

“The Outlander” *by Dudley Foster*

Webster’s Dictionary defines an “outlander” as a person who belongs to another region, culture, or group. I fit that definition as I was one of six security officers assigned to CAT/Air Asia/Air America etc. etc. by the CIA.

Our job was to provide the best physical security we could for this very valuable asset and to get the job done, whatever it might be, as securely as possible. There were other Agency employees embedded in the organization, not many, but a few mainly in operations. If we had a job description, I think the last paragraph for all of us would have read “and other duties as assigned.” This is what made the job interesting.

Agency personnel assigned to the CAT complex were under “commercial cover”. We were not to be known as Agency employees. We were to appear to be regular employees. My wife knew, but not my family. Until one morning in Tainan (TNN) my oldest son David, then about age 11, suddenly popped his head up from the Stars and Strips comics and said “I know where you work Dad.” Buzz Sawyer had just walked into the CIA Headquarters lobby and there was the big Agency seal. We had been there to get Yellow Fever shots so I told him I didn’t work there (sorta true, I worked in a different building). I said we had to get Yellow Fever shots to come to Taiwan (true) and there were only two places to get them in Washington, (true) and the other place was in a really bad neighborhood (very true) so we had gotten them at CIA. He seemed to “buy” the story, but he didn’t forget the seal.

How did I get there/here? I was born on a family farm in southern Ohio. A very long time ago, 1927. After a couple of moves, we ended up in Miami Florida the fall of 1941. Living in Miami during the war was interesting, blackouts deprived the German submarines that were hanging out off the coast from having loom to see the silhouettes of ships leaving port at night, working as a volunteer aircraft spotter and instructor with the Air Raid Warning Service. This was in addition to regular school as well as learning to fly a seaplane and getting my license at 17.

I was to graduate from Miami Senior High School in the spring of 1945, but my parents had to go in my place as I was already in the Navy. During Boot Camp, I was selected for the V-12 program, a four-year college officer

preparation program. The Navy in their infinite wisdom sent me to the University of Mississippi. You got quite an education there, but not an academic one. Their lives were so completely different from anything I had ever experienced, that it took a lot of effort to adjust. It was hard to get an academic education as they were unprepared for the number of veterans who returned to college when the war ended. Try Calculus and World History with no textbook. I was fortunate to be able to transfer to Purdue University where I got a serious education and my degree in 1949.

After Purdue, I went to Washington, D.C., and started law school. I attended class in the morning, studied at the Department of Justice Law Library in the afternoon, and worked as a fingerprint technician for the FBI from 3:30 to midnight. After graduation from Purdue the Navy had given me a direct commission. Shortly after that the Korean War started. As I had received a four-year college degree at no cost I felt it only right to volunteer for active duty. During my first deployment to Korea, I was the Air Intelligence officer (AI) for fighter squadron VF-193 on the Aircraft Carrier USS Princeton. The second deployment was again on the Princeton as the AI for the entire air group. A very, very new Lt. Junior Grade in a Lt. Commander's job. The balance of my active duty was as the District Intelligence Officer (Air) for the 6th Naval District.

After four years of active duty in the Navy, I returned to the FBI as a special agent. After basic training in Washington and Quantico, VA. I went to Houston, TX, and then to New York City. New York was not where I wanted to bring up my children and I was able to make the rewarding transfer to the Central Intelligence Agency in January 1957. In 1962 I was selected for the position at Air Asia, in TNN, where I served from June 1963 until the fall of 1968.

Life in TNN settled into a pattern, pretty much normal, kids off to school, mom off to the golf course, dad off to work. I must say it differed from life in the U.S., different environments, different smells, different residents, learn new ways of doing normal tasks. It was all very interesting and worthwhile. On weekends we spent a lot of time at MAAG Beach sailing our little English dingy in the Taiwan Straits. Our friend, the Episcopalian Priest, and I taught sailing for the U.S. Air Force special services. It was an interesting and educational life. All four children thrived.

The job at TNN was pretty basic, supervise the physical security of the Air Asia base with a cadre of 110 guards -- review the reports from my six investigators regarding all the new hires, perform any investigations of a criminal nature, and the most taxing of all aspects of the job -- dealing with the Chinese officialdom.

At this time Air Asia had about 4,000 employees in TNN and the facility was comprised of two parts. One part was on the Chinese Air Force base and the other was “across the road“ where we had the new modern shops building and our new supply building. We were performing heavy service on USAF F-100s, and F-4 C’s from Vietnam, and fixing anything else that taxied through the gate. This was in addition to maintaining all of our own 170/180 aircraft which ranged from Helio Couriers to Boeing 727’s.

In the “Other duties as assigned” department was assisted in the B-908 “Round the Island” crash investigation. To this day the Chinese say the left engine malfunctioned, the pilot lost control and the aircraft crashed killing all 57 people aboard. In our investigation we found that two members of the Chinese Navy boarded the flight, both carrying radar manuals with the interiors of the manuals cut out to accommodate guns. The remains of one of the Navy personnel were found in the cockpit wreckage along with one of the guns. The pilot, Benji Lin, had a hole in his right temple and most of the left side of his head was gone, typical of a gunshot wound. Representatives of what is now the National Transportation Safety Board concluded that the engines were synchronized and within 25 RPM of each other at impact. Our conclusion was the crash was caused by an abortive highjack attempt.

