

Draft: 23 Oct 23



A casual history of US Air Force Medical Service operations at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota, (1962 – 2023) and an account of some adventures had while there.

**[But first, some backstory on
Minot Air Force Base (MAFB, ND)]**

Minot Air Force Base was conceived in the early 1950s and developed initially as an *Air Defense Command* installation, at which interceptor aircraft would be based that could, with the aid of aerial refueling, defend a large swath of the north-central border of the Continental United States against a feared attack by Soviet nuclear-armed bombers. In the early 1950s, it had become obvious that our former WW2 ally (the Soviet Union) had become the emerging 'new threat' to America...a circumstance brought to crystal clarity by the 'Korean War' conflict that pitted Communist affiliated nations (China and North Korea) against the United States and the United Nations of the free world.

Construction of the new base was begun in July of 1955, after a cooperative agreement between the City of Minot and the US Air Force was reached that permitted the base's to be built on farming acreage (approximately 14 miles north of the city) that lay on the perimeter of Minot, after purchase of the first portions of private property had been completed. According to official accounts of the transaction (including stories in the Minot Daily News), it was a huge economic win/win for both the Air Force and the people of the Minot area

In 1957, two years into construction of the 7-million-dollar complex, the first Air Defense Command (ADC) unit was assigned to the base. This was the *32nd Fighter Group*, along with its component 32nd Materiel and 32d Air Base Squadrons. There were at that time still no fighter aircraft scheduled for assignment to the new base's 32nd Fighter Group, although two years later (1959) a special TDY (Temporary Duty) detachment (Detachment 2, 4080th *Strategic Reconnaissance Wing* of the highly classified, high-altitude Lockheed U-2 aerial reconnaissance aircraft, based at Texas's Laughlin AFB) was temporarily stationed at the new Minot base. Their mission (code name "*Operation Crowflight*") was ostensibly to monitor the atmosphere for signs of Soviet nuclear testing throughout the Western longitudinal hemisphere from altitudes of about 70,000 feet.

In 1959, the very first aircraft to be assigned to MAFB was a KC-135 *Stratotanker* (named '*Miss Minot*'). In addition to two Kaman '*Husky*' HH-43 crash-rescue/fire suppression helicopters (with unique contra-rotating, intermeshed rotors), the base's first combat-ready fighter squadron (the 5th Fighter Interceptor Squadron) was

reassigned to the base from its former station at Suffolk County AFB, NY. As part of the 32nd Air Division's 52nd Fighter Group (ADC, activated 8 Feb 57) with its 433rd Fighter Interceptor Squadron not yet allocated any aircraft), this marked the beginning of almost 28 unbroken years of successful North American airspace defense operations. Flying the new Mach 2.4 Convair F-106 '*Delta Dart*' interceptor, the 433rd FIS was soon redesignated as the 5th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, and would remain based at MAFB until it was inactivated in 1988. [In 1986, the Convair F-106s were retired from active duty at MAFB and the squadron flew F-15As until the squadron inactivated in 1988. In subsequent years the 5th FIS was reactivated in a new identity (and at a new location), as the 5th *Fighter Training Squadron*, a role it continues to play today.]

When *Strategic Air Command's* 810th *Strategic Aerospace Division* subsequently assumed MAJCOM responsibility for the base in 1962 as the new host command, it brought SAC's 450th Bombardment Wing to Minot the next year, in 1963; ADC, meanwhile, retained the 5th Fighter Interceptor Squadron on the base as a tenant unit on 24 hour alert. The 450th BW, flying the new B-52 Stratofortress strategic bombers ('BUFFS' in the colloquial USAF idiom), would in its turn be inactivated and replaced by the 5th *Bombardment Wing, Heavy* in 1968.

Additionally, as the threat of newly developed Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) grew more imminent each month, MAFB was selected in 1961 as part of the 'TRIAD' ICBM land-based nuclear deterrent element; launch control facilities for the new Minuteman I ICBMs were soon constructed at the base in outlying areas of its perimeter. In 1962 the base's 455th *Strategic Missile Wing* was activated, along with the 455th *Missile Maintenance Squadron*. Not long after this, three associated Minuteman I squadrons (the 740th, the 741st and the 742nd) were subsequently activated.

With the new MAJCOM command change, further changes occurred in 1962, which included the establishment of 862nd Combat Support Group as host unit for the base. Other new subordinate units included the 862nd Civil Engineering Squadron, the 862nd Combat Defense Squadron (later redesignated the 862nd Security Police Squadron), 862nd Food Service Squadron, 862nd Operations Squadron, 862nd Supply Squadron, and the 862nd Transportation Squadron.

Another new unit, the 862nd *Medical Group*, was also formed in 1962, although it reported directly (and independently) to the Commander of SAC's 810th Air Division. The 862nd Medical Group had responsibility for both the operation of the combined VA and Air Force John Moses Hospital in the city of Minot and the USAF Medical Clinical services on base, although only for a fairly short seven years' time (until 1969). In 1969, the 862nd Medical Group was inactivated and (the John Moses Hospital) was redesignated the *USAF RGN. HOSPITAL – MINOT*.

In 1972, the 862nd Combat Support Group was inactivated and base host duties were assumed by the 91st *Combat Support Group* (missile), since air units were considered 'mobile' elements and land-based missile units were regarded as 'fixed' installations. Thus, the base now had two major sub-commands of SAC weaponry on the Minot base.

When this change in the command structure occurred, the renamed 'USAF RGN. HOSP – MINOT' was consequently *subordinated* to the base's *91st Strategic Missile Wing* host and renamed the *91st STRATEGIC HOSPITAL*, accordingly. It is noteworthy to observe that in 1968, when SAC reorganized its nuclear bomber force, the 450th Bomb Wing was briefly otherwise redesignated, and then 6 months later again inactivated (and further redesignated as the *5th Bomb Wing*). At this time the reordered unit responsibilities found MAFB's organizational structure again considerably shaken up and lines of authority redrawn.

In 1992, with Strategic Air Command's formal stand-down, a major reshuffling of units again commenced, with the new *AIR COMBAT COMMAND* taking over the base. When this occurred, the base's medical command authority reverted to that of the 5th Bomb Wing and the base's medical services collectively became designated as the *5th Medical Group*.

[At this point it should be clear that given the massive reorganizing, the complex command restructuring and the radically changing nature of the US Air Force's global readiness commitments over the past 6 decades of Minot AFB's existence, tracking all the resulting unit statuses (inactivations, reactivations and redesignations of units) from a historical standpoint can be a challenging task indeed for historians, both amateur and professional! One of the less-than-optimal results of this is that base history offices are often unclear as to the changes that have occurred over time, since many lower level enlisted personnel do not reenlist and the minimal awareness of historical continuity that may exist suffers, when questions about lineage and traditions are directed to that base's history office.]

Air Force Medicine at Minot: The John Moses Veterans and Air Force Hospital

Dedicated on 11 June of 1950, the *John Moses Veterans Administration Hospital* at Minot, North Dakota, began operations in July of that year. Intended to serve veterans from several wars, the 7-floor hospital was conceived and designed at the outset so that every patient would have an 'outside' room with a view. At the time it was built, it reflected state-of-the-art planning and infrastructural design.

After the First World War there had been several thousands of US Army veterans, many of whom had severe, long-term wartime injuries and disabilities from chemical weaponry used in that war, as well as disabling trauma injuries sustained from the murderous artillery fire directed at the trenches.

The first regional care center for vets was established, therefore, in Fargo. By the time the Korean War had begun, it was clear that a second such facility was needed as well. The proposed John Moses VA Hospital, named after a former Governor (and State Congressman) of North Dakota, was part of an ambitious effort by North Dakota

American Legionnaires to promote treatment projects to care for all these veterans and in 1950 the new Minot VA hospital was completed.

When the new Minot Air Force Base began to take shape in 1955, the VA's John Moses Veterans Hospital had seemed an ideal option for US Air Force planners to consider, as a solution to its lack of an adequate medical support operation at the base. The VA administered John Moses Veterans Hospital at Minot was at that time operating at only half of its full 162-bed capability and in taking over the administration and medical care services of the hospital, the Air Force proposed that it assume full responsibility for operations of the hospital, additionally providing roughly half of the total requisite operating staff from its own military medical personnel. Thus, it would gain a fully equipped, ready-made hospital to serve the future needs of the new base. The transfer was soon agreed to and although the hospital remained locally known as the *John Moses Veterans Hospital* over the years, it was officially designated by Air Force Headquarters as the '*32nd United States Air Force Hospital*', given that the new Air Defense Command host unit at the new ADC base was initially the 32nd Fighter Operations Group.

Under this mutually beneficial agreement with VA, the Air Force leased the 8-story/7-floor VA facility located in downtown Minot (at 1500 University Avenue, Minot, ND) and agreed, under the new arrangement, to provide care for both vets, US Public Health Service recipients (mostly *Dept. of Indian Affairs* patients) and the base's several thousands of anticipated Air Force personnel and dependents. [To its immense credit, the current 5th Bomb Wing's 5th Medical Group still honors that agreement today (2023).]

Thus, effective 1 July 1959, the VA Administration turned over the hospital to the air Force, which placed it under the command of Col. William Bradley (MD), the hospital's first Air Force Commander, and the 32nd USAF Hospital began its new combined mission with the full approval of the City of Minot and its citizens. The economic benefit to the people of Minot was soon made readily apparent.

When the 32nd Operations Group was inactivated (in 1962), concurrent with the 450th Bomb Wing (SAC) assumption of base air ops, the newly activated 862nd Medical Group (as an autonomous unit *independent* of the 862nd Combat Support Group) became the primary medical support unit for both the hospital in town and the MAFB clinic (on the base, 14 miles north of the town). With the turnover of MAJCOM responsibility for MAFB (from ADC to Strategic Air Command, under the air operations aegis of the 450th Bomb Wing), the new 862nd Medical Group continued the agreed-upon medical service responsibilities at both the John Moses Veterans Hospital in town and at its adjunctive clinical facility on the base itself. Services at the base clinic included a crash rescue and trauma/emergency capable ER, ancillary out-patient medical services (such as lab, pharmacy and radiology), and the base's Flight Surgeon's Office (FSO); it also provided ongoing full out-patient clinical care for base dependents (with acute *in-patient* care for

all base personnel and dependents provided by the *John Moses Hospital* facility in town) until 1969, when the 862nd Medical Group was inactivated.

Part of the in-town hospital's services consisted of coordinating air-evac support of patients, to and from the base, as needed and weather permitting. A new hospital helicopter pad was established not far from the hospitals' main power and heat generating building (with its characteristic, tall red-&-white-striped chimney...a Minot landmark for many years), operating Bell UH-1H *Iroquois* 'Huey', all-weather rotary-wing aircraft. As the John Moses Hospital site grew, additional outbuildings were added that included a large enlisted barracks structure, a separate nurses' quarters building, officers' (medical and administrative staff) quarters, and private individual residences for the hospital's Commander and Vice-Commander. At the rear of the main facility, a fully equipped receiving trauma-center/Emergency Room stood by to take air-evac patients to and from the base via helicopter (such as might occur in an on-base, mass-casualty aircraft accident).

In 1969, after only 7 years of activation, the 862nd Medical Group's mission at MAFB came to an end when its medical support mission was subsumed within the new (5th BW) air wing's 5th Bomb Wing's 5th Medical Group, a newly (re)activated unit, in July of 1969 at the base (where it currently continues), as part of the 5th Bomb Wing host organisation.

By 1988, the original John Moses Hospital building (which was also known as the '*John Moses Veterans and Air Force Hospital*', but officially as the 'USAF REGIONAL HOSPITAL, MINOT') was now 38 years old and much in need of considerable updating and improvements; it was also clear that the base itself needed an on-site hospital. Ground was therefore broken in 1985 to build an entirely new combined hospital and clinical facility on the base itself, a decision prompted to no small extent by continuing difficulties transporting patients during the frequently severe Minot winters. The decision was simultaneously made to demolish the old John Moses Hospital shortly after as the new on-base, 3-story hospital was completed and operational (in 1988).

In 1969, concurrent with the inactivation of the old 862nd Medical Group, the John Moses Air Force & Veterans Hospital had been renamed '*USAF REGIONAL HOSPITAL - MINOT*'. In 1987 the hospital was once again redesignated as the '*91st STRATEGIC HOSPITAL*', indicative of its subordinate status to the *91st Strategic Missile Wing's* (SAC) command authority. This 'new' designation remained in use only for about a single year before being inactivated in July of 1988 (when the new on-base hospital was completed). Nearly simultaneous with the initiation of full-scale hospital operations on-base, the old John Moses veterans' structure in town was at last demolished in 1992 (the old site has been since occupied, as of October 2023 at least, by the Federal '*Quentin N. Burdick Job Corps Center*'). To many of Minot's citizens, the razing of that imposing structure marked the passing of a memorable amount of the town's recent history.

After several years of operation (beginning in 1988), the base's new 47-bed hospital (later expanded to roughly 75 beds) closed-down its in-patient and acute services and dedicated the entire on-base site to emergency services, clinical out-patient services and emergency aircrew support services. Surgical patients were thereafter immediately referred to both Trinity and Saint Joseph's Hospitals in the city of Minot (as required and transported by all-weather-capable *Huey* air evac helicopters).

The new on-base hospital/clinical complex continued to use the 91st strategic Hospital heraldic emblem (see *Plate IV*) until 1988, when the facility adopted the heraldic emblem of its parent organisation, the 5th Bomb Wing (becoming known as the 5th Medical Group). This emblem, which uses an updated variant of the 5th Bomb Wing's historic heraldic design, has been seen with both the '5th MEDICAL GROUP' legend and the 5BW's motto ('*Kiai O Ka Lewa*', which is Hawai'ian for '*Guardians of the Upper Realm*') emblazoned on the scroll at its bottom, at various times. As most know, today any changes in Air Force unit insignia must be authorized by the Air Force Historical Center and comply with strict guidelines summarized in 1985.

With SAC's standing down in 1992 (and transfer of the base to its replacement, the Air Combat Command), the base's medical support unit has remained the 5th Medical Group, a subordinate unit of Air Combat Command's 5th Bomb Wing, and a status that continues through the present with the new *US Air Force Global Strike Command* (replacing Air Combat Command, a major command shake-up occasioned by a subsequent nuclear weapons handling incident that occurred at MAFB in 2007).

Medical unit emblems at MAFB (details)

-The unit emblem of the **862nd MEDICAL GROUP** was in use for only about 7 years (1962 - 1969). The 862nd MG was inactivated 1969.

-The hospital emblem of '**USAF REGIONAL HOSPITAL - MINOT**' appears to have been in use for about 17 years (1969 - 1987).

-The redesignated '**91st STRATEGIC HOSPITAL**' emblem seems to have been only in use for a single year (Jul 87 to Jun 88). [Note that the only difference between the USAF REG HOSPITAL - MINOT emblem and its 91st STRATEGIC HOSPITAL iteration is the substitution of '*91st Strategic Hospital*' legend on the unit scroll in place of '*USAF Reg. Hospital - Minot*'. Otherwise the heraldic shields on both are identical (the latter is therefore not illustrated in the attached plates section.)]

-The current MAFB medical unit, the **5TH MEDICAL GROUP**, supporting the 5th Bomb Wing, has been active from 1988 through the present, 2023 (?). A variant of the patch bears the 5th Bomb Wing motto, "*Kiai O Ka Lewa*", which is roughly translated from Hawai'ian dialect to

'Guardian of the Skies' ("*Guardians of the Upper Realm*") on the scroll under the 5th Bomb Wing heraldic emblem. With USAF Global Strike Command's changing mission requirements, there have been many challenging demands put upon the 5th MG's personnel and services...all of which it may be justly said, have been met with true professionalism and dedication to mission.

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[Please note: This is merely a working draft for a work in progress and is not definitive in its present form, dated 22 Oct 2023, or intended to be such. The patches illustrated are all modern reproductions, not USAF sanctioned originals (except for the 862nd Combat Support Group. Today the unit emblems are made in 3" x 3" sizes; back in the 60s and 70s, 4" x 4" sizes were standard. When the 862nd Combat Support Group announced a contest for its emblem design, my submitted entry (not illustrated) was rejected in place of the officially accepted (winning) entry. -Prepared by C. Carey]

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Emblem plates and other images (I – XVII)

PLATE I: Original 862d Medical Group heraldic emblem, 4" by 4"

(Original approved heraldic patch, 1962 – 1969)



PLATE II: 862^D Medical Group (work uniform) patch, 4" x 4"
(1962 – 1969)



PLATE III: USAF Regional Hospital – Minot (heraldic emblem) 4” x 4”
 (1969 – 1987)



PLATE IV: 5th Medical Group working patch, 4" x 4"
(1988 – 2023?)



PLATE V: John Moses Veterans Hospital (1952)



PLATE VI: John Moses Veterans and Air Force Hospital (1955)
(note power building and chimney to right)



PLATE VII: John Moses VA and Air Force Hospital, 1950s



PLATE VIII: 862d Combat Support Group patch (4" x 4")



PLATE IX: 862nd Medical Group Dispensary on base, but out of view to the right (1967), after a severe winter snow-storm.



PLATE X: Headquarters, 862nd Combat Support Group
December 1967, post-storm.

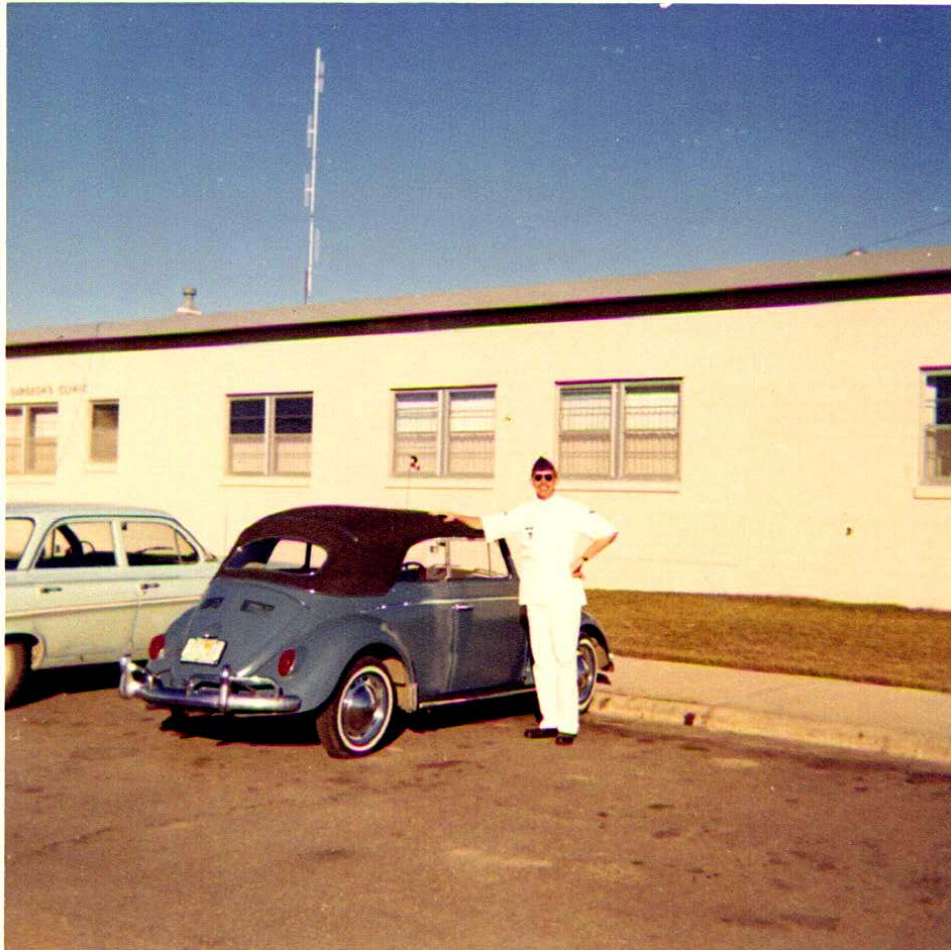


PLATE XI: Outside the base dispensary, July 1967. Air-cooled Volkswagens were virtually unstoppable, in winter, despite the often challenging cold temperatures. This one, my personal 'Bug', was a 1962 convertible that was formerly owned by the son of a nearby Lakota Sioux Chief's son. I bought it in 1967 for \$700 and it NEVER failed me once in all the time I had it!



