

Begin with 40th & End with 40th

My story was inspired by the movie Forest Gump. As Forest sat on a bench waiting for a bus, he said to one of the ladies sitting next to him, **“Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get”**. I reflected upon my military career, thinking that was just about the right explanation for how it actually transpired.

In 1967, I joined the Air Force to escape being drafted into the Army. I wanted to learn a skill other than pointing a gun at someone and shooting them and, frankly, being shot at in return. Also my father, who fought in the Pacific during WW II, was a Flight Engineer on **C-47 Sky Trains**, nicknamed Gooney Bird. Initially stationed in New Guinea, he flew all over the Pacific supporting the ground troops that invaded the islands we took back from the Japanese. His job sounded exciting, but I knew little about the aircrew specialties and the responsibilities required of each.



My first flight in an airplane was in 1955, on a Eastern Airlines Super Constellation, more commonly referred to as a “Super Connie.”

My older sister and I flew back from Tampa, Florida, to Chicago’s Midway Airport by ourselves. We went down to Florida by bus with my mom’s sister to visit my grandmother for the summer. My Aunt decided to remain in Florida with grandma, while my nine-year-old sister and I, at age seven, decided to return home. The flight departed Tampa in the late evening, and we flew into the night hours. I was deeply impressed by the red

flames coming out of the individual exhaust pipes on those big R-3350 engines. And I believe that magical experience is when flying took hold of my mind and soul.

I didn't fly again in an airplane until 1967. Then it was in a Boeing 707 jet, and I was on my way to Basic Training in the USAF, in San Antonio, TX. I remember being a bit scared because I couldn't quite comprehend how we were moving through the air without a propeller.



I grew up just 10 miles south of O'Hare Field and witnessed the evolution of airplanes during my childhood and teen years. I remember looking skyward, almost every time a plane flew over the house, and this behavior has changed little to this day. I always wonder what's going on inside each plane and where they're flying. Clearly, destiny played a role in selecting my military aviation career, but the flying bug was planted when I was a young child.

Basic training helped form the core of who I am. I was really a country boy, growing up in a small suburban town called Elmhurst, IL. I'd never experienced gruff talking, order-barking men like those Drill Sergeants who came into the barracks and terrorized us the first morning of our military lives. I thought at the time, **"what did I get myself into?"**

I quickly adapted to this strict, regimented way of military life and successfully made it through basic training. While there, we were given written tests to determine our knowledge and skills, so they could best assign us given the Air Force's needs. I'll never forget when the Sergeant called my name and handed me orders to attend a Technical Training School. I read them and they said Loadmaster School, Sheppard AFB, TX. I asked the sergeant what a Loadmaster was, since I didn't have a clue. I then asked him how I got selected for this career field. He told



me I scored high on the math test. That was the thing that got me into this career field. I asked him to double check that information because my high school teachers would beg to differ with him on "high math scores." He confirmed it and then I asked again, "what in the world is a Loadmaster?" He said I would be loading airplanes with cargo, then flying on them all over the world to deliver it. He also clarified I would be paid extra money for being on flying status, which I liked!

After graduating from Loadmaster School, my first assignment was on C-130A aircraft at **Lockbourne AFB, OH**. I thought “Cow Town USA. Oh My God!”

Airman 3rd Class Bob Bien
Loadmaster, Suda Bay, Crete



I was assigned to the **40th Tactical Airlift Squadron** (TAS), which turned out to be one of the best things that ever happened to me. The C-130 was the workhorse of combat operations. You learned every facet of being a Loadmaster on these rugged airlifters. This assignment also meant I crossed paths with my soul mate, my wife of now 46 wonderful years. Destiny brought us together..



