

ML.81.Oh What a Night!

[On 18 Aug 1979 the 55th Wing had a memorable Dining-In at the Offutt AFB Officer's Club. There was patriotism, esprit, pride, camaraderie, and good cheer that still glows. Part of it was the presence of General Ellis, partly the hi-jinks of the whole assemblage, mostly the quality and professionalism of an elite unit. The attached photos are an attempt to capture that fleeting, delightful moment. -ed]



General Ellis was in the Southwest Pacific (under the command of the self-aggrandizing General Douglas MacArthur) demonstrating air leadership flying A-20 Havocs, and seemed to relive those heady days, experiencing a redux with the 55th. At the Dining In his smile was like the sunshine radiating as the evening developed.

The whole assemblage – males and females – donned black stick-on mustaches without me noticing. I was so damned surprised – pleased

that they felt comfortable in the CINC's presence to demonstrate their faith and trust in me by the action – so surprised I turned to Gen Ellis, who was waiting/watching for my reaction, already looking at me with that smile, a twinkle in his eye AND a mustache on his upper lip. I was floored!

During a break, I went to the club office, where I had stored a WW I aviator's uniform (like Eddie Rickenbacker's) with my medals and wings, and changed. Gen Ellis waited for me outside the door and beamed with surprised delight when I stepped out. We waited until the Mess had reconvened before walking in together. I walked to the lectern, looked at the assemblage, paused until the effect of the uniform wore off, looked around the room steely-eyed, and said "OK, you sumbitches, you wanna look like me, DRESS like me!" Another roar rose from the crowd and away we went, continuing our climb to one of the most memorable evenings I had attended since 82nd Dinings In on Kadena. Impossible to describe the emotion and joy of knowing you're serving with men and women who display the key ingredients for a GREAT unit. We had been successful in bringing the 82nd spirit and pride back to the 55th!

General Ellis' brother had flown in from Delaware to attend the event and was not disappointed.



Everyone who serves should be so fortunate at least one time in their service to experience the 'Magic of the Hogs' that we felt in the 82nd. We had the spirit one normally associates with a fighter squadron. We flew our asses off, the maximum allowable time: boring but very rewarding effort either 'feet wet' over the GOT or in Northern Laos over the PDJ. We made up for the boring time –

- at the stag bar for social gatherings and after our weekly Friday pilot meetings, after which the wives joined us,
- at our squadron parties,
- At our picnics,
- On Admiral's Island,
- At our sojourns to Okuma, and
- at Christmas delivering cookies to the guys guarding our airplanes on the ramp
- traveling around the base in a decorated trailer singing Christmas Carols.

No possible way to describe it unless you were there.

"Esprit in a military unit as every military man well knows is a delicate intangible, nurtured over a long period of time in many seemingly trivial ways. The result translates into far-reaching positive benefits in times of crises, above all in war, and those benefits to the country concerned can endure for generations, as they have done so brilliantly in so many armies. They also can be destroyed at a stroke, and what was an elite unit become just another run-of-the-mill organization."

- *General Mathew B. Ridgway*

"Great Units are not constituted magically or by accident. Great Units do not happen by granting the designation or by unit number.

Great Units occur only because the people within them work as a team with pride, esprit de corps, high morale, determination, patience and dedication.

Great Units are inspired by their belief in their mission of "Freedom", and their trust, faith and confidence in those who serve next to them and those who lead them."

- *Brigadier General Regis F. A. Urschler*