

CHAPTER XV - FLEET PHOTO LAB

When I checked in to Light Photo Squadron Sixty Three, I was assigned to the Fleet Photo Lab. The Fleet Photo Lab at Miramar existed for the sole purpose of training Photo Pilots and enlisted support personnel for deployment to the Western Pacific. Each aircraft carrier carried a Combat Air Wing plus a detachment of three photo planes to provide necessary reconnaissance. Each detachment usually consisted of four pilots, one Air Intelligence Officer and 30 enlisted men. My new assignment was to train the younger Photo Intelligence men to make sure they were ready for their next deployment and to evaluate the photography taken by the young Aviators training to be Photo Pilots.

THE ASSIGNMENT BOARD

A large assignment board hung on the training office wall. This assignment board listed all of the Attack Carriers assigned to the Pacific fleet and the nickname of the Photo detachment that was serving on or was scheduled for deployment aboard that carrier. It also listed the pilots, the Air Intelligence Officer and the Photo Intelligence man that was assigned to each detachment. I noticed that all the spaces had been filled in except for one. The USS Constellation was scheduled to steam from Norfolk, Virginia to San Diego, California in a couple of months and none of the Photographic Intelligencemen had volunteered for that detachment. When I asked why this was, I was told that Lieutenant Dippold had been assigned as the Intelligence Officer and no one could stand the man. I have always thought of myself as an easy going likable person and I sincerely believed that I could get along with anyone. This cruise had the makings of a once in a lifetime experience so I wrote my name along side of Mr. Dippold's on the assignment board.

USS CONSTELLATION (CVA-64)

Since the USS Constellation was too large to go through the Panama Canal, she would have to sail around "the horn." Her scheduled ports of call were Mayport, Florida, Trinidad, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Valparaiso, Chile, Panama City, Panama, Acapulco, Mexico, and finally San Diego, California. It would satisfy the requirement that I make at least one cruise and it would give me a chance to visit some of South America.

Mayport was a "Hi and Bye" port for the "Connie." We weren't there long enough to even bother getting off of the ship. Trinidad was well worth visiting however. When I was a student at Ball High School in Galveston I spent a lot of time sketching as part of my art class. My favorite location for sketching was the city park next to the school. The palm trees, the beautiful oleanders and even the trash cans made excellent subjects for my sketch pad. I also liked it because it gave me a chance to sneak a smoke, away from school. One of the subjects that I tried sketching was a stranded merchant seaman named Andrew was a native of Trinidad. Every morning Andrew would go to the seaman's hall hoping for a berth on a ship leaving Galveston. It was my understanding that because he was a foreigner, his "papers" wouldn't allow him to work at anything except as a merchant seaman. He disappeared after about a week. I assumed that he finally caught a ship. During our week together, we spent a lot of time visiting and just hanging out at the park. He told me a lot about his home in Trinidad.

WE VISIT TRINADAD

Just after the Constellation anchored off Trinidad, I was lucky enough to catch the first liberty launch going ashore. The ship's photographer had been assigned a photo shoot in Trinidad, and I asked him if I could come along as his assistant. We both knew that he didn't really need an assistant, but this ruse was effective in gaining me a seat on the first liberty launch. Upon my arrival, the first thing I found worthy of a second look was a small waterfront bar. Since only a handful of sailors had made it ashore by then, I was the only customer there. My first discovery was that American dollars were as good as gold and the price of a beer was only one BIWI dollar. BIWI was short for British West Indies and was pronounced bee wee. The exchange rate was six to one so the actual cost of my beer was around 17 cents American. I handed the barkeep an American dollar bill and he gave me five BIWI dollars in change. I returned to this same bar about four hours later and found that the price for a beer was now one American dollar instead of one BIWI dollar. I politely protested the price increase to the bar tender, so he only charged me one BIWI dollar for each bottle of beer for the remainder of our in port period.

THE STEEL DRUM BAND

My most memorable discovery in Trinidad was the steel drum band. During WWII, the Americans used Trinidad as a staging point for ferrying airplanes from the United States to England. Fuel was shipped to Trinidad in 55 gallon steel drums. The Trinidadians discovered that banging on one of these drums would produce a nice sounding musical note. They also found that by cutting holes in the drums, they could change one note into a new one. With a lot of cutting and experimentation, they transformed a few old fuel drums into a marvelous musical instrument capable of producing fantastic music. I was told that steel bands were popular all over the Island, and that they had annual competitions to determine the best. This year's competition was somewhat special because Trinidad and Tobago had just been granted their independence from Great Britain. Trinidad-Tobago was now a sovereign nation. The winner of the competition honored the USS Constellation with a command concert. I tried to capture their music on my tape recorder, but what I recorded was simply awful compared to the live performance. I even bought an album of their music, but this too was found wanting. If you ever have a chance to attend one of these concerts, please do. You won't regret it.

