, and get enough contract pulpwood loggers working on the forest, to really make headway on the needed work. The loggers in the hardwood pulpwood operations usually produced a few low quality sawlogs. For a while I was able to sell these to sawmills in the area to be made into railroad ties, but the railroads quit buying ties just as I got the pulpwood operations up to the cutting budget level

needed, and we wound up with about 100,000 board feet of sawlogs for which I could find no market. This eventually led to moving the school's sawmill from State College to Stone Valley in 1962.

Thus I became manager of a sawmill, manager of over 6000 acres of forest land, and acting as a pulpwood dealer for four paper mills. In addition, I was called on to teach courses when other faculty members took sabbatical leave or retired. In the meantime, the school had been through two acting directors (Bramble and Cope), and finally P.W. Fletcher was hired as director in 1960. Fletcher had rather a pleasant personality, but was the worst person I ever worked for. He made absolutely no effort to understand anyone else's point of view. In the spring of 1966, he was called into the Dean's office and fired on the spot as director; however, he had tenure and stayed on as a professor, and taught a couple of courses for a few years.

Wib Ward was appointed acting director, and eventually director; he served in that post until June 30, 1977. In the summer of 1966, after I had recovered from my heart attack, Ward asked me to take an office in Ferguson building, and take over the dendrology and silviculture courses. Bill Arnold and Gary O'Bryan were given greater responsibilities for the experimental forest and sawmill operations, but I continued as director of the forest until 1978.

Wib was very easy to work for, and he seemed to value my opinions and my work. Orval Schmidt retired suddenly in late 1973, and I was assigned most of his work and his title, Assistant to the Director. Scheduling courses, transportation for field trips, counseling, assigning advisors on job placement, editor of the Alumni Newsletter, recording secretary for faculty meetings, teaching the logging course, and co-director for the annual two week management course for natural resource managers that we offered in conjunction with the College of Business, were suddenly my added responsibilities.

Wib decided in 1976 to retire June 30, 1977. We had difficulty getting his replacement selected. Two good candidates in turn were offered the job. The first declined to take it; the second accepted, but after a while called and turned it down. Then it was offered to Robert Bond. He accepted on condition that he not assume the position until January 1, 1978. Dean of the College of Agriculture, Jim Beattie, asked me to serve as acting director from July 1 to December 31. I was really busy for those six months.

In the 1960s Margie and I had looked around for a home to buy or a place to build a house of our own, and finally found the three plus acre lot near PA Furnace. In 1972, the time came to build the house.

Hurricane Agnes came that year and hit the Susquehanna River valley building supply industries pretty hard. Our builders finally got everything together, and turned the house over to us in early winter, but we didn't move into it until June 1973.

After Bond became director, he wanted me to continue as assistant to him. I had to get rid of some responsibilities, and late in 1978 turned the experimental forest over to another faculty member. We had closed down the sawmill operation in 1976. Gary O'Bryan and Don Hoffmaster left the university and developed sawmill operations of their own. The rest of the sawmill crew transferred to other jobs on campus. Also in 1976, I was promoted to professor after spending 19 years in the associate professor rank.

Sometime in the early 1970s I developed an additional plant identification course at the request of some graduate students in both forestry and wildlife. This course covered native shrubs, wildflowers, and weeds, and became rather popular with undergraduates in short order.

I retired as professor emeritus June 30, 1988 after forty years and nine months with PSU. I had been chosen to receive the Excellence in Advising Award given by the College of Agriculture Alumni Association. I continued to offer the wildflower identification course for two years after retirement as a volunteer.

I have had and still have so many hobbies that I thought it easier to tell about each of them without trying to fit discussion of that part of my life in with other things. I will try to keep them in order of their beginning.

