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## The Incredibly Stupid One at the Hanoi Hilton

### SN HEGDAHL, USS CANBERRA – PRISONER OF WAR (continued from previous issue)

*By Dick "Beak" Stratton, Captain, USN (Ret.)*

Meanwhile he watched the Love Boat merrily steaming over the horizon, firing at the coastline and never missing him for two days. There is not much to do in the South China Sea at 0345. He took off his boondockers and hung them around his neck in case he needed them when he reached shore. He stripped off his dungarees, zipped up the fly, tied off the cuffs and popped them over his head, as he was taught, to make a life preserver. He reports back to you that it doesn't work. (He missed the part about old dungarees, with holes, out of the Lucky Bag would have to be kept wet if they were to hold any air at all.) So he put on his trousers, socks and shoes. (Sharks? Sea snakes?)

Somewhere along the line he had heard that drowning was a "nice way to die;" so he thought he would try it out. He put his hands over his head and down he went—bloop, bloop, bloop. Now both he and I had heard the myth that when drowning you would get cuddly, warm, all the nice things in your life would flash by in your mind and you would go to your eternal reward to the sound of music (harp?). Doug resurfaced and reports back to us that it is all malarkey: there are no movies, there is no music and it's colder than Hell! As dawn came he started swimming away from the sun, hopefully towards shore. He could see the haze of land, but the harder he tried, the further back it receded. So he just rolled on his back, playing like a whale, humming a few tunes and saying a few prayers.

Notice he never gave up. How many people have we been exposed to in the course of our lives, in a situation like that would have just plain given up? About 1800 that same day, a Vietnamese fishing boat

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**Please note - we have changed the access to the online newsletters so that you will need a password to access them. We're hoping this will help past members who haven't paid their dues to do so, in order to read the newsletter. This password will also give you access to the membership & phone list. GO TO OUR WEBSITE AT: [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com).**

**The username will remain the same: panam. The new password will be: captain.**

**Dues are \$20 a year or \$80 for 5 years. Make them payable to Clipper Pioneers, and mail to Jerry Holmes at 192 Foursome Dr., Sequim, WA 98382.**

## The Incredibly Stupid One at the Hanoi Hilton

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came by and hauled him out of the water—some twelve hours later. Even those peasant fishermen could figure out that this moose would never fit in the cockpit of an A4 Skylark. They turned him upside down and inside out which garnered them absolutely nothing. Remember, he had prudently left everything back on the ship in his locker. Picture yourself being tortured to admit you were a CIA agent who entered the water in Coronado, California to swim ten thousand miles across the Pacific to infiltrate their shores! When the authorities got him ashore, they showed Doug piles of materials allegedly written by Yankee Air Pirates who had been captured before him. (95% of those captured in North Vietnam had been tortured, were not offered the option of death, and were made to give more than Name, Rank, Serial Number and Date of Birth sequence permitted by the Military Code of Conduct and required by International Law.)

Doug recognized that something was amiss, but, as he said later, “Geeze, they’re officers, they must know what they are doing.” So he decided his best ploy was to pretend to be stupid. He got them off target by comparing farms in North Vietnam and South Dakota. He didn’t realize that even then the Communists were categorizing him to gauge his usefulness to their cause. His dad had about ten motel units, numberless vehicles and all kinds of land—but no water buffalo. No water buffalo meant in Vietnamese parlance that he was a “poor peasant.” This is just as well, as Communists had murdered over 20 million “rich peasants” in their various revolutions, because those folks are unreconstructed capitalists. A little miffed at first, Doug caught on right away—he is a quick study—it was to his advantage to play out the poor peasant act to the bitter end. Tired of the verbal jousting, the Communist cadres told him that he would have to write an anti-war statement for them. He joyously agreed. The interrogators were dumbfounded. This was the first Yankee to agree to do anything without being tortured first. They brought out the paper, ink and pens. He admired them all and then stated: “But one small thing. I can’t read or write. I’m a poor peasant.” This was quite credible to the Vietnamese since their poor peasants could neither read nor write. So they assigned a Vietnamese to teach him penmanship, spelling, grammar and sentence structure. Immediately his learning curve went flat.

