

RICE, REFUGEES, AND ROOFTOPS

BOOK TWO

THE CROTCH

1960-62

Harry Richard Casterlin

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PREFACE

This second book in the Second Indochina War in Laos series follows the lengthy Genesis account that traced the origins of the Air America organization, and its development in Udorn to support the West's effort in the Lao war. It is intended to be a lead in to the Author's participation as a helicopter pilot for Air America, Inc.

Examine the American psyche. In time of trouble, acts of terror, or accident, some souls dash toward the scene in an effort to help, while others retreat. After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, American patriotism prevailed. Millions of enraged Americans hastened to recruiting offices to enlist. Others were conscripted. Those still at home mobilized to support the troops. Although the Allies, following great sacrifices, eventually won the war, the forces of evil simmered just beneath the surface, only to emerge a few years later when the communists invaded South Korea. Once again, the country rallied, drafting a younger generation that was largely led by veterans of World War Two. But this time, Americans were wary of war, so the conflict was labeled a police action, and a stable peace was never established.

Meanwhile, during the 1950s troubles were festering elsewhere in Southeast Asia, as countries rebelled against western imperialism. Communist aggression in French Indochina necessitated American involvement as concerned nations joined forces to contain the spread of the red tide. By now the nation, including the younger American generation, was war weary, as we collectively enjoyed a post-World War Two peace and unprecedented prosperity at home. Although some individuals still believed in serving on foreign soil to avoid an eventual war at home, many in this generation sought to dodge military conscription at all costs. Influenced by press negativity and the conflicting political policies of our government, many Americans turned violently against the Vietnam War effort, and cruelly

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castigated our brave men and women who were serving in the conflict.

Some might question why a lengthy collection of books regarding the Indochina War in Laos is necessary. What motivates a young man to occupy thirteen years of his life in Southeast Asia, nearly twelve thousand miles from his family and country of origin, first serving in the U.S. military, and then as a civilian with the Air America paramilitary organization; the latter for almost twelve years of flying supply, rescue, and combat missions in the remote country of Laos for diverse people he previously never knew existed?

Partial answers to these questions are buried in the many nuances of childhood and adult development. As a youngster during World War Two, days included outdoor activities with toy lead soldiers in imagined war-time settings, studying aircraft profile flash-cards to readily identify enemy planes, and being exposed to the abundant propaganda, and deprivations associated with the war. A patriotic father and years in the regimental Boy Scouts fostered a sense of discipline and nationalism that remains deeply embedded in my sense of God and Country today.

At college I was exposed to the grim downside of war. Many physically or mentally damaged Korean War veterans, exercising their right to a GI Bill education, exemplified the horrors of modern conflict. Discounting the "war is hell" philosophy, I could envision that war was a mixture of gory and glory.

Continuing a family tradition, choosing the U.S. Marine Corps as the best of the best organizations, and as a conduit to aviation, was an easy decision.

After graduating from aviator training at the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, Florida, and assignment to the East Coast Fleet at Marine Corps Air Facility New River, Jacksonville, North Carolina, by chance I learned about a shadowy company with the innocuous name of Air America. The touted mystery, money, and high adventure appealed to me, but with very few details concerning the operation, and with two years left to serve in the Marines, further specifics would have to

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wait.

In anticipation of an overseas tour, squadron training continued in the HUS-1 helicopter, as information regarding events in Southeast Asia filtered down to our level. Two of my roommates shared tales of cruel family experiences with Soviet communism. Their stories had a sufficient impact on me to foster a distinct life-long aversion to communists and their ideology.

Some of these precursors to a military, and then a quasi-military life, are pursued further in *The Crotch*.¹

This book shares the Author's United States Marine Corps service experiences, during which he first learned about Air America, Inc., and actually had a chance to view the Udorn, Thailand, helicopter operation, where he conversed with Company helicopter pilots and Chief Pilot, Clarence "Ab" Abadie.

The Crotch concludes as the Author, by now a civilian, prepares to depart America for Air America's headquarters at Taipei, Taiwan, miles and, as it developed, years away from the American culture.

In the subsequent thirteen books covering a time period from the 1950s to 1974, the Author attempts to further pursue the origins of the Air America Company and the paramilitary civilian helicopter program. Narrating a part autobiographical and part historical account of the era of Lao conflict, the books are sprinkled with individual human experience to moderate the impact of dry history. Many photographs, first-hand observations from members of Marine Helicopter Squadron HMM-261, and footnoted additions, describe the time frame and copious local color of Southeast Asia during the period.

¹ The Crotch: The title is not intended to offend those not acquainted with the Marine Corps. Marines enjoy attributing names to everything and anything that involves them. This particular label was generally used to reflect a somewhat negative view of the Corps when bored, or when matters might not be going well. However, it was really just another pejorative term for a service we all loved, if not while serving, then afterward throughout life. There will be many military expressions and acronyms used liberally throughout the narrative. Explanations can be found in the glossary at the end of the book.

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Hopefully, the books will prove interesting, stimulating, and educational, inspiring the reader to pursue further information on the subject. Of course, the reader, if any still exist today in America's television sound bite-and cell phone-tainted society, will ultimately decide whether I have succeeded.

HRC

INTRODUCTION

After departing the rollicking good times in Pensacola, Florida, the false security associated with the military family, and the drudgery of an aspiring pilot in the Naval Air Training Command, I looked forward to a tour in the vaunted Fleet Marine Corps, particularly the Far East. Since joining the Corps in 1957, most of my life appeared to have been preordained. Moreover, refuge within the military womb provided a valuable learning vehicle, not unlike the college "ivory tower" atmosphere. Moving onward and upward in life was important to me, although each step into the unknown presented its own form of apprehension as to future events. Yet, I firmly believed stagnation, or no growth in human development, to be a terrible waste of a valuable asset, and the worst possible environment to sustain positive mental health. I never envisioned what lay ahead, certainly not the challenges, heartbreaks, and rewards that occurred during the next fourteen years.

The Fleet experience enabled me to grow and mature, both as an individual and as an aviator. Collateral duties in the squadron further enhanced my leadership abilities, while increasing my respect for the heart of the Corps: the enlisted personnel.

During the early portion of my Fleet Marine Corps tour, events festering in Southeast Asia rapidly progressed toward an overt conflict there. However, other than occasional headline news and rumor, these far distant proceedings seldom affected those of us enmeshed in the East coast cadre. Not until we actually patrolled the Theater did the realization of what might likely happen begin to emerge. By then, superiors had tailored most training and maneuvers toward a realistic life confrontation on the Indochina mainland.

Although not yet totally equipped to perform as an aviation unit, I considered my squadron a highly trained and very motivated force, one that had proved itself many times, and one that deserved to be the

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first to enter a hostile situation. Ultimately rebuffed for Vietnam duty by rear echelon political decision makers, who bypassed our East Coast squadron in favor of a West Coast Marine squadron, I elected to leave the "Crotch," with its rules, regulations, inane politics, and offer my flying experience and services to Air America's paramilitary organization.

HRC

"Most of us wonder if our lives can make a difference. Marines don't have that problem."

Ronald Regan 1985

While returning to the New River Marine Corps helicopter base one rain drenched night, I wheeled my small black French Renault Dauphine into a parking space in front of a local bar on the main drag leading into Jacksonville, North Carolina. ¹ It had been a typically boring, and largely uneventful evening in the military-saturated confines surrounding the city where, contrasting with the prime pickings and sunny climes of Pensacola, wise town fathers locked their daughters up early against the nightly onslaught of young energetic Marines.

Once inside the grubby, dimly illuminated, and odiferous watering hole, I tentatively flopped down on a bar stool next to one of the patrons, Sergeant George "Bulldog" Butcher, a burly crew chief whom I recognized from one of the five squadrons assigned to the New River facility. Well into his cups, from his bully pulpit Butcher bragged loudly about his imminent retirement from the Corps and pending employment in South East Asia with Air America Inc. This revelation was unusual, for Air America was a shadowy government-sponsored paramilitary company, and, like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), except in private was rarely mentioned. For various reasons, people were reluctant to talk about the two entities, and when they did it was couched in only very hushed terms. In fact, I had only heard the name mentioned once before, in passing.

Hunched menacingly over his golden brew, clutching the glass with enormous hands, as if guarding it from greedy invaders, the grizzled bear of a man patiently explained his future job. It entailed flying

¹ New River was the helicopter home of Marine Air Facility Group (MAG) 26, (Second Marine Air Wing, and Fleet Marine Force Atlantic). Cherry Point was the wing's location containing the fixed wing element.

as a flight mechanic in Laos, where communist forces hostile to the Lao government currently waged a low intensity conflict. The "Gunny" further indicated that the Company would reward him handsomely--much more than U.S. Marine Corps pay--to crew and perform maintenance on HUS-1 helicopters in Thailand and Laos.

From the deep recesses of my mind, I remembered hearing about Thailand--then called Siam--in Mrs. Smith's sixth grade history classes at the Netherwood School in Plainfield, New Jersey. ² Vivid images of a tropical country consisting of kings, temples, and beautiful women flashed before me. However, whoever heard of Laos? Where was that located? Obviously, I would have to brush up on my deficient geography. The sergeant also suggested that, in addition to the excitement generated by the endeavor, the employment would provide an excellent supplement to his military retirement pension. At that moment, the gruff extrovert looked every bit the part of a soldier of fortune.

Joyful visions of combat and the ancient Corps adage learned in training that *"Even a piss-poor war is better than no war at all,"* crossed my mind. In addition, tropical splendor, wealth, high adventure, and mystery were conjured, permeating the acrid smoke and stale, beer laden fumes in the grubby establishment, while we weighed the numerous pros and cons of the "hairy" occupation.

Although I found Butcher's sketchy and boozy details of his impending civilian war work interesting, since more than eighteen months remained of my service obligation, I filed the information into the recesses of my mind for future reference.

GETTING THERE

Despite an astigmatic visual deficiency, after two frustrating attempts, I was very fortunate to have been selected for flight training. I did not find the art of learning to soar with the birds

² The name of the school was later changed to Cook School after a deceased superintendent.

a particularly easy task, and experienced a prolonged and difficult interval in the Pensacola Naval flight-training curriculum. Motivation alone did not appear to suffice; talent and, for a slow learner, the ability to quickly adsorb the material mattered most of all.

Always working under maximum pressure, it appeared that planners had designed the flight program to "wash out," rather than create new aviators. ³ However, with perseverance, assistance from a couple of interested instructors, and U.S. Navy friend, Ensign Rudy Radake, I managed to squeak through both ground school classes and flight programs in all five aircraft types flown, to eventually attain my original goal as a rated helicopter pilot. Above all, I clearly understood that earning the U.S. Navy's coveted "Wings of Gold" only constituted the beginning of a steep learning curve inherent in an aviation career. I required additional training to gain flying experience, air sense, proficiency in the HUS-1 helicopter and, in particular, the vagaries of the Fleet Marine Corps.

FORMATIVE YEARS

After lowering aspirations to pursue a medical career, prompted by a disastrous encounter with a required pre-med course in organic chemistry during the first semester of my junior year at Duke University, as an alternate, I looked forward to flying helicopters for the United States Marine Corps. Moreover, following graduation and the necessary military training at Quantico and Pensacola, I anticipated an enjoyable and enlightening one-year tour in the mysterious Far East before deciding how best to proceed with my life.

My transition to the military from civilian life seemed preordained and effortless. From early childhood, an awareness of current events and related activities indoctrinated and pointed me

³ I was the only Marine officer from my original Quantico group to successfully complete the pre-flight ground school and flight training program.



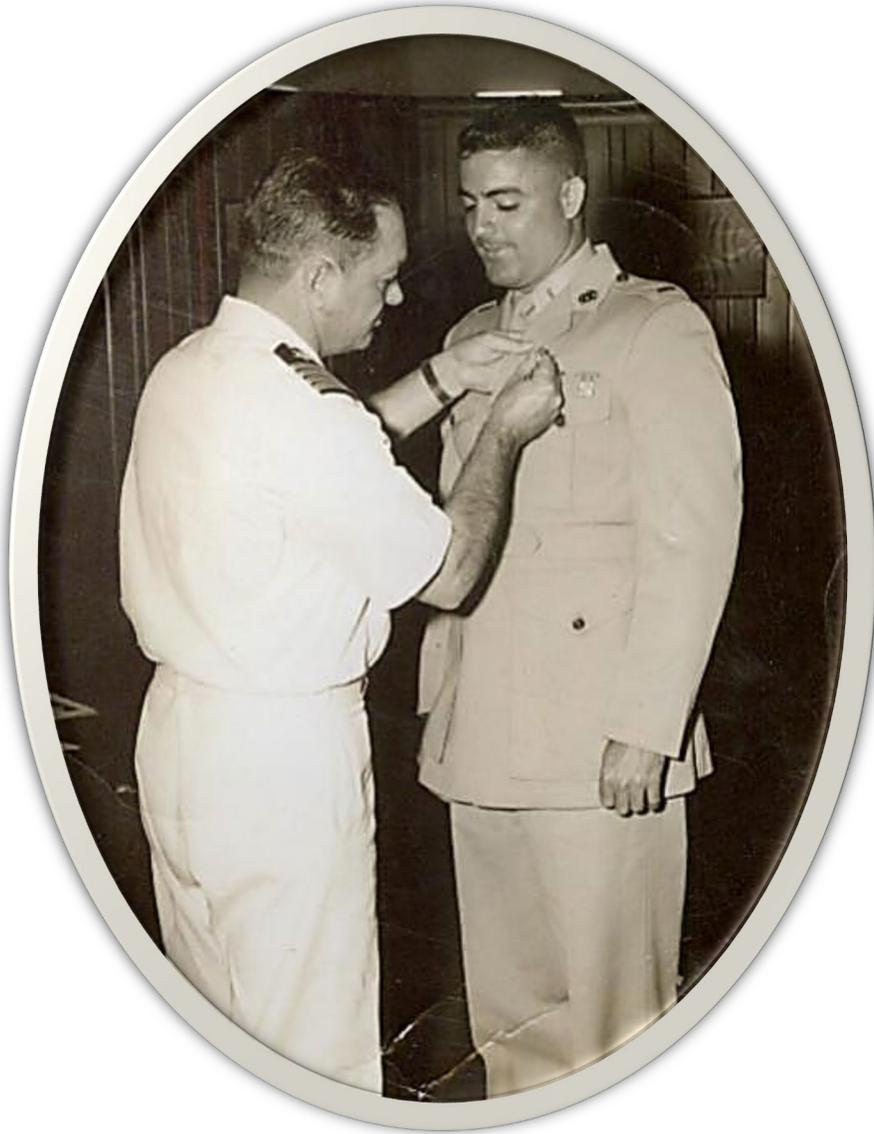
Pensacola pre-flight training class 18-60. The class consisted of a blend of U.S. Navy, Coast Guard, Marine officers, and Naval Cadets (NAVCAD). Author squatting second from left. Rudy Radake, my friend and academic mentor, is immediately to my left.

Official Navy Photograph 04/07/60.



H.R. Casterlin following a T-34 solo flight at NAAS Saufley Field, Pensacola, Florida.

Official U.S. Navy Photograph.



Dressed in a Summer Service Alpha uniform, First Lieutenant Harry R. Casterlin receiving the coveted U.S. Navy "Wings of Gold" from Captain W.R. Stevens 05/25/60.

Official U.S. Navy Photograph.

me in that direction. From the time I was old enough to comprehend world events, life appeared fraught with great wars or Biblical threats of war. Indeed, many of my early childhood games aped unfolding events of the day. Playtime involved hours of juvenile strategic planning, tactical positioning of toy lead soldiers in grass and dirt bunkers, and ultimate destruction--with the good guys always triumphant. Blackouts, air raid drills at grade school, food and fuel rationing, stereotyped slogans, grinning, bespectacled Japanese hate posters, war bond drives, and studying profiles of enemy aircraft enhanced my awareness of, and tended to channel my thoughts toward military matters during my formative years. In concert with the paranoia of the time, my father, who was the designated civil defense block air raid warden on Dorsey Place, constantly drummed into my head that we must be prepared for an enemy attack.

One day during this early period, a dump truck deposited a huge pile of sand in front of my parents' house. I had a grand time rummaging in the mound, creating interlocking tunnels and castles, until Dad returned from his day job in New York City.⁴ My fun and the pile vanished quickly as he distributed one pail of sand to each house, recommending that the occupants store it in the attic to extinguish fires caused by potential incendiary bomb attacks. Dad also jealously guarded the block's single water tank, a small pump spray type fire extinguisher provided by the government and coveted by others to water and spray insecticide on their victory garden plants located on vacant land in the center of the block.

As my youthful years rushed by, history records that not much changed in the realm of world geopolitics. One totalitarian government desiring global domination replaced another. Furthermore, while the mistress of the Cold War wrapped her deadly, icy breath around world

⁴ Many patriotic men in the community, like my dad, in addition to their day jobs, also worked night shifts at the Mack Truck factory on Front Street, producing tanks and military trucks for the war effort.

humanity and threatened nuclear annihilation, it became easier to loathe communism and those nations and individuals associated with it.⁵

Still too young for military service, I attended the Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, National Boy Scout Jamboree during June 1950, when, unannounced, North Korean hoards charged stealthily across the 38th Parallel. I did not fully realize the deleterious effect the ensuing "Police Action" fostered on our young citizens until I was a student at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Thrown together with Korean War veterans attending college under the government GI benefit program, I observed and associated with many individuals with physical or mental impairments stemming from the conflict. Disfigured, patched up with the latest cosmetic techniques of the day, they seemed to function quite well in society. They were the easy ones to recognize. More difficult to distinguish were those war veterans crippled in an entirely different manner: mentally. These individuals were highly cynical of most events occurring around them, and psychologically distinct from us individuals not yet exposed to war's horrors.⁶

THE CROTCH

With years of world conflict to influence me, with a government continually extolling the evils of communism, with lowered career aspirations, and with the omnipresent draft facing me, I represented a choice military candidate for Uncle Sam. My maternal and paternal ancestors and recent family members were not particularly militaristic, but always answered the drumbeat and call to arms. With relatives having participated in both the Revolutionary and Civil

⁵ Having spent many years fighting the flawed system, except as the first word in a sentence, the Author's will not capitalize communism in any of these works.

⁶ In order to attain sleep at night, a highly intelligent psychology class friend was obligated to ingest one or two quarts of beer before retiring each night.



Recently commissioned Second Lieutenant H.R. Casterlin wearing newly purchased dress blues in front of his parents' Dorsey Place house during the 1957 Christmas holidays.

Author Collection.

Wars, and more recently two cousins in the Crotch during World War Two, the Marine Corps was a logical choice of service for me.⁷ I wanted to join the best of the best, and nothing less. The mystery and lure of the Orient also drew me into the web. The East had fascinated and interested me for many years. I reasoned that a government-sponsored trip to the area would provide an excellent supplement to the education of this sheltered and largely provincial youth. In the end, it proved a wise career choice.

ATTITUDES

Soon after reporting to the Marine Corps Air Facility at New River, North Carolina, the impact of the Cold War became more personal. The billeting officer assigned me a room in the bachelor officers' quarters (BOQ) with HMR-261 squadron mate Bob Goforth. "Goldy," a short, stocky redhead from Oklahoma, had an extraordinarily taciturn nature, rarely saying much on any subject. Early during the first week of July, he appeared to brood more than usual, so I inquired as to his distress. Uncharacteristically animated, he bitterly related that the U.S. Air Force had recently informed the family that his brother, Captain Oscar Goforth, a RB-47 tail gunner, was missing at sea. Apparently, while conducting a "standard" reconnaissance mission over the Barents Sea on 1 July, ostensibly in international waters near the Soviet Union, enemy fighters ambushed, savagely attacked, and shot down the aircraft. Out of a crew of six, only two men survived: Captains John McCone and Bruce Olmstead. Ironically, the co-pilot of the ill-fated plane, Olmstead, had married Gail Burner, a lovely girl, and one of my Plainfield High School girlfriends. Later, as more information surfaced concerning the RB-47 spy plane and its occupants, I learned that Bruce had injured his back during ejection, had survived ocean immersion, and, after seven months incarceration in mother Russia, he and John McCone were released and

⁷ Crotch: A semi-derogatory term profane U.S. Marines occasionally and endearingly used to describe their service.



Looking from the helicopter flight line where a Sikorsky manufactured HRS (H-19) is parked, toward the tower, hangar, group offices, and squadron billets at the Marine Corps Air Facility, New River, North Carolina.

Official Marine Corps Photograph.

returned to the U.S in February 1961. ⁸

It seemed an unlikely coincidence and ironic that two individuals I knew by proxy were aboard this ill-fated aircraft. The odds against such duplication must have been astronomical. Why had the incident transpired at such a crucial and impressionable time in my military career? Harkening back to my Presbyterian roots, it seemed almost predestined that an event such as this was revealed to steer my life in the direction of violence.

During a sensitive operation, search and rescue units never discovered any trace of Goldie's brother or other crew members. Moreover, during the short time he remained in the service, Goforth cursed the communists daily.

Supporting our common bond and thread of communist-hating Marines was the attitude of my suitemate, Connie Alexander Barsky. Connie, of Eastern European Polish extraction, maintained that odious Soviet villains, whom he referred to as "Ukrainskies," had exterminated most of his extended family before or during World War Two. Like Goforth, he was also very bitter toward the communists, and vowed that he would do anything within his power to strike back at his kins' murderers. ⁹

Thus, within a relatively short time of entering the Atlantic Fleet Marine Force, through others' eyes, I established firm opinions concerning the red menace threatening the Western world. To me, the world situation boiled down to a simple black or white equation, no gray involved at all. As a true patriot, I trusted my government implicitly as an entity to always execute the correct policy relating

⁸ *U.S. News and World Report, The Case of the Boston Casper*, 15 March 1993: 50-52.

Time Magazine, Return of the Airmen, 02/03/61.

While on leave between change of stations, along with my boyhood friends, I visited Gail at the Burner home a few blocks from my folks. The mood was somber, for at the time no one knew the disposition of her husband.

⁹ Connie Barsky's father's original name was Konstanty A. Barszczyk. My friend Connie passed on 03/25/04.

to America's well-being. From my viewpoint, depending on the way other countries lined up in world geopolitics, they were either the bad guys or the good guys. If they railed against USG policy, or perpetrated bad deeds against us or our friends, they were the bad guys. And with the current state of world affairs, I literally itched for a fight.

During the initial months with the newly assembled HMR(L)261 Squadron, my flight training in what was called the "Cadillac of the Fleet" progressed satisfactorily. Under the relaxed tutelage of Tom G. Maiorine, Hal Yanosky, Jack Durrant, roommate Bob "Goldie" Goforth, and other experienced and accomplished aviators, I rapidly gained the necessary confidence to meet squadron standards and perform reasonably well. While immersed in this environment, one highly conducive to learning without censure or pressure from my peers, I became "armchair comfortable" in the HUS-1, considered the most advanced reciprocating engine helicopter in the free world (or at least the Western world). In time, it became abundantly clear to me why instructors in the Florida Naval Training Command fondly referred to the machine as the "Cadillac of the Fleet." It was both fun to fly and a utilitarian machine. With flying deeply lodged in my psyche, flying increasingly became a vocation, a tangible aspect that I enjoyed immensely, and a focal point I could be enthusiastic about.

THE HUS-1 AKA H-34D

Why do helicopters fascinate people? The answer to this theoretical question is contained in the acronym HUS (Helicopter Utility Sikorsky). Specifically, the "U" relates to functions, which connotes that the rotary wing aircraft possesses the capability to accomplish almost any reasonable task. Taking into account design limitations and operating conditions, this is generally true. Unlike other flying vehicles, the machine possesses the ability to hover, move up or down, and fly forward, backward, or sideways. Only the commercial or military operator's imagination and talent limits a helicopter's application. Whether seeding or spraying farm land, erecting towers, stringing wires, herding cattle, performing emergency medical service (EMS), fighting fires, performing air taxi duties,



The "Cadillac of the Fleet," the Sikorsky HUS-1.
Photo Laboratory U.S. Marine Corps Facility New River, North Carolina.

medical services, fighting fires, performing air taxi duties, transporting military troops and equipment, search and rescue operations, intelligence missions, delivering ordnance on enemy positions, or a multitude of other uses, the helicopter has proven to be beneficial and largely indispensable to man's advancement in the twentieth century. ¹

From a helicopter pilot's perspective, there is absolutely nothing else on this planet approaching the wonderful sensations and experiences associated with piloting such a machine. Also, from a biased operators' perspective, the finest elements of rotorcraft flying are derived from nerve-end sensory perceptions, while actually manipulating the machine's control, sometimes called seat-of-the-pants flying. For example: the euphoria in soaring with the birds at altitude, or marveling at the panorama unfolding beneath him at low altitude, and ecstatic at the heightened sense of movement, forever endears and bonds the aviator to his machine. In addition, unlike in fixed wing flying, thanks to its multitude of tasks that are rarely duplicated, and to potential emergency situations, one is seldom bored flying helicopters. However, in accordance with the Chinese ying and yang philosophy, marking the downside of helicopter flying are the pounding vibrations inherent in the machines' rotating systems. These can exact a serious toll on the human skeletal system over a period of years. ²

HELICOPTER DEVELOPMENT

The concept of a rotating airfoil predates the modern world by hundreds if not thousands of years. Indeed, early in the nineteenth century, derived from the Greek helix (spiral) and pteron (wing), aviation buffs already used the term helicopter to describe their dream. Most individuals interested in early aviation are aware that

¹ *The World Book Encyclopedia, Helicopter*, Volume 9 (Chicago: Scott & Felzer, 1981) 162-164.

² After flying helicopters for thirty-five years and accumulating 19,000 flight hours, the Author suffers from considerable arthritis.

the Italian genius Leonardo da Vinci created sketches of a vertical lifting device five hundred years ago. However, even further back in time, reference within a Chinese manuscript sixteen hundred years ago alludes to a helicopter-like device and manufactured "toy flying tops" that fly much like the helicopters of today. In late 1800 and early 1900, British, French, and German enthusiasts participated in helicopter development. Even Thomas Edison experimented with helicopter models. Finally, it was Ukrainian born Igor Ivanovich Sikorsky, who, after a shaky beginning, eventually created a viable mass-produced helicopter for both military and commercial aviation markets. Along with company engineers, he initially built two prototype helicopters around 1910, but, as other rotorcraft aspirants had discovered, engine technology, rotor design, and excessive torque-induced stability problems stymied helicopter experimentation. These factors and cost limited development and required solution before interested moneyed parties became involved.

A distinct plus for America, the Russian Revolution and the notion of free enterprise ultimately brought Igor Sikorsky to our shores. To earn a living, he pursued airplane manufacture, but continued working on a rotary-wing aircraft design. By the early thirties, he applied for a helicopter patent incorporating one main horizontal rotor and a smaller one located at the tail section to counteract torque. The Great Depression curtailed much interest in his project, but by 1939, with European designers advancing the technology, the time proved right for Sikorsky. He conducted an abbreviated tethered test flight in the VS-300 in September during which adequate control proved the main problem. It was not until May 1941, after many improvements, that the VS-300 broke the world endurance record for helicopter flight. Subsequent work on an improved tail rotor configuration and main rotor control eventually produced a machine acceptable to army aviation.

Sikorsky commenced testing the XR-4 in 1942. By the end of World War Two Sikorsky Aviation had manufactured over 400 R series

helicopters.³

In 1948, Marine Helicopter Experimental Squadron One (HMX-1) began training pilots at Quantico, Virginia, in a few small helicopters, capable of carrying two combat-loaded Marines. At the same time, Colonels Merrill B. Twining and Victor H. Krulak, planting the seeds for a future vertical envelopment concept, initiated publication of Phib-31, the first manual of Marine Corps helicopter amphibious doctrine.

When Marine Corps forces landed in Korea during August 1950, their commander began utilizing a Sikorsky HO2S-1 (S-55) from the VMO-6 squadron for reconnaissance missions and communication with forward units.

Within a year, HMR-161 arrived in the theater to fly the larger and more powerful Sikorsky HRS-1 during troop and supply missions. Over the next two years, the HRS-1 and HO2S-1 proved themselves, lifting 7.5 million pounds of cargo, and evacuating 9,815 casualties. By the conflict's end, these accomplishments had established the helicopter as the vertical envelopment vehicle.⁴

Oddly enough, the HUS-1 was not Marine Corps hierarchy's initial choice for a first line helicopter. The machine entered by the back door to implement the amphibious vertical envelopment concept. Originally used by the Navy for anti-submarine warfare missions, the ship was first used in the Marine Corps as an interim utility type in 1957 as a stopgap measure until the huge twin engine HR2S (S-56, later designated H-37) arrived in the Fleet.⁵ However, the HR2S initially encountered production difficulties and later maintenance problems in squadrons, and never achieved expectations, while the H-34 would provide excellent service throughout the waning years of the

³ Curt Wohleber, *Straight Up: American Heritage of Invention and Technology* Winter 1993: 34-37.

⁴ J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1977) 431.

⁵ The Author embarked on USMC training in 1957 and flew as a passenger in the HUS during field exercises.

Vietnam War.⁶

Hoping to counter other U.S. manufacturers' substantial headway in garnering military contracts, Sikorsky engineers at Stratford, Connecticut, developed the S-58 (civilian model) as a distinct improvement over the S-55 (Marine designation HRS-3) first used to good advantage in Korea.

During the early years of helicopter growth, Sikorsky design engineers located the reciprocating engine behind the cabin section. This produced an undesirable effect of restricting helicopter center-of-gravity, and thus reducing available total cubic space and payload. With the S-55 and S-58 models, Sikorsky people brilliantly moved the Curtis Wright R-1820-84 engine to the front of the cabin, greatly expanding and enhancing the center-of-gravity envelope. In both models, the engine configuration necessitated developing an elevated cockpit overlooking the engine compartment. The S-58 engine was canted 45 degrees to allow the drive shaft direct access to the transmission without impinging on the cabin.⁷

U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps aviation units all eventually adopted the S-58, but assigned it different terminology and names: Navy-HSS-1, Army-H-34 Choctaw, and Marines-HUS-1 (Helicopter Utility Sikorsky). By 1962, conforming to a Defense Department edict, all S-58 designations in the military became standardized as H-34.^{8 9}

The beloved rotorcraft marked the final development of large piston-type reciprocating engine machines before the growth and future introduction of more efficient turbine engine helicopters.

⁶ Lt. Col. William Falls USMC, *Marines and Helicopters 1962-1973* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1978) 5.

⁷ Wohleber, 35.

⁸ Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, *Sikorsky UH-34D*, 1-2, (<http://www.nasm.si.edu/nasm/aero/aircraft/sikoruh34.htm>), 02/20/02.

⁹ Author Note: It was not until after working with Air America in January 1964 that I began logging the H-34 terminology.

Unfortunately, unsettling world events prevented our East Coast helicopter cadre having the luxury of conducting a great amount of non-training flying. Our squadron, a rear echelon complement slated for overseas duty, but assigned the lowest priority for aircraft component parts in the entire supply system, was required to conserve flight hours by using only a handful of airworthy ships for proficiency training. Only units stationed in the Pacific region and the East Coast Mercury space capsule recovery project enjoyed a class one parts priority. Therefore, for much of the week, a majority of our twenty-four machines hunkered like sick old men on the New River flight line. Only special events such as group unit flybys or carrier qualification operations off Onslow Beach prodded the ugly green grasshoppers into flight.

TRIPS

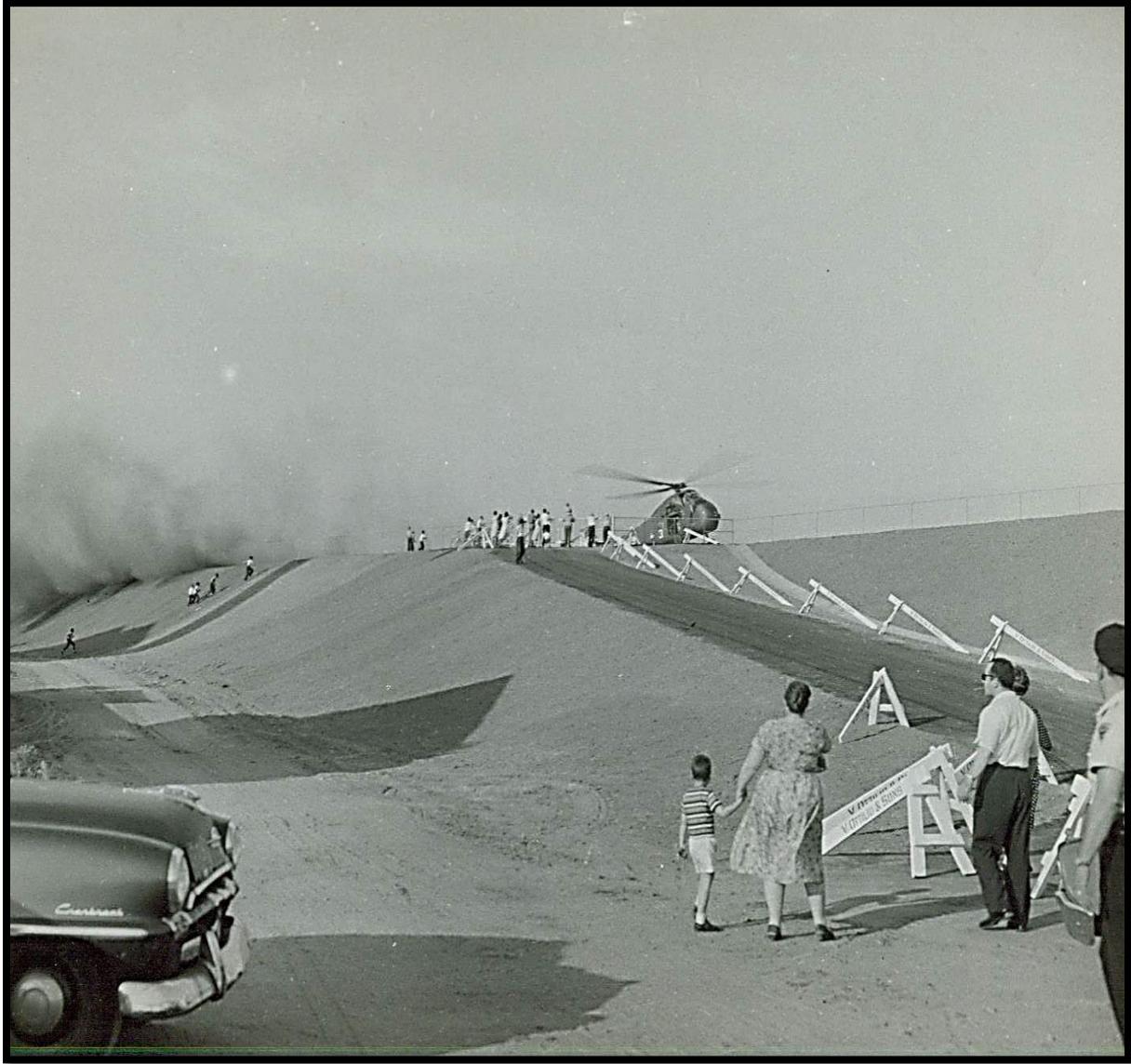
A certain amount of mandatory flight time was required to achieve a second in command position (H2P) and allow us bachelors to escape the sterile environs pervading Jacksonville, North Carolina. In order to accrue this time, provided sufficient aircraft and plane commanders were available, squadron operations officers authorized weekend cross country training flights. Naturally, I took maximum advantage of this opportunity during my first four months at the facility, flying long interesting trips to various sites in New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and Florida.

An exception to normal weekend escapes from New River was my first HUS-1 cross country flight to Northern New Jersey on Wednesday 22 June. The officially sanctioned mission involved a flight to Paterson, New Jersey, to help dedicate the country's first city heliport that was designed and built to government specifications with matching funds from the Federal Aviation Agency. Constituting a public relations opportunity, one the USMC relished, the invitation to participate in the civilian affair was readily accepted by the MAG-26 commanding officer.



Flight line USMC facility New River, North Carolina. HR-2S helicopters located on the first row; HUS-1 helicopters on the second and third rows.

Official U.S. Marine Corps Photograph, courtesy of Sergeant A.J Cotterell.



Trailing a huge dust cloud, the HMR-261 crew of Echo Mike-3 lands at the newly certified FAA heliport at Paterson, New Jersey.
Author Collection.



The crew of HUS-1 Echo Mike-3 (EM-3). Standing left to right: First Lieutenants H.R. Casterlin, John D. Durrant, and Hal Yanofsky. Kneeling: Lance Corporal Samuel T. Laird, Private First-Class James J. Cahill, and Gunnery Sergeant W.B. McDaniel.

Author Collection.



Echo Mike-3 parked at a U.S Army Nike site near Hadley Airport, New Jersey. Author is giving instructions to the crew chief while Mrs. Casterlin observes Mr. Harry Casterlin sitting in the cockpit.
Author Collection.

Creating a sizeable dust storm on final approach to the heliport, we had the honor of being the first helicopter to land at the new facility. Other military and civilian helicopters from different venues followed, and were also placed on static display for public viewing. The trip also afforded some of us from the area the opportunity to slip home for a day. ¹⁰

The following month Bill Durrant and I departed the base for another trip to New Jersey. Both from the town of Plainfield, we had ample motivation to visit either a wife or parents.

To ensure adequate security for Echo Mike-3, we landed and parked in the fenced confines of a U.S. Army Nike missile base near the southern edge of Hadley Airport, the first airmail facility in the country. Located only a few miles from Plainfield, my Mother and Father arrived to deliver us home.

Since requirements for weekend "training" trips stipulated that we return the aircraft to New River for the work week, we were in the air Sunday and landed at the base about dark.

Training continued on a catch-as-catch-can basis with the few airworthy helicopters available to fly. Flights were necessarily short, but stage fields were not far from the base, and much could be accomplished within the prescribed periods. My mentors were excellent instructors. I soon became fairly proficient in flying the HUS-1. Finally, in August I was upgraded to second in command status (H2P).

Occasionally we were assigned sky-diving parachute missions to accommodate Camp Lejeune pathfinders in the piney wood countryside around MAG-26.

On Labor Day Weekend, Hal Yanofsky and I drove a ship up the Atlantic coast to Boston, Massachusetts. We parked at the U.S. Coast Guard station adjoining the large bay where numerous anchored boats lazily undulated in the calm water. Hal's parents lived in a nearby

¹⁰ Information from the 06/23/60 *Paterson Evening News* regarding the heliport opening was liberally reported on pages one and two.

community, and as his service tour was nearly complete, he was making plans to join his father and engineer brother in a fledgling aerospace parts manufacturing business. The cordial Yanofsky family were great hosts, and since I had never been to "Bean Town" before, I found the experience interesting and fun. In addition, I was gaining valuable experience from a professional pilot who had a major hand in my transition training to the HUS-1.

THE CARRIBEAN

The boredom of repetitious ground duty and minimum flying in New River was temporarily relieved late in September. At that time our squadron boarded the USS *Boxer*, along with a twin engine HR2S squadron, for carrier qualifications and a projected ten-week Caribbean cruise to Puerto Rico. During this time we would participate in hot weather amphibious vertical envelopment training. The *Boxer* had been converted, commissioned, and designated Landing Platform Helicopter 4 (LPH-4) on January 1959, thus becoming the second helicopter carrier in the Naval inventory.¹¹

It did not take long to tire of shipboard life when the boring regimen consisted of sleeping, standing fire watches, watching low-rated Vince Edwards's black and white grade "Z" movies in the pilots' ready room, and eating. Fortunately, as a senior 1st Lieutenant, along with two other officers, I was assigned quarters in a compartment. Less fortunate junior officers were billeted in what was called "the Zoo," a squad-bay type area consisting of stuffy, confined, and cramped quarters.

ROSY ROADS

While ashore in Puerto Rico, we billeted at the Roosevelt Roads Naval Air Station, located on the island's east coast where the U.S.

¹¹ William Fails, *Marines and Helicopters 1962-1973* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, U.S., Marine Corps, 1978) 22.



Preparations for parachute jumps in the New River area.
Official Marine Corps Photograph.



With HUS-1 helicopters lined up nose to tail on the carrier deck, Marine crewmembers standby to participate in flight quarters.

Author Collection.



After receiving a "Charlie" signal from pri-fly, a division of HUS-1 pilots in trail formation prepare to turn downwind and land on the LPH, while troops load for a lift. Time was of the essence when recovering on carriers. Therefore, 180-degree breaks were generally performed at two second intervals.

Collection Author.

Navy, in addition to normal training, conducted extensive tests of early model drone aircraft.

Operating for the first time in a true tropical environment, we parked squadron aircraft on a concrete mat at the edge of a dense jungle, where critters we had seldom seen before lived. Rosy abounded with unattractive green iguanas, a lizard that undulated across the cement parking area. Nocturnal wild dogs or monkeys roamed the flight line, chewing plastic coverings of the string-like ADF radio sense antennas attached to pylons along the underside of our helicopters.

There were other problems. "No-see-ums," a minute, but particularly annoying and vicious strain of vampire insect, flew unimpeded through the fine mesh of our porch screens at night. They attacked any exposed human skin with voracious bites, which an unsuspecting victim might scratch bloody by morning. Second Lieutenant Vince Tesulov was a choice appetizer for the beasties.

Our activities were enhanced by short trips to the San Juan capital and the islands of Saint Thomas, Vieques, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

VIEQUES

Vieques, a picturesque, heavily jungled island thirty miles east of Puerto Rico, hosted a "grunt" Marine training base. Although providing an excellent jungle environment for training exercises, rugged and hostile terrain contributed to many injuries during field operations. Therefore, by prior agreement, the squadron provided a flight crew and ship nightly for potential medical evacuations. Roughing it for a night in a tent became more tolerable when one considered that the Post Exchange (PX) sold the finest and cheapest rum in the entire Caribbean region.

Vieques, like other area islands, appeared a particularly beautiful and largely pristine spot, displaying stunning palm-lined coves and fine white sugar sand beaches. A disturbing rumor circulated that, if true, would go a long way toward destroying this island

paradise. The Hilton Hotel chain planned to erect a luxury hotel in a cove located a short distance below the hill encompassing the Camp Garcia airstrip.

A partially completed wave-washed rock causeway jutting out a considerable distance to the west toward the parent island of Puerto Rico displayed the remnants of a hastily constructed World War Two bastion that fortunately was never needed. Scuttlebutt indicated that USG leaders chose the remoteness of Vieques to provide a seat of exile for the British government following England's expected fall to Hitler's Nazi Germany during the grim early days of the conflict. Decaying overgrown ammunition bunkers, then scarcely visible in the jungle's tangled mat, merged into and littered the landscape, crumbling monuments to a possible last-ditch resolve of a vanquished and beleaguered nation to survive the onslaught of an unstable, power-crazed dictator.

ONION

In November, after a second early morning ship-to-shore movement into Camp Garcia during a mock war exercise, *Boxer* air operations personnel hastily recalled the squadron for emergency redeployment. The reason: serious political trouble and unrest had erupted in "Banana Republic" Guatemala's capital. Therefore, once again the age-old cliché, "Send in the Marines," rumbled through the halls of the Pentagon.

Initially, the sudden recall caused a problem. With our projected cruise nearly completed, many personnel were on R&R, scattered throughout the Caribbean sightseeing, or conducting last minute shopping. Those of us still available to work packed squadron gear and loaded the ship, while other crews rounded up strays. Amazingly, but in the finest military tradition, we were underway within a few hours with all hands on board.

The following three days were very tense, while elements of the Atlantic fleet joined us. We orbited a predetermined position in the

ocean, curiously named "Point Onion." We nervously awaited additional instructions, while assuming a full alert for a battle plan operation to invade Guatemala City. I became aware of the flap's serious nature, and my guts began to churn when issued my personal side arm. Fortunately, astute Central Intelligence Agency agents quickly resolved the situation and, to everyone's relief, military leaders informed our squadron to stand down.¹²

*"On November 14 a few army officers revolted against President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, who was responsible for allowing the CIA to operate in Guatemala [preparing forces for the future invasion of Cuba]. Cuban exile units from the home base, code named Trax, deployed to Guatemala City and to Puerto Barrios to disarm the rebels. The U.S. Navy also responded, dispatching Amphibious Squadron 10 to the Caribbean with the helicopter carrier Boxer, five destroyers, and a contingent of two thousand Marines."*¹³

After the aborted mission, and before returning to New River, as a sop to the squadron's excellent work during the non-war event, superiors awarded us two days shore liberty at the Caribbean Island capital of Kingston, Jamaica. As a young hormone-conflicted Marine, I personally found the experience repulsive and a degrading example, of youthful aberrations in judgment and moral turpitude.

NEW RIVER

In order to escape the restrictive life style at New River, many of my squadron mates elected to sail on the annual fall Mediterranean cruise or a peace trip to South Africa.

I had several reasons for not participating, but primarily, I was not that fond of ships. Having previously experienced considerable

¹² At the time, the term CIA was generally only an acronym to me. It was considered an organization so shrouded in secrecy that one felt constrained to talk or speculate about it.

¹³ John Prados, *Presidents Secret Wars* (New York, N.Y.: Morrow and Company, 1986) 188.

discomfort on board ship, I decided to remain at the MAG-26 facility and accumulate additional required flight time toward the coveted plane commander status.

In the fall, Captain Charlie Weitz, whose carefree ways and colorful reputation preceded him halfway around the world, arrived at New River from a completed overseas tour to await service separation. After visiting his parent's home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Charlie planned to join the paramilitary forces of Air America in Southeast Asia. Members of my squadron, including Bill Connor, Hal Yanofsky, and others stationed at Oppama, Japan, knew Charlie very well. The stories of his antics were classic and awesome. Of all the tales, one that particularly tickled me involved Charlie scaling the outside wall of Sisters Bar, climbing through a window, plunging his hand in the fish tank, and devouring two gold fish. Yes, the larger-than-life guy seemed extraordinary. We would meet and interact again.

The 1961 New Year ushered in a fresh, young, and exciting Democratic administration to Washington, D.C., while Southeast Asia events took an ominous turn for the worse. Reports continued to trickle down to our level speculating that our machines and flying skills might shortly be required there.

Squadron readiness and upgrading continued, with cold weather and moderate level mountain training conducted near Donaldson Air Force Base, Greenville, South Carolina. The exercise marked my first experience landing a helicopter at high altitude during winter and snowy conditions.

UPGRADING

During the middle of March, after completion of a series of troop lifts, followed by an unannounced simulated forced landing and OMNI instrument approach, pilot in command (PIC), Captain Frank "Black Mac" McLennon, informed me that I had just satisfied the squadron plane commander (PC) requirements. Pleasantly surprised and elated, I had absolutely no idea the upgrading was accomplished in this manner. The

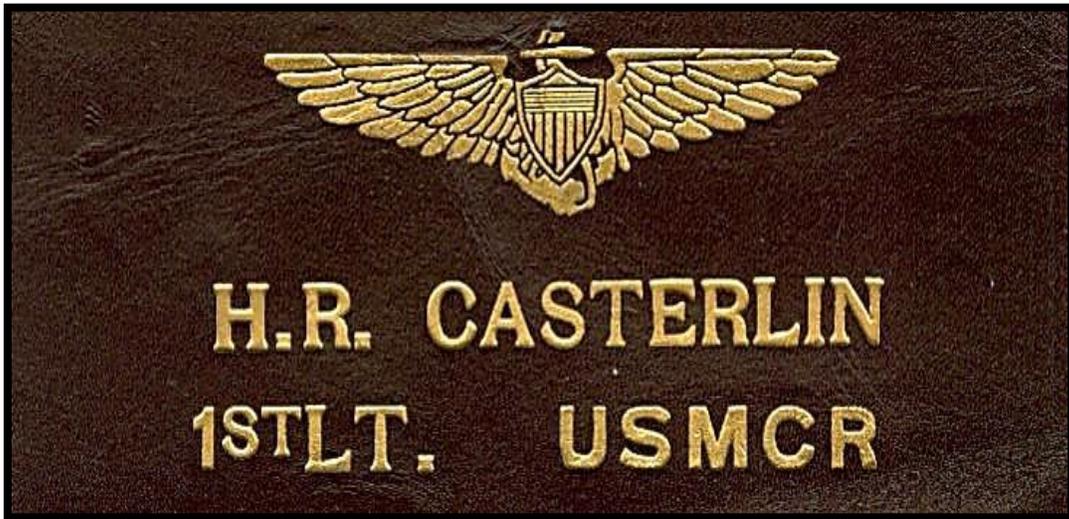
apparent spontaneity lacked the opportunity for me to "sweat" an announced check ride and become hopelessly nervous, as I had so many times before in the Pensacola training command. Now, at last, I would have the opportunity to display my proficiency and shape my own decisions, dependent only on the seniority of the second cockpit pilot.

Armed with a squadron patch that Second Lieutenant Billy Massey designed and had manufactured, we readied for the squadron's impending Far East tour.



Raging bull squadron patch worn on the right-hand side of our leather flight jackets.

Author Collection.



In addition to the squadron patch, officers wore leather name tags with ranks on the left-hand side of our leather flight jackets. These swatches were manufactured, embellished, and sewn onto the jackets by my three enterprising flight equipment personnel.

Author Collection.

On 24 April, 1961, I received orders transferring me to MAG-16, HMR-261, Futema, Okinawa. Sketchy briefings pertaining to our impending overseas tour indicated that fully half of our Far East tour would station us onboard Navy carriers. This news, a real bummer, stirred very little enthusiasm within the group, as most of us reluctant sailors considered ourselves basically landlubbers. During the interim period, I turned my flight equipment shop over to a salty H&MS warrant officer who had formerly been a flying sergeant during World War Two. In order to form an advanced party and smooth our projected July transition, several key squadron personnel left early for Okinawa.

In preparation for the overseas deployment, I shipped my household goods to the Fleet Marine Force, Naha, Okinawa on 1 May. The remainder of the squadron started drifting away on leave during the month. A majority of the married squadron members had requested leave to effect last minute family relocation and preparations for the one-year absence.

Sadly, two of my hometown friends relinquished their hard earned "wings of gold" in deference to family pressure to remain in the States. One had previously talked about transferring to the Coast Guard, but when rejected by that service, initiated the extreme step. Unfortunately, a married Marine's life was eternally difficult, for needs of the service generally required an individual's absence from home for at least half his military career. A Marine adage alluding to priorities and voiced during initial T&T Regiment training that "if the Corps wanted you to have a wife, it would have issued you one," still rang loud and clear in my head. This and other troubling concerns with gender relationships I witnessed in the Jacksonville area would dissuade me from ever considering marriage while still in

the service.

With most squadron duties curtailed, at the tender age of twenty-six, I arranged to have long neglected and troublesome tonsils removed at the Camp Lejeune Hospital. Merely a precaution in case of excessive bleeding, after a competent Navy doctor performed a snare and snip procedure, a three-day stay in the hospital was required. Healing after the minor operation was another matter. It caused "Old Watashi" considerable throat discomfort for about a month, and created a serious void in my social life.

Following a short home leave, I flew to Las Vegas, a planned stopover to meet with other squadron pilots. Unaccustomed to the region's oppressive heat and humidity, when I stepped out the door of the plane onto the roll-up steps, I nearly fell down. Since we were traveling on official orders, we stayed at the Nellis USAF Base BOQ, located a short distance from town. Like Camp Kilmer near my home in New Jersey, the wooden barracks looked like left-over buildings erected during World War Two. Late one night, dressed in my summer service gabardine uniform, I rubbed elbows with popular singer and movie actor Dean Martin at a crap table in the Sands Casino. While half a dozen gorgeous honeys hung around the celebrity, Dino enjoyed his customary cocktail.

To minimize the heat index, we completed the cross-country trip to California in the dark of night via a black ribbon through the still fiery Mojave Desert. My diminutive roommate, Lieutenant Rick C. Sweeney, was the driver. ¹

Rick was reared in the small gaming community of Jackpot, Nevada, where both his parents were casino dealers. Unfortunately, from an early age he was exposed to the considerable foolishness associated

¹ My former roommate, Bob Goforth, had left the service shortly after receiving word of his missing brother. Younger than most of us, Rick Sweeney drank a lot to blend in and, since I was considered a good influence at the time, he was assigned as my new roommate. However, I am afraid that I failed to live up to expectations.

with gambling towns.

Following breakfast in Bakersfield, California at sunrise, we eventually reached the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ) at Treasure Island, San Francisco, and were informed that the facility was fully occupied. Since there would be a delay in our departure, the officer in charge of billeting allowed us to venture downtown to secure accommodations at the Worth Hotel, where we spent the next five days enjoying the historic and fantastic city at government expense. In that short time, as the delights of San Francisco unfolded, I nearly forgot my anticipation and excitement relating to the overseas trip. It appeared that the cosmopolitan city, surrounded by bridges, peaks, rolling hills, bays, and oceans, provided something for everyone. Loving local color, I attempted to do it all, gleefully riding bell-clanging cable cars, visiting the park and fantastic zoo, journeying to Sausalito to quaff a beer on a wooden pier, dining at DiMaggio's restaurant on Fisherman's Wharf, watching old timers play Bocce Ball at the foot of the hill, sightseeing in the financial district, and the especially colorful Chinatown. To cap it all off, once again evidencing the trite axiom that happens to be quite true—"it's a small world," my buddy Connie Barsky and I unexpectedly met two good friends I knew from Duke University on the street. Formerly nursing students, Ann and Susan currently worked at the local Kaiser Hospital. Both had no plans for the evening, so we invited them to accompany us to the recently released Paul Newman movie *Exodus*. Afterward, we enjoyed a drink at the famous Top of the Mark.