Fishing When I was quite young, our closest neighbor “Happy” Forgey would cut through our fields and orchard with his long cane pole and can of worms on his way to Finley River to fish. Eventually I somehow acquired a small cane pole and some hooks, sinkers, and a bit of line and was allowed to tag along with Happy. He taught me how to catch blue gills from some of his favorite fishing holes. Max and Roger were into fishing, and as I got a little older Max would let me go with him to fish for bass in the James and White Rivers. He used minnows for bait, and I helped him seine minnows in Bull Creek to keep his minnow tank, near our springhouse, stocked. While at the University of MO, and in the service I didn’t fish any. At the University of MI, most of my friends were fly fishermen for trout so I bought my first fly rod and joined them in this sport at summer camp, and on a camping trip on the Au Sable River in central Lower Michigan. However, I stayed with casting for bass, and the man who sold me the Terraplane kept a boat on a small lake, which he let me use. One night Margie went with me to row the boat while I cast a jitterbug. I caught a largemouth bass that was over 21 inches long and weighed about six pounds.

At Mont Alto, Bill Pfiefer, who was a forestry professor and the campus financial officer offered an evening course in fly tying which I took in the winter of 1947. On opening day of trout season in 1948, Bill invited me to fish with him and George Harvey on the east branch of Antietam Creek. We fished through a light snowstorm. George Harvey is famous as a trout fisherman and for offering a combination fly tying/trout fishing course at Penn State for many years.

In every succeeding winter at Mont Alto I helped Bill Pfiefer with the fly tying instruction. The need for feathers and fur with which to tie flies caused me to buy a flock of Bantam chickens from a farmer along the Falling Spring Creek. We also had other chickens at the Mont Alto house. So now in the year 2002, I have several full sheets of pegboard covered with plastic bags of chicken, pheasant, duck, quail, goose, and turkey feathers, and fur and hair from various other critters. I almost never go fishing anymore.

Hunting At the age of ten, I was given a single shot 22 with the admonition to never point a gun at anything you don’t intend to kill. With this gun I killed rabbits, that I could find sitting, and squirrels.

We ate the squirrels and some of the rabbits. Max had a bird dog, and was really into quail hunting. Now and then I would go with him, and on rare occasions would get to shoot a quail in the head that the dog was pointing.

In the fall of 1934, I went on a turkey hunt in the mountainous area of Stone or Taney County, MO with Max, Roger, Lawrence, Ira Cantrell (Ruth's second husband), and a mountain man named Bur Quick. Bur knew the territory we were to hunt, and he started us off to head toward Wolf Pen Ridge, which he pointed out. We were perhaps 30 yards apart and as we moved through the dense oak woods, down the slope I somehow lost my bearings and apparently went to the right of the course, and passed behind the rest of the hunters. After quite a while I came out of the woods into a farm field where a farmer was loading hay onto a wagon. Since none of the hunters were in the field, I walked over to the farmer and asked if he could tell me how to get to Wolf Pen Ridge. He pointed the way up a hill from the edge of his field. I hurried to get up the hill and found a somewhat worried bunch of people. For the rest of the day I was required to stay right with Bur Quick. He and I were the only ones to see a turkey that day, and it was out of range and then it took off.

In those years the squirrel season opened on May 31. The young squirrels were out of their nests by then, their meat was tender enough to be fried. The old ones needed more rigorous cooking, but mom could make them great eating with dumplings. Max would occasionally give us enough quail for a meal; fried quail was my favorite treat.

While we were in Michigan I bought my first shotgun, and killed my first ringneck pheasant. As I was preparing to leave for Mont Alto, my filling station friend learned where I was going, and offered to sell me a rifle for deer hunting. I bought the used model 99 Savage 300 that I have used for many years of deer hunting.

At Mont Alto, quail and ringneck hunting areas were available nearby, and with a drive of up to about 30 miles I could find some mallards and wood ducks along the west branch of the Conococheague River and some of its tributaries. One year I got lucky and killed two Canada geese as they took off from a wet weather pond just outside Mont Alto. While I did hunt deer every winter from 1948 on, it was 1954 when I got the first one hunting from Wib's hunting camp at Cowan's Gap.

