

A Manila Adventure Memory

AG3 Robert H. Davis Viet Nam Cruise 1966-67

Written: 05 December 2020

In 1967 we (the U.S.S. Ticonderoga CVA-14) departed the Tonkin Gulf from our latest thirty day "line period" transiting to Subic Bay, Olongapo City (aka Po City), Philippines (PI) for liberty. While enroute the ships MWR (Morale Welfare Recreation) department sent out a bulletin for those interested announcing that there would be a three-day R&R (rest and relaxation) outing to Manila while in-port. The only cost would be \$5.00 to cover the round-trip airfare on Philippine Airlines from Subic to Manila. I and my command Senior Chief (AGCS Bittenbinder) immediately signed up.

Shortly after docking in Subic, a Navy MWR bus pulled up to the ship's brow to take those that had signed up for the trip to the airfield. When we got to the airfield there was a PI Airlines old DC-3 tail dragger waiting on us. We boarded the plane, and off the group went. The plane's physical condition was a little sketchy. While cranking the old RECIPS (reciprocating engine) it belched a lot of blue smoke, which was normal for that aircraft. We had a little turbulence enroute to Manila and the cockpit door kept swinging and banging back and forth (all adding a little character to the experience) but nonetheless, we made it.

We were met at the Manila airport by an MWR air-conditioned bus manned with personnel whose whole job was to facilitate our R&R experience while in Manila, and they did a great job. But, before we could be let loose on Manila there was a requirement for an "indoctrination" lecture back at the R&R center, so we headed that way. However, the R&R staff started our experience immediately by having an iced-down cooler of ice-cold San Miguel (San-Magoo) beer and commenced to hand it out on the way. Hit the spot on a hot PI day. While enroute to the center they gave us a mini sightseeing tour of the downtown Manila area, showing us the location of some hotels, tourist attractions, etc.

When we got to the center, they gathered us all for a VD (venereal disease) lecture, which was standard in those days prior to commencing liberty. Of course, it included some very graphic and gross looking pictures of what could happen if appropriate precautions weren't taken. Following this lecture, they commenced to tell us about the various forms of entertainment, location and prices. They also explained procedures to follow and where to call if we were to get into any trouble, or if someone tried to rip us off (which was not unusual). Finally, they provided instructions on when to be back at the center for our return trip to Subic. And, off we went.

Did some shopping and sightseeing during the day, and some clubs that first night. The next day was more sightseeing and shopping until we got bored with that. Across Manila Bay there was Naval Air Station Sangley Point, where my liberty partner had been stationed on a previous tour of duty. He said that he still knew people in the weather office there, and suggested we go over for a visit. There were two ways to get there, a long bus ride around the bay, or go to the American Embassy and take the embassy boat that made several thirty-minute trips a day over to NAS. We elected for the shorter boat ride and got to Sangley where we met up and visited his friends. Nothing eventful happened, just a few old shipmates reliving days past.

When it came time to leave, my friend suggested that we take the bus back to Manila. "It's different" he said, "I've taken it many times before." So, we headed out to catch the bus back to Manila in the little town right outside the Sangley gate. The Filipino people are very good people but in the 60's when you got outside of major towns, they were still very "third worldish." He forewarned me that I might see some "different ways" [which became obvious rather quickly.] For example, there were businesses on either side of the street where we were to catch the bus that my friend told me "sometimes the local mortuary, if they have too much business, stores bodies on their front porch roof." Sure enough, true to form, they were putting their porch roof to use that day. Anyway, we waited for the bus, and it eventually showed up.

Keep in mind, in my young life experience in Texas, a bus looks like a "Greyhound" bus, that is, reasonably comfortable, air conditioned and well kept. Well, what showed up? It was a bus alright, but definitely not a "Greyhound." This bus was like a school bus but multicolored, open sided, and colorfully decorated in

various ways, and packed to the gills with people (hanging on inside, outside, and on top) of varying ages carrying pigs, chickens, goats, farm implements, bedding, baggage, etc. I thought to myself, "Wholly crap! What have I gotten myself into?" My travel mate looked at me and grinned. But we were committed now.

The bus driver took off, and for the next hour and half, I had one heck of a life experience. We were whizzing by people and buildings alongside the road. And these weren't just any roads; they were narrow and full of potholes with dense jungle on both sides between stops. The bus driver operated at only two speeds, "flat-out" and "full stop", and he continually honked his horn while hitting those potholes and rattling us all the way. In between stops in all of the villages between Sangley and Manila everyone on the bus was bouncing off their seats. It was surreal, like a scripted scene out of a movie. A movie that I am glad I was in to this day. What a hoot! The bus ride alone was worth the whole trip. I wouldn't trade that memory and experience for anything.

We made it back to Manila no worse for wear and returned to the ship the next day and back to the Tonkin Gulf for another line period.

Submitted by AGC Robert Davis, USN (Ret)