

Athenaeum Society

February 6, 2020

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Hey, we started a whole new week. It's Monday.

*(Why Vets don't talk about Military Experiences)*

Good evening Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, my fellow presenter, and Athenaeum members. During our November meeting, after Win Radford's excellent paper, there was a short discussion about Veterans not discussing things that happened to them during their Military Service. I would like to share, with this august group, some events I experienced. My experiences are not necessarily unique. I have been fortunate in that I have flown in the Air Force, sailed with the Navy, and walked/flown with the Army. I have driven an M-1 tank, stood on the flight deck during carrier operations, rappelled with Army dudes, and gone places a country boy from Kentucky never dreamed of growing up.

The best place to start is probably at the beginning. I was born in Owenton. (*Slide 2, Map of Kentucky*) That is a small town in the Golden Triangle of Kentucky. My childhood was growing up on a racehorse and crop farm in northern Fayette County. My family did not take vacations. The farthest I had ever been from home as a kid was 68 miles to Cincinnati. But since this paper is about military service, I'll skip ahead to save some time. My first operational duty station after flight school, RTU (Replacement Training Unit), and various other training courses was on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. (*Slide 3, UP of Michigan*) One story along the way from Survival School, we were "camping" in the mountains of Eastern Washington State. (*Slide 4, Survival School snow*) Our last night in the woods was a cold, rainy March night. The morning brought a light sleet and blistering 35-degree temperature as we were split into two-man teams. (*Slide 5, Survival School guns*) Each team was given a paper map of the area and a rendezvous time at a specific location approximately 10 miles away. I should note, we had a group of Seal trainees going through the Air Force course at the same time as a part of their training. The instructors were "hunting" for the students, so our purpose was to evade our way to the rendezvous (RZ) point. On our approach, approximately 1000 yards from the RZ point, I was crossing a stream when I stepped on something soft in the water. And his eyes opened as I realized I had stepped on a man hiding in the stream, one of the Seal trainees. Convinced me right there that these were the guys I wanted coming to get me if I ever got shot down. The irony was I would meet Seal teams again 15 years later, while I was working with some operators, in Central and South America. Let me clearly state, I'm not a snake eater, never been a snake eater, but I have worked with several along the way.

Before I get ahead of myself, let's back up to my first operational duty station. I was part of the Cold War when it was red hot, flying B-52s and "sitting" alert. (*Slide 6, B-52*) Alert duty meant living near the airplane for 7 days at a time, the cycle was 7 days on alert, 14 days off alert during which we did all of our flight training. One break from alert time was a deployment to some real garden spots and other times to some very nice places. The garden spots you won't find listed on any triple A brochure. Our deployments lasted between a few days and a few months. Sometimes we had some notice, other times we grabbed the bags (that were always packed) on the way out of the house and disappeared for an indeterminate amount of time. In the days before cell phones, goodbye at the door meant goodbye until I return. Hopefully, we would

have access to a phone line a couple of times during the trip. If that phone line was a commercial line it would cost \$3-\$5 per minute to call home. On one deployment we were only flying night sorties every night. We would usually take off about 10 pm and land just after sunrise. The flying was fine, but the most memorable part of the trip was returning each morning to a meal of spam and eggs. If you woke up in time for lunch, since it would be about 100 degrees in our sleeping quarters, it would be spam and potatoes. If you waited until supper then it would be spam, potatoes, and green beans. EVERY DAY. I do not eat Spam.

But back to living at the alert facility. Life on alert meant responding to “alerts” 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. (*Slide 7, Running out*) A klaxon would sound without notice, we would run to the airplanes, start engines and prepare to launch on predetermined missions. (*Slide 8, Running to plane*) Most of the time that was as far as we would go but sometimes there was more.

We certified and briefed these predetermined missions to our Wing commander. (*Slide 9, B-52 weapons*) We did this briefing one crew at a time, with the Commander and his staff asking us questions to ensure we knew what we were doing. I remember one particular mission brief as a young Lieutenant. I described the target as a hydroelectric generation plant at the base of a large dam. (Much like the one you can see at the northern end of Lake Barkley.) I then told the Wing Commander that after hitting the dam we would fly our circuitous flight path around some air defenses as fast as we could and hope to get to our next target before the water from the dam we just destroyed got there and wiped out the next target. That got a real reaction out of some people on the Wing Staff, not to mention the Colonel taking the briefing. Seemed no one had noticed the connection between these two targets, or the simple physics involved in releasing that much water.