While Kerry Schell was living on the Stone Valley Forest in 1956, his bird dog had a litter of pups. He gave me two, which I named Ladd and Lass. After a year of training they helped me get lots of quail and pheasants, and a few grouse and woodcock. The Mothersbaugh Swamp was the most productive area I hunted. Most years I would get a deer, and for the first few years would butcher it myself in the lodge. I finally learned to take deer to a meat market in Smithfield for processing. They trimmed out the less desirable cuts, ground the meat and ran it through their patty maker for ¼ pound burgers. Our children seemed to like to eat whatever game I harvested.

After moving to the PA Furnace area, Rex and I still went back to the Stone Valley to hunt some years. Rex got a doe one year with his new 3006, and he got a wild turkey at another time. One year when we hunted doe in the area behind the red house, we came in early because I was scheduled to be at the Natural Resource Management course meeting at 10 a.m. While I was shaving Rex yelled that a deer was running up through the field behind the house. With shaving cream on my face, I ran up and threw on my red shirt with hunting license on it, grabbed my rifle, loaded it, stepped out on the back of the carport and shot the deer. As I had to leave soon we quickly field dressed the doe and hung it in the back yard maple tree. Rex skinned it while I was away.

In recent years I can't keep my feet and hands warm enough to be still on a deer stand very long, and because of problems in my right shoulder I don't want to shoot a shotgun or a 30 caliber rifle very much, so most of my hunting is for ground hogs with 22.

Archery My first experience with archery was a ½ semester credit of archery in Phys.Ed at the U of MO in 1940. At the U of MI in 1946, several of my new friends were into archery, and into making their own equipment. I joined in, and was soon involved in ordering Port Oxford Cedar and Douglas fir dowels from Oregon, buying nocks, points, turkey feathers, and assembling my own arrows. I also bought a lemonwood blank to make a bow backed with black fiber. Later, I found a small Osage orange log (fence post size) that had been drying in a barn for several years. I split this and wound up with a reasonable stick that I made into a bow with self-backing of the sapwood.

At Mont Alto I found some interest in archery in the student body the first year I was there; I established an archery club and taught a once weekly evening course in arrow and bow making for all the years I was there. One of that first year's students, Bill Knechtel, later sold me a beautiful recurved osage

orange bow, named Maid-of-Osage, made by his uncle who was a semi-pro in bow making. I then sold the lemonwood bow I had made in Michigan to another student.

I gradually lost interest in archery as my hectic schedule in managing the Stone Valley operations, and hunting with Ladd and Lass left little time for other things. In about 1990, I decided that the Maid-of-Osage bow should be in the hands of someone who would use and appreciate it, so I sent word to Bill Knechtel that he could have it if he wanted it. A few months later while visiting his family in Pittsburgh he drove here to get the bow.

Harmonica playing Happy Forgey had two sons, Leo and Roy, who were really great blues harp style harmonica players. Maybe because I liked to hear them play, I received a harmonica for Christmas when I was seven or eight. I was never able to comfortably handle either of the standard described ways of blowing a single note, so a friend of mine from another harmonica playing family suggested that I might try curling my tongue under the hole I wanted to get a note in. That worked for me, but neither instruction manuals nor other players I have met mention that method or understand how I play.

I do not recall playing at all in the years 1939 to 1948, but in 1948 I picked up a diatonic harp and played some. I soon found there were lots of songs I liked that I couldn't play on the diatonic, so I ordered a Hohner chromatic from the Montgomery Ward catalog. For several years I played both types, but gradually gave up on playing diatonics, although I have probably a dozen in different keys and models.

One summer at Camp Blue Jay, Ronnie Bartoo heard me playing; he brought his banjo up, and we played together now and then in evenings. We also played to entertain the forestry faculty after a dinner party held at the lodge at Stone Valley. Now and then I would play at other faculty and student beer parties in the late 60s, 70s, and 80s. In 1979 I spent a week at a harmonica seminar in New York City. This seminar was offered and taught by Charm-Ber Huang, who was in charge of research and development for the Hohner Company. He is a virtuoso on the chromatic, but plays with the harmonica turned end for end. He explained that when he was taught to play in grade school in China, the diatonic harp he was issued had the plates assembled on the wrong sides, so his low notes were on the right. At the time he assumed that was how it should be, and he learned to play that way and never changed. These days I play some for my own amusement, and try to learn something new when I hear something I like.