CROSSING THE EQUATOR

A few days after we left Trinidad, the USS Constellation crossed the equator for the first time. The "Connie" along with most of the men riding her were officially "Pollywogs." Crossing the equator was the major requirement for changing a person or ship from "Pollywog" to that of "Shellback." There were other requirements of course. Each and every slimy Pollywog had to appear before King Neptune's Royal Court and be tried for his multitude of short comings. Before trial, each slimy Pollywog had to be groomed by the Royal Barber. The path to the Royal Barbers chair was at the end of a torturous shillelagh line with Royal Shellbacks swatting you with their belts as you ran the gauntlet between them. A shillelagh is actually a fancy word for stick, but the Royal Judicial Committee allowed for the substitution of belts because of an acute shortage of suitable sticks. I kicked up my heels extra high as I ran the gauntlet to the Royal Barbers chair. As a result of my high stepping, almost all of the swats aimed at my tender backside landed on the thick soles of my flight deck shoes instead.

Surviving the gauntlet, I sat myself down in the Royal Barbers chair. The barber's assistant declared that my hairdo was definitely unfixable. The Royal Barber responded by shaving a three inch strip from the top of my forehead to the back of my neck. He then declared to his assistant that he had fixed it just fine. The assistant responded by sticking a mirror in my face and asked how I liked it. I responded with, "That's nice, but I think it would look better if he took some off the side?" He accommodated me and once again asked me how I liked it. I replied, "That's even better, now would you please take some off of the other side?" By now he was sensing that I was having more fun than he was. He yelled at me to, "Get the hell out of here," He then turned to the next Pollywog and yelled "Next."

After my appointment with the Royal Barber, I was required to kiss the Royal Baby's belly. They had designated the fattest Shellback on the ship as the Royal Baby. Dreading the obvious, I approached the Royal Baby cautiously, hoping to get away with giving his belly a small peck or better yet, escape with a near miss. That is what I had in mind at least. A near miss would be perfect from my point of view. Unfortunately for me the Royal Baby would have none of it. He grabbed me by the back of my head and pulled my face into his lard laden blubbery belly with all of his might, laughing his ass off.

Next I had to crawl through the ships slop chute. Exiting the slop chute I had to continue my crawl up to the throne of the mighty King Neptune himself. The Great and All Powerful King of the Deep declared me guilty of all the charges made against me and then some. He then ordered that I "walk the plank" in atonement for all my sins. The ship had bought a large above ground swimming pool and a portable diving board, to serve as "the plank," just for this purpose.

Now that I had "walked the plank," I had become an official Shellback. As a proud and mighty Shellback, I went to my quarters so that I could clean up. Noticing how stupid I looked with my Royal haircut, I finished cleaning up by shaving the remainder of my head. By the time we arrived in San Diego, my hair was beginning to look halfway decent once again.

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

Our next port of call was Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The powers-to-be arranged for our Air Group to put on an air show for the Brazilians one day out of port. The basic mission for the Connie was a simple one, as I understood it. We were to travel from Norfolk to San Diego and act as goodwill ambassadors along the way. Unspoken outside of closed doors, we had a secondary mission. We were provided a list of dams, bridges, radio stations, and other military targets that various government intelligence agencies wanted aerial photographs taken of. Our job, as a photographic reconnaissance unit, was to take as many of these pictures as possible without violating another countries air space. This covert task was managed by offering as many countries as possible the gift of an exciting air show. Our non photo aircraft would put on an air show while the photo planes pretending to support the air show would accidentally get lost and wander into a position where they could snap pictures of the desired targets. During the cruise we managed to stay very busy making several agencies very happy.

Our ship pulled into Rio de Janeiro the morning after Marilyn Monroe's tragic death. Her death was a world wide news event, but somehow none of it reached us on the Constellation. As we went ashore we were swamped by Brazilians wanting the details of her death. Their curiosity in her passing was only a small sampling of their curiosity of and love of the United States. My accidental meeting with an elderly Brazilian gentleman further illustrates this point.

We were sitting a few tables from each other at a sidewalk café and our eyes happened to meet. He said, “George Washington” in a loud voice, as if to say, Hello.” I smiled at him and returned his hello. He then started naming other famous Americans. “Mark Twain, Thomas Jefferson, Clark Gable, Andrew Jackson.....” He went on and on. In the midst of his volley of American names, I motioned for him to join me at my table. He continued, “Henry Ford, Harry S Truman, Sam Houston, Thomas Edison, Abraham Lincoln...” he continued on and on. The man was astonishing. He could easily name more famous Americans than I could. It suddenly occurred to me. This old Brazilian could name hundreds of famous Americans and I could only think of two famous Brazilians. These two personalities were Carmen Miranda, “The Brazilian Bombshell,” and Pele, the greatest soccer player of all time. Compared to the knowledge of my newfound friend, I felt ashamed of my ignorance.

LAUNDRY

On the USS Ticonderoga, I had learned not to trust the ship’s laundry service. All of the ships fresh water is made by distilling sea water. On aircraft carriers steam catapults are used to launch the aircraft. A very large amount of fresh water is necessary to operate these catapults. Aircraft launchings have priority over everything else so clothes are normally washed in sea water. Washing clothes in sea water necessitates the use of a much harsher detergent. Because of this, the life of clothes washed in sea water is much shorter than those washed in fresh water. For this reason, I would save my dirty clothes until we made port. I would then find a local laundry to do my clothes.

