

OPENING REMARKS VC-8 REUNION DINNER, NAS PENSACOLA, 18 NOV 06

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen - And welcome once again to the beautiful National Naval Aviation Museum, a facility that first opened in an old 8500 square foot wooden building in 1963, and has now grown to a huge facility with over 291,000 square feet of exhibit space, and has become the second largest aviation museum in the country. As we cast about for an appropriate venue for tonight, we decided a museum of old flying machines was a perfect spot for a VC-8 reunion. My name is Pete Lumianski. I'm a retired and partially retarded rotorhead Navy Captain with about 25 years of active duty. Mid-way through my easily forgettable career, I received a set of orders to something called a "Composite" squadron in Puerto Rico for duty involving the operation of helicopters in and around our gigantic naval base at Roosevelt Roads for the support of Fleet training and target practice activities. The first thing my wife Chris and I did was break out the charts to find Puerto Rico, and then wind our fingers down the road map to a tiny crossroads of a town called Ceiba, located right next to a large Navy anchor symbol. For the next three years, from 1972 to 1975, it was simply day after day of total excitement, and for me, a literally a hair-raising experience. Right from the get-go, we realized this would be an unusual tour of duty - starting with all the sweaty, pressing bodies to be found in the San Juan International Airport, the tropical, primitive roadway system, the incredible number of frying chickens along the roadside, the invisible bugs with huge mouths, the creepy-crawlers in every available corner of our assigned government house, the diaper-wrapped, Budweiser Beauty of the world-renown & brown Luquillo Beach, the ever-present and ubiquitous signs with the PPP or the PPO or the POP or the PIP or the PDQ or some other acronym commencing with a P. It was noisy, confusing, congested - but mostly, just hotter than hell, with an air thickness quotient of 10 out of 10. This was all BEFORE we got to the VC-8 hangar. At first sighting, the hangar was surrounded by ancient warplanes of all types and fronted by an impressive palm tree and dumpster arrangement which gave off just the right impression and reality of Roosevelt Roads as a whole. As I quickly came to find, this was one of those "Hogan's Heroes"/Rube Goldberg types of operations - a totally odd and unique mixture of aircraft, people, missions, venues, sights, sounds and un-normal happenings, one example of which is this very uniform I have on tonight. I'll tell you, nothing says Impressive, or cuts a sharper figure than a U.S. Naval Officer with shorts, long black socks and an old piss-cutter standing next to a tarnished P-2 with its engines removed. That's what you call the pure sex of Naval Aviation. For those many of you who are here tonight against your will, and who left deep heel marks on the ground as you got dragged from your nice comfortable home-setting all the way to Pensacola to mingle with people you've never seen or heard of before, let me take just a brief moment to explain what VC-8 was and who we are.

There was once was a time when the United States ruled the world, and we set up a very large naval base on the eastern end of Puerto Rico which encompassed over 30,000 acres of real estate, including many Caribbean islands. Commencing in the mid-50s, the base

was gradually improved and customized to become a gigantic training area for naval ships and planes to come and practice invading and shooting at things. In 1958 VC-8 was formed from the seeds of a guided missile squadron, and its primary mission became the support and operation of target services for something called the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range. By the time we all arrived in the 1970s, operational programs were maturing, and we were all busy acting as targets, launching targets, tracking targets, looking for expended targets, and hauling the targets back to Roosy to be refurbished and then shot again for the next visiting ships and planes. Meantime, the good ol' Marine Corps was busily using its training monies to practice making beach landings on the large and beautiful off-shore island of Vieques, an activity which often involved the bombing and shelling of the island just prior to sending in the live grunts. VC-8 would receive most of its operational orders from the Roosy-based Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range headquarters, and we would all buzz around trying to comply, using all our assets at hand: 200 officers and men of the U.S. Navy; 15 or 20 ancient, creaky aircraft of five different types - including jets, props and helos - and our remotely located hangar/basing facilities with a long supply line to the mainland USA. Needless to say, our aircraft maintenance department had a huge supply of chewing gum, baling wire and invective for all contingencies. And as you can imagine, our ready room was full of weird, gesticulating pilots of all types, talking loudly with hands and words, but communicating very little useful information, somewhat like a modern day Tower of Babel. The only ready room constant - and solace - throughout my nearly 1000 days of VC-8 experience was the sound and sight of LCDR John Phillips shooting dice through the plexiglass Acey-Ducey tube 24 hours a day. You could literally set your clocks on the beat of John's throws, and whenever the operational stress went up, you could come sit next to John and his dice, and find great relief.

So there you have it. VC-8 was a sort of combined Naval Zoo and museum, featuring various types of both live and inanimate human mammalaria inside each cockpit and behind each door, all set in a nice tropical setting on a base that went for miles and had every conceivable activity and luxury - all except fresh milk and meat. Tonight we've attempted to put together a little program to help bring back some of those dim memories and historical oddities, recognizing we're all at least 30 years older, and significantly less capable of seeing, hearing, comprehending and remembering what we did just last night, let alone 35 years ago. If nothing else, we're hoping it will be some modest relief that you're not at home discussing some age-related misfire like erectile dysfunction, upcoming colonoscopies, urine stream irregularities, or complications associated with menopause, an ailment most of us have come to find can be more accurately described as meno-halt. The theme of our program tonight is *Les Bum Le Rouge Awards*, broken French for our squadron's unusual nickname, the *Redtails*. We're going to proceed as if we're conducting a standard TV awards show by having some songs, some awards, some chatter, some speeches and hopefully, a good time. We have some official awards - these beautifully hand-sculpted facsimiles of VC-8 aircraft - and we'll have presenters to announce the winners. If you are designated a winner, we'd like for you to come forward and make some short acceptance remarks. We'll be assisted tonight from time-to-time with some of the old Shanty Town Players - a short-lived acting tradition in the mid-70s

your

→ THE LATEST STUPID THING YOU ASK CHILDREN
~~ARE DOING~~ ARE DOING - OR WORSE

which featured Naval Officers making fools of themselves at going-away parties. These parties were usually timed just prior to fitness reports being written, so the performances could be used to help the evaluators differentiate among the many well-qualified VC-8 passover candidates. Also, keep in mind there hasn't been too much time for practicing – or really even communicating what is desired – among the players or the producers, so be sure to keep your expectations and criticisms well below the bar. If things start getting really bad or slow, we have devised an automatic, yet hand-held mechanism to fast-forward a bit, an interruption device that will become evident as the show proceeds. Also, be comforted by the fact that regardless of what happens, at ten o'clock, we get kicked out of this place.

So now, without further ado Welcome to *Les Bum Le Rouge Awards* at NAS Pensacola, tonight featuring some of the most deserving Redtail officers of the 70s. To start off tonight, we're going to present to you one of the nominees for Best Redtail Song of the Seventies: Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy, sung tonight by the Shanty Town Players. Please sing along with them by following the lyrics on the screen. Take it away boys . . .