

## **THE HONEY BEAR**

A little story about Jason Broussard

By Robert Firth

One day the diminutive Cagin and I rode downtown and were wondering around Tudo street when we saw two Vietnamese kids with a little black bear with an orange scruff of fur under his chin. The bear was just a cub. Jason said he just had to have it. He wound up paying the equivalent of about \$100.00 for the beast and, since we couldn't very well sit in any of the downtown bars with a bear on a leash, we "de-de maued" ( Vietnamese for getting our of Dodge) and headed back to the crew house.

We hailed a very small but very clean and neat cab- barely big enough for the two of in the back plus the bear sitting on Jason's lap. Half way home, the bear said "grrrr" Jason, said "now isn't that cute, he said Grrr" The next minute all hell broke lose, The bear commenced to turn from a cute cuddly ball of bear into a 25 lb terribly strong, mean tempered maddened beast. We both made a dive into the right front seat with our legs against the roof. The cab driver started howling and the bear was jumping around growling and trying to bite our legs. Frustrated for whatever reason and spitting mad, the bear began ripping the back seat to pieces. When we finally got back to the house, Jason had to give the driver \$100.00 to repair the damage to the cab.

Not knowing exactly what to do with the little tyke, Jason put it in one of the second floor bathrooms. This house had 3 floors with rooms for 10 pilots. Later that day one of the heilo-pilots came dragging in, covered with red dust, hot and tired as all hell.

Dan headed up to take a shower and while he was trying to find the light switch in the bathroom, the bear found his long leg first. It must have felt like a familiar tree- Dan being over 6'5 tall. Feeling the claws biting into his leg in the pitch black room, he quite naturally screamed bloody murder and came tearing out of the room with the frightened baby bear bawling horribly and digging in for all he was worth onto Dan's bleeding leg. His towel fell off and two of the maids started screaming like hell when this huge white, naked, mad-man came running at them with a bear climbing like mad up his leg trying to make a home run and bite Dan's wildly swinging dick.

Jason , realizing what had happened ran up the stairs yelling at the top of his lungs in his Louisiana accent , " Doncha hurt mah bea now hear!" Jason somehow got the little bear off Dan's legs before any serious parts were ingested and Dan went off to tend to his wounds muttering horribly under his breath about " how the hell anyone could be stupid enough to hide a man-eating, hydrophobic, God-dammed killer bear in the fucking bathroom...etc., etc.."

Jason brought the bear down and introduced it to the shaken maids. Eventually it settled down and began to sleep in one of the chairs. Jason got some water and vegetables for the little critter and thus began the last and happiest twelve months of the little honey bear's life.

Back in Saigon Jason and I had both moved out of Lucky Waller's crew zoo and rented homes of our own. I was sharing my place with an old friend, Glenn Van Ingen, who, as I write, is living the life or Reilly in Hawaii. Of course Reilly is bound to come home some time and disrupt Van's island paradise.

One day Jason came over and said that he had a "terrible problem" and would I please help him. "Sure, what's the deal?" Well, he explained, his wife was coming to visit- I said Jason, I thought she was already here. He said,"Rabbit, that aint mah wife, that's Brenda." I knew Brenda, I thought she was his wife. He had moved into the private house from the crew

house because she had flown in to be with him. In those days, Vietnam wasn't a hard ship post and a lot of the pilots had their families with them.

Jason's real world wife had called and given him 24 hours notice that she was coming to visit. She didn't know about Brenda but Brenda certainly knew about her. Jason asked if Brenda could stay with us and pretend she was my girl friend. This was easy, Brenda was lovely and this seemed like it might work. We all spent the day making sure that everything that Brenda owned was out of Jason's place.

Mrs. Broussard showed up at Tan Se Nuit the next morning and Jason brought her home. The bear was there - he had forgotten to tell her about the little honey bear. That wasn't all- Cynthia was there too. Cynthia, who's that? Charlie, one of our stranger pilots, was Cynthia's owner. She was a twelve foot 100 lb python who used to travel with Captain Charlie in his big flight kit between the seats in the Twin Beech. She had been with Charlie for years and was altogether a lovely snake with a gentle disposition. Charlie had a two week stint up-country and had asked Jason to take her until he got back. Cynthia was easy to keep, a rat every two weeks from the cage Charlie left and she slept under Jason's bed or the closet floor.