We departed continental United States (CONUS) from Travis AFB, Fairfield, California, late on the afternoon of June 23. We did not get far that first day. Slick Airways, the military air transport service (MATS aircraft), chugged and vibrated west through the air for forty-five minutes. Suddenly, one of the four turboprop engines malfunctioned, necessitating an immediate return to San Francisco International Airport.

Following a safe landing, airline personnel housed us in a plush motel adjacent to the airport. A short time after consuming a sumptuous steak, I became violently ill with flu-like symptoms. In this miserable state, but fortified with medicine obtained at the Oakland Naval Hospital, I continued the flight late the next day, while wondering if the trip constituted a gross error with so many dire omens occurring simultaneously.

We arrived at Kadena USAFB, Okinawa, on 26 June, where the officer of the day stamped my orders at 1330 hours. Four days after processing, and temporarily billeting at Sukiran Army Camp because officer's quarters at Futema were not completed, squadron personnel again redeployed by air transport to regroup at Cubi Point Naval Air Station on the Philippine Island of Luzon to replace the HMR-162 squadron, and assume responsibility for their helicopters. Turn-around was rapid. The following morning, officers and men of HMR-162 departed for Okinawa on the same planes.

Before leaving for Cubi Point, Corporal Dale Hinton wrote to his parents on 29 June from Futema:

"This base was just recently constructed and will be nice when completed. The mess hall is nice and the food is good...I think there is much to do here in Okinawa.

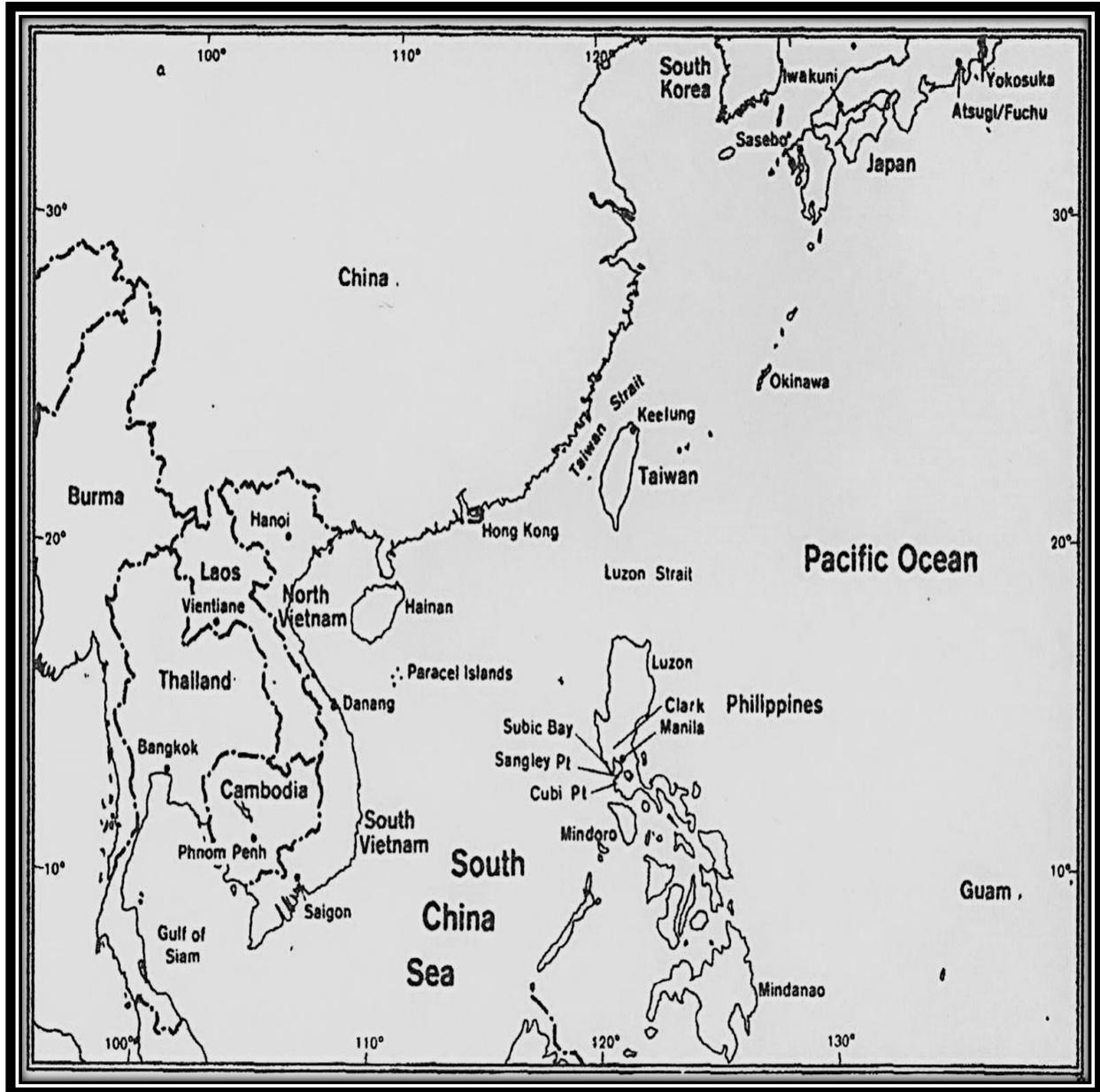
*Tomorrow afternoon we are flying out of here in transports and heading for the Philippines and the USS Thetis Bay...the helicopters we will be taking over are supposed to be in bad shape. Two of them are here at Futema all smashed to hell. A pilot sat one down on tree stump and tore the bottom out of it..."*¹

LUZON & CUBI POINT

Luzon, the largest island in an eleven-hundred-mile chain of more than seven thousand tropical and mostly uninhabited islands, became the location of several large and highly strategic U.S. Naval and Air Force bases dedicated to support the U.S. Government's Far East policy.

Fully one half of the island's total area was composed of dense forest and rugged mountainous terrain. Throughout the chain fifty

¹ Hinton Letter from MCAF Futema, Okinawa, 06/29/61.



HMR-261 Squadron's sprawling theater of operations during 1961-1962. Main bases of operation were located at Okinawa and Cubi Point, Philippine Islands. The year-long tour involved actual missions or liberty stops at Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mindoro, Philippine Islands, Soc Trang, South Vietnam, and Udorn, Thailand.

Author Collection.

tribes, some consisting of people with origins dating back to three thousand B.C. and speaking more than eighty dialects, roamed at will, largely unrestricted or controlled by the government. Much of the Philippine Island group was still uncharted, mainly because of restrictions presented by fierce nomadic headhunters living in inaccessible forbidden regions. ²

"In 1951, U.S. Navy Seabees commenced the largest earth-moving job in their history constructing the U.S Naval Air Station at Cubi Point in the Philippines. Their job was to erect a huge base for our fast aircraft carrier forces.

The task consumed five years. It would utilize the efforts of five battalions, and as it was the most advanced base for our largest carriers, was to later prove invaluable to our Vietnam War effort.

The architect-engineer contract for the design of all facilities went to Bechtel Corporation. The massive dredging contract for the deep-water port for the world's largest ships was assigned to the Midpac Corporation of Honolulu, Hawaii.

The tough work was undertaken by the Seabees. Units involved were Mobile Navy Construction Battalions 2, 3, 5, 9, and 11. More than 3,000 men worked on the projects at the peak of the effort. Their work involved carving off the tops of two mountains to provide fill to develop the 8,000-foot runway and 1,000-foot overruns. They additionally constructed the pier and a variety of other facilities. Other yeoman chores involved hacking a road through dense rain forest and moving a native village to a spot across the bay." ³

We arrived at Cubi Point, Subic Bay--puny in comparison with Manila Bay--with the typhoon season well underway. Consequently, heralding the first two days of a questionable "welcome aboard," weather conditions were unbelievably wet. Before that time, I had never observed rain pour to the ground with such fierce intensity.

² Robert De Roos, *National Geographic, The Philippines: Freedom's Pacific Frontier*, Sept. 1966: 312.

³ Sources.

Waves and sheets of water, blowing horizontal to the deck, intermittently flooded the flight line and spilled tons of liquid into the heaving, dark, and turbulent bay. Actually, we were fortunate to arrive toward the beginning of the monsoon season, for it tended to somewhat moderate the extreme temperatures of up to 120 degrees prevalent during the dry season.

During intervals between storms, high humidity, the stench of decay, and dampness permeated the area. As yet uninitiated to the new environment, jungle sounds were generally foreign to my ear. Howls from various monkey clans and incessant insect din from jungle thickets, which closely bordered the dual parking ramp and operations shack, were deafening, and only slightly muffled by intermittent torrential downpours.

In addition to the problems fostered by natural elements, squadron readiness was a joke. Specifically, our friends in the preceding squadron had departed the area leaving us with numerous machines either in advanced stages of disrepair or within a few hours of requiring heavy maintenance. To our dismay, we discovered that most new bureau number aircraft, and those recently returned from overhaul facilities, were delivered to Thailand to satisfy the Air America Inc. contract sponsored by the U.S. Air Force Lao Military Assistance Program (MAP). For this identical reason, and smacking of New River, most supplies and spare parts were non-existent or in short supply. We in the maintenance department glumly understood that a considerable amount of work remained before the squadron could hope to deploy, or provide the Seventh Fleet with an effective western Pacific vertical assault capability. Additionally, an initial asset inventory revealed a confused and grim situation with our POL supplies. The previous supply department had mistakenly ordered, or Okinawa supply had forwarded, drums consisting of an improper type of tail and rotor head lubricating grease. Consequently, the only petroleum by-product remaining at our base constituted a purple colored, low viscosity lubricant, one that rotating zerk fittings rapidly ejected, and heavy



A portion of Luzon, Philippine Islands, largest land mass in the extensive island chain. NAS Cubi Point is located on the lower right side of Subic Bay, the smaller bay on the peninsula to the north-west of Manila Bay.

Map Author Collection.



Flight line at the U.S. Naval Air Station Cubi Point, Luzon Philippine Island group. Squadron aircraft were designated Yankee Sierra (YS) prior to being re-lettered with our unit's call sign-Echo Mike (EM).

Dale Hinton Collection.

rain easily flushed away. The unsightly concoction proved so unsuitable for our operation that the tail rotors of our few operational aircraft required four hours greasing intervals instead of the normal twelve. To alleviate this problem, senior maintenance officers forwarded flash messages through channels describing our plight and requesting an emergency response. Eventually supply rushed fresh drums of the correct grease to our location. Such was the initial marginal state of HMR(L)261, one of two Special Landing Forces afloat, and the United States Government's (USG) first line of defense in the Far East.

HISTORY

Spain ceded the Philippines to the U.S. in 1898 after suffering an ignominious defeat during a naval engagement in Manila Bay. The action ended three hundred years of Spanish influence and rule in the area, but left a confused people who desired complete autonomy from colonial rule. ⁴

Independence finally arrived in 1946, but at the terrible price of one million deaths, dislocation of many, and a long humiliating Japanese occupation. If there was any positive benefit salvaged from the destructive armed conflict, it might have been the extraordinary and lasting good will exhibited by the majority of Filipinos toward General MacArthur and the American people for granting them liberty. ⁵

On Sunday July 2, during a Filipino holiday equivalent to American Armed Forces Independence Day, I was assigned squadron duty officer of the day on board the USS *Thetis Bay* docked at Subic Bay. The ship, the first and oldest converted helicopter Jeep carrier, had sailed infrequently during the past three months because of a cracked hull, and was currently undergoing emergency repairs to make her

⁴ Don Moser, National Geographic, *The Philippines: Better Days Still Eludes an Old Friend*, March 1977, 368.

⁵ De Roos, 312.

sufficiently ship-shape to accommodate our squadron. Because of considerable water infiltration, engineers were reluctant to untie the ship out of concern that it would sink. The target date for going aboard was the second week in July.

In keeping with friendly nation tradition, U.S. Naval authorities invited the local gentry to a shipboard open house. During the course of the day, I met many Filipinos for the first time. Although cordial and engaging people, my initial reaction to the town folk was anything but favorable. ⁶

Corporal Hinton wrote another letter home commenting on the Naval base and area:

"We now have been here at the air station for 10 days and it already seems like months. We arrived at the start of the monsoon season and it rains most of the time. When it stops raining it gets so hot that you broil. And the humidity is unbelievable.."

[HMR] 162 was sure glad to see us. The helicopters they left us aren't in too bad shape considering the weather, the salt water, and everything...The Thetis bay is sitting across Subic Bay tied to a dock and taking on water through a cracked hull...

We haven't been paid since we left Treasure Island..

This town and the area outside the gate has the highest VD rate in the Far East. You can rent a 'Flip' girl to dance and talk with for 20 cents an hour..

Tonight we played the officers in a softball game under the lights and beat them 13-7..." ⁷

⁶ Without much previous exposure to Orientals or their culture, I was privately a little intolerant at first. For a short period, until reversing this bias, I viewed dark skinned Asians with less charity than I should have. I have no such bias today.

⁷ Hinton Letter to Parents, 06/10/61.

TALES FROM THE VILLE

One evening, in order to enhance my knowledge of the people, help dissipate any peer or inborn intolerance, and gain additional exposure to local color, Connie Barsky and I ventured into infamous Olongapo, a pleasure town which specifically catered to the prurient interests of transient military communities. Strategically centered between both Subic Bay and Cubi Point Naval bases, we found ourselves approaching an "off limits" section.

Olongapo enjoyed an arguable reputation as one of the worst (or best) sin cities in the Far East, if not the entire world. It was also reputed to have the highest venereal disease rate of any liberty port in the Far East. I had journeyed to similar places during infrequent cruises, and had to admit Olongapo surpassed all others, providing all the ingredients calculated to satisfy a young single man's desires.

The place we slipped into was located toward the end of a long, narrow twisting dirt alley behind several unimposing two story green concrete buildings. Single room shanties sat on the high banks overlooking an incredibly filthy river that wound unmolested through town. Log platforms jutted from the bank, forming open-air privies, contributing effluent which further polluted the disgusting waterway. My collateral duty as squadron survival officer, and the hours of research conducted in my small flight equipment office while at New River, had forewarned me regarding the unseen dangers lurking in Asian rivers and streams. Most waterways, especially in this area, contained minute schistosome parasites, so small they could penetrate the body's tiniest orifices. While relieving myself from the platform, I shivered when contemplating the implications of a vertigo-induced splash into that parasitic infested water.

Purely in the role of an observer, I enjoyed conversing with one of the young prostitutes and expanding my education about the seedier aspects of life, when suddenly I heard muffled sounds from the alley (Barsky, infinitely wiser than me, had departed the area earlier).

Members of the local constabulary were conducting their nightly appearance to shake down sex workers and sweep the area for wayward souls. By then, darkness and the threat of discovery in an off-limits zone, destroyed whatever bravado I had originally mustered when entering the forbidden area. Therefore, with few available options-- I certainly did not intend to jump into the river--recalling the "when in Rome" adage, after the alarmed girl implored me to enter her tiny shack and hide under her bed, I immediately complied. All the while, I considered the embarrassing consequences of an irate Skipper having to bail his errant lieutenant out of jail.

After chattering in Tagalog (the predominant language after English and Spanish) for a few minutes, and discovering no offenders, and perhaps obtaining hush money, the police promptly departed. After waiting a reasonable period, and hearing no more voices, I sheepishly emerged from under the bed, chagrined that during the encounter I had cowardly acted out an age-old joke. I left, after enjoying all the local color I could stomach that night.

With the passing days, I developed a definite taste for the "Ville," spending many happy and sodden hours observing abundant local color and quaffing the local "San Mickey Green." ⁸

After accompanying the Skipper, other married senior officers, and hangers on for a couple of days of obligatory barhopping, the group collectively selected and descended upon the Willows as their preferred watering hole. However, I did not believe in segregated bars and found the establishment, girls, and married company a bit dull. In addition, I was a short timer in the Corps and did not particularly consider it necessary to suck up to the Skipper like some of the other dead-end individuals in the squadron. Therefore, on the advice of my enlisted people, I soon gravitated to the U&I, a far livelier establishment located across the street at the end of a short alley.

⁸ Brewers produced San Miguel beer appropriately bottled in green containers so rapidly that it did not have sufficient time to adequately mature. Hence, the term green beer. However, given enough consumption, the brew was quite effective.

Not far from the main gate, it was preferred and frequented by our single enlisted men. I always had good rapport with the men I worked with and thoroughly enjoyed their off-duty company. I also counted on the big men in the squadron, like S.D. Marsh, for protection in that questionable environment. This was particularly evident one night when a couple of drunken sailors, taking umbrage at my looks or flapping mouth, wanted to clean my clock.⁹

Like most liberty towns, over time Olongapo generated many colorful and fanciful stories. Exaggerated tales, and outright fabrications generally spun by "old salts" pervaded our repertoire of sea stories. A current story was circulating regarding sailors being carried to the base after being castrated by local hoodlums.

Another sobering account exceeded all others described the occasional vengefulness of the local folk. According to the anecdote, one night, while driving an official vehicle on the town's main street, a sailor ran over and broke a small child's leg. An extremely angry and restive crowd halted the unfortunate offender and unceremoniously dragged him from the vehicle. Then, conforming to the ancient Hebrew Old Testament "eye for an eye" tenet, without benefit of anesthesia, they summarily amputated an identical limb the man had damaged on the child.

Caution was an excellent watchword while visiting Olongapo. Aside from the normal hustle and bustle in a town designed for and catering to the pleasures of military personnel, thievery was rife. Ingenious larceny involved even small children. Therefore, knowledgeable individuals advised newcomers to forbear wearing an expensive watch equipped with an expansion band in town. The reasoning was simple. This provided easy pickings for talented street urchins. They could dash at full tilt past an individual, slide a hand between the band and one's wrist, quickly relieving an unsuspecting person of his property, while never breaking stride on their way to the nearest

⁹ The infamous Casterlin mouth has always been, and still constitutes a problem at times.



U&I bar matchbook advertisement.
Author Collection.

pawnshop.

Before settling on the U&I as my preferred recreation spot, I accompanied other officers to a bar located on the second story of a building on the main drag. Lieutenant Jim Creech, a sizeable man with a correspondingly large waist, was one of the attendees. Sometime during the evening, he hailed me from the rear of the establishment. Then, lifting his colorful Hawaiian shirt, he displayed his particular brand of life insurance to cope with the town bad boys—a .45 caliber pistol jammed into his belt. I thought this a viable deterrent, but perhaps a little extreme.

I was never dissuaded by constant warnings. I eagerly inhaled Olongopo's atmosphere and wandered by myself unfettered throughout the interesting town while encountering a minimum of trouble. (I would later cringe when I recalled some of my nocturnal antics.) It did not take long to become fond of, and trust, the warm nature of most Filipino people. Furthermore, the ever-changing local color captivated me, and at times I sacrificed common sense to increase my experience level.

THE JEEPNEY

Before long, rumors circulated--scuttlebutt being an integral and almost essential ingredient of military life--that "Jeepney" drivers, on occasion, would drive an inebriated American into the jungle where, along with accomplices, they would assault and relieve the hapless individual of his valuables, if not his life.

The "Jeepney," a bizarre vehicular adaptation of the war-surplus Jeep, provided an inexpensive mode of transportation in cities and towns of the Philippine Islands. ¹⁰ Drivers attached much pride to decorating these fringed-topped vehicles with as many lights, reflectors, medallions, pictures, ornaments, and any other gaudy or garish chrome adornments the owner could procure and attach to his

¹⁰ Moser, 361.

open air mini-bus. Although Filipinos were not the only Asians to decorate their vehicles, the "Jeepney" was definitely unique to the region.¹¹

Despite the disconcerting "weeds" rumor, after a long evening, I found myself alone with Toni, my temporary and preferred U&I honey, on the hard backseat bench of a "Jeepney" transiting the town for a late night snack. Down the road, the driver stopped and picked up several wild-eyed and evil-looking young hoods. Their boisterous behavior and the manner in which they eyeballed me suggested that this might be my night for a trip to the jungle. Toni, sensing my discomfort, sized up the situation and wisely maintained a distracting and constant stream of conversation. Finally, we safely arrived at our destination, and I uttered an audible sigh of relief as we disembarked in front of the restaurant. By then, I had little appetite, for I had no doubt that if alone that night, I would have provided adequate food for the ants.

Military leaders, when in the field, have a proclivity to caution their captive personnel not to consume local food, cohabit with the women, or in general, conduct activities that one might construe as fun. Such platitudes usually grate on any red-blooded American boy's normal lusts and raging hormones. Rarely are the leader's words of wisdom heeded.

Recalling these past admonishments, even when deep in my cups, proved easy when offered a nauseating balut to consume. Filipinos considered the balut, a partially developed duck embryo, along with canine meat, a decided delicacy. However, one peek at the gruesome be-feathered mass poking disgustingly from the top of a cracked egg was enough to make even the strongest individual swear off eggs forever. The few brave American souls attempting to swallow one were invariably unsuccessful, their palates and throats unaccustomed to the stimulating fowl feathers. Despite this Occidental aversion to the balut, the U&I gals took sadistic delight in trying to introduce their

¹¹ De Roos, 317.

American paramours to the food of the gods.

My favorite watering hole, the U&I, almost became the focal point of my demise one night. Late in the evening, an angry, highly distraught, and inebriated honey vigorously fired an empty beer bottle in the general direction of her estranged paramour.¹² Considerably wide of the mark, the missile terminated its flight trajectory, smashing against a concrete pillar, and shattering into thousands of minute splinters only a few inches from my head. I had not experienced such a narrow escape since a small homosexual individual attempted to stick me in the belly with a rusty blade in Trader Jon's Pensacola establishment, for what I considered an innocuous remark regarding his type. Clearly, it did not pay to piss off the natives.

Marines love to tell stories to relieve the boredom of a humdrum existence. Often these tales are embellished and skewed considerably from the truth.

Whenever the squadron was deployed for sea duty, I learned from one of the U&I enlisted regulars that upon my return to Luzon, Toni, the establishment's top trick performer had me targeted for a renowned "Filipino Haircut," (a good throat slashing). Her reason: I had transmitted a venereal disease (VD) to her. This revelation always stimulated mirth and laughter among the men on the ship, but the accusation worried me little, for I always adhered to the Marine Corps school solution following any sexual encounter and never contracted VD. The episode was soon forgotten and probably never would have been broached had I not been so close to the men.

American music, especially *The Twist*, was still in vogue during the early sixties and was the U&I dance of choice. Gyrating wildly to the repetitive beat of Chubby Checker's song, "*Come on baby let's do the twist*," and succumbing to the effects of the bad beer, oppressive heat, and humidity, I unbuttoned my shirt to effect some relief.

¹² A curious de facto bar girl code frowned on indiscriminate flirting between bonded customers.

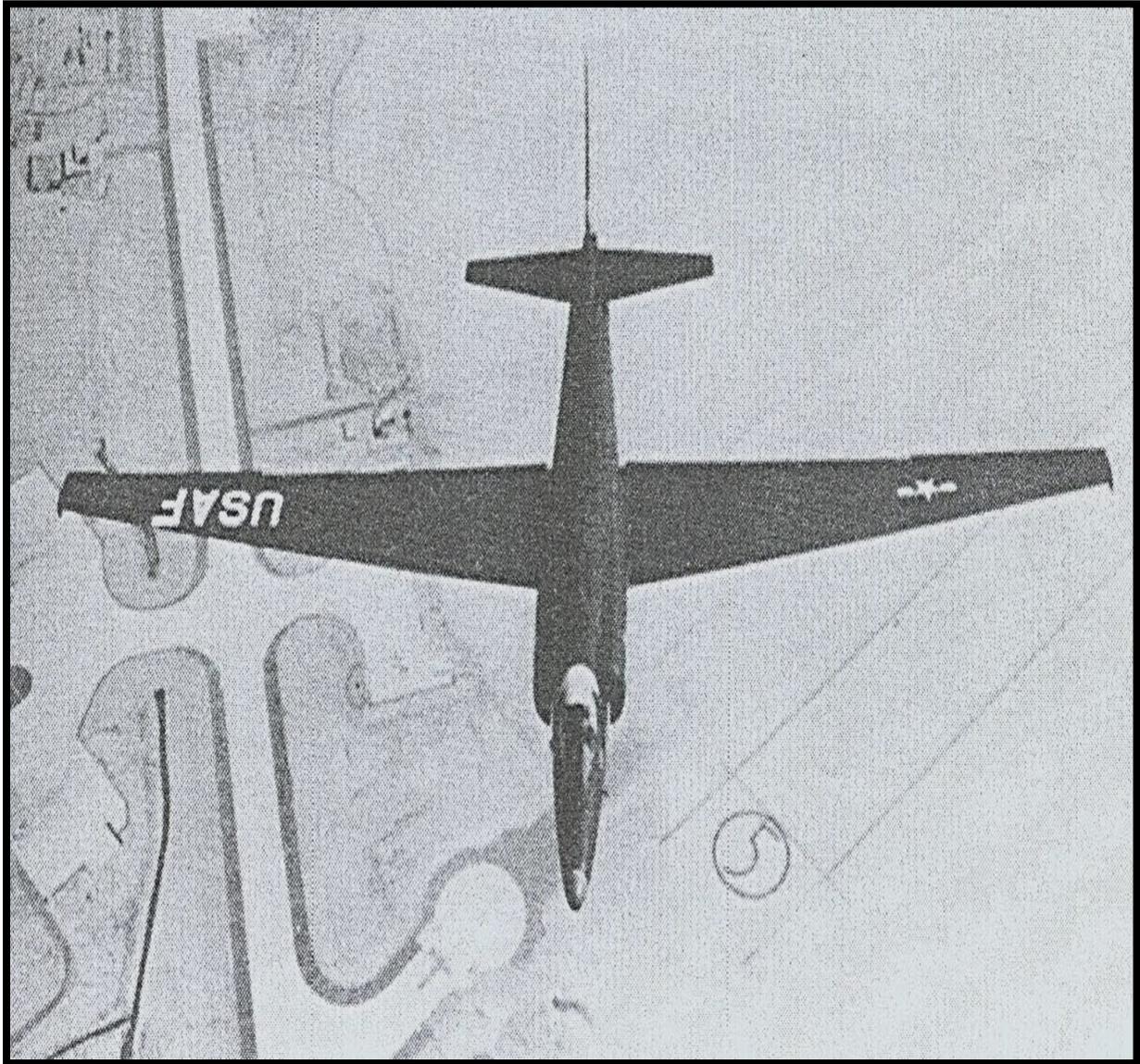
During the next slow dance, Toni, my soft, brown, smooth-skinned partner huskily cooed in my ear, "*Augie, baby, you taste like Dial Soap.*" (For anonymity, I still used my boyhood nickname.) Well, that humorous proclamation nearly dropped me to my knees. Chuckling, I presumed that no one had ever uttered a more glowing tribute for an American manufactured product. What a testimonial that story would make for a television soap commercial.

Unless conducting troop training support missions, or sightseeing to remote parts of the island, time tended to drag at Cubi Point.

However, a few exciting incidents occasionally interceded to break the monotony. One day, the crash-fire crew foamed the single runway to accommodate a Navy jet pilot experiencing cranky landing gear that failed to extend. A squadron mate and I launched, ostensibly for SAR duty, but in reality, to view the impressive display of sparks and spraying white foam as the aluminum belly of the aircraft scraped along the asphalt surface.

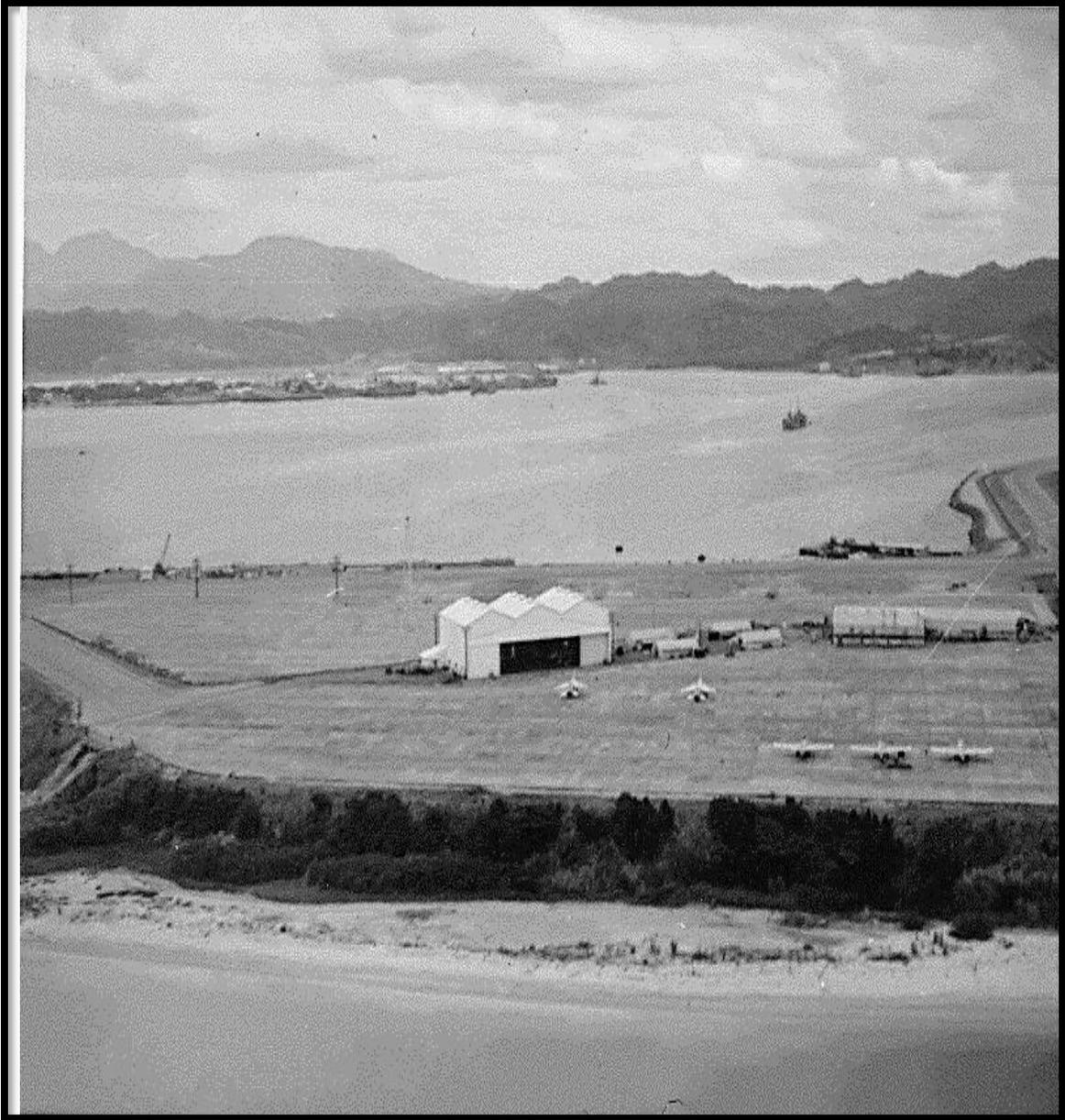
Another afternoon, while tooling around the base perimeter on an administration flight, I overheard the pilot of a U-2 surveillance spy plane calling the tower operator for landing instructions. From the high-pitched urgency in his voice, the pilot seemed very anxious, especially since he insisted the tower immediately clear all surrounding airspace. Unsolicited, he explained that during descent, he was encountering clouds and turbulence during the long high approach. It presented an environment that the single engine, flimsy black plane, little more than a long-winged glider, with unstable and extremely unforgiving flight characteristics, might not be able to handle. I found it easy to commiserate with the pilot and was relieved when he eventually touched down safely without incident.

Tales of thievery elsewhere on the island were almost as widely publicized within the military as the ones concerning the Olongapo region. At Clark Air Force Base outside Angeles City, thirty miles northeast of Cubi Point, a crash-rescue fire truck mysteriously disappeared. Since guards monitored the main gate around the clock,



USAF U-2 high altitude photo reconnaissance plane developed by the Lockheed Aircraft Company's top secret "Skunk Works" division to accomplish long range overflights of denied areas.

Author Collection.



Foreground shows part of Cubi Point's fixed wing parking area, flight line, and the dedicated U-2 hangar. The Subic Bay naval facility lay across the bay.

Hinton Collection.

investigators eventually surmised that phantom hordes must have lifted the truck over the high security fence surrounding the base. If this unlikely scenario is what actually occurred, it certainly must have constituted a first in all other ingenious methods to rip off the U.S. Government.

THE NIGERITO

An interesting story circulated relating to countermeasures in place to curtail burglary activity within the confines of the Cubi Point Base. Because of constant theft and incidents, for many years U.S. Navy officials had hired indigenous Nigeritos to cope with security problems in the Subic Bay area. Members of aboriginal pigmy tribes, the Nigerito people were descendants of the first people settling in the Philippines, having migrated to the islands thousands of years before Christ's birth. The people were similar in stature and skin color to Australian and African Bushmen.

The tribesmen, fiercely loyal to U.S forces during World War Two, had proved invaluable helping to overcome the Japanese menace. So adept were these stealthy individuals at dispatching interlopers with their large bows and arrows, that distressed relatives of dispatched robbers eventually complained to and petitioned the Manila government to intercede in the matter. Consequently, the government rescinded the long-established Carte Blanche for on base "termination with extreme prejudice" to deal with thievery.

However, the edict failed to deter one enterprising soul from modifying and fulfilling his appointed task. Under bilateral agreements, the tiny Nigeritos enjoyed free access to and from the Cubi base. One never challenged this right. One day, when a Marine guard observed a tribal man leading a Filipino through the main gate at arrow point, his interest piqued, and he inquired as to his intention. To the guard's amusement, the Nigerito informed him that since he could no longer slay his prisoner on the naval facility, to satisfy government regulations and still perform his job, he would

kill him outside the base perimeter.

My opportunity to view the Negerito people first hand in their environment occurred when a medic invited me to visit a small village outside of Olongapo, and help him distribute much needed supplies. Following a Jeep ride through the jungle, we arrived in the village and were greeted with courtesy and respect. However, the squalor and disease prevalent among the tribe appalled me. I had witnessed primitive living conditions in other outlying villages, but nothing like I observed that day. Apparently, the stories circulating alluding to the Philippine government's complete disregard for the suppressed race were accurate. Obviously, the tribe's own government provided little help to alleviate their hardships. Consequently, it was not at all surprising that they tended to gravitate toward USG auspices for support and kindness. I found it particularly difficult to accept the children's plight. Their puny bodies were covered with festering, disgusting sores, a result of unsanitary living conditions and infections caused by scratching numerous insect bites. Despite all the enforced poverty, the people appeared genuinely cheerful, interested and alert. As a parting gesture of friendship, the village chief presented me with a hunting arrow almost as tall as one of his warriors. Images of the visit remained in my memory a long time. ¹³

JUNGLE TRAINING

Squadron leaders organized a survival hike to familiarize a few of us with unique conditions we might face if forced down in a tropical jungle environment. While stationed in Puerto Rico, along with a couple of enlisted men, I had driven through a tropical rain forest located halfway up El Yunque, a 3,500-foot mountain in the Caribbean National Forest. It was my first real taste of a jungle's multi-layered canopy of trees and vegetation that restricted movement and

¹³ I had to cut the bamboo, metal and feather artifact, little changed from ones produced thousands of years ago, in two to fit it in my footlocker for shipment home.

one's visibility because of the reduction of sunlight. However, I was unprepared for the claustrophobic effect a jungle setting produced in a hiker, and the other negative factors that impinged on one's senses.

As squadron survival and flight equipment officer at New River, I read extensively and prepared lectures for the pilots regarding factors to expect in a jungle setting, but found this secondhand knowledge never fully prepared me for the actual experience. Afterward, I speculated that if alone in the jungle, strange noises and the lonely, clammy atmosphere might be sufficient to foster terror in the hearts of the uninitiated.

Our friendly Nigerito guide and instructor for the day, satisfied and amused that we had absorbed sufficient feel for our surroundings, led us into an enormous bamboo grove. The oversized grasses displayed varying diameters up to ten inches in girth and soared fifty feet or more into the air, where long, feathery culms bent over in deference to earth's gravity. Choosing one segmented portion, our instructor began to gently tap the node with his knife handle. Hearing a dull sound, he drilled a small hole into the base of the node until pure potable water gushed from the orifice. The exercise provided an impressive insight into the natural resources available to those souls knowledgeable and comfortable in the environment. I had previously read that when searching for water, one could lick early morning dew off broad leaf plants and slice water vines, but I had little idea that the jungle provided so much drinking water to an experienced survivor.

Attempts by our guide to ignite a fire while rubbing two bamboo sticks together failed miserably. This attested to the jungle's pervading dampness and the technique's degree of difficulty.¹⁴ I had no doubt that if given sufficient time, and persisting in this endeavor, our guide would have eventually succeeded. Undeterred by the setback, he demonstrated how to manufacture a crude, but effective,

¹⁴ Although highly adept with flint and steel in starting a fire, I never could perform this procedure in the Boy Scouts.

pressure cooker using a bamboo node. After starting a fire using conventional methods, within a matter of minutes, he offered us delicious steamed rice. After this extraordinary learning experience, much jungle mystique vanished, and the tropical forest did not appear overly hostile to us now "seasoned experts."

SIGHTS OF INTEREST

Flying in and around Luzon offered a very enjoyable diversion from both a scenic and historic aspect. Sites of historical battles during World War Two, Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island, located to the south, were largely overgrown with lush vegetation, but lasting remnants of the nasty war still pockmarked the landscape. Observing the harsh terrain, it seemed incredible to me that the Japanese attack drove U.S. and Filipino forces back to last stand positions in just five weeks.

Bataan defenders surrendered to Japanese forces in April 1942, and the forces on Corregidor capitulated a month later. The courageous survivors of these engagements suffered grievously, but their heroic efforts denied the Japanese Navy access to Manila Bay for a crucial six months, significantly delaying their programmed timetable for the region's conquest. ¹⁵

While flying at low level over the trees, a sharp eye could spot hulks of war machines rusting in the verdant jungle. Monoliths to a wasteful and bitter conflict, they competed for space with Mother Nature. Sunken barges and vessels of various types and sizes were visible poking above the surface or submerged in the clear, shallow water along the coast. Something of a World War Two buff, in previous years I had devoured many paperbacks describing the Pacific campaign, never dreaming that I would ever see or visit the more famous landmarks of the war.

¹⁵ De Roos, 350.
Moser, 380.



Luzon and Mindoro Islands. Subic and MCAS Cubi Point were located next to the town of Olongapo. The resort town of Baguio was located in the mountains north of Cubi Point.

There was never a lack of strange, incredible, and interesting occurrences while serving in the Philippines. Late one morning, while returning single ship to Cubi after a troop lift to Lingayen Peninsula, I spied a large black-gray object floating on the northwest surface of Subic Bay. Appearing to measure at least my helicopter's length, the enormous monster looked like a whale or perhaps some kind of hammerhead shark with lateral head protrusions. Curious, I momentarily considered hovering closer for further investigation and identification. But, low on fuel, I wisely rejected the idea in deference to the mammal's size and the chilling consequence of an engine failure that might result in a modern-day Jonah episode. Having no camera to record the sighting, with deep regret I continued to Cubi with yet another "sea story" chalked up for the "0" club that night. Unfortunately, I never discovered what I had witnessed that day.

The encounter with the monster became the first of several unexplainable mysteries to confront me during the next thirteen years in Southeast Asia. ¹⁶

AN UNSCHEDULED TASTE OF LOCAL COLOR

Another event morphed into one of the high points of my Luzon experience. While flying in the number three slot during a training formation flight over central Luzon, a deteriorated high-pressure hydraulic hose in the servo compartment located above the cockpit ruptured. Within seconds, the severed line spewed red, viscous fluid over the greenhouse top and down the cockpit, largely obscuring the front and side helicopter windscreens. Attesting to the shabby state of our equipment, I had blown hydraulic lines twice before on the overseas tour, but nothing quite as messy and spectacular as this one.

¹⁶ Sea monsters: In later years, toward the end of my commercial flying career, while working offshore in Louisiana for the Southern Natural Gas Company, in the process of returning to our onshore base, I encountered a relatively rare whale shark floating the surface of the Gulf of Mexico. Although as large as my Bell 206 Jet Ranger, it resembled nothing like the sea monster I saw that day in Subic Bay, but it reinforced my supposition that many curiosities not often seen lurked in the world's oceans.

A considerable distance from base, and unable to see well, I elected to execute a routine precautionary landing to a spot near a small hamlet, one of many rural settlements in the remote, flat rice growing area. The crew chief investigated the malfunction and I determined further flight to be unwise. When I apprised the airborne flight leader of our requirement, the remaining aircraft in the flight started back to Cubi for required maintenance personnel and our replacement part.

Local people still reported communist Huks and a few remaining bands of headhunters scattered throughout more inaccessible parts of Luzon, but these hill bound elements were not reputed to present much of a problem, except to an unwise individual, such as a dedicated priest, who might stray far from civilization and lose his head.

The Hukbalahap movement vigorously contested the Japanese during the war, and cooperated to some extent with U.S. and Filipino forces. After the war, the Huks attempted through military and political activity to rid their country of all American influence and involvement. Initially successful, by 1950 they controlled much of central and southern Luzon, and were active on the southern islands. Secretary of Defense Magsaysay, himself a wartime guerrilla, crushed the rebellion, effectively concluding the civil war by 1956 by using military force and personal persuasion.¹⁷

After the main flight departed for base, I experienced a lonely and apprehensive sensation. (I have no idea why no one chose to land and keep us company.) Moreover, never having been subjected to a similar circumstance, it became a first, and I had no idea what to expect next. I didn't have long to wait to find out. Almost immediately, large numbers of curious villagers approached the helicopter site, while I tried to plan ahead and formulate a plan of action. Working

¹⁷ Raphael Littauer and Norman Uphoff Eds., *The Air War in Indochina* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972) 213.
National Geographic, September 1966, 326.
De Roos, 326.
Moser, 381.

under the Status of Forces Agreement with the friendly host nation, we carried no weapons or other authoritative means of protection. However, the aircraft was equipped with an innocuous-looking yellow signaling kit. It contained a device that looked much like a short version of a large bore shotgun and a few flares. At close range, in a pinch, the flares probably had minimal value as a people deterrent, but more likely would provide a diversion--an awesome firework display to impress or perhaps cow a superstitious people.

One person in the group, a diminutive, weather-beaten old man who appeared to be the group's spokesman, stated proudly that he had participated in the last war as a U.S. Filipino Scout. Speaking fluent English and seemingly a friendly individual, the scrawny leader assured me that the local situation was calm as to any insurgency problems, and my crew had nothing to fear. To counter my mounting anxiety, I attempted to cultivate him further. While we chatted, I noted that a few dark brown, sun-burnished men failed to mingle with the rest of the milling group, but hunkered down on paddy dike berms surrounding our area. Ever suspicious in the unfamiliar environment, I speculated about their presence, while they stared at us with their hands loosely resting on the large wooden sheaved machetes dangling from their loincloths. They looked mean and fierce enough to conjure an image of Huk terrorists in my mind. They also appeared a formidable element to one yet uninitiated regarding people from remote villages.

When would our helicopters return?

Our unscheduled appearance from the sky obviously constituted a highly unusual event and interrupted the villagers' normal hum-drum patterns of life. Curious, a few adventurous natives cautiously approached the helicopter and stood at the entrance of the passenger compartment, hoping to peer inside. My crew and I encouraged them to touch and look at everything. However, in my zeal to please and be friendly, I unwittingly committed a cultural taboo by innocently smiling, laughing, and gesturing toward a collection of giggling village girls. Surprisingly, my innocent actions evoked exactly the

opposite response from what I hoped. The old gentleman, with whom I had been conducting an interesting talk about his part in the war, took offense at my action. His previous demeanor switched 180 degrees as he angrily spat, "*Why do you make fun of our young women?*" It appeared that once again the intemperate Casterlin mouth would cause me serious trouble. I was dumbfounded, totally unprepared for the unforeseen turn of events, and I vigorously endeavored to assure the former scout that I definitely did not intend to insult anyone.

The turn of events shook me. Feeling a little threatened, unsure of whether my profuse apology had registered in the positive manner intended, and to restore my former warm relationship with the old scout, I retrieved the ship's Very pistol. Eager to divert attention away from my indiscretion, reestablish esteem, and command the masses' respect, I proceeded to demonstrate its firepower.¹⁸ With the flair of a ham actor, I dropped a cartridge into the open chamber. I could not believe what happened next, for the outdated round proved defective. The plastic retaining cap plunged to the ground. This was followed by all the solid propellant, rendering the tube empty and the flare completely useless. It was embarrassing. In one simple move, all the elements of my proposed show of force lay in the dust at my feet. I had failed miserably in my endeavor.

Besides feeling utterly foolish, I additionally suffered a personal humiliation for, as the squadron's former flight equipment officer, I had failed to foresee the malfunction.

Murphy, what were you doing in the center of Luzon? Having learned a lesson from the error, and emboldened by returning squadron aircraft then orbiting overhead, this time, I loaded the device with the barrel pointing horizontal to the ground. Much to the delight of the natives, I successfully fired the gun and concluded the simple demonstration. Having apparently repaired the misunderstanding and

¹⁸ Looking much like a large barrel gun, the flare pistol breaks open like a shotgun with the chamber and barrel pointing down for easy loading.

temporarily frayed Filipino-American relations, all parties once again appeared friendly. After repairs were accomplished, we departed for the coast and left the natives to their mundane pursuits.

Soon after conducting six shipboard landings to refresh carrier qualification proficiency, we boarded the USS *Thetis Bay* for a planned ship-to-shore operation. However, a storm brewing in the ocean kept us in port and the operation was canceled.

A liberty trip to Hong Kong was scheduled next on the agenda.

Our initial trip to Hong Kong (translated as fragrant harbor in Chinese) on the USS *Thetis Bay* late in July offered me a delightful and a completely new experience. A former haunt of pirates and primitive fishing villages, except for a short Japanese occupation, Hong Kong had served as a British colony since 1841. Encompassing an area of thirty-two square miles, eleven long and two to five wide, the island hosted more than a million and a half refugees, many illegally fleeing mainland Communist Chinese oppression. The total estimated three million Hong Kong population, crammed into such a small area, produced an acute housing problem for the local government. ¹

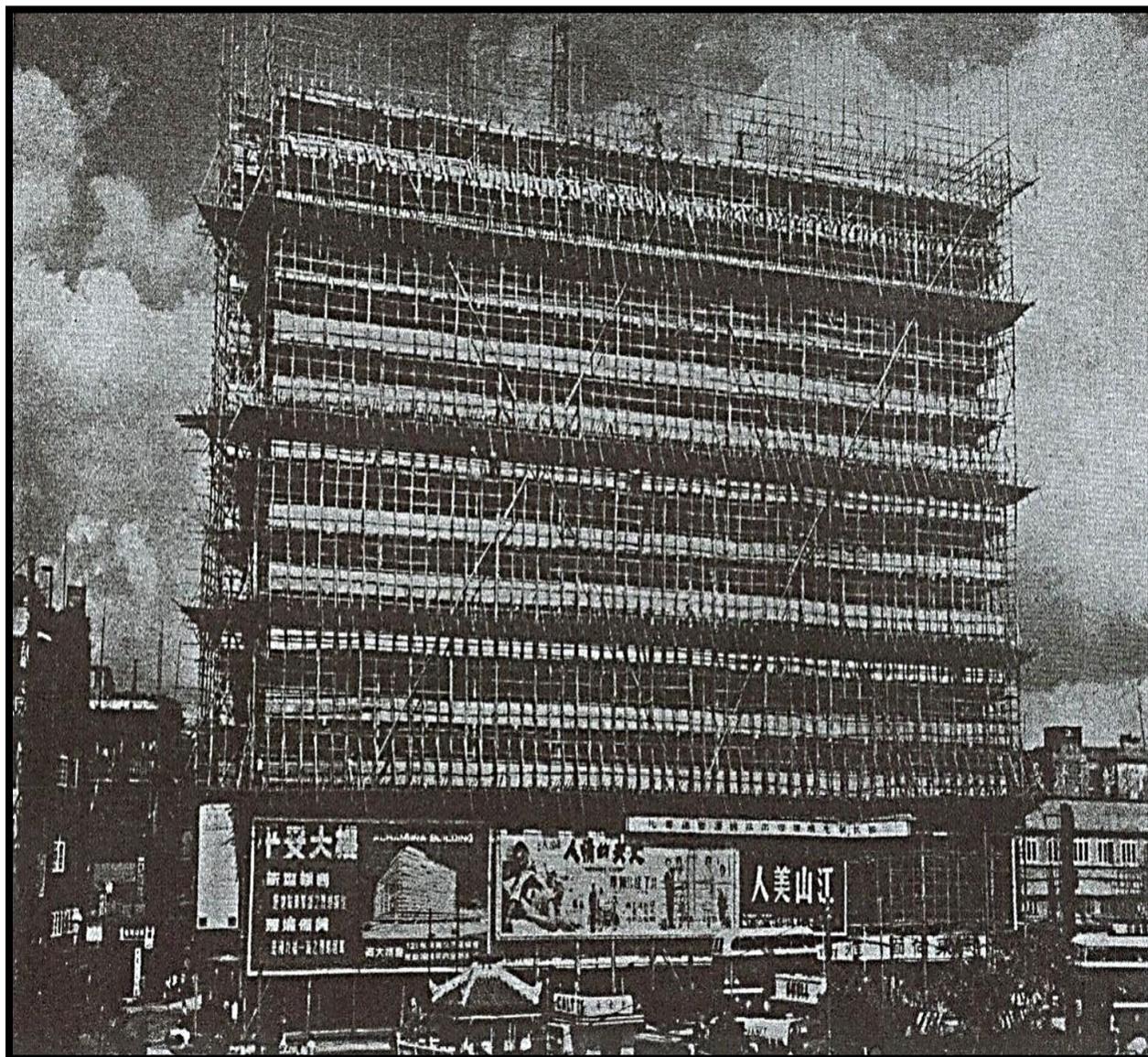
Contrasting the uber-wealthy and upper middle class from the poor masses, lavish white high-rise apartments soared in the hills, while ramshackle inner-city tenements and hundreds of thousands of rough squatters' shelters littered the hillsides. Because of numerous deaths occurring from massive mudslides perpetrated by devastating typhoons and periods of extensive rain, government projects were underway to erect inexpensive resettlement buildings. Well along in construction, multi-storied buildings thrust into the air over the landscape, eerily sheathed in popular construction methods, skeleton-like bamboo scaffolding. The scene reminded one of an immense house of cards.

During our first night in port, squadron shore patrol duty introduced me to the entire hubbub of contrasting chaotic order. My rounds, which did not take me far from the ship, entailed scrutiny of a few "Suzie Wong" type bars in Hong Kong's Wanchi District. Along filthy sidewalks, I witnessed entire families huddled together, sleeping on rattan mats. I considered myself very fortunate to have

¹ The *National Geographic*, John Scofield, *Hong Kong has Many Faces*, January, 1962, 4.
South China Morning Post, Introduction: *This is Hong Kong*, 1959.



Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, New Territories, and environs.
National Geographic, Volume 140, #4 October 1971, 548.



Standard Asian bamboo scaffolding employed in high rise Hong Kong construction projects.

The South China Morning Post.

