

# CANDOER News



A quarterly Newsletter dedicated to Communicators AND Others Enjoying Retirement

April 2013

Spring Issue

Volume 13 - Number 1

## Inside this issue

<b>Cat's Corner</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Life in Saigon By James Prosser</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Naval Radio Operators By Charles Christian</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>If this war keeps up I'm gunna get pregnant By John Lemandri</b>	<b>5</b>

Welcome to the latest issue of the Newsletter dedicated to the **CANDOERS** (Communicators **AND** Others Enjoying Retirement). This newsletter will be published quarterly. New issues will be posted on the Web for viewing on or about, January 15, April 15, July 15 and October 15.

The **CANDOER** web site and newsletter may be viewed at: [www.candoer.org](http://www.candoer.org).

***The success of this newsletter depends on you. I need story contributors.***

Do you have an interesting article, a nostalgia item, or a real life story you would like to share with others? If you do, please send it to me at the following e-mail

address: [candoercat@gmail.com](mailto:candoercat@gmail.com)  
or to my snail-mail address:

Robert J. Catlin, Sr.  
2670 Dakota Street  
Bryans Road, MD 20616-3062  
Tel: (301) 535-9263

Please, NO handwritten submissions.

This newsletter is available on the Web **only**, free, to any and all.

None of the material in this newsletter has a copyright, **unless otherwise noted**. If you wish to print the newsletter and make copies to distribute to others, please feel free to do so.

The **CANDOER** Newsletter will be available in three formats: as a Web Page; as an Adobe PDF file; and as a Microsoft Word document.

The PDF file and Microsoft Word document will allow you to download and print the newsletter exactly as if I had printed it and mailed it to you.

---

## Cat's Corner

Spring has sprung, the grass has riz,  
I wonder where the birdies is!  
There he is up in the sky.

He dropped some whitewash in my eye!  
I'm alright, I won't cry,  
I'm just glad that elephants can't fly!  
**H**ere we are back in lawn mowing season  
but at least we did not have to shovel snow  
this winter.

**N**ancy and I did not winter in Florida this year. In January, after Nancy suffered with Shingles (We both had the shot.), we went to Florida for two weeks, took a cruise out of Cape Canaveral and then visited with some old friends from work and from my high school days.

The boat is back out of moth balls and has been out on the Mattawoman Creek several times already this year. The white perch, yellow perch, and large mouth bass are plentiful this spring.

The article, "*Think before you donate*," published in the winter issue of the **CANDOER** News had a lot of invalid information. Several **CANDOERS** have pointed out that I should have checked the article with Snopes for authenticity. I agree and wish to express my sincere apologies for publishing this article without verifying its accuracy. The article has been removed from the winter issue and the issue has been reposted to the web site.

The one-liners used in this issue were sent to me by Jim Prosser and are titled, "Clever Quotes!"

---

**I'm not a paranoid, deranged millionaire. God damn it, I'm a billionaire.**

**Howard Hughes**

---

**Life in Saigon**  
By James F. Prosser

My first Foreign Service post was Saigon in then French Indo-China. Shortly after independence in 1954 it changed from a Consulate General briefly into a Legation and then into an Embassy when the country became Vietnam. In a two-year period the post grew rather quickly from a meager staff of 14 to 42.

The French Foreign Legion had just been defeated by the Viet Minh at Dien

Bien Phu and it, along with thousands of French colonists, were packing up and leaving from the ports of Haiphong in the north and Saigon in the south.

Housing initially was difficult to obtain for our Embassy staff. Consequently, the Department of State assigned mostly single employees. Married employees had to leave their spouses in the U.S. until adequate housing eventually became available. Staff houses with three to six employees were the main interim housing solution. I could write a long dissertation on this, but it will have to wait for another time.

I was placed in a "staff house" of three congenial persons. We were a USIS officer, consular officer, and me, a communicator. The consular officer, Walter Keville, was a quiet gentleman who regaled us at meal times, almost daily, with extraordinary tales of what was going on in the consular section. I'm sure he never had a dull day in his job. Here are two of the more interesting incidents.

Walt came home one evening for supper and told us that the Ambassador (G. Frederick Reinhard) had asked him to go early in the morning to the town of Can Tho southwest of Saigon where the French Foreign Legion was going to publicly execute a captured leader of the Binh Xuyen rebels in the town square at the 6:00 a.m., sunrise. Normally a political officer would go to witness executions, but none was available. After returning, at dinner that evening, Walt related how he had just assumed the execution would be by hanging or firing squad. When he walked into the town square, he was horrified to see there erected was a guillotine! He said he was not mentally prepared for this for it really unsettled him for the remainder of the day.