PLATE XII: On a hilly overlook of Minot, with John Moses Hospital buildings viewable in right mid-distance, nestled in the Souris River Valley.



PLATE XIII: The 'new' *on-base* hospital, 1988 (USAF RGN HOSPITAL MINOT, later renamed the 91st Strategic Hospital) and kept in use by the 5th Medical Group today for out-patient clinical care, base personnel and dependent out-patient care.

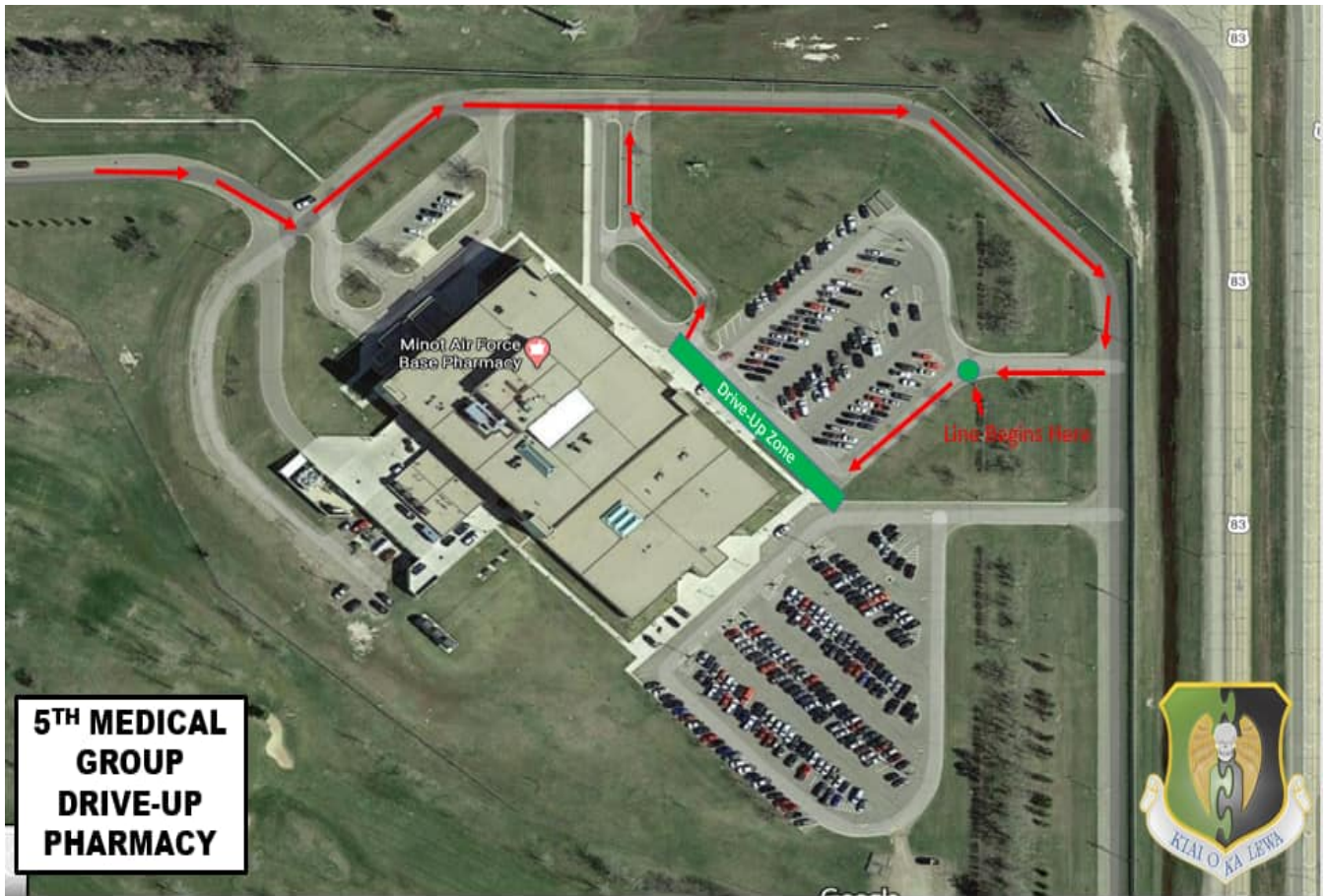


PLATE XIV: Aerial view of base's 'new' 5th Med. Group Hospital (1990s)



PLATE XV: Early proposal for an 862nd Med. Group heraldic emblem dated about 1962 (?); This is a rare photo negative of the proposed early design that was disapproved; note use of US Army style Caduceus, rather than an Air Force style Caduceus, which may have contributed to its disapproval and adoption of the emblem seen in PLATE I. Not readily discernable are the faint 'rays' extending outward from the upper Caduceus.



PLATE XVI: Digging out after a 1967 winter snow-storm; the Dodge Power-Wagen 'crash ambulance' we used was alternately known as 'the cracker-box' or 'the meat-wagon', depending upon whom we might be alienating in using the latter term. Being worn is the typical Air Force N-3B Cold Weather Parka (part of the 'Bunny Suit') worn, as issued to and used by all base personnel; these were often life-savers in the severe cold of Minot winters!



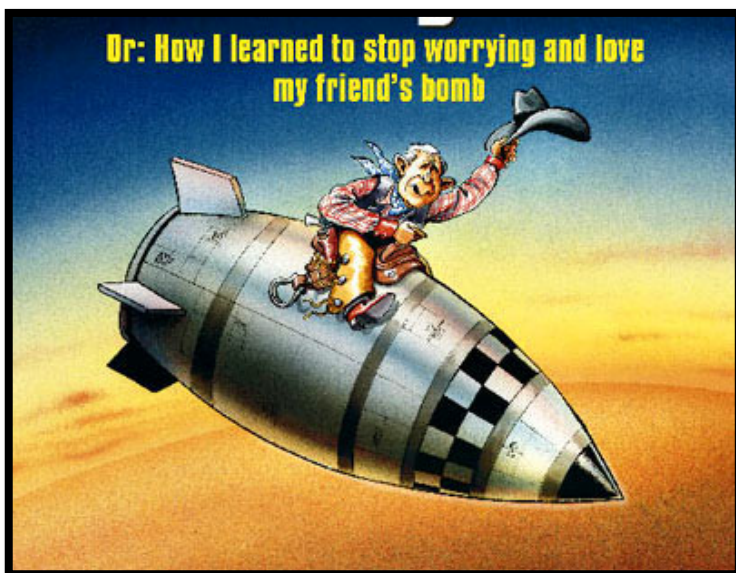
PLATE XVII: Very 'junior' medic (who shall remain nameless), striking a heroic pose in front of the meat-wagon (1967), hoping that that *BUFF* (B-52) on final approach with an 'in-flight' emergency wouldn't ruin our day by creating an unpleasant mess on the nice, clean MAFB active runway.

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When I was in the Air Force and facing the possible consequences of being a uniformed active-duty war-protestor, I found myself wondering what I'd tell my kids about my involvement in the Vietnam War. Of course, my wife and I elected not to have any kids, so the question is now moot. This is part 1 of a 2-part retrospective glimpse at some of my military experience as a 'Hawkeye Pierce' clone in the US Air Force medical service (with SAC).

“What did you do in the war, daddy?” (Part 1)

by Kalikiano Kalei



Doan wanna make war no more, no more....

When I was still a tender-hearted, rather sheltered young adolescent, someone in Washington DC decided to start a war. *Again*. It was 1966 and this time it was once more the Chinese Communists who were responsible for getting the American beehive all stirred up all over again (Korea was an earlier and related hive-shaking event, of course).

Actually, that's not quite correct, since 'the war' didn't start in 1966; it actually began back in 1917, when the Bolsheviks succeeded in overthrowing the last Russian (Romanov) Tsar. By 1966, however, 49 years of world-wide political foment and economic change had brought the Communist Chinese nation into being, along with all greater Communism's smaller geopolitical 'sputniks', and the specter of Communism's continuing appeal to the down-trodden masses cast a giant and rather unwelcome shadow on America's cozy little materialist, capitalistic tea party. [Note: it may or may not be of passing interest to explain here that the Russian word 'sputnik', in actual fact the first Soviet earth satellite that was

launched in 1957, translates roughly to '*fellow traveler*'. Thus, both terms (*Sputnik* and '*fellow traveler*') have some bearing on this subject.]

Although rabid congressional Commie hater Joseph McCarthy had been deposed not long after having created a national witch-hunt in the 1950s for the purpose of seeking out and eradicating *suspected* (emphasis, emphasis) Communist sympathizers in America, many politically well-connected Sons of Freedom continued to fear anything that suggested America's happy little socio-economic paradigm of democratic capitalism might not be as free from Commie taint as it was cracked up to be. In terms of political philosophy, the right-wing 'domino theory' still held ascendance, reasoning that America must intervene wherever possible in the world to prevent unaligned nations from falling over, domino style, to the threat of Communism's avowedly expansionist aspirations. To far too many patriotic Americans, 'John Birch' was still a conservative national hero and the sight of an American flag (*any* American flag) had a Pavlovian effect on those who fancied themselves as potential defenders of the Christian 'free world' in its fight against the dastardly Bolshevik atheists. Sigh!

Just my luck, then, to be in my sophomore year at the local college, an emotionally insecure, somewhat sheltered, and academically uninspired undergrad with no well-defined career aspirations of any sort. The French had recently bailed out of their Anamese colonial territories in SEA after being soundly thrashed by the Viet-Cong's precursors, the Viet Minh, and by 1966 America had already long-since passed the 'MAAG' phase ('Military Assistance Advisory Group') of US involvement (wherein US military advisors were sent to work with the Vietnamese military forces in a strictly non-combatant instruction and training role). I was rather distractedly barely keeping my head above C-level in my studies at the time and my weekends were committed to passionately hedonistic wave-sets on the California coast, which my dilapidated old 1940 Chevy Deluxe Coupe could barely get me to without its radiator running dry. I fancied myself a surfer, despite persistent and hard to ignore evidence to the contrary. In fact, not only was I a complete 'wipe-out' at trying to stay balanced on a 10 foot longboard (for 10 seconds on a three foot curl), despite my wearing all the regulation gear (shades, baggies, a fake 'Iron Cross', Mexican huarache sandals, Woolrich shirts, and anything Madras-patterned I could get my hands on), regardless of my using all the then-hip surfing terms ('*bitchin'*', *far-out*, '*dude*', *wahine*, *cowabunga*, *skag*, *gremmie*, *hodad*, etc.), the chicks were absolutely, completely and categorically disinterested in me. It was therefore quite easy for me to retreat emotionally to embrace the cherished '[*lonely surfer*](#)' (remember that wonderful old [Jack Nitzsche](#) song?) posture that the surfing stereotype hewed to in those days, since there was simply no reasonable alternative to my being the very personification of that image I had already spent an adolescent lifetime (a few years) cultivating...a romantic loner. *Ah!* Misunderstood, ignored, but secretly semi-heroic in my own mind, I fancied myself a sort of oceanside rebel in the James Dean mold, since we both loved Porsches and disdained the proletarian hoi-poi (the main difference between us being as I saw it, aside from his being handsome and a movie star, was that Dean had been able to actually *own*

Porches and it was all I could do to buy my \$50 asthmatic 26 year old '40 Chevy Coupe).

Me and my buddy James Dean...

Of course, my frequent weekend trips to the coast in that old Chevy took me west along State Route 46 (originally known as US Route 466), since I preferentially hung out at Pismo, Avila, and Cayucos beaches. Each time I passed the Highway 46/Highway 41 intersection (near *Cholame*, a small bump in the road surrounded by nothing for miles except dry fields) where James Dean had died in his Porsche 550 Spyder (in 1955, some thirteen years earlier) I would absently reflect on that incident, while keeping one eye on the Chevy's temperature gauge. Dean's fatal accident with *Donald Turnipseed* (the other driver's real name, I swear it) was about as avoidable as my pending decision was about the war and it always made me a bit spooky, driving past that infamous site late in the day with the sun low on the horizon and full in my eyes, to think about it. Maybe Dean was my hero, and perhaps the good *did* die young as the old saying has it, but was I *really* willing to die prematurely because of someone else's paranoiac sense of patriotic obligation? My youthful career as inept surfer dude and failed chick-magnet notwithstanding, the future might *still* hold better things in store for me and I was in no hurry to turn in my transit pass just yet for a 6-foot-deep hole in the ground!

So there I was...failed surfer and self-styled misunderstood rebel. It was yet a comfortable fantasy with which to dress and bandage all my juvenile psychic wounds, however, and death (whether seated in a silver Porsche or slogging through a tropical rice paddy) is just so, well...*final!* One weekend, I actually stopped at the Dean crash site on the way to Avila and got out to drink a coke after filling the nearly empty radiator from the last three-gallon plastic jug I had in the rumble seat. As I tossed the fizzy liquid down, the radio newscaster was saying something about how the Selective Service had just decided to start yanking *ALL* student draft deferments, making *everyone* prime draft bait! Mulling that unhappy news over under the hot sun, I spent a few minutes distractedly searching the ground for any overlooked small slivers of silver aluminum that might have been missed from the crash, but in the thirteen years since Dean had died, Dean's legions of fans had long-since clean-combed the area for crash souvenirs of their iconic hero and all I found were a few cow pies and a dead bird. More death to think about. Hmm.

Shortly after this news about the change in draft deferments had been released, I found myself sitting in a political science class on campus when a vision of the possible personal consequences of what had just transpired hit me right between the eyes with the impact of an imaginary AK-47 bullet. Looking out the classroom window of my mind, I fancied I could see my holographic self slumped-over, quite dead in a flooded rice paddy, with a ragged edged red hole in my forehead. It was a scary and sobering flash to be sure, since I am by nature a pretty cowardly and timorous creature who hates to even step on an ant, let alone engage in fierce battles with some unseen

enemy in a tropical outback region eight thousand miles from home. A little more thought about all this prompted me to formulate two possible alternative options. The first involved a daunting and somewhat longish trip to the Canadian border to seek asylum and the second called for a much shorter one to the local US Air Force recruiter's office, since I reasoned that I could more *safely* safeguard my brain in *that* branch of the service than I would be able to as point man in a Marine platoon, dodging *pungi*-stakes, frag-grenades, AK-fire and mines in Vietnam.

Decisions, decisions...

The first option posed several complex logistical problems in that 1), I was still enrolled in college and my family wouldn't approve of my suddenly bailing out without a very good reason, and 2) my poor old Chevy would surely give up the ghost entirely if I attempted an 800-mile run to the border in it. That pared the options down considerably, so shortly after that I opted to visit the local Air Force recruiter and took a hard look at the options open to me there. One thought remained upper-most in my mind and that was that Momma hadn't raised her precious little fair-haired boy to rot away in some lonely rice paddy on the far side of nowhere.

For as many years as I could remember, I had abstractly dreamed of becoming an Air Force pilot and had in fact decided that once I finished my lower division work in college, I'd join that service under the auspices of what was then called the Air Force Pilot Training Program. With my usual luck, I learned from the recruiter that this program had just been terminated and that in future all pilot applicants would have to furnish proof of a completed four-year baccalaureate for acceptance into flight training. Modern aircraft technology state-of-the-art had apparently progressed to the point where they figured you needed a college degree to fully understand how to fly military airplanes. Looking back on things, it was probably just as well (given my already admitted gentle nature), since flying 30,000 pound warplanes off into a hazardous hail of hostile anti-aircraft fire is not a task well-suited to ruminative, bucolic and highly reflective personalities like mine (I mean...what if *I died* doing something I fancied I loved, only to realise at that last gasping second that I'd much rather have been peacefully sniffing daisies somewhere?!). And that's not even taking into consideration the very real possibility of having my nether aspect explosively re-sculpted by a well targeted SAM-2 and having to eject, perhaps seriously wounded, into a swarm of angry Vietnamese peasants below who would just as soon kill '*Yankee Air Pirate*' foreign devils on the spot as allow the VC to cart them away into captivity. Nope, no implacably stoic John McCain was I, not even a Don Knotts younger-and-smarter-brother clone!

At any rate, since the officer corps option was closed off to me, I listened to what the Air Force had to offer its enlisted recruits. Although the Army was still letting recruits have their choice of specialties, there were so many Vietnam 'escapees' like myself clamoring to gain entrance to the Air Force that no promises could be made. It was clearly a buyer's market, enlistment-wise. You signs on the dotted line and you takes your chances. That was it. At least the recruiter was honest about that unhappy fact,

contrary to the usual vituperous practice (it's still the norm today, by the way) of promising the moon and then pulling the rug out from under enlistees the moment they had been sworn in (*"Sorry sucker, your sweet ass belongs to Uncle Sammie now....mwah-hahahaha!"*).

Having given everything considerable thought after that initial encounter with the recruiter, I agreed to enlist and was scheduled for what the military calls the AFQT (Armed Forces Qualification Test), which was a sort of functionally dumbed-down SAT exam. Varying slightly from service to service, its purpose was to determine what specialty one was best qualified for and yielded aptitude data in four primary skills and knowledge subtest categories that included 1) General, 2) Mechanical, 3) Administrative, and 4) Electrical. I recall having qualified highest in 'electrical' and 'administrative' but followed closely by the remaining two. However, that was a long, long time ago and the only thing that really remains electrifyingly fresh about the exam experience is that based upon my test results and subject to Air Force career skill areas open at that time, I was offered the choice of three specialties: 1) Medical Service, 2) Food Service, or 3) Air Police! As a person who has never ranked gastronomy high on my personal list of interests and as someone who has forever distrusted the integrity of law enforcement agencies, the choice of becoming an Air Force medic was therefore the only logical and reasonable option to avail myself of.

Off to Scout camp with the US Air Force...

Once my entry medical exam had been completed at the Los Angeles physical processing center, it wasn't long before I was shunted off to begin four weeks of basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in hot, humid and thoroughly uncomfortable Amarillo, Texas. As a California coastal resident used to cool Pacific Ocean breezes, the interior of Texas, with its swelteringly hot and humid Gulf Coast climate, was definitely not to my taste. However, the four weeks went by fairly quickly and about all I recall from the experience, some 44 years later, is an unending frustration with having to keep toilets clean enough to eat out of. It really seemed senseless to me at the time, but it was all part of the indoctrination process designed to cut the rough corners off a wildly diverse group of immature youngsters and reshape them into a new and useful uniformity of thought and action.

