

## I think I see it coming around Grande Island

We had an emergency situation in our shop once. A shipmate of mine had gone on a deployment on a diesel boat, and his wife didn't handle his absence well. We were contacted by Family Services that they were going to take custody of the children and she was going to be committed for psychological stress. We had to get "Brownie" back.

We sent a message to the captain of the boat and advised him that we were requesting that Brownie be sent back and that we would replace him with another. The "other" was me. I had been Brownie's backup during the install, I was familiar with the boat, and I was also the one that had been on that particular type of mission most recently, so I knew the "lay of the land".

Arrangements were made for a quick turn-around with our boss, CinCPACFLT (Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet). Even though there was a disruption of the current plans, it only reflected the travel time in getting me to the Philippines. This was all laid flat, I was told, as I left the shop to go to the airport. I didn't know the details, just my travel plans, as during the planning session, I was at home packing my seabag, and getting ready to go. (This is another story – the day I got stopped for speeding by the same Hawaiian Cop three times.)

I got to the airport OK and got on my flight to Tokyo. That's when I learned of the rest of my travel itinerary, the flight to Tokyo, then a change of flights from Tokyo to Manila. I would be met in Manila by "a guy" from the American Embassy who would take me to Subic Bay to pick up the boat; well, I thought, this is a unique trip so far!

When I got off the plane in Manila, and cleared customs, sure enough there was a guy in a suit holding up a cardboard sign with my name on it. I met him and he took me to the waiting car – a US Embassy black limousine. Yup, this was a unique trip indeed. According to the driver it was going to be a couple of hours drive to Subic, and he was going to take me right to the boat at the pier. So, while in the back of the limo, I changed clothes from my civilian attire into my working uniform. Other than trying to change clothes in the back of a moving limo, not much happened on the way down. Just an exchange of some local customs stuff<sup>1</sup> when we stopped for drinks halfway there. Other than that the driver was quiet and so was I.

When we got to the Navy Base and through the gate with no problems whatsoever he took me right to the primary pier there in Subic; there was a great view of the entire Subic Bay harbor – no submarine. Our being there parked on the pier in a US Embassy Limo attracted the attention of the Harbor Master. The harbor master on duty at the time was a Lieutenant Commander, and he came up to us in his jeep. I got out of the back, when he asked what we were doing there.

"Sir," I said, "I'm here to pick up the USS Tang."

He said, "Well son, you're a little late, the Tang left this morning for Hong Kong." Apparently, he didn't know of the change of schedule, and neither did I at that point, nor did the Limo driver.

I asked him, "Is there a phone I could use somewhere?"

He offered the one in the Harbor Master's office about a block away, so away we went, the Harbor Master in his jeep leading the way, and me in the Limo. When I got to his office, I called my shop back in Pearl, and they told me that the Tang was coming back for me. It's schedule had changed to only have one day at sea today, then to come back to pick me up and whatever stores were needed and then to leave for Hong Kong.

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<sup>1</sup> Yet another story that I probably won't tell as I am embarrassed and ashamed of it. If the topic ever comes up; I'll tell it then.

The Harbor Master had left after he showed me where the phone was. So armed with the new information, my attention went to – what was I going to do to accommodate “fitting in” (to use another topic heading). I asked the Limo driver to take me to the enlisted men’s Club. There I bought four cases of beer, and then I had him drive me back down to the pier. I offered him a beer and told him that it was OK to leave me there on the pier; that I could wait for the boat by myself – there was no need to hang him up. He took the beer and agreed. So there I sat, on the empty pier, in the late afternoon, with my seabag, my toolbox and four cases of beer with two beers missing; when who should show up again – the Harbor Master.

He came up to me, “What are you doing here?”

I said, “The Tang is coming back for me.”

He said, “Yeah right, a US Navy Submarine is going to come back for one third class petty officer (he had noticed my rank). Let me tell you son – that ain’t going to happen. You have missed ship’s movement and you’re in a heap of trouble.”

I said, “No sir, I think you don’t have the schedule right.”

Now he was turning a little angry. “Son, I have the schedule right here.” And he produced a piece of paper from his back pocket. Sure enough it showed the Tang departing for Hong Kong that morning, but the date of the schedule was a week ago.

“Sir,” I said, “that is the old schedule. There is a new one as of yesterday that puts the Tang on a daily op today, and returning here for me and any needed stores, and THEN a departure for Hong Kong.”

Now I could tell by his looks that he was pretty angry at this point, but I could also tell that he wasn’t sure, because after all I had been brought here in an American Embassy Limo – and that probably didn’t sit right with him. Something was a foot that he wasn’t used to – this was not a “typical” situation.

“Well, son.” He said; “I’m going off watch at six and if you’re still here at 5:30 I’m dragging your ass over to the brig because by the looks of things (pointing to the beer) you’ll be drunk and you’ll have missed ship’s movement!” He turned back to his Jeep, got in and left.

I sat there with the beer – searching the horizon every once in awhile. At 5:30 sharp he returned.

“Well son, time for you to go. Get in the Jeep.” He said, as he looked out his window at me.

“No sir, I don’t think so.” I replied, “If you look really close, I think I see it coming around Grande Island on the left. If I were you, I’d start looking for a line handling party.”

He looked past me to the horizon and got this panicked look on his face. He reached for his binoculars and looked again. “Shit” is the word I heard as he put the jeep in reverse and high-tailed it off the pier in a hurry.

He got back in the nick of time with several line- handlers. The boat pulled in and along side the pier. A truck with some “stores” showed up and everything got loaded on board, except for the beer. Nearly everybody on the boat had an opportunity to get one during the loading process. When it was all gone, I went up to the Harbor Master with the empty beer bottles in their boxes; “Could you take care of these for me?” And I walked onto the Tang, and we left.

Just as I went below decks when we were about 300 yards away from the pier I looked back. There was the Harbor Master hat in hand and rubbing his brow. I’ll bet he still wonders about the day a US Submarine came back for a third-class Petty Officer that had been dropped off by a US Embassy limo – Who was that guy????

PS – The Tang was my favorite of all the Diesel boats that I rode.