

## **Snoopy, a Mascot with a Mission**

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Korat 10/1967-11/1969

My life, as a Bat Cat, began June 1967 when I flew into Logan IA from Detroit (during the 1967 riots for which I was the butt of jokes concerning stolen TV sets) to join the 553 Recon Wing at Otis AFB, Mass. I had recently completed survival training in Spokane, Washington and had no idea what my new assignment was all about. After arriving, the mission of our Wing had become clearer as we settled in to begin training and testing in preparation for deployment to Korat.

As part of the training/testing process, it was required that we traveled via C119's to Ft. Walton Beach, Florida to Eglin AFB to join what was known as McNamara's Foleys, so named because of the various experimental aircraft and missions located there (and thought to be a waste of money). This base (which had been scheduled for closure, on several occasions) afforded very basic living accommodations including out door showers; this was definitely not a Club Med. The primary mission of our TDY was to test equipment and processes in preparation for our combat missions. As you can guess, much of the military decorum had gone out the window as we adapted to a base that reflected no investment in basic maintenance over many years.

One evening, a few of the airmen and NCOs ventured into town to clear their heads and relieve the stress of the Viet Nam War (right!), returning to the base both drunk and with our new, soon to be, mascot of the 553<sup>rd</sup> Recon Wing. It didn't take long for us to come up with a name...one look and Snoopy was the obvious choice. He soon became one of the troops in the wing. Some how(?), I began taking care of the pooch and tried to keep him out of trouble (not to mention, some of those persons with which he served) as he and we settled into the Air Force routine.

During our flight testing, one of our NCOs, after not too much thought, decided to take Snoopy on a flight, if for no other reason, but to break the boredom of the slow pace of activities on base and in flight. Snoopy's first flight was less than spectacular. Still a young pup, he did what puppies do...pee. As you know, much of the sensitive equipment in our aircraft was located below the floor board and would not mix well with pee.

After a while, we tried again, to much fanfare and success. Later, I returned to Otis AFB, leaving Snoopy behind, really not expecting to see Snoopy again. I expected he would remain part of Eglin AFB and the remaining crews. However, to the surprise of most of us, Snoopy deployed to Otis with one of the flight crews and was returned to my care while we prepped for our October deployment. During that time, a plan was developed to keep Snoopy as part of the Wing as the official mascot after the deployment. The basic plan was to sneak Snoopy through Hawaii by insisting, to custom officials, they were not allowed because of the classified nature of the aircraft and its equipment while keeping Snoopy out of sight and on board the airplane. Snoopy arrived in Korat safely

and without any mishaps on an otherwise uneventful trip. For me, however, our Flying Tiger flight suffered through a “Co-Pilot” landing which blew a tire in Alaska. We had a 10 hour layover while we waited for a replacement tire before proceeding to Korat. Although it was considered winter in Thailand, it was in the 80’s and we were dressed accordingly. The weather in Alaska was not quite so friendly and was very cold.

We arrived in Korat many hours later and enjoyed their winter weather greatly. It wasn’t long before we hit the pools and otherwise made the best of the much warmer weather in Thailand. We were greatly surprised to see many of the resident airman wearing jackets and other warm clothing. After my first year stationed on base, it became very clear why they were dressed that way...we mimic their dress code and we didn’t go swimming☺. After a summer of 95 plus degrees and high humidity, 70 and 80 degree weather seemed quite cool. Because of my experience in swimming competition in high school, I landed a job managing the NCO club swimming pool. This was good for extra money and a great way to pass the time on base.

We quickly settled in to the routine of the base we shared with the 388<sup>th</sup> and Camp Friendship. As life would have it, the 388<sup>th</sup> had a mascot of their own...the **Red Baron**. And it wasn’t long before he and Snoopy met...it was not friendly. Snoopy required a couple of stitches and a shot after that meeting. The **Red Baron** was very territorial and that territory included the whole base on which Snoopy was not welcomed. Snoopy kept his distance from that time forward.

Our crew’s first mission was less than glamorous. We didn’t know what to expect and it was an extremely nervous time for us. During the pre-flight briefing, we received, what appeared to be, good intelligence on what to expect while flying our mission. But, being a very green crew, entering combat for the first time, we were covertly scared. When we arrived on station, every time the plane turned, a part of the crew had to make a trip to the “john” to throw up. This lasted the whole trip. The toilet was a total mess and had a terrible odor by the end of the mission. On the other hand, Snoopy had a great flight, in spite of its length. The only problem he had was at the end of the flight while on the ground and we were about to deplane. We were opening the door waiting for the stairs to roll up, when Snoopy darted for the opening. Thankful for someone’s quick reflexes, Snoopy was grabbed and spared the plunge to the concrete below. After waiting impatiently for the stairs, he quickly headed down and straight to the grass to empty his full bladder, apparently to his great relief. All future flights became very routine and, for the most part, uneventful.

The most unfortunate event for me happened while on station near the end of our mission waiting to be relieved by the next crew. We later received word that our relief flight was missing and may have crashed in extremely bad weather. This, of course, was a shock and a great loss to all of us. The enlisted portion of the crews shared common barracks and we shared a close kinship. As a side bar, Snoopy had a story that related to this tragic time for the 553<sup>rd</sup>. One of the crew members, killed, berthed in a bunk next to mine; a bunk I shared with snoopy. For some unknown reason, he and Snoopy never got along. Snoopy would snap at him whenever he attempted to pet him or play with him.

But the night before the accident, Snoopy slept with him willingly and quietly. This has always puzzled me over the years.

The next major event in Snoopy's life was his 100 mission celebration at the Swadee Club. That was a great time for everyone, especially for Snoopy and me. He drank quite a bit of beer, as did many of us (I couldn't, because I was on crew rest). In fact, he missed his flight and went AWOL for two days before returning from where ever he was (he had the same look that many of the airmen had when returning from a satisfying night in town ☺). At this point, I wish to apologize for not including any names. This year represents the 40<sup>th</sup> year since my discharge and, during that time, I have only seen one person with whom I served. That is a awful lot of water under the bridge! I hope anyone reading this will take the time to get back with me to help fill in the blanks and make this a living document.

Snoopy served his time quietly until his trip home which is well documented. He did create a small problem at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport when he broke away from his leash. It took us 30 minutes to catch up with him to get him home. He lived and traveled with me over much of the country. Besides Detroit, he lived in Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Houston, Galveston, San Jose and El Cerito, CA. He enjoyed riding in cars, on motorcycles and in boats. We took him fishing numerous times. He also enjoyed swimming. He lived a full life; a life that many humans could only hope for. I was proud to be part of his life and part of the 553<sup>rd</sup> Recon Wing. Snoopy Died in Dallas, Texas in 1980.