

# HEY, DON'T FORGET US ARMY GUYS

By Gil Bouffard

A while ago I was discussing some of my military experiences with Julian Lake (RADM, Ret), a fellow member of The Association of Old Crows and I told him that I had flown in EA-3Bs and had been a member of VQ-1 in the late '60s.

"I thought you were in the Army?" Julian said. "Yes sir." I replied, "But I flew in EA-3Bs out of Atsugi as a member of a special Army Det. I can even tell you the bureau numbers of the birds. I flew in PR-9 (BuNo 146449) and PR-13 (BuNo 142673)."

I had the same conversation with John Dillon, an ex-Whale jockey and co-worker at Ford Aerospace and Communications Corp. in Palo Alto, Calif.

John called me one day and said he had something I should read. It was the Spring 1987 edition of The Hook. There, authored by a name out of my near and distant past, was a historical article about "my old squadron." I spent five and a half years in CinCLant (where I was once again a member of a small group of Army guys in a joint military command), at the LANTCOM ELINT Center (Formerly called LANTDAC. Now known as the Atlantic Intelligence Command (AIC)), and Don East's name would either pop up in conversations or message traffic.

Names and faces, dates and places crept into my mind. Then I noticed that even though two pictures featured our old "Seabrine," bird, there was no mention of the Army Det in the article.

"Ah ha!" I thought. Don East spent most of his time in VQ-2 and we had an Army Det there too. (Part Two of his history was to be about VQ-2). But, what about us guys at Atsugi?

Did I not catch the wire at Shemya, Alaska, and then have to wait for the Air Force to figure out how to get us off?

Did we not declare an emergency coming in to Midway and then have to fly over the beach because "ropeyarn" had been called?

Did I not lose about a pound of facial skin getting into and out of "poopie suits?"

How many times had I been looking out the window to see where the Flagons or MIGs were? What about all those "mystery meat sandwich," flight lunches I ate? Yeah, guys, we were there!

My personal history at Special Activities Detachment One (SAD-I) was the period 1968-71. I first learned that there was a detachment of Army guys flying in Navy jets while an instructor at Fort Devens, Mass. One of the guys, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Bill Capazolli, was telling me about flying in EA-3s from VQ-2 based in Adana, Turkey.

In a past assignment to White Sands Missile Range, I had earned my Army aircrew wings while flying range operations in Air Force planes at Holloman AFB, N.M. My assignment was with the Office of the Area Frequency Coordinator. This was the FCC office that controlled and assigned the radio frequency allocations for the southwestern United States.

I really wanted to get back to a flying billet, so I put in a request for reassignment to Special Activities Detachment Two. I also wanted to go back to Europe and SAD-2 was quartered at Ramstein AFB, Germany. The Army in their infinite wisdom offered me an assignment to SAD-1 at some place called At-a-zuki, Japan.

With some trepidation, I set off for wherever and eventually arrived at NAS Atsugi. Major Craig Loe commanded the detachment, his XO was First Lieutenant Willie Haynes, and the NCOIC was an old acquaintance from Fort Devens, SFC Pete Muller.

CAPT Dilorenzi was Squadron Commander, CDR T.W. Connolly was the XO and CDR J.D. Meyer was Ops Officer. Our Det had an assigned pilot, LCDR Larry Lamb, and our Navigator was LTJG Harold T. (Mr. 'O', also-known as Weird Harold) Ostensen. Shortly after I arrived, Lamb and Loe transferred.

LCDR Lamb's replacement was everyone in the pilot pool. They included "Navy," Dave Pate, CDR Calhoun, the squadron Maintenance Officer, J.D. Meyer and the guy I have the fondest memories of, LCDR Dick Von Hendy.

LCDR Von Hendy was a droll sort who used to look at you through his eyebrows when he talked. He apparently had a philosophy that the airplane would do two things for him; it would damn well fly and it would damn well land.

He once told me that he believed that he should have single engine airspeed before rotating. You could tell when he was flying because the plane always had the wheels in the well before it was really off the ground.

A example of LCDR Von Hendy's skill was an incident at Shemya, when immediately after takeoff in PR-13, the aircraft experienced a run away up trim! As the PC worked to cut the electrical power, Von Hendy flew the aircraft around the island and brought it back in.

