
SCENE

29

COMMANDER FAR EAST SECTION, USCG—1961-64

Tokyo, Japan (Chain of LORAN Stations)

Every time I expressed enthusiasm about my forthcoming assignment to Japan, I received the same question: What is the Coast Guard doing in Japan? I didn't know either until I got my orders in hand. They contained great news. I would be in charge of five LORAN-A stations in Japan proper and three on outlying islands. AND it was a three-year assignment. I was authorized to take my family, selected household effects, our big new yellow Mercury station wagon, our piano (children of music-lesson ages), and our one dog, dachshund "Biddie."

The next most frequently asked question was: What is **LORAN**?

I will defer to The World Book Encyclopedia to explain: "LORAN stands for Long Range Navigation. It is a system of radio navigation that helps ships and aircraft find their positions. Two stations, known as the *master* and *slave* continually send out radio signals. The ship or aircraft receives these signals with special equipment. The receiver equipment measures the time interval between the pulses it receives from the stations. The difference in time between receiving the signals from one pair of stations places the ship or aircraft at some point on a *LORAN line of position* on a chart. In actual operation, two pair of operating stations are used. This allowed the navigator to *intersect two LORAN lines of position for a fix*. LORAN is effective up to about 800 miles during the day and 1600 miles at night."

From the beginning to the end of World War II, there was a requirement to send huge squadrons of warships, flights of military aircraft, and convoys of cargo ships across the

vast expanses of the North Atlantic and western Pacific oceans. There are no lighthouses, landmarks, or buoys out there. Precision navigation was necessary for the safety of these movements. LORAN was the answer.

As it was being refined, surveys were made of suitable locations and construction teams were soon building stations up the Atlantic Coast of the United States and Canada, and westward across the northern Pacific and on scattered islands in the mid and south Pacific. As Japanese troops were driven off, stations on Okinawa, Iwo Jima, and the Japanese main islands were made part of the COMFESEC chain. Mobile LORAN units were placed ashore even as the military occupation was taking place.

Mobile units consisted of two semi trailers, one for the power plant and the other for the transmitter and receiving units. Two telephone poles were erected with an antenna between them and a copper wire ground plane around them. That unit would be in place as its slave was being built hundreds of miles away.

Now, let's take a look at one of my units. Niigata LORAN Station was typical. The personnel consisted of a Lieutenant Junior Grade in command. These young men were about three to four years out of the Academy. Typically, just off sea duty. Often married for about a year and proud fathers of first born children. They would command a unit with a Warrant Officer trained in electronics as Executive Officer and a dozen enlisted men. One would be a ship's cook. One Japanese male would be hired as a mess cook, but with time he would wind up as the No. 1 cook, and also as interpreter. The crew would chip in to hire a Japanese woman to do their laundry and polish their shoes.

These Coast Guardsmen would serve one year on station, without liberty except to visit a little farming or fishing village. No USO shows or other R&R. But, at the end of this "isolated duty," they would be granted thirty days of compensatory leave in addition to their thirty days earned.

Their orders were to report to COMFESEC for unit assignment. I had inherited the office staff, which I found too efficient. These men would report aboard in the morning and by afternoon were on their ways to their remote stations...without even really seeing Japan! I changed that by keeping them at our office for two days of orientation and briefing and a liberty to see the Shibuya District with its fantastic neon displays, ancient lanterns, restaurants, and bars (and yes, barmaids!) just outside our base gates.

I remembered my family's first night when the FESEC officers took the six of us to dinner at a typical (shoes off) restaurant and the waitresses (in kimono) served the men first, the boys second, and the females last! Mary was shocked!

With this in mind, I usually took the incoming LORAN station CO to lunch as a good way to get acquainted.

As COMFESEC, I obviously needed to inspect "my" stations as soon as possible. How did my predecessors do it?

The Japanese Maritime Safety Agency assigned Mr. Ono to serve as liaison and interpreter. Together, they flew by Nippon Air to the closest field and went the rest of the way by Toyota or Nissan taxi. There was no easy way to go from one LORAN station to the next, so they returned to Tokyo and visited another station on another day.

I did that one time with Ono-san, but since I had learned enough Japanese to get by, and my secretary had written directions in Japanese using roman letters, I chose to go it alone. I traveled in uniform and found all the Japanese to be friendly and eager to help (and practice English). I loved that experience—traveling on the local economy, staying in Japanese Inns, dining on local cuisine, and bathing in an ofuro (public bath).

Mary didn't usually travel with me on inspection trips, but there were two occasions I recall. One was to the new LORAN-C station under construction. One of the contractor's men accidentally electrocuted himself, and I thought I should personally view the circumstances. In showing me around, they opened the reefer and there he stood! I'm glad Mary was elsewhere having tea!

When I was satisfied the investigation was complete, Mary and I joined a sightseeing bus 100% full of Japanese. The main attraction would be to see aborigine villages much like Americans visit Indian Villages. Yes, they sold souvenirs, posed for pictures, viewed craftsmen at work, etc. These were the Ainus. They were a white race, larger than the Japanese, with white skin and heavy black beards. Their women tattooed their faces. They lacked the oriental eyelid flap.

On the way home, we stopped at a huge public bath in Sapporo where you squat naked (except for a little towel) on a small stool to wash outside of the big pool. Then, after you are nice and clean, you enter the steaming hot pool with the others. Unisex, of course!