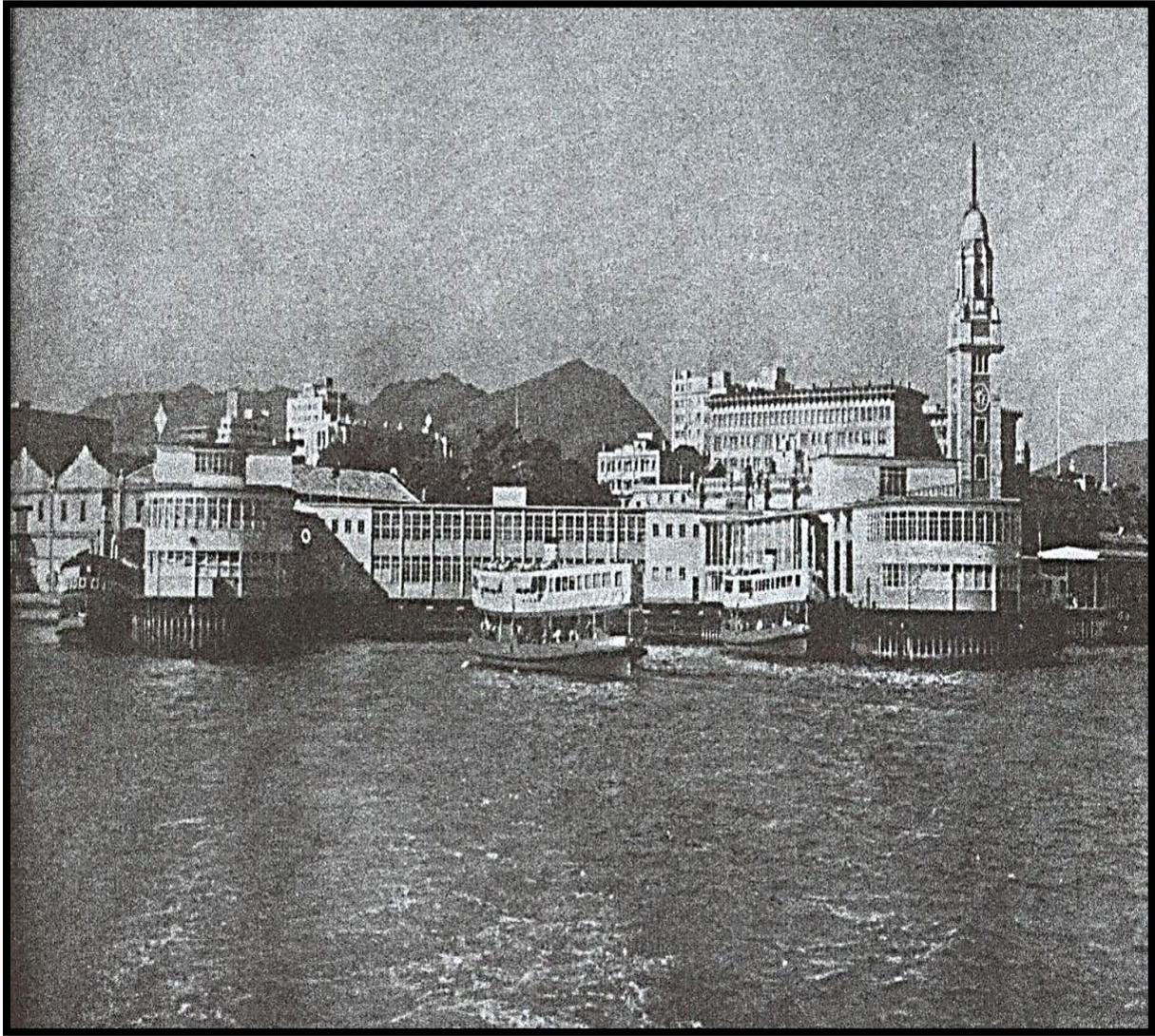
been born an American and raised in a different society under different circumstances. The night's duty, although restrictive, prompted me to subsequently avoid certain establishments and direct most of my activities toward Kowloon.

Kowloon, (translated as nine dragons) a three-square mile slice of a larger peninsula acquired by the British twenty years after their acquisition of Hong Kong Island, ² lay to the north across a large active harbor crammed with junks, yachts, ferries, Naval ships from various nations, scows, and small, inexpensive water taxis called "bum boats." The district, also in a state of flux, appeared somewhat cleaner, more affluent, and a preferred tourist Mecca.

Around the Kowloon ferry pier complex, railway station, and the Peninsula Hotel I met by chance a local character, I had first heard about half a world away from a former high school chum, "Washko," who had made the Hong Kong scene during his two-year Naval obligation. "Hot Pants Molly Malone," a middle-aged Chinese madam, was world renown (at least in that area), and very much a portion of the area's local color. The diminutive and friendly hustler, while soliciting for her damsels, roved the waterfront contacting various military types. Surprisingly, she knew exactly when the world's naval ships were arriving in port, and could instinctively spot a potential customer. Her trademarks, probably more celebrated during her formative years, revealed gaily-colored butterflies tattooed on the outside of both thighs.

Obligatory, but highly frustrating shopping experiences followed, where one "goes broke" purchasing good deals. After selecting desirable merchandise, one bought an item at supposedly the area's lowest price, only to observe the same article marked lower in an adjacent shop.

² *South China Morning Post*-Introduction.



The Kowloon waterfront depicting efficient Star Ferry boats employed as inexpensive transportation while crossing the bay to Hong Kong Island. The elite Peninsula Hotel, where Civil Air Transport maintained an office, was located in the right rear portion of the photograph.

The South China Morning Post.

Exhausted in my quest to seek "good deals," it was time for me to sightsee. My running mate, Connie Barsky, and I persuaded two relatively unattractive English ladies to drive us north in their vehicle into the New Territories, where we could view the adjoining Red Chinese border.

As a final land package acquired from China in 1898, the Brits had leased the New Territories, a 270 square mile area for ninety-nine years--since satisfied and reverted to Mainland China. This region of rugged hills and lush valleys served as a garden and orchard for Hong Kong, and supplied much of the colony's food requirements.³

While admiring the countryside, Connie snapped a picture of peasant women tilling one of many rice paddies. Apparently, Barsky's seemingly innocent action triggered a Chinese taboo. Taking offense, one of the young women, dressed in padded farmer's garb, darted toward us yelling, spitting, and brandishing her wooden rake. To paraphrase a famous Marine general's quip when questioned by curious media concerning the retreat at Chosin Reservoir, Korea, it seemed time for our thoroughly shaken group to "*advance in a different direction.*" A later critique of the situation in the safety of the auto presupposed that the farmers assumed we were communist agents sent to inform on them.

³ *South China Morning Post, The New Territories.*

The USS *Thetis Bay*, an antiquated World War Two CVE-90 Casablanca Class Escort Carrier, initially formed the nucleus for our Marine Special Landing Force afloat and provided squadron transportation. Kaiser shipyards in Vancouver, Washington, originally built and launched the ship during April 1944. The well-seasoned vessel participated in Third Fleet operations against Japan in July-August 1945. Decommissioned and mothballed following the war, in 1956 the Navy Department had the dinosaur retrofitted to accommodate helicopters. During the dry dock conversion, in order to serve as the first ship renovated and modified to accommodate helicopter assault operations, workers stripped catapults from the deck and enlarged troop compartments to house 938 men. When completed, the Navy re-designated the *Thetis Bay* a Landing Platform Helicopter (LPN) Naval inventory of the day, the ship displaced 10,866 tons, and was 512 feet in length. Two steam boilers produced 11,000 shaft horsepower that enabled a flank speed of slightly more than nineteen knots, which severely limited any rapid deployment in a modern convoy. ¹

After HMR-261 squadron members boarded the *Thetis Bay* on 13 July, the ship displayed, among many weaknesses, an embarrassing and shabby appearance of America's vaunted sea power. An engineering superstructure fault during conversion caused the vessel to list several degrees to the starboard side, from up to five to eleven degrees depending on the source. In an attempt to offset some tilt, ground equipment was stored below deck on the port side. The effort did not help much. To save face, during flight deck parades while steaming into a port, an announcement would boom over the bull horn, "*All hands move six paces rearward behind the centerline.*"

¹ Lt. Col. William Fails USMC, *Marines and Helicopters, 1962-1973*. (Washington: History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1978) 21
NavSource.



USS *Thetis Bay* carrier without a visible complement of Marines and helicopters. A single elevator is at the stern of the ship.

Author Collection.



USS *Thetis Bay*, LPH-6 at sea with Marine HUS-1 helicopters stacked near the stern.

Hinton Collection.²

²Online: Amphibious Photo Archive, Hinton Email, 04/12/20.

Miraculously, the vessel would assume a level position when entering port. After the men were dismissed, the ship would slowly assume the standard list.

The *Thetis Bay* was no luxury cruise liner. Accommodations were limited for both ship's company and Marines. Almost totally lacking creature comforts, the luxury of air conditioning centered on the officer's ward and pilot ready rooms.

One evening, at the completion of a four-hour fireguard watch, my relief, a grunt lieutenant, confidentially informed me that he heard the ship possessed a nine-inch hull crack just above the waterline and had partially rusted boilers. Further increasing my lack of confidence in the vessel, I also learned that repair parts were difficult or impossible to obtain, and many were no longer manufactured. Because of the boilers' small capacity and deteriorating condition, the fresh water evaporator system constantly malfunctioned, forcing mandatory water rationing. At first, shipboard regulations restricted us to a single "Navy" fresh water shower per day, then none at all.³ We then reverted to only salt-water showers. Highly objectionable and unsatisfactory, traces of salt remained on one's body. Nasty, it felt like taking no shower at all.

For enlisted men, anyone caught taking a fresh water shower during water hours was obligated to wear a "Sandwich Sign" saying, "*I am a water waster. I take long luxurious showers during water hours.*"

Coupled with the South China Sea's high heat and humid environment, we endured a miserable existence. Three days at sea normally afforded the maximum time either the tired ship or the personnel could tolerate. Naturally, all hands were overjoyed when the word filtered down to the troops that the Teddy Bear--an affectionate term many used for the ship--would shortly return Stateside for

³ Author Note: A "Navy Shower" consisted of briefly wetting one's body, closing the shower valve, soaping, and then washing off the residue. The highly efficient method used only a few gallons of water and reputedly conserved significant amounts of water.



A Yankee Sierra HUS-1 helicopter departing the USS *Thetis Bay* with an external sling load during a ship to shore operation.
Hinton Collection.

repairs.

Because of many obvious deficiencies, the ship's captain was understandably reluctant to exact maximum performance from his charge and we suffered deprivation of liberty because of this. Should weather or heavy seas even minimally threaten, he would either decline to dock, or leave port, which effectively restricted us to the ship. This occurred at Kaoshung, Taiwan, formerly Formosa and at Manila Bay, Philippines creating unhappiness among those of us who eagerly anticipated cherished liberty. Because of his perceived reluctance and timid approach to displaying USG sea power, the men bestowed the uncharitable title of "Chicken of the Sea" on the "Teddy Bear's" Captain, Walter L. Curtis Jr.

Kaoshung was a particularly bitter experience, for we had looked forward to enjoying the highly touted liberty port. We arrived off Taiwan on the morning of Tuesday, the eighth of August, to conduct a mock assault with the Chinese Nationalist Marines on the following day. However, a nasty typhoon had preceded us. Normal activities were disrupted, and much of the land around Kaoshung was submerged in water. That afternoon, the crew of Yankee Sierra-59 experienced an engine malfunction at the beach while performing administrative chores. ⁴

The first HUS-1 crews began lifting off the carrier on Wednesday morning at 0500 hours for the ship-to-shore operation. That evening, because of a high sea state and unsettled conditions caused by the typhoon, the *Thetis Bay Skipper*, The Chicken, made a decision not to sail into port and instead anchored far off shore.

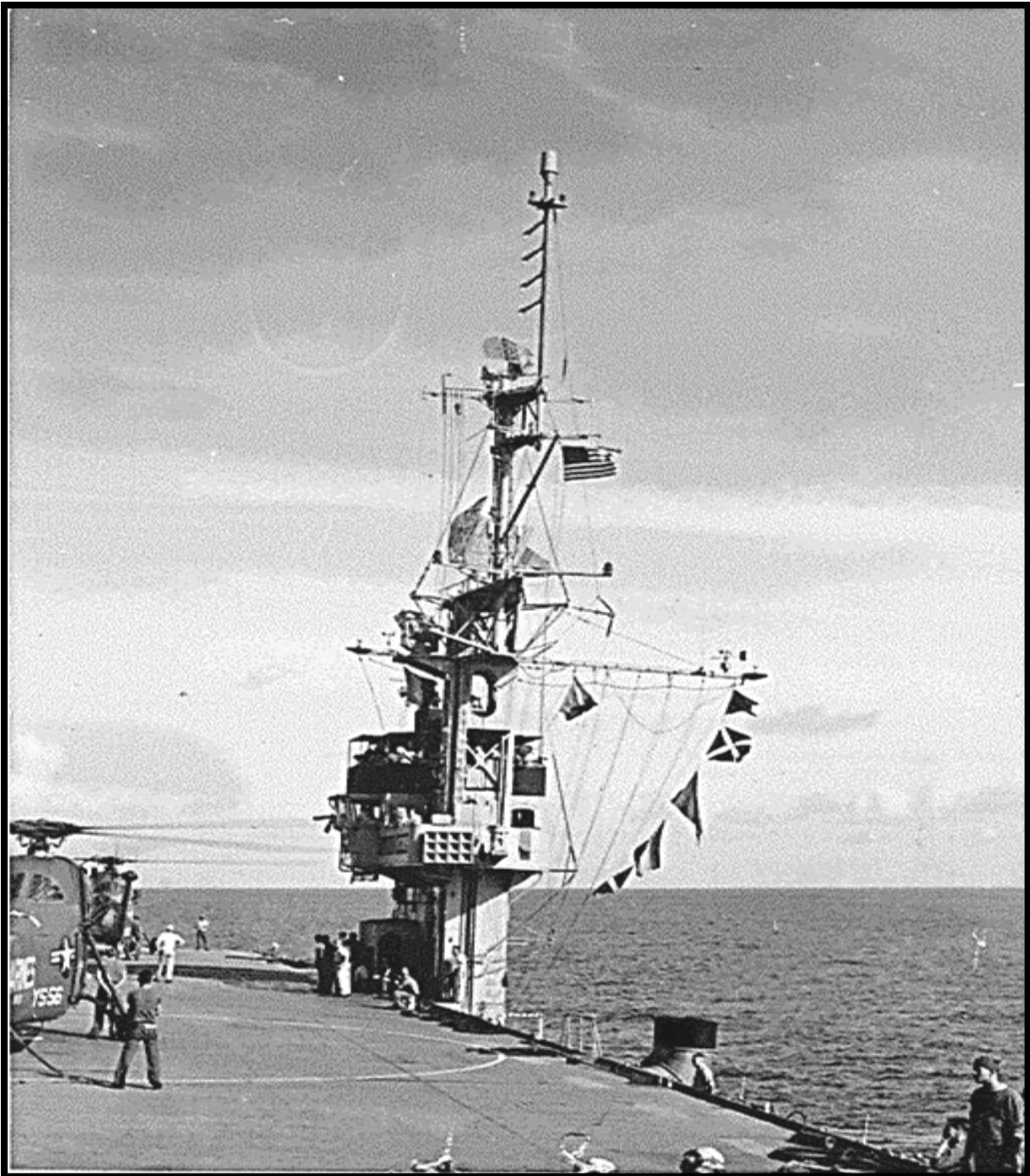
Corporal Hinton had recently secured his helicopter when he was informed that the squadron Sergeant Major wanted to see him. He and three other corporals were selected, along with other ship's company personnel, to attend a special event on shore. Following an

⁴ Author Note: When we first arrived at Cubi Point, maintenance focused on producing airworthy aircraft to conduct shipboard operations. This task took precedence, and repainting the ships with squadron Echo Mike logos was deferred.



HUS-1 Yankee Sierra-59 on static display on the beach at Kaoshung, Taiwan, following an engine malfunction.

Hinton Collection.



USS *Thetis Bay*'s infamous superstructure that caused a noticeable starboard list of up to eleven degrees.

Hinton Collection.

uncomfortable ride on the Captain's boat, they were greeted by an honor guard, a band, a Chinese drill team, and several thousand people, including pretty girls carrying flower bouquets. The festivities continued until midnight, when the fifteen exhausted men returned to the Thetis Bay. ⁵

Most of us lesser mortals never set foot on Kaoshung. We sailed for the Philippines on the evening of August the eleventh.

Due to the difficulty of preparing and moving aircraft into position for flight quarters, unless a ship-to-shore operation was scheduled, we rarely flew while at sea. Consequently, attempts were made to correct this imbalance onshore when at Cubi Point. However, most days the weather did not cooperate and normal flying was limited.

"After the rainy season passes, there should be renewed action in the jungles [of Southeast Asia]. This is speculation on my part, but I'll bet money on it."

Author's 08/26/61 Letter to Parents.

Like the Boy Scout motto, **Be Prepared**, with the possibility of war on the horizon, on 17 August the squadron conducted night field carrier landings (FCLP) in preparation for actual night carrier qualifications. This flying was considered by most of us as the hairiest ever performed in a single engine aircraft. No one liked to fly at night, and jokes abounded regarding "that black air" flowing through the R-1820 engine carburetors. In a little over an hour, alternating with Captain Don Krepplein, I conducted four landings.

I flew a HUS-1 onboard the Teddy Bear early on the twenty-first. The short trip to Manila for liberty was as disappointing for us as had been the Taiwan non-experience.

⁵ Hinton Letter to his family, 08/11/61.

Dale Hinton wrote his parents from anchorage three miles off the port in Manila Bay while awaiting arrival of a typhoon:

After returning from the Taiwan trip, squadron personnel enjoyed "a pleasant week ashore at Cubi Point. We loaded back aboard the Thetis Bay Sunday afternoon (20 August). My helicopter was (and still is) broken, so we had a six aircraft convey at night in the rain and towed the downed machines from Cubi Point to where the ship was docked at Subic Bay and hauled the helicopters aboard by crane. The following morning the ship got underway and the rest of the squadron flew aboard..

[Because of rough weather], it took us 24 hours to sail the 60 miles from Subic to Manila. We have 16 aircraft down on the hanger deck really packed together and tied down with steel cables..

This storm has been chasing us and spoiling our liberty for three days now. Tuesday, our first day in port, there was no liberty because we were preparing to outrun or out-ride the storm. Yesterday I got to go into Manila but the sea was rough and the liberty boats were taking on water. Today they cancelled liberty because of even rougher seas..

The San Miguel beer they brew in Manila is pretty potent stuff and I did not feel well today. ⁶ I hid out in my plane all day but needed to go to evening chow. Well, I was at the tail end of the chow line and they ran out of food and closed the line. So my buddy and I stole a pie with the help of one of our squadron mess men who works with the bakers. We went up to the one of the planes on the flight deck and ate the whole peach pie and drank Kool-Aid made from a package his wife sent..

At least they turned on the fresh water showers today. I can't wait to head back to Okinawa. My aircraft is falling apart. My feet are rotting away. And nearly everything I own is starting to mildew..." ⁷

After sitting onboard the carrier for most of the week, we

⁶ We used to joke and speculate that green beer, or not properly processed beer, was introduced to local markets.

⁷ Hinton Letter, 08/21/61.

departed for Cubi and arrived on Saturday the twenty-sixth. We anticipated a week onshore before loading out for a scheduled landing. Liberty in Hong Kong was slated again for mid-September.

Actual night carrier qualifications were conducted on Wednesday. With the carrier anchored in Subic Bay, flying with Captain Don Leach, I performed the required six-night landings. We were ready for any eventuality.

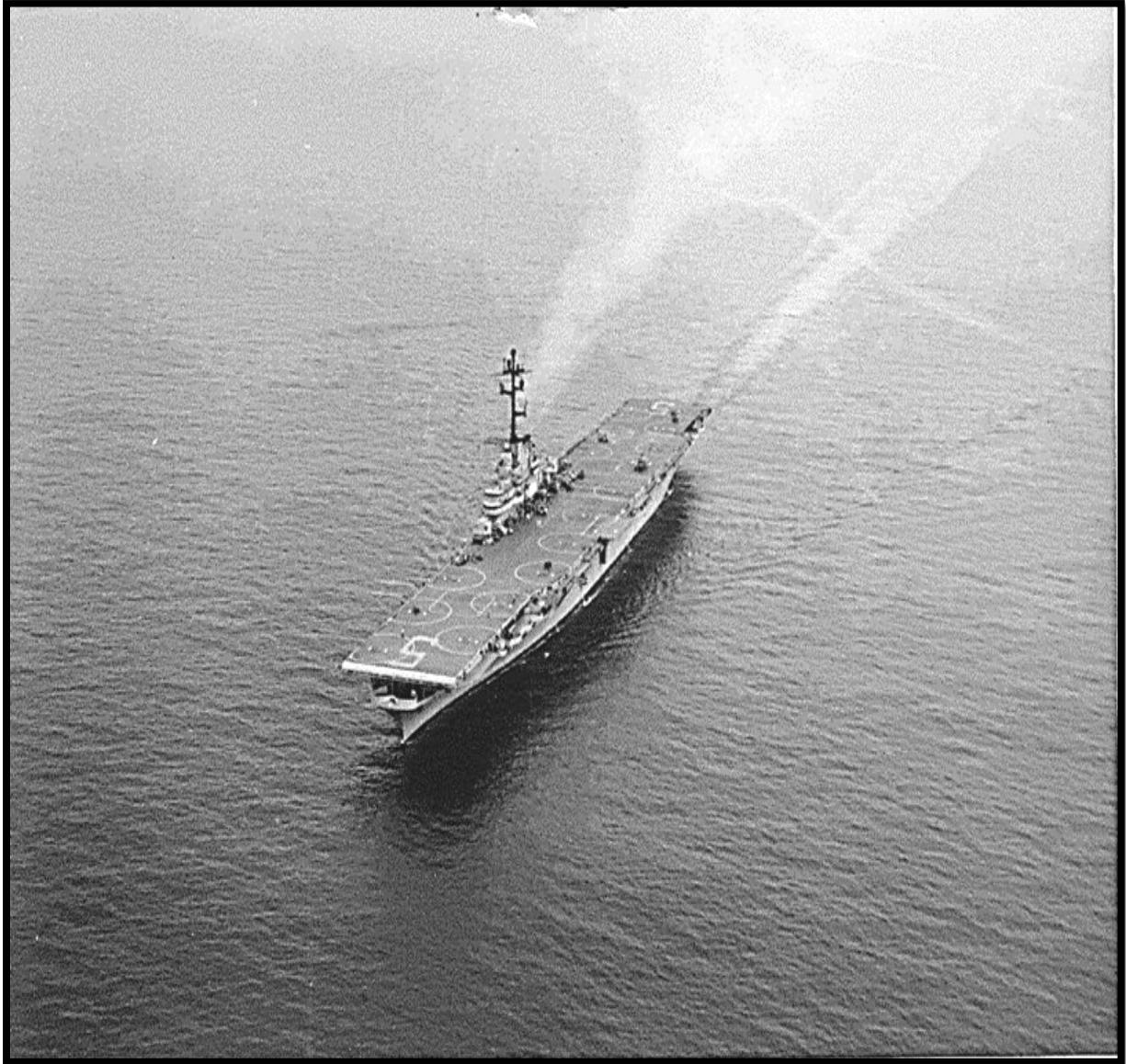
Although no one actually knew the arrival date, we anxiously awaited duty on our next vessel, the more modern USS *Princeton* (LPH-5, converted and commissioned April 1959). This ship, and subsequent ones consisting of the "Essex" class, displaced an impressive 38,000 tons and were almost four times larger than the *Thetis Bay*. Mounting eight steam boilers that provided 150,000 horsepower, these ships easily outdistanced most others comprising the amphibious portion of the Seventh Fleet. ⁸

AT SEA

Some aspects of shipboard life in the South China Sea provided breathtaking views not normally seen or enjoyed by civilian landlubbers. One experience, the transition from night to day, seemed almost instantaneous, with sunrise over the dark blue water providing a magnificent sight. The great ball of flame burst rapidly above the horizon through incredibly clear air. Devoid of dirt or pollution, the sun dazzled one's eyes with innumerable piercing rays that sparkled on the constantly undulating surface. Considerably moved, the spectacle reminded me of a passage from Greek author Homer's *Odyssey*, "*And up came the dawn, the rosy fingered and shone upon Telemachus of the fair hair.*"

Sunset at sea was equally spectacular, with the glowing orb, struggling in its dying throes of providing light to our world,

⁸ William Fails, 22.



LPH-5, USS *Princeton* steaming in the South China Sea. Most squadron helicopters are stored below on the carrier hangar deck where they were considered secure and more easily maintained either day or night.

Hinton Collection.



USS *Princeton* at sea with HMR-261 HUS-1 helicopters lined up and prepared to launch from numbered deck positions. The Skipper's aircraft sat on spot one located on the forward starboard side.

Author Collection.

seemingly plunging below the horizon in a matter of seconds.

After supper I occasionally climbed the ladder to the flight deck's bow. There, warm tropical breezes and salt spray gently caressed my face, creating an unusually invigorating feeling, and rendering a sensation compatible with the world and its elements. Abundant luminescent sea life, stirred and churned upward by the ship's wake and rapid passage, provided a mesmerizing effect.

During the day, I observed poisonous sea snakes, wrapped in knots, floating on the surface. While copulating, they appeared threaded together, like mini life preservers. Subjected to such a wondrous and inspiring environment, one could not help but have his inner senses stirred and soul moved, if not revitalized.

Refueling at sea provided an interesting diversion from the humdrum life. The support ship first had to parallel, and then exactly match, our vessel's speed and direction. Then, while sailing in close proximity, and employing heavy ropes, an exchange of fueling hoses was effected. Once joined and inserted into fueling ports, the heavy rubber umbilical cords provided excessively smelly, but necessary life support, for our thirsty engines. A breeches buoy exchanged personnel, mail, and other necessary items. Of course, the ship's smoking light was extinguished while transfer of fuel was underway.

To me, the shipboard experience was a love-hate relationship. Contrasting with the more pleasant aspects of life at sea just described, were more mundane features. The discomfort of oppressive heat and humidity, unfamiliar movement of the ship's constant pitch, roll, and wallow that resulted in low-grade nausea, daunting boredom from lack of work, and entirely too much male companionship, all contributed to my distaste of shipboard duty.

Fortunately, Squadron Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Fred A. "Bud" Steele, always considerate of the men's interests, also thoroughly disliked Navy "boats" (a deleterious term Marines are fond to tongue regarding Navy ships). Whenever we approached within one hundred miles of the beach, the Skipper went out of his way to obtain permission for



Refueling the carrier in the South China Sea.
Hinton Collection.

the squadron to launch toward Cubi Point, or our projected destination.

Miraculously, as soon as we departed the carrier, my funk always dissipated and I felt both physiologically and psychologically restored.

CUBI

United States Navy Captain Preston served as Commanding Officer of Cubi Point Naval Air Station during our tour. Captain Preston was an interesting person with a colorful history. While returning to his carrier nursing a badly battle-damaged aircraft, following a particularly challenging engagement with the enemy during the Pacific campaign, the young Naval aviator received the unsettling information that Japanese planes had just dispatched his vessel to "Davy Jones's Locker." With no other viable option, he had recovered on Guadalcanal Island. Living with and fighting alongside Texas Marines, he won the coveted Navy Cross. Because of his fond relationship with, and enduring love of the Corps and its members, whenever a contingent of Marines arrived in port, he declared the entire base theirs.

Preston was as good as his word, as was aptly illustrated one night, after we had erected a pyramid of empty beer cans that towered to the thatch roof's superstructure, when one of Preston's junior officers vigorously objected to our "O" club antics. (Perhaps caused by our more athletic squadron pilots swinging from the roof supports.) In front of everyone, the commanding officer, who had also participated in building the aluminum can edifice, immediately dressed the complainer down, curtly telling him to leave the club if he objected, for *"these were his chosen people and they could do no wrong."* Sometimes I wondered about the wisdom of the Captain's policy while observing our sodden young warriors rowdily swinging from the



Subic Bay, Luzon, Philippine Islands encompassing both the U.S. Naval docking facilities and Cubi Point Naval Air Station (NAS).

Author's Map Collection.



Commanding Officer of the Cubi Point Naval Air Facility, Captain Preston squatting left of Captain Bill McKillop during a 09/01/61 HMR-261 party in the "O" Club. To the right Fred Schober, unknown, Jim Turner; second row, standing "Monk" Taylor, John Fitzgerald, Rick Sweeney, Larry Weinerth, Lloyd Smith; third row, Mike Tivnan, Don Leach, Connie Barsky, unk; top, Curt Mason, Ralph Yakushi. The Author was AWOL.

Official U.S. Navy photograph, USNAS Cubi Point, Philippines.

iron ceiling supports, emulating their simian ancestors. ⁹

Occasionally, the burly and aggressive Captain displayed a serious quirk. Besides an obvious fondness for drink, our mentor possessed an equal affection for late evening arm wrestling. He detested losing a match so intensely that if he perceived a serious challenge to his prowess, he frequently slugged an equally intoxicated opponent with his free hand. Fortunately, most of us were aware of this character flaw, and the wise person tactfully refused to engage in combat with him, or capitulated the wrestling match early.

Shipboard training operations continued. We did not carry as many troops or cargo as during Vieques lifts in the Caribbean, but anticipated more efficient operations when the USS *Princeton* arrived. Most training problems were canned, and because of the extreme heat, the troops did not move about much. They did, however, remain in the field one night.

Late one afternoon during the second week in September, following completion of a long, sweltering series of troop lifts from the carrier deck to shore, as we awaited taxi and parking clearance on the steaming taxiway, good Captain Preston suddenly appeared from a gray special services van. Unexpectedly, the large commanding officer climbed eight feet up the side of my aircraft to the open cabin window to thrust a cool, refreshing can of Schlitz beer into my hand. It tasted wonderful. At that moment, I loved the man like a brother, and wondered how many other Marine Corps First "Looies" ever had such a memorable honor bestowed upon them by a senior officer during times of war or peace.

"Sleep well America, the USS Thetis Bay is still afloat."

Author 09/12/61 Letter.

⁹ Some information provided the Author by Frank McLennon shortly before his death, 08/01/01.

OPERATIONAL READY STATUS

The questionable level of HMR-261 squadron readiness had not appreciably changed in the months since the dark days when our squadron first formed at Cubi Point, Philippine Islands. In fact, during early September HMR-261 squadron aircraft availability dropped to a dangerously low level, as Far East supply depots continued to re-route critical HUS-1 parts to Thailand in support of Air America's helicopter operation in the higher priority Lao theater.

Moreover, our delivery system, the aged Thetis Bay, appeared on its last legs, and had difficulty remaining at sea for more than three days. Deterioration of the ship has been previously mentioned. U.S. Marine military troop gear onboard, except for some newer hardware and rolling stock consisting of Jeeps and cargo-carrying mules, was reputedly the oldest in Corps inventory, and was essentially worn out. Consequently, our segment of the Seventh Fleet, the Special Landing Force (SLF) afloat in the graveyard of the South Pacific, seemed relatively unsuited to participate in, or contain, anything other than a minor conflict. To me, a supreme pessimist, this scenario constituted an intangible factor in USG's overall Far East defense scheme. Moreover, an underlying restlessness occurred within our group, especially after curious rumors circulated that we might not rotate to Okinawa on schedule. Uncertainty arose regarding future commitments to unspecified destinations, and this led to general speculation that "the balloon would soon go up."

MORE FOR LESS

While we were still onshore, the Macapagal government devalued the Philippine currency from two to four pesos per U.S. dollar. This act had no impact on us while on the naval base, as we conducted all monetary transactions there in military payments currency (MPC) or script, commonly called "funny money." However, U.S. "green" currency spent in the "Ville" instantly assumed a more valuable status, as vendors failed to immediately adjust prices upward to reflect the

devaluation. For a short time, their neglect effectively allowed beer and liberty expenses to be diminished by half.

Prices of a few worthwhile products in strip stores almost became reasonable, with velvet oil paintings leading the list. Striking sunset, moonlight, and nude scenes protruded life-like from dark backgrounds of pictures painted by Gomez and other leading artists of the day. The technique impressed me, and I deemed the procedure unique and modern until informed in a letter from my Mother that the same art form was popular in the twenties era.

HONG KONG

The middle of September found all hands once again leisurely steaming toward Hong Kong for a welcome morale-building vacation, and to show the American flag in a foreign port. Having berthed after dark during our first trip to the island, we had been unable to observe entry into the area. Therefore, after learning that we would dock the following morning, I arose early, scrambled up the ladder (stairs to civilians) and burst out the bulkhead hatch onto the flight deck to view the myriad of picturesque mini-islands and weather-sculpted rock formations dotting the lengthy approach into the harbor. With everything vigorously bathed in the rising sun, I considered those precious moments to be ones never to likely occur or be captured again. However, the sense of joy and awe I felt in my being and surroundings, at that precise moment in time, was considerably dampened by the comical appearance of Chicken's listing, antiquated vessel.

"Garbage Mary," a generic term assigned a group of enterprising Chinese ship painters, patiently awaited us in the harbor. Working from bobbing scows, and wielding long brush-tipped bamboo poles, with material provided by the Navy, the entrepreneurs would hurriedly paint a vessel gray from stem to stern solely in exchange for the trash a ship generated. Mary, Hot Pants, and thousands of other individuals and local commercial vendors, dependent on U.S. and tourist currency

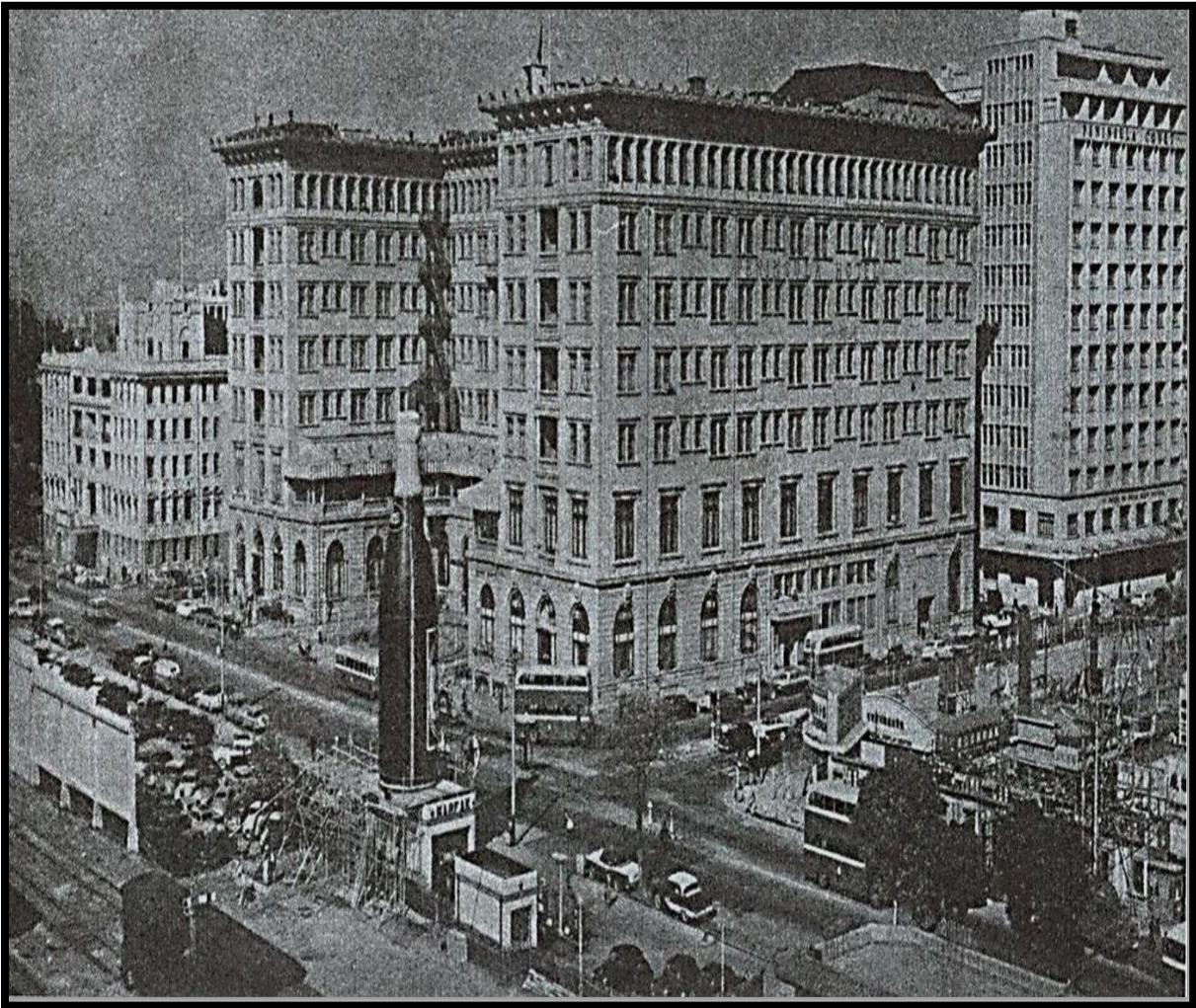
to survive, always seemed to instinctively know the exact time of a ship's arrival. Their intelligence network was uncannily accurate, far outperforming any other source in the Asian world. I speculated that it would be sensible to enlist such people's expertise to work on our side.

A recent cholera epidemic, supposed to have run its course before our arrival, still flourished in the area. Consequently, local health authorities were busy recovering pasty-skinned, skeletal, and comatose Chinese victims from apartments and stairwells of high-rise, low-cost housing projects. This intermittent problem in the water-impooverished community failed to restrict liberty. However, familiarity with the area from my first visit diminished the current allure and excitement to some extent. How many times could one endure the scary tram ride to Victoria Peak, ride double-decked buses around Hong Kong Island, or the Star Ferry across the bay, visit the intriguing Tiger Balm Gardens, or dine on sumptuous meals of excellent filet mignon, or gourmet borscht soup, all for mere pennies?

I soon discovered that for all its attractions and pleasures, the Hong Kong locale was actually quite small and restrictive. Therefore, as an alternative to sightseeing, I honed my bargaining skills with local merchants located in numerous tiny stalls, while purchasing mainland stamps and exquisitely detailed woodcarvings. I found this pursuit intensely enjoyable, but always departed a shop wondering if I had actually managed to obtain a bargain.

THE AIR AMERICA ENCOUNTER

One undertaking did prove especially fruitful while in Hong Kong. As previously planned, Connie Barsky and I visited the Civil Air Transport office in the opulent Peninsula Hotel to discuss with the site manager the possibility of future Air America employment. Reese T. Bradburn, a friendly sort, informed us that requirements for helicopter pilots in Southeast Asia continued within the organization. He also stated that Robert Rousselot, Vice President of Flight



Peninsula Hotel Kowloon where the Civil Air Transport (Air America) office was located.

The South China Morning Post.

Operations (VPFO), Taipei, Taiwan, would briefly transit Kai Tak Airport that afternoon. He strongly recommended that, if we seriously sought employment, we should meet and converse with him there. Although out of the way, the manager's advice seemed logical.

Rousselot, a personable man of impressive stature and military bearing, evidenced interest in us, particularly Connie, who possessed additional maintenance credentials. However, he noted that we both had considerable time remaining on our service obligations. In spite of this and even though we would not know anything for some time, I sensed that the brief interview was well conducted. Encouraged and enthusiastic over prospects of working for the clandestine paramilitary Company, we returned to the ship with company applications in hand.

Before departing for Luzon, the threat of a monsoon delayed us one night while awaiting word of the storm's progress.

As the monsoon season moderated, "flapping" rumors again reached squadron personnel.¹⁰ On a positive note, as we received aircraft parts and necessary supplies, our SLF readiness status slowly improved.

While unsettling reports of increased enemy movement in Indochina filtered down to our level, we waited impatiently for "the balloon to go up" and our considerable talents to be tapped.

¹⁰ Flapping: A military operation of an undetermined but potentially serious nature.

Having fulfilled the obligatory three-month sea tour, during early October we rotated to our home base at Futema, Okinawa, switching SLF assignments with our West Coast sister squadron, HMR-362.

"Oki-knock-knock," the largest land mass in the 140-island Ryukyuan chain, consisted of the peaks of a submerged mountain range and a series of volcanoes. Historically, it represented the site of World War Two's bloodiest combat operation. The battle for the island commenced on 1 April 1945. When finally secured after a three-month struggle, ninety-four percent of the existing structures were leveled and 185,000 American, Japanese, and Ryukan inhabitants had lost their lives. ^{1 2}

FUTEMA

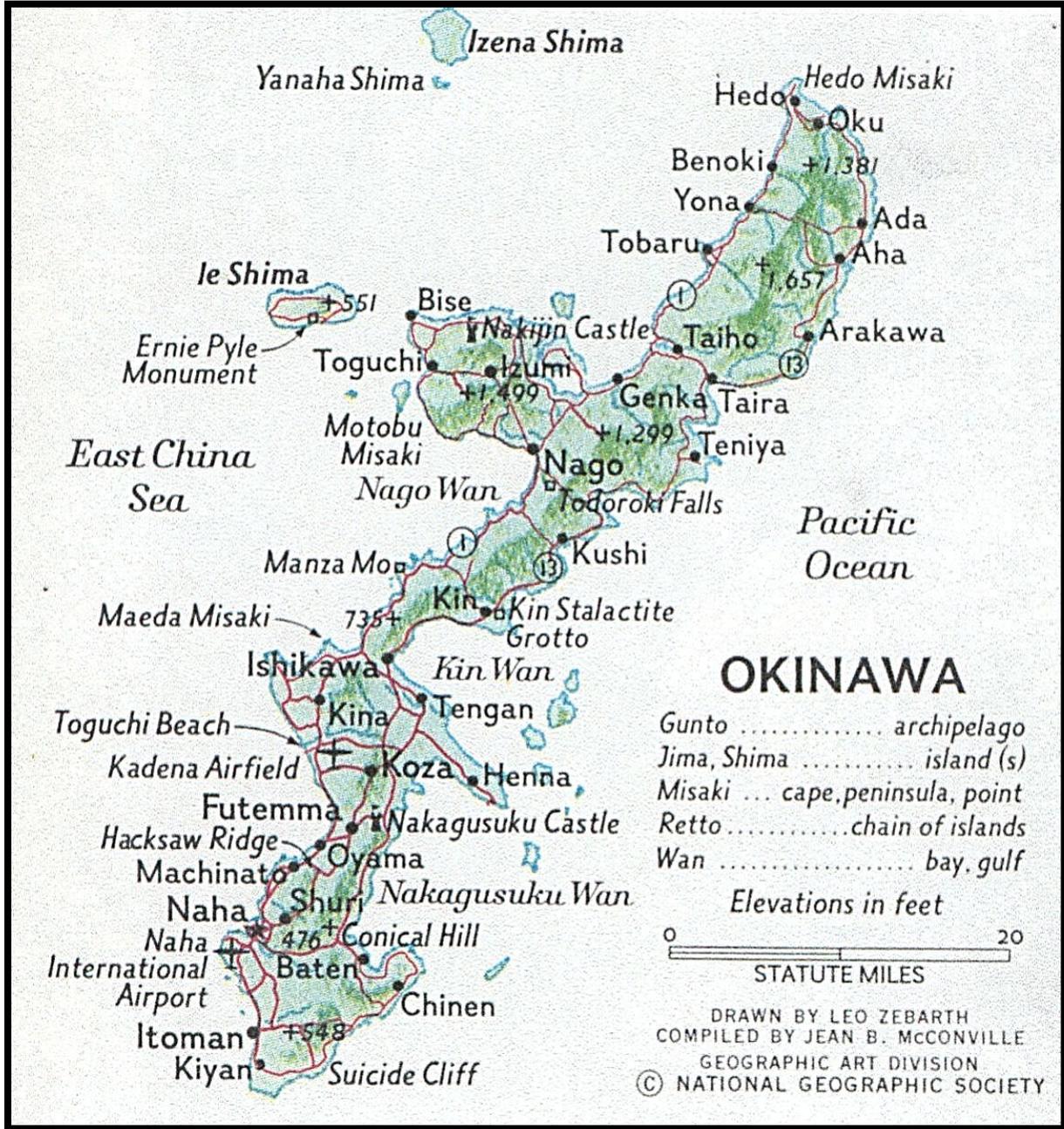
"As you know I am on the "Rock" again...Of course, we are ready to move off this island at a moment's notice, so if any time you don't hear from me for a period don't worry, for I'll probably be someplace I can't write."

Author's 10/06/61 Letter.

The 1959 Lao crisis produced a requirement to effectively concentrate Seventh Fleet Marine forces in one area for rapid deployment and regional commitment. Consequently, during January 1960, military authorities activated the Okinawa-based Futema Air Facility.

¹ Jules B. Bullard, *National Geographic, Okinawa: The Island Without a Country*, September 1969: 425, 429.

² Author Note: As a child, almost ten, despite all the USG fostered "Jap hating" propaganda of the day, I recalled little of this nasty conflict. Furthermore, my cousin Artie Wallace, a former Marine mortar crewmember, would never discuss his experiences when queried concerning them.



"The Rock."
 Courtesy of the National Geographic Society.

This was part of a master plan to position the two western Pacific Marine helicopter squadrons in a central location, ready for immediate deployment in response to any trouble spot within the Southeast Asian Theater. Later in the year, implementation of the floating battalion concept was initiated with one squadron constantly afloat (or at Cubi Point) and the other squadron staged on Okinawa. Shipboard duty generally lasted three months, with an identical amount of time spent on Okinawa.

Futema, the Marine helicopter facility located in the southern third of the sixty-seven-mile-long island, appeared primitive in contrast to other military services' older, more permanent bases. Many facilities dated back to Korean War days. After a year of construction, employing huge cranes and pre-cast concrete slabs intended to typhoon-proof barracks, most basic structures, hangars, billets, and a "O" club stood in place, although amenities and "creature comforts" were still lacking. This policy seemed in line with the ever-constant Marine Corps refrain, "make the most with little." Located on the crest of unsodded, hilly terrain, the largely barren facility was exposed to all of nature's elements and the dust-churning winds common to the area. In contrast to the more hospitable Philippines, it would be a long time before I felt comfortable living there.

Our trip by ship to Okinawa from the Philippines had been turbulent, but we arrived in good shape. However, with the island lying in the center of "Typhoon Alley," and subjected to numerous violent storms each year, "The Rock" had been severely whacked just prior to our arrival. Consequently, island people throughout the area required extensive aid.

With a full complement of downed wires, destroyed infrastructure, and numerous needy survivors, HMR-261, in conjunction with other relief efforts, immediately went to work conducting missions to outlying islands, carrying rice and other critical foodstuffs to

stricken natives. We were well received at every stop, and overwhelmed by laughing and smiling children, who charmingly demanded our autographs. A worthwhile enterprise, I derived a great deal of satisfaction during this peaceful opportunity to assist those in distress with our talent and machinery. It also afforded a choice public relations opportunity for the publicity-starved USMC. In fact, we had a photographer, Corporal Fiacco, assigned to the squadron while on Okinawa.

"BUD" STEELE

On 13 October, I forwarded an employment application to Robert Rousselot in Taipei, Taiwan, headquarters of the Air Asia Company, Limited. Along with the application, I included a decent recommendation from my commanding officer, Bud Steele. I had worked for Colonel Steele over a period of seventeen months. Without "brown nosing," I felt the Skipper sincerely liked me, and we shared a special relationship. One of the man's extraordinary attributes made an individual perceive a special closeness to him, yet without familiarity, retain complete respect. I also believed squadron pilots wanted to emulate his leadership skills and management qualities. In the past, while at "Rosy Roads," I had often escorted the colonel on San Juan liberty, but, not possessing his alcohol consuming constitution and staying power, I usually begged off the duty early.

Always a hands-on officer, the number one carrier launch position belonged to him, and he took pride in leading squadron flights during shipboard operations. Located on the forward starboard bow, lacking good visual reference or a horizon, the spot one departure generally necessitated an instrument takeoff (ITO). Many times operations scheduled me to act as his "safety pilot," monitoring instruments and assisting him in any required task. I always enjoyed these flights as, unlike several of his World War Two peers in the squadron, he took the utmost pride in piloting the HUS-1 well, and did not treat the machine with the normal disdain and heavy-handed manipulations of the "old



Barracks chief, Fred Clark outside the typhoon proof concrete structures at MCAF Futema, Okinawa.

Hinton Collection.



Futema barracks in foreground. Flightline and HMR-261 hangar in the background.

Hinton Collection.



Squadron effort delivering supplies to Ryukyuan islanders affected by a vicious typhoon. Left to right, Tom Hargrove, unknown, the crew chief, Al Dean, and the Author leaning on the helicopter main gear air-oil oleo strut.
Official USMC Photograph, 11/21/61.



Adorable Ryukyuan children's smiling faces dazzle us after landing on an offshore island with needed and much appreciated supplies.

Official USMC Photograph, 11/21/61.



Ryukyuan child modeling the crew chief's flight helmet. Left to right, Lieutenant Tom Hargrove, HMM-261 crew chief, hatless Author, and Lieutenant Al Dean.

Official USMC Photograph, 11/21/61.



Okinawa landscape seen from hills overlooking the ocean and a World War Two invasion beach.

Dale Hinton Collection.

dog" former fixed wing crowd.

My left seat tenure ended abruptly and was assigned to Second Lieutenant, Curt Mason, one day when, after a take-off from spot one, I "tactfully" intimated that Bud had slightly over boosted the engine, exceeding the prescribed maximum manifold pressure for the RPM setting. It was a bad decision. Once again the Casterlin mouth had caused a problem. My ears burned for days afterward as Steele semi-jokingly related my accusation, while voicing his denials to peers in the pilot ready room.

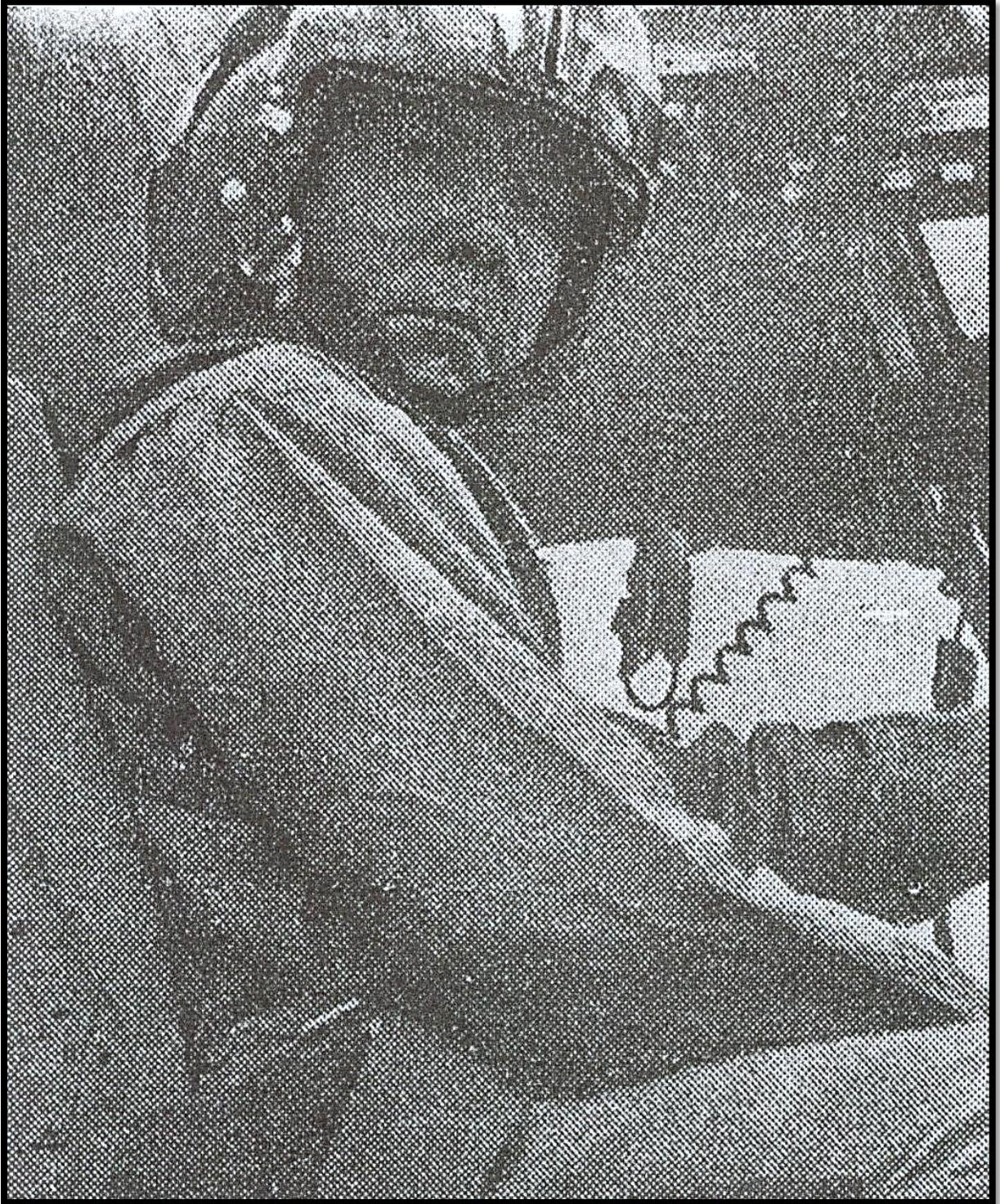
(At least Colonel Steele was man enough to speak to me about his displeasure.)

While on Okinawa, at senior officers' behest, Connie and I became the colonel's occasional and unofficial chauffeur, driving him down the hill for nighttime extracurricular activities. It could be tough duty, particularly when the Skipper disappeared for hours and he was difficult to find.

For this task we employed The Gray Ghost, a decrepit 1940 Ford that legendary pilot Lieutenant Tebow had previously shipped to the Far East. Since the departure of HMR-362 on SLF duties, Bob Whaley, the squadron's nominal guardian of the vehicle, traditionally passed the baton, charging us with the Ghost's preservation and maintenance.

Subordinates, equals, and superiors universally liked Skipper Steele. Having advanced upward through the ranks in the "Crotch" as a "Mustang," he not only displayed unusual expertise in handling men, but he also possessed the ability to delegate authority where needed.

Disdaining paperwork, the short, graying leader had the knack of realizing when to step into a deteriorating situation at just the precise moment. Equally adept at politicking or partying, he often combined the two to achieve a goal, which he usually attained, and always with his men's welfare in mind. Because of his superb leadership qualities, other squadron members and I respected him to such an extent that we would have followed him anywhere, anyplace,



Lieutenant Colonel Fred A. "Bud" Steele.
Author Collection from a centerfold of the *Stars and Stripes*.

anytime. My opinion never wavered, and throughout my entire tour with HMR-261, I considered myself very fortunate to be a member of Colonel Fred Steele's squadron.