Eventually, the interrogators gave up in disgust; writing a confession for him and having him sign it in an illegible scrawl. He admitted to the war crime of shelling the presidential birthplace of Ho Chi Minh and signed it as Seaman Apprentice Douglas Brent Hegdahl III, United States Navy Reserve, Commanding Officer, USS Canberra. No one has ever seen this piece of paper. Doug was shuffled around from pillar to post, since his captors didn’t know where he would fit into their propaganda plans. One mistake they made was to put him in for a while with Joe Crecca, an Air Force officer who had developed a method of creating the most organized memory bank we possessed to record the names of pilots shot down and imprisoned in Vietnam.

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### NOTICE FOR END OF CLIPPER PIONEERS IN 2018

It has been decided that the Clipper Pioneers’ newsletter will end in December 2018. This allows for most of the 5-year payments that have been made to expire naturally. If you have paid more than the amount due for that period of time, you will receive a refund - or you can choose to donate it to the Clipper Pioneers to keep the website going. We will continue the website, provided funds are available, beyond the 2018 time when the printed newsletter will cease.

## The Incredibly Stupid One at the Hanoi Hilton

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Joe took this young Seaman and, recognizing the potential, painstakingly taught Doug not only 256 names, but also, the method of memorizing, cross-referencing and retrieving those names. It was no easy task that Joe set for himself for it was not intuitively obvious to Doug the value of such mental gymnastics. It was a hot summer day when I first met Doug. I was in solitary confinement again. The Communists did not care for me, which was OK because I didn't like them either. My cell door opened and here was this big moose standing in his skivvie shorts (prison uniform of the day).

"My name is Seaman Douglas Brent Hegdahl, Sir. What's yours?" It is awful hard to look dignified when you are standing in your underwear, knock-kneed, ding-toed, pot-bellied, unwashed and unshaven for 100 days.

I automatically recited, "Dick Stratton, Lieutenant Commander, USS Ticonderoga." Immediately I saw that I probably made a mistake as his eyes rolled back in his head and you could see what he was thinking: "Cripes, another officer!" But notice that instinctively he asked the critical and most important question for survival:

"Who is your senior?"

The rule we lived by was: "If I am senior, I will take charge; if junior, I will obey."

The Communists took a siesta for two hours every afternoon which was a good deal for us as we were free from torture and harassment. I was laying on the floor on my bed board and Doug was skipping, yes, skipping around the room. I asked: "Doug, what are you doing?"

He paused for a moment, looked me in the eye and cryptically said: "Skipping, Sir" and continued to skip.

A stupid question, a stupid answer. After a moment, I again queried: "What ya doin' that for?"

This stopped him for a moment. He paused and cocked his head thoughtfully, smiled and replied: "You got anything better to do, Sir?"

I didn't. He continued skipping. I guess he did learn one thing from boot camp. You can say anything you want to an officer as long as you smile and say "sir." One siesta period he said: Hey, Beak, you went to college and studied government; do you know the Gettysburg Address?"

We got a brick (no paper or pencils for the criminals) and started to write it out on the tile floor until we got it correct. Then he stopped me with the question: "Can you say it backwards?"

Well, who would want to say the Gettysburg Address backwards? Certainly not the Jesuits at Georgetown and especially not me. Doug could say it backwards, verbatim, rapidly. I know because I could track him from the written version we had on the floor.

"So what?" you might say. The so what is that when they threw him out of Vietnam, and throw him out they did, he came out with 256 names that Joe Crecca had taught him memorized by service, by rank and alphabetically; next to each name he had a dog's name, kid's name or social security number to verify the quality of the name which we had picked up by tap code, deaf spelling code or secret notes. He still has those names memorized today and sings them to the tune of "Old MacDonald Has a Farm."

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**Keep the memories alive! Send in your stories to [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com)**

## The Incredibly Stupid One at the Hanoi Hilton

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One of our intelligence officers asked him if he could slow the recitation down to make for easier copying.

Doug replied “No” that it was like riding a bike, you had to keep moving or you would fall off.

If it weren't for Joe Crecca, Doug and our government would not have had those names until the end of war five years later. In trying to get people to accept early propaganda releases, the Communists would have some “good cop” interrogator like the ones we called the “Soft Soap Fairy” talk to the prospect and sound him out for pliability. They got Doug one day and asked what we eventually learned to be the lead question: “What do you want more than anything else in the world?”

The answer of the weak and willing was : “To go home to my family.”

Doug thought for a long time, then cocked his head with a smile and said: “Why, I'd like a pillow, Sir.”

