

# Steve and Elwood's Weird Monitoring Adventure

## By Steve Douglass

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Does adventure seek me or do I seek adventure ? It seems that after fifteen years since I joined the ranks of radio hobbyists I would have had my fill of radio-related adventures. To the contrary, I think the more I get involved in the hobby the more strange stuff that seems to come my way . In any event the following adventure was one of the weirdest.



A few years ago I planned to visit Southeastern and South Central New Mexico and in particular to do some military monitoring in the Roswell and Alamagordo areas. Roswell is surrounded by military MOAs and Alamagordo is the home of Holloman AFB. Holloman is where F-117A stealth aircraft are based and rumors also abound that the TR-3A and a hypersonic "pulsar" aircraft may be fielded nearby as well. Another monitoring target in the area is the huge White Sands Missile Range, where the military tests everything from missiles to warplanes. These reasons were more than enough to get me to pack my bags and my scanners and hit the road.

My scanner buddy on this trip would be Elwood Johnston, a frequent Intercepts contributor and good friend. Elwood also happens to be my father- in -law and the trip would be a good chance to get acquainted, have some fun (without the wives) and get away from the daily grind. Elwood had just recently been bitten by the scanner bug and was also eager to go on his first monitoring safari. As we packed our monitoring equipment and prepared to hit the highway neither of us could have anticipated the events that awaited us.

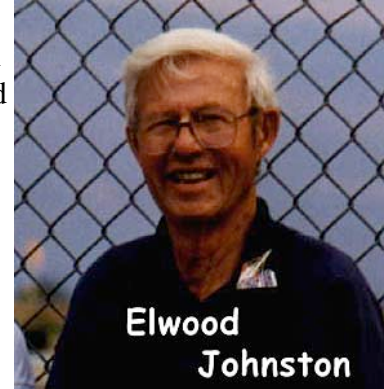
We hadn't been on the road long when we had our first encounter. We stopped to top off the gas tanks at a little station just outside of town. There were many cars waiting to fill up and we took our place in line.

Suddenly a blue mini-van raced into the parking lot and screeched to a halt, stopping barely in time to keep from hitting the pumps. A crying woman jumped out and ran up to a man who was busy pumping gas into his truck. The man hung up the hose and ran over to the van. Soon it was apparent what all the commotion was about. The man ran into the gas station clutching a baby that wasn't moving. The scanner in our car came to life as the first radio calls for help rang out. "Attention Rescue Three, respond Code 3 to the gas station, on Interstate 27 and FM-2219 on an infant not breathing. " Inside the gas station I could see the man who had only stopped to get gas, frantically giving CPR to the tiny infant laid out on the counter. Soon the gas station parking lot was filled with rescue and ambulance workers rushing to the child's aid.

Not wanting to be in the way of the rescue operations we decided to leave the station and go somewhere else to get fuel. Both Elwood and I listened intently as the ambulance reported the condition of the child.

Apparently the baby was choking on something it had swallowed and an object was stuck in her windpipe. Fortunately whatever the object was removed and the baby was breathing again by the time it reached the hospital. Leaving the flashing lights and wailing sirens behind us we headed towards Roswell.

The drive to Roswell was uneventful and the scanners remained quiet. Outside of Roswell we were greeted by a herd of prairie antelope that raced our car. I tried to find the antelope's frequencies but had no luck. Just as we were about to Roswell the scanners came alive as fire units rushed to a grass fire that had started up just north of town. I realized that we were entering town from the north and began scanning the horizon for smoke. Off to the west of the highway was a small smouldering grass fire that was nothing really to write home about, but a steady 30 mph wind was trying its best to get the fire going.



As we entered Roswell we were passed by fire trucks heading for the fire. By the time they arrived the small grass fire had grown in to a raging prairie fire and was out of control. Smoke blowing across the highway we had just been traveling reduced visibility to zero and a major pileup occurred resulting in many serious injuries and the main highway into town being closed for several hours. Elwood and I had just missed being involved in the mess and were thankful we missed it.

The military monitoring from Roswell was first rate. From the BEAK MOAs could be heard the radio chatter of jet-jockeys bouncing each other in mock combat. Like something out of Top Gun, pilots could be heard grunting into their microphones as they pulled heavy G's struggling to get their F-15s and T-38s behind a bandit that had just "electronically" shot at them.

