

15 October 2007

George Almy Thurston Jr. - Memories of Rager

Dear Ms. Martin,

Just a few lines before I begin my memories of the time I spent on the Ochoco. One person you could contact would be Bill Barnaby. When Bill arrived at Rager in 1957 there were no TV's in camp. Bill, with the help of Keith Nye, contacted several people who lived in the area to gain information on what was needed and how to install it. After buying boosters, ladder line and other equipment they installed an antenna on a thirty foot, two inch pipe near the water tank which could be raised and lowered with the help of "Old Herc" the Dodge power wagon. They appropriated an outhouse from one of the campgrounds, placed it next to the antenna pipe which housed the boosters then ran an electric line to it for power. Ladder line carried the signal downhill to each house. To adjust the antenna, a pipe wrench was used to turn the pipe.

I only found out recently over the telephone while talking to Bill that when he arrived at Rager he and his family moved into the old Ranger's house which was located on the right after crossing the bridge over Rager Creek from the east. After moving into one of the new houses the old Ranger's house was sold to Alvin Johnson and now sits across the street from the general store in Paulina. Bill also told me that he started but did not finish a journal of his time at Rager. His address is:

William Barnaby
1304 Glacier Place
Wenatchee, WA 98801
(509) 662-1059

Another person who may have a limited amount of information is Robert Martin, no relation I assume. Bob arrived at Rager in 1963 to replace Stogie Johnson. Strangely Bob and I were in the same forestry class at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. After graduation the next time I saw Bob was several years later on the South Prong Trail where he was in a crew that was relieving us after about 30 hours on the fire line.

Bob was not your typical engineer. He arrived at Rager with his horse and hound dog and lived in lower camp. He was in Prineville every weekend and took part in the Paulina Rodeo as well as a few others. He became involved with a woman in Prineville who was separated but not yet divorced. One night the soon to be ex-husband showed up and shot Bob in the chest. Lucky for Bob it was only a 22 caliber handgun and Bob escaped with a collapsed right lung. Our District Ranger at the time was John Lundgren who seemed to swing between being worried about Bob's wellbeing and the reputation of the U.S. Forest Service.

Another time Bob was arrested in Prineville at some ungodly hour in the morning for lassoing fire hydrants from his car. If you contact him he may or may not want to share these stories with you. His current address is:

Robert Martin
1140 Rodeo Road
Sedona, AZ 86336
(928) 554-4445

I realize you'll get many different versions of the same event but I feel compelled to correct parts of Stogie's interview as I feel it makes us look like idiots back then:

1. It wasn't unusual to have single friends from lower camp stop by our house for a visit after dark. I was never aware of any boundary line until I read Stogie's account.

2. We all had uniforms but seldom wore them in the field unless there was an inspection team on the district from the S.O. We all wore Khaki shirts and Levis in the field and I have pictures to prove it.
3. I assure you that as FCO I never concentrated all the suppression crews at Wolf Mountain or any other single location.
4. With the exception of some panel trucks all the rest of the vehicles had radios mounted under the dashboard or on the floor. They were large by today's standards but two people could still fit on the front seat. In addition to the radios in the vehicles the district had six "Handi-Talkies." These weighed about ten pounds each and were carried in a protective bag with a shoulder strap. They had a limited range but could reach at least one lookout. All crews carried one during fire season and checked in on a schedule.
5. While 1961 was a bad fire season all the fires (72) occurred after mid August so fire suppression did not impact other district activities until that time. Furthermore, there were only seven fires in 1962, most or all of them Class A.
6. The idea of the scooters was to use them primarily for trail maintenance work. We did have a training session and one man, Erwin Kaul, took a spill but no serious injury resulted. They were never used in the field. If there were any injuries, as district safety officer I would have completed the accident reports and I never made out an accident report regarding any scooter incident.
7. We were never snowed in at Rager. There were a number of children in camp who had to get to Paulina to attend school. Most of the single men went to Prineville every weekend unless we held them at the station on fire standby during the summer. Like most of the married couples, my wife and I went to Prineville every other weekend for supplies.
8. While we were at Rager last summer my wife said someone made reference to a drowning during the flood in 1965. We did have one close call but no one either at Rager or nearby lost their life in the flood.

In addition to my memories and the newspaper clippings of our airlift to Prineville for the birth of our baby I will send along a short (five minute) DVD. This includes some aerial footage of the ranger station in 1965 or thereabouts and some other miscellaneous shots that may or may not be of interest.

Regards,

George A. Thurston Jr.