

BIOHAZARDS OF MODERN AIRPORT TRAVELS

CHICAGO--(RNWS): After a long week-end in Bozeman, Montana concluded, with the choking nasal congestion still in place, there was a SHOCK upon returning to the homestead to unpack.

The Outlaw Eastern Alumni had planned the second longest (in travel terms) reunion in its 25 plus year history. It was time to reward Rocky with the gang squatting at Rancho de Rogstad in Big Sky territory.

On the dual plane rides to Gallatin Airport, the planes were packed filled with germ factories housed in the sneezing and sniffing remains of the human race. The invaders wrapped around the brain stem and began to squeeze brain matter out like an overripe lemon.

So grounded in the high plateaus of a wet desert, trying to drink the viral flu into submission, one forges on from event to event. The original Germanic armies may have gotten local reinforcements like pollen, allergens and more travel bugs as more attendees arrived at the homestead triage.

Getting sick because of the close quarters of airplane travel is one of the growing known risks for the passenger.

But when I arrived home to unpack my bags, I found the NOTICE OF BAGGAGE INSPECTION from the TSA. Apparently, federal agents hand inspected my checked luggage on the return flight to Chicago.

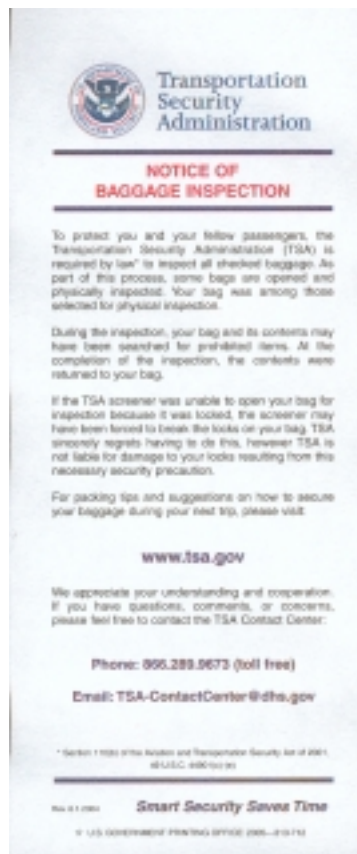
When I opened the second

THE MONTANA Real news

It's the July '05 Edition!



bag, I found the notice and a surprise. The inspector put into my bag two moldy oatmeal cookies in a ziploc. What are these people doing? Placing hazardous materials into passenger luggage?! Mixing belongings between passengers? What else??





THE GATHERING OF THE LOST BUS STOP SOULS

Wandering through Terminal 2 at O'Hare creates flashbacks of the old Greyhound Bus Station on Randolph Street. Half of the main aisle is torn up and roped off by police tape and plywood barriers. People zombie walk into the shoots like cattle funneled into Amour's butcher wheel. It would like a refuge video 100 years from now. Airplane fares are so low that bus passengers now clog the airline gates like flies to pasture dung heaps.

Trash comes in all colors. A Mexican bus ride with chickens, open cook flames, and bullet holes in the windows would be the next step down in the transportation pyramid. Travellers are bent to break the rules for number of carry-on bags, when to board the plane by row number, and time consuming stupid questions.

With most airlines on the verge of bankruptcy and labor disputes, one must plan an entire travel day in order to get to your final destination. One must go through the airline version of the meat packers wheel, the Hub System, in order to change to even more packed planes. The overall experience is like going to a mad dentist to have a tooth pulled without pain medication.

The remake of the War of the Worlds could have been filmed as a documentary in Terminal 2 during this long holiday weekend. Aliens, flu germs, and the hot baking sun turning to thunderstorm ground delays.



HI TECH MAN ARRIVES IN MONTANA

“IT LOOKS LIKE HE GOT ROLLED . . .”

Herr Hepner, farmer-educator-administrator, was to arrive late in the evening. He was flying in on the last NWA arrival. Rocky wanted to make sure he'd see us from the glass partition above Gate 1, so he printed out a sign: “Arriving Passenger: Mr. Hi Tech Man.”

