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**Captain**  
**603rd Military Airlift**  
**Support Squadron**  
**U.S. Air Force**

**Okinawa**  
**Thailand**



In 1964 I was a senior at Central College, planning to graduate in May of '64. It was a couple months before I graduated that I saw an Air Force recruiter, and I was interested in flying and airplanes. The draft was on, and I was going to be in the service in one way or another. I wanted to be on active duty rather than the reserves. They gave me a bus ticket to go from Pella to Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha. I had a written test called the Air Force Reserve Officer's Quotient qualifying test. There was some math, language skills, and personality tests, plus a lot of spatial awareness problems. On the physical I said that I occasionally I couldn't go out and work in a hay field because I'd get allergies. That disqualified me from flight school, but I got a chance to go to transportation school.

I graduated on the 10th of February, 1969, from San Antonio. I was supposed to go to transportation school at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls. I went to transportation school for three months.

I got my orders to go to Okinawa and join the 603rd Military Airlift Support Squadron, which at the time was called MASS. They changed it to MAC, which was Military Airlift Command. Most of the passenger planes and some of the cargo planes were commercial contracts. I got there in September of 1965, about the time that Johnson sent troops to Vietnam and things really got super active. The Support Squadron loaded and unloaded airplanes and had a maintenance department to fix anything that was wrong with the airplane when it came in.

There was an airlift command post which decided where the airplane should go and which briefed

the crew that came in. That was all done by the Airlift Command Post. Our main routes were from the United States, then going to Da Nang, Cam Ranh Bay, or Saigon, or maybe to Bangkok. They were 727's, a new plane which replaced the DC-6. They were owned by Southern Air Transport, which was the CIA airline.

When we had passengers, it was pretty trouble free. But the freight would be mislabeled sometimes, or mis-weighed, or would take longer to put on. I had to argue with aircraft commanders and flight crew guys. They'd say, "We're supposed to leave at 16:00, and here it is 15:30 and you're still loading the plane." I'd say, "I've got the airplane till 4:00, regardless of your checklist." So, I'd get my name, rank and serial number taken down I don't know how many times.

It rained a lot on Okinawa, maybe for a week at a time. In wintertime it was cool. We didn't even have a uniform that was right for the occasion. You couldn't wear your raincoat around airplanes because it created static electricity. And I was hoping a forklift doesn't punch its way through an airplane. Everybody would buy a flight jacket on the black market so you didn't freeze to death.

I was in Okinawa for two and a half years at Kadena Air Force Base. Off-base housing had to be typhoon proof and snake resistant. They had bars on the windows, they were wood, but that would deter young Okinawan kids from getting in your house and stealing stuff. They had wooden shutters that you could shut in case of a typhoon.

The Marines had a big operation. They'd

show up in a 707, or a DC-8 which would hold 165 Marines from the states. They'd get in trailers that looked like cattle cars and go up to Camp Hansen about 30 miles north. They'd go up there for three or four weeks. The guys who had already been there would be waiting for at least a couple hours, sleeping on the cement or on the ground or on the marble floor. They'd get on that same airplane and go to Da Nang. Anybody that was coming to Okinawa, or leaving, went to Kadena Air Base. That was essentially what I did in Okinawa.

I came back after two and a half years and went to a school in Florida. Counter Insurgency School, learning more about what to do if you got captured. Then I reported to Des Moines to go to Thailand. I went to Bangkok for a year at the Eighth Aerial Port. I was an Air Freight Officer. I was the guy in charge of our operation at Don Muang Royal Thai Air Force Base which also had the civilian Bangkok air terminal. We had detachments at all the bases in Thailand. I was in charge at Don Muang, but it didn't really take very much to be in charge. I spent a year there.

Then I was assigned to McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey. It was the headquarters of the 21st Air Force. We scheduled passenger airplanes for basically half the world, from the Mississippi River to New Delhi, India. We did custom flying for the Navy. The two nuclear submarine bases in Rhodes, Spain, and Prestwick, Scotland would rotate nuclear submarine crews after so many days at sea, underwater the whole time. We would schedule their planes to be there so they could come right back to the states and take some time off, or at least be assigned to a stateside Navy base for a while.