WARM-UP

"I am to get a new job. I will be out on the [flight] line working for maintenance and may be test hopping the A/C out of down status.

We have a big operation soon, which will involve a great deal of flying for once.

The commandant will be here the middle of next week [12 October] for a short visit. I am busy preparing VIP equipment for him."

Author 10/06/61 Letter home.

Within a relatively short time, we were settled into a normal routine. Although lacking adequate grass and still very dusty, Futema appeared somewhat more developed than the base we had left three months before. Telephone lines had been repaired or replaced, and power restored to the entire base.

On 18 October, HMR(L)-261 helicopters participated in an extensive seven-day land, sea, and air mock war game, appropriately code-named "Warm Up." Encompassing fifty-five hundred Marines from surrounding camps, the exercise stressed the requirement for training in recently popularized jungle warfare techniques and anti-guerrilla operations. The first day of "Warm Up" squadron operations assigned Captain Lloyd W. Smith and me to "VIP" (very important person) duties. We ferried Major General Robert E. Cushman, Third Marine Division Commanding Officer; General Condon, Commanding General of the First Marine Air Wing; and additional high-level types to numerous viewing sites around the island war game area.

Late in the day, we were obligated to refuse a troop lift, citing rigid regulations that limited us to no more than six hours flight time per day. We had no choice, but a few uncomfortable moments and

pressure from upper echelon types ensued, and the Wing consequently rescinded the offending policy. Fortunately, squadron aircraft availability continued to be excellent throughout the entire operation, helping to create abundant flight time and negate our slightly tarnished image. During the period, we remained in the field for two nights, were infiltrated twice by "enemy forces," and destroyed twice.

In addition to receiving kudos for our part in the highly impressive exercise, General Maxwell Taylor's fact-finding mission to South Vietnam fueled widespread rumor and speculation regarding future USG operations in South East Asia. With luck, we expected his return to the States, and ensuing report to the President, to determine our future.

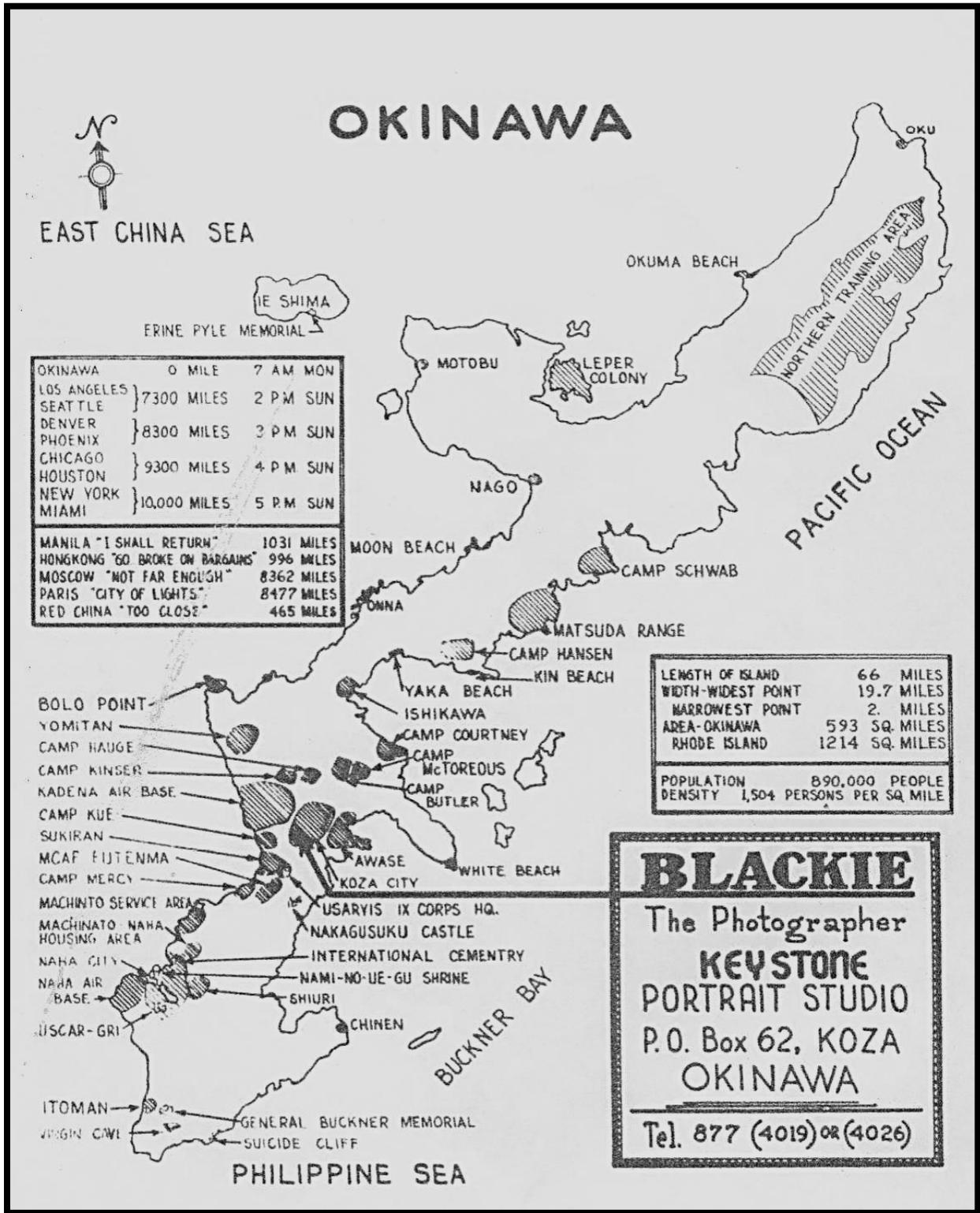
After Warm Up's successful conclusion, I thirsted for, and anticipated, participation in a low intensity conflict in which to assess in actual combat the largely contested theory of vertical envelopment, and utilize our long months of training.

VERTIGO

"We are in the process of getting our night flying minimums. We must fly 15 hours of night time a year."

Author 10/29/61 Letter Home.

On Tuesday, 30 October, while acquiring the quarter's required number of night hours, an unpleasant incident occurred, causing me to seriously question whether I actually belonged in the cockpit. With Second Lieutenant Vince Tesulov accompanying me in the left seat, our division formation launched toward northwestern Okinawa to practice night rough area landings (RAL) on Motobu Peninsula, a mountainous, pockmarked area dotted with limestone quarries. Situated two-thirds up the west coast of the sixty-six-mile-long island, the large arrowhead-shaped promontory jutted into the East China Sea at a right angle



Map depicting numerous U.S. military bases located on Okinawa.

toward E Shima, the small island where, late during the World War Two conflict, the famous and beloved war correspondent Ernie Pyle fell victim to a Japanese sniper bullet.

Although loath to admit it, not many pilots honestly enjoyed night flying, for too many bad things could occur to a single engine aircraft. This gave rise to a humorous quip regarding the peril of "that dangerous black night air" sucked through the carburetor as opposed to air during daylight hours.

I found this particular evening especially dark and foreboding. The inky blackness only intensified as we cleared the bright, winking lights defining Camp Courtney's boundaries and soared over the island's invisible shoreline. At once, the ocean and sky merged into one indecipherable black void that, except for the dim, blinking red running lights of my starboard side wingman, provided no visible horizon or external reference.

Flying in the number four slot, and realizing that I was "getting sucked" (falling behind my flight position), I added power to catch up to, and resume, my original sight picture on the port light of the number three ship. Recognizing an alarmingly rapid closure rate that could result in an overshoot, I radically decreased power and flared abruptly to instantly slow the charging beast. My obvious inexperience that led to the over control proved a serious error, as the process instantly created spatial disorientation, or a condition of vertigo.

Sensing a diving left turn toward the dark abyss below, but fully recognizing my temporary condition, I increased power and climbed above the flight, while circling to keep them in sight.

During the instrument ground and flight training phase at Pensacola, instructors had induced vertigo while sitting in a spinning chair or in the cockpit. They always drummed into us, "Believe your gages." However, with Murphy hard at work to complicate my problem, the "peanut" lights on my primary artificial horizon (vertical gyro) instrument failed. Although an annoyance, this glitch constituted only a minor problem, and, using the needle-ball airspeed gages, I kept the

aircraft upright, while attempting to eliminate the horrible panicky feeling. Try as I might to rectify my situation by shaking and banging my head, my inner ear sensory organs continued to stubbornly indicate that the machine was descending in a left turn toward the ocean.

Frustrated, I realized that logically, especially with two additional crewmembers onboard, I should no longer attempt to fly while enmeshed in that terrible fog of a vertiginous condition. However, conflicted by peer accounts and from prior experiences, I maintained little respect for, and seriously questioned Tesulov's, flying ability. Still, out of sheer desperation, and unable to eliminate the nerve-wracking sensation, after ascertaining that my copilot was functional, I relinquished the controls to him. Fifteen minutes later, harboring newfound respect for Vince, and with my equilibrium completely restored, I happily performed seven approaches to unprepared mountainous areas on Motobu's heights. The return trip to Futema was uneventful, making me wonder if possibly a health problem, lack of sleep, or some other variable, might have contributed to the untimely incident.

Although an embarrassing event, I learned to respect the value of instrument flying during conditions that might cause an aviator grief, and, above all, the importance of two pilots in the cockpit. The experience proved useful the following night, while practicing non-directional beacon (NDB) approaches with Steve Field over the black water east of Naha. After sensing another case of incipient vertigo, I immediately initiated a counter action and successfully coped with the situation.

AIR AMERICA TAIPEI

"I received a letter...I don't think I stated quite what I would be doing, but it would be a soldier of fortune affair down around here at fantastic wages. Consult Time Magazine for details. I would probably be compromising something if I said much more through the mail. It is

a long way off and who knows what will be happening then."

Author 11/09/61 Letter home.

About this time, a letter arrived in response to my employment solicitation to Vice President of Flight Operations Robert Rousselot in Taiwan:

AIR ASIA COMPANY LIMITED

*46 Chung Shan Road, North, 2nd Section
Taipei, Taiwan
27 October 1961*

*RND-DP-61/3576
Lt. Harry R. Casterlin
First Marine Air Wing
FPO San Francisco, California
HMR(L) 261 MAG 16*

Your application dated October 13, 1961 has been forwarded to this office for consideration and reply. We note that you have approximately nine more months of active duty to complete prior to terminating your military obligation, therefore, we would appreciate your writing to us approximately one and a half months prior to your discharge, at which time we can more accurately state our personnel requirements.

We appreciate your interest in our Company and look forward to hearing from you at a later date.

*Very truly yours,
David R. Traylor,
Director of Personnel*

In addition to receiving this letter, my interest in Air America was enhanced and piqued, while briefly talking with Lieutenant Wayne Knight in the "0" club. I did not know Wayne then, but others in my squadron did. During the summer, Knight had served a short tour with MABS-16 detachment at the Air America helicopter facility in Udorn, Thailand. Having fulfilled his service commitment, he prepared to return to Udorn as the latest soldier of fortune.³ His imminent departure reassured me that the Company was still hiring former Marines. Envious, I considered him a lucky devil.

The November presidential election instilled needed calm to our Theater and "flapping" rumors subsided considerably. Perhaps we simply did not talk about geo-political situations as much as before.

During Thanksgiving week, our participation in sea-air rescue operations and typhoon-linked people-to-people programs increased on several outer Ryukyuan Islands. Throughout this period, crewmembers of HMR-261 delivered hundreds of pounds of clothes, cooking utensils, household furnishings, food, and similar items to needy villagers. All items were donated by Marine and USAF personnel on the big island.

On Thanksgiving Day more unpalatable duties awaited me. They included searching for a body missing for three days, and a medical evacuation of a young injured indigenous scavenger with a broken leg from an off-limits bombing site. A visit to an offshore leper colony afforded considerable information regarding three forms of the universally dreaded, and largely misunderstood, disease. I learned that only one type was communicable, but only following long-term exposure. Once again, the children illuminated a bright, shining light on our activities. I found them enthusiastic and loveable in their quest to discover more about our machines and us.

The same month I relinquished my squadron flight equipment collateral duties for reassignment to the maintenance department as an assistant flight line officer. This billet offered me a position that

³ Soldier of Fortune: A term loosely used, for Air America pilots were not in this category.

required me to work directly with, and learn more about the HUS-1 helicopter. I had long coveted such an assignment, even though it entailed considerably more work and extensive hours on the job.

SLO GIN CAPER

As part of periodic informational generally boring lectures, Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, our attached Navy doctor, cautioned us about the harmful consequences of imbibing locally manufactured "back street booze," often served in the small-town alley bars. Strictly a beer drinker, I considered his information tailored for a captive audience and simply another "Ho Hum" lecture, calculated to bore us troops. But, as luck would have it, while performing group duty at MAG headquarters on Friday night, 24 November, I witnessed the appalling effects of mixing Sake rice wine and bad Okinawan Slo Gin on a young man's body.

After an uneventful evening, while preparing to retire to my makeshift cot at about eleven o'clock, a trooper alerted me that one of the group's enlisted men had recently returned from the Ville, and was wandering about the area in a drunk and disorderly condition. After investigating and confirming the report, I advised the young man's companions to conduct him to bed before he stumbled into any serious trouble. Believing the problem resolved, I returned to headquarters and again prepared for bed. Twenty minutes later, a panic call from one of the barracks requested that I come immediately, as the private was now totally out of control. Arriving at the quarters with my assistants, I discovered the tall, slender individual lying spread-eagled in the stairwell, rolling and thrashing about in a violent animalistic manner, something akin to a violent seizure. Several concerned individuals barely managed to restrain him in his present condition. With his eyes rolled back in his head, growling, snapping his jaws, and foaming at the mouth, he appeared to be in desperate trouble, perhaps about to harm himself or another. Seriously alarmed, a little sickened, and more than a little unnerved by the

unearthly display, I unbuttoned the flap to my .45 caliber holster, should the situation become untenable and possibly warrant deadly force.

Fortunately, a Navy corpsman rushed in at this point. While five strapping Marines attempted to control the youth, the corpsman administered a sizable injection of the tranquilizer drug Thorazine. The influence of the tainted alcohol on the individual's nervous system proved so powerful that several anxious moments passed before the drug's intended effect produced the desired result.

The next afternoon when I was off duty, I visited the unfortunate chap at the base hospital. Still unconscious when I saw him, a corpsman advised me that he would remain in that state for some time, while effects of his excess dissipated. At last a believer, I determined to pay closer attention to Doctor Fitz's "all hands" lectures, for they obviously had some merit. Fitz and I would soon cross paths again.

For those of us who partook of the "nectar of the gods,"--several squadron pilots abstained--the Skipper managed to wrangle an extra BOQ room for after-hours activities. One night, likely during the USMC birthday, we duplicated the rollicking Cubi Point "O" Club party by again stacking beer cans to the ceiling. It was an excellent advertisement for the product, and duly recorded by photographs. Because of the more "sophisticated" environment and wearing our finest attire, the evening was not followed by uncouth activities like the rafter-swinging exercise the Cubi Club had afforded.



How many empty beer cans are contained in a pyramid?
Author Collection.



HMR-261 officer squadron party in a Futema BOQ room. Sitting left to right: Bill McKillop, Don Leach, Bill Massey. Second row: Frank McLennon, Mike Tivnan, Fred Schober. Third row: Jim Cooper, Bill Everett, Charlie McLennan, Bob Waterfield, Jim Turner. Leaning over: Bob Reed. Fourth row: Colonel Carey, Fred Steele, Author, Warrant Officer? Last row: Jim Richardson, Sam Moate, and my buddy Connie Barsky.

Author Collection.

With excess leave on the books, the squadron administration department (S-1) approved a planned vacation allowing me to spend two interesting weeks in Japan. Excited at the first-time prospect of visiting a country I had long dreamed about, I envisioned climbing the more than twelve-thousand-foot Mount Fujiyama, until someone patiently explained to me that no one ever attempted this feat during the harsh winter months.

Five peers, Captains Don H. Hadden, Art H. Nussel, Lloyd W. Smith, and First Lieutenants Bob L. Reed, and myself, made the long trip on a Marine GV-1--The Marine Corps equivalent of an USAF C-130. All my companions were married except Watashi.¹

TOKYO

"I saw almost everything there was to see in the big city. It was quite an expensive place, but typical of the new Japan."

Author 12/16/61 Letter home.

We spent the first few days billeted in an old U.S. military complex referred to as "Washington Heights."

Strategically located in the center of Tokyo, from the bachelor officer quarters (BOQ) one could easily walk or ride a short distance in a "suicide taxi" to lower portions of the city. People reassured us that all Japanese taxi drivers, having satisfied two-year courses involving rigorous training programs before being released into the chaotic and congested traffic, were excellent wheel men. However, the exclamation, "Hiacko silver-san!" spurred them into even greater terrifying action, speeding, and missing other cars by mere inches. It appeared far easier on the

¹ Watashi: The Japanese equivalent of me, myself, or I.

nerve to sit back and enjoy the normal traffic frenzy in one of the world's most densely populated cities. ²

Along with several other foreign tourists, we embarked on a delightful Japan Gray Line night tour around the gaily neon lighted metropolis, visiting the Sykiyaki Suehiro restaurant, Cabaret Minato, and Kikaku, a Ginza district geisha house. During another evening foray, we walked a short distance to the elaborate and well-appointed Mikado, the city's largest nightclub. To an uninitiated and relatively impoverished Marine officer, a night's entertainment in that grand establishment offered the world's greatest bargain. Six dollars provided one with a fair dinner, one drink, and two fantastic shows, which featured Parisian and Japanese revues, rivaling similar productions anywhere in the world.

The Mikado experience ended our good deals. Nightlife in other parts of Tokyo proved expensive and far beyond my means. Drinks were expensive, and the handpicked, exotic B-girls in hostess clubs, like the renowned Queen Bee, were extraordinarily beautiful and seductive in the subdued lighting. However, the going rate of 36,000 yen (360 yen to the U.S. dollar) for an evening's entertainment was totally unaffordable to a poor first lieutenant. Briefed long ago at New River concerning these high-end establishments, I took satisfaction in the ability to now claim bragging rights that I had indeed been there, done that.

Duplicating my previous sightseeing policies in other countries, I boarded comfortable buses by myself, riding them for hours throughout the city at amazingly affordable rates. I only disembarked to switch vehicles, or to enter a pachinko parlor for a game or two, before

² Author Note: Because of exorbitant expenses in the Japanese capital, this trip would not have been possible for us underpaid Marines without the BOQ facility. Sadly, for future generations of Marines, within two years, Japanese builders had demolished the "Washington Heights" facility to accommodate the 1964 Olympics.

continuing my sojourn. During these excursions, I never observed another Westerner, yet felt entirely safe among the friendly bustling people.

I also spent considerable time riding the punctual national trains around the city loop to lovely Ueno Park, site of excellent historical museums, and Japanese cultural exhibits that displayed ancient armor and dynasty emperor's attire. Despite a lack of English language signs, I never experienced a directional problem, as adorable school children, at times unsolicited, were always more than willing to assist me and practice their rudimentary "Engrish." However, the antics of scurrying little old ladies distressed me, as they dashed around, or seemingly through my legs, in their haste to board a train and avoid a hard shove from the white-gloved "pushers" who helped load an enormous number of people into the cars.

Yee! That heavy, sweet odor! What is it? Packed tightly in the rocking train, I attempted to identify the unfamiliar perfumed aroma wafting around those standing in the car. Not particularly offensive, it provided a distinctive scent to my olfactory senses. Being an Occidental meat eater, I clandestinely snuck a sniff of my armpits and speculated as to how I must smell to them.

Denied access to the Imperial Palace grounds, instead, I watched ducks and other waterfowl swim in the wide moat surrounding the large complex. Afterward, I walked to the Tokyo Tower. The scarlet colored thousand-foot structure housed advanced technical displays of every kind. They revealed that the nation represented a sophisticated industrial society and the past "made in Japan" junk image of pre-war Japan no longer applied to the country. I had to retreat from one of the observation platforms when I began feeling queasy while gazing down a massive curved supporting beam toward the ground. It seemed unusual that I could be an aviator and yet suffer from mild acrophobia.

I could never resolve the universal wearing of strange looking white masks covering the noses and mouths of many people. Perhaps

designed as a combination pollution control and infectious cold germ guard worn out of respect for their fellow citizens, the coverings provided a surrealistic atmosphere to an already unusual looking scene.

At the Sanyo Hotel, one of the U.S. military billets, I enjoyed a lunch of quail, or some other tiny bird unfortunate enough to end up on my plate. The meal hardly satisfied my hunger, but provided a fresh gourmet experience for a meat and potatoes person. The hotel contained a highly recommended hot bath massage parlor. I had already indulged in one "hotsi bath" in the village lying at the bottom of the Futema base hill, and found the steam chest and hot bath much too extreme to suit me. In contrast, massages were always relaxing, with miniature masseuses first tying one in knots, then walking on the back, working large, deep muscles with their strong, manipulative toes. At the Sanyo the procedure seemed a bit more sophisticated, but achieved the same result: a superior massage. The only difference was the beautiful "Nipper" attendant clad only in white panties and bra. After she began her expert ministrations, I pointed to my turgid erection and could barely contain my lust. Somehow, I managed, as peers forewarned me that these institutions were definitely not hanky-panky parlors--wink-wink.

KYOTO

"Kyoto was something out of a storybook. It was a personal experience that I couldn't begin to describe, but I will try"

Author 12/16/61 Letter Home.

Their leave time up, my four companions departed for Okinawa. Therefore, after exhausting most Tokyo local color and excursion possibilities, I next boarded a military flight to the Marine Corps Air Base at Iwakuni. The base was located on the lower portion of Honshu Island, where Bill Peters, a buddy from U.S. Naval Flight

Training, and former housemate in East Pensacola Heights, was assigned. Like all my other friends from Marine Corps Basic School, Bill had washed out of the program and been assigned to a ground control intercept (GCI) unit. I spent a day at the base restocking my meager funds and organizing train reservations for a Kyoto trip.

The next morning, eager to visit the cultural and religious center of Japan, I boarded a speedy second-class sleeper for Kyoto. The modern "bullet" train possessed huge windows that afforded excellent viewing of the quaint countryside, as it rocketed swiftly toward my destination. I had neglected to bring provisions for the extended trip, and at lunch had foolishly declined to purchase a small box of rice and fish offered by a vendor making his way down the aisle. There it was again: The "Crotch" mentality burning, and impinging on my superego, admonishing me not to eat local food. In this case, it had fostered an unfortunate decision. Experiencing the first stomach growl, and realizing my serious error, I dashed down the aisle searching for the man and something to eat. By the time I overtook him, not a morsel of food remained on his tray, or on the entire train. The old adage of "live and learn" flashed through my mind. Certainly, I had learned an excellent lesson. When I returned dejected to my seat, a kind soul behind me, realizing my plight, provided me with an orange from her brown bag. *Gee, these generous people were great. Would this have happened in America?*

Kyoto, an eighth century Japanese capital that remained so for more than a thousand years, abounded with national treasures in the form of storybook Buddhist temples, pagodas, and Shinto shrines. As the only major city not targeted for bombing during the war, much of the Kyoto area representing ancient Japan survived devastation.

Hoping to sample and experience the style of pure native living, and still obsessed with assimilating local color, I had prearranged a two-day stay at a Japanese family inn.

The Kyoto experience was totally Japanese, and even more pronounced than I expected. Sliding rice paper screens graced the

entrance to my sparsely appointed, but spacious room. I slept on a thick straw tatami mat, which covered the floor, and employed futons, thick comforters that my personal maid unrolled and placed on the floor. I appreciated the value of these coverings, as fall nights in Japan were quite cold, particularly after shutting off the kerosene space heater. Before retiring, Mama-san offered me the first trip to the common bathroom, where one first washed and then after thoroughly rinsing, gingerly entered a large steaming tub for a relaxing soak. Now I resolved the mystery of the Ueno Park train odor. Yes, the soap I used in the bath exuded the exact scent that previously had assailed my nostrils. Delighted over this revelation, I determined to use this cleaning agent for the remainder of my stay so as not to further offend these gentle people with my occidental musk.

The scalding caldron gave me pause to wonder if I would end up boiled alive like the Negro slave in Kyle Onstott's book, *Mandingo*. Keeping this in mind, and aware that the family still had to bathe, I limited my immersion period. The host provided thick bathrobes to ward off cold, but except to shield one's modesty, they were really not necessary, as heat from the bath water radiated profusely from my body and enveloped me in its own warming shroud.

Highly pampered during the entire stay I was provided not one, but two, housekeepers, who served meals to me while I sat on the floor of my room at a low table. Most of the traditional foods, tempura and other cuisine, although very tasty, were unfamiliar to my Western oriented palate. However, I had no complaint about the thin sliced succulent Kobe beef sandwiches, so tender that they melted in my mouth. Mama and Papa San, the inn owners, went out of their way to make me feel at home, and treated me hospitably like their son. I was flattered, and considering their coddling no sin for the abbreviated period, determined to enjoy the simple life offered.

Fortified with good will, I sallied forth into the community to sightsee and absorb all the culture possible. I spent the entire day tramping through castles, temples, and shrines, while observing

milling crowds venerating their ancestors. Perhaps emboldened by the fact that I represented the only Westerner in sight, occasionally people stopped to talk. One young lady, deciding that I needed a guide, attached herself to me for a few hours before going about other business. There was no ulterior motive involved. These were truly unique people, where platonic and uncomplicated relationships between sexes appeared so relaxed and normal.

Many of Kyoto's historic and religious sites in outlying areas lay situated on low hills. This necessitated long ascents up steep stairways to access the ancient structures. Late in the day, after climbing what seemed like endless stone stairs, I arrived on a hilly, forested apex housing yet another nameless religious building. Ever curious, I wandered beyond the shrine to a cool, secluded, partially wooded ridge. The quiet and serene site resembled a sanctuary of its own. Calm prevailed. I felt completely at peace and the refuge elicited within me an unusual sense of awe. Alone, exhausted from the day's exertions, I gazed slowly down the partially sun lighted and shadowy manicured grassy slopes that fell gently away from the sides of the surrounding hills. Lying below, thousands of tiny, sparkling white gravestones flowed in neat rows along contours of the vale, and along the hillsides, marking the final resting place of a multitude of rank-and-file Japanese Christians (Buddhist and Shinto adherents were cremated). Mesmerized, I had never witnessed anything so simple, strikingly beautiful, and inspiring. Enthralled, with eyes tearing, I stood transfixed, wrapped tightly in that brief precious moment, one which actually seemed like an eternity; nourished with an inner peace and epiphany that only emanates from deep within one's soul. Reluctantly, I departed the magical site, conscious that the experience had captured an unexplainable special "Something" that would likely never be duplicated in my lifetime.

Hoping to continue and enhance my cultural experience, wanting to bundle as much into my short trip as possible, I desired to view a performance at the local Kabuki Theater. This involved a series of

plays, depicting popular dance-drama that evolved in sixteenth century Japan. Therefore, that morning I furnished Mama San with several thousand yen to purchase me a ticket. However, when I arrived at the inn that evening, my affable host presented me with not one, but two tickets, which elicited some confusion until the woman enlightened me that my maid would accompany me to the theater. She appeared firm, so, of course, assuming the "when in Rome" axiom, I did not argue with her. Not particularly elated over the arrangement, I calculated that Dickie had been expertly and royally conned, for I recalled the girl to be an exceptionally unattractive creature. However, when she appeared that evening wearing the stunning traditional kimono and obi garments, seemingly transformed from an ugly duckling into a swan, I accepted my fate.

Although I squirmed in my seat toward the end of the many long performances, I sat through six and a half hours of a fascinating, artfully performed, and beautifully choreographed series of lively plays in which only male actors exclusively portrayed both male and female roles. Naturally, I failed to understand the dialogue, but followed the contextual trend, proving to myself that one did not need to understand a language to enjoy the culture. I also believed a certain amount of naivety enhanced an experience.

We departed the theater late. Relying on my escort's navigation skills, we wandered slowly along narrow, lonely, deserted streets. Squeezed on both sides between monotonous brown wooden structures, the houses were tightly shuttered against the cold and darkness. Rounding a corner, my companion pointed to one of the structures and stuttered, "Geisha house." I grinned and nodded. Whether she was attempting conversation, propositioning me, or merely stating a fact, I never discovered. In silence, we returned the short distance to the inn. Deep in thought, I regretted having to depart the extraordinary soul cleansing paradise where one could easily sublimate mundane interests and carnal desires.

Following the fantastic experience in Kyoto, I returned to the

Iwakuni base. I had two days left before the return flight to "Oki," so Bill Peters introduced me to the nightclub scene, something I had previously neglected, but did not particularly miss, during my recent quest for less worldly pursuits. At one of his favorite haunts, he introduced me to a lovely, appealing young lady, who became my consort for the remainder of my trip.

The experience was almost like starting life over. From cups of delicious green tea, to numerous pleasurable and sensual episodes followed by obligatory hot baths, the episode surpassed any during my previous existence. Over the next two days, all accounts I heard from friends regarding Japanese women's treatment of men folk were revealed to me. Without exception, they proved true. I effortlessly concluded that mainland "Nipper" women were the Far East's loveliest creatures, certainly experts in treating a man like a king. At last, I wearily dragged myself on board the Okinawa-bound Marine GV-1 aircraft, knowing full well that if I failed to depart at that exact time, I would surely expire.

FUTEMA

"I am again plagued by overwork. This line duty is the type that never ends. I have been made a test pilot, which makes me happy, for I have desired it for a long time."

Author 12/16/61 Letter Home.

At Futema, I discovered squadron maintenance work backlogged. In addition to normal duties, by mid-December my boss had assigned me to a time-consuming test pilot status. As with the maintenance officer slot, I had long desired this assignment, mainly for the additional experience and possible assistance in gaining future civilian employment.

A pair of sizeable helicopter operations scheduled prior to Christmas week challenged those of us in the engineering department to

produce the maximum number of flyable aircraft. One Saturday, while breaking in an overhauled Curtis Wright engine, I experienced eleven successive engine chip detector lights.³ The process consumed the major part of the day, but I stuck with it, almost quitting several times out of sheer frustration and disgust, before releasing the cranky machine for operational flight.

IWAKUNI

"I spent the last five days in Iwakuni, Japan. It was cold and New Year's Eve it snowed toward morning. There is snow on the mountains and it is quite lovely."

Author 01/03/62 Letter Home.

Relaxed holiday requirements allowed me to slip back to Iwakuni toward the end of December. Ever since leaving Japan, I had thought of little else than a return engagement and a sweet liaison with the little bar hostess. Now well rested, I once again desired Miyoko's silken embraces.

Darkness pervaded the area where she lived. Harboring an intense anticipation, I rapped on the door of her traditional Japanese house. Although the house was lighted, no one responded to my knock. However, I heard muffled voices within, so I softly called her name. After further delay, the door opened, but the sight of an American "round eye" male sitting in the room crushed all my pent-up expectations. Disheartened, about to turn away and leave, the couple politely invited me in to the tatami-covered parlor. During the ensuing small talk, accompanied by a soothing cup of the obligatory bitter green tea, I discovered that the chap had recently flown in from Chicago to marry and whisk the delightful creature away from her homeland. After paying respects to the couple, trying not to display my intense

³Metal flakes circulating in the oil were not unusual when running in a new engine. A chip light required draining and replacing the hot engine oil.

disappointment, and severely humbled, I disappeared into the now sour night air.

Seeking relief in sublimation for less hormonal pursuits, I planned day train excursions. Unfortunately, I arrived in Hiroshima on the wrong day of the week and discovered the war museum closed. However, I took advantage of unrestricted access to the ground zero wasteland, preserved by the government to retain the horror of the event. Gazing at the gutted, steel beam-twisted building left standing by the government as a monument attesting to the near total destruction wreaked by the atomic bomb, I reflected on the terror President Harry Truman's decision perpetrated there, and man's inhumanity to man. ⁴

As I exited the area, three affable young ladies, who desired nothing more than English conversation, spared me any further paranoia or lingering depression regarding the area's devastation. Happy to oblige them, with my spirits considerably lifted, we strolled into a nearby coffee shop to chat.

After leaving the girls, I visited high-rise modern department stores. According to my philosophy, one could learn considerably more about a country and its culture by observing the goods produced and merchandise people purchased. I also continued to patronize local buses around the city as an economical method of viewing the area. It appeared that, except for various shrines erected to house the remains of A-bomb victims, Hiroshima was no different from other Japanese cities. I could never completely resolve the fact that Japan had rebuilt everything in sight since the bomb had wiped the old city off the face of the earth. Throughout the day, I sensed an eerie, guilty feeling regarding the severe violence my country had wreaked on Hiroshima, but this sentiment gradually dissipated as it was obvious that the inhabitants' friendly attitudes apparently bore me or my

⁴ Author's Note: Naturally, at the tender age of ten, I was too young and naive at the time of the bombing to comprehend the implications attached to dropping the atomic bomb which, if one believes the public relations hype, actually saved countless American and Japanese lives.

government no ill will.

Upon return to Iwakuni, with no other plans, I enjoyed New Year's Eve in the Ville with Peters and his ground controller (GCI) friends. Numbing cold enveloped the area, and toward morning, a light dusting of snow enhanced the beauty of the surrounding mountains. Inspired, Bill borrowed a friend's motorcycle and we motored to the nearest mountain to view the scenery. While slowly ascending the winding trail, the bike suddenly skidded on a patch of icy mud. To avert serious injury, Bill instantly dropped the machine on its right side. The sudden stoppage promptly launched both of us over the handlebars. Fortunately, as only a passive rear-ender, I landed uninjured on top of my companion. Meanwhile, the hapless cycle zoomed off the side of a cliff. Still running, it landed twenty feet below.

Fortunately, Peters only sprained his ankle, and after a humpty-dumpty fall, the motorcycle fared little worse. After straightening out a few items, we were able to drive it back to the base. Afterward, I jokingly accused Bill of perpetrating the incident to even a score with me for rolling my Renault Dauphine over one evening in the Pensacola area while he slept on the rear seat.

January morphed into a very cold, windy, rainy, and influenza-ridden month on The Rock, which did little to endear me to island living. Thus far, I had failed to experience any bond with either Okinawa or its people, such as had quickly developed in the Philippine Islands, until my final month there.

Early in January we were informed that, commencing in February, squadron unit nomenclature would be amended from HMR(L)-261 to HMM-261 (Marine Helicopter Squadron Medium). The briefer presented no logical reason for the change. We also discovered that planners had tentatively scheduled our next cruise for the latter part of February, and that rotation home possibility was advanced one month to June.

THE NTA

"Just got back from the guerrilla camp up north...This guerrilla training is experimental, but is being pushed by everybody because it has been neglected for so long."

Author 01/25/62 Letter home written on Okinawa.

In preparation for future or ensuing Southeast Asian conflicts, acceding to the current Kennedy Administration doctrine, accelerated efforts directed considerable military emphasis toward specialized counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare training. Conceived during the fall of 1961 to further assist allies in their struggle against communism, and approved before the end of the year, infantry unit training and command and staff training programs commenced in January on the Rock. To satisfy this requirement, engineers erected an experimental training camp in northern Okinawa's rugged and heavily forested mountains. Designated the Northern Training Area (NTA), staffed by Fort Bragg-trained "Grunt Marines," or U.S. Army

instructors from the Jungle Warfare School in Johore, Malaysia, personnel designed the infantry unit training course to prepare battalion rifle companies for counter-guerrilla warfare. Courses stressed importance on guerrilla movements, small unit tactics, night operations, and several live fire exercises. The week-long course terminated after a two-and-a-half-day field operation. ¹

Our squadron worked closely with project instructors, including overnight twenty-four-hour search and rescue (SAR) duty. Initial standbys involved HUS-1 crews staging at our Futema operations office.

Late on 24 January, Second Lieutenant Bill Everett and I received a call from the NTA duty officer to conduct a medical evacuation at the northern base. With the aircraft preflight and run-up already accomplished, within minutes we launched north into the inky darkness for the NTA. It looked like I had finally licked my previous vertigo difficulty, for during this night flight, I experienced no similar problem. Flare pots staged at the landing pad's four corners clearly delineated the elevated zone's borders and considerably eased my landing process.

To expedite future medical evacuations--called med-evacs--, rotating crews and one helicopter later staged overnight at the site. At that time of year, much of the NTA was a muddy mess, but I thoroughly enjoyed the field operations, especially working closely with the ground troops. During this period, to commemorate our NTA work, one of our talented second lieutenants designed and arranged for the manufacture of a circular red and black flight jacket patch, bordered with-HMM-261 1st Counter Guerrilla Warfare Squadron. This marked the second authorized patch to be proudly worn on our flight jackets.

¹Captain Robert H. Whitlow, USMCR, *U.S Marines in Vietnam-1954-1964* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1977) 41.
Edward J. Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land*.



Counter guerrilla patch awarded HMM-261 squadron.
Author Collection.

During extended missions to northwest portions of the Island, I noted recent excavations of several vertical holes in the mountainsides. All the obvious missile sites pointed menacingly toward both U.S. adversaries. When I mentioned the fresh sites to senior squadron officers, they advised me to forget what I had observed.

When the initial experiment and NTA training concluded, the commanding officer of the unit, an Army major, invited us to a farewell party at the opulent Buckner Army Officers Club, located on the heights overlooking Kadena Air Force Base. Considered rough and tumble uncouth Marine officers, most of us had never previously attended the ultra-luxurious club, created in the early days of post-war occupation to help alleviate island boredom. In deference to regular patrons' sensitivities, we initially endeavored to curb any overt outrageous behavior, and attempted to exhibit a little discreet demeanor while enjoying our libations. Apparently, the degree of difficulty involved in controlling our behavior failed to sufficiently assuage the angst of little, white-haired old ladies, who bitterly complained to the club manager that they had trouble hearing the whirring and clicking of their favorite slot machines--at least that's what he indicated. After apologies and several attempts to modify the situation, and perhaps with a few unkind comments regarding little old ladies' foibles, inanimate machines overruled humans, and the manager politely and regretfully asked us to leave the premises. Such was the lot of energized, exuberant Marines unleashed upon the sensitivities of high society types.

A TAXING SAR

"It was really hairy."

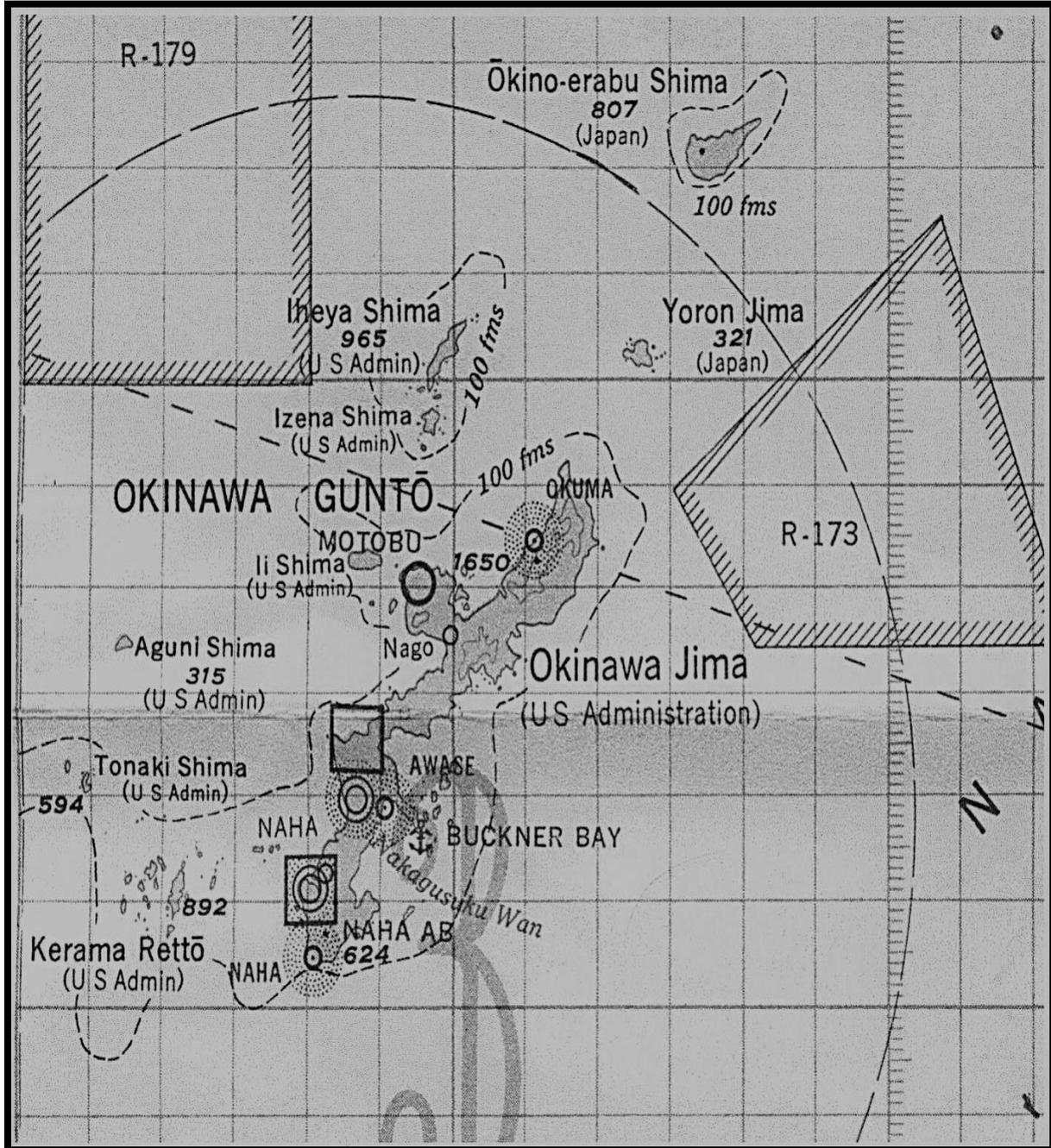
Author 02/02/62 Letter Home.

During the morning of Tuesday, 30 January, a significant mission unfolded, which marked a first for our squadron, and which challenged

several crewmembers' mettle. To relieve boredom while standing SAR duty at the Futema hangar, instead of the standard aviator game of backgammon (acey-ducey), Captain Charlie McLennan and I passed the time enjoying Hanafuda--also known as Sakura, or cherry blossoms--, a simple Japanese flower card game that I recognized as similar to Old Maid played by American youngsters. I had originally learned some aspects of the game, but not the cultural nuances, through a Japanese girl's eyes at her house in one of the Ryukyuan towns, and had subsequently introduced it into the squadron as a matter of interest.

The deck consisted of twelve suits of four flower cards each. The twelve flower cards, or variations, were accorded points. For two players, eight cards were placed face up between the individuals. Then eight cards were dealt each player face up. Drawing proceeded with card matching or discards. The game was over when either player no longer held cards, or the deck was exhausted. The game further differed from Old Maid in that it lent more player involvement, at times requiring loud individual vocal participation using authentic Japanese words, like **sakura**, **ume**, or **hagi**, while matching flower combinations. Of course, the more heavily weighted cards merited the greatest emphasis. Charlie was the perfect candidate for such a pastime, for even when talking normally, he bellowed like a bull. We enjoyed the game so much that we continued to play it in the ready room on our next ship to the refrain, "deal them paps."

Around noon, squadron Operations Officer, Captain Ralph S. Yakushi, alerted us to a request from the Naha Okinawa Air Defense Control Center to participate in an overwater SAR mission. The briefing officer informed us that a Japanese seaman had plunged into a vat of gasoline on the tanker Juno Maru. The ship was projected to be located forty miles northeast of Okino Shima, a small island eighty miles north of Futema. I had flown to Okino once before, carrying a small USO troupe of sugar-coated honeys to perform for the enjoyment of a few isolated Air Force radar station personnel based there. Because the distance involved was extreme, operations programmed four



Large scale map of Okinawa, Okino, area of the SAR. Dot in upper right-hand corner of the chart indicates the approximate location of the Japanese ship Juno Maru.

Author Collection.

helicopters to either help to conduct, or to support the mission. All involved would launch toward Okino Shima, two loaded with fuel drums and manual pumping equipment, and two allocated for the rescue attempt. McClennan as PIC and I would crew the lead ship, Echo Mike-59 (EM-59). Captain Bill M. McKillop and First Lieutenant Al Dean crewed the escort helicopter. ²

Without benefit of navigation charts, which were of little consequence over water, Okino Air Force radar operator vectors steered us accurately to the Japanese merchant ship. Very windy conditions produced unusually high seas, which caused the target ship to toss and flounder wildly through the water. There was no place to land, and a first assessment of the situation revealed that our mission offered a very hazardous challenge that would require a maximum effort from all hands. Further complicating our immediate task, the red ship cruised downwind, and all attempts to communicate with the captain to come about into the wind failed. A steady hover over the deck proved extremely difficult and hazardous to maintain, as the ship's pitching and rolling movements caused the superstructure to bob menacingly close to our aircraft. While Charlie Mac hovered precariously over the steel monster, our Crew Chief, Sergeant N. L. Perry, successfully lowered the doctor, Navy Lieutenant C. Fitzgibbon, and Navy Corpsman J. D. Scott to the wet steel deck. Once aboard, the medical team quickly disappeared through a hatch to stabilize and retrieve the victim.

During the prolonged hovering downwind, the transmission oil temperature gage needle rose close to the red line. To cool the

²Our squadron pilot inventory contained five men with Scottish or Irish family names beginning with "Mc:" Second Lieutenant McMullin, First Lieutenant Charlie C McLennan, Captain Frank G McLenon, Second Lieutenant Simeon McDaniel, and Captain Bill McKillop. To help dispel confusion in referring to any one individual, one of our wags designated Frank McLenon "Black Mac," McMullin "Little Mac," and Charlie McLennan "Charlie Mac. As there did not seem to be any confusion with McDaniel and McKillop, they retained their original names and the system worked surprisingly well in differentiating individuals.

component, Charlie departed the hover and flew circular patterns.

Finally, after observing our medical personnel and a few ship's crew on deck carrying the patient strapped in a Stokes metal wire basket, Charlie repositioned us over the deck to attempt the hoist pickup.

In addition to my anxiety over the wild gyrations of the ship and helicopter, with only the ocean to my port or left side, I possessed absolutely no hover reference from my position. Therefore, except for moral support and monitoring the instruments, I provided little help to McLennan. Having the utmost confidence in his piloting ability, and after conveying my thoughts about assisting Crew Chief Perry, I lifted my hinged seat pan and climbed down the bulkhead steps into the cabin section.

Although a large man, Perry was already experiencing difficulty with the task at hand. While hanging out the door, he attempted to communicate with the individuals located fifty feet below on how to properly hook up the unwieldy litter basket. Finally, with the load ostensibly secured, the crew chief raised it a few feet off the deck. At that precise moment, the ship pitched violently, and the basket containing the human load flipped upright to a vertical position. For a moment, I thought we had lost the patient, but he remained firmly secured in the basket. Suddenly a seaman grabbed the litter, unwisely attempting to reposition it to a horizontal position. While he worked to right the basket, the ship lurched once again and then suddenly fell away into a trough. This had the negative effect of jerking the helping individual into the air. Losing his grip, he plunged to the partially awash deck. Out of desperation, Perry hoisted the victim to the cabin door as fast as the motor would allow. Then, with considerable difficulty, we wrestled both litter and patient into the cargo compartment.

Noting increased aircraft gyrations, I assumed that Charlie increasingly struggled to remain over the spot, and that he must be highly fatigued. However, aware I could provide little help to Charlie

in the cockpit, and with the job still incomplete, I elected to remain below to help Perry.

The entire scenario became hairier by the moment. Ocean spray blasted the cockpit, and the superstructure's presence close under our belly continually alarmed me.

Utilizing the rescue sling horse collar to hoist Corpsman Scott aboard the helicopter proved as difficult as the litter recovery. During the delicate and unstable process, adverse conditions jerked him off the unsteady deck. Scott entered the cabin with no apparent injury. However, instead of appearing relieved to be safely in the helicopter, he collapsed blubbing into a tight fetal position in the left corner seat facing the front bulkhead. Still at a critical juncture in the recovery process, we required one hundred percent cooperation from everyone to successfully complete the mission.³ More than a little annoyed over the large strapping boy's condition, I assumed that he was suffering extreme shock from the trauma involved in the recovery. Therefore, I balled my fist and stuck him about the head and shoulders a couple times.⁴ This crude but effective act appeared to quiet and calm the youngster a bit. Then I turned to assist Perry with the doctor's recovery.

We had similar problems hoisting the doctor into the cabin section. Although he seemed to arrive in far better mental condition than Scott, Fitz's chalky white skin alarmed me. All the blood appeared to have drained from his face. *God knows what went on down there*, I thought as I pushed the co-pilot's seat up and reentered the cockpit.

Charlie, totally exhausted by the hour-long ordeal, happily relinquished aircraft controls to me on the return flight toward Okino. The radar people and their equipment cooperated nicely, and maintained an accurate track to the refueling destination on a nearby

³In the military, a mission is never considered successful until every unit returns safely.

⁴A term often used in the Crotch to humorously describe violence.

deserted island. The prolonged hovering at a full mixture setting had exacted a toll on our fuel burn, for at touchdown we were only several minutes from fuel exhaustion. The mission to that point had consumed three hours and twenty minutes.

While we refueled Echo Mike-59 for the lengthy, anticipated after dark flight to Futema, another squadron ship piloted by Captain Tom "T." Fish and Lieutenant Billy R. Massey flew the seaman and medical team to the Camp Kue Army Hospital. Unfortunately, because of the seaman's nationality, medical staffers there denied him admittance and instead transferred him by ambulance to an indigenous hospital in Koza City.

There the thirty-two-year-old Kiyoshi Matsue, seemingly recovering from burns and gas poisoning, lingered for a few days, took a turn for the worse, and expired.

We had performed our best, to the extent of an above and beyond the call effort for someone not even our own. Consequently, after conducting such a hairy and challenging rescue, and then eventually losing our man, perhaps because of the military hospital personnel's lack of concern, or regulations, news of his death disconcerted all of us involved in the operation.

As a token of appreciation for our humanitarian effort, seaman Matsue's brother journeyed from Japan to personally thank us, in what developed into little more than a USMC public relations photo opportunity for the Stars and Stripes newspaper. Perhaps because it involved a Japanese national's death, or because of poor communications, we never received a coveted Sikorsky "S" from the company for participating in the hair-raising SAR.

Early in February, a few of us wandered to the VMO reconnaissance squadron hangar for a chat with Captain Herb Baker recently returned from visiting the Air America helicopter facility at Udorn, Thailand. He reputedly possessed the most current information on the organization's operation in Thailand and Laos. During the discussion, Herb authoritatively maintained that carefree pilots occasionally



The crew of EM-59 who rescued a Japanese seaman from the Juno Maru on Tuesday, 30 January 1962. Left to right: Author, Doctor C. Fitzgerald, Crew Chief N.L. Perry, Matsue's brother, Charlie McLennan. Corpsman Scott was absent.

Official U.S. Navy Photograph in Author's Collection.

overboosted engines and over speeded transmissions to extract themselves and their charges from difficult situations in the mountains of Laos. In doing so, they incredulously employed 3000 or more rpm, pulling the guts out of the helicopter engines and drive train. Despite the occupational hazards involved in the job, wages appeared to be excellent, and Herb planned to leave the service soon for Thailand. The session provided interesting and enlightening news regarding the Air America operation, but I left VMO only half believing the wild stories Herb had related.

SUICIDE CLIFFS

"Last Sunday I drove down to the suicide cliffs, a spot where the Jap general gave up the ghost."

Author Letter Home.

A week of beautiful weather enveloped and graced our area. Invigorated by the welcome change, Connie Barsky, Don Hadden, a Ryukuan guide familiar with the area, and I drove the "Gray Ghost" south to "Suicide Cliffs." Someone had aptly named the area after the bitter fighting and mass suicides by Japanese soldiers and civilians, who leaped into the sea or onto rocks below to avoid capture by the reportedly uncivilized and cannibalistic Americans toward the end of the campaign to capture Okinawa.

Our guide, only a youngster during the war, stated that he had walked barefooted over the sharp volcanic rock. Proving his point, he displayed heavily calloused feet. When we expressed disbelief that he had wandered shoeless through such terrain, he insisted that during the war the bottoms of his feet were like leather shoe soles, several inches thick.

The entire lava-encrusted region, honeycombed with caves and deep multi-level sinkholes, abounded with artifacts of the battle from seventeen years before. With our guide's advice, and with some risk,

we explored safer caverns, careful not to disturb clusters of rusty grenades deposited long ago in wall niches. At the bottom of one sinkhole, among small piles of discarded pottery shards and other rubbish, I salvaged a rice bowl, glass medicine bottles, and an oxidized 50-caliber shell casing. Molding leather, ammunition, and other debris of war also littered the area. I considered the locale no place for the faint hearted, and imagined that I smelled a lingering stench of death. There were other interesting places deemed too dangerous to approach. Anti-personnel mines and booby traps, degraded by the elements and time, but still highly lethal, waited to destroy or maim an unwary visitor. At the battle's conclusion, following Japanese troops' refusal to surrender, rather than expend more assets and men, throughout the island American forces sealed numerous caves with explosives. Some caves reportedly contained sufficient provisions and munitions to have lasted defending forces for ten years.

