

Airstream Meets the Horrors of Atomic Warfare and the Threats from the Soviet Block – the 1950's Revisited

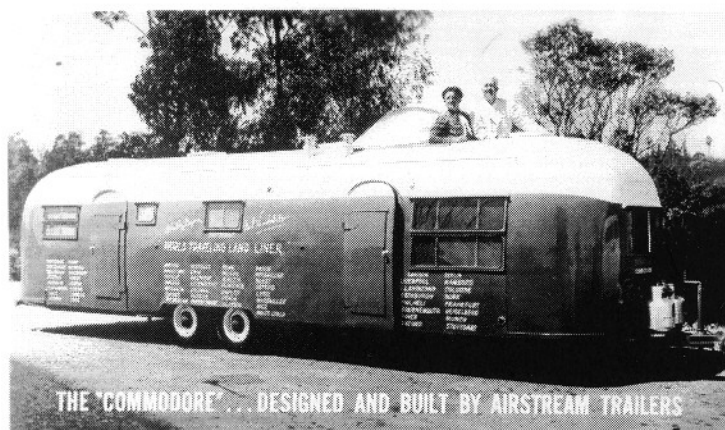
There is a missing segment of the Airstream story. It begins with the notion of George Washington slept here and more recently that Wally Byam slept here.

Wally Byam had many trailers that he used during his adventurous travels as the owner of Airstream. Recently one of his trailers was sold for \$55,000.00. He probably would scratch his head in wonderment. Not withstanding there were other high visible Airstreams in his journeys through the years.

In 1948 Wally and Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr. (Neil) traveled through Europe. This trailer had countries, and towns painted on all sides and front and back. This same trailer made the 1st Caravan to Mexico and Central America.



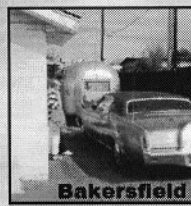
In 1952 Neil Vanderbilt and Wally made good use of the "Commodore". This extended, custom Airstream was named after Neil's grandfather. The blue color also came from Commodore Vanderbilt. This special trailer was spotted in Chicago for the 1952 Democrat and Republican Conventions, and later it was shipped to England for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.



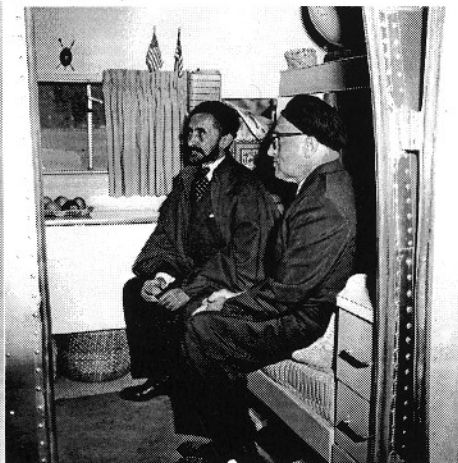
Wally and Stella had a truly wonderful trailer on the 1956 European Caravan. It was painted white to match Wally's Cadillac. Here are two pictures that give the flavor of this fantastic trailer.



The highest visibility of any Airstream manufactured for travel is the "Gold Trailer." Wally used it first on the Kentucky Derby, Indianapolis 500 Caravan. It even appeared in the Derby Parade. It became legend on the 1959 African Caravan going from Cape Town to Cairo. At one point the trailer needed military protection from bandits. The bandits believed it was made of solid gold. Who can forget the Emperor Haile Selassie visiting the Caravan's campsite in Addis Abba and talking with Wally inside the Gold Airstream?



Wally Byam's Number One 1959 to 2005



At this point we all wonder what Wally's trailers, and a threat of atomic bombs have to do with Airstream, and Wally's trailers?

A few years ago I took a picture at my high school in Bakersfield, East Bakersfield High School. After 50 years the bomb shelter sign stills appears on the auditorium. We practiced in our classrooms by diving under our desks. We were told about the visible flash of the bomb exploding.



Yes, we even had a fallout shelter. How times have changed.

In my journey with Airstream, Wally, my Mother I have slept in the 1948 Byam-Vanderbilt trailer. Having owned the Gold Trailer, I boondocked and toured the Western United States. One year at the Airstream Palm Springs Rally I used the Commodore trailer.

At different Palm Spring's Rally I slept and used the "Atomic Bomb Trailer". I have found that the story of this travel is not widely known.

The first literature called the *Airstream Story* was printed late 1955, or early 1956. It was a tool for the dealer's to sell Airstreams.



The actual booklet was 10 ½ by 13 ½.

