



(U) A Remembrance of NSA Thanksgivings Past... (repost)

FROM: SIGINT Communications (S0202)
Unknown
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(U) To help readers get ready for Thanksgiving, SID today is reposting this holiday-themed article. Last year we asked NSA'ers to send us their stories of spending Thanksgiving in unusual circumstances. Here's what we learned...

(U) Kenyan Cuisine

(C) Thanksgiving of 1984 was very interesting for me. I got to spend it TDY in the wilds of Kenya.

(C) I was in the Air Force, stationed here at NSA, working in the Special Support Activity (SSA). In November 1984, I went TDY to Kenya, attached to CSG Centcom, with a Special Forces group out of Ft. Bragg. We spent three weeks in country, living in tents and working with the Kenyan military.

(U) The commander gave us a "training" day on Thanksgiving and we did have a feast. But, instead of Turkey, we had goat along with salad, rice and a few other "goodies." The goats were cooked over an open fire on spits and actually tasted pretty good. There weren't any pies or cranberry sauce or even stuffing, but we made the best of it.

(U) We did have a "Turkey Bowl" football game which gave the Special Forces guys an opportunity to knock the Air Force guy around. But all in all, I think I held my own and earned their respect.

(U) There were many more interesting things that happened during that TDY, but those will have to wait for another time.

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(U) Hijacked Turkeys

(U//FOUO) In 1969, I was a young Marine, stationed at the NAVCOMMSTA at San Miguel in the Phillipines. This was a tiny remote collection site on the west coast of Luzon. It was about an hour's drive north of Subic Bay Naval Station in Olongapo. This was a fairly lawless period, before Marcos' martial law was decreed. (In the village north of us, communist "Huks" reportedly massacred the mayor, his family and guests at an outdoor mah-jongg party.)

(U) Being connected to the rest of the world by only a one-lane, partially paved "national highway," we had nothing from outside that wasn't trucked in, including holiday food. For Thanksgiving of 1969, the one truckload of frozen turkeys being brought to our commissary got hijacked on the national highway. I don't remember what we ate instead, but adobo at baboy (the Philippine national dish, a vinegar-based stew usually made of "baboy" (pork)), pansit (a noodle dish) and lumpia (a classic small, fried spring roll) were favorites.

(U) Then around Thanksgiving in Mogadishu one year, we had Somali surf 'n turf: roast camel and shark steaks.

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(U//FOUO) *Editor's note: After this article was originally published, Dr. Mathews received the following feedback on his anecdote:*

Dr. Mathews,

(U) I was born and raised in San Antonio, Zambales. I used to go to San Miguel base on July 4th to watch fireworks and K-9 demonstrations during their Open House. I remember eating turkey when I was a kid around the time frame you mentioned in your article. I was wondering where my uncle got it from....HMMMMM????

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(U) Thanksgiving in Bavaria

(U) When my family was stationed in Bad Aibling, Germany between 1973 and 1977, we lived on base. All government civilian and military families lived on base in those days. My mom got together with all the other moms in Building 311 Stairwell C and planned a Thanksgiving Day feast. Instead of each family cooking their own Thanksgiving Day dinner, all six families would celebrate together. There would be two turkeys and everyone's favorite family dishes.

(U) We celebrated in the "Play Room" on the top floor of the building. The ping pong table, with extensions, provided seating for the adults, the kids had their own table. Every family was allowed to bring a guest. The food table was groaning under the weight of all the dishes. We had sage and chestnut stuffing and cornbread stuffing, lumpy mashed potatoes, smooth mashed potatoes, and sweet potatoes, sweet and sour green beans and sauerkraut. Dad made up several batches of his egg nog - strictly off limits to the kids. It was a wonderful way to celebrate the holiday, and so popular that we continued the tradition every year we were there.

-- Regina Hambleton

(U) Thanksgiving Down Under

(U//FOUO) While an integree at DSD in Melbourne, Australia, we hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for a group of Aussies and Americans. Since this came less than a month after we hosted a costumed Halloween party, one of my co-workers at DSD asked whether anything special needed to be worn for Thanksgiving. I told him with a straight face that he and his wife could either dress as pilgrims or just wear an apple on a string around their necks. I guess they couldn't find black shoes with big buckles, because they showed up on Thanksgiving, each with a shiny red apple on a string tied around their necks. Being extremely good sports, they wore them for the entire evening.

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(U) Midway Between Turkey and Curry

(S) I spent Thanksgiving Day 1986 at Midway Island on a TDY to support Operation PONY EXPRESS. Air Force C-130 and Navy P-3 and EP-3 collection aircraft staged from there to monitor a full-range Russian SLBM (Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile) test launch impacting in the ocean near Midway.

