

Northwoods Humane Society -Vallie M. Szymanski – Board Member

The Pacific Family Vacation. From 1965-67 my father, Lt. Col. James H. McNamara, DVM was assigned to Clark Air Force Base, U.S. Military base in the Philippines. He was the head veterinarian in South East Asia responsible for the U.S. Military Working Dog operations in the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and South Vietnam. His duties also took him to Australia to check out their military working dog operations.

Once again my parents Hettye and Jim McNamara were excited to begin a new adventure and this time in South East Asia. My brother Jack and I were students at the University of Wyoming so we did not accompany my parents on their “maiden” voyage to the Philippines. When they arrived, they had a beautiful house on the compound that made up Clark Air Force Base. Banana trees in the yard, “gecko lizards” harmlessly climbing the walls of the interior of the base home and a lovely Filipino couple “Fel and Aurora” who graciously welcomed them to their new home. My parents did not send many of their “household goods” and instead took advantage of the “military issue” furnished home. That was ok with them as it would give them more time to explore the area and meet new friends.

Jack and I did not see our parents for a year and were finally able to travel to Clark Air Force Base for Christmas in 1966. My parents had a wonderful six-week holiday planned for us (we took a couple of approved weeks off from school) and we couldn't wait to get started. As a family, we were able to take advantage of a military dependent standby option which allowed us to travel on military transport planes.

So with that in mind, we started our “star trek” that would take us from the Clark to Bangkok, Thailand with an intermediate stop in Tan So Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam. To land in Tan So Nhut, we flew over the Mekong Delta and witnessed some gunfire. When we landed at the Air Base we were not allowed to deplane. It was a very chilling experience. In the normal course of his job responsibilities, my father traveled to Tan So Nhut monthly to meet with the US military dog handlers to check on the status of the military working dogs to make sure they were healthy and getting the proper nutrition. The monthly meetings were key to the success of the entire unit and that information was communicated to the Military Dog Training Team based at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. When my father returned to the United States after his tour of duty in the Pacific he was assigned to the Security Police Division in the Pentagon and would be the liaison between the Security Police and the Military Working Dog Training team. He was also a key contributor to the assessment of the diet of the working dog and collaborated with Hill's Science Diet to develop “MSD” or Maximum Stress Diet in the late 1970s.

Our next stop was Bangkok, Thailand. The US Military had worked closely with the Royal Thai Air Force and they were very interested to learn more about the US military working dog program so my father spent quite a bit of time going back and forth to Thailand. He helped them design the kennel and gave them advice on the proper diet for their working dogs. Many years later, my father was invited back to Thailand to the unveiling of the Royal Thai Air Force Military Working Dog kennel. He had worked closely with General Kriangsak Chamanan who would later become the Prime Minister of Thailand from 1977-1980 and it was he who had invited my parents to attend. My parents were honored at this very kind gesture on behalf of the People of Thailand.

We returned to the Philippines and learned more about my father's work with the Filipino government and the military regime in Taiwan under the leadership of General Chiang Kai Shek. It was a challenging time for the development of the U.S Military Working Dog Program and my father was honored to be a part of that very important slice of canine military history.

Author's Note 1: Clark Air Base, formerly Clark Field, former U.S. military air base, central Luzon, Philippines. It covered an area of about 12 square miles (30 square km) and was located 48 miles (77 km) north of Manila near the foothills of the Cabusilan Mountains. It was first established as a U.S. military camp for the 5th Cavalry after the Spanish-American War (1898). The base was named Clark Field in 1918 for Major Harold M. Clark, a pre-World War I pilot. On December 8, 1941, at the outset of the Pacific phase of World War II, the installation was the principal target of raids by Taiwan-based Japanese bombers that destroyed more than half of the U.S. Army's aircraft in East Asia. After the Japanese occupied the Philippines (1941–42), the airfield became a major Japanese base of operations during the war. The first Japanese kamikaze (suicide) flight was made from Clark in 1944 as U.S. forces began the process of recapturing the Philippines. In the post-World War II era, Clark Air Base became the largest U.S. military air base outside the United States and a vital connecting link with U.S. forces in South Korea and, later, Southeast Asia. During the Vietnam War (1955–75), Clark Air Base served as a strategic supply base and fighter-squadron installation.

Author's Note 2: **Tan Son Nhut Air Base** (1955–1975) was a Republic of Vietnam Air Force facility. It was located near the city of Saigon in southern Vietnam. The United States used it as a major base during the Vietnam War (1959–1975), stationing Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine units there. Following the Fall of Saigon, it was taken over as a Vietnam People's Air Force facility and remains in use today.