

# Cartwright, Labrador

## 1953 – Memories of Cartwright – Don Wisgirda

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### Memories of Cartwright Don Wisgirda 1953-1954

The 922nd AC&W Squadron was formed at Grenier AFB outside of Manchester, NH. We were there for the summer of 1953. I imagine it was because of the fact that the site at Cartwright was not yet ready for our arrival. We left on September 18th on the troopship General Heintzelman. I, not positive but I believe the contingents for St. Anthony and Hopedale were also on this ship.

There were no docking facilities at Cartwright so we unloaded everything into an LCU. The base still wasn't ready when we arrived and we had to do a lot of the final preparations. We ate "C" rations for at least two weeks. It took about two months to get the radar operational. When we did, we were very successful in that the operation time of our radar was in the mid-nineties.

The thing I remember most was the constant wind. Seems like it blew 30-40 mph all the time. One storm in March 1954 registered over 100 mph. Our communications with the outside world were very difficult at times. We could hear ships in the English Channel but we couldn't communicate with Goose Bay.

Most of our supplies were dropped by parachute. During the summer months, the SA-16s came in, and after the ice froze in the winter we made use of C-47s on skis. Rarely did we get helicopters from Goose Bay because of the distance, the winds and the mountains.

I only got out of Cartwright once in the fourteen months that I was there. That was on an R&R trip to the Eagle River fishing camp which was operated by personnel out of Goose Bay. For the most part - radar personnel were not given an opportunity to visit these locations.

One incident does stand out in my mind. Being in the radar section, we monitored all aircraft transmissions coming over the pole. In July of 1954, in the early evening, we heard a commercial airliner talking to Goose Bay about an unidentified object flying off the port side. We had both of these on our radar. It followed along

side for some time and was seen by both the crew and the passengers. The unknown finally flew off to the northwest and left our radar coverage at about 200 miles in a matter of seconds. This incident is still mentioned in books as an unexplained UFO sighting.

Our Commander, Major Barr, had a heart attack and we had great difficulty getting him out because of the winter weather.

At the end of my tour in Cartwright, I returned to the USA on the Marine Carp, but not until we had spent about three weeks going to Greenland to pick up people who had been unloading ships for the base at Sondrestrom. This was the subject of a Congressional Hearing because the relatives were told that we would be back in a week. We were reduced to mutton stew for the last four or five days. On the way back across the North Atlantic, we ran into a terrific winter storm. Everything had to be tied down.

I was discharged when I returned since I had less than three months remaining in my enlistment. My stay at Cartwright was a significant event in my life. It was like a religious retreat. Even at my young age, it gave me plenty of time to think about life.

This detail was made available by Don Wisgirda. Don served as a member of the 922nd AC&W Squadron at Cartwright. He arrived in September 1953 and departed in October 1954.