This was not an unreasonable response since we had no pillows on our cement pads or bed boards. However, the response sure confounded the enemy. They eventually came up with a name for Doug amongst the guards and interrogators: “The Incredibly Stupid One.” His original resistance ploy had paid off. Because they thought him stupid, they would let him go out in the cell block courtyard during the siesta to sweep up the grounds period monitored by only one sleepy, peasant guard. I thought that was great since it kept him from skipping and I could get some rest.

However, curiosity got the better of me and I started to watch him through a peephole we had bored in the cell door. He'd go sweeping and humming until the guard was lulled to sleep. Then Doug would back up to a truck, spin the gas cap off the standpipe, stoop down and put a small amount (“Small, because it's going to be a long war, Sir.”) of dirt in the gas tank and replace the cap. I watched him over a period of time do this to five trucks. Now, I'm a liberal arts major who shot himself down, so all I can do is report what I saw. There were five trucks working in the prison; I saw Doug work on five trucks; I saw five trucks towed disabled out of the prison camp.

Doug Hegdahl, a high school graduate from the mess decks fell off a ship and has five enemy trucks to his credit. I am a World Famous Golden Dragon (VA 192) with two college degrees, 2000 jet hours, 300 carrier landings and 22 combat missions. How many enemy trucks do I have to my credit? Zero. Zip. Nada. De Rien. 0. Who's the better man? Douglas Brent Hegdahl, one of two men I know of who destroyed enemy military equipment while a prisoner of war.

Later on, Doug, having left his eyeglasses on board Canberra , discovered that he had difficulty linking up isolated cell blocks throughout the prison compound with his defective distance vision. So he went to the authorities and asked if he could read some of their propaganda. They were delighted. Here was a prisoner, without being tortured, volunteering to read their swill. But then Doug cautioned them with his: “Small thing [They never learn]; I cannot read without glasses.” So they trolled out a dime store clerk who fitted him with glasses by trying one on after the other until Doug said he could see. His near vision was OK. Unbeknownst to the clerk, he was fitting Doug for distance vision, Now, in between sweeps and gas tanks he was able to link up cell blocks not only by sweeping in code but now also using the deaf spelling code.

**TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE**

**Pan Am Historical Society has a Facebook page. You can view it here:**  
**<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pan-Am-Historical-Foundation/226994925218>**



## 1936: IN SEARCH OF A BOAT...

*by Tom Beard*

This is an account by Coast Guard Lieutenant Frank Erickson on a search to find a boat off Key West. Erickson was flying a Douglas RD, twin-engine seaplane out of the Coast Guard Air Station in Miami.

"Sometimes there was a question as to whether or not picking up a patient from a ship at sea was worth the risk of an offshore landing. But there was one mission, I remember with pleasure. On 7 January 1936, the Captain (Carl von Paulsen) told me to fly to Key West, land at the old Navy World War I ramp and pick up [a person named] Maloney, the Pan American Airways Manager, who would accompany me on a search for a government chartered boat missing between Key West and Fort Jefferson on Dry Tortugas Island. ...

"We flew the Arcturus [at this time, each Coast Guard aircraft had an individual name—named for the stars]—to Key West and landed off the old Navy ramp. A boat stood out from the ramp with a passenger. As it came along side, I was surprised to see that the passenger was a lady. When she stepped into the plane, I told her that I was expecting Mr. Maloney, the PAN AM Airport Manager. She replied, 'I am Maloney and I am the PAN AM Airport Manager.' So she climbed up into the copilots seat and we were off on the search. About 5 PM, we found the chartered 30-foot cabin cruiser V-2395 about 15 miles Southwest of Rebecca Shoals drifting in the Gulf of Mexico.

"From the air, we could see that the passengers, particularly the women members of the party, were terribly seasick. They were stretched out on the gunwales too weak to even raise their heads. Since they had probably been in this condition for most of the 30 hours since they had left Key West, it was essential that we pick them up. So Miss Maloney became the first lady crew member of a Coast Guard plane to make a landing in the open seas to rescue someone. The seas were running about three feet high (with a little imagination it could have been five or six). But in any case it was high enough to make the landing interesting. We put a line aboard the boat and cut the engines. All of the passengers had to be taken through the bow hatch. Neither of the women could help themselves. They were passed aboard like sacks of grain. The three men passengers were also in bad shape from extreme mal de mare. The crew stayed with their boat. We radioed for the surface craft to take them in tow. The takeoff was rough but our passengers were too sick to care. They came to, however, after we landed that night at Key West. The next morning, we relocated the cabin cruiser for the 165-foot [Coast Guard] patrol boat NEMESIS, which had come down from St. Petersburg during the night.

