

Foreword

I met... well, sort of met “Bags” while I was doing research for a second book about a little “garden spot” sometimes known as “Naked Fanny”. “Naked Fanny” was what some called a U.S. Air Base that was built on a big patch of land that had been carved out of the jungle in Southeast Asia. The base was also known as Nakhon Phanom... NKP. For almost 10 years, Americans fought the “Secret War” in Laos from that base at NKP.

I had just finished “Memories of Naked Fanny” and started working on a follow on book. I sent out a series of emails to guys who had been stationed at NKP asking them to send me their stories about their time there. A few days later I received an email back from “William Bagwell” with a document attached. In the email he told me that he had been at NKP and I could use anything in the attached document for my new book.

He pointed me to the sections he had written on NKP, and I started reading there. After a little bit I thought, “Man... this is really good stuff.” The more I read, the more I got drawn in. “Bags” told about his time at “Naked Fanny” in an easy reading way. It read a lot like a “Hollywood Novel”... except I had been there, and I knew this was the real thing. There are a few books out there that are mostly “fairy tales” and “war stories”... not this one. If you check the facts you’ll

know that this is the real thing. “Bags” is the real thing. (By the way, working with him on this book I’ve come to know him as “Bags”. He says that he almost never answers to William.)

Once I started reading his story, I couldn’t put it down. So before I finished the section on NKP I jumped back to the beginning. After reading a couple more chapters I thought that this was way more than just a few pages in my book. I knew this was a story that had to be told for everyone. This needed to be a book on its own.

I’m not the only one who felt this way. Ron Furtak was one of the pilots on the team that rescued “Bags”. Ron was instrumental in urging “Bags” to turn his story into a book. Here’s what Ron had to say:

I believe the first time I heard of Bill Bagwell, I knew him not as Bill or “Bags” but by his radio call sign, “HOBO 32”. I was on rescue alert in Southeast Asia as a SANDY armed escort on the evening of 21 October 1968. The alert sounded to scramble for a rescue because HOBO 32 had just extracted [ejected] from his burning A-1 Skyraider over central Laos. We rushed to our aircraft, took off, and found him but by then it was too dark for a rescue. For a rescue in the dark, The JOLLY GREEN rescue helicopter would have to use landing lights to illuminate their surroundings in order to safely hover to pick him up. This would have exposed the JOLLY GREEN helicopter and the crew to potential hostile fire. SANDY 1 advised “HOBO 32” to find a safe place to hide for the night and that we would be back in the morning at first light. I’m sure his night on the ground in hostile territory was not the most comfortable!

The weather gods were not kind to “HOBO 32” because when morning weather reports came, fog was down to the tree tops in his area. I would have sworn that we would wait for the conditions to improve but SANDY 1 directed the 4 Skyraider SANDYs and 2 JOLLY GREENs to takeoff to get HOBO

32. Fortunately, the fog was clearing at his location and a successful rescue was made just as the sun was rising in the east. The JOLLY GREENs stayed under the fog returning to NKP but the weather was still below landing minimums for the 4 fixed wing SANDYs, and we had to divert to Udorn RTAFB. This experience was not the only time he walked on the ground in Laos! Bill would successfully extract from another burning A-1 some eight months later; this second time in northern Laos.

Many, many years went by before we reacquainted by e-mail. Bill mentioned that his daughters had asked him to write his life history, and he did. He allowed that it had not been published, but, after some prodding, agreed that he would share his writings. Once I opened his story I couldn't stop reading! And I'm not an avid reader. How a man could achieve what he did against the odds he faced along the way in his life was heart warming, and a true success story! I mentioned to Bill that this SHOULD be in print for others to read, reflect on and learn from. It depicts how he coped with the many challenges he faced and made a success of his life despite the trials and tribulations that he encountered and endured. Lesser men would have given up along the way.

Ron Furtak
28 Feb 2011

“Bags” and I are kindred spirits. It was almost as if we were on parallel paths for a lot of years... we tromped a lot of the same ground... spent a lot of years in the same “worlds”. So I needed to be sure that the reason I liked what “Bags” had written was because of more than our common experiences. I needed someone else to give me an objective view.

So I sent it to my daughter to see what she thought. I emailed her just the first few chapters and told her she might

like it. She came back with enthusiasm and told me that she liked it... a lot! She wanted me to hurry up and send her more. She said that she could “see, feel and hear” the places and people that “Bags” had written about. Next I had my wife read it. I knew that she would tell me what she really thought... and when she raved about it, I knew I had a jewel that just had to be published.

This is far more than just a war story. As I read through, it made me smile... it made me giggle... and it made me sad. It’s about a large chunk of a man’s life spent in the service of our country... about facing the Russian bears during the early years of the cold war... about facing the real possibility of going to World War III during the Cuban Missile Crisis. It’s about flying into the massive anti-aircraft fire “Uncle Ho” amassed to shoot down our boys... and living to tell about it. It’s about the years spent working in our country’s space program... and programs that helped to bring down the Soviet Union... and it’s about life after military service... and it’s about a man and his family.

But most of all it’s about a boy and then a man making his way through life. “Bags” talks about a few heroes he encountered over the years while quietly denying that he is a hero himself. He says he is privileged to have merely served and survived. But make no mistake about it... I think *Plagued by Good Luck* is a story about the life of a hero.

Bob Dennard
Memories of Naked Fanny
4 Mar 2011