In the Air Force boot camp our physical conditioning was called 'physical training' or PT for short. Instead of hard-as-nails USMC-like DIs (Drill Instructors), we had somewhat more gentle TIs (Training Instructors) and our flight of post-adolescent enlistees were handed over to a certain Technical Sergeant Dawson. Although we lived in awe of Sgt. Dawson, he was actually more like an endlessly patient mother to us than a mean-hearted source of perpetual torment. I was actually quite surprised to find out how mild Air Force boot camp training was (compared to the Marine Corps version), but that's just as well, since we were all just a bunch of little lost kids trying to get our rather puerile minds around this slice of the entirely new experience we had all signed up for.

Of course, some of our group were more 'lost' than others, since the individuals making up our flight came from all over the country. Two in particular I well recall as being particularly intellect-challenged. They frequently transgressed the limits of Dawson's concept of the acceptable and after one memorable breach of egregious behavior, Sgt. Dawson called them both into his office at the end of the barracks and said something on the order of "OK. *From now on you two will report to me as 'Dipshit #1' and 'Dipshit #2' Do you understand?*" They both yelled out "Yes SIR!", while standing at attention and for the ensuing several weeks the rest of us were regularly entertained by the sight of them hitting a brace in front of a scowling Sgt. Dawson, using those names. This loses something in the telling, naturally. Suffice it to say you had to have been there to appreciate the full hilarity of the recurring spectacle.

At the end of the four weeks, during which we studied all the basics of citizen soldiers and prancing around the exercise track in garishly yellow T-shirts and AF blue nylon shorts (yuk), I ended up considering two of our full complement of 60 'students' as worthy peers. One, a heavy-set, pink-jowled Pole from Ohio named Dumbrowski, and the other, a lanky and laconic string-bean from Oklahoma named Robert Acton, were pretty decent guys by my reckoning, but I shuddered to think what terrible things the others might do to the carefully oiled machinery of the US Air Force, once they were turned loose in their subsequent specialties after a few scant weeks of training.

Looking back, several very important bits of knowledge acquired at Basic Training have remained with me through the years and proven quite valuable again and again. They are 1) never let anyone in a position of responsibility learn your name; 2) never volunteer for ANYTHING; 3) never try to substitute muscle power for brain power, and 4) adopt the simple tactic of keeping your mouth shut (since it makes one appear to be far more intelligent than one might *actually* be; the *reverse* is also true).

Learning how to put Band-Aids on baby booies...

From Lackland, that great stamp-mill processor of fresh Air Force enlisted fodder, I was next sent to Sheppard AFB outside Wichita Falls (TX) for the next phase of my training: three months of intensive medical specialization that would qualify me to do everything from applying Band-Aids to slashed carotid arteries to sewing traumatically severed limbs back on with little more than barbed wire and spit. The medical course instructors were colorfully named Sgt. Mapp, Sgt. Rosebud, and Sgt. Levenson, each a fairly engaging individual (and all blessed with a great sense of humor, thank God, since one of my secret talents was that of cartooning and I skewered them all mercilessly in my multi-panel sketches).

Not having a car, I spent all my time on the base, although Amarillo was reported to have quite a scenic ambience, with its vine-entwined and flower-strewn canals and many lovely settings for tourists. My main pastime was reading and I haunted the base library while most others were off getting howling drunk downtown on their off-hours. Another of my recreational activities consisted of prowling around the base, seeing what

there was to see, since Sheppard was also the Air Force's primary A&P specialty training base and more than half of it was devoted to rows and rows of interesting older parked aircraft that student powerplant and airframe mechanics used to perfect their skills. For me walking around those areas was like dying and going to heaven, since there were at least a couple of examples of most of the airplanes in recent use (1966) by the Air Force to be found there. This included whole rows of older North American F-100A *Super Sabres*, ANG KC-97 Stratotankers (the military version of the Boeing 377 Stratocruiser airliner), A Boeing B-52D or two, T-6 Texans, NAA B-25 *Mitchells*, and even a few Martin B-26 *Invaders* among many others. One sight I recall very clearly was the nearby fire and crash training area, where old airframes no longer useable would be doused in JP-4 jet fuel (essentially kerosene) and set on fire so that crash-rescue trainees could practice putting the fires out (and rescuing personnel). It was quite a show (and an unwitting taste of many similar future sights I would experience in future) but I remember feeling a bit sad to learn that classic old airplanes were frequently destroyed in this manner. I guess even at that early age, the 'aviation historian' in me was making itself known!

When we had time to talk in the odd off-moments, my classmates and I would occasional speculate on the present course of the war we were all being trained to participate in, wondering where we'd eventually end up once the training had been completed. The best guess of most, given our specialty as 'medics' was that we'd be sent off to the front-line medical areas near the big US air bases in Vietnam (like *Cam Ranh* and *Tan Son Nhut*). Incoming hostile motor fire was the biggest concern there, although there were also occasional VC saboteurs to worry about. At least that sort of danger wasn't in the same league as walking point with the grunts out near *Khe Sanh* or dangling out an open Huey door over a troop drop-zone!

Why not Minot?... (Or, "Only the Proud Go North!")

Came late September with our courses having been completed, all of us eagerly awaited our orders that would assign us to both our new commands and to our first duty assignments. Up to that time I had never even heard of '*Strategic Air Command*', but that is the command I had been handed over to. My first duty station...a very far cry from the hot, sweaty environs of Southeast Asia...was at a base in North Dakota near some prairie dog city named 'Minot' that hosted a strategic bomber wing: *Minot AFB*. It had a strange sound rolling off the tongue. Little did I suspect that once arrived at that remote northern base, given the typical fourteen below winters the name of the base would promptly freeze on your tongue if you kept your mouth open longer than a split second to utter it!

Very soon after graduating ceremonies had been completed and belongings packed up in the OD duffels everyone had been issued, we were all on our way out of quaint, humid old Wichita Falls (TX) and off to new adventures we were at that point incapable of even *dreaming* about. My flight out found me crowded onto an asthmatic old TWA Convair 540 airliner that connected with another flight out of Bismarck (ND) which

would eventually deposit me at Minot. The airliner ferrying me on the last leg of the trip from Bismarck to Minot was an equally elderly *Frontier Air* Convair 440 that shook, rattled and rolled more loosely than Elvis himself (so it seemed), but after a while we began our descent to Minot International Airport (formerly a grass landing strip for Piper and Cessna puddle jumpers...at least before the arrival of the US Air Force and their shiny new base, some 12 miles from town). Outside visibility was totally obscured by a driving snowstorm as dusk approached, but the pilot was apparently able to use a combination of VFR, IFR and an especially powerful lucky rabbit's foot to find the field and set us down on solid ground with a resounding thump before the engines froze over. Once the door had been opened by the blonde stewardess, a frosty gust came howling through the doorway to remind me that this was truly another part of the world totally apart from my own cozy coastal clime. Looking out the door, my first actual glimpse of Minot was a large sign that said two things: '*Only the best go North!*' and somewhat lower down, '*Why not Minot?*' Why not Minot indeed? It didn't take long to come up with a number of excellent arguments to counter that cock-eyed bit of Chamber of Commerce PR optimism (my personal favorite was "*The freezin's the reason*").

Minot, North Dakota, is presently a city of about 37,000 people and the 4th largest in the state. At the time I first arrived there, back in late 1966, it was home to about 33,000 people, the 40% white segment of which being comprised of mostly of Germanic and Scandinavian (primarily Norwegian) descended people. Minot sprang into existence back in 1886 when the Great Northern Railway pushed its part of the transcontinental railroad through the state and has since been supported by largely agricultural industries such as dairy, cattle, and crop farming. In 1955-56 the US Air Force decided to build a huge new air base near Minot, eventually using it to host a *Strategic Air Command* bomb wing (the 450th, later the 5th) of B-52 intercontinental bombers and a tenant 5th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (Air Defense Command) flying Convair F-106A Delta Darts. Somewhat later a missile wing (the 91st SMW) was also established there consisting of several squadrons of thermonuclear warhead tipped Minuteman ICBMs. The base, with its many personnel and large positive impact on the Minot economy, has been a welcome and stabilizing influence on the region for many decades. At a mean elevation of about one and a half thousand feet, and located nearer the Canadian than lower state borders, the summers in Minot can be swelteringly hot, while the winters are severely cold.

Thus, it was that I stepped out of that rickety old Convair 440 and found myself staring absently down at my snow-covered GI shoes, probably not unlike Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* when it finally sank in that she and Toto weren't in Kansas anymore, and wondering what the immediate future had in store for me. Whatever it turned out to be, I reminded myself, it wouldn't involve getting picked off by a Viet Cong sniper hiding in the paddies just off Provincial Route 1.

I am introduced to 'Gomer Central'...

One of the interesting sidelights about the US Air Force's presence in Minot is that although the main base is 12 miles to the north of the city, the Air Force agreed to take over and share an existing eight-story VA facility in downtown Minot named the '*John Moses Veterans Hospital*'. The VA hospital had originally been built back in the early 1950s to take care of the large number of disabled and injured vets hailing from the state, but having the Air Force agree to share operational responsibilities worked to the advantage of both the VA administration and the Air Force, which could use it as a large hospital complex to support the base. Technically, the vets benefitted from having access to the Air Force specialists and medical teams, but the John Moses facility also helped train new Air Force personnel (such as myself and our '90-day wonder' medical officers).

Out on the base, the 862nd Medical Squadron (which I belonged to) additionally maintained a large multipurpose clinic facility, with attached flight surgeon's office for aviation medicine concerns, but the base's dependents (and severely ill military personnel) could be accommodated and cared for in the extensive VA facility in town.

Since I had just arrived at the base and in view of my very junior status in the greater scheme of things at the field, it was a natural move to assign me to the John Moses Hospital initially. After I had been checked in at the medical squadron's orderly room, I was taken to my new quarters in a large modern dormitory next to the hospital that was used to house enlisted medical personnel.

In contrast to the airmen's barracks on base, the hospital's dormitory was a luxury assignment, since it was divided into separate rooms, each holding from two to four airmen. Perhaps the best part of the deal was that because winter conditions would frequently isolate the base from the city (due to heavy snowfall and frequent blizzard conditions), those of us at the hospital in town had the place all to ourselves at such times and we were located only a few blocks from the Minot State Teacher's College (now Minot State University). The first thing I learned about my new duty assignment from my roommates was that MSTC was just bursting at the seams (like a well-stuffed bra) with hundreds of gorgeous young women of Scandinavian ancestry! My notorious chick-repellant qualities notwithstanding, that still sounded pretty *good* to me!

Some SAGE reflections...

Before I was able to settle into the John Moses Airmen's' dorm, however, I was whisked off to the base to complete routine in-processing. This took place in a huge, multi-storied, squat beige monster of a concrete blockhouse (measuring several hundred feet on all sides, as well as vertically) that sat somewhat out by itself near the flightline. This, I was told, was the *SAGE Building*, but no one offered any more information about exactly what the 'SAGE' in 'SAGE bldg' was all about. All I knew at the time was that the SAGE Building's ground floor served a number of administrative purposes, including in-processing for newly arrived troops. It was only much later that I learned that the SAGE Building was the semi-hardened facility that housed what passed for the guts of two of the world's most advanced (as of 1966) digital computers, together comprising a

system designed to control and direct (via up links) our Air Defense Command fighters against airspace intruders. [Note: SAGE stood for '*Semi-Activated Ground Environment*' and it has been dealt with in a separate article.] The many yellow and black framed security warning signs in the SAGE Building impressed me with the knowledge that *whatever* lurked unseen on the building's upper floors, it *must* be something worth dying for, since '*Use of Deadly Force has been authorised*' cautions were plastered all over the various elevators and stairways. Compared to security restrictions on other parts of the base where armed Air Police (known as '*Apes*') with beady eyes and itchy trigger fingers roamed about with live rounds loaded in their M-16s, the SAGE signs were merely a teaser indication of the seriousness of the nuclear combat mission that Minot was tasked with. Serious or not, it definitely caught my attention, as an FOB newbie!

Once I'd been checked in as a new arrival for the 862nd Medical Group, my first duty assignment, and received my bulky N-3B arctic parka (and the rest of my cold-weather 'bunny suit', as we called them), I was returned to the city of Minot and John Moses Hospital in one of the base crash ambulances. The strange smell that permeated it was caused, I was told by a cheerful fellow medic who drove it, by a load of embalmed cadavers that had just been hauled in from the base's small morgue. Then without skipping a beat, he asked me if I'd had lunch yet? "*Um? Uh, no....thanks!*"

John Moses Air Force Hospital is today no longer to be found in Minot, having been finally demolished (in the mid-80s) after decades of caring for crusty old *Norskahoovian* WWI vets in its salad days, but in 1966 it still presented a rather imposing sight to us new arrivals. Some eight stories tall, it held several hundred acute and long-term care beds, as well as all the usual hospital departments, specialties, surgeries, clinics, etc. On the typically clear, bitterly cold North Dakota winter mornings the smoke from its adjacent electrical power generating plant would send up a single vertical plume of smoke from its tall chimney several thousand feet above the small caldera the complex was sited within, before mild surface gusts began playing with it. The sight of that white plume, seeming to rise right up into the cold lower heights of the stratosphere in the frosty chill of early morning, never failed to arrest my thoughts as yet another winter day in Minot dawned.

Outlying buildings on the campus accommodated the hospital's complement of female nurses, the powerplant, the airmen's dorm and the Hospital Commander's residence. Situated near the powerplant was a *medevac* heli-pad where one would usually find a parked Air Force blue and white Huey UH-1H helicopter on standby. One additional small building housed administrative officers and the two male nurses we had on staff, and a large morgue occupied still another.

My own digs, located on the second floor of the airmen's dorm, had space for four corpsmen and there were two already assigned to that room when I got there. One was a compact, dark-haired fellow of Greek ancestry named Michael Zaharakis and the other, a smaller Airman named Francis Bouchard, was of French-Canadian descent. His

nickname, Mike explained to me, was 'Frenchy'. These two would be my roommates in the coming months ahead and soon became my close friends, as well.

This late in the season, the snow would fall regularly in the Minot area and from inside the dorm you could easily discern the unceasing keening of the wind as it moaned around the sharp corners and sills of the main building. It was a curiously plaintive sound, not unlike the sinister sound effects version of wind in horror movies and it didn't take much imagination to conjure departed souls hovering outside, perhaps those of old veterans who had died at the facility and were reluctant to depart. Considering a few stories I heard later about some of the old vets who had passed on at John Moses, it wasn't that hard to imagine at all.

Life on the frozen plains...

As I settled into this new life on the North Dakota prairie, I began to find much of it almost enjoyable, since unlike the poor stiff isolated out on the base, those of us at the hospital felt more like a regular part of the Minot civilian community. There were some parts of the daily hospital routine that definitely were *not* enjoyable (such as emptying bed pans, placing and emptying urinals, inserting urinary catheters, and...that most unpleasant task of *digitally removing* impacted faeces from crusty old vets who were in various states of advanced end-stage disease), but much of it wasn't all that demanding. Since this 'on-the-job' training was the follow-up part of my clinical school studies, I was kept fairly busy learning proper medical and clinical procedures and there wasn't much time to mope about.

The vets the Air Force had inherited in taking over the facility from VA consisted of about 180 individuals among the 300-bed population. Many were in terminal stages of various malignancies, most were quite elderly, and more than a fair number were crotchety, cantankerous and short-tempered old fellows, principally of Norwegian extraction. Given their extreme illnesses and hopeless status I can't really say they weren't entitled to their nasty, ill-natured outlooks, but it certainly didn't gain them much sympathy from the young and relatively naïve young corpsmen charged with taking care of them. Many of the old vets had been ignored or poorly cared for at home before being admitted and many had toenails that had remained untrimmed for so long that they curled over on each other in a sort of Goat's horn appearance. It was quite a sobering experience to encounter this *grotesquery* for the first time. Severe bed sores, of course, were almost a given.

A particularly sad incident...

One old vet in particular remains fixed in my mind, an extreme case among the many others. His name was Roald Pahl and at the time he was suffering from severely advanced (terminal) CA of the GI tract and throat. The CA in his throat had eaten away his larynx and upper respiratory tract to the point where he was left with only a tracheostomy stoma (an opening directly into his trachea through which he breathed)

and no voice at all. Of course, trying to understand his needs and intentions was substantially complicated by his inability to speak, and his usual nasty mood didn't help the process along, either. Such was the severity of his condition that his stoma had to be repeatedly suctioned throughout the day and night to remove the accumulation of tenacious fluids that secreted into his airway, threatening to choke him.

Without meaning to be unkind to poor Mr. Pahl, such was his unfortunate overall appearance that he looked startlingly like the Lord of the Rings character *Golum* at first glance. It was clear to most of us that he was just barely hanging on to life, but tenaciously and with no perceptible intent to go unresistingly that last inch of the way towards drawing his final breath. It was disturbing to have to witness his progressive decline each day, let alone take care of him, but that was part of our duty, so we all coped with this unhappy vision of misery as best we could and did our best for him. I had to regularly remind myself that he was, like all of us, some loving mother's son...

One morning that I will never forget, I came on the AM shift to find Mr. Pahl under my team's care. After taking care of all the necessary shift-change tasks, I went into Mr. Pahl's room to assess his condition, but found him strangely quiet and serenely reposed, as if sleeping: a most unusual status for him. Taking a closer look, it suddenly dawned on me that Mr. Pahl wasn't breathing at all, but since he wasn't red in the face or any evidencing signs of apparent dyspnea (difficulty breathing), I quickly guessed that he had somehow passed on in the night. Leaning over to inspect his trach stoma, I found to my dismay that it was stuffed full of small white puffy cotton balls!

Someone (one of the corpsmen?) had apparently taken it upon himself to end Mr. Pahl's unhappy, painful life in the dead of night by suffocating him. I never found out who did this, nor had I wanted to at the time, since to me this was clearly and obviously an act of murder no matter how you looked at it and it was all simply too much to accept. At that early date in my life I hadn't even heard of the phrase 'mercy killing' either, so I was simply shocked into numb silence. Removing the cotton balls seemed to be a logical thing to do at the time, however, so I did so, not thinking about any possible ethical questions arising from my attempt to determine whether or not he might still be alive, and nothing further was mentioned about this by anyone. As far as I know, Mr. Pahl was officially determined to have died in his sleep from 'natural' causes arising from his terminal illness, but I still occasionally look back on that moment with disquieting reflection. *Fortunately*, there were no further incidents like that while I was at John Moses Air Force Hospital.

Getting to know my new fellow-inmates...

My new roommates in the dorm seemed to be nice enough, but Mike, the dark-haired Greek fellow had a most unusual and curious sort of charismatic affect about him that was as palpable as the static shock one might get from touching a brass doorknob. You might describe him as a sort of synthesis between the mad Tsarist-era Russian monk *Rasputin* and *Mr. Rogers*, since although Mike's personality had a penetrating

unworldliness about it, he also was as genuinely and believably well-intended as the Cardigan-sweatered children's matinee host. I soon learned that Mike was a science fiction fan and given to deeply esoteric religious spirituality of the Eastern Orthodox kind. 'Frenchy' Bouchard, the other roommate, was a bit more amorphously engendered than Mike in terms of personality and can best be described as Mike's devoted *sidekick*, his experiential mentor: a sort of comic relief *Pat Buttram* to Mike's *Roy Rogers*, or *Pancho* to the *Cisco Kid*. Both were good people, fortunately, and being a bit of a precocious little nerd myself, we immediately hit things off perfectly. Not quite '*the Three Amigos*', but close enough within the context of US Air Force 'blue uniformity'.