An interesting side light to this episode was the marriage [later] of Miss Betty Maloney, our lady crewmember, to Captain Carl von Paulsen."

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## Upcoming Events:

Do you have an upcoming event that would be of interest to the other members? Please forward the information to [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com).

***Having trouble viewing the membership list online?*** When you open the list, go to the top of your screen - you should see that it is set at a percentage. Click on that to make it larger.

## SET TO GO CRUISIN'?

Serenade of the Seas will set sail on April 24th, 2015 from Boston, Massachusetts at 5 p.m. From April 25th to April 30th, you will be cruisin'. On May 1, you'll land in Cork, Ireland; then on May 2, on to Portland (Dorset), UK. On May 3, you'll arrive at Le Havre (Paris), France; and on May 4th, in Cherbourg, France.

On May 5th, Zeebrugge (Brussels), Belgium will be the next stop. Then on to Amsterdam, Holland on May 6th. Back to cruising on May 7, then on May 8th, a day in Gothenburg, Sweden. Finally, on May 9th, a visit to Copenhagen, Denmark.

What a great cruise is planned. See page 8 of this newsletter for information about signing up to join your fellow Clipper Pioneers in this fantastic opportunity to relax and enjoy sights in parts of Europe!

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### PAN AM'S WORLDWIDE FAMILY REUNION

**JULY 31- AUG 3, 2014**

**Nassau County Long Island & NYC**

Here is your invitation to celebrate the history of the world's most iconic airline and the people that built it...

75 years ago this summer the first commercial passenger transatlantic flight was made by Pan Am "Clipper" with 22 passengers from Port Washington Long Island to Portugal. The reunion will celebrate this historic aviation achievement.

For full schedule & more info: [www.PanAmFamilyReunions.com](http://www.PanAmFamilyReunions.com)

REUNION HOST IS LONG ISLAND MARRIOTT IN UNIONDALE NY - minutes from JFK & LGA . Reserve today- it will sell out.

The weekend will be full of Speakers, Presentations, Parties, Tours, Receptions and so much more. The highlight will be the GALA DINNER AT THE CRADLE OF AVIATION MUSEUM - GARDEN CITY NY. Don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime event Saturday Aug 2, 2014. (You must be registered for the reunion to attend.)

***Please update your email address and phone number if it's been changed!  
Email or write to Jerry Holmes - 192 Foursome Drive, Sequim, WA 98382  
or email to: [jerryholmes747@gmail.com](mailto:jerryholmes747@gmail.com)***

### MORE ON THE CLIPPERS PIONEERS WEBSITE!

Check out the Clipper Pioneers online [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com) - for up-to-date announcements, videos about Pan Am, and other interesting articles and photos! The "In Memory Of..." page features more information about those who have passed on than what we can print here, and the current list of members is also available for paid members. ***Having trouble viewing the membership list online?*** When you open the list, go to the top of your screen - you should see that it is set at a percentage. Click on that to make it larger.

*...and God will lift you up on Eagle's Wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,  
make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of His hand.*

## IN MEMORIAM

**Robert James Condry**, 86, of Los Gatos, CA died June 5th, 2014. He passed away peacefully at home in the company of family and close friends. Bob was born in Idaho, served in the Army in Kansas, earned his degree at University of Denver, worked for General Electric in New York, was a Special Agent with the FBI in Oklahoma, and then flew around the world as a pilot for Pan American World Airways for 25 years before retiring. He was an entrepreneur and enjoyed establishing small businesses over the years, which meshed well with his appreciation for meeting new people and exchanging stories. He will be missed by many.

**Walter George Viator**, 89, passed away on June 3, 2014. Walter was an avid golfer and loved dancing. He spent his younger years sailing and boating. Walter was a Sergeant in the USMC and a Marine Corp fighter pilot in WW II and later a Pilot for Pan Am for 25 years. Walter was a devoted husband and father. He was pre-deceased by his wife, Grace and their son, Bill and Walters's second wife, Jane. He is survived by his son, Walter Viator (Rolena); daughter Stephanie Viator Reece; granddaughters Rachel Lavish Hannan and Summer Viator and grandson Hunter Viator. Celebration of Life Services will begin at 11 AM Saturday, June 21, 2014 at Stanfill Funeral Home followed by inurnment at Woodlawn Park South.