These exercises would start just after sun up and last to just before sunset. Most of the aircraft were from Holloman, AFB with some of them coming from Reese, Cannon and Kirtland AFB. Some of the pilots had thick foreign accents giving them away as the German and Taiwanese pilots who were also being trained by the USAF at Holloman.

At sunset, the radio's would go quiet as the fighter pilots headed to their bases and beer call after a long day of dog fighting. As soon as it was dark the radio action would begin again as the night movers took to the skies. To the South in the Talon MOA, F-117s from Holloman would make mock bombing runs on the oil refineries in Artesia. Sometimes in groups of two or threes and sometimes alone they would hit the area's oil complexes possibly pretending they were flying into Baghdad or some other Middle Eastern petroleum state.

From the North, F-111s from Cannon, AFB and B-1Bs from Dyess AFB could be heard bombing unmercifully pretend enemies dug into the Melrose Bombing Range. All the bombing sorties would

take place well after dark and into the wee hours of the morning. Many of the aircraft could also be heard refueling with KC-135 tankers from Altus AFB, Oklahoma on AR-602, 623 and 644.

After spending two days in Roswell it was time to pack up our gear and head to Alamagordo, Holloman, AFB and the White Sands Missile Range .

Almagordo is definitely a military town. In every park and rest stop are pieces of defunct military hardware (such as missiles and airplanes) now serving as playground equipment for the local yard apes. What once was a terrible symbol of the Cold War now has scrawled on its metal fins "Seniors 93" and is now a piece of playground equipment.

It is also apparent that the F-117A stealth attack aircraft is based in Alamagordo. What once was one of the Pentagon's best kept secrets is now displayed openly on billboards selling real estate, advertising bowling alleys and mobile home parks. This once camera-shy stealth aircraft now flies in the open and in broad daylight over a town so used to the F-117's appearance that the locals don't even bother to look up when one passes over. That certainly wasn't the case for us, as we were delighted when an F-117 buzzed our motel room

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We set up our "monitoring post" in a room situated on the second floor. Our room faced West and gave us a good view of Holloman AFB which was about five miles away. The rest of the evening Elwood and I spent listening to the fascinating communications coming from Holloman and the White Sands Missile Range.

At about 2:00 AM, what seemed like the loudest screeching noise I have ever heard woke us from a deep sleep. Immediately awake I looked outside to see what was the source of the terrific racket. In the parking lot a pickup truck had skidded to a stop and barely missed Elwood's car. More screeching filled the air as police cars slammed on their brakes and instantly surrounded the truck. A woman crying and screaming, jerked open the driver's side door and ran over to the police who had their guns drawn and pointed at the driver of the truck. Reluctantly the driver of the truck came out with his hands up and a policeman threw him on the ground and handcuffed him. More police cars poured into the parking lot and soon the whole motel was awake and peering out their windows to see what all the commotion was about.

In all the excitement, I had almost forgotten that I had a room full of scanners. I turned on the PR0-37, I had brought and searched for the frequencies the police were using. I was instantly rewarded when the scanner came alive with police calls.

Apparently what caused all the commotion and disrupted our sleep was the abduction of the woman by the man driving the truck. He had forced the woman by knife-point into his car. The woman signaled her distress to a passing motorist who called the police on a cellular phone and followed the truck in his own vehicle. When the police caught up with the abductor he led them in a merry chase that ended below our motel window. When the arresting officers ran a "make" on the guy it turned out he had already been arrested before (three times) for rape and attempted rape. I didn't mind our front row seat to the live police drama, I just wished they would have scheduled it for prime time.

The next morning, Elwood and I made our way down towards the base. Both of us were a bit bleary eyed after staying up to watch the police drama unfolding in the parking lot. I hoped to catch some F-117s on film (and video) along with some juicy military monitoring as well. We picked a spot on the highway that ran by the base and for the first couple of hours watched T-38 jet trainers do touch and goes. Around noon we saw our first F-117s take off from Holloman but they were too far away to photograph. In the span of an hour three other Nighthawks took off and disappeared into the sky and to attack some targets on the White Sands Missile Range.

At one point two triangular- shaped aircraft passed overhead at a very high altitude . I shot some video of them as they flew over (very fast) but they were too high to make out what they were. I was hoping they were super-secret TR-3As but at the altitude they were flying at I couldn't say for sure.

