



Nick Zoa

Yokota Air Base
Tokyo, Japan
Term V, 1982

In 1982, I was stationed at Yokota Air Base, on the west side of Tokyo. One term, I was scheduled to teach afternoon classes at Yokota, followed by evening classes at Yokosuka Naval Base on the east side of Tokyo. This meant that I would have to traverse Tokyo in one hour – a distance of about 65 kilometers – and that I would have to make this trip between 5:00 and 6:00 pm, i.e. rush hour.

By train and subway, one might be able to get from Yokota to Yokosuka in two hours, on a good day, not during rush hour. To do this trip in one hour would be impossible at any time by any means – or so I thought. As we all know, Julian Jones was a wizard at solving logistical problems. He was also adept at negotiating with the military. In Tokyo, the U.S. mail is carried from base to base by helicopter. Julian arranged for me to travel with the mail across Tokyo on the evenings when I taught at Yokosuka.

So, every Tuesday and Thursday, as soon as my afternoon class concluded, I hustled from Yokota's Education Center to the airfield where a UH-1 Huey, loaded with crates, bags and packages, waited for me. To allow for fast loading and unloading, there were no doors. I was strapped into a seat facing outwards. My toes hung outside the door. I wore a helmet to muffle the thunder of the engines and the whir of the helicopter blades. A headset allowed me to listen to the crosstalk between pilots and ground crew.



A UH-1 Huey about to depart from Yokota Air Base

We flew across Tokyo about 100 meters above the tallest buildings. Hedgehopping over the roofs of Tokyo at sunset was a pretty amazing way to get to class. After a flight like that, I taught my evening classes at Yokosuka with extra adrenaline. When my evening class concluded, I had a long ride back to Yokota by train. Not everyone enjoyed flying military, but I always did.