



Trip to Tachi 1966

Early in my 1966 tour at Cam Rahn, the ability to travel was pretty easy. I was on mids, just a lowly A1C E-4, however, I had learned that you could get Space-A if you were on leave. So, armed with a signed leave form and at about 5:30 AM, I went, nearly next door, to the quonset hut that served as the Aerial Port and was manifested on a flight to Okinawa, a Navy C-130 with an Air Force crew hauling a bunch of empty pallets back to somewhere. We aborted on take off...now THAT was an interesting experience....when the dust settled and we got out, I asked the loadmaster what was up. He said an oil pressure light came on on one of the engines. I asked him if they were staying to repair it and he says "No, we can't get it fixed here, we're unloading and heading on. Stand by & we'll take off pretty soon!"

We took off and it was just me and the flight crew. After a while, the loadie says "Hey, you wanna' sack out?" "Where?", I reply. He says "Come here!" That Navy C-130 was a medic evac ship as well, and in the back on each side was four canvas enclosed bunks. I crawled into white sheets and covered up and then next thing I knew he was shaking me to wake up. I looked out the window and were in the pattern and....wait...this ain't Naha or Kadina! Where the heck are we? Turns out we were at Tachikawa. Seems that Okinawa was under typhoon conditions and we were diverted.

So, sadly.....yeah right....I spent a week there. After about 3 days, I started coming to the terminal to see if I could get Space A back and for three days in a row, all the flights were filled with higher priority folks. After they'd call the Space A's, the terminal would nearly empty. On the third day, it was the same story but this time I decided to go upstairs to the cafeteria and have some breakfast.

I was just about to order when I heard an announcement "All requiring Space A to the Republic of Vietnam please report to the Army ACTO counter." I hurried down stairs and walked to the counter. There wan't anybody at the counter so I said "Hey, anybody here!" A voice from the back says "You going to Nam?" Of course I was and said "Yes!", and he said, without looking back in, "Grab you bag, let's go!"

I went thugh the door and he says "Get in the truck, we gotta' get there quick!" We flew down the ramp and there was a beautiful Pan-AM Super Connie with all four turning. I jumped out...no paperwork, no nothing, and ran up the stairs. A very attractive stewardess (turned out to be Brittish) grabbed my bag and shut the door. Well, what a surprise! The plane was full of Army guys returning from R&R. There I was, an Air Force guy in fatigues in a sea of Army Green.

After settling in, we took off and as soon as we got to altitude, they served breakfast...steak & eggs and, would you believe it, champagne! So, you think those Army guys had it really bad? Ah, they deserved it. I wouldn't trade places with one of em. After the meal, everybody quieted down and was napping.

I got up and went to the head and when I came out, that good looking stewardess was there at the galley and asked me if I wanted a cup of coffee, and what was an Air Force guy doing on this Army R&R flight? That started it and we chatted for quite a while.

We had to divert to Tiwan because of some generator issue and we stayed there for a few hours waiting for it to be replaced. We finally took off and it wasn't a very long leg. I still didn't know where we were going, but I figured if it was in SOUTH Vietnam I'd be OK, right? When we came out of the clouds and into the pattern I looked out the window and thought "Shit, that looks like Cam Rahn!" Damn! It is! We landed and unbelievably, we parked, not more than 100 yards from the Weapons Control tent, right there near the F-4 revetments! It turned out that while I was gone, they had started R&R out of Cam Rahn and this flight was the very first returning flight. How lucky was I to get this one?

I was standing outside, waiting for the bags to be unloaded when the good looking one comes up and says "Do you work on those F-4s?" Well, is the Pope catholic? She then says, "I sure would like a tour of those one of these days!" I said, "Do you see that tent over there? If you come back through, just poke your head in that tent and ask for Airman Slusser and if I'm there, I'll give you a tour." I added that I would spread the word and if I wasn't there, SOMEONE would definitely show you a bird. No pun intended...you DO know that young ladies over in England are called "birds", right?

About that time, I spotted my bag, grabbed it and told her I'd see her later. As I walked away, some Army Sgt yells, "Where you going?, you gotta' fill out a customs form!" I turned around and said "See that tent, that's where I work!" And, with perfect timing, as if I had somehow called ahead, here pulls up the WCS Shift Supervisor in his pickup and says "Hey Slusser, you need a lift?" He had spotted me standing there when he was coming from the revetments. I threw my bag in the back and, as I jumped in the cab, I told the Army Sgt that I didn't have anything to declare and left him sputtering as we drove off. From there, he dropped me off at my hooch and all was well.

About a month later, I was on the dispatch board and someone yelled "Hey Slusser, you got a visitor!" Guess who was standing outside the back entrance? Yeah! Well, I asked the boss if I could show her one of the aircraft and he says "Yeah, OK, but we get to go too." And several of the guys hanging out waiting for a work order did, indeed. We went to the nearest bird and I put the ladder up and clambered up and opened the canopies and invited her up the ladder to see the stuff. Oh man! She was wearing that Pan-AM short skirt and she came up the ladder and gave everyone but me a show...and by the look on her face, SHE KNEW IT! She was shifting from one foot to the other, you shoulda' seen 'em, their eyes were rolling and their tongues were hanging out. I had a tour to Bentwaters and Lakenheath years later, and I found out that those English girls were party animals. Not the prim, stiff-upper lip, conservative, shy things that you might have seen in the movies, that's for sure! That day, I was a hero! I never heard the end of it, plus, there was a litany of complaints from the ones who missed it.

Oh, to be that young again!