

## Kung Fu Skip

*Alcohol and Sauerkraut on the Fly*

By Dorcey Wingo©

Camp Enari, on the outskirts of Pleiku in the Central Highlands of Vietnam's II Corps area, is where I performed my duties in 1969 for the US Army's Fourth Infantry Division. As a Huey pilot, I was honored to be flying at one time or another for either "A" Company's *Blackjacks* or "B" Company's *Gambler Guns*. Most of us young Warrant Officers were housed down the hillside, in what was referred to as "The Ghetto."

Camp Enari had once been an Army of the Republic of Vietnam [ARVN] military compound, and had long rows of barracks lined up four-abreast to house all the pilots. Over time - by scrounging wooden packing crates from thousands of 2.75-inch rocket boxes - resourceful helicopter jockeys fabricated themselves some custom-made hooches. Nothing fancy, but we were far better off than many others In Country who slept in foxholes, or eight to a tent.

There was no such thing as a flush toilet on Post that I recall, unless General Pepke had one. Every other soldier relied on the standard primitive facilities, which were a little further down the hill from the Ghetto, toward the first row of perimeter barbed wire.

Being an all-male outfit, a concession to practicality was made in that two each "field-type urinals" were located between each row of hooches. These consisted of perforated 55-gallon metal drums, buried until they were almost flush with the ground. The top of the drum was then capped with screen-door wire, perhaps to keep aviators from falling in. A crude wooden shed was then put up, which gave the loitering pilot a little shade - but a mere suggestion of privacy.

The Ghetto's "hooch maids" - as they were known - were local Vietnamese women (civilians, we hoped) who arrived every morning Monday through Friday to "wash clothes," make our bunks tidy, and sweep up a little. Off-duty-and-inebriated Warrant Officers were known to ask for *assistance* from passing hooch maids while standing before the mighty screen<sup>1</sup>, downloading. [This was guaranteed to raise a ruckus every time!]

Walking up the inclined boardwalk to the east, one would leave the Ghetto and come upon two rows of Commissioned Officer's hooches. Naturally, the "real" officers' quarters were more presentable, carefully laid-out, and quasi-militarily correct - considering this *was* a combat zone. Being *officers and gentlemen*, a hooch maid was far less likely to see an RLO<sup>2</sup> standing butt-naked before the screen, requesting assistance!

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<sup>1</sup> More than one Unit actually fashioned special "awards" out of these well-used screens to decorate the designated debaucher or others deserving something beyond standard military pomp and circumstance.

<sup>2</sup> Real Live Officer

One of the more celebrated pilots in the Ghetto was a fellow we called “Skip.” His real first name was decidedly *German*. His last name was also from a famous German clan, which we shall keep secret; owing to a dastardly deed - yet to be revealed.

Skip and I arrived In Country on virtually the same airplane, so as time passed, it appeared we might just survive to take the *freedom flight* together, back to the World.<sup>3</sup> At around ninety days from DEROS,<sup>4</sup> our next assignment “orders” suddenly appeared, a celebrated time to be able to say “**FIGMO**”<sup>5</sup> to all the guys still breaking in their boots.

Skip was especially elated to have gotten his assignment-of-choice, an Army Aviation Battalion based in West Germany, near his ancestral homeland. Taking a seat at our table in the Officers Club that evening, he was ecstatic! His German accent resurfaced as he laughed about all the great times ahead, “...far away from all these muddy #@!\*% rice paddies and slanty-eyed people, ” he laughed, “HA HA HAH!” Which made us laugh too, well aware that Skip was rumored to have a secret Vietnamese girlfriend in nearby Pleiku City.

Skip seemed to revel in the fact that most of us would get thirty days “leave,” and then go right back to Fort Wolters, Texas, where we would teach rookie candidates how to fly those old piston-powered training helicopters. Try to envision one thousand little bug-smashers, swarming around at the same time!

Practically bent over with joy, Herr Brewmeister stood back up with a fist full of MPC<sup>6</sup> notes and bought a round of beer. Picking up from where he left off, Skip rubbed in the fact that – after leaving Vietnam - our Huey flying days were probably over. But Skip would be flying armed patrols along the Iron Curtain in the latest version “Mike” model Huey - flying *über Deutschland!* He celebrated his great fortune with many cans of the diminutive Officer’s Club’s coldest beer, which were usually kind of warm and dented.

As the hour grew late, we slowly wandered outside the O’ Club. Skip and several others wobbled around a bit in the dark, adjusting to the darkness or lighting up cancer sticks and/or heading toward the nearest screen. In this case, it was the RLO’s brand-spanking new, freshly buried metal drum.

There it stood - practically unscathed - under a sturdy-looking shed of some kind, designed to hide anyone in the process of downloading. A flawless red metal can half full of clean sand hung at arm’s reach, a neatly stenciled sign on its side said, “Butts.”

The lieutenants had worked extra hard to get the spiffy new urinal ready before the evening’s gathering. It smelled of fresh paint in the dark and while standing *in position*, one couldn’t help but notice the RLOs had come up with some honest, 4-inch-by-4-inch-by-8-foot wood posts, to which were nailed carefully-sawn rocket-box side-partitions.

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<sup>3</sup> What all soldiers in Vietnam called the USA.

<sup>4</sup> Date Estimated to Return from Overseas

<sup>5</sup> F-k It, Got My Orders!

<sup>6</sup> Military Payroll Currency – used in place of greenbacks In Country.

Whereas, down in the Ghetto, we had nothing so remotely *evolved*.

And to one happy-drunk German, the prissy hut was a brazen insult to *him* and *The Ghetto* - and it must *go!* He shouted an oath, advising all us would-be down-loaders to *stand aside!*

Always ready for a good laugh, we standers-by raised very few objections as *Skip-turned-Don-Quixote* challenged the shed with a guttural expletive. He sprang with all the strength his stocky German bod could muster, straight into a near-perfect martial arts flying-side-kick. One had to admire the height and energy a drunken aviator can achieve under these conditions.

Alas, the officers had done a resounding job of packing dirt around the shed's sturdy posts, and the one that Skip's GI boot contacted stood its ground, while the Skipper's beefy leg bones suffered under the physics of a *spiral-compound-fracture*.<sup>7</sup>

And that's the last we saw of ol' Skip, poor guy! He would spend many painful weeks recovering in a drab, stateside military hospital, so he could return to flight duty. And *gone* was that dream tour in Germany. Someone else would upgrade into that slot. *Kung Fu Skip* would be Texas-based, studying the military Method of Instruction manual and mentally preparing for his first flock of grasshoppers.

The End

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<sup>7</sup> To soften the blow, we declared Skip to be an "Honorable Recipient of the Flying Piss Screen Device," *In-absentia*.