Continuing our ground level search, we examined a cave partially filled with human bones. Gathered and neatly stacked in the rear, the remains of the unknown patiently awaited consecration and enshrinement before final entombment. The resulting sealed memorial would appear similar to the womb-like crypts observed on hillsides during my previous journeys to other parts of the island. Ever since my pre-med training, when fraternity brother Jack Hubbard and I used to regularly sneak into the Duke Hospital's cadaver room, I had remained interested in human anatomy. So motivated, in the cavern's half-light, I moved toward the pile of bones. However, when I reached out to touch a femur, our guide loudly screeched his disapproval. Apparently, I had crossed a delicate line and violated a sacred taboo. With apologies, we departed the historic graveyard, but not before Barsky inadvertently booted an old grenade lying hidden in the weeds on an overgrown trail. We held our breath, half expecting an explosion, but fortunately, none occurred. Certainly, the Suicide Cliffs represented a place that one did not wish to visit often.

One evening, while dating my favorite kitten-like waitress from

our "0" club, the Ghost's clutch plate disintegrated. To coin a pun, the vehicle literally gave up the ghost. Naturally, halfway around the world from the original manufacturing facility in Dearborn, Michigan, no parts existed on the island.

After all this time and abuse on the island, those charged with preserving the antique vehicle professed amazement that the machine even ran. Now it had broken down under my care. Just when I thought the automobile would never run again, and I would go down in the annals of Marine Corps history as the joker who destroyed the Ghost, an enterprising body shop manufactured a part, rendering the machine roadworthy once again.

"I would like to brief you on what is going to happen next month, but I'm not sure if it is classified and really I don't know that much. I do know that I'll be spending about a month in the field."

Author 01/25/62 Letter Home from Okinawa.

Throughout our tour, the squadron S-2 intelligence section continuously cautioned us to maintain security and never confirm any newspaper articles concerning our troop movements. Therefore, on the 25th, after reading a base handout detailing future military operations, I was appalled at the publication's lack of security. Apparently, the entire world would be informed regarding a classified operation, one on which I had not yet been briefed. For posterity, I sent the clipping home to my parents, neither confirming nor denying its existence.

"This clipping was in a paper here, but the subject is still supposed to be classified, so I will say no more about it. Seems silly doesn't it?"

Author 02/25/62 Letter Home.

The article read in part:

"Clark AB, P.I. (According to the Stars and Stripes)

An eight-week air-ground-sea training maneuver for a task force of U.S. and Filipino marines, sailors and airmen is set to begin March 2 in the waters of the southern Philippines.

Called Exercise Tulungan, the training operation is under the auspices of the Southeast Asia Treaty organization (SEATO).

Tulungan means "mutual assistance" in the Filipino Tagalog language.

Also taking part in the games will be planes of the Royal Australian Air Force and troops of the Philippine Army.

(An Associated Press dispatch from Honolulu said the U.S. Marine force would be made up of the Third Marine Division, stationed on Okinawa, strengthened by 1,500 marines from Hawaii. Observers from all eight SEATO member nations will attend the operation.)...

A spokesman said Saturday that Tulungan, first SEATO maneuver of 1962, is designed to strengthen the operational readiness of the U.S. and Philippine forces and to acquaint them with procedures and equipment of both armed forces.

The 41-day exercise will mark the 20th that the eight-member SEATO pact has undertaken involving armed forces of member nations.

The exercise, which will stress fleet operations, antisubmarine warfare and beach landings, will be based on a simulated problem in which a SEATO member country has called for help to combat infiltrating aggressors..

Amphibious reconnaissance of the exercise area, bombardment by gun and an assault beach landing will be carried out before the actual operation begins.

The first phase of the exercise will be the embarkation of troops, assembly of forces, an assault landing and inland maneuvers ashore after the initial landing is completed.

A spokesman for the commander, U.S. Naval Forces Philippines, said an "aggressor force" will give resistance as a simulated enemy during the exercise. (Units from MAG-16 will participate in the exercise)."

According to reports, Tulungan would include seventy ships, 400 aircraft, and 37,000 men, which comprised the largest amphibious training exercise in the Pacific region since World War Two. A primary objective of Tulungan would include large scale SEATO member training to foster working relationships between dissimilar military units. Authorities also expected signals would be sent to communist powers that SEATO forces were ready and willing to counter any threats of low key Southeast Asian aggression. The exercise appeared tailored for possible future operations in Thailand, or "other Asian countries," and the landing area on the projected Mindoro coastline actually

simulated South Vietnam's Northern provinces.

USS PRINCETON

"By the time you receive this I should be at sea again...I'll write later and fill you in on the secret details."

Author 02/25/62 Letter Home.

As more seasonal weather replaced the unusually nice days we had been experiencing, most of the squadron members appeared happy to board the USS *Princeton* for rotation to the Philippines' sunny climes. Regretfully, I had saved eleven days leave in order to visit Japan during the picturesque cherry blossom season, but it became increasingly evident that events were beginning to evolve that would soon change the face of Southeast Asia, and these would quite possibly thwart any future Japan trip.

A DITCHED SHIP

The squadron loading operation proceeded well, and the *Princeton* departed port on the afternoon of the 27th, carrying two additional squadrons (HUS-1 squadrons HMM-261, HMM-362, and a VMO-2 unit), approximately sixty-six aircraft, and numerous additional personnel. I flew over six hours, including two carrier landings that day. Then the unexpected happened. Marking the first time since the squadron formed at New River, we lost a HUS-1. Mister Murphy must have finally awakened from his long slumber, or irony surfaced, for two weeks previously we had logged 11,000 accident-free hours.

While Pri-Fly and deck hands recovered aircraft, only fifty feet from the ship's fan-tail, Echo Mike-62's engine failed on approach to the ship. With no options available, the PIC ditched beside the carrier. Fortunately, EM-62 rolled to the left, enabling Captain Lloyd Smith, Lieutenant Lowell Schaper, and crew chief Bill L. Wenger to exit safely from the cockpit and cabin sections. The crew used the



Following an engine failure alongside the USS *Princeton*, the three crewmembers of EM-62 safely evacuated to the helicopter's starboard side. The crew was rescued immediately by shipboard personnel.

Hinton Collection.

hull for a temporary raft, as the ship began sinking 500 feet toward the bottom of Davy Jones' Locker in a relatively short time. The helicopter floated long enough to enable the carrier's SAR unit to rescue everyone reasonably dry and unharmed. Beside EM-62, the only other loss was a substantial amount of clothing and cameras. ¹

CUBI

After steaming rapidly at flank speed in open sea, we offloaded at Cubi Point on 1 March.

Dale Hinton wrote to his parents:

"Operating from the old 'familiar homestead.' VMO stayed with us. There are several jet squadrons here and a lot of 'ground pounders.' [The West Coast squadron] 362 stayed aboard the Princeton which is tied up at the carrier pier across the runway.

With all the various outfits here there are lots of fights going on every night. Two guys have been killed in town recently while on liberty

Today [3 March] three of our [A/C] left for Mindoro to become the 'bad guys.'" ²

MINDORO

"I have been down here for two weeks...It is quite hot-109 degrees in the sun..

What we are preparing for I will leave to your imagination"

Author 03/20/62 Letter Home from Mindoro, PI.

Our squadron was twenty-five percent under strength, as six

¹Dale Hinton Emails, 04/04/10, 03/04/12.
Hinton Letter to Parents, 02/28/62.

²Hinton Email, 03/04/12. Letter to parents, Saturday 3 March 1962.

aircraft and crews had previously rotated TDY to Korea for a field operation. Depending on status, this left us with eighteen operational HUS-1s. While I was test flying an HUS-1 on 3 March, Operations dispatched three of six aircraft and crews for early participation in the Tulungan operation. Following a day off the flight schedule, to bolster our administrative contingent already on Mindoro, on Monday, 5 March, along with Second Lieutenant Steve Field, I ferried an aircraft 180 miles south of Luzon to San Jose, Mindoro, Philippine Islands, the seventh largest island in the extensive Philippine chain.

In addition to the six HMM-261 aircraft, the special forward detachment from Marine Air Group 16 (MAG-16) also contained two HOK helicopters and two O1E fixed wing planes from the VMO reconnaissance squadron. The unit's projected missions, among many, would entail performing administrative tasks, which included transporting VIPs, troop rations, and sick and wounded personnel.

DEATH IN THE FIELD

Assigned a short flight, First Lieutenant Jim H. Richardson and I had just touched down at Mitchell Field, located near Mindoro's southwestern tip, when a sergeant rushed up to the helicopter alerting us to an SAR mission at an inland crash site. The crew chief loaded the helicopter with firefighting personnel--called smoke eaters--clad in white fire retardant suits; we hooked onto a large red kettle-shaped foam bottle, and after obtaining vectors from the GCI unit at Mitchell, launched toward the crash site. En route, we learned from the cooperative GCI (ground control intercept) unit that a F8U jet pilot had augured in while practicing touch and go landings on a recently completed Morest airstrip. I was surprised, for I had originally understood that a civilian plane was involved. ³

The crash must have just occurred, for thick, greasy black smoke

³ Morest gear: Designed as field expedient for rough areas, the metal strip was constructed like an erector set with linked aluminum boxes. Failure of the Seabee unit to properly lock all the metal plates together may have contributed to the accident.



Map of Mindoro, Philippine Islands, the focal point of the large SEATO operation, Tulungan. The training exercise was conducted as a prelude to potential ship-to-shore operations into South Vietnam. We were located on the beach near the town of San Jose, at the bottom left of the chart.

Map in Author Collection.

still billowed skyward from the wreckage.

After Jim pickled the extinguisher unit next to the burning area and unloaded the eaters, I landed and secured the helicopter. Next, I ambled over to smoldering pieces of torn and scattered aluminum, where our efficient fire fighters were engaged in smothering the remaining flames. Out of habit, I inquired about the pilot's welfare. Without talking, a fireman casually pointed to the ground only four feet from where I stood. I made a quarter turn to the left. What I saw did not register immediately; when it did, I could hardly believe the image. The man had not managed to punch out of the aircraft as I had surmised. On the ground, with his arms and legs drawn up as if in an act of entreaty to the heavens, sat a largely unrecognizable black, charred mass that represented the shriveled remnants of a Marine aviator. The center portion of his scorched and seared helmet exposed a black, gaping hole lacking a discernable face. The grisly corpse posed a horrendous sight, one difficult to view or soon forget. The incident became my first encounter with violent death by fire. However, one of our first flight indoctrinations at Pensacola had cautioned that this particular form of demise was a distinct possibility in our profession and one that all aviators came to accept and joke about, but still feared.

Adding to the accident's misery and personal touch, I learned that the deceased pilot had been a casual acquaintance at Pensacola.

Mindoro offered a wildly rugged, untamed, unspoiled, and attractive land to the dispassionate viewer. One could readily distinguish why planners had selected the island for the impending operation, as it closely resembled important parts of the eastern Southeast Asian land mass along the Vietnamese coast. In addition, the topography offered everything: beaches, flatland, hills, mountains, and triple-canopy jungle. Wildlife abounded. The more dangerous ones included crocodiles, wild water buffalo, boar, venomous snakes, and spiders. Offshore, sharks provided considerable excitement for those disposed to swimming. The southwestern coastal region, where we had

our base camp, tapered inland and upward to Mount Baco's rapidly rising 8,000-foot jungle-clad mountain, and a chain of other promontories generally extending north and south throughout the entire central portion of the island. Lush banana plantations abounded in the south, and a few cattle ranches were scattered inland over rolling foothills.

Unsubstantiated rumors of the presence of hundreds of fierce HUK communist tribals, and Japanese holdouts from World War Two, added a touch of mystery, spice, and actual reality to our operation. Local planters from San Jose town spoke in awe of Gaur, a large, rare, aggressive cape type buffalo or wild ox, often measuring six feet from shoulder to shoulder, and weighing over 2,000 pounds, that was a prime animal for big game hunters. A Stone Age tribe of natives with tails was also mentioned in the folklore. Of course, none of the town folk we talked with professed to have seen any of these oddities.

During the Pacific War, contesting navies fought battles west of the island. During December 1944, allies assaulted the island to secure airfields nearer Luzon and to facilitate the push north. Our forces experienced only light resistance, but ironically, a nasty typhoon battered "Bull" Halsey's ships over a two-day period, causing as much damage as anything sustained in a major battle.⁴

The first few days after arrival, discovery of still deadly World War Two ordnance in the San Jose area kept our DOT teams busy collecting and destroying the dangerous items in the nearby Bugsanga River.

Over the next two weeks, we familiarized ourselves with the area, helped prepare landing sites, and resupplied inland positions with rations for the upcoming operation. Unsupervised, and with the aid of a strong lift-enhancing headwind, I found considerable enjoyment experimenting with mixed loads, often carrying 2,500 pounds of "Rats"

⁴ E.B. Potter, Ed., *The United States and World Sea Power* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1955) 866-868.

per sortie.

Compared with plush Cubi Point BOQ life, we found camping on the beach harsh. During the day, while we attempted to acclimate to the sweltering 109-degree heat, our standard size military tents, smelling of a waterproof coating, provided the only shade from the searing and merciless sun. As a coddled aviator, long divorced from grunt field exercises, I found the combination of "C" rations, dust, and heat almost unbearable. To help reduce my misery index, I gained some relief while flying that month, which enabled me to remain busy aloft in a slightly cooler environment. The eighty-five hours of flight time, my highest for any thirty-one-day period, could have been substantially more had not our gasoline stocks been in short supply.

In the evenings, following flight operations, I repaired to the detachment's special service general purpose (GP) tent to quaff as many "San Mickey Gold's" as I could ingest, rationalizing with the façade that I was replenishing the liquid lost during the day, although alcohol has the opposite effect. Through a program worked out with the local beer franchise, the San Miguel Brewery provided us with top-of-the-line export beer at low prices. The club, in turn, charged us troops ten cents a bottle, leaving Special Services a penny profit for future activities. Before retiring, I customarily wandered over to one of the many open-air stands that magically appeared on the perimeter of Mitchell Field, to flirt with female vendors and purchase fried bananas prepared in a delicious banana liqueur sauce. The fare was a distinct improvement over the bland "Rats."

In a gesture of friendship, the San Jose mayor invited several of us in the unit to a town festival that featured a pig roast. Early that evening, feeling a bit shaggy beneath my fatigue cap, I decided to obtain a haircut before attending the festivities. This supposedly innocuous decision fostered a long-lasting impression on me. It constituted an experience that, without a doubt, became the worst haircut I ever had. The inept barber wielded dull, manual clippers that tended to pull rather than cleanly cut one's hair. Maybe the guy

hated me, or all Americans in general. As a foreigner in the guy's country, I didn't know whether to cry or clobber him. Instead, in the interest of maintaining good relations, I bit my lip and managed to suffer through the indignity, and the dry shave that followed the initial torture. Helping to distract me from the discomfort, I partially hypnotized myself by watching a fascinating display of lizard tag on the fly-encrusted wall. Sandy colored reptiles madly chased each other in circles around the pink wall. Then suddenly, with a burst of speed, one would snatch another's tail, which automatically detached, leaving a mini-lizard. This humorous procedure, if a true mating ritual, seemed a new twist on the process to obtain a piece of tail. It marked my first studied observation of the tiny, noisy lizard that I would later recognize in Thailand as a Jing Juck, which made a sound analogous to one vigorously sucking on a knuckle. Still smarting from several tender spots about my head and face, but a much wiser patron, I made my way toward the center of town, vowing next time to let my hair grow to my shoulders unless I could find a competent, bona fide barber.

The succulent roast pork served from a heavily laden table was beyond description, and made much more palatable by various and tasty dipping sauces. I was well pleased with the food and the evening.

On the 17th, I flew a mission inland to resupply a grunt aggressor team. The OIC was enjoying a birthday party in his bunker and, to be sociable, forced a gin and tonic on me. It was hot and I was thirsty. Despite having reservations, I accepted and quaffed the drink. Later, as I climbed into the hot cockpit and looked at the fuzzy instrument console, I realized that by consuming that one drink I had screwed up royally. The alcohol had rendered my dehydrated body and brain incapable of flying duty. Fortunately, Lieutenant Curt "Smoke" Mason still functioned properly and flew us back to camp. I never repeated that mistake for the remainder of my flying career.

On Thursday afternoon, a couple of days prior to the official start of Tulungan, while "Charlie Mac" and I returned from a lengthy

mission to the capital of Mamburao located on the northwest coast, I spied a herd of several hundred porpoise undulating through the water. We tracked them for a while, marveling at the sight until, laughing like a fool, I caused the entire herd to turn by initiating a pass around their perimeter. With no damaging effects to the mammals, it felt wonderful to exert such power over life.

On Friday, 16 March, the crews of HMM-261 prepared to position squadron helicopters onboard the USS *Princeton* at Cubi Point and sail to waters off Mindoro.

As Dale Hinton recalled:

"...we were ready to leave, but the ship didn't show up so we hauled all of the gear and baggage back up the hill to the barracks. The Princeton may have been on a search mission for a Flying Tiger Super Connie that went down with 107 aboard.

In Subic Bay there are over 75 ships-carriers, destroyers, troop ships, more than 100 jets and numerous other aircraft squadrons.

Last payday here were numerous fights and robberies (Flips with 45's). Last two days no off-base liberty, but somehow the guys make it to town. We had a man in the hospital suffering from burns after a prostitute threw boiling water on him.

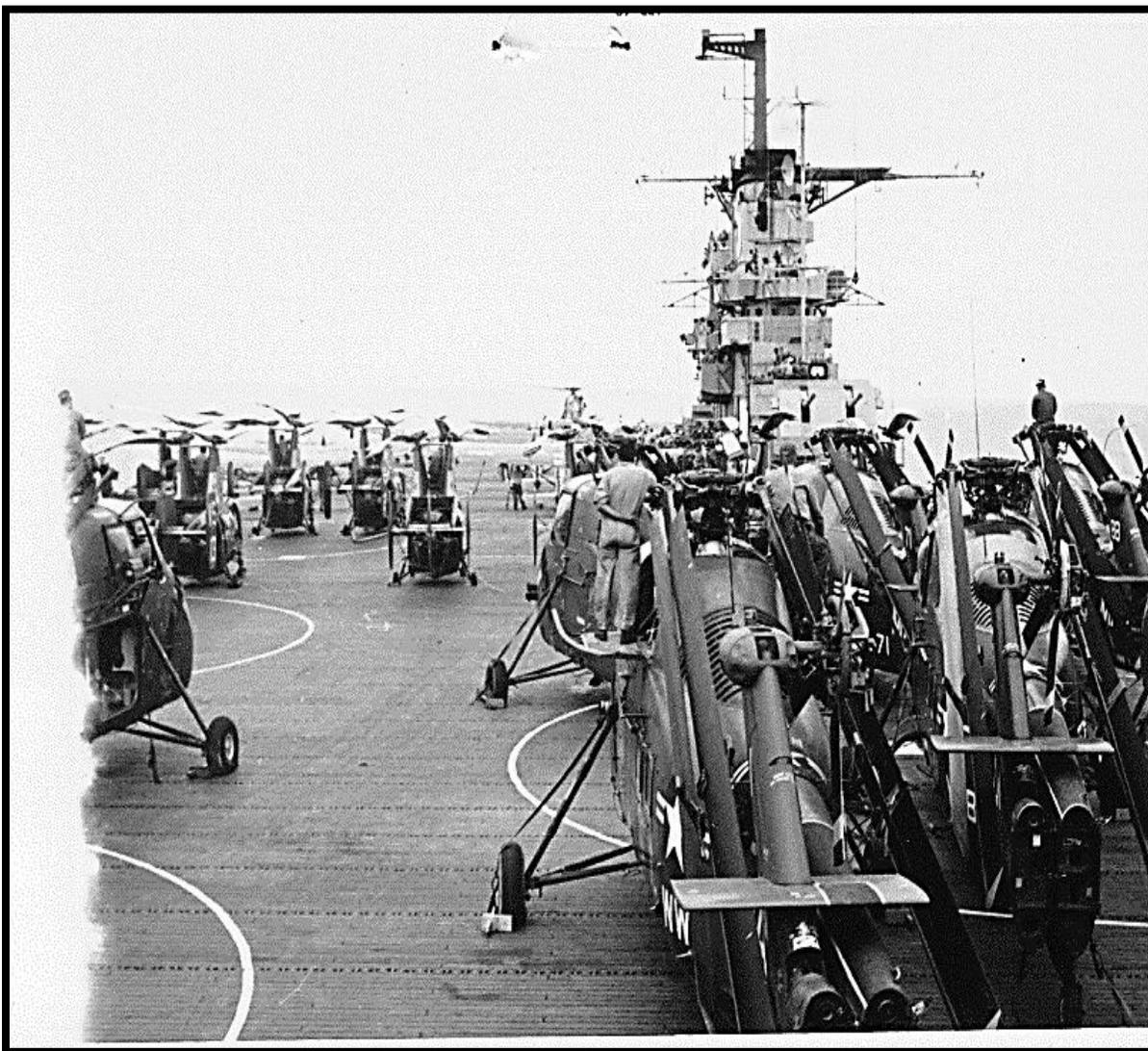
*Five PM-Here comes the Princeton. Guess we'll be leaving in the morning. That makes three aircraft carriers in the harbor and three cattle cars of troops just arrived at the barracks..."*⁵

Monday, 19 March, the USS *Princeton* departed the pier at Cubi Point to form up with other ships participating in the exercise and sail for waters around Mindoro.

After a few days at sea, on 25 March, a day prior to commencement of the massive ship-to-shore movement, Corporal Dale Hinton penned another letter to his parents:

"So far today the ship hasn't been strafed or torpedoed, although we did go into 'general quarters' and 'battle stations' once this

⁵Hinton 03/18/62 Letter Home.



USS *Princeton* flight deck. To the right, HUS-1 blades and tail pylons remain folded after being raised on elevators from the hanger deck prior to flight operations. Kaman HOK aircraft are seen parked forward. One HUS-1 is departing from spot one on the ship's bow.

Hinton Collection.



Crew chiefs preparing Echo Mike squadron aircraft for spot positioning in preparation for flight quarters.

Hinton Collection.

morning.

Sailing and very little flying for the past four or five days-boring! Last night a lone aircraft bombed our convoy in a simulated attack.

Tomorrow is the big 'D' day when we storm the beaches of Mindoro in real marine style. Expect an early revile and a long-long day of flying. The rest of the task force will be sending some 15,000 troops ashore amphibiously. The day after 'D' day we (261) go ashore and set up operations at a little airstrip near Mamburao on the island of Mindoro." ⁶

Spearheaded by amphibious assaults on Blue and Red Beaches, the sea-borne phase of the Tulungan ship-to-shore operation commenced on Monday, 26 March. Helicopter crews from HMM-261, and HMM-362 simultaneously conducted vertical envelopment sorties off the USS *Princeton* to prepared inland landing zones.

Once troops "secured" Mitchell Field, fixed wing aircraft delivered an Okinawa-based Marine battalion to the strip. By midnight the following day, personnel and machines completed off-loading the 15,000 Marines and Filipino troops. ⁷

While our administrative detachment continued to camp on the beach, the remaining squadron aircraft and crewmembers either relocated to general purpose (GP) tents on the beach, or to Mitchell Field for four days.

SOUTH VIETNAM

Even though we possessed superior troop lift helicopters, and what we considered to be the most experienced pilots in Southeast Asia, politics within the Pentagon's military structure had previously

⁶ Hinton Email, 03/25/12.

⁷ EdwardMarolda, 285-287.



Crew of Echo Mike 45 in the hills of Mindoro overlooking the flatlands and ocean during the Tulungan operation.

Hinton Collection.

dictated that Army H-21 helicopter units would deploy to South Vietnam. Now the word filtered down to our level that our squadron would send a few observers to the Indochina country for insight into the unfolding action, and to gain valuable field experience. My juices began flowing when I thought I might have the chance to actually participate in a combat theater.

Much to my disappointment, however, I quickly learned that I would have to wait until senior officers, mostly captains, first took their turn in the field.

A TALE OF TAILS

With my detachment's administrative duties largely fulfilled, for the remainder of the Tulungan exercise our leaders reassigned us to fly missions for the exceedingly successful and ever evasive aggressor forces. These assignments increasingly took us further inland, toward the Baco Mountain Range where one day, after buzzing its heights--but not too close, out of respect for the prospect of well-aimed arrows--, I observed a pair of male tribesmen walking along an isolated path. There had been reports of tribal types pilfering pre-positioned rations, so I decided to investigate. While hovering for closer examination, I noted the men wore nothing on their sleek, bronze bodies except scanty magenta loincloths, much like our early American plains Indians. Observing highly evident rear end protrusions poking up the back of their garments, I surmised that these people must represent the evolutionary deprived individuals occasionally mentioned by San Jose inhabitants. Apparently, these individuals were derived from an elusive clan of genetic throwbacks cursed by two-to-three-inch caudate extensions of the human vestigial coccyx bone.

Excited, but without benefit of a camera to record the phenomenon, I circled several times to confirm my suspicions. I later discussed the rare sighting with local Filipino people. While admitting that they had never actually seen these legendary Stone Age individuals, the consensus seemed to be that these people, called Mangyan, or

mountain dwellers, had only recently come down from the security of their mountain habitat. Perhaps out of curiosity, or a desire to obtain booty, they had made an unusual appearance because of the current lowland activity.⁸

EVAC

"I picked up a man at wing headquarters one day who was a critical appendicitis victim."

Author 04/02/62 Letter Home from NAS Cubi Point, PI.

At times in life, just attempting to remain out of trouble while performing one's duty affords an insurmountable challenge. Around noon on 31 March, toward the end of the Tulungan operation, in an attempt to minimize the day's blazing heat effects, I lounged half naked on my campstool in front of the squad tent, with my orange flight suit tied around my waist. I had just finished eating a highly prized can of government issued C-ration peaches, when a request for an evacuation mission arrived to break the day's monotony. With a vague fragmentary order, much like "sergeant take that hill; pop red smoke", and without much additional information, I was to retrieve a critical appendicitis victim at Major General Condon's wing headquarters, and ferry the person to the CGA Eldorado anchored a short distance offshore. GCI vectored Jim Richardson and me into a tight maze of tents, where blast from my rotor downwash promptly collapsed three of the nearest accommodations.

This did not portend a good beginning to the medical evacuation, and it only got worse. Landing on Rear Admiral Hooper's flagship proved equally demanding, for the tiny stern helideck afforded only a one-foot rotor blade clearance from the vertical steel bulkhead.

⁸ Author Note: Like unidentified flying objects (UFO) adherents, I am careful to whom I relate the story today, and those I do tell tend to either chuckle, say nothing, or stare at me in disbelief.

Apparently, no one from the beach had contacted the ship regarding the nature of my mission, for after gingerly squeezing my aircraft on board, a radio operator informed me that no medical facilities to treat the patient existed on the ship. Consequently, he recommended that I take him to the USS *Princeton*.

The *Princeton* lay a quarter mile to my starboard side. After informing the ship of my medical evacuation, instead of performing a standard time-consuming approach, I elected to expedite my arrival by hovering laterally and directly to the carrier deck. By this process, I hoped to enhance the stricken Marine's chance of survival.

The non-standard approach must have shaken the Primary Flight Control (pri-fly) officer to his core, or he simply wanted to assert his authority. Immediately following my touchdown, verbal abuse began raining down on me. The Navy person's criticism really chapped my backside and crushed my ego. By using initiative, and in the finest tradition of the U.S. Marine Corps, I proudly believed that I had performed admirably. The emergency nature of my mission made no difference to the Navy pogues. My passenger was suffering a life-threatening ailment--a burst appendix would likely lead to peritonitis, mass infection, and quite possibly death. But all the clowns onboard the ship worried about were their precious rules and regulations--no deviation or initiative was allowed.

I was always aware of the USS *Princeton* senior crew's overlying problem: not enough Marine officers onboard in command positions. Mostly staffed with Navy officers--only one Marine officer served in a Combat Cargo billet--the ship was the first we ever served on without a senior Marine officer in Pri-Fly. With that skewed ratio, how could Navy personnel possibly understand Marine thinking? Angry, after discharging the victim, I bit my tongue hard to prevent saying something that might lead to Courts Martial charges. At that moment, I wanted to leave that ship of fools, and requested an immediate departure. Upon return to the beach, I expected a reprimand from the Skipper, but never heard a word concerning the incident.

Another less invasive incident, this time not involving the permanent loss of HUS-1 EM-53, occurred on the 31st. While en route to shore near San Jose, Captain S. Larry Weinerth noted an illuminated chip detector light on the instrument panel. Soon afterward, the engine quit just short of the beach. Larry conducted a successful autorotation into shallow surf without injury to the crew. Despite the ship being immersed in six feet of salt water, a recovery team pulled it onto the beach. These two successful personnel recoveries within a little more than a month bolstered my confidence in the machine's durability, the ability to survive a helicopter landing without benefit of power, and a trained helicopter pilot's longevity.

LOWER ECHELON CRITIQUE

From an enlisted man's perspective, Dale Hinton's 1 April letter to his parents revealed some of the problems and events occurring during the final period of the operation:

"We just returned to the ship today after spending four days living in tents and the aircraft on the beach. The birds are dirty and need lots of work...EM-41 hacked up the main rotor blades in the brush.

It has been a hectic exciting week. The crunchies were dropping like flies from heat exhaustion. One of them died after being taken to the LST hospital ship and I had to fly with his body all the way from Mamburao to San Jose. Two nights in a row, I had to go on medical evacuations to the ship. One case was an officer suffering from a heart attack. Those night landings on the ship are scary! The inside of my plane is a mess of sand and weeds and dirt from the landing zones over on Mindoro. We landed on tops of mountains, in the jungle and every place imaginable. We chased and hunted aggressors, took hundreds of grunts out on patrol, and even flew beer runs from San Jose.

All of us crew chiefs lived in our aircraft on the beach and everyone else lived in tents and we all lived on "C" rations. This afternoon's meal here aboard ship tasted pretty damn good after a week

of crackers and beef-peas-and gravy! We did get to go swimming after work and they finally set up an outside shower. Between the sand, the bugs, and the aggressor attacks on us at night, we managed to have a pretty good time-with a few cases of beer every night."

In a later Email to the Author, Dale explained the body incident in more detail:

"It was a very early flight without morning chow. We buzzed one of the anchored LSTs until a LSO showed up on deck bare chested in shorts. We landed on the ship and the pilots promptly disappeared below and left me with EM-45. Soon some swabbies showed up carrying a litter with a body covered with a sheet or blanket. Guess I must have put the starboard side seats up and they slid the litter in there. The thought occurred that while the pilots were down in the officer's mess, we had been had. Later, I adjusted that notion to nobody told me what was going on, which was often the case. Well, the flight to San Jose was spooky to say the least. Door open, the material covering the body wanted to lift off. Door closed was not good..

Later that same day we switched from an airborne hearse to a flying paddy wagon. We picked up two marines-one black, one white-who supposedly had been in a fight the day before. Can't remember if we took them to court martial, confinement, or what. Best I could do is avoid eye contact. Do remember observing a wire compound with armed guards there in gruntville. I decided those were not aggressors inside the wire, but good Marines gone bad. Think I missed lunch that day too. Must have had had some survival rats stashed somewhere.."

On another occasion, Hinton and his pilot complement flew to the USS *Princeton* on a "special mission." After landing on the port side, they shut down while frozen sides of beef were loaded for the officer's mess ashore. During departure, an overboost or RPM decay occurred and EM-45 slammed to the deck from ten feet. Following the incident, the helicopter was shut down for inspection. Other than the meat shifting, there was no damage to the aircraft. The beef was

strapped to the deck and the mission completed.

With all the refuse generated during the operation, rats proliferated. One of the men discovered that the rodents lived in a large four-foot drain pipe that ran under a road near the air strip. Another Marine conceived the idea of burning them out of their lair. All agreed this was an excellent idea. A detailed recon was performed and it was discovered that the rats gravitated to the far end of the collapsed pipe.

While discussing options, someone offered, *"Hey, we can pour gasoline into the small end, then we can go to the other side of the road and wait until the gas is lighted. When the rats attempt to escape the fire, we can kill them."*

Most agreed, *"That sounds like a good idea."* Others were not certain.

While papers and other flammable material were stuffed into the small end of the tube, the rest of the group gathered in front of the large end of the drainpipe wielding machetes, clubs, and other supposedly lethal weapons. A bucket of highly volatile aviation gasoline was introduced and the paper ignited.

Whoosh! Bang! Silence. All who had stood in front of the large opening lay stunned on the ground. Except for their pride, no one was hurt. Inspection revealed a clean pipe and no rats.

In addition to Hinton's assessment of the operation, there were other items that I gleaned during my month in the field. According to rumor and innuendo, many serious errors of commission, and omission occurred during the Tulungan operation. These blunders indicated a necessity for further coordination, planning and additional field operations of a similar type in order to enhance the force's capability for success during any future conflict.

One example occurred during the initial landing when, unaccustomed heat killed several personnel and temporarily incapacitated 30 percent of a battalion during the first day of operation. Attempting to save one Marine with acute sunstroke, whose eyeballs had rolled back his

head, corpsmen packed him in ice.

Another example was the failure of a Seabee construction unit, who erected a Morest runway system in the jungle and neglected to lock one portion of the metal boxes in place. This failure ruined thousands of dollars of taxpayers' equipment, and contributed to the loss of one aviator's life.

Fifty cases of rations pre-positioned to a forward site mysteriously disappeared the following day. On a separate occasion, I had personally witnessed two groups of natives slipping through the jungle loaded down with our rations.

Adequate coordination between units certainly presented a dilemma, as I unhappily discovered while trying to deliver the sick Marine to a ship for treatment. Another night, a helicopter crew flew a trooper suffering from acute snakebite to a ship for medical attention. Halfway back to the beach, the crew was ordered by the ship to return and retrieve the injured man, as sickbay supplies contained no anti-venom serum.

Lastly, some commanders reported that a few supporting units knew no more about their role in the operation than green Cub Scouts.

From a senior First Lieutenant's personal viewpoint, in the final analysis, the exercise seemed to encompass enormous value by revealing what a large contingent of men could expect during a mammoth undertaking, and how to cope with a harsh tropical environment, perform the assigned mission, and survive to fight another day.

RTB

"I will not talk of the future foe naturally it is classified. You will read of it soon and I will report on it soon."

Author 04/02/62 Letter Home.

Recent geopolitical developments in Southeast Asia mandated that we terminate our portion of the Tulungan operation early.

Consequently, we re-boarded the Princeton on 1 April.

On 2 April, Corporal Hinton wrote from sea:

*"Right now the ship is entering Subic Bay and we are supposed to anchor about 9 AM. There are all kinds of rumors going around about where we are going now. Our destination is one of three places, Okinawa, Saigon, or another liberty run to Hong Kong. We may not get back to Okinawa at all or we may just be there in three or four days. The word is we'll be transferring to the Valley Forge."*⁹

⁹ Hinton Emails, some containing letters home, 03/26/10, 03/28/10, 03/29/10; 03/08/12, 04/03/12.

"Yesterday we made a landing in South Vietnam."

Author 04/16/62 Letter Home.

During the final six months of 1961, the military situation in the Republic of South Vietnam substantially deteriorated. Searching for answers and solutions, President Kennedy dispatched his favorite general and military advisor, Maxwell Taylor, on a fall trip to South Vietnam to appraise the current situation. Taylor's subsequent report indicated the requirement for change from a military advice stance to a more active role with the Vietnamese--in a word, escalation. One recommendation advised immediate deployment of three U.S. Army helicopter companies to the country. Kennedy chose the helicopter option as the least objectionable of the proposals. ¹

According to an 11 December *New York Times* dispatch for Saigon, the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) ship Core (T-AKV 13) docked in Saigon. Onboard were 400 personnel from two U.S. Army helicopter companies and thirty-three H-21 Piasecki tandem-rotor type (Flying Banana) helicopters. The aircraft would be assigned to the South Vietnamese in the field, but remain under United States Army control and operation. ²

Thus, in an unprecedented move, greatly escalating USG participation in Southeast Asia, two U.S. Army helicopter companies were hastily committed in Indochina in support of the Vietnamese Army.

On 17 January 1962, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed Commander

¹ Captain Robert H. Whitlow, USMCR, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam-1954-1964* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1977) 42.

² Pentagon Papers.

in Chief Pacific, Admiral Harry Felt, to prepare for increased South Vietnam operations. Shortly afterward, the USS *Card* ferried the Army's 93rd Transportation Company to Subic Bay, where the unit transferred to the USS *Princeton* (LPH-5) and two LSTs (LST 629, LST 630). The ships sailed for Da Nang and off-loaded a third Army helicopter company there on the 25th. A fourth U.S.-based helicopter unit located at Fort Ord, California, stood by awaiting marching orders by 18 April.

The usual inter-service political infighting for such choice assignments ensued in Washington. Therefore, to forestall additional wrangling, rivalry, and to sooth the naked beast, Pentagon officials suggested modifying existing plans by substituting a Marine medium helicopter squadron from Marine Aircraft Group 16 (MAG-16), 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW) for the Army company. According to knowledgeable staffers, the positive advantages for the change were deemed overwhelming. The Marine squadron was currently deployed in the Far East Theater and could be on station by the target date of 15 April. The unit's twenty-four HUS-1 aircraft would provide additional support for South Vietnamese armed forces, carrying supplies and troops to threatened Vietnamese villages, and would also provide unit members with a firsthand experience in an actual counterinsurgency situation. Proponents of this move further argued that an excellent sea-borne supply system equipped the Marines better logistically, and the Sikorsky HUS-1 offered a far superior helicopter lift capability than the Army H-21 equipment, particularly at higher elevations.

By 16 March, following considerable discussion and much reservation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved Marine Squadron HMM-

362's deployment to South Vietnam. ³

Following the First Indochina War, the Geneva Accords agreement of 1954, signed by all parties except USG, allowed formation of a watchdog International Control Commission to monitor protocols contained in the document. One of the stipulations related to introducing unconcealed war materiel directly into Saigon. Therefore, to forestall problems with the ICC representatives, in a joint State and Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting on 23 March, U. Alexis Johnson inquired if it would be feasible to fly the Marine helicopter squadron directly into South Vietnam rather than conduct a high visibility and more objectionable delivery to the Saigon port. Admiral Ricketts indicated that this was a good objective, and that the JCS would do their best to meet it, but could not guarantee a specific commitment at that time. Then Marine General Shoup reminded everyone that the squadron was currently in the Philippines, and could be flown in from as far out at sea as fuel capacity would permit. ⁴

While dickering was still in progress for introduction of a fourth helicopter unit to Vietnam, our squadron and HMM-362 were in the Philippine Island area preparing to take part in the vertical assault segment of Tulungan, a large SEATO exercise slated to begin on 25 March. General Condon, Commanding General of the 1st MAW, Iwakuni, Japan, had already repositioned his headquarters to Mindoro Island when notified on the 22nd of the South Vietnam deployment. ⁵

³ Robert Whitlow, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam, The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era 1954-1964*, SHUFLY at Soc Trang (Washington: History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1977) 57-59.

Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict*, Volume 2, Chapter 2 *By Sea, Air, and Land: The Era of Growing Conflict*, (Washington DC: Naval Historical Center, (www.history.navy.mil//seairland.chap2.htm)).
William Falls, 29, 31.

⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1961-63, Volume 2, Vietnam, 1962, Memorandum on the Substance of Discussion at a Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, Washington 23 March 1962, 116 state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii_1961-63/k.html

⁵ Robert Whitlow, p 59.

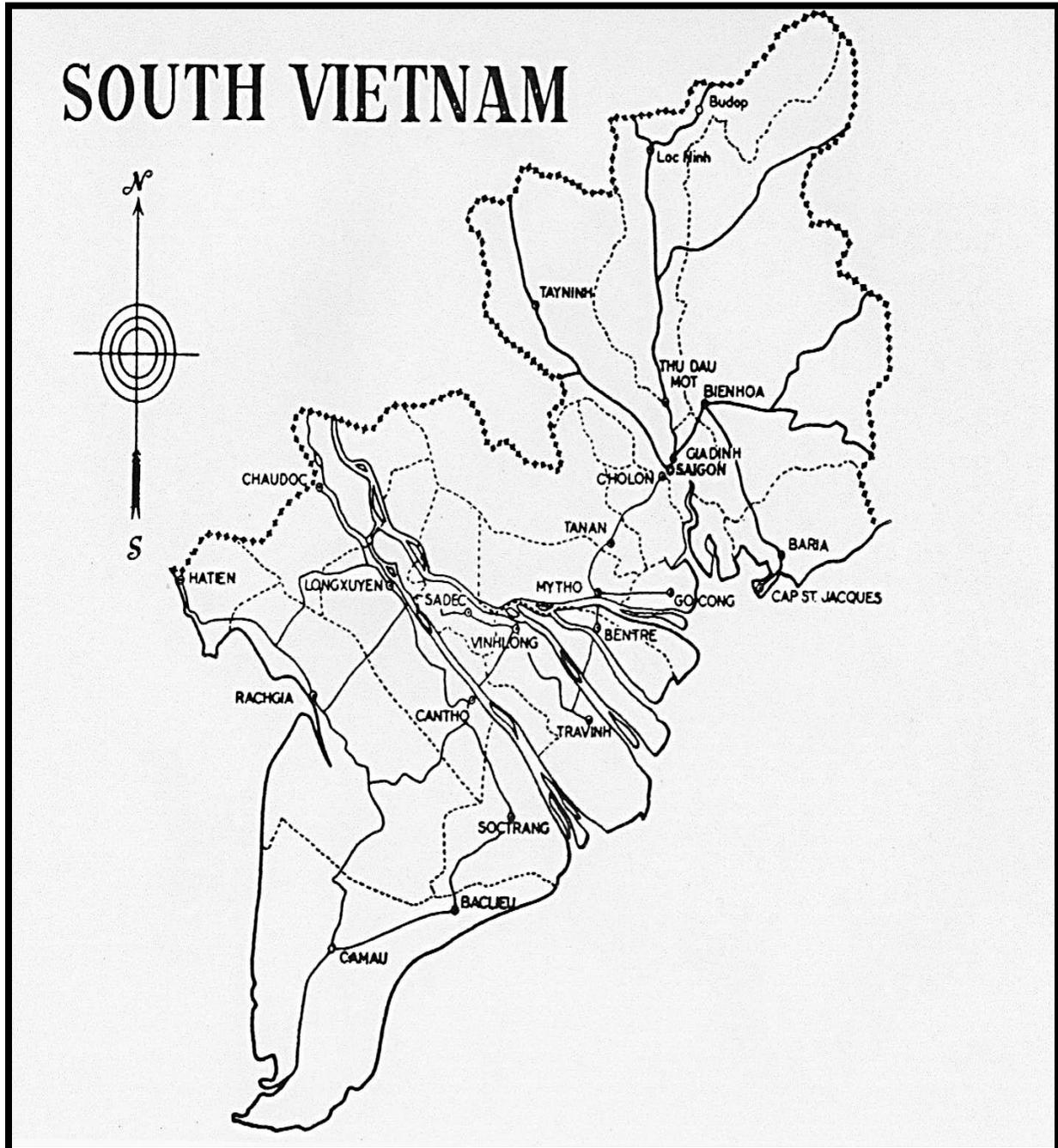
In October, our sister squadron, HMM-362, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Archie J. Clapp, was assigned helicopter support duty for the Far East Special Landing Force (SLF). Now the Pentagon selected that squadron for deployment to South Vietnam. Even though tapped to support the HMM-362 deployment, most of our squadron HMM-261 pilots were highly disappointed by the decision. Having trained for almost twenty months, and attaining knife-edge proficiency and esprit for a small scrap, we naturally believed our unit was the best qualified for the task. I never discovered whether our approaching rotation to the States, or that six of our twenty-four-squadron aircraft were in Korea, or other overriding political considerations generated by lobbying interests influenced the unpopular decision.

U.S. Army aviation units already based and operating in northern South Vietnam were equipped with plans they preferred not to disrupt. Therefore, policy makers targeted the projected April Marine insertion into the flat southern Mekong Delta region. By the end of March, First Marine Aircraft Wing staffers selected Soc Trang, a large regional town located on a sizeable canal that emptied into a branch of the Mekong, for the Marine HUS-1 base. Still essentially under government control, the area and site lay eighty-five miles southwest of Saigon, south of Can Tho in Ba Xuyen Province, and twenty miles from the South China Sea. Formerly constructed during Japanese occupation, the abandoned fighter strip offered a 3,000-foot concrete runway, a rundown hangar, and a few disused buildings for the helicopter operation. ⁶

PREPARATIONS

At the termination of the Amphibious Force Tulungan operation, on 1 April, HMM-261 and 362 personnel, along with equipment and other assets, returned to Cubi Point on the USS *Princeton* to prepare for the

⁶Robert Whitlow, 60.
William Fails, 31.



Map showing Soc Trang's southeastern location in relation to Saigon and the town's proximity to the South China Sea. The diamond shaped Mekong Delta of South Vietnam was fertile, cultivated, and heavily populated.

Author Collection.

ensuing South Vietnam operation.

Following almost a month in the field, I looked forward to Cubi Point's creature comforts, and leisure time in the Ville. However, this would have to wait. Effectively curtailing Ville enjoyment, upper echelon officials placed the entire squadron on four-hour base alert.

Once ashore, fourteen of our recently overhauled aircraft, along with critical parts, were swapped with HMM-362 for the same number of substantially higher-time-to-overhaul (TBO) and lower quality helicopters. For one reason or another, it seemed from the commencement of our appearance in the Theater that we were always saddled with other squadrons' junk. Adding to the extreme heat on the flight line, confusion reigned, but the job was accomplished.

While men from both squadron maintenance departments worked frantically around the clock to ensure that Clapp's squadron had twenty-four top condition helicopters, we maintenance test pilots spent the next three days flying and readying machines for deployment. I individually flight checked or flew five aircraft. This also included attempting to create airworthy machines out of some of HMM-362's "hangar queens."

Upgraded to thirty-minute alert status, early on Thursday the fifth, the word arrived from headquarters to "load out."

I had finally taken a break from the long hours of maintenance activity to enjoy ville pleasures most of the night, which rendered me virtually useless when assigned to ferry one of our degraded aircraft sans auto stabilization equipment (ASE) onto the carrier. Fortunately, I conned Second Lieutenant Billy Massey into flying both the sick machine and its worthless pilot aboard. With both squadrons on board, the LPH-5 Princeton departed for Okinawa to load additional supplies and personnel.

"...We returned to the ship yesterday after a Wednesday beer blast. Everyone was packing bags and hangovers.

Now we are halfway to Okinawa...From Okinawa the Princeton will go to Vietnam where 362 will go ashore and set up operations. We were

offered the same commitment, but our CO refused. ⁷

After 362 deploys, the Princeton is supposed to go to Hong Kong.

The Valley Forge is supposed to relieve the Princeton next month and bring us a bunch of new aircraft. We will remain the ready squadron and probably remain aboard the Valley Forge until HMM-162 relieves us in June." ⁸

"We flew off the ship this morning and will be here at Futema for only three days before going back on the Princeton. Today they have the PX and everything open just for us. It sure was nice to sit down in the good old mess hall and eat a good breakfast." ⁹

"Today, I traded the wreck from 362 to HMS for a fairly new, clean, and smooth flying aircraft. The new '45' is a real nice bird and I hope that I keep it.

Reveille goes at four thirty in the morning and we started back-loading the ship about 6 am. 362 has taken a lot of gear aboard for Vietnam.

Our guys will be out raising hell tonight. A couple more got locked up last night. No liberty for me-I have duty." ¹⁰

Following the squadron unloading operation into Futema, we test pilot types continued attempting to upgrade HMM-362's castoffs to an airworthy status. Then, on 10 April, after shuttling necessary personnel and supplies to the Princeton, as a segment of U.S. Navy Task Group 76.5 (Amphibious Ready Group), the ship sailed from Buckner Bay, Okinawa, with a two-helicopter squadron complement designated Task Unit 79.3.5. It was code named **SHUFLY**. (The expeditionary unit consisted of 450 Marines commanded by Colonel John F. Carey.) The previous day, Marine GV-1s airlifted MABS-16 support units from Futema along with a Tactical Airfield Fuel Dispensing System (TAFDS) and

⁷ The Author was unaware of this, and is not convinced that it is entirely accurate.

⁸ Hinton, 04/06/62 Letter Home.

⁹ Hinton, 04/08/62 Letter Home.

¹⁰ Hinton, 04/09/62 Letter Home.

Marine Airfield Traffic Control Unit (MATCU) to the Soc Trang airfield to facilitate upgrading of the base. All phases were programmed to be operational by 15 April. ¹¹

"We are somewhere in the South China Sea headed from Okinawa to Vietnam. Overnight, we picked up a destroyer escort and there is another carrier with us. Guys were picking up Filipino and Chinese radio stations.

This morning the ship went on radio silence. Today, we had flight quarters and all the test hops went without incident even though it is Friday the thirteenth.

Sunday, we are supposed to off-load [HMM] 362 into Vietnam. They [crewmembers] have all been given passports and civilian ID cards. Since orange is a sacred color there [for the Buddhist priests], we won't be wearing our orange flight suits. Supposedly, the pilots will be wearing .38 [caliber] revolvers and crew chiefs will be issued .45's or grease guns. Since my aircraft has no cargo hook, #45 will be flying as angel [SAR] over the rest of the flights." ¹²

While attending a ready room briefing regarding the impending joint ship-to-shore operation, we pilots learned that HMM-362's mission included assisting and supporting South Vietnamese Federal Forces with air mobility in the Viet Cong guerrilla-infested Mekong Delta, while performing the Corps' cherished vertical envelopment tactics. This was considered a temporary operation, as intelligence units speculated that the joint force would clear the enemy-saturated area of enemy forces within three months. ¹³

I realized the seriousness of the task that lay ahead when the supply department issued my T.O. weapon, a .38-caliber pistol. Such action always triggered anxiety in me. I recalled carrying a sidearm only once previously while orbiting "Point Onion" for three days in the Caribbean, as we nervously awaited orders to invade Guatemala

¹¹ Robert Whitlow, 60.

¹² Hinton, 04/13/62 Letter Home.

¹³ Robert Whitlow, 61.

City. Crew chiefs were issued an M-1 rifle with an extra eight-round clip.

THE DELTA

"Everything went off smoothly and there were no incidents...It feels pretty good to participate in something like this after preparing for it for two years. It is a good end to my service career."

Author 04/16/62 Letter Written at Sea.

Early on the morning of the 15th, Palm Sunday in the Christian world, most elements of Task Group SHUFLY steamed within twenty miles of the South Vietnamese coast. Covering jet escorts from the USS *Hancock* orbited far out to sea as per Department of Defense (DOD) stipulation that helicopter shuttles remain as inconspicuous as possible. Like the rest of my anxious squadron mates, I arose at 0330 hours for chow and final briefings before the day's proceedings.

Prior to first light, we received the order from Pri-fly over the public address system, *"Pilots start your engines."* Soon the chug-chug of the powerful R-1820 power plants broke the predawn silence. Then, in a ghostly sequence, after hooking up "Mules"¹⁴ loaded with provisions for the Soc Trang airbase, one by one we lifted off the deck with our loads, and prepared to move toward the beach. Assembling in division formation, four HMM-261 flights, with airspeed drastically restricted by the dangling sling loads, headed slowly for shore. The aircraft of HMM-362 followed. Within twenty minutes, the lead ship announced "feet dry."¹⁵

We cruised over the Mekong Delta at 1500 feet, an altitude generally accepted as a safe elevation above small arms fire. High

¹⁴ Mechanical Mule: A small motorized light weight flatbed vehicle carrier. Weighing 870 pounds, the machine was capable of carrying up to 1,000 pounds of military gear over rough terrain.

¹⁵ Feet dry: passing the beach onshore; feet wet: passing from a land mass to water.

above potential hostility, the April morning appeared calm and peaceful. In what was officially considered South Vietnam's dry season, early morning sunshine bounced and glistened brown and green over the broad, flat countryside; land differentiated and crisscrossed by silvery strands of countless drainage canals--some short, others narrow, or fairly wide. Over eons of time, annual Northeast Monsoons had caused the mighty Mekong River and other large watercourses to flood, slowly creating the fertile patch of earth below. The networks of rivers, waterways, and patchwork farmland imparted a maze-like appearance to the Delta that blended nicely into the total landscape.

From my vantage point, I could only view a fraction of the sprawling wetlands that included an estimated 26,000 square miles and 5,500 miles of waterways linking at least one third of South Vietnam's fifteen million population into a semblance of society. Peering down, I found it difficult to believe that so many people lived in the vast region. Rice paddies segmented by interconnecting canals, meandering rivers, lakes, tiny hamlets, and villages interspaced the expanse. Small settlements, mostly situated along life sustaining waterways, appeared hemmed in by dense Nipa Palm tree lines or bamboo breaks. I speculated that, in addition to providing shade from the searing heat, the palms also bore delicious tropical fruit. Except along canals, most rice-growing terrain lacked foliage. From my movable perch, each village seemed to contain a minimum of a temple and a school flying the national flag in the front exercise yard. Intelligence briefed us that Viet Cong units constantly harassed and often influenced this type of village. Looking down at the difficult terrain, I wondered how any government could provide sufficient assets and mobility to adequately maneuver and fight in these waterlogged, marshy plains. I hoped that our helicopters would soon introduce a fresh and rewarding dimension to Vietnamese Army activity.

