

Wally Carpenter, PJ, 1955

Recalled on 9 August 1993 - The funny story of how Wally Carpenter was promoted to Staff Sergeant in 1954 at Selfridge Field, when we were with the 49th Air Rescue Squadron. A little background info about Wally: Before joining the AF and Pararescue, he was a US Marine with combat time in WWII and Army Airborne time in Korea. Wally was very bright, world-wise, a dedicated poacher and over-sexed.



Anyhow, very late one night, Wally came into my barrack cubicle (I roomed with Bill Vargas, but he wasn't "home") and awakened me, needing me to drive with him to Pontiac where he 'had something lined up'. In case he got too drunk, he needed me to drive him back (I was single at the time). Well, reluctantly I went with him - at least it began that way. He had his Chevy panel truck parked on the paved, dead-end strip by the barracks. Instead of backing out to the road, he started forward. I was shocked. "Dammit, Wally, don't drive over the lawn, you will tear it up!" It had rained during the day. Immediately to my mind came LtCol Joe Walker (a real 'nut'), our CO, who was extremely fond of the excellent lawn conditions around the wooden barracks of the squadron. If one was caught so much as throwing a cigarette butt onto the lawn, it would mean at least an Article 15, but tearing up the lawn could ensue a firing squad! "Naw, no sweat." The light truck got about six feet onto the lawn when it got stuck. The more he rocked the truck to get free, the more it buried itself. Shit!

I went into the barracks and awakened a bunch of comrades. We must have had twenty men or more trying hard as hell to get it back onto pavement, but couldn't budge it; the lawn looked like a shit-filled barnyard stomped by cattle. It was after

midnight when I finally told Wally that I will go to the motor pool and check out the 'duce'; it had a winch. Those who helped were told by Wally to keep the story straight: that a civilian white convertible had made a wrong turn and was helped free by the troops.

Showing up in civilian clothes and with muddy foot gear, I told the motor pool dispatcher that we had to unload a plane which had just arrived. He looked at me funny, but gave me a trip ticket. Off I drove with the duce. Using the winch, the truck was freed. I followed Wally with the duce to a place on the other side of the base, where we washed off all traces of mud. I then turned in the 'duce'. No Pontiac trip.

Next morning, a call came to the PJ section; I was to report to the OPS officer, Major Fritz, great chopper pilot (H-19) and enlisted-respected hunk. He came right to the point, wanting to know what all this shit was about unloading an airplane after midnight. Well, Fritz was the kind of straight man you don't want to lie to, so I told the truth. No one else was present. He showed a big grin when he heard that Walker's lawn was torn up.

After I was finished, Fritz said that he was the duty officer during the night. He had been called by the dispatcher. Hearing Fischer's name, he figured that something fishy was going on, but he covered for me! He then told me that this was the last time he would cover my ass. I told Wally at the section what had transpired. He wasn't too happy.

Now, on this particular morning, Walker and the First Shirt Stayler made their standard inspection round of barracks and lawns. Later, Stayler told us that when Walker saw the mess, he thought that Walker would have a heart attack. All hell broke loose. The APs were called and had to make tire track measures and collect evidence. Stayler had to get all troops living in the barracks to appear before the CO individually to be questioned. Evidently, all told him the story about the white convertible driven by an unknown civilian, because things became quiet for the next three weeks.

One morning a couple days later, the first shirt called the section and said that the CO wanted to see Airman Carpenter immediately. Oh, shit, Wally, someone squealed! We already had picked names of suspected brown-nosers. Wally shrugged his shoulders and headed for the head shed. When Wally returned, he grinned from ear to ear.

"Wally, why in hell are you grinning? Didn't he pull all your stripes?"

Wally shook his head and told what transpired: He sharply reported before Walker, who had him stand at attention for quiet awhile as Walker stared him. Suddenly, Walker asked, "Airman Carpenter, have you done anything wrong lately?"

Without hesitation, cool ol'Wally snapped back, "No, sir."

"Well, Airman Carpenter, I have been watching you for a long time, and believe that you always are an outstanding airman, worthy of promotion. I hereby promote you to Staff Sergeant!"

From Udo Fischer