That my new roommate Mike was a good natured and interesting person was quite fortunate for me, since as an only child I had always had difficulty making friends and usually ended up with only one or two truly close buddies with whom I could relax and interact. Mike and I seemed to share many similar affinities, but as science fiction fans who had both read the genre extensively (and also been involved in what we called 'fandom', which was what the organized sci-fi culture of sci-fi enthusiasts was known as), we got along famously from the first day. [Note: Science fiction *fandom*, for those who may not be aware of it, are what comic fans are to comic book art. 'Fans' ("*fen*" is the more popular plural) attend conventions, write their own sci-fi stories, publish fanzines (amateur magazines about sci-fi and sci-fi fan activities), and so forth. They were the original publishers of today's popular amateur 'fanzines', long before comic fans and the youth mainstream discovered that form of self-expression and have existed as a popular sub-culture from the earliest days of science fiction as a legitimate literary form since back in the 1920s.]

Mike was, as I already mentioned, quite an interesting person. He came from a family of Greek-Americans, had a younger sister, and had suffered a bit from the extremes of an alcoholic father as a child. Still, he had what can only be described as an angelic *personae*, if a man can ever be convincingly characterised by that term. In this, he shared the same sort of beatific affect enjoyed by bohemian hipster Jack Kerouac, who was frequently described by those who knew him as having an innocent, angelic *aura* about him. Mike was also a very sincere, entirely honest person who hated deception, deceits, and dissembling of any sort. As I shortly also came to understand, Mike was furthermore an ardent pacifist and war protestor. He had joined the Air Force for almost the same reason I had, as an alternative to getting caught up in what was to him a most unjustifiable and insupportable war he did not believe in. As a *true* pacifist of genuine conviction, Mike was against war in any way, shape or form.

One day, after all of us had been released from duty at the end of our respective medical shifts on the wards, Mike and Frenchy took me downtown and introduced me to the Minot USO, which was installed in the basement of a downtown Minot former bank building, located near where highway 83 through Minot crosses over the railroad tracks. It was to be quite a catalytic introduction for me.

Likely due to the outlying location of the base (12 miles north of town), very few airmen came down to the USO. In fact, as events turned out, we literally had it all to ourselves most of the time. It was a pretty bare-bones affair, actually, with a pool table, a few chairs, some magazines (*The Lutheran Standard*, *Modern Scandinavia Digest*, etc.), and occasionally some doughnuts to accompany the perpetually boiling coffee on hand that could keep you awake all night without half trying. There was an old mimeograph machine in one corner donated by the local Lutheran Church and a decrepit (but still functioning) typewriter that looked as if it had been used to help prepare Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Little did the USO realise that they had just helped establish another 'underground GI coffeehouse' in the growing covert movement to resist the Vietnam war!

The anti-war movement gains momentum in a bank vault...

Mike had already taken a whack at publishing an anti-war mimeographed magazine that he produced in small numbers and circulated around the hospital. Although a few copies made their way to the base, it really had very little success in reaching most of the troops out on the sprawling confines of MAFB. Still, it was a modestly well-prepared magazine, full of innocuous content, his usually trenchant (and cogent) editorial opinion, an occasional cartoon (by Mike, who used the *nom de plume* of 'RAKI'), a few poems here and there, and less remarkable content. The USO 'advisor' who was appointed to oversee things at the Minot USO in a nominal way was the pastor of the nearby Lutheran church and LSA advisor (*Lutheran Services of America*), Pastor Jurgens. Of course, the *American Lutheran Church* (back in 1966 this Lutheran body had not yet merged with the *Lutheran Church in America*—a union that occurred in 1988) was opposed to the war in Vietnam, so there was an added and substantially reinforcing reflection of our already restive and resistive anti-war mood to be found therein.

That winter, and throughout the entire succeeding winter, when the streets were piled high with snowdrifts so large that cars were unable to travel on them, we would gather together in the USO's 'bunker' and huddle over ways to get the anti-war message out. For all the really substantial effect we had on the war's progress (it was negligible), it was still a great place to get away from the military mentality and uniformity of thought we were otherwise exposed to at the hospital and on base. It was also a very evocative setting for late night flights of poetic expression, fits of writing activity, and lots of daydreaming about how a world without war would be...if the US would just *bail out* of that god-forsaken patch of SEA turf America insisted on defending with such stubbornly dogmatic determination.

Christmas is only what you make of it...

At Christmas, not really much into the obligatory holiday mood that pervaded the corridors of the hospital, we had a Christmas dinner of pizza from the local pizzeria, tossed down with near-beer. Outside the former bank basement the city had erected a large if somewhat *Charlie Brownish* municipal Christmas tree that was bedecked with

strings of short circuit prone lights, clumps of dingy tinsel, and a *woebegone* tinfoil angel awkwardly impaled upon the uppermost top of the tree. Finishing up the pizza, Mike grabbed a cheap Pakistani-made sword he had purchased at the nearby surplus store and struck a suitable Han Solo 'Star Wars' pose in from of it (*Star Wars* the epic sci-fi movie was still about 20 years off in the future, at that time), which I managed to capture on film (one of the few pictures I still have of Mike).

The snow was falling lightly and it was cold as day-old s**t during a hard NoDak freeze as we goofed around near the tree and of course there was no traffic nearby, so the sight of three figures dressed in green Air Force arctic parkas chuffing madly about in the snow drew no attention whatsoever in the absolute dead of that dark night. To us it was just another unremarkable celebration of the erstwhile birth of the son of someone's *god* (but a god that no one among us but Mike devoutly believed in) and *any* excuse to goof about and blow off steam was always welcome. The mood and atmosphere of that timeless moment recollected these 44 years later is still fresh. There was something enduring and eternal about it, even if we had we been aware of anything other than the fact that at the age of 20 one has no useful concept whatsoever of the fact that, ultimately and inevitably, eternal, youthful, exuberant life finally comes to an unspectacular end! Given the late hour and no Christmas celebrations to go to, after a while we ended up at a local all-night café for coffee. Three tough looking local *NoDaks* were sitting at the far end of the cafe and fortunately the fact there were three of us posed enough of a deterrent to forestall any inclination they may have had to do more than glower at us, conspicuous in our Air Force issue parkas as being some of those hated GIs from the base.

Interestingly, the N-3B 'arctic' parka we all wore were made distinctive in that each of our parkas had circles of reflective tape on the arms and a reflective cross (a target?) stitched to the rear. Although some of the *townies* wore these N-3B parkas as well (available at the nearby surplus store) due to their excellent suitability for Minot's cold winters, the civilian versions lacked those reflective crosses (this had been mandated for all base personnel use, so that airmen would be visible on the flight-line and not get sucked into jet intakes by accident). As it was, any person possessed of a reflective cross on their parka might as well have been wearing a red bulls-eye on their back for the benefit of town folk who felt the need to express their irritation over some aspect or another of the base's presence.

Saint Benedict's Holy willie...

As we sucked hot java, staring out the frosted window at the late-night snowfall, Mike was launching into a reflection on the fact that the town's primary Roman Catholic Church had recently acquired a small relic of some saint or another that it was currently displaying. The thought of some macabre body part of a reputed 'saint' being proudly shown off in its little glass *reliquarial* box to the yokels made me shiver, but I volunteered the observation of how neat it would be if they managed to find the saint's mummified *willie* and build a De Molay '*Follow Holy Father's example: abstain from sex*'

youth program around it. After all, the mental picture of sex-starved monks and nuns feverishly debouching each other in the dark corners of monastery basements had always held a certain grotesque fascination for me during my studies of Western Civilisation, since the discovery of the remains of dozens of infant remains buried deep under those monastic havens is a proven archeological and historical fact.

Looking across the table at Mike, I could see his eyes glazing over in that now familiar way as he got further and further afield in his esoteric musings. Mike clearly missed his calling, since he had always seemed to me to have had the makings of a good Eastern Orthodox Priest in his make-up. Rasputin with a tender and loving heart? But that bit of déjà-vu speculation come true would occur much later, after he left the Air Force. I was meanwhile wondering what *Oswanna Bergdahl* was doing that evening, out on her family's snowbound farm and celebrating Christmas Eve in true old fashioned Norwegian family style.

A fine post-puberty howdy-do!...

Oswanna had come to my attention not long after I had arrived at the hospital, since she was attending the nearby teacher's college and there were several extra-curricular student social organisations on the campus, one (LSA) operated under the aegis of the Lutheran Church our USO advisor belonged to. Since most of the student teachers were women, the local male-female ratio was—seen from the viewpoint of a horny GI—absolutely mind-boggling. And since the base would frequently be cut off from town by recurrent snowstorms, during those protracted winter periods we airmen practically had the attention of all those young women entirely to ourselves. The only real problem I could see was that they were all from good Christian (Lutheran) families and I (along with most of my airman cohorts) was most un-Christian in both intent and purpose! How to lure these clean living, sweetly virginal young ladies off the path of filial righteousness and onto the path to eternal perdition was the chief challenge of our off-duty lives, of course. The official SAC motto may have been '*Peace is our profession*', but it became '*Peace may be our profession, but pu*s*y is our passion!*' to us.

Aside from a couple of high school crushes I'd had that never amounted to much, I couldn't claim the experience of having had a real girlfriend before and Oswanna quickly attracted my attention. With short bobbed brown hair, a cute little snub nose, nice hooters and a well-proportioned shape, Oswanna had all the requisite physical attributes, but she also seemed to possess a substantial intellect as well...*a/ways* a plus on my score-sheet. One other airman at the hospital named Russ also had his eyes on Oswanna, however, and through our mutual interest in her we became good friends. Russ was from New York City and played jazz saxophone; he also tended towards depression, as I later found out. Russ and I initially became the best of enemies as we pursued lovely Oswanna in our off-time, but with neither of us gaining the clear upper hand. Given the prominence of strong rural Christian beliefs that prevailed at this time, augmented by the strict teachings of the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), neither of us ever got to first base in our intent to bed lovely Oswanna (which was probably just

as well, since getting hitched and having to settle down in North Dakota that early in our lives even then had seemed an awful prospect to both of us).

Nevertheless, Oswanna remained high on my list as I also met a few others among the teachers-to-be and gingerly trolled the local waters. There were three others, actually, who caught my attention at the LSA meetings. One, named Robin, was a bit too angular and ectomorphic; a blonde, her manner was rather hyper-staccato and her affect slightly nervous. Another, a short-haired blonde named Lynn, was a bit too well padded and had these deep brown 'cow-eyes' that perhaps communicated too much to her already more than 'willing' nature; when I finally had the chance to drill for oil on Lynn's plot, I just couldn't bring myself to take advantage of her (probably more so because I didn't relish the thought of getting married and hitched to Lynn forever). Then there was Carole-Anne Johnson, a vivacious blonde who had a sharp sense of humor and a set of perfect hips that promised absolutely no complications with future child-birthing whatsoever! Regrettably, Carole-Ann was a dedicated Lutheran vestal virgin who was 'saving her body' for her future husband and, as already emphasised, nothing could have been more off-putting than the thought of marriage to *anyone* at that early point in my earthly learning curve.

Mike, Frenchy and I finally finished our coffee at about 1AM, grinned annoyingly at the tough locals in the cockroach café as we departed, and took our leave to return to the airmen's dorm after slogging through the deep snow piled up on the Souris River (French for 'Mouse' River) that meandered back to the hospital from downtown. Actually, this was a pursuit I regularly delighted in, crunching along in the snow on that river's frozen surface. Since North Dakota's cold dry snow was so much different from California's moist and heavy Sierra Nevada snow, walking in it late at night when the temperature was fourteen below was an exotic and personally delightful experience. To my reckoning, nothing could beat getting totally encapsulated in our full arctic paraphernalia and going out for a stroll at midnight, during those dark winter nights. The stars were so bright and clear it almost seemed as if they might hurt your eyes looking at them too long, and the sharp dry cold enhanced the scent of everything with a unique piquancy that made even the creosote on telephone poles seem like a sublimely exotic perfume. Quite often, when the solar wind from sunspot outbursts of radiation was strong, the *Aurora Borealis* danced across the sky like a procession of fitful insomniac ghosts. Moments like those remain as fresh in my mind today as any over the entire course of my seven and a half decades of life, and I still love the scent of creosote on cold days.

Thinking back on those singularly unique nocturnal winter walks, all I lacked was a faithful sled dog by my side to imagine I was somewhere up in the Arctic Circle wasteland, captured by the ancient Native American spirits' magic in those timeless frozen nights. Unfortunately, my reveries quickly came crashing down to reality once I was at the hospital dorm's door again and the exotic natural perfume of frosty North

Dakota nights was quenched by the stink of stale heated air that rushed out through the doorway as I entered.

(Continued in 'Part 2')

The saga of medical life in the far northern ZI (Zone of the Interior) during the 'Cold War' continues. Note: No citizens of North Dakota were hurt or injured in the creation of this memoir about the making of SAC's 'Cold War' in the cold north! This story is also very likely the EXCEPTION that proves the rule that in the Air Force, "Only the best go north!"

“What did you do in the war, daddy? (Part 2)

by Kalikiano Kalei (continued from Part 1)



M*A*S*H was closer to the truth than you'll ever know...

Still, life in town wasn't half bad compared to life on the base. Back in the 60s most military medical people were notoriously casual about such trifles as rank and military protocol, a custom that the television and movie productions of *M*A*S*H* rather accurately reflected. In the hospital and around its grounds us medics routinely went around

without caps, although the regulations strictly specified that all personnel would be 'covered' at all times when outside of a building. Salutes routinely went by the board, especially if the officer encountered was a FOB '90-day wonder' butter-bar nurse, a habit even more ingrained by the fact that many of the nurses (all commissioned officers and 2nd lieutenants at the very least) regularly slept around with the hunkier enlisted men at the hospital. Thus, the *fraternization* that is so severely condemned among the officer corps was, in our instance, conjugal fraternization of the most flagrant sort. One can image how difficult it was to even consider saluting a nurse with

your hand when just the night before you had enthusiastically saluted her charms with your *willy*, standing erect and ramrod straight in its own right!

This habit of treating officers casually often got us into hot water when we 'town-troops' were out on the base, since we'd walk around by habit without our caps until some eager young fighter pilot would round the corner and heatedly call us on our failure to render appropriate military courtesies (the rumor that these junior grade Tom Cruise clones all went around with an aircraft pitot tube stuffed straight up their collective *arses* is untrue, but they were a bit undeservedly over-awed by the self-exaggerated importance of their very junior officer status). Typically, if we were within a 100-yard radius of the base medical clinic, instead of saluting we'd simply grin and dart around the corner to vanish in the radiography film vault (if the officer decided to give hot pursuit). It became a game we medics played with increasing finesse.

Don't ask, don't tell, don't even speculate!...

If the female nurses favored sleeping around with the male enlisted men at the hospital, the two male nurses we had at John Moses apparently preferred to just as eagerly keep each *other's* intimate company. Our two male nurses, both FOB butter-bars, were Lt. Gringo and Lt. Dilbert, the former being somewhat short, dark and rotund, with slicked back Hispanic hair, and the latter being more closely approximating a sort of blonde version of Washington Irving's *Ichabod Crane* character. Despite their extreme differences, they were clearly an *item*. Gringo drove a late model Chevy Corvair convertible of which he was inordinately fond, despite its abysmal (and dangerous) handling characteristics, and one would occasionally see them dashing off together during warmer weather, top down, with Dilbert riding shotgun as the Corvair's rear end sagged perilously askew around the corners. They weren't bad guys, really, and just seemed to be a tad more...um, shall we say *sensitive*?...than the other male medics. Nothing wrong with that, of course, since both were very conscientious and thoroughly dedicated to their patients (and probably damn happy to find each other in this very austere and religiously conservative northern region, also). In those days of the 60s, Oscar Wilde's '*love whose name may not be spoken*' was still pretty much buried away in the nearest closet and even the present military '*don't ask, don't tell*' policy was several decades off in the future. Besides, even if they had been flagrant about their relationship, the military needed nurses now that the Vietnam War was in full reheat, so Gringo and Dilbert were safe enough tucked away in provincial little Minot. In fact, most NoDak townies probably weren't even aware that such homo-erogenous pairings even existed!

Strangely, for someone who hailed from sunny California coastal beaches, I found the dire NoDak winters to be somehow sublime and enjoyable. If the climate was so severe that it found even some of the dire-hard Norwegian-Americans grumbling about finally quitting the farming business and moving to *my* state, I was clearly a bizarre anomaly beyond understanding to them. Such was the unhappy reputation of Minot AFB throughout the Air Force as a 'hard duty' assignment that the mere mention of Minot

anywhere on a base around the world brought immediate smirks and nudges. As if the hot prairie summers and icy-cold, sub-zero winters weren't enough of a misery for most, Minot AFB also had the dubious distinction of being hosted by SAC, just a short time earlier under the lightning bolt clutching mailed fist of General Curtis Lemay himself (we called him *'the Cigar Grinder'* behind his back), the non-nonsense father of modern nuclear strategic bombing operations theory and practice.

SAC introduces us to the 'ORI' (Operation Readiness Inspection')...

While that might not have been enough in itself to inspire markedly indifferent enthusiasms among those assigned to Minot, the frequent SAC 'Operational Readiness' inspections (known as ORIs) *were*. These unannounced inspections of a given SAC base by the top SAC brass occurred unpredictably and fairly frequently, the earliest notice coming from the base control tower upon being notified of an unidentified KC-135 approaching the base on final and requesting permission to land. As soon as word flashed out about the pending inspection, the base would suddenly become a beehive of activity with every single person on it frantically preparing for a white glove examination of the base's erstwhile 'combat readiness'. This typically ranged from microscopic examinations of the dozens of ceramic toilet bowls for slight blemishes, all the way up to an assessment of the polished sheen on Minuteman I missile warhead nosecones and throttle movement lubricity in the nuclear alert BUFFs that were poised for takeoff on the alert pad.

For those of us at the hospital (and at the base clinic), this most often meant wearily searching for dust bunnies and *woolieboogers* under the beds of our crusty old vets, dust on bedrails, and an inspection of the gleam on our sterilized stainless-steel bedpans and 'ducks' (urinals) under the direct observation of a stern-faced bird colonel from SAC higher headquarters. The dorms also had to be spit-shined to perfection, as well, and any stray evidence of lost nurse lingerie under airmen beds had to be well hidden. However, given a little luck, an ability to roll with the punches and some smooth public relations work by the Hospital Commander (usually a formal 'dining-in' for hospital officers and the higher HQ command staff in the John Moses cafeteria), we usually managed to get through the worst of the ORI fun & games without losing our collective cool. Still, it was usually the closest we would have to get to being reminded of our real military status, in our otherwise *M*A*S*H*-like little medical slice of the uniformed services world.

We find out about the SAC 'North / South Policy'...