About an hour later the F-117s began returning to Holloman. I could hear them talking to Holloman Approach from about twenty miles out. Their flight path would take them right over our position and we would get an excellent view of them.

The first F-117 came in low and slow. I was struck by how strange the aircraft looked. Black, angular and menacing looking. I imagined how the first civilians to see them flying into Tonopah must of felt. Although I have seen F-117s on many occasions, I am still awestruck whenever I encounter them.



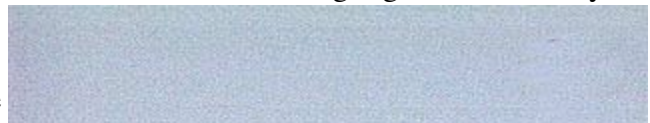
I snapped away as the returning stealths passed overhead. Another TWO pair of F-117s came in flying line abreast. On the scanner I could hear the instructor in one F-117 relaying instructions to the student in the other. The student landed and the instructor's F-117 peeled off, came back around and landed also.

A few minutes later another F-117 with a T-38 flying on it wing, appeared. It flew south of our position and circled while some T-38s and an F-4 landed. Then both the T-38 and the F-117 turned towards us. What a great shot, I thought and positioned myself so they would pass overhead. As the pair flew over I heard some sirens at the base go off and some strange warbling tones over the scanner.

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On almost all of Holloman's frequencies came the same message, "Attention all stations we have an aircraft emergency .. An incoming F-117 has live ordinance hung up in its bomb bay .. The Bomb Disposal Unit is needed on the dearming pad immediately!" Needless to say I was a bit surprised to find out that the aircraft that had just flown over my head had a live bomb dangling in its bomb bay.

To make a long story short, the aircraft landed safely and we headed back to the motel room where



things were probably a little less exciting. Or so I thought.

As we headed up to our room I noticed a large crowd of men loitering behind the motel . All were Hispanic, shabbily dressed, shuffling nervously as if waiting for someone. My scanner had the bad taste to start blaring out police calls. The men all looked at me with a panicked expression on their faces. Soon they were all piling into the backs of



pickup trucks and burning rubber to get out of the parking lot. In about thirty seconds what was once a lot filled with 30 or so men was completely empty. My scanner had obviously sent them heading for the hills. That was when I realized what was going on. The men were illegal aliens who had probably just come in from Mexico (the border was only 80 miles away) and were most likely waiting for someone to pick them up, or bring them work. My scanner had frightened them and thinking I was either a cop or a Border Patrol agent, the scattered. No wonder they beat it so fast.

Elwood and I had a good laugh and we settled in for the night. It was hot in Alamogordo and the air conditioning was not functioning so we opened the window. Looking out of the window to admire the New Mexico sunset, I spotted two men sitting in a truck that was facing the highway. Occasionally one of the men would raise a microphone to his mouth and speak into it. I noticed that the truck had what looked like antennas cut to the VHF high band.

A quick search of the VHF police frequencies proved that my suspicions were correct. The two men were undercover cops and were watching the car-lot across the street. They were communicating with two other detectives about two blocks away. Suddenly there was movement across the street and the truck took off. Apparently the undercover sting had netted what they were after. Soon the detectives were hauling away two thieves who were stealing stereos out of the cars in the lot. I said to Elwood, "who needs television when we have live entertainment all around us!" We both hit the sack wondering what would happen next.

We didn't have to wait long. The hour of 2:00 AM seems to be the popular time for waking up sleeping motel guests, for about that time the sounds of sirens interrupted everyone's slumber. Again I looked out our window to see police car after police car, with lights flashing and sirens blaring, racing down the highway . I counted twelve police cars, two ambulances and three fire trucks passing by in less than a minute. By this time I knew enough to turn on the scanner once again to see what the story was.

Again the scanner played out the drama. Apparently a drunk and angry truck driver was barreling down the highway towards Alamogordo in excess of 100 miles per hour. The New Mexico Highway Patrol had started chasing him when reports of a deranged psycho-trucker, running people of the road started pouring in. The chase began just outside of Las Cruces (almost 50 miles away) and was heading into Alamogordo. All attempts to stop the mad trucker had failed. Whenever a police car got close enough to the truck they were run off the road. Something had to be done before the truck reached town.

