

Rest and Recreation – and Training in Hawaii

On 5 March, squadron personnel disembarked from NASSAU for transfer to the Naval Air Facility (NAF), Barking Sands, Kauai, Hawaii for some well earned rest and recreation after what had been an intense two months aboard the carrier. It was also to be a time for the fighter pilots to get used to their new FM-2s with their more powerful engines. As J.P. Fox recalls, "They were slightly faster and could climb faster." And another of the VC-66 fighter pilots, ENS Dean J. "Bird" Birdsong from Marquette, Kansas, remembers that the FM-2s were "better and more powerful. Only real difference was the FM-2 had a Wright Lycoming engine and swung a more powerful prop. Made all the difference in the world."

Banks and many of the men made the trip to Kauai via the SWAN – a 110 foot long utility craft that was a far cry from the NASSAU. As soon as the SWAN was on the open ocean, the men knew they were at sea because of the extreme pitching and rolling. As for the carriers - at least according to any destroyer Sailor, they were so big and rode so smooth that - "The only time carrier guys know their ship is underway is when the word is passed over the IMC (ship's public address system)." And thus, "The only real Sailors are destroyer Sailors."

As the junior officer in the squadron, Stephens also had to ride to Kauai on the SWAN. He recalls, "As the junior guy (officer), I got some 'unusual' assignments." The junior officer in a Navy command is generally known as the "SLJO" (shitty little jobs officer). The name says it all. As to the trip to Kauai aboard the SWAN, Stephens remembers:

It was supposed to be a one day in the daylight trip, but the SWAN had engine problems causing us to get to Kauai after dark. Regulations would not allow us to enter port after dark so we had to cruise back and forth on the ocean during the night killing time while waiting for sunrise. I stayed in a cabin, but most of the men stayed on deck all night. And squadron rumor has it that somehow alcoholic beverages showed up and considerable drinking took place during the night. There was speculation that it came from some officer's seabag.

Kauai is the farthest west of the major Hawaiian Islands - about one hundred miles west of Oahu. Banks remembers the men of VC-66 having some good times at Barking Sands. While the base was pretty rustic, for a while at least, VC-66 was the only squadron stationed there and they had the whole place to themselves. The Kauai beaches were great and they could load up a TBM with several guys and fly to Honolulu on Oahu for liberty. Banks recalls as an aircrewman being bought drinks by grateful Marines and ships' company Sailors in the bars. He also recalls the occasional "good natured" bar fight between Sailors and Marines.

And Banks knows a native Hawaiian that had some "good natured" fun at the expense of some of the squadron's Sailors. Once while on Kauai, Banks and a group of

the VC-66 men went down to the beach. There was a native Hawaiian fellow there so they decided to ask him how the place got the name Barking Sands? He told them, "Sometimes the wind picks up the sand and blows it against the cliffs and it sounds like barking." He also told them, "If you throw sand against the beach cliffs you can sometimes get the barks." The Hawaiian left and the Sailors decided to give it a try. An hour or so later after much throwing of sand and no barking heard, Banks and his buddies decided that they might have gotten some bad information. They figured that the Hawaiian would be having a good laugh with his friends that evening at their expense.

The VC-66 officers also enjoyed Kauai. In addition to visiting the beaches and the relatively spartan officers' club, fishing, and hunting goats, they would frequently be invited to dinner and drinks by various local island families.

As it turns out, one of them, DeLoach Cope, later married the daughter of one of the ladies who enjoyed hosting the pilots for dinner at her home on Kauai. Her husband was the chief engineer of a sugar mill. Cope met the daughter again after the war when she was going to school in San Francisco. They married and settled in Mississippi. Cope began an eighteen year career in public service with the state government. Afterward, the Copes would raise cotton, corn, and rice on their farm. They also bought an airplane and "flew all over" as they enjoyed it. DeLoach and Allegra have been married sixty-one years. As Cope tells it, "I have had a very good life."

On 15 March, the squadron's TBM pilots and aircrewmen detached from NAF Barking Sands and were sent to NAS Kaneohe Bay on Oahu for two weeks of anti-submarine warfare (ASW) training and training in use of the relatively new and super secret Norden bombsight.

Banks recalls, "The Norden sight was so secret that each one was guarded by an armed Marine." Banks was sent to the bombardier course in case anything ever happened to Stoops, he would be able to fill in. Banks remembers the Norden sight as, "being a very complex instrument that required a lot of concentrated attention." He also recalls suggesting to the instructors that he was wasting his time in the class because in his opinion, "The new sight was more suited to high level bombing like that done by the army's big bombers rather than the low level stuff that the TBMs were doing." He stopped short of using the old Navy expression, "They didn't know shit from Shinola." But he does remember telling them that, "Heck - sometimes the TBMs flew so low on their bombing runs that they came back with their bomb bay doors wet!" The instructors listened, disagreed - and Banks remained in the class.

On 24 March, while the TBM crews were still in ASW training, the squadron's fighter pilots went to Honolulu for 5 days of R and R.