

Morrow County's 'only'

Airport carved from hilltop, bunchgrass

By GLENN MORRISON

Recently a hapless flyer readied to the Walla Walla control tower and asked instructions, "How shall I proceed to Heppner International?"

After a stunned silence over the airwaves a bewildered air controller replied that there is no Heppner International, but he could land at Lexington, Morrow County's only actual airport.

For many years there was no airport in the county, only private landing strips woven over and around various knolls and plateaus on the ranches. Airplanes had been in the county, but there were no formal facilities for them.

Orville Cutsforth remembers when champion stunt-flyer "Tex" Rankin used to barnstorm in the county while Rankin was working with his brother in the warehouse at Lexington. "He used to land up on the grassy knoll where the airport now stands," Orville said in 1923 he bought a ticket for \$15 to ride with Rankin but, "I gave it to my sister and I never did get to ride with him."

Interest in plane facilities came up during the early 1940s and eventually Orville and Harry Duvall bought the land for the present airport. The land was bought from the Peters estate, and turned over to the City of Lexington for the purpose of establishing an airport.

Initial work on the airstrip was done by volunteer labor, particularly that of the Munkers brothers, Archie, Leonard and Vernon. By using borrowed equipment they bladed off a dirt strip which served its purpose until 1960.

During this period many local ranchers learned to fly under the tutelage of Dick Forsyth. Many GIs fresh out of the service were able to get their wings because of the GI Bill and the local facilities. During this time while the City of Lexington owned the airport, Cutsforth donated a training plane so that others could learn to fly.

More volunteer labor resulted in the first hangar at the airport in the late 1940s.

In 1957 Mel Boyer came to the airport and used it as his base for his spraying and chartering businesses. Boyer now manages the airport, while maintaining his business, Gar Aviation, which includes aerial spraying, chartering, mapping and photography. He keeps his eye on runway conditions and aids flyers who touch down on the high plateau. Boyer uses several spray planes and also flies a Cessna 180 owned jointly with Cutsforth and Elden Padberg.

By 1960 the airport had been turned over to Morrow County to be used as a county airport so that state and federal monies could be obtained for further improvements. That same year work began with county crews leveling, graveling and eventually paving the runways. The two runways bisect each other, thus giving flyers alternate landing strips which may be used in changes of wind conditions. The runways measure 1,400 x 50 feet and 2,500 x 50 feet, providing ample space for larger air-

craft to land. Strong winds across the hill provide much lift for the crafts, making the plateau an ideal spot for the airport, which is why Tex Rankin probably picked the spot years ago.

The airport now houses approximately 10 planes in its four hangers, some of which are privately owned.

At this time lights are being installed on the runways, making the strip less hazardous for night flying.

Cutsforth remembers when pilots would have cars park at the ends of the runway at night to shine their headlights so that the planes could swoop down over them and hopefully not end up in the brush.

Most maintenance work for the airport is done on a donation or volunteer basis as the county has no tax base for the care of the airport, and Boyer is not salaried.

No, the airport hasn't reached "international" status yet, but now flyers don't have to bounce over bunchgrass as Tex Rankin did 50 years ago.



MEL BOYER



Sunset finds these local planes earth-bound at Morrow County's Lexington Airport.

After 25 years

Father, son reunited

"I thought stories like this only happened on TV, and now that it has happened to me, I still don't believe it," said Reo J. Russell, 74, Lexington, as he embraced a son whom he had not seen in more than 25 years.

A series of strange events led to this joyful but tearful reunion in Lexington Friday night.

Ronald was born in Portland, Jan. 24, 1944, and when only five years of age his parents were divorced, with the mother receiving custody of the child. She moved to California, taking the boy with her. There was no communication between the parents, and only on occasion did she write to her former friends telling them where she had been living. However, Reo Russell, the father, could never locate her or gain any information regarding his son.

Mother and son moved frequently in California and as the youth grew up he inquired about his father. All he ever knew was that his father was named Reo, and that he might be living somewhere in Oregon.

Years passed with Russell unaware of the whereabouts of his son. After the Korean conflict and the war in Vietnam, Russell presumed his son might have been killed in the war.

One day a few months ago the father, determined to locate his son if he was still alive, wrote to California Governor Ronald Reagan asking if he could help in locating his son.

Last week the governor's office replied informing Russell that "A Ronald Russell has been located in Sacramento, Cal., who was born Jan. 24, 1944; however, we cannot determine if he is your son."

With the message an address of Ronald Russell was enclosed.

Russell Sr. wrote a letter to the address given him by the governor's office and waited for a reply.

When the letter arrived at the California home, Ronald's wife, Arlita, opened the letter from Oregon, read it and called Ronald immediately at work. Ronald told his wife to try and contact his father by phone. She tried, but the Russells were not at home when she called.

When Ronald arrived home from work he asked his wife to pack the car, for they were on their way to Lexington, Ore. They stopped along the way and phoned again, this time locating the elder Russell.