Sometimes flights were part cargo and part passenger. I had to decide how many seats I needed, and how much cargo. I'd make out a schedule, but the requirements were always changing, so I was always on the phone. A computer could do it now. If I changed a flight, I'd take a flight that was going to one place and change it to another one. You've got an adding machine, a big sheet of paper with all these destinations, and a pencil with an eraser. Communicating was a good part of it. I'd talk to Sgt. So-and-so in Germany, and somebody else down in Panama.

In Okinawa, once in a while people would demonstrate; there were some anti-American feelings. The B-52's would come in on rare occasions from Guam when there was a typhoon there. They wouldn't do any missions from Okinawa but since

Japan had two atomic bombs dropped on them, we didn't use the B-52's because they're associated with atomic war. The schoolteachers would come and they'd get the little kids out there waving Japanese flags, lining the street of our little village because they wanted to go back to Japan, even though the Japanese considered Okinawans to be hillbillies.

We lived in the city of Bangkok when I was at that base. There was an old Mercedes bus that would grind away. We went back and forth on what they called the superhighway, eight miles of four lanes, two lanes divided. Up at Nakhon Phanom there were times when there might be trouble, even getting shot at. At another one of the bases, a C-141 four engine cargo jet had shown up, and while they were offloading the plane a half dozen people got in the base and were shooting at these guys. You just kind of get used to the fact that something could happen. I was more likely to get killed in a taxi than by a sniper's bullet.

One plane that took off from Da Nang had about 98 guys that had just finished their tour of duty. They got shot at with a 50 caliber AK-47. The rest of the way home they had to fly lower because they couldn't pressurize the plane. When I looked at it, from near the cockpit to the end of the airplane, every three feet or so there was a half inch hole. Bullets just went right through the thing like a hot knife through butter. One guy got a little aluminum in his leg.



**Cargo Loading Area**

I went to Vietnam two or three times. In Saigon if we took a ride in an Air Force bus, we saw that there wasn't any glass in the windows. They'd have strong fencing like stuff that would cover the whole window, so no one could throw a grenade in the bus. When you flew into places like Saigon and Cam Ranh Bay they'd do a corkscrew type of approach so that they weren't targets. People in Bangkok were friendly. We had Thai contract workers

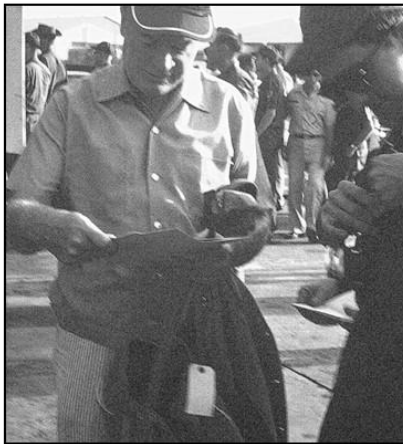
who were paid \$5 an airplane to load or unload an airplane, no matter how big or heavily loaded. A Thai supervisor we called Charlie, if he fired somebody, would carry a 22 Colt pistol in his pocket for about a week after he fired somebody in case they came out and tried to shoot him.

I was made Captain when I was in Thailand. I went from Second Lieutenant to First Lieutenant on Okinawa, and then Captain in Thailand. If you didn't screw up, you were pretty much going to make Captain.

I came back in December of 1969. The hardest thing really was coming home and trying to be

normal again. I took a lot of crap from people. You had the Vietnam war factor. You're in your unit doing your thing, then you come back to the states and everyone's against it. Everything's messed up. I had a rough time with depression for a while.

I learned to fly after Solfrid and I got married in 1977. Once I got my private license I got ninety percent of my instrument and commercial license paid for with the GI Bill. I've been interested in flying since I was a little kid. I'll just fly anything I can get my hands on and do what it takes to get better and better, and get more experience, and make flying my career until I'm old. And that's what I did.



**Bob Hope**



**Thai Loading Crew**



**B-52 Bomber**