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Subject: 82 RS Reunion

.....greetings from Colorado Springs. I just returned from Okinawa Sunday night where I attended the 82d birthday of the 82d Reconnaissance Squadron. It was great to visit the old stomping grounds and see how things have changed and also how some things remain the same. Here is a summary of my visit:

Tuesday, 11 June—arrive Naha airport and met by Lt Col John Isacco the current 82 RS/CC. We then cruise up the 4-lane expressway that goes from Naha to Nago in the north. The trip that used to take an hour and a half up Hwy 58 took a mere 30 minutes give or take. Got to my room with my welcome package and basket which was well stocked (note the single malt scotch). Many of the old billeting buildings are gone and have been replaced by several high-rise buildings. This is the one I was in which is right across the street from the Shogun Inn which is the billeting office.



Wednesday, 12 June—a day to get our bodies a little acclimated. The squadron got us day passes to the Hilton resort which is close to the main gate to Kadena AB. There is also a Doubletree Hotel right next to it and an area called the American Village which has dozens of touristy type shops. All of this is new since I was there and seems to have been built up right out of the sea. Here is a view of the Hilton.



That night I met up with a former cadet at the Air Force Academy that we had sponsored years ago and who is now assigned to the 909th Air Refueling Squadron. His apartment was right outside the main gate to Kadena and we walked to a great hamburger place near where he and his wife lived.

Thursday, 13 June—breakfast at the Banyon Tree golf course and a briefing by the base historian followed by a tour of some historical places on base. Discovered some things I never knew about.



Lunch at the brand new and huge Rocker NCO Club with 82 RS airmen. Some pretty sharp men and women here!! That was followed by a squadron and aircraft tour and squadron briefing. The main squadron building which houses ops and intel and some admin is exactly the same with some renovations. The maintenance building which was adjacent to the main building when I was there is now home to an aeromedical evacuation squadron and maintenance has moved down the flight line to a hangar which they share with the AWACS squadron. My office when I was there is now a heritage room (photos below).



When I was there in 1991 I remembered stumbling across an old 82 SRS patch that had been etched into the sidewalk near our maintenance building. I went searching for it again, not quite remembering where it was, but after a short search sure enough found it!! The patch was the old one with the hog sitting on the torii gate holding a martini glass. Unfortunately, half the patch had been cemented over and we could only make out the 82 and SRS at the top. It's a little hard to see in the photo below but if you look hard you can make out the 82 and SRS (rotate 90 degrees counterclockwise). This must have been done in the late 60s or early 70s.



That night we had dinner at Sam's by the Sea with the squadron commander and about a dozen of the squadron. The place hasn't changed a bit including the uniforms the waitresses wore! Still great food and great atmosphere.



The picture below is from 1982 at Sam's. It is Tom Prior who was my Ops Officer in 1991-1993 and his wife who at the time was a DODSS school nurse. They met in Okinawa. Note the Sam's sign which appears to be identical to the one above with me.



Friday, 14 June—we were supposed to help launch an ops sortie this morning but it got weather cancelled. This was the only day that the weather was bad and it was only in the morning. Other than that it was pretty nice with temps ranging from 75 to 83 and the humidity wasn't that bad. We then participated in a squadron all call and got a chance to tell some war stories from our days. I told the assembled group that I was well aware that when I was in the 82d in 1991-1993 many in the room had not yet been born! One of the things I told them was the story about how we built the SCIF self help. And also how we managed to lock ourselves out of the SCIF! My intel officer told me not to worry because since he built the SCIF he knew how to break into it. Had lunch with a couple of the squadron spouses and then wandered gate 2 street for a bit. Gate 2 street appeared a little run down with several businesses closed and a few tattoo parlors, but BC street was thriving with quite a few businesses. Anyone remember Charlie's Tacos or Tiger Embroidery?



The Officer's Club and Jack's Place haven't changed a bit although unfortunately Jack's was closed for major renovations.



My house in Stearly Heights hasn't changed either.

That night we had dinner at a sushi place with the 82 RS Ops Officer and about another dozen squadron mates.



Saturday, 15 June—this was the big squadron birthday party pig roast and BBQ at Torii Station beach. The first picture is me, the current commander, and Andy Marotta who was Commander from 1998-2000. Good turnout and good people.



Some observations about Okinawa and the squadron.

Okinawa appears to be much more modern and cleaner than I remember. Highway 58 is much more congested also. There has been a lot of modern buildings put up in the past 26 years which I guess shouldn't be a surprise. Okinawa seems to be a bigger tourist destination for the mainland Japanese. Everyone seemed to speak very good English.

The biggest change in the squadron is the ops tempo which is much higher. The day I arrived I believe Rivet Joint, Combat Sent, and Cobra Ball were all on station. Most of the aircrew get rental cars authorized now and stay for 90 day deployments (except Cobra Ball) versus the 24 days back when. Sortie length is not as long now. Cobra Ball is here so often they have a dedicated billeting building for aircrew and the maintenance they bring with them.

I started to send daily updates to some of the folks who were here with me. They gradually added a few more names to my email updates and at the end we had about a dozen folks on the list. Each one shared some more memories and got to live vicariously through me. It was a blast and we are now considering having a mini-82 RS reunion of our early 90s crowd sometime in the next year. We just have to pick a time and place.

Mace