

# Echoes from the Past:

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the island, and they sent Sumrow and some other mechanics out on a C-47 with a replacement engine. As they neared Johnson Island the pilot said, "There it is!" When they looked out, all they could see was a little dot in the ocean. The island was so small the runway had

been extended out onto a reef. As they descended to the runway, it looked like they were landing in the ocean. They exchanged engines and returned to Hawaii.

From Hawaii Sumrow was sent to Okinawa on a troop ship in a convoy. Because the war was still going on they had two

destroyers escorting them. They were zigzagging their course because of enemy submarines when a Typhoon blew in.

When the Typhoon hit, the ocean swells were so large the nose of the ship would rise to almost vertical and fall at such a rate the destroyers, which were on either side, would disappear from sight. Against orders Elmer and another guy went to the stem of the ship. He said, "When the nose of the ship went up you could look straight up and see nothing but water."

After the storm passed the ocean was still really rough and the troop ship had to anchor far out to sea from Okinawa. They sent landing crafts out to pick up the troops. When the craft reached the ship, the rough seas caused it to rise and fall 10 to 15 feet at a time. The troops had their full gear with rifles and duffle bags and their mess kits hanging on the side of the duffle bag. They threw a rope ladder over the side of the ship and told the men to jump off the ladder into the craft when it was at the top of a swell. Sumrow said some of the men couldn't do it. With mess kits clanging and the ocean rising and falling, some fell into the landing craft and were banged up but none seriously injured. Elmer made his jump successfully and was okay. He was thankful he never got seasick like a lot of the troops did.

Okinawa, a Japanese Island and was not fully secured at the time of their arrival. The capitol city, Naha, a large city, lie in ruins from bombings. Sumrow recalled there was just a piece of one building left standing in the whole city. They set up camp in a potato field.

A buddy of Elmer's had a brother who was somewhere on the island, so they got a jeep and went looking for him. They found him and brought him back to their camp, so he could get a bath and clean up, then took him back to his camp.

Sumrow was in the Air Force for three and a half years from September 1942 to 1946. He made the rank of Tech Sergeant. When the war ended they returned to San Francisco and then Elmer came home to O'Donnell where his folks had moved.

Elmer Sumrow was born in Celleste, northeast of Dallas in 1922. His parents were Elmer and Hope Sumrow.

He went to school at Celleste where he played basketball and football, but at 130 pounds he said, "I was just an average player."

After graduating from high school he went to Amarillo and stayed with his sister. He got a job with Borden Milk Company, but didn't make much money.

After his discharge, his dad asked him what his plans were and he said he would get a job and settle down. His dad said, "Would you want to help me on the farm for a few days?"

He started farming with his dad and before long he met a young lady named, Billye Gibbs, who was to be his bride.

Billye was working for the bank in O'Donnell where they met. She also played the organ for the Methodist Church. Years later

she would play the organ for the Presbyterian Church in Lamesa for several years.

After they started dating Billye went off to college at North Texas State in Denton, but she quit college to get married in 1948 and they were married for 57 years. They had two children, Rex and Bevalynn.

Sadly, Rex is deceased. He and his wife, Karen, had three children, Justin, April and Heath, who all married people from Seminole. Two of them still live in Seminole.

Justin and April live here and both work for Valley Irrigation and Pump Service Inc., (VIP). Justin is married to Rebecca (Webb). April's husband is Zane Neal. Heath, lives in Levelland, and he is married to Deann (Apple).

Bevalynn Sumrow lives in Lubbock and teaches at Cooper High School in Woodrow.

Elmer now has five grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. In 1951 the Sumrows moved to Puntkin Center at the beginning of the severe drought of the 1950's. He was farming cotton.

The sand blew every day and it was impossible to raise a crop. Elmer had made around two bales to the acre, but in 1953 he didn't even plant. He came in one evening and said, "I'm going to town and get a job. Since he had worked at the milk company in Amarillo, he went to Mr. Powell's Milk Plant and asked if they needed a hand. They needed

a delivery truck driver so he went to work on Monday morning. His route went to Lamesa, O'Donnell, Tahoka, Brownfield, Seagraves and Seminole. He said, "Sometimes you couldn't even see Seagraves for the blowing sand."