HI TECH MAN was a Real News Komix that debuted during the last Montana Bachelor Summit in 1994. The main character had an eerie similarity with Hepner, a non-technical administrator in an out-of-control school.

So the passengers came through the jetway, some looking up at us; a few grimaced, a few looked confused, and a few smiled at the sign. The families, the strollers, the three bags per person set made their way slowly through the doorway. Then a dazed man in an undershirt and suspended jeans came out. “It looks like he got rolled on the



In a pre-weekend posting, it was inferred that administrator Hepner's last school day lunch of a beefy cheeseburger was interrupted by menstrating, bitch-slapping cat fight between two sexually active students. It was a difficult decision: finish the burger or let it get cold by pouring cold water on the Fellini film outside his office door.

THE PACKAGE BEFORE THE TRIP

The OEA at most reunions have weird or funny occurrences which usually turn into the line "that's the album cover," or "that's the B-side."

Well, this year, to "be different," Ski decided to put some of those titles to music and lyric. In one week, he created a musical CD that he sent to each participant with the instructions that the package not be opened until one was on the way to Bozeman. It was supposed to shock and surprise them.

Most reactions were what the . . . how'd he do that? . . . "it sounded like The Mothers of Invention - - - on meth!"

"And now for something completely . . ."

ROLLED, PART II . . .

plane!" exclaimed Ski.

Hep walked slowly out the gate until he startled himself from his skin when he finally saw us. He was carrying on a paperback book. No luggage. This confirmed he probably gambled his entire worldly possessions during the Minneapolis layover. He would probably beg poverty and seek Montana public aid assistance during his three day stay.

We made it to the stairway from the gates near baggage claim. The rest of the passengers slowly centipeded toward the conveyor belt. We stood in the middle of the mob, and Hep walked by us. We were only three feet away, but he continued to walk on by. We stood in place for a few minutes until Hep finally refocused his mind and found us.

"Where's your shirt?" He looked like an Amish poster boy. "This is it," he replied tugging on his two button undershirt.

When a very small bag came within reach he grabbed it. "That's it," he said. He was packing light. The little medicine cabinet size suitcase was all he brought (?). Maybe it was filled with unused credit cards; he'd buy new before he left the State.

WE told him that there were three possible scenarios of his arrival. First, he would be escorted off in cuffs with the air marshal. Second, his ear would be glued to the cellphone. Third, he would exit the plane in the company of his secret second family from Peoria. He was not amused. But he proceeded to show us the book under his arm: it was called ASSASSINS. "Nice choice when the nation is on elevated alert and you're passing through boneheaded TSA agents."

We get to the rented Spanish Inquisition vehicle, an Armada SUV. "I really need a beer," Hep yelps. So it is the quick ride back to the home base; a fresh MGD in hand; and the skies opened up to a magic astrological star map because it was the new moon. In the quiet cool morning, a shooting star streaked across the heavens, and the police scanner hissed about a drunken co-ed in town.

AMOROUS BEAST MAKES MOVE ON THE WELH BOYS

Prz had decided to drive from Minneapolis to Bozeman. He wanted to put some burn-miles on the BMW. At the last minute, his standby passenger, Mr. Hash, arrived to shotgun the Interstate run to the reunion. A Thursday, 7:51 a.m. email



from Hash stated only, "Westward, HO!"

A phone call to the office on Thursday morning revealed that Hash had called the office and asked for me. My secretary stated I was at O'Hare. Apparently, Hash missed me by a half-hour and half a concourse. He flew to Minneapolis to take his ground transport connection while I flew on to Montana on NWA.

While my flight did u-turns around a massive Midwestern thunderstorm front, Hash rested at the Prz estate for the early morning NASCAR dash to Dakota for leg one of the marathon drive.

When they hit Fargo, they pulled into a UFO restaurant. Green aliens were hanging from the rafters. Strange things happen in the Outlaws, the Badlands and apparently Dakota.

Sink Sleep in Bismarck was the last item for Day One. Another early morning exit toward

ONE EYED
BISON LOVE
BEAMERS

Billings. No word on the final ETA for Friday. With a quorum present by Thursday night, evil plans were beginning to gel. The fireworks stands were begging for business. The mindset was to do "something different."