On my first trip ashore, I carried with me almost a month’s supply of dirty clothes, looking for a laundry. After searching unsuccessfully for a couple of hours, I ran across a Brazilian Army Officer, who spoke English, and asked for directions, He informed me that there were no laundries in Brazil. He explained that Brazil was a two class society. The rich class had servants who did their laundry, and the poor did their own laundry. He then explained that his government had assigned him to serve as liaison with the USS Constellation, and he had a possible solution to my problem, He called over a Brazilian soldier and had a brief discussion with him in Portuguese. He then told me to follow the soldier. After about two blocks, we came to a gated guard post. The sentry was armed with a sub machine gun and he looked as if he knew how to use it. The two army men had a short conversation in Portuguese and the sentry motioned for us to pass. All I could think of was, ”Oh shit, what have I got myself into?” As we went deeper and deeper into the military complex, I began to notice men in guard towers and lots of barbed wire. After passing several of these towers, we passed through an archway into a small compound. In the middle of this enclosed area there was a middle aged man bent over a wash board scrubbing clothes. Not knowing what else to do, I ask the scrubber man if five dollars would be enough. I think he understood me because he answered, “Si.” I then left my laundry with the scrubber man and followed my escort back to where I had left the Army Officer. I spent the next 24 hours wondering if I should go back for my laundry or just write it off like a scary dream. I went back. Since I knew what to expect, it didn’t seem nearly as scary as it did the first time.

After dropping my laundry off that first day, I was approached by a young boy around eleven or twelve years old. This little boy seemed well educated, spoke very good English, and just wanted to hang out for a few hours with an American sailor. We started by talking about the Brazilian Government. He told me that Brazil had a coup the day before our carrier arrived. and that was one of the reasons there was so many armed soldiers in the area. He said that coup’s

were not at all unusual in Brazil because of the way their military was organized. Each branch of the military was independent and separate from the other two branches. He said that none of the three was ever strong enough to run the country without the aid of one of the other branches. Things would go along fine until the excluded branch made a deal with the weaker of the in-power branches which would result in another coup. He said that power was all important to these military branches. As an example, he told me that Britain gave Brazil one of their surplus aircraft carriers. The Brazilians renamed the carrier, "Minas Gerais". The Minas Gerais was an old but fine aircraft carrier. It had a well trained crew to sail her and a full compliment of aircraft complete with trained pilots and mechanics. The only thing she didn't have was a Commanding Officer. The Navy maintained that the Minas Gerais should be commanded by the Navy because she was a ship and as such the Navy should direct her movements. The Air Force said that argument was so much nonsense. Since the Minas Gerais sole purpose was that of a floating airfield, it should be under the command of the Air Force. The Navy and the Air Force were at a standoff. The Minas Gerais became a national joke. She even earned a new nickname: "Her Majesty, the Impotent" or something equally unflattering. My young friend said that Her Majesty, the Impotent was a rough translation from Portuguese that Queer Boat might be closer. Queer because it was unable to function properly.

He also talked about the police force and their independence. He said that if a crime was committed against you it was unwise to press a complaint unless you could also deliver the accused. If you really pushed a complaint, there was a good chance that you would be arrested instead of the accused. He also said that the rate of inflation was so high that the police no longer issued tickets for parking violations. The fine for illegal parking was so small that it wasn't worth the paper it was written on. Instead of writing tickets, the police would chain illegally parked cars to each other and then charge the driver a fee for unchaining the car.

In addition to making several new friends, I also spent a lot of time wandering aimlessly, soaking up the beauty and charm of this marvelous city. I fueled my wanderings with frequent stops for food, beer or coffee. The food was marvelous but the beer and coffee took a little getting use to. Brazilian beer has a higher alcoholic content than American beer. It is also sold ice cold in large half liter bottles. I was advised to never drink more than one bottle at a single sitting. After enjoying a tall cool one, I made it a habit to get up and find a Brazilian coffee shop. I was delighted to find these little coffee shops all over the city. Brazilian coffee is made very strong and is served in tiny demitasse cups. Actually, demitasse mugs would be more descriptive. These little mugs are filled with a coffee so strong that is almost syrup. Traditionally the cup is filled about half way with this thick brew. This leaves ample room for cream and sugar. The standard price for these little treats was a little over a penny a cup.

On another outing, I caught a trolley out to Copacabana just to say I had been there. I found it to be loaded with expensive tourist traps. For budgetary reasons I didn't stay but an hour or so. I thought about visiting the site of the famous statue, Christ the Redeemer that sits atop of Sugarloaf Mountain but decided against it. It is so beautiful viewed from a distance. I couldn't imagine it looking any better up close.

