

# **Grand Fun While It Lasted:**

## **The Coast Guard Career**

### **Of**

## **CAPT Peter E. Prindle, (Ret.)**

**CG Aviator #1184, CG Helicopter Pilot #581**



## Table of Contents

<b><u>Chapter</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<b>I. Prologue: May 2006</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. In the Beginning: February 1946 - July 1965</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>III. Navy Flight School: August 1965 - October 1966</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>- Flight School Certificates</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>IV. Air Station Miami: October 1966 – December 1968</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>V. Aviation Training Center Mobile/IBSEC: January 1969 – November 1970</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>- AVDET #1, Arctic West 1969</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>- AVDET #9, Arctic West 1970</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>VI. Air Station New Orleans: December 1970 – August 1975</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>VII. Air Station Cape Cod: September 1975 – October 1978</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>VIII. 33<sup>rd</sup> ARRS, Kadena Air Base Japan: November 1978 – June 1982</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>IX. Air Station Elizabeth City: July 1982 – June 1985</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>X. Joint US Military Assistance Group Philippines: July 1985 – June 1987</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>- The EDSA Revolution: February 1986</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>- The <i>Mercy</i> Mission: March – May 1987</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>XI. Fifth Coast Guard District: July 1987 – July 1989</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>XII. Air Station Cape May: August 1989 – June 1992</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>XIII. Epilogue: August 2006</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Flight Time Summary</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Aircraft Flown</b>	<b>92</b>

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**I. Prologue: May 2006**

1916 is generally regarded as the beginning of Coast Guard Aviation. In April, Third Lieutenant Elmer Stone, who would become CG Aviator #1, reported for flight training. On August 29<sup>th</sup>, Congress authorized (but did not fund) Coast Guard Air Stations along the nation's shores. 2006 marks the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of those events, and I have now been associated with CG Aviation for more than 60 of those 90 years.

Last summer I transcribed some journals that my father, Bill Prindle – CG Aviator #143, CG Helicopter Pilot #24 – had kept during WWII. That effort, which demonstrated the difficulty of filling in the details of what he had written 60 years earlier, has prompted me to record my own memories of a career in Coast Guard aviation before I get too old and forgetful. Some of my H-3 adventures from “Pelican Tales” on the CG History web site are incorporated here, as are my journal of the Philippine Revolution and a detailed account of a case in New Orleans I prepared in anticipation of a law suit. My flight log books record the essential facts about 5300 hours of Coast Guard flight time – hours flown, landings, instrument approaches and a brief annotation as to whom I flew with and what we did. The log books provide the outline of the plot – 6 Air Stations, two tours with DOD, and two desk jobs over 29 + years - this document attempts to fill in some of the details of a career filled with constant adventure, unforgettable characters, world travel, and unparalleled job satisfaction.



## II. In The Beginning: February 1942 – June 1965

My first airplane flight was in a Stinson Model 10 on 7 September 1946. My dad rented it at the Laconia, NH airport, paid \$6.00 for 30 minutes of dual to prove he could still fly, plus \$5.00 for another 30 minutes to fly our family of four over our summer home in Gilmanton, 10 miles



away. My first flight in a helicopter was in 1948. After WWII my dad found work with New England Helicopter in Pawtucket, RI. That summer, when I was six years old, he took me for a ride in one of the Bell Model 47s the company operated, similar to NC5 at left. I still recall the exhilarating sensation of watching the earth shrink beneath my feet as we lifted off and climbed vertically at what seemed an alarming rate. When I later flew the TH-13, the military training version of the Model 47, at NAS

Ellyson Field during flight training in 1966, I realized that what had seemed high performance to a six year old was in fact rather mundane – the TH-13 could barely get off the ground on a warm day with an instructor and a student whose combined weight exceeded 400 pounds. Through adolescence, I enjoyed building and flying model airplanes and gliders, and was fascinated by the pictures of my dad's Coast Guard career, many of them now incorporated in "A Coast Guard Aviator in World War Two," his oral history now captured in the Coast Guard History website and Library of Congress files. I also enjoyed playing with his cloth flying helmet and "Coat, BUAER Transport," a lined full length leather coat for winter flying, much the same as the one donned by the "Ancient Albatross" upon becoming the longest serving aviator on active duty. It was apparently designed for extreme temperatures, because wearing it generates so much body heat that it's only comfortable at temperatures of around 10 degrees or so. In my career, it was only that cold at Cape Cod and Cape May.

I joined the Coast Guard in January 1965, and was commissioned from OCS in June with 124 others in the class of 2-65. The Coast Guard had just purchased the HH-52A, and was then contemplating the purchase of the HH-3F, so it was a period of expansion. As a result, about fifty members of the class were accepted for flight training at NAS Pensacola. The Navy, however, was also increasing its aviator requirements for Vietnam, so we couldn't report to Basic Training for a couple of months. To pass the time, we were temporarily assigned to various Coast Guard Air Stations, and I wound up at CGAS St. Petersburg, which was then located at Albert Whitted Field on Tampa Bay. (This was actually my second tour at St. Pete - my dad had been stationed there from June to November 1943 when I was one year old.)



It was at St Pete that I met the lovely lady who is now my wife of forty years. She was visiting a friend who lived across the street from my apartment. The friend complained about her difficulty getting dates, so Jacki decided to demonstrate the proper application of feminine wiles. They had noticed that my roommate and I arrived home at about the same time each afternoon, and where we usually parked. They staked out a spot next to the friend's car and kept it clear as they lugged her console TV down from her second floor apartment and placed it in her trunk.

We arrived somewhat later than usual, having had to stop at the dry cleaners on the way home, to find two apparently helpless women needing our strong backs to get the TV back upstairs. That weekend we double dated at the local drive-in movie, “Dr. Strangelove.” Jacki and I were in the back seat, since I didn’t yet have a car. To impress her, I bought the super size coke to go with her popcorn. Handing it through the window, I caught the edge of the glass, spilling it all over her. We’ve been married forty years, and her friend and my roommate never saw each other again. Jacki had a Corvair, and took me car shopping. Base pay for an Ensign in those days was \$222.30/month, but by sharing an apartment with another Ensign and minimizing expenses, I too was able to afford a Corvair. I always had mixed emotions toward that car, since I managed to slam my thumb in the door while inspecting it (distracted no doubt by my comely companion), causing me to bite my tongue until it bled so as not to use bad language in the presence of my lady. She claims that the incident convinced her that I was the one, so I also love that car . . . .



At St Pete, we newly minted Ensigns were properly introduced to Coast Guard aviation, standing watches in the Operations Center, tagging along on training flights in the H-52 and the HU-16E, enjoying the camaraderie of a Coast Guard Wardroom, and filling various supernumerary positions as the “Duty Nugget.” It was there that we first experienced the adrenalin producing shrill of the SAR (Search and Rescue) Alarm, and the time honored announcement “Now put the ready aircraft on the line – boat taking on water . . . .” We experienced the full spectrum of Aviation Operations from helicopter hoisting to water landings in the “Goat.” It was at St Pete that I watched my only water operations in the HU-16E from the Radio Operator’s seat behind the copilot. It was a memorable experience to splash down in Tampa Bay with spray covering the windscreen, maneuver on the water with ponderous grace, and then accelerate to get the hull “on the step” so as to break the grip of the water’s suction during the takeoff run. By the time I got to Miami, however, hull corrosion had limited the “Goats” to emergency only water landings and I think there were just two the entire time I was there. We left for Pensacola in August 1965 with a keen sense of anticipation for our future careers as Coast Guard Aviators. The two months at CGAS St Pete was a great start to a wonderful lifelong adventure.





### III. Navy Flight School: August 1965 – October 1966

**Pensacola:** Basic Training at Pensacola proved to be somewhat more mundane than an operational Coast Guard unit. We endured six weeks of Pre-Flight Training in the fundamentals for an aviator – aerodynamics, aerial navigation, weather, survival skills, and so on, interspersed with introductions to the Parachute Landing Fall, the Dilbert Dunker, physical training, and the “obstacle course.” Beyond the academic and physical activities, I recall that “Coasties” were a sufficiently small minority that most of the Navy and Marine Corps Flight Students were completely unfamiliar with the fact that there was a Coast Guard, much less that it had an aviation arm. We delighted in illuminating their failure of understanding, and let the myth develop that we would be flying a specially modified Coast Guard version of the F-4 Phantom upon “reaching the fleet.” Another notable memory is that Roger Staubach, who is three days younger than me, was then completing his Naval Service at NAS Pensacola, with his primary duty apparently being to quarterback the “Goshawks,” the Navy Football Team. He had been drafted by the Dallas Cowboys in the 1964 draft, but did not report to them until 1969 due to his Navy service commitment. Another benefit for Coasties at Mainside was the fact that we were all officers, while many of the Navy and Marine students were AVCADS or MARCADS, who were combining OCS with Basic Training, and as a result had little or no spare time. We, on the other hand, were off whenever we were not in class.

From NAS Pensacola it was off to NAS Saufley in October '65 to begin the flying portion of Naval Flight Training. Due to the number of students in the pipeline, we were “pooled,” which for the most part required only that we check in twice a day to prove we were still alive, and catch an occasional ride in the back of an H-34. (My log shows 4 such sorties for 5.9 hours between 5 & 11 October) Otherwise, we were free to explore the Florida Panhandle and enjoy the ambience at “Trader Jon’s,” the local watering hole for student aviators. The following excerpt from the Navy Times remembers the bar after its “last call” in 2003:

“It was a Mecca for naval aviators, and you’d be hard-pressed to find anyone who got his wings in the past 50 years who hadn’t been there. But after more than five decades, Trader Jon’s is closed for good.

To a newcomer, the first view of the Pensacola, Fla., bar could be overwhelming. Dark and overrun with memorabilia, it had concrete floors, high ceilings draped with flags, a heavy wooden bar surrounded by stools and walls covered with aviation paraphernalia. Hundreds of model aircraft dangled from the ceiling, giving the effect of an informal museum.



Sailors and Marines were the core clientele, but the bar also attracted astronauts, politicians, royalty and movie stars, including John Wayne, Bob Hope, Prince Andrew and Brooke Shields.

Martin “Trader Jon” Weissman, an Army veteran who founded the bar in 1952, had a passion for flying and created a naval-aviation theme for his bar. Aviators donated equipment and other items to the decorations. Weissman’s eccentricities added to the appeal: His favorite attire consisted of walking shorts and mismatched socks, and he offered \$100,000 to anyone who caught him wearing a matching pair of socks. He claimed he never paid up.”

The City of Pensacola ran softball leagues year round, and there were enough Coast Guard Flight Students to field a team. Somehow, I wound up as the Second Baseman, and in the only

highlight of my softball career, recorded an unassisted triple play when I happened to catch a line drive near the bag for one out. The runner on second was so intent on making third that it was an easy matter to step on the bag for the second, just as the runner on first, clearly oblivious to what was transpiring, collided with my glove for the third. The opposing team had apparently exported a little too much liquid merchandise from Trader Jon's . . . .



**Saufley:** Life became more focused as we began the program at Saufley in mid-October. Ground school was followed by 19 syllabus flights in the T-34B Mentor, a tandem seat military trainer version of the Beech Bonanza with a 225 hp engine, a top speed of 190 mph, and a maximum gross weight of 2900 lbs. We learned basic airmanship, normal and emergency procedures, and even flew some acrobatics to ascertain whether or not we had the “right stuff.” My log book shows 4 flights from October 23-29, and 8 more in November for a total of 15.6 hours.

PS-12X on 18 November was the check ride on which one was declared safe for solo. After practicing touch and goes at an outlying airfield, my instructor told me to make a full stop landing on the next circuit, taxi off the runway and let him out. At first I thought I must have either irritated him or made him sick, but his final instructions proved me wrong; “Take off, make three touch and goes, and then another full stop to pick me up. Do not fly off and leave me here!” He had deemed me safe for solo, and was entrusting me with an airplane he had signed for. Filled with trepidation, I took off, reentered the pattern, and ever mindful of his watchful eye, made three tolerable “bounces” followed by a full stop landing to recover him. From there, it was back to Saufley, finish the paperwork, and relax in the glow of having been declared safe for solo, the first milestone in the process of becoming a Coast Guard Aviator. The next day was my first solo flight, followed by some cross country navigation training, another check ride, and a final solo cross country. With a grand total of 25 hours, 4.9 of them solo, I was declared ready for the next phase of training on 23 November.

**Whiting:** We migrated northeast to Whiting Field where we grappled with the T-28B/C, a veritable monster compared to the T-34. The Trojan boasted a 1425 hp engine and weighed in at 8,500 lbs. The B models had an instrument hood for the rear seat, and the C models were fitted with a tail hook for carrier operations. Both performed like most WWII fighters, with a top speed of 350 mph, a service ceiling of 37,000 feet, and a range of over 1,000 miles. According to my log book, the month of December must have been devoted to T-28 ground school and the Christmas Holidays, as it records only two flights as a passenger in the back of a T-28. I can vouch for the Christmas Holidays, since that was when I took my bride-to-be home to meet the parents and accept my formal proposal of marriage.



Aircraft have a way of making men humble, and the mighty T-28, when not handled properly, could be very humiliating indeed. The R-1820 engine required a delicate touch to start, but then

rewarded the pilot with a throaty roar worthy of a Spitfire. The powerful engine required significant left rudder on takeoff to counter the propeller's torque, so much so that several of the shorter Vietnamese students then training with the Navy had to use custom seat cushions to have enough pedal deflection. The T-28 would also enter an inverted spin if improper spin recovery techniques were used, and the NATOPS procedure for that situation was to bail out. On one flight the plane entered an inverted spin, and the instructor commanded "Bail Out." He promptly departed but the student had been so engrossed in the evolution that he missed the command. With the rear seat now empty, the aircraft's Center of Gravity moved forward, and the student's application of forward stick caused the plane to recover normally. The student had quite a bit of explaining to do upon his return to Whiting without his instructor. He then had to face the music again when the irate instructor was recovered and returned to base.

As T-28 training progressed and my confidence grew, the fun level increased. I soloed in the T-28 on 27 January after 9 flights and 11.6 hours, which completed the Transition Phase of T-28 training. That was followed by the Proficiency Phase during February, seven instructed rides interspersed with seven solos. March was filled with the Basic Instrument phase. We met and conquered the Link Trainer, and applied our instrument skills under the hood in the back seat of the B models. Having demonstrated some capacity for keeping the aircraft upright solely by reference to the instruments, the radio navigation instruments were introduced, and we learned the arcane mysteries of VOR, ADF, and GCA approaches. Then it was on to acrobatics for loops, rolls, Immelmans, and half Cuban eights, followed by formation flying and day/night cross country navigation flights. As our newly acquired skills began to meld man and machine, we departed the pattern with increasing frequency on instrument and formation adventures to places like Houston and North Carolina.



In April, I managed two weeks leave between my Basic Instruments check ride and the beginning of the Radio Instrument syllabus. Borrowing a fellow student's station wagon, I drove to Tampa to marry Jacki, my wife and wingman for the past 40 years. We tied the knot on 9 April, and after an overnight honeymoon, we loaded the station wagon with wedding gifts and headed for our small apartment in Milton, FL. Jacki had sold her Corvair to help finance the wedding, and we soon traded mine in on a 1966 Mustang convertible, navy blue with white top and interior, which set us back \$1,800. That seemed a veritable fortune on our monthly income of \$499.18 - base pay had gone up to \$241.20, subsistence and housing allowances (with dependent) added \$157.98, and flight pay for an O-1 was \$100 – but we enjoyed it immensely, and it “pegged the cool meter” for a student aviator and his bride.

Since it is now chronologically correct to explain why I don't play golf, I will do so. Jacki had brought a set of golf clubs and a dozen balls to our marriage from a college elective course. Our best man, fellow student Jim Loomis, was an avid golfer, and convinced me to go golfing one weekend. We headed for the course at Whiting, which was notorious for its long roughs, a variety of snakes, and abundant water hazards. After four holes, most of the morning was gone, all of the balls were lost, and two of the clubs were bent. And that is why I don't play golf!



Near the end of the program, Hurricane Alma threatened Pensacola, and the decision was made to evacuate all aircraft to Memphis. To fill the cockpits, staff officers and advanced students, including me, were utilized. An indelible memory of that mission is sitting on the taxiway in flights of four at Whiting under lowering skies, awaiting our turn to take off in a scene reminiscent of a WWII strike mission. Arriving at Memphis, flights of aircraft were stacked in holding patterns at 1000 foot intervals to await landing clearance. Many of the staff pilots were somewhat rusty, and forgot to lean their mixtures, making them low on gas. They got priority for landing, as well as priority for buying rounds at the bar. On the flight home in clear weather, several of the instructors displayed their exhilaration with the beauty of the day by executing barrel rolls. I was sorely tempted to follow suit, and had even gone so far as to stow loose objects in the cockpit in preparation for the maneuver, when I thought better of the idea – I was after all, still a student.



There was one particular formation instructor at Whiting who was known as a “screamer;” he was never satisfied with a student’s performance, and literally screamed at them over the intercom while “instructing.” Word of his style filtered up to Navy Leadership, and they decided to teach the errant Lieutenant Junior Grade a lesson. Soon there after, he was scheduled to “instruct” a four ship formation of students. After the briefings were completed and the aircraft signed for, the students were replaced by members of the Blue Angels, who proceeded to put the formation through its paces in ways the hapless instructor had never imagined. Every time he

screamed instructions, the Blues would exaggerate them so as to have the formation either hundreds of feet apart or with overlapping wingtips. On the verge of apoplexy, the irate LTJG directed a return to base, where the Blue Angels introduced themselves and noted they could not have learned to fly their level of formation under the tutelage of a “screamer.” The LTJG got the message loud and clear.

It was while at Whiting that I witnessed the only mid-air collision I have ever seen. I had just landed from a solo flight, and was taxiing back to parking when I saw what appeared to be a two plane formation on short final. As it turned out, the lead plane was a dual, and the trail plane a solo flight which had gotten out of sequence in the pattern. In what seemed at the time like stop action, the solo aircraft slowly overtook the aircraft ahead of it while both descended toward the runway. The propeller of the trailing aircraft inexorably consumed the tail and rear cockpit of the dual, and both aircraft tumbled to the approach end of the runway. It was a horrific sight, resulting in three fatalities, and one I hope never to witness again, but one which forever impressed upon me the need for situational awareness and constant vigilance while flying.

**Ellyson:** Having “conquered” the T-28, we moved to Ellyson Field for helicopter training. After 122 hours in a high performance aircraft like the T-28, flying a helicopter should be easy, right? Wrong! After the prerequisite study of rotary wing aerodynamics and helicopter systems, I walked out to the TH-13 for my first flight on July 28, 1966. The Ready Rooms prominently displayed pictures of the rudder pedals, cyclic, and collective in different modes of flight, and when I saw the helicopter, I knew why – it had only engine instruments, an airspeed indicator, and an altimeter. Attitude was controlled solely by the eye of the pilot, hence the pictures to provide a sight picture of normal. The instructor cranked it up and flew us to one of several practice fields, literally an eight acre farmer’s field with a few other helicopters in it. After demonstrating the flight controls of the H-13, the instructor proffered cyclic control to me with an admonition to “keep us in the field.” He knew whereof he spoke. Merely moving the stick right or left was enough to move us to the margins of the practice area. On subsequent flights, the other controls were introduced until I could in fact manipulate them so as to “stay in the field,” albeit looking pretty much like a bear balancing on a beach ball . . . .



Helicopters require much less control input to make attitude changes, so one has to “unlearn” the magnitude of inputs required for a fixed wing aircraft like the T-28, and learn to make the minute helicopter inputs which achieve large changes. In addition, a change in one helicopter flight control requires nearly simultaneous changes in the others to maintain the desired flight parameters, while an airplane generally affords one the luxury of making changes one control at a time before trimming the others to compensate.

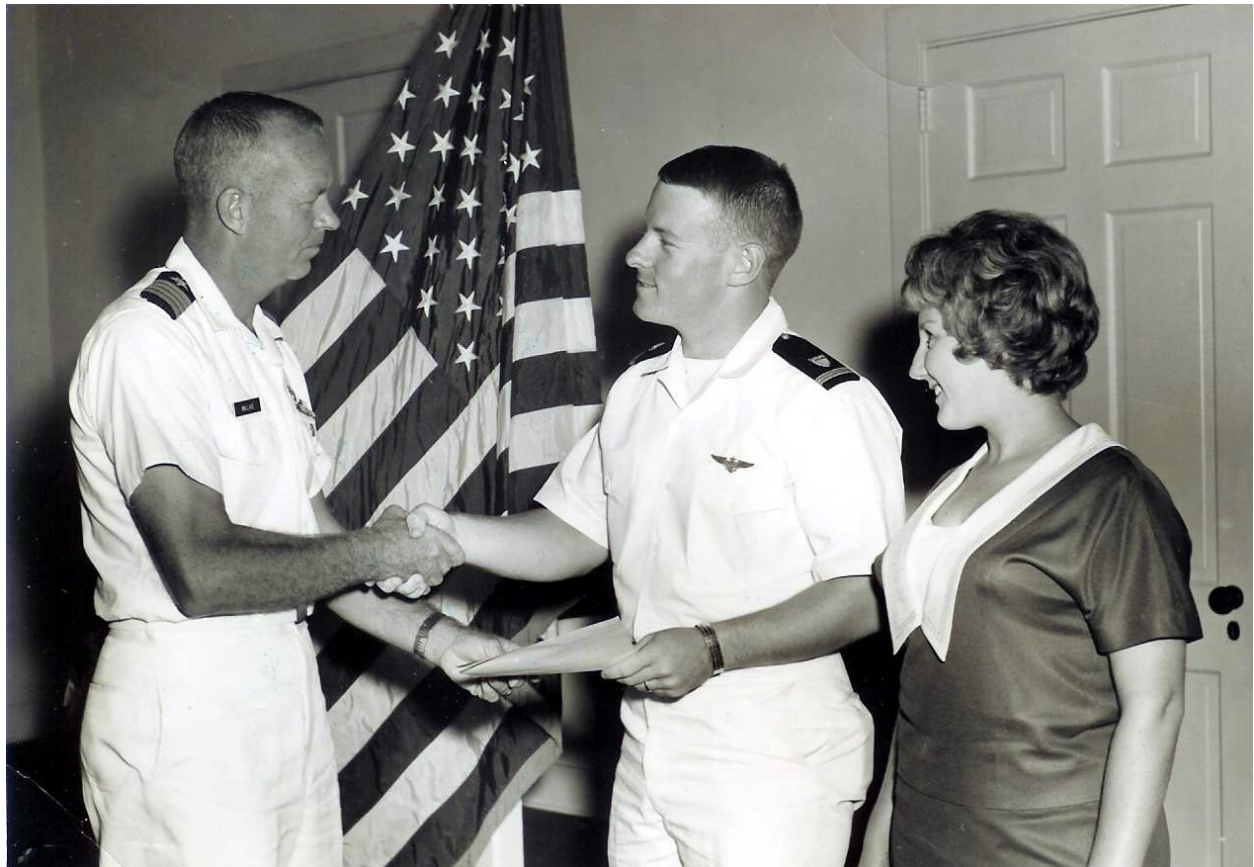


After completing the H-13 syllabus (26 hours), it was on to the UH-34 for training in hoisting, landing in confined areas, and other operational maneuvers. In comparison to the H-13 – 200 hp and 2000 lb MGW, the H-34 seemed huge. Powered by a 1425 hp R-1820 engine similar to the T-28, it had a maximum gross weight of more than 13,200 pounds. The pilots climbed the outside of the fuselage to reach the cockpit perched atop the engine, with the drive shaft passing between them to

the transmission. It was noisy, and required supplementary ear protection in addition to one’s helmet. The Navy version was designed for shipboard operations with rotor blades which folded manually. One of the preflight checks involved climbing up to the transmission access platform to assure that the large pins which held the blades in the extended position were secure. There were two per blade, and the projected an inch or so from the blade hub. While up there, one was also to push the blades around while listening to the transmission for unwanted sounds. On one flight as I was pre-flying my helicopter, I glanced over at the one next to me. The student was pushing the blades around, but he failed to duck as the blade behind him approached. The blade locking pins neatly snagged the neck of his flight suit, picked him up, and deposited him on the

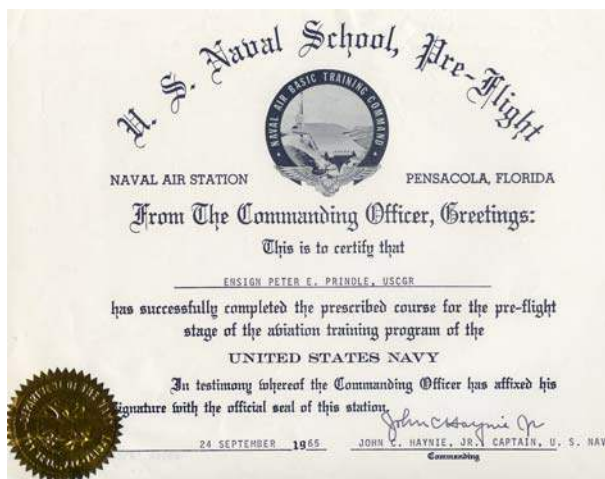
other side of the helicopter. Fortunately the old cotton flight suits were well constructed and he wasn't injured.

Between 30 August and 4 October, I logged 48 hours in the H-34, and complete the prescribed course of training to be designated a Coast Guard Aviator. Graduations were always scheduled on a Friday, so I received my wings of gold on 7 October 1966 as Coast Guard Aviator # 1184, and CG Helicopter Pilot # 581.



Our first assignment was to CGAS Miami, so we packed the Mustang, fretted through the details of our first government move, and left Milton for a somewhat larger and more modern apartment in Opa Locka. The Air Station had moved there from Dinner Key the year before, and occupied some vintage hangar space along with several new buildings on a civilian airport. Various certificates from Flight School are shown on the next page

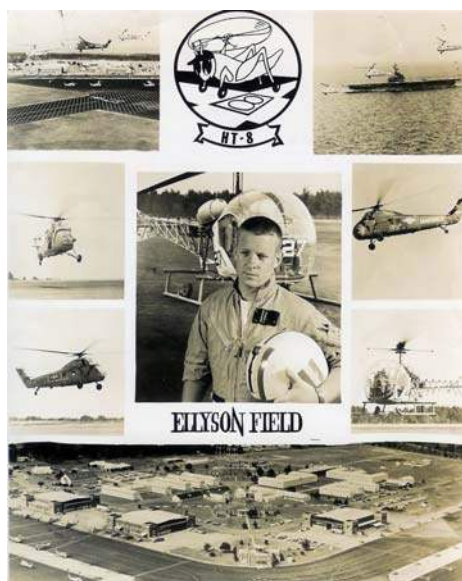




Pre-Flight Completion



T-34 Safe for Solo



H-13 Safe For Solo



Helicopter Pilot Designation

#### IV. Air Station Miami: October 1966 – December 1968



The complement of aircraft at Miami was 4 HH-52As, 6 HU-16E's and 2 C-123s for logistics support of the Caribbean LORAN chain. During WWII, Opa Locka had been a Navy field, and still boasted a blimp hangar. The Goodyear Blimps sometimes used it for maintenance, and we always enjoyed watching them come and go. My log book indicates that I first flew the HH-52A on 31 October, 1966 and was designated a co-pilot on 2 November after 5 flights totaling 9 hours. Miami must have been desperate for co-pilots in those days, because I flew twice on the 31<sup>st</sup> with Ken Roughgarden and Rick Folker, and twice on the 1<sup>st</sup> with Rick before my check ride with Jack Lyon on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Coast Guard bought 99 H-52A "Seaguards" in the early 60's. It combined a 1250 SHP turbine engine with the H-19 rotor system in a boat hulled helicopter which was both capable and reliable. The H-52 maximum weight was 8300 pounds, and the cabin could accommodate 10 passengers. (Based on my having picked up 10 AF pilots on one trip during water survival training at Homestead AFB) The H-52 cruised at about 90 knots, with a redline of 110 knots.

Duly designated, the next step was an instrument check, which was accomplished with Billy Ed Murphy on the 18<sup>th</sup>. We did an ILS, a VOR, and an ADF, and I was pronounced fit to stand duty with LCDR Marshall K. Phillips. Marsh was somewhat irascible, and did not suffer fools lightly, but he was an accomplished pilot from whom I learned much. On one occasion, we were doing hoist practice with a CG 40 foot utility boat, and Marshall couldn't raise them on the radio to discuss the next evolution. To get the coxswain's attention after several unanswered radio calls, he deftly maneuvered the helicopter over the boat and tapped the wheelhouse vigorously with the right front tire. The coxswain quickly switched his radio back on.



CG Air Station (CGAS) Miami frequently patrolled power boat races in Biscayne Bay. Sometimes we would act as the starter by flying low over the boats as they approached the starting line, and as we crossed the line, the crewman would deploy a bag of flour from the cabin door to signal the start of the race. The faster classes of racers would then accelerate out from under the helicopter, as we were only flying about 60 knots. During one race, Marshall K. was assigned to patrol the event in case a boat needed help. As he cruised above the race at about 1,000 feet, the helicopter engine suddenly quit, and Marshall had to make a full autorotation to the water while avoiding both the racers and the spectators. His consummate skill made the maneuver successful, and the HH-52 was subsequently recovered at Dinner Key. Analysis of the engine revealed that a Coke can had caused the flameout. It had been thoughtlessly dropped from one of the many spectator aircraft orbiting overhead, 2,000 feet above Marsh. The moral in the story for helicopter pilots is always look up as well as down and around, since you never know where the next threat may be coming from. That lesson served me well while flying under bridges for both business and pleasure during my Coast Guard Career.