Late Friday afternoon, a Z3 flies by the homestead at high speed like a dive-bombing crop duster. They have missed the turn to the frontage road. Hep goes to the end of the driveway to direct them towards the right destination.

The top down Beamer returned at full speed slide breaking down the block, and rumbled down the pothole-gravel frontage road. Hep is standing on the street waving them toward the driveway.

In a scene like North by Northwest, the car barrels down on Hep, and he hops out of the way as Prz hard steered the vehicle into the driveway.

He parks in front of the garage. Hash ducks, tumbles and rolls out of the passenger door. Rocky remarks that the Gemini capsule was bigger for those astronauts. A laughing Hash gets up off the ground, baked by the sun and with stories to tell.

A green UFO alien head was attached to the top of the radio antenna.

They had driven through part of Yellowstone to view the majesty of nature. Prz was into the Alpine racing turns at high speed, while Hash hung on to the outside of the car like the Death Demon rollercoaster ride.

At one point, they stopped to view when a cataract, one-eyed American bison approached the car in a rut. It came within three feet of the vehicle. Prz was clamoring to Hash "We got to go NOW!!!" as the beast approached closer.

It would have been an interesting medical insurance claim. Causation of injury: raped by a one-eyed bison in national park visitor vista.

Or the car would have been humped like a jackrabbit in heat by the lonely beast. Either way, the picture would have priceless.

TRAVEL MOMENTS



Left, “Dad does BMW stand for “Busty Montana Women?”; Right, Ski’s card gets eaten at pump.



DEMOCRATS COULD GET BUSHWACKED BY ‘43

Hepner was wandering the house like a hungry bear early Friday morning. It must be the farmer’s bioclock. He was listening to a streaming radio broadcast from Rocky’s computer room.

“O’Connor resigned this morning,” he said. A Supreme Court justice retirement on the eve of the holiday weekend put the media into a mother-cursing tizzy.

So this immediately led to the discussion of Bush 43’s options. We were aware that the Democrats main strategy is to stonewall, road block and blame W. for everything. The alleged “filibuster” compromise to get Bush’s two conservative female appointments to the federal appellate bench was no “compromise.” It was a meaningless scripted bunch of hot air.

Bush 43 is fairly stubborn when he makes his mind up. As a lame duck president, he can try to push an unpopular nominee through the Hill, but he has little political capital left. So, the best move would be to torpedo the Democrats before the nomination ever arrives at the Senate chambers.

Ski proposed that Bush 43 should nominate Bush 41 to the court. Hepner, the historian, did a double-take smile. He liked the idea. “It would be just like Taft,” he summarized. “Taft was a one-term president who really accomplished

little as president, but was a good Supreme Court justice.”

How could the Democrats challenge such a choice? Bush was a career bureaucrat who passed the nomination process during the Dems majority rules. Bush, as a former president, would have to be given the utmost respect against personal attacks. Even Bill Clinton likes him.

The media would have a frenzy over such a choice. It would say he was unqualified to be a jurist. Well, the constitution does not require a justice to be a lawyer, or a judge. The media would say it was nepotism to the highest order. Well, the constitution does not require a justice to be a non-presidential family member. Hep thought that if Bush 41 was 10 years younger, the move would make sense.

Ski’s next option would be the collapse of the Senate’s Berlin Wall strategy. Bush 43 should nominate one of the two justices that the Senate just approved to the high court. The Dems could not say either woman was unqualified because they just passed on her only weeks ago!! There would be no need for another confirmation hearing; she had already went through one. Straight to a floor vote and a Bush victory -- adding a conservative female justice to replace a moderate Republican on the Supreme Court.