(U) The large group of TDY personnel made for crowded conditions on an island already inundated with gooney birds. The Leyte albatross, called the gooney bird for it's less-than-graceful landing technique, flock to Midway Island in the winter to mate and raise their young. The squawking and bill-clicking of their mating rituals was a constant cacophony during the day. The gooney is not an exceptionally brilliant bird either. We found a stray tennis ball on the walkway and rolled it toward a nearby gooney bird sitting on its nest. The bird stared at for a moment before repositioning herself to cover the tennis ball as well as her egg.

(U) We enjoyed a traditional Thanksgiving dinner on the island, although there was a slight hint of curry to it. The Navy out-sourced base services to ITT, who had staffed the place with Sri Lankan workers. There was a curry dish available at every meal in the cafeteria, including breakfast, and the taste of it was everywhere. I don't think the dishwasher removed the curry from the plates and utensils, just redistributed it in a fine layer on everything.

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(U) Thanksgiving in the Cotswolds

(U//FOUO) A cold and heavy fog hung over the Cotswold hills in southwest England as temperatures hovered in the very low 40s while members of the Special U.S. Liaison Office (London/Cheltenham) (SUSLOL) family gathered to celebrate Thanksgiving 2005. As in past years, this celebration was planned and orchestrated by an impressive list of 43 SUSLOL volunteers and their families. Close to 150 family members attended the event, which was the largest SUSLOL family Thanksgiving dinner I've had the privilege to attend. Being at an overseas location during the holidays does not mean we -- as Americans -- leave our traditions and values behind. While we may not always have the opportunity to share in the traditional holiday gatherings with our immediate families back in the U.S., the SUSLOL family is one that we all appreciate and will miss. As with most Thanksgiving family dinners, our SUSLOL family feast had all the usually trimmings of turkey, ham, stuffing, mashed potatoes, breads, desserts and many more calorie-laden items. SUSLOL Chief Chris Inglis welcomed everyone and thanked us all for serving our country in ways only we could. [REDACTED] gave the invocation and master-of-ceremonies [REDACTED] orchestrated the rush to the buffet table. As the afternoon was winding down and the turkey leftovers were being sent home with many families members, only to reappear one day as a turkey sandwich, the SUSLOL families said their good-byes and disappeared in the heavy fog longing to continue the post-Thanksgiving dinner tradition -- a nap on the sofa.

[REDACTED]
Written on behalf of all SUSLOL family members!

(U) Alone in the Albanian Alps

(TS//SI) I believe it was 1996, and I was one of the Agency's electrical engineers in their facilities department. One of the programs I typically assisted with was the Agency's Third Party program. We got a job from G Group to have power run up a mountain to a remote collection facility currently running on generators. The schedule had me going to Albania in November. I traveled to the site with several European Technical Center members, but their work ended much earlier, so they left to go back to Wiesbaden before the holiday. I was the sole American on the mountain top that Thanksgiving. Fortunately, I saved an appropriate MRE (Meal Ready-to-Eat) to have for dinner.

(U//FOUO) Of intense interest to Government employees at this time was the fight between Congress and the President. This resulted in furloughs of Government employees, including several people I know. My main contact here at the Agency would call me about every other day on the ringdown phone and assure me that I had not been furloughed for that day.

[REDACTED]

(U) Thanksgiving on the High Seas


(U//FOUO) This is a story of Thanksgiving during the Iran-Iraq war in 1987, when the Iranian navy was attacking oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and US warships were escorting the "Ernst Will" tanker convoys through the Straits of Hormuz into the Arabian Sea.

(U//FOUO) We were aboard the USS Standley, and had exited the Straits into the Arabian Sea, which placed us under the jurisdiction of the Commander of Task Force 800 (CTF800). The Captain of the Standley wanted us to transfer to another ship so that the Standley's crew could proceed to their next port call.

(U//FOUO) On the night before Thanksgiving, CTF800 ordered our helicopter transfer to the USS Whiteplains. So, at 0600, Thanksgiving morning, we were lifted by wire, and dropped by wire, onto the Whiteplains. We were invited to join the Whiteplains crew for a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner; wonderful..because, after all, they were the supply ship for CTF800 and had been saving the choice cuts for themselves!

(U//FOUO) Watching the sailors on board the Whiteplains work 24 hrs a day, supplying the long line of ships, generated a great deal of my respect for their ability to coordinate this feat. After

our meal, we transferred to another ship and resumed operations in the Gulf.



(U) Thanks to everyone who shared their Thanksgiving stories, and Happy Thanksgiving from your colleagues in SIGINT Communications!

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