

COLLECTANEA

A FOLK DRAMA -- "WHAT THE CAPTAIN MEANS IS...",
OR THAT INTERVIEW YOU NEVER SAW ON TV

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When I arrived in Southeast Asia in May 1968, this humorous dramatic sketch was already something of a classic. I heard about it long before I was able to get my own taped copy. Almost everyone who has flown combat in Southeast Asia has either heard it or heard of it. I have never seen it in print anywhere, but I have long felt it should be more widely available.

The sketch speaks best for itself. Anyone who finds it in poor taste, I'm afraid, misses the point. During my combat tour I found that profanity, on the lips of those who faced death cleanly every day, seemed more a blessing than a curse.

The following exchange occurs when a news correspondent interviews a shy, unassuming Air Force Phantom jet fighter pilot in Southeast Asia in late 1967. So the correspondent wouldn't misconstrue the pilot's replies, the Wing Information Officer is on hand as a monitor to make certain that the real Air Force story would be told. The pilot was first asked his opinion of the F4C Phantom:

Captain: "It's so fuckin' maneuverable you can fly up your own ass with it."

IO: "What the captain means is that he has found the F4C Phantom highly maneuverable at all altitudes and he considers it an excellent aircraft for all missions assigned."

Corr.: "I suppose, captain, that you've flown a certain number of missions over North Vietnam. What did you think of the SAMs used by the North Vietnamese?"

Captain: "Why those bastards couldn't hit a bull in the ass with a bass fiddle. We fake the shit out of them. There's no sweat."

IO: "What the captain means is that the Surface-to-Air Missiles around Hanoi pose a serious problem to our air operations and that the pilots have a healthy respect for them."

Corr.: "I suppose, captain, that you've flown missions to the South. What kind of ordnance do you use, and what kind of targets do you hit?"

Captain: "Well, I'll tell you, mostly we aim at kicking the shit out of Vietnamese villages, and my favorite ordnance is napalm. Man, that stuff just sucks the air out of their friggin' lungs and makes a sonovabitchin' fire."

- IO: "What the captain means is that air strikes in South Vietnam are often against Vietcong structures and all operations are always under the positive control of Forward Air Controllers, or FACs. The ordnance employed is conventional 500 and 750 pound bombs and 20 millimeter cannon fire."
- Corr.: "I suppose you spent an R and R in Hong Kong. What were your impressions of the oriental girls?"
- Captain: "Yeah, I went to Hong Kong. As for those oriental broads, well, I don't care which way the runway runs, east or west, north or south -- a piece of ass is a piece of ass."
- IO: "What the captain means is that he found the delicately featured oriental girls fascinating, and he was very impressed with their fine manners and thinks their naiveté is most charming."
- Corr.: "Tell me, captain, have you flown any missions other than over North and South Vietnam?"
- Captain: "You bet your sweet ass I've flown other missions. We get scheduled nearly every day for a place where those fuckers over there throw everything at you but the friggin' kitchen sink. Even the goddam kids got slingshots."
- IO: "What the captain means is that he has occasionally been scheduled to fly missions in the extreme Western DMZ, and he has a healthy respect for the flak in that area."
- Corr.: "I understand that no one in your Fighter Wing has got a MIG yet. What seems to be the problem?"
- Captain: "Why you screwhead, if you knew anything about what you're talking about -- the problem is MIGs. If we'd get scheduled by those peckerheads at Seventh for those missions in MIG Valley, you can bet your ass we'd get some of those mothers. Those glory hounds at Ubon get all those missions while we settle for fightin' the friggin' war. Those mothers at Ubon are sitting on their fat asses killing MIGs and we get stuck with bombing the goddamned cabbage patches."
- IO: "What the captain means is that each element in the Seventh Air Force is responsible for doing their assigned job in the air war. Some units are assigned the job of neutralizing enemy air strength by hunting out MIGs, and other elements are assigned bombing missions and interdiction of enemy supply routes."
- Corr.: "Of all the targets you've hit in Vietnam, which one was the most satisfying?"
- Captain: "Well, shit, it was when we were scheduled for that suspected VC vegetable garden. I dropped napalm in the middle of the fuckin' cabbage and my wingman splashed it real good with six of those 750 pound mothers and spread the fire all the way to the friggin' beets and carrots."

IO: "What the captain means is that the great variety of tactical targets available throughout Vietnam make the F4C the perfect aircraft to provide flexible response."

Corr.: "What do you consider the most difficult target you've struck in North Vietnam?"

Captain: "The friggin' bridges. I must have dropped 40 tons of bombs on those swayin' bamboo mothers, and I ain't hit one of the bastards yet."

IO: "What the captain means is that interdicting bridges along enemy supply routes is very important and a quite difficult target. The best way to accomplish this task is to crater the approaches to the bridge."

Corr.: "I noticed in touring the base that you have aluminum matting on the taxiways. Would you care to comment on its effectiveness and usefulness in Vietnam?"

Captain: "You're fuckin' right, I'd like to make a comment. Most of us pilots are well hung, but shit, you don't know what hung is until you get hung up on one of the friggin' bumps on that god-dam stuff."

IO: "What the captain means is that the aluminum matting is quite satisfactory as a temporary expedient, but required some finesse in taxiing and braking the aircraft."

Corr.: "Did you have an opportunity to meet your wife on leave in Honolulu, and did you enjoy the visit with her?"

Captain: "Yeah, I met my wife in Honolulu, but I forgot to check the calendar, so the whole five days were friggin' well combat-proof -- a completely dry run."

IO: "What the captain means is that it was wonderful to get together with his wife and learn first-hand about the family and how things were at home."

Corr.: "Thank you for your time, captain."

Captain: "Screw you -- why don't you bastards print the real story, instead of all that crap?"

IO: "What the captain means is that he enjoyed the opportunity to discuss his tour with you."

Corr.: "One final question. Could you reduce your impression of the war into a simple phrase or statement, captain?"

Captain: "You bet your ass I can. It's a fucked up war."

IO: "What the captain means is...it's a FUCKED UP WAR."