

Project (X) Location (X)

After a 2½ year absence from (APC) Army Pictorial Center, in March, 1969, I was back again for the second time. The old Field Photo pool of Army cameramen was now disbanded. That was due to a culmination of the Vietnam War and directives from the Pentagon. The few Army cameramen stationed at APC were relegated to Camera Branch as assistant cameramen to the (DAC) Department of the Army Civilians or civil service employees with a rank of GS-11 Photographers. In effect there was a major (RIF) Reduction In Force

From a culmination of events including U.S. Embassy military attaches observing the Israeli military in action, during the 6 day and Yom Kipper Wars and numerous border skirmishes with Arab countries, the attaches reports were the catalysis for the U.S. Army's implementation of a fast response photo team concept, under the acronym (DASPO) for DEPARTMENT of the ARMY SPECIAL PHOTO OFFICE. This unit was set up in team format. Each team was assigned adequate equipment, bags packed and passport ready to travel with the combat troops on a moments notice. This was in contrast to pools of men and equipment that took weeks to get ready for travel to a hot spot.

Other dismantling factor of Field Photo were the exponential expansion of the Vietnam War. With more manpower in country, the Pentagon sent a directive to formulate the 221st Signal Company (Pictorial) at the signal school at Ft. Monmouth in neighboring New Jersey. Before being shipped to Vietnam, the 221st Signal company took other members from Field Photo. Still a few more were transferred directly to Vietnam to replace personnel returning after their year tour of duty in Vietnam.

For me Vietnam was another glory job. I was assigned to the 221st Signal Company (Pictorial), but on permanent loan (TDY) to MACV, the supreme command in country, with the Army 2 teams, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corp subordinate to the MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND VIETNAM. The MACV Photo Teams were created by the Assistance Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, because during the evening meal he got sick and tired of seeing blood, guts and gore. The network news crews were sending back from the war zone, when he knew the U.S. was spending millions of dollars yearly on NATION BUILDING and PAFICATIONS efforts. These elements were to win over the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese populous that were seldom covered by the TV news. The MACV Teams were to exploit these values, of humanitarian efforts along with new equipment in the Vietnam country and war.

With DTC I had the world by the ass. As boss of MACV Photo Team Army Alpha I had the war by the butt. The war zone benefits at times doubled my base pay, with flight pay, no income tax, combat pay and overseas pay. Some months these benefits equalled my regular pay. Everything was tame. Our mission forbid the 5 MACV Photo Teams from filming combat operations. Thus during TET while the rest of Vietnam was in a blood bath, the 5 MACV Photo Teams took a hiatus, staying in our hotel rooms away from the action. Everything was tame until the U.S. Army Vietnam (USARV) spent \$18,000 dollars apiece 3 flag poles. That told me the war was to civilized and get my rear out.

At Camera Branch it was a tumultuous period, where APC was filming nearly as many civil service films as Army productions. The shortage of personnel created pure pandemonium to the extent that in one 5 day work week, I was assigned to work on 7 different productions. Some jobs was just long enough to film a single scene. Others were from 8 A.M. until the morning coffee break at 9:30 A.M. I recall several days of working on one movie set from 8 A.M. until lunch. One movie, the producer coordinated with Suffolk County to film at the Police Station and Court House requiring a full day. Suffolk County is over 50 miles out on Long Island. Some other scenes were filmed upstairs in Special Effects. Most were shot on the ground level main stage, which was the largest sound stage on the East Coast. Other movies were filmed in the basement where stages "B" and "C" were located. I never knew how long I'd be on any given set. In addition there was location film- a tank movie was being shot at Ft. Knox, Ky. and a helicopter movie at Ft. Rucker, Ala. I would work on both endeavours.

Out of all the chaos I remember several isolated incidents among the 7 jobs in a single week. However 2 sagas I experienced I remember well. One was good the other rotten. The bad film was so technical the director refused to shoot a single frame of film without the Washington, D.C. technical advisor on the set! It was on the D.I.M.E.S. System. Maybe this thearconym D.I.M.E.S. System was part of the INDUSTRIAL FUNDING the military undertook by Secretary McNamara tenure. All I can remember is that manpower plus time equals productivity. It was so boring the the civilian cameraman fell asleep while shooting one scene. I had to wake him up to shut off the camera. The other civil service flick had a government employee with a guardian angel that only the employee could see or hear. It set up a few strange events where family and co-workers heard him talking to himself and considered he had a screw loose.