Oil painting Some time in the early 1950s Margie was taking an evening class in oil painting; I decided to do that too, and I enrolled the next time it was offered. I painted a few stills and landscapes while we were in Mont Alto. I didn't continue painting after we moved to Stone valley.

Leather craft In the winter of 1955-56, Kathryn Schell and Margie Stutzman let me know that they were enrolling for an evening course in leather craft in State College. This sounded interesting, so I enrolled too. This was a very stimulating hobby, but as I worked on billfolds; belts and purses with different tooling and carving patterns, I needed additional stamping tools, so it became a somewhat expensive endeavor. Rex became interested in this craft too, and quickly became highly skilled at it.

After a few years, all the family seemed to have all of the leather items they wanted, so I quit the leatherwork. Eventually it occurred to me that Rex might sometime want to do more leatherwork. On one of our trips to visit him and Christy in Wilmington, I took him the tools for tooling and carving.

BeeKeeping - After living at Stone Valley a year or two, I learned that Schuyler Gross wanted to sell his beekeeping operations. Schuyler had grown up on his parents farm near Manor Hill, but had moved to Pittsburgh to work, and was tired of spending his weekends at home taking care of his 6 colonies of bees.

Because I had watched and perhaps helped my Grandmother remove full supers of honey from her one beehive in our orchard when I was a child, I decided to buy Mr. Gross's bees and equipment. The equipment consisted of a hive tool, capping knife, large gloves, smoker, veil, white coveralls and a hand powered centrifugal honey extractor. I tended the bee colonies at the Gross farm for a while and then moved them to a location I prepared near the forest headquarters.

Orvil Schmidt, a faculty associate who also had bees advised me on where to buy supplies such as new hives, frames, wax foundation sheets (honey comb) and new queen bees. I also completed a correspondence course in beekeeping and obtained a book and bulletins on the subject.

Soon I was getting calls from people who had bee swarms in their trees or shrubs, and I would take a new hive and coax the queen and her swarm to move in. After they accepted their new home, I would close the entrance hole some night and move them to my apiary. I also bought a few hives of bees from Mr. Taylor in Petersburg who was tired of beekeeping.

Eventually I had 20 colonies, some of which I kept at locations other than at home to have bees near a good stand of tulip poplar and black locust. Honey from the flowers on those trees is especially desirable.

At that time, the late 1950's and early 1960's, premium honey brought 20 cents a pound. Late season honey from aster and goldenrod was somewhat less valuable and was sold to bakeries in 5 gallon cans.

The process of extracting honey became a family operation. I used a hot capping knife to cut the wax caps off the full cells then placed the frames in the centrifugal extractor. Dawn, Kay and Karen took turns with Margie or I turning the crank handle that turned the centrifuge that flung the honey out of the cells. Speed had to be fast enough to throw the honey but not fast enough to break the honeycomb.

When Kay was in 4-H she used some of the home colonies as her project for a year or two. I would give her a hand by removing the 80 pound full size supers, but as I recall she handled the half depth extracting supers and the even smaller comb honey supers.

Eventually in the mid 1960's this hot work and heavy lifting lost its charm and I sold the entire lot to Bill Clarke, the Penn State University Beekeeper at that time.

Recording I believe it was in 1978 that Margie and Rex gave me a portable cassette player/recorder for Christmas. My first real use of this was to record the New Year's Eve Guy Lombardo show. I really got into recording music that I liked, and began cataloging what I recorded. For several months, my recording was done by placing this small machine by the radio, but the radio often had some static and those early cassettes weren't too great. Early in 1980, I upgraded to a Radio Shack all-purpose machine (radio, cassette deck, eight track player, turntable), that had input jack for cable. For several years some of the radio stations on the cable had music I really liked (big bands and jazz of various genres). WYZZ in Wilkes Barre now and then included a Patsy Cline record in their Saturday morning pop and big band program. Patsy's recordings quickly became favorites, and caused me to develop more interest in other country artists like Jim Reeves, Ed Arnold, Marty Robbins, Crystal Gayle, etc. For quite a while I used Certron cassettes which were cheap, but now and then one would develop sound distortion; so I upgraded through several brands until I got to Maxell XLIIs. By mid-1980, I wanted to make copies of

what I liked best from cassettes I had recorded or bought; I invested in a rack system with two cassette decks.