He had a young Mexican farm hand, but had to tell him he couldn't use him anymore. The boy said, "I'll go to Eden and stay with my dad. When it rains again you call me." This was the last of June, 1953. It finally rained April 4th, 1954. He called the boy and they went back to farming.

After living and farming in Puntkin Center they moved to a farm four miles north of Lamesa, rented it and bought the guy's irrigation pipes and started irrigating in 1955. They built a house in Lamesa in 1962. The farm kept getting bigger as he accumulated more land.

Elmer bought his first farm in Seminole in 1962, then added to it. He farmed 2 1/2 sections in Gaines County as well as in Dawson and Lynn Counties.

Elmer and a partner built a Convenience Store in Lamesa in 1978 called, "Mary Ann's." Billye did the bookkeeping. The partner did most of the running of the store. Ten years later his partner wanted out so Elmer bought his share and later leased it all to Dan Poindexter who ran the Wes-T-Go stores. He renamed it Wes-T-Go, and ran it for 21 years. Elmer sold the store

to him last year. Poindexter asked if he could buy one of the vacant lots behind the store so he could get trucks in and out. Elmer told him, "you just bought the store and all the vacant lots around it."

When Billye's health began failing she started coming to Seminole for treatment. They moved here in 1990. Unfortunately Billye died in 2005.

Elmer got into the "horse business" here in Seminole. They raised Thoroughbred race horses. He raced them in Ruidoso and other places in New Mexico. Elmer said, "The race horse business is not the way to get rich!" He sold all of his land in 2002. He said all he owns, now, is his house and car.

Elmer took up golf when he was 40-years-old. He is still playing three days a week, when the weather is good, at 90.

A friend related a story about Elmer's golfing. "He was selected to be on a team for a 'day game.' Because of his age, not much was expected of him. He ended up with the lowest score for the team. At age 89, he shot a 57 for the course. He was the medalist of the day!"

Elmer said, "I've had a lot of fun and made a lot of friends on the golf course. This is a good bunch to play with, out here." He added, "I think golf has kept me going at my age." His summation: "I'm just a cotton farmer."

**Leo's Lance...**

## My Shangri-la

By Leo Copeland  
Seminole Sentinel

A thousand linear feet doesn't seem so far, but when you are looking straight down from a rocky bluff into a gaping canyon with a rambling creek a thousand feet below, it seems a long way, and a bit frightening. My dream fishing spot lay at the bottom of this chasm. My Shangri-la!

When my fishing buddy and I heard about a wild trout stream down in a hidden canyon where huge German Brown and Rainbow Trout abounded, we just couldn't resist the challenge to go and see, and try our luck.

The place is West Clear Creek Canyon. The longest canyon cutting into the Mogollon, (pronounced "Muggy-own"), Rim which is over 7000 feet in elevation. The canyon is 1,000 feet deep and not very wide. At places the creek covers the entire bottom of the canyon. The walls look like the solid rock which had been sliced with a big butter knife. Most places it is impossible to get into or out of this canyon. The U.S. Forest Service calls it, "One of the most rugged, remote canyons in Northern Arizona."

There were stories about rattlesnakes, wolves and bears, but we heard the part about the fish. The guy at the nearby Long Valley Store tantalized us by pulled a 32 inch Rainbow Trout out of his freezer to show us the kind of fish we could expect to find down there.

We heard of the ruggedness and danger of the climb into and out of the canyon which kept many people away, and caused the fainthearted to vow never to come back. One young man threw away a basket creel full of big trout along with an expensive, new, split-bamboo fly-rod. He was about half way out when he gave out on the climb. He fell justing them down the face of the cliff and swore he would never come back again.