In past years, the Delta's bountiful rice bowl had provided the inhabitants a peaceful place to live, with year-round warmth, and abundant plants and flowers growing throughout all seasons. Now beset



The Soc Trang airstrip and open surrounding countryside.
Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kizer; *The Advisory and Combat Assistance Era*,
1954-1964.

by discontent, and affording difficult ground for large units to maneuver, but ideal for guerrilla warfare, it harbored increasing numbers of elusive and marauding Viet Cong insurgents.

For once Murphy was absent. Generally devoid of negative influences, the ship-to-shore movement continued unabated throughout the morning and into afternoon. With the sling load phase completed, we ferried personnel into the base. Inbound sorties were long and necessarily slow. Including fueling, loading, and unloading, roundtrip shuttles generally required two hours, a task I shared with First Lieutenant Al Chancey.

During a short refueling break at the airfield, I heard scuttlebutt from a ground-pounder that only a single company of South Vietnamese soldiers protected the facility's sprawling perimeter. In addition, a recently arrived grunt captain informed me that there were only five American advisors in town, and they were very apprehensive regarding the fluid Viet Cong situation. He added that the local people spoke little English and generally disliked Americans. Furthermore, Viet Cong sympathizers were difficult to identify and capture, since they first infiltrated an area, and then assimilated by marrying into the group. American units had not yet made contact with the Viet Cong, and only caught fleeting glimpses of hatchet-man squads at the dreaded central water point located on the town's outskirts.

By late afternoon, with the HMM-362 squadron transfer largely complete, our helicopters straggled toward the ship, where the squadron would assume its new role as the sole Special Landing Force unit afloat. We were halfway to the Princeton, hoping for a well-deserved rest, when the carrier steamed further out to sea and flight operations assigned Echo Mike-44 the final SAR duty. We orbited high over the shadowy Delta, bored by the monotonous, flat landscape, a bit apprehensive should we experience maintenance problems or an engine malfunction while still circling over "Indian Country."

At twilight, announcing "feet wet," the last aircraft crew cleared the beach. Soon afterward, with our SAR assignment complete, and all



Soc Trang, South Vietnam during Operation SHUFLY, which relocated the West Coast HMM-362 squadron there from the USS *Princeton* in April 1962.
Hinton Collection.

helicopters accounted for, the carrier recalled us. With our Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) equipment dialed to the correct frequency, vectors from the ship radar placed us directly on target.

Dog tired, dehydrated, and in a foul mood after nine hours of pounding helicopter vibrations, I asked Al whose turn it was, and if he considered himself fresh enough to execute a final landing. As Chancey touched EM-44's gear softly to the deck, a loud voice boomed over the public address (PA) system,

"Congratulations Echo Mike Four Four you have just accomplished the 20,000th safe landing aboard the USS Princeton!"

This amazed me, for the ship's company normally reserved such an honor for the Skipper or another senior ranking officer. *Had the "rank has its privileges" component in military protocol somehow evaporated?* The dubious accomplishment resulted in a celebration of cake and a public relations picture in the wardroom that night after dinner. I was still suspicious of the Navy pogues' motives, but because of this kudo, my appraisal of the Naval officers on board the Princeton reluctantly edged up a notch. With the ship's formal ceremony complete, we repaired to the pilot ready room. There, just as all squadron medicos had done following other arduous operations, the good doctor produced his seemingly inexhaustible supply of celebratory and medicinal grain alcohol to relax us and relieve tension. Mixed with grapefruit juice, the powerful mixture easily slid down our throats, almost instantly impacting our dehydrated bodies. With some pride, a sense of accomplishment, and a highly successful operation behind us, we steamed out of Vietnamese waters toward the port of Hong Kong.

Echo Mike-45 Crew Chief, Corporal Dale Hinton, harbored a slightly different opinion of the SHUFLY operation:

"Well, Vietnam didn't show me much and everything went off without incident. I flew 10 hours without chow and made 3 refueling stops. 45 was the angel most of the day and [we] had an NBC crew aboard for a time. Touched down at Soc Trang once long enough to jump out and touch Vietnam.."



The crew of EM-44 performing the 20,000th landing aboard the USS *Princeton* in waters off South Vietnam.

Author Collection.



Although we were quite fatigued after the long day, cake cutting festivities were held after dinner to celebrate the 20,000 safe landing onboard the USS *Princeton*. The ship's Captain and Al Chancey look on as the mustachioed Author slices a fair share of cake. Our Skipper is more interested in stirring his coffee. Lieutenant Fitzgerald stands behind the ship's Captain; Captain Mike Tivnan behind Colonel Steele. Lieutenant Tom Hargrove and "Black Mac" McLennon behind the Author. Other peers in the photo are unidentified.

Author Collection.

All of the aircraft are lined up three abreast down the middle of the flight deck for tomorrow morning's entering port ceremonies. About 10 am we will pull into Hong Kong and liberty will probably go about twelve noon." ¹⁶

Still smarting because higher ups had not selected our squadron to remain at Soc Trang and participate in the South Vietnam operation, I considered the day's activity bittersweet. On the positive side, the fresh experience and a new country exhilarated me. Furthermore, rumor abounded and some hope of action remained a remote possibility that HMM-362 might eventually require our assistance should combat operations in the theater heat up.

This speculation was reinforced eight days later while at Cubi Point:

"I heard on the radio today that they [HMM-362] had started operating and had [achieved] minimal success. I am looking for us to go down there for a couple of weeks in a joint effort to clear the area. I don't know if we will go, so I can talk about it. By the way, all this I have told you is classified from where I stand because it confirms what you have read in the papers and magazines, so I would appreciate it if you would be discrete." ¹⁷

Author 04/23/62 Letter written at Cubi Point, PI.

Our third trip to Hong Kong resulted in primarily a woodcarving purchasing experience for me. The surprisingly cold weather did little to restrict our activities before re-boarding the *Princeton* for Luzon. Another voyage to the British enclave was planned for May.

"Last Sunday afternoon [22nd] we flew off the ship from 30 miles

¹⁶ Hinton 04/17/62 Letter Written at Sea.

¹⁷ In late 1962, SHUFLY aircraft traded places with an Army squadron and relocated to Danang, South Vietnam. The move was effected largely because the HUS-1 (H-34) provided superior performance in the mountainous northern South Vietnamese terrain, as opposed to that of the Piasecki H-21.

out from the Philippine coast. #45 broken from an Easter day cross formation with a terrific vibration and shuffle, but Captain Mac wasn't about to spend another night on the ship.

The ship entered Subic Bay later Sunday and docked Monday.

The squadron continues to get the short timers' attitude. We have one man in the brig and two more going there after tomorrow's court martial. One of our officers was rolled in town the other night and an Australian sailor was killed. The Shore Patrol caught a Filipino carrying a military .45, two knives, watches, and Navy ID cards.

It's so hot and humid here now. The Sky Club and the beach are the only places to get relief and beer...

After loading on the new carrier (the Valley Forge on the way with our new aircraft), maneuvers with the new battalion and more trips to Hong Kong, our overseas tour will just about be over." ¹⁸

¹⁸Hinton 04/27/62 Letter Written at NAS Cubi Point, PI.

"I have made two flights up to Baguio, Luzon."

Author 05/02/62 Letter written at NAS Cubi Point, PI.

Once again based in the relatively friendly Philippines, the squadron instituted daily rest and relaxation (R&R) flights to Baguio City, Luzon's cool summer capital situated a hundred miles north of Cubi Point. Baguio, a tourist attraction, seemed like paradise compared to the urban squalor of Olongapo City. Plush golf courses and splendid, lavish homes of wealthy Filipinos lay deep in the highlands. Site of the World War Two Japanese high command, people still talked about a "fortune" of gold bars buried in the immediate area. Here I gained valuable mountain experience, flying at 4,000 feet, to supplement the high elevation flying obtained in northern Okinawa.

One morning, during a lengthy R&R flight to Baguio, halfway to our destination my cockpit mate, young "Charlie Mac," McMullin felt an urgent call of nature. Hoping he could tough out the spasms until we reached Baguio, I initially ignored his entreaties to land, but he kept insisting that we must land immediately or suffer the consequences. Despite communist Huk activity reported on the island, after weighing the unsavory alternative, and against my better judgment, I descended and came to rest in an isolated rice paddy. We skated that day and continued on to Baguio City.

Baguio afforded an excellent commercial outlet for very fine native artifacts, including woodcarvings at reasonable prices after minimal bargaining. Skilled local artisans fashioned indigenous tribal images and other art objects from what locals called "monkey pod," a generic term for an extremely hard wood derived from various species of the country's mahogany trees. The finished products compared favorably with any I had previously observed, and were considerably



EM-45 Crew Chief Corporal Dale Hinton stands beside his HUS-1 helicopter with young admirers at Camp John Hay U.S. Air Force Base, Baguio City, Luzon, Philippine Islands. Hinton is dressed in the standard U.S. Navy aviation, borate impregnated, fire retardant orange flight suit and the red squadron ball cap.

Hinton Collection.

more durable than the split prone rosewood artifacts I had purchased in Hong Kong. However, I committed one serious error. Incorrectly assuming I would conduct additional trips to Baguio before returning to Okinawa and ultimate rotation to the States, I failed to purchase all the wonderful carvings that appealed to me.

"I still haven't received any orders and it burns me up because I haven't been able to ship my gear to the States."

Author 05/16/62 Letter Home.

Since the squadron overseas tour and my military obligation were both nearly complete, the immediate future concerned me. It seemed that geopolitical events were changing almost daily. With no orders yet cut, I was not certain whether I would be extended until December because of "needs of the service," or would I return to New River, or be released at Treasure Island in July. I briefly considered extending for a short period, especially if guaranteed a Mediterranean cruise, as this would have just about slaked my thirst for world travel at government expense.

With reports of an impending Lao peace publicized in the Stars and Stripes, my plan to seek employment for a minimum of eighteen months with Air America was now tenuous at best. Therefore, I almost discounted pursuing this vocation. Helicopter flying offshore in the Gulf of Mexico oil fields, or work in Canada, provided viable alternatives should I choose to remain in rotorcraft aviation.

As one day merged lazily into the next, HMM-261 personnel appeared destined to devote their remaining time at Cubi Point to relaxing and enjoying relative inaction. With beautiful weather to bathe our youthful svelte bronzed bodies, a minimum workload of mostly test flights, and the lure of sailing and skin diving were too tempting to ignore. Who could complain? Furthermore, after such delightful activities, it was difficult to envision a civilian life full of real-world responsibilities.



Naval Air Station Cubi Point beach.
Hinton Collection.

A FINAL FLAP

"Word came through to mount up."

Author 05/24/62 Letter home.

Our lull in action abruptly halted on 11 May. Momentous events frequently transpired when I stood duty, and that Friday evening I was saddled with the responsibility of squadron duty officer. While deeply engrossed in another popular mixed officer and enlisted men softball game, one of the men shouted at me to take a phone call from a person on the USS *Valley Forge* (LPH-8).

Now what?

"The Valley," the fourth and final carrier I would serve on, casually bobbed at anchor in Subic Bay. Answering, I failed to recognize the caller's name or his importance. Abrupt and direct, with a command voice, and without identification, explanation or detail, the man inquired how soon I could have our eighteen helicopters delivered to the Valley's deck. I was dumbfounded.

Totally unexpected, especially so late in the day, the caller's query shocked and briefly tongued-tied me.

Grasping for something satisfactory to say besides "Yes sir-Yes sir, three bags full," my neurons went into hyper-overdrive. There was no one to consult. It was Friday night, men were on liberty, Happy Hour was well underway, Skipper gone God-knows-where, and this clown is demanding an answer to an apparently impossible question. What could possibly present a worse situation?

While searching for a quick resolution to the question in the few seconds allocated, I hastily considered the options available as to how to attack this challenge and save the day for myself and the squadron. The situation appeared grim, for at that particular moment, short of a miracle, nothing seemed viable. Under considerable pressure, I soon discovered that it was the ship's captain, or his direct representative, confronting me. Therefore, out of sheer

desperation, and aware that I could not likely fulfill what I proposed, I informed him that we would have all the helicopters aboard the vessel within two hours. Then I went to work. Word of the general recall spread rapidly, but rounding up sufficiently sober and able-bodied crews to ferry eighteen aircraft aboard the Valley Forge proved a challenge. There were always a few abstainers of alcohol in the squadron. Therefore, a few of us had to fly two ships aboard the carrier. Some aircraft were in poor shape, and I personally flew two onboard without benefit of ASE. After the movement was completed within the stipulated time frame, the carrier relocated to the Cubi Point pier for on-loading of gear and supplies.

It was almost impossible to know where to look for the Skipper. After searching local Olongapo haunts, "Black Mac", Private First Class Victor P. Rivera, and E.P. Gremelsbacker discovered Colonel Steele enjoying a spaghetti dinner in a town restaurant.

Under pressure of the moment to move out, Corporal Dale Hinton recalls holding his seabag open at the bottom of his locker and raking his belongings into it.

Paul Bailey was enjoying Olongapo with his friends. Sometime after 2100 hours, the bar girls told the group about the squadron recall, and that they would be leaving Cubi at six in the morning. At the barracks, the men noted that all the lockers had been stripped of their effects and delivered to the ship.

Loading of squadron and battalion provisions continued throughout the night. When Bailey finally arrived at the dock, he found an ant hill of activity. Men and officers were busy passing stores up the gangplank. Toward morning the gangplanks were removed. When the last one was pulled in, the mooring lines were released, and those not already aboard scurried up the ladder.

At exactly 0600 hours, a mere twelve hours after receiving the unexpected alert, with more than a little pride in our noteworthy achievement, we pulled away from the dock and began steaming at flank speed for an unknown destination. Then, before exiting Subic Bay, the

Valley suddenly began to shudder and slowed, as a small boat sped toward the ship. When the craft came alongside, a ladder was lowered from the fantail to accommodate the VIP. The VIP turned out to be private first class (PFC) Gremelsbacker. The missing movement rated the private a day or two in the ship's brig.

The exercise had been an "all hands effort," one we had performed several times before, but also one that never failed to amaze me: the ability to assemble such a quantity of materiel and men in so short a time frame. ¹

THE LAO CONUNDRUM

The landlocked country of Laos, sandwiched between Vietnam, China, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia, had been formed following the end of the Indochina War and signing of the July 1954 Geneva Accords. However, the agreements did not ensure peace for any country in the region, and low intensity conflicts by communist-inspired people continued unabated.

Remote and isolated in the northwestern reaches of the country adjacent to the Chinese border, Royal Lao Government (RLG) battalions at Nam Tha, Laos, had been under pressure for some time by enemy forces. By early February 1962, Pathet Lao (PL) and other communist units began shelling Lao troops in earnest, as they had at Dien Bien Phu.

Fearing the worst, on the 13th, for the first time since 1940, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) moved infantry and mechanized Army units to various locations adjoining the upper Laotian border. Alarmed by the recent events in Laos, they unilaterally prepared to defend their

¹ Frank "Black Mac" McLendon Interview, 08/01/01.
Hinton Email, 05/11/10.
Paul Bailey Email, 05/12/10.

Every ship's captain the squadron had served under praised the can-do professionalism of our unit. The amazing thing about the movement was that there were no threats or intimidation involved. Officers and men just performed as the Skipper always expected.

country, without consulting U.S. or SEATO leaders. Robert Kennedy, ostensibly on a Southeast Asian junket, attempted to calm Thai leaders, indicating that the U.S. would honor its previous commitment to Thailand. By March, a visit to the U.S. by Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, and political posturing by Prime Minister Sarit, resulted in the signing of a U.S.-Thai bilateral commitment to defend Thailand. In the agreement, USG pledged to continue its assistance to the Thai armed forces, and immediately accelerate military equipment deliveries. A joint communiqué reaffirmed USG commitment to the independence and integrity of Thailand as vital to U.S. national interest and world peace. In the case of communist aggression, the U.S., under a modified SEATO framework, and in accordance with its constitutional process, would unilaterally act to timely counter any danger to Thailand, without prior agreement of all SEATO members.

Because of constant bickering and a lack of agreements within Western parties on solutions to the Lao problem, by signing the agreement, the Kennedy administration acknowledged the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization's ineffectiveness to act promptly in the face of a crisis. ²

During April, despite introduction of reinforcements, Royal Lao Army (RLA) offensives failed miserably in the Pak Beng Valley and around Nam Tha. Consequently, the military situation appreciably deteriorated in the Military Region One (MR-1) area of northern Laos.

NAM THA

The Thai government did not have to wait long to test U.S. Government (USG) resolve and intentions to protect their country. On the morning of Sunday, 6 May, with Nam Tha defenses crumbling, Air

² Actually, considered more of a political "show the flag" type of organization, SEATO had not originally been conceived or structured with an ability to wage war. Also, the pesky French rarely cooperated with the other countries represented.

American helicopter pilots evacuated twelve White Star team advisors from the valley, while thousands of RLA troops fled south toward presumed security at the Mekong River site at Ban Houei Sai. Rumors of further enemy advances south panicked the routed troops into crossing the river to the Thai side at Chiang Khong.³

The crisis sent shock waves coursing throughout Thailand. Concerned military leaders dispatched tanks supported by infantry troops to northern border areas. Searching for viable answers, some Washington insiders postulated that the enemy had perpetrated the attack on Nam Tha to discredit Lao General Phoumi and eliminate his troops--and much of his army--as an obstacle to further military or political advances.

USG REACTION

Because of the perceived crisis in northeastern Laos, as during previous flaps, the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to ready Joint Task Force 116 for possible deployment. On the eighth, Secretary of Defense McNamara and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) General Lemnitzer journeyed to Bangkok for talks with Thai leaders. Within a few days, both sides agreed to an unpopular solution: the stationing of U.S. troops in Thailand.

During a 9 May news conference, President Kennedy spoke of USG concern regarding the enemy breach of the 1961 Lao ceasefire agreements, and subsequently complained to the Geneva Conference British Co-chairman regarding the violations. The U.S. Ambassador to Moscow had already contacted the Soviets with hopes of restoring a ceasefire in the Nam Tha region. JFK mentioned introduction of American forces, but recommended a peaceful solution.⁴

On 10 May, the National Security Council (NSC) convened in

³ A more detailed account of the Nam Tha problem is contained in Book One-Genesis: *The Air America, Inc. Helicopter Program-Laos 1959-May 1962*.

⁴ *The Pentagon Papers, President Kennedy's News Conference, Question of the Cease-fire in Laos* (Gravel Edition, Volume 2) 10-811.



Author White
 Laos. Roads v
 scarce and no
 with a bicycle
 weren't many
 kill of NBC-T
 Narrow, hill-strewn La
 Thailand. For centuries

Houa Khong Province containing Nam Tha is located in the upper left portion of the orange Lao map.

National Geographic Map. Peter White, Author.

Washington to discuss recommendations and options available to thwart the latest Lao threat.

Conceived in 1959, a military contingency plan, Operations Plan 32-59 (OPLAN) provided for the airlift of two Marine Corps battalions from Okinawa to Vientiane and Seno airfields as an immediate reaction force. During a previous January 1961 flap, C-130 aircraft actually repositioned to Clark Air Force Base (AFB), Philippines, for possible transport of Marine units into the Theater. However, subsequent events precluded implementing this action. Now, with another muddled situation confronting USG, sending the Seventh Fleet to the Gulf of Siam and troops into Thailand seemed the least provocative approach to the current situation. It was more a political stroke, calculated not to promote immediate enemy retaliation, while at the same time reassuring the Thai government of USG support, and displaying a strong show of force to deter further communist movement. Indeed, a similar action the previous year, although on a smaller scale and aided by Soviet and other outside pressures, had led to bilateral negotiations and a tenuous cease-fire.

Phase Two (Laos) in CINCPAC's Operations Plan 32-59 was designed to secure the Thai-Lao border, maintain a ceasefire, and integrate Thai and American forces. It incorporated provisions for the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, consisting of a regimental landing team from the 3rd Marine Division--three reinforced infantry battalions--, a jet attack squadron, a helicopter transport squadron from the 3rd Marine Air Wing, and supporting units to operate from the Royal Thai Air Force Base in Udorn, Thailand. Located only thirty-miles south of the Laotian administrative capital at Vientiane, Laos, the Thai site included a 7000' concrete runway, constructed in 1956, and a "pre-prepared" billeting area where Marine Air Base Squadron-16 (MABS-16) detachment had erected accommodations for a unit in 1961. ⁵

⁵Robert Whitlow, p 88.

Pentagon and Joint Chiefs of Staff, adamantly opposed to any military operation short of employing all assets available during a possible war in Southeast Asia, opted instead for fleet movements, diplomatic protests, and increased support to the then-discredited Royal Lao Army. Seeking advice, officials also consulted with former President, Dwight Eisenhower. Heeding the wisdom and recommendations of the elder statesman, and concurrence of most parties, officials set fleet movements in motion.

During subsequent high-level meetings on coping with the Lao situation, high echelon participants wavered between military versus political solutions. Several proposals were offered. One involved restoration of the 1961 cease-fire line, which effectively left the mountainous terrain to the communists. A theoretical demarcation line had generally divided the country at the foothills. Since half the country's population, and most towns and agricultural production, lay in the flat river basin, planners believed that region the easiest area to achieve an effective stand. They theorized that in case of an actual war, it would be far easier to defend Thailand at the Lao foot hills rather than the Mekong River. Furthermore, Royal Highway-13 (Route-13), a rough main artery generally paralleling the Mekong, would provide U.S. military units with north-south mobility for hundreds of miles, and deny the route to an aggressive enemy who might choose to employ it to maneuver and attack anywhere along its length. In addition, occupation of this territory would restrict enemy movement along traditional routes of advance through relatively narrow corridors leading into the lowlands, and allow air assets to interdict chokepoints.

On the same day, determined to preserve the status quo and reassure allies of American resolve in the region, President Kennedy ordered the Seventh Fleet into the South China Sea. Anticipating the order, Admiral Felt immediately directed Major General John Condon, Commanding Officer, First Marine Air Wing, to activate the joint task force headquarters, assemble its staff, and refine its deployment



Early U.S Marine Corps photograph looking northwest at the largely undeveloped Royal Thai Air Force Base Udorn, Thailand.
Author Collection.

plans.⁶

Once alerted to action, the *Hancock* (CVA-19) carrier group and the *Bennington* submarine hunter-killer group sailed toward a predetermined location off Danang, and the Fleet's Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) carried the Marine Special Landing Force (SLF) toward the Gulf of Siam.⁷

In a memorandum from President Kennedy's Deputy National Security Advisor Walter Rostow, to Dean Rusk discussing Laos, and both South and North Vietnam, the advisor's ideas on the subject of Laos assumed precedence, and likely helped influence the administration's decision to introduce troops to Thailand. The hawk stated his preference:

"...to force a confrontation [with U.S. policy planners] with Hanoi's role in Southeast Asia to counter previous low-key military and political posturing..."

He specified the Nam Tha operation, and the entire communist adventure in Laos, centered on North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces illegally and clandestinely operating within the country. He further believed that USG failure to act immediately would foster a negative indication to Hanoi leaders, and lead to the effective loss of Northern Laos and a gradual collapse of Southern Laos.

Among a number of proposals set forth by Rostow, he advised pressuring Hanoi leaders by:

"Recognizing the Soviets had agreed to permit North Vietnam and China a free hand in Lao aggression. America should inform Moscow's leaders that their continued support for a neutral, independent Laos was required as previously agreed on a diplomatic level; also the role of North Vietnam in Laos, especially in the Nam Tha conflict was wholly unacceptable to U.S. interests.

Despite a perception in the Soviet camp the U.S would not react to

⁶ Robert Whitlow, 88.

⁷ Edward Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land: The Era of Growing Conflict, 1959-1965*, Chapter 2 (www.history.navy.mil//seairand/chap2.html).

aggression and permit a communist conquest, Hanoi should be informed their military role in Northern Laos was totally unacceptable and should they continue to pursue such measures, it constituted a means for strong retaliatory action.

To implement this, the U.S. should move carrier forces into the South China Sea south of the 17th parallel.

Then move the Marine battalion to the Lao border in Thailand and Naval forces into the Gulf of Siam, and covertly attack the enemy hub at Tchepone.”⁸

On 12 May, during the same time period as the Walter Rostow memorandum, the Kennedy Administration announced to the world that elements of the Seventh Fleet had sailed for the Gulf of Siam. An Administration spokesman followed with a more detailed report on the 15th, stating that acquiescing to a Thai government's request to help ensure territorial integrity of the country, JFK had ordered American troops into Thailand. Consequently, President Kennedy, in order to dispel any perceived weakness or lack of American resolve to help its allies, dispatched Marine aircraft and troops from Japan and Okinawa to Udorn Thani, a small provincial town located in northeast Thailand thirty miles from the Lao border. On the same day, the Royal Thai Government explained to the media that Thailand required the introduction of U.S. troops, who, in conjunction with Thai forces, would counter the Pathet Lao seizure of northern Laos and subsequent movement toward the Thai border in direct violation of the May 1961

⁸ Memorandum from the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Rostow) to the Secretary of State, Washington, May 12, 1962, FRUS 1961-63, Vol. 2, Vietnam 1962: 180 (www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii_1961-63/p.html).

Lao cease-fire agreement.⁹

HMM-261 AT SEA

"We will miss our Hong Kong trip, for we are elsewhere.

Maybe I'll have some news later. If I don't write for a while don't worry."

Author 05/16/62 Letter Home; Written Onboard the USS *Valley Forge*.

The die was cast. Once again rearing its ugly head, the relentless drumbeat of war reverberated throughout Southeast Asia.

Onboard the USS *Valley Forge*, squadron personnel anxiously awaited information concerning our ultimate destination and mission. Furthermore, apprised that we now operated under the nebulous terminology of "Battle Plan A" that included a little rumbling about Thailand and Laos, except for trouble in Laos, a comprehensive briefing regarding the geopolitical situation never materialized.

Since most of us knew very little about Laos, a briefing and current situation would have been quite helpful in understanding our role in the overall situation. However, no history or cultural lesson was forthcoming, and I could only surmise from the dearth of hard intelligence and other deficiencies that no one really knew exactly what was happening. If someone did, perhaps it was determined that we had no "need to know," and they were not talking. If correct, then this was equally strange, when one considered that we were a captive audience on a ship in the middle of the South China Sea. The entire scenario was counterintuitive to a primary leadership principal, one I

⁹Compilation of material for this segment: The following publications were employed to assemble and paraphrase targeted material for this history. However, the list is not limited to these authors.

Arthur J, Dommen, *Conflict in Laos: Politics Neutralization*.

_____, *Laos, Keystone of Indochina* (Boulder and London: Westview Press).

Hugh Toye, *Laos* (New York: Oxford Press, 1968).

Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

Norman Hannah, *The Key to Failure* (London: Madison Books, 1987).

had learned in Basic School that of keeping your men informed.

On a mundane level, perhaps calculated to assuage our anxiety levels, during an abbreviated briefing, S-3 officer, Captain Ralph Yakushi, humorously interjected:

"Men, in Udorn a short-time piece of ass is ten cents, but to ensure your protection against contracting a venereal disease, you officers spend a dollar."

Right...

Despite that questionable piece of advice, I looked forward to a minor flap. As a substitute for not being allowed to operate in South Vietnam, the exercise might offer an opportunity to assess the merits of our previous training in a combat situation. Additionally, it might recoup some lost self-respect and help us to attain a small taste of what we had missed by not being assigned to South Vietnam. Best of all, the trip might afford me a firsthand observation of the Air America helicopter operation in Udorn, meet local management, and converse with principals.

Corporal Hinton also crafted a letter dated 16 May 1962:

"News had been a precious thing in the past 5 days that we have been underway and the rumors have been wild and plentiful. The captain of the ship finally answered everything with his announcement this afternoon. We are now in the Gulf of Siam about 40 miles from Bangkok, Thailand."

Early in the morning we begin unloading the battalion (3rd Battalion, 9th Marines) into Thailand. We will be 30 miles offshore and it's a 98-minute flight to our destination, which is an airfield about 50 miles from Bangkok. The following day, we (261) go ashore.

They tell us that this whole deal is nothing more than an 'administrative action' to prove our pledge of support to Thailand which is one to the SEATO countries along with the USA. This action could prove to be very interesting. Vietnam and Laos are very close by. I have no idea how long we will be down here, but this sure shoots the hell out of the Hong Kong trips!

Don't worry about anything. Remember this helicopter family has been together over two years now. Besides, we'll be flying over friendly country.

I guess we finally lost the two unidentified submarines that were following us.

The last supper tonight was steak, baked potatoes, and apple pie..."¹⁰

SHIP-TO-SHORE MOVEMENT

"We steamed south...Finally we got the word to move and we offloaded the battalion and gear."

Author 05/24/62 Letter Home.

On Thursday, 17 May, the Seventh Fleet's Amphibious Ready Group, carrying the Special Landing Force, boldly sailed into the Gulf of Siam. The venture commenced at 0500 hours. During a two-day operation, HMM-261 crews began offloading battalion equipment and leading elements into the military side of Don Muang Airport north of Bangkok. The movement marked the first overt deployment of USG combat forces in Southeast Asia since World War Two. In addition, it was the first time in recent history that foreign combat troops had entered Thai territory other than to invade or to occupy.

Two ships involved in the operation docked at port Klong Toey, south of the capital, where 1,500 men from the Third Battalion, Ninth Marines, and supporting engineering units, disembarked along with tank and artillery equipment. ¹¹

Reported in a *Time Magazine* article at the time:

¹⁰ Hinton Email, 05/16/12, 05/16/62.
Hinton Letter written onboard the USS *Valley Forge* (LPH 8).

¹¹ J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S Marine Corps Story* (New York, Little Brown & Company, 1977) 623.

"Bangkok was barely awake when the [M]arines landed. Wearing canvas-covered helmets and fatigues, burdened with rifles and full field packs, men...walked ashore from two U.S. transports. There were no crowds, no bands, no girls with flowers.

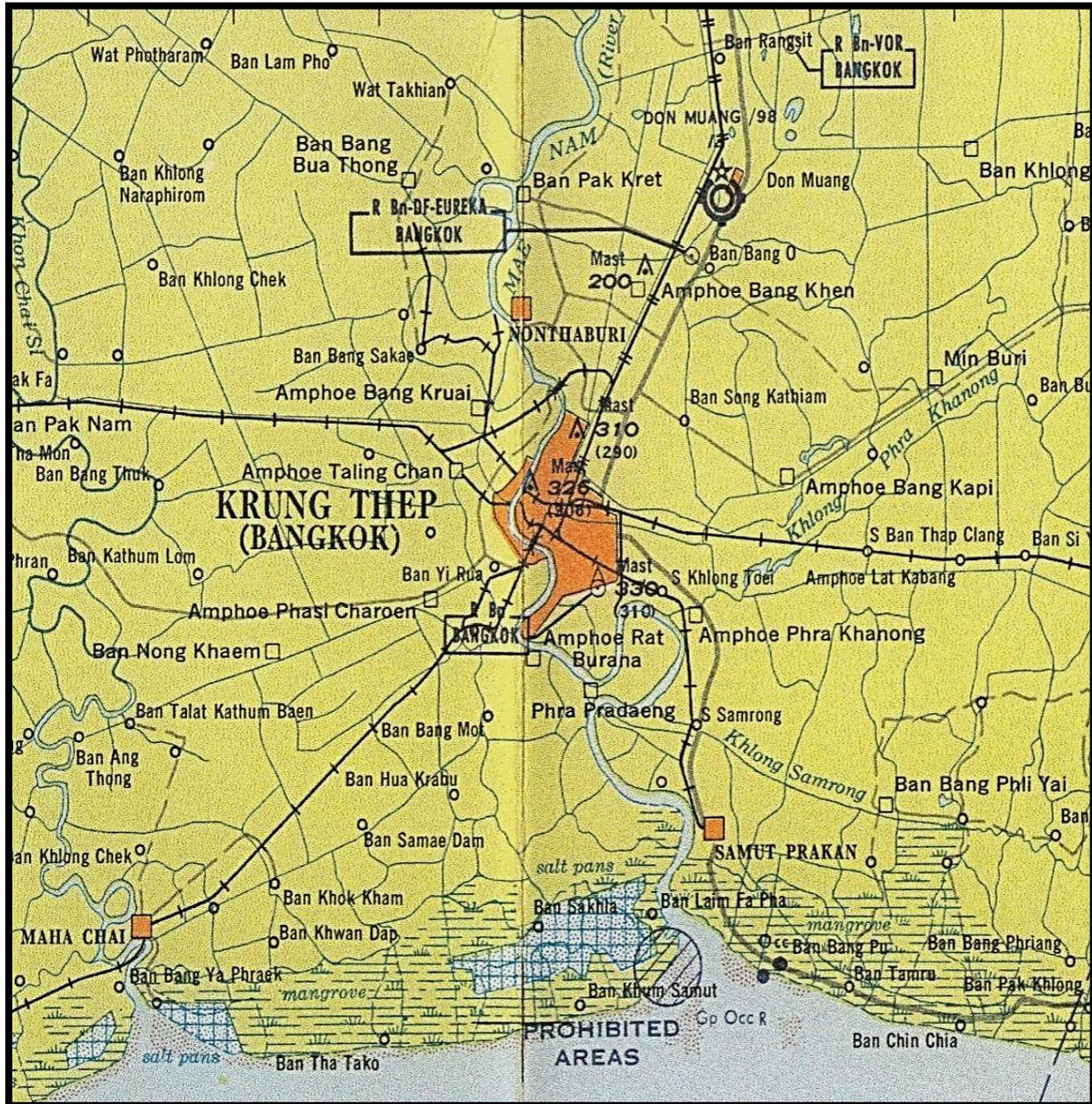
It was all business...The [M]arines were in Thailand not only by presidential order but at the invitation of Premier Sarit Thanarat, the first time in 600 years that the Thai have asked foreigners in to help them defend their soil. Said a Thai Cabinet minister: 'Persons with old fashioned ideas may not like having foreign troops in Thailand, but in these times a country has to depend on collective security.'

The [M]arine detachments had been rushed to Thailand to help protect the vital left bank of the Mekong River from the communist menace. Yet the Reds, since their overwhelming victory at Nam Tha two weeks ago, have been strangely quiet. The Laotian river town of [Ban] Houei Sai, evacuated in panic after the fall of Nam Tha, was reoccupied by 300 skittish Royal Laotian Army troops. If anything, the Pathet Lao had retreated, not advanced..."

After being trucked to Don Muang, eleven USAF C-130's from the 315th Air Division, and Marine GV-1s from Japan, ferried the enlisted men to Udorn. (Air Force aircraft flew eight-five round trips during this operation.) Most heavy equipment deemed transportable arrived in Udorn on a single narrow gage rail track.¹²

Bangkok International, or Don Muang, was expanded in 1961, providing one of Southeast Asia's most modern airports. Owned and controlled by the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF), the complex consisted of two parallel runways. The western portion was allocated for major commercial carriers, while military activity took place on the eastern side. Aided by ground personnel, we deposited sling and internal loads to military runway aprons next to four U.S. F-100s. Throughout the day, I encountered difficulty understanding landing instructions from

¹² Ray L. Bowers, *Tactical Airlift: The USAF in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973*, 113.



1:250,000 aeronautical Map depicting geographic locations and the proximity of Port Klong Toey, Bangkok, and the International Airport to the Siam Gulf. The double blue circles indicate the location of Don Muang airport north of the city.

Author Collection.

the tower, whose operator (s) spoke with an English inflection I found totally unintelligible. Therefore, without really comprehending what he said, I "Rogerred" everything.

During the time-consuming movement, while Lieutenant Jim Richardson alternated flying sorties with me, I helped to moderate the tedious shuttles by observing the splendor of constantly changing hues and shades of green terrain below. From the air the Thai countryside appeared cleaner, fresher, and overall better organized than terrain I had seen in the South Vietnamese Delta. Latticework canals, largely conforming to cardinal compass headings, stretched for as far as one could see. While passing well east of Bangkok, looking carefully toward the capital, I could detect sprays of bright sunlight glinting off multi-colored tiles of a few of the 400 Buddhist temples located in and around the city.

Toward dark, the squadron's tired group of cowboys gratefully straggled back to the Navy carrier for food and blessed rest. In addition to nine plus flight hours that included one hour at night and entailed the use of two helicopters, we had endured several more hours in the saddle, either refueling, or awaiting loads. I rarely departed the cockpit, and the Valley Forge catering service served box lunches to our sparsely-appointed Sikorsky cafeteria.

After packing personal items the previous evening, an identical drill followed bright and early on Friday. This time Captain Fitzgerald and I focused on carrying squadron personnel and HMM-261 gear ashore.

Advanced units flew to Udorn on fixed wing aircraft to erect tents and prepare a site for the squadron to operate.

Utilizing eighteen helicopters to fly over 350 hours during the period, we completed the last of the ship-to-shore operation by late afternoon. Following a stressful week of apprehension and confusion relating to our mission, and two days of maximum flying, the Skipper granted all remaining hands liberty. A few hardy souls, including the Skipper, slipped off to the city for a little fun.



Patchwork rice paddy fields and canal seen from the air north of Bangkok, Thailand.

National Geographic, Volume 132, #1, 07/67.

Too exhausted to participate in boozing or foolish girly games, I retired to the wooden Royal Thai Air Force barracks in the wide median between airstrips, made available to the officers. Enlisted men had the choice of bunking either in the Sikorsky Hotel or on the tarmac.

Unimpressed with the barrack's austere interior, but mumbling phrases of gratitude, I flopped down on an uncomfortable canvas cot, one of many arranged in squad bay fashion. Then I pulled a single white sheet over my head. Despite the offensive heat and humidity prevalent that time of year, I immediately dropped off into deep slumber.

Because of the twelve-hour time difference, placing Thailand ahead of Washington, we were already in the country when the president conducted a news conference.

On the subject of U.S. troops in Thailand and an increased chance of a war in Laos, President Kennedy stated:

"...continued to hope for a national [Lao] government or [one of] national union. He dispatched troops to Thailand after the RTG's request and a USG desire to defend the country. He stressed the hazards of war in Southeast Asia and USG's aspiration to foster a diplomatic solution.

*Stimulating the current movement, he cited bilateral concern over the ceasefire infringement in the Nam Tha region and whether it constituted a general violation that would threaten Thailand. Since the next step depended on Pathet Lao intentions, he had no idea how long U.S. forces would remain in Thailand. He hoped opposing Lao princes would meet and hasten the formation of a government of National Union [to relieve him of the unsavory task of invading Laos]."*¹³

Heralding the impending heat, I awakened early the following morning to intense rays of sunlight slicing through open apertures in

¹³ *Pentagon Papers*, President Kennedy's News Conference, May 17, 1962 (Gravel Edition, Volume 2) pp 811-813.

the upper barracks wall. Glancing at Second Lieutenant Vince Tesulov's adjoining cot, I sat up in horror, for Vince's sheet was liberally spotted with blood. Further examination revealed that my sheet was also marked with red gore. *Had bad guys assaulted us during the night?* We were indeed attacked, but not by humans. While we had attempted to sleep in the open-air structure under less than desirable conditions, voracious mosquitoes had feasted on all of us, creating an illusion of violence. Vampire insects seemed to thrive on Vince's body, for minute no-seeums at NAS Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, had also vigorously attacked him.

UDORN THANI

"We arrived here without incident. Consult the maps and articles for particulars."

Author 05/24/62 Letter from Udorn, Thailand.

Colonel Steele, along with many other senior officers, had been out all night carousing, but on the morning of 19 May the Skipper was waiting impatiently at EM-45 to launch when Crew Chief Corporal Dale Hinton arrived at his aircraft. Dale and other enlisted men had also been enjoying a night out, and had just arrived from a scrambled egg and beer breakfast at the International Airport Restaurant.

Our destination at Udorn, the provincial capital of the same name, was located on a low plain in northeast Thailand at seventeen degrees forty-six minutes east, and 500 feet above sea level. It was nestled close to the Mekong River and Vientiane, the Lao administrative capital.

Flight to the country's northeast provincial capital required a 245-mile direct northern flight from Don Muang. However, since the Skipper possessed our organization's only chart, to preclude problems with disoriented or straying pilots, he elected to lead our eighteen HUS-1 helicopters in a loose cross-country trail formation up the

German-built, narrow gage railroad track. After an hour and forty minutes of observing enjoyable and diverse scenery through Thai highlands, and again flying with Captain John Fitzgerald, I touched down, "Tail End Charlie," on the lengthy Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base taxiway. While squadron crew chiefs struggled to move the cranky refueling vehicle and top off all the ships, we consumed the customary box lunches and attempted to remain cool in the shade of our aircraft.¹⁴

The SEATO operation, Air Cobra, sponsored by Thailand and the U.S. along with Australia, France, and the United Kingdom, was conducted in Thailand during late April. Although largely lacking teeth, the operation was likely staged to instill some caution in the communist faction currently in Laos, as to the potential of the Western nations to come to the aid of the Lao Army. Under the umbrella of tactical air operations, the objectives were tailored to:

"develop coordination in the use of SEATO air power through an air operations center, demonstrate the feasibility of rapid aerial resupply or ground forces, exercise SEATO capability to conduct behind-the-lines guerrilla warfare, and standardize operational procedures between participating SEATO forces."

Planned in advance of the exercise, Thai and U.S. troops jointly conducted training until 9 May.¹⁵

Army units from the First Brigade 27th Infantry--a battle group numbering about 2,000 men--held over from the April Air Cobra exercise when the Nam Tha flap began stirring, were already in place in the Korat area. Additional units from Hawaii were programmed to soon reinforce them. At that time, an officer and fourteen airmen were co-located TDY at the base representing the Joint U.S. Military Advisory

¹⁴ Hinton Email, 07/03/09. The segment contained a portion of a 05/25/62 letter home.

¹⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, 193, 210, Chronological Summary of Significant Events Concerning the Laotian Crises, Fifth Installment: 1 January 1962 to 30 April 1962, Historical Division.



Eighteen Echo Mike HMM-261 HUS-1 helicopters lined up in trail on the Thai Korat Airforce base taxiway awaiting fuel, while a squadron personnel "all hands effort," physically repositioned the fuel truck.

Dale Hinton Collection.

Group-JUSMAG. ¹⁶

After departing the Korat Plateau, we continued north on the final segment of our journey over sun-parched open country, a barren contrast to the lushly covered region around Bangkok. As we approached Udorn, narrow ridge lines paralleled our flight path ten miles west of course, and widened into 2,000-foot mountain ranges.

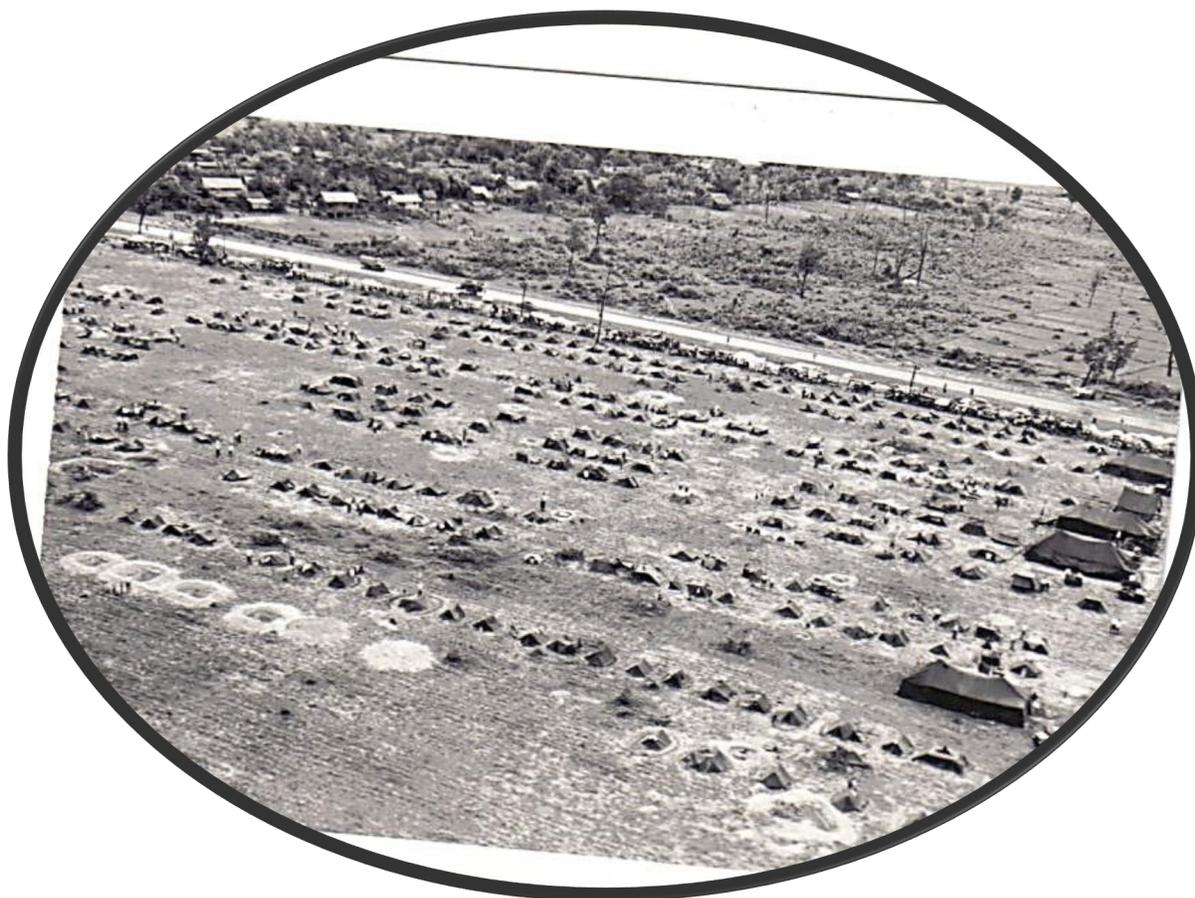
Upon our arrival at our destination by mid-afternoon, elements of our advanced party directed us to a designated grassy parking area southeast of the 5,000-foot runway, adjacent to the unpaved laterite-dirt Air America ramp. Considerable activity was already underway, with military personnel erecting tents alongside the runway to house both squadron and brigade headquarters.

Since the annual rainy season was imminent, battalion troops had relocated eight miles south to an open area at Nong Ta Kai, where somewhat higher terrain and improved drainage existed. During the build-up, as with any field exercise, foul-ups initially plagued the operation, and we endured a somewhat painful learning process.

Before we had come ashore in Bangkok, twenty A-4D Skyhawk jets from the all-weather attack squadron, VMA-332 Iwakuni, Japan, had arrived in Udorn on the 16th, to assume bragging rights as the first U.S fighting unit in the Theater. However, following the lengthy ferry flight from a forward base at Cubi Point, their squadron personnel discovered that the existing fuel nozzles were not compatible with the planes' fueling orifices, which temporarily grounded the squadron's aircraft. Hearing this, I wondered if the current exercise might herald a repeat of Operation Tulungan's many operational errors.

Since a parallel taxiway did not exist at the field, the jet squadron parked on cul-de-sac ramps located at the end of Runway-12. Out of operational necessity, all departures occurred on Runway-12, with arrivals and taxiing on Runway-30. Tail letters displayed Echo

¹⁶ U.S. Foreign Relations, 1964-1968, Volume 27, Thailand, 13 May 1964, 17. 13th Air Force History, The Bases.



Except for 3rd MEU battalion headquarters, collocated with HMM-261 at the Udorn airfield, battalion troops were billeted on higher ground eighteen miles south of the RTAF airfield. Seen at the upper portion of the photo, the main north-south road was unpaved. It would later become the northern extension of the Friendship Highway, a strategic military artery stretching from Bangkok to the Nong Khai border.

Ben Middleton Collection.

Alpha, and the Skyhawk pilots employed Blackhawk as their tactical call sign.

Concurrent with the Japan-based A-4D squadron's arrival, a Marine Air Traffic Control Unit (MATCU) deployed as part of the Provisional Marine Air Group (PROVMAG). The men initially worked from the civilian control tower located at the approach end of Runway-30. Using Udorn Tower as a call sign, the unit provided airport traffic service for the A4Ds, the Royal Thai Air Force AT6s, the U.S. Air Force, the Marine logistic aircraft, and, within specified hours, Air America helicopters.

The Air Traffic controllers lived in general purpose tents like other Marines. Before erection of a more modern portable tower, the operators walked along the parking ramp to the old tower. Thai controllers requested that the Americans not shoot their pet cobra that lived in the surrounding weeds. The operational area was equipped with electricity, but no air conditioning. During night operations, with the interior light extinguished, various ugly lizards covered the walls. Ground Control Approach (GCA) radar also provided approaches for an occasional Air Force C-124 and GCA practice for those pilots requesting the approaches. A mobile arresting gear established at midfield provided assistance to A4Ds operating in a strong crosswind.¹⁷

THE BUILD UP

"The buildup has been fast and furious, but we still lack many things that make life bearable. Every day we add a little bit to ease our burdens.

This is probably a big thing to you people back home, but to us it is just another field problem and we treat it with reserved jest...I think we are ready."

¹⁷ Emails from Air America Club Secretary Judy Porter about an Air America membership request from Robert A. Marshall, 8/27/01, 9/5/01.



Cul de sac ramps located at the northwest portion of the Royal Thai Air Force Base in Udorn, Thailand, where VMA-332 A4C planes parked during the May 1962 flap.

C.J. Abadie Collection.



A westerly view of the shared Royal Thai Air Force, Air America, HMM-261 dirt and laterite parking ramp at the Royal Thai Air Force facility Udorn, Thailand. The relatively undeveloped Air America compound is located at the upper left-hand corner. Several Air America and squadron HUS-1 helicopters are parked on either side of the ramp. Beyond the RTAF combat aircraft in the right foreground, elements of the Third Marine Expeditionary Unit are positioned to the right of the ramp. The low lying Phu Phan Mountain ranges are visible to the west.

Dale Hinton Collection.



A tighter view of the laterite parking ramp at the RTAFB during May-June 1962 that accommodated both Air America and HMM-261 squadron helicopters. Double hangars of Air America's Maintenance Department are visible in the upper left-hand corner.

Middleton Collection.



Crew Chief Corporal Dale Hinton posing in front of his designated aircraft, Echo Mike-45.

Hinton Collection.

Author 05/24/62 Letter from Udorn, Thailand.

Squadron pilots billeted in four general purpose tents stretched tightly over wooden frames, and located high off the ground on interconnected platforms. Elements of Okinawa-based Marine Corps MABS-16 and H&MS units, dispatched to support the March 1961 Air America build-up and maintenance operation, oversaw housing construction. However, attesting to the extreme ravages a tropical environment can wage, wire mesh screening tacked under the platforms to prevent insect and vermin intrusion had quickly rusted, and provided little help in preventing nightly mosquito and insect penetration. Our billeting officer assigned each of us a standard cot and poncho, but no sheets, pillows, or anything else in the way of creature comforts.

Even these stark accommodations provided ultra-luxurious conditions compared to the enlisted men's plight. With the monsoon season nearly upon us, their small tents, borrowed from an Australian military unit, were pitched on the ground with predictable results. Even before the first heavy rains fell, reptiles, drawn by human body warmth, and in search of more hospitable dwellings, crawled into some of the men's beds.

Since the treated water was sickening and largely unpalatable to drink, the men had to exist on beer and coke for two days. Attesting to their initiative and superior improvising techniques, called "field expediciencies," some of the men dug holes in the tent center and then emplaced a cruise box or GI can lined with canvas and rice husks. To this ersatz "ice-box," they added ice obtained from town and their favorite beverages. To alleviate the situation before the purification system was improved, more acceptable water was flown in from Cubi Point and Okinawa.

Despite the minor setbacks, a rapid buildup proceeded. Within three days, the squadron began lifting reinforced infantry companies in simulated combat training movements. During our first few days in the field, we also commenced a "Dawn Patrol" mission. This operation entailed launching at sunrise with A-4D escort and flying across flat,

sun cracked terrain, to the Mekong River, then returning to base. I surmised that the flights merely provided a show of force, if one considered an unarmed helicopter and drowsy pilots much of a force.

Area flights were interesting at first and stimulated a bit of apprehension at the new surroundings, but with increased familiarization, and at the expense of precious and difficult-to-achieve sleep, they soon became a distinct bore.

Friday 25 May

"Here in Udorn we are located 36 miles from the Laos border and the battalion is out in the field half that distance from the Mekong River. Air America is located here with their unmarked HUS helicopters and their 'civilian' pilots. There are several guys here working as crew chiefs who I know very well from 264 at New River. They came over here when they got out of the Marine Corps. They fly left seat and their base pay is 650 dollars per month plus living expenses. Flight pay increases when they cross the border into Laos.

