

THE BEER RUN

We all remember when, if the Airmen's Bar wanted more beer, we would have to go to the US Navy Commissary in Cholon, a suburb in Saigon, to buy it from them. Do you remember how it went?

A couple of blokes would grab the Milk Run to Ton Son Nuit, get off and grab a US Army vehicle with a local driver and drive to the Commissary, buy the Beer, load the Beer and drive to the Australian Embassy which was situated in the Caravelle Hotel, race up to the reception and grab the mail, back to the vehicle and drive back to Ton Son Nuit, off-load the beer and wait for the Milk Run to return, load the beer and return home. ***A piece of cake!!***

This is my recollection of one such Run, which happened in late March 1966.

Two members of the Committee were to go and buy the Beer, there was myself, an LAC Assistant Loadie/G.H. and an LAC Loadie/Engine Fitter (*who arrived 24/11/65 and departed 25/07/66*) and who shall remain nameless, however for the sake of the story and for something he did later in the day I will call him "***Little Boy Blue***" as in the nursery rhyme.

We caught the "Duty Loadie" vehicle from the Villa out to the airstrip; dressed in our correct uniform, you remember, Drab shirts, Drab shorts, secured at the waist by 2 strips of cloth passing through metal clips, Drab long socks, Black leather shoes and our Blue Hat. And being so immaculately attired we refused to physically assist the Crew in the pre-flight checks etc, however, we did offer *constructive comments* on their style and method.

Upon arriving at Ton Son Nuit we left the aircraft to continue on its milk-run, while we met our contacts and somehow, I don't remember how, we were given a deuce and a half (two & a half ton) with a local Vietnamese driver. The only thing I remember about the white knuckle drive to the Commissary was, to get right of way in the traffic the only rule seemed to be; the larger the vehicle and the louder the horn, got right of way.

Going into the Commissary was like something out of the future, it was huge, you could buy everything that opened and shut, the Yanks could even buy the latest model of a motor vehicle and it would be ready for them to drive away upon their arrival home to the states. We purchased the pallets of "beer" (Budweiser & Schlitz) and paid for them, I don't recall how we did that, but I assume ***Little Boy Blue*** either paid them in Greenbacks or MPC. We loaded them onto the back of the Deuce and a half and headed off on our next white knuckle ride to the Embassy, which was situated on one of the upper levels of the Caravelle Hotel in down town Saigon, when we finally got there we found that there was no parking

spots out the front, but we did find one just around the corner in To Doo' Street, after parking and just as we got out of the truck we noticed that an American MP jeep had pulled up behind us.

Can you imagine the sight that beheld the Big, Black Yank MP, with his 45 hung low on his right hip, there in front of him was a US Army vehicle driven by a local Vietnamese driver and hopping out of the passenger side was two white blokes dressed in Drab shirts, Drab shorts, secured at the waist by 2 strips of cloth passing through metal clips, Drab long socks, Black leather shoes and our Blue Hat, on closer inspection he would have noticed that on our epaulettes we had the word "Australia" and on each of our sleeves we had a two bladed propeller. His first words to us sounded like "*Wot chew doing in Too Dough Street?*" We didn't understand him so we asked him to repeat it, which he did, **Little Boy Blue**, being the senior L.A.C., told him "*Mate, we are just nicking up to get the mail and bugging off back to Ton Son Nuit.*" The Big Black Yank MP, with his 45 hung low on his right hip then said "*Say wot chew sayin? So Little Boy Blue* repeated it. The Big Black Yank MP, with his 45, then unclipped his holster and told us that due to recent bombings that no-one was allowed to park in this street, it was at this point that **Little Boy Blue**, and just before he nicked off to get the mail, invited the Big, Black Yank MP, with his 45 hung low on his right hip, to go and have sexual intercourse with himself, or words to that effect.

There I was, a young bloke who had only turned twenty a couple of months ago, left with our local Vietnamese driver, who was still sitting behind the wheel of the truck, but excreting bricks, and a very excitable Big, Black Yank MP, with his 45 hung low on his right hip, trying to placate and explain to him that we were members of the Royal Australian Air Force based in Vung Tau and we flew Caribous and worked under the command of the 315th Air Commando Squadron.

Upon reflection I think the only thing that saved us was, that the very excitable Big, Black Yank MP, with his 45 hung low on his right hip, didn't know what rank we were, but because we had a two bladed propeller on our sleeves we were possibly Prop Jockeys and therefore Officers and he was only a NCO. Thankfully after a few more minutes, although it seemed like a lifetime, **Little Boy Blue** reappeared with the mail bag slung over this shoulder, he threw the mail bag into the back of the truck and told me to get back into the truck, which I did. Just before **Little Boy Blue** hopped back into the truck he turned back to the very excitable Big, Black Yank MP, with his 45 hung low on his right hip, and once again invited him to go and have sexual intercourse, or words to that effect. **Little Boy Blue** then told our driver to take us back to Ton Son Nuit.

After surviving another white knuckle ride back to Ton Son Nuit we pulled up at the hanger that stored all the mail and other goods that "Wallaby Airlines" carried on its Milk Runs to all the different Special Forces Camps, we unloaded the pallets of beer and stored them in the hanger to await the return of the Boo. Located around a couple of the walls inside this hanger were large, open wooden timber

crates, each with the name of the camps we visited on either, the milk run to Nha Trang in the north or to Ca Mau in the south.

In due course the Boo returned and I organised a fork-lift to load the pallets of beer into the aircraft, it was only after we started to tie the load down that I realised that **Little Boy Blue** was not with us, so I went back into the hanger to find him, and where was he?

Why, he was in a Mail Crate fast asleep!

Cheers,

Bob

P.S. If you still haven't worked out who Little Boy Blue is, his Christian names are *James Claude*.