

Kugler Stories

Life in the 60's

Life in the 60's was like no internet and thus no Google. One had to rotate a dial to make a telephone call. French author Jules Verne wrote "From the Earth to the Moon" in 1874 and on July 20, 1969 men actually walked on the moon. I would, later in life, get to shake hands with one of those men in a beach hotel in Florida; Buzz Aldrin. Perhaps it is the fact I was born in Australia, but whatever the reason, I gained a desire for seeing and experiencing the world through travel that started in the 60's and remains today.

For me, the 60's was a time of constant transition and travel. My mother died in 1960, in 1961 I left home to attend an all-boy boarding school for three years in NJ, matriculated onto four years of college in Ohio and attended one year of graduate school in North Carolina before starting a military journey in 1968 that would send me to 16 countries and two combat zones before ending in 2005 when I was 60 years old.

In 1966, between my sophomore and junior years in college (I was 21) and I had not seen any of my Australian relatives in over a dozen years. I wanted to be with my mother's side of my family in Sydney and Wagga Wagga, both in New South Wales, for the summer before returning to college. My father said, "If you are going to Australia on the other side of the world, why come back the same way? It is the same price to fly onto Asia and Europe and you'll get to see a bit of the world."

My father booked my trip with Fugazy Travel in Marathon, FL and he sent a package of airplane tickets to me at college so I could fly directly from Ohio to LA onto Australia. Mr. Fugazy thought because I was born in Australia, I would not need a visa to enter the country. I received the tickets on a Thursday and I immediately called the Aussie embassy in NY to confirm Mr. Fugazy's assumption. I was told Mr. Fugazy was wrong. I was told I would have to get an Aussie visa before I could board my LA flight. I was also told all US based Aussie embassies for visas were closed on weekends. The only Aussie embassy in North America open on weekends was in Mexico City, Mexico.

I then called Mr. Fugazy and told him of my dilemma. He called back and said, "No problem I talked to your father, I have you booked on a Friday afternoon flight from Columbus, O. to Mexico City where you can pick up your visa Saturday morning and catch a plane to LA for your late Saturday flight to Australia. He also said, "Your father wants you to stay at the Reforma Hotel in Mexico City where he stayed in 1934; I booked it." What could possibly go wrong?

I managed to get to the Reforma Hotel Friday night and I spent the night sequestered in my room drinking room service beer for fear of being stranded in Mexico. Lucky for me, the Aussie embassy, located in another hotel, was in easy walking distance from the Reforma. I arrived early at the embassy hotel and I was

told the embassy did not open until 10am. I was further informed I could get breakfast in the hotel bar in the basement while I waited. After reaching the bar room, I was told I could eat breakfast at the small round bar in the center of the room. I ordered a beer with my egg-burrito and I noticed there was a fellow seated across from me at the bar reading a small Spanish/English translation book and he was asking the bartender if his pronunciation was right on certain Spanish words. I detected an Aussie accent in the gentleman's Spanish words. I informed the would-be Spanish speaker that I came all the way from Ohio to get an Aussie visa because of my travel agent not knowing I had to have one before flying to Aussie later that evening. The guy smiled and said, "It's your lucky day mate, I am the Australian Ambassador." It was his first full day on the job. He went on to inform me he arrived before his wife and children who were coming the following week from his last duty post in Pakistan. He joined me in a beer at the bar and we then went up to his office where his staff issued me my visa. The Ambassador said the embassy had a driver who could take me out to the airport to catch my flight to LA. Off I went in a car with diplomatic plates to the airport to catch my flight to LA.

For my one-night stay in Mexico, I had to fill out a US customs form on which I declared nothing. As I went through US customs, two very large men in uniform said to follow them. I was taken to a room where two more large, uniformed gentlemen, were standing and I was asked again what I was bringing into the US from Mexico. I explained the ignorance of my FL Keys travel agent and my Mexico/Aussie adventure. I was then told to remove my clothing down to my underwear. I was wearing an Oxford white button-down shirt with no under shirt, khaki pants with a leather belt, Weejun loafers with no socks, and boxer under shorts. I removed all except the boxer shorts in less than 30 seconds and still I could not convince anyone I was not smuggling something into the country after they searched my one suitcase. I told the customs folks that if they called the Aussie Ambassador in Mexico City, he would vouch for my credibility.

