

The Army Air Field
By
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I remembered my Uncle talking about the Old Army Air Field out in the Panhandle of Texas years ago, but I never thought I would be out that way, and especially on that very location. As I drove around looking the place over I wondered if some of the area I was driving on had been marched on by him.

The old base had been given to this city and the only restrictions on the property were those put there by the private property owners. Some of the old building and hangers were still on the market, some of them had been for years and that was why I was here.

Our interest was in an old hanger that had not been used at all in many years. It was old, large, and with a wide open interior, making for a very expense place to heat and cool. Never the less, my company needed lots of room; I was just not sure we needed this much. It was an aircraft hanger in its prime and was built for the B-29, which made for the wide building with very few offices.

Along the insides walls of the building there were some rooms that had been used for parts storage and electronic benches for workshops on the

electrical and electronic gear of the aircraft. One room was still marked "Gunnery" and another marked "Norden Bomb Sight System" in bold letters and in several locations around that area was painted, "Top Secret". This area was still isolated behind a fenced area leading me to believe that it had not been visited very often, if at all.

In the same fenced area, but a different room, was another door marked, Top Secret, "Need to Know." The fenced area was still locked as well as both of the rooms behind the fence had padlocks on the doors.

That was strange. But most folks generally respect locked property so maybe some had investigated this area before, but how would one know?

I had the telephone number of the city employee that had the keys to the property. I called him; a fellow named Jim, and asked if he had the keys to the rooms around the hanger. He informed me that as far as he knew there were no keys stating it had been years since there was any interest in this hanger. He suggested that I meet him out front and he would give me a set of bolt cutters. He had other duties he needed to perform; otherwise he would come with me.

Within minutes he was there with the cutters and informed me that he would need to lock the place up in an hour, closing up for the night at 4.30

PM. I assured him that I would be through before that and would see him back at his office as soon as I was finished.

A quick squeeze on the cutters and the lock snapped on the fence. It was the same for the Norden Bomb System door lock. It also cut easily. Not so with the door marked "Need to Know".

I used all the effort I could gather and the metal did not give. The wood eventually gave way around the doorway hasp allowing me to kick the hasp from the door frame. I do not think I could have cut that lock.

Using the lock cutters to pull down the cobwebs around the odd looking pieces of equipment, I worked my way back into the room. Some pieces scattered throughout the room looked like the cockpits of fighter aircraft of World War II. One was from a P-51 Mustang resting on a solid wooden pallet built to accommodate such an item. It looked to be still strapped to the pallet. Climbing up to where I could see inside it, some of the instrumentation was still in place.

In a center of the room, there was a small cubicle, nicely fabricated out of a very heavy durable substance, maybe magnesium, but not being all that familiar with metal I could not say for sure. It looked like the center or main

body of this structure had been fashioned around one of those fighter cockpits.

One thing that caught my eye was a small red light in the center console that was still glowing. That would have to have a nuclear power source or solar power, as a battery could not possibly last all the years since anyone had attended to this equipment and that certainly put some questions in my mind.

The lighting was very poor and while there was writing and markings around some of the instruments, I could not read it. Next to the red light was a lever with the numbers, 1 through 10 with a plus sign on top and toward the bottom 1 through 10 with a minus sign marked to the right of the lever with about a quarter inch between the markings.

Also, in the center of the cubicle was an aircraft style seat, probably from the fighter, facing the console. On the back of the seat was a Lieutenants coat, one that was in amazingly good shape. I shook the dust from it and wiping off the seat, climbed into the seat to get a feel of this contraption. The seat would still swivel, easily too. Then I noted more console to the left of the seat, away from the door, again with more dim markings. The darkness of the room did not help.

As my eyes adjusted to the darkened room, I notice a key inserted in the console, top center, and brushing the dust away, saw the plainly marked "Off" position with a warning sign to DO NOT OPERATE UNLESS AUTHORIZED. Leaving the contraption and searching the outside, I checked to see if it had wheels or wings or other indications of mobility. Nothing on the exterior of the machine indicated that it would move. So what did the "On" position mean? What did being Authorized mean? I had to think about that some, not wanting to turn something on and maybe blast right out through the ceiling.

One quick "On" shot could not hurt anything, could it?", I thought. A quick turn to the "On" position and just as quickly back to the "Off" position surely would not hurt or harm anything, especially after all these years of accumulating dust.

I climbed back into the cockpit and I did just that. An immediate whine, very high speed and ear piercing whine, scaring me back to a very quick "Off" position. It took several minutes for the engine to come back to the quiet status of a few moments ago.

