

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 8, 2010

A Week in June, 1943: I started in an Army program called "pre-meteorology" at Brown University in Providence in mid-March 1943. Halfway through this six-month program, they gave us a recess from studies to learn how the Army did things. We marched all over the place including a 12-mile bivouac almost to Woonsocket and back on a very hot day, experienced several kinds of poison gas in a tent where we took off our gas masks just before exiting the tent to see what it was like, and had a special drill on Brown's campus for the Governor of Rhode Island.

Then came three days that were fun for me. The time was about June 20, the weather perfect, and we were taken by bus to Sachuest Point each day for practice at the Navy's Rifle Range at that location along the ocean east of Newport. Many in our class dreaded the experience of learning to shoot a gun and its accompanying recoil, but I relished it, as I had been trapshooting for many years with my father and had shot a 22-caliber rifle before that. The trip itself from and to Providence each day was beautiful along the east side of Narragansett Bay and over the Mount Hope Bridge.

At the rifle range, we were divided, more or less, into three groups, and we alternated activities. One group lay prone with a 30-30 rifle, shooting at a still target while being instructed by naval officers and enlisted men. A second group was behind and below the large targets, pulling them down, marking the holes, and recording the scores before returning the targets to be shot at again. Finally, a third group was free to relax, which usually meant swimming in the surf nearby. The water off Rhode Island is *cold* in June, but young men not yet 20 years old didn't seem to mind. I enjoyed all three occupations.

I found another connection at Sachuest Point. Joe Hiestand, perhaps the greatest trapshooter of those years and an annual visitor to Yorklyn, had told me of his association with George "Twinkle-Toes" Selkirk when they were together in Florida the year before. Hiestand, then a lieutenant in the air corps, was a shooting instructor, as was Selkirk, a navy ensign or lieutenant, at an installation nearby. Selkirk had been an outfielder for the New York Yankees in the years leading up to the war, and he was the head instructor at Sachuest Point. I told him I knew Joe Hiestand, and this lowly buck private had it made! At the end of the intensive week, we were granted a three-day pass, and I enjoyed my mother's cooking and my father's mechanical projects at Auburn Heights.

I never saw George Selkirk again, and he did not play in the major leagues after World War II. However, Bill Schwoebel's father had a book *The Philadelphia Inquirer Remembers* that showed the box score of Lou Gehrig's last game in 1939. Sure enough, Selkirk was playing left field! Joe Hiestand, whom I saw last in 1984, died in 2005 at the age of 99.