I guess they did because in about 20 minutes, a man in a civilian suit came into the room and he was very apologetic. The man asked if there was anything he could do for me and I mentioned that I had never seen Disneyland. After checking my bags in, I was given a GOV car ride (the first of many I would receive in life) to Disneyland. I can't remember if the GOV car waited for me but, somehow, I made it back to the airport. Upon checking in for my flight, I was told that I had been moved to first class for my flight to Sydney. (A great example of the excellent diplomatic relations between Aussie and US governments)

I would be remiss if I did not mention actor Charlton Heston, as a rep for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), was in first class with me and he found my Mexican adventure amusing. From Australia that summer, I would go on to adventures in Hong Kong and Kowloon (on mainland China), India, Egypt, Greece, Switzerland, Germany, France, and England before returning to Ohio. Each stop has a story of its own that perhaps one day I will tell. I learned in the 60's we live on a big planet and there is a lot of adventure on it.

Kugler and the Gator

In 1989, I was scheduled to attend a 3 day Army Reserve drill while camping the long weekend in a Miami Park that contained a rifle range. We would perform weapons qualification and do compass orienteering in the park. I was able to be excused from the Friday drill because my wife, Ali, was coming home from the hospital after an ear operation. I picked Ali up at the hospital and her head was wrapped in a bandage covered in netting with the netting tied at the top of her head. I told Ali her head looked like a Hershey's kiss and I thought she was just as sweet. Prior to heading to the hospital, I called my supervisor and told him that I would be working at home typing up a discrimination case for OSHA if he needed to contact me. I arrived home with Ali from the hospital at about 7:30am and I placed her in bed with the expectation she would be sleeping most of the day. When I walked into the living room, I looked out the sliding glass doors and I saw about 25 people standing on the other side of the canal located directly behind our house. The canal divides our Broward County from Palm Beach County north of us. There was a TV truck and police officers with rifles standing on the other side of the canal along with local residents. At the time, I had a Mohawk canoe resting up on the tree in my back yard. Naturally, I walked to the canal to see what was causing all the rumpus across the canal. When I arrived at the edge of the canal and looked down, I saw a bloated human body floating face down in the canal with what appeared to be spaghetti for arms. Floating next to the body was a ten foot alligator that had apparently been chomping on the body's arms. I had never seen anything like it in my life, however, I had spent time in combat areas so the situation was not overwhelming to me. As I was trying to take the scene in, one of the policemen holding a rifle across the canal from me yelled, "We need to borrow your canoe to catch the alligator." Being use to taking orders from men in uniform, I agreed to help. I then dragged my canoe to the boat ramp, located in the park next to my house, with an oar and I paddled about five feet from the body and the floating alligator in the canal to the other side. I was greeted by a guy with a beard who looked as though he had just fled a homeless shelter yelling at me, "I am commanding your canoe in the name of Palm Beach Fish and Game to protect public safety; stand aside." I looked at the guy and told him that he could use my canoe and he could get into the canoe but I was going to paddle us to my side of the canal before getting out and relinquishing my canoe.

The homeless looking Florida alligator hunter paddled back to the other side of the canal where he was greeted by another homeless looking Florida alligator hunter who handed him alligator hunting paraphernalia. The equipment included a fishing rod with a small grappling hook attached to the line and a real grappling hook, one used in climbing buildings, that was placed inside my canoe. The hunter paddled my canoe out to the alligator and cast a line with the small grappling hook over the body of the alligator and reeled it in. When the hunter snagged the alligator with the small hook and sunk it into gator's hide, the beast dropped to the bottom of the canal. The hunter reeled in the line until he was directly over his quarry before getting the real grappling hook from the bottom of my canoe and sinking the real deal into the alligator. Suddenly, my canoe gave the appearance of being a speed boat as it lurched eastward towards a bridge, about 3 quarters of a mile away, with the bow raised and the hunter holding onto the grappling hook rope with both hands.

