

BRAD J HALLIDAY - My Military Service

Written by Brad J Halliday

USAF 1982-1987 and USN 1996-2001

After returning home from an LDS Mission to England from 1979-1981 and not able to find good employment or an affordable lodging near San Jose CA where my parents and family lived and where I spent the greater part of my childhood. I did a little research and ended up joining the US Air Force.

My father served a tour as an officer in the Navy mid to late 1950's, and my older brother served as an enlisted sailor in the late 1970's, my father had a cousin who made the Landing at Normandy on D-Day in WWII, and on my mother's side we had ancestors who fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. You might say that military service has been viewed as a duty for many in our family.

I left for basic training at Lackland AFB, San Antonio TX later in the summer of 1982. After basic I went to tech school at Sheppard AFB in Wichita Falls TX to train as an Operating Room or Surgical Service technician, passing instruments doctors during surgeries. As it turned out I didn't have the stomach for that career field and was transferred to the Motor Pool and started driving everything from sedans and pickup trucks to school busses. I drove enlisted and officer alike wherever they needed to go in the San Antonio area or just on base. I quickly grew board of being stationed at Lackland AFB and the uptight atmosphere at a training base and volunteered to transfer to Guam USA in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

While stationed in Guam from 1984-1987. Guam was about 30 miles long and 4-8 miles wide. That makes it a little smaller than Salt Lake's Antelope Island. Often I went snorkeling off the reef and eventually learned to SCUBA dive and dove on a few WWII wrecks, among those were a Japanese Zero (Japans primary fighter plane), and two ship wrecks, both Tankers from WWII. I got acquainted with the vast variety of exotic foods they had on Guam. There was Kelaguan beef where the beef was prepared raw with a touch of boonie Pepper (a small hot red chili pepper), soaked in lemon juice with onions and served with rice. They also had varieties of Kelaguan prepared with cooked chicken or raw fish. I loved them all. The foods were like a blending of Spanish, Pilipino and Chinese foods. A man could really get fat living there. Many of the islanders did. It seemed like the locals who called themselves "Chamorro" looked great until they turned 30, and then it was as if they took fat pills and put on 50 lbs.

Anderson AFB was located on the northern tip of the island. The runways ran east and west with the west end stopping about 30 yards short of a 400 foot cliff that dropped off into the pacific. Years before I got there during the Viet Nam War, a B-52 Stratobomber, (B-52 Bomber) stalled just after takeoff and crashed into the ocean. To this day you can pick out it's outline in the shallow water just beyond the cliffs. The story is that they were launching B-52's at 3 second intervals and one with an older engine configuration started to overtake the aircraft ahead so the pilot reduced the throttle from 100% to 80% and lost lift and the aircraft fell into the ocean all six souls lost. There were a number of other aircraft wrecks such as a C-140 Hercules that ran into the cliff when landing.

Neither of these aircraft crashed while I was stationed at Anderson AFB, I did see wreckage. While on a hike a friend and I recovered an aspirin bottle among the C130 wreckage that was strewn about the cliff and jungle at the base of the cliff. Between the Ocean and base of the cliff there was a thin strip of jungle. There was some of the tail section and bits of aircraft and shattered propeller just below the runway.

A friend of mine was killed when he went down about 200 miles N/W of Guam. LT Carlos Miller USN was a P-3 pilot. Carlos Miller was a midshipman at the Naval Academy and attended the same LDS Ward as Marry Ann and I 1977-1979. He married MaryAnn Wood after he graduated the Academy. This was a common occurrence. Many young women from the area all around Annapolis ended up marrying the ensigns' right after graduation from the Academy. He was stationed at the air strip at Naval Communications Station "NAVCAMS" Guam. I was at church and Mary Ann approached me and asked what I was doing there. I told her I was in the Air Force and got stationed there. While Carlos' P-3 was broken down in Japan, he decided to catch a ride back to Guam on a Navy A-3 Skywarrior. This was an older aircraft and when they were about 200 miles from Guam, they radioed they were having minor electrical problems. A few minutes later they dropped off radar and were never heard from again. No wreckage was ever found. We believe the aircraft must have encountered a cascade effect of system failures after the electrical problem was reported and gone down and broke up on impact with the water. It was a shock to me to lose someone so close to me. Our branch president spoke at the memorial service and said "this is the price of freedom".