Among the confusion and the few other military besides me were all in the same situation, being moved from set to set all the time. However one tidbit that I can reminisce on was a bit of TV news. I heard that Campbell's was ordered to get the marbles out of their soup, by the Justice Department. Some weeks later walking onto the set, the gaffers, electricians, grips, director, cameraman and producer were mocking and harrassing the actor over that commerical. It seems Madison Avenue Ad agencies have an unwritten law to never sink a spoon into soup! They just skim the surface of the bowl as correct procedure. To get the vegetables and meat to the surface where skimming the surface a spoon full of broth, meat and veggies would create a pleasing spoon full, the Ad agency added marbles to the soup bowl to bring the desired spoon full of meat and veggies to the skimming surface.

Another actor was kidded on the set because he did a shaving advertisement. I saw the commerical many times, but I can't remember if the Ad was for shaving cream or razor blades? I remember from the commerical he put shaving cream on only one side of his face and shaved his entire face with the same razor. I think he used a credit card with sound mike close to his face to hear the stubbles and the sound difference between the shaving cream and no shaving cream side of his face. He complained to us it was the worst shave he ever had. He also claimed he was lucky he didn't nick his face shooting that Ad.

Of course the film shooting time depended on the length of the film. A 30 minute film would be completed quicker than an hour long film. The film I was most assigned to work on was the guardian angel production. The ghost had never worked for the Army before. When he complained to the director that he hadn't been paid, as soon as the paperwork was ready, I was asked to escort the actor to the finance office in another building.

On the way he told me he had a semi regular acting job, that of a doctor on a daytime soap opera. He said he was called to work an average of 1 day about every 3 weeks. I heard the government got a special union rate of \$80.00 a day for silent actors. If the role required sound voice the pay jumped to \$120.00 a day in 1969. I don't really know, but I guess minumim wage was about \$2.75 a hour or \$22.00 a day.

If you think you could live on a gross wage of \$120.00 , just remember Federal Income Tax and Social Security were deducted. New York had a state income tax, along with a city occupation tax. Then union dues and talent agency fees were taken out of that \$120.00 pay check. Then there was always the chance of the casting couch syndrome that got the actor or actress into see the money bags for the job, but never guaranteed a job on the set. Other deductions were rent, utilities, transportation, HBA (health and beauty aids) that included wardrobe styles, haircuts, laundry and dry cleaning. Then you can talk about food. In no way a single day of work could do the trick. Actors needed every possible job and never knew if or when a acting position might call. It is a hap-hazard occupation, and why starving actors support themselves as restaurant wait staff or other careers.

One day while on the guardian angel movie set, during the morning coffee break, I was changing a 1,000 film magazine and threading the BNC Mitchell Camera. In the closed door stairwell, I could see and hear the government worker and guardian angel mentor in a heated argument. They were face to face and red nose with throat muscles extended yelling at each other. I was dumbfounded and at a loss for a plan of action. The film had been nearly a month in filming. I couldn't let one actor quit the project, yet I had no concept as to the root of the dispute.

I didn't know what I could do? But I had to do something to quite down the anger. Lucky for me before I was finished with my task it ended. Cool as a cucumber one calmly stated you know your line. Everything was back to normal. Christ they were just rehearsing their lines for an up-coming scene! I was marvelled that an actor could turn on-turn off anger or other emotions, like a light switch, water faucet etc. Even more to see actors turn on tears at will to a scene of acting emotion. Especially night after night on live theatre like in "WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF", I can only envy those with such talents. Such was the case I didn't need to intercede with their rehearsal after all. Man I was hoping to be on the set and see the rushes or dailies, but no such luck. I was on other projects when that scene was shot!

Slightly over a month at the Pic Center I was called away to cover the last Deseret Test Center (DTC) Project. The treaty to never use WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION had been signed this year. Thus this project could well be the last of DTC. All research, development and testing would cease in 1969.

Slightly over a month at the Pic Center and being switched from project to project, I felt like being slouched around in a agitator washing machine, I was called away to substitute on a Deseret Test Center project, because one man didn't possess the required security clearance. Being a last minute substitute, I had no say in what equipment or travel arrangements. All I knew was go to San Juan, Puerto Rico and wait!