There is also a marine jet fighter squadron here, so we have no worry about close air-support. Marine and air force transports are coming in here every day unloading troops gear, food and beer, but no mail for us so far. And we have been flying the hell out of our planes since we got here. The plan is to let the people know we are here and to familiarize the pilots with the area and the terrain. So we fly to the Laos border up and down the Mekong River and back to Udorn.

We are living in tents here and the rains are just starting. At times the entire area is nothing but red oozing mud. Tonight, we got a lantern for our tent. [Incidentals] Heat and 100% humidity; salt tablets; community cold water shower; field mess between two squadron areas; chow better than C-rations; big and numerous mosquitoes-net essential to sleep; variety of snakes and lizards; cobra found in avionics shop this AM; check boots for scorpions in the morning.

Special Services care package arrived with candy, soap, cigarettes, and razor blades.



With afternoon storm clouds building in the distance to the north toward mountainous terrain, the flat Lao alluvial flood plain is viewed across the Mekong River from inside Thailand.

Hinton Collection.

Sunday

"Got up at five-thirty this morning and took a cold shower... Hot cakes and canned sausage for breakfast.

One of Air America's C-123's is in here this morning. Right now they are loading helicopter engines into it probably to deliver to an airstrip in Laos. One of their helicopters came back last week with 34 bullet holes.

Our planes left for a flight to Saigon. The second flight will be leaving soon. I sure want to go, but '45' is missing some radio and navigation gear. The Chaplain went flying with me the other day and brought his Polaroid camera. I took the Padre's picture and he took mine. He kept laughing all the time sticking his bare feet out the open door and thumbing his nose at the Laotian border..." ¹⁸

Needless to say, venomous Kraits, cobras, and vipers abounded throughout the tangles of lush growth and generally undeveloped area. Indeed, some people called the place snake hollow. According to local Marine Corps lore, while working on the Marine facility a year earlier, Seabees encountered a deadly fourteen-foot neuro-toxic banded krait, humorously called a "two-stepper." It was reputedly the largest one ever encountered. ¹⁹ With no anti-venom serum available in Udorn Town, medics were obligated to evacuate a grunt bitten by a cobra to Bangkok medical facilities.

Snakes provided a focal point for a few squadron jokesters. After killing a large snake, one playful enlisted man stripped the insulation from an electrical wire and threaded it through the dead animal's corpse. Then, arranging the trophy to appear like an angry reptile with bared fangs, he coiled the imitation snake in a strategic spot around a post. The first individual who spotted the life-like

¹⁸ Dale Hinton, 05/27/62 Letter.

¹⁹ Author Note: Similar to the Ryukan Habu, after one was bitten and venom injected, the unfortunate individual reputedly could only advance two steps, then fall forward, and expire.

creature became so unnerved that he dashed screaming at high port through high grass toward the runway, while still carrying a tent pole.²⁰

Unfortunately, squadron enlisted troops were required to endure miserable field conditions until, as a temporary stopgap measure, wooden pallets were hastily manufactured to raise their sleeping accommodations out of the danger level until all tents could be permanently elevated to platforms.

Toward the latter part of May, a seventy-one-man detachment of Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 10 arrived to assist local Marine carpenters and our more ambitious and motivated men to improve the camp facilities. After erecting a portable sawmill, they built platforms and tent frames to identical specifications as the officers' billets. Eventually, a modicum of equality had come of age in the Crotch--at least in the field

Some of the issues involved in this initial period were portrayed in a letter Corporal Hinton sent home toward the end of May:

"Morale was pretty low among the troops until we got our mail last Sunday. People, gear, food, and beer are pouring in here every day and it looks like the Marines are going to stay awhile...building a raised platform for the messhall-next the platforms for the tents and living areas. Tomorrow, real bread and eggs for breakfast-later real milk. Today we enlarged our underground refrigerator. They told us we could have all the beer we wanted in the tents. Last week they lifted the two can per night limit. Tonight a second issue of razor blades, candy, and cigarettes.

The heat, rain, and mud are increasing. How about 120 degrees out on the runway today-105 in the shade? The dust is hell. Flies and gnats in the daytime, mosquitoes at night. They found a snake in the

²⁰ Bill Long Email, 11/28/07.
Frank McLenon, 08/01/01.



Courtesy of a squadron jokester, posed for effect, a dead snake is wrapped around a post at the HMM-261 enlisted man "Tent City."

Hinton Collection.

clutch compartment of one of our helicopters.

Night flying every night this week. We are only allowed to fly within five miles of the Lao border anymore. One really hot day, I had SAR duty. Lt. Mac [Charlie McLennan, or Charlie Mac] took us to 8,000 feet and it was cool and beautiful for an hour. On the way down he pulled an autorotation and we did three 360 degrees. My heart was in my mouth.

They issued us side arms. I have a 38 revolver and a survival knife...We hear that 362 gets shot at on most missions they fly over in Vietnam. Air America guys say they fly over the bad guys all the time, but they are getting paid for it.

The helicopters you saw on the Valley Forge on TV were the red-nosed birds of 261 Steele's Raiders, flyers, fighters, lovers, and drinkers." ²¹

EFFECTS OF THE SOUTHEAST MONSOON

"We experienced a storm last night that took everyone by surprise and did quite a lot of damage."

Author 06/01/62 Letter Home from Udorn.

As advertised, the weather soon began to change. I was assigned the squadron duty officer billet on Thursday, 31 May. Toward evening of the sleepy afternoon, I stepped out of the oppressive heat of the general purpose (GP) tent where a freshening breeze greeted me and assailed my nostrils. Curious as to the source of this rare phenomenon, I glanced toward the airfield's northwest quadrant, where a cloud's dark and menacing appearance startled and concerned me. As the wind velocity quickly accelerated, I realized that a massive storm would shortly envelop and wallop the camp. With the available time remaining, I ordered my clerk to alert various squadron departments

²¹ Dale Hinton, 05/30/62 Letter.

and the flight line. Then I quickly cinched-up all the outside tent guy lines to remove all the slack. It appeared, as in other crucial times during the year, with no help available, that I was once again on my own.

The storm struck with all the violence of a hurricane. Since the clerk had no success in contacting the Maintenance Department or any other squadron unit, I took over, and furiously cranked the field phone handle to no avail. Like a mighty blacksmith's hammer smashing an anvil, the tempest pounded us with all its fury. Totally out of ideas, unable to think of what to do next, and concerned that the tent would collapse at any moment, I clung to the center ridgepole, in an unrealistic attempt to stabilize the unit.

Suddenly the blow was over. Associated wind, rain, and noise all ceased. The maelstrom stopped as abruptly as it had begun. A deathly silence followed. With considerable foreboding, I rushed into the brilliant sunlight and noticed another round of even more dark, threatening cloudbanks bearing down on the camp from the same direction. Apparently, I stood exactly in the eye's center of whatever rolled over the area, and would soon experience round two of the terrifying onslaught.

Battalion general purpose (GP) tents were flattened all around me. Figuring I had done something right, I again attended to tightening guy lines in order to preserve my place of duty. Still alarmed and considerably rattled from the attack of fierce weather, and concerned about our aircraft, I continued attempting to contact someone, anyone, on the phone. Unsuccessful, I struggled in vain with nowhere to hide.

Then like incurring the wrath of "Zeus of the Thunderbolts," the monsoon storm struck the area with redoubled explosive force. Marking frontal passage, the winds shifted 180 to 360 degrees within seconds. Feeling completely helpless, I had never experienced anything like it. Once again, I became concerned that the tent would collapse, burying me under folds of heavy, smothering canvas. As before, attempting to contribute something positive to the situation, I hugged the vibrating

center pole tightly, hoping it would not snap. Then, having wreaked sufficient vengeance on us invading Marines, the cyclone and deluge abruptly stopped.

I rushed outside to witness a state of utter confusion and chaos normally only seen in a humorous Keystone Cops movie. Tents in my immediate area that had survived the first onslaught of wind now lay pan-caked on the ground or were blown away, with only the duty squadron tent immediately behind me poking its nose defiantly toward the sky. The only others remaining erect were the ones raised off the ground, secured and supported by wooden frameworks. This force of Mother Nature's Asian wrath respected neither rank nor privilege, as Brigade Commander, General Ormand Simpson's tent ignominiously fell with the rest.

As often occurs after a catastrophe affecting Americans, people rapidly gather to evaluate the situation and initiate immediate action to establish order. Before long, individuals began appearing from beneath the tangled mess, sheepishly scratching their heads, already beginning the task of rebuilding and refurbishing the camp.

I eventually discovered and mustered several squadron maintenance personnel. Fearing the worst for our aircraft, we splashed our way through the flooded high grass to the parking-flight line that we shared with Air America. A quick assessment revealed considerable damage to both HMM-261 and those Air America ships still remaining on the flight line. High winds had tossed machines, each weighing more than 5000 pounds, about like pieces of paper. Ten HUS-1s were spun about, with three colliding. Two rotor blade spars on one ship were broken off at the root section like Popsicle sticks. In addition to generalized blade damage, one Air America helicopter, as if in obeisance to the storm's fury, displayed all four-rotor blades bent perpendicularly to the deck. In contrast to the seriousness of the situation, the littered scene appeared almost comical. Other aircraft exhibited small holes from debris that had violently sailed through



HMM-261 personnel, assuming the role of actual "Mud Marines," in the final stages of rebuilding squadron and battalion camps following the vicious storm and torrential downpours that wreaked violence on the RTAF base.

Ben Middleton Collection.



HMM-261 personnel, some in the buff, continuing to rebuild the storm-ravaged camp.

Middleton Collection.

the air and punctured the thin fuselage magnesium skin. EM-52 incurred tail damage from a large wooden box hurled into the airframe. Directly across the parking ramp, the un-chocked multi-engine R-4D had swung around 180 degrees from its original parked position.

Although unknown to me, others had been forewarned of possible foul weather, and attempted to secure squadron aircraft, but with limited success. Since only limited tie-down kits were available, crew chiefs elected to emplace tie-downs on the aft rear side from the direction of the prevailing wind. With no sledge hammer available, Corporal Bill Long beat on a stake for a long time with a brass mallet. After eventually driving the peg into the almost impervious laterite soil to what appeared a sufficient depth, Long departed to find a tie-down rope with a blade pocket combination. All his efforts were academic. Upon return to the flight line, Bill discovered that careless Gunny Sergeant McDaniel had driven over and broken the peg he had spent so much time inserting. ²²

Because of obvious airframe stresses and other potentially invisible damage, higher authorities directed the maintenance department to ground the squadron's entire helicopter fleet, pending thorough inspection. Consequently, we spent the next four days frantically trying to reestablish our temporarily emasculated unit into a viable fighting force. Mechanics removed all main rotor blades for detailed visual examination. Inspectors then scrupulously checked each one for evidence of minute twisting, scratching, or denting before reinstallation. During this twilight period, I helped test fly six machines, so essential to success in this phony war, and place them back into service.

The storm's sole benefit, if there was one, focused on a concerted all hands effort to speed erection of the enlisted men's raised Tent City.

²² Hinton Email, 04/07/10.
Hinton Letter Home, 06/03/62.
Bill Long Email, 11/28/07.

Contingent on the current Lao situation not radically changing, we expected to remain in the field for approximately thirty more days before members of Colonel Reinhardt Leu's HMM-162 squadron would relieve us in place.

Building projects continued unabated at an elevated level in an attempt to have all the tents off the ground before more heavy rains arrived.

As Corporal Hinton noted on 4 June, the attempt was nearly too little, too late:

"It rained all afternoon and the rainy season is just beginning. Trenches around tents have to be maintained; cots elevated on boards and blocks.

Mess hall platform is up; real eggs and bread. Sunday dinner was C-ration style hamburgers on fresh bread; 15-ounce cans of Falstaff came in this weekend; celebration prompted wrestling and crawling matches in a three-foot mud hole between the tents." ²³

"This morning, I flew a two hour hop on Ready Plane status. This land of rain forests with dense jungle and 200-foot trees is something to see. The rest of the land is covered with rice paddies now flooded due to recent rains.

The close of another day and the start of night flying.

A major part of night-flying included practice hook-ups and drops. Well, my 'high altitude hero' from a few days earlier lost some points with me during a drop. I was out in front with the wands and the crew was about to release the hook around the steel cable attached to the wire basket full of rocks. Suddenly, Lt. Mac decided to abort the drop. RPMs went up, tail went up, and rotor plane went down as the helo roared forward basket swinging. I dove for the side of the road and probably felt lucky with nothing more than some gravel burns. Of course, there was no follow-up discussion or explanation." ²⁴

Monsoon conditions continued.

²³ Hinton, 06/04/62 Letter.

²⁴ Hinton, 06/05/62 Letter.

*"Boy did it rain last night. The floor of the tent is flooded and the icebox is ready to float up out of the hole. It's a good thing we brought some wooden pallets in here yesterday because the dike on one side doesn't hold back the flood-here. I sit on my seabag and gaze at my worldly possessions. My clothing bag is hanging on the center pole. One piece of Samsonite on the deck. One blanket, two flashlights, ten 38 caliber rounds, a pair of shower shoes, three apples, two packs of gum, and six Japanese candy bars..."*²⁵

During the few briefings subsequent to our arrival, we were apprised of an official concern regarding an impending communist incursion across the narrow waist of Laos toward Thailand. Still operating under a "Battle Plan A" maximum alert, I took little satisfaction in the continuing abbreviated information regarding our mission. Because of the great state of confusion, leaders required us to wear our .38 caliber pistols and the hot, uncomfortable shoulder holster--our Table of Organization (TO) weapon--at all times, even in town.

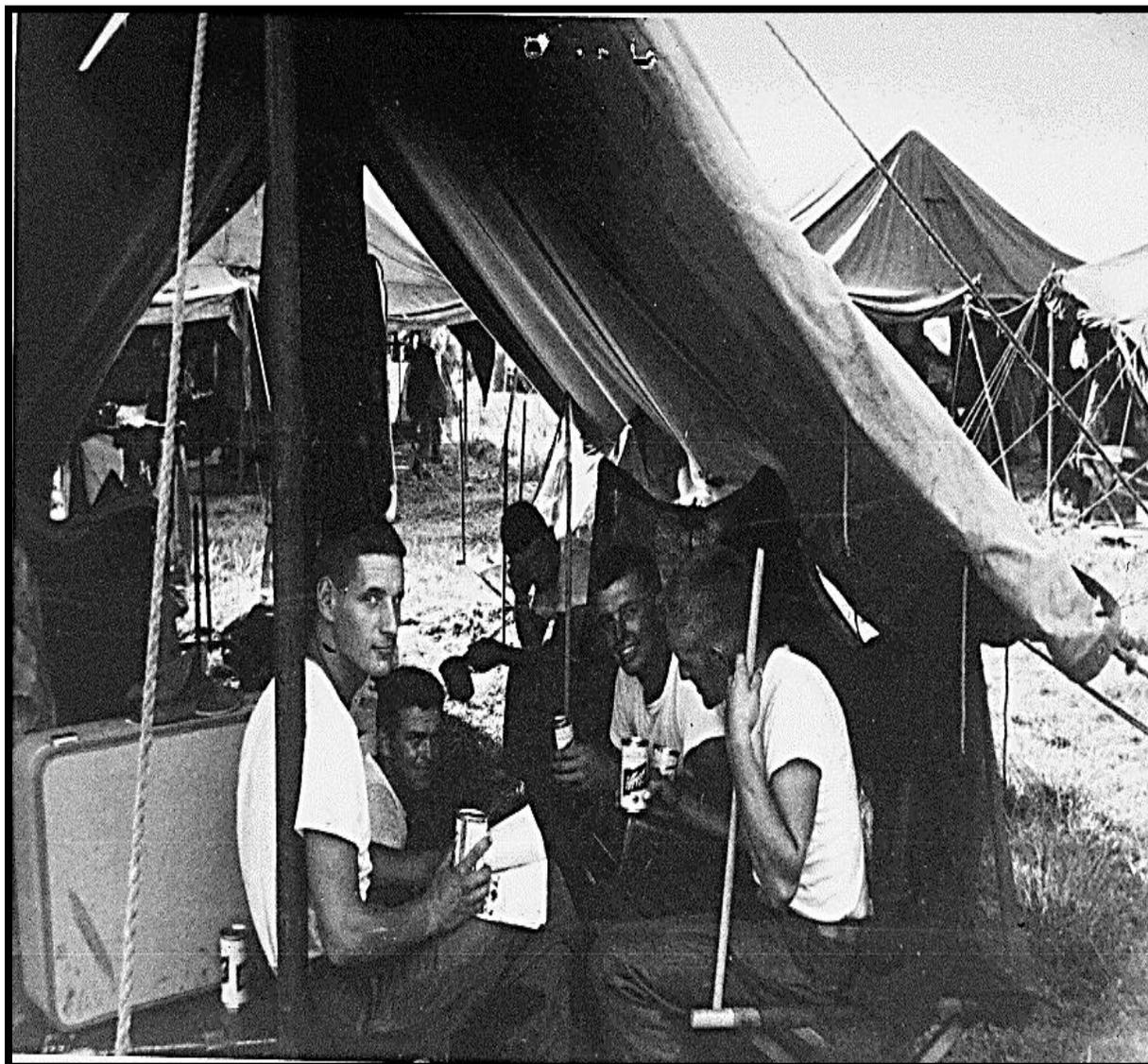
As part of our daily uniform, we also wore standard Navy issue orange, fire retardant flight suits that we had previously swapped for brown ones at New River. Almost immediately we heard that local Thai monks, holy men, representing the universal Theravada Buddhist religion, protested our inappropriate clothing, accusing us of sacrilege. Through U.S. Embassy representatives, like affable Gordon Murchie, they indicated that we mocked them and their religion by wearing a color similar to their saffron robes. Of course, our intention was not to alienate the people, but to preserve good relations with the people in our host country. Consequently, flash messages were issued to fleet supply personnel, who frantically searched Naval Far East supply systems for an acceptable substitute. Attesting to the high priority assigned our mission, we soon received, and were issued the formerly utilized brown flight suits to replace

²⁵ Hinton, 06/06/62 Letter.



An HUS-1 flyby of the U.S. Marine Corps HMM-261 helicopter crew tent camp located at the Udorn, Thailand, Royal Thai Air Force airfield. Enlisted tents were initially pitched on the ground until platforms like the ones the officers enjoyed (to the left) could be erected to keep the men out of water and away from creepy crawlers that proliferated throughout the area.

Hinton Collection.



HMM-261 enlisted men's tents were initially pitched on the ground. They were subject to water infiltration and penetration by insects, reptiles, and vermin. Beer rations tended to ameliorate the horrible living conditions. Corporal Hinton smiling second to the right

Hinton Collection.



After tents were erected, the men set up the HMM-261 squadron raging bull logo. Left to right: Bill G. Martin, W.J. Carroll, R.L. Pittman, J.C. Beck, C.A. Reiner, Copeland.

Ben Middleton Collection.



Stacked lumber and improvements underway to erect raised HMM-261 enlisted quarters. An enlisted mess was located to the right of the "Tent City."
Middleton Collection.



After U.S. Navy Seabees erected raised wooden platforms and frameworks for large general purpose tents with the assistance of squadron enlisted men, there was a distinct improvement in HMM-261 personnel living conditions.

Middleton Collection.



Finished product of the HMM-261 enlisted men's "Tent City" during the 3rd MEU operation, Udorn, Thailand, May-July 1962.

Middleton Collection.

the offending ones.

The changeover was not popular with flight crews. My flight equipment people at New River had previously labored long and hard cutting, stenciling, and sewing name tags and ranks to the orange suits. Furthermore, according to individual recipients' personalized requests, provisions for knife sheaths or other accommodations were incorporated into the suits. While stationed in Udorn, the squadron had no equipment or capability to accomplish any of this.

Former Marine Corps Captain Herb Baker, a VMO squadron member stationed at Futema, who had previously briefed a few of us regarding a few Air America details and now worked with the outfit, visited our camp. Herb had a dramatic side and relished relating hairy stories of recent action in parts of Laos that made our eyes pop. Apparently, fighting continued in the north, but had scaled back slightly.

Within a week of our arrival at Udorn, minor contingents of armed forces from Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand arrived at various Thai bases.

Used to the Aussie troop's playful nature while stationed at Cubi Point, the sudden overnight appearance of red Kangaroos stenciled on the olive drab sides of our squadron's and Air America's H34s failed to surprise me. Despite positioning guards and increasing ramp vigilance, nothing deterred the Aussie's nocturnal activities. It appeared that the friendly forces assumed the role of invaders, trying to reveal what could happen to our birds without adequate security. This provided an excellent object lesson.

During ensuing days, the ranks of American military forces in Thailand swelled to over 5,000, with additional personnel slated to arrive should the Lao situation worsen.

PLANNING

Attesting to Washington's ongoing concern over Laos, in a late 24 May Cabinet Room meeting that generated National Security Action Memorandum # 157, President Kennedy requested strategy planning for



Left to right, squadron enlisted men V.P. Rivera, L.S Santos, and Second Lieutenant John W. Shoaff in front of a HUS-1 cabin door. Pilot Shoaff is wearing the obligatory table of organization .38 caliber pistol, holster, and newly issued brown flight suit.

Hinton Collection.

movement into and seizure of two strategic Lao areas should the ceasefire collapse. Mentioned were: Sayaboury Province adjoining Luang Prabang Province and the Lao Panhandle region from Thakhet to the southern border. Both would be seized and occupied by Thai Army, Vietnamese, or American forces.

JFK requested his advisors unilaterally accomplish the contingency planning without Thai or Lao officials' input.

He further stated that if necessary, he favored retaining U.S. forces in Thailand during the three prince negotiations and the initial days of the government of National Union.

STAND DOWN

Hoping to prevent incidents between local people and us hormonally challenged Marines, Commanding Brigadier General Simpson had denied all personnel liberty in town for two weeks after our arrival. By then, with so many western forces in place and political compromise likely, the hostile situation across the border had eased. To everyone's relief, our leaders ordered the ridiculous hand guns removed from our shoulders. Except for a few area familiarizations that revealed Thailand was not unlike the flatlands of Mindoro, we were bored. Moreover, most of us began treating the operation as similar to any other static field problem, and we approached every new war rumor with extreme skepticism. However, far from complacent, we considered ourselves combat ready and spring loaded for any and all eventualities. Past commands had always praised squadron personnel for cooperation and good work. We received kudos from the USS *Boxer*, USS *Thetis Bay*, USS *Princeton*, and, just lately, the USS *Valley Forge*, for our squadron's professionalism. The command on the *Valley* could not believe how quickly and efficiently we had performed our missions. Notwithstanding the welcome acclaim, our leadership expected even better performance from all hands during every operation.

To temporarily relieve camp monotony, I managed to sneak a look at the town during the sanctioned daily ice, beer, and soda pop supply

run. Since first arriving in Udorn, unit cooks had served "B Rations" contained in large cans especially tailored for mass feeding. Granted, the concoctions provided a step up from the gross "Cs," but before long, I tired of the same smell and brown color of the standard fare. Besides, I had heard that Thai food, and especially the country's tropical fruit, were quite delicious, and wondered why we could not enjoy the latter. At least in the Philippines, I was able to purchase avocados.

While driving through the small town with Steve Marsh and another enlisted man, delicious aromas of Chinese and Thai cuisine wafting into the street from tiny noodle shops tempted me to stop and sample the wares. Aromas of various oriental seasonings stimulated my olfactory senses and almost drove me crazy. Sidewalk vendors hawked their produce from stalls; others sold items from pushcarts piled high with delicious-looking food stuffs. I recognized various sizes and shaped bananas among other unfamiliar exotic multi-colored fruit. I had not eaten fruit for at least two weeks and wondered why our mess unit could not requisition and purchase such items.

A stop at the icehouse further enlightened me to a potential danger and a requirement for increased health awareness in the country. Our medical people had already cautioned us to avoid drinking local water. After witnessing large blocks of ice thrown onto the sidewalk for reduction into more manageable sizes, and noting that the pieces indiscriminately mingled with filth and refuse from wandering dogs and humans, I vowed in disgust to curtail any ice ingestion.

While driving English style on the left side of the macadam road into Udorn, my two assistants informed me that the rear plumbing leaked on the right section of the POL truck. I confirmed the existence of a substantial leak when we stopped for the ice and drinks. This revelation displeased me, for as POL officer--a minor collateral duty--, I assumed responsibility for the truck. While the driver cautiously made his way back to camp through the congested streets, I cringed and thought to myself:

My God, what if this potential bomb explodes in the midst of all these milling people? Talk about people-to-people relations, what a negative public relations disaster that would be.

On my recommendation, the truck never departed the base again.

Province Governor, Suphat Wongwhathanat, invited a few senior squadron and brigade officers to a party in town.²⁶ I was not invited and do not know what transpired at the social gathering, but soon afterward we were granted town liberty. Before releasing us on the unsuspecting Udorn folks, our handlers conducted an obligatory all hands people-to-people spiel. I considered the charm school unnecessary. We were already aware that the Thai were a friendly and proud people, a good ally, and I naturally assumed that we would work and play well together. As with past boring lectures, while omitting more cultural aspects, the briefing again keyed on the triad of not messing with local women, not eating the food, and not drinking the water. However, deviating this time and presenting a slightly different format, our leaders advised us not to ride in a samlor, the three wheeled pedicab used for transportation. Harking back to incidents in the Philippines, there was apprehension that a shady operator might drive his American passenger to a secluded place and rob him.

Following the talk, the Skipper assigned officers and men "Cinderella Liberty," that stipulated a midnight curfew. It was the first such restriction I had ever experienced in the Corps. With the lid finally lifted off the liberty goody jar, we gradually filtered into town during the daytime, orienting ourselves and adjusting our sights for nocturnal pursuits. Liberty also led to further relaxation in our field experience. The working uniform of the day at the base for non-flying enlisted personnel became rotted-at-the-cuff cutoff utility trousers, flip-flops, and baseball caps. Officers and crew chiefs wore flight suits. Initially, enlisted liberty attire consisted

²⁶ Although he had already expired by then, in 1965, I became related to him by marriage.



One of three traffic circles located at Udorn Town intersections. Since there were few motorized vehicles in 1962, the circles tended to slow and channel samlor, motorcycle, and bicycle flow at intersections. They were also used for gathering places. At 1800 hours, colored lights were directed on the fountain.

Middleton Collection, June 1962.

of white "T" shirts with trousers. This changed to khaki short sleeved shirts with utility caps and trousers. Officers wore the green utilities.

One squadron enlisted man, Billy Martin, recalled a small wooden gated sentry box at the end of a dirt road that spilled onto a one and a half block top road leading into town. Security was lax and a Thai guard on duty seemed unconcerned in regard to Americans' leaving and arriving at the base. Parts of Udorn town reminded Martin of Wild West films with false fronted buildings and tents in the rear. Billy noted that Udorn possessed all the ingredients of a great liberty town: warm beer, cigarettes, and women. All in all, the experience reminded one of being at a surreal summer camp, except that you could not go home, and Mom was not going to visit. ²⁷

Of course, one of our first daytime visits included one to the vaunted "Five Baht Alley," not only for local color, but out of curiosity to confirm or deny Captain Ralph Yakushi's humorous Valley Forge briefing related to our more prurient interests. "The Alley," an exceedingly grubby place, constituted Udorn's major red-light district. Anything but lavish, reminding me of a sub-community surreptitiously tucked away from sight so as not to offend people, it lay in a square open dirt courtyard off a main street. Rough wooden stalls and a few raised stilt houses formed the perimeter. Immediately upon our appearance, lithe, sarong clad-gals magically appeared. One of my close friends who partook of a lovely's charms soon discovered that "GI inflation" had indeed preceded us, driving the going "short-time" rates from ten cents to a whopping twenty-five cents--hence the term "Five Baht Alley. Not surprisingly, the current price for Asian female flesh had escalated an enormous 150 percent from original intelligence estimates. Either Ralph Yakushi had passed erroneous information to us, or perhaps, like the amazing Hong Kong business people, the superior Asian civilian intelligence network had once

²⁷ Ben Middleton Email, 02/22/08 containing a Martin Email, 02/19/08.

again managed to circumvent any military effort at covertness.

Air America Captain Wayne Knight invited a few of us to the town bungalow that he shared with two other Air America pilots, former Marines Sam Jordon and Jerry Souders. During the course of the loud, boozy evening, one first-hand-account centered on Nam Tha's loss, the prime reason we were in Thailand. The narrator stated that Royal Lao Army troops, reputed to be the world's worst fighters, had fled their northern Lao stronghold in panic following enemy pressure. Fear of their communist adversaries' prowess in battle triggered thousands of the beaten and demoralized warriors to cross the Mekong into Thailand, where Thai forces subsequently herded them into a group, shepherded them west to Chiang Rai, and returned them to a less active part of Laos. Tales of lip-smacking monthly paychecks of over a couple thousand dollars per month renewed and further stimulated my desire to pursue employment with the company. Later, while eliminating the brews' diuretic effects, I observed several cans of unused shaving cream on the tiled ledge of the bathroom wall. In my hazy, confused, and inebriated state, I thought with envy that this must really be a very good job to allow one such luxury.

SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Because of extreme tropical heat, high humidity, and other detrimental environmental factors at a peak during the spring months, achieving a sound night's sleep proved almost impossible. Before retiring, after extinguishing a pair of naked light bulbs hanging by wire from the rafters, we tossed an insecticide bomb into the tent's interior. After the fog settled, we hustled inside to attempt sleep. Dozing, I generally lay half naked on my rough, canvas cot until the day's radiation effect somewhat dissipated the acute heat effect, and moderated the morning air. Then, after detecting a slight temperature change, in semi-wakefulness, I pulled my rubberized poncho up over my body. However, within a few hours, I had to kick off the covering, as the poncho's underside and my body were drenched in a clammy wet

sweat, condensed from the night air. Near dawn, I normally awakened fatigued and drained of energy, seemingly unfit for the day's duties.

JUTE BOX

Until visiting the Jute Box, one of two town bars we frequented, I had failed to experience a single restful night's sleep. The Jute Box was partially owned and patronized by Air America Flight Mechanic and former U.S. Marine Sergeant, "Bulldog" Butcher, although a Thai friend fronted the small, dimly lighted bistro. ²⁸ There I quickly learned that some English words spoken in a different culture presented a completely different meaning, when one pilot ordered a soda and promptly received a bottle of soda water. ²⁹

Singha beer, produced in Thailand and pronounced Sing, provided a strong, heady lager, eighteen percent proof by volume, adult drink. Sold in brown quart bottles, when served ice cold the flavorful, refreshing brew more than satisfied one's thirst.

A smattering of Air America crew chiefs and mechanics chatted on bar stools that night. All either former or present Marines, we were compatible, until the incipient effects of several Singhas took hold of me and I began ogling a pretty barmaid, a distinct favorite of the local crowd and the girlfriend of attending Flight Mechanic Stan Wilson. The regulars immediately castigated me, especially Louie Jones, who seriously questioned my qualifications as an officer and gentleman--we wore our ranks on utility uniforms. Rather than challenge him and create an incident, I was shocked and humbled by his tirade. A light bulb clicked on in my head and I recognized that I was way out of line and rightly deserved the tongue-lashing. Therefore, I apologized to all who cared to listen.

I failed to fully realize the Asian drink's potency until

²⁸ Foreigners were not allowed to own businesses in Thailand if they displaced a Thai national.

²⁹ Author's Note: To reiterate, I had first learned about Air America from Butcher in the fall of 1960 in the North Carolina town of Jacksonville.



HMM-261 enlisted men enjoying Udorn town's Jute Box bar where young Thai ladies provided diverse company.

Hinton Collection.

returning to Officer's Tent City. After negotiating the steps to the platform, but finding myself physically unable to reach my quarters, I reclined for the rest of the evening on the rough, slatted boards of the raised platform, where I attained the most restful sleep since arriving in Udorn. The Singa must have offered other beneficial qualities, for I survived unsheltered in the open air with minimal physical damage from the insatiable mosquitoes.

BANGKOK

On the fifth, my 27th birthday, I drew an overnight courier assignment to Bangkok. This duty, only recently implemented by the Headquarters Third Marine Expeditionary Unit, supplemented classified message traffic between the Joint Task Force 116 Marine Air Group in Bangkok, Korat, and Udorn. Attesting to mission security protocols, I was issued a .45 caliber handgun to wear.

Even at my own expense, I was more than ready to vacate the Udorn base for a night. While lodging at the modern Rama Hotel, I enjoyed the luxury it afforded. This "hog heaven" included everything necessary to promote an enjoyable life: a hot tub soak, tasty meals, female companionship at an establishment recommended by Air America pilot, Wayne Knight, and finally a peaceful, insect-free night's sleep in a soft bed within an air-conditioned environment. It seemed like paradise after spending more than two weeks in the bug-infested hot, humid, dusty, and liberty-impooverished Udorn.

I discovered Bangkok to be very expensive, likely a result of the tourist trade. Having seen a lot of the city from an official military vehicle during the drive from the airport to the joint U.S. Marine headquarters, I did not feel a need for further city tours. However, I did walk around the area. During limited wanderings, I observed few Americans. I also added to my growing woodcarving collection with the purchase of a teak elephant.

Unfortunately, like all pleasant things in life, the visit ended too soon.

Upon return to camp, I found my overdue orders waiting. Dated 4 June 62, they stated in part:

"On such date during July 62 as the Commanding Officer may designate, you stand detached from your present station and duties...proceed to CO Marine Barracks Naval Station (Treasure Island), San Francisco, California...pending release from active duty."

This early release was something of a surprise, as, with five months remaining on my tour of duty, I expected that I would return to New River. Now I really had to get busy and accelerate my job hunt.

One day a B-26, flown by an Air America pilot returning from a recon mission in Laos taxied to the parking ramp requesting fuel. Not familiar with the aircraft, the fueling operator did not know where the fueling orifice was located.

The sassy pilot uttered, *"On top of the wing you dummy."*

"Come on fellow. I wasn't even born when this thing was built." ³⁰

Camp life continued to improve. On 11 June all the men were finally off the ground and out of the muck.

"I am writing from our new house. They have been working night and day on the raised wooden ten platforms and just this afternoon they ordered us to strike our tents and move up off the ground out of the mud. We have 16 men living in this 'house;' about 6 of the squadron's BSers, so I am sure it's going to be a talkative group. Already we have the rear tent flaps extended forming a back porch overlooking the runway and mud and lumber piles.

For chow tonight we had steak, though tough and tasteless, but real steak. It's a short walk across a 1X6 boardwalk to the mess hall. Eggs and bread with peanut butter and jelly make a decent breakfast." ³¹

³⁰ Frank McLenon, 08/01/01.

³¹ Dale Hinton, 06/11/62 Letter.

AIR AMERICA, INC.

"A while back I mentioned working with Air America. These people have been flying here for some time and probably will continue to..."

Author 06/17/62 Letter Home from Udorn.

My conversations with Air America pilots and Helicopter Chief Pilot, Captain Clarence J. Abadie, revealed that although on somewhat more tenuous footing than previously, the Lao helicopter operation would probably survive for some time. The Company was confident of remaining in place, despite reestablishment of a ceasefire and continuing negotiations to form a three-faction government of National Union progressing in Laos. ³²

If Lao leaders were actually to agree to and form a coalition government, interested observers estimated that flying and wages would moderate considerably from an average of \$2,500 per month during the past year. However, even at a lower tax-free base wage of about \$1,000 per month, it appeared to me that an eighteen-month tour could be financially rewarding. Furthermore, those I talked to regarding the potential slowdown voiced no complaints or reservations concerning future company employment.

Relying on this information and still desiring to work for Air America flying helicopters, I composed the following letter to Taipei, supplementing one sent eight months previously:

*9 June 1962
HMM-261 MAG-16
FPO San Francisco, California*

*David R. Traylor
Air Asia Company Limited*

³² As conceived by months of negotiations, this organization was composed of Rightists, Neutralists, and Leftists. Each unit maintained its own political agenda and army.

Director of Personnel
46 Chung Shan Road, North, 2nd Section
Taipei, Taiwan

Dear Mr. Traylor:

In reference to your letter dated 27 October 1961, my termination date for military service will be July 1962. I expect release at Treasure Island, San Francisco, California.

An application dated 13 October 1961 was sent to you previously. Enclosed is an up-to-date resume of flight hours and current information.

I have been in Udorn for the past three weeks with HMM-261 and have talked with several Air America personnel concerning work there.

I strongly desire to work for your company in the role of a HUS-1 pilot.

Any further questions concerning my qualifications will be gladly forwarded to you upon request.

My home address is...

Sincerely yours,

Harry R. Casterlin

UNWINDING OF A CRISES

On 11 June, principals from the three Lao factions agreed to form a coalition government. Neutralist Prince Souvanna Phouma would serve as Prime Minister, and other Neutralist leaders hold portfolios of Defense and Interior Ministers.

Thereafter, warlike tension eased considerably in the Theater, and our Thailand experience appeared even more like an inflated field exercise. USG introduced no more combat troops into Thailand, and Brigade Commander, General Simpson, re-designated the still incomplete

force, the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Unit (3rd MEU).³³

To preclude any international incidents while flying missions north or east, our leaders cautioned us to remain five miles from the Lao border. This was exactly the wrong advice to give me. It presented a challenge. During the next Dawn Patrol mission, with Jim Turner, I flew down the center of the Mekong River, which constituted the border between the two countries.

LAOS

Despite perceiving that a defused situation now prevailed in our Theater, Washington planners were not asleep. They continued sizing up enemy reactions should the U.S. elect to introduce forces into Laos. In a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) dated 12 June (compiled in May), the Central Intelligence Agency, and intelligence divisions of the Departments of State, Defense, U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, and National Security Agency (NSA) prepared a report regarding U.S. escalation. It was titled Communist Reactions to Additional U.S. Courses of Action in Laos and North Vietnam.

The SNIE consensus was not particularly encouraging. The paper postulated that any air attacks against communist supply bases in Laos and parts of the logistic routes, called lines of communication (LOC) in military parlance, within Lao territory might be construed by the communists as U.S. preparations for extensive military operations in Laos. To counter these measures, the North Vietnamese Army would reinforce their antiaircraft artillery (AAA) units. Soviet and Chinese aircraft would be forwarded to North Vietnamese airfields and make some attempt to strike U.S. positions in Laos, but they would restrict action to Laos.

U.S. occupation of the Mekong River Valley would be answered by communist movement, in concert with enemy reinforcements, to contain

³³ *Marine Corps Gazette*, November 1965, 87, Brigadier General O.R. Simpson, *Expeditionary Medal 1962, Thailand*.

areas under U.S control. In addition to increasing logistic support to North Vietnam, the Chinese government would reinforce their border garrisons and might introduce troops into northern Laos.

U.S air attacks on North Vietnamese territory at the terminus of main supply routes into Laos would mark a major turning point in escalation and hostilities, and trigger Soviet and Chinese support for the Vietnamese. The communists would implement political, diplomatic, and propaganda attempts against us. Should we continue sustained attacks and move to occupy the Lao Panhandle, they would conclude that an offensive of North Vietnam would follow. In such a case, they would attack Thai, perhaps South Vietnamese bases, and our carriers. ³⁴

NIGHT ACTIVITY IN THE VILLE

Early one evening a few of us entered the Snow White, the only reasonable and bona fide facsimile of a nightclub in Udorn. The galvanized tin building, located close to town on the main road south, looked suspiciously like a former warehouse. Spectacularly unattractive, the interior included a broad dirt floor and a high corrugated metal roof. A few cheap Formica topped tables and folding metal chairs adorned the area in front of a small raised stage. Assorted brown skinned "honeys" danced with each other, while obviously eyeing us and hoping for a score. As we sipped cold Singha, laughed and liberally mocked our drab surroundings, one very attractive girl appeared to brighten the otherwise drab atmosphere. All we uncouth lovers immediately coveted the comely Sunee, but we ultimately lost her to the monetary charms of a late arriving blond haired Air America pilot. That tended to quell further desire to remain in the ville.

³⁴ FRUS 1961-63, Volume 2, Vietnam, 1962: 204, SNIE 58-5/1-62; (www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii_1961-63/r.html).

MUANG THAI

Much of the Udorn experience included seasonal monsoon showers that dumped enormous amounts of precipitation on the ground in relatively short periods. I experienced this one evening while attending a Thai boxing event staged downtown at City Park. The peculiar form of Thai boxing began as a serious martial art used on ancient battlefields, and later developed into the popular modern spectator sport. The blood sport employed elements of French kick boxing, although the Thai version differed widely. In addition to employing kicks, Thai boxers used fists, elbows, and knees to advantage in subduing an opponent.

A complex warm-up process, seemingly largely ceremonial, preceded each match. With clasped hands, both boxers paid homage to Lord Buddha, their teachers, and others. They raised and lowered their heads, while praying and invoking the spirits for protection and a safe victory. Then, to the rhythm of eerie slow music, they artistically pranced around the ring, whirling, jumping, and bowing in a traditional ritualistic dance. Some fighters wore rope implements around their upper arms and a colorful braided cord around their heads. Their handlers removed the ceremonial headpiece just before the bout commenced.

Finally, the referee issued words to the opponents, and they shook hands. Then the music quickened in tempo, inspiring and urging each boxer to battle. Marking the beginning of the event, the men immediately engaged, clashing to the peculiar strains of a flute, drum beat, and clanging cymbals. The repetitive refrain produced a form of high pitched, squealing music, calculated to stimulate the fighters' juices. These sounds were completely foreign and more than a little disquieting to me.

Most contestants' appearances deceived me, looking exactly like smiling, smooth-skinned, hairless teenagers, who, if seen walking on the street, I might consider effeminate types. Wrong! They all performed superb exhibitions of boxing and courage like none I had ever witnessed.



The vicious Thai blood sport of Muang Thai.
Author Collection.

Caught up in the enthusiasm of the crowd, whose loud exclamations followed each punch or kick, the fighters' skill, violence, and grace kept me thoroughly entranced. During one five-round match a combatant, who could only be classified as a featherweight in America, kicked so high that he opened a nasty cut alongside the contender's eye. Blood spurted out of the wound in such profusion that the referee immediately terminated the fight.

Shielded light bulbs, attached to tall bamboo poles in each corner of the boxing ring, illuminated the small enclosure. During the two-minute rest period between rounds, a tall, bare-chested man hopped into the ring. In one hand he held a bottle of clear liquid; in the other a flaming torch. After craning his head upward toward thousands of nocturnal flying insects attracted by the lights, he tilted and drank something from the bottle. Then he spat and blew the mixture as high as he could. With the torch held high at the ready, he simultaneously lighted a fine mist of the kerosene explosive mixture into an immense and spectacular fireball. To the crowd's delight, after taking another mouthful of the volatile concoction, he proceeded to each corner of the ring and repeated the procedure, temporarily eliminating the insects.

With the advent of blood, violence, shrill music, fireballs, and enthusiasm of the crowd, the entire spectacle assumed a carnival-like atmosphere, one I considered enormous fun. Throughout matches, hawkers sidled through the crowd brandishing fistfuls of baht, challenging others to gamble money against theirs.

Amid the crowd's roar, another contestant went down to defeat nursing a dislocated knee caused by a vicious, well placed whirling pirouette kick. I could empathize with this chap, having incurred a similar painful knee injury during a Duke University-Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI) wrestling match at Blacksburg, Virginia. ³⁵

At the peak of the evening's entertainment, nasty rainstorms tore

³⁵ The torn cartilage still remains today and I still suffer lingering effects from the injury.

through and walloped the area. Lacking rain gear, and largely unprepared for the initial deluge, I was so thoroughly enjoying the demonstration that I sat through the drenching downpour. Surprisingly, few spectators left the area.

As I looked around at the crowd, one person stood out from the rest. Of medium height, dark with smooth complexion and handsome features, the Thai man easily fit a description that represented many males of his ethnic group. However, particularly interesting and distinguishing him from the crowd, was a long black and white checkered cloth wrapped around one shoulder, partially concealing the fact that he had no left arm. He seemed a very gregarious person, confident and well known to individuals in the audience. Our paths would cross again in the future. ³⁶

Profiting from the experience, aware that abrupt storms could spawn at any time during the southeast monsoon, I always carried minimum rain equipment to future boxing events.

THE PANTY CAPER

At times, squadron responsibilities appeared to require talents above and beyond the call of normal military duty. My boss, "Black Mac," cornered me early one afternoon requesting that I first confirm, and then act, on a rumor that our young enlisted men from maintenance and other squadron departments were fornicating with young female soda pop vendors at a location close to the entrance of the Air America access road. Since this problem theoretically occurred on RTAF property at the intersection of the main road during daytime for all to see, and purportedly involved our people, the practice must cease immediately.

Brigade honchos constantly stressed constructive people-to-people interaction for all troops, but not too intimate. Considering this aspect of our overall mission to be of the highest priority, they

³⁶ This man would become yet another relative when I married a Thai girl in 1965.

disapproved of any young Marines overtly diddling local native girls, especially on or near the base. Indeed, I had previously overheard upper echelon types voice concern over the fact that fetching young town lovelies wore nothing under their clinging and highly revealing sarongs, and the general, not well steeped in Asian culture, had voiced a skeptical interrogative, *"What, the girls don't wear undergarments?"*

Conflicted between duty, amusement, curiosity, and a naturally randy disposition, with my marching orders firm, I commandeered a Jeep and drove the short distance to the area in question. Except for oppressive heat, all seemed in order. An enterprising soul had pitched a large, orange colored tepee-style tent along the south side of the access road, and the middle-age female vendor, along with friendly banter, appeared to be conducting a brisk soda trade. A glance inside the bare, dirt floored tent revealed a few innocuous wooden cases containing Green Spot, Pepsi drinks, and ice. Certainly, no hanky-panky was evident at the time. Duty bound, I took Corporal Pressley and other enlisted men from HMM-261 aside for a fatherly talk and explained the situation to them, as I knew it. Probably for the 50th time, I reminded them that to prevent incidents, brigade headquarters frowned on fraternization and sexual misconduct with local women, particularly this close to the base. I knew the hormonally challenged youngsters would listen to me, but they were going to follow their own desires. Even as I spoke, I assumed they plotted to negotiate their turn with the sweet young thing selling pop when I left. Of course, displaying their innocent youthful faces, they assured me nothing out of the ordinary would ever happen and the lieutenant should not worry.

The older lady, probably the proprietor or the madam, in an attempt to charm and accumulate brownie points with the boss man, offered to sell me a civet cat. I had never seen one of these cute, furry creatures before. Although tempted to purchase it, I rejected her offer, as I had no place to house the beautiful animal. Then, by way of flattery, she gushed in broken English that from observing the

wrinkles on my brow, she alleged that I was a highly intelligent person. Wow! I never had any woman say that to me before. On that curious note, with a much-inflated ego, and no evidence of youthful Marine misadventure, I decided to return to camp with my report.

EASTERN REGION RECONNAISSANCE

"This weekend, I led a two-plane flight to Sakon Nakhon southeast of Udorn to work with the grunts."

Author 06/17/62 Letter Home.

On Friday the 15th, with Second Lieutenant Simeon McDaniel my second in command (SIC), operations assigned me to lead a two aircraft flight seventy-eight nautical miles east of Udorn to work around the provincial capital of Sakon Nakhon. Our mission plan included supporting a Marine recon patrol intent on recording and assessing area road conditions, bridges, and terrain throughout a large portion of northeast Thailand, which the Thai called Isan. The two-day remain-over-night (RON) task provided an interesting experience, for we landed at many towns and villages along our route, learning much about the Thai people through observation and the assistance of our genial Thai interpreter. The trip also comprised a high point in my Thailand experience, for the mission occurred at an appropriate time to alleviate the monotony and daily routine of Tent City.

Prior to landing at our first RON destination, Mukdahan, a provincial capital bearing the same name, three yellow T-6 SNJ planes crossed the Mekong from the direction of Savannakhet, Laos, and headed directly toward my flight. I recognized the aircraft as ancient U.S. Navy training planes that were replaced by the single engine T-34 just before I commenced transition training at Saufley Field, Pensacola. However, these were not training ships, for they mounted gun pods and rocket rails under the wings and displayed no clearly visible markings. The sighting was confusing, as S-2 had never briefed us

regarding the presence of enemy aircraft, certainly none of this type in our area of operations. ³⁷ There was so much I did not know about or completely understand at the time. As I considered my options, one aircraft suddenly commenced a threatening pass at our flight. This action concerned me. As I prepared to take the only evasive maneuver available and autorotate toward the ground, the pilot abruptly broke off, pulled away, and joined the rest of his flight heading west. Shaken and confused, threatened apparently by a playful Thai Air Force unit, I continued my approach to the tiny river town's dirt airstrip.

After securing our helicopters, at the insistence of the ranking Marine officer, our small party conducted a customary and obligatory visit to the home of the provincial governor, who was also the brother of Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat. Attempting to place us at ease, and displaying renowned Thai hospitality, Governor Thanarat offered us a cool glass of water and friendly conversation. Not used to dealing with government officials, I felt slightly intimidated by his easy going, but dignified, presence. Not yet accustomed to such formality, I began to understand that respect played a very important part in Thai culture. We learned that the King and Queen had visited the river town the previous day to attend a ceremony, and had left for Udorn that same morning. Missing the monarchs at both towns seemed bad timing, for I had previously seen pictures of the beautiful Queen, and would have cherished a chance to view her majesty in person.

Continuing our road recon the next day, we headed eighty miles west toward the town of Kalasin. While en route, the lieutenant in charge of the patrol requested that we land near a small hamlet, where he could examine the roadbed condition. I selected a wide portion on the road and touched down on the laterite dirt surface with no problem. However, my wingman, Jim Turner, selected a more confined spot to my rear. Jim misjudged the obstacles. While landing, the rotor blade tips contacted low tree branches overhanging the road, causing

³⁷ S-2: The intelligence unit in our squadron.

substantial damage to the fragile rotor caps. During my short maintenance career, I had once ferried a helicopter with all four rotor tip caps removed. It had proved no problem. Therefore, with no compunction about duplicating this simple task, I instructed the crew chief to remove the damaged caps and prepared to fly the stricken helicopter to Sakon Nakhon. Although somewhat shortening our intended recon, the flight proved uneventful, except for an annoying whistle from the exposed, uncovered, and unsymmetrical blade tips.

That evening the Thai interpreters assigned to our party once again found a delightful open-air restaurant that offered delicious spicy food, which I had been hoping to sample ever since arriving in Thailand. Several doctors who worked at the provincial hospital dined at an adjacent table. We quickly became friends with the genial men and swapped stories concerning our recent adventures in their country. At last, I felt comfortable experiencing the local color I so craved in all countries I visited.

Following a sumptuous dinner washed down by a couple of deliciously cold Singhas, the host interpreters, always ready to please us Americans, arranged for those of us who chose to participate, to enjoy some local "Thai dessert." The activity was conducted in a partially open wooden shed adjacent to the field where our helicopters were parked. Marking a long time between drinks, I was more than ready for any and all carnal activity. Sated, I received all the action I could handle and more. However, always obligated to "pay the piper," in the end, I suffered painful abrasions on both knees and elbows, caused by friction created from a rough rattan mat covering the dirt floor.

At 2100 hours, while discussing sleeping accommodations, clouds in the monsoon-laden sky opened wide, spilling rain in sheets. Debating what to do, we opted to dash to our nearby "Sikorsky Hotels," where we spent a reasonably dry night, albeit in Spartan conditions.

While we were working to the east, we missed the King and Queen's second visit to towns in the northeast:

"The other day the King and Queen of Thailand visited the base. We stood in review and there was a brief air show. They are a fine looking couple. The Queen is 29 and quite beautiful. The King is only 34 years old. The Thai people are very loyal to them and it is too easy to offend the King or queen or their pictures which are seen all over the place.

This place is taking on a new look. All sorts of buildings and structures and tent platforms are popping up out of the mud. Looks like the Marines will be here for a while.

A few of [HMM] 162's people have arrived and it's good to see our replacements showing up. They look rather bewildered. This place isn't Okinawa, the balmy Philippines, or the exotic Hong Kong that they must have expected.

One of the guys in Air America that I know, JB Timmons from 264 New River, caught a slug in the aft fuel tank of his chopper while flying over Laos last week, but they were able to fly back OK.

The Sgt. Major told us at muster yesterday morning that we were all a bunch of degenerates trying to do as we please and drinking anything and everything we could get our hands on. The speech was funny because the previous night two of the senior NCOs, Albritton and Arnote, got into a brawl and crashed through the tent flaps and ended up rolling in the mud in the ditch around their tent." ³⁸

POP GOES THE KNEE

Shortly after we returned to Udorn from our eastern mission, the squadron special services organizer mustered sufficient hands for a sandlot softball game at the Royal Thai Army Base, adjacent to, and just south of, the airfield. Officers against enlisted men softball games had been a common source of intramural sport since the squadron was formed. Naturally, the younger, less dissipated enlisted men normally won.

³⁸ Dale Hinton, 06/18/62 Letter.

Although flat, the rough ground consisted of hard packed red dirt and small, sharp laterite stones. During the game, while attempting to stretch a single into a double, but not wanting to slide on the harsh, stony ground, I leaped toward the base. As I landed, I felt my left knee pop out of joint. Apparently, I had re-injured the identical knee that took so long to heal at Duke in 1955. Making matters worse, no adequate medical facility existed at Tent City to provide decent care or a walking cast to immobilize such an injury.