WE GO AROUND THE HORN

After spending four days in Rio, we weighed anchor and headed for the Horn. The passage around Cape Horn was a rough one. This didn't surprise anyone because Cape Horn has the reputation of being one of the most perilous navigation routes in the world. The worst of it was in the middle of the night. The darkness of the night seemed to increase the pitching and

shuttering of our huge vessel. It reminded me of a backdrop for some horror show. I once read about an old sailing ship that tried for several weeks to go around the Horn. The Captain finally gave up and sailed around the Cape of Good Hope, the Southern tip of Africa, as an alternate route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. We made it through o.k. Even so the Captain said that the passage caused over a million dollars damage to one of the big elevators that lift the aircraft up and down between the hanger deck and the flight deck.

VALPARISO, CHILE

Our next Port of call was Valparaiso, Chile. Valparaiso didn't have docking facilities large enough to accommodate a ship as big ours so we had to anchor about a mile out and take the Liberty launch into town. Valparaiso was a typical port town that soon became crowded with sailors from our ship. Feeling the spirit of adventure, I exchanged \$20 dollars into Pesos and bought a round trip ticket to Santiago, the Chilean Capital. The Chilean capital is only about a two-hour bus ride inland from Valparaiso. I was looking for an adventure. The first thing I discovered was that I was the only person on the bus who spoke and understood English. I was also the only person on the bus that didn't speak Spanish. I was lucky enough to have a young army cadet take the seat next to me. This young plebe was charming enough to try and make conversation with me. It didn't take long for me to realize that there are an awful lot of English words that have Latin roots and since Spanish is a Latin based language, there was a good chance we could make ourselves understood. One of the things I understood from our conversation was that Chile raised some of the best beef in the world and Chilean wine was one of the world's best kept secrets. Later, after I returned to Valparaiso, I ducked in a small restaurant and ordered a nice thick sirloin, a baked potato and a bottle of their best wine. I was in heaven. It was absolutely delicious. The entire meal was cheaper than a hamburger in San Diego. Walking back to the ship, on the final day in Chile, I still had a little over \$5 in Chilean money. I heard a lot of laughter spilling out of a back alley waterfront dive. Out of curiosity, I stuck my head in to see what was going on. It was a domino parlor, and there were several locals sitting around, playing dominoes and drinking wine. They invited me to join them and I did. I was treated like a guest of honor. I was having a grand time except my money was no good. My \$5 worth of pesos was good, but they wouldn't let me pay for anything because I was their guest. In the very early morning hours, I finally had to leave or risk missing movement. I certainly didn't want the Connie to sail without me. I placed all my Chilean Peso's in the center of the table, said goodbye and left.

PANAMA CANAL

Our next stop was the Panama Canal. Panama was rather uneventful except that they had a railroad that would take passengers from coast to coast for about a dollar. I enjoyed the scenery so much that I made the journey round trip three times. One of the things that amazed me about the Panama Republic was its currency. The Panamanian money standard is based on the Balboa, which has the same value as our Dollar. As a matter of fact, it is our dollar except that they prefer the name Balboa instead of Dollar, because of nationalistic pride. Their change is different, however. Panamanian coins are minted outside of Panama and are referred to as centesimos instead of cents. As you might expect a ten centesimo piece is exactly the same size and has the same value as our ten cent piece.

ACAPULCO, MEXICO

Our final stop, before completing our journey to San Diego was Acapulco, Mexico. In Acapulco they had jeeps for rent to the tourist. I never had money to waste on things like that but a lot of my shipmates did. On our last night in port one of the modified rental jeeps was parked next to the fleet landing. A local prostitute was sitting on the tail gate of the jeep haggling with a sailor over the price of her services. The sailor was obsessed with the old American term, "two bit" whore. Two-bits is American slang for twenty five cents. The sailor was determined to haggle the price of her services down to twenty five cents. Negotiations continued for at least a couple of hours, and the crowd of sailors grew to a small mob. We were all interested in the possibility of a real life two-bit whore. The sailor finally wore the prostitute down to his twenty five cent target and then amazed everyone by walking away. Another sailor promptly stepped into the first sailor's place and announced that he would take the offer. The sailor and the prostitute left seeking more privacy. Since the show was over, I caught the liberty launch back to the ship.

TENSION MOUNTS

About half way through the cruise, tension began to mount between Lieutenant Dippold and myself. We ran through a very large volume of film, satisfying the covert requirements of several agencies. After each mission, I had to annotate each negative with the days date and assigned photo number. After that I had to plot each photograph on a map overlay. Next we had to print and package up the photography for shipment to the requesting agencies. All of the developing and printing was done by the Ships Photo Lab. All of the plotting and packaging was done by me, under the direction of Mr. Dippold.

During the busiest part of the cruise, most of our flying was in the tropics. The Constellation had to use steam catapults to launch its aircraft. These steam catapults required fresh distilled water. The manufacture of distilled water is very difficult in the tropics. Since the ship's number one mission is the launching of aircraft, fresh water was at a premium. During this period of water rationing, Mr. Dippold and I were working consecutive 24 hour days. We were both walking zombies, trying to keep up with production. The ship had declared water hours because the situation was so bad. During water hours, we were each allowed a ten second trickle of water in order to lather our bodies followed by another ten second trickle for us to rinse off the soap. If you needed more time, it was too bad. A member of the Master at Arms force controlled the water valve. Not only were you limited to twenty seconds of water, you were also restricted to the time of day that you were allowed to shower. When my scheduled time of day rolled around, I informed Mr. Dippold that I was going to the compartment for a shower. He ordered me to remain at my station and continue working. I pleaded with him to rescind his order. I told him that I had missed my last two shower opportunities and that I stank so bad I couldn't stand myself. He said I needn't worry about stinking. There was only him and me in the room, and he didn't mind.

