

The good ole days?

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As a newbie, I reported to freezing Westover where I was introduced to mobility

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HELLO WESTOVER AIR FORCE Base, Chicopee Falls Massachusetts, and, welcome to Splinter Village.



814th APS Westover Winter, 1959

The history of Westover goes back a few years. It first opened in 1940 and I found myself billeted in what was not so fondly referred to as “Splinter Village.”

A grouping of multiple wooden barracks still standing and, continuously occupied from the time they were first built in 1940. They were in full use upon my arrival in 1958. I spent two winters there before the SAC housing program caught up to West-

over and we moved into new brick barracks in 1960.

In the winter they were cold, in the summer, well in the summer we could open the windows and be greeted with the breathtaking aroma of spent JP-4, which permeated the base . . . but you got used to it.

The “village” was just off the base “ellipse” within which was located the principal base flagstaff.

At revelry and taps all traffic on the ellipse came to a stop. The driver, if military, was required to exit the vehicle face the flagstaff and salute as the colors were either raised or lowered.

Our Flight Sergeant, if in a particular mood would, at times, require us to form up and come to attention at taps as we had a perfect view of the

ellipse.

Before moving into the new barracks the winters were, well . . . interesting.

Ever clear snow out from under your bunk first thing in the morning so if it were to have the opportunity to melt later in the day it wouldn’t ruin the shine on your shoes or boots? Oh, yes we had heat, we had a small oil fired furnace that sent warm water through the radiators and gave us water warm enough to take showers with, but it was, shall we say, “cool” most of the time.



814th APS A Flight Barracks, 1958

The 814th was comprised of four flights A, B, C, and D. Each flight was tagged with “mobility” for a period of three months. This was a rotating assignment, which meant

that every flight pulled the three-month assignment once every year.

In 1959 "A" Flight (my Flight) had mobility Jan, Feb, and Mar.

Mobility, for the uninitiated, was a standard assignment at that time within the Combat Defense Squadron forces assigned to SAC bases to provide off base security augmentation in the event one of the assigned bomb wings was dispatched to another base and that base didn't have the forces to absorb the additional security of a bomb wing turning up on their door step.

Other assignments of the mobility flight could range anywhere from providing security for "broken arrows" to off base crash sites, or so we were told.

However, I wouldn't know. We were alerted several times drew our weapons and extra ammunition from the armory, loaded our gear, and our selves onto aircraft but never completed take off.

We were required to have our duffel bags packed with uniforms, personal items, hawk gear, and depending upon the time of year different specialty items.

Our duffel bags were packed, locked, and then stored in an area of the barracks cordoned off by chicken wire and a locked door com-

prised of crossed and framed 2x4s and more chicken wire.

Jan, Feb, and Mar came and went and it was time to get our gear out of the duffel bags and back into our footlockers and on to the pipe racks that we used to hang our fatigues and class As on (it substituted for a locker).

Well, let me tell you a little of what happens when your duffel bag goes missing.

My duffel bag had among other items, three sets of fatigues, two pair of boots, and one complete class A uniform with winter overcoat, a full set of winter hawk gear, field jacket, helmet, and numerous personal items.

Okay, so time came to retrieve our gear, not feeling like climbing over every thing I waited until there were about 10 duffel bags left then entered the storage area.

Nope, not there.

I mean really now, who in hell would want my gear? Mistake right? Some one grabbed the wrong stuff. Nope... all... gone.

OK, so off I go to the Flight Sgt. No sympathy there, he accused me of stealing my own stuff and selling it in town to make money, which I did not do.

I mean, really, *he* was the one who had the key to the door it was secured with his padlock lock. Okay, now off I go to the duty Sgt.

To say he was slightly peeved at my "stupidity" at allowing my gear to be stolen is an understatement.

So I make out an inventory of my missing gear, get a statement from the Flight Sgt that the mobility storage area was secured at all times,

"yeah right."

So what did we make back then as a clothing allowance? I can't remember but between \$8 and \$12 a month sounds about right.

I had, at that time, been in the AF for less than one year, a total of 10 months x 12 = \$120. To replace every item in my inventory was estimated to exceed \$600.

I received a voucher for \$112. Base supply took the voucher and handed me one "Class A" Winter Over Coat, a field jacket, and a replacement helmet.

If I needed to replace the special issued cold weather gear, (which I was required to turn in upon PCS to another duty station or upon discharge) the two sets of boots, and three sets of fatigues, plus all my personal items, it was up to me.

Don't you just love it? Where in hell was I going to get over \$480 and some odd dollars to replace all my stuff?

Simple answer, I didn't, not then anyway.

There was a cleaner's just outside of the main gate where our squadron had arrangements to stock our squadron patches and they also sold and tailored fatigues.

I had a conversation with the owner and he agreed to alert me if anyone didn't pick up the special issued cold weather gear after leaving it to be dry-cleaned.

After a period of a few months if an item was never claimed I could retrieve it for the cost of the dry-cleaning. It took over a year but I did manage to get a full set of the hawk gear. I know that was a no-no, but what the hell, they were always telling us to improvise. ¶