My compassionate boss offered me evacuation to Okinawa. However, I really did not want to miss anything, and since only a few days remained before the squadron disbanded, I elected to have our designated Navy corpsman tightly wrap the sore leg with an ace bandage as I awaited imminent rotation. Furthermore, I still probed for an Air America job and awaited Taipei management's decision.

In this sorry condition, hoping for positive news regarding employment with Air America, I slowly gimped across the parking ramp the following day to visit Captain Abadie in his stark, barracks like office. With a measure of good and bad news, I learned that Rousselot had lately inquired if I could arrange an overseas release. I discussed this possibility later, with the squadron S-1 administration officer, Captain Tom E. Fish, who indicated that he required at least three months notice to effect any change to my orders. Three months sounded excessive, but as the two of us were sometimes at odds with each other, I surmised he simply lacked motivation or interest in my endeavor. It seemed that I would just have to wait until arriving in Okinawa to further pursue the VPFO's request.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Ever since HMM-261 had arrived in Thailand, the squadron had worked closely with the Royal Thai Army, executing several joint airborne vertical envelopments. Marking a grand finale and a last hurrah to our overall satisfactory Thai experience, on the morning of Thursday, the 21st, operations scheduled an ambitious Thai troop lift involving all



The Author manning the shortstop position in an HMM-261 sunbaked squadron intramural softball game that later resulted in a dislocated left knee.
Author Collection.

sixteen squadron aircraft and thirty-two pilots, some scrounged from supporting units. As events unfolded that day, this mission constituted my next to last flight as a Marine aviator in Thailand.

On mission day, I still hobbled painfully about on a leg and a half, and elected not to participate in the operation. But, when Captain John F. Fitzgerald suddenly became ill, I offered to substitute for him and fly left seat with Al Dean. Even though I disliked the left side of the cockpit because of engine exhaust and noise, I planned to merely sit in the left seat as an observer and fulfill the requirement for two cockpit pilots. ³⁹

The entrance to the HUS-1 cockpit window was located a full eight feet above the ground. This required climbing up the fuselage's side by utilizing recessed foot holes and hand grips, a process requiring coordination and mobility from even a healthy individual. It was painful. Already ruing my macho decision to volunteer for this flight, I managed to pull myself up and swing stiff-legged into my work area.

We comprised the second of four divisions. Following takeoff, the flight joined up, and climbed to cruise altitude. Colonel Steele led the first division in Echo Mike-40. As number two aircraft in the division, we tooled along in the right slot of the formation.

Twenty minutes east of Udorn, while gazing over the flat, semi-forested landscape, I observed a lengthy, and copious trail of uncharacteristic white smoke slipstreaming from Echo Mike-47's exhaust stacks. This was not good. Searching the Casterlin memory banks for a logical explanation, I recalled once reading an article in one of the U.S. Navy aviation safety publications about just such a phenomenon that had occurred to a fixed wing aircraft pilot. The article explained that the white smoke related to an engine cylinder ingesting a broken sodium-filled exhaust valve--the sodium compound serving to dissipate heat. The exhaust valves of our Curtis Wright 1820 engines

³⁹ Author Note: I should have known better; with Murphy already lurking around every corner, my naive attitude would result in a perverse and unwanted incident.

contained sodium. If my analysis proved correct, further flying that day appeared highly unlikely, and I expected an imminent engine failure. I informed Al of my concern, and, as senior pilot onboard, assumed aircraft control. At this point, I ceased having fun.

Suddenly, the trail of dense white smoke abruptly ceased. Even though I knew this did not preclude further problems, the development led me to hope that we might be OK. As a precaution, I continued to scan the terrain directly below and out our port side for potential forced landing areas. Despite half expecting an impending engine failure, I elected to continue in formation, while cruising at 700 feet over the scantily populated, mostly flat secondary forest land, interspersed with very few visible landing spots.

Two minutes later, my prediction came to fruition. One of the nine engine jugs blew, accompanied by a thunderous roar.⁴⁰ An enormous sheet of flame vomited forth several feet from the exhaust stacks. My first moment-of-truth, something that eventually confronted all aviators, had arrived. The power loss severely limited options. Losing altitude, I instantly dropped out of formation, radioed a squeaky Mayday in the blind, and maneuvered left toward the only open area in sight.

As I adjusted attitude for a minimum rate of decent, and fed in right rudder pedal to trim the aircraft, crew chief John P. Winter came on the air from the cabin. He squawked in a semi-panicky voice, *"Lieutenant, after that explosion, the nine Thai troops down here tried to leap out the cabin door!"* Fortunately, a gunner's belt strung across the opening had saved the day. Moreover, Winter's quick thinking and reflexes ushered the panicked troops back into their seats, saving them from joining Lord Buddha.

Gravity reigned: Without recourse we rapidly plunged earthward. I would have welcomed a lighter aircraft, but the cost in lives and political repercussions would have been too high, and I mentally

⁴⁰ Jug: An engine cylinder.

applauded crew chief Perry's effort in averting a major tragedy.

Following the throaty explosion, the normally married engine and rotor tachometer needles split, but it was obvious from the engine needle that the power plant was still running. That was a positive aspect in that the auxiliary hydraulic servo would continue to function and maintain a normal boost control function throughout the autorotation. I briefly attempted to determine if engine power still existed to conduct a power-on landing, when I felt Al gently bottom the collective lever, basically committing us to a full autorotation. At that moment I had other things to worry about--like safely landing the big bird. Operating at or near maximum gross weight, we fell out of the sky at an alarming rate. Virtually a falling body, at flat collective pitch, rotor RPM rapidly increased to a high level that required me to raise the collective lever substantially to prevent a rotor overspeed. ⁴¹

To obtain a gross reference point for the glide to touchdown, I selected a solitary tree to our left side, located near what appeared to be a drier portion of a series of linked wet rice paddies.

As we descended over the tree line at the edge of the clearing and neared the ground, at an estimated hundred feet our rapid movement became alarmingly apparent. Thus, with only seconds remaining before contact with terra firma, in order to counter the high rate of descent on short final, and to reduce our forward speed, I abruptly decelerated. During the full flare, I lost sight of my reference tree. Concerned about striking the tree, I simultaneously slipped the aircraft slightly to the right, leveled the fuselage, and pulled maximum pitch. The landing was certainly positive. The helicopter splashed down extremely hard in a slightly tail wheel low configuration, one paddy short of drier land. The water and mud most likely helped moderate and cushion the landing. A small amount of

⁴¹ In a power off condition, the HUS-1 helicopter attained a rapid sink rate approaching 2,000 to 3,000 feet per minute. At slightly above a 1:1 glide ratio, one might equate our situation to a falling rock.



Rice paddy area approximately nine miles east of Udorn, Thailand, where the Author and Al Dean planted HUS-1 EM-47 following a partial engine failure.
Author Collection.



The tree to left rear of the helicopter, originally intended as a guide point, distracted the Author during an abrupt deceleration prior to splash down.

Author Collection.



Echo Mike-47 "deep sixed" sans a tail wheel.
Author Collection.

forward momentum brought us skidding to a stop against a raised paddy wall dike. ⁴²

The hard landing provided a last straw for the terrified Thai troops who, shocked but thankful to be alive, rapidly exited and took off at high port, immediately vanishing into a nearby tree line. I am sure that, to a man, they had to change their underwear.

I struggled thankfully, but painfully, out of the machine, and shakily conducted a hasty post flight. Beside the obviously sheared tail wheel yoke, there did not appear to be any other damage. I was reminded of an aviator axiom, "Any landing you can walk away from is a good one." ⁴³

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

The pristine and except for the rice paddies, apparently uninhabited area seen from altitude, proved only an illusion. After only a short while, it seemed like the entire Thai population converged on the scene. This did not overly concern me, for as squadron survival officer at New River, I had eagerly devoured World War Two survival accounts of how to humor and cope with South Sea natives. Although my earlier attempt in the Philippines had failed miserably, I was confident, grinning broadly and assuming my most friendly, smiley face, I approached a small group of equally smiling, sun-burnished farming people. I began to relate my story through basic pantomime hand gestures. ⁴⁴ Before long, a mostly naked, loin clothed elder pointed to a smoke blackened pot perched on a smoldering fire

⁴²One of the pilots in an orbiting ship later related that when we struck the water, a spray appeared to soar fifty feet into the air, totally obscuring the helicopter. His observation tempted me to log a water landing.

⁴³I initially felt bad about damaging the machine, but after finding the tail wheel assembly, examination of the sheared component revealed the metal wheel strut was badly fatigued. It displayed a tell-tale black color halfway through the broken part.

⁴⁴ Author Note: A grammar school teacher once informed me that fewer facial muscles were used to smile than to frown.

pit and offered me water. Although very thirsty and dehydrated from the stress of the incident, military mentality prevailed and I cautiously, but politely, declined his kind offer. To compensate for my potential rebuff of his hospitality and fill a void until rescue help arrived, I produced a length of string, and commenced to demonstrate a favorite string trick I had learned as a child. This entailed winding a looped string around my fingers in such a way that it looked secure. Then I had the elder pull a loose portion from the center of my open palm. As planned, the string mysteriously pulled free from my fingers. With the survival book's advice right on the mark regarding superstitious people, the trick proved immensely popular and a real icebreaker with the smooth, dark-skinned people surrounding me. I had to repeat my magic trick several times, accompanied by constant Oos and Ahs from the gullible natives. Happy that I had at last done something right in a quasi-survival situation, I possibly smiled as widely as my new found Thai friends, purportedly a gentle people renowned for their toothy white smiles. So hospitable were these villagers that the obvious leader offered me, with gestures any idiot could readily understand, a lithesome, sarong-clad lass whom I noted standing shyly, but provocatively, against a giant tree, observing my foolishness. His kind tender both flattered and tempted me, but recently forced down in remote surroundings, with a crippled knee, and with scores of people milling throughout the area, I wisely declined the offer.

After depositing their troops at the destination, a squadron aircraft crew retrieved and ferried Al, John, and me to the Udorn base. Pumped up, I judged that after the eventful and interesting morning, life would certainly not be boring for some time.

While I sucked up a few suds in the relative security and comfort of Tent City, a myriad of people attempted to reposition the Echo Mike-47 a few yards to a drier adjoining field. Using a long thick rope obtained locally, squadron personnel, along with approximately 200 Thai farmers, eventually performed the Herculean task of pulling

the aircraft from the thick, gooey mud to an adjacent dry field, captured on film to later appear in the centerfold of the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper. Then, utilizing a field expedient metal A Frame lifting device, an engine, and with other items delivered to the site by Captain Walker and Corporal Hinton in EM-45, Corporal D.T. Higashihara and Sergeant Winter laboriously changed the 2,000-plus-pound engine. ⁴⁵

I correctly assumed that squadron maintenance people in charge of the difficult recovery were more than a little miffed at me for plopping the ship down in the water when dry land was available. This was confirmed when the eternally all-business OIC and serious-minded Captain Jim H. Walker required me to fly to the site with him the following day and return the machine to Udorn.

I claimed more than my fair share of exclusive bragging rights, until other pilots tired of hearing me boast about my part in the incident. As usual, the acerbic and easily annoyed "Charlie Mac" put me in my place. Our successful autorotation with a full load of troops, however, comprised a squadron first, one that netted me compliments from the Skipper, and a favorable evaluation report. Ironically, the autorotation marked only the second full auto I ever executed; the first was clandestinely performed at Cubi Point while conducting a maintenance test flight with Lieutenant Fred J. Schober.

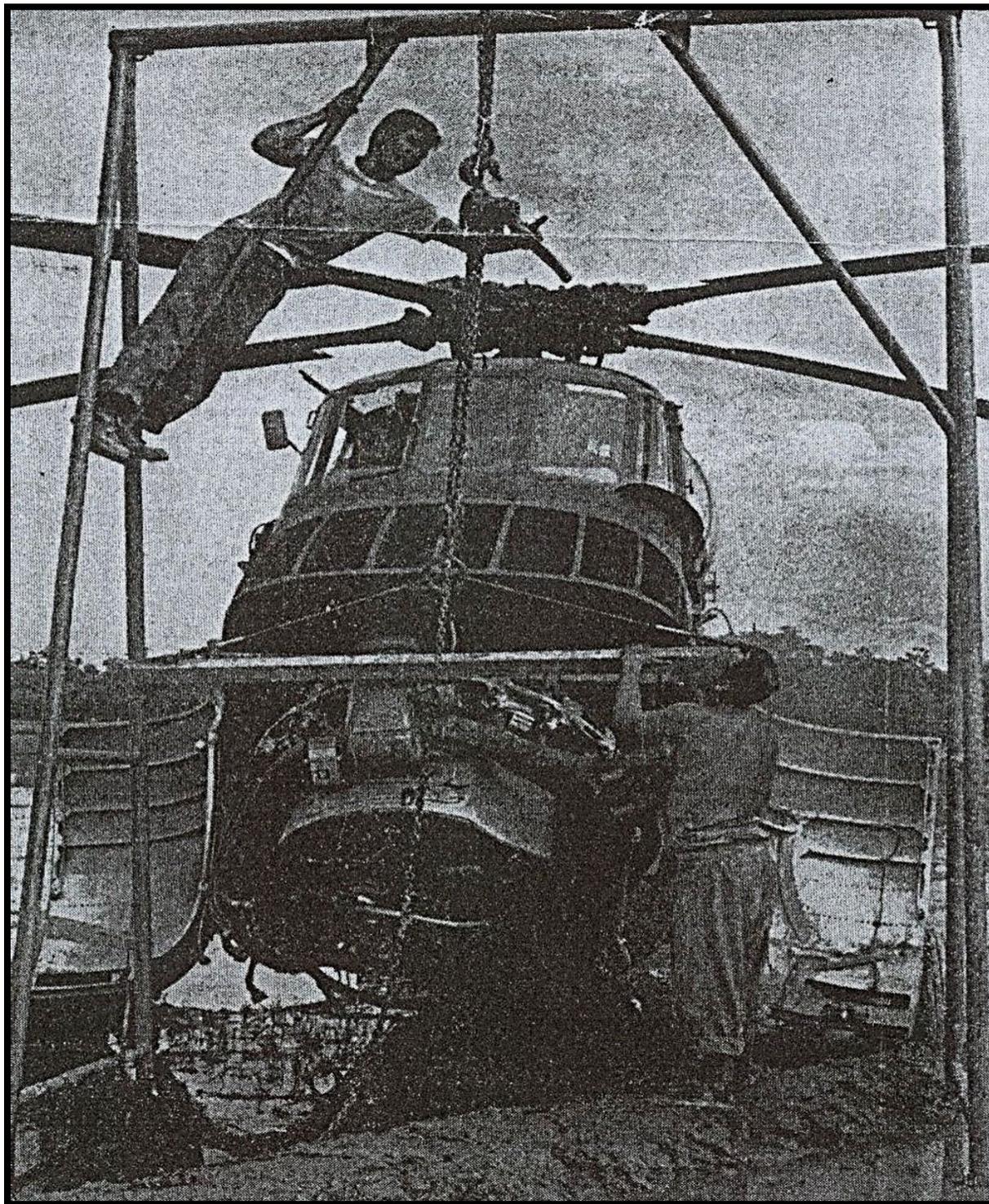
Unfortunately, a conservative NATOPS training policy, unlike training conducted in U.S. Army aviation, restricted all Navy and Marine pilots to power recoveries when practicing helicopter autorotations. Correctly assuming that engine failures were rare, and HUS-1 helicopters inordinately expensive--almost 300,000 dollars in 1962--, the policy revolved around the old Marine Bug-a-Boo regarding a lack of money and equipment allocated to our branch of the service. The restriction seriously deprived those learning to fly the machines

⁴⁵ Amazingly, the seemingly all-business, by-the-book Walker allowed Hinton to fly to base on the return trip.
Dale Hinton Emails, 02/25/08, 03/06/10.



Local Thai villagers were engaged to pull EM-47 to drier ground to permit a field engine change.

Stars and Stripes centerfold photograph taken by Army Master Sergeant Al Chang.



HMM-261 squadron personnel Higashihara and Winter change EM-47's engine under trying field conditions.

Stars and Stripes Newspaper.

from experiencing total realism, and gaining additional survival skills while practicing power off touchdowns.

During the incident and increased forced exercise, the pain in my knee was amplified to an even greater magnitude than previously. From experience with the original injury at Duke University, I knew that, in order to properly heal, I required a walking cast to immobilize the limb. As evidenced from the latest incident, the longer I remained in the area the more subject I was to additional injury.

Therefore, with only a few days remaining before HMM-162's planned arrival in Udorn that would trigger HMM-261's return to the USS *Valley Forge*, I requested an early transfer to Okinawa.

During a final meeting with Captain Abadie on the Air America side of the parking area, I proudly discussed the recent engine failure and reiterated a continued desire to work for the company. He again indicated that, despite positive Lao political developments with a new coalition government forming under Souvanna Phouma, and a Geneva Conference on Laos scheduled to assemble in early July, Taipei still intended to continue the Udorn operation. The job might not be as lucrative for crewmembers in the future, but would still be rewarding. Before I left the compound, Abadie wrote down a phone number and advised me to contact Mister Reed, the Air America representative at Kadena Air Force Base, Okinawa.

On the afternoon of my departure, while I was lying on a canvas cot resting my throbbing knee, Lieutenant Len Demko, a pilot from one of HMM-162's advanced party, walked into the tent and inadvertently bumped my outstretched leg. (What is it that people say about a sore thumb?) That did it! Hurt, howling, and cursing in my most eloquent vernacular, I painfully hobbled to the Okinawa-bound GV-1. The engine failure episode, walking, and careless people seriously took a toll on my left knee.

HMM-162 did not remain in Udorn long, for by the time the Declaration of Neutrality of Laos was signed on 23 July, the 3d Marine Expeditionary Unit was reduced to about a third of its peak strength.



Pilot crew of EM-47, Author and Al Dean flanking HMM-261 squadron Safety Officer Captain Tom Forbes at Udorn RTAF base tent city.
Author Collection.



A Third Marine Expeditionary patch most likely produced toward the end or shortly after the operation. The Author does not have one in his possession.
Ben Middleton.

By 31 July no U.S. Marine Corps combat units remained in Udorn, and within a few days the 3rd MEU was deactivated. Apparently, USG's show of force had temporarily worked to retard a communist advance in Laos, and stimulated a new Geneva Accord Agreement. Now it was the politicians' job to ensure that the situation remained that way.

Once back in civilization, if one could call Okinawa such a place, a doctor molded a walking cast to my leg. I would wear this contraption for a couple of weeks to immobilize the joint, allow it to heal, and to prevent additional knee injury.

Concerned about the injury and its implications to my immediate future, I wrote a final letter to the Air America VPFO:

26 June 1962

HMM-261 MAG 16

San Francisco, California

*Mr. R. E. Rousselot
Air Asia Company Limited
46 Chung Shan Road, North, 2nd Section
Taipei, Taiwan*

Dear Mr. Rousselot:

I hope that this letter will tie a few loose ends together.

I did not expect to be terminated from the service immediately upon arrival in the States. When I learned of this in the speed letter I received in June, I wrote Mister Traylor regarding the information I had available.

A week later Mister Abadie, acting on a note from you requested to know if I could be released overseas. I checked with my squadron S-1 and was informed that the request for this has to be submitted to CMC three months in advance.

On my return to Okinawa, I rechecked with the group S-1. He seems to think that there still is a remote chance of an overseas release.

I am slated to leave for California on 13 July. I realize the time is short, but I would like to know if I would have a job with the

company if I requested to be terminated in Okinawa.

I am in contact with Mister Reed at Kadena and will work directly through him for speed.

I understand that if I do return to the States that I will have to communicate with the Washington office. If this is the case, would you be able to send my application forms and letters on to that Office?

Any advice you could give me at this time would be greatly appreciated.

Enclosed is a brief resume to supplement my application.

Thank you.

Very truly yours...

THE RELUCTANT ATTORNEY

While awaiting my final orders to CONUS, Marine Air Group headquarters assigned me duty as a defense counsel for a young enlisted man charged with alcohol infractions. ¹ It marked my first "hands on" experience with the workings and regulations contained in the Universal Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) since attending the boring officer basic school classes at Quantico. Consequently, I had to do considerable late-night reading to refresh my memory and attempt to understand the rudimentary points of military laws. Despite attempts to do my best in presenting the case, court members, intending to teach the youngster a lesson, awarded him a severe sentence, one I considered entirely too harsh for what I considered a minor transgression. I had previously heard horror stories about prisoner treatment by sadists in the Marine brig, and shuddered at the thought of the boy being incarcerated there for any length of time. I recalled the sorry condition of our flight equipment sergeant after U.S. Air Force military police had mishandled him.

Later in the day, still concerned about the youngster's plight, I intercepted and asked the trial judge, a major, about the severity of

¹ CONUS: Continental United States.

the sentence. As I suspected, he indicated the court wanted to teach him a lesson. He further stated that, following a case review, the commanding general would certainly downgrade the original court sentence. Perhaps I failed to understand how the system worked, but it appeared to me that these apparently unconcerned folks were playing with the young man's future. I did not like that, but left relieved at the major's explanation. Moreover, I was very happy to be leaving a military that fostered such stern justice.

During my treks to MAG headquarters to coordinate with superiors regarding the court case, I met Jack Durrant. Jack, a former Plainfield, N.J. resident, was one of the principals who taught me how to fly the HUS-1 at New River, North Carolina when the squadron first formed. I was shocked, for Durrant had previously relinquished his hard-earned Wings of Gold to remain stateside with his wife Flora Jean and family. Now with some ironic twist of fate, despite his efforts, he had ended up overseas in Southeast Asia for a year, attached to MAG headquarters--so much for Jack's careful planning and the Corps' needs.

Days passed slowly. A medic removed the cast and I flew incidental local missions for a few days with a still aching leg. Although repeatedly calling Mister Reed seeking information concerning a job with Air America, I heard nothing further from Bob Rousselot--perhaps the VPFO did not care to commit himself for a particular reason or perhaps due to a lack of communications. Because of the uncertainty, from a logical standpoint, I did not want to terminate in Okinawa, and, through some quirk in the system, find myself stuck overseas without either a job or transportation home.

In the meantime, I wrote to several other firms inquiring about possible helicopter work. Among a few contacted were the Japanese Self Defense System, courtesy of Sergeant Pete Hillock, and an outfit in White Plains, New York, reportedly hiring pilots for H-34 instructor duties in the state of Israel. That appealed to me for two reasons: I would be helping an underdog nation to maintain democracy, and

secondly, I had heard that some of the Israeli women were ravishingly beautiful.

LAOS AND THE GENEVA ACCORDS

In Geneva, negotiators counted down the days leading to a successful conclusion and signing of the proposed Lao Accords. With South Vietnamese representatives waffling over a few remaining items, President Kennedy's chief representative, W. Averell Harriman, forwarded a letter to President Diem seeking his acceptance of the accords.

"I have been told of your concern over the agreements on Laos now being negotiated at Geneva. Since these long and difficult negotiations are reaching a conclusion, I thought it would be helpful for me to review with you our thinking about Laos and Southeast Asia generally.

We have sought to counter the communist drive in Southeast Asia by programs and tactics which recognize both the regional nature of communist threat and the particular circumstances of each country in the region.

...In Laos, the circumstances are quite different [than South Vietnam]. Because of that country's location and because of the conditions in which its people find themselves, the United States believes that a neutral government, committed to neither the west nor the east, is most likely to succeed in providing the Lao people with peace and freedom, We are supported in this belief by most of the free world governments.

In negotiating with the communists to achieve a free and neutral Laos, we have not been unmindful of the relationship between Laos and the security of its neighbors. We have sought to build adequate safeguards into the Laos settlement, including assurance Lao territory will not be used for military or subversive interference in the affairs of other countries. We are aware of the danger that the

communists will not honor their pledges. But the only alternative to a neutral Laos appears to be making an international battleground of Laos...

I am informed that the Geneva negotiations have reached the point where the agreements which have been hammered out over the past thirteen months are nearly ready for signature...When Mr. Khrushchev and I met in Vienna last year, we were able to agree on only one of the many issues which divide us. This was our mutual desire to work for a free, independent and neutral Laos. The result has been that the Soviets, as one of the co-chairmen, have undertaken an international responsibility under the Geneva Accords to assure the compliance of the communist signatories with the terms of those accords. This responsibility will be tested soon as the agreements are signed. In return for these undertakings by the Soviets, both your delegation and mine have made some concessions in the course of the thirteen months of negotiations. These concessions are the result of the almost complete ineffectiveness of the Royal Laotian Army, as demonstrated again in the recent action at Nam Tha. It is only the threat of American intervention that has enabled us to come as far as we have in Laos. But I hope you agree with me that considering this deteriorating situation the safeguards built into the Laos settlement give us the best hope of future improvement against continuing communist military encroachment through that country..."²

Harriman then went on to solicit President Diem's support overlooking some communist objections and accepting the Accords.

The same day, Lao Foreign Minister, leftist adherent Quinum Pholsena, presented a Statement of Neutrality to the Geneva Conference, requesting its inclusion in the Declaration on Neutrality.

² FRUS 1961-62, Vol. 2, Vietnam, 1962: VI, Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam, Saigon, 07/09/62, (www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/volii196163/html).

Contained in eight declarations—numbers four and six mentioned here-- , the letter specified in part that Laos:

"will not enter into any military alliance or into any agreement, whether military or otherwise, which is inconsistent with the neutrality of the Kingdom of Laos; it will not allow the establishment of any foreign military base on Laotian territory, not allow any country to use Laotian territory for military purposes or for the purposes of interference in the internal affairs of other countries, not recognize the protection of any alliance or military coalition, including SEATO.

...it will require the withdrawal from Laos of all foreign troops and military personnel, and will not allow any foreign troops or military personnel to be introduced into Laos..." ³

"On July 21, in the presence of nearly all the Foreign Ministers of the participating states, the documents of the [Geneva] Conference were formally and finally approved by the whole conference and welcomed by Prince Souvanna Phouma, the new Prime Minister of Laos. The ceremony of signature took place on July 23. Signed was the text of the Statement of Neutrality by the Royal Government of Laos and the texts of the Declaration and Protocol." Secretary of State, Dean Rusk and W. Averell Harriman signed for the United States of America." ⁴

The Geneva Protocols contained twenty articles of "feel good do's and don'ts," but, except for unspecified assistance from the Commission in case of an Article 6 violation (dealing with introduction of war materiel), no hard provisions existed to assure compliance by foreign parties. Certainly, the Lao army, then in a total state of disarray after withdrawal from Nam Tha, had proved incapable of any countrywide enforcement of the Protocols. And, the Protocols, as stated, largely ignored the issue of continuing and de

³ International Conference on the Settlement of the Laotian Question (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, October 1962) 9.

⁴ International Conference on the Settlement of the Laotian Question. 5, 24.

facto use of the eastern Lao border areas by the North Vietnamese Army to infiltrate men and materiel into South Vietnam. Still, a start had been made toward neutrality, which afforded opposing parties--especially the West--time and the opportunity to retrench, plan, and await the outcome of the agreements.

While the U.S. abided by the Accords to withdraw military advisors, the communists did not. The following account is skewed and only tells part of the story in regard to the North Vietnamese presence after the agreed departure date in October:

*"After the 1962 Geneva Agreement on Laos was signed, to implement our promises, our Central Committee and Central Military Party Committee ordered the withdrawal of all **volunteer** forces and the bulk of our military specialists back to Vietnam. Only 49 personnel, still designated as Military Specialist Group 959, were left behind to continue to provide military assistance to Laos. In accordance with requests from our Lao allies, during this period our specialists provided assistance only at the province level and higher. Each province retained two or three Vietnamese specialists, while the remainder of our specialists focused their efforts on assisting the three headquarters staff branches of the Lao General Military Committee and the Lao Army High Command..."*⁵

Overlooked in this fallacious history was the fact that many North Vietnamese Army personnel remained in Laos after the Geneva Accords departure date. Throughout the long war, the communists continued to deny their presence in the kingdom, and still do today. Furthermore, without substantive teeth, the plan would fail. Twelve more years of war would ensue, and I was prepared to continue to fight communism in the employ of Air America.

⁵ History of the Vietnamese Volunteer Groups and Vietnamese Military Specialists in Laos, 1945-1975: Group 100-Military Advisors Group 959, Military Specialists, 147. (Courtesy of Bob Sander.)

GOODBY SOUTHEAST ASIA...IF ONLY TEMPORARILY

On 18 July, I received orders that had been previously cut on 5 July transferring me to California within six days.

As my departure date approached, Mister Reed provided me with the Air America Washington, D.C. office address and phone number. I forwarded a letter to that office, expecting it would constitute the final communication I would ever have with the company:

Mr. Gilmer

Air Asia Company Limited

808 17th Street, N.W.

Washington 6, D.C.

Dear Mr. Gilmer:

I have been communicating with Mr. Rousselot and Mr. Traylor in Taipei over the last year, pending my release from the active service.

While in Udorn, I was asked if I could be terminated overseas. I received my orders late and expected to return to New River, North Carolina, but now find that I will be severed at Treasure Island, San Francisco.

I wrote to Mr. Rousselot through Mr. Reed at Kadena and informed him of this and asked him to forward my application forms and other papers to your office.

As I have mentioned, I have had the opportunity to view Udorn operations and have spoken extensively with the people there.

I assume the situation is rather unsettled at present, but I am still interested in work with the organization.

I should be home by the end of the month and would be available for an interview if necessary.

Thank you...

The Boeing 707 flight to the States afforded comparative luxury, as opposed to the vibrating turbo-prop Slick aircraft on which I originally had crossed the Pacific Ocean more than a year before. Another plus, I was not sick. However, an unforeseen incident in Hawaii nearly marred my journey home.

After arrival in Honolulu, officials informed passengers of a multi-hour layover before continuing the journey to California. Using this delay to advantage, I phoned a lady friend whom I had previously known in Jacksonville, North Carolina. Eager to link up, she indicated that she would meet me soon at the "airport."

Apparently confused as to my exact location, she drove to the wrong airport, and a considerable time lag ensued before she arrived. After I confirmed the flight's departure time, we drove off to renew our acquaintance. When we returned to the terminal, a stern looking, tight jawed female first lieutenant glared at me from the steps. Obviously not impressed with my largely innocent tryst, she scornfully informed me that I had just missed my flight to San Francisco. My jaw dropped. With a reaction bordering on panic, as a recent law expert, well versed in military UCMJ interpretation, and the harsh penalties for infractions, I visualized a messy court martial for a missing movement violation. *Why did this have to happen at this late date?* While I stewed, considered my options and dubious fate, "lady lieutenant" jabbered into a hand-held radio. Perversely, she seemed to thoroughly enjoy my discomfort, when she piped up and pointed to the tarmac, *"There's your aircraft lieutenant. It's waiting for you."* *Could this be true?* Yes, an aircraft sat on the ramp while a ground crew hastily pushed a boarding ladder toward the front cabin door.

Highly relieved, at an abbreviated high port, I limped toward the flight line. Entering the passenger compartment as modestly as possible with ninety sets of eyes focused on me, I flashed the flight

attendants a sheepish grin and plopped down on an open seat in the front row. Suddenly, the entire compartment erupted in a roar. All on board cheered me--at least that is what I perceived. The Captain even made a snide remark over the public address system about finally getting underway. I failed to recall ever experiencing such embarrassment, and must have flushed beet red from the blood rushing to my head.

GOLDEN GATE

We arrived at Travis Air Force Base on 25 July at 0130 hours.

With the bachelor officer's quarters (BOQ) at Treasure Island full as usual, the billeting officer authorized a standard twelve dollar per diem allotment, and sent me downtown to the Marines' Memorial Club on Sutter Street for a projected two week wait while the swamped personnel unit processed my military release. The unanticipated delay failed to upset me. San Francisco was a wonderful city, one I could enjoy at leisure, and best of all, at government expense.

Sandwiched between sightseeing excursions to Golden Gate Park and China Town, I scheduled an appointment to have my sore left knee examined at the Oakland Naval Hospital. Thus far, the injury was healing fairly well, but without frequent exercise the knee joint stiffened appreciably. I also desired a professional opinion for service file documentation in case of later complications. According to the testy orthopedic surgeon, miffed over my reference to Duke's sport doctor as being the country's foremost orthopedic surgeon, the X-ray scans revealed torn cartilage around the knee capsule. The Navy doctor recommended an operation to repair the damage. However, upon discovering that only a fifty percent success rate existed following such operations, and the recuperation and rehabilitation period required at least a month, I quietly declined his offer. Further influencing my decision to refuse a proffered operation was the welcome information that I had received the previous night, while

talking to my mother on the telephone. Air America personnel at the Washington, D.C. office had called my home indicating that they were interested in interviewing me as soon as possible. ¹

Slated for release on 1 August, I delayed my discharge until the third in order to earn the monthly flight skins. A first lieutenant's flight pay with longevity provided an additional 150 dollars per month. This tidy sum, combined with sixty days accrued leave—I had lost eleven days leave because of the unscheduled Thailand operation-, and eleven days' pay allocated for crossing the country, would provide sufficient walking around funds.

On Friday night, members of a local Naval reserve unit allowed me to accompany them as an additional crewmember to credit the required four hours. The pilots conducted a training flight in an uncomfortable P5M that wallowed around the sky. After two boring hours drilling through the dark, the pilots asked me to crawl through a long tunnel to the cockpit. Then they invited me to sit in the left seat, manipulate the huge yoke, and fly the lumbering beast for about 30 minutes. I had not flown a fixed wing in over two years, and never anything so large, but since all flying is basic, I found it fairly easy to maintain a correct airspeed and cruise altitude.

HOME PLATE

Soon after arriving at my parents' home in Plainfield, New Jersey, I called the Air America office in Washington D.C. I learned from the representative there that obtaining a civilian CAB commercial helicopter license was a firm job requirement. I thought it curious that a paramilitary job in Thailand and Laos required a Southeast Asian bush pilot to hold a United States commercial flying ticket. While searching for tangible information relating to the test, I drove

¹ Author Note: After more than fifty years, a MRI at the New Orleans Veterans Administration Hospital just prior to the devastating 2005 Katrina Hurricane revealed that torn cartilage still remained in the left knee. However, I am still somewhat mobile, and as I continue to age, the knee occasionally causes me problems.

to Hadley Airport in South Plainfield, New Jersey, where as one of the first long distance night delivery airmail fields built in 1925, private aircraft still flew. Dad had taken me there at least once when I was a tyke to see people paying for small airplane rides. ²

Discussion with the fixed base operator revealed no current CAB Part-91 Regulations available at the historic location. Therefore, out of frustration, I borrowed a two-year-old regulation publication from the Plainfield library a block or so from my old high school, and crammed for the exam. Studying dated material proved a gross error. Unknown to me, regulations pertaining to airport light signals had been radically altered, and I flunked that portion of the test. Making matters worse, the Newark Airport CAB examiner informed me that I would have to wait a full thirty days before being allowed to take another test.

Angry at myself over the stupid blunder during my first encounter with government bureaucracy, and armed with a current regulation manual, I returned home to phone Washington with the bad news. I pessimistically feared that my recent failure might discourage their interest in hiring me. However, my boo-boo and projected delay did not appear to concern those in the Washington office. Furthermore, the man on the phone indicated that he would forward United Airlines tickets to me in order to fly down to Washington for a face-to-face interview. I had not expected that reaction, and hung up much relieved. Actually, it was a blessing. Now I could spend more time with my parents, await delivery of my Okinawa household shipment, and rest my still bothersome knee.

FOGGY BOTTOM

As I walked along the wide searing sidewalks toward the Air America office, I noted that Washington was still as humid and steamy

² Since the land at Hadley was highly desirable real estate for commercial development, the airport was shut down in 1968, and became the site for a shopping center, industrial park, and hotel.

as I recalled on previous summer days.

My interview in the unpretentious office proved anti-climactic. Having recently been in Udorn, I was far more knowledgeable about the area and what was currently occurring there than my two interviewers. Instead, I provided information to the two friendly people, an older redheaded individual, who went by the nickname of "Red," and a younger fellow, who quizzed me regarding the operation.³ During the relatively one-sided discussion, I seemed to provide the majority of conversation. The only direct question relating to my previous qualifications curiously related to my sling load experience. I assured them that my participation in numerous ship-to-shore movements since April ensured that I had a high degree of sling load proficiency. However, the query caused me pause to wonder how much they really knew about the Lao operation, for Udorn pilots had informed me that the job entailed no sling load requirements.

I enjoyed the abbreviated interview and returned home with assurances that an employment offer would soon be forthcoming. Also, presupposing that I successfully passed the next commercial pilot test, they reiterated that the thirty-day delay presented no problem to my hiring process.

THE OFFER

Soon after my visit to Washington, I received the following employment offer and stipulations:

*AIR ASIA COMPANY LIMITED
808 17th Street, N.W.
Washington 6, D.C.
9 August 1962*

Ref: WG-62-3507

³ This man was the legendary personnel manager, General "Red" Dawson.

Mr. Harry R. Casterlin
1123 Dorsey Place
Plainfield, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Casterlin:

This letter constitutes an offer of employment in the position of Senior First Officer/Helicopter Pilot at a monthly salary of \$650. This offer is subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Your possessing the necessary qualifications in our opinion for the above position being offered.
2. Completion to the satisfaction of the Company of such personal history checks as it may deem necessary or desirable.
3. Your satisfactorily passing a physical examination and meeting the physical requirements as set forth by the Company for the position offered to you.

4. **Reporting for Duty**

(a.) You will report for duty at Air Asia Co. Ltd., Chung Shan Rd., 2nd Section, Taipei, Taiwan on or before 10 September 1962 or at such other place as you may subsequently be notified.

(b) As you will travel by air...the Company will pay for the transportation by surface shipment of up to 1,000 lbs...of your personal effects from your bona fide home...to your station of assignment.

5. **Salary**

Your salary will commence the day you start travel en route to the place stated in paragraph 4(a) above. Salary will be paid by U.S. dollar check once a month. *If found qualified and while actually assigned to duty as a Helicopter pilot-in-command in Southeast Asia, you will be up-graded to Reserve Captain at a monthly rate of \$1050.

6. **Term of Employment**

Subject to your satisfactory completion of the probationary period, as set forth in the Company's Personnel Manual, your employment will be for an indefinite period. If you fail to meet at any time any of the conditions set forth in paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 above, or if your services become excess to the needs of the Company, and your services are therefore terminated by the Company, you will be given two weeks advance notice, or pay in lieu of such notice, with return passage to Plainfield, New Jersey. If your services are terminated by the Company for any other reason you will be given return passage to Plainfield, New Jersey. If, however, you resign prior to completion of at least three years of service, the Company will not be responsible for the return passage for you...to Plainfield, New Jersey or for the repatriation of your personal property.

7. **Location**

Your initial assignment will be at Taipei, Taiwan, however, our operations in conjunction with those of our associated companies normally extend throughout the Far East and sometimes to other locations and you will be subject to assignment to work with an associated company and to assignment to any point of operations required by the company.

8. **Transportation for Dependents**

Transportation for your dependents will be provided by the Company upon certification by your Supervisor that you have successfully completed a probationary period of such duration as the Company deems necessary to evaluate your performance and suitability... only travel by Company authorized route will be provided or reimbursed and reimbursement will be only at authorized Company discount fares.

9. **Company Personnel Manual**

The terms, conditions, and benefits relating to employment with the Company are set forth in its Personnel manual. ...The following generalize some of the benefits of employment with the Company.

(a) **Annual Leave**: Two weeks annual leave with pay for each full year of service. Annual leave may be accrued up to a maximum of four weeks. Payment for unused annual leave will be made upon separation from employment for convenience of the Company (without prejudice), or upon separation for any reason provided such separation takes place after completion of a full year service.

(b) **Sick Leave**: Two weeks sick leave per year. Unused sick leave is carried forward to the following year and is cumulative up to a maximum of sixty (60) days, however, no payment is made for unused sick leave.

(c) **Home Leave**: After completion of three years service with the Company you will be entitled to ninety (90) days home leave with pay and transportation for you and your dependents to your bona fide home. Payment for accrued unused home leave will be made upon separation from employment in the event of termination of employment by the Company on a non-prejudice basis or upon termination for any reason after completion of two years continuous employment.

10. **Personal Conduct**

We expect that personal conduct of our employees will reflect no discredit upon themselves, upon their fellow employees, or the Company. Excessive or even considerable use of intoxicants will not be permitted.

This letter constitutes the only authorized offer of employment to you from us on behalf of the Company. We have attempted to cover the general terms of your employment and some of the benefits, which will result from your employment. As provided above, it is understood that

the Personnel Manual (as it presently exists and is amended from time to time) is the final authority on details. It is an employee's privilege and responsibility to familiarize himself with the Company's Personnel Manual and the benefits provided therein.

If this offer of employment is acceptable to you, will you please indicate your acceptance by signing the enclosed copy hereof, as provided below, and return that copy to us at the above letterhead address. This offer of employment shall remain in effect only for a period of thirty (30) days from the above date unless extended by written notice from me.

Very truly yours,

S/S

G.W. Gilmer

For George A. Doole, Jr.

There it was. After months of anticipation and waiting, I finally held a firm offer of employment from the organization for which I most desired to work. It appeared that my patience had paid off. However, two items contained in the employment offer concerned me: my ability to pass a physical with a stiff and still not completely functional knee joint, and the curious reference to a First Officer status. I thought everyone who flew helicopters with Air America was immediately rated a Captain. However, without much further thought, I signed and returned the Company's offer of employment.

READY TO LAUNCH

August passed quickly, with last minute visits to friends and family. A passport, visas, immunizations, a household shipment, and other necessary items were obtained to process for the transition. Fortunately, the military shipment arrived from Okinawa, including my old green footlocker. Dad had purchased this reinforced cardboard

trunk from a war surplus outlet for fifty cents after World War Two. Refurbished, the box, like a puppy, had followed me through Boy Scout camp, college, and military service. As an old friend, I considered it only fitting that the container accompany me to Southeast Asia. ⁴

Partially acclimated and Americanized again, the thirty-day period ended abruptly. On 7 September I retook the commercial helicopter exam in Newark. Knowledge of correct regulations made a huge difference, and I easily passed the test. Then I discovered that the Casterlin thumb rule that "nothing is ever easy," still prevailed. According to current CAB regulations, an inspector could transfer a current standard military instrument ticket directly to a civilian license without requiring a ground test or flight check. When asked to perform this courtesy, James Ruscoe, a puffed-up, self-important inspector, blustered and bristled, stating that I required 5,000 hours and a green instrument card for this addition. Obviously unfamiliar with his own federal regulations, I invited the obnoxious individual to check **HIS** government's rules. He did, and I left the Newark office with a temporary airman certificate and a civilian instrument rating.

Elated, I rushed home and phoned the Washington office. The secretary who answered indicated that she would dispatch the proper documents for travel ASAP. Later that afternoon, I shipped my trunk overseas using the local Railway Express Agency.

Along with trip tickets, and the new passport with proper visas, a letter of introduction soon arrived.

CIVIL AIR TRANSPORT

808 17th Street, N.W.

Washington 6, D.C.

Telephone ME 8-2161

10 September 1962

⁴ Author Note: The footlocker would later accompany the family to Iran and now resides in the workshop of an acquaintance.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to certify that Harry R. Casterlin is an employee of Civil Air Transport traveling to our main office in Taipei.

Tickets for the portion Tokyo-Taipei will be awaiting the employee upon his arrival in Tokyo. Civil Air Transport assumes responsibility for the onward transportation of the passenger.

G.W. Gilmer

Assistant to Managing Director

Even though I had some idea, I did give brief thought to Air America's curious corporate structure. However, I was not unduly concerned. It was easy for one to become confused over the numerous names and titles the shadowy Company employed in its correspondence. Although signing a contract for employment with Air Asia Company Limited, I believed that I would work for a company named Air America Inc. However, I possessed a letter stating that I was an employee of Civil Air Transport. Perhaps it was merely bookkeeping jargon, or Company officials wanted it that way to obfuscate the organization and true nature of the work, but *whom was I really working for, and where?* Confusing, yes indeed. In addition, I wondered what other conundrums lay ahead for me, to comprise the rest of this lengthy anthology to be related in additional books describing the Author's experiences during the protracted Lao war; one that covered nearly the next twelve years, and encompassed a strange conflict like no other country or people in the world had ever seen... ©

Edits, 05/01/16, 09/04/18, 03/01/19, 05/16/19, 07/31/19, PW 08/04/19, 12/06/19, 12/22/19, 12/26/20, 04/30/21, 07/02/21 02/25/22, 06/30/22.

EPILOGUE

I did not maintain contact with squadron mates for many years. My first attempt occurred in 1966 when I drove my wife and child to Quantico in the new Ford Mustang. I had heard that our Skipper Fred "Bud" Steele was stationed there, but upon arrival learned that he had moved on two years previously. I then inquired about Sergeant Steigerwald, my former drill instructor during T&T Regiment training in 1957. He had passed.

Many others mentioned in the book have passed. Charlie Weitz, Frank McLenon Connie Barsky, Curt "Smoke" Mason, Charlie McClennon, Ralph Yakushi, and Bill Long are a few. Al Dean was killed in a helicopter crash during the Vietnam War.

A special thanks to former squadron mates Dale Hinton and Ben Middleton who provided me with numerous photos. Hinton was also forthcoming with letters home and narrative.

CJ Abadie has moved from Tickfaw, Louisiana to live on a houseboat in Alabama. Ab provided photos and narrative for this and other books.

Wayne Knight, now retired, still lives in Australia.

Although some of the Philippine bases have reverted to government control, there is still a U.S. presence in the country.

The Mindoro tribe with short vestigial tails has been noted on the internet. One of our Air America Flight Mechanics was from the northern part of the island. He had heard stories about the tribe, but never saw them. I told a few Filipinos the tail story, but have stopped, as my wife discourages this.

Hong Kong has reverted to the control of the mainland. Problems with democracy exist today.

Okinawa has reverted to the Japanese, but U.S. military bases

still dot the island.

The Thais never looked back and Bangkok has continued to modernize and has changed appreciably. A monorail train serves much of the city. This form of transportation was well received by the local people and tends to moderate the smog created by numerous taxis, motorcycles, and trucks that ply the streets. Authentic Thai food is still tasty and outstanding.

Udorn has changed so much since the bridge was built across the Mekong to Laos, that it is largely unrecognizable as a hub of economic activity.

As a tribute to aircraft engineering, attention to maintenance procedures, and sheer luck, the partial engine failure east of Udorn in 1962 was the only one the Author experienced during his thirty-five-year flying career that encompassed 19,000 flight hours.

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GLOSSARY

AAA	Anti-Aircraft Artillery.
Air America	A paramilitary organization performing work for USG agencies in Laos and Southeast Asia.
AAM	Air America.
A/C	Aircraft.
AFB	Air Force Base.
A-frame	A metal device used in the field to help mechanics change H-34 engines and main rotor blade transmissions
Air Asia	Maintenance division of the AAM complex on Taiwan.
AKA	That is to say.
A4D	Marine Corps jet bomber.
ASAP	As-soon-as-possible.
ASE	Automatic stabilization equipment installed in the HUS-1 helicopter to relieve pilot fatigue.
AT6	Navy trainer (SNJ) converted to an attack aircraft.
ATC	Air Traffic Control.
AWOL	Away without leave.
Battle PLAN A	Highest priority for war.
BOQ	Bachelor officer quarters.
B-26	Three-place, mid-wing, twin engine, all Metal monoplane, light bombardment A/C fitted with tricycle landing gear.
CAB	Civilian Aviation Board that preceded the FAA.
CAT	Civil Air Transport.
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency.
CINCPAC	Naval Commander in Chief Pacific.
CONUS	Continental United States.
Crew Chief	Military term for a person in charge of well-being of an aircraft. Known as a Flight Mechanic with Air America.
Crotch	Term used by Marines to describe their Service in the Corps.
C-124	Large 4 engine propeller transport plane.
C-130	Four engine, high wing transport plane.
Don Muang	International airport located north of Bangkok
Echo Mike	Call letters for HMR (HMM)-261 squadron Helicopters.

F-100	Air Force jet bomber.
Feet Wet	Navy/Marine term to indicate departing land. Reverse, feet dry was used for transition to land.
Five Baht Alley	Seedy area in Udorn where sex could be reputedly obtained for 25 cents.
Field Expedient	Adjustments by mechanics to perform field repairs.
Flap	Trouble requiring Marine presence.
FMF	Fleet Marine Force. Unit transported by Navy ships to areas of contention.
GCA	Ground control approach radar.
GCI	Ground control intercept radar.
Geneva Accords	1954 agreements leading to French withdrawal from Indochina.
GI	Term used when referring to U.S. soldiers And airmen during World War Two.
GP	General purpose tent.
Gray Ghost	1940 Ford based on Okinawa.
Grunt	Term used for an infantry Marine.
GV-1	Marine designation for the C-130 A/C.
Hiacko	Japanese for rapid.
High Port	Rapid advance.
H&MS	Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron.
H-34	Military designation for the four bladed Sikorsky S-58. Also Marine HUS.
HMM	Medium Helicopter Squadron.
HMR	Helicopter Medium Rotorcraft. Designation changed to HMM in 1961.
HOK	Kaman-small helicopter with two counter-rotating blades. Used for reconnaissance.
H2P	Second in command in the cockpit.
HR2S	Marine designation of the Sikorsky S-55 helicopter. Also H-19.
HSS-1	Navy version of the Marine HUS-1.
HUK	Communist insurgents living on Luzon.
HUS-1	Helicopter Utility Sikorsky (S-58).
H-21	Tandem rotor banana shaped helicopter called the HUP in the Navy.
IFF	Identification Friend or Foe code.
ITO	Instrument take-off.
JSC	Joint Chiefs of Staff.
JFK	John Fitzgerald Kennedy.
Jug	Slang for an engine cylinder.
JUSMAG	Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group.

Stationed in Bangkok, the unit was responsible for logistics.

Ladder Navy terminology for stair.

Lao Panhandle Area east of Savannakhet and adjacent to the North Vietnamese border that contained the Ho Chi Minh Trail system.

LOC Lines of Communication.

LPH Landing Platform Helicopter. A small aircraft carrier for a Marine squadron and contingent of Marines.

MABS Marine Air Base Squadron. Provided additional maintenance services that a normal squadron could not.

MAG Marine Air Group.

Manifold Pressure Measure of vacuum pressure between the throttle and cylinders.

MATCU Marine Air Traffic Unit.

MATS Military Air Transport Squadron.

MAW Marine Air Wing.

MEU Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Monsoon Seasonal winds bringing rain to SEA during April to October.

Morest Similar to PSP for rough area landing, but more advanced. The box type runway incorporated an arrested landing provision.

Murphy A mythical character who purportedly delivered on the principle that what can go wrong will go wrong.

Mustang Enlisted man who advanced through the ranks.

NAS Naval Air Station.

NATOPS Naval Air Training Operations policy.

NAVCAD Naval Air cadet undergoing flight and officer training at Pensacola.

NDB Non Directional Beacon used for navigation and landing approaches.

NSA National Security Agency.

NSC National Security Council.

NVA North Vietnamese Army, or PAVN-Peoples' Army of Vietnam and originally called the Vietminh.

NTA Northern Training Area in Okinawa.

OMNI VF omnidirectional range; also VOR.

OPLAN Operations Plan.

OSS	World War Two Office of Strategic Services intelligence and action agency from 1942 to 1945. Forerunner to the CIA,
PI	Philippine Islands.
PIC	Pilot in Command.
POL	Petroleum, Oil, Lubricants.
Pri-Fly	A carrier's Primary Flight Department responsible for take-off and landings.
PL	Pathet Lao. The military arm of the communist faction in Laos.
PROVMAG	Provisional Marine Air Group.
PX	Post Exchange for military personnel to purchase sundries.
RAL	Rough area landing.
RB-47	Six engine plane used for high altitude reconnaissance
RLA	Royal Lao Army.
RLG	Royal Lao Government.
RTA	Royal Thai Army.
RTAF	Royal Thai Air Force.
RON	Remain Overnight.
RPM	Revolutions per Minute.
R&R	Rest and recuperation.
S-1	Squadron Administration Department.
S-2	Squadron Intelligence Department.
SAR	Search and Rescue.
Sarong	Tube type skirt worn by many Southeast Asian women.
Seabee	Naval Mobile Construction Battalion. responsible for building airfields.
SEA	Southeast Asia.
SEATO	Southeast Asian Treaty Organization.
Singa Beer	A very strong Thai beer.
SLF	Special Landing Force (afloat).
Smoke Eaters	Slang for military fire fighters.
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate.
Sucked	Term used to describe falling behind while flying formation.
Suzie Wong	Character portrayed in a 1960 movie based in Hong Kong.
S-55	Sikorsky three bladed helicopter; preceded the S58 (HUS).
TBO	Time before overhaul.
TDY	Temporary additional duty.
The Rock	Okinawa.

TO Table of organization.
UCMJ Universal Code of Military Justice.
U-2 Lockheed single engine jet plane used for
high altitude reconnaissance.
USG United States Government.
USMC United States Marine Corps.
VD Venereal disease.
Vertical Envelopment USMC concept to deliver troops by
helicopter into a war zone.
Ville Village, town, or city.
VIP Very Important Person.
VMO Marine squadron observation unit.
VPFO Vice President of Flight Operations.