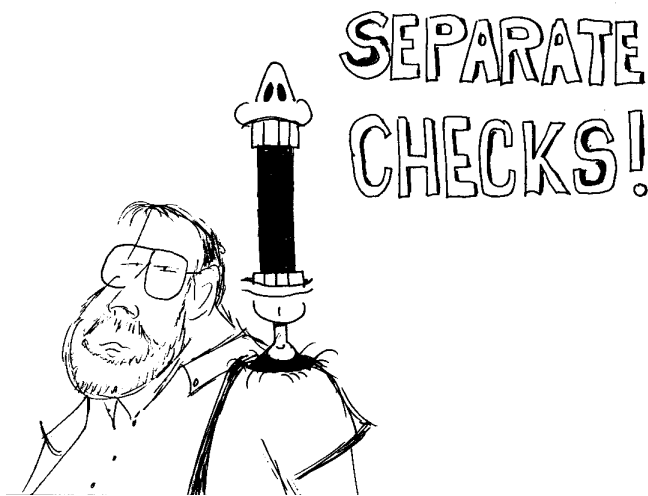
THE NIGHT THEY TOOK OLD CHICAGO DOWN

Friday in Bozeman. After a morning of watching the cable news broadcasters foam at the mouth over the O'Connor resignation, we decided that the Prz-Hash express would be arriving in the early to late afternoon. So we had time to leave the homestead and wander around town.

The skies were getting dark clouds. Which is normal when Hepner, the Rain Man from 1994, is within the borders of Montana. It has been so wet in Montana, that the fire danger signs are at the lowest level. In contrast, Illinois has baked under 90 plus degree weather for three weeks without any real rain. The grass is dried straw.

A few sprinkles hit the large windshield of the Armada as we tooled into town. It was lunch time; most people would not be working a full day on the Friday before the Fourth. Bozeman still has a college town base, which is now being bulldozed and concreted over with eastern suburbia (strip malls, franchise restaurants, and big box stores). We knew there would be a wait.

The Illinoisans came approximately 900 miles for lunch at an Illinois (DuPage County) restaurant, Famous Dave's BBQ. After a short wait, we hit the booth. Before the menus were released from the server's hand, Hepner said "Separate checks!" It was like the substitution for the Jeopardy buzzer sound -- "separate checks!!!" We just shrug our shoulders and go along. The portions were huge, and the food was good.



The post-lunch activity was a trip to the bookstore. The routine was typical; divide and conquer the shelves. Each person split to their own area of expertise or interests: Hep to history; Rocky to tech; Ski to current events. Being educated professionals with too much time on their hands, they can spend hours at a bookstore until the security cameras run out of tape.

Hepner's M.O. is simple. He finds a book that looks interesting, he takes it off the shelf and proceeds to read the entire publication in the comfort of a sofa chair. He sits down, reads it, then puts it back. He says that if he really likes the book, he buys it with an educational discount at school.

It was mid-afternoon before we could pry Hep from his reading seat. Even flashing him titles like "Do You Fear Freemasons?" failed to get him moving toward the door. Once outside, his rain-storm appeal had a large dark storm cloud hovering over the vehicle. He asked about seeing a movie --- and the cinema had all bad remakes and kids fare. Rocky drove to the other theatres in town, and the marquis revealed the same bad selections.

So it was off the homestead to drink and wait for the last attendees to arrive. (See story, page 4).

Hash sat on the back porch, sun baked and wind burned at high speed from the cross-country drive. Prz had taken the long way, down Chief Joseph trail, to see part of the national park. he said it is worth the extra traffic and slower speeds.

Rocky made the selection for the evening meal --- Old Chicago. (Again, another reference to the home state and the suburbanization of Montana.) It would be at least a 20 minute wait, so we took 5 empty stools at the bar and began to partake in the World Beer Collection (probably thirty beers on tap).

Our waitress was a young, petite, recent high school graduate with an engagement ring on her finger. Apparently, you get a job and get married as part of the diploma ritual.

FIRE IN THE HOLE!

On the way back to the homestead on Friday night, Rocky pulls off the highway to the Bobcat Fireworks stand. We immediately think that it is run by the unemployed comic with the same name.

The crew behind the trailer counter were eager to make a pyromaniac's evening complete. "What interests you 'all?" he said. Then he started making suggestions: the missile variety; the "All Hell Breaks Loose" package, or the "End of World" special or a raffle prize package worth \$250 which apparently would compete with the professional municipal shows. For a ten spot, we purchased enough fireworks artillery shells and a battery pack to have some good, clean, legal fun.