I retraced my steps leaving the building. It was practically dark. Jim seemed very impatient with me. He said, "I was beginning to wonder if I

needed to come in and look for you. It is almost 5:30 pm. They pay me overtime but I have some things I need to do tonight. I normally don't work on Saturday, but I will see you here at 8 am tomorrow, if you want to check it out further."

I agreed that I did need to do some further study and would be here promptly at eight O' clock. I apologized for being late. How could I have been this late as I had only been in there a few minutes?

Back at the motel that night I had to come to terms with the missing time element. When Jim had told me it was 5:30, I looked at my watch and it read shortly after 4:00 pm, which to me seemed more like the time I was away from Jim. The clock on the wall of Jim's office had agreed with Jim. So did the clock in my rental car.

Thinking about the machine I had encountered made me wonder what I had found. If it was a time machine, the federal government would not have just left it. I should probably question someone about this building and its usage in the years after the field had been closed and when the city had taken it over. I just hope Jim will know some of the answers.

I slept on many questions that night, a restless sleep with weird dreams.

Jim was waiting on me when I came in the gate Saturday morning. "Boss, I am going to work on some things I need to do. Call me on my cell phone if you need me for any reason." Apparently, Jim called everyone Boss as I had just met him yesterday.

"Jim, before you go. Who owned or worked in this building last. It has a few items in there that I am surprised were left here. What can you tell me about this building," I asked.

"Well, that was the last building maintained by the military. The 504th Bombing Squadron was stationed here. You know it was here that Col. Paul Tibbets picked his squadron boys the 393rd. They were the boys that dropped the bomb on Japan, you know, and later became part of the 509th Bomb Group. Some of the best Army Air Corp fliers and airmen came from this field. The last boys to work here were flying in one cold wintry morning and no one knows what happened, but the plane crashed and burned, killing everyone associated with the program. By the way, now that you have brought them up, I have seen a picture of the leader of that bunch and he looked a lot like you do, only he was younger. We were told they had some experiments running here and had asked for complete secrecy. Folks stayed away from that building, probably because it was several years after the

base had closed and most interest had been lost in it. I think a lot of folks thought that the government would be sending in replacements to complete whatever it was they were doing in there. I had forgotten about that high pitched whine until you started it up just now. They used to do that pretty often. I was wondering how you knew to do that. I intended to check the place out, but I just never got around to it. And I would not let anyone inside there if they did not have business here. We always heard strange noises coming from that building, voices of several people talking, a real high pitched engine whine, and the length of time they would work in there without coming out to eat and stuff. Well, I got to go. Call me when you finish."

With that Jim climbed into his pickup and started down the tarmac. It is now just a paved parking area that still shows the faint yellow lines marking the parking area for the B-29's.

I brought my flashlight this morning and went right to the machine. Looking the exterior of the contraption over again I still could not see an engine so it had to be encased within the machine.

I had determined during the night that I was going to try out the machine longer than last night. Climbing into the seat I reached up turning

the switch on and grabbed the lever in an attempt to pull the seat forward and unintentionally pulled the lever down into the negative position, about a number five, before I got it stopped and pushed back to the middle range. It could not have been very long, a matter of seconds.

Lights had come on in the building, I could hear other people now, the sounds of workers, and of shop tools, and smell the fumes of welders, etc.

I slipped out of the machine. I could see people outside the open door of the room dressed in WWII fatigues and some in officer's dress and others in flying clothes. I was now pretty sure this had to be a time travel machine and I wondered how best to handle the situation. The Lieutenants coat was still on the back of the chair and it looked much newer, cleaner and neater today than it did yesterday. I would be out of uniform if I put the coat on but if I carried it over my shoulder maybe I could stay out of real trouble. I did have on khaki pants. I wanted to visit one or two of the soldiers to see if I had really gone back in time and if so, what year I was visiting.

"Lieutenant, what are you doing in this area? Do you have a clearance for this "need to know" operation? You look very familiar, but why are you out of uniform and where is your I.D. tag? I think you better come with me", said the Major.

"I dirtied up my uniform, sir, and I need to get some replacement clothing. I just put on whatever clothes I could find in there. I need to get by supply and see if they can help me out. I do have a clearance to be working here, I have misplaced my badge," seeing his badge clipped to his uniform.

The major continued looking me over and said, "Let's get over to headquarters and clear this up. Come with me, please."

As we were walking away from the area, a full bird Colonel approached us. He looked at me and says, "Are you the lieutenant who has been conducting the experiments in this building?"

Hoping to get away from the suspicious Major I replied that indeed I was the person from the building.

"My name is Col. Paul Tibbets. I am putting together a squadron for some special duty training. I have heard about you and in a round about way of some of your activities here. You're a bombardier, right? I need you on my team handling some highly secret stuff. Are you willing?" asked the Colonel.

