

THE NEW WING-DING 36th Photo Recon Squadron



Stories written by Jim Chastain
while serving on Biak & Okinawa

Home Sweet Home of CWO Chastain and Lt Farlin (Biak) style

At Biak of the Schouten Island group, Dan Farlin and I were tent mates, actually living in two one man tents joined on a floor of appropriated dunnage, supported by two logs of felled coconut trees. Ends of the trunks were on the shore and these logs were leveled with the other ends positioned upon two sand filled oil drums in the surf. Dan and I used one tent to sleep in, the other was our living room with a view overlooking the bay. This bay was filled with bomb craters indicating our bombers had either sunk retreating Japanese boats, or had missed the Japanese landing strip which had been a short distance away. The above craters made many new homes for a variety of tropical fish, making improvised scuba diving a great pastime.

I thought that I was a great inventor when I modified a discarded gas mask to fabricate a scuba type device by attaching several hoses together so they could extend to an empty salad oil can which floated upon the surface. This can enabled the air intake to protrude above the water enabling me to breathe while viewing the wonders below. FALSE! The lenses of the mask were curved which demagnified and distorted ones vision under water. So back to the work- bench where I replaced the original curved ones with flat plastic which enabled me to see a bit better. For a very short time I enjoyed those wonders of the deep until I saw a

huge shark swimming only a few feet away. Needless to say, I was immediately an Olympic candidate swimming back to the safety of the shore. From then on, I restricted my viewing to seeing those wonders at night from above, for we had installed an overhead light on the bay side of our tent which attracted many varieties of fish to be seen from our living room.

Dan and I had many conveniences of locally fabricated furniture made from packing crates and dunnage. An inverted plastic bubble, a former astro-dome from a B-24 bomber was inverted and installed in a corner as a sink. This bathroom convenience was fed from a 5-gal salad oil can used as a water source.

We resourcefully made do with a lot of discarded or borrowed items. This can for our water source was rescued from the mess hall dump.

Our non-culinary water for our outdoor shower was obtained from a spring of brackish water, blasted in the coral with the sweat of many Airab brows and explosive assistance from the Corps of Engineers. Using a borrowed pump, water was lifted to an overhead P-38 drop tank allowing this brackish water to sprinkle down on sunburned and grimy backs.

B-6 portable generators from our photo lab provided the luxury of electric lights. Electric transmission was through discarded or borrowed telephone wire. At night these lights provided a National Geographic tour of our front yard at high tide. Overhead illumination on the bay side brought many species of tropical fish to our doorstep to be viewed without any additional aids. Many times Dan and I were glad to be out of the water, for some of those critters appeared rather mean, however others looked rather tasty

Sports or fresh food on Biak

Many of us didn't have access to those ditching kits with fishing tackle, therefore, if anyone wanted to go fishing it was necessary to devise a catching method. Some time before we arrived at Biak, the natives and later, personnel from our sister squadron, the 20th Combat Mapping squadron used captured Japanese hand grenades to blast out schools of fresh fish. I can't say that Ground Safety office approved of this method, for the Jap's had several grenades with short fuses, which resulted in some terrible accidents.

Capt. Brewer, a pilot of the 20th Combat Mapping Squadron of our 6th Group, lost an eye and an arm while involved in this sport. I had flown with him at Peterson Field CO before I made Warrant Officer

A new version of the salute, "The shotgun" or, One size fits all.

Dan Farland and I often went out looking for souvenirs, one day we had been on an approximately one mile trip to an anti-aircraft battery, upon return we took both sides of the road to see what may have been overlooked by those before us. We looked up from our search to see a soldier walking our way in the middle of the road. His eyes were looking forward with his body erect, looking a bit confused. When he got within saluting distance we found out why.

In a very militarily manner, from the center of the road, he gave his version of the hand salute to two Officers approaching on both sides of the road. With both hands he rendered one, sharp simultaneous, salute to the Lieutenant on his right and to the CWO on his left. Seeing this act was better than finding a Japanese sword or pistol.

Biak Business Men

Later, souvenirs which we sought were brought to us in the aforementioned tent. While awaiting for our new aircraft to arrive from the States, I had collected raisins and about to be thrown away fruit cocktail juices from the mess hall and put this concoction in gallon jugs to brew raisin jack or what some called jungle juice. After a proper brewing time I got cold feet and was afraid to drink this nectar of the gods. Also, I didn't smoke and hoarded my cigarette ration for trading purposes. Because we were in the tropics, I had cut the legs off my trousers to make shorts also the tails off my shirts for better comfort and air circulation. While my special nectar was brewing, I hand sewed baseball caps, knife scabbards and other stuff.