Rocky had promised 360 degrees of fireworks for his guests. Apparently, we would have to light some of them off, too.

Unpacking the boxes led Rocky to remark

on how small the fuses were to each shell. No matter, he would point the rockets away from the house and to the unmowed back acre.

Hash, the resident chemist and foreign objects and debris consultant, helped light off the mortar fireworks. After each propel into the sky (at less than the 200 feet the salesman touted), Hash would smell the tube like sniffing a fine wine.

In night vision mode, Ski was making an terrorist training movie through the laughter and curses of the fireworks operators. Then the battery pack was set off; it looked like an ammo box of shells. There were 100 rounds. The fuse was lit and the high pitch anti-aircraft fire pierced the sky. Ski remarked on camera, "This is Bernie Shaw, live from Baghdad."

The night's show was to conclude with the launch of a cardboard rocket that had a booster and then a payload shell. Rocky had been hyped by the NASA channel's coverage of the space agency's comet collision. (Ski surmised that NASA orbiter hits the comets, changes it direction, sending the huge rock to crash on earth.) Well, Rocky had his NASA moment. The small fuse was lit, and instead of moving toward the stars, the fireworks load exploded near the ground. Upon further examination, it appeared that the booster rocket never fired.

The post-mission agenda was to continue drinking the cold beers in the cool night air; smoke fine cigars, and partake in 3/4 of a bottle of Glenlivet French Oak Reserve.

When the breeze picked up, and the temperatures dipped into the high 40s, the boys decided to go into the living room to finish off the drinks. As Hash finds the lazy boy, he passes out into a coma stone face. So Rocky immediately takes a digital picture of him looking like a cadaver.

The picture is printed on Saturday morning as Hash's birthday card. Each person puts on their own sentiments on the card like "Kudos on your role in CSI: MONTANA."

OLD CHICAGO, PART II...

Before she can finish her greeting about how is everyone doing tonight, Hep blurts out "splits checks" except add Rocky's on as because Rocky is his "date." She froze in mid pencil to paper mode. It did not help that Rock said "hey, I'm not that easy."

The poor young woman barely got the appetizer order down when she fled to the kitchen to call her minister for immediate psychological counseling.

The wait staff gave our table a wide berth that evening because we were pretty raw with laughter and jokes. When the final checks came, Jerry was sure that the waitress made a mistake on his last beer charge. So, she lost her tip as a result, Ski opined. But she quickly returned and forcibly removed the ticket from Jerry's hand to correct the beer tab. If the acoustics were that good, then we were in real trouble. As we were leaving the place, the rest of the restaurant was empty, just like the scenes from *The Day After*. They roll up the street life just after 10 p.m.

FRANK'S ARMY RECRUITS

Saturday's plan was for a Rocky road trip. He had a friend who lived outside of Whitehall. So it was an interstate buzz with the SUV filled to capacity.

Driving through town with Rocky at the wheel is an experience that is easy to get used to after his two days of cursing at other drivers. Rocky's Driving School, an animated, curse filled South Park like movie, coming to a theatre (or courtroom) near you.

We were supposed to be at Frank's place by noon, but we were half way there and a half hour late when Rock's cellphone buzzed. Before he picked it up, he knew who it was. The deal was still on.

The turnoff at Whitehall was a typical scrub sage landscape. Rocky pulls into the KFC to bring lunch. A large bucket, four sides, and biscuits. The manager says he only has one biscuit left. Rocky said add a dozen to that order; and the manager said it could take ten minutes or so. "We have no choice," the driver said.

Prz, Hep and Ski went down the road to the Exxon station for drinks and other supplies. Rock wanted a 2 liter Pepsi, but they only sold 1 liter bottles. This Exxon station is attached to another one of those Little Lil's casinos, a video gaming arcade, that sprouts like mushrooms across Montana. The station pumps are also across the street from the main cashier, who was constantly on the intercom looking for trucker credit information to activate the pumps. As the crew returns to the SUV, the rain drops the size of quarters begin to pelt them. The Rain Man's streak was still in tact.