The team flew out of LaGuardia Airport on a early morning bird on the 28th of April, 1969. This was supposed to be only a 3 or 4 day assignment. It was possibly one of DTC's final projects, because the U.S. had or was going to sign the treaty forbidding WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION from being used in war. Testing WMD's was DTC's only mission. DTC's expertise was now useless. Out of business!!!

We landed at San Juan some time around noon and had to wait quite awhile for the bus to Roosevelt Roads Naval Air Station (NAS) to arrive at the airport. We finally headed out for Rosie or Rosy as its referred to by naval personnel. Along the way I saw scores of grass shacks selling rum. Hawaii also had a main stay of growing sugar cane, but I never saw rum stands in Hawaii. It soon hit me that the caribbean region, that from Jamaica to Puerto Rico are famed for rum that dates back to buccaneers and pirate era in this area. The bus even passed a Bacardi distillery along the way. Thus rum would be a major island commodity.

By the time we checked in at the transit barracks, it was closing in on super time and the chances of routine traffic happening after the close of normal business hours was slim. Maybe 1 out of 10 chances of getting to our LOCATION (X) yet tonight. Normally one alert crew, 1st responders and emergency personnel were on duty after normal business hours.

Everyone in the barracks was talking about the casino downtown and the gambling life style that Puerto Rico extended. There seemed to be a passion for hitting the casino. With the outlook for spending the night here at Roosevelt Roads, I didn't see much excuse not to follow the crowd into town. I had never been to Puerto Rico and maybe never get back, so I chanced it.

The casino wasn't that far away, but still out of reasonable cab fare. The bus arrived downtown adjacent to the casino at sundown. The western sky was bright red at sundown. It was early for the evening crowd, who were at home just relaxing from work or having dinner, but too early for serious gambling. The card dealers were just sitting at their tables shuffling the deck, waiting for a sucker to try and win against the house. As a kid I played 21 with the neighbor kids and won roughly half the time. Down here I lost 3 hands in 90 seconds and gathered my stuff and moved on.

During the Manila Conference I recall our soundman Steve Garvey telling the team he was a slot machine repairman in Vegas. He told us he could set the machine to pay any ratio the house wanted. That trueism was verified in my story THE KHAKI MAFIA available at this website, when I was assigned to collect slot machine money from 21 clubs on Long Binh Vietnam post. As NCIC of this detail to collect and count the clubs gambling take for the past evening. I had the privilege to see the chart for the month above the big boss's desk. It clearing showed for every dollar put in the slot machine it only paid out 33¢. Of course a few machines were rigged to pay out 90% as well as others rigged to pay only 10%, with the majority paying out only 1/3 of the coins dropped

I had never been in a casino before. The black-jack tables ripped me off in a instant. The entire casino activities was nothing like the movies portrayed. The one armed bandits teased me some every now and then I'd get 3 cherries or plums to entice more endurance and raise expectations. However some where about 9 P.M. I got bored of the fast life under the Tropic Of Capricorn, and headed back to the bus stop. I probably spent a whopping \$15.00 and was not in the least impressed with a gambling casino.

Back at the barracks I was alone. The rest of the photo team's bunks were vacant, their bags gone. The mattress were folded in half. They disappeared in the night. Against all odds, they were gone but to where? Well I couldn't cry over spilled milk. I'd have to see what transpired in the morning.

On the distaff side, by Thanksgiving 1968, I foresaw wedding bells on the horizon after leaving Nam during the coming February. I never believed in love at first sight. That lovie-dovie stuff was reserved for romance novels and Hollywood dramatics. That was the artistic way of condensing several months of dating into a few romantic moments of interlude and passion. Real fairy tale romance is something for fiction and certainly not realistic, until it happens to you!

What I encountered at the New York World's Fair was a mature Disney World atmosphere. The world's nations pavilions extolled the virtues and assets of that country with it represented, while totally ignoring the sovereignty of it's liabilities. This disingenious forum spawned my desperation with the pomp and circumstance display. I was feeling a side of frustration, demoralizing and dispondent that this was all a happy feel good show. People from all over the planet were in attendance for this charade.