Knowing that I was in trouble with the Major I thought this may be a good way out of my fix. "Sure, Colonel, I have handled some optical bomb sights." (Not telling him it was on B-47E from several years in the future) "I

have heard about you, Colonel, and yes sir, I would love to join your new squadron. I need to get some new clothing and gear issued to me as mine were lost in transit." (This was a wonderful opportunity to see history being made I thought yet it left some open ended matters around Dalhart and at my company headquarters. If it was truly time travel could I come back and cover them up?)

"No need for that now, Lt. You see that aircraft there. Climb aboard.. We are going out to Utah¹ for some high altitude training. We can issue you the clothing there." He calls a Sergeant over to him that had been walking with him a couple of minutes ago. "Take the Lieutenant here with you and the two of you climb on board that aircraft. I will see the two of you in Utah."

The Colonel turns and walks off just as the Sergeant says, "Let's get going, Lieutenant. The Colonel is ready to get his troops in training."

"I, wait, you see, I mean.....Well, it's like this...." And the engines starting up drown out all other sounds.

The Sergeant half pushes and half guides me around the equipment and up to the steps into the aircraft. Several soldiers are seated inside ready to go. The door closes on the old DC-3. (I think of the rental car and Jim

¹ Wendover Army Air Field, Utah Dec. 17, 1944 Sent to the Marianas May, 1945

waiting on me.) I again try to protest as the Sergeant points to a couple of empty seats. The roar of the engines overpowered my voice.

As a past member of the 509th Bomb Group in the 1950's I knew our destination. I just hoped I could get back to Dalhart sometimes, and to that damn weird contraption, then back to the year 2006..... I wondered if I could get assigned to the *Enola Gay*. No, I know who they are. So, maybe on the secondary aircraft, *The Great Artiste*, observing the *Enola Gay*. No, those names are on record as well. A Historian? Maybe. More than likely an innocent bystander, but that may be rather interesting also:

To be continued

Enola Gay Crew (Hiroshima) Aug 6, 1945

Col. Paul Tibbets, Pilot
Capt. Robert Lewis, Co-pilot
Maj. Thomas Ferebee, bombardier
Capt. Theodore Van Kirk, navigator
S/Sgt. Wyatt Duzenbury, flight engineer
Sgt. Robert Shumard, asst. flight engineer
Pfc. Richard Nelson, radio operator
S/Sgt. George Caron, tail gunner
Sgt. Joseph Stiborik, radar operator

On board - non crew members:
Navy Capt. William "Deak" Parsons, weaponeer
Lt. Jacob Beser, radar countermeasures
Lt. Morris Jeppson, Asst. weaponeer

Bockscar Crew (Nagasaki) Aug 9, 1945*

Maj. Charles Sweeney, A/C commander

Capt. Charles Albury, copilot

Capt. James Van Pelt, navigator

Capt. Kermit Beahan, bombardier

Lt. Olivi, observer

M/Sgt John Kuharek, flight engineer

Sgt. Raymond Gallagher, Asst eng.

Sgt. Spitzer, radio

Sgt. Buckley, radar

Sgt. Dehart, gunner

On board - non crew members

Lt. Jacob Beser, radar countermeasures**

Navy Cdr. Frederick Ashworth, weaponeer

Lt. Phillip Barnes, Asst. weaponeer

*The Great Artiste crew flew Captain Frederick Bock's aircraft as it was rigged for the atomic bomb. The Great Artiste was the observation aircraft again but it was flown by Captain Bock and his crew.

**the only man to make both bomb drops

This information comes from Enola Gay home page

https://www.afa.org/new_root/enolagay/crew.asp

and from GlobalSecurity.org

<http://gobalsecurity.org/wmd/agency/393bs.htm>

When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941 they did wake a sleeping giant. Thousands of soldiers and sailors were killed and wounded on both sides. When Japan was dropping the 200 pound bombs on Pearl Harbor I don't think they ever dreamed of the magnitude of the bomb soon to be

dropped on them on August 6 and August 9, 1945. The brave men flying these missions had no idea of the deadly destructive power of this fat bomb loaded into the belly of their bomber.

As a member of the 509th Bomb Squadron in 1955, 56 and 57, those bombs, bombers and crew members were still being talked about. The 393rd Squadron dropped the bomb. I was in the 830th Squadron, but in the ready rooms and on base we mingled. But, that many years after that August, 1945 day, the Strategic Air Command kept at least one fully armed and ready to go bomber at each SAC base and always some were flying with sealed orders with which target to bomb should an attack happen to our nation. Times have changed and our nation is relaxing, but our military might remains the best, the biggest and the mightiest the world has ever known because of that day in December, 1941.

A/1c Elmer V. Hester,

AF 24524503

Reporting for duty when ever you need me, sir!