

Darrell Norman

by Jon Gwinn



Darrell on the right, Orlando, FL 1967

I first met Darrell when he arrived in Fairbanks, Alaska in 1967. He had driven up the Alaska-Canada (Alcan) highway in a four-wheel drive International Scout. Not long after arrival, Darrell, his wife and another couple went "off-roading" in the Alaska wilderness. The Scout got stuck and the four of them had to walk out. I don't recall how far the walk was, but it was substantial and the four were not dressed for such a journey. It was springtime and the terrain and mosquitos were the principal hazards. A friend of Darrell's owned a Land Rover with a winch, so they took the Land Rover back into the wilderness to retrieve the Scout. But, despite having a winch on the front, the Land Rover got stuck. The winch would just pull the small trees up out of the permafrost. They walked out again.

Weeks later, Darrell and another airman who's name I can't recall joined me on a trip from Eielson Air Force Base to McCoy Air Force Base, Florida for altitude chamber refresher training. We caught a hop on a KC-135 tanker and made a stop at March Air Force Base, California to pick up an engine. Between Fairbanks and Los Angeles, I crawled into the boom operator's position and watched the scenery as we flew over the northwest. I'll never forget the sight of Lake Tahoe below.

In Orlando, we booked into a motel near McCoy. The motel had a swimming pool, so we decided to take a dip. Wow! The water was much colder than I expected and it was June. I had been for a swim in Harding Lake, outside Fairbanks, a few days earlier. The water in Harding Lake was warmer than the swimming pool in Florida. Lake Harding is shallow and there are 24 hours of sunlight in June. What a contrast!

We completed altitude refresher training but were having trouble getting a hop back to Eielson. It turned out to be an extended Florida vacation. Eventually, we caught a KC-97 tanker from McCoy to Warner Robbins, near Macon, Georgia. Then we were stuck again. We discovered that, at least in 1967, Maconites shut down all the establishments and rolled up the sidewalks. There was literally no place to get dinner or have a drink.

Have Another Cup

Morning Essays



DARRELL R. NORMAN

Fortunately, we were only there for a couple of days before catching another KC-135 back to Eielson.

Darrell retired from the Air Force and became a reporter for the Gadsen, Alabama newspaper. He wrote a weekly column and later collected many of those columns into a book titled "Have Another Cup."

I met up again with Darrell in Destin, Florida in 2004 at a Prop Wash Gang reunion. One of Darrell's columns is about that reunion.



Darrell (right) with Jeff Wilcher at Destin, FL Reunion 2004

Rest in peace, Darrell.

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