During this time I titled several rolls of film incorrectly, and Mr. Dippold hit the ceiling. He was so furious he threatened me with a Court Martial. I swear I had titled them exactly as Mr. Dippold had ordered. Mr. Dippold made several mistakes after that, and I began logging them down just in case he decided to blame his mistakes on me. His following through with his Court Martial threat was a real possibility. I now understood why none of the other enlisted men wanted to work with him.

THREE DAYS IS A LONG TIME

We still had three days work left when we pulled into San Diego. I wanted to transfer all of this work to the photo lab at Miramar and finish it there, but Mr. Dippold ordered me not to leave the ship until our work was finished. Margaret and the kids were on the dock waiting to greet me and give me a ride home. I snuck down to meet them and explained the situation. I was restricted to the ship for the next two or three days.

Before leaving for this cruise, my Aunt Margaret gave Margaret Ann what she thought was good advice. Aunt Margaret was a long time Boatswains Mate's wife and wanted to start Margaret Ann off on the right foot as a Navy wife. Aunt Margaret told Margaret Ann that I would find something to screw every time my ship pulled into port. She went on to say that when the cruise was over and I came home to her, I would tell her that I had been true. She then went on to say, "You know the son of a bitch is lying, but believe him." Thanks to Aunt Margaret's advice, I've always wondered if Margaret Ann really believed me and my tail of woe about Mr. Dippold and my having to work or figured that it was all a cover because I was under a medical restriction. I'll never forgive Mr. Dippold or Aunt Margaret for planting this seed of doubt in Margaret Ann's heart.

MR. SCHWIM AND THE RANGER

Right after I checked back into the Fleet Photo Lab, I was called into Lieutenant Commander Fierarro's office. Mr. Fierarro was the Photo Lab Department Head. He told me that Mr. Dippold had turned in a damning evaluation on me. He went on to say that he was familiar with my work before the cruise and that he didn't believe Dippold's evaluation. He then recommended that I volunteer for another cruise. If I did he would replace Dippold's damning report with a new one written by my next Photo Intelligence Officer. I was trapped. Because I had volunteered for a cruise with Dippold, I was now forced to volunteer for still another cruise. This time I wrote my name next to Lieutenant Schwim on the assignment board. Mr. Schwim was the Photo Intelligence Officer assigned to Detachment Mike, preparing to deploy on the USS Ranger (CVA-61).

HEMORRHOIDS ARE A PAIN

My number one pre-deployment duty was to pack all the charts and equipment that Mr. Schwim and I would need for the deployment. Unfortunately for me, my hemorrhoids were nagging me something awful about this same time. After a long talk with our squadron's flight surgeon, it was decided that I needed to check into Balboa Naval Hospital and have my bothersome hemorrhoids surgically removed. Lucky for me, Balboa Hospital's hemorrhoid specialist had a surgical assembly line scheduled for the very next day. After the operation, my bung hole hurt much worse than it did before the operation. After a short stay in the recovery room, they had me walk to the ward where I was scheduled to spend the next few days. The ward was crowded with the day's crop of patients who had hemorrhoid surgery or who had cysts whacked out of their back sides. That night one of the patients, wanting a little attention from the night nurse began moaning and calling out, "Nurse, I hurt. Get me something, I hurt." I was experiencing a little pain but not enough to bother the Nurse about. Still the moaner kept it up. Soon others joined in with the moaning and echoed first guy's request for "something" to ease their pain. The Nurse explained to the loudest moaner that outside of aspirin, there was nothing

she could do without unlocking the narcotics cabinet, and she wasn't authorized to do that. Finally she could stand it no longer. She called who she needed to call and got the authorization she needed. Armed with a tray of needles and vials, she went from bed to bed injecting each patient with a pain killing, sleep inducing drug. When she got to my bed, I told her that I didn't need a shot so she skipped me. The rest of the night was nice and peaceful. I spent most of the following day mentally preparing for my first post operation bowel movement. When my time came I was told to strip naked, go into the bathroom and inject myself with a double enema. Then I was told to hold it as long as I possibly could. When I felt that I could hold it no longer, I was to sit down on the toilet, grab my ankles and hold on for dear life. I had been told that it would feel like a spool of barbed wire being pulled out of my anus. That described the pain I felt perfectly. As much as I wanted, I couldn't stop the process.