When the gator reached the bridge it did a U-turn and sped back towards my side of the canal as I stood on the dock next to the boat ramp where I had launched my canoe with my mouth open in disbelief. By now, there were at least 50 people on the other side of the canal and only me standing on the dock as the gator came lurching directly below me under the dock I was standing on. The hunter said to me while wrapping the rope attached to the gator around one of the dock pilings, "Here, hold the rope while I load my stick with a shotgun shell and kill the gator."

Now, I am holding onto a wounded ten-foot man eating alligator with only my Mohawk canoe separating me from the jet black beast with its mouth open coming at me while I am supposed to be typing up a government report in the confines of my living room while also caring for my wife recuperating from surgery.

At this point in time, the gator and the stick with a live shotgun shell on it were not the only dangers confronting me. A violent electric storm was emerging on the scene with vats of water starting to cascade from the heavens. The whole affair seemed unfair to me as I had only volunteered to loan my canoe to the operation and, definitely, I did not volunteer to be an active participant in the killing of a gigantic reptile amid a lightning storm. Suddenly, while vexing over my problems, I heard a boom as the shotgun shell imploded into the alligator and suddenly the gator broke off from the rope I was holding and disappeared down the canal. I walked home wet and covered in mud as the alligator hunter took off after his prey in my canoe while loudly cursing. When I reached my house, I looked into my patient's room and I quietly entered. Ali raised her Hershey kiss head and

asked, "How has your morning been?" I replied "Exciting. I will tell you all about it later. Go back to sleep." Later that night we watched my exploits on local television. I would be less than honest if I did not mention that I approached my Army commander the next day at the park telling him my alligator story and inquiring if the Army had some kind of award for civilian bravery which, of course, I would modestly accept. He said he would get back to me on it; he never did.

Kugler and the Moon Landing

On July 20, 1969, I was 12 days from being commissioned a Second Lieutenant (2LT) in the United States Army. My journey to this end began in February 1968 when I received a letter from the draft board informing me that graduate school deferments were being done away with due to the shortage of manpower in meeting the demands of the Vietnam War. At the time I received the letter, I was a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC. There were military recruiters on the campus, so I decided to go to them and review my options to be in compliance with the draft board.

My first stop was at the Marine Corps. The burly buzzed red-haired Marine who was about 40 years old and appeared not to like his job replied when I asked him what the Marine Corps could offer a graduate student in communications, "A rifle, a pack, and a hard time". I thanked him and moved onto other military options. At the Army desk, I was greeted by a friendly sergeant who told me that if I became an officer, with my education, I would most likely end up running an Army TV station with the possibility of working in Europe. He said the Army would evaluate my written package and put me on the right path. I signed on the dotted line and about two weeks later I discovered I had been selected for infantry schooling; not further TV training.

Before going to Infantry Officer Candidate School (OCS), I was sent to 8 weeks of basic training at Ft. Dix, NJ and then another 8 weeks of advanced infantry training at Ft. Dix. The difference between basic training and advanced infantry training, as far as I could tell, was that in advanced training you slept out in the

snow of NJ in a sleeping bag with 20 other guys in a heated hut when not chasing men with straw hats around the woods.

By January 1969, I matriculated in my Army education to Ft. Benning, located in Columbus, GA. Infantry (OCS) lasted 24 weeks. The first 8 weeks had you getting up at 5am with 220 other shaven headed men and running everywhere around the base singing songs relating to your combined enthusiasm for killing the enemy; mostly referred to by soldiers as “Gooks” or in the songs as “Charlie Cong”. One running song started, “Hey Charlie Cong, we’re going to kill you, kill you in the morning.” After 16 weeks, you still ran but you were not yelled at as much while you mostly sat in classrooms trying to avoid slumbering at your desk. My platoon consisting of 30 men (one of which would die in Vietnam) in a company of 220 men. My platoon was run by a 2LT training officer. Lucky for me, 2LT Dick Dent was from Pennsylvania and he wrestled in college. I was the only guy in the platoon who wrestled in college, so LT Dent took a shine to me.