In final desperation on the way to the subway station and exit I came by the French pavilion. At an alcove entrance that was more an employee entrance, not the front door. In the alcove looking through a window, God there she stood on the second level. I only saw her upper torso, because of a safety barrier preventing her from falling to the ground floor. I had no idea what her name might be or anything else. But just the sight of her I said if there is any way, I want her for my wife. I didn't know if she was happily married, divorced, had 3 linoleum lizards hanging on her apron strings, going steady with someone or nothing else, except her beauty. So there was a honest to God LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT!

Inside the exhibit she was waiting on 2 male customers at her jewelry counter. Her hands were spread wide sort of displaying her own rings as well as a protective wall for the rings she was showing the gentlemen customers. Her hands were such incase someone tried to steal a ring. I could see any wedding ring. I wasn't about to intervene with a sale. Especially since I could not tell a ruby from emerald. An onyx from a tope, so why try to conduct a sensible conversation with her, this dream come true was out of the question. I couldn't get back to the World's Fair anymore that year, because I was sent out on Project Echo & Echo for DTC. There I filmed the Smithsonian Institute banding birds around the equator until early in December, after the fair closed for the season.

The next year between DTC Projects High/Low and Magic Sword when the fair again was opened for the 1965 season, I went to the World's Fair again, after thinking about this gal all winter. My luck was still holding, for she was once again behind the same counter. This early in the season few people were at the fair. Even though I was an introvert all my life, no customers, I got up the courage to ask her her name, I had to also ask her for a work schedule, so I'd know when she was off from work. I dashed back to the barracks, grabbing the Queens Phone Book, low and behold she was listed as Helen Thompson in a town Called Kew Gardens. I never heard of that community. On her day off I hailed a taxi and gave the driver the address. I was soon there. It certainly wasn't walking distance, but then Queens was an entire county. When I got to the address my hands were clammy and feet shaking in my shoes. I was wondering if she was home, did she have a guest, would a rug-rat answer the door or worst yet slam the door in my face?

To my surprise she didn't slam the door in my face, but instead invited me inside. No guests, no kids just the two of us. Our conversation flowed like water. The introvertness disappeared. Our cohesiveness was fluent and propelling. She told me that she had been a ball room dancer and married to a Marine Corp officer. Our thoughts locked onto each other. By the time sundown came I had no inclination to depart. I wished we could sit and converse all night. She said she divorced the Jar-Head, telling me he wanted a Kopi-doll for people to look at but not touch. After sundown I had to leave, she asked how I got there. When I said taxi, she said there was a bus stop on the next block and I could get a transfer to the subway to get back to the barracks. She also said I could call her in the morning. Thus started a 12 year friendship.

Helen could have dated many guys, beside the ballroom scene. She was of Hungarian decent and was hired by the immigration authorities during the 1956 Hungarian revolution, when thousand of Hungarians escaped to the U.S. She worked as a translator and made lots of long lasting friends among the displaced people. I felt like king of the hill that we clicked so well. She possessed a very rare attribute, in that she smiled with her eyes. Since I didn't have a ring on her finger and on the rode so much, she was free to date anyone she wanted, but only mentioned a Hungarian sculptor/jeweler. She showed me all her rings that he created for her and suggested I have a family coat of arms ring made for myself.

As things materilized I wasn't the only one foaming at the mouth to be with Helen. While I was in that whimsical world of playing the stock market and mutual funds, attempting to make 2 bucks out of 1 buck, to pay for the wedding rings, marriage and honeymoon that would allow 2 people to live as cheap as 1. As things evolved a neighbor bachlor on the same floor in the apartment building, was also foaming at the mouth when ever there was a junction in their roads around the building. He tended his sickly father, until the elder passed away. Then his retardation evaporated and asked her for a wedding. Since they were neighbors and not strangers the romance flew by, and marriage was expedited.