Miami was and is a very busy place, and in my first year there, I flew on 55 SAR cases, and added nearly 300 hours to the 225 I had accrued at Pensacola, flying with such notables of Coast Guard Aviation as Bill Cooper, Benny Weems, and Harold Woolley, who had been enlisted



pilots in WWII. Harold had in fact babysat for me on a few occasions at Elizabeth City when I was two years old, but in the late 60's, he was at the point in his flying career which required him to take a "baby sitter" (co- pilot) along when he flew. I often filled that role, and benefited from his experience. Also graven on my mind is Benny Weems' description of one of my early attempts at tracking along an airway using the VOR "Your track line looks like a snake!" Another interesting footnote to being assigned at Miami was the fact that the District Commander, RADM Louis M. Thayer, had been my father's CO on *CGC Unalga* during WWII. At the first personnel inspection after I arrived, RADM Thayer came to the Air Station to present some awards. As he reviewed the station company standing in formation, he noticed my name tag, immediately inquired after my parents, and began to make small talk. The admiral had an excellent memory!

Our daughter Pam was born in Miami at precisely 0200 on 29 October 1967, the moment at which Daylight Savings Time officially ends. We've often wondered whether she's really an hour older than her birth certificate indicates. In any case, within a year or so, her paraphernalia had exceeded the volume of the Mustang, and we traded it in on a 1968 Ford Station Wagon, the first of several such "child bearing" conveyances.. Had we the foresight to keep and preserve the convertible, it would today be worth upwards of \$50,000! If only our foresight was as keen as our 20-20 hindsight . . . .

Some of the more memorable SAR cases at Miami include delivering pumps to a vessel taking on water off Key West in what was to become a hurricane. Fortunately the wind was from the exact direction we needed to make the hoist relatively simple, and we had a huge tailwind coming home. On another occasion, Chuck Peterson and I were launched to locate a young couple who had gotten themselves into the Gulf Stream on a Sunfish (surfboard with a sail) and couldn't get back. We found them just about dusk clinging to the overturned vessel, and lowered the rescue basket to begin the hoist. As the woman reached the light of the cabin door, the hoist operator exclaimed loudly over the intercom "Holy #\$\*! – she's naked." Apparently she had lost her bikini top in the capsizing, and consumed enough salt water afterwards to bring on diarrhea, resulting in the removal of her bottom. The crewman quickly restored her dignity with a blanket from the helicopter's equipment, and recovered her partner without incident. Particularly memorable for me was a solo MEDEVAC several hundred miles down the Bahamas chain.. I was dispatched with 1 crewman to refuel aboard a 210 foot CG Cutter. Upon landing, we stripped the helicopter of all its rescue equipment except the rescue basket for maximum fuel capacity. We then flew to the



scene, recovered the patient and retraced our steps to the cutter for more fuel before heading back to Miami. Totals: 3.8 hours, one save, and a junior Coast Guard pilot with an exceptional feeling of job satisfaction!

On 27 October 1967, I was designated a First Pilot in the H-52, having accrued the requisite 500 hours and completed the training syllabus. At that point in time, CGAS Miami was flying daily 6-8 hour "Red Patrols"

in the Straits of Florida, photographing vessel activity so that the CIA could monitor Cuban infiltration and exfiltration. There was also a weekly “White Patrol” of 8-10 hours through the Windward Strait east of Cuba. Since nearly all of the pilots at Miami were qualified in two of the three aircraft types assigned, the policy was to qualify fledgling helicopter pilots like myself as HU-16E co-Pilots so we could build time more quickly toward the 750 hours required for Aircraft Commander, while also providing the fixed wing pilots some relief. I started the “Goat” syllabus on 16 November ’67, (I’ll never forget the emergency procedure for any engine anomaly - “Feather [the propeller] Mixture [Cutoff], Gang Bar [a guarded switch which turned off all the switches associated with the recalcitrant engine]) and Duane Coppock declared me a Co-pilot a month later. In the ensuing year, my log books record nearly 470 hours of flight time, including designation as an H-52 A/C on 30 April 1968.

The Grumman HU-16E Albatross was built in the 1950’s, and was the offspring of the JRF Widgeon my dad had flown in WWII. Powered by two 1425 R-1820 engines, it cruised at 120 knots with a redline of 200 knots over a range of nearly 3000 miles (Coast Guard HU-16E 7255 still holds the several records for an amphibian aircraft, including a speed record of 201 knots, distance record of 3100 miles, and altitude with payload of 29,500 feet.) The usual crew was two pilots and a radio operator in the cockpit, and a Plane Captain / Drop master in the cabin, which had ample space for passenger seats and cargo to accommodate 35,700 pounds at maximum gross weight. The Coast Guard has always referred to the HU-16 as “The Goat,” perhaps because of its unique aroma of sweat, AVGAS and various lubricants.



One particular Red Patrol turned into a marathon for Don Millroy and me. We had nearly finished the patrol when we were diverted east of Cuba to investigate a report of a vessel violating Cuban waters. When that proved to be a non-event, we headed for home again only to be diverted to the Bahamas for a SAR Case. When that had resolved itself, we finally landed at Opa Locka with 9.6 hours, of which 1.0 had been solid instruments in heavy rain showers. Another unforgettable Red Patrol occurred with Gerry Hotchkiss. We had just turned southwest along the Florida Keys to begin the patrol when we received a report that two Air Force F-4s from Homestead had collided in mid-air, and the crews had bailed out. We diverted to assist, and after an hour’s search located the survivors. They came up on the Guard frequency and we ascertained that there was one fatality and three injuries. After vectoring an H-52 to the scene and monitoring the pickup, we were cleared to return to Miami, since some five hours had elapsed, and we wouldn’t be able to complete the patrol.



As we leveled off, the emergency landing gear extension handle at the base of the pilot’s seat failed, spraying Gerry with hydraulic fluid. After a bit, he announced that he was feeling nauseous, and directed that we change seats. He raised the center

console to afford egress from the seats, and I stepped down into the aisle in the center of the cockpit, and back by the radio seat to make room for him. As he slid out of his seat to cross to the copilot seat, the toggle for the inflation cartridge on his Mae West caught on the console, inflating his vest. He exclaimed that he was having a heart attack, and lurched against the aft face of the upturned console upon which the autopilot roll control was located. So there we were, no one at the controls, and the ponderous “Goat” starting a barrel roll on its own initiative. Fortunately, the mighty HU-16E had a rather ponderous roll rate, so we were able to salvage the situation. Having seen what had transpired, I assured Gerry that it was his life vest clamping his chest and not a heart attack, and encouraged him to continue into the right seat so that I could regain control of the aircraft. Things settled down in short order, and the rest of the flight was uneventful, save for Gerry having to replace his flight suit upon our return.

The Cubans were not amicably disposed to having the Coast Guard monitor their activities and they sometimes sent a MIG 21 out to “intimidate” us, even though we flew in International Waters. Upon being intercepted, the drill in the HU-16E was to slowly retard the throttles, lower the flaps, and slow to our minimum control speed of 82 knots. The MIGs would then decelerate to stay with us, but would inevitably have to give it up as a bad project when they began to stall at about 100 knots. Cuban Patrol Boats were frequently sighted on the Red/White patrols, and as we flew low over them to take their pictures, the crews could be seen brandishing weapons on deck. On one occasion, a post flight inspection of the aircraft revealed several bullet holes in the tail, apparently from a Cuban rifle. The Cubans were not the only unfriendlies in the Straits of Florida. Langouste (Rock Lobster) fisherman on the Cay Sal Banks frequently exchanged gunfire with one another to protect their traps (or cover their tracks!), and they were not above taking pot shots at a CG plane which appeared to be interfering in their “Lobster Wars.”



At some point during my time in Miami, it was decided to stage a launch of the ready helicopter for the cameras, I think for the District Newsletter. Dick Cottingham (Just behind me at left) and I were tasked to run out to a “cocked” helicopter (One which had already been pre-flighted, and prepared for immediate takeoff) and depart as though we were on an urgent SAR Case. The cameras rolled and the story was told,

but the fact of the matter is that the only good thing which can happen when you run to an airplane is that you don’t fall and hurt yourself – all the other possibilities are bad. In actual practice, SAR crews move expeditiously but safely toward the aircraft, execute the checklists with dispatch, and still get airborne in a matter of minutes.

In going through my files, I came across another photo taken for the mock SAR Case story. I decided to include it because it so dramatically provides the survivor’s view during thousands of search and rescue missions by Coast Guard helicopters. I’m sure that many spirits have been lifted and many hearts warmed over the years by the letters “USCG” on a helicopter lowering a rescue basket to pluck them from the perils of the sea.



There's an old saying that the mission isn't over until the paperwork is complete, and someone took a picture of me in the Operations Center at Miami doing just that, ca. 1967-68 as a LTJG. I don't know if it was in connection with the following story, but it could have been.



In November of 1968, Nixon had been elected president, and President Johnson flew to Miami to meet with him in conjunction with a speaking engagement. (Nixon had a home on Key Biscayne) For reasons I will ever quite understand, it was decided that they would meet at the Coast Guard Air Station north of the city, rather than at Homestead AFB to the south. That morning, the Secret Service descended like a swarm of bees to begin preparations and set up a modicum of security (The Air Station shared the airport and ramp space with Burnside Ott, a flight training operation.) Before long, they began drilling holes, running wires, climbing on hangar roofs, and recruiting CG security guards. As the day wore on, the activity increased in intensity, until mid-afternoon, when a convoy containing most of Homestead's ground support equipment appeared in the distance. Several miles long, the convoy brought portable generators, auxiliary lighting, ground power units for Air Force One, a Big Bertha Crane in the event that aircraft wreckage had to be moved, and a host of vehicles and personnel. Soon thereafter, Marine One, the Presidential helicopter, landed, and commandeered one of our tow bars and most of the hangar space while a company of Marines turned to with rags and polish. I was on duty, and we were launched on a SAR case in the midst of the drill. Returning a couple of hours later, Miami approach informed us that we would be delayed while AF One landed. Taxiing in after the glistening 707, we parked the helicopter and made our way to the operations center to complete the paperwork. As I was turning around for another form, the glass doors facing the ramp swept open, and President Elect Nixon walked out to greet President Johnson. After the obligatory photo op, they strode back through the ops center and up to CAPT Reed's office for their pow wow. Within the hour, Nixon departed with his Motorcade and Johnson left in Marine One for his speaking engagement. During the night, AF One returned to Washington, the Air Force reclaimed its gear, and life returned to normal. We never did find out what their discussion was about, but it probably centered on the Paris Peace Talks then in progress.

After 25 months at Miami, I had accumulated nearly 1,000 hours and flown on 118 SAR cases, an average of 30 hours and 5 SAR Cases per month. Miami continues to be the Coast Guard's busiest SAR Aviation SAR unit, flying an average of 1.5 cases per day. It was an excellent start for a young CG Aviator.





## V. Aviation Training Center Mobile/IBSEC: January 1969 – November 1970



In December 1968, we were transferred to CGAS Mobile as part of the initial cadre of IBSU, the Icebreaker Support Unit which was then forming. It soon became known as IBSEC, the Icebreaker Support Section, when CGAS Mobile was designated the Coast Guard Aviation Training Center in the summer of 69. As AVTRACEN grew over the years, IBSEC morphed into the Ship Helicopter Operations Division SHOPDIV, and finally came to be known as the Polar Operations Division – POPDIV - until it was disbanded in the fall of 2005. CDR Dewey Barfield was the unit commander, and Ken Roughgarden the deputy. Two Ensigns fresh from Pensacola, Fred Kent and John Gaines, had reported in before the Christmas holidays, and I reported between Christmas and New Year's. Ralph Giffin reported right after the holidays, and we four became the pilots of AVDET #1, which was scheduled to deploy in *Northwind* at the end of April.

The first order of business was to round up the additional helicopters which would constitute the 14 assigned to IBSU. (There were then 7 icebreakers, requiring 2 helicopters per detachment – Three Winds, *Edisto*, *Staten Island* and *Burton Island*, and *Glacier*). My log reflects a 7.5 hour flight from Miami on 8 January to fetch the 1402, and a 10.9 hour jaunt from Elizabeth City to Mobile from 17-20 January to deliver the 1379, and two other HH-52s. In those days, ferry flights were required to be accomplished under VFR conditions. On Friday the 17<sup>th</sup>, Dewey Barfield, Roger Millett and I flew 6.1 hours and stopped for the night at Savannah. On Saturday we made it as far as Monroeville, AL, only 100 miles from Mobile, before the weather deteriorated to the point that further flight in visual conditions was impossible. We landed at Monroe County Airport to refuel and consider our options. A check with the local FAA flight service station disclosed widespread low clouds and reduced visibilities across the Southeastern US, so we decided to spend the night, and caught a ride to town.

Monroeville in those days was not yet five years beyond the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and evidences of segregation persisted. Public water fountains were still labeled "White" and "Colored" and the town's only movie theater still had an outside entrance to the balcony labeled "Colored Only." The Coast Guard was not widely known there, there being no navigable waters nearby, and we made quite a stir walking around town in our flight suits and leather flying jackets. The word quickly filtered up to the local constabulary, and as we walked to breakfast at a local café on Sunday morning, we were accosted by a young deputy sheriff who wheeled up to the curb in his cruiser and in his best Alabama drawl inquired, "Y'all some kind of motorcycle gang?" We assured him that we were merely stranded CG aircrews, and after sifting through the differences between the Coast Guard and the National Guard with him, the light of understanding came on and he called another deputy to help drive us to breakfast. The bad weather persisted through the weekend, forcing us to remain yet another night. To pass the time on Saturday night, we had gone to the recently desegregated movie theater. Fortunately the feature changed on Sunday for the coming week, affording a modicum of entertainment for our second night in town. The weather lifted on Monday, and an hour after takeoff we were back home in Mobile.





The following months were devoted to training our fledgling co-pilots, training ourselves in Arctic survival techniques, getting fitted for wet suits for protection against Arctic waters, preparing the “DIKs” (Deployment Icebreaker Kits), carefully packaged supplies and equipment designed to fit in the retractable hangars being installed aboard the icebreakers), and teambuilding with the 10 aircrewmembers, lead by AMC Bob Dillard, pictured with me at left, who would be the heart of the deployment. To practice cold weather survival, we flew to Eglin AFB, and spent an afternoon in their climatic hangar, a huge test facility which cooled the 80 degree Florida Air to sub-zero, and could even produce snow. We also spent a night camping on the snow white sands

of Gulf Breeze, AL east of Mobile to simulate being stranded in the Arctic wastes. Part of the drill was to prepare signals for the Search and Rescue forces, which if good enough to attract attention, would be rewarded by a case of beer parachuted from the HU-16E search aircraft.

As the initial Aviation Detachments were forming, the co-pilot positions were mostly filled with recent graduates from Pensacola, one of whom soon became legendary as a classic manifestation of the criteria “unable to expend effort constructively,” which merited a discharge for convenience of the government. One of his first assignments was to obtain the case of beer for the search and rescue exercise and deliver it to the “Goat” crew. He dutifully purchased the merchandise, but then opted to carry it on his shoulder across the Hangar Bay, inquiring as to where he might find the HU-16E crew. He soon encountered the commanding officer, and told all about the proposed use of the beer, ending what had been an enjoyable practice. When this same inept Ensign later qualified (one wonders how) to solo, he opted to fly his initial outing about 0800 on a Saturday morning. To impress his girl friend, he decided to buzz her house. What he failed to consider, however, was that she lived in the same neighborhood as the deputy IBSEC commander, who liked to sleep in on Saturday. Needless to say, the hapless Ensign never soloed again. His Coast Guard career came to a timely end soon thereafter when he decided to furnish his home with some furniture stored in the Air Station Supply warehouse while the O’Club was being remodeled. Guilty on all charges at the ensuing court-martial, he was quickly discharged for the good of the service, fortunately before he had killed anyone with an airplane.

**AVDET #1, ARCTIC West 1969:** After several delays due to problems with *Northwind’s* propulsion system, we finally departed for Seattle on 2 May with H-52s 1375 and 1459. (The Wind class breakers were powered by six main diesel engines driving two huge electric motors, one per screw. The diesel electric system afforded the power to speed ratios required for maneuvering in ice. One of *Northwind’s* electric motors had mysteriously flooded, and the drying process proved very time consuming.) The eight day cross country flight took 37 hours, with stops at Houston, Del Rio, El Paso, Phoenix, LA, San Francisco, and Medford, Oregon. Crossing Texas at 90 knots indicated airspeed into a headwind, it was not uncommon to see 18 wheelers making better groundspeed than we could. We also flew under the Golden Gate Bridge in formation leaving San Francisco, after carefully looking for pedestrians armed with coke cans . . . Upon checking in with the ship in Seattle and getting a firm departure plan, we continued on



to Port Angeles for a little last minute maintenance. On 13 May we hopped aboard as *Northwind* transited the Strait of Juan de Fuca outbound for Kodiak, arriving there on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The ship was still having some more propulsion difficulties, so we stayed in Kodiak for about two weeks, finishing up maintenance odds and ends, sightseeing, and giving the co-pilots some final training. For the month of May 1969, my log book shows a total time of 51 hours!

With the main diesels patched and a Fairbanks-Morse tech rep embarked, *Northwind* departed Kodiak on 8 June to transit the Northwest Passage for Greenland, where she was scheduled to meet the tanker Manhattan, an oil tanker which had had been converted for ice operations to explore the feasibility of using tankers to move oil from the North Slope of Alaska. The Commanding Officer, D. J. McCann, was a salty old sea dog from Down East Maine. As soon as we got underway, he donned his WWII vintage “Arctic Khakis,” a warm woolen uniform no longer officially in service, some LL Bean Moose hide slippers, a well used ball cap, and a pipe full of tobacco. There were a couple of new Ensigns fresh out of the Academy standing bridge watches to qualify as Officer of the Deck. The CO enjoyed slouching in his Captain’s Chair, and asking apparently preposterous questions to foster their education. On one occasion as the ship beat her way across the Bering Sea amidst ever increasing swells, the Captain observed “Mr. Smith, the barometer is dropping. What do you think we should do?” As the Ensign racked his brains for a “by the book” answer, the Captain continued, “If I were you, I’d sell when it gets to 26 (inches of Mercury).” He then went on to explain the Heavy Weather Bill to the embarrassed Ensign. His Stock Market analogy was meant to illustrate the problems with inaction in the face of changing conditions, since a pressure of 26 would likely be encountered only in the eye of a Category Five Hurricane, at which point the ship would be at the mercy of the seas. The prospective OOD never forgot that lesson, and neither did I.



The wardroom was on the starboard side of the ship on the main deck. It had four tables running athwart ships, with standard government gray steel arm chairs along each side and at the head of the head table. The tables had automobile seat belts at each place which fastened through the arms so that when the ship rolled, the chairs wouldn’t slide. During heavy weather, the Filipino Stewards usually prepared simple fare such as soup and sandwiches. Split Pea Soup was a particular favorite, as were “Cheese Mashies,” grilled cheese sandwiches held on the grill by small sections of the ship’s 2 inch thick hull plating, resulting in a quarter inch thick sandwich. The XO didn’t usually fasten his seat belt, because he wanted to be able to egress quickly if the contents of the table suddenly headed his way. On one memorable occasion however, the ship was rolling a constant 45 degrees, so he buckled in with strict orders to his table mates to keep one hand on their soup and one on their drink. As luck would have it, the ship immediately took a 60 degree roll, and most of the nearly full soup and Kool-Aid headed in his direction. In what seemed like slow motion comic relief, he let go of his own bowl and cup and went for the seat belt. You can imagine the rest – he got a lap full of his own meal, followed hard upon by everyone else’s. He never belted himself in again!

Evenings were wiled away with 16 mm movies projected on a pull down screen at the forward end of the Wardroom. The ship set out with a small library of films from the Naval Motion

Picture Service, none of them terribly good. A particular favorite of the Aviation Detachment, however, was "Panic in the City," a B thriller about a plot to explode an atomic bomb in Los Angeles. The film ended with a Coast Guard H-52 flying into a setting sun with the bomb dangling beneath it until the inevitable mushroom cloud appeared. The lovely irony was that the tail number of the helicopter in the movie was the same as one of the helicopters we had on board! We finally got to the point of showing only the final reel, having memorized the rest of the film. On 20 June, *Northwind* slowed for the better part of the day as she crossed the Arctic Circle – 66-30 N latitude at longitude 168-36 W in order that the "pollywogs" among the crew (those who had never crossed the Arctic Circle) might be tested and found acceptable by King Neptune and His Royal Baby to be forever known as a "Bluenose." CAPT McCann was of course King Neptune, and the Royal Baby the Bluenose with the largest belly, since one of the rites was to kiss the royal belly. It was cold, wet, slimy but grand fun, and a double ration of the 3.2% beer carried by the ship was provided to all.



Crossing the Bering Sea, we made stops in Nome, Tin City, and Prince of Wales, AK to pick up mail and some Navy divers to service the hydrophones at the base of Fairway Rock in the Bering Strait. Fairway Rock is about 12 miles from Little Diomed Island, and thus only 14 miles from Big Diomed, which is Russian territory just across the international dateline. The rock is about 20 miles west of mainland Alaska, and during the Cold War was useful for monitoring Soviet Naval Activity. The Navy had some generators mounted on top of the rock to power the hydrophones, so we made several helo trips to the top of the rock, about 300 feet above the waterline. The rock was often shrouded in fog, with enough ceiling at the base to allow flight operations, and just enough of the top visible to permit a safe landing. The rock serves as a nesting ground and feeding stop for migratory birds, so the drill was to make a low pass to scatter the birds and then quickly turn in for landing to avoid striking them. In winter, the arctic ice pack sometimes closes the Strait with solid ice from Russia to Alaska, and at some point, an Arctic fox had made his way to the rock and somehow clambered to the top. He was **very** well fed, and disinclined to bother humans, so we ignored him, but did have to wonder whether he was Russian or American. In any event, when I returned the following summer, he was gone, having either moved on or gorged himself to death. While working underwater, the divers encountered a King Crab and brought him up for dinner. He was fully eight feet across, and provided a feast of crab leg "steaks."



With the work at Fairway Rock completed by the end of June, we sailed on to Point Barrow, the northern most city in Alaska. Located on a wind swept, gravelly beach, it is truly barren with no vegetation, and structures constructed primarily of bare or lightly tinted wood, since the climate precludes any effective painting. The local airport is named after Wiley Post, the 1930's aviator who circumnavigated the earth in 1931 with a navigator on board, and then replicated the feat solo in 1933. In 1935, he and Will Rogers the Cowboy humorist and author, were exploring mail routes between Alaska and Russia when they crashed just south of Barrow. While we were at the airport waiting to pick up some Coast Guard dignitaries coming in by C-130, an airliner filled with "Land of the Midnight Sun" tourists arrived. I'll never forget their stunned expressions as

they came down the boarding ramp, saw how desolate Northern Alaska really was, and realized how much they had spent to see it . . . .

Once the final arrangements had been made for the *Manhattan* mission, we headed east on 7 July, stopping at every DEW Line station across the Northwest Territories of Canada for mail. Having long ago exhausted fresh milk and produce aboard *Northwind*, our standard response to the inevitable Canadian offers of steak or fish was always, “No thanks, but we’d love some real milk or fresh vegetables and fruit.” Food aboard an icebreaker is abundant, but consists primarily of those items which can either be frozen or powdered after the initial stores of fresh food is consumed. The cooks become increasingly creative at disguising the iterative menus, and no one goes hungry, but the human appetite seems to crave fresh food. One grand culinary experiment which failed was Maple Nut Ice Cream. The recipe was coming together well with the usual powdered ice cream mix and maple syrup for flavor, but foundered with the addition of nuts – the cook unwittingly grabbed a can of salted mixed nuts instead of pecans. Although a few hardies choked some of it down, the several gallons left over were soon in the trash.

One of the sites into which we flew was Tuktoyaktuk, a swampy outpost in the Northwest Territories. The summer there is very brief, and the mosquitoes make the most of it. They were armed with sufficiently long probosci to bite us through the 1/8” Neoprene wet suits we wore. Cambridge Bay was another mail stop, and on July 24, we arrived just in time to watch kinescopes of the moon landing 4 days earlier, which had just been flown in. In early August, we reached Thule Air Base, Greenland to await the *Manhattan*.

Thule was established during WWII as a weather station. The Air Base was built in the 50s as a cold war bomber base, and later transitioned to fighter-interceptors. With the dawn of the space age in the 60’s however, Thule proved better suited to hosting early warning radar and satellite control stations, and by the mid-60’s had no fixed wing aircraft assigned. In 1969, it had a detachment of HH-43 Helicopters., a small complement of military personnel, and about 2000 Danish employees. It also had a club, which was our first stop after docking. Foregoing happy hour, we headed for the salad bar and gorged ourselves on reasonably fresh lettuce, tomatoes, and other produce to quench appetites developed during three months at sea without such luxuries.



The climate at Thule, 750 miles north of the Arctic Circle, is quite harsh in winter, but average summer temperatures are in the 40s. One oddity is that despite its proximity to water, the humidity is so low that things don’t rust. Barbed wire and machine guns erected during WWII have not rusted, and still look new. The low humidity also plays havoc with USO troupes. The singers usually have to wait a day or two after arriving to acclimate before they can perform. During our time there, a USO sponsored group composed of college girls arrived. After several shows at the main base, it was decided that we would fly some of them to Cape Athol, a CG LORAN Station about 20 miles south of Thule. To maximize passenger space in the helicopters, we left the co-pilots behind, and used the left seat for a passenger. A cute little red haired girl sat

there in my helicopter, CGNR 1459, and wore the copilot's helmet. It was widely reported that he slept with his helmet for the rest of the deployment . . . .

The *Southwind* was operating further south near Sondestrom, and struck an uncharted rock, holing her bow and flooding a storage compartment. Although the damage was minimal and was quickly repaired, the flooded compartment unfortunately contained the ship's supply of toilet paper, which was rendered useless. This made the situation critical, and *Northwind* got underway to assist. My log reflects a 2.2 hour flight to transfer "relief" supplies from one icebreaker to the other.



The *Manhattan* was predictably delayed, and we remained docked at Thule for most of August. The waters there are only free of ice for a month or so each summer, during which time there is a steady influx of re-supply ships for the coming year. One ship contained most of the merchandise for the Base Exchange, including a broad assortment of the latest stereo equipment. On the day the merchandise was available for sale, the line outside the building began to form at midnight for a 0900 opening, and by noon, most everything was sold. Clearly it was a highlight of the year, especially for those permanently assigned at such a remote station. We also passed the time with maintenance on the helicopters, training flights, and some sightseeing. Greenland is like a giant teacup filled with ice. The central glacier rises almost 12,000 feet above seal level, and where there are cracks in the rim of the tea cup, fingers of ice find their way back to the sea. Since the Greenland glacier is the highest point closest to the North Pole, we made landings on the snowy surface so that we could say that we were indeed "sitting on top of the world." We also visited Qanaq, the Eskimo village 75 miles north of Thule. As Thule was being built, the local inhabitants were relocated to Qanaq by mutual agreement. It was interesting to meet them and to enjoy their hospitality, a rugged people in a rugged land.

We departed Thule on 2 September to rendezvous with *Manhattan*, and the Canadian ice breaker, *Johnny MacDonald*. We caught up with them near Resolute on 6 September, and began the westward transit of the Northwest Passage. *Manhattan*, built in 1961, had been modified with an icebreaker bow and reinforced hull plating to operate in ice. At just over 1,000 feet, she was an impressive sight, particularly in comparison with our 289 feet, and the slightly larger *MacDonald*. In addition to the work on her hull, she had been fitted with a flight deck and two S-62 helicopters, the civilian version of our H-52s. The capacious flight deck was painted with a huge rendition of "Tony the Tiger" similar to the patch at left to maximize the advertising potential of the mission. Sadly, unlike the flight decks on military vessels, which are coated with a non-skid paint to keep both helicopters and people from slipping, "Tony" was painted in high gloss enamel. One had to exercise great caution when landing, and debarking passengers looked like they were ice skating as they delicately made their way forward to the ship's superstructure on the glassy surface. *Northwind's* flight deck was coated with a coarse anti-skid paint which wore the rubber soles off my flight boots over the course of the trip.





During the BX bonanza at Thule, I had purchased a super eight movie camera, and took several rolls of film which have since been transferred to DVD and provided to the POPDIV library at ATC Mobile. I've extracted several frames to illustrate the process of operating two helicopters aboard a flight deck large enough to hold only one. With the helicopter hangar retracted as at left, the drill was for one helicopter, usually the one with the least fuel, to land. The crew would



then fold its blades, and move it forward with a small electric tug attached to the tail wheel and park it athwart ships. The second helicopter then had room to land, normally 45 degrees off the ship's heading to permit a go around. After its blades were folded, both helicopters were positioned fore and aft, one facing forward and one aft so that they fit into the hangar, which was then extended over them to permit maintenance out of the weather. As the crew grew proficient, the time between landings was rarely more than 10 minutes, and often only five. For take offs, the process was reversed.

Shipboard navigation in the ice was problematic at best in those days, since the electronic systems such as OMEGA and LORAN were not terribly reliable, the perennial overcast precluded effective celestial navigation, and the remote area of the Northwest Passage was not very accurately charted. As a result, my logbook contains notes on several sorties to the effect of "Located ship," or "Relocated ship," meaning that we would take off and climb high enough directly overhead to get ADF bearings from two DEW Line Stations so as to fix the ship's position. A National Geographic photographer along for the mission asked to accompany us on one of these flights. After we had "located" the convoy, he asked if we could climb higher so that he could get a good panoramic shot of *Manhattan* and her escorts. We had time, and were already at about 5,000 feet, so we started to climb as the intrepid photographer donned the hoist operator's "gunner's belt" and positioned himself in the door. As we climbed, the winds increased and the temperature dropped 3 degrees per thousand feet. Approaching 13,000 feet, the Outside Air Temperature was about -25 C, and the wind was exceeding our airspeed, since the ships far below, even though stopped in ice, were moving ahead of us. I told the photographer that if we were going to get back in time for lunch, he'd better take his pictures. Shaking with the cold, he readily acquiesced, and we started down, landing aboard just in time for lunch.