In the summer months Minot would often sizzle and fry under the hot NoDak plains sun and the frequent droughts were not much fun either, as semi-permanent features of the plains farming region along the Canadian border. NoDak winters, by contrast, were notorious for having severe sub-zero weather for weeks at a time, often just as ferocious and almost as miserable as the worst northern located bases in Alaska. Life at MAFB was hardest for good ole boys from the American south, of course, since they didn't particularly take a likin' to havin' their hominy grits freeze up, but SAC had what

was termed the 'North/South' Policy, an official protocol that would routinely assign personnel to alternate and highly contrasting temperature zones. This meant that once assigned to SAC, an airman could rely on being sent to at least one severe cold area, followed by a subsequent duty station in an extremely warm area (Arctic/Tropics). This was intended to temper the experience of all SAC personnel so as to enable them to contend with climatic extremes and function seamlessly in the complete range of global weather possibilities. Keeping sophisticated weapons systems in a top state of immediate readiness for instant nuclear deployment in either type of weather was a daunting and arduous undertaking at best, as most soon found out, but to my reckoning, having to work on the guts of a balky turbojet engine and make it operate properly at 20 degrees below zero HAD to be among the worst of the challenges anyone in SAC faced. By contrast, putting cartoon-character Band-Aids on *baby booies* at the base clinic was a pure lark (if not very adventurous)!

Of course, not all medical duties were as mild and pacific as that. Every now and then we'd have to respond in our big blue crash ambulances to aircraft crashes, some in (and often partly due to) the worst winter weather imaginable. Most were not catastrophic, usually resulting only in bent landing gear, aircraft sliding off the icy runways, and engine failures (on multi-engined aircraft this was not often very serious) that were either approaching the base or taking off from it. In these instances, there were usually few if any casualties, since they were what we call 'survivable' (non-catastrophic) emergencies. The one major incident that was a total catastrophe involved a KC-135A jet tanker that had been fitted for passengers and that was used by SAC headquarters for inspection visits to various SAC wings. The incident in question occurred in January of 1968, just before I left for a new assignment in Arizona (DMAFB in Tucson), and since I have already written about it in [another article](#), I won't recap the details here. Suffice it to say that all 13 individuals on board (seven crew and six higher headquarters staff, including SAC's Vice-Commander, Major General Charles Eisenhart) died when the 300,000-pound aircraft experienced a failed take-off and impacted the ground inverted about two-thirds of the way down the main runway in a snowstorm. That was the single most destructive crash I have ever been involved with, needless to say, and one can't even begin to imagine the incredible forces involved that can break a human body into such tiny fragments that you literally have to comb the ground to find any identifiable human remains. Although there were only 13 people aboard, multiply that scene by a passenger factor of x 42 and you come close to a fairly accurate sense of what a *non-survivable* modern commercial airliner crash is like. Personally, I usually preferred pediatric clinic baby Band-Aid duty, myself.

A really mixed bag of characters...

As the winter stretched on, the USO downtown gathered a few more hard-core war protestors under its wing, including one memorable character named Dave Estridge. Dave was an engine mechanic in the base's Air Defense Command detachment, the 5th Fighter Interceptor Squadron and he played a mean folk guitar. Like most of us anti-war protestors, Dave would rather make love than war, as the old saying had it, and he

would occasionally play the latest folk tunes for us whenever LSA was hosting a social gathering for the Minot State Teacher's College students. With wild Irish red hair, a gritty Dave van Ronk style voice, and extensive repertoire of *Phil Ochs* songs, Dave could outshine Leon Redbone in his better moments. You'd have thought he was still in the Village (Greenwich Village, in NYC) to hear him play and it made the rest of us (Mike, Frenchy and myself included) rue his natural 4-string talent. So compellingly unforced was Dave's performing ability that he even affected a sort of 'celebrity depression' problem that made him shirk the limelight when he wasn't in the mood to sing (shades of James Dean!). I never found out what ultimately happened to good old Dave, but hopefully he didn't end up across the pond and stretched out on a cold *Da Nang* slab somewhere. Since he was in ADC (based only within the continental US), it is likely he was spared that less than happy experience.

Also mentioned earlier was my old buddy Russell Kelly, who in addition to coping with occasional mild depressions had a sort of Woody Allen complex, complete with small nervous tics and minor neuroses. Russ was my main competition for Oswanna, our mutual heart-throb, but he was always fearing rejection by her so his life was usually inconsolable. That left a bit of breathing-space for me to squeeze into Oswanna's awareness, but one day I blew what fragile relationship I had with her to pieces, thanks to my too-clever sense of humor.

I had noticed that there was a company back east that would print sweatshirts with whatever a customer wanted emblazoned on it, so on a sudden inspiration I ordered a powder blue sweatshirt with the words *SIGMA EPSILON XI* on the front. Since the teachers' college had sororities, it was a natural to see some of the students walking about in similarly decorated sweatshirts. Oswanna was actually quite pleased when I presented it to her, giving her some sort of line about her being made an honorary member of the SIGMA EPSILON XI fraternity that I belonged to. Of course, the hidden joke didn't dawn on her until another student saw her on the campus at a Lutheran student social and asked her if the SIGMA EPSILON XI on her sweatshirt stood for *SEX*? Oswanna was mortified and refused to even see me for at least a couple of months after that, but I wrote it off as simply a matter of her lacking a sufficiently broad enough sense of humor and quickly forgot about it as a promising joke that didn't quite pan out as expected.

Amazingly, many years later and long after having gotten out of the Air Force, I found Russ on the internet and reestablished contact with him briefly. He was still the same Russ, still a neurotic Woody Allen surrogate, but for all that just as likeable. For reasons I forget, we drifted apart soon after and lost track of each other. As for Oswanna, amazingly she later ended up coming to California, where she tried teaching school in San Francisco for a while. We got together occasionally, since by then I was relocated in the San Francisco East Bay (Berkeley) but there just didn't seem to be any real prospect of a solid long-term relationship between us, so she moved to Sacramento (CA), where she eventually married a sailor and had a family. As far as I know she is still there.

A winter's tale (about yellow snow)...

I'll never forget one time when Mike, Russ and I drove out to Oswanna's family's farm on the south outskirts of town. It was deep winter, the snow was falling and the wind was blowing up a howling blizzard when we decided to go out to see her in my little blue VW convertible. As I mentioned earlier, the typical Minot snowstorm was more of a horizontal than vertical affair, since the unobstructed winds swept all the dry snow in a layer over the ground to a height of from thirteen to twenty-five feet. This meant that vision 'on the deck' could be totally whited-out and obscured, while just twenty-five feet higher the air was clear and the sun shining (albeit bleakly). For our part, there was so much snow already on the ground that it was just about all we could do, even in my stalwart little bug, to keep ploughing on through the drifts that clung to the roadway. Despite the bug's near-unstoppable snow-keeping ability, we all knew that to stop anywhere between town and farm would mean getting snowbound and temporarily marooned until the storm blew over. Thus, we kept driving, despite the fact that Russ and I had had several beers and were feeling a dire need to take a whiz (Mike, as a priest in training didn't drink anything 'harder' than root beer). I had let Mike drive, so Russ and I were passengers in the cramped bug, but since our respective bladders threatened to burst on the next sharp impact with a bump on the roadway, in our increasing desperation we finally hit upon a plan to relieve ourselves without necessitating a stop.

Forcing the bug's right-side door open against the howling wind-stream as a shield, first Russ and then I managed to shoehorn ourselves into the right front seat in succession and stand in the open doorway to direct a steaming jet of yellow fluid out onto the roadway. And this at a speed of about 35-40 mph in an almost total whiteout! It remains one of my finest performances to this day, I think, calling for a mix of good balance, reckless daring, and precise aim that I doubt I could ever repeat again. Mike's performance as 'pilot' on this mission was also flawless and after a short interval we managed to reach the safety of Oswanna's farm where she wondered how we could be so crazy as to attempt a passage in those conditions (after all, even the farm animals had had enough intelligence to stay safely out of the storm and in the barn; those that didn't and ended up grazing near the road into Oswanna's farm might have been momentarily attracted by two neat little lines of yellow snow that pretty much led right up to a point shortly past the entrance, by her gate!).

Elvis spotted in a flying saucer at Minot AFB again (again!)...

Since we were 'townie airmen', assigned to the hospital in Minot and not located directly at the base (12 miles north of town), we were totally unaware of some mysterious goings-on out there that to this day challenge explanation. While Mikie, Frenchy and I were taking care of cranky old Norwegian vets (and seriously ill base personnel who had been sent to town), our awareness of all things considered classified on the base was considerably lessened, compared to that of our cohorts stationed at the base clinic. In addition to the base's 450th Bomb Wing, MAFB also hosted the 91st Strategic Missile

Wing, a three-squadron strength unit comprised of nuclear-armed and combat ready Minuteman II intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) on constant alert. This large ICBM complex joined two others situated on the northernmost frontiers of the country as part of the nation's 'TRIAD' nuclear deterrent force (sub-based missiles, land-based missiles, and nuclear bombers). Our 91st SMW birds, the solid-fuel Minuteman II ICBM (with an 8,000 mile range and armed with a 1.2 megaton single thermonuclear warhead), lurked in reinforced concrete prairie dog holes that had been designed to resist the near-direct hit of a Soviet thermonuclear missile and (in addition to their own highly secure perimeter defenses) were protected up topside by a very elaborately configured security force of mobile Air Police strike-teams. In the event that an unauthorized object (person, vehicle, aircraft, etc.) was detected within a certain radius of each silo, one of these teams would respond with extreme haste to intercept the intruder using both ground vehicles and helicopters. Above each silo complex elaborate sensors and surface detection systems were monitored by those below in the command and launch centers. These systems were also backed up by sensitive surface scan radar and motion detection arrays, leaving absolutely no chance that anything would get within several hundred feet of the silos' outermost perimeters without being detected.

According to authenticated reports and recorded documentation, the 91st SMW was visited by unidentified flying objects (yes, *UFOs*) several times throughout 1967 and 1968. In each of these instances, flying objects were picked up in the immediate vicinity of the silos, hovering or maneuvering close to the ground (in a non-aerodynamic manner, meaning they weren't conventionally winged airplanes) above them. Beams of light were directed by the objects at several of the silos and in at least one instance the *unimaginable* occurred as a result: *several of the missiles in their concrete silos went on full pre-launch mode entirely by themselves* (that is, the launch control officers had not initiated any launch actions themselves). Given the extremely complex series of command sequences and authorizations (both electronic and sequential) that a pre-launch mode requires, it is entirely impossible that these situations could have been either accidental or human-initiated.

Security teams actually approached the hovering objects and upon arrival at the complex found the locked outer perimeter gates open. In addition to radar documentation, a number of confirmed direct sightings were recorded and to this day there is no possibility that these objects were anything *other than* unidentified flying objects. More information about these sightings may be viewed here, for those interested: <http://www.ufocasebook.com/minotafb.html> and at <http://ufocasebook.com/minotafbufo1968.html> . A separate article I wrote on the subject of unconventional flight propulsion systems makes mention of this incident and may be viewed here: <http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewarticle.asp?id=50806> .

So highly classified were these incidents at the time that I wasn't even personally aware of them until many years later, despite the fact that our medical group had direct responsibility for taking care of the medical needs of the 91st SMW launch crews and support personnel, and despite the events described having occurred when I was

assigned to the 862nd MG at the time. Given the enormous range of possibilities concerning the existence of UFOs and all the swirling controversy that has forever surrounded the subject of space aliens and ET life in the universe, there is a strong tendency by most to simply dismiss 'hardened factual' instances such as those that occurred at MAFB back in 67 and 68 as simply the result of fanciful imagination. In this instance, however, as in so many thousands of others (as any research into this topic will quickly demonstrate), there is simply no possible dismissal of what happened as 'fanciful'. These totally mystifying but well-documented incidents remain unexplained to this day.

North Dakota learns about California style 'beatniks'....

Back at the hospital in town, life for us continued with a fairly tolerable regularity. Once a week in the evenings we'd meet at the local Lutheran Church, situated just across the street from the college campus, for socializing with the women students and there would be the occasional party to attend (all strictly sans ETOH, of course, since these were all good little God-fearing girls from good little God-fearing families). Naturally nothing would have pleased us more than to get into a few sets of knickers, so it was often quite frustrating to have to put on halos and assume a more appropriately 'godly' demeanor, but persevere we did (without much luck).

Since the war was in full swing overseas, peaceful resistance was a frequent theme of some of the social gatherings and one or two of the parties we attended reflected unconstrained war-protest sentiment. People would come dressed as what they imagined San Francisco's beatniks looked like, with berets, turtlenecks, shades, peace symbols, bongos, etc. Of course, it was all pretty *hoakie*, given the fact that most folks in NoDak hadn't the most remote idea what REAL San Francisco Bay Area beatniks looked like and besides, the beats were almost totally extinct by 1968, having yielded to the growing hippie movement, with its iconic MJ and LSD substances. Nevertheless, they were known as 'beatnik' parties.

One of the most convincing of our group of male regulars at these LSA parties was a Lakota Sioux fellow named Phil. Phil was also a very, very smart young man, possessed of the sort of dark good looks that predictably set Scandinavian girls' heart rates a tick faster. Slim, but well-muscled and possessed of a naturally cool demeanor, Phil played the bongos with some skill and could also play the guitar. No '*kumbaya-er*' Phil, and if he had been in California, he undoubtedly would have been right at home, riding the crest of the popular hippie movement wave. Strangely, Phil lacked any sort of connectivity with his Native American ancestry and if one didn't know his Lakota Sioux family name was *Mahpiyawakankidan* (*Sacred Cloud Worshipper*), one would think he was merely a smoothly acculturated Italian. With his impressive looks, keen intellect, and social adroitness, Phil would have perfectly fitted right in at any Bay Area (or Italian) coffeehouse. Being cool and with local connections, Phil would show up from time to time with a vampish female on his arm and smoking funny looking (and curiously smelling) cigarettes. Innocents that we all were, it wasn't until a few years

later that I came to recognise these *Cheechee and Chong* specials of Phil's as that evil scourge of J. Edgar's minions (LoL), *MJ*. [Sadly, super-cool or not, I am told that Phil ultimately succumbed to the bias and prejudice directed towards those Native American ancestry by WASP NoDaks and ended up prematurely dead from drink and substance abuse.]

But even if we were entirely devoid of any factual knowledge about REAL drugs, we were an inventive group at those parties and there was always a platter or two piled with simulated LSD (that took the form of a small red dot made from food color dye on the sugar cubes). The girls called it '*LSA LSD*' which usually gave our chaperone Pastor Jurgenson mild palpitations whenever he reflected on what his parishioners might think of what his youthful congregation members were up to. It was all in good, harmless fun of course since the mid-60s were still relatively innocent, compared with the far more harmful pop-culture social excesses of later decades that followed.

Hauling 'A' with Heine, the wunderauto...

In the spring, another good airman friend of mine (who had a bright red 1963 VW convertible) would join my own blue 62 ragtop bug for a two-car convoy to the nearby shores of *Lake Sakakawea*, hauling a carful or two of the Minot college girls along for a day in the sun. There were small sailing dinghies available for sailing (Lido 14 Class) at the lake and the fishing was also great, if you liked great big lazy lake carp. Sometimes during the winter snow melt-off, these huge carp would get trapped in little drying rivulets and you could just wade in and catch them by hand (some 22 inches long and larger). To me, a person whom the fish usually avoided as often as the girls, that was quite a unique experience!

Having a ragtop VW bug in North Dakota was rare enough but seeing two together sailing down the prairie roadways in 1967 was somewhat of a sight to behold. The fact is that, appearances to the contrary, the soft-top VW beetle was actually far *better* insulated than its hard-top counterpart, so in addition to the excellent snow-tracking and cold-weather characteristics of our '*Strength-Through-Joy*' wagons, they were also warmer in the winter. [As a note of explanation, the VW beetle was originally named the *KDF wagon* under Hitler's Nazi regime. That was an acronym for '*Kraft durch Freude*', or KdF, attributable to the fact that as originally envisioned by Dr. Porsche and *der Furher*, German citizens would all subscribe to a mandatory savings program that would when completed result in their having purchased their own beetle. This program was known as the 'KdF' program, hence the original name of the vehicle.]

My own blue 62 soft-top bug was named 'Heine' (after the German poet) and it was the first thing I acquired after arriving at Minot. My very first car had been the lime green '40 Chevy Master Deluxe Coupe I mentioned earlier (as having been barely able to wheeze its way to the beach) that I had picked up for \$50. Having had to leave it home when I enlisted, I gave a lot of thought to what sort of car I would get at my newly assigned base before passing by a local Minot used car dealership and spotting the blue bug. It was a 62 model and the asking price, used, in 1967 was \$600. Although a

considerably daunting sum for someone making only \$125 a month to contemplate, I was fortunate enough to get an HFC (*Household Finance Company*, a franchised high-rate of interest private loan business) loan for the full amount and soon took charge of the small beast. It seemed to be in great condition with only about 60,000 miles on the clock, so Heine and I began a happy association that would last until I traded it in on a new 69 beetle (big mistake, as it turned out) a while later. While installing a battery warmer wrap under the rear seat (where the battery was located, being a rear-engined vehicle) I was briefly startled to find at least a bucket full of oats, wheat, and barley. Asking the dealer about this, I was told that the car had formerly been owned by the son of a local Lakota Sioux chief who had used it to haul feed for his sheep around in. I guess it's a good thing he didn't use it to ferry the sheep themselves, thinking this all over.

Heine the VW ragtop gave me excellent, uncomplaining service while in the US Air Force, regardless of whether I was freezing my ass off in North Dakota or roasting under the merciless Arizona sun and I really *should* have kept it, since I regarded it with about as much affection as a favorite dog. Unfortunately, after getting out of the Air Force and returning to the *Peoples Republic of Berkeley*, I decided to trade Heine in on a late model VW. Originally intent on getting a new 1969 VW ragtop, they had none available at the Berkeley VW dealer, so I let the salesman sweet-talk me into getting a beige hard-top instead. True to VW's rep, it ran perfectly, as smooth as a Swiss watch, but I soon got tired of it since it had none of the little quirks and endearing rattles that I had come to regard as 'personality' in my blue 62. For some reason I've never been able to either understand or explain, I actually enjoy having a few quirks in my vehicles; something about *karma*, I guess.

However, being very protective of it and trying to guard the new car against any possibility of damage on the crowded Berkeley streets, I was in the habit of leaving it parked safely at home by the curb, in the street in front of my apartment, and used a small motorcycle to get to and from work. Only a week after I had bought the new bug, I returned from work to find that some truck had passed too close to it and left a huge crease along the entire left (driver's) side, gouging a one inch deep gash in both front and rear fenders! Since the fenders on old VW bugs project a good 6 to 8 inches beyond the doors, it is all too easy to overlook the fact that the lower-situated fenders are closer to one's passing vehicle than might otherwise be apparent and in a somewhat higher American full-sized truck, well...so much for my protective precautions! I felt like my girlfriend had been raped!

And now a serious note about the ravages of war...

But I digress. Most of our patients at John Moses were, as mentioned, elderly Norwegian World War One veterans, many suffering from serious diseases and almost all of them crotchety, cranky, and sour dispositioned old men in their 80s and 90s. Since we were in our early 20s, there wasn't much real understanding between us and them. We did what we had to do and provided reasonably good medical and nursing care for

them, but for my part and despite being a military person myself, I hadn't had the foggiest notion of what their World War One service had actually been like. At that point in my life I was far less historically aware than I am today, naturally enough, and had not yet undergone later years of academic study in history. Although my father (who had passed on when I was age four) had been a *Spanish American War* veteran (too young to enlist as a private soldier, he had been a drummer boy for Teddy Roosevelt's regiment, back in 1898), the First World War was something that lay far beyond my understanding then. It had been simply another forgotten 'war' to me, *ho-hum*.