A Border Patrol officer announced on the frequency and said that they were going to lay a belt of spikes across the highway and that would blow out the tires on the truck. They set up the spikes just across from the local Walmart which was about a half a mile from our motel. Leaping out of bed I grabbed my binoculars and went out on the balcony for a better view. The sound of sirens getting louder told me that the chase was coming our way.

A parade of police cars came screaming by the motel with their PA systems blaring a warning for everyone who might be in the truckers path to get out of the way. Looking down the highway, I could see the chase was getting closer. The scanner went strangely quiet as the mad trucker hit the spikes. I could hear the tires explode even though I was quite a distance away.

Straining to see what was going on, I expected a horrendous wreck but the scanner revealed otherwise. "I can't believe it, he's not stopping!" An incredulous officer exclaimed into his two-way radio.

Suddenly I saw the reason for all the disbelief that was expressed in the officers voice. The truck flew by the motel at over eighty miles an hour on bare metal rims! Sparks flew from the truck as metal met pavement in angry protest and what little was left of the tires were flying apart in shreds, littering the road with debris. Dodging the debris and in hot pursuit was everyone but the Canadian Mounties!

The police pursuit of the trucker (turned terminator) roared right through Alamogordo. Fortunately the streets were bare at this hour of the morning so the trucker didn't have many targets. In his drunken fury he would have mowed down anyone who stood in his way.

The chase continued for another ten miles and the trucker finally lost control at a curve and flipped his truck just outside of the town of Tularosa. Incredibly the trucker survived with nary a scratch but his truck didn't. A propane tank that the trucker was hauling burst and caught fire and destroyed what was left of the rig. Fortunately there wasn't much propane in the tank and the gas went up in a small ball of fire that didn't endanger anyone including the mad trucker. The trucker was taken in to custody and probably booked on enough charges to keep him out of a truck for a good long while. In the meanwhile I went back to bed, still not believing all I had seen on this trip and hoped that it was all over. As usual, I was wrong.

The next morning it was time to pack everything up and head back home. Although it had been a fun and exciting trip, I would be glad to get back to the relative saneness of home.

Elwood and I discussed all the weirdness that had happened over breakfast at the local McDonalds and had a good laugh about it all. On the way back to the motel to check out we noted the deep ruts in the highway that were evidence of last night's goings on.

When we got back to the motel and started packing it all up I noticed something was wrong. My prized PR0-2004 was missing ! We both searched the room and were soon faced with the fact that we had been burglarized. I had packed the PR0-2004 in a special suitcase that I could take anywhere, sort of a portable monitoring post equipped with built in power supply, antennas, recorder, the works. The

whole outfit was very compact and portable, unfortunately too portable. Someone had obviously been in the room and snatched it.

After a quick search we discovered that the only thing that had been taken was the scanner and the case. This perplexed us because we had locked the motel room and hidden the case under the bed.

Apparently that is the first place thieves look for valuables since they ignored a 35 mm camera that was sitting in the bathroom.

We called the local police and reported the loss. Both the police and I surmised that it may have been someone who worked at the motel and they promised they would look into it. Funny though, he wasn't the least bit interested why I carried a scanner in a specially outfitted suitcase.

We were about to hit the road and head home when the weirdest thing happened. We had just packed up the car and were checking the room for anything we forgot when a man walked passed our room or should I say staggered past, dragging a large trunk about the size of a coffin. I use the word coffin, for that is what it reminded us of. The man struggled to drag the heavy box down the stairs and load it into the back of his pickup truck. Elwood and I both wondered why the man had requested a room on the second floor if he had such a heavy load to keep with him in the motel room.

After loading his strange load into his truck, the man returned to his room and began hauling another similar sized box down to the truck. This one was a rubberized container that sloshed with something wet inside as he dragged it down the stairs. This was followed by three large green garbage bags full of something wet and sloshy as well. Elwood and I looked at each other disbelievingly and decided it was time to go before we found out what was in the containers.

We ended our trip with the long ride back home, both of us discussing the adventure. Neither of us could figure out what was in those boxes and bags, but we did agree that we really didn't want to.

Months later the Police in Almagordo recovered my PR0-2004 in a raid on a pawn shop. It was returned to the author (minus the case).

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[return to main menu](#)

[back to top](#)

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