Another incident was when a seaman, on an American freighter docked in the Saigon River harbor near the embassy at the intersection of Avenue du Port and Boulevard de la Somme, either fell overboard (or was tossed) and drowned. His body was later found and disposition by the embassy had to be determined. Walt

notified the next-of-kin by telegram of the event, plus costs for embalming or cremation, storage and shipping requesting final instructions. Cremation was selected. The mortuary gave the ashes to Walt in an inexpensive sealed clay jug. Walt took the jug of ashes back to the embassy, packed them securely (he thought) in a cardboard box. He then addressed the parcel and brought it to communications where it was sent to the Department of State via air pouch for affixation of U.S. postage and transmission to the next-of-kin. (At the time Saigon did not have an APO and international mail was much too expensive and completely unreliable.) This was just the beginning of Walt's problems with the seaman's remains.

About two weeks later, the next-of-kin reported to the embassy the ashes had not been received. A little later the congressman of the next-of-kin got into the act by pressuring the embassy for action. Walt unfortunately neglected to register the parcel, making tracing impossible.

Walt eventually received a telegram from the Department of State asking for full details on the lost ashes. He then came with it to the communications supervisor, Eric Baxter. Eric tells Walt, "Sit down. I've got some bad news for you!" That very morning Eric had received a WIROM (telegraphic version of an Operations Memorandum) from the chief of the Department of State's pouch room severely criticizing Saigon's mail room for violating Foreign Service regulations on the misuse of diplomatic pouches, as this particular pouch "was full of dirt and pieces of clay pottery along with diplomatic mail."

I'm not sure, but I think Walt and Eric may have walked out the front door of the embassy to the nearby sidewalk cafe and took their lumps from the Department of State with a couple bottles of "33".

---

**If life were fair Elvis would still be alive today and all the impersonators would be dead.  
Johnny Carson**

---

## Naval Radio Operators

By Charles Christian  
W6CLC@sonic.net

Something happened today that reminded me of a story that those who do, or did, CW might find interesting.

In 1984 I had the occasion to fly out 175 miles to the USS Midway on some communications business concerning a secure circuit between the Omani Armed Forces and the USN Battle Group that is always in the Arabian Sea area.

The Sultanate of Oman has a very close relationship with the U.S. and Britain. As the absolute ruler, Sultan Qaboos, is very pro west on the Q.T.

After I had my conference with some senior officers and R/Adm Tom Brown, the nice admiral had the ship's Communications Officer, LT/Cmdr. Claude Cole, give me a tour of all the ship's communications facilities. My various clearances had already been sent out to the ship by the U.S. State Department in WashDC and I would get to see all that neat stuff.

After I saw what I knew I would see, state-of-the-art communications gear and some very sharp and proficient communications personnel at work, Cole took me down a companion way to a compartment and opened the water tight door. I did not go in as I saw enough at one glance. Sitting at a console full of old radio gear was two old, grizzly CPO radio operators, playing with their (bugs) keys and drinking coffee. They had on their dress uniforms full of hash marks marking their decades of service. The uniforms were shabby looking and had a sort of greenish shade of mold (?) on their blouses. If they did not move around, I guess they would also have spider webs on them.

Surreal!

If all else fails, CW gets through. The navy knows that and therefore has two old salts standing by 24/7 on their capital ships, such as a flagship like CV 41 was.

The ship is now tied up in San Diego and is a most interesting museum to visit.

I wear with pride, at times, the VIP ball cap from the ship that R/Adm Brown gave me. Of course, I get stopped by folks at times and then I have to tell them, "No, I was only a visitor on her at sea once, not a former crewman."

**If toast always lands butter-side down,  
and cats always land on their feet,  
what happens if you strap toast on the  
back of a cat?**

**Steven Wright**

**If this war keeps up I'm gunna get  
pregnant**

By John Lemandri

1978, my second posting, Baghdad, land of Nimrud, Nineveh, Ur of the Chadenese and Babylon from where King Ebenezer sent his armies to destroy the Temple of Solomon and enslave the Israeli people.