Reflecting on that today, it is amazing what a contrast there was between the conditions those First World War vets served under and those imposed upon us in the Air Force of the 60s. Reading later about the indescribable horrors of static trench warfare and the unimaginably terrible violence they suffered on the muddy French lines, I am always impressed by the fact that although the conduct of war has been steadily and increasingly refined since 1900, no matter how one considers it, war...any war at all, no matter how or where...is contemptible and lamentable. Unfortunately for them, in the early 1900s technology first began to make the mass killing of millions of soldiers possible, with the result that veterans of that war suffered in ways we can't even imagine today.

Looking back on the history of warfare, any modern student of history has to be profoundly struck by the unceasing brutality of armed national conflict throughout the ages. As science and technology grew from the age of the industrial revolution onwards, the means of inflicting death and destruction have kept proportionate pace, accordingly. With new weapons and more effective means of killing the enemy a given, over any period of time, one cannot but wonder how modern human sensibilities can tolerate the perpetuation of warfare. When the atomic age produced thermonuclear weapons capable of destroying the entire world many times over, some dared to hope that humanity had *finally* reached the point where a liberating epiphany of sorts was about to occur to humanity's collective consciousness. That hope has, of course, been long-since dashed as nations found ever-increasing and more efficient means of continuing to wage war just short of launching an Armageddon of nuclear holocaust. Today these 'means' take the form of so-called 'limited warfare', guerilla and terrorist resistance, and 'limited tactical action', but they are just as deadly in entirely new ways.

While wars still kill and maim combatants, the means employed to kill have simply become more technique-intensive, more highly technology-driven and more surgically precise. As medical science kept pace with weapons sciences, and as the effectiveness of medical treatment and casualty evacuation became more sophisticated, greater assurance of life-preservation became a byproduct of modern war-fighting, but at the same time that survival became more likely, permanent maiming and disfigurement arose as the new casualty norm. Today, in Afghanistan, improvised explosive devices are a whole new and terribly destructive force to be reckoned with, combining the worst features of traditional mine-warfare with the unpredictability and uncertainties of new guerrilla terrorist tactics. From my viewpoint, witnessing a whole new generation of

partly dismembered, but still living bodies return home—life preserved, but forever severely disabled—my shame over being a member of the supposedly intelligent species that permits such outrages is intense.

Gavrilo blows it big-time...

Back in the days of the First World War (1914 through 1918), weapons technology outpaced medical science by an order of magnitude, given the abrupt assumption of hostilities after Serbian anarchist assassin *Gavrilo Princip* shot the Austrian Crown Prince in Sarajevo. By the time the war finally ended in an armistice in 1918, monster long-range artillery had been developed that could send 14 inch (naval sized) high explosive shells down on an entrenched and helpless enemy more than 24 miles distant. The terrible devastation of new chemical and biological weapons had also been introduced, and the machine gun provided an entirely new way of efficiently mowing down an enemy by the thousands at a time. New tactics, such as using progressive heavy artillery bombardment (known as ‘creeping barrages’) followed closely by massed infantry attacks, came into use, and entirely new armored weapons such as the tank came into being, as well. Against all of these things there was little or no defense back in the First World War and as a result of this, the veterans we took care of had all suffered to some extent or another from all of those horrors, many from mustard and phosgene gas exposure (against which rudimentary ‘gas masks’ initially provided only partly or an incompletely effective defense), a great number from ‘shell shock’, and worse.

Additionally, many of our old vets at John Moses had sustained severe psychological injuries resulting from their exposure to trench warfare and their experiences contending with the sight of seeing their mates atomized all about by unceasing high explosive shelling. ‘*Shell-shock*’ was the original term used to describe what we today understand as ‘*Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*’, but it was rather incompletely understood in those days and in far too many cases the psychological damage was left untreated, left undiagnosed (and therefore untreated), or simply dismissed as inconsequential. Then too, far too often PTSD was felt to be the result of cowardice or mere fearfulness, with the result that soldiers suffering from such devastating mental injuries were frequently regarded as shirkers and cowardly slackers and sent right back to the line.

Over the years following their service in the trenches of World War One, many of those with lingering psychiatric effects simply worsened until finally, although they were committed to our hospital for quantifiable physical disease and old war injuries, most also suffered secretly from severe psychiatric illnesses associated with the war in addition to any chronic or long-term war-related physical ailments.

Private Parts gets his orders...

Thus, as mere kids ourselves, we medics were largely unsympathetic to the cranky moods and demanding attitudes of our charges and certainly hadn’t the slightest

understanding of what they might have originally suffered or gone through in that most terrible war. Considering that the United States hadn't even gotten into the battles in Europe (effectively speaking) until the last stage of the war, the emotional and physical devastation suffered by our American troops paled by comparison with that suffered by the French, British, and German soldiers, since they had had to endure all this for almost *3 full years before* the US became involved in the conflict. Today, one reads the histories and accounts of participants that survive and one can only imagine at the cumulative effects on the soldiers (and civilians) of those three nations and the horrors they faced.

Reading any history of that first great world conflict, euphemistically known variously as '*The Great War*', the '*First World War*', and '*the war to end all wars*', one reads the statistics and figures that after the passage of time all wars are reduced to (long after, of course, all the intensely personal suffering and anguish has long since passed and been forgotten) and tries (unsuccessfully for the most part) to garner a small bit of comprehension about what it must have been like. While some understanding may be gained through voluminous reading, it amounts to only the merest of a small fragment of awareness of what the actual fighting must have been like.

Although by no means reflective of the *true* depth of the irredeemable tragedy that the First World War engendered, a few statistics may be helpful to understand the magnitude of some of the carnage that prevailed. By conservative estimate, over *ten million* (10,000,000) men were lost on the actual battlefields, concurrent with an equally high number of unknown civilian mortalities. That doesn't take into consideration the millions upon millions who were either seriously injured and survived, or those who received disabling injuries that were not immediately life threatening (traumatic loss of limbs, permanent lung disease and/or vision problems resulting from exposure to war gases, etc.). *Perhaps the starkest statistic is the fact that over 20,000 British soldiers alone were killed on the first day in the First Battle of the Somme, and on average more than 6,500 soldiers were killed on each and every day throughout the full five-year period the war encompassed...*

When one takes a modern war, such as Korea, Vietnam, or the actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, circumstances and degrees of suffering pale by comparison. Although the death rates and overt loss of life for the latter wars are far lower than those arising in the First or Second World Wars, the emotional (and often physical) trauma suffered is still substantial. One of the main mitigating factors between the two eras is the fact that America as a nation has sunk far deeper into the familiar softness and comfort of our modern, technology-enhanced materialist culture, with the development of a consequently far less firm resolve and diminished fortitude to undergo deprivation beyond a certain point than has obtained in past decades. Thanks to the vicarious voyeurism enabled by modern, live media reporting, the loss of a few dozen of our soldiers today produces the same level of intense grief and emotional angst that the loss of *thousands* of World War One soldiers created among families back then, but this

neither dismisses nor reduces the impact of war, no matter where it takes place, or in what era.

‘Maturity’ is a synonym for getting older...

Back in Minot, at John Moses Air Force Hospital, I had at the time none of these more recent awarenesses to help temper my youthful empathy beyond that which my normally somewhat pacific disposition supported and my intense opposition to the then-current war in Vietnam had, in my understanding, almost no association at all with the personal sacrifices all those old Norwegian vets had made in the First World War. I guess that's partly because I wasn't entirely anti-war (opposed to war in *any form* or manner), but simply (situationally and circumstantially) against that specific war being fought in Vietnam. My distaste for ALL war and national conflict didn't come about until sometime later, when I had read far more widely and gained a much broader and complete understanding of exactly what politically motivated armed conflict is all about.

Accordingly, I led two separate and compartmented lives during my Air Force service in North Dakota, one working as a medical orderly in a hospital full of old vets whom I had little concern for and *another* as an idealistic young anti-war protestor in uniform after duty hours. The great but perhaps unavoidable tragedy of that may be that I hadn't yet put all the pieces of the life puzzle together, but this is almost always the way life is. Life is a continuing experience that one may think of as an emotional and intellectual savings account. As the years go by, one's understanding grows commensurate with one's experiences and an equal ability to reflect intelligently upon them. Regrettably, by the time one is better able to put all those pieces of life's puzzle together meaningfully, the opportunities for making use of what is gained from them and bringing about meaningful change has diminished proportionately, until finally one is almost at the end of life and realizes with a sense of profoundly hollow sadness that nothing will ever really change. Human beings are doomed to a cyclical life experience, each generation not listening to the previous one and repeating the same mistakes over and over and over, until...*dare we hope for it?*...some major error in strategic planning occurs at the top of some superpower's food-chain or another and suddenly the human race (along with all its tendencies to squabble and violently disagree) will finally be vaporized out of existence. *Poof!* We should be so lucky...

Wars suck, but bicycles are kinda neat...

Ah well. Meanwhile life goes on....barely. One of the many things I developed a taste for while serving in NoDak was bicycling. There was an old hole-in-the-wall Schwinn bicycle shop across the street from the Lutheran Church and just down the street from the campus. They had a nice array of Schwinn '10-speed racers' there, one in particular catching my eye: a *Schwinn Continental Super Sport*. By today's standards it was a fairly heavy beast and the quality none too great (not up to Italian or French expectations), but it was affordable and I soon discovered the delights of taking drives along some of the rural roads bordering Minot's city limits. Taking a knapsack in hand, I'd make a leisurely run out to the orchards on the north end of town and just cycle

aimlessly down the rural country roads for a few hours until it was time to get back to town. There were apple trees along the way and on a hot summer day nothing was more personally satisfying than pulling over after a sweaty hour or so and decamping under an apple tree by the side of the road, to watch the world go by. While munching on an apple (I am guessing Adam rather innocently had the same pleasant feeling, when offered one by Eve), it was all too easy to forget crotchety old vets and ignore the possibility that at any given second, due to a sudden sharp international disagreement between the US and the USSR, the drowsy, bucolic calm of Minot's summer fields could be shattered by multiple rising intercontinental missiles exploding forth from their subterranean holes below, or that the hazy blue skies above could at any second erupt with a dozen explosive nuclear suns having a brilliance greater than the mind can conceive. The contrast between boy, bicycle, tree, and apple couldn't have been less distinct at such moments, but the possibility of a nuclear war breaking out was all too real to dare contemplate seriously at such a perfect moment; thus, after a leisurely respite of cheese, French bread and an apple, I would pedal back to the hospital attitudinally re-equipped to battle bedpans and renew my fight against the next day's small stresses and strains.

A few of the small, uncomplicated pleasures of those times occasionally return to my mind's eye, when I think back on those days. Some of those special little moments would occur while sitting at a nurses' station late at night, listening to the winter winds howl along the window ledges, moaning past the windowpanes and whining with a most animal-like plaintiveness. Closing one's eyes to blot out the dingy institutional yellow of the ward's walls, it was easy to think about the great frozen expanse of snow-draped landscape that lay just outside the window and seven stories beneath, as if it were a location off in Russia somewhere. There was something magical about that thought, very evocative and melancholy simultaneously, but I was given to abundant imagination anyway. The resulting mood reminded me strongly of the scenes in David Lean's cine masterpiece, *Dr. Zhivago*, in which he and *Lara Feyodorvna* have sought refuge in an old family *dasha*, far out in the snowy rural wastes surrounding Moscow, late at night. In one especially memorable scene, the windows of their frozen sanctum are frosted over with hoar crystals and the temperature outside is far below zero as Zhivago and Feyodorvna huddle for warmth by the light of a single candle. Gazing at each other over the guttering of a half-burned candle with unspoken passion, it is a particularly evocative romantic moment in that movie. Although there was precious little romance at the dimly lit nurses' station that I was charged with watching over, a vestige of that mood was still vaguely palpable, lurking just beyond the mind's full grasp and captured in the vocalizations of the icy draughts playing outside the frost-covered windows.

Sodding off on 'All Souls Day'...

Another time, at Halloween and late at night during a fairly stiff snowstorm, Mike and I had just finished up printing yet another issue of our war protest broadside (which we distributed at the USO and covertly passed out on the base whenever circumstances

allowed) and on a whim, as we closed up and left, grabbed a large carved jack-o-lantern someone had left at the USO and placed the pumpkin on top of my VW bug's roof. The lit candle inside faced rearward, since the wind would otherwise have blown it out, and thus decorated I drove my beetle slowly back down the city streets to the hospital. It made quite an interesting spectacle, I'm sure, but there were few others out and on the road to see it. As our luck would have it, one of the few spectators happened to be a Minot policeman in his patrol car and we were soon pulled over. Although I can't imagine a LEO writing a ticket for something like *'illegally driving with lit Halloween jack-o-lantern on roof of car'* (since as we all know there are so many laws both enforceable and unenforceable on the books that no truly *legitimate* cause is ever required, should an officer decide to make a stop), we were pulled over. He had little sympathy for bored US Air Force enlisted men and clearly possessed no sense of humor at all, but he did let us off with a grumbled warning to get *'that blasted pumpkin'* off our car and go home. That was the extent of this real-life Washington Irving Halloween moment. Not half as dramatic as the one experienced by *Ichabod Crane* with his headless horseman pursuer, however. Someone had probably stolen his doughnut back at the precinct house.

Mike learns about 'marital bliss'...

Not long after this, Mike met his first wife, Diane, who was a local townie and a cadet in the Minot Civil Air Patrol Wing and they soon married and moved into private quarters in town. Diane was very likely taken by Mike's unique combination of Rasputin-like and saintly qualities and of course they didn't grow them like Mike up in NoDak, so perhaps it is understandable that she fell under his spell quite rapidly. Besides, she understood the whole military *schtick*, being a CAP cadet and all, and read science-fiction a lot; for whatever the reason, they seemed to hit it off as well as anyone had a right to respect. For his honeymoon, Mike loaded Diane up into his beaten-up old Volvo 544 sedan and they *amscrayed* off to a small hotel in the nearby rural town of *Max* (yes, that's its real name: beautiful downtown 'Max'). Max had, in the last 2000 census, a population of 278 humans, uncounted numbers of cats and dogs, and probably *several millions* of prairie dogs claiming residence within its municipal borders. In 1966 it had to be at least a third *less* populous. Of course Frenchy and I felt we had to commemorate the occasion of Mike & Diane's honeymoon departure for Max by smearing a huge hunk of ripe Limburger Cheese on the manifold of the Volvo's engine, a rather large and almost unforgiveable lapse of decorum on our part (at least regarded as such by Mike and Diane, who had to live with the unbelievably *TERRIBLE* stench both up and back from their conjugal getaway).

Diane was also originally attracted to Mike because she read and enjoyed sci-fi almost as much as he and I did, so it initially seemed a match made in heaven. Geeks in love? Despite this shared interest, living with a saint has never been easy, however, and especially one with Rasputin-like overtones of mystic presence that tended to predominate at odd moments. Accordingly, the bloom soon faded from the blossom, so

to speak; I later came to find out (after leaving for a different duty assignment) that Mike and Diane had parted permanently after only a couple of years together.

Minot AFB bids me a fond 'adieu'...

Eventually, after nearly a full two years of similar misadventures and other post-adolescent experiential anomalies (of which this is a good example) that cemented our friendship and highlighted our mutual efforts to help bring the war in Vietnam to a close, I was finally given orders to report to a new duty station in Arizona (Davis-Monthan AFB, as part of that sprawling base's 803rd Medical Group) and Mike, Frenchy, Russ and I all parted company. Still, given the close bonds we had developed during our time together at Minot, we remained in touch over the years and in 1969, after I had returned to the *Peoples' Republic of Berzerkeley* in California, I shortly found Mike established in that city as well, it being the really happening West Coast place for peaceniks and radical fringers and all. Russ returned to New York City, where he was reabsorbed into Woody Allen's alternate universe dimension once again. Of Frenchy, I heard no further word after I left Minot.

Not long after coming to Berkeley, Mike became involved with the Eastern Orthodox Church, soon becoming a priest in that religion and found his strong sense of rather eclectic mysticism quite at home within Orthodoxy's holy embrace. Although Mike and I lived in the same urban area, we really didn't cross paths much and after a year or so Mike relocated back to Portland, Oregon, where his younger sister lived. I was devastated to learn that after leaving Berkeley Mike had been diagnosed with a form of fatal leukemia that claimed his life a few years after that disclosure. Mike was truly one of the most unique and genuinely good, caring human beings I have ever had the honor and good fortune of knowing and it seems ironic that his life was ended prematurely (doesn't it always, when good people demise prematurely?). Sadly, I did not learn of his passing until a year after the fact and I greatly regret not having known of his condition until it was too late to get back in touch.

I remained in Berkeley, went to work for several hospitals in the East San Francisco Bay Area, and continued following my own path through life. But that is another (equally long-winded) story and probably good for at least another 50,000-word tangential excursion on paper. In summary, my introduction to Minot, to North Dakota, and to that entire Mid-West part of the United States, was an enormously rewarding and fulfilling one. I look back on those days of my earlier youth as part of a unique and richly memorable experience growing up to maturity. While I don't claim to have ever fully matured (I'm still a kid in my 60s, but aren't we all?), it certainly filled out a very important part of my attempt to grasp and understand a small portion of what the life experience is all about. 41 years later, I still have no greater clue about what matters most in life or what it all means, but like any good journey, the 'getting here' part of the trip has not been boring!

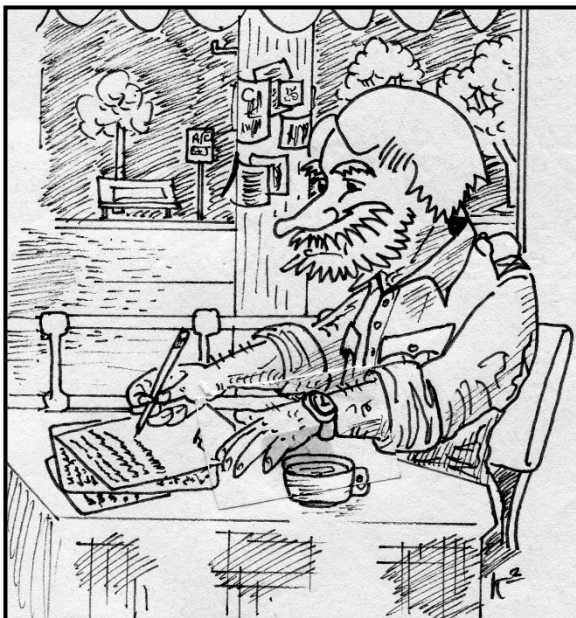
Note: At this point, Porky Pig was supposed to pop up here and say “*Bubbada-bubbada-bubbada that’s all, folks*” but I think they sent him off to Afghanistan to entertain the troops in that unhappy war (and he ended up on some GI’s dinner plate). Oh well. Considering the history of humanity’s perverse love affair with organized death and destruction, perhaps there really is no such aspect of war as “...*that’s all, folks!*” anyway. *D’ya think?*

Postscript: Regarding the above, *Porky Pig lied!* There’s actually a THIRD (and FOURTH) part of all this that needs to be added here, the third part of which entails a capsular recollection of my subsequent 2nd Air Force duty assignment at Davis-Monthan AFB in Tucson, AZ (the fourth part deals with my post-Air Force life as a student back at Berkeley, CA). I may attach these at some future date but since Part-3 summarises the final phase of my ‘uniformed anti-war activism.’ I’ve always been a bit leery of blatantly exposing that particular revelation of my early, youthful leftist idealism and immaturity (remember, I was only about 20 years old when I began my Air Force adventures and extremely opposed to the Vietnam War at the time).