Along the “Other Duties” line were several “black” flights in and around India. As you know a “Black flight” is one where all the aircraft markings are removed and there is nothing on or in the aircraft to reveal who the owner is or who is operating it. Handy for “plausible denial.”

In the past I enjoyed going to the reunions, but being an “Outlander” I never felt I was a part of it all. Then at the Oct. 2000 reunion in San Diego on a sunny afternoon, several of the old timers were sitting around “shooting the breeze” when the subject of James B. “Earthquake” McGovern and Wally Buford came up. They all could not understand why their remains had not been recovered. The location was well known, Life Magazine had even done a story with photos. Naively I said I live in Hawaii I’ll check when I get back. That started a 15-plus-year relationship working with the POW/MIA people

at Hickam Air Force Base regarding the recovery of our flight crews and helping them in their recovery efforts.

When I went out to the Central Identification Lab of Hawaii (CILHI), the laboratory doing the identification of remains, and asked them why Earthquake and Wally hadn't been recovered they checked and had no record of the incident. They said they would check further and found that the State Department had them listed the same as a tourist who had gone out on "a walkabout" and had not come back to the hotel. I pointed out they were on a combat mission authorized by the President of the United States and they were employees of a government-owned entity. CILHI was unaware of the CIA's involvement and said they needed some verification. I was able to get the former Director of CIA Richard Helms to provide a letter so stating. All members of the Hawaiian Congressional delegation also provided letters. CILHI then put Earthquake and Wally on a priority list for recovery.

The parent office of CILHI in Washington then said they needed substantiation. I happened to be in Washington at the time and was able to get an appointment with Buzzy Krongaard, the Counselor to the Director of the CIA. While we were in our meeting, Director Gorge Tenet stopped by and asked what was happening and Buzzy said he was getting an education. The director joined us and I filled them in on the history of CAT and the follow on organizations. They were aware of CAT/Air America, etc. but had no idea about how large an operation it was or the losses incurred. I explained my need for a letter to the Washington office and the Director said 'Done.' I had mentioned the memorial plaque at UT, Dallas and the Director said Headquarters needed something like that. There is now a small replica in the Headquarters lobby.

The Director also asked if McGovern and Buford had a star on the "Wall of Honor" in the Headquarters lobby. I said no and I only knew of two CAT employees that did, Norman Schwartz and Robert Snoddy, the pilots of the aircraft that Downey and Fecteau were on. Schwartz and Snoddy were killed and Downey and Fecteau were captured and spent 20 years in a Chinese prison. The Chinese team that Downey and Fecteau were trying to recover had been captured and a trap was laid by the Communist Chinese.

The Director then said he would like to have a list of all personnel who died in "operations." This led to a lot of research. Which of the 242 names, on the plaque had died in flight operations? There were 149 combat losses.

As a result of the research, I was able to identify how each person on the plaque had died. In addition, it turned out that I was able to exchange information with the POW/MIA folks as I still had contacts at the Agency that could provide unclassified information that was helpful in their work and they could give me information that aided me in my research.

One story, regarding the recovery efforts for McGovern and Buford. On the afternoon of the last day of the third deployment, the recovery team found one set of remains by cutting into a new highway. The Laotians had straightened the old highway and had destroyed the small Buddhist burial site where the locals had buried the crew, Earthquake, Wally, and the local “kickers.” Several weeks later I got a call from the scientist in charge of the identification. He asked if Earthquake had any unusual physical characteristics. I said other than being big I didn't know of any but I would check. I called Felix Smith and asked him. He said Earthquake had a big head and tiny feet. He said “Don't you remember the story of when Earthquake was captured by the Chinese and he refused to walk because it hurt his feet too much? He ended up riding the Chinese officer's horse and the officer had to walk with his soldiers. I called the scientist and told him that Earthquake had a big head and tiny feet and he replied “Bingo.” Earthquake posed a challenge to the end.

Over the years I have been a part of a variety of functions as the CAT representative, such as accompanying Robert Snoddy's sister Ruth, and his daughter, Roberta (who was born after his death), to receive his remains from the POW/MIA group, attended several funerals. The most impressive and emotional one was for Capt. Felix Smith. Because Felix had served in the Merchant Marine during wartime he was eligible for burial at sea. On 12 July 2019, Felix's final wishes were honored from the deck of the Coast Guard Cutter Oliver Berry as his ashes were spread on the Pacific. There was not a dry eye to be seen, even members of the crew were crying. It was an honor to be holding Junko's hand as she received the flag from the Captain. As my wife Nicki and I were quite close to Junko and Felix it was particularly touching. This was truly the end of an era and I felt as though I was no longer an “Outlander” and had become a part of CAT.