Eventually, I discovered that the public libraries had extensive record collections; I started borrowing their records, and taping what I liked best from them. I was also buying records and cassettes. In 1988, I got a CD player. Now I have a huge collection of music on records, cassettes, and CDs, including cassette tapings of about 100 eight track tapes, which I gave to Dale along with lots of records and a player. The good radio music programs gradually dropped out, and were replaced with music I do not particularly enjoy. Sometime along the way, I added a VCR and have accumulated a couple hundred video cassettes of music performances, much of it Lawrence Welk reruns. For a few years there were some good live country music programs, but they too have dropped out.

Wood working When we cleared the lot for the red house, I sent the logs to a sawmill to be custom sawed for my use. It was mostly black locust, but some black cherry. At that time my only power tool was a ¼ H.P. drill. I didn't do much with that lumber right away. When we cleared the area for the new house in 1991, again I sent the logs to a sawmill (Don Hoffmaster's), for custom sawing. I had him put the boards on sticks for air-drying. A year later he ran it through his planing mill, and I brought it home. I bought a radial arm saw, and built workbenches and storage shelves in the outer garage.

One day I watched a Shop Smith power tool demonstration at the mall. It functioned so well that I ordered one with rip saw, band saw, jointer, lathe, and boring machine attachments. It is a very handy machine, and I enjoy working with wood using these machines to make workbenches, shelves, tables, racks for video and audio cassettes, bird houses, towel racks, and such things. In recent years I've had two more batches of logs processed, and now have more than 1000 board feet of cherry, locust, walnut, and oak lumber in various stages of drying or already dry.

Flower gardening and composting While I have been gardening all of my life except the years 1940-48, I didn't really get into flowers much until Kay had five daylily propagules sent to me several years ago. When these bloomed, I was hooked and have acquired many more varieties over the years, several of them from Dawn. Liliium lilies and irises also caught my interest, so I have several kinds of each.

As spring approaches in 2002, I find myself with a basement full of fly tying material and wood working tools; an outer garage full of lumber and wood working tools; a yard full of flower beds; two big composting enclosures; a room full of audio and video music, and machines to play them with. Too much of everything, but busy adding more of some things.

Written Memorials to Rex Melton

Remembering Rex

Time turns pages---and in some cases, blurs images.

Time also has a distilling effect on the truly good aspects of life and growth and the learning process.

The richest moments of my life-learning and growing times included two semesters at Mont Alto in 1954-1955.

Rex Melton was the incarnation and personification of those semesters. He is yet, the essence of mentorship and leadership and role model that sent me out of Mont Alto with sound positive attitudes and basic skills.

Rex was the embodiment of core values that served me well in a forestry career and a life journey.

I am a grateful graduate of his dendrology classes. As a member of his Mont Alto Archery Club, I learned to select good cedar shafts, fletch arrows and bend a recurve bow.

Some of the physical skills have become a bit rusty. But the spirit remains willing. That spirit is with me on the practice range. It travels with me in the October woods. There is NO DOUBT; that Spirit would not be as enduring, if Rex had not been there to set pace and pull chain.

Several years ago Ralph Peace hosted a group of us Reunion Repeats at his Huntingdon Home. Rex was there. I was carrying my favorite walking stick.

Spur-of-the-moment, it dawned on me. Here was an opportunity--a chance for the student to test the Master.

I asked Rex if he might identify the wood. My hiking stick had no leaves, no buds and the bark was smooth from wear. On top of that, it was not a typical bark pattern.

Rex did not pause. He looked over at me. There was a sparkle in his eye--the hint of a smile at his lips.

"It's probably sassafras," he said.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

He reached out. In a quiet way, he was good at reaching out. The hiking stick changed hands. Rex looked at it more closely--but ever so briefly.

"Sassafras," he said.