During the last two weeks of our infantry training to become a 2LT, we were all aware that the life expectancy of an infantry 2LT in combat in Vietnam was a matter of weeks and not months or years. Needless to say, I was greatly relieved when I received a branch transfer to the Signal Corps. I would still be going to Vietnam, but theoretically, not shot at as much as being an infantry officer. On the night of July 20, 1969, LT Dent invited me and my two training roommates, Peter Nowlan of Windsor, VT and Bob Hines of Louisville, KY, down to his apartment in Columbus to watch the moon landing on TV. We watched as Neil Armstrong (a Purdue graduate and USC post grad) and “Buzz” Eugene Aldrin (West Point grad and MIT post grad) landed on the moon and Armstrong took “one giant step for mankind”. Both men had been combat-pilots in the Korean War. Aldrin had 66 combat missions and shot 2 enemy MIG planes down over Korea.

What makes the “moon landing” night more memorable for me was the adventure we got into when we were driving back to the base from Dent’s apartment in Nowlan’s car which had Vermont license plates. We were stopped at a red-light. I was in the back seat. The next thing we knew, four men in a car pulled up behind us and jumped out of their car and surrounded our vehicle holding tire irons. One guy pulled Nowlan out of the driver’s seat and started

punching him. After five or six punches the men ran back to their car and drove away. Nowlan's reaction to the attack, "I guess they are still fighting the Civil War down here and my Vermont tags incited them."

Years later, I was doing OSHA business in Cocoa Beach, FL. When I checked into the Hilton on the beach there was a sign reading, "Meet and Greet Buzz Aldrin" tonight at 8pm in conference room #1. I was in conference room #1 with about 30 Air Force pilots from nearby Patrick Air Force Base when Mr. Aldrin walked into the room and took a seat at a table and gave a very laid-back summary of his adventures and took questions from the assembled pilots. I remember Mr. Aldrin saying when he looked at earth from the moon; he felt less like an American and more like an Earthling which changed his whole thinking about life.

I shook Mr. Aldrin's hand after the meeting and I remarked to him that I thought my night in Columbus, GA, the night he landed on the moon, was more terrifying than anything he encountered on the moon that day. I briefly told him my story and he got a laugh out of it. He remains, to this day, the only "moon walker" (12 Americans have walked on the moon) whose hand I have shaken.

Kugler's First Job

I was 13 years old in 1958, living across the street from the bay in Margate City, NJ, when my father decided it was high-time I had a full-time job. It should be noted that my father did not have a full-time job. He chose to make me a paper boy delivering newspapers for the daily evening Philadelphia Bulletin (no longer in existence). Fifteen years later, I would have a full-time job as a reporter for the Denver based morning newspaper, The Rocky Mountain News (no longer in existence). See a pattern here?

To make my nightly newspaper deliveries, I received a bundle of about 40 newspapers each night and I had to fold them (in a manner that they could be thrown without opening up) and place them into a huge metal basket attached to the front of my English Racer bike with narrow tires. The basket stuck out on each side of my handlebars; in essence, I was carrying 40 plus pounds of newspapers on a bike designed for speed through rain, snow, and sleet during the winter. (Frankly, I attribute this delivery work in

training me to have the fastest bike time of anyone over 40 in the 1985 Hawaiian Ironman triathlon-6 hours and no minutes.)

Initially, I could not remember the location of the houses I was assigned to make my paper deliveries. So, my father took out the cardboard from one of his laundered shirts and he drew a street map on it with red dots to guide my way. With the map propped up on my handlebars, I made my nightly guided deliveries until I was able to secure the route to my memory. The map was good until nightfall and then I had to use a pocket flashlight. Eventually, concerned for my safety I guess, my father bought me a bike light.

