Air Weather Association

Serving the Present… Remembering the Past…

NEWSLETTER

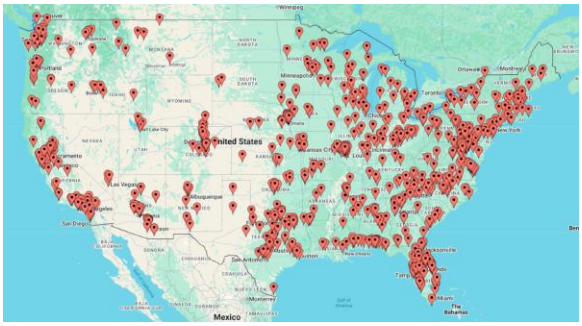
March 2026

Greetings Air Weather Association Members!

Another month in the rear-view mirror and another month closer to our next reunion.

A reminder that our next reunion will be **April 14-18 2027** at Shades of Green Armed Forces Recreation Center near Disney World in Florida (https://www.shadesofgreen.org/) Mo re details about reservations will come soon.

If you're curious about geographical spread of our members, go to this website to view. You can zoom in for detail.



Continuing with some Weather War Stories, we have two...

Richard Nixon and the Sling Psychrometer – by Al Mongeon

I was one of the members of the Presidential Support team at Homestead AFB from 1969 to 1972. During President Nixon's trips to his summer White House on Key Biscayne, we would provide hourly observations from the compound. A helicopter pad had been built extending into Biscayne Bay to facilitate his move from Homestead to the compound.

We used the AN/PMQ-4, deployable weather kit. The kit consisted of a sling psychrometer, wind sensor, and barometer. The only permanent weather instrument was a ceiling light installed on one corner of the pad. Unfortunately, it was under a palm tree and the best baseline we could establish was less than 100'.

Our working area was in the Secret Service command post on the edge of the helicopter pad. The rules for taking an observation were dictated by the Secret Service. We weren't allowed out of the command post if the President or a member of his family was out of his house.

On the day in question, I was the duty observer. The President and his neighbor, Bebe Rebozo, were out in the bay fishing. Normally, if we were out taking an observation, we would get a warning to return to the command post when they started in. In this case, however, things got a bit harried when word came down that the French President de Gaulle had died unexpectedly and the President would be returning to Washington that afternoon. I was out on the deck

taking an observation and, in the excitement, someone forgot to tell me the President was coming in.

I'm out on the deck slinging the psychrometer when an agent comes running out, waving to get back in. I turned around to see the President getting out of the boat. I started moving toward the building when the agent suddenly stopped me. The President came over and asked what I was doing. He asked if he could try his hand. He did a pretty good job. After that, he always made it a point to come by our spaces and inquire about the weather and we would give him a copy of the local discussion.

Offutt Base Weather Station, Winter 1979 – by Tom MacPhail

I was a newly-minted 2d LT manning the counter during a weekend day shift. I had driven through very light freezing drizzle on the way to work. The overnight forecaster briefed me to expect the freezing drizzle to end very soon; certainly before the next Looking Glass crew arrived for their briefing or the airborne bird needed to land. As I began working on that morning's 175-1 briefings and the Looking Glass packages, the 55th SRW Command Post called for an update on the freezing precipitation warning about to expire. I passed on what I was briefed; the freezing drizzle would end any moment and the warning would be allowed to expire. I then got back to the stack of 175-1s but also thinking hard about why this freezing drizzle was happening in the first place. At the shift change briefing, the very experienced TSgt told me there was no warm layer on the 00Z skew-T or on the incoming Omaha RAOB data being plotted by the observer nor any freezing drizzle being reported at downstream stations we routinely watched. Freezing precipitation was extremely impactful to the Looking Glass mission because it was the only condition that prevented, without waiver for any reason, the landing of the airborne EC-135 and/or the take-off of its replacement. When freezing precipitation happened, a decision to scramble a tanker had to be made in a timely fashion to ensure that the Airborne Command Post did not falter in its continuous, command and control mission. The Offutt BWS forecasters knew this well and, in winter, watched continuously for any signs of low-level warmth and moisture migrating northward from the Gulf to overrun cold air at the surface. We also knew from experience that any 55thSRW Command Post call during these events would soon be followed by an urgent visit from the 55th SRW/DO likely followed by an even more urgent visit from the 55th SRW/CC if the critical decision to scramble a tanker had to be made. Sure enough. not long after the Command Post call, the 55 SRW/DO appeared at the counter asking the expected question, "When is this freezing crap going to end?" I kept to my story, "Any moment, sir." I then began even more urgently looking for data to support

this forecast; the 12Z skew-T, another scan of the map wall, conditional climatology but all proved to be no help. "This crap shouldn't be happening, so it's got to stop soon", I continued to believe. The 55 SRW/CC then made his expected appearance once, twice, a third time and each time I gave him that same "confident" answer. After his fourth visit, he was understandably perturbed but remained professional and, to my surprise, likely because of the fear he saw in my eyes, thanked me for my input. Finally, on his fifth visit, I threw up my hands in frustration and said, "I can't figure out why this crap is happening now so forecasting when it will stop is obviously beyond me!" He actually laughed and then got on his brick with instructions to scramble a tanker. The freezing drizzle finally stopped around 3PM as my replacement arrived. I was, honestly, humbled beyond words but also incredibly impressed by that One-Star's patience with my inexperience as well as the appreciation he later expressed for the concern and effort I put into trying to get that mission accomplished. The lesson learned for this new forecaster was that data must never override the reality of what's actually happening. In this case, my later bust review indicated that a very narrow warm layer had migrated northward between all the reporting stations and RAOB sites. In those days of hand-plotted charts, primitive model data, no regular satellite imagery and single-station radar, forecasting was far more art than science with experience on-station and being deeply embedded within the customer's mission the key to success. I went on to earn the confidence of the 55 SRW leaders, operational decision-makers and crews as I gained weather and flying ops experience though I did have one additional lesson to learn at Offutt. One night, a 2AM classified mission got delayed after I had already arrived at the SCI vault to brief. Rather than return to the BWS, I stayed to further "bond" with the crew. Two hours later, the briefing commenced as usual with my weather. As I told them to expect a dry runway for take-off, a snowball flew from the back of the room and hit me in the chest. It had snowed during that "bonding time" which, in typical crew dog fashion, provided an opportunity to teach me another important lesson; always look outside before briefing. I went on to tell young forecasters working under my supervision at follow-on assignments that they have one opportunity to be 100% accurate ... at zero hour ... so always look outside or at the latest observation to be sure to get at least the first line of their TAF right!

I hope you enjoyed reading those and if you like it, send some comments to share in the next news email and send me an AF Weather War story of your own!

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Please add locator@airweaassn.org to your address book and if this arrived in your spam or promotions folder, move it to your Inbox.

Hoping to hear from you!

John Hahn, AWA Locator and Roster Manager