"How could you tell for certain?" I asked.

"Nothin' else smells like that," was his reply.

I was not even aware that the fragrance remained. The walking stick had been with me for years.

Rex was correct on the identification. He had a nose for what was right--and genuine feeling for real life.

I will miss Rex.

And remember him.

And give thanks.

With respect and appreciation

*Bob Slagle
Mont Alto 1955 Penn State 1958*

To: Rex Melton and His Family

I had a feeling of great loss, when I received Ralph Heilig's E-Mail re-ported that Rex Melton had passed over. I was just one of the guys in our 1958 Forestry class. I was known as an old geezer, second only to Kerry Schell, who we lost a few months ago. But my real claim to fame was that I Aced the dendro classes taught by Professor Melton. I don't claim that much smarts. Instead, I freely admit that my grades reflect the teaching ability of one of our favorite Forestry instructors.

Rex Melton was on a mission and he was successful in helping to create a crew of Foresters that have made many important contributions to Forest management in all corners of America.

God's speed to you, Rex, and look for us all to join you on cloud 58 in the not too distant future.

*Chuck Hollenbaugh
(Class of 1958)*

REX MELTON!!! His name will always be associated in my mind with the magical year we spent at Mont Alto. He was the benchmark against which all other teachers were measured. Rex was my role model long before the term was invented.

In general, it is fear of failure that motivates most college students. Remember chemistry? And being six years out of high school that certainly kept my nose to the grindstone.

However, I came to realize that with Rex I studied and wanted to do well in his class because I didn't want to disappoint him. He was genuinely interested in his students and wanted them to do well. How can you not like a guy like that?

You wanted his respect more than just a good grade. And I decided that I had achieved some degree of respect when he asked Allen and I to babysit for him on a couple of occasions.

Over time we developed a real friendship that I greatly prized. He was a great teacher but an even greater man.

A great man but not quite a perfect one.

After summer camp at Blue Jay, Rex hired a number of us to work the remainder of the summer at the Experimental Forest. One evening after supper, Rex stopped in the bunkhouse and asked if any of us knew anything about honey bees. He had noticed a swarm of bees on one of the little Ash trees along the drive. He decided he would like to try to get them in a hive and produce some honey.

Allen said that he had dated a girl in Germany whose father had kept bees and he would give Rex a hand. (Using that logic I could have been working as a stock broker on Wall Street.)

The rest of us watched from the front porch as Allen, carrying a short ladder and a pair of pruning shears, and Rex with a big cardboard box, proceeded down the driveway.

The plan, we found out later, was for Allen to climb the ladder, snip off the limb holding the swarm of bees and gently deposit it into the cardboard box.

The limb turned out to be a little too heavy for the pruning shears and as Allen chewed away, instead of cutting loose, the limb suddenly swung down and hit Allen on the legs where it hung as the bees moved from the limb to Allen's person.

Rex, the cool, analytical bomber pilot quickly assessed the situation, decided that Allen was a lost cause and high-tailed it up the drive at a speed I had not thought possible. Allen followed a few moments later with a cloud of bees streaming behind him. There would be no honey for the pancakes next winter.

Joe Frank

(Class of 1958)

A letter to Kay Hoch

Hello Kay,

Your Dad will continue to be a very special person to many of us in this forestry community. In particular, our Class of '58 took exceptional pride in having known Rex as a teacher, an adviser, and as a true friend. The central catalyst to this long-time friendship has been Ralph Heilig, who encouraged us to maintain a continued correspondence with your Dad.

To many of us, it seems "just like yesterday" that we were being put through our academic paces by Rex, as he taught and quizzed us on the various nuances of dendrological specimens. Mercy, he knew his trees (and shrubs and wild flowers) and in all of their micro and macro forms - "See that tree up on the horizon ? Now, right from here, identify it by family, genus, and species." That was our professor !!