The testing of atomic bombs was routine for many years. Then the trailer manufacturers were contacted to supply trailers for a bomb test. The project was held by the Civil Defense Mobile Home Industry Atomic Test program. The following dialogue and pictures appeared in the *Airstream Story*. It has significance to me, because I slept in the trailer **and lived to tell about it.**

THE SUPREME TEST!

They say a picture speaks louder than a thousand words. What more convincing proof of Airstream's superior construction than these four views of an Airstream which underwent the supreme test – Doomtown, U.S.A., 1955, the great atomic civil defense test in Nevada.

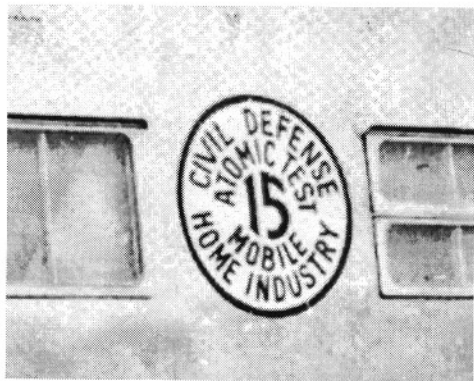
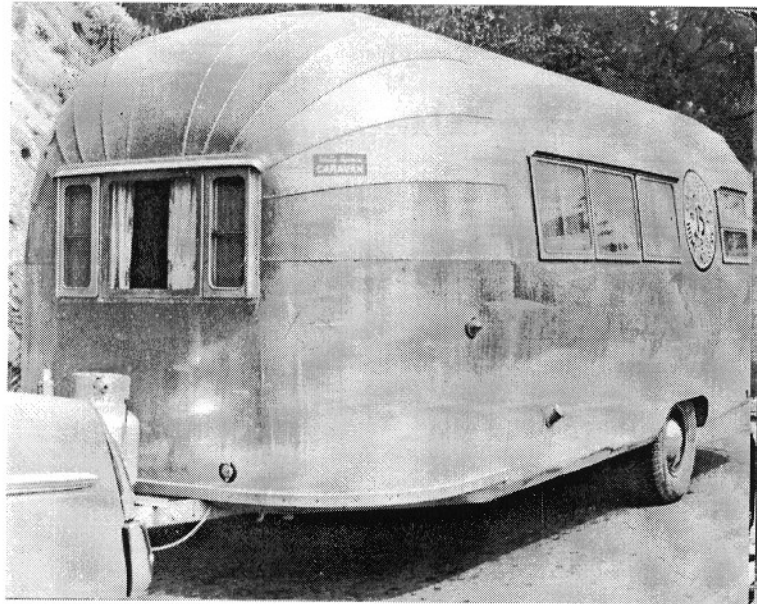
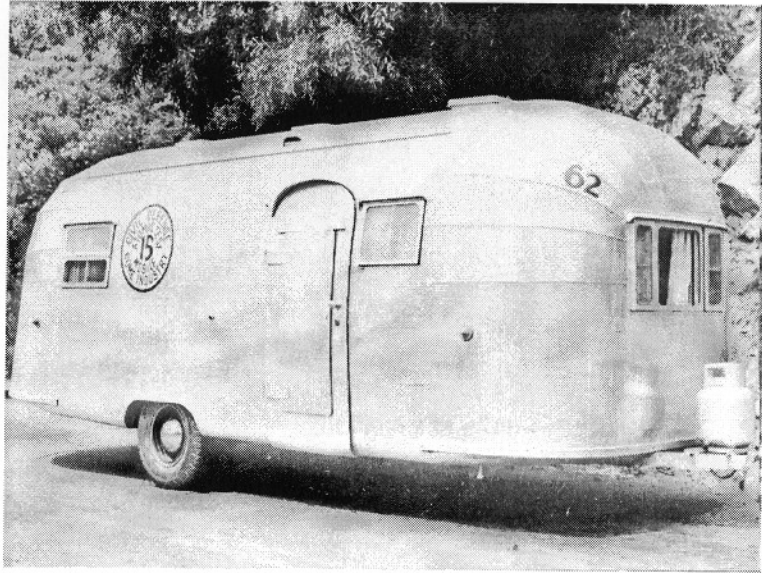
This Airstream was not a new one – it had already weathered 60,000 miles of the roughest road travel in Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. when it was placed 10,500 feet from Ground Zero to determine how it would stand up under the blast of an atomic explosion equivalent to 40,000 tons of TNT.