It was another twenty minutes on a two lane ribbon road going up and down the hillside until a small dirt road creeped up on the left side. The Nissan rolled along from side to side until it hit the flat area of the compound. On the hillside deck, a bald man with a mustache starts yelling friendly jabs at Rocky as he emerges from the vehicle.

We walk up the new wood deck stairs about



STAFF BOX

PUBLISHER: CHICAGO SKI
 ROCKY MOUNTAIN BUREAU CHIEF:
 CRAG ANTLER
 FARM BUREAU: HERR HEPNER
 FORMULA ONE VOWEL EDITOR: PRZ
 F.O.D. EXPERT: MR. HASH
 DRIVING INSTRUCTOR: RUSH ROGSTAD
 GOPHER: BILL CLINTON

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No animals were killed during the creation of this publication . . . no wait, there were a lot of animals who met their demise as a result of this vacation experience, including many tasty game animals plated to perfection. Mmmmmmmmm . . . game.

20 feet to the small, 800 sq foot cabin. We quickly fill the kitchen table with the bags of food. Frank is a disabled former vet/education teacher. He knew Rocky as a student teacher at Bozeman High.

Frank is building a self-sufficient compound on his 125 acres. The small cabin is perched above five outbuildings and a corral. He plans to get a horse, a donkey, a big-ass garden, and an underground house (bunker). He's a pro-American patriot who does not like the way things are heading.

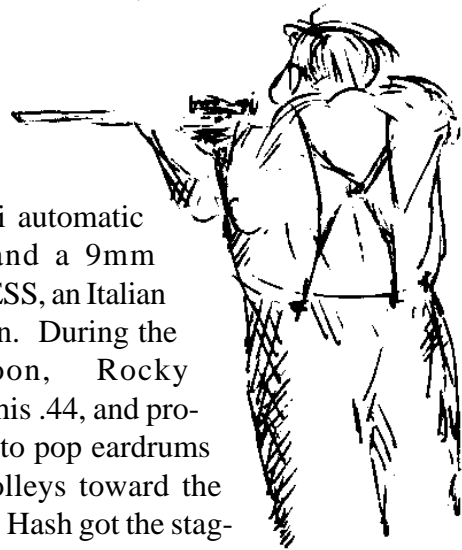
After lunch, the main event began. Later, Rocky said he had doubts that everyone would be into the event. Ski asked him who has been telling him about Libertarian principles for the last 25 years? Frank got the bed of his pick up truck loaded with steel boxes. He asked Rocky if he brought the watermelons. Rocky cursed at himself.



PREPARATION

We moved slowly toward the corner of the property fence line to Frank's firing/target range. An earthen, railroad tie structure was at the of the fence line. After a safety seminar, Frank and Rocky

began to load various weapons. Each person had the opportunity to fire off several rounds from a .22 pistol ("sounds like a cap gun; but most people in America are killed by .22s"), a bolt-action .22 rifle, a mini-



30 semi automatic rifle, and a 9mm WITNESS, an Italian handgun. During the afternoon, Rocky loaded his .44, and proceeded to pop eardrums with volleys toward the targets. Hash got the staggering feel of the .44's gun barrel fire and recoil. At the end, each tried shooting a replica black powder, single ball rifle. It was an interesting afternoon.



BIRTHDAY BOY



FRANK'S ARMY, PART II...

A cool breeze under overcast skies picked up as the afternoon wore on. Most used the Aaron Burr dueling stance with the .22 pistol; outstretched arm and patient aim toward the paper targets.

The .22 rifle rekindled childhood memories of the participants of running around with their rifles. It was an easy gun to target because the rest hand helped against the growing cross-breeze.

By the time Mr. Hash recoiled in laughter after blasting a water jug with the .44 magnum, the breeze had turned into a real, steady crosswind. The mini .30 was supposed to have more kick back, but with the butt tight against the shoulder the recoil was less than expected.

The .9mm pistol was the smoothest action of any of the guns. It was easy to group a clip, too, as Ski ground out a fist-size termite hole in the railroad ties.