Rex is perhaps best known for his intimate knowledge of the natural world and his ability to decipher the exact classification of both plant and animal kingdoms. But few people seem to recall Rex's business contributions to our School and University in the operation of a circular sawmill as an integral part of the Stone Valley Experiment Forest. Shortly after Rex moved to University Park in the mid-50's, he accepted the responsibility of inventorying and managing the Stone Valley Experiment Forest, an area of approximately 6000 acres in northern Huntingdon County. However, at the time, there was a noted shortage of timber markets in this region. Accordingly, Rex accepted the added responsibilities for establishing a circular sawmill near the Stone Valley Headquarters and building it into a full-time operation. This required a stable work force, which complemented the region's need for added employment. By the early 1960's, the mill had an annual output of one and one half million board feet of hardwood lumber and was further used as an instructional site for our undergraduate majors and Cooperative Extension programs. In fact, this fine mill soon became a buying center for timber from public and privately owned forests in the region. However, by the late 60's, other mills had entered and expanded into this market region and our University was "encouraged" to discontinue the mill's operation. As the mill's operation wound down, Rex saw to the successful transfer of all employees to other regional or University positions.

Our School's loss in sawmilling soon proved to a gain to our undergraduate students, with Rex accepting the role of advising coordinator for our two majors (Forest Science and Wood Utilization). When I joined the School's faculty, I had the added pleasure of working side-by-side with Rex as he showed me the "art" of advising our students. He knew how to decipher their strengths and weaknesses, how to direct their energies toward a successful degree, and how to suggest appropriate employment opportunities. Rex led our faculty in their responsibility as student advisers through the simple, yet effective, manner of advising thousands of students by himself.

Years later, many of us were very pleased to congratulate Rex Melton, a faculty member without a "coveted" PhD, on his promotion to Professor. This was, truly, a well deserved recognition of the true merits of the man.

An even stronger virtue of Rex was his friendship to all; be they faculty, staff, students, or alumni. He greeted everyone with his typical cordial manner - a quiet demeanor, yet with a positive lilt to his personality and that ever present smile. He would quickly inquire about your day, your pursuits, and your family. He remembered the matters that were important in your life. There was an ease in any conversation with Rex, he avoided the negatives, the politics, and the unrest that too many of us dwell upon. Instead his direction was toward the positive virtues of life, be they tied to one's family or to the simple facets of the great outdoors. We would talk about our daughters and sons, about the alumnus who purchased his hand-tied flies at a recent auction, and about the flights of swans and geese that were moving across our spring-time skies. Life was always around him.

To be sure, Rex will be missed, as a key member of our faculty and as a friend to so many of our graduates. He will be long remembered and will serve as a central figure within his own Family. Indeed, we will continue to owe him our mutual love and respect.

*Best regards,
Chuck Strauss*

April 12, 2010

My Memories of Professor Melton

In 1966 I took Dendrology from Professor Melton. Two fond memories stand out. He could set a pace on the trails, up hill and down through the forest, eagerly looking for the next specimen to teach us with. While us youngsters tried to keep up!

I think it might have been the final field exam - standing at the bottom of a skinny 20 ft tall tree, he said "This is your next specimen, notice the distinctive 3-part compound leaves". Of course, we thought, Bladdernut Staphylea trifolia. High in the top of the tree we could see the distinctive 3-part leaves. What we did not see was that the tree was dead, and thick a vine wound up the back side of the trunk – of poison ivy Rhus radicans!

Happy Trails, Professor.

Bill Kramer, For. Sci. '68, MRP '70

April 13, 2010

I was sorry to hear of Rex Melton's passing. As an undergraduate student, he was always willing to take the time to see you when you needed help or advice. I know he was instrumental in helping me to land some wonderful summer job experiences. I always enjoyed stopping in to talk with him. Please pass along my condolences to his family, especially Rex Jr., who may remember me from our high school cross country team.

Sincerely,

Jim Boyer

PSU Class of 1980

RECALLING REX

In late summer of 1954 slightly more than 100 young men and boys gathered at the Penn State Forestry School in Mont Alto, PA ready to prepare for a career in forestry. As college has a way of doing, that number was winnowed during the school year, so we finished with about 80 students.