*Manhattan* carried her own helicopter, a Sikorsky S-62, the civilian version of the Coast Guard H-52. To practice ice operations they would dispatch the S-62 with a trained ice observer in the co-pilot seat, usually one of *Northwind*'s junior officers or senior enlisted personnel. The experiment was short lived, however, for on one of the early flights, the pilot decided to land on the ice pack, perhaps to familiarize himself with such an evolution. He selected what appeared

to be a smooth spot, and against the advice of the Coast Guard Ensign in the left seat, proceeded to land on a refrozen puddle. The newly formed ice wasn't strong enough to support the 8,000 pounds of S-62, and the landing gear began to break through the ice. Rather than simply lifting off and finding a better spot, the untrained pilot panicked and began shutting down the engine and rotor system, which of course made the helicopter sink into the shallow puddle all the faster. Thoroughly confused, he ordered "Abandon ship!" and climbed out his cockpit window into the frigid water. As the rotors struck the ice, they stopped themselves, and the helicopter came to rest on its boat hull in a shallow pool of water with a useless rotor system. We had thoroughly trained the Coast Guard Ensign in H-52 operations for his many flights with us, so he nonchalantly finished the shut down check list, turned off the battery, and made a graceful exit out the cabin door without so much as wetting his boots. The ruined helicopter was unceremoniously hoisted aboard *Manhattan*, where it spent the rest of the voyage parked at the front of the flight deck, its missing rotor blades conspicuous by their absence.

It was interesting to fly in the area around Resolute, Canada, which was then very near the magnetic North Pole. (I understand that the magnetic pole has now moved closer to Thule) The magnetic standby compass on the helicopter's dash would spin aimlessly as we crossed the earth's lines of magnetic resolution more quickly than it could register. To make the aircraft gyro compass systems function usefully, we would deselect the normal mode in which they slaved to a magnetic flux gate in the tail, and set them to the grid function, in which we slaved them to the true heading of the ship before takeoff, so that we could use them to navigate. The difference between true and magnetic headings is very apparent at a place like Thule, where the runway runs east and west, but the magnetic compass indicates north and south because of the magnetic variation there. The airport at Resolute is gravel, and most of the buildings are painted red or green for visibility during the frequent whiteouts.



The *Northwind* continued to have problems with her main diesels, however, and could not develop the power necessary for the heavy ice breaking ahead. Since *Staten Island* had by then arrived to help represent the Coast Guard, *Northwind* reluctantly departed on 11 September and retraced her steps through the southern section of the Northwest Passage to rejoin *Manhattan* and her escorts off Prudhoe Bay. A week later, the convoy appeared out of the mists off Alaska, and we spent a week ferrying various dignitaries to and from the ship. On 21 September, we delivered the last of the VIPs ashore at Barrow, and headed for Seattle.

The *Manhattan* made one more voyage the following summer, but proved to be underpowered for operations in ice much over 4 feet thick. In October 1970, the oil industry decided that the Alaska pipeline was a more viable alternative to move oil from the North Shore, and the grand experiment was abandoned. The rest of the story is that *Manhattan* returned to the grain trade, where in 1974 I had occasion to perform a MEDEVAC from her while flying out of New Orleans. Her icebreaker bow made her easy to identify in the warm waters of the Gulf of

Mexico, and her flight deck made the MEDEVAC a piece of cake.. Ironically, *Manhattan* started loading oil at the end of the Alaska Pipeline at Valdez in 1977, and spent her last decade of service delivering North Slope crude oil to west coast refineries and the Far East until she grounded in a typhoon and was subsequently scrapped in 1987.

Another footnote to the *Manhattan* project is that it provided the catalyst for funding the current Coast Guard Icebreakers, *Polar Star* and *Polar Sea*. In 1968, the Congress had declined to appropriate funds for new Coast Guard icebreakers. Following the mechanical difficulties experienced by *Northwind*, the need to modernize the Icebreaker fleet became increasingly apparent, and the required funding was soon provided. *Polar Star* began construction in 1973, and was commissioned in 1976, with *Polar Sea* following in 1978. After thirty years of service, *Polar Star* was placed in “special commission status awaiting disposition” on 30 June 2006 due to escalating maintenance costs and decreased funding for the National Science Foundation, the organization which had generated much of the requirement for icebreakers in recent years.

On 2 October, we departed *Northwind* outside the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and began the trip home to Mobile. My log reflects that the return trip took only 27.6 hours, 10 hours less than the flight out, and only required 4 days, with stops in Medford, OR, Palm Springs, El Paso, and Austin. The quick trip home was no doubt the result of favorable tail winds and a bad case of “get home itis” after five months. I arrived in Mobile on 6 October to a tumultuous greeting from my loving wife and nearly two year old daughter, and we enjoyed a glorious reunion and some time off.

My log book entries for November 1969 through May 1970 indicate a steady round of training and test flights as we prepared the continuing influx of IBSEC personnel for the coming round of deployments. Neal Nicholson, Jerry Millsaps, Ray McFadden and I were on tap to take AVDET #9 for an Arctic West Deployment leaving Seattle in June aboard *Northwind*. Both co-pilots had already deployed, but Neal had not, so we concentrated on getting him up to speed on Icebreaker operations. Under the guise of mountain flying training in northern Georgia, we flew to Dobbins AFB near Atlanta to rendezvous with some Air Force H-53s. We sat in the jump seats as they flew at various mountain top landing zones with what we considered reckless abandon because of the huge disparity in size and performance between our single engine 1250 SHP machines, and their twin engine 4,000 SHP per side monsters. We quickly decided that their tactics, techniques and procedures had little application to H-52 operations, and the training program was terminated. 10 years later while serving with the Air Force in Okinawa, I flew H-53B and C models, and appreciated the helicopter’s large power reserves, but more on that later.



We spent the balance of the day touring the Lockheed C-5 plant in Marietta, which made us feel even more Lilliputian – tires 6 feet in diameter, fuselage sections which should have been in a shipyard, a 27 step ladder from the cargo deck to the flight deck, and a cargo hold which could hold 75 Cadillacs or 150 Volkswagen Bugs. While serving with the Air Force, I had to return to the states each year for simulator training, and the usual mode of transport was as extra crew aboard a C-5. During those 10 -12 hour flights, I got to

explore the C-5 in detail: the pilot seats were far enough apart that two sets of engine controls were needed; behind the flight deck, there were two bunk rooms for crew rest, a full kitchen and lounge area, and 16 aft facing “courier” airline type seats. On one flight, there was a deadheading C-5 crew of 10 and two or three others beside myself, and we all had plenty of room. Near Hawaii, the instructor pilot was going to train the co-pilot in refueling, and all 14 of us managed to fit ourselves onto the flight deck to watch the show as the poor co-pilot sweat bullets as he tried to get lined up with the tanker. The C-5 pushes so much air ahead of it that the bow wave moves the tanker, a 707 derivative aircraft, around like a fly. He persevered, and finally connected to a round of applause.

**AVDET #9, Arctic West 1970:** Back at Mobile, we finished up preparations for the coming deployment, and departed for Seattle on 17 June. 7 days and 31 hours later, we arrived in Seattle on 23 June after stops in Fort Worth, El Paso, Yuma, Los Angeles, NAS Lemoore, and Medford. Two highlights of the trip were flying across the Salton Sea in California at 100 feet below sea level, and flying directly over Mount St. Helen’s. Had we known what was to occur there 10 years later, we might have been more prudent and observed the peak from a safer distance.

There was an airport in the central Texas town of Wink, which provided S&H Green Stamps with the purchase of fuel. Since it was on the route from Fort Worth to El Paso, we made it a point to refuel there. Since each helicopter required about 150 gallons of fuel per stop, we quickly filled enough green stamp booklets to redeem for a coffee pot and a popcorn popper when we reached Seattle. The only drawback was that we had to work for the stamps – the fuel tanks had relatively short hoses, and wouldn’t reach the helicopter parking spots. Undaunted, we manually pushed the helicopters one at a time to the tanks, topped off, and claimed our stamps.

After checking in with the ship, we continued on to Port Angeles to change the transmission on CGNR 1377. The crew performed in their usual magnificent style, and soon had the repairs finished. Many of the ship’s crew had rotated since the previous summer, so the Captain asked for some practice in helicopter operations. We rendezvoused on 29 June in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and provided 4 sorties totaling 6 hours of shipboard landing practice before landing and securing the helicopters for the transit to Kodiak. We arrived in Kodiak on 3 July, topped off the food and fuel supplies, and headed for Nome.



On 13 July, a civilian helicopter went down in Norton Sound south of Nome. Norton Sound is the body of water between Nome and the Yukon River Delta, about 125 miles across. It was decided to launch both helicopters to search, and then recover on the southern shore to await the arrival of the ship for refueling. We flew south, searching for the missing helicopter. To assure we would have enough fuel to recover aboard the ship, we landed after about three hours to wait for the ship. In the summer months, the Yukon Delta is abuzz with Eskimos catching and drying fish for the winter ahead. We landed near one such group, and they provided hot coffee and dried fish, inspected the helicopters, and regaled us with fishing stories about the ones that got away. After a pleasant three hours on the ground, the ship was close enough for us to reach it with our remaining fuel, so we departed, logging 3.4 hours out of a 3.5 hour fuel load. After refueling, we flew another 3.1 hour search that afternoon with no sightings. As the ship



was returning to Nome that evening, it came upon the hapless helicopter crew clinging to the wreckage, well away from the area we had been directed to search. They had become disoriented in the reduced visibility which prevails at that time of the year, and misreported their last position before going down. Fortunately, *Northwind's* lookouts stood a diligent watch, and both they and their wrecked helicopter were recovered. The helicopter was totaled – the crew was fine after some medicinal brandy from *Northwind's* Sick Bay!

The remainder of July, according to my log books, was given over to various passenger and cargo deliveries to such outposts as LORAN Station Port Clarence, Air Force Station Tin City, AK, and a return to Fairway Rock. The Arctic Fox observed atop the rock on the previous summer was gone, either having grown tired of his fowl diet, or eaten himself to death. August log entries reveal more routine passenger/cargo movements around the Bering Strait, and a MEDCAP (Medical Dental Civic Action Program) to Little Diomed. The ship carried a Public Health Service doctor, a hospital corpsman, and a dental technician to handle medical situations for the crew. The village of Diomed had just been incorporated that summer, and it was decided to offer the population of 140 or so the services of the medical department, since there were no US doctors within 30 miles. Although the village faces Big Diomed 2.5 miles west, that island is Russian Territory, and during the Cold War, could not be relied upon for even emergency medical care. The rugged terrain offered no suitable landing areas for routine helicopter operations, so the ship's LCVPs, (Landing Craft, vehicles/personnel) were used. I went along on one trip, and it was interesting to meet the Native Alaskans and observe their subsistence lifestyle. They hunt polar bears, walrus, and seals, and cure the hides or make parkas and mukluks to trade for durable goods which arrive once a year by barge. The meat is the mainstay of their diet, and is supplemented with fish, crabs, sea birds, and the few edible plants and berries which grow on the tiny island.

Back home, Jacki was with her parents in Tampa expecting our second child about 25 August, so I was eagerly awaiting word on the new arrival. The International Dateline passes between Big and Little Diomed at about 168W. As *Northwind* headed west on a shipping reconnaissance mission north of Russia near Wrangel Island, the Captain called me to the bridge after a flight on 7 September (6 September back in the states). Wondering what grievous sin I might have committed to warrant such an audience, I was filled with trepidation. As I came to attention and announced, "LT Prindle, reporting as ordered, sir," he beamed and handed me the transcript of a radio message announcing the arrival of my son Jon. Two days later, he summoned me again, and provided a second message announcing the arrival of son Jon, the text of which seemed to indicate that the date of birth was the 7<sup>th</sup> of September. The captain had annotated the message, "Is this possible? Were you expecting twins?" After returning to my stateroom and examining the two messages closely, it became apparent what had happened. The first message had been sent by the duty officer at Mobile on Sunday the 6<sup>th</sup>, and had correctly captured the facts of Jon's arrival. Monday the 7<sup>th</sup> was Labor Day, and a holiday. When the administrative staff came to work on Tuesday, they reviewed the logs, noted the report of Jon's birth, and eager to get the word to me, failed to check that the glad news had already been sent. The dates had inadvertently been confused in the second message. As my now 35 year old son recently observed, "You were deployed when I was born and standing duty or TAD for most of my birthdays, but I'm glad you were present when it counted!"





The mission in the Chukchi Sea was routine with two exceptions. We passed close aboard a Russian Icebreaker, apparently monitoring us as we monitored them, and while flying an ice reconnaissance for *Northwind*, we were “buzzed” by a Russian patrol plane, which was so far as we could tell, their version of the DC-3, the Lisunov Li-2, built under license during and after WWII. Curiously, it was painted a rather bright green, apparently for visibility in the Arctic. The Red Star insignia on the wings and fuselage thus gave it a somewhat bizarre appearance. As this was the height of the Cold War, however, these encounters were chilling, both figuratively and literally, since we were operating in pack ice and a thin, cold fog at the time.

In those days, the military was not particularly concerned with the environment, and the ship’s refuse was simply tossed over the side in weighted bags. While the ship stopped in the ice to observe the Labor Day holiday, the trash accumulated on the ice. This particular batch included a large quantity of soap powder from the ship’s laundry, which had become wet and caked to the point of being unusable. An itinerant polar bear, no doubt of Russian extraction, wandered by and began to investigate the growing garbage heap. Disdaining the various scraps of meat and other more normal bear food, he went for the caked soap. Within a couple of hours, the bear was foaming at both ends as the crew gathered on the flight deck to witness the spectacle. CAPT McCann was adept at pulling one’s leg, so he suggested to the doctor, “That’s a Russian bear, Doc, and if it isn’t better soon, I’ll have to put you over the side to look after him.” The startled doctor did a classic double take and fumbled for an answer until he realized that the CO was teasing. The crew enjoyed the joke immensely.

After proceeding to about 170E and thus earning our “Domain of the Golden Dragon” certificates for having crossed the 180<sup>th</sup> Meridian, *Northwind* turned east and began the journey back to Seattle. My log book reflects several sorties between 16 and 21 September to Gambell, the airport on the west end of St. Lawrence Island, and thus only 40 miles from Soviet Siberia. The native village is noted for its ivory carvings from walrus tusks, and we bartered for several small items while waiting for passengers or cargo to arrive. From Gambell, the ship sailed directly to Seattle. My final sortie in the HH-52 was .9 hours from *Northwind* to SEA-TAC, the Seattle-Tacoma Airport, where I turned over the 1375 to a replacement pilot. Because of my newborn son and upcoming HH-3F transition, I had been granted a dispensation from the cross country flight back to Mobile, and took an airline flight to Tampa instead. In April 1970, I had passed the 1,000 hour mark in the HH-52A, and finished this deployment with 1112.8 total flying time in this reliable and capable helicopter. If memory serves, during that time the only actual emergency I experienced was an overheated battery at Miami, which was easily resolved by turning off the battery switch and landing.

After enjoying another joyful reunion with my now expanded family, we returned to an apartment in Mobile while I completed H-3 transition in preparation for our upcoming PCS to New Orleans. As I noted earlier, hindsight is always 20-20, while our ability to see into the future is practically nil. The officer assignment detailers at Headquarters had implied that volunteers for IBSEC would get their choice of duty stations as a follow on tour, and New Orleans was just about our last choice. As it turned out, God had other plans for us, plans which

were for our good and not for evil, plans to give us hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11) More on that later . . . .

I started the H-3 course on 17 October, and finished on 24 November after 26 flights totaling 35 hours. Among my instructors were Lonnie Mixon, Jim Loomis, and Rob Ritchie, all recently returned from flying Air Force “Jolly Green Giant” H-3s in Vietnam, and now ensconced in the Coast Guard Aviation Hall of Fame. Their skill at sharing their experience proved invaluable, and I felt eminently well qualified for H-3 operations upon completing the syllabus.

The H-3 was nearly double the H-52 in every respect. It had two 1500 SHP turbine engines, a top speed of 142 knots with normal cruise at 120, and a gross weight of 22,000 pounds. The cabin could seat more than 20 (I once picked up 17, plus two crew), and it was equipped with a relatively sophisticated navigation system fed by LORAN C. A Moving Map display had been included in the center console of the cockpit, but it quickly proved more useful as a repository for box lunches and other items. It even had an accelerometer based hover coupler, which enabled the hoist operator to maneuver the helicopter (within limited parameters) using a joy stick at his station in the cabin door.



## VI. Air Station New Orleans: December 1970 – August 1975

We arrived in New Orleans on 1 December, and purchased a house in the Terrytown section of Gretna, LA, on the West Bank a few miles north of NAS New Orleans where the CG Air Station was located. Elmo Zumwalt had become CNO that summer, and decreed that well kempt beards were acceptable in the Naval Services. Many of the crew grew full beards while deployed, and mine was both full and in those days, nearly red. I kept it until 1978, when I was preparing for an exchange assignment with the Air Force. One of the prerequisites to fly in an Air Force helicopter is training in the altitude chamber. They gave me the option of altering the beard to accommodate the oxygen mask, or becoming clean shaven again - I opted for the latter. Upon returning from that metamorphosis, I went to pick up our two sons at soccer practice, neither of whom had ever seen me without a beard. When I called a greeting to them on the field, they both did a double take – one nearly got hit by the ball! I currently sport a goatee, but these days it's nearly white . . . .



My log book indicates that my first flight at New Orleans was on the 14<sup>th</sup>, and involved two SAR cases, # 195 & 196. New Orleans was quite busy in those days, averaging over 400 SAR cases per year. The oil fields in the Gulf of Mexico accounted for a large percentage of the SAR activity, followed by commercial fishermen and private boaters. Following are my recollections of some of these cases and other adventures at New Orleans, our longest tour at 4 and ½ years.

We were dispatched one evening at dusk to evacuate some injured seamen from a freighter on its way out of Southwest Pass at the mouth of the Mississippi River. One crew member had gone berserk, and attacked several of the officers with a knife. As we arrived on scene and turned on our lights for the hoist, we discovered that the controllable landing light in the nose had burned out, leaving just the flood and hover lights in the belly of the helicopter for illumination. Since the ship was partially lighted, we decided to proceed. The hoist operator, a full blooded Cherokee, lowered the basket, and kept up a running dialogue on the position of the helicopter relative to the ship, the location of the basket, and the apparent condition of the victims as they came up. We had picked up five of them, the number initially reported, when the ship called on the radio to say that there was a sixth. As he was loaded into the basket in the dim light, the hoist operator noted he appeared to be badly injured, as he was wrapped from head to foot. As he got closer, he reported that the man was wrapped in a two inch rope, and must have been the "mutineer." The hoist operator went on to say "But don't you worry sir, I've got the crash axe right here, and I know how to use it if he tries anything." With the perpetrator glaring at everyone on board, we headed for the West Jefferson Hospital, where the injured were moved to the emergency room. The hospital staff, however, declined to accept the "mutineer," who turned out to be Greek and the ship's cook. The stabbing victims were the ship's Filipino officers, who had apparently commented on the evening meal. (Perhaps a bad Greek Salad?) After a half hour of negotiation with the hospital staff, however, we convinced them to load the malcontent, still wrapped in the hawser and seated in the rescue basket and, onto a gurney and roll him into their psychiatric holding cell to await the police.

We were on a photo mission in February 1971 with a District Photographer aboard when we were diverted to look for an overdue small boat in the bayous southwest of New Orleans. We soon located the vessel stuck in the mud amidst several hummocks of grass. We lowered a rope and attempted to pull the boat to deeper water, but the craft wouldn't move. We then decided to lower the copilot and radio operator to help the boat owner push the craft into deeper water. The photographer asked if he could be deposited on a nearby hummock to photograph the action, so we complied. He was flying in his dress uniform under a flight suit to protect it, but failed to take into account that the terrain, even on a grassy hummock, would be muddy. He sank in well over his low cut shoes. Undaunted, he still got the shot. He later hand tinted a print of the picture above, which I now proudly display in my office.



The H-3 was the last of the Coast Guard's amphibious aircraft, having finally retired from Coast Guard service in May 1994, and the capability to land on the water often proved handy in a variety of situations. Dan Bridges & I were flying over Mississippi Sound on a Fisheries Enforcement Patrol when we noticed a boat tied up to a day marker. Thinking the vessel might have broken down, since it's illegal to use navigation aids as mooring buoys, we made a low pass to investigate. The occupants were fishing, and waved happily as we flew by. Since all Coast Guard officers are also Federal Law Enforcement officers, we came to a hover and tried



using hand signals to indicate that the vessel was illegally moored to the day marker. Because of the rotor downwash from the helicopter, however, we couldn't get close enough to make ourselves understood. Undaunted, we made a water landing, taxied closer to the vessel, and used the small blackboard we carried for such occasions to get the message across. The chastened fisherman quickly untied and sped away.

We were dispatched from New Orleans to Destin, FL to assist some boaters whose craft had struck a jetty, throwing them in to the water. Arriving on scene, we discovered that one person had managed to climb onto the rock jetty and make his way to safety, but the other was foundering in the surf. He was caught in a rip tide carrying him away from the jetties parallel to the shore line, in strong surf from an approaching storm. An attempt to hoist him failed as he was too tired to swim to the rescue basket. After a quick discussion on procedures, we rigged the rescue platform, a 4 foot by 4 foot perforated metal device which fits in the cabin door. We then made a partial water landing downstream of the struggling swimmer between the wave crests, and let the current carry him to us. The timing worked out perfectly, and we scooped him to safety just ahead of the next set of waves.

John Luther & I launched from New Orleans to assist an oil rig work boat reported taking on water in the Gulf of Mexico. The report indicated that there were three people on board. We arrived on scene in time to observe the work boat slipping beneath the waves, with an inflated 9 man raft and a 12' John





Boat (flat bottom, square ended duck hunting boat) along side. There were 3 people in the John Boat, so we landed nearby, and motioned for them to paddle over to us. Interrogation disclosed that there 12 more people inside the covered raft, oil rig workers who were omitted in the initial report. To avoid bringing the raft under our rotor blades, we used the John Boat to carry a line to the raft, then backed away just enough to keep the raft outside the rotor disc with line taut. The John Boat proved a capable ferry, and we soon had all 15 safely on board. (We did decline a request from one who wanted to go back to the raft to retrieve some forgotten luggage.) Until all 15 were on board, we didn't know what the final count would be, and as they continued to pour out of the raft, the rescue took on aspects of the Circus Clown Car Skit, in which a seemingly endless stream of clowns keep on popping out of a tiny car. The post script to this story is that we delivered the barefoot survivors to Coast Guard Station Grand Isle, LA. It's close to the beach, and the helipad there is surrounded by sand which is heavily populated with sand spurs. Talk about adding insult to injury . . . !



Dave Drake and I were doing some hoist training with a Coast Guard boat on Lake Ponchartrain, LA, when the Tail Rotor Gear Box warning light came on, indicating the presence of metal chips. The emergency procedures for that situation call for landing as soon as practicable, since chips indicate imminent failure of the gear box and probable loss of directional control. The amphibious capabilities of the H-3 made the lake our landing spot of choice, especially since we had the CG boat nearby to tow us to a local airport with a seaplane ramp. We landed and shut down the helicopter, whereupon the utility boat took us in tow toward the airport some five miles

away. There was a modest crosswind, however, and we soon got a complaint from the Coxswain about the helicopter weather cocking and not having a water rudder. Our ever resourceful aircrew had soon rigged the sea drogue we carried for emergency water landings, using the helicopter's ramp cables as a bridle, and the helicopter was safely recovered and returned to service. The ramp cables had to be replaced, however, having been unraveled by the slow rotation of the sea anchor.

We launched in response to a report of a boat overturned in the Mississippi River just north of the Air Station. After a brief search, we located a man being swept downstream as he clung to some debris. Rather than try to hoist him and perhaps dislodge him from his perch with the rotor wash, we opted to land downstream and let the current carry him to us. The crewman soon had him on board, still clinging to the Igloo Cooler he had been using as a life preserver. It developed that he and another worker had been doing some maintenance on one of the water pipes along the river bank, using a small row boat to afford access to the fittings, when the wake of a passing ship capsized them. Neither was wearing a life jacket. It was early spring, and the river was near flood stage due to melting snows up north. As a result, it was also fairly cold. The co-worker succumbed to the rough water and the temperature, and his body was recovered well downstream a few days later. The fellow with the cooler, however, stepped off the helicopter still clutching it to his chest when we landed back at the Air Station, happy to be alive, and singing the praises of the Igloo company. The incident was a classic example of the importance of not only having, but also wearing a personal flotation device when on or



around the water. The man who was rescued did indeed owe his life to the cooler, because it not only kept him partially out of the cold water, but also enhanced his visibility so that we could spot him from the air, unlike his companion, whom we never saw at all. We suggested that he write the company about his experience and offer a testimonial to Igloo Coolers, but I don't know whether he ever did.

The downside to the Search and Rescue business is that not all cases have a happy ending, however as witnessed by the crash of Bonanza N9123Q in Lake Pontchartrain on 23 April 1975. RCC called at 2010 that night, directing us to respond to the possible crash of a Beechcraft Bonanza with a family of six on board. At 2025, I was airborne in HH-3F 1477 with copilot - LCDR Bill Zensen; Flight Mechanic - AD3 Drake; and Avionicsman - AE3 Vanacek. We reached the lake at 2034, and contacted Lakefront tower (LKF) for information. They stated that several Army Guard helicopters were at the scene and had been since the crash was reported. Available information was that the Bonanza had suddenly disappeared from radar north of the airport in the vicinity of Lake Intersection (A radio navigation fix over Lake Pontchartrain) during an instrument approach, and was presumed to have crashed. The Army helos reported sighting an oil slick just east of the Causeway, near the center fixed bridge, so we flew there to investigate, arriving at 2042.

At approximately 2100, we abandoned the search for the oil slick, as the Army helos had departed and another report of debris near Lake had been received. By 2104, we were searching at Lake, and communicating with New Orleans RAPCON, LKF tower, and the vessels on scene to ascertain the facts in the case. RAPCON indicated that the aircraft was executing a localizer 17 approach, and had broadcast a Mayday 30 to 45 seconds after passing Lake. Accordingly, we commenced a PS search from 3 Miles NW of Lake to the Airport, oriented on the localizer, and from 1 mile west of it to 2 miles east of the centerline. (We extended the pattern further east of the localizer due to winds from 120 degrees at 10 kts, and the probability that the aircraft would have ditched into the wind) The weather was generally 600 overcast with 3 miles visibility in ground fog. During the first hour on scene, the moon was occasionally visible, but disappeared entirely after 2130 or so. By 2200, Coast Guard surface vessels had arrived on scene, and I instructed one of them to place a floating strobe light at Lake, using a smoke float we had dropped there as a reference. This was done, but unfortunately, the light was anchored at datum, (the most likely position of the crash) and not adrift as I had directed. Unanchored, it could have provided valuable information as to survivor drift.



By 2220, we had organized the boats on scene into a PSM (Parallel Sweep Multiunit search pattern with legs parallel to the long axis of the search area) search from datum into the airport, using a 4 mile track space. We continued to search the area either side of the localizer using PS and CS (Creeping Line Search, with legs oriented 90 degrees to the long axis of the search area) patterns at altitudes from 50 feet to 300 feet, using the Night Sun Searchlight, Landing Light, and the Hover Lights. Our search speeds varied from 30 to 60 knots, increasing with altitude. The Probability of Detection (POD) for persons in the water, without PFD's (Personal Flotation Devices) or signals was nil - roughly equivalent to trying to see an old tennis ball on the shoulder of a highway while driving 55 mph at night. At 2327, fuel and deteriorating weather required our departure from scene, and we passed On Scene Commander duties to the CGC *Pt Spencer*,

together with a lengthy brief on our activity, and the suggestion that she drift at datum, and continue the search pattern then in use by the surface vessels. We landed at the Air Station at 2344.

After refueling the aircraft, and with LT Doug Phillips as copilot, we were airborne again at 0045, 24 April. Arriving on scene at 0054, we checked in with *Pt Spencer*, and were directed to undertake a CS pattern, six miles wide, either side of a line through datum extending 310 -130. We began at the northwest end, using a line from Goose Point (N shore of the lake) to the center bridge of the causeway, and crept SE using a half mile S (Track Space - the distance between adjacent tracks) This pattern proved difficult to navigate, however, and we noticed that the localizer could be received there, so we reoriented the search after about three legs to center on the localizer, and cover three miles either side of it. We carried this search into the airport and then made three sweeps NW - SE along the area, about a mile either side of the *Spencer*. At 0338, fuel required an RTB (Return to Base) and we landed at 0345. POD was even less than the 1st sortie due to the increased S and miniscule W (Sweep Width – the distance at which the target of the search is theoretically visible).

With no sightings, the search was discontinued by RCC at dusk on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Late the next afternoon, the 12 year old son of the family was recovered barely alive, swimming near the north shore of the lake, nearly 15 miles from the crash site. All available resources were launched to search for the other family members. That evening, 25 April, I was called in to fly after the boy had been located alive, and with CDR Bob Williams as copilot, was airborne at 2131. We were on scene at 2145, and searched along the marshes from the causeway to Goose Point and to about two miles offshore. We landed at 0031, 26 April. On 27 April, I had duty again, and was on the desk during the morning search. At 1251, I was airborne with LT Doug Phillips to search Area B-10 in CGNR 1432. At 1600, the Mandeville Police reported sighting a body near the causeway. At 1614, we recovered the body of a male child from the water using the rescue platform, delivered it to the security police at LKF, and returned to scene. At 1735, fuel required us to RTB.



On 29 April, I was launched to search the various structures in Eastern Lake Pontchartrain. At 1003, I was airborne in 1432 with LT Doug Phillips. Shortly after takeoff, we were instructed to embark a Channel 6 photographer at LKF. We were on scene at 1015, picked up the newsman, and departed for the North Shore to conduct a hover search of the causeway. At approximately 1105, we received info that a transiting vessel had located a body. After some initial confusion as to the actual position, we located and recovered the body using the rescue platform, and delivered it to LKF security. After a stop at CGAS New Orleans to clean both aircraft and flight mechanic, we returned to the lake to resume searching the structures. Fuel required RTB at 1330, and we landed at 1350.