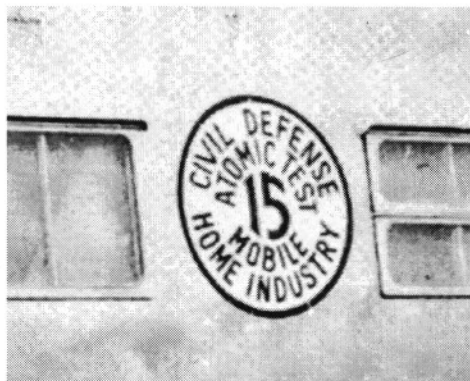
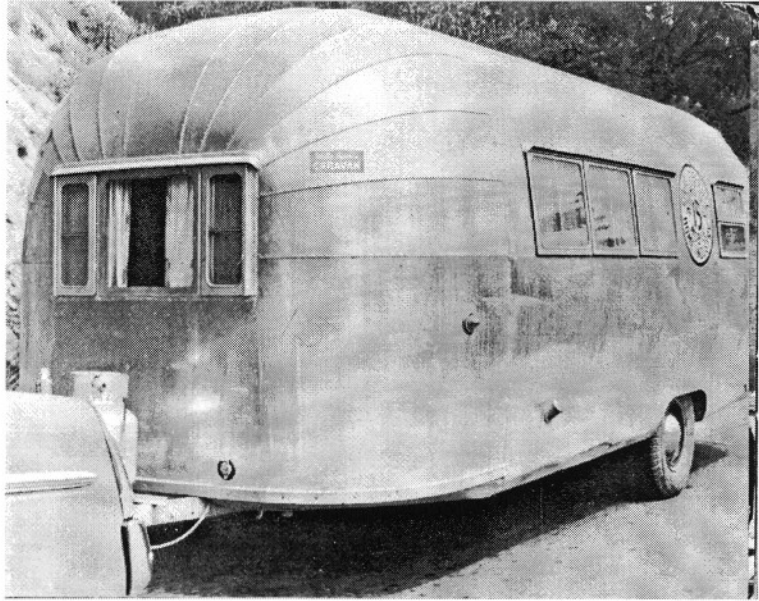
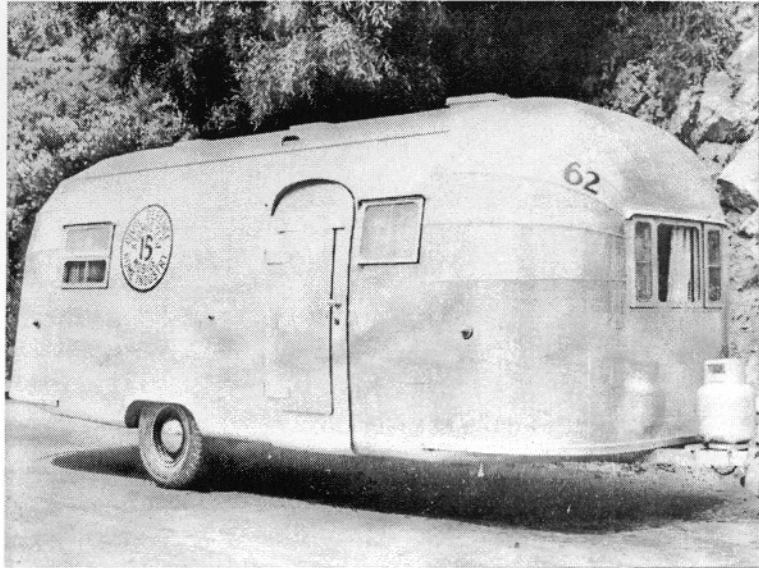
When the dust had settled, the Airstream was found to be as roadworthy as ever. Where some other trailers tipped over or had their sides bashed in, the only damage to the Airstream was a slight dent in the rear and two broken windows.

Not a rivet popped, not a seam opened.

Hundreds of thousands of miles over the most rugged roads in the world could not equal the awesome force of the A-bomb.









What a remarkable adventure for an Airstream!

To end *The Airstream Story*, Wally Byam wrote a few words, here is a copy of his statement.

These pages show why Airstream has the kind of reputation it has – for super-light weight, unbelievable ruggedness and outstanding beauty of design – in short, why it is the world's foremost travel trailer. Sure, there are cheaper trailers – but you get what you pay for. There is nothing cheap about an Airstream. From the first raw piece of steel to the final rivet, it's all top quality material put together by skilled labor after the most careful planning and rugged testing. Other trailer manufacturers take their products around the block and say they're "road-tested"; we take ours around the world. Airstream owners don't just lie around trailer parks for months on end – they get up and go. And why shouldn't they? As anyone who has ever towed one knows, wherever a car will go, an Airstream will follow easily. For us, trailering and caravanning all over the world is the finest travel experience one can have. But it is more than just romance. It's the acid test of our product – the experience we bring home goes right into the construction methods you see in these pages, to give you Airstream, THE travel trailer.

–WALLY BYAM

That is the history of sleeping around in Airstreams.

Airstream's tradition goes on into a new century.