It was during the cold war that I served in the Air Force. While stationed in Guam we went into alert more than once because of things the Russians (Soviets) were doing. One time they decided to put all their ships to sea and start flying a whole lot of extra sorties with their air force. They were probably going into an exercise themselves. Unlike the US and her allies, the Soviets never announce the commencement of military exercises, so we had to presume they were actually starting military action against the US or their allies. As a result, we loaded our bombers with Nuclear Weapons and taxied them to the end of the runways, and parked them there. They kept the crews in the aircraft and after a while let the crews stand down but kept the aircraft at the end of the runways standing ready and the crews were kept on alert ready to be scrambled. We stayed at this heightened state of alert for about three days before standing down. The point was to let the Russians see by their reconnaissance satellite photos that we were ready and willing to defend ourselves and our allies with the use of Nuclear Weapons if necessary. This was a game the Russians liked to play on a regular basis. On a regular basis our fighters had to escort Russian Bear Bombers out of US airspace. This became so routine that our pilots and RO's took pictures and waved at the crews of the Russian aircraft. I would have been a little more like "Tom Cruise" in "Top Gun" and flipped the bird at just so there was nothing lost in translation.

Philippine President Marcos was deposed 1986 after ruling since 1965. The US owed him some protection and support because he led guerrillas attacks against the Japanese during their occupation of the Philippines during WWII. After he had his political opposition killed there was a popular uprising against him and it looked like it was going to get nasty. So the US government encouraged him to step down. He and his wife were taken to Clark AFB in Manila and flown to Guam and in turn to Hawaii

where he lived until his death in 1989. His wife Imelda Marcos had to leave most of her more than 100 pairs of shoes behind; the Marcos' took with them more than twenty-eight million cash in Philippine currency. While the Marcos' were on their layover in Guam enroute to Hawaii the local press was all over the place and managed to sneak onto base under false pretenses to get a scoop on where Marcos was. The press was handled with kid gloves and escorted off base again. While all this was going on, Anderson AFB was on alert. We loaded a bunch of B-52's with conventional bombs and readied them for takeoff. This went on for 9 days prior to Marcos being brought to Guam and hosted at Anderson AFB. Even though he was a corrupt bastard, the US owed him at least safe haven. It was an exciting and long 9 days. We covered our duties in 12 shifts while on alert. Day shift and Night shift, 7-7. I was glad when it was over. I was pretty tired with all the extra running around and keeping so many B-52's ready. My job was to tow generators and air conditioning units to and from the aircraft while the crew chiefs worked on them.

It was usually in the upper 90's f on Guam. By lunchtime our shirts were sweat soaked and salt stained. The trucks we towed the AGE (aerospace ground equipment) with had no air conditioning, all we could do was roll windows down and sweat. You got used to it being hot and humid, but it was still uncomfortable. When I finished my tour I flew into San Francisco, and it felt pretty cold after the tropic climate of Guam. I eventually moved to Rexburg and used my GI Bill (VEAPS) to start school at Ricks College. I studied Graphics and Design. I moved to Salt Lake and transferred to the University of Utah graduating with a Baccalaureate of Fine Art in 1992.

In 1996 I joined the US Navy Reserves at Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City, UT. I spent the next four years attending drill at the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve Training Center at Fort Douglas, with an occasional weekend in San Diego on the USS McKee (a sub tender that provided maintenance for submarines) at Point Loma. We spent our two week annual training there also. We would go in February to get away from the winter cold in Salt Lake. While on the USS McKee I served with deck division, as I was striking for Boatswain's Mate. Eventually I made petty officer 3rd class. In 1999 I took my last annual training on board the USS Thorn in the Mediterranean. I met the ship in Naples Italy. It took about 19 hrs to get there by passenger jet to Rome then motor coach (bus) to Naples. USS Thorn was a DD destroyer armed with tomahawk and harpoon missiles with two five inch guns, one fore and one aft. While serving on board in January 1999 an executive officer mentioned they were short of men so I volunteered to stay longer and had my orders amended to allow for me to stay. I stayed until mid March 1999. Not long after we made way from Naples, we practiced taking another ship under tow. It was a smaller German radio ship, about the size of our frigates, with an antenna array under a dome that ran the length of her superstructure. After a few attempts by the German ship to shoot a line over, our gunner's mate took a shot from his M-14 with the spool of line and made it the first try. A small line is fed over tied to a larger line which is tied to our regular ships mooring line. Our line was staged on deck in a zigzag to be paid out without tangling. Our tow exercise was successful. Later in the cruise we made port call in Corfu, we tied up to a mooring buoy. It was interesting to see how all these things were done. A small boat was sent out with a small line tied to a larger line that in turn was connected to the buoy with a Clovis.