We were a two man IRM team, Leo Duncan and I, and when Leo departed a year later I held the fort, running incoming radio-teletype and outgoing offline encrypted. The Iraqi Government limited us to two incoming frequencies and no outgoing so our only alternative was to use a Siemens teleprinter. The only problem was that after the war began, the Iraqis, afraid we were transmitting information to the Iranians, garbled every message I sent. After my wife was evacuated to Europe I moved into the Intra Section full time and slept on a cot in the commo center, especially now that the Iraq - Iran War was in full bloom with Iranian Phantoms bombing and strafing the city twice each day while 52 American hostages endured Iranian incarceration in Tehran. With our spouses and all non essential employees evacuated from post, we were down to six Americans including the Charge' Ed Peck.

Those were long and arduous days, typing each cable and then encrypting and re-encrypting, often for 12 to 14 hours straight as reporting to and from the Department significantly increased. One morning as we met in Ed Peck's office there was fear Baghdad could be overrun so our

Administrative officer gave each of us a few ounces of gold and a thousand dollars in US currency along with separate evacuation plans. The only problem was my plan had never been updated and I was to head to the boarder with Iran, thereby becoming the 53rd American hostage.

The Iraqis, bastards as they were, took delight in garbling every message I sent as each had to pass through the local telecom exchange. Finally, one day as I neared total collapse, I mumbled to myself that enough was enough and went to discuss the issue with Ed Peck. I was a walking zombie, over-worked with little if any sleep since the war began. I discussed the situation with Charge' Peck who told Washington and the Iraqi Government in easy to understand terms that from this point on the American Intra Section would not be issuing any visas to Iraqis, including those on official assignment to the UN until our telex circuit cleared. Not surprisingly, within two days the circuit was clean as a whistle and for the next few weeks I had no difficulty sending and receiving telexes. No more encrypting each message multiple times to where I often ended up with a wad of worn and broken encryption tape in a pile higher than the machine I used to transmit it on.

Then one day the teleprinter froze in the middle of sending a message. It remained on but would not process the tape past the first few seconds. Frantic we could no longer send encrypted messages, I asked OC to come up with a fix. A dozen ideas were floated around the Department, some costing thousands of dollars until a few days later some technical genius, God bless his sole, advised me by phone to bend a paper clip a certain way and insert it at a certain point into the teleprinter to defeat the answerback mechanism. Bingo! We were back in service. During the days we were out of commission we made arrangements for me to drive half way across the sprawling metropolis of Baghdad twice each day to have the Canadians and then the Brits send our encrypted traffic, sometimes utilizing the services of both friendly missions which was a great backup

while we needed one.

The Iraq - Iran war intensified to a point where the Iranians flew so low you could often see the pilot. On one occasion a phantom flew under the arm of a construction boom. On another I was in a bar with Leo Duncan and Ryan Crocker, who would later become a Career Ambassador, and Christine, our secretary who Ryan eventually married. We were enjoying a beer when the air raid sirens began to wale and a few minutes later all hell broke loose as the Iranian phantoms flew at tree top level over the city, then shot straight up as they delivered their ordnance on the oil refinery in the middle of the Tigris River a half mile distant. As the shit hit the fan the Iraqi bar tender abruptly stopped serving a beer, grabbed his AK-47, jumped over the bar, ran into the street and emptied a full magazine at one of the phantoms, then calmly returned to serving the beer as if this were an every day occurrence, which it was.

Iraqi air defense was anything but competent, letting loose tends of thousands of anti-aircraft rounds of all caliber and dozens of surface to air missiles or SAMs. They rarely hit anything, although the night display was better than any fireworks I had seen in Vietnam or on the fourth of July, and it often lasted long after the phantoms had gone. The only problem was that whatever went up, had to come down, and quite a few homes and vehicles sustained damage during each attack.

At the beginning of the war our own home would vibrate from all the boom boom boom ack ack ack boom boom boom while my former spouse and I hid in the closet under the stairwell for protection from shrapnel. One morning we said "to hell with it" and proceeded to have sex. This routine not only continued each morning for a week but intensified as the phantoms arrived at the break of dawn. Then one morning, fed up with having to hide each and every day, my wife surprised the hell out of me when during our romp in the hay she yelled out, "Damn it, if this war keeps up I'm gunna get pregnant."

**Having more money doesn't make you happier. I have 50 million dollars but I'm just as happy as when I had 48 million.**

**Arnold Schwarzenegger**

**See you next quarter!**