For the record, at the time I was convinced that ‘*Peace on Earth*’ was not just a fervent hope but an actual possibility. Today, after more than 7 decades of life, I now know only too well that PEACE is a contradictory complication in the nature of human affairs and that the only lasting peace on Earth may occur when someone finally pushes the *Big Red Button* and...as the wonderful 1969 Kingston Trio song put it...”...*and we shall all be blown away!*”

A selection of Minot 862nd Medical Group cartoons (1966-67)

[Disclaimer: The party guilty of preparing this ‘casual history’ of the 862nd Medical Group managed to find LOTS of ways of getting into hot Borscht and one of them was by putting my modest artistic talents to good use during those long, cold and tedious nights while working as a bed-pan jockey on Med & Surg



Wards at John Moses Hospital, (when I wasn’t working up some of the 862nd Medical Squadron First Sergeant’s Moen’s pet graphics projects for squadron affairs, dinings-in and such)...

No one was spared my angst when I was disgruntled with the hum-drum of my late-night duties there and a few of the following images reflect that, capturing as they do a few of the characters I interacted with while a lowly MSS ‘junior medic’ on ward duty.

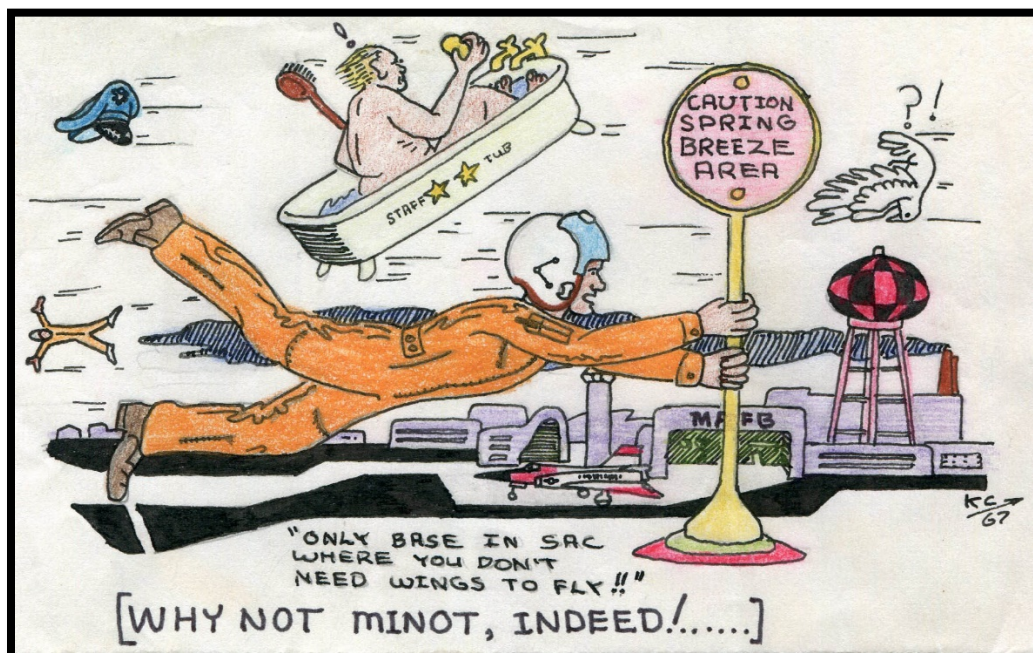
Since we also acted in concert with the aircrews in a medical context, even a few of the 5th FIS hot-shots got humorously skewered, as well as some of our own Flight Medicine docs. The cartoons shown on the following pages are just a few of the many that have survived the decades and remain in my hands today.

At the end of this section is a 6-page cartoon series reflecting the Medical Service School experience I had

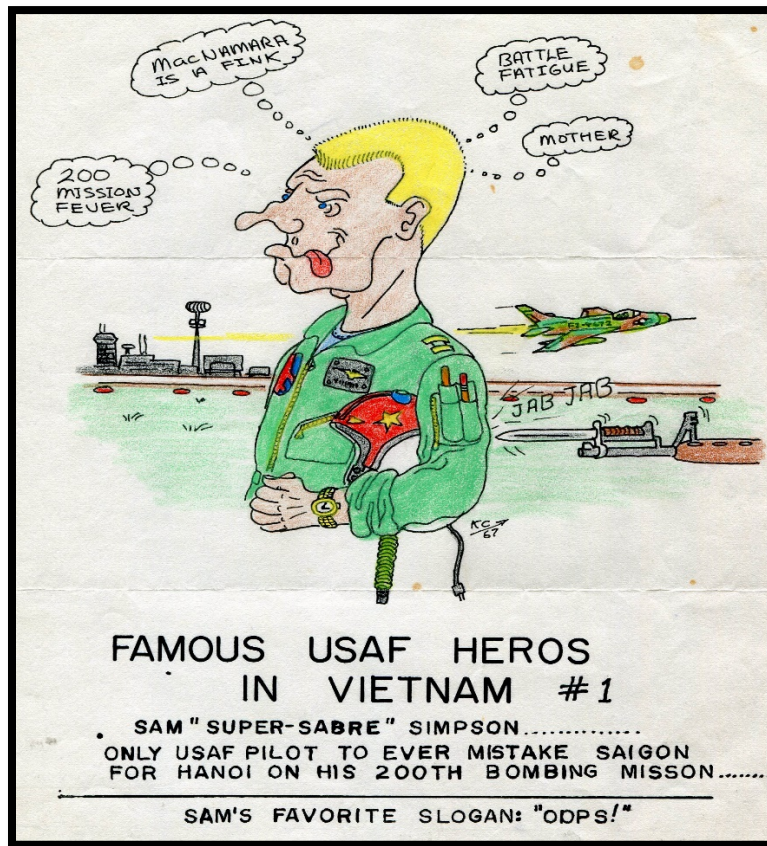
recently 'graduated' from, down at Sheppard AFB, in the Lone Star State before arriving at MAFB. I cranked them out over the span of a few nights on the Post-Op Surg Ward (while my shift cohorts snuck off with a few of the randy'er junior nursies to the laundry room for a few quickies (the nurses at John Moses, although '*Offkissers and Gentlewomen*' both by decree and commission, were no prim maidens, I can assure you!). That was my first peripheral lesson regarding lusty young nursies, which I took advantage of somewhat later after leaving the Air Force for civilian medical employment in the East San Francisco Bay Area of California. [The self-portrait at above is of *yers trooly* in Hemingway mode, done while sitting at *Café del Sol* in Berkeley, one sunny summer civilian afternoon.]



Above: John Moses Hospital surgeon, post op...1967.



Above: Great flying weather...for complete idiots! Base FSO, 1967.



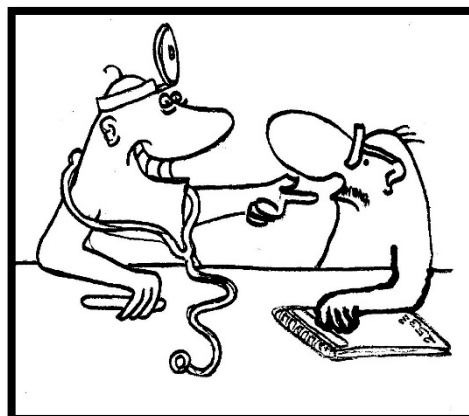
Above: A quick jab at our fearless aviators, late night boredom on the JMH wards (1967)

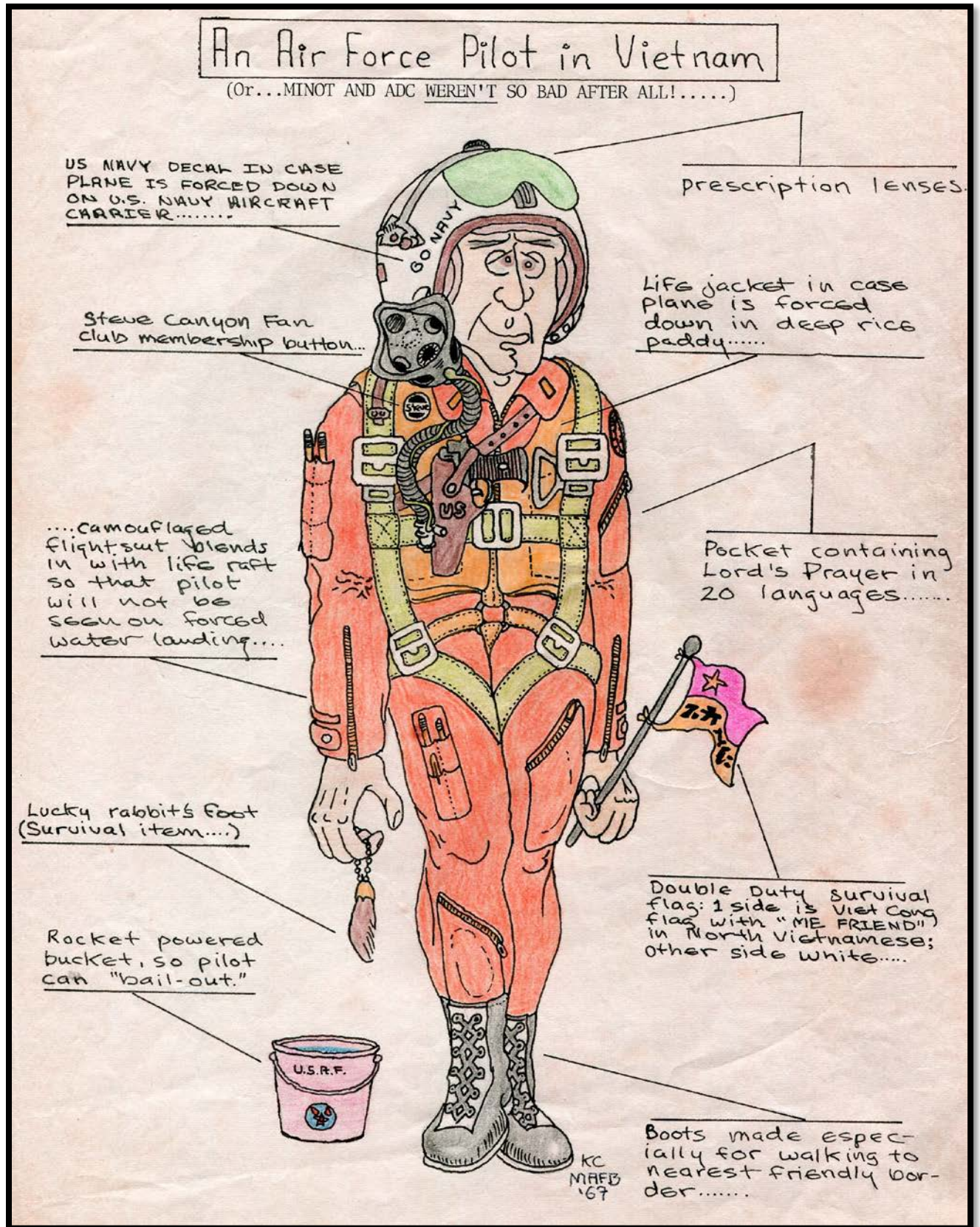


Left: One of our JMH ward docs on call

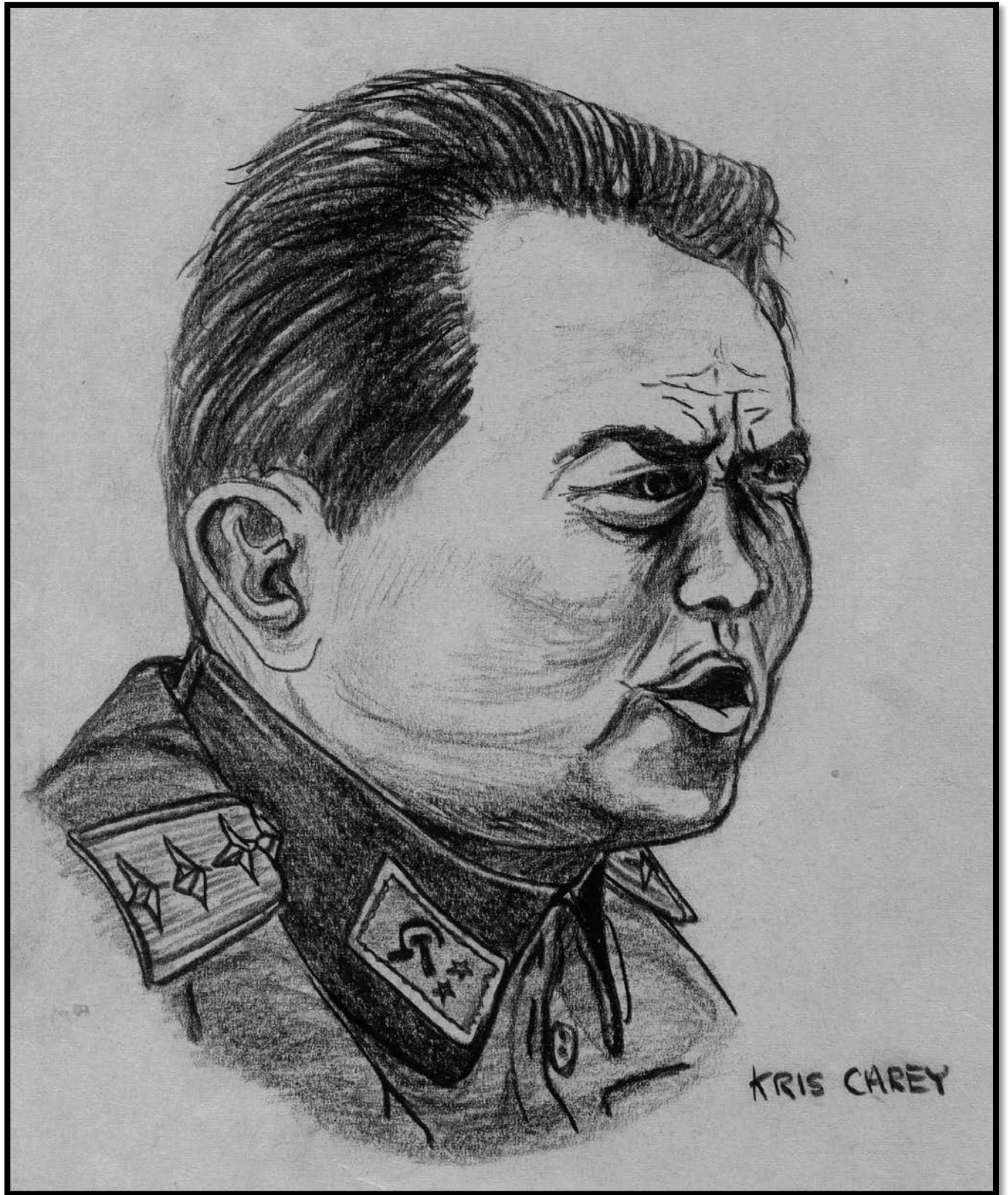
Right: JMH Jr. Grade Medic

Below: JMH Eye-doc and colleague

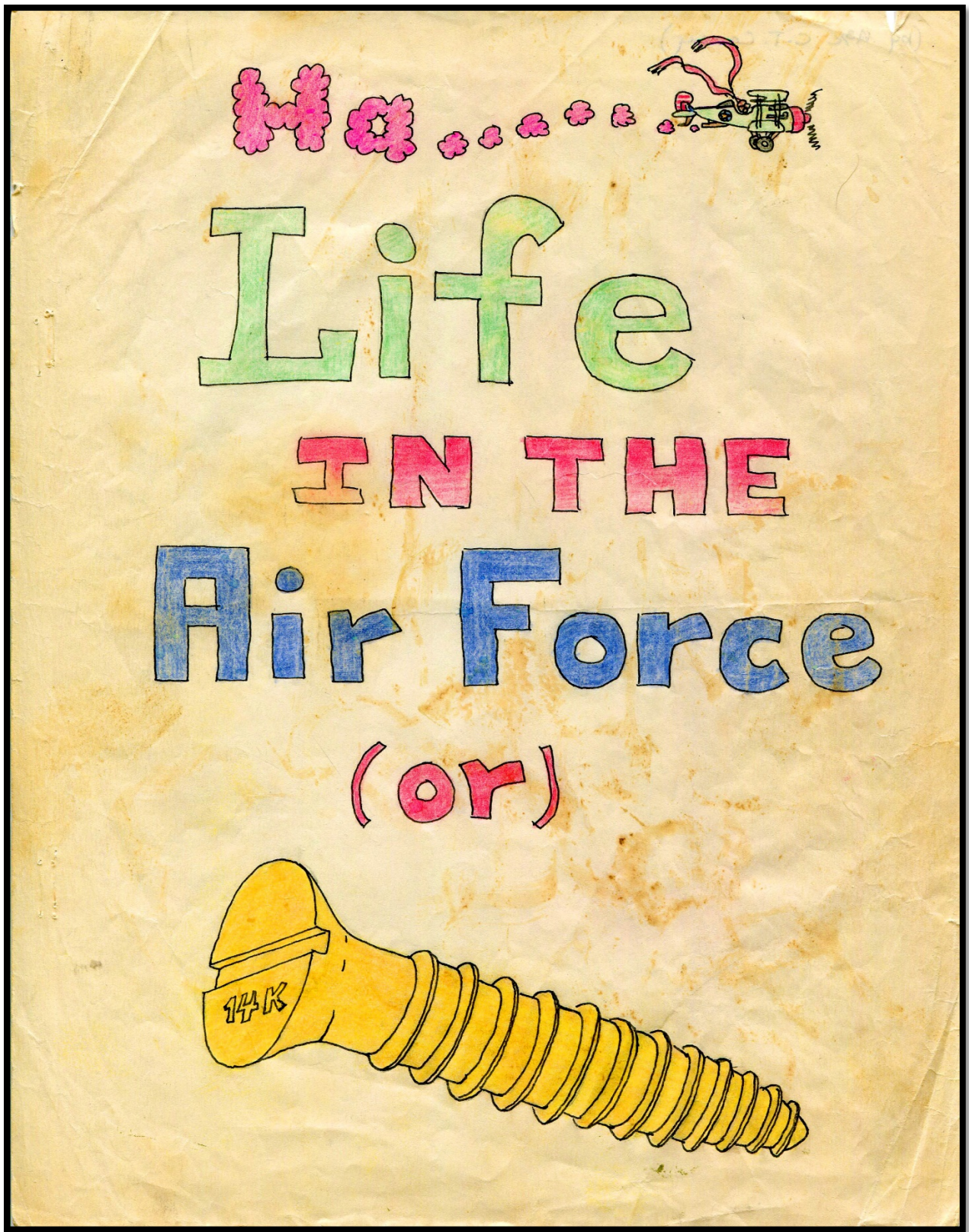




Above: A 5th FIS Sixer gets orders to fly Rhinos in Nam, MAFB 1967.