I flew over 18 hours on this case, and after recovering the bodies, I was reduced to tears by the needless loss of life. Debriefing of the one survivor revealed that the aircraft had run out of fuel passing Lake Intersection after flying from Pompano Beach. The father, who was flying, quickly

organized a successful ditching drill, made a successful water landing, and got everyone safely out of the aircraft. Unfortunately, however, they did not have any PFDs, a raft, or any signaling devices, and despite the Coast Guard's best efforts, we could not see them. They boy reported that his family succumbed one by one to hypothermia and drowned. Several years later, other family members attempted to sue the Coast Guard for negligence, which occasioned this detailed account of my participation in the case, but the matter was dismissed by the courts.

The H-3 also had a rear ramp and a nose wheel which could be partially retracted – “kneeled” – to afford greater clearance under the tail boom. This proved useful for both official and not so official business. The service recruiting offices in New Orleans held a competition, and the winner was given a small sedan suitably emblazoned with the winner's service logo and a proclamation as Recruiter of the Year. The Coast Guard won the initial round, and it was decided to deliver the vehicle by H-3. It was loaded aboard, and we took off to orbit while the dignitaries assembled for the presentation. We then landed, lowered the ramp, and kneeled the nose wheel. The crewman selected to drive it off happened to be quite tall, and made quite a sight folded into the tiny car as he drove it down the ramp to the appointed place for the ceremony. This capability was also used to move an unnamed officer's vintage sports car from one Air Station to another in connection with a change of station move.

In the H-3, most of the circuit breakers were on the panels above the pilot's heads, as was the switch to kneel the nose wheel. A favorite trick was to surreptitiously kneel the nose wheel to see if the pilot flying would detect it before touchdown. Those who didn't double check the position of the wheels before landing never forgot the sinking sensation as the nose of the aircraft settled to the tarmac while landing. Another favorite was to pull the breaker for the torque indicator on one or the other engines, and watch bemused as the other pilot adjusted the other engine to keep the indicators “married,” eventually inducing a single engine situation. The moral in the story was that a continuous cross check of all indicators was required for safe flight, and that concentration on a single engine indicator could have drastic consequences.

As I indicated earlier, New Orleans was a special assignment for us, even though we had not have chosen it. In the spring of 1972, an Army couple moved in across the street from us. They had a son and daughter about the age of our kids, but had also adopted a bi-racial child. We had been thinking about expanding our family, and had decided that adoption might be the way to go. Seeing their example, in September we started the paperwork with the parish placement service, who indicated that it might take a year or more to find a child. Meanwhile, our friends had invited us to a Bible Study, where we began to read God's word, discuss it, and apply it to our lives. I had been raised in a nominally Christian home, but had never accepted God's gift of salvation. That was soon to change! Our now 33 year old son Jeff was born on 6 October 1972, and placed with us on Jacki's birthday, 8 November. God used this miracle and the influence of the others in the Bible Study to bring me to Himself. I accepted Christ as my savior that same day, and have been following him ever since. God did have plans for us, and they were for good and not for evil, and they continue to give us hope, and an eternal future!

In October 72, I had occasion to go to the Sikorsky factory to pick up the Coast Guard's newest H-3, CGNR 1488. It was interesting to tour the plant and see various helicopters in test and production, and unique to fly a brand new machine. My log reflects that the acceptance flight



took two hours, and that it took two days and 11.5 hours to fly it back to New Orleans, taking time along the way to circle my home in western Connecticut, and stop for lunch at the farm of the Flight Mechanic's father in North Carolina. We spent the night at Pope Air Force Base, NC, where my brother-in-law was stationed, and took the opportunity to load some furniture he had bought for us on a recent C-130 trip to Europe. (Flying was somewhat less regulated in those days . . . .) Upon arriving at New Orleans, it was discovered that one of the bolts which connect the rotor head to the helicopter had been improperly installed at the Sikorsky factory, and had worn nearly halfway through its fitting. I'm glad we weren't flying it to the West Coast!



One of the advantages of being able to land on the water and open the ramp was that when a hazard to navigation was sighted, for instance, an abandoned aluminum "John Boat," (a 12 foot square ended hunting/fishing craft) we could land and retrieve it. Dan Bridges and I did that on few occasions in Mississippi Sound, and brought the boats back to the Air Station where the Aviation Metal Smiths soon had them in tip top shape for use as station morale boats. We also found an abandoned airplane on the beach, but it wouldn't fit in the cabin. In any case, it had already been stripped of radios and instruments.

The junior enlisted personnel stood a security watch overnight, and their final task about 0600 in the morning was to empty the trash. The man on watch was at the dumpster when he noticed a dark object on the pavement begin to move. A 12 foot alligator had crawled onto the parking lot from the nearby swamps to enjoy the warmth of the concrete. The security watch alerted the rest of the duty section, and the resourceful Coasties soon had the creature lassoed and tied off to a stop sign with one of the Dixie cup sailor hats on it. As I came in to relieve the watch about 0730, crowds from around the Navy Base were gathering to view the alligator. Soon thereafter, Ray Wirth, one of the bachelors, arrived. He brought his dog to work so that he could care for him during the day. As Ray and the dog approached the gator, the animal slowly opened its jaws in anticipation. Ray and his dog got quite a start! We couldn't call Fish and Wildlife to come and relocate the animal until they came to work about 0830. Meanwhile, someone alerted one of the local TV stations who sent a film crew to cover the operation. Using the Coast Guard lasso, the Fish & Wildlife agents trussed the gator head to tail and tried to lift him into their truck. The gator would have none of it, and was soon free, much to the crowd's delight. One of the Coasties suggested using Duct Tape, which we had in good supply. The gator was soon tightly bound in yet another use of Duct Tape, placed in the F & W truck, and relocated to a new home. The TV station edited the video and aired the story on the evening news to the tune of "Dueling Banjos." It was a popular news cast!

The Executive Officer, Bob Williams, was wrestling with his younger brother when he injured his back. He was grounded for several months as a result, and soon after he returned to flying status, he nearly injured himself again as he was sitting down in his desk chair, a gray metal, government issue version with wheels. The next morning when he came to work, his desk chair had been outfitted with a complete helicopter seat belt and shoulder harness, courtesy of the survival equipment shop,

In the spring of 75, we were told that there would be extra money available at the end of the fiscal year, which in those days ended on 30 June. We were further directed to prepare three proposals of various prices for furnishing the recently completed wardroom at the Air Station. We dutifully got out the Government Services Agency catalogs and prepared our three estimates – one with relatively cheap and durable Federal Prison Industry Ranch Oak typical of most barracks in those days, one with a mid-grade assortment of furnishings, and one with everything top of the line, from eider down stuffed leather couches and easy chairs to inlaid tables and a custom bar. In the zeal to spend every dollar before the year ended, the fiscal powers that be opted for the high end proposal, and after I left it was delivered and installed. Although great for a tired duty section to relax upon while waiting for the next SAR alarm, the furniture proved to be so comfortable that Officer's meetings often resulted in a number of attendees dozing!



New Orleans is famous for Mardi Gras, and one year the city fathers invited the French Helicopter Carrier *Jean d' Arc* to participate. We were tasked to accompany her as she made her way up the Mississippi River, and a photographer in another CG helicopter caught these shots.

At New Orleans I accumulated 1,284 hours in the H-3 in 4 and ½ years, nearly 300 hours a year, and flew on 290 SAR cases, an average of almost 6 per month. Since we were on duty

every fourth day or so, that works out to about one case every time we were on watch.



## VII. Air Station Cape Cod: September 1975 – October 1978



In August 1975, we left New Orleans for Cape Cod (CPD), the only time that the desires expressed on my “wish card,” the popular name for the Officer Assignment Data Card one executed to indicate assignment preferences, actually coincided with the needs of the service. Check out at New Orleans, leave, travel, proceed time, and check in at Cape Cod took over a month, and my log shows the first flight at Cape Cod on 2 October 1975.

At Cape Cod, we lived in base housing. The Coast Guard had moved to Otis AFB from Salem the year before, just about the time the Air Force decided to leave the base to the Air National Guard. The Coast Guard ended up operating most of the services such as housing, BX and Commissary, while the National Guard operated the base infrastructure. The housing was relatively small, about 1200 square feet, but offered a full basement, which the occupants could configure to suit their needs within the constraints of safety and accepted building practices. We lived on Kelly Street and most of the houses backed up to a large common area. Our two boys soon became part of the “Kelly Street Gang,” a group of a dozen or so kids in the 4 to 6 year old range who played together constantly. We made many lifelong friends during our time there, and look back on it as one of our favorite assignments. The complement of aircraft was three HU-16Es, three HH-52As, and three HH-3Fs. Some of my CPD escapades are recorded below.

Mike Lovett & I were sent to evacuate an injured fisherman from a boat about 200 miles east of Cape Cod. The wind and seas were dead calm, but there was a thick fog from the surface to about 300 feet as a result of the warm air overlying the cooler water. We located the vessel with no trouble and although we could see it from above, the surface visibility was about 1/8 mile. The helicopter’s weather radar was only good down to about 1/4 mile, however, and we were concerned that making an instrument approach to a hover wouldn’t get us close enough to see the boat without hitting it. Consultation with the fishing boat’s captain revealed that his radar was good to 100 yards or so, and that he had been able to see us clearly on his radar as we flew near him. We made an instrument approach and landed on the quiet Atlantic. The fishing boat motored up to us until we had visual contact at 1/16 of a mile or so, and we completed the medical evacuation without incident.

We were launched to assist a Piper Super Cub fish spotting aircraft which was losing engine oil 150 miles northeast of Cape Cod. We rendezvoused with the plane, and discussed ditching procedures with the pilot as he headed for Provincetown. About 20 miles short of the airport, the Cub’s engine finally seized, and the pilot executed a flawless emergency landing on the soft swells of the Atlantic Ocean. He boarded his one man life raft, and we landed in the water nearby so as not to upset it. He paddled over to us and climbed aboard. Our crewman noted that the pilot seemed somewhat irritable, and when we inquired as to why, he explained that despite all his careful planning, meticulous preparation, and flawless execution of the ditching, he had slipped while climbing from the sinking plane into his raft, and had gotten his expensive snakeskin Cowboy boots wet.

One advantage of a twin engine amphibious helicopter is the ability to operate with relative safety in close proximity to the water. During the *Argo Merchant* grounding and oil spill 25





miles off Nantucket in December 1976, many of the rescue and recovery missions were predicated on the fact that if the lowering ceilings and dropping temperatures generated airframe icing at normal altitudes, we would plan to fly just above the water with enough speed and altitude for a safe single engine landing if need be, but also low enough to take advantage of warmer temperatures near the water to

stave off icing. Although we never had to resort to that technique, it was an amphibious ace in the hole to avoid running out of ideas and altitude at the same time.

My log book shows 6 sorties between 16 and 25 December on the *Argo Merchant* case. The ship, loaded with 7.7 million gallons of heavy fuel oil, ran aground on the evening of 15 December, and 30 of the crew were evacuated the next day. On the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, I was on duty, and was dispatched twice to hoist the last eight crew members, including the master, after it became apparent that the ship could not be saved. Upon returning to Cape Cod, we discovered that the oil soaked seamen had brought along the ship's cat, who was immediately adopted by the Air Station after a long bath to clean the oil from its fur.



The Coast Guard's Atlantic Strike Team was called in to attempt recovery of the ship's cargo and prevent pollution damage to the fragile coast lines of Nantucket and Cape Cod. The near freezing waters of the Atlantic Ocean, however, had congealed the normally fluid oil to the consistency of asphalt, and their pumps couldn't move it. Meanwhile 10 foot seas and strong winds continued to pound the ship's hull, and the recovery efforts had to be abandoned to prevent personnel injury. On 21 December, the ship's bow broke off, and by Christmas Day, the after section had also broken in half. The entire cargo spilled into the sea, but strong northwest winds pushed it offshore where heavy seas broke up concentrations of pollution, minimizing damage to the environment. My final SAR flight on the *Argo Merchant* was Christmas Day to monitor the pollution and deliver newspapers and Turkey Dinners to the Coast Guard cutter assigned to remain at the scene. When I next flew over the site in January, the entire ship had sunk beneath the waves, and the sheen of oil which had surrounded the scene had dissipated.



In August of 1977, Sikorsky decided to make a commercial featuring Coast Guard helicopters. I was selected to fly down to Cape May, NJ to serve as the camera ship for the two day project. After the camera was installed, we followed a Cape May HH-52A out to the offshore fishing fleet, and after some formation flying with the commercial fleet in the background, we executed a series of rapid climbs and descents while the cameraman focused on the H-52. The resulting footage made it seem as though the H-52 was going up or down with the greatest of ease, when in fact it was the better performing H-3 which made it all possible. To further fool the public, the cameraman filmed several shots out the cockpit windows from the jump seat, making it appear as though the shot was from the cockpit of the H-52. In one series, he filmed my gloved hand pointing at a distant fishing boat, my only claim to film stardom. The commercial aired on



the CBS Evening News that fall, which is why I remember it – that and the fact that Sikorsky put us up at a very nice hotel in Cape May, and provided us a great dinner . . . .

We were flying a routine fisheries enforcement patrol over the North Atlantic east of Cape Cod when we sighted a trawler hauling back its nets. Upon descending to observe, we saw that they had netted a medium swordfish, a species they were required to release. The trawler's crew soon had the large fish over the side, but it appeared to have succumbed to the trauma of being netted and released. As the trawler moved off, we went down for a closer look, and determined that the fish was indeed dead. Not wanting to waste fresh swordfish steak, we made a water landing, wrestled the carcass into the helicopter via the rescue platform, and proceeded to the Air Station at maximum speed, where the galley staff soon prepared a swordfish feast for the crew.



I was dispatched to assist a fishing boat which had run aground on the shoals off the south coast of Nantucket, several hundred yards offshore. We arrived on scene to find the vessel hard aground in the surf line with waves washing over the deck. Although the crew had initially indicated that they needed pumps, the vessel was clearly beyond the point that pumps would help, so they asked to be evacuated. A local photographer on the beach caught us at mid hoist in a nicely silhouetted picture of a classic Coast Guard rescue scene, with a 41 foot UTB standing by to assist as needed.

An Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT) was reported near Pease AFB, NH and we were diverted to investigate. We searched the area but since the signal was intermittent we were recalled. The next day the signal was heard again and we were dispatched to investigate. It seemed to be coming from the north northwest, so we flew north toward the White Mountains and refueled at Laconia, near my family's summer home, the same airport at which my dad had taken me on my first flight in 1946. As we continued into the mountains, the signal grew stronger, but as we crisscrossed the rugged slopes at about 4,000 feet, we could see no apparent source of the ELT. After 20 minutes or so, one of the crew reported seeing a whiff of smoke coming up through the trees, which were quite dense and perhaps 50 to 80 feet tall. As we began a hover search, the corpsman, who had come along to get flight time, noticed that one treetop was broken. Since we still could not see down through the trees, the corpsman agreed to be lowered to investigate the now strong and steady ELT signal. Upon reaching the ground, he discovered an overturned Piper Tri-Pacer and its pilot, waiting by a small signal fire.

The unfortunate aviator was soon retrieved, and related his story as we headed for Manchester, NH, his home airport. We found him on a Wednesday. He had left Manchester on Sunday, heading for Maine under overcast skies. As the weather worsened, he orbited near the Maine - New Hampshire border to get his bearings, and listen to a weather report. Reassured, he decided to press on, but inadvertently selected heading 300 instead of 030 on his cockpit compass. As he

approached the White Mountains, the clouds began to obscure the mountain tops as he climbed, so he began looking for his map. When he looked up, there was a ridgeline directly in front of him, and he instinctively pulled back on the stick, stalling the airplane. It stalled at about the time it hit the trees, and because of the slow speed and high nose angle, it effectively landed in the tree tops, and then slowly settled to the forest floor below, coming to rest inverted after breaking one treetop. Since the weather was bad and he hadn't filed a flight plan, he realized that

no one would be looking for him, so he turned off his ELT to save the batteries and entered for a survival scenario. He prepared a signal fire, inventoried his supplies and equipment, and created shelter within the aircraft. The weather didn't clear until late Tuesday, at which point he intermittently activated his ELT. Meanwhile, he subsisted on a can of peanuts he had brought along, and whatever rain water he could collect. Wednesday dawned bright and clear, so he began to activate the ELT in longer bursts until he heard the sound of our engines and put it on continuously. Someone snapped our picture while we were delivering him to the airport and waiting to refuel, and his story was later reported in Yankee Magazine. I'm at far right, next to the Corpsman who went down the hoist. The survivor is third from the right, next to Brian Wallace, the co-pilot. The hoist operator and the radio man, whose names sadly I can't recall, are next to him.



In addition to Search and Rescue, the H-3 was used for logistics support of the numerous lighthouses along the rugged New England coast. We frequently sling loaded materials and equipment to various sites, using the time on deck waiting to good advantage by exploring and collecting various artifacts brought in by the tides. On one occasion, we were tasked to pick up the Commandant of the Coast Guard, ADM Siler, at Portland International airport and fly him to several of the lighthouses for a visit. Since we would have some slack time while waiting for Coast Guard 01 to arrive and depart, we decided to arrange with Group Portland to procure 4 dozen lobsters. The plan was to pick them up after the Commandant had departed, and store them in the large cooler we carried for the 1 hour trip back to Cape Cod, where a lobster bake was planned. We flew to Portland and made the arrangements to have the lobsters waiting at our planned



return. ADM Siler arrived on time, and we spent the day touring lighthouses, returning to Portland on schedule. As we shut down the helicopter, however, a fitting on the transmission failed, leaking transmission fluid all over the back of the helicopter. The Commandant debarked and departed in his jet for Washington, leaving us with 4 dozen lobsters and the dubious prospect of keeping them alive in a motel shower until repairs could be effected.

Coast Guard Aircrews are endlessly resourceful, however, so we gathered in the cabin to assess our options. The Flight Mechanic noted that he could easily repair the fitting with some

common gasket material, and that we had sufficient extra fluid on board to replenish the transmission. We quickly deployed to the airport terminal and the local fixed base operator while the Flight Mechanic removed the offending part. One crew member obtained the gasket material – gratis once our plight was explained – and another purchased some razor blades at the terminal gift shop, while the third paid for and loaded the lobsters. We gathered around the small table at the radio operator's position, and using the old gasket as a template, carefully cut a new one. It was soon installed and tested, and we were on our way in less than an hour - a glorious dinner was enjoyed by all. So far as is known, that gasket remained in service as long as those manufactured at the Sikorsky factory.

Cape Cod was the only assignment at which my helicopter was “hijacked.” Here's what happened: Mike Lovett and I had evacuated an injured fisherman and delivered him to the helipad at Falmouth Hospital. The helipad is located about ¼ mile from the hospital, down a path through some trees. After the patient had departed the helicopter, we shut down the rotor and engines, leaving the APU running for communication with the Air Station as we waited for our hoist operator and stokes litter to return.



Shortly thereafter, a girl in her late teens came running down the path and clambered aboard the helicopter. Thinking that she was a nurse with news of our crewman, we provided her a headset, whereupon she demanded that we fly her away from there. While I explained to her that the request was impossible, and that we were about to fly her anywhere, the other was on the radio having the police summoned. They arrived in short order, and took her into custody. When our crew returned, they provided the rest of the story. When they got to the emergency room, the girl was there with her mother. She was high on drugs and the mother was trying to have her admitted. Seeing Coast Guardsmen in flight suits, she correctly deduced that a helicopter must be on the pad, and might provide an avenue of escape from her predicament. It didn't . . .

Sometimes in Search and Rescue you had to learn by doing. We received a report of a small plane lost and disoriented over Cape Cod Bay in lowering visibility with night approaching. Having never trained in how to get a scared, confused and inept pilot back on the ground, it was time to improvise. We quickly located the aircraft with our Automatic Direction Finder (ADF), and asked him to follow us to the airport at Hyannis. It soon became apparent that the perplexed pilot could not fly even a loose formation, as the crewman, watching out the side door reported that he kept overtaking us and threatened to hit us. I tactfully maneuvered away from him, keeping up a convivial chatter on the radio to try to settle him down. Once we were in position



behind him, it became relatively easy to tell him to fly specific headings toward the airport, provide descent instructions, and then talk him through a simulated instrument approach until he had the airport in sight. The on-the-job training proved useful 15 years later when I had a disoriented pilot at Cape May, but that's another story.

Cape Cod was also the only unit at which I got to wear the Aviation Winter Working Green Uniform. It was very comfortable, wore extremely well, and despite having been around since 1917, was still stylish. It was my favorite of all the various uniforms I've worn,

probably because it signified one's status as an aviator, and also linked one with those who had gone before. When asked what I'd like to be if I could go back in time, I invariably reply, "A World War Two Pilot." It must be something about those cloth flying helmets and the roar of reciprocating engines turning AVGAS into noise . . . .

In the 70s, the America's Cup Races were held off Newport, RI every three years, and in 1977, I had the good fortune to be assigned for one of the race patrols. We had a great view as Ted Turner in *Courageous* beat *Australia* to retain the cup. We also had occasion to patrol offshore power boat races – the H-3 was fast enough that the boats didn't outrun the helicopter as they did with the H-52. The Coast Guard was exploring the use of hydrofoils in those years, and had obtained the *Flagstaff* from the Navy for that purpose. It was always fun to fly formation with her at about fifty knots during the 14 months or so she operated out of Woods Hole, but the cost to maintain her proved to be exorbitant, and she was finally returned to the Navy in 1978 as I was preparing to leave for Okinawa and an exchange tour with the Air Force flying the HH-53. Jay Crowe, who had flown the H-53 with the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS in Thailand during the rescue of "Bat 21," was at Cape Cod then, and his adventures had whetted my appetite for flying the HH-53

Cape Cod was not all work and no play, however. It was a time of great spiritual growth for our family, with weekend retreats at a local retreat center, a vibrant chapel program, frequent vacation trips to our family's summer home in New Hampshire, and some memorable air station parties. My duty section was known as "The God Squad," since it included four Christian Officers and a Mormon. We put on a party wearing our "God Squad" T-Shirts; it featured a mixed up dinner using a coded menu so that the diners could not be sure what they were ordering for each of the four courses. The evening was capped off with a skit based on "Fern Wood Tonight," a take off on late night talk shows. To recognize the departing Commanding Officer (CO) in 1977, we put together a half hour home movie detailing his various misadventures while assigned at CPD. The CO's wife was a co-conspirator in the project and let us borrow his sports car to reprise some of his minor accidents, several of which involved the ubiquitous split rail fences on the installation. She also arranged for us to use his Dress Uniform Blouse (the only one with four stripes at the unit) to capture some other foibles, such as "fleeting up" from Executive Officer to CO, being on leave during the *Argo Merchant* grounding, disdaining paperwork, and having to deal with several crimes at the Base Exchange. We showed the film, suitably narrated, at his Hail and Farewell party with a good deal of trepidation, but he enjoyed it so much that he asked for a copy which he later had converted to video incorporating our script and appropriate background music. We happened to inquire about it some twenty years later, and he provided us a copy of the video.

Another fond memory of Cape Cod was taking my father for a flight in the H-3. The rules permitted taking retired military personnel along on training flights, so I arranged for him to go along on a training flight which we planned as a cross country excursion, to include the family home in New Hampshire over which he had flown me some thirty years earlier.. He had been one of the first Coast Guard helicopter pilots, and his last military flight had been in 1946 in a Sikorsky H-6. After the war he had flown the Bell Model 47 (H-13) until 1948. Needless to say, the H-3 was a quantum leap in rotary wing technology for him, and he thoroughly enjoyed his two hour helicopter tour of New England.



No two CG Air Stations are alike, however, and where New Orleans had lots of Search and Rescue activity, Cape Cod offered lots of logistics flights to support the numerous light houses along the coast of New England, most of which required use of the cargo sling, which was rated at 6000 pounds. Many of the lighthouse ancillary structures were built of greenheart lumber, which was so dense that it wouldn't float, but so tough that it could withstand the harsh marine environment. On one occasion, a logistics flight experienced a severe load imbalance which threatened to upset the helicopter, and the crew was forced to "pickle" the load (push the button which released the cargo) over the Atlantic. Sure enough, the dense timbers hit the water and sank immediately. We also moved generators and occasionally tower structures which had to be carefully lowered onto their base from a hover with extensive coordination between the air crew and the ground crew. During my time at Cape Cod, I think I visited every Light House along the Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine Coasts, and my home office is now decorated in part with "Cat's Meow" cut outs of many of those light houses.

I left Cape Cod with 3500 total hours, and another 119 SAR cases. That averages about one case every other duty day, roughly half the pace at New Orleans. The difference is probably attributable to the seasonal pleasure boating activity in New England versus the year round activity in the warmer southern climate.

Cape Cod was an especially rewarding time for us and we developed several life long friendships there, but the three years had passed all too quickly and it was time for orders. During Vietnam, the Coast Guard had established an exchange program with the Air Force under which five Coast Guard Aviators would serve with the Air Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS) and five Air Force Aviators would serve at Coast Guard Search and Rescue Units. Following the collapse of Saigon, the 33<sup>rd</sup> ARRS, which included one of the Coast Guard billets, had moved back to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa from Thailand. Terry Beacham, with whom I'd served at New Orleans, was the first incumbent at Kadena, and I was to be the second. Jay Crowe, who had served with the 37<sup>th</sup> ARRS in Thailand during the rescue of "Bat 21," was at Cape Cod then, and his stories about the HH-53 had whetted my appetite for the new assignment.



## VIII. 33<sup>rd</sup> ARRS, Kadena Air Base Japan: November 1978 – June 1982



Service with the Air Force required a transition to the HH-53, the rescue helicopter Sikorsky had developed from the USMC CH-53 troop carrier. The AF HH-3E, although capable, had become overloaded with armor, weapons and aerial refueling capability by 1966, and the Air Force wanted a more powerful and heavily armored machine. The HH-53Bs were delivered in 1966, and were followed by the HH-53Cs from 1967 to 1973. With a maximum gross weight of 42,000 pounds and two engines each producing 4,000 shaft horsepower, the H-53 was effectively twice the size of the H-3, which had a MGW of 22,050 pounds and 1500 SHP per side. Finally, the H-3 was redlined at 142 knots but the H-53's top speed was 165 knots.

The Air Force transition seemed to cram one month of training into four, taking 35 sorties and 74 hours to complete. The H-53 flew much like the other Sikorsky helicopters I had flown, and the only new maneuvers for me were aerial refueling, which was easier than night water hoisting, gunnery, in which the gunners did all the work, and low level evasive action, which provided an opportunity for legal flathatting over the New Mexico countryside. The H-53 was highly maneuverable for its size, and had been looped and rolled during its development. It was limited to + 4 and -2 G, and had a G-meter in the cockpit to assure compliance. It was grand fun to fly at a mesa at 150 knots, and roll into an angle of bank more than 90 degrees to simulate avoiding an enemy fighter or stinger missile. For refueling, the helicopter's retractable probe was extended just beyond the rotor disk. The tanker flew from behind and below the helicopter to a position in front of the receiver. The helicopter was then maneuvered to the pre-contact position just behind the tanker's extended refueling hose, and when everything was set, the helicopter accelerated slightly to engage the drogue and fuel nozzle at the end of the hose. Once contact was made, the helicopter continued forward and up to take advantage of the slightly smoother air just above the C-130's wing. As the helicopter "pushed" the hose, the hydraulic hose reel mechanism sensed the reduced pressure and retracted it slightly, which enabled fuel to flow. A series of lights on the refueling pod indicated when fuel was flowing, and markings on the hose showed when it was in the refueling range, somewhere between 60 and 80 feet of hose length. The H-53 held 10,000 pounds of fuel, and the C-130 could fill it in about 5 minutes with all of its transfer pumps on the line.



I finished the transition course in March, and the family, who had been staying with Jacki's family in Florida, joined me in Albuquerque for some sightseeing before we caught the train for Norton AFB, CA. The city was at about 5,000 feet and Sandia Crest loomed over the city, at 10,600 feet. A cable car ran from the city up to the peak, which was a favorite launch point for hang gliders. It was fun to watch them as they unpacked and assembled their gliders, and then stood around discussing the thermal conditions and trying to decide when it was time to go.

Eventually, one would decide to take the plunge, and go soaring off into space over the outskirts of Albuquerque, followed in short order by the rest of the ‘flock.’ They reminded us of the documentaries on Penguins, who group at the water’s edge, assess the odds of attack by predators, and then follow their leader into the water.

The overnight train trip to California was the first sleeper car experience for any of us, and it was a pleasant trip with lots of interesting scenery. At Norton, we boarded a chartered stretch DC-8 for the 16 hour flight to Okinawa. It was a long, cramped, and loud trip, as the bulk of the passengers were Navy Seabees on their way to Diego Garcia, and they were taking the opportunity to party. Another passenger was a Marine who had been AWOL – he made the entire trip with his hands cuffed behind his back!

We arrived in Okinawa and set up house in a small Japanese home off base while waiting for base housing. It was interesting living on the economy, particularly in Japan, which is very orderly and practices the rule of law we cherish in this country. There was a significant amount of in-processing associated with living in a foreign country, so my first flight there wasn’t until April 12, more than a month since I had finished at Kirtland. One of my first assignments was to write the Squadron Commander’s endorsement on the report of a recent accident.

In February, the month before we arrived, the squadron’s two HH-53 flight examiners had been refueling north of Okinawa. A main rotor blade struck the drogue, shortening the blade by about two feet and causing tremendous vibration. The H-53 was designed to sustain battle damage, but not to the rotor blades. The pilots elected to fly to the closest land, a small island 16 miles away. After fifteen and ½ miles, however, the horrendous shaking caused the tail pylon to fail, and the helicopter crashed inverted in a shallow lagoon. A third pilot had been riding in the cabin of the helicopter, and during the attempt to reach land had braced himself against the bulkhead behind the co-pilot against his parachute so he was facing aft. The impact killed the two pilots and the flight engineer, but he survived. His account of the discussion following the accident was illuminating: Rather than immediately land in the water and use the rafts readily available in both the helicopter and the HC-130, the discussion centered on the fact that they might be administratively grounded if the helicopter sank, and so they elected to stretch their luck, too far, as it turned out.