Since the Rangers deployment date was rapidly approaching, I talked the doctor into releasing me from the hospital early so that I could finish getting ready for it. The doctor placed me on light duty and released me on condition that I take a thirty minute sits bath after every bowl movement. Lucky for me he put this in writing. A couple of days later, I arrived at the Photo Lab a few minutes late for roll call. My tardiness really disturbed the Leading Chief. At the conclusion of roll call, he asked me to meet him in his office. I went to his office and asked him what he had on his mind. He proceeded to lecture me for a good half hour about being on time. He went on and on about how important it was for senior petty officers to set good examples. It was clear that he was thinking about having my Chief recommendation pulled or my proficiency in rate pay canceled, or perhaps both. He concluded his spiel by asking me if there was any reason that he shouldn't recommend me for disciplinary action. I told him that I was on laxatives to keep my stool soft and I had an untimely bowel movement that morning. I then showed him my light duty chit and the Doctor's sitz bath order. You should have seen the look on his face. The sadistic old bastard just knew that he had another victim, but this time his victim got away.

MOONBEAM McSWINE

In addition to packing, I had an unofficial requirement to come up with a colorful nickname and design a colorful logo for our detachment. Our little group was officially known as Light Photographic Squadron, Detachment Mike. Since this title was a bit cumbersome we referred to ourselves as "Det. Mike." For our mascot, I copied an Al Capp creation, "Moonbeam McSwine" from the popular Little Abner Comic strip. She was a gorgeous cartoon character that rivaled Daisy Mae for the affection of Little Abner. I renamed her "Moonbeam Mike" to make her compatible with our official name, "Detachment Mike".

Our detachment had a compliment of three RF8A Crusaders. These photo airplanes were painted deep blue with a big white "PP" painted on both sides of their tails. "PP" is phonetically enunciated, "Papa Papa" and identifies the aircraft as a Photo Plane. I cut out a large stencil of Moonbeam Mike so that our painter could position her sitting on top of the letters, "PP." She transferred gorgeously, and Mr. Schwim and the pilots loved her. She was both distinctive and in good taste. Our senior officer was so pleased that he asked me to make several smaller stencils of her and have the painter stencil her on all of our equipment and cruise boxes.

Unfortunately the story didn't end here. One of our officer's, inspired by the legendary "phantom shitter" stories of WWII, decided to take a spray can and stencil Moonbeam Mike all over Officer's country. There was never a confession, but I knew it was one or more of our Detachment officers who had committed the dastardly deed, from the way they were talking.

After all the officers had their laugh, our senior officer had the Leading Chief round up a clean up party with orders to remove all traces of Moonbeam Mike from Officer's Country. The next morning I couldn't help but notice a bit of chuckling among our Officers. During the night the Phantom Moonbeamer had struck again. In fact, the Phantom struck on the next four consecutive nights. Each of these sophomoric ventures had to be cleaned up by our enlisted men. On the last day I finally got up the guts to suggest that the officers lend a hand in the clean up. I was informed that it was beneath an officer's dignity to do such a thing. I suggested that if it was beneath an officer's dignity to clean up a mess, it should be beneath his dignity to deliberately create the mess in the first place. The Detachment phantom was heard from no more.

GREEN LIZARD EGGS

There were other phantoms on the ship, however. Actually, for awhile phantom pranks escalated into an all out war. VA95 was an Attack Squadron that flew AD6 Skyraiders. This fun loving squadron had green lizards painted on the tails of their aircraft as part of their identifying logo. They took great pride in being "Green Lizards." Before leaving port in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, two of Green Lizard Officers had a few drinks at the Officers Club and returned to the ship early. One of the young officers was disappointed that he still had a package of condoms in his wallet. He had hoped to dispose of them in the conventional way. He and his buddy decided to dispose of them some other way. They put their heads together and came up with a plan. They were just drunk enough to think it was a good plan. They decided to take their unused condoms into the bathroom and fill them up almost to the point of bursting. Next they tied water filled condoms off and declared them to be green lizard eggs. They had decided to "lay" their eggs in the empty beds of members of a rival squadron. Next, they scouted the area to make sure their intended victims hadn't returned from the Officers Club as yet. After making sure the coast was clear, they would roll their prized green lizard eggs onto a blanket and carefully transported them to their rival officer's stateroom. The lizard eggs were then carefully tucked into their rival's bed. The prank went off exactly as planned. Word spread throughout the ship about the funny practical joke the green lizard officers had pulled off. As expected the victims were outraged and their honor demanded satisfaction. They decided that even though their squadron's mascot was incapable of laying giant lizard eggs, they were capable of manufacturing an effective substitute. They filled up several condoms with water and went calling on the officers they suspected of firing the first shot. As far as they were concerned, war had been declared and they were prepared to retaliate. After several days of officers sneaking through the passageways armed with water bombs, the Commander of the Air Group ordered an end to this good natured war without declaring a winner. He made it clear that if any more lizard eggs were found, he guaranteed there would be losers.