Thus began a multi year relation. When I was in New York she treated me as if I was God's gift to women. When I was on the road trumping all over the world, we corresponded by mail at least weekly. From love at first sight to lover and now prepared to ask her hand in matrimony, when I got the most elegance DEAR JOHN Letter one could ever hope to receive. It was so simple. So direct yet to the point. I marvelled at its simplicity. When the man asked her to marry him, She answered by telling him YES--IF I CAN KEEP EVERY FRIEND I CURRENTLY HAVE!!! He agreed! The beauty of this was simple. Helen had damn good SCRUPLES. I would learn her husband Colin likewise had SCRUPLES. The 2 of them gave me scruples not to interfere with their happiness. I could see my love, but not touch her anymore. Weird as it was I was a friend of the family for 7 more years. If I hadn't been shipped off to Germany for 3 years we would have maintained contact.

It was truly odd being married to a Marine Corp Officer and living in New York City that must have 10,000 jobs listings at the unemployment office. Every description from carriage driver for horse drawn rides in Central Park to limo driver to sales clerks of all vocations. I mean no one wants a car salesman to sell clothing. There are many sales persons. There are stock brokers to hair dressers. Insurance sales people to sanitation personnel, etc, etc, etc. How odd that a Jar-head and grunt got her attention baffles me, but I'm glad it happened. When I met Colin, the husband I instantly knew he did not possess a jealous bone in his body. I just said the better man won her heart. If however there was any problem she knew I'd be on her side. Probably the oddest thing of all, Colin was affiliated with the photo business. He worked for a division of Kodak selling photo chemicals to metropolition photo labs.

Back at Roosevelt Roads, I'd have to face the music in the morning. The of photo team was someplace, but here was LOCATION (X)? With such vague instructions what more could one expect? Even if I was kidnapped and given truth serum what could I say, when you don't know anything. In the morning several officers gave me a going over, but gave up after realizing I was dumb to their question. I was escorted out onto the tarmac and a waiting chopper. This was the first time I would fly in a Navy H-46, a slightly smaller chopper than the Army H-47 Chinook.

They officers might have tried to Court Marshal me for AWOL (Absent With Out Leave)? But DTC had never charged entire photo teams for not going out into the HOT GRID when covering DTC Projects! They certainly couldn't charge me for FAILURE TO REPAIR, or not being at an assigned location at a certain time quoted.

The flight time to LOCATION (X) was about a ½ hour over water until we landed on a island. Utilizing the National Geographic Book of maps, the Isle of Vieques is located about 30 miles Southeast of Roosevelt Roads Naval Air Station. The isle is about 30 miles long by 5 miles wide at its apex the highest point is 301 feet MSL (mean sea level). The island is split in half, with the U.S. Government owning half the island under the caretakership of the Marine Corps Station at Camp Lejune, N.C. The rest of the island belongs to spanish speaking natives with the main town of Isabel Segunda.

The flight over water was no problem. It just seemed a long trip for a 30 mile journey to take 30 minutes, when we were flying at over a 100 miles an hour. A greeting party met the helo and I was taken to quenset hut with the rest of the photo team. Outside the sky condition was scattered clouds, with puffy cumulas less than 6/10 sky coverage. Here and there were Alto and Stratus cumulas thunderheads taking on an ominous look of things to come.

While I unpacked I was quizzed about last night. I told them I simply went to the casino and came back. They told me they were notified after 7 P.M. to get ready to leave. So the Vieques Island was location (X). It started to thunder and lightning strike. Soon it was raining.

For much of the afternoon it poured rain. Later in the afternoon, some marine came by to notify that Supper would be late. It was let known the living area was on high ground, while the kitchen and mess hall was located in a gully. The low land was flooding. Later it was rumored that turds and toilet paper were floating around in the kitchen. Still later volunteers were wanted to clean up the mess in the kitchen. Raw sewage for din-din WELCOME TO THE MARINES. What we ate it wasn't memorable. I would have been happy eating C-rations. I've eaten them nearly all my 7 years in the Army.

I believe The next morning somebody drove us to some sand dunes over looking the would be grid. From this vantage point of 75 to 80 feet elevation over looking the beach, one could see a ship about a ½ miles off shore safely away from the reef. We were told marines would climb down the cargo nets to waiting LCVP's (Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel). The landing craft would bring the Marines ashore. The Marine would be dressed in full rubber protective clothing. As the Marine reached the shore Navy jets flying 200 feet off the water would bomb the coming ashore Marines with simulat nerve agent. The mission was for the marines to climb the sand dunes to a point behind where we were now standing.