The Commander of ARRS came to Okinawa to hear the squadron’s account of the accident, and I was selected to brief him. I told it like it was, that the Air Force’s preoccupation with administrivia had apparently beguiled the supposedly two most competent helicopter pilots in the unit into forgoing common sense, and continuing flight with known rotor blade damage. A contributing factor was the fact that the HH-53 Flight Manual didn’t contain any notes, warnings or cautions on continuing flight with known rotor blade damage. The general took the briefing well, and within weeks the Pilot Handbook had been amended to include the standard cautions

against continuing flight with damaged rotor blades, such as are found in all other military helicopter flight manuals.

In those days, Air Force helicopters were given the lowest priority for parts and people, ranked down with the “all others.” Accordingly, the skill level of the maintenance troops wasn’t on a par with what I enjoyed in the Coast Guard, since the “fixers” didn’t fly in the aircraft they worked on, and tended to do things by rote. For example, after I had been there for a couple of months, I was assigned as co-pilot for an FCF (Functional Check Flight) of a helicopter which had just finished a periodic phase inspection. On Day One, we got the machine started, checked the systems, and took off, only to find that there were no altimeter or airspeed indications. Since altitude and airspeed indicators aren’t crucial to operating a helicopter in visual conditions, we returned for landing, and noted the discrepancy in the pitot static system. The maintenance crew swarmed over the airplane with tech manuals and soapy water, looking for a leak as directed by their trouble shooting guidelines. Two days later the machine was pronounced ready again and we went out to test it. No airspeed and no altitude . . . That afternoon, we were told that all was finally well and took off again to find nothing changed.

By this time, my Coast Guard dander was up, so I told the Chief Master Sergeant (E-9) in charge of the maintenance crew to grab a Philips Head screwdriver and follow me to the top of the helicopter. I led him around to the front of the transmission above the cockpit and directed him to remove one of the Pitot Heads mounted there. When it was off, I asked, “Chief, what do you see?” “The Pitot Line and the Static Line,” he replied. “What are they connected to?” I asked. “The Static Nipple and the Pitot Nipple,” he answered. “Well, Chief,” I said, “That’s your problem. Pitot Static doesn’t mean that the Pitot Line goes to the Static Nipple and visa versa. Pitot goes to Pitot and Static to Static. Connect them properly, check the other Pitot Head, and let’s finish this test flight.” The pitot heads had been replaced during the phase inspection, but there hadn’t been any work done on the rest of the pitot static system. Common sense thus dictated that the lines had been reversed upon installation, but the maintenance manuals failed to address that eventuality. The Chief and I became good friends.



The Air Force tried to get me to wear one of their olive drab flight helmets, but the Life Support people could never get one to fit well, so I generally wore my comfortable but conspicuous Coast Guard APH-6. Someone apparently thought it was worth a picture for posterity, and took this shot of me “pushing a C-130 down the road’ during aerial refueling. The white helmet with reflective orange tape was not only comfortable, but far more visible for peacetime rescues had the need arisen.

As an incentive toward retention, the Air Force had a program called *Volant Spouse*, in which the wives of the aircrew were permitted to fly on selected training (sightseeing) missions. This was the only time Jacki was ever permitted to fly with me, so we made the most of it. I was able to take her on a sunset tour of Okinawa, viewing the white sand and coral beneath the green Pacific, touring her shopping haunts from the air, and finishing the flight with a simulated instrument



approach from 10,000 feet so as to maximize the duration and effect of the setting sun. While the program didn't convince us to change to the Air Force, it did give her an appreciation of the joys, as well as the frustrations of flying military aircraft. For two completed sorties, she had to traipse out to the aircraft five times, and sit in the heat and discomfort of a Life Vest while various things went wrong until it became necessary to cancel the flight. The Air Force has a saying that an ETIC (Estimated Time in Commission) in motion tends to stay in motion, and her experience graphically illustrated why I used it so much.

In the post Vietnam era, the Air Force was in a peacetime training mode, and actual Search and Rescue cases were few and far between. Most of them involved Marines who injured themselves in the rugged training areas on the North end of the island, and I picked up a couple of them. We were on 24 hour alert with a two hour response time every 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> day, which meant that we had to carry a "brick" (portable two way radio) and wear our flight suits. There was an AF Rescue Coordination Center associated with the squadron, but their case load was relatively light, and usually involved coordinating US assistance efforts in other Asian countries. I did perform one MEDEVAC off a commercial vessel several hundred miles from Okinawa. If memory serves, the hoist was routine, but the flight out and back required a refueling each way.

My one rescue of note while I was there happened as follows: I was out on an evening training flight with a full crew – co-pilot, flight engineer/hoist operator, and two "PJs" (highly trained Para rescue men). As we neared the end of our training, we overheard on the Guard Channel that a Marine A-4 pilot from Futenma Marine Corps Air Station had bailed out west of Okinawa. My Coast Guard instincts kicked in, and we quickly diverted to assist the downed aviator, since sharks were prevalent in the area. We arrived on scene, and soon had the wet but otherwise undamaged airman back at his base. Upon returning to Kadena, however, the phones were ringing off the hook. It seems that we had failed to hold a "Conference Skyhook" with our parent organization in California before undertaking the rescue, and had thus violated several points of Air Force Doctrine. Fortunately, the phones in those days were "push-to-talk" so I could in effect hang up while listening to the diatribes of various higher headquarters staff alternately castigate, council, and criticize me over having violated procedures. All's well that ends well, however – I eventually went back to the Coast Guard and my co-pilot, a second lieutenant fresh from flight school, later became a general. I don't know what became of the Marine we rescued.

One of the best ways to practice war is through exercises, and we usually deployed twice or three times per year to either Korea or the Philippines for Cope Thunder, Cope Jade, and Team Spirit. It was a nine or ten hour flight to each country from Okinawa, mostly over water, so we refueled often to assure we could reach the nearest point of land. On one Cope Thunder in the Philippines, I had the opportunity to fly in the back seat of an OV-10 Bronco with a forward air controller. Fifteen years after my last acrobatics in flight school, it was exhilarating to yank and bank over the jungles of Luzon, counting rockets as the pilot fired them to mark targets for flights of attacking fighters.





Exercises in Korea were held more frequently, probably because of the looming threat of North Korea. The entire country of South Korea became a simulated battlefield for major exercises such as Team Spirit, and there would be a number of scenarios underway at one time, including Search and Rescue to simulate airmen downed in combat. Tent cities like the one at left were established to house the influx of participants. (I'm apparently demonstrating the hazards of an "Irish Pennant" to the Air Force Personnel) One day we were assigned as one of the alert helicopters: Several "downed aircrews," fifty airmen in all, were "captured" at random, and delivered to sites

around Korea for the scenario. As each crew or individual went through the required steps they were supposed to reach a pickup point from which they could signal for a rescue helicopter. There were three HH-53s from Kadena, three H-3s from Osan AB, Korea, and some Korean HU-1Es poised to make the rescues. I was scheduled to take off first, and we found and recovered our first victims, a B-52 crew of four. We were then informed by radio that several of the other helicopters and broken down, and that since poor weather was expected to roll in, we were to pick up as many of the remaining survivors as we could. After an aerial refueling, we began making the rounds, and soon had all fifty air crew wedged in the back of the helicopter with our crew of five. As we headed for Osan, however, the weather got progressively worse until we were practically hover taxiing along a river bed. According to the charts, there was rising terrain ahead, so we called the orbiting E-3 AWACS to find out what the tops of the clouds were, and whether any other aircraft were still flying. They came back at once with cloud tops at 4,000 feet and no one else flying because of the weather. Even with 10,000 extra pounds of people in the cabin, some quick calculations indicated that we could easily make a vertical climb to get clear of the clouds and the obstacles contained therein. We soon popped out of the clouds at 4,000, filed an instrument flight plan, and made an instrument approach back to Osan. We never got any specific feedback from our passengers, but we suspect that it was the ride of their lives, and that they probably thought helicopter pilots are crazy. . . .

It has been said, "Rescue and become the victim," and sure enough, a few days later after returning from another mission, my crew and I were informed that we had been "shot down" and could take with us only the equipment on our helicopter. We were then transported to the hinterlands by another helicopter, and deposited to "survive" and work on getting rescued. Since it was late in the day, we made camp, rounded up firewood because it was expected to be below freezing that night, inventoried our equipment, and organized our defenses. To preserve our survival radio batteries, we slept with the radios in our sleeping bags and spent a cold night in the wilds of South Korea. The temperature dropped to about 28, and in the morning, we looked like a group of popsicles. Our body heat and respiration had caused our sleeping bags to frost over. With daylight, we arranged our signals, reviewed authentication procedures, and ate some C-Rations. We were "rescued" shortly after noon, and returned to Osan for hot showers and some real food.

Another log book entry from my time at Kadena shows that I flew then BG Tom McInerney around Okinawa for 4.1 hours, probably for an area familiarization as he assumed the duties of commander, 313 Air Division at Kadena. Now retired, LTG McInerney is a frequent commentator on Fox News.

But perhaps the most unusual flight during my time with the Air Force was our capture of a squad of Marines. There were several small uninhabited coral islands about 50 miles west of Okinawa which we used as gunnery ranges for the helicopter's three mini guns, which fired 7.62 mm rounds at the rate of 12,000 rounds per minute to provide suppressive fire during a combat rescue. The ranges were shared with the Marine Aircraft at Futenma, and were centrally scheduled to



avoid conflicts. We took off and flew to the range. Upon reaching it, we made the requisite radio calls and a fly by to be sure the range was clear before we began firing. The firing area had several excess trucks and bits of equipment which we sling loaded from Kadena as they became available. (A common fantasy was to sling load one of our cars to the range just before leaving the island, since most of them developed terminal cancer in the salt environment) As we opened fire with all three guns and renewed the assault on the targets, a red flare went up from a small karst at one end of the island. We ceased fire, and put the PJs out to investigate. They soon reported back that a squad of Marines, who were to be ground controllers for some A-4s in the range period after ours, had failed to check the schedule and had arrived somewhat early. Since the H-46 which delivered them wasn't armed, they assumed we weren't either, and ignored our radio calls and fly bys. When the initial burst of 4,000 rounds started walking toward their position, they surrendered almost immediately . . . . Fortunately no one was injured, but we're confident that the Marines never again underestimated the fire power of the mighty HH-53.

We sometimes did small scale exercises with the Marine AH-1 Cobra helicopters at Futenma. They would be assigned to escort us to a pickup site at one of the outlying islands, and then provide additional firepower while we hovered to recover the survivor. Although the Cobra had a higher redline speed (190 knots to our 165), their two bladed rotor system reached the vibration barrier at about 140 knots in level flight - 190 KIAS was achievable only in a dive with the rotor system unloaded. The H-53, on the other hand, with a fully articulated rotor system boasting 6 blades, could easily cruise at 165 knots. As we departed Okinawa in formation heading west, we would invariably get ahead of our escorts, who would then call us on the radio in a uniquely vibrato voice requesting us to "*Pulleeaase sallow down . . . .*" All that notwithstanding, we always made the save and returned victorious to home plate, usually sans escorts.

In the summer of 1981, a new Lt Col (O-5) squadron commander arrived. Since I had been promoted to Commander (O-5) the year before, he was referred to as "thee" commander, and I was called "thu" commander. There had been a large turnover during the preceding two years, and I had become the most experienced H-53 pilot at the unit with 430 hours in the machine. The new commander decreed that I be upgraded to Instructor and then Flight Examiner, and take over as the Chief of Standardization/Evaluation, responsible for all aircrew evaluations, flight records, and compliance with AF flying regulations. The requisite maneuvers and check rides were accomplished over the next month, and I was duly designated as an HH-53 Flight Examiner. The Wing "stan/eval" staff in California was aghast at the decision, primarily because of my failure to coordinate with them on the earlier rescue of the Marine A-4 Pilot, and were prepared for the worst when they came to inspect several months later.

When the Wing Staff arrived for their inspection, (Always on Sunday morning, because they could never get the time change right.) we greeted them with coffee and doughnuts, every record resplendent with every “i” dotted, and every “t” crossed. Things were going well, until one of the enlisted inspectors noted that the helicopter flight engineer on alert had gone through the Tactical Air Command altitude chamber, rather than the Military Airlift Command chamber, and had thus only experienced hypoxia at 25,000 rather than the requisite 37,000 feet. (The service ceiling of the H-53 was only about 20,000 feet, and it had no oxygen system.) The Sergeant was adamant that this apparent discrepancy would be a major finding until I pointed out to him that AF regulations required that stateside units, in this case Kirtland AFB, were responsible for assuring that air crew members were fully qualified before shipping them overseas. I went on to explain that if we were to be held responsible for double checking that the CONUS units had done their jobs, we would have to close down the squadron for some time in order to confirm that the rest of the Air Force was in compliance. His superiors quickly realized that the discovery was both trivial and untenable, and we received a top grade.



In a policy directive, the Wing Chief of Stan/Eval had noted that DOV (the office symbol for Stan/Eval) should be the “watchdogs of the squadron,” alerting on non-compliance wherever they found it. With that in mind, we set out to reinvent DOV’s image. The C-130s flew to Korea almost weekly for training with the helicopter squadron there, and usually had time for shopping. I directed the C-130 Flight Examiner, Marsh Eto, to have patches made which reflected us as the squadron watchdogs. The first attempt came

back with a cute little puppy nipping at 53) consoling a crowned “K” (the C- quite,” I told Marsh. “We need a Jolly. In a couple of weeks, he came featured a larger, but overly friendly giant consoling a “K”. While



to see one of the navigator’s displayed a decal of “UGA,” the University of Georgia Bulldog Mascot, growling fiercely and wearing a spiked collar. “That’s what we need,” I told Marsh. “Have them make up patches with a large and ferocious “UGA” bulldog, and a suitably impressed Jolly Green Giant with crown.” The third time was the charm, and we soon had our patches, and embarked on our mission of creating compliance wherever we found the lack thereof. When I departed several months later, the Stan/Eval branch gave me a porcelain bulldog to remember them by. It still sits proudly on my desk.

the heels of a Jolly Green Giant (H- 130 Call Sign was King.) “Not bigger dog and a smaller King and back with another sample which dog and an equally sized green pondering this version, I happened briefcases, which prominently



Near the end of my AF tour, they imposed a requirement for the air crews to fly while wearing a Chemical / Biological / Radiological (CBR) ensemble. One pilot donned the charcoal lined coveralls, which were very warm on Okinawa, and a full face mask apparatus. Of course the helicopter had no oxygen system, so the mask hose provided ambient air. I was acting as the safety pilot on one of these flights when the pilot in the mask began flying erratically. A quick visual inspection revealed that he was sitting on his hose, and slowly suffocating himself. I finally got him sorted out and wrote up the incident. The requirement was soon dropped.



The “wetting down” ceremony is a time honored tradition among air crews. It may take various forms such as the newly promoted officer buying the drinks at the club, or a pilot getting literally



wetted down with a fire hose after his last flight at the unit. The 33<sup>rd</sup> ARRS was no exception, so after my last flight on 9 June, a half hour test flight, I was greeted with the fire hoses, resulting in the picture at left. Soon afterwards, following a three month extension to allow the kids to finish school, we headed back to the states, after one last shopping trip in Korea, which at that time produced many of the sneakers and “Logo” clothing popular with the younger set. We had purchased some air line tickets in Okinawa which gave us unlimited travel on Eastern for a year after our return, with only proviso being that we could only fly into each Eastern destination once. Since our next assignment was to Executive Officer at CGAS Elizabeth City, NC, we managed to get our money’s worth and more from Eastern, with stops in

Tampa, Miami, Boston, New York, Raleigh, Richmond, and Norfolk, plus some others which have faded from memory over the years. When the airline went out of business a couple of years later, we did feel guilty, but we also got to visit family and friends we hadn’t seen in three ½ years, buy a house in Elizabeth City, and enjoy the US for several weeks. My log book reveals no flights from 9 June until I started H-3 Requal in Mobile on 9 September, so I expect that we used up some extra leave visiting, and getting settled in at 905 West Church St, a house built in 1916 with 1400 square feet of porch, 10 foot ceilings and lots of room for a growing family.

My total time with the Air Force was 634 hours over 44 months, or about 14 hours per month. Nearly all of the time was training, as I only had 5 SAR cases while there. As a Flight Examiner, I got more time than most pilots, so my experience illustrates the relatively low time AF pilots get - I had nearly twice as much total flight time as the highest time AF pilot in the squadron.



## IX. Air Station Elizabeth City: July 1982 – June 1985



ECity was an interesting tour, with lots of activity on a daily basis. The aircraft complement was five C-130s and three H-3s when I arrived in August of 1982, and in addition to their share of SAR cases, the C-130s supported Atlantic Area missions and the International Ice Patrol. After moving into my new office, it took some time to become familiar with the local hierarchy – there were five commands; the Aircraft Repair and Supply Center for Coast Guard Aviation, the Aviation Technical Training Center for aviation ratings, the Atlantic Strike Team for pollution response, the Support Center which operated the facilities, and the Air Station, which operated the air field and the operational aircraft. The Coast Guard inherited the Air Base from the Navy after WWII, and although there was a modest amount of civilian traffic, the Coast Guard's only five Air Traffic Controllers manned the tower and controlled local air traffic. The air station also operated a couple of small boats for local water crash coverage, hoist training, and occasional SAR missions.

In September, after 7 flights totaling 14 hours at Mobile, I was pronounced re-qualified in the H3, and settled down to flying less and administering more as the Executive Officer of a large Coast Guard Air Station. With over 300 people assigned, there was always paperwork to be done, discipline to be meted out, and personnel issues to be worked. Drug use had been rare ten years earlier, but now seemed to be spreading to Coast Guard personnel even as we took the lead in the war on drugs. Women had come into the service a few years before, and their capable presence gave rise to various situations requiring new solutions, since their generally excellent performance sometimes brought out the chauvinism in some of the men. That women have excelled in Coast Guard Service is evidenced by the fact that the current Vice Commandant, VADM Vivien Crea, was then a lieutenant who served as the Flight Safety Officer at Elizabeth City. She was also an accomplished C-130 Aircraft Commander.

My log book indicates that I averaged less than 10 hours per month during the first year as XO, so I must have been busy with administrative matters. I had upgraded to Aircraft Commander in November 1982, and my logbook indicates a series of apparently mundane training and logistics support missions. There were some exciting flights, however, not the least of which occurred on the afternoon of 11 February 1983.

I was launched about 1500 to assist the Fishing Boat *Theodora*, which was reported disoriented and taking on water off the Virginia Eastern Shore. The weather was making into a strong nor'easter, with low visibility, freezing temperatures, 20-30 foot seas, and 40-55 knot winds. We found the vessel east of Ocean City, MD, and delivered two dewatering pumps, not without some difficulty due to the weather. Approaching the area, we had seen a radar target a few miles to the north, and hailed her on the radio to provide assistance. She agreed to come about and stand by. The ship turned out to be the *Marine Electric*, a collier bound for Massachusetts with a load of coal from Norfolk. That night, the *Marine Electric* capsized and sank off Chincoteague with the loss of 31 of the 34 seamen aboard. Although Coast Guard and Navy helicopters reached the scene as soon as possible after the ship's distress call, the frigid waters and raging seas took their toll despite heroic efforts by the helicopter crews to recover them. All but three who had somehow made it to a raft, a life ring, and an overturned lifeboat succumbed to the



harsh conditions. This incident gave rise to the development of the Rescue Swimmer program, now featured in the upcoming Kevin Costner movie, "The Guardian," which has proved to be an invaluable tool for thousands of subsequent rescues. The resourcefulness, skill, and valor of Coast Guard rescue swimmers received widespread coverage in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. I've always felt a little eerie at having been one of the last to see the *Marine Electric* afloat, not knowing that her wasted hatch covers were letting her slowly fill with the water which would sink her nine hours later.

The rest of this story concerns an aerodynamic condition peculiar to helicopters which is known as retreating blade stall. As we departed the area for Elizabeth City, I asked the co-pilot to fly for a while so I could rest my tired hands. Delivering pumps in raging seas and gusting winds requires intense concentration and one tends to keep a tight grip on the controls. As we cruised along at about 120 knots indicated airspeed, the groundspeed indication in the navigation system was about 170. As we neared Cape Charles, VA the helicopter suddenly pitched up and rolled left as though it wanted to return to the scene. After a moment of shock as I ran through the possible reasons for this anomaly, a bit of rotary wing dynamic theory from 17 years before popped into my brain – retreating blade stall, the condition in which the forward speed of the helicopter adds lift to the advancing blades on the right, but must be subtracted from the retreating blades on the left. The blades on the right develop more lift while the blades on the left lose lift, and you encounter retreating blade stall. I instructed the copilot to lower the collective and raise the nose and the condition immediately resolved itself. Why did it happen? We were flying along through the air mass at 120 KIAS, and the air mass was moving in the same direction at 50 knots, so we were moving over the ground at 170 knots. Apparently we flew through a wind shear, perhaps caused by the proximity of land, and the wind suddenly dropped to near zero in a brief null area. The helicopter's momentum, however, kept us moving over the ground for a bit at 170 knots, which is well above the HH-3F redline speed of 142 KIAS. Result – classic retreating blade stall. The moral in the story – never relax your vigilance when flying, and expect the unexpected, even with a fifty knot tailwind.

In the summer of 1983, ECity's aircraft inventory took a quantum leap. The Coast Guard was finishing the buy of HU-25A's, a militarized version of the Dassault Falcon 20, and assigned three of them to the air station without a mission. Since it seemed imprudent for me to stand duty in the HH-3F while a junior officer kited about in the new toy, I convinced the CO that I should transition to the Falcon. After a month at Mobile and 46 hours in the jet, I was deemed a qualified copilot on 14 October 1983, some 15 years after my last HU-16E flight at Miami. In addition to the three Falcons, the Air Station was tasked with the care and feeding of the venerable turboprop Gulfstream GI, aka VC-4A Coast Guard 02. Politics inside the beltway was bringing increasing pressure on the Coast Guard to make the presence of VIP aircraft at Washington National less visible, and it was decided to leave the jet Gulfstream II, Coast Guard 01, there and move the older plane to Elizabeth City. John Rice, the Engineer and Mont Smith, the Ops Officer, had failed to follow my example and seek a seat in the HU-25, so they both jumped at the chance to fly the Gulfstream, even though it meant dealing with a never ending round of VIP passengers, and lots of time waiting at airports for their passengers. Running a one plane airline proved to be



no small challenge, as it involved stocking and storing the requisite perqs – snacks, beer, wine, liquor, and so on. We persevered, however, and soon had the operation up and running and a half dozen pilots trained to fly it.



The Falcon was grand fun to fly, and with only nine pilots for three planes, there was plenty of flight time to go around. Moreover, because they were special mission aircraft (i.e., no specific assigned missions) training scenarios were limited only by the pilot's imagination and a nod toward the "needs of the service." Since the HU-25 was designed to operate at 41,000 feet and Mach .85, and had full RNAV

capability, with a Category II autopilot, auto throttles, and five hours of fuel, it seemed only appropriate to exercise its full range of capabilities on ever more ambitious cross country flights. As a result, my log book reflects forays such as ECG-EYW (Elizabeth City to Key West), ECG-TVC (CGAS Traverse City, MI), Little Rock, Gander Canada, Aruba, Bermuda, Denver, and Albuquerque. Some of these missions were for fun, and some were for business. The C-130's were assets of the Atlantic Area Commander, and often deployed to the far flung reaches of the Caribbean for counter drug operations, or to bases in Canada for the International Ice Patrol. On one occasion, a "Herc" needed a part down in Curacao, and it was my turn to be copilot. There were delays getting the part delivered from ARSC, so our takeoff was delayed several times, and Dan Connolly, the Aircraft Commander (A/C), spent a good bit of the time drinking coffee. We finally got airborne about 1600 and headed south. After an hour or so at FL370, (37,000 feet, our assigned altitude) Dan announced that he needed a bathroom break. Although the Falcon was equipped with a chemical toilet in the cabin, it was rarely used because "he who used it cleaned it." As an alternative, we had all been issued individual urinal bottles designed for hospital use, suitably calibrated of course to record output. Leaving me in the cockpit (on oxygen as required for single pilot operations above 25,000 feet), the bursting A/C retired to the cabin to relieve himself. He returned some time later with a completely full bottle – all 32 ounces! He was known thereafter as "Dan the Can," because he surely had a hollow leg. We landed in Aruba without further incident, delivered the parts and after a night at the local casino, returned to ECity the next day. Dan was particularly parsimonious with his breakfast coffee, and made the trip home without a potty break!

We also flew periodic pollution enforcement routes to Bermuda and back, checking any shipping we encountered for evidence of pollution from leaks, improper tank cleaning, and the like. For some reason, it was decided that we needed to stage an HU-25 in Bermuda for a week to intensify pollution detection and enforcement efforts, and George Gill and I got the nod. We packed our bags, picked up several hundred dollars apiece in advance per diem, and prepared to depart. We taxied out to the hold short line to await takeoff clearance, as a Navy jet was on short final and about to land. We watched eagerly as the A-4 pilot approached, silently urging him to hurry so that we could get on to Bermuda. To our





horror, he touched down about a foot short of the paved runway surface, tearing off his main landing gear as it caught the lip of the pavement. The aircraft then continued down the runway far enough so that it effectively blocked traffic in both directions. As the situation continued to unfold, it became apparent that there would be no more fixed wing takeoffs until the next day, and we taxied sadly back to our parking spot. Upon learning of the difficulties at Elizabeth City, the higher headquarters which had developed the mission gave it to Cape Cod instead, and our grand adventure was cancelled.



In August of 1983, the Coast Guard was considering the possibility of using blimps for drug and pollution surveillance, and in keeping with the concept of multi-mission assets, wanted to evaluate their potential for search and rescue, including hoisting operations. Airship Industries, a Canadian Firm, was trying to rejuvenate the use of Airships, and was seeking sites more amenable to operations than Toronto. Upon learning that there were two WWII blimp hangars in Weeksville, just south of the Coast Guard Air Station, they deployed an airship and a couple of pilots to

reconnoiter the area. The pilots were Brits, and soon became members of our wardroom, joining us for weekly happy hours. They were conspicuous both for their accents and their well developed forearms, for as we would discover, piloting a blimp is often a matter of brute strength. Since the Coast Guard was interested in evaluating their product, and they were actively marketing it, several of us were asked to come fly with them. At the appointed time, we pulled up to the old blimp hangars, which we had frequently seen from the air and looming in the distance from the ground, and the first task was to acclimate ourselves to the scale of air ship operations – the Sky Ship 500 is about 110 feet long and 40 feet in diameter, and there were two of them in one hangar. (Airship Industries parent company TCOM purchased the larger hangar, reported to be the world's largest wooden building, and used it as a maintenance and manufacturing facility for Air Ships and Tethered Aerostats. The other was partially occupied by a cabinet factory. The large hangar burned to the ground in 1995, but the cabinet factory went out of business at about the same time, and Westinghouse took over both TCOM and the second hangar.) After a tour of the facility, we inspected the Air Ship itself. Powered by two Porsche automobile engines driving ducted fan propellers, it otherwise had conventional, albeit inflated control surfaces.

The engines could be tilted to facilitate climbs and descents. The gondola was outfitted much like an aircraft interior with some notable exceptions. There was a huge pitch trim wheel next to the pilot's seat, and a series of levers protruding from the overhead panel. Each seat had an oversize control wheel reminiscent of a ship's wheel without the spokes. After getting airborne, we began to understand why the pilots' forearms were so well developed – every input required full throw of the flight controls, and there was no hydraulic system to move the control surfaces 50 feet away. There were no rudder pedals, because the rudder was controlled by the control wheel. The levers in the overhead controlled valves to move air into either the forward or the aft ballonets, bags of air within the helium filled envelope. Since air is heavier than helium, the ballonets are the primary pitch control, augmented by the elevators and the vectored engine

thrust. Flying the airship proved to be quite interesting. Cruising at about 35 knots with superb visibility below and to the side, with little engine noise, one soon forgot the huge mass above and behind the cockpit, with only the mooring line dangling from the bow 30 feet ahead as a reminder that we were in an airship. We each got an hour or so of stick time over a leisurely 4 hour sortie, and all agreed that the control system would require far greater responsiveness to be useful for hovering and hoisting, or other delicate rescue maneuvers, but that for searching, the airship was unparalleled. After the evaluations, we were given patches commemorating the event, and mine is still being used today as a coaster in my office.



Airship Industries flourished in Weeksville, and it became an airship manufacturing and training base. In the spring of 1984 as we were on our way to church, we noticed three Japanese men apparently sightseeing. Since Elizabeth City is not known as a tourist Mecca for Asian vacationers, we stopped to greet them. Because of our time in Okinawa, we were able to say “hello” in their language. They were duly impressed to find such urbanity in such a small place, and even more pleased when we invited them to dinner. In preparation for sponsoring the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, Fuji Film had decided to buy a Air Ship decked out with their logo, and the three men were to become its pilots and mechanic. We entertained them frequently during their month there, and enjoyed their stories of Japan, and the transition to Air Ship flying, particularly their account of a cross country trainer extended by several hours because of the wind. After a lengthy cross country flight reminiscent of my HH-52 flights to Seattle, but at half the groundspeed, they got their air ship to LA and were widely seen during the Olympics.

