

Never Were We One

By Pete Clark

In the early spring of 1966, the Air Force moved the Ground Controlled Approach (GCA) Detachment from Lowry AFB to Buckley ANGB. After the GCA Unit had been moved and was operational at Buckley, there was a problem. The National Guard pilots refused to do practice landings so the GCA Controllers could become proficient at the new landing field. The GCA controllers also needed practice to stay current and ready for any emergency. The Guard pilots refused to cooperate until the Air Force threatened to remove the GCA unit from Buckley. This was a harbinger of things to come.

On 30 Jun 66, I worked the last shift in the Lowry Weather Tower. At 0600Z I transmitted the last weather observation from Lowry. I went down stairs to an empty building and transmitted the teletype messages that ended Flight Operations and Weather Operations at Lowry AFB. The next morning I reported for duty at the Buckley Weather Site.

Those of us who were assigned to the Buckley Weather Site were strictly observers and spent no time at Base Weather. Each of us was assigned to an outgoing civilian weather observer to help us become proficient at that location. Several of the laid-off civilians later became Air Traffic Controllers at Denver Approach in Longmont.

The first six months we were at Buckley, we shared an office with the 1910th Com Squadron, while we waited for the Weather Tower to be built. When the tower was ready for occupation, we couldn't move in until the top of the roof of the Com Squadron building was cut off so we could see the intersection of the runways from the Weather Tower. When we moved in, there was a wind direction and speed recorder, a teletype transmitter and furniture. There was no telephone and no telautograph. Outside we had an instrument shelter housing mercurial thermometers and a ceiling light that could be used at night in conjunction with a clinometer to triangulate cloud heights. The only good equipment we had was our calibrated eyeballs.

We could transmit observations by long line teletype from the tower. For local dissemination of information we had to leave the weather tower and go to the 1910th Com building to use the telautograph. The First Shift had been stonewalled for more than three months by the Air Guard's bureaucracy. I was Senior Airman at the Weather Site so I resolved the situation without going through channels. One morning after my first observation of the day had been transmitted long line, I did not leave the tower to do the local transmission. Thirty minutes later a man came into the weather tower and asked why no information had been disseminated that morning. I told him that I had no telautograph and no telephone and it was forbidden by Air Force Regulations to leave the Weather Site unmanned. Three hours later I had a telautograph, a telephone and a hotline to the Control Tower, but I should not have been forced to go to such an extreme, as my uniform looked just like theirs.