I enjoyed the delivery process of the job; but I was very poor at record keeping so I never really knew how much people owed at the end of each month when I was supposed to pick up the money while delivering the paper. To avoid the angst and the time needed to pick up monies; I put off that part of the job even though I had to pay the newspaper for the papers at the end of the month. This required me to borrow funds from my mother who had a full-time job as the buyer for Homberger's (the largest ladies clothing store in Atlantic City, NJ).

When I absolutely had to pick up monies, I used the services of a classmate, Roger Newman. Roger's father owned a gift store on the boardwalk in Atlantic City and he had no problems knocking on a door and asking for monies. He generally had to ask the customer how much they owed. As the customer generally did not know the amount of money owed, Roger would then ask the customer to estimate the length of time since their last payment to the paperboy. (I would be hiding in the house bushes of the customer during collection efforts.) Since that memory often involved months, Roger would compute time and the weekly cost in his head and then ask for that payment. To our utter amazement, we received tips. Not being a great businessman, I paid Roger a quarter a house. We split the tips. I quit my first job after about a year of biking and about a dozen slippery falls; luckily, I was never hit by a car.

In 1959, I wanted to be a Margate City Beach Lifeguard like my father had been. In order to do this, one had to spend a summer in training on the beach, with no pay, and be selected the following year in a beach tryout. I thought I could work on the beach throughout high school while watching ladies and waves and perhaps save somebody's life. My father, a WWII

Pacific boat captain, told me I was not going to be on the beach that summer. He announced that I was going to the Atlantic City boardwalk every weekday morning that summer to learn to type. He said if there was ever another war, my office typing skills would keep me alive. I was the only male typist student in a class of twenty plus people. I entered the Army as a Signal officer, destined to be placed atop a lonely mountain base, when I arrived in Vietnam. I mentioned I typed when I arrived at a personnel office in I Corps (area closest to North Vietnam). I was then put in charge of a unit's personnel office (S-1) for a 250-man trucking unit and given my own typewriter. The first thing I did in my new job was to comb through the personnel files of the 200 plus enlisted truckers. I selected the two men with the highest IQ's and made them my assistants. They were my combat Roger Newman's.

I never had another job in my life that required me to ask people for money. I did pay Vietnamese civilians to work on our Army base in Chu Lai, S. Vietnam. All the female civilian employees had a habit of rolling around the floor of my pay office protesting the low wages the US. Government was giving them for their work. It was quite a show. I would profusely apologize to the workers for their low wages, and I would give them a tip from my personal funds. I remained the poor businessman from my newspaper delivery days.

Mr. Magoo leaves the VA and visits the Ballpark

After returning from Iraq in 2004, I was given free Veteran's Administration (VA) medical care for one year to include eye and dental work at the VA in W. Palm Beach, FL (WPB). Due to medical issues incurred while serving in Vietnam and in Iraq, I was awarded a disability rating of 60 percent which entitles me to free VA medical care for life. So, any time I have any physical issues I make a bee line to a VA facility for what I have experienced to be timely and excellent medical care with few exceptions. The VA issues veterans ID cards that we carry around our necks and there is a security officer checking individual tags before admission in permitted.

Every year I have my eyes checked at the VA in WPB and if there is a change in my prescription requirement, I am issued a new pair of glasses to go with the new prescription. Before departing for Iraq, I was issued a pair of reading glasses at Ft. Bragg, NC. The young soldiers called my glasses, "Birth Control Glasses" (BCG's). I was told anyone wearing my glasses would be unable to find anyone to have sex with during their time in Iraq or for the rest of their lives for that matter. Since I was happily married for 19 years, no problem.

