



UNIQUE DI EXPERIENCE

Mike St Clair

The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis began while I was training my recruits at the Camp Matthews rifle range. You could see Highway 101 from the tent camp and one day I spotted a long convoy of trucks heading south towards San Diego. My platoon was cleaning their rifles and I had them stop and take notice. I said "Those are Marines going to war and you will be with them soon!" Needless to say this was a motivating experience.

That same day my Company First Sergeant told me I had to report to Depot Headquarters. He didn't know why and neither did I. Upon reporting I received orders to report to the U.S. Army Special Forces Headquarters at Fort Bragg N.C. for duty "concerning Marine Corps matters." I was nonplussed and knew nothing about why I had been chosen for this assignment.



They flew me commercial to Fort Bragg and upon checking in realized that my top secret security clearance from a previous embassy duty tour made it happen. It seems when Special Forces comes up to full wartime strength there is one Marine Colonel and one Marine Sergeant assigned to their headquarters.

I spent over a month at Fort Bragg being the only enlisted Marine. We never deployed thanks to President Kennedy standing firm to the Russian Dictator, Khrushchev. Being among all these fine Special Forces soldiers was a real experience. They were proud of their green berets that President Kennedy had recently authorized. I found out about Army Ranger training and Airborne Parachute training and decided to become a Reconnaissance Marine after my DI tour.

My only time off in all those weeks was a one night liberty aboard the base. It was on a Thursday evening and not knowing where to go I asked a base cab driver if there were any NCO clubs aboard the base where there was dancing. The cab driver said he knew of one but I probably shouldn't go there. I thought he was probably referring to me being a Marine and told him to take me there anyway. I walked into the club and ordered a drink at the bar. It was then I discovered I was the only white in a black club. I was about ready to leave when



.....
I got slapped on the back. I turned around thinking I would have to fight my way out only to discover it was the Special Forces Sergeant Major. He asked me why I had come to the black only club. My quick answer was they wouldn't let a Marine into the other clubs. He laughed and invited me to join his party at a booth. I did and had an enjoyable time. One of the girls was from Detroit and we had plenty of reminiscing about our hometown. There was lots of dancing and drinking. They were amazed when I told them that the Marine Corps did not have racially segregated clubs.

After the club closed they drove me back to my barracks by way of an off-base southern rib joint for a great meal. It was one of the best liberty night outs I ever had!

When the Cuban Missile Crisis was over I flew home to Detroit on leave for a few days then back to California via a plane change in Chicago. I slept during most of the flight and when the plane landed in Los Angeles the stewardess woke me up. I was the only passenger left in the main cabin. Walking thru the first class cabin I came across a memorable sight. Hugh Hefner, publisher of Playboy magazine, was being interviewed by a reporter. He was in Los Angeles to open the new Playboy Club. I greeted Mr. Hefner and he gave me a warm greeting back. Walking thru the tunnel to the lobby all by myself I noticed it was roped off with quite a crowd waiting to see Hugh Hefner. There were twelve beautiful Playboy Bunnies lined up to welcome their boss to Los Angeles. I waved at the crowd and they cheered me as I gave each Bunny a kiss. It was one of those experiences a Marine could not tell his pals back in the barracks because they just would not believe him.

One side note to that experience added to my fond memories of that day. Upon boarding the PSA San Diego bound plane I was the only passenger. The stewardesses did not even notice me coming aboard and I took a window seat in the second row falling asleep almost immediately. Upon awakening I heard the two stewardesses sitting in the seat in front of me talking. They were discussing the Hugh Hefner arrival. One asked the other "Did you see that good looking Marine who kissed all those Bunnies? He was much better looking than Hugh Hefner"! It was then I leaned over the seat and said "Hello Ladies". We all laughed and I must admit I was treated very well for the rest of that flight.

Reporting back to DI duty I was happy to be back in the Corps training recruits. I was asked many times but I never discussed my time at Fort Bragg with the Army. After finishing my tour on the drill field in 1964 I requested and was assigned to the First Reconnaissance Battalion at Camp Pendleton. This began a six year experience as a Recon Marine for me. It never would have happened if I had not had that TAD experience with the U.S. Army Special Forces. I was one happy Marine.

.....