

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

Reminiscing the Early Days of Aviation

by

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This is a true story, never disclosed heretofore to anyone, probably due to my fear of regional office repercussions or possibly being laughed at. It all happened on one blustery night back in 1939 at the newly commissioned CAA Airway Communication Station at Martinsburg, West Virginia. I had the lone mid-watch. About 3 A.M., I started to take the honorable weather observation. When going outside, I generally left the big front door open. I had misgivings that this was not the thing to do as I sadly learned later.

I had just finished taking the temperature and dew point readings when a big gust of wind slammed the door shut with a bang. Not realizing what really happened, I calmly tried to turn the doorknob. It wouldn't turn -- the bolt was stuck. Then I had a horrible feeling. I WAS LOCKED OUT.

What should I do? I rushed around to all the windows and the back door. They were all locked. In desperation, I started to tear off the screen of the only window that had a screen but immediately thought better. Suppose that window was locked, too? By this time the hourly sequence had already started. I distinctly could hear the clickety-clack, CR, LF with the bells on the teletype. I was scared because R. O. Donaldson (our Chief of the Communications Branch) had issued an ultimatum to the effect that if one missed more than three reports in a year, he was fired. I already had one missing report. I looked at that massive door questioningly. There was only one thing to do -- bust it down. So I rushed back about ten feet and leaped my 180 pounds against it. No budge. Still went the clickety-clack along with the bells on the teletype. Then I backed off about 15 feet and let loose. No give.

With a determined effort on the third attempt and with all my strength, the door finally fell into the room with a



crash. So did I, receiving a badly badly bruised body. Notwithstanding, I immediately punched out the weather report on the old "Iron Horse." Every second counted, so I slapped the tape in the transmitter without even checking it. To my dismay, by the five fingers of fate, I was five seconds too late. It was a terrible thought. Yes, "MRB" was missing. However, I made a hurried late report after the regular sequence was over then sat back trying to console myself with my predicament. After calming down somewhat, I found a screwdriver and hammer to put that damned door back up. However there were splinters of wood around, showing a large crack and because of a broken hinge, the screws would not fit properly. Well, what would you do, tell the Chief in the morning or let it ride?

I firmly believe that no one ever noticed that door, much to my delight. Nevertheless, about two years later on relieving the Chief at MRB for a week (I was Chief at FRR at the time) I carefully examined that suspected ill-fated door. Yes, the old one had been replaced. Someone finally noticed the crack and busted hinge and bolt. Later, I dreamed that I heard a carpenter cussing, "Now who in hell busted that door?" I WOKE UP SMILING.