

Fitting In

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With luck, we will sometimes find that we fit into a place but not just a place but also a time and a culture. That happy situation cannot be returned to as time has passed and the individual has also changed. Those halcyon days we remember best are selected parts of the past which stand out for a particular reason. Most commonly the reason is the trauma from an unavoidable near-disaster that you survived with wit or more commonly just plain old luck.

The brave do not live forever, the timid never live at all. Motorcyclists are masters of measured risk as are bush pilots and travelers like Paul Theroux. Lewis and Clark did not live long lives, but they had immense adventures.

When base hospital appointments became expensive, I attended to my own simple medical needs. After being told that calcium deposits on my tendons were causing my pain I treated it by eliminating most calcium from my diet instead of having surgery. Nine months later the deposits were gone, (along with part of one tooth) and I resumed a normal diet. In Asia one simply bought the antibiotics as needed to treat infections with the guidance of a Merck Manual. I closely followed my policy of medication only for genuine medical need and with Merck and experienced local physicians as needed.

At Subic (1982) a friend remarked that "I looked like I was in the Navy" My hair looked too long so when the barber took a break for a few minutes I cut it shorter myself with his tools and returned to the chair. He seemed not to notice my work and finished it off nicely. I fitted in.

At Misawa(1976) I was offered the loan of a Navy "deck suit" used by the aviation detachment there. It was wonderful for motorcycling in bad weather. I wore it everywhere and when, at the Misawa dining hall, I was asked how I got away having such long hair, I replied "it depends on who you know". His face fell until I continued "being a civilian helps" As detachment officer lived just down the hall from me and on seeing the deck suit said, "that looks like one of our flight suits" to which I replied, "it probably is". No issue was raised, we trusted each other. I remember him complaining that he did not like the airplanes he flew as they all leaked water on the pilot. I should have offered to look at them, but they did wear the perfect clothing for a leaky Grumman OV-1 Mohawk.

The Navy and Army used the dowdy Mohawk for another decade. The Marines flew the maneuverable North American OV-10 Buonco which they flew putting on a good show when landing. Capable A-10 Warthogs don't appeal to F4 pilots, but they are immensely effective in destroying tanks. On a costal ride in Korea, I remember an F4 popping up out of nowhere,

blasting away at a rock with the sound of ripping fabric and disappearing. I was on the shooting range.

A close buddy Dick who I met years later was offered F-4 training. He accepted the offer as a civilian and excelled on his check ride. Told to expect orders to Vietnam shortly he said "No way, they shoot missiles at you there, I'm not joining". No commitment was required of him for the training. Courage has reasonable limits.

I felt no pressing need to stay in Korea if the North Koreans had a nuclear bomb and could deliver it on target where I lived at Osan in 1993. It amounts to an assessment of measured risk.