Two years ago in March, I was in the optical department at the WPB VA and I had my eyes dilated for examination. Normally, I would wait for an hour for my eyes to adjust and I would wear sunglasses and drive the 30 miles back home. To avert any vision issues, I always took a backroad home that passed by a brand new spring training home of the Houston and Washington baseball teams. As I approached the stadium, my eyes were burning and I considered it to be a safety problem to push on and I drove into what I thought was the entrance to parking lot. I was surprised that there was no one to collect what normally would be a \$10 parking fee. When I parked my car near the gate, I got out and noticed there was a line of cars out on the main street waiting to get into the park. It was obvious that I had driven in the exit to the park. It was an honest mistake caused by poor vision and I did not see the need to admit my guilt and pay \$10.

Normally, when I leave the VA, I take my ID card off my neck and stick it in the glove compartment of my car for its permanent safe keeping. This day, I was so discombobulated that I forgot to take my ID tag off and I believe this fact contributed to my forthcoming adventures. I then walked up to the stadium and purchased a standing room only ticket. The two home teams, the Astros and the Nationals, were playing and they would alternate changing the home team dugouts during the season when they played one another. Half blind I used both hands to hold onto the railing as I climbed the nearly 30 steps leading up to the main walkway. I thought I would only need to watch two or three innings between two teams I had no interest in before my eyes would adjust and I could safely drive home.

As I stood in the glaring sun after about a half hour I developed a blinding headache and I decided I would be better off waiting for my eyes to adjust sitting in my car in the parking lot.

I looked around and saw an elevator with a guard standing by it. I walked over to the guard and told him that I was having eye problems and I asked if for safety reasons I could exit the stadium without having to take the stairs. He looked at my ID card and said I could ride the elevator down to the first floor and if I kept right I would find the exit. He must have misunderstood me. When the elevator hit the first floor, I was standing in the Nationals dressing room with two guys getting rub downs. I immediately admitted my guilt and not being where I was supposed to be and I was directed to head down the hallway and I would find the exit door that I presumed would put me in the parking lot.

Obediently I trekked down the hall and when I reached the end and I opened the door and walked in. I was standing in the Astros dugout and I had a small conversation with a catcher in his full gear as the game was going on. My guess is the catcher thought my VA badge signified some status in Major League baseball and he told me that I should go back to the main hallway and head further down the hallway as that was the door I was looking for. He must have misunderstood me. Once again I was obedient and I moved further down the hall and I walked thru the last door in the corridor and I entered. I then found myself standing alone in the Astros owner's box. What became alarming at this point were fans sitting close by me waving at me while I squinted to see if I

knew anybody or not. I thought, "What the hell? Sit down and watch a half inning and maybe my vision will come back." It did not and I thought no one would believe my honest account of my presence in the owner's box so I departed while waving to the crowd. I had to retrace my entire hallway march and take the elevator back up to the second floor and inform the guard that I had decided my car was closer to the stairs.

One major league clubhouse, one major league dugout and a major league owner's box in one day at the ballpark is more than any soldier is entitled to expect per baseball game. I refer to my post VA experience as "Mr. Magoo leaves the VA and visits the ballpark."

Farrah the Lion's Day Off

By

CPT Clarence Kugler



On 1 DEC 03, my Miami based Civil Affairs Army Reserve unit was activated for deployment to Iraq to replace a civil affairs unit from Virginia. By the end of JAN 04, we were sent to Ft. Bragg, NC to deploy directly into Iraq and bypass the normal week of preparation in Kuwait.

On 31 JAN, the night before our departure, the Army's Civil Affairs Command Sergeant Major (CSM) came into our briefing room and he was visibly angry (not an unusual emotion for a CSM) when he said, "I don't want you soldiers

causing the trouble over there that the clowns you are going to replace got into". CSM then related the horror story of his civil affairs soldiers holding a promotion party at the Baghdad Zoo. During the party, one of the soldiers reached into a cage and offered an endangered species white tiger a steak. The tiger, belonging to Saddam's son Uday, grabbed the soldier's arm and began dragging the soldier through the bars of the cage. In response, a member of the civil affairs party took out an unauthorized pistol and shot the tiger dead. Frankly, I could not tell if the CSM was more upset about the unauthorized pistol used, the soldier needing surgery to replace the bone in his forearm, or the killing of an endangered species animal. Suffice it to say, he made the point; no more zoo promotion parties.