After a year of special mission status, it was finally decided that the Falcons at Elizabeth City would become a Fifth District asset, and be used for Search and Rescue, so I wound up standing duty again. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1984, Bill Schleich and I were launched to search for an emergency locator transmitter reported 300 miles east of Atlantic City. The weather was poor with a thick overcast layer from about 500 feet to 20,000 feet, so we flew to the scene above the clouds at FL 250. As we approached the area, the signal became progressively stronger, so we made an instrument descent through the clouds, breaking out of the clouds at about 400 feet. As the surface came into view, there on our nose was an orange life raft, which was clearly the source of the ELT, since our ADF needle swung just as we flew over it. Using our radar, we found a merchant ship about twenty miles away, and the master agreed to assist while we stood by to communicate with the Rescue Coordination Center. We learned afterwards that the raft held two sailors, whose boat had sunk from under them while enroute to Bermuda.

I had the opportunity to take my dad flying in a Falcon while stationed at “the Swamp,” the common appellation for Air Station ECity due to its proximity to the Great Dismal Swamp. It was a night flight and we cruised up to Dulles for some practice instrument approaches. My dad had flown a variety of Coast Guard fixed wing aircraft during the war, such as the PBY, the Kingfisher, and the Widgeon, but aviation had come a long way in forty years. He was suitably impressed as he watched from the jump seat while we put the Coast Guard jet with the 1980’s version of a glass cockpit through its paces, letting the systems do most of the work while we explained what the various indicators meant.



I was appointed to head up a mishap analysis board after a Coast Guard Falcon from Mobile had encountered thunderstorms in the Caribbean, damaged an engine and made a forced landing on one of the islands. They were flying in clear skies, and could see two towering cumulus clouds ahead of them, far enough apart that blue sky was visible on the other side. Accordingly they decided to fly between the two storms. As they did, they encountered violent turbulence, torrential rain, and hail large enough to damage the aircraft and cause

one engine to fail. Our investigation disclosed that one of the storms had sufficiently strong updrafts to begin throwing rain and hail out the top of the cloud into the clear area into which they were flying. Nature had laid a clever trap and caught a Coast Guard Falcon! After a trip to Phoenix to consult with the engine manufacturer, and discussions with several meteorologists, we determined that the amount of water ingested was far beyond the design capacity of the engine, causing damage to the turbine blades. One of our recommendations was a change to the Coast Guard Air Operations Manual, CG 3710.1, prohibiting flight within 25 miles of a thunderstorm except when required by urgent search and rescue requirements. During my absence on these trips, Jacki took over the boy's soccer team I had been coaching, and took them to the championship! Talk about a swivel shot award winner . . .

An interesting footnote to our time at Elizabeth City was the 1984 appearance of AF HC-130P, 65-987 which was assigned to the 33<sup>rd</sup> ARRS while I was with the AF in Okinawa. As the Drug Wars heated up, the Coast Guard found itself strapped for resources, and Congress mandated that the Air Force provide some C-130s on an interim basis until new Coast Guard C-130s, (the 1700 series) could be built. "King" 987 became CG 1451, and was affectionately called "the Frog" by its crews because of its camouflage paint scheme. 987 was eventually returned to the Air Force, and is currently flying out of Moody AFB. I saw it again at a recent air show in Virginia, repainted in the current AF gray livery. Although I had never flown 987, it had become a good friend in Okinawa, providing thousands of gallons of JP-4 during trips to Korea and the Philippines, and it was good to see her again.

Elizabeth City was a rewarding tour for our family. Small, southern, and somewhat provincial, the fact that we had lived overseas was considered quite extraordinary, since many of our non-Coast Guard friends and neighbors had spent their entire lives in the same county, if not the same town. When asked how she liked life as a military kid, our daughter responded that she thought it was great, because it taught her that with frequent moves, you had to make friends and get established quickly in each new place. Our adopted son, who is biracial, also made a small stir by being the first black child to be invited to Junior Cotillion. Our daughter graduated at the top of her class in June 1985, and the boys played on a championship soccer team. I was due for orders, however, and after some negotiation with the detailers, it was decided we would be going to the Joint US Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) in Manila, Philippines. I spent the month of May at Wright Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio attending the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management in preparation for the assignment. Falcon training flights were arranged for weekend pickup and delivery so that I could "take care of official business associated with

the move.” We had some concerns about leaving our daughter “home alone” to start college, but the Lord was watching over us and arranged a scholarship for her to Trinity University in San Antonio where Jacki’s brother was stationed. After getting our daughter ensconced at Trinity, we packed out and started on a seemingly endless round of briefings in Washington, Alameda, and Hawaii before heading for the Philippines. The good news was that we were entitled to rent luxury cars because of all our baggage, and stay at fine hotels including the Hale Koa on Waikiki Beach. We left ECity in early July, and didn’t arrive in Manila until early August.

At Elizabeth City, I flew another 104 hours and 7 SAR cases in the H-3, and 322 hours and 8 SAR cases in the HU-25. As Executive Officer, however, I was frequently tied to my desk with paperwork and other administrivia, so I only averaged about 12 hours of flying per month.





## **X. Joint US Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) Philippines: July 1985 – June 1987**



Upon checking into the JUSMAG and going through my inbox, I found a message which had gone out the day after we left Elizabeth City announcing the zone for the upcoming Captain Selection Board. I had not expected to be in the zone because I was in the top of the next year group. To my amazement, the zone extended about five numbers below me, and the board had finished more than two weeks earlier. With some trepidation, I picked up the phone and called the Coast Guard in Hawaii to ask if they had the board results. They did, and I had been selected without having had the opportunity to worry about it! Even though promotion was still 18 months away because I was near the bottom of the list, I was “frocked” almost immediately since I was dealing with Filipino Flag Officers, and the higher rank gave the US more credibility with the host country.

The US was providing about \$450M/year in security assistance dollars to the Philippines, and the JUSMAG was ostensibly there to help them spend it on US military hardware. The Filipinos viewed the money as rent for the bases at Clark and Subic Bay, however, and thus were disinclined to observe most of the regulations governing how it could be spent. Graft and corruption were accepted elements of the Philippine government in those days, and abuses, particularly under Marcos, were widespread. In the early eighties, the Coast Guard had wanted to become more “joint” as the war on drugs escalated, and had established the Coast Guard billet at JUSMAG to help the Naval Forces Section in their programs, and work with the Philippine Coast Guard, a command within the Philippine Navy. The annual budget for the Philippine Coast Guard, however, was about half of the budget for CGAS Elizabeth City, and their fleet was very small and largely out of commission, as the Marcos government had effectively declared bankruptcy the year before. Two significant events occurred during our time in the Philippines. The first is recounted below from a journal I kept on a Commodore 64 computer during the “People Power” revolution in 1986. With today’s technology I was able to scan and transcribe the faded dot-matrix all capitals text using Optical Character Recognition and reformatting software. The website <http://www.stuartxchange.org/EdsaIntro.html> offers a comprehensive compilation of various media reports on the “EDSA Revolution,” and provides many details to which I was not privy.

### **The EDSA Revolution: February 1986**

**Introduction:** In August 1983, Filipino Senator Ninoy Aquino was assassinated as he returned to the Philippines after a three year exile. In 1984, the Marcos government effectively declared bankruptcy and as economic and security conditions worsened in 1985, Marcos suddenly called for a presidential election in November, to be held in February 1986. Ninoy’s widow Cory ran against him. The elections were held on 7 February, but were marred by violence and ballot tampering. The government election canvasser, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), declared Marcos the victor with 10,807,197 votes to Aquino’s 9,291,761 votes. The final tally of the National Movement for Free Elections, (NAMFREL), an accredited poll watcher, however, had Aquino winning with 7,835,070 votes to Marcos’ 7,053,068. Things came to a head when Juan Ponce Enrile, Minister of Defense, and LTG Eddie Ramos, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) publicly accused Marcos of

cheating, and announced their support for Aquino. I recorded the following thoughts and observations as the drama of the people power revolution on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) unfolded.

### **Saturday - 2/22/86**

It was a quiet Saturday evening and we were planning to watch a video. I had recently been appointed Chief of Staff for JUSMAG, so about 1900, the Communications Watch called to inform us that Radio Veritas, the Catholic “free” radio station, considered the only truthful voice of the people, and the only radio/TV station not controlled by Marcos, had broadcast the defection of minister of National Defense Juan Ponce Enrile (a 20 year Marcos follower) and AFP Vice Chief of Staff LTG Fidel Ramos. We quickly tuned in and heard General Ramos denouncing Marcos and declaring that the election had been a total fraud. He went on to say that Cory Aquino was the duly elected president of the Philippines. Minister Enrile echoed these sentiments. My wife Jacki took a moment to call a friend, Joan Clawson, and tell her to listen in. We spent the rest of Saturday evening listening to Radio Veritas as they reported on the defections. The revolutionaries were ensconced in the Philippine Constabulary (PC) headquarters, Camp Crame (Ramos was head of the PC), and Camp Aguinaldo, which houses the general headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), as well as the Ministry of National Defense and some other major commands. These two Installations are separated by EDSA, the primary north south road in Manila, and were only about a mile as the crow flies from our house. The camps are bounded on three sides by housing and businesses with EDSA, an eight lane highway, between them.



Both in response to calls for a show of support and in an outpouring of anti-Marcos/pro-Aquino sentiment, the Filipinos who were to become “people power” began to congregate at the gates of the two camps in numbers which soon blocked the road to vehicular traffic. We had several calls wondering “What’s the situation? What should we do?” I got a call from MG Allen (Chief of JUSMAG) to pass the word that Americans should stay calm, that evacuation wasn’t yet indicated, and that the embassy team was working the problem. As we were going to bed, Marcos came on the TV to state with his usual arrogance and apparent ignorance of the low regard in which his countrymen held him that he was in “complete control, that he was withholding his troops as a humanitarian gesture, that he couldn’t understand how his old friends could be so disloyal, and that there had been an aborted coup de etat at the palace.” A master of prevarication, he sought to turn the situation into a “poor me” scenario, painting himself as the rightful president who couldn’t believe that Ramos and Enrile were involved in the coup (but clearly implying that they were). He even produced a hapless palace guard (an obvious scapegoat) who confessed to plotting the coup (probably in return for many pesos and promises of other favors) to divert attention from the defection. Jacki’s folks called at this point, the news having already broken in the states on the Sunday morning talk shows, and we were able to reassure them. We knew General Ramos quite well and had attended some bible studies with him. He related after the coup that his time of greatest doubt was in the early hours of Sunday morning when it appeared that Marcos was rallying his forces for a counterattack. A man of great faith, he opened his bible at random to Psalm 91:5, and upon reading “You will not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day,” he knew that God was supporting his stand against tyranny.

**Sunday - 2/23/86**

We slept well and woke to more radio info which indicated no change in the situation, so we decided to go on to church - Joan Clawson went with us. (It was her first visit to church since arriving in Manila!) Attendance was about ½ normal, but traffic was lighter than usual, and the PC (cops) on the corner was conspicuous by their absence. Our church however, was the opposite direction on EDSA from the scene of the action.



Back home, we learned from Radio Veritas that during the night, armed men (Marcos goons) had bombed the station, forcing them to change from a 50 KW transmitter to a 10 KW standby transmitter which was difficult to receive clearly. At this point, none of the other media was providing any coverage of the events. Around 1300, Marcos held a press conference with those officers still loyal to him seated in ranks behind him in an obviously staged portrait of control and solidarity. He persisted in his claim of legitimacy, denied any intention of stepping down or altering his inaugural plans for Tuesday the 25<sup>th</sup>, and produced three more “conspirators” who skillfully and soulfully “confessed” to their crimes in the coup. Marcos continued to play the great humanitarian, wondering how Ramos and Enrile could be so deranged as to think they could resist the government’s power. He repeated his pleas for calm and emphasized his magnanimity in not unleashing AFP firepower to bring the “rebels” to task, and finished by boasting that Camps Crame and Aguinaldo were surrounded by AFP troops ready to strike. His answers to subsequent questions from the press were typically evasive and supportive of his opening statements. (With more than half of the AFP and most of its operational equipment in Ramos’ camp, it was clear that Marcos was desperately trying to buy time.)

The atmosphere at home was strained but calm; our boys spent the afternoon playing in the compound with some other kids, while Jacki played Mah Jong and planned a neighborhood dinner party (What else?) I stayed near the phone. One JUSMAG couple took their video camera up to the growing crowd on EDSA, and got some good footage of “people power” in action - some 500,000 by this time – creating not only a human barricade, but throwing in a few “donated” buses and cars as well. When Marcos mounted his “offensive” - some trucks full of Marines, a few APCs (armored personnel carriers) and a couple of amphibious vehicles armed with 20mm cannons - they quite literally couldn’t get through the crowd without shooting them, and so retired from the field of battle. The tape was brought to the dinner party, and enjoyed by all, as the government controlled media had scarcely acknowledged that anything was even afoot. The church had joined the rebellion early on, and in addition to prayers at mass, the crowds prayed together, and priests offered mass in the street as Radio Veritas, its voice literally a whisper after their transmitter switch, called for greater “people power,” more prayer, and reports on Marcos troop movements. After dinner and an evening of Tripoley to ease our minds, Marcos came on the TV as we prepared for bed, with an angry denouncement of the “rebels,” claiming that Enrile and Ramos had masterminded the plot against him and Imelda, and were trying to seize power for themselves. He fumed and blustered, and we went to bed.

**Monday - 2/24/86**

We were up at 0530 to catch the news, and while checking a local station which usually had snatches of US. News from CNN or ABC, we discovered that they were now carrying Radio Veritas – in FM no less! During the night the station ownership had apparently rallied to the cause, and set up the Radio Veritas staff in their studios. A dial check revealed that others had also joined the rebellion and Veritas was giving a blow-by-blow account of Marcos' Marines tear gassing a human barricade at a rear gate of Camp Aguinaldo, as ever more people flocked to the scene. The Marines, however, soon ran out of tear gas and joined the rebels.

A rumor soon developed that Marcos had fled the country, apparently substantiated by a report that he had been seen In Guam. Meanwhile channel 4, the notoriously pro-Marcos government TV station, signed on as though nothing had happened, and gave their usual rehash of the previous day's news at 0700. Curiously, the "Good Morning Manila" show which followed the news and was normally hosted by two local media personalities and Angelique Lazo, the daughter of the Philippine Coast Guard commander, featured only Angelique. Crowds had gathered outside the studios (across the street from the JUSMAG compound) and had prevented the "stars" from entering the studio. At 0800 General Ver, the AFP Chief of Staff, gave a radio Interview to scotch the rumors of Marcos' flight, while channel 7, the least sympathetic to Marcos, ran a bulletin reporting his departure over their pre-sign on graphic. At 0900, just as channel 4 was announcing that Marcos was about to give another press conference, the station went off the air. We later learned that rebel troops had stormed the facility and pulled the plug. About 1000, Marcos finally appeared on the other channels, ranting and raving about the rebels, and insisting that he had the situation under control. Because of amateurish camera work (Such as never showing Marcos and the press in the same shot) and Marcos' failure to mention anything about the current situation for the first ten minutes, we thought it might have all been staged. Eventually he got around to taking questions, and it immediately became apparent that he was still in the palace when the French correspondent said that he could not for the life of him see any of the tanks, artillery, or troops with which Marcos had just stated the palace was surrounded.



At that point, Gen Ver, RADM Ochoco, and a couple of other loyalist commanders appeared to "report in" to their Commander-in-Chief. A classic bit of comic relief followed: Marcos instructed his Chief of Staff to authorize the use of small arms if needed; General Ver then blustered about military firepower, and countered with a request to use heavier weapons such as artillery for "self defense;" completely ignoring the Chief of Staff, Marcos droned on about remaining calm and avoiding bloodshed, which drove Ver to the verge of apoplexy. Somewhat flustered by Ver, who had by then stormed out to "strategize" some more, as well as the increasingly pointed questions from the press, Marcos suddenly declared a state of emergency, and directed the media to quit broadcasting troop movements. We thought they might come to blows on nationwide TV before a group of foreign correspondents! What a way to run a war! They were obviously trying to develop a strategy on the fly, and the audience had to wonder whether they had any troops or hardware left to command. (Those of us in JUSMAG who dealt



daily with the AFP knew that Ver's posturing was a sham: Much of their artillery was useless, as they had no sighting tables and little ammunition. The F-5 fighters flying overhead were on their way to defect at Clark AB, and the helicopter gunships had already defected.. In fact, by the afternoon of 24 February, Marcos actually controlled only a small ground force of Philippine Marines and Palace Security Guards.)

Radio Veritas quickly confirmed that Marcos was still in Manila, and soon had established an even better network of spies to report troop movements, as they called for "people power" to deploy against them, and requested prayer. About 1400, Channel 4 was back on the air, with a new cast of rebel announcers, including June Keithley, who had started broadcasting on Radio Veritas, moved to DZRJ when the Veritas transmitter finally went down, and then to TV (a brave and longwinded girl!) The New Channel 4 remained on the air without interruption, and in view of the grotesquely distorted coverage it had provided during the election, it became a powerful symbol of the entire struggle.

That afternoon, I was dispatched by the embassy with two other JUSMAG personnel to reconnoiter the airport. Beyond the fact that traffic was flowing in both directions on both sides of EDSA (a divided highway!) the mission was unremarkable. Departing passengers at the airport outnumbered arrivals two to one, but the volume was less than usual, and no Marcos troops could be found, since they were mostly now on Ramos' side. On the way home we got caught in a monumental traffic jam. The crowds had blockaded EDSA at the Pasig River, 2 miles from the camps, and south of our house, so we had to take a long detour to make it home. That evening we watched Channel 4. Channel 7 had gone off the air, because Marcos men were threatening to take it, although "people power" was trying to protect it. About 2300, Marcos came on the remaining three TV stations to reiterate that he was still in control, that he would not step down, and he invited his "people" to join him at the palace (and bring their guns!)

## **Tuesday - 2/25/86**

Jacki woke at 0400 to hear several reports of new defections, including 770 Philippine military cadets, the 5<sup>th</sup> fighter wing (F-5s) and the 15th strike wing, whose S-76 helicopter gunships had been launched to attack Camp Crame the previous morning, but had instead defected. One of them later strafed the palace to demonstrate the rebel capabilities, while others neutralized the few remaining loyalist forces at Villamor AB. About 0700 there were reports that tanks and troops were advancing on Camp Crame and that TV 4 would be strafed. About 0800, there was a report of gunfire at TV 4 - during a phone interview with Cory Aquino, shots could be heard in the background. She appealed for calm, asked for "people power" to continue the vigil, and requested prayers for unification. At 0803 there were reports of snipers on the channel 9 TV tower shooting into the crowds, but rebel rangers and a helicopter gunship eventually killed the three Marcos fanatics. TV reports continued of the Aquino Inauguration and Marcos' plan to hold his Inauguration at noon. A report of C-130's departing Villamor AB (Phil. Air Base In Manila) and landing at Clark AB (US) was verified as more defectors.

Other snapshots: a channel check revealed other 3 stations on the air, unusually early. At 0830 Jacki got a call from someone wanting to know if "Shopper's Day" (the wives' club bazaar) would be held on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Answer - yes, but on March 26<sup>th</sup>! 0838 - Calls for more people power at Channel 4, as well as medical equipment and personnel. Announcement that



Channel 4 was so biased that they didn't even have a file photo of Cory Aquino, despite the two month long campaign! 1045 - Cory and Doy Laurel sworn in at Green Hills Shopping Center. Live audio coverage, pictures at 11! 1200 - 3 other channels prepare for Marcos Inaugural, with standard shots of small crowd in a small room waving lots of flags to look like a big crowd in a big room. Just as the MC began the ceremony, someone pulled the plug, leaving the panel of commentators with blank stares. All three channels cut to old movies, and soon went off the air for good. Meanwhile, CH 4 aired the Cory - Doy Inaugural, and Laurel gave a speech which moved us to tears of pride for these courageous people, as he acknowledged the power of prayer both in his opening and closing comments. Cory then led the crowd in singing the Lord's Prayer to close the ceremony.

Shortly after noon, Filipino neighbors came by seeking food and water for the "vigilantes," and we provided rice, tuna fish, crackers, and water. I got a call that the JUSMAG guards had left their posts, and secured other security forces through the embassy. Increasingly antsy, Jacki sought relief in a game of Mah Jong at Gen Allen's house (he'd been at the embassy since the thing broke) and I plunged into the book "A Sense of Honor," while the boys enjoyed swimming, blissful in their prolonged vacation. After dinner, Jacki went out for more Mah Jong (after repacking her bag) while Jon spent the night with a friend, and Jeff & I watched the movie "Top Secret." I got a call from a JUSMAG member with a brick (portable radio) who had heard that helicopters were landing at the palace. About 2200, TV 4 began to request that Malacanang Palace not be stormed, followed by appeals not to loot. At 2249, June Keithley, the courageous reporter who started the coverage (and warranted consideration for the Nobel Peace Prize) announced with pride that Marcos and family had been evacuated to Clark, for further transportation an unknown destination. Another report came in that one of his crony Supreme Court Justices had been nabbed at the airport while trying to sneak out of the country. There was also an unconfirmed report that Gen Ver was still around and up to dirty tricks. The rumors notwithstanding, there was general jubilation among the announcers and the crowds gathered outside the TV station.

### Wednesday - 2/26/86



Again we woke early to TV coverage on the "New 4" of the previous night's joyous crowds accompanying Ramos' soldiers into the palace grounds, singing, dancing, destroying pictures of Ferdinand and Imelda, and generally celebrating the fall of their longtime dictator. Despite the opportunities for looting and general mayhem, the crowds did little damage, heeded the troops' cautions about booby traps, and were mostly curious; for twenty years the palace had been nothing more than a symbol of a way of life in which they could never share, Mr. Marcos' protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. It was clearly the end of a nightmare for them, and the beginning of a new chapter in Philippine history. The power of the people in prayer had been demonstrated in a marvelous way, and their

votes in the election had been vindicated. At Minister Enrile's suggestion, my boss Teddy Allen had been tasked by the ambassador to escort the party out of Dodge and to be sure they stayed out! (Marcos died in Hawaii in 1989. His wife Imelda was sentenced to 24 years in prison on numerous graft charges, but is free pending appeals.)

In a curious footnote, two weeks earlier, we had planned a dinner party for the next Monday, 8 March, to honor the promotion of RADM Ochoco, head of the Phil. Navy. Other guests were to have been commodore Lazo, head of the coast guard (father of Angelique, the last announcer on old 4) and General Tadier, head of the Marines. Since they were all Ver loyalists, and were now out of work, we revised our plans. It was later revealed that Marcos had taken with him his entire family and cronies such as Ver, Ochoco and other loyalists for a total of 90 people, filling a C-9 and a C-141, so none of our guests would not have been available anyway.

The television commentaries continued to extol people power, and on Thursday a Thanksgiving Mass on EDSA caused another massive - but welcome traffic jam. The courageous actions of the Filipino people cannot be denied. Although they probably didn't fully apprehend the poor training and lack of discipline among the troops threatening them, or realize the dubious operational capability of the weapons those troops carried, dedicated disciplined, and trained troops with functional weapons and effective leadership might have made the Philippine revolution quite another - and sadder story. To Marcos' credit, and without knowing his motives, which were undoubtedly selfish (perhaps expecting a good write up in the history books) he did exercise restraint and withheld his thugs, thus avoiding loss of life and perhaps all out civil war. It was interesting to note that the New People's Army (NPA, the sons of the HUKs, the longstanding Muslim dissidents in the Philippines) was strangely silent throughout the revolution, perhaps hoping the fall of Marcos would help their cause, perhaps mesmerized by people and prayer power, or perhaps waiting for an opportunity that never came. In any case, 'Mabuhay ang Kalaayan!' (Welcome Freedom!), the rallying cry of the new Government of the Philippines. (General Ramos was made Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, then Minister of Defense for President Aquino, and ultimately succeeded her as president.)

### **The *Mercy* Mission: March – May 1987**

The other significant event during my time at JUSMAG Philippines was the initial voyage of the Hospital Ship USNS *Mercy*. To show solidarity with the new government of the Philippines, it was decided to deploy *Mercy*, a tanker retrofitted into a hospital ship, to the Philippines for a shakedown cruise from March through May 1987. Coordination for the visit was assigned to the JUSMAG, and I was appointed project officer, tasked with drafting and executing an Operations Plan for the mission. *Mercy* and her sister ship *Comfort* were adapted from two tankers built in the late 70s. The Navy bought them and after removing the tanks and associated plumbing, dropped specially fabricated hospital modules into the empty spaces. The ships boasted an eighty bed emergency room, 12 Operating Rooms, and at 1000 beds apiece, are the largest trauma centers in the world.



Mission planning began in October 1986 at about the time *Mercy* was launched, and we assembled a multi-service team of medical, operational, and logistics experts to see what might be accomplished. With one exception, there were no ports with dockside facilities capable of handling a vessel the size of *Mercy*, so we did some extensive chart study and took soundings to verify the chart data, much of which dated back to the turn of the century and the Spanish-American War. We then correlated the operational requirements with the regional Filipino medical infrastructure and prospective patient pool to establish potential ports of call. Early on, we established rules of engagement which required that any inpatient procedures be limited to those with a high probability of completion within a week to avoid the appearance of “cutting and running.” (Operating on a patient and then leaving the post operative care to the local medical facilities) This involved extensive screening and coordination with local medical staffs to develop patient histories and assessments, and match patient requirements with the ship’s medical staff and unique capabilities.



Meanwhile, we were combing the AFP to find the right officers to sell the proposal to both the local and national governments. Eventually we located a Lt Col and a Major who had recently attended Military Schools in the US to take the lead for us, and they succeeded in convincing everyone that the mission would be of great benefit. Following the Revolution, there had been a broad resurgence of national pride, and the hardest part of the *Mercy* mission was convincing some rather parochial national and local medical officials that their people would benefit from the project, and that their medical staffs would profit from working with state of the art equipment, and receive extensive free training during the visits. We finally sweetened the pot by agreeing to establish a library of medical texts at each stop, and to distribute “Operation Handclasp” materials (Surplus non-perishable foods, school books, personal hygiene items, and so on) at each location. Another requirement was the proximity of a paved runway, so that US Navy C-2s and AF C-130s could deliver supplies for pick up by the ship’s two H-46 helicopters. This became another stumbling block, as the *Mercy*, Naval Air, and Air Force did not use the same radio frequencies. After visits to Clark AB and Subic Naval Station, and numerous telephone calls, I finally convinced the NAVAIRPAC Frequency Manager in Japan to let the ship and the Air Force use some of their aircraft frequencies, and the airlift aspect of the mission thereafter was exceptionally smooth.

After three months of site surveys at potential ports of call, we determined that the ship could



make 7 stops of about ten days duration at Subic Bay, Leqazpi, (At left, with *Sioux* alongside) Davao, Zamboanga, Puerto Princessa, Cebu, and Calbayog. The Philippine Islands are primarily mountain peaks which extend above the surface, so the water deepens rapidly as the distance from land increases. For a ship nearly 900 feet long, this meant that we had to select ports which offered water shallow enough to anchor the ship, but far enough offshore so that the she wouldn’t ground as she swung at anchor. JUSMAG operated a C-12, and we used it to accomplish numerous trips around



the Philippines for mission planning. I was able to talk the pilots into letting me fly a couple of legs, and despite the lack of practice, managed to get up and down without incident.

Although *Mercy* was a Navy asset, the medical staff was composed of specialists from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Public Health Services to reflect the Concept of Operations for wartime use. The various specialties were assigned to different departments such as Administrative, Ancillary, Dental, Medical, Support, Supply, and Surgical Services to reflect Naval Medical organization. In addition to the usual 950 Hospital Staff, there were four groups of rotators, medical specialists from the service reserves who wanted to accomplish their two weeks of active duty aboard *Mercy*. They joined the ship in groups of 15, lending their expertise to the mission while gaining valuable medical experience in conditions not often encountered in the US. The Medical Dental Civic Action Program (MEDCAP) at each site was planned so that inpatient candidates would be transported out to the ship upon arrival, while outpatient clinics were being set up ashore for the duration of the visit.

*Mercy* was designed to expedite patient flow, with delivery of the patients by helicopter. The large flight deck could accommodate two H-53s, the largest US helicopter. Immediately forward of the landing area were large doors leading to a bank of elevators. Patients were wheeled from the flight deck to the elevators and straight down two decks to the emergency room. Radiology was just aft of the ER, with operating rooms next, followed by the Recovery Rooms and Intensive Care Units. Everything was laid out with providing immediate care for combat casualties in mind. What had not been envisioned, however, was a way to get patients aboard from small boats – the *Mercy's* helo pad was nearly 60 feet above the water. There was a sally port about midway up the hull, so some clever Naval Engineers designed an accommodation ladder which was enclosed by mesh and reversed direction to facilitate the climb by ambulatory patients. At its base, they included a platform which served as a landing for small boats. In addition, they arranged a sally port just above the water line to facilitate boarding stretcher born patients. These changes added significant versatility, and made the ship “patient friendly” for humanitarian missions.

To facilitate the logistics for an undertaking of this magnitude, we arranged for a seagoing tug, USNS *Sioux*, to transfer equipment and supplies ashore at each site. The MEDCAPS were typically set up in the town center, near the local medical facility when possible. In comparison to US medicine, the health care delivery in the Philippines was primitive at best, with the equivalent of a county hospital usually little more than a single story concrete block building without screens or air conditioning. The staff was often a single doctor and a few nurses who routinely autoclaved and reused what we consider disposables – rubber gloves, syringes, and so on. X-Ray equipment was typically WWII or earlier vintage, if at all. As we toured these facilities, the US medical members were amazed at how much was being done with so little, and many of them saw ancient medical instruments and equipment which they had previously encountered only in the history books. One aspect of the MEDCAP was medical equipment repair, and *Mercy* staff worked wonders of improvisation and ingenuity in restoring over 330 major items to service, and even locating compatible film for some of the totally obsolete X-Ray machines.