We listened carefully how to get to the trail into the canyon, off the main road and through the pine forest over logging roads. "When you come to a fork in the road, just follow the main traveled road," they said, but logging roads, are obscure. We took a wrong fork somewhere and didn't find the trail leading into the canyon, the one they said was marked by a large, dead, pine tree.

Our road just suddenly ended. We got out of the pickup looking for where the road went from there, and we discovered, about ten yards in front of us, a gaping gash in the ground. We had "arrived at our destination."

The first thing we did was walk to the edge of the gorge and look in. We tried to see fish in a "puddle" below us, but couldn't see any. The "puddle" turned out to be 20 feet wide, 30 feet long, 15 feet deep in places. Depth perception can play tricks on you, no wonder we couldn't see any fish!

We had missed the road which led to the dead tree and thus to the cut trail down into the canyon. This was a set-back, and cost us a lot of time, but we were determined to get down into the canyon catch some fish that day. After more than two hours of false trails, miss-guesses and much up and down mountain climbing we made our way down into a side canyon which led us into West Clear Creek.

There was no stream in this canyon, only little pools with water running in the upper end but no visible exit for it. As we got closer to Clear Creek, the pools became larger and I spotted a pool I thought might have fish in it.

We had been told, "These fish are wild and not used to seeing people. If they see you they will hide under a rock until you are gone," so I sneaked up close enough to make my cast, and tried to drop my lure just in front of a patch of moss which covered the lower end of the pool. As my lure descended toward the water, a sixteen inch brown trout leaped out of the water and caught it in mid-flight. He and

I cleaned the moss off the pool before I was able to talk him into my creel. My first trout was caught on Tom Creek, not Clear Creek.

Our first up close view of West Clear Creek was breathtaking. The water was so clear you could see every pebble in the bottom, even of deep holes. At places the water was over your head, and in other places it was a jigsaw of little streamlets weaving through the rocks and weeds.

At one such place I caught a little trout by accident when I slipped on a slick rock and dropped my rod, causing it to release the lure and when I retrieved it I had a five inch trout on it.

At some places the Creek was a semi-swift river 20 feet wide and it was at such a place I saw the biggest live Rainbow Trout I have ever seen. I was wading in hip deep water, casting far downstream. I saw his dorsal fin when he came out of some bushes along the bank and headed straight for my lure. I felt him hit it, but I think I anticipated his strike and jerked too, soon, jerking it out of his mouth. He took off up stream and swam by within three feet of me. (I would tell you how big he looked, but you would call it a "fish story!")

We caught our limit of foot long trout in a short time, but because of the time wasted finding a way down the mountain, and the approaching darkness, (we sure didn't want to be caught down there and have to climb out after dark.) We had to leave before we got to do very much exploring.

On a later trip we were able to locate the trail we had missed, where, in the 1930's, the WPA (Works Progress Administration) built a long since gone, aerial tram, into the canyon and cut a zigzag trail to the bottom. It was more convenient although still treacherous because the trail was only about two to three feet wide. It took about 45 minutes to an hour to descend or ascend on this trail.

The largest fish we caught was a 24 inch German Brown Trout which my buddy caught. It had a protruding lower jaw and sharp teeth which were about 3/8 inch long.

A huge brown followed my lure into shallow water, but he saw me and vanished.

We found a cave in the bottom with rustic shelves stocked with old, rusty cans of food and a note dated 1924, stating, "Take what you want, but replace what you take."

Except for the climb in and out, which kept many people away, this was an ideal place. A regular Utopia, the fishing hole I had dreamed of all my life. We didn't see any rattlesnakes or bears, or wolves in the canyon, although a game ranger warned us bears were in the area. We did see deer and elk, and a coyote up on the rim.

Down in the bottom, I disturbed something in a deep thicket which made a lot of noise and shook some good sized saplings. I didn't see what it was, but I decided I really didn't need to know, so I departed the way I came, and left it to its own doings.

This place is still my Shangri-la. Will I ever go back again? Who knows? It has been nearly 40 years since my last trip, and it is a long way from Seminole. Would you go back, if you were me?

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