

Camping at Stead



SAC KC-97 - Tanker plane crew members prepare camp site in survival training (L to R) A3C Farell Phillips; 1st Lt. Dennis Belknap; 1st Lt. Richard Larson – 21 January 1957

I remember Denny Belknap from the 55th ARS (Air Refueling Squadron. This looks like Stead (Reno). I went in April '57 two months after these guys.

After a week of ground school, we went to the 'woods' to determine if we had been paying attention in class. We built our shelter, a teepee from a surplus parachute. The weather during the several days of bivouac/training was beautiful, with sunshine and moderate temperatures. We learned how to trap, fish with what was available, and killed, dressed and cooked our one rabbit, which one of the guys in our six man 'crew' refused to eat... we ate pemmican bars, boiled lots of water ("liver flukes in the streams, you know," they said) and went hungry. I became fixated on a ham on rye sandwich.

The night prior to departing on our three-day E&E exercise it began to rain, then sleet, and then snow. We rose soaked and without snowshoes began our evasion (we could not build any fires as smoke would lead the 'bad guys' to capture us). We intended to rendezvous with 'partisans' on a designated map coordinate which we found after several interesting incidents enroute. We were pleased to see the trucks waiting to transport us back to main base, Stead (we thought), showers, dry clothes, warm, solid food and a good bed.

WRONG!!!!

The trucks took us to a prison compound where we were exposed to interrogations and further individual physical restrictions for two or three days. I can't remember specifically how long. It was NOT fun in any event, but certainly gave us perhaps a small taste of what we might expect if ever in those actual conditions.

After graduation, Bill Palm and I drove to Reno in my 1955 Oldsmobile, two door, aquamarine and white hard top. Bill drove all the way back to Topeka while I, in the back seat, nursed one helluva graduation hangover from one of the Reno Casinos the previous night!!!

Sadly, Bill was shot down by the Russians over the Barents Sea in 1960, sixty miles off-shore. We were close.

The memories are flooding back!

- *Reg Urschler*

Reg, my favorite from October 1968 Spokane survival school was the tiny box, with the cell with my shoe sticking out coming in second. Camping in the snow was a distant third, and seeing a bear across a field was a real plus.

- *Dave Connaughton*

I still have nightmares of that tiny box. Seriously it gave me the heebiejeebies!

This is a photo of my dad - I think just starting out at Stead because he sure didn't look like this when he got out of the Goony Bird at Biggs. I think Pop lost 20 lbs.

I went through global survival at Fairchild - a cakewalk compared to Stead.

- *Tom Dawes*

If not already shared, I strongly believe this photo and explanation is a very important part of our 55th history for future members to see some of what their forefathers experienced.

Awareness of your history is a signal element in understanding why you serve and this story and photo depicts that element for all those today who also experience survival school.

Thanks for sharing.

- *Reg Urschler*