Mrs. Broussard wasn't impressed with our neighborhood. The drive to Chi Lang from the airport was pretty horrible for the uninitiated. The Mrs. had never been outside of her little state of Louisiana and the chaotic traffic, noise, filth, smells nasty little people, unbelievably crowded streets, all combined to make her regret her decision to visit her dear husband. This was before she got to the house.

Once inside, after traveling for more than 30 hours, she wanted a bath. Immediately she started bitching with considerable volume that there wasn't a bath tub. Even if there had been there wasn't any hot water. I had hot water, but I bought electric heater made for this and hooked it into the plumbing- Jason didn't.

The Mrs., according to Jason, came out of the cold shower and was sitting very unhappily on the bed drying her hair with the towel covering her eyes. This was the very moment the bear choose to rub up against her bare legs. The scream could be heard all over the neighborhood! Louder even than poor Dan's had been. Jason finally got her calmed down but not before he had to bring the bear over to my place too.

Later that night the end came. The Mrs. got up to pee in the middle of the night and sat down on the john, turned on the light, opened her eyes and saw Cynthia curled up in the shower. This time the screaming when on for thirty minutes- nothing Jason could say calmed her down in the slightest. He had to get a cab and go with her to a downtown hotel. The next morning he took her back to the airport where she caught a flight to Bangkok on the first departing aircraft out of this horrible country.

Brenda moved back in and fed the badly terrified little bear a whole jar of blueberry jelly which the little tyke adored more than anything. For weeks, smelling something only he could smell, he would hold the then long thoroughly empty jar in his little paws and rolling on his back with his long purple bear tongue, happily lick the inside of the glass jar for hours. With profuse thanks Brenda also gave Cynthia an extra fat rat for which she was also quite grateful. Sadly, one day the honey bear crawled through the porch screen, up the nearest telephone pole and began gnawing on one of the many wires. Unfortunately, the one he picked carried 250 V. Jason never did buy another bear.

#### Early days

The days in Bangkok were fun and have remained very pleasantly in my memories. While in Taipei, we had uniforms made by a local Taylor, Peter Woo, whose shop was across from

the President Hotel where we stayed for several weeks. One of the guys, L.J. Broussard, a Cagin from Louisiana said to the tailor "Missa Woo, ah really lik China- cuz all you guys a' smaller than ah am." While telling Mr. Woo this, he was laughing and poking his middle finger while holding a big cigar, into Mr. Woo's skinny chest to emphasize the point. "Woo, listin, ah wants red silk liners understand, an ah' pay more now you heah- heah's an extra fifty bucks now do it all nice now, heah?" - all the while with more finger poking. The little Tailor most certainly did "Heah" but obviously didn't like this brash American and didn't deliver the Cajun's uniforms until we were on the bus heading to the airport.

When we got to the hotel in Bangkok, L.J. ran upstairs, saying- "Robbit, pleas jus bring up m'bags- ah gotta try on m'uniforms, heah?" Sure, I said and gathered our luggage while the Cajun ran up the stairs holding the box with his uniforms.

When I go to the top of the stairs I could hear this screaming coming from the open door down the hall. "Gawddam, Gawdam that damm Chinaman, Gawdammit." there was this bizarre shadow dancing on the opposite wall from the open door- a kind of flashing that was somewhat in tempo with the "hellayshus" cursing and bellowing emanating from the room.

When the bellman and I reached the door we saw LJ surrounded with pieces of torn open cardboard boxes and wrapping paper, shirts and pants were laying all over the floor. He had one leg in a pair of grey uniform pants and one arm in a matching shirt and was dancing on one leg in a circle trying to put his other arm and leg in. He was shouting and spitting mad with a red face mouthing an unending stream of vile curses in horrible French and mumbling something about "the dirty SOB Chinaman sewed my GD shirts sleeves and pants shut."

This was Woo's revenge- every pair or pants, all the shirts and coats were sewn shut- even the pockets were stitched closed. They did however have lovely red silk linings. I did my best not to laugh- but I had to drop the bags and get downstairs to do it.

We were in Bangkok for about four weeks. We memorized every system on the Porter, PT6A and Twin beach, C-45, as we would be assigned to one of them when we got to Saigon.

I was sad to learn of L.J.'s passing but he was doing what we all love to do- fly and flying low was what L.J. was doing before AAM and what he went back to. A tryly amazing guy who I will never forget.....and always remember with a smile.....