By JUL 04, I was acting as the public affairs person for our unit which required going out on missions with soldiers and writing articles for publication in the States. The articles defined the helpful missions we participated in for and with the Iraqi people. The articles contained the names of the soldiers and they listed hometowns of the soldiers. The articles featured such stories as supplying medical equipment to hospitals, giving back packs and equipment to schools, providing training to fire fighters, supporting different orphanages with clothing and equipment, opening a gas station to the public, providing artificial limbs to the public to name just a few. The home town newspapers of the soldiers mentioned in the articles published the articles giving folks back home some positive information of what our soldiers were doing to improve the lives of the Iraqi populace.

Our unit worked directly under the Commanding General (CG) of the 1st CAV Division out of Ft. Hood, Texas. In my military duties, I have always attempted to emulate the persona of Ensign Pulver in the book, "Mr. Roberts". Jack Lemmon played the character in the movie by same name. Ensign Pulver attempted to never be seen by his commander, thus avoiding any supervision that might lead to his being verbally chastised or killed. Thus, I was bewildered when I was informed the 1st CAV CG was reading my articles and ordered me to go out to the Baghdad Zoo and write "a favorable article on our veterinarian successes at the zoo." The order required a convoy of about 15 armed soldiers, avoiding combat perils, to get me to the zoo with a camera and a pen.

Upon our arrival at the zoo, I linked up with 1st CAV veterinarians in order to guide me around. My first stop was to interview the zoo director, Aadil Musa, in his office with a 1st CAV officer present. Mr. Musa was in the process of giving me the zoo's history when the chief veterinarian of the zoo, Dr. Wasseem, rushed into the office yelling "Farrah is loose, Farrah is loose". I had no idea who or what he was upset about but very intrigued when the 1st CAV officer became stone faced while looking me in the eye saying, "Kugler, are you ready to go on the most dangerous mission you are going to be given in Iraq?" A secret to success in the Army is when you have no concept of what it is you are being asked to do; give the appearance of being eager to do it. I replied in my best gung ho voice, "Roger that, Sir". I was then informed that Farrah was a 28 year old 12 foot long female lion and she was running around the zoo and, at the age of 59 and with only months away from retirement, I was going on a U.S. Army sanctioned combat lion hunt with the express purpose of capturing and not shooting the lion.

Along with zoo workers, military and civilian veterinarians, I took 6 of my armed soldiers and we began looking for Farrah. When we located her, she was lying atop a 10 foot high stone wall surrounding the zoo. If Farrah went on the other side of the wall, she would be running around downtown Baghdad. To avoid this calamity, zoo workers were outside the fence with poles attempting to get Farrah back into the zoo grounds. While they were doing this, Dr. Wasseem was assembling what looked like a cross bow to shoot a foot long anesthesia loaded needle/cylinder into her hind quarters. Dr. Wasseem went outside the wall and when I took my camera out to shoot a picture of Farrah, my concentration was broken when I saw the foot long projectile go above the head of Farrah and land about two feet in front of my right boot. If I had been hit, I doubt if I would have been eligible for a Purple Heart but a medical evacuation to a hospital in beer drinking Germany might have been in the works.

After two sleep inducing projectiles hit her, Farrah slowly slipped off her perch and I literally had a lion by the tail when six of us hoisted Farrah onto a lowboy to transport her back to her cage. The most terrifying aspect of the operation was the fact Farrah came back to life about 15 seconds after we lifted her back into her cage. No one wants to be in the vicinity of an unhappy lion during a wakeup call.

I did, along with the rest of my unit, receive the Army's Humanitarian Award at the conclusion of our tour of duty in Iraq. I am sad to say the Army has no specific award for a successful lion hunt that ends with not killing the lion.