Things didn't go as planned. In fact MURPHY'S LAW happened. If anything can go wrong, it will and it did !!! First off the Navy jets flying that low were not in a strategic bombing position. Flying so low their was no aiming mechanism for accurately delieve the bombs. As things turned out the Navy pilots couldn;t hit the Marines worth a damn. Many of the bombs landed hundreds of feet short of the beach, some half way between the ship and shore. Other bombs landed behind the us camera crew and even behind the finish line, a 100 feet behind our vantage point.

I have to give the Navy ground crew a huge degree of credit. The bomb racks are mounted on the wings HARD POINTS and magnets hold the iron bombd onto the racks. For this project the Navy pilots used sacks of GOLD MEDAL Flour as bombs. There is no metal in sacks of baking flour to hold or use as a magnet. The ground crews had to open each sack of flour and insert steel plates or strips and re-sow the bags shut, for sacks of flour to be dropped from bomb racks. We could see the impact points on the beach because the beach was beige in color while the flour was pristine white.

Meanwhile the Marines were creating havoc for the medical staff. Almost immediately the Marines began falling out. Normally the medics could expect a 4 to 5% drop out rate. Here in full rubber, even without about 60 pounds of combat gear the Jar-Heads were dropping constantly. Heat stroke and heat exhaustion were taking a toll wearing the rubber suit that would protect the troops from persistence agents like (VX) nerve agent. Instead of single digit figures, the medics accumulated nearly 85% percent that never made it to the finish line. Here in the tropics the full protection of the rubber suit drastically reduced the combat effectiveness of the fighting force.

The results of the 1st trial was so out of context to the planner envisioned results of all concerned. The project planners at DTC, the general in charge of the Marines and the admiral overseeing the aviators, they all foresaw the participants of the trial with contretemps. They took the trial as a sporting event, where practice, practice makes perfect. Not as a life and death toxic agent war game, where there is no second chance. The 1st trial left the leaders with much trepidation.

The results could leave a stigma on their reputation and leadership abilities. The Marine general couldn't swallow the fact that his men failed, flunked, had short-comings and training weaknesses so blatant the credibility of his command came into question!!

For the pilots flying barely 200 feet off the ocean at 500 miles an hour had only a split second to see the beach and drop their bombs. It was a hap-hazard arrangement at best. I can attest from experience see story: ARMY PHOTOG FLYS A-37 at this website. The Air Force in Vietnam cruised at 3,500 feet elevation waiting for a FAC (Forward Air Controller) to identify a target or ground troops in combat that needed an air strike. The FAC would mark the target by smoke rocket. From their altitude any sortie of prop-driven Sky-raidiers, F-4 Phantoms, F-5 Freedom Fighters or A-37s would commence a bombing run at a 60 degree dive and utilizing a target location aiming device by the windsheild would drop a 500 or 750 pound bomb, and pull out of the dive in a climbing arc back up to orbit altitude for another run at the target.

Those planes heading to North Vietnam had the aid of photo reconnaissance Pic to identify the target. Even then the target was a bridge, plant, staging area something big. In South Vietnam the target could and was often no larger than a bunker or manhole size objective.

The Navy pilots probably had a sighting device useful during dives, but worthless bombing from a horizontal position. That was why the Navy pilots could not hit the Marines on the 50 foot wide shore as the LCVPs reached the beach.

For the 2nd trial the most evident alteration of the project were the full rubber suit were exchanged for the lighter, cooler cloth coverall. This suit wouldn't protect against (VX) nerve agent, but most others. The reward was instantly seen. The success rate jumped to 85% reaching the finish line, and only about 15% dropping out of the exercise. For the pilots unless the criteria for the project was altered from horizontal to vertical bombing, little improvement was feasible.

With the cloth protective suit the rest of the trials went without incident. The project was scheduled for only about 5 trials. However it was highly rumored that both the Navy and Marine Corps injected additional funds into the project prolonging the estimated one week time table, to double that time. This was a means in an attempt to cancel out the 1st trials horrible results which were indeed detrimental to the Navy admiral and Marine Corps general reputation and career.

As a finale to the project an announcement was made for all those involved with the project. The announcement had an aria of DTC's consecration and/or orchestration, therefore there wasn't any opposition toward my electing to avail myself of the helo ride to St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I just knew I wasn't coming back here or to Puerto Rico. I'll fly straight to New York from St. Thomsas. I had never been in the Caribbean before and may never get back this way again. So why not see as much as possible. I took my suitcase with me, my airline ticket and I was off to the helo pad. None of the other photo team members wanted to go.