We made port calls to Bari and Trieste Italy, Split Croatia and Corfu Greece. The NATO task force we were part of had ships from Turkey, Greece, Spain, Great Britain and Germany. I was given an opportunity to participate in a sailor exchange, and spent a night on a Turkish ship (old US Knox class frigate). I observed that the Turks ran a "tight ship", the birthing quarters were kept extremely neat and clean. More so than our ship, I'm sad to say. The Turkish sailors seemed better disciplined than the American sailors too. Not to say they were better at their jobs than the Americans.

Things started to heat up in Kosovo. The Serbian Army had invaded and was torturing civilians. So President Clinton asked our task force to stay off the coast of Albania to watch and listen. Radio intercepts gave away the situation in Kosovo. We did the best "saber rattling" we could in hope the Albanians would send gun boats out to confront us. The Albanians were close allies to the Serbs. I was on the bridge when we made a run at the territorial waters of Albania, holding our breath until we turned a mile or two short of entering their waters. Nothing happened, no action, no one came out to play. A few days later there was a pretty bad storm, I was on the bridge at the helm. It was pretty challenging keeping her straight as the wind and waves tried to push us off course. We were not taking green water over our bow, but were enjoyed a pretty lively ride, with spray hitting the pilothouse widows.

The day after the storm, we spotted a life ring adrift. Probably by a fishing boat during the storm. Our captain used the opportunity to call a man overboard drill. We all manned the sides and pointed at the life ring and the ship made turns until we were able to bring it along side, hook it and bring it aboard. It was surprisingly difficult to see, even though it was bright orange, as the waves kept obscuring our view. I can see how hard it would be to find and recover a sailor who fell overboard. Our uniforms are made to blend in with the sea, and only our head would be visible. Odds are against finding someone out there in just a life vest.

In March I returned to Salt Lake, and a few months I put in for orders and was assigned to the USS George Philip out of San Diego CA. I only lasted on the ship for 7 months before medical problems got me assigned to shore duty. Before leaving the ship we, sailed to Puerto Vallarta Mexico, Victoria BC Canada, and Juneau Alaska. Both Ports were enjoyable, but Mexico was most fun. A couple of shipmates and I went ashore on liberty and found a stable up river and rented three horses and a guide to take us out for a couple of hours. It cost each of us \$8:00 for two hours.

In Alaska I visited a glacier and took a few pictures, that was just about all there was to do. Sunday I did manage to go to church, and was fed lunch at the Kearns family's home. I gave them a tour of the ship when they brought me back.

Victoria BC was very pleasant and there were plenty of restaurants and a nice harbor. I remember how clean Victoria was. The weather was nice with some light rain on a couple the days there. The ship had mechanical problems so we got a few extra days of liberty in Victoria.

I spent the rest of my tour on shore in San Diego working in the "sail loft" at SIMA (ships intermediate maintenance activity) on base. We sewed machine covers and re upholstered a few captain's chairs and mess deck chairs. Before ending my tour the USS Cole was bombed by suicide bombers in Aden, Yemen.

Al-Qaida was responsible.

I was medically discharged from the Navy in San Diego, in May 2001. A few months later on 11 September 2001, our lives changed forever.

I returned to Utah, moved Springville, married a good woman from Orem and moved to Lehi UT. Her son Carlos A Aragon, joined the Marines and was killed in Afghanistan, 3/1/2010.