C.K.YUNG, HONG KONG TAYLOR

One of the nicest things about this cruise was that we pulled into Hong Kong long enough to find a good tailor and have my Chief's uniforms made to order. Hong Kong tailors had a reputation for being both better and cheaper than uniform shops stateside. Something steered me to a tailor named C. K. Yung. I think the something was the good bourbon whiskey he offered his clients. I was very happy with his work and his hospitality. He felt like an old friend. On my final fitting, he asked me if he could interest me in some civilian clothes as well. I told him that after I paid him for my uniforms, I would be flat broke. He said that he would be happy to fix me up with a nice civilian wardrobe, and I could pay him whenever I could. I couldn't pass up

an offer like that. As it turned out he gave me \$350 worth of civilian clothes on the strength of a hand shake. When I finally did make Chief, the Navy paid me a special allowance for my Chief uniforms. I cashed my Navy Check, went to the Post Office and bought a \$350 money order and mailed it along with my thanks, to Mr. Yung.

Hong Kong is a beautiful and fascinating city. It is the home of the extremely rich and the very poor. When we were there, it was said that there were over a million Chinese who lived in crude shelters on top of the commercial buildings of Hong Kong. These roof dwellings had been declared "off limits" by the U.S. Navy. I never had the courage to enter this forbidden domain, but some of my shipmates did or at least claimed that they did. They said it was a massive shanty town.

GARBAGE MARY

What I found most charming about Hong Kong was "Garbage Mary." It was said that Garbage Mary was a widow and a sampan dweller. She was barely getting by when it occurred to her that she could make a pretty good living if she used her head. She managed to contact the Captain of a visiting destroyer and told him that he was being foolish when he paid someone to haul away his garbage when his ship was in port. She told him that if he would let her have his garbage, she would paint his ship for free. The Destroyer Captain saw this as an excellent morale booster and it would even save the Navy a few dollars. From that moment on, it became the Pacific Fleet's custom to discontinue all painting a couple of months before visiting Hong Kong. As an added bonus, Mary's girls would take over all the mess halls scullery duties of the ship. They would leave the scullery spick and span. Mary would then take the garbage to a pig farm that she had acquired an interest in and turned the garbage into a saleable product. From that humble beginning, she eventually acquired enough sampans' to service the entire fleet. It is said that she went on to acquire a fleet of "Walla Wallis" (Water Taxi's) and a major ferry line. Someone asked Mary why she had girls doing all the work. She said that she tried working men for awhile, but the girls did a much better job. Besides, the sailors were a lot happier watching girls do the work.

On about my fifth day in Hong Kong, I noticed that several of the buildings were painted International Orange. I later found out that the Federal Aeronautics Administration had ruled that the tails of all non combatant airplanes had to be painted International Orange. As a result of this ruling, we were carrying several crates of five gallon cans of bright orange paint. The sailors that loaded this paint on board had kept this paint a well guarded secret. They discovered that if they smuggled a can of this paint ashore they could take it to almost any Sleazy Night Club in Hong Kong and trade it for a night with one of the working girls.

THREE FIRST CLASS PETTY OFFICERS

Our enlisted crew was headed up by a Leading Chief and three First Class Petty Officers. The Chief was in charge of aircraft maintenance and the enlisted crew. The First Class Petty Officers were Fikins, who was the Chiefs top mechanic, Hartsock, a leading photographer and me, the Photo Interpreter. The Chief berthed in Chief Quarters and dined in the Chief's Mess. Fikins, Hartsock, and I berthed with the crew and ate in the First Class Mess. The First Class Mess had a president, who charged us \$20 a month extra so that he could offer more than the standard fare from the general mess. A large portion of this money was spent on lunch meat for sandwiches. We were about four months into the cruise when the Chief had to be flown back to

the states because of a family emergency. As luck would have it, I had already met all necessary qualifications for promotion to chief but my promotion wasn't scheduled until September. I recommended that Fikins and Hartsock share that honor of being acting Chief with me because I felt it would look good in their service record. Fikins would handle Maintenance and all maintenance personnel, Hartsock would do the same in his specialty, and I would take care of my one man team, namely me. This was pretty much the way things were run before the Chief's departure and it continued to work that way after he left.

Fikins, Hartsock and I spent a lot of time down in the First Class Mess. It was a good place to hang out when you had time to spare. Movies were shown after the evening meal every night. We would usually get there a little early, make ourselves a nice big sandwich, and settle in for the movie. Everything about the First Class Mess was as good as could be expected until our ship pulled into Yokosuka, Japan for a routine port call. Hartsock, our First Class Photographer had managed to finagle temporary additional duty orders to catch Japan's high speed train to Kobe, in Southern Japan, for a special photo shoot. Rather than take a chance on unfamiliar Japanese food, Hartsock decided to go to the Mess and make himself a few sandwiches to eat along the way. Just as Hartsock was about to leave the ship, the Mess President caught up with him and told Hartsock that he could go but the sandwiches would have to stay. He told Hartsock that if he wished, he could eat all the sandwiches he wanted but he had to be in the Mess when he ate them. Hartsock told the Mess President that he thought the President's position was stupid and if the Mess stood its ground he would resign his membership. The President stood firm and Hartsock quit the Mess.