Living on alert meant being surrounded by 60 or so primarily type A personalities. Sometimes there would be a lull in the activities which would create opportunities. One of these opportunities was to describe our alert living facility. Turns out it was rather easy to describe. (*Slide 10, Alert Entry*) As a matter of fact, there was a for sale ad in the Chicago Tribune newspaper one weekend. It described a partially underground facility with 35 bedrooms, (*Slide 11, Bedroom*) a dining hall serving 100 meals 3 times a day. Two TV lounge areas seating approximately 30 each. Four small training/conference rooms. (*Slide 12, Training Room*) One conference room, seating for 80, that also functioned as a movie theater. 24-hour security with parking for 12 jets and immediate access to a 12,000 x 300-foot runway. (*Slide 13, Apron*) Serious inquiries only to Don Rodriguez. (Colonel Don Rodriguez, Our Wing Director of Operations) He got several phone calls at his home number, listed in the ad.

One guy on alert in Michigan decided he would like to swim during the winter. He brought a piece of plywood to the alert facility and used it to block the door to the shower room exit. Stuffed a rag in the floor drain and turned on all four shower heads. It took a while but before long he had several feet of water in his little swimming pool. He was enjoying himself and regaling in the novelty when the klaxon sounded. Do you know how much water pressure 5 or

so feet of water places on a piece of plywood set up against a shower room opening? It places a similar pressure on the rag in the floor drain. We had a couple of engineers calculate it after the fact but I'm not sure how accurate they were. I do know he was several minutes late getting to his plane that evening (running naked across the tarmac) which caused quite a stir amongst the bosses. The flooded floor and hallway were another cause for grief. It seems that if you kick it enough times the plywood will finally break.

My best alert story comes from a simple logistical event. You can imagine the high-quality mattresses we were given; bought on a government contract from the lowest bidder. The staff were doing the once each decade replacement by storing the extra mattresses in the evacuation tunnels while they were replacing the old with the new. (*Slide 14, Tunnels*) One guy carved out the stuffing so he could lay down on the box springs and the carved-out mattress could be placed over him. The bed was then made thus appearing as normal. His "friend" comes downstairs and goes to bed. The mattress is lumpy, but no different than normal. After an appropriate amount of time, to allow his "friend" to drift off to sleep, the guy in the mattress pokes his arms and legs out of mattress, wraps them around the "friend", and makes a loud roar. This caused his "friend" to wake up suddenly with a blood curdling scream that would have awakened most of the people in the alert facility except they were already standing in the hallway. I heard a string of profanities linked together and so prolonged that it would be impossible to recite them. All while surrounded by gut wrenching laughter with tears streaming down more than one face.

Thus, was life on Alert. Hijinks surrounded by an explosively serious business. (*Slide 15, SPs*) One mistake could get you court martialled or certainly end any hope of a career or long life. (*Slide 16, Warning*) The use of Deadly Force was authorized without warning.

The men I flew with were quite the eclectic collection of personalities. My first operational partner was Major Eric Foged, nicknamed the "Fog Man". A reputation he earned by eating peanut butter, salami, and banana sandwiches. That combination caused "Fog Man" to produce a certain "air" around him and in an enclosed cockpit resulted in the use of 100% oxygen by the rest of the crew.

While the Upper Peninsula could be very cold and it snowed a lot (average 245 inches each year) it was a flight across the Pacific Ocean, 17 hours takeoff to land, that was undoubtedly the coldest I've ever been. The heater failed about 3 hours after takeoff from a Pacific Island. It gets really cold at 40,000 feet. We had a small 5-inch square heater that we could plug in to heat food. That was our sole source of heat for approximately 14 hours. Imagine warming one hand at a time by sticking it in the oven and you get the idea. We tried to fix the heater by following the instructions in the technical manual. The instructions read, "Strike the valve with a soft, firm instrument such as a flight boot." Kicked it, kicked it, and kicked it to no avail.

