

Bill Cline

I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force on June 25, 1950, just as the Korean Peace Action was starting.

Initial assignment was to radar operator school at Keesler AFB, Mississippi and from there to Fort George G. Meade, Maryland.

I volunteered for duty as a Ground Observer Corps (GOC) instructor and was transferred to Trenton, New Jersey. The GOC was patterned after the British system where outlying observation posts reported aircraft movement to a central Filter Center, where volunteers pushed markers representing the reported aircraft around on a horizontal plotting table. I had the enviable job of instructing mostly young women in the art of moving these markers. It was in the Filter Center in Trenton that I met my eventual wife-to-be.

I joined the Air Force for one reason only and that was to fly. Because of the Korean situation, the Air Force resurrected the WW2 plan of training enlisted men as Aviation Cadets and I soon became a part of that training regimen. I trained in the L-21 (Piper Super Cub), T-6 Texan, T-28 and the North American B-25. Because my sitting height was in excess of fighter plane limits (I am 6'5" tall) I ultimately flew the Douglas B-26 in Advanced Training.

Immediately upon completing my B-26 training, I married my beautiful Irish/Ukrainian fiancé whom I had met in Trenton.

The B-26 was the fastest twin-engine flying machine available at the time and was thoroughly enjoyable. A really hot airplane, red-lined at 425 knots. Although I could not get into fighters, the Invader was the next best thing. This was with the 9th Air Force, Tactical Air Command. I also flew the B-45 Tornado and got quite a few hours in our support B-29 and C-54 while at Biggs Field, San Antonio, Texas.

I flew the B-26 for a couple of years until one day I was given the opportunity to fly in a Sikorsky H-19, which was then the primary USAF helicopter in service. I was hooked and volunteered for helicopter school, which was conducted at the Mecca of Air Force pilot training, Randolph AFB, San Antonio, Texas.

Upon completion of helicopter training, I was assigned to Myrtle Beach AFB, South Carolina, again in the Tactical Air Commands 9th Air Force. I served as Assistant Base Operations Officer, Rescue Commander, and watched many of our F-100's staging from Myrtle Beach to Aviano AB, Italy. For two years, I also had the additional duty as Assistant Provost Marshal. While at Myrtle Beach, I checked out in the Grumman SA-16 Albatross, the DeHavilland L-20 Beaver, the C-123, the C-47, the base B-25, and the C-45.



In 1960 I was sent to Osan AB, Korea (K55) where I headed USAF Air Rescue forces for the Republic of Korea (ROK). This was a remote tour and I left my wife and two daughters at Myrtle Beach for a year and a half. Most interesting of my work was carrying the Air Force general

officer to the peace talks at Panmunjom. We also participated in all of the many joint military exercises with our Army and Navy and ROK forces there.

Upon return from Korea, I was assigned as an instructor at the Helicopter School, now at Stead AFB, Reno, Nevada. Ultimately, I spent nearly 6 years at Stead AFB, performing such duties as School Standardization/Evaluation Instructor, and Assistant Group Operations Officer. Since Stead AFB was also home of the Air Force Survival School, I had various duties concerning that activity, too. One of the more pleasant jobs was to report to Harold's Club in downtown Reno to pin on "I Survived" name tags to the men coming out of survival training. Harold's Club sponsored every Tuesday evening to these men, giving them \$5.00 in free gambling chips and two hours free open bar. Needless to say, I was a very popular fellow on Tuesday nights!

In 1967, I was alerted to ship to Nha Trang, South Vietnam, as Detachment Commander of the helicopter rescue unit there. Although this was another remote tour where my wife could not accompany me, she was nevertheless reassured because Nha Trang was well known to be a very quiet, combat-free zone. It was considered to be the "Riviera" of Viet Nam. Three weeks before my departure, I was notified that the Detachment Commander at DaNang had been shot down and I was to replace him. It took quite a bit of courage to eventually tell my wife where I was going.

My introduction to DaNang was noisy. After obtaining a briefing at 38th Air Rescue Squadron headquarters, I hitched a ride from Saigon to DaNang on a creaky old C-124 and we arrived in the dark just as a rocket attack commenced. The young captain who met me didn't seem to be too concerned, saying that this was almost a nightly thing.

My tour at DaNang was extremely interesting. We were flying the Kaman H-43 Huskey, and the primary mission was to provide fire suppression while hovering over crashed or burning fighter aircraft, which were trying to land at DaNang. Also, we had the local base rescue responsibility to respond to pickup pilots who had bailed out in the jungle or in the South China Sea. But, as time progressed, it seemed my detachment at DaNang became the primary means of transporting wounded marines and soldiers to either the Navy triage hospital at China Beach or to one of the two hospital ships, Sanctuary and Repose, which were cruising up and down the coast. I am very proud of the "MASH" work our crews did, especially during the enemy TET offensive in February, 1967. During that month alone, we picked up over 1300 severely wounded marines and GI's.

Returning to the States in late 1967, I was again assigned to the USAF Helicopter School, now at Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, Texas. Initially, I again served as a Flight Commander and in the Stan/Eval section, eventually serving as Executive Officer to the School Commander.

I retired from the U.S. Air Force at Sheppard AFB in July, 1970.

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