The Mercy mission treated over 62,300 outpatients, and performed nearly 900 inpatient procedures aboard ship. That's about 1,500 patients per day, and when one takes into account the extended family of each patient, as well as those who appeared to receive "Operation Handclasp" materials (over 300 tons worth), it's estimated that *Mercy* and her crew touched more than 1,500,000 Filipinos, 15% of the country's population. Here are some snapshots from the Cruise Book of medical procedures accomplished during the mission:



- Numerous cases of the eye disease pterygium were resolved. Pterygium occurs when exposure to sand and sun cause a fleshy growth over the cornea, eventually obstructing vision. It's easily corrected in a short surgery which peels the growth off. Many Filipinos are also afflicted with cataracts, and more than 100 had their sight restored by *Mercy's* ophthalmic surgery department

- The Philippines has an unusually high incidence of cleft palate and hair lip, both of which are disfiguring, and typically relegate the patient to being an outcast in Philippine society. Corrective surgery is relatively straightforward, and not only heals the patient medically, but also psychologically. *Mercy* surgeons performed dozens of these procedures.

- In the Provinces, electricity is uncommon, and most families depend on fires, oil lamps, or candles for light. Many children are burned every year, and because of poor medical care, the scars can be both disfiguring as well as disabling, since the scar tissue often limits range of motion. Numerous scar revisions were performed, significantly enhancing the quality of life for these young patients.

- One teenage girl had lost an eye, and the empty socket made her a social outcast who rarely smiled. One of an artificial eye for her, bringing a huge



eye, and the empty socket made her a social outcast who rarely smiled. One of *Mercy's* dental technicians fashioned an artificial eye for her, bringing a huge smile to her formerly sad face.

- A woman had been suffering with a huge abdominal tumor for many years. It proved to be benign and was easily removed, leaving her fifty pounds lighter and able to resume a normal life.

- Each MEDCAP included a dental clinic, since dentists were largely unknown in the hinterlands. The dental clinics sometimes treated over 650 patients per day – including pulling all 32 teeth from one man – relieving untold numbers of toothaches. All told, more than 17,500 dental patients were treated during 185,000 procedures which included 142,000 infected tooth extractions, and 4,600 restorations



- MEDCAP staffs of more than 200 people went ashore each day to work a 12 hour shift in temperatures often exceeding 100 degrees. In addition to the medical miracles they performed, they provided 6,000 immunizations, and conducted 24,000 lab procedures. At each stop, the Preventive Medicine Department assisted local officials in testing water and food supplies, and offered corrective measures, including spraying for insects at the MEDCAP sites and local facilities.

- The ship's medical staff included 65 AFP personnel, and local medical staffs were invited to scrub in for procedures performed aboard the ship - most jumped at the chance to use

state of the art equipment. In the evenings, *Mercy* medical staff members provided over 1,000 classroom hours on various medical issues germane to the local area, and distributed more than 50,000 handouts, including a set of basic medical texts. Over 9000 Filipino doctors, dentists, nurses, technicians and medical volunteers benefited from this training.



- Although US medical policy required that opened packages of materials such as bandages, syringes, gloves and so be discarded if not used immediately, it was known that the locals would go through the US trash every day. Pains were therefore taken to discard medical supplies which might be “appropriated” by the Filipinos in ways that would facilitate their reuse.

At the end of *Mercy*’s \$20,000,000 mission, President Aquino presented her crew with the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation for the magnificent work they had accomplished in a few short months. After a few more stops in the Pacific, *Mercy* returned to her home port of Oakland, where she remains in 5 day Reduced Operating Status (ROS) near her supporting hospital with a small cadre of MSC mariners, Navy medical administration personnel, and Navy support staff as crew. They keep the ship’s systems and supplies in working order against the day she may be called to active duty, whereupon the full crew of 61 MSC mariners, 269 Naval support staff (Supply, Subsistence, and Operations) and her full complement of 956 medical personnel report and get underway within five days. (USNS *Comfort* is in ROS at Baltimore, readily visible as you drive north on I-895) *Mercy* served in Desert Storm, several local exercises, and then provided Tsunami Relief in 2005. She’s currently on a humanitarian mission to nations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, including the Philippines. I was proud to have been able to be part of it all.

As the only Coast Guard Officer on the JUSMAG staff, I was normally in the minority. On one occasion, however, Coast Guard Officers constituted a significant majority. VADM Jack Costello, Commander of the Coast Guard Pacific Area, stopped by one day with a C-130 full of Coasties. He was inspecting CG facilities in his AOR, and I had known him from Elizabeth City when he was District Commander there. In addition, a Coast Guard Buoy Tender out of Guam



was at Subic Bay working buoys. We had them all to dinner along with the JUSMAG Staff and senior members of the Philippine Coast Guard and Navy. There were 4 officers from *Basswood*, and about fifty Coast Guard officers and men from the C-130, so we had quite a majority. As a footnote to history, Jacki had found a seamstress who made napkins with the Coast Guard Insignia sewn in. The Coast Guardsmen present that night ordered a full gross, 144 dozen napkins – they certainly did their bit for the struggling Philippine economy. . . .

I was in receipt of orders to the Fifth Coast Guard District, so with the conclusion of the *Mercy* Mission, it was time start working the move back to the states. It had been an exciting and interesting two years, but the constant threat of an NPA attack, the uncertainties of life in the Philippines (electrical current varying from 90 to 150 volts vs. the US standard 120), and the lawlessness there made the prospect of life in the states welcome indeed. The JUSMAG headquarters was located in Quezon City near the infamous Channel Four. Although surrounded by a chain link fence, it was spread over three blocks in separate compounds, and lacked any real physical security. During our time there, the NPA periodically tossed grenades over the fence,

and their occasional nighttime drive by shootings sometimes broke a window. One night a beer truck lost control rounding a corner and crashed through the fence, hitting a building – the Filipino Guards had quite a party before they bothered to report the incident. Shortly after the March 1986 US attack on Libya, the NPA mailed each of the 27 US Military JUSMAG personnel a scathing diatribe accusing us of child murder and various other crimes, and threatened us with all manner of mayhem in a holy jihad if we didn't leave. The threat was not entirely hollow, because about nine months after our return to the US, they managed to kill the Chief of the Army Division and his driver, who were in the unit's only armored car, a Toyota with aftermarket light armor. The next week, the unit packed up and moved to the Embassy grounds, which were extremely secure and tightly guarded. As one of our sons remarked when asked what he had liked most about living in the Philippines, "Living there made me appreciate the fact that the US is a country which honors the rule of law."





## **XI. Fifth Coast Guard District: July 1987 – July 1989**



My assignment at the Fifth District in Portsmouth was to stand up a new division in the district office to provide personnel administration, planning, budget, accounting, and procurement services for 2400 Coast Guard employees at 84 units with an annual budget of \$24 million, twice the entire budget of the AFP. The Administration Division was established to bring together the Personnel, Finance, and Planning functions formerly provided by separate entities, and as its first Division Chief, I was relieving two other division chiefs and a couple of branch chiefs. It was an easy task because of the great staff I inherited, and we soon had the organization running smoothly. If memory serves, a creative budget officer even found a way to save 11% of the budget, which we spent on some long overdue projects to improve quality of life at various units.

By 1987, there was a computer on nearly every desk, and mine was no exception. The District Commander was constantly being asked questions about various units, so we put together a data base of all eighty-four units, with authorized strength, people on board, payroll, annual budget, and several other bits of demographic trivia. He used it not only to respond to congressional queries, but also to prepare himself for trips to visit the field units. The Coast Guard Standard Workstation included a rudimentary version of E-Mail, so we set up a network within the building to facilitate intra-office communications. The Internet was still a gleam in someone's eye, however, so we were limited to the District Headquarters staff. Computing power in the eighties also meant heat, however, and one of our projects was creating a computer room for the accounting branch, since they used mainframes. It had to have a raised floor to accommodate all the wiring, and additional air conditioning to keep it in the mid-sixties. The cost was several thousand dollars to support less computing power than today's laptops.

In 1987, to better fight the growing "War on Drugs," the Coast Guard had initiated a major functional realignment to free up billets for counter-drug operations. The Third and Twelfth District Offices in New York City and San Francisco were closed, and many support functions from the other districts were consolidated in two new Maintenance and Logistics Commands (MLC's) in Norfolk and Alameda, CA. Part of this change was the creation of the Admin Division to interface with these new commands on supply and civil engineering matters, so I kept busy establishing working relationships with the new commands. Since most of them were located in the Hampton Roads Area, I organized a regular series of Senior Officer Present Ashore (SOPA) conferences to sort out responsibilities and prevent duplication of effort.

The Coast Guard was also becoming more closely involved with the Navy in Maritime Defense Zones at that time, and as the N1-N4 (Personnel & Logistics) I not only got to develop the Coast Guard portions of the OPLANS, but also to serve as Battle Staff Supervisor for "Command Post" exercises. These typically used scenarios involving Navy "Port Breakouts," scripts in which the Coast Guard was tasked to provide port security and escort for Navy vessels putting to sea against opposition from both fictitious enemies, and anti-war protesters. To monitor and grade our performance during these events, the Navy and Coast Guard typically used Reserve Officers to manage the Master Event Sequence List (MESL) and be sure that the scenario unfolded as planned. That they were not always successful was indicated by the fact that during Proud Scout 88, we were three days into the war when one of the monitors came into the operations center as we were responding to various threats with vigor and dispatch to inquire as to whether or not we had a copy of the War Plan applicable to the exercise. When we assured him that we did, he

asked if they might borrow it since the monitors didn't have one. We responded, "Yes, but not until after the war." Somehow they had failed to notice that they were missing the document against which they were grading us until the third day of a four day "war." We passed!

While serving at the Fifth District, Headquarters asked me to assess the continued need for the Coast Guard billet at JUSMAG Philippines. Since the Philippine Coast Guard had been reduced to little more than a regulatory agency with no operational assets or viable role in Low Intensity Conflict, there was no real purpose in having a Coast Guard Liaison Officer at the JUSMAG. In my two years there I had served as Chief of the Naval Forces Division for six months, Chief of Staff for nine months, and Chief of the Support Division for nine months, most of which was spent coordinating the *Mercy* visit. Accordingly, I recommended that the position be disestablished. The other two incumbents had similar recommendations, and the billet was returned to the Coast Guard in 1989.

One significant advantage to being Chief of Admin was that the incumbent's office was on the northeast corner of the building on the third floor with a splendid view of the South Branch of the Elizabeth River, and the shipyard on the opposite side of the river. The view was better than that from the Admiral's office on the sixth floor, which faced south toward a parking lot, and the never ending river traffic provided constant inspiration when pondering the administrative difficulties of the District. It was a spacious corner office with lots of windows and shelving along the window sills which provided a great spot to display the airplane models and other memorabilia I had acquired.

The Fifth District Office shared the Federal Building In Portsmouth with the Post Office. The Coast Guard was building custodian, however, and it fell to the Admin Division to perform those duties. It was interesting to discover that the Post Office portion of the building featured a catwalk around the entire space with peep holes through which postal inspectors had once monitored mail sorting activities. Modernization long since reduced the space required for mail sorting activity, however, and most of the area which could be observed from the catwalk had been converted to storage and office space with suspended ceilings, so the only thing which could be monitored was HVAC ducting. We kept the access door locked to prevent unofficial access and untoward activities in the darkened retreat.

I screened for command in 1989, and received orders to become Commanding Officer, Coast Guard Group and Air Station Cape May. The largest and busiest of the Coast Guard's groups, the unit had 13 subordinate commands - 6 small boat stations, 3 patrol boats, 3 Search and Rescue Detachments, and an Aids to Navigation Team - plus the air station with 3 H-65 helicopters. I would have 450 personnel under my command, and an area of responsibility covering 25,000 square miles from New York to Maryland. The average Search and Rescue case load was 3,500 annually, with nearly 3,000 of those occurring between Memorial and Labor Days. It seemed a daunting task, but one for which my Coast Guard service to date had prepared me well.

After turning over my duties in Portsmouth to my assistant, who was to fill in until my relief arrived, we began packing to move for the 18<sup>th</sup> time in 24 years. Our daughter had just graduated from Trinity, and we helped her get settled in Tidewater. She soon married a Maryland Bay Pilot, and now as the mother of 11 year old twins, Pam stays busy writing books on parenting. They live in Virginia Beach, so we get to see them often.

## XII. Air Station Cape May: August 1989 – June 1992



In the summer of 1989, one son was at the Citadel and the other was facing a move for his last year of high school, a prospect he was not enjoying. We had received a promotional video from the Cape May Chamber of Commerce, part of which featured bathing beauties frolicking in the surf. Jacki arranged to have the video playing at just the right point when Jeff came home from school with some friends one day. When they asked what was up with the Bikini Babes, Jeff proudly announced that they lived in Cape May, the place he was moving to. We never heard another discouraging word . . . . In the hurry to get moved, I decided on a last minute haircut before driving up to Cape May. The only place open was one of those ubiquitous chains, and the only available barber was not terribly skilled, resulting in a really bad hair day. So bad, that Jacki insisted that I visit the base barber upon reaching Cape May. I complied, and the barber, who normally dealt with recruits from the Training Center, couldn't do much for me beyond a "high and tight." Although it was appropriate for the ceremony, it did give some of the staff pause when they saw me at our first meeting, and I was compelled to explain why one should never get one's hair cut in haste . . . .

The night before the 2 August change of command, there was a dinner for the principals and their guests at a local restaurant. My father was seated next to the District Commander, RADM Paul Welling, who would preside at the ceremony the next day. A long time member of the Essex CT Yacht Club, my dad began to relate a sea story involving Coast Guard officers and one of the Coast Guard Academy Yawls. It seems that a half dozen or so Captains attending an Academy function decided to sail the vessel from New London to Essex for lunch wearing their white uniforms. As they entered the anchorage at the club, they hailed several club members on the pier and indicated that they wished to come alongside. The club members counseled against it, and suggested that they anchor out since there was a shoal area near the pier which would ground a 40 foot sailboat. The Academy grads persevered, however, grounded on the "bump," and had to maneuver vigorously to get off. They then anchored out and called for the club launch. As the story unfolded, RADM Welling's face became increasingly red, and when it was over, he confessed that he had been at the helm that fateful day, and had suffered significant abuse from his shipmates, particularly in view of the fact that he was at that time the Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard Barque *Eagle*, the Academy training ship.



The ceremony was on a hot day, and although it was in the hangar out of the direct sun, there was no breeze to cool the assembly. My predecessor had prepared a rather lengthy farewell address, and proceeded to deliver it without putting the formation of military personnel at ease. He finally finished and read his orders. I read my orders, and we effected the change of command. I then directed the Executive Officer to put the troops at ease before making my brief remarks and concluding the ceremony. I hadn't given the order any thought or planned it ahead of time, but when I left three years later, several of the men told me that they knew I'd be a good CO because my first official act had been to give them a much needed break. The first couple of weeks there were a whirlwind of orientations, introductions, and other activities, including a visit

from Secretary of Transportation Sam Skinner two days after I arrived. As a result of accumulated administria and the fact that I hadn't been able to get an H-65 transition slot arranged until late September, I didn't get myself on the flight schedule until 14 August, an enjoyable 2.3 hour flight with Pat Merrigan which included an Area Familiarization for the "new CO" coupled with a Fisheries Enforcement and Pollution Patrol in the finest multi-mission traditions of the Coast Guard. Cape May is one of the nation's leading ports in terms of seafood, and the temptation to harvest various species beyond a vessel's allocated quota can be compelling. Accordingly, the Coast Guard closely monitors who's fishing and what they're catching, and coordinates closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to enforce the rules and protect the increasingly fragile stocks of sea life. Pollution is also a threat to those fish stocks, and the Coast Guard routinely patrols for both prevention and detection of violators.



I managed one more flight in August, an area fam of the southern AOR with Ron Leidner, capped by some small boat hoist training in the Chesapeake Bay with Station Crisfield, MD. Purchased in 1984, the twin engine H-65 cruised at 120 knots, and could dash at 165 knots within a 150 mile radius of action, so Air Station Cape May often trained with units from other groups, since the next closest helicopter units were at Elizabeth City, well to the south, and Brooklyn, well to the north. Developed from the Aerospatiale SA-365, the USCG H-65 had a ducted fan tail rotor system – Fenestron –

which provided some protection for the tail rotor blades. Largely built of composites, it was known as the "Plastic Puppy" or "Plasticopter" – the official name "Dolphin" never quite caught on. The H-65 had a complete avionics package, with a computerized flight management system which included radar and LORAN, and an automatic flight control system which permitted hands off operation in most flight regimes. A side benefit of the avionics was the requirement for air conditioning, which also cooled the crew of two pilots, flight mechanic/hoist operator, and rescue swimmer. With a maximum gross weight of 9,200 pounds and limited cabin space, however, the H-65 was often underpowered for hot weather hoisting operations. Moreover, the engines were experiencing significant reliability problems from continuous operation at or near their limits, and helicopter availability was going steadily downhill. One of my first initiatives, therefore, was to collect and collate the air station's data on the growing engine problems and outline the problem for the chain of command. My letter was generally well received, and eventually, the Coast Guard sued Lycoming, the engine manufacturer. The Coast Guard subsequently negotiated a "power by the hour," contract under which the service paid the company only for the hours of operation the engines produced. With the upgrade to the HH-65C model, the Lycoming engines are being replaced with more powerful and reliable Turbomeca Arriels. The C model conversion also includes an extensive avionics upgrade which will extend the life of the H-65 to about 2015.

One of the group units, CG Station Atlantic City is located immediately adjacent to the Trump Castle Casino. Donald Trump had long coveted the property to expand his empire, and so often invited the Coast Guard to social activities. In 1989, he organized a tribute to Medal of Honor recipients, and invited me to attend as the representative for Douglas Munro, the only Coast Guardsman to receive the coveted medal. Munro was coxswain of a landing craft during the invasion of Guadalcanal, and gave his life returning to the beach to retrieve Marines pinned



down by enemy fire. With me in dress whites and Jacki in her finest, we drove to Atlantic City to join the other Medal of Honor Recipients / Representatives for a cruise on the Trump Princess, his 280 foot yacht which could barely negotiate the channel at Atlantic City. The ship was built



for Adnan Kashoggi, the infamous gun runner, and purchased by Trump in 1987. It featured excessive luxury, with just eight staterooms, each outfitted in and named after a semi-precious stone such as Jade, Amethyst, and so on. There were so many electric and electronic gadgets that the crew included two technicians to keep them all working. Mr. Trump insisted on giving me a guided tour of the bridge and engineering spaces along with the rest of the ship (avidly currying favor with the Coast Guard), and provided Jacki an unaccompanied visit to his elephant skin lined stateroom

(they were alone there for maybe 30 seconds, a factoid she now uses to advantage in trivia exchanges.) Kashoggi had been so paranoid that he included a fully outfitted sick bay and operating room in case he was attacked – Trump used it to store Dom Perignon. Mr. Trump indicated that he had only been able to use the vessel three or four times, and two years later he sold it.

Following the cruise, we all repaired to one of the ballrooms at the Trump Castle Casino for a reception with a host of other guests who had been invited for dinner. Among the celebrities were Joe Theisman and Kathie Lee Crosby, Don Johnson of “Miami Vice” fame (all dreadfully under dressed), and a hundred or so others. Apparently still trying to impress the Coast Guard, Mr. Trump engaged me in a long conversation about the causes of the recent helicopter crash in which some of his executives had perished, and sought my opinion on a good replacement machine. The dinner was significantly overblown, with more crystal and cutlery than a diner could possibly use at one meal, waiters everywhere ready to pounce and replace it if anyone used the wrong utensil, and entrees plated with 2 medallions of veal for the ladies and 3 for the men. After the tribute to the assembled heroes, a curtain was pulled back revealing a huge chocolate replica of the Trump Palace – all 23 stories – and an array of desserts containing a lifetime supply of calories. We sat with an Army Colonel who had won the MOH in Vietnam, and his humble recounting of the events resulting in the medal was stirring. All in all, it was quite an experience, and probably cost as much as the entire Group Cape May annual budget



The next year, Mr. Trump decided to put on a power boat race off Atlantic City, which was of course regulated by the Coast Guard. The Commanding Officer at Station Atlantic City, LT Dean Lee, was designated Race Marshall. He was tasked with assuring the safety of both competitors and spectators, and accordingly had final authority on whether conditions were acceptable for racing. The command post for the race was established on the twelfth floor of the casino where it commanded an excellent view of the race course – and afforded Mr. Trump easy access. I went up for the final day of racing, because sea conditions were threatening to force a delay or cancellation. Dean made me proud as he held his ground against Mr. Trump and forced the delay. When “The Donald” turned to me hoping I would overturn the decision, I was just as proud to be able to say no. As it turned out, the one day delay just meant increased revenue for the Trump Organization, despite the inconvenience to individual schedules. Having worked with

Donald Trump, my sense was that he leads an unhappy life in which his goal is always more, but when he gets it, there's more to be gotten. He's accompanied everywhere by a retinue of security people and hangers on, and never seems to have any time to enjoy his acquisitions. Money can't buy happiness . . .

My H-65 Transition started 15 September in Mobile, and wrapped up on 11 October after 21 hours in the simulator and 19 hours over 12 sorties in the helicopter. Much of the course was devoted to learning the flight management system, which was a significant advance over the H-3, the last helicopter I had flown some 6 years earlier. Flying is much like riding a bike – once you learn how, you never forget – so the manipulation of the flight controls was pretty straightforward – the new bells and whistles were not. Pronounced a qualified H-65 copilot, I returned to Cape May and began flying regular turns. Since I signed the flight schedule, it was only appropriate that I get my name on it. The pilots had started the “Stick Hog Award,” a ceramic pig, which was given to the pilot with the highest flight time for the previous month. Their protestations notwithstanding, I only won it a couple of times during my three years there. As discussed earlier, my log book reflects that only two of the three helicopters were in service for October & November, one throughout December, and two in January. Not until February could the maintenance crews get all three up at once, whereupon we launched a three ship formation. It was during this time that I was formulating the letter outlining the engine maintenance problems with the HH-65 for CG Headquarters.

On one of my early flights, a static display at Yorktown Training Center for Officer Candidate School, one of the engines lost torque indication on short final for landing on the parade ground. Committed to a landing at that point, we touched down safely. The static display, which had been planned for the morning, lasted most of the day while another helicopter flew down with the necessary parts. After the repairs were completed, we flew back to Cape May, recording half an hour of night time at the end of the flight. The engine torque system was more complicated than it needed to be, with a transducer on each engine which transmitted a signal through the mission computer unit to the vertical scale indicator segments on the pilot's instrument panel, which are colored green for the normal operating range, yellow for transient conditions, and red for parameter exceedances. (The torque gauges are at left in the picture) A problem with any of the components could result in either fluctuations or faulty torque indications. The transducers were notoriously unreliable, and often failed, resulting in any number of abnormal indications for the affected engine. Analysis of other engine instruments would usually resolve the confusion, but it was part of the problem which led to the CG lawsuit against Lycoming. After leaving Cape May, I was appointed to investigate a mishap in which the torque failed indicating high. The pilots failed to properly analyze the situation, shut down the affected engine, and then tried to manipulate the fuel flow control lever (normally left in the full forward position) for the operating engine to control torque. The result was very nearly a catastrophe, as they reduced the rotor rpm to 80%, well below minimum, and descended to 20 feet above the water at 40 knots, a dangerous flight regime.





In September 1990, an aviation writer, Robert Dorr, was authorized by the Coast Guard to do a book on Coast Guard Aviation, and Cape May was one of the units asked to assist him. He visited us twice, once in September, and again in February 1991 to interview members of the crew and get aerial shots of the H-65 in action during a week's stay. In September, he flew on a search for an overdue sailboat, and in February, flew in a three

plane formation when we finally got all of the helicopters working on the same day. I flew on both missions, and some of his shots are shown here. Cape May's helicopters had yet to go through overhaul and receive their all orange paint schemes, so were in the traditional white and orange livery. As the H-65 fleet went through overhaul, they were painted orange with white trim, a measure which not only heightened visibility, but also saved weight. The picture of 6587 in a right bank off Egg Harbor



above left was staged to demonstrate the dimensions of the rotor blades. The picture at right of 6587 crossing the coast at Wildwood was considered by Dorr to be one of his favorites, perhaps due to the shadow of the blades on the fuselage. His book was published by Motorbooks International of Osceola, WI, and sold for \$19.95. Flying the missions was fun, and it was fulfilling to not only show off Coast Guard Aviation, but also to see the station featured in the book. The shot of 6588 was taken as we approached the Air Station to land after the February,



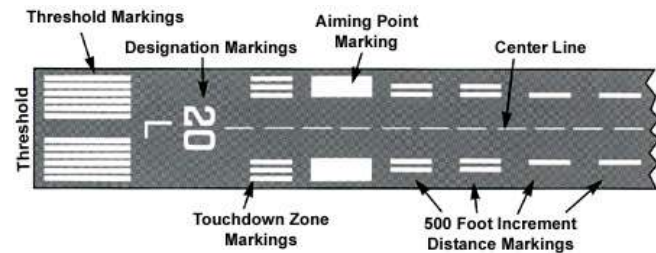
and shows the waterfront at TRACEN Cape May, with Cape May harbor in the background, 210 foot Cutter *Dauntless* at the dock, with the 110 foot Patrol Boat *Matinicus* forward of her, Buoy Tender *Hornbeam* at the pier opposite them, and the 82 foot Patrol Boat *Point Franklin* behind *Dauntless*. The buildings along the waterfront housed the group Aids to Navigation team and Station Cape May, which operated 41 and 44 foot utility boats, along with some smaller craft for three summer SAR detachments.

Cape May was not routinely tasked to deploy helicopters aboard Coast Guard cutters, but pilots maintained their shipboard landing qualifications against that eventuality. CGC *Dauntless*, a 210 foot medium endurance cutter, although home ported in Cape May, was an Atlantic Area asset, and deployed frequently for fisheries enforcement patrols. When her schedule permitted, we practiced landing aboard her as in the picture at right. The helicopter would approach so as to come to a hover just short of the vessel, assess the pitch and roll, and the air taxi forward to land, guided by a Landing Signal Officer standing on the flight deck just aft of the superstructure. Under conditions such as in the picture, it was a relatively straightforward operation – when the weather kicked up and night conditions were thrown in, it could become a daunting task.





We also had our share of fun in the air while training. Cape May County Airport offered two paved runways to practice various flight maneuvers. I had challenged the pilots to be the best pilots they could be, so we spent hours on training maneuvers such as describing the locus of an ellipse on the runway centerline with the tail rotor, a maneuver which not only expanded their vocabulary but also enhanced hand – eye coordination. It involves flying the hovering helicopter down the runway in a continuous pedal turn so that the tail rotor remains over the centerline as the rest of the machine circles around the tail. Seen from above, the tail rotor would be the locus (moving point) and the circular motion of the helicopter would describe an ellipse over the ground. Variations included keeping the nose over the centerline, or keeping the rotor mast centered on the line, and “boxing the Commander’s Bars,” the three large stripes on the runway indicating the touchdown zone, by flying around them in a square with the nose always pointed at the center. Although the maneuvers had little practical application, they made the younger pilots keenly aware of the constant need to know where the tail of the helicopter was while maneuvering, and improved their flying skills.



Since engine failure in a hover was an ever present possibility, a timely and coordinated response was required to assure a safe landing. The Ops Officer, Kurt Carlson, who had been chief of the H-65 training division at Mobile, introduced the practice of standing a flashlight on the cockpit floor, and then performing an unannounced engine cut from a hover. If the subsequent maneuvering and touchdown were properly executed, the flashlight would remain standing – if not, time for more practice and perhaps buying a round at the bar. Since dual engine failures were not outside the realm of possibility, regulations required each pilot to do at least five autorotations every six months. To increase the degree of difficulty and increase our proficiency, we worked on initiating autorotations from various points in the traffic pattern, and coming to a hover at the conclusion of the maneuver over a designated the point on the runway. Most pilots logged well over the minimum each semi-annual period. Similarly, we encouraged the younger pilots to standardize their normal approaches to a landing so as to select a touchdown spot, and then control the helicopter so as to touch down at the appointed spot. This was especially challenging during simulated tail rotor failures, during which the drill was to make a running landing at up to 60 knots, the limit of the H-65 landing gear, which allowed the air flow over the vertical fin to keep the helicopter aligned with the runway.

In the H-65, many of the circuit breakers were located on the vertical side panels of the center console. The breakers were guarded, however, to prevent accidental activation, and were therefore hard to pull with gloved fingers. In order to initiate various failures, most pilots carried a golfer’s divot tool, a small key chain size device with two prongs set just far enough apart to fit under the head of a circuit breaker. Applied with a modicum of stealth and timing, one could simulate a number of delightfully insidious emergencies such as freezing a torque indicator at either a high or low setting and then playing the “dumb co-pilot” while the other pilot diagnosed (or misdiagnosed) the situation and either corrected or compounded it. Making training fun and challenging made for more competent and confident pilots, and when difficult missions or actual emergencies occurred, the pilots handled them with relative ease.

On the ground, we had fun as well – at the outset of my command, I had told the senior officers



that if what we were doing wasn't fun, it might not be worth doing. One morning, obviously hand made posters appeared around the Air Station with a picture of me, with my normal full head of hair, holding a picture of me sporting a Phil Silvers Chrome Dome hair do, with the caption, "Remember, I'm not only the Hair Club President, but I'm also a client." Clearly, the duty section the night before had not been called out for any SAR Cases. We had a "Super Sloppy Double Dare" Party at a dock house owned by the local Coast Guard Auxiliary. For those who don't remember the show, it was on Nickelodeon, and involved lots shaving cream, Jell-O and other messy activities. Ours had a SAR theme, with a kid's pool full of nearly set Jell-O, and a variety of objects to be "rescued" with the teeth. Everyone was issued a poncho made from a plastic garbage bag, and invited to apply condiments to a hot dog held by their partner five feet away – impossible before the advent of the squeeze bottle. The evening was capped by a version of "Rescue Swimmer Deployment", in which the senior officers, with me in the middle, donned safety goggles and shower caps and popped our heads through holes in a 4X8 sheet of plywood. The SAR crews consisted of the pilot, who stood back to the board, and the Flight Mech, who stood in front of the pilot and provided direction while the pilot attempted to deliver the Swimmer, a pie shell of whipped cream, at the targets. Although there may have been some overly forceful swimmer deliveries, it was all in good fun and did much to enhance esprit de corps and morale at a hard working unit. On other occasions we had a mixed up dinner, in which a full meal is served, but the menu is encoded so the diners aren't sure what they've ordered for each course, and a murder mystery party at which everyone is assigned a character, and the challenge is to solve the mystery based on their revelations or lack thereof.