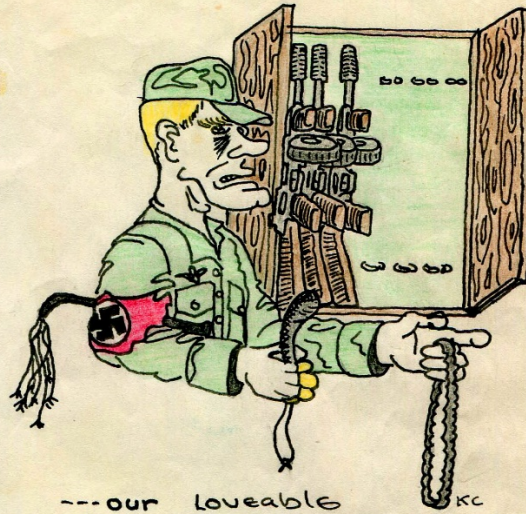
Above: The work of a day or two on late night shift at JMH (General Vo Nguyen. Giap, Commander of NVA forces)



From MSS training, just before orders to MAFB, 1966-67 (page 1 of 6)



---our new
Second Lieutenant.



---our loveable
Drill Instructor....



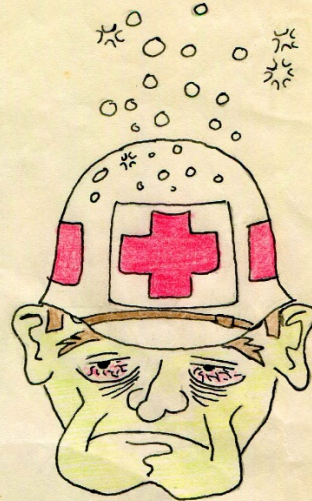
.....most important piece
of machinery in the
whole @*#! Air Force....



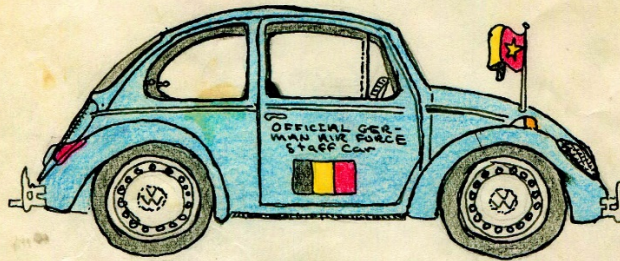
.....our base abounds
with beautiful
females.....



...The Air Force doesn't have K.P. anymore they have something better called Practical Training in Air Force Duties.....

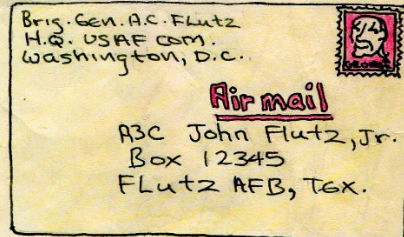


.....I was happy to know I was going to be a medic....



....Several of our allies have personnel stationed here on the base.....

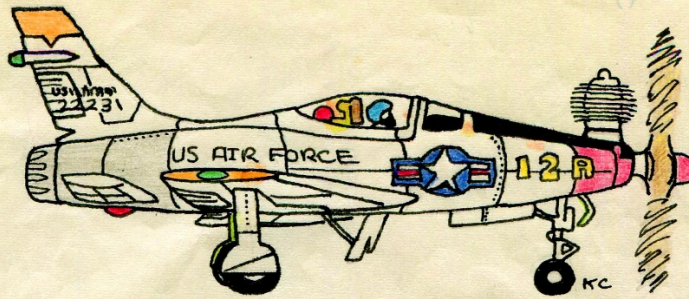
(1)



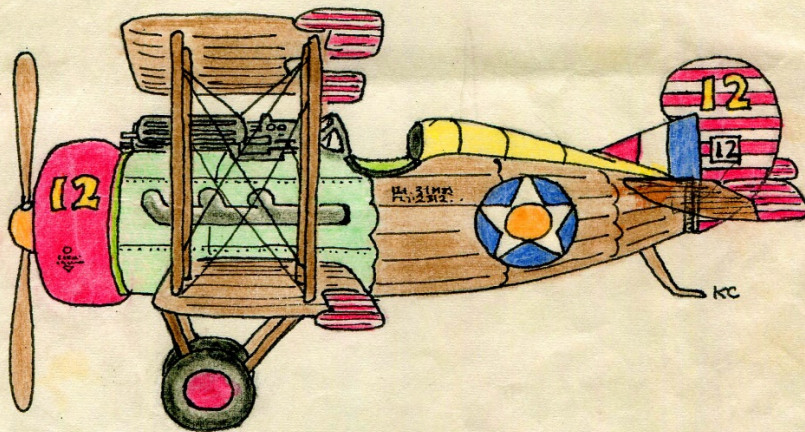
(2)



.... two factors vital to life itself.....



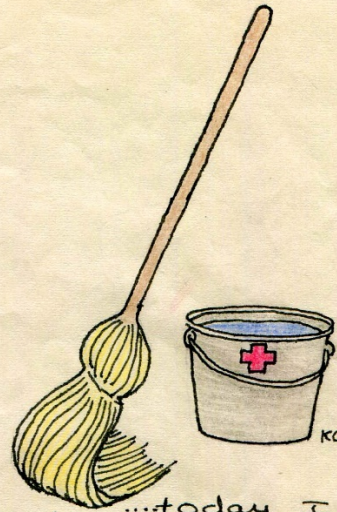
.....every now and then we get
a glimpse of one of the new
super secret experimental
planes they test here.....



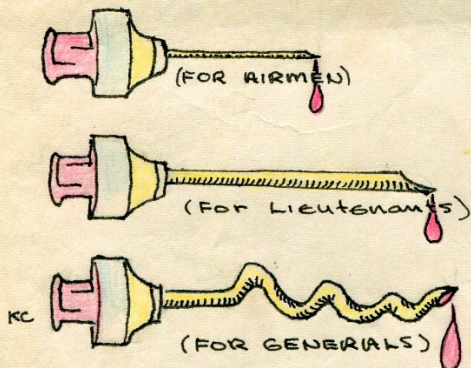
.....Some of the planes here
aren't so new.... or super-
Secret..... or experimental.....



....I met one of the surgeons yesterday....



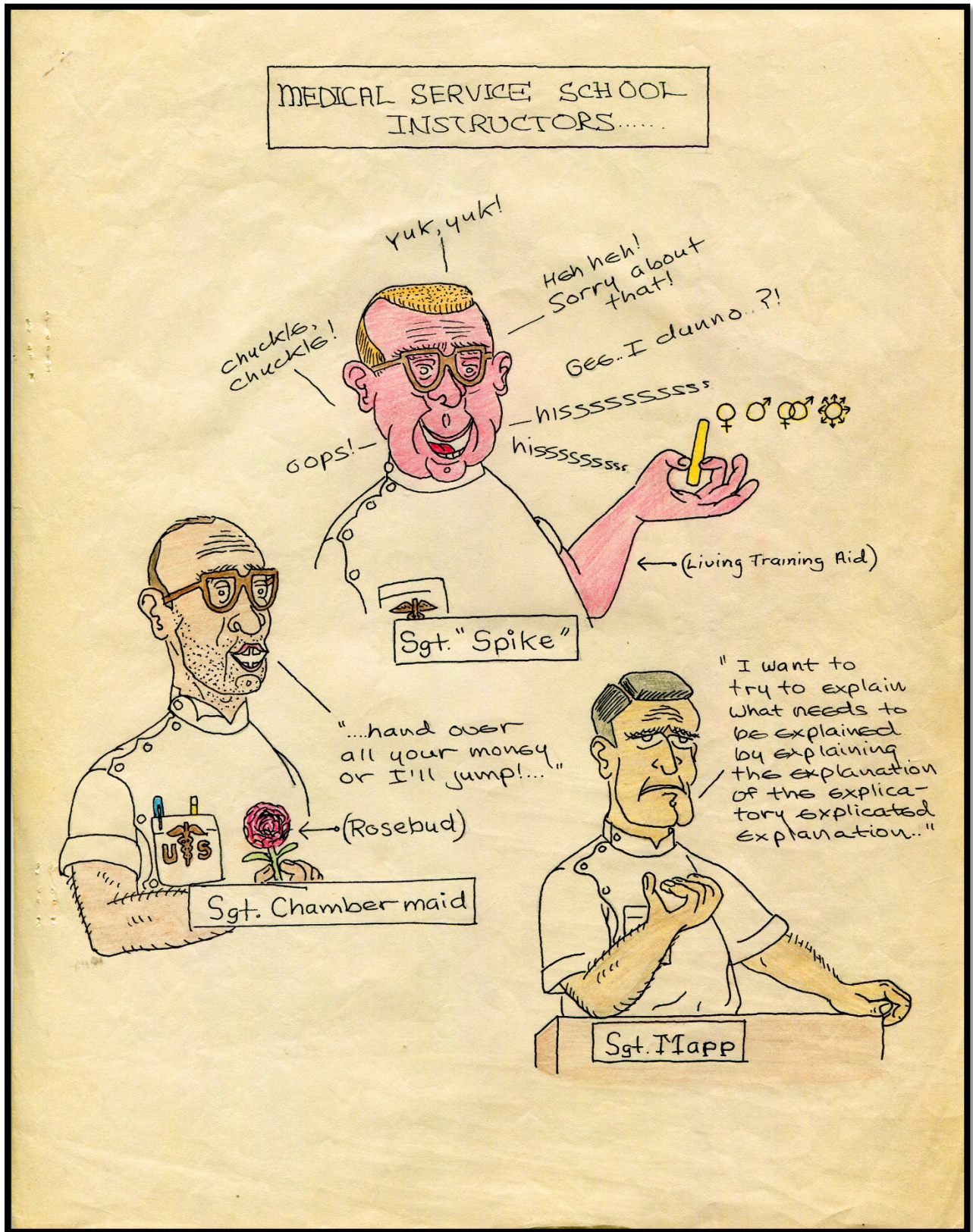
....today I was introduced to Hospital medical Aseptic Technique.....



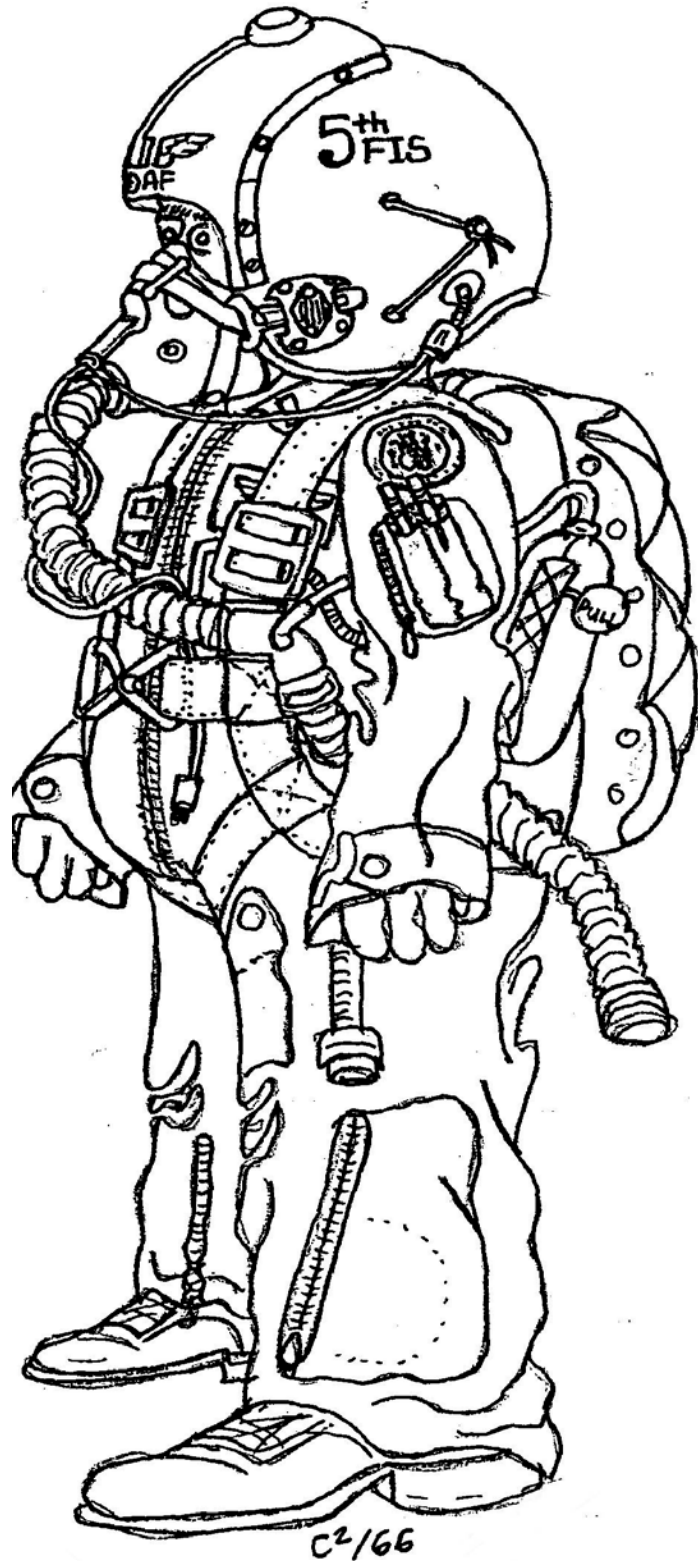
....we were introduced to specialised syringe needles.....



..... During this mornings' surgery, my room-mate experienced a mild touch of Reverse Dynamic Peristalsis.....



From MSS training, just before orders to MAFB (page 6 of 6)



"Sorry, Colonel. Doc Said I couldn't fly alert today...sinus problem!" (MAFB, 5th FIS, 1966)

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Personal communications

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2) Personal correspondence with Mr. Taylor G. Kirby, Archivist, USAF Historical Research Agency, USAF AFHRA AFHRA/HOA (2023)

[Contents Copyright, 2023, Kalikiano Kalei. Permission is granted by the author of this paper (Kalikiano Kalei) to quote and/or reprint all or portions of the paper, provided that full author credit is given.] As was stated earlier, this is a preliminary working draft which will be corrected, added to and updated as necessary in future. All errors are solely attributable to K. Kalei and not to any agency of the US Military Uniformed Services, or their personnel therein.

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Last but assuredly not least, this work is dedicated to the memory of **Chief Master Sergeant Robert DiAntonio**, AFSC 90292 Medical Service Superintendent, at Minot's **John Moses Air Force Hospital**, who was my NCOIC while at that facility in 1967. Robert passed away 26 May 1995, after a long and fruitful career with the US Air Force. Robert was an excellent leader and a tremendously inspiring mentor to us young airmen. I am sure everyone had the greatest respect for his abilities and his demonstrated achievements as a Non-Commissioned Officer in the US Air Force. His interest in each and every one of us young airmen was genuine and extremely helpful as we learned the ropes, as new Air Force medics. He was truly a credit to that service! *Thanks, Bob, and God Speed!*

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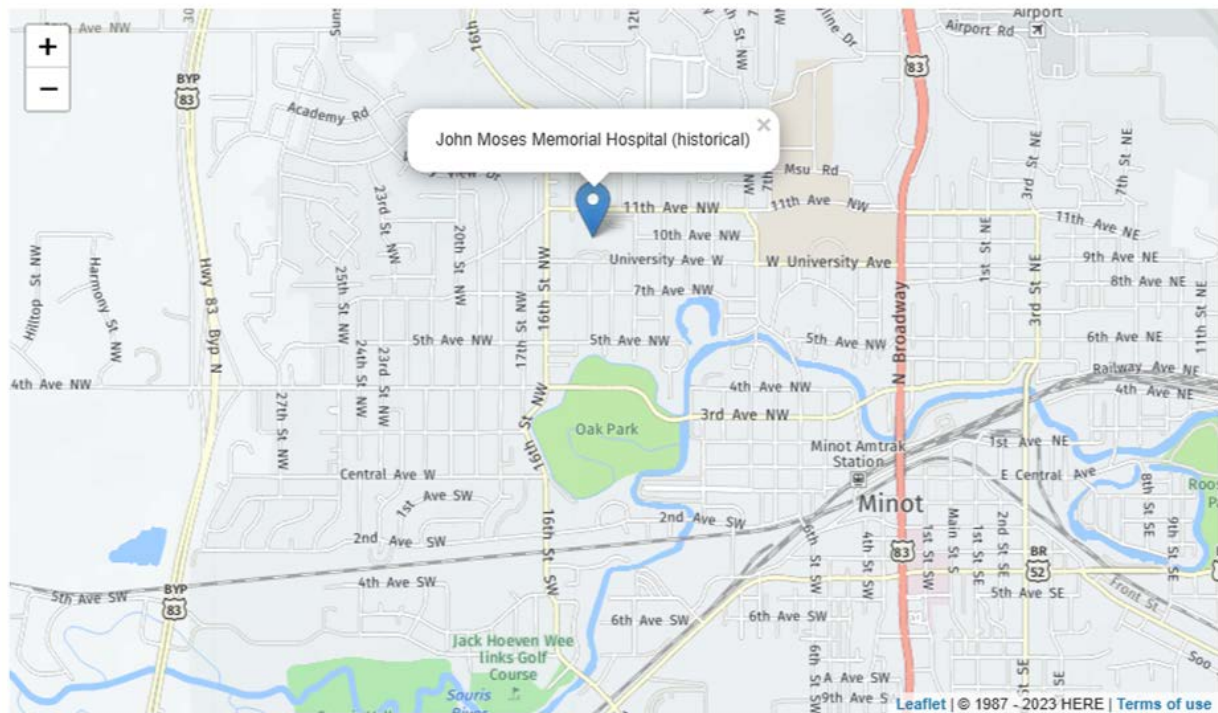
SOME ADDITIONAL CANDID PHOTOGRAPHS: 1966-1967

Above: Mike Zaharakis with his Pakistani sword by the Minot City Christmas tree (1966)



Above: (From viewer's left) Lynn Erickson, Chris Carey, newly-weds Diane and Mike Zaharakis, 'Lin', Frenchy Bouchard, at Mike's Wedding reception 1967

John Moses Memorial Hospital (historical) - Location Map



Above: John Moses Air Force Hospital in Minot (to the left of Minot State University, on West University Avenue)



ABOVE: Wintertime follies in the 862nd MG dorm (John Moses Hospital)
One of us was a bit further into the party atmosphere than the other two... (1967)



ABOVE: That Lutheran LSA 'Beatnik/LSD' party I was telling you about, somewhat earlier in the narrative (me with guitar, Mike to viewer's left, 'Cool Sioux Phil' and his chick to my right and two tender Minot State co-eds at our feet; *yum, yum.*)



ABOVE: Same night, a bit further along in the celebration (John Moses Hospital airmen's dorm) 1967. Note SAC-tidy room!



ABOVE: Building a Budweiser ICBM missile, Winter 1967



ABOVE: SAC inspection team with Budweiser ICBBCM; party-party-party John Moses AF Hospital airmen's dorm, winter 1967. *"But d'ya think it's flight-ready, General LeMay?"* (Unidentified Launch Crew)



ABOVE: Titan II ICBBC Missile ready for launch, Winter 1967