My longest flights were 34 hours takeoff to land in December 1980 and January 1981. You can sleep in an ejection seat (remember the seat was built by the lowest bidder), but you don't get

much rest. Time will pass but you don't feel any better when you wake up. For these long missions we would leave Guam, fly west into the Indian Ocean, and returned to Guam. We air refueled 5 times. Our mission was to find the Russian fleet in the Indian Ocean and "buzz" them. (*Slide 17, Map Indian Ocean*) After getting their attention, we would fly away from the Russian fleet to troll the south coast of Iran. (The National Interest, March 30, 2019, *Death Wish: These Madmen Flew B52 Bombers at Wave-Top Heights* by War is Boring) We would draw Iran's electronic attention to note their locations. In mid-January 1981 we were flying similar missions but this time our ordinance load was quite different. After 444 days of captivity the Iranians freed the Americans from the embassy in Tehran. President Carter's administration transferred \$7.98 billion dollars of gold to Tehran the morning the hostages were to be released. But the hostages weren't released until after noon, when President Reagan was sworn in.

Deployments were a normal part of life, but the comforts of home were often left behind. During my first deployment to Guam we decided to have a barbeque on Tarague Beach. The deployed crews plus our maintenance troops totaled about 100. Several grills were "borrowed" from around the base and transported to the beach. (*Picture John Belushi in Animal House outside Dean Wormer's building when they took the horse into his office.*) Several of the grills had to be liberated from their chains in order to be free to travel to the beach. This was accomplished under the cover of darkness since asking during the daylight hours resulted in a consistent NO from everyone we asked. But to grill enough chicken for 100 people requires more than a 24-inch grill. Don't be alarmed, the grills returned to their imprisoned status the next day.

We left Guam and redeployed to Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia. (*Slide 18, Map Australia*) Remember, Australia was founded as a British penal colony. Aussies refer to everyone from the US as Yanks. We were out traveling around on a Sunday afternoon when we spotted a large group watching a sporting event. The Aussies living in the Northern Territory are not particularly loyal to the British. Seems that in World War II the British pulled out of Northern Australia when the Japanese invasion appeared likely. Conversely, the Americans reinforced Northern Australia to repel the invasion. The residents still remembered that 35 years later. Once we were recognized as Americans, we talk funny, the crowd made room for us in the stands. Spent the afternoon watching Cricket and consuming an adult grain-based beverage. Aussies can drink LARGE amounts of beer, drink it like water. Still don't know how to play Cricket. At this game is also where I learned that the giant dirt spires in the Outback, roughly 30-40 feet tall, were actually ant hills. (*Slide 19, Ant Hill*) Impressive ant hills that you can see from the air. (*Slide 20, Ant Hill 2*)

Later, to shorten our flights, we started flying off Diego Garcia, a British atoll in the Indian Ocean. (*Slide 21, Map Diego Garcia*) In those early days while Diego was being developed, recreation was in short supply. One thing you could do was go swimming. We went down to the beach. There was a sign that stated, "Before swimming call this number". We did. The guy on the phone said ok, I'll be there in about 10 minutes. About 10 minutes later this Navy guy in

a little motorboat comes around the point. He picks up his bull horn and says, “Y’all want to swim”. He proceeds to throw a couple of grenades in the water. “All clear”. Every 10-15 minutes he would chase us out of the water and throw in a couple more grenades. I tried to remember if sharks could swim in knee high water. never got my swim trunks wet!

During another deployment I sailed with the Navy aboard the USS Mt. Whitney. We were part of the Roosevelt battle group. Luxurious accommodations compared to some of the Navy’s vessels. As a field grade officer, I had my own bunk and only one roommate. The room was just big enough to have a bunk bed and one closet. You could get dressed in the room, just not at the same time. We were running an Air Operations Center. My duty was “the guy in the chair.” We were managing approximately 2300 sorties per day. I would sit in the chair while the Navy guys used a grease pencil to note where the packages (groups of planes) were in their mission. (Takeoff, air refueling, enroute, target area, post target, return, landed) Delays, maintenance problems, air aborts, battle damage were all considerations to moving packages before takeoff or while in flight. The “guy in the chair” balanced all those inputs to keep the missions covered. Rerouting refueling and target packages as the day or night progressed to ensure the highest priorities were accomplished. Each shift was 12 hours. Once I sat in the chair there was a young mess attendant that put coffee, sandwiches, or other snacks in my hand. The work was so intense and continued at such a constant pace that 12 hours would pass without getting up from the chair. My replacement would show up and I would realize I need to GO. After each shift I would go up on deck just to make sure the world was still there. One night there was a total cloud cover. It was so dark I could not tell where the ocean started, and the sky ended. If not for the noise of the ocean passing by, I couldn’t tell up from down.