Unfortunately, the Air Force Base Commander thought we were showing off and raised holy stink about the incident.

A piece of virtually every pilot and navigator's airmanship went into finding Atsugi after a mission. It always seemed to be, "Down there under the clouds somewhere."

We also had some of the best Plane Captains. ADJ2 B.C. Turner, PR1 Lord and ADJI Joe Roth, come to mind.

Major Loe's replacement was James F. Miller, Captain U.S. Army. It is interesting that Major Loe was always Major Loe, but it was really hard for the Navy guys to call someone wearing two bars "Captain." There was the time I was called to the Comm-Center to review some message traffic. When I got there was told, "Mr. Miller is already here." Being in the Army, I didn't know any Mr. Miller.

Then there was the time Captain Miller from NAS Atsugi made reservations for himself and his wife at the Sanno Hotel, an officers hotel in Tokyo and the reservations clerk thought he was Captain Miller, USN.

The reverse was also true. When Captain Willie Haynes (he got promoted at Atsugi) transferred, his replacement was an Army Second Lieutenant, Jerry Autry. Yep, even the Army guys always called him "Mr. Autry". Of course, he did have his own private parking space all over the base—it read "Any Ensign."

In 1969 we took possession of BuNo 142673 (PR-13) from VQ-2. Our detachment activities increased and the SAD-2 operations were shutting down. The guys from Rota regaled us with stories of deployments to the Canary Islands and warm weather flying. So—we made sure that they got to make the Det to Shemya!

Our SAD-I birds were unique in that they were the only "long nosed," (other than "Double Nuts." the TA-3) EA-3Bs in the squadron. Both PR-9 and PR-13 had cheek bulges for special phased array antennas and PR-13 had a "cross plane" antenna mounted

in the tailgun position, which looked pretty ominous.

The trick was to arrive at a base and tell the unsuspecting flightline guards that the "cross plane" was a special high-powered laser and it took a long time to cool down. The guards would walk a real egg-shaped pattern around the plane, with the small end of the egg at

the nose of the plane.

SAD-I deployed to the garden spots—Midway and Shemya, as well as Kunson and Osan AFBs in Korea.

Many were the hours we sat in poopie suits waiting to jump at the sound of the klaxon at Shemya, only to be told to stand down (usually 12 hours at a whack), crawl into bed, just get comfortable— and then have the klaxon go off! Charge out of bed to the plane and "Hollywood start." the devil at the hangar doors! They either chose to blow the klaxon while we were sleeping or just getting served in the chow line.

There was the time when one of the guys had to spend two days in his poopie suit on Adak because he chose not to wear the liner and had worn only long johns.

There was the incident on Midway when a "Blackshoe" chief chased our alert truck back to the flightline on his bicycle because we had broken the speed limit. By the time the chief got there the offenders had launched.

At Midway we cooperated with a VP squadron from Barbers Point. The VP Detachment Commander had it figured that when he heard us fire up it was time to go. One day we were testing the engines and we watched as the P-3 lumbered out to the runway and took off. Boy, were they hot when they got back.

There were the sad times, too, like walking around the recovered parts of the "Willie" laid out on the hangar deck after the shoot-down. Or the friends we lost in the crash at DaNang. Getting the letter from Dick Von Hendy's wife, after they returned to the States,

to tell me he had died of a cerebral hemorrhage.

We Army guys qualified as Naval Aircrewmen and after the April 1969 shutdown, I wore my Navy Aircrew wings on my uniform as a token for my "squadronmates".

In the years after I left VQ-1, whenever I stood inspection, I could expect the inspecting officer to ask about the gold wings and when I told him they were Navy Aircrew wings, he would invariably say, "Oh, prior service in the Navy?" "No sir." I would reply, and then explain why I wore them and that I had earned them. Most times the inspecting officer would offer a compliment. Only once did an inspector grunt and walk on. He just didn't understand.

Unfortunately, the only thing I have left are these memories, because over the years I lost all my pictures and memorabilia, squadron coffee cup, decals and patch. I've been told that BuNo 146449 and 142673 reside at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., baking in the sun. But I've still got my wings!

In the 21 years of my Army career, I always had interesting assignments but being part of VQ-1 and flying in the "Whale" was the best.

Gil Bouffard