You know that Wild Westerns movies with the ricochet bullet noises? Well, that sound was recreated several times as the bullets went through the ties and hit an earthbank rock.

Hepner got into trying to figure out how well he was doing. He changed the targets so he could get a better gauge of his aim. The crosswind had some affect on us amateurs, but by the day's end, most of the targets were pretty well shot to pieces.

After the testosterone gorging target session, what would the gang need to do? Eat red meat game. Hash called on his cell Buck's T-4 in Big Sky for reservations. It was a little after 5, and they could seat us at 7. Sounded good. Time to get the Spanish Inquisition back into the Armada and ride back to Yellowstone.

We were still a little jacked from this adventure. Rocky said he thought that most of us would not go for this shooting spree. He kept on shaking his head on how we got into it. Whether we will take up Frank's advice ("When you get home, I want you to buy as many guns as you can!") is another question. The wide open spaces in Chicago are alleys, which are already on pace to fill up with homicide victims at a record level. Be-

sides, one cannot go in your backyard and start skeet practice. Close quarter neighbors get edgy with loud noises. There are very few gun ranges in the suburbs.

So most of the trip was spent talking firearms, or trying to get a cell phone tower for the married with children crowd. At one point, three guys were trying to signal, steal or takeover a distant tower. They kept on cutting each other off, especially when we got closer to the park.

After a long while, Rocky had to do a NASCAR pit stop for gas. He figured we were still 70 miles away with a half hour to reservation time. Rocky's sense of time and space is put into neutral in the summer when school is not in session. After a quick pit stop, we were off toward Yellowstone. But the road kept winding, and we seemed no closer to Big Sky. By 7:30, Hash got a weak signal and called the restaurant to say we were running late. The woman on the other end said that was fine. How about 8? Fine. Hash then said we were by some lake, and she gasped that we were still "at least" 45 minutes away! But she said she'd hold a table, but the kitchen closes at 9. Rocky continued his driving school quest through the two lane, trailer and log cabin hamlets, cursing under his breath at each mile marker.

If an army travels on its stomach, we would have starved to death. But luck won, as Rocky coasted into the Best Western parking lot. There was only one parking space available. The place was packed with guests milling around outside. To cramped to curse at the three hour tour, we headed inside to see if the kitchen was still open. Luck wins again; yes.

After Hep's first words ("separate checks!"), the past diners look to see the Californication of the place: a wine list longer than the menu and increased entree prices. Prz took the mountain surf and turf; Rocky went Wild Boar and the rest had the bison tenderloin. The plates came in nouveau West Coast presentation style. But the game was cooked well and tasted great in the lingering smoke of black powder rifle.

SUNDAY BLOODY SUNDAY *FRANK'S ARMY, PART III...*

The floor creaked early Sunday morning with the zombie walks of persons who know that it's too damn early to rise but have willed their disgruntled spirits hungover from the other kind because today is travel day.

Prz had asked for directions late last night for the nearest car wash. His Z3 was encrusted with the insect world so he decided to have "clean car, clean ride" back to Minnesota.

He was gone when a quorum of dead heads awoke and wandered into the living room. It was show time. Ski's raw footage for El Terrorist television was ready for viewing. (Most wanted to see the target range footage). As the video rolled, there were the normal cut-downs and laughter as the memory receptors fired in short term brain cells.

Jerry returned with donuts and a story that the car wash recommended was closed. He found another self-serve power wash, but it sucked down 75 cents for "20 seconds of service." Most shrugged their shoulders, took a donut, and continued to watch the UFO video fade into Gunfight at the OK Corral.

Rocky thought of going to Karl Marx Pizza near the MSU campus for lunch. That was the name of the place when he first arrived in town (the name has since changed). So Prz followed the Armada into town. But in the parking lot, we find the place CLOSED. The lunch plans in limbo, Rocky turns the corner and suddenly he sees Hep in his side vision and pulls a quick right to turn around the block back to campus, to the Pickle Barrel.

