

An AIR FORCE Mosaic

INSPECTION STICKERS ARE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES.

It's late summer and I am stationed in South Carolina—not the best tour of duty so far in my Air Force career. I have been making preparations for several months now for our family to move to my home area in Michigan. I am being transferred to Udorn, Thailand for a year. About a month before we are due to leave, South Carolina ruled that military personal had to have a state inspection sticker on their vehicle. I waited until the last day possible before putting on the sticker. This is how much I disliked the state of South Carolina. Parenthetically, I have said many times that if I was standing on the Atlantic Ocean beach in North Carolina and had to go to Florida I would drive around the state of South Carolina. Well, back to the move.

It is now mid October and the movers have closed the doors on the big moving van. Our entire household has either been packed in cardboard boxes or wrapped in padded moving blankets. Another couple of days and we will pack our suitcases in the Audi and head north to Michigan. Rita, Mark and Traci will live in Selfridge Air Force Base (AFB) housing for the next year. The day has arrived. I have signed out from Shaw AFB. Our time in South Carolina is quickly coming to an end. After loading the car with our luggage, the kids are in the back seat and we drive through the main gate for the last time. I looked down at the lower left corner of the windshield and saw the state inspection sticker that shortly would be in a trashcan. By midmorning we were at the state line. I pulled the car over, the kids sat up straight thinking, *Why is dad pulling over on the rock road, we haven't done anything.* I took out a razor blade and scraped the inspection sticker off. Traci age 3 asked me what I was doing. I told her, *I am scraping off the South Carolina inspection sticker.* To this day she remembers the experience.

IS THIS AN OMEN FOR A ROUGH YEAR?

The time we had together in Michigan went by fast, the family was settled in an apartment on Selfridge. I had located a mechanic to care for the car while I was gone, another story in itself. Rita drove me to the airport, and on the way a truck threw up a stone and chipped the windshield of the car. If this was an indicator of the way things were going go, it would be a rough year.

RICE IS MORE THAN A WEDDING COMMODITY!

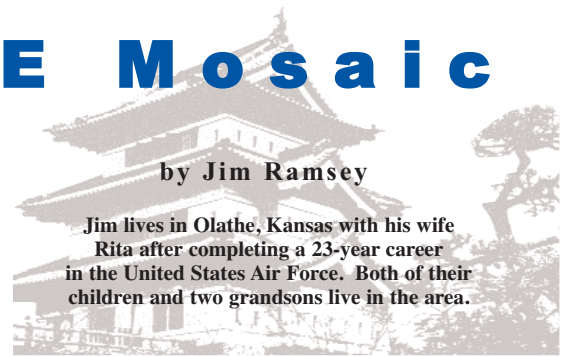
It would be a long trip for me before I would step foot in Thailand. The trip included a layover in the Philippines. The last leg took me Udorn. My arrival must not have been eventful. I don't remember much about the first few hours. As I went through the normal "in processing" I was mixed in with about a half dozen other new arrivals. Over the next, few days we would sit in briefings and just in general hang out together. I vividly remember diner that first night. There were several "Thai" restaurants on base and bunch of us went to dinner together. I ordered a steak, and when given the option of rice or baked potato, without any hesitation I said baked potato.

As the waiter left, Bob Humpert turned to me and said, *You don't like rice do you?*

No, I said.

You're in for long year, was his prophetic comment.

Within several days, I learned that rice was not just something that was thrown at weddings, but eatable.



by Jim Ramsey

Jim lives in Olathe, Kansas with his wife Rita after completing a 23-year career in the United States Air Force. Both of their children and two grandsons live in the area.

THIS IS NOT THE TWILIGHT ZONE.

The events over the next few days would take a unique turn. Bob and I were sitting around with our fellow servicemen. There were times when he would make a comment about the subject at hand, I would sit there in disbelief. Not only was I thinking the same thing, but also would have phased it in the exact same words. I wouldn't have thought much about it once or twice, but time and again this was happening. It would be several more days before Bob and I would be alone and I worked up the courage to say something to him about my observations. His response was, You know, I have felt the same way. A friendship was formed that day that would help us get through the year.

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

It's never easy for military personnel to be away from family for an extended period of time, but November and December are perhaps the most difficult. Thanksgiving approached and we still had over 11 months before we would return home. On Thanksgiving day we had nice meal and that night went to the USO club, our normal hang out. The difference that night was there was a USO troupe on tour; Bob and I found ourselves standing about 10 feet from the left corner of the stage, with exit doors to our

left. I don't remember much about the show.

I do remember, however, Bob tapping me on the shoulder and saying, *Come on lets go.* The show was not over yet and I was not ready to leave so I said, *I'm going to stay.*

Well Bob had figured out that there was only one song left, *Silent Night.* As the performers started to sing, they invited us to sing along. It was only a few words into the song and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. After the show Bob and I went out the side door our eyes still moist. No words were necessary that night as we walked through the dark.

The song, *Silent Night* for me has never been the same. I know by experience that when I sing it somewhere in the world there are service men and women aching to be home in the arms of their families. ♡

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