I was standing in formation for my once-a-month Miami based 478th Civil Affairs morning roll call in 1995, I was 50, when the Commander announced, "We need six volunteers to go down to Panama to support South Command's earthquake relief efforts for two weeks starting next Wednesday. Who can get away from their jobs for two weeks?" As I was working for the U.S. Department of Labor, I was allowed two weeks a year for military duty and I received double pay during that time, so, I immediately raised my hand.

Upon arriving in Panama at Ft. Clayton, located at the Mira Flores lock in the Panama Canal Zone, I was told our group would be going up to Bocas de Torro Province in northern Panama. The area consists of an island chain off the Caribbean coast, plus a section of mainland that consists of tropical vegetation to include banana growing areas. Our group was divided in half with me being in the first group to head off in a Blackhawk helicopter. Just before takeoff, the young pilot noticed my Vietnam combat patch on my shoulder and he came over to me and asked me if I had done much flying in helicopters in Vietnam. I told him I had regularly flown in Huey's, small troop carrying helicopters, and I mentioned that I had crashed in one when we hit a convoy of ducks coming up from the marshes. No one was killed in the crash but the pilot suffered a broken leg. To give the young pilot a sense of my macho attitude for flying, I said I was interested in seeing what his Blackhawk could do in the air. I would never ask another pilot to show me anything in the air again.

We took off four to five feet above the canal water at over 100 mph east to the Caribbean Sea where we shot up over the waves before landing an hour or so later in Bocas Town. Our group was lodged in a quaked small hotel. I was paired up with a soldier from my unit who graduated from the University of Oklahoma and he and his wife had season tickets to the university football games for the last ten even though they resided in Miami.

There was a 40 foot long 10 foot deep gash in the earth about half a football field from the entrance to our hotel. Our hotel room was unique in that it was missing an outer wall; it had collapsed in the earthquake. I found the constant rain at night soothing while huddled on a cot underneath my poncho. The restroom area was an outhouse behind the hotel where in a neighboring shack you could find

bottled water to brush your teeth. I was brushing my teeth the first night when I distinctly heard a train rush by the building while the earth I was standing on began to violently shake. I was told the next day that there were no trains in the vicinity and I had experienced "An After-Shock." I was shocked alright.

We were given trucks to aid in our distribution of food, clothing, and medical supplies to the various aid centers in the area. Every morning, I would lead the civilian Red Cross workers in calisthenics and a one mile fun run through the town to include a lap around the soccer field.

The last 3 days of our duty was known as "familiarization duty" by the Army. This pleasant duty was performed in civilian clothing and designed to give soldiers time to practice their Spanish with local citizens while becoming familiar with the country side so we could lead soldiers in the area should the Army be required to return in the future. It also gave us time to sample the local food as well as the local beers. I drove three soldiers north from our hotel into a city some 20 miles north of our hotel one late afternoon. The city was located next to a fast moving river. I noticed there was a railroad bridge crossing the river. On the opposite side was a bar that had a sign on the roof stating, "Cerveza Frio" or Cold Beer.

I said to the guys, "Hey, let's cross over the river on the railroad bridge and drink a couple of cold beers." My suggestion was heartily approved by the group and we walked over between the rails on the bridge. Once inside the bar, I noticed a large glass jar on the bar with what looked like pickled eggs. The English speaking bar tender told me that most of the bars in Panama sell turtle eggs because it is believed they are an aphrodisiac giving men extra fortitude in love making. In my college days in Ohio there was always a large glass jar of pickled pigs-feet on the bar. Neither turtle eggs nor pigs-feet ever intrigued me enough to sample them with a beer. However, I would leave Panama with a better understanding of why turtles were on the endangered species list.

We ordered our beers and when the bartender brought them to us he asked, "How long have you been in Costa Rica?" One of my fellow soldiers exclaimed, "Costa frigging Rica, we're not supposed to be here." We chugged our beers and ran back across the train bridge to Panama without causing an international problem for the US Army. Total time in Costa Rica was 9 minutes and I have never been back.

Of the 16 countries I visited during my time in the Army, Costa Rica was the most surprising.