After moving to Fort Campbell in 1992 and while working with the 101<sup>st</sup> I was part of a training exercise in Korea. Most of the unit deployed together but I traveled with an Army civil engineer several days later. After landing at the airport in Seoul, we took a bus to join the division. Along the way this civil engineer kept pointing at things and saying, “That’s not quite right.” After the third time I asked him what he was talking about. He explained and then I noticed. For example, each streetlight along the highway had a concrete base. Some of the bases had 4 square corners, some were round, some had a couple of corners with the rest round, and so on. This theme was consistent throughout my time in Korea. Everything was off by a little bit. No two steps in the country were the same rise and run. You name it, no two were the same unless by accident. The land of not quite right.

Another thing I noticed in Korea; traffic lanes are suggestions. (*Slide 22, Traffic Jam*) Six marked lanes in one direction meant that about 8 or 9 cars could flow along side by side. The motorcycles were fascinating to watch. I saw one guy transporting a full-sized refrigerator on the back of a motorcycle. He was weaving his way in and out of traffic.

Many of you know General Jack Keene. (*Slide 23, Jack Keene*) He was the commander of the 101<sup>st</sup> during this trip. I remember teaching General Keene to play Crud while we were in Korea.

Crud is an aviator's game played on a billiard's table. It involves only two balls, one object ball and one striker ball. Two teams of three alternate shots with the striker ball to keep the object ball moving and out of all the pockets. If the object ball goes in a pocket, comes to a stop, or leaves the table then the opponent scores one point. Blocking is allowed to keep the opponents from being able to get into position to take the next shot. This is a bar game and can get very physical. It was hilarious watching the Army staff guys treat General Keene like a marshmallow that could not be touched. I saw General Keene several years later and he fondly remembered his night playing Crud with the Air Force.

During this trip to Korea it rained, a lot. It rained over 45 inches in 9 days. Korea is about 6 inches of dirt over a big pile of rock. Trees were falling over, roots and all. Walking around was a significant risk. If you heard that sound, like a tree pulling up by the roots, you had to quickly determine which way to run because a tree was coming down.

This was a fun paper to write as it took me down memory lane. These are but a few of my stories with most coming from the early part of my career.

These are the stories we tell. Maybe not what you wanted to hear, but those stories can be summarized in a couple of scenes from movies you might have seen.

Video clip (*Slide 24*) of Saving Private Ryan "Ryan at the Cemetery"

*On the bridge, as Captain Miller is dying, he implores Private Ryan to "earn" the sacrifice made by most of Captain Miller's squad as they were killed during the search for Private Ryan. Cut to a new scene, Ryan, now a grandfather traveling with his family, visits the grave of Captain Miller in Europe. He turns to his wife and asks her if "he has lived a good life, if he is a good man."*

Video clip (*Slide 25*) of Blackhawk Down "Hoot's Speech"

*One of the Delta Force guys, Hoot, is eating and reloading his ammunition. Sgt Eversman walks up and asks Hoot if he is going back in. Both men are still dirty and sweaty from the rescue mission just completed. Hoot says, "Still a man out there." The only guy left out there was Michael Durant, from the 160<sup>th</sup> SOAR. Hoot says, "When I go home, people ask me, hey Hoot, why do you do it man, why, some kind of a war junky. I won't say a damn word, why, they won't understand. Won't understand why we do it. They won't understand it's about the men next to you. That's it. That's all it is." Then as Hoot walks away he looks back at Eversman and says, "Hey, we started a whole new week. It's Monday."*

We remember the good times because most people won't understand the other times. Those reminders occur often enough. It's a job that must be done and I hope you never have to do it. So, when you encounter guys who don't share stories just remember what Hoot said, "Hey, we started a whole new week. It's Monday."