One day an island native named Kornelis Korwa and his kin came around foraging for food etc. bringing some of those sought after Japanese souvenirs for trade. I told him in pidgin English and through a pointy talkie that I wanted a monkey, of course he said he would return the next day, which he did. Instead of the monkey he presented for trade a parrot named Jakob. He was tied to a perch made from a joint of bamboo two inches in diameter. When green, the joint had been cut to form cups at

each end, one holding water in one and food in the other. These cups were then joined by a hand cut dowel for the perch. The thing that I didn't know was that Kornelis must have operated a jungle pawnshop and that he was a master at the art of shrewd trading long before the GI's invaded his homeland. With no coercion and very little effort on his part, I had traded him two gallons of my rare raisin jack, a bob tailed shirt, a pair of shorts, a hand made baseball cap, two cartons of Chesterfield's and 11 Dutch Guilders for old Jakob (US Value \$60.50). Kornelis sure knew how to sucker a lonesome GI by substituting a parrot for a monkey in a trade with a GI sucker that day.

The Original Bombardier

My folding cot was nearest to the living area, Dan slept on the outer wall. I had tied Jakob's perch to the center of the ridge pole of our living room tent to find out that he was the original bombardier equipped with his own air raid warning squawk for his simulated missions which occurred every night around 2.30 AM. He would get his perch to swinging and at the zenith of the swing, in my direction, he would release his poop bomb, which would detonate right on the foot of my cot. His warning and his bomb score accuracy was phenomenal. When the Airab squadron received orders for Clark Field, they included a prohibition restricting the importation of pets of local origin to the Philippines Islands. Thinking that I was putting one over on what I thought was a Biak based load master of the C-46 squadron which was transporting us to Clark, I sold Jakob to him for the bargain price of eleven Guilders. What I didn't know was that the loadmaster's squadron had also been transferred to Clark Field and Jakob traveled to the Philippines in the same C-46 with me. I never did get my monkey.

The Airab Navy

As I remember there was ,T/Sgt Jacob who was a jack of all trades and master of same. His larder always contained souvenirs like Japanese tanks, suicide boats etc. In Okinawa, he had removed the nose charge, installed a GMC truck engine and patched up one of those kamikaze boats so that it would float and go.

It should have been christened as the USS AIRAB for he provided a semi-sea going navy for the 36th Photo Recon. This vessel established a ferry service cruising between the main island of Okinawa and

Ie-Shima. When the quartermasters started by passing Okinawa with bread and fresh food for the POW's in the mainland islands of Japan, hard tack was a bit more difficult to swallow. I had a former pre war photo-lab buddy in Ie Shima who had connections with one of the NCOIC's of Ie Shima's Quartermaster Bakery. As many of you know cigarettes, photo prints, paper and film spooled from mission remnants became better barter material than MPC. So I managed a voyage in our ex kamikaze boat to successfully barter for bread to temporarily but briefly end our squadron's hard tack diet.

The beginning of the end of WWII occurred on the Island of Ie Shima approximately fifteen miles from the Okinawa encampment of the Airabs.

From the Armed forces radio station it was learned that the Japanese were sending Peace Envoys in white Betty bombers stripped of armament, marked with green crosses to the Philippines to arrange for Japan's surrender. It was also learned that this peace flight would land at Ie Shima and that Envoys would be transferred to C-54's to continue their mission to the Philippines for a conference with General Mac Arthur. Permission was obtained to use our ferry service to Ie Shima to photograph this historic event on August 19, 1945. With Speed Graphic cameras in hand my buddy Frank Noone and I headed for Baker strip to photograph the envoys arrival. Two Air Apache B-25's of the 475th Bomb Group intercepted them and escorted the peace envoys to their landing. Prior to their landing, GI troops had been positioned approximately six feet apart on either side of the runway. One of the Betty's had part of the Plexiglas of the tail gunner's position missing, and the person in the tail gunners position could be plainly seen. As this aircraft settled on to the runway and when this person saw these all those GI's spaced on each side of the runway, it appeared that he wasn't sure what they were going to do, so he immediately scurried back out of sight.

Massive rolls of barbed wire prevented us getting in position for close up shots of the Envoys transfer to the awaiting Army C-54's. Later, when we were able to view the Betty's more closely, one could see that paint jobs were slightly streaked as if they had been hurriedly applied by brush. One could even see the old red meat ball through the thin white

paint and that the almost black green crosses had been applied with more care.

With thanks to an article written by Maj Robert C Mikes in the August 1966 issue of the "Airman" is a story of how the end of big war was almost delayed.

On August 20, 1945, General Kawabe and party loaded with brief cases bulging with orders for surrender and the Occupation returned to their own aircraft on Ie Shima.

Misfortune plagued both of these peacemaking aircraft upon their return flight from Ie Shima. General Kawabe in the first Betty, took off gracefully, the second piled ignominiously into a ditch with no casualties. It was never repaired and eventually pushed into the sea by a bulldozer. Its crew and passengers returned to Japan by other means. The first Betty continued onward to the home island, however it experienced mechanical trouble, necessitating a forced landing at midnight on the beach near Hamamatsu. Repairs were not possible and General Kawabe and party continued the trip by auto, to deliver the surrender instructions to Tokyo on August 21, 1945."