That year gave us much that has remained with us in varying degrees in the many years that followed. It gave us what college should – a challenge to learn and an appreciation of how much there is to learn. But that campus gave us more than academic awareness and goals: it bonded friendships that exist today, over a half-century later. Those friendships were not only among the students, but with then outstanding faculty members we were privileged to study under. But unlike larger campuses, the faculty at Mont Alto did far more than teach: they shared not only their academic specialties, but their personal skills – be it singing, archery, fly tying, fly casting, whatever – and most importantly, their time. They were present for our athletic activities, our class celebrations, and forestry field day.

Faculty always has to have office hours, those few hours a week when they are available to students for one-on-one discussions of things academic, personal, or philosophical. Our faculty exceeded the required number of office hours; they were with us or on call for large parts of every day, voluntarily. Rex Melton, it seems, put in more than his share of those extra hours with the students. Bob Slagle's remembrance touches on some of the many specialties Rex shared with the Mont Alto class of '54 – '55, and doubtless with those which came before.

Rex taught my dendrology class and whatever I learned about identifying trees, it was from Rex. He can't be held responsible for what went unlearned on my part, however.

Rex shared the quiet passion for Mont Alto that remains with many of its students throughout their lives, a fact made clear by his coming together with our class whenever we put together a formal reunion or an informal get-together or picnic. His presence at those affairs was always one of the highlights of the gathering.

Rex's multifaceted life story and career touched many of us in different ways as we matured and gained additional interests of our own. His flying

career in World War II was a part of history that fascinated me. We talked about the “Flak towers” in Vienna, Austria, those twelve story, reinforced concrete anti-aircraft emplacement I encountered in peacetime travels, but which he had known far earlier when they were most unwelcoming to his bombing runs over the city.

Ralph Heilig and I share an interest in things military. When Ralph e-mailed me with the sad news of Rex’s passing I replied that we had lost a significant page from the story of World War II.

When I received Bob Slagle’s remembrance I noticed that he started out talking about pages also. It was then that I recognized that Rex was still touching us, for what other name do we have for pages but leaves? And who had brought us our first knowledge of leaves but Rex.

Great teachers – and great people – can touch us for a long, long time. Rex met both categories, with honors.

We only wish that his interests, knowledge, and kindness would remain more directly available to us. But we can treasure all of those he shared with us since those first days in 1954.

George Siehl

PSFS 1954-55

The B-24 Pilot

This is my tribute to a one-time 23 year old World War II soldier-aviator, the plane commander of a ten man B-24 heavy bomber.

Military service was a topic Rex Melton seldom mentioned, let alone provide details of his 24 combat missions in the skies over Italy, Germany and Austria. He probably told fewer people of having a hole blown in his aircraft windshield by a German anti-aircraft shell while flying his fifth combat mission at 28,000 feet over Linz, Austria on January 20, 1945. Or that he was wounded in the arm and face by shrapnel and shards of plexiglass.

Try to imagine deliberately flying into anti-aircraft fire so heavy and so thick that it resembled a solid broad black cloud. And watching as fellow airmen were having their planes shot down and knowing those who did not die would be taken as prisoners of war.

Amid such chaos, imagine the awesome burden of responsibility of safeguarding the lives of the nine other men aboard, all the while enduring frigid cold and wearing a cumbersome, cold, clammy oxygen mask which chaffed his face during a flight which lasted as much as ten hours.

I do not recall the statistics but the odds of surviving 24 such combat missions were definitely not good.

Rex and thousands of other airmen were only doing their duty but the cold bare fact was that he did what he did in spite of nearly overwhelming fear. Call it courage, call it bravery but know that then Lieutenant Rex Melton successfully met and overcame a challenge that few of us ever have had or will have in a lifetime.

Rex returned to civilian life and went on to lead by example. He led by demonstrating a strong sense of ethics, high moral values, always trying to teach, help and encourage others. And he usually did so with a smile and a certain warmth that was genuine. I am certain that there were many instances in his long life when he had to summon the courage to do or say what he believed was right but the courage he so ably demonstrated in service to his country will not be forgotten by me.

*Ralph E. Heilig
Mont Alto 1954-55
PSU Forestry, Class of 1958*



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