Even routine duty days were not without their humorous moments. One morning, the duty section was preparing for the day when a naked man appeared in the hallway. Randy Talley, one of the pilots, quickly found him a blanket, provided him some hot coffee, and began to interrogate him. Here's the story. The fellow had been out drinking the night before and had a fight with his girl friend. To sober up and collect his thoughts, he decided to take his boat for a spin. Misreading the lights marking the jetty coming in to Cape May Harbor, he struck the rocks, sinking his boat. Already disoriented, he began swimming away from the land instead of towards it (the shore line is very dark at the jetties) and removed his clothing to make swimming easier. As dawn broke, he realized his mistake and finally reached the beach near the Coast Guard Hangar. The first door he came to was a stairway leading to the second floor where the duty crew slept. Randy was the subject of many jokes thereafter, particularly since he had been tagged to fly Evander Holyfield, the boxer, on a publicity mission a few months earlier and was being kidded about his role as a celebrity pilot.

In May 1991, the Operations Section noticed that I was nearing 5,000 hours of total pilot time, and planned a surprise for me. On 21 May, I was out on an orientation flight for the new District Chief of Staff, which was planned for an hour. After dropping him off, the radio watch called and asked us to check on a possible mission in Delaware Bay. We did, and of course found nothing, and since I had some things to do, I suggested that we return to base. The co-pilot was of course in on the plot, and cajoled me into taking one more look, and then concocted several sightseeing spots on the way back. As we landed, I was surprised to see a gathering of people just outside the hangar, and upon alighting from the helicopter, I was drenched again with a well aimed fire hose. The Survival Equipment shop had prepared a "Golden Helmet Award - 5,000 Hours" which the XO, Sutter Fox, presented, along with a plaque



commemorating the occasion. The co-pilot had planned the mission perfectly, and I landed with exactly 5,000 hours after the 1.7 hour mission. A small reception was set up on the hangar deck, and everyone enjoyed the rest of the afternoon off.

The crew at Cape May was certainly devious when it came to commemorating individual foibles. On one of my first flights there, we had landed at the helo pad of one of our stations. The pad was nicely landscaped with a white gravel border and ground cover, and had served its purpose well during the years that the H-52, with its tail rotor 10 feet above the ground, operated there. The H-65 Fenestron, however, is only about 4 feet above the ground, and the ducted fan construction makes it the equivalent of a large vacuum cleaner. Post flight inspection back at Cape May revealed that we had sucked up a bit of gravel from the helo pad landscaping, putting a small ding on one of the tail rotor blades. The maintenance crew replaced it, but kept the damaged blade for the duration of my assignment there. Doug Quinley, the Warrant Carpenter who served as the Group Public Works officer, mounted it on a five foot long wooden replica of an H-65, and they presented it to me at the change of command when I



left. I still display it proudly in my home.

It was at Cape May that I learned that failure is often a prerequisite to success. One of the 82 foot patrol boats, Pt. Batan, had a long standing discrepancy, a leaking bridge window, which allowed water to get into the engine control console. Naval Engineering had directed a number of patches over the years, but had never corrected the problem. In December of 1990, the Pt. Batan was on duty, ready to proceed within 30 minutes. A winter storm was raging, with strong winds and freezing rain. A commercial fishing boat was returning to Cape May with a full catch. They had called in an Estimated Time of Arrival from a point five miles beyond the jetties, but never made it. Since the weather precluded a helicopter launch, the Pt Batan was directed to assist. They could not start their engines however, due to the leaky window, and another boat crew had to be called in. The response was several hours late, and when the wreckage of the boat was located the next day almost exactly where she had made her last radio call, there were no survivors. As the press and the families of the lost fishermen excoriated the Coast Guard for the slow response, I talked with Naval Engineering to see when they might make permanent repairs. Since they remained non-committal, I decided to force the issue, and issued a CASREP (Casualty Report) on the vessel, meaning that it was out of service until the repairs were made. Naval Engineers appeared in abundance, and the vessel was soon ready for duty again, this time with an entire new set of bridge windows, the originals having wasted to the point of collapse.



I used the CASREP technique twice more during my tenure, once at Station Great Egg and the other at Station Barnegat. There was a long standing project to repair the metal sheathing which supported the station building at Great Egg. The Station consisted of a three story house on a lagoon in a residential area, and the sheathing kept the water from undercutting the building's foundation. It had become wasted, and was letting water wash against the building's foundations with every passing boat. When routine efforts to elevate the project priority failed, I inspected

the unit myself and noticed the beginning of some cracks as the building had begun to settle. I declared it uninhabitable, and moved the crew to a motel, slowing their response time from 30 minutes to two hours. The next day a host of civil engineers arrived on scene, and within a week had arranged permanent repairs. At Barnegat, the heating plant had long been suspect, and was providing progressively less heat. In the bitter cold winter of 1990-91, the temperature in the building was less than 40 degrees, and routine requests for assistance provided no relief. A CASREP and the mission impact of reduced readiness got the boiler replaced in a matter of days.

Coast Guard personnel are endlessly innovative. The patrol boats were having difficulty getting all of their dockside preventive maintenance done, because their operational schedules required them to log a certain number of underway hours, but provided no meaningful mission for those hours. The Executive Petty Officer on one boat asked if they could try scheduling their own underway time to get required training done, and perform missions when called upon. The group staff thought it through and agreed that it was better for the boats to be ready when needed by keeping ahead of their preventive maintenance requirements, rather than underway when not needed. We sold the District on the idea, and never had another patrol boat which was not “Semper Paratus” in every aspect of material and training readiness.



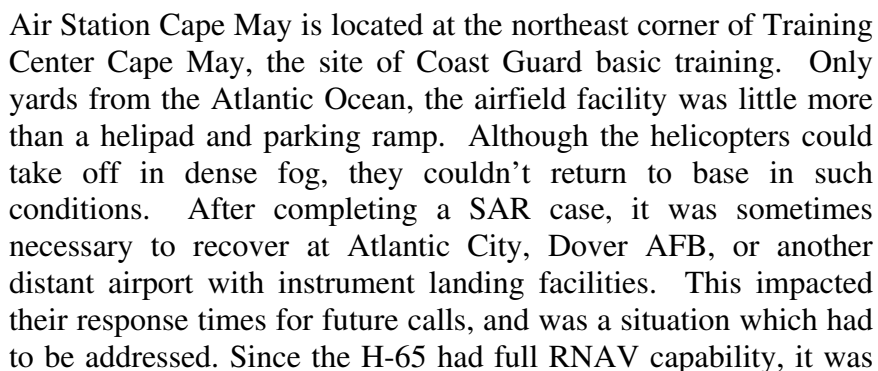
Coast Guard small boat crews have a requirement to practice helicopter hoist operations, and the aircrews have a requirement to perform 6 hoists every semiannual period, so Cape May did a significant amount of hoist training. The group had about 25 utility boats at its six stations, and the Air Station also supported Group Philadelphia and Group Eastern Shore, so there were many opportunities for practice. After rendezvousing with the boat and determining the optimum wind and sea combination for the maneuver, the helicopter crew would brief the boat crew on the type of hoist, normal and emergency procedures, and the desired heading, typically 30 to 45 degrees right of the wind direction as shown

above. This permitted the pilot to see the boat’s bow while placing the hoist cable above the fantail, and provided the best wind for the helicopter, thus requiring less power to hover. Other variations included crossing the “T” – placing the helicopter 90 degrees to the long axis of the boat – and having the boat dead in the water, in which case the technique was to creep up on the vessel, allow the rotor wash to blow it into a favorable position relative to the helicopter, and deliver the hoist. The hoist could either be direct – lowering the rescue basket, pump, litter, or sling directly to the boat – or indirect using a trail line. In this method, one end of a weighted polypropylene line was dropped to the boat, the other end was clipped to the hoist hook, the helicopter moved off to the left to facilitate visibility and remain clear of the vessel’s rigging, and the boat crew pulled the rescue device on to the vessel. With the survivor in the basket or sling, the helicopter would move back over the vessel to begin the retrieval, and once the device was clear of the rigging, move left again as the hydraulic hoist lifted the survivor to the helicopter with the boat crew tending the trail line to avoid swinging or twisting. For dewatering pump deliveries, the trail line could be delivered to the vessel in distress, and tied off to the floatable pump can. The helicopter would then descend to a minimum





The frequent practice made actual rescue hosts under often extreme conditions safe and effective, and the key to success was the hoist operator. In Coast Guard aviation, the crews that fix the aircraft also fly as the air crews, and they are the most professional group I've ever been associated with. During a hoist, the Flight Mechanic operates the hoist and provides a steady commentary on the progress of the evolution, providing directions to the pilot, location of the rescue device, activities aboard the vessel, and so on. When the wind and sea preclude normal procedures, the hoist operator often has to innovate to get the job done. "Air Stories" abound, but Flight Mechanics have had to weight trail lines with the anchor from the H-3, fill a helmet bag with weights, and maneuver litters which were literally flying in hurricane force winds. They inevitably persevere, however, and get the job done with distinction. With the survivors on board, the Flight Mechanic transitions to care provider, assisting the rescue swimmer with medical needs and passenger comfort. After the mission, they perform necessary maintenance on the helicopter to prepare it for the next mission. The hoist operator is the "sine qua non," the "without which nothing" of the helicopter rescue business.



**COPTER VOR/DME RNAV 320**

U.S. COAST GUARD ALEX RV  
CHART NO. 92

RELATED CITY AND CTR  
136-12 180.6  
GMR MFD JAN 2015.6

KIRWA  
K39-04 W74-52.5  
114.8/Chan 19 S1B 112  
282 - 4.9

SEA ISLE ...  
114.8 S1E ..  
Chan 97

DAT  
COAXX  
K38-54.8 W74-52.6  
114.8/Chan 92 S1B 207 - 11.5

LAF/PAY  
DULPS  
K38-52.5 W74-49.7  
114.8/Chan 19 S1C 280 - 14.2

ALEXRV  
1700  
W

**APPROACH VECTOR/FIXES**  
BASED DATA, REDUCED TO  
IDENTIFY JITTERS AND GADSLINES

**VEHICLE APPROACH**  
CLIMB TO FIX OR ALT ABOVE  
TIME ALLOWING DOWN TIME  
TO THE NEXT FIX OR  
JOB END

**GLIDE PT**  
100+  
d=100  
180°  
2.00

**GLIDE PT**  
100+  
d=100  
180°  
2.00

DATE/TIME	CAPTAIN	COPILOT	NOTES
0110	USCG	USCG	100-17

Mileage may exceed VFR from HRP to landing area or enroute.  
No vertical planned approach procedure.

PROCEDURE REFERENCED TO HELICOPTERS ASSIGNED TO U.S. COAST GUARD  
AIR STATION CASE INS.

100  
180°

84



headquarters, we had suggested that the solution to the problems with the plant as well as the constraints on operations could best be resolved by relocating the Air Station and Group Headquarters to either Atlantic City Airport or Dover AFB. Apparently we planted a seed, because in 1998, the unit was moved to new facilities at Atlantic City, a fully instrument capable airport. At the same time, Brooklyn Air Station was closed, and its helicopters moved to the new facility, currently commanded by CAPT Jim Hubbard, one of my lieutenants at Cape May.

Jim achieved some notoriety in January 1991 when he plucked five fishermen from a sinking fishing vessel off Atlantic City during a winter storm. He and Chip Hatfield were scrambled to assist and it was only about 20 minutes enroute. The exigencies of the situation precluded dumping fuel and the wind and cold provided sufficient power, so they hoisted the five burly fishermen aboard and flew them to Atlantic City. With the fishermen safe, we started calculating what the gross weight of the helicopter had been with a nearly full fuel load and an extra 1200 pounds of passengers, and figure that the helicopter was operating about 600 pounds over max gross. That notwithstanding, the crew ultimately received medals for their valor.

The “Perfect Storm” of 30-31 October 1991 spoiled Halloween for the kids at Cape May. An Air National Guard HH-60 crew from the 102<sup>nd</sup> Rescue Squadron at Frances Gabreski Airport on Long Island also had a bad day during the “Perfect Storm.” They were launched with an HC-130 escort tanker to assist a Japanese sailboat 200 miles south of Long Island and about the same distance east of Cape May. The horrendous on scene conditions precluded a rescue, however, and the worsening weather as they flew back to base prevented aerial refueling. Sixty miles offshore, the decision was made to ditch the aircraft in 100 foot seas before it ran out of fuel. Four of the crew members evacuated safely and were recovered four hours later by the CGC Tamaroa in a daring rescue at sea under extremely trying conditions. The fifth crew man however, was never found, and as the search area expanded with time, Cape May was called to assist. Despite an extensive search turned up nothing, and the case was closed on 8 November. Several days later, the family requested another search effort, and on 12 November, I flew a 2.2 hour mission combining a search for the missing PJ with a Marine Environmental Patrol. No trace of him was found, and the case was closed. The event was captured in the book, “The



Perfect Storm,” by Sebastian Junger (coincidentally a graduate of Wesleyan University, my alma mater) and later portrayed without much realism in the movie of the same name. The motto of the Air Rescue & Recovery Service is “That Others May Live,” and on 30 October 1991, Pararescueman Rick Smith gave his life while serving others.

There had been several SAR cases involving commercial fishing vessels sinking. In some of the cases, the crew donned survival suits and was rescued; in other cases the lack of suits was the primary factor in their failure to survive. In the winter months when the Atlantic water temperature is in the mid 30’s, life expectancy without an immersion suit is less than 30 minutes, which doesn’t provide time for a helicopter to reach the scene and recover someone alive. We decided to hold classes for the local fishermen on hypothermia, proper maintenance and use of

the survival suits they were required to carry, and what to expect during a rescue mission. To make the offer more attractive, we arranged to hoist those who wanted to don their suits and enter the water, and give them a short helicopter flight. Nearly 100 fishermen showed up for the classes, and about 1/3 of them donned their suits and were hoisted. It was a successful program, both in saving lives and in public relations. Since the Coast Guard regulates the fishing industry, we're often viewed as the enemy. We're also viewed as saviors by those who need our help, so it was rewarding to break down some of the barriers and demonstrate the life saving value of proper maintenance and use of the safety equipment required by the Coast Guard.

Every week, the Boot Camp graduated another class. During the summer, the ceremony was held on the Training Center Parade Ground just at Sunset, and vacationers from the community were invited to watch. When available, the duty helicopter was scheduled to perform a flyby. I watched a few, and noticed that there was no standard procedure, so I tasked the Operations Section to develop a routine which showed the H-65 to advantage. After a few refinements and some timing checks, we published the procedure: orbit at the initial point 5 miles



away so as to be out of earshot. Upon receiving word via radio from the Master of Ceremonies that the Recruit Band had started the National Anthem, which normally took about two and a half minutes, turn toward the field and accelerate to so as to arrive over the harbor on short final at 100 feet and 120 knots. At the last strains of the anthem, ease the nose over and flick on all exterior lights, descending to no lower than 50 feet and no faster than 150 knots over the parade ground center. Passing the grandstand, initiate a cyclic climb so as to avoid the flagpole at the far end of the parade ground and disappear from sight. (A cyclic climb simply exchanges airspeed for altitude by raising the nose without increasing power, thus avoiding overloads on the blades.) Appearing suddenly out of the sunset with lights ablaze, blades muttering and Fenestron whining, the H-65 had a deliciously alien appearance, and when after 20 seconds or so it suddenly disappeared into the night sky, the effect was excellent.



John Currier, who had served with Kurt Carlson and me at Cape Cod 15 years earlier, stopped by for fuel in the fall of 1991 with a brand new HH-60J. John was then Deputy Program Manager for the Coast Guard acquisition of the HH-60; he was later selected for RDML, and now serves as Assistant Commandant for Acquisition. We agreed to sell him some fuel, but only on the condition that he provide us some stick time in the Coast Guard's newest toy. He agreed

and we each got a 30 minute hop. The Jayhawk's twin engines are rated at 1662 SHP each, enabling it to cruise at 140 knots and dash at 180. Although the helicopter's max gross weight is 21,884 pounds, John's ship was fresh from the factory and didn't yet have its search and rescue equipment installed, so it was well below the maximum. After a brief cockpit checkout, he gave

me the controls, and I lifted into a hover. The H-60 has cockpit displays similar to the H-65, so I simply noted that the torque values were in the green and raised the collective to what seemed a reasonable value for transition to forward flight and climb out, based on my experience in the H-65 and H-3. The Jayhawk responded with what appeared to be a sprightly rate of climb until John pointed out that I was only using about 60% of the 100% torque available. Raising the collective to 100% torque provided a truly spectacular rate of climb and we were soon putting the new helicopter through its paces. The H-60's capabilities were pushed to the limit in January 2002, when one of Elizabeth City's Jayhawk's hoisted 26 people from the M/V *Sea Breeze* in a raging storm off the Virginia Capes. The H-60 is an impressive rescue helicopter, and I would have loved to be able to fly it. If only I were 20 years younger . . . .

In the spring of 1992, several of the station's pilots expressed interest in getting their FAA Airline Transport Pilot rating, the aviation equivalent of a Doctorate. The rules permitted the use of Coast Guard aircraft for this purpose, so we organized a weekend course to study for and complete the written exam. Like many professional qualification courses, the written is by far the most difficult part, so companies offer cram courses in which you take old tests over and over for two days before taking the real one, in the hope that you will retain enough to make a passing grade. We crammed and we passed. The Flight Check was a breeze by comparison. We arranged for the FAA examiner to be at Millville Airport on 15 June, and I and Chris Martino (to act as safety observer during the instrument portion) flew over to meet him. The examiner had never seen an H-65, much less flown in one, so I had to give him an extensive briefing on its capabilities and limitations. We spent an hour or so going over the flight manual as he asked questions on the various systems and operating limits. We then went out for the check ride. Since I knew we would be flying at Millville, I had already programmed all of its instrument approaches into the flight management system to prevent any last minute mistakes. After take off, I purposely left the landing gear down so as not to forget it at the end of a simulated emergency. As a result, the flight was relatively smooth, and the examiner could find no fault with my performance, most of it made possible by the helicopter's sophisticated avionics. In due course, I was designated an Airline Transport Pilot, with a type rating for the SA-365, the civilian version of the H-65.

But alas, all good things come to an end, and having achieved my ATP, the ultimate rating for an aviator, I received orders to Headquarters as Chief of the Command and Support Division with a reporting date of 1 July 1992. My last flight in a Coast Guard Aircraft was on 24 June 1992, a



2.5 hour flight involving a SAR case and some training for a new co-pilot, capped off with some low passes over the Air Station to demonstrate that the "old man" still had the "right stuff."

The change of command was the next day, and someone snapped this picture of Captain (O-6) Prindle with two future Captain (O-3) Prindles. Both sons attended the Citadel, graduating in 1992 and 1994. Both joined the Air Force,



and for a few years both were Air Force Captains. I used to tease them that it took two O-3s to equal one O-6, but now that they're both Majors (O-4) and thus the equivalent of a Rear Admiral, I guess they're ahead of me to stay . . . . Jon (at left) is a Mission Commander for the Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) which monitors the ground battle and separates the bad guys from the good guys. Jeff is a Security Police officer in the Air Force Reserve when not pursuing his civilian career as a Deputy Sheriff. Both have served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan fighting the Global War on Terror.

The picture below is one of my favorites. It was taken from the third helicopter of a 3 ship formation, a rarity in those days for the H-65. The composition features Cape May Point in the near background, with the Atlantic and the Delaware Bay in the distance. To me this shot represents the diligence and determination of Gail Donnelly's maintenance force in getting all three helicopters flyable at one time, coupled with the skill and professionalism of Coast Guard aviators who rarely get to practice formation flying, but quickly adapt and excel at most things aeronautical.. These stellar attributes, posed before the unit's area of operations, provide an appropriate summation of my time at Group/Air Station Cape May.





### XIII. Epilogue: August 2006

It's fun to be the King, but it's also an awesome responsibility, a burden, however, which is happily shared and made manageable by the marvelous people who serve in the Coast Guard. Command had been a wonderful experience, and it was certainly great fun while it lasted. Headquarters, as expected, was not, so I retired in March of 1994 with 29 years, three months of service, and 5317.6 flying hours, nearly 30% of them flown at night or in instrument conditions. I flew in 83 different aircraft of 12 different models, and participated in 596 SAR cases. Since retiring, I've flown some hours in a Cessna 172, and a few more in a Robinson R-22 helicopter, but it's just not the same as flying with the Coast Guard. One gets spoiled flying highly complex, multi-mission capable aircraft with all the bells and whistles, and though it's fun to take an occasional turn around the flag pole in a general aviation aircraft, it quickly becomes dangerous if you don't fly often enough to stay proficient. I averaged nearly 20 hours of flying per month as a Coast Guard aviator, and as a result was well prepared to perform any mission assigned. Having also flown with other services, I can say unequivocally that Coast Guard Aircrews are the most competent and professional. DOD aviators train for a war they hope will never happen, but the Coast Guard executes its missions on a daily basis. As a result, Coast Guard pilots are indeed "Always Ready" to accomplish any assigned task.

Coast Guard Aviation has enabled me to "slip the surly bonds of earth . . . and [touch] the face of God," as John Magee so eloquently put it, in a marvelous variety of outstanding aircraft while flying from the equator to the North Pole, and halfway around the world. The popular IMAX Film "The Magic of Flight," extols the beauty of flying. Some of my magic flying moments include an instrument approach with the weather closing in so fast that upon touchdown, the thick fog required the crewman to walk ahead of the helicopter to guide us to parking. In New Orleans, we often flew through the tops of the early morning cumulus clouds which would become the afternoon's thunder storms, and watched in the rear view mirror as the furrow created by the rotor wash formed and refilled. At Elizabeth City, I sometimes flew through thin cirrus cloud at 41,000 feet with the tinkle of tiny ice crystals against the windshield audible even while wearing a headset, and I remember tracing a perfect 360 degree turn at altitude which brought us back through our own contrail. I have often seen the aircraft's shadow surrounded by a rainbow on a cloud deck below, and viewed countless sunrises and sunsets of unmatched beauty, all w at government expense. I am blessed to have served as a Coast Guard Aviator.



When notified by a customer that one of their helicopters was used in a life saving mission, the Sikorsky Company sends a "Winged S" Helicopter Rescue Award to the aircrew members who were involved. I found twenty of them in my files, and have no doubt misplaced others. Still other lifesaving missions may not have been reported to Sikorsky, and in reviewing my log books and searching my memory, I estimate that I was credited with at least 100 lives saved, and countless others helped.

That's the reason a career in Coast Guard Aviation is so fulfilling. It's an unparalleled opportunity to help mariners in distress, protect the environment, and enforce the laws and treaties of the United States, all while flying the most capable and reliable aircraft of any military service with the best air crews in the world. I wouldn't trade a moment of it for anything, and I publish these anecdotes in the hope that some who might read them will be encouraged to make the Coast Guard a career, and that others might be challenged to record their bit of Coast Guard history in a similar fashion.

Summaries of my flight time and the various aircraft I flew are appended. The picture below of three now retired CG aircraft in formation over Cape Cod is a fitting conclusion to these reminiscences of a CG Aviator who retired at about the same time the last of these great aircraft did. It was indeed, grand fun while it lasted . . . .



As for Jacki and me, we now live in Yorktown, VA. After the Coast Guard we worked for three years at White Sulphur Springs, the Officers' Christian Fellowship Center in Pennsylvania, and then fully retired until 2002. After 9/11, the Air Force recruited retired aviators to do staff work so that active duty pilots could fight the war on terror. As a result, I'm currently programming future year budgets for the Director of Operations of Air Combat Command at Langley AFB. Jacki stays busy with grandmotherly endeavors, Community Bible Study, and Mahjong. The good Lord willing, we'll retire for good in 2008 and perhaps resume our travels. We're still having grand fun, and it is certainly lasting . . . .



## Appendix 1:

### CAPT P. E. Prindle, USCG (Ret.) Flight Time Summary

Acft Model	Hours	SAR Cases
T-34	25.0	N/A
T-28	122.3	N/A
TH-13M	26.1	N/A
UH-34G	48.1	N/A
HU-16E	313.6	28
HH-52A	1112.8	90
HH-3F	1976.9	416
HH-53C	634.0	5
HU-25A	321.7	8
HH-65A	737.1	49
<b>Total</b>	<b>5317.6</b>	<b>596</b>
RW	4535.0	85.3%
FW	782.6	14.7%
Night	693.8	13.0%
Instrument	751.0	14.1%

## Appendix 2:

### CAPT P. E. Prindle, USCG (Ret.) Aircraft Information

Model	CGNR	Dates	Unit
HH52A	1375	Oct 66 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HH52A	1384	Oct 66 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HH52A	1407	Oct 66 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HH52A	1408	Oct 66 - Nov 66	CGAS Miami
HH52A	1421	Jan 67 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HH52A	1366	Jun - July 67	ATC Mobile - BOTU
HH52A	1382	Jun - July 68	ATC Mobile - BOTU
HH52A	1408	Jun - July 69	ATC Mobile - BOTU
HH52A	1423	Jun 67 - Apr 69	ATC Mobile - BOTU
HH52A	1441	Oct 67 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HH52A	1449	Jul 68 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HU16E	1315	Oct 67 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HU16E	7215	Jun 68 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HU16E	7216	Oct 67 - Jun 68	CGAS Miami
HU16E	7223	Oct 67 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HU16E	7227	Oct 67 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HU16E	7254	Oct 67 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HU16E	7255	Oct 67 - Dec 68	CGAS Miami
HH52A	1360	Nov 69 - Apr 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1362	Jan 69 - May 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1369	Apr 69 - May 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1375	Jan 69 - Sep 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1379	Jan 69 - Dec 69	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1393	Apr 69 - Feb 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1395	Apr - May 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1402	Jan 69 - Feb 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1412	Apr 69 - May 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1415	Nov 69 - May 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1420	Nov 69 - May 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1447	Oct 69 - May 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1450	Oct 69 - Nov 69	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1455	Oct 69	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH52A	1459	Jan 69 - May 70	ATC Mobile - IBSEC
HH-3F	1474	Oct 70 - Nov 70	ATC Mobile - TRASEC
HH-3F	1479	Oct 70 - Nov 71	ATC Mobile - TRASEC
HH-3F	1430	Dec 70 - Apr 73	CGAS New Orleans
HH-3F	1431	Dec 70 - May 73	CGAS New Orleans
HH-3F	1437	Oct 70 - Aug 71	CGAS New Orleans
HH-3F	1434	Sep 71 - Nov 73	CGAS New Orleans
HH-3F	1477	May 73 - Jul 75	CGAS New Orleans
HH-3F	1488	Oct 72 - Jul 75	CGAS New Orleans

Model	CGNR	Dates	Unit
HH-3F	1432	Oct 77 - Oct 78	CGAS Cape Cod
HH-3F	1438	Oct 75 - Aug 77	CGAS Cape Cod
HH-3F	1473	Oct 75 - Sep 78	CGAS Cape Cod
HH-3F	1479	Jun 77 - Sep 78	CGAS Cape Cod
HH-3F	1480	Oct 75 - Oct 77	CGAS Cape Cod
HH-53B	435	Dec 78 - Feb 79	Kirtland AFB
HH-53C	995	Dec 78 - Jan 79	Kirtland AFB
HH-53C	795	Dec 78 - Mar 79	Kirtland AFB
HH-53B	428	Feb 79	Kirtland AFB
HH-53C	790	Mar 79	Kirtland AFB
HH-53B	432	Feb - Mar 79	Kirtland AFB
HH-53C	286	April 79 - Jun 82	Kadena AFB
HH-53C	357	April 79 - Jun 82	Kadena AFB
HH-53C	358	April 79 - Jun 82	Kadena AFB
HH-53C	363	April 79 - Dec 81	Kadena AFB
HH-53C	364	April 79 - Jun 82	Kadena AFB
HH-3F	1433	Aug 83	CGAS ECity
HH-3F	1434	Sep 82 - Aug 83	CGAS ECity
HH-3F	1471	Sep 82 - Aug 84	CGAS ECity
HH-3F	1489	Mar 83	AR& SC
HH-3F	1496	Sep 82 - July 83	CGAS ECity
HU-25A	2103	Sep - Oct 1983	ATC Mobile
HU-25A	2104	Sep - Oct 1983	ATC Mobile
HU-25A	2107	Sep - Oct 1983	ATC Mobile
HU-25A	2120	Sep - Oct 1983	ATC Mobile
HU-25A	2121	Sep - Oct 1983	ATC Mobile
HU-25A	2133	Oct 83 - June 85	CGAS ECity
HU-25A	2134	Oct 83 - June 85	CGAS ECity
HU-25A	2135	Oct 83 - June 85	CGAS ECity
HH-65A	6560	Sep - Oct 89	ATC Mobile
HH-65A	6564	Sep - Oct 89	ATC Mobile
HH-65A	6582	Oct 89	ATC Mobile
HH-65A	6596	Sep - Oct 89	ATC Mobile
HH-65A	6506	Jan 92	CGAS CMay
HH-65A	6511	May - June 92	CGAS CMay
HH-65A	6576	Jan 92 - June 92	CGAS CMay
HH-65A	6583	Apr 92 - June 92	CGAS CMay
HH-65A	6585	Aug 89 - Feb 92	CGAS CMay
HH-65A	6587	Aug 89 - Feb 92	CGAS CMay
HH-65A	6588	Oct 89 - Feb 92	CGAS CMay