The young couple arrived in Lexington at 7:13 o'clock Friday night, and after a brief exchange of words both men wept with joy at their reunion.

"It is still hard to believe that after all these years we have finally been re-united," said Ronald.

Ronald, now 30, lives in North Highlands, Calif., with his wife and their infant son, Aaron. Ronald is employed as a pharmaceutical stock clerk in a Sacramento hospital. His wife has been employed at a nearby air base for the past 11 years.

"Mom and I did a lot of moving about in California, and I finally graduated from high school in Sacramento," explained Ronald. "When I was 21 I was drafted into the army and spent 13 months in Korea." After his discharge he lived a short while with his mother and later married.

The young couple from California returned home last weekend. But they have plans to move to Lexington and live as a family reunited.

Reo Russell moved to Lexington from Westport two years ago. He and his wife, Jeannetta, have been married

for 13 years now. Russell is retired from running dairy cattle ranches, working as a butcher for 18 years, and as owner of 16 restaurants from Bend, Ore., to Washington State. He has one other son,

Allen, 54, who lives with his family in Portland.

The Ronald Russell family left Sunday to be home early Monday for a doctor's appointment. They couldn't get gas at Grants Pass and had to

spend the night. Monday, Ronald called his father to say, "You're the most wonderful dad in the world!"

Reo Russell thinks his new-found son is pretty wonderful, too.



Father and son reunited after being separated for 25 years. From the left, Reo J. Russell, Ronald Russell and his seven-weeks-old son, Aaron.

Free lunch!

Heppner Boy Scout Troop 661 and the Cub Scouts will host a free lunch at the Elks Lodge Saturday at noon, consisting of cold cuts, potato salad and soft drinks.

The public is invited to this special luncheon and learn more about scouting, support the local troops, or just to "freeload."

Scouting is supported by United Fund contributions, but Morrow and Gilliam counties do not have United Fund, so scouts must solicit funds on their own to continue their programs.

It costs approximately \$15 per boy to continue in the scouting program, in addition to the fund-raising projects scouts have within their own troop.

Following the luncheon, scouts will solicit local residents and businesses for funds.

Cliff Waetje, scout executive from Walla Walla, Wn., will explain scouting and the use of funds during the luncheon.

WINDSHIELD BROKEN BY VANDALS

Vandals broke the windshield of an automobile belonging to Dennis Doherty, assistant district attorney of Morrow County, some time Sunday morning.

Police Chief Dean Gilman noticed the broken windshield on the parked auto and asked Doherty what had happened. Doherty had parked his vehicle in front of his home Saturday night and was unaware of the damages until Gilman informed him.

A rock about four inches in diameter, found lying on the ground near the vehicle, had been used to smash the windshield.

ATTENTION, ALL WORKERS?

Saturday, March 30, will be a special work day for all members of the Willow Creek Country Club.

Members have been commanded by Clint McQuarrie to show up for this special event in order that the course can be put in shape for the championship classic to be held here following the Bing Crosby Open.

"Reprisals will be taken," McQuarrie said, "against those who fail to show."

Blood donors sought

An American Red Cross "blood drawing" will be held Monday, April 1, 2:30 to 6 p.m., at the Elks Lodge in Heppner.

Healthy persons between the ages of 18 and 61 may give a pint of blood unless they have had yellow jaundice, hepatitis or malaria. Donors must weigh at least 110 pounds and must not have given blood within the last eight weeks. They may eat and drink as usual before donating blood, but should not come in hungry or after eating fatty foods.

Dorothy Hearg is chairman of the Morrow County Red Cross. Barbara Cutsforth is assisting in the blood donor project.

Free Square Dancing

Beginning Lessons

Darrell Wilson, caller

Every Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.

(experience dancers welcome)

at Willow Lodge IOOF Hall Heppner

In Heppner Every Thursday

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8 p.m.

Willows Grange Hall

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Drawing for electric knife and table-top oven and broiler.

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THE DANNY WILSONS HAVE A NEW SON

Mr. and Mrs. Danny Lee Wilson, Lexington, are the parents of a son, Stacy Lee, born March 14 at Pioneer Memorial Hospital. He joins a sister, Jodi, 1 year old.

Grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Bud Wilson and Mr. and Mrs. Ray Papineau, all of Lexington. Great-grandparents are Mrs. Columbine Orwick, Mrs. O.E. Baker and Mr. and Mrs. R.G. Nichols, all of Lexington; Mr. and Mrs. Harold Castor, Nyssa; and Ed Wilson, Heppner.

IRRIGON LIONS' PANCAKE FEED

The Irrigon Lions will host their annual Pancake Feed at their clubhouse this Sunday, 8 to 11 a.m.

The proceeds will go toward the Eyesight Foundation.

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Beecher says, "To all the good folks that patronize my place, sorry I ran out of so many main dishes last weekend."