**Robert Joseph Durant** passed away peacefully in his home on May 21, 2014. In December 2012 he had suffered a stroke, from which he never fully recovered. Bob flew in the Navy until joining Pan Am in 1967, and remained with Pan Am until he transitioned to Delta Airlines when Pan Am ceased operations.

**Donald Dee Bond**, born on Nov. 9, 1919, left on his final flight in the early hours of Christmas morning, Dec. 25, 2013. He kept his bags packed for this last trip and always said he was ready to take it at any time. While his pre-flight plan had not been made, his unexpected departure weather was calm and peaceful ...no storms or turbulence.

**Captain Joe Flynn** has "flown west" at the age of 97. He was one of the last "boat drivers". More to come next issue.

**Frank Reeves** passed away Feb. 9, 2014 with son Jon and daughter Keri by his side. He was predeceased by his wife Jane, who was a Pan Am stewardess. Frank was born March 7, 1928 in Nashville, TN where his love of airplanes began with controlled models to airline and Navy mechanic, and then 33 years as a Flight Engineer with Pan Am. In retirement, he was an EAA member, worked on building his BD4, and enjoyed being the neighborhood "fix it" guy.

**William H. Seeman** passed on the event of March 28, 2014. He had an incredible mind until the very end. He died peacefully at home surrounded by his family.

**Bob Arnholt** was 91 and passed away just prior to Memorial Day. He has two sons and a daughter. A World War 2 veteran, he flew B-24's before joining Pan Am.

**For more information about each of these friends who will be missed, click on "In Memory Of..." at our website: [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com). Know of someone from Pan Am who has passed? Email the obit to Jerry Holmes at [jerryholmes747@gmail.com](mailto:jerryholmes747@gmail.com)**

## **PAN AM REUNION CRUISE ~ APRIL 24 - MAY 9, 2015**

### **ROYAL CARIBBEAN'S SERENADE OF THE SEAS**

Dear Pan Amers:

Once again we prepare for our next much welcomed Pan Am reunion cruise. We are honoring the many requests for a Transatlantic cruise with lots of wonderful and interesting ports of call. Our 15 day cruise, departing Boston to Copenhagen, starts off with six relaxing days at sea. Plenty of time to reach out to old friends, take a spa treatment, movies to watch and much, much more. Expect a great time.

Embarking on an oceangoing adventure like this will be no doubt one of the most exciting moments of any traveler's life. The old saying that it's as much about the journey as the destination has never been truer. Adventures await you at each port, shopping, exploring famous attractions or sipping a cool drink in a romantic café. So, welcome aboard, I know this cruise will provide you with a lifetime of memories to cherish. Family and friends are most welcomed.

Rates: Prices are per person, double occupancy, cruise only and based on availability at time of booking. Once our allotment is gone prevailing rates will take effect. Singles pay 200% of cruise fare and port charge. Port charges (\$240) and taxes (\$280.94) additional. Call in your reservation now; a deposit of \$450 per person will lock in the current price which may increase in the future. As usual, all major credit cards are accepted but checks are preferred in an attempt to keep down credit card fees and pass the savings toward our onboard amenities, onboard parties and the like. **DON'T DELAY !**

Insurance is available and highly suggested and is priced by category chosen. Inquire on your price. More information will come with your invoice.

Inside from \$1279 / Outside from \$1749 / Balcony from \$1979.

**PRICE UPDATE:** Those guests booked with deposits before May 30 may be eligible for a further discount depending on category booked, your Crown & Anchor status and of course assuming the price will be less than our group rates.

Call Interline Travels at 1-888-592-7245 or  
Carmen Jaquet's cell 786-252-7838 (Pan Am Cruise Coordinator).

Email [interlinetravels@yahoo.com](mailto:interlinetravels@yahoo.com).

My line may be tied with many calls for this cruise;  
please be patient and leave your message and I will get to you ASAP. Thank you.

Address - 456 MERLIN CT. , TALLAHASSEE, FL 32301

Feel free to contact Stu Archer former Pan Am pilot and cruise consultant at 305-238-0911.  
Email [stunjune@aol.com](mailto:stunjune@aol.com).

**Check out the Clipper Pioneers' website for the itinerary, at [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com).**

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