

## **University of Maryland, European Division – North Base, Sinai, Summer, 1993**

**Michael Denison**

**July 28, 2020**

I flew into Cairo from Frankfurt and was told that I would have to take a bus cross country to get to my teaching site, the North Sinai camp. Fortunately, there was a small cargo plane heading that way, so I was saved from what would have been a grueling journey. Most of the students would be taking basic English and Speech classes to earn points toward promotion.

The site itself was manned by the MFO, the Multi-National Force & Observers, a consortium of UN peacekeepers, including some from France, Scotland and the Fiji Islands, among other countries. The Scots hosted a “Bobby Burns Night” party with haggis for all who wanted to try it one night and the French celebrated their Bastille Day with a contest featuring a bottle of champagne as the prize. An attractive female officer sat at one end of a long hall, holding the bottle of champagne. Contestants would be strapped to long bungee cords at the other end of the hall and would have to run towards the bottle through a long puddle of slippery Wesson Oil in order to win. The soldiers from the Fiji Islands were housed in separate area and started early each day with beautiful choral singing that was loud enough to be heard throughout the camp.

One of my students was a helicopter pilot and she said she would be absent from class one day, but if we looked out the window at exactly a certain time, she would be in the air and would “waggle” her helicopter at us, which she did. Another student, giving a demonstration speech, took the whole class inside a nearby Chinook helicopter and showed us where everything was stored. Definitely the largest audio-visual aid ever used in one of my classes.

Another memory is being invited by the Israelis to visit their base just across the border in the Gaza Strip. It took about an hour to get through Egyptian customs, where they stole my pen, and about five minutes to get through Israeli customs. In Israel, we toured an outdoor airplane museum, which included the Navy Grumman Avenger piloted by President George H.W. Bush in WWII. We were shown documentary films which had the faces of Israeli officers blanked out so that they could not be identified in case anyone stole the film and were also shown a 3D live-action computer screen which followed every aircraft in the air over the country at all times.

I also took a day trip to Sharm El-Sheikh, a resort area at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. They have rentable cabins, done in a Thai style and some Thai restaurants which I was surprised but delighted to see there. On another trip, to the northern end of the Red Sea, I remember seeing in the distance the port of Aqaba, which was famously taken from the land side in a surprise attack by Lawrence of Arabia during the Arab Campaign in WWI.