The flight took about 45 minutes. Landing at Truman Airport I wasn't sure if the airport was named after the president or just my wishful thinking. The most striking thing was the abbreviated runway. I doubt if it was 5,000 feet long that's less than a mile. I was appalled with its shortness, much less there were hazards at one end of the runway. It would take quite an experienced pilot flying DC-9s or 727s to fly into this airport, yet that the standard aircraft operating between the mainland and here.

After I checked my bags in a terminal locker, I booked my flight back to New York. Thus I knew how much time I had to sightsee of St. Thomas. I do not remember if I took a cab or bus to town. I can't remember it's name. It took me back several centuries. The street were narrow. something for a donkey cart. The buildings were small. This was no veneer, but authentic rustic pirate strong hold of bygone days. Without a doubt this was straight out of the buccaneer era. The doors were made of 2 inch thick planks. The hinges were wrought iron. Massive in size to hold up the timber used in the door. Most were over 15 inches in length. The locks were just as impressive. To say nothing of the keys to unlock the doors. I expected to see the JOLY ROGER flying over the buildings. Furniture was sparce. The speciality was cheap booze.

From numerous trips through the territory of Guam I knew coming back to the states each person can bring back a gallon of alcoholic beverages tax free. The beauty is outside CONUS (for Continental U.S.) there is no federal or state taxes on booze. While 1 quart of Jim Beam in New York cost over \$6.00 with sales tax. In the territories it was about \$2.50 a bottle. Hell I scarfed up 2 gallons. I'd pay the added tax on one gallon.

For what it was worth on the 9th of May, 1969 I boarded a Pan Am flight back to New York. I can't remember paying any extra for my ticket back than what my (CATORGY Y) government seat cost into San Juan, Puerto Rico. If my ticket was less, UNCLE SAM got the advantage. Coming through customs I almost laughed at the tax collector, when the person told me I owed an extra \$11.32 for the extra gallon of booze. That was a steal!!!!@

Outside the terminal, I grabbed a taxi heading straight to Helen and Colin Mason's place in Kew Gardens to drop off the booze. While the Pic Center had a fully stocked bar in the basement of the barracks, not a single drop was allowed out of the cellar. I meant for all of us to partake of the alcohol at will even if I wasn't around. I had a variety of gin, vodka, rum, bourbon and an assortment of other booze among the 8 bottles, in a handy carry box. I'm sure either Helen or Colin or both drove me back to APC to sign in from the TDY.

Getting to my room to unpack, I found out that I was only about 4 hours later getting back to the Big Apple. What they missed in that short amount of time may haunt them for ever? I was satisfied with my actions, and only regret that I never did get back to any part of the Caribbean region. I was glad I did what I did.

I wasn't born when the Army bought the studio from Paramount Pictures, but I was there for its demise, that nearly cost me my life. By the 1960's television and video tape had encroached on the mass media that was making films antiquated and not cost effective to produce. First of all film can't be erased and recorded over. Secondly film needed processing once exposed. These steps took at least overnight to several days to see the results. This compared to instant replay with video tape and erase unuseable scenes.

During my dying days at APC in June, 1970 I was assigned to work in a separate building housing the film vaults. We were instructed that there was a chance of nitrate film in the vaults. I spent about 4 days before signing out on my way to White Sands Missile Range, in New Mexico. I was home in Pa. for 2 days, when on the TODAY Show I heard a NEWS FLASH (An explosion in a New York photo lab kills 2 with several injured.) I knew immediately that guys I worked with just 2 days ago were dead. They tossed a nitrate based roll of film into the grinder and it blew up. Two days later and I would be part of the carnage. I salvaged much of the motion picture film the Vietnam archives had from the vaults I worked.

Upon closing the equipment assets of APC were divided between White Sands Missile Range, Redstone Arsenal in Al. Tobyhanna Depot in Pa. and Ft. Story in Ga. The manpower was split among White Sands, Redstone Arsenal and Ft. Story.

P.S. It's come to my attention the old Army studio are being utilized by THE MUPPETS!

Written Fall of 2016

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