Last visit, Hepner defied Rocky's suggestion to only get the "half" sandwich. Hep got the full tuna, which looked like a U-Boat. He ate that massive sandwich, then almost died climbing a mountain side to visit the Big M. So Rocky tells the newbies not to order the full sandwich. The half sandwiches still are HUGE by normal comparisons. We dine outside (since there is no seating inside the little shack deli). We can only down quarters; some wrap for the drive home; Rocky

At the end, the waitress smittingly got Hash a birthday candle. We forgot to tell her that the score was Life 48 Hash 0.

When the separate checks arrived, the waitressed dropped Hash's bifold on top of Hepner's. It was like she dropped a live rattlesnake in his lap; he nearly jumped out of his seat. She assumed that we would take care of the birthday boy. (In retrospect, that probably would have been the right thing to do but why start now?) The thought of a conspiracy to pay his bill was comical.

It was past midnight when we arrived back at the Rancho Rogstad. The night was the coldest so far, but we braved the elements to drink on the back porch, watch the neighbors attempt to blow off fingertips with their light shows, blew off another few ourselves, drank some more brew, Jerry and Rock smoking Cubans from Panama, and watching two shooting stars and a corkscrew satellite transverse the clear Big Skies.

The early morning/late night fare ended with the gang trying to horde power outlets to recharge their cameras, cellphones or computers.

decides to get messy with some ice cream.

This is where the road warriors part company. Jerry heads to the Conoco for gas. Hep and Ski stay with Rock a while, then decide to head back to the ranch. As we turn the block, the Z3 is still at the station. Rocky yells at them. No response. Hash is wearing his Me Kong Delta floppy hat. Pissed, Rocky pulls into the station and blocks the front of the Z3. He waits for recognition. And waits. Hash looks up, does a double take and a spasm seizure hand raise. He comes over to chat some more as Jerry returns from inside cashier. They are good to go.

Rocky heads back toward the mall to see if souvenirs are in order for the family members back in Illinois. Then it is a late dinner of charred brats and beer, and a 360 degree fireworks display around the neighborhood.

DAWN PATROL

Rocky had been trying to veto Hepner’s return flight plans. Hepner had the first flight out which meant rising at 4:30 a.m. in order to get to the airport with an hour cushion for security clearance.

So Hep wanted to get to bed by midnight; he rolled into the living room sofa, and proceeded to stay up reading until past 2 a.m.

When the alarm rang, he was like a caged animal. He was anxious to get to the airport. It was like he was heading to a parole hearing. He did not understand why Ski needed to go to the airport, but Rocky said it was the appropriate time to return the rented SUV.

On the way to gas the tank, Ski’s EXXON card refused to be recognized by the gas pump. The station had no cashier because it was before sun-up. The card must have gone dormant because it had no expired. A different card swipe and fueling proceeded without any further hitch.

Hep was so nervous to get checked in he had Ski stop the vehicle at the front door instead of waiting to park fifty yards ahead.

Ski parked the Armada in the return parking area at the airport (the same spot where we parked to avoid the parking fees when we picked up Hep). He totalled the miles: 430!

Hep got his bag checked quickly and paced the lobby for a few minutes before going upstairs to the Gate. Afterward, Rocky and Ski lounged around the place when a woman approached Ski and asked if he was “Brian.” Apparently she was picking up a person who she did not know from the first Delta flight. He pointed to the Delta counter at a man with numerous baggage asking a question to the counter clerk. She headed over to the counter to greet him.

The rest of the morning was Rocky beginning to log in the video and digital stills into his computer. He took the CSI:Montana picture of Hash and put it up on the WELH blog with the dream balloon “MMMMM, Real Bobcat Sandwich.” (The Bobcat was one of those Pickle Barrel giants ordered the day before.)

There will be at least two video versions of the week’s events. Rocky’s and Ski’s.

Ski arrived at the airport and went through security well before his plane was to depart at 1:55 p.m. The Gate was filled with passengers by 1:20 p.m so he went across the Gate to the souvenir shop to browse and kill time. At 1:45, he started toward Gate 1 to find the concourse totally empty!!

Preview of Poster for the Reunion; The Montana Park group graphic.

