

# Memory Items

What is shown here on the right is a “reminder item”, from my past. During the swimming season here in San Diego, it can be found at the edge of my pool. The rest of the year it is stored along with the other pool paraphernalia. But while it serves its design purpose well (an ashtray), it is also a “Memory Item” representative of a happen chance occurrence that I often spend a great deal of time thinking about in those quiet moments drifting around my pool in the summer heat in those occasional times of pure reflection. It is symbolic to me of a different time that encompassed a fulcrum moment to our nation and the world. A parallel to some of today’s thought-provoking events that we, citizens of the United States ponder with the upcoming election. Now then, this past 4<sup>th</sup> of July, I was asked about the ashtray – here is the story.



First the story behind the acquisition. In February of 1972 there was a US Presidential trip to the Peoples Republic of China, known in my Navy days as the PRC. It was the first time that the United States recognized the PRC with communication and diplomatic ties following the 25 years of what was called the cultural revolution of China. Something that started before I was born. And much to my surprise following several of my Submarine Service missions a civil visit to a country “we” considered a hostile communist regime. We thought that it was a diametrically opposed entity to our concept of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that needed a defense from such an entity.

During my time working out of the shop in Pearl Harbor, I performed many “installations” on board submarines of the US Pacific Fleet. There was also a “surface ship” group that I never participated in, but there was nobody assigned to the “aircraft” portion of our group. That was until that one day in 1972. Two of my shipmates and I currently working on the installation portion of our task were called into the office for a “special”.

The “special” was a single position installation onboard each of two P3V Navy Aircraft that were primarily submarine hunter-killers. This time they were going to be going on a special mission, using the submarine relationship as a cover. We were to go to Kaneohe Marine Corp base on the north shore of the island and install these “positions” in an appropriate spot on both aircraft. So, when the time came we had the “install van” loaded with the equipment and tools to perform a very different installation to that of our experience.

Not one of us three that made up the “team” had ever done such an installation, but following the briefing we understood what had to be done. We were to tie-in “our stuff” alongside the normal radio equipment on board the aircraft and create a working station alongside the normal aircraft operator. Two people would be working the position, one of which was the normal radioman, and the other would be one of our “operators”.

When we got to the Marine Corp base, we were escorted to the two aircraft that were sitting alongside the runways. We went inside and scoped things out. It turned out to be relatively easy, except for how we were going to tee-off the antenna and power cables from the normal radio system to ours. I noticed the ashtray in the very small desk/arm rest in front of the normal

operator's position. It turned out to be the perfect pass-thru for those wires to our system alongside. So, I removed the ashtray and placed it in the top of my toolbox and went to work.

We were wrapping up the installation and we were going to have to go to the Exchange on base and get a couple of replacement ashtrays that could be accessed by both operators. Just as we were deciding who was going to go and who was going to stay, we were told that we all had to leave for about an hour, due to a special circumstance. So, we packed up all our stuff and all three of us left to the exchange. We got two suitable ashtrays that could be taped in place for the operators to use and we went back to the aircraft but were prohibited due to the "operation". So, we parked the van with some other people who were stopped as well and by happen-chance we met the operators who were going to man the "positions" that we had just installed.

We explained the ash-tray situation and they thanked us for that consideration, and they volunteered to put them in place themselves. So, we could leave. But just as we were about to do so; we watched US AIR FORCE ONE land. It was then we learned that some of the "operators" were going to be on AIR FORCE ONE. And they asked if we wanted a tour. We all answered yes, and after President Nixon, his wife and entourage left I got a tour of AIR FORCE ONE. And yes perhaps I should have grabbed an ashtray from that aircraft as well.

It was during that "tour" that the overall concept behind the mission of the P3's was explained to us. We got it. Unfortunately to this day I cannot relay what that mission was for the same reasons I don't describe a lot of things in my eBook [SeeStories](#). But understand it was for the safety and well-being of our President and all of the people involved in making the visit to China a purposeful and safe visit, with almost all possible encounters and outcomes prepared for.

Now then years later, I will tell you that I did obtain a copy of Chairman Mao Zedong's "Red Book" and I read it cover to cover. You should do so as well. It provides great insight into what the Chinese version of the Communist Party was supposed to be. Put that in the context of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness and then ponder what the two governments have evolved into over the last 52 years. Believe me, it takes hours and hours of very reflective thought, of what should be and could be.

**As to the ashtray. Yes, it triggers thoughts as well. I think about the Nixon era, and keep in mind that I was submerged during most of the Watergate aspect. Nixon represented to me a guy that wanted to address the peace in the world, make our jobs in the Navy less intense. Yes, indeed he was responsible for the entire series of events from the actual break-in to a pardoned resignation. He also ordered a DefConIII status that screwed me up on one occasion. And he lengthened the apparent time I spent at sea on one mission. I submerged under his Presidency and when I surfaced, Ford was President. Two Presidents – one mission. And it was the Nixon/Ford era that led to Jimmy Carter, who at one point was on the other end of a phone call I took once.**



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