When Hartsock returned from his Kobe trip, he told Fikins and me all about his misadventure with the sandwiches. We sided with Hartsock and supported him by rendering our resignation. From that point forward, we still had to eat in the First Class Mess but we were only allowed to eat food that came from the general Mess. Basically this meant we could still make ourselves sandwiches but we weren't permitted to put any cold cuts on them. I became very fond of onion pickle and tomato sandwiches. This fondness was enhanced by the pleasure we received from watching the Mess President trying to catch us stealing delicatessen products from the member's only stash.

MR. SCHWIM GIVES ME A GLOWING EVALUATION

Upon completing the cruise, I returned to my old job in the Photo Intelligence section of the Fleet Photo Lab. Mr. Schwim gave me a glowing evaluation. He didn't say that I could leap tall buildings with a single bound, but he might as well have. I received 4.0s across the board. A 4.0 is the best score you can get in the Navy. Lieutenant Commander Ferro was very pleased and tore up Mr. Dippold's evaluation of me. Now that I was back in the Fleet Photo Lab, I was really beginning to enjoy my circumstances. The enlisted trainee's program and the photo pilot trainee's program were both doing well and managing them took very little of my time. Much of my spare time was spent on physical fitness. John F. Kennedy had set certain minimum standards for all military personnel, and I didn't want to embarrass myself by failing to meet any of these standards. There were five tests that everyone had to pass once each quarter. The first time I was tested, they pitted me against my brother, Luther. I distinctly remember beating him in the standing broad jump, and I also beat him in both running events. I'm also positive that he beat me at pull ups and push ups. Actually it was no contest. I've always had poor upper body strength and I've never been able to do a pull up or a push up in my life, without cheating. Because I excelled in three events my poor showing at pull ups and push up was overlooked.

My monitor scribbled in the minimum for these two events. The final tally was I beat Luther in three out of five events. Considering I was in my thirties, I felt pretty good in being able to out run and out jump him and everyone else in the squadron. Continuing the spirit of keeping physically fit, the Photo Lab instituted a two hour lunch break so that we would have 30 minutes to eat and an hour and a half for physical activities. I chose volley ball. I found volleyball exciting and it helped keep me in good physical shape.

CHARLES STERLING – CHIEF PETTY OFFICER

On 16 September, the Navy as I had known it, ceased to exist. I was promoted to Chief Petty Officer. In the Navy a Chief Petty Officers is a role model and a supervisor. They are discouraged from doing anything except supervising. A day or two after I made Chief I went into the dark room to print something that I was interested in. One of the enlisted photographers snatched it out of my hand and said, "I'll do that, Chief." Several similar incidents after that drove home the fact that I was no longer a worker. I was now a supervisor. I suddenly became aware of why so many Chiefs walk around with a coffee cup in their hand. It gives them something to do.

On 22 November 1963, I was standing outside the Photo Lab conference room. Our Commanding Officer was conducting an all officers briefing. The briefing was classified and I was directed to make sure that only "cleared" people attended. The Photographer assigned to the front desk was quietly listening to music on his radio. All of a sudden he yelled at me, "Chief. The President's been shot." I had him turn his radio up a bit and listened enough to confirm what the Photographer had told me. After that, I entered the conference room and relayed the terrible news to the attendees. The terrible news ended the briefing. Most of the officers rushed out to the radio so that they could hear the morbid news for themselves. Our spirits lifted a bit when it was announced that the assassin had been caught. Later I felt a burst of joy when I first heard that Jack Ruby had shot the little creep that killed our president.

For the most part, life was wonderful during this period. Margaret was pregnant with my second daughter; Cynthia Ann. Cindy was born on May 20, 1964 in Grossmont Hospital in La Mesa, California. She was a precious little thing. She grew up and married her grade school sweetheart, Darrell Person on July 10, 1982 in El Cajon, California. To my delight, this union presented me with three wonderful granddaughters. Erica Ann, the oldest, was born on December 27, 1986. Erica was followed by Breanna Nicole on October 25, 1990 and Elisabeth Ann on March 28, 1996. All three were born at the Grossmont Hospital in La Mesa, California. When my third granddaughter was born, she was given the name Elisabeth which is spelled with an S and not a Z. I've been told that the S spelling is German and the Z spelling is English.

Cindy was destined to make me proud in still another way. Cindy quit her job as a classified sales person for the Tulsa World, despite her success as the newspapers top producer. Cindy made up her mind to go back to school and become a teacher. She enrolled, full time, at Northeastern State University's Broken Arrow Campus. She graduated May 8, 2007 with a Bachelors of Science in Education. She is now a special education teacher.

When my father was a little boy, his ambition was to become a school teacher. In those days an eighth grade education qualified a person to teach school. Dad told me that by the time he graduated from the eighth grade, the State of Oklahoma had raised the requirement to the tenth grade. Before Dad could meet this qualification the State raised the requirement to a High School Diploma. By the time Dad graduated from High School, a teaching certificate required

one year of college. At this point he was totally frustrated and said, to hell with it. It's a shame my Dad didn't live to see his granddaughter achieve the goal that he wanted so badly.

Just as I was beginning to really enjoy my position at the Fleet Photo Lab, I received transfer orders to the Atlantic Intelligence Center at Norfolk Virginia.