

Dick Jones' Tale of Cubi Point and Olongapo City

This is another story from the Philippines from so long ago that includes a fellow USNA graduate from the Class of 1964. In growing up, and playing sports, in Western PA, I got to know one Richard Earnest, USNA 1964, and from Irwin PA, high school, class of 1960. Back in high school, I tell the story that we actually broke his leg in the first football game of my senior, his junior, year, fall of 1958. Our friendship endured as midshipmen and then it was off to fly the F-4, Phantom, for both of us: Jones for the USMC and Earnest for the US Navy. In approximately February, 1967, the CO of our squadron, VMFA-314 Black Knights, called me in for a special assignment. At the time, we had a pilot who was "stuck" in the PI while ferrying an aircraft back to Vietnam from overhaul work done in Japan. His ferry flights had gotten him as far as the BOQ at NAS Cubi Point, PI, and he had been there for over two weeks. No number of messages nor any amount of threatening from our CO had gotten him out of that PI BOQ and there they sat, both pilot as well as recently overhauled F-4, enjoying the casual life at Cubi Point. My assignment was simple. I was to go to NAS Cubi point via an Air Force transport flight from Danang to Clark Air Force Base and then proceed overland to NAS Cubi Point. At Cubi, our CO had scheduled me for a 4-5 day jungle survival school to be followed by 2 extra days intended for a mini R&R. I was then to pick up the F-4, fly a test hop on the aircraft and then have the aircraft back at Chu Lai by a date designated by the CO. I had orders in hand for the pilot who had been detained at Cubi Point to proceed immediately via either US Navy or US Air Force transport to Chu Lai, RVN where he would either be sent immediately for the rest of his RVN tour to duty as a forward air controller with the infantry along the DMZ or he would be court martialed for dereliction of duty in his ferry assignment, choice yet to be determined by the CO. Off my RIO and I went from Danang to Clark AFB on a Sunday afternoon flight. Upon arrival at NAS Cubi Point, we found the ferry pilot that we were relieving living in the BOQ and having a grand old time on base during the day and then out in Olongapo City each night. He just did not want to go back to RVN. During the test flight that my RIO and I flew on the aircraft, we lost an engine on final approach into NAS Cubi. That meant an extra day or

so there in PI while the engine was repaired. As we sat one afternoon at the bar of what became the infamous Cubi O club (this was 1967 so still before the famous O Club ejection seat that was established in 1969), we looked down off the mountain and saw a US aircraft carrier in the harbor at Subic Bay. Speculation decided it to be the USS Enterprise as I recall. I then said that I thought my friend from USNA, Dick Earnest, was flying the F-4 off the Enterprise. "I wonder if he is on board?" In a telephone call to the Enterprise duty officer, we discovered that he was actually on board and we did, in fact, get him onto that telephone call. Great reunion on the phone! Question from Earnest to Jones-"What will you guys be doing tonight?" Answer from Jones -"Going into Olongapo for drinks just like last night." Statement from Earnest-"I want to come up to the Cubi O club to join you and have myself and some of my buddies go into town on liberty tonight with the US Marines." The meeting was arranged. After dinner for the entire group had been accomplished at the Cubi O club, it was time for the entire group to head for the Sodom of the Olongapo bar strip. We did. Remember the days at USNA when we had a curfew to make on Saturday night at the end of Saturday liberty in town? Always a mad dash to Bancroft Hall to make it by the curfew deadline, specific time now forgotten. Anyway, there was a similar curfew on the base at Subic Bay/Cubi Point, PI in 1967. Just as in Annapolis as midshipmen, we stayed too long at the bars of Olongapo and had to run madly for the Subic Bay gate in order to be off the streets of Olongapo by the 0100 curfew hour. Curfew was only that one could not be out and about on the streets of Olongapo between 0100 and 0500; where they actually spent the time was of no concern to the military police. We all ran like crazy for the main gate at NAS Subic. We made it. The next morning, my RIO and I blasted off with the aircraft for Chu Lai and my brief out of country excursion was over. Upon arrival back at Chu Lai, I made arrangements to call home via MARS radio that afternoon. Kay my two children were living in an apartment in Greensburg, PA during my tour in Vietnam. Dick Earnest had married his high school sweetheart, Pam, and Pam was living in Irwin, PA, their home town that is about seven miles from where Kay was living in Greensburg. Since they were living so close together, Kay and Pam had become friends who could rely on each other during their husbands'

excursions in Southeast Asia. MARS radio was basically a two way radio method of communicating wherein the radio was switched manually by an operator between send and receive modes. For the operator to make the manual switch between send and receive, one had to finish a conversation with "Over" so that the operator knew when to switch modes. Something like this - "George, this is Harry. Over" George could then speak back to Harry. Etc. At any rate, I placed the MARS radio call that afternoon to Kay at home in Greensburg, PA. "Hello, Kay, it's me. Over." Answer back to me - "What the hell did you do to Dick Earnest?" I immediately knew that I had a bit of a problem. My answer was "nothing," but that did not bet much mileage. Seems that Dick Earnest had already been in touch with Pam and the story went something like this. As already stated, we had all stayed too long at the bars when out in town together. As we madly dashed toward the navy base to make it before curfew, we had to cross a bridge over the Olongapo River. Now, the Olongapo River was not really a river at all. It was a sewage ditch in which one might find the most objectionable of things! As our group raced over the Olongapo River bridge, it seems that Dick Earnest was pushed off the side of the bridge into the Olongapo River sewer ditch. His description was something like - "damned Marines pushed intentionally pushed me into the river." Marines would never do such a thing to one of our Navy brethren. At any rate, by the time Lt Earnest crawled out of the river under the Olongapo River bridge and looked at his watch, it was something like 0103 or such. He had missed naval base curfew by three minutes or so. It seems that he spent the rest of the night laying on the river bank under that Olongapo River bridge from 0103-0500 in the morning at which time he crawled out from under the Olongapo River bridge, walked back through the main gate at Subic Bay Naval Station uncontested, trekked on back to his ship, and had a nice day. A shower would not have been the main thing needed. In my opinion, he probably needed a series of booster shots to counter any of dozens of things to which he was likely exposed in that Olongapo River. So much for Navy liberty with his US Marine buddies! Ain't life great? OORAH!!!