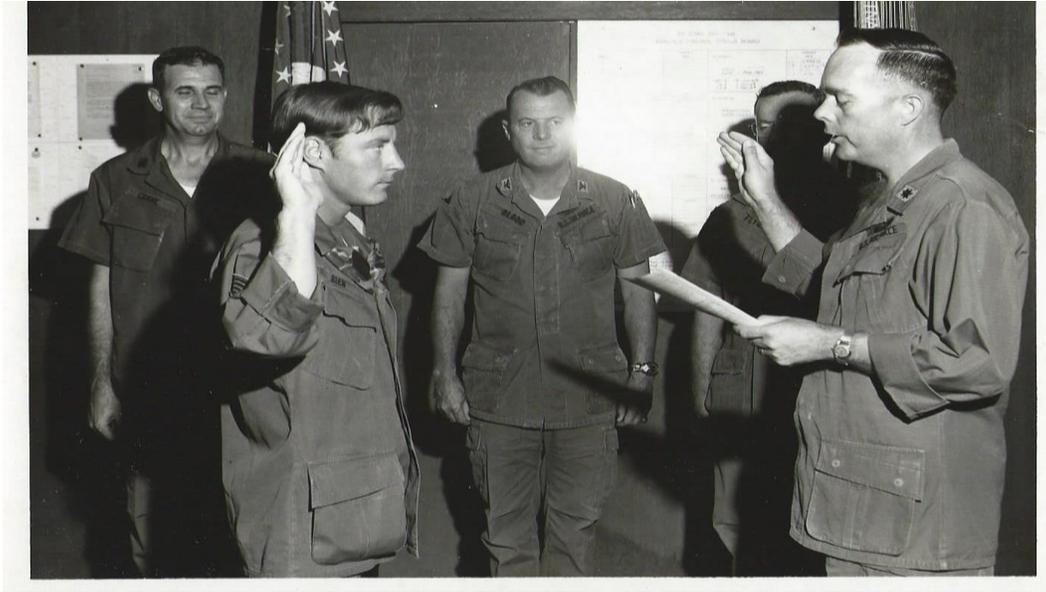
Uncle Sam didn't allow me to enjoy married life for very long. Six months after our wedding, I was reassigned to **Viet Nam** and cross-trained to C-123K aircraft, truly a combat plane: no wet wing fuel tanks, not much in the way of hydraulic systems, two powerful R-2800 reciprocating engines, and two J-85 jet engines. It could land and takeoff on runways as short as 2,000 feet. It would take much more than small arms fire to knock this aircraft out of the sky. This wonderful workhorse saw me safely through 1,000 hours of combat flying.

C-123K
Sgt. Bob Bien, Ton Son Nhut AB, Saigon, RVN



My one year in Viet Nam flew by quickly. I was not only constantly busy, but also focused on doing my job to the best of my ability and getting home safely.

In 1970, I reenlisted in Viet Nam and received a tax free bonus along with the base of my choice for my next assignment.



Three Full Colonels Witnessing & LTC Administering .

I chose **McCord AFB** in Tacoma, WA. I was going to be working on the “high flying, fast moving” C-141A Starlifter.

This was the latest and greatest in cargo aircraft. The only drawback to this assignment was the fact I would continue to fly numerous trips back to Vietnam, because the war was still going strong.

C-141A
Flying over Mt. Reiner near McCord AFB, WA



Two years into my assignment at McCord AFB, I was asked to become a C-5A Loadmaster and join the 62nd Military Airlift Wing ALCE, or Airlift Control Element. This was a specialized group of Loadmasters who taught and trained the Army, Navy and Marines how prepare all their military vehicles and mobility equipment for deployment on Military Airlift Command aircraft, to any place in the world. I jumped at the chance to be a C-5A Loadmaster.

It was the biggest cargo aircraft in the military. It could carry 6 Greyhound buses, fully loaded with people, or two M-60 tanks, which were about 110,000 pounds each. This kind of knowledge and skill was what I was born for. It was my destiny.

After several years at McCord AFB and being attached to the 22nd Military Airlift Squadron at Travis AFB, CA, for training and flight currency, I requested a reassignment to Dover AFB, DE. I was averaging about 220 days a year TDY. This was causing a strain on my young family. I was granted a transfer to the 3RD MAS at Dover. The picture above shows one of the missions I flew into Israel, during **Operation Nickel Grass**. I also



Golda Meir – The aircraft that saved Israel

flew in **Operation Baby Lift**, bringing women, children and refugees out of Saigon as it was being captured by North Vietnam soldiers. After accumulating thousands of flight hours on C-141A & C-5A aircraft, it was time to share my knowledge and skills with the new and upcoming young loadmasters. I volunteered to teach at the Aircraft Loadmaster School, at Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls Texas. This assignment also gave me the time on the ground to complete my college education. I attended Wayland Baptist College at night, graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Education (BSOE), with two important Majors: One in Traffic & Transportation Management, and the other in Instructional Methodology.

I hoped this would give me the necessary credentials for Officers Training School (OTS). I applied but was turned down after two board cycles because I was over the age limit. I made an Age Waiver Request to no avail. At this point, I felt my knowledge and talent could be better applied outside the military. My wife and I returned to Columbus, Ohio, where we first met and fell in love, with our two girls.

I tried civilian life for 6 months but it wasn't for me. I had become too committed to the military way of life and found myself back in the saddle, this time in a Air Force Reserve unit called the 355th Tactical Airlift Squadron (TAS). There I flew the same C-123K aircraft I worked on in Viet Nam. They were happy to have my Loadmaster knowledge and skill, along with my experience of 1,000 hours on C-123K's in combat over the skies of Viet Nam. In less than 6 months, a full time, Civil Service, Air Reserve Technician (ART) position opened and the senior Loadmaster, who was an ART himself, encouraged me to apply. I was quickly selected and became a full-time Air Reserve Technician Loadmaster. I was flying in the 355th Aerial Spray Unit, where all the flyers in this unit were the cream of the crop in their respective crew positions. They had to be due to the difficulty and challenges encountered in the low flying missions of aerial spraying.

UC-123K Winter Spray Training Mission , Lawson AAF, GA 1980



During my time in Aerial Spray, I entered a Master's program through Central Michigan University, requiring me to spend more time on the ground to complete the curriculum.

When a position opened in the **40th Mobile Aerial Port Squadron** as the Air Transportation Superintendent, which was a ART position and actually a promotion from my previous position, I applied for the job and was selected.

During the nearly 3 years I was there, I completed my Masters Program, earning a MA Degree, specializing in Transportation Management, and another in Management & Supervision, these were subjects I knew a fair amount about.



So, I started my military career at Lockbourne AFB, later renamed Rickenbacker ANGB, in the 40th TAS as a **one striper** Loadmaster and ended my military career in the 40th Mobile Aerial Port as a **Chief Master Sergeant (E-9)**.



I had come full circle and still believe in the saying, "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get".

Another interesting coincidence is that the first airplane I ever flew on, the Eastern Airlines Super Constellation, was pioneered by **Captain Eddie Rickenbacker**. My first assignment was to Lockbourne AFB, which was later renamed Rickenbacker. This is also the place I retired from!

My Loadmaster skills were not yet put to rest. While in the 40th MAPS, I was asked to become part of a unique team of highly skilled aviators and fly risky missions, on C-123K aircraft

From **Lima, Peru**, across the Andes Mountain, at altitudes between 20 -30 feet, and land in the jungle, where all the cocaine was being made and shipped to the U.S.. Not only was the flying risky, every member of our group had a “Price Tag” on their head, placed there by the Shining Path or Sendero Luminoso, a Maoist guerrilla insurgent organization in Peru. The aircraft we had were previously at Rickenbacker ANGB and had been retired to the “Bone Yard” , in the desert of Tucson, AZ. The U.S. State Department pulled several of these airplanes out of the “Bone Yard” and were flown to Lima, Peru, where all US markings were removed and a Peruvian Flag and Tail Number were painted on these aircraft.

All of our team members were given a Peruvian Police I.D.’s and we were taught Spanish at the U.S . Embassy. Peru is a story for another time!



Bob with his friends at Tingo Maria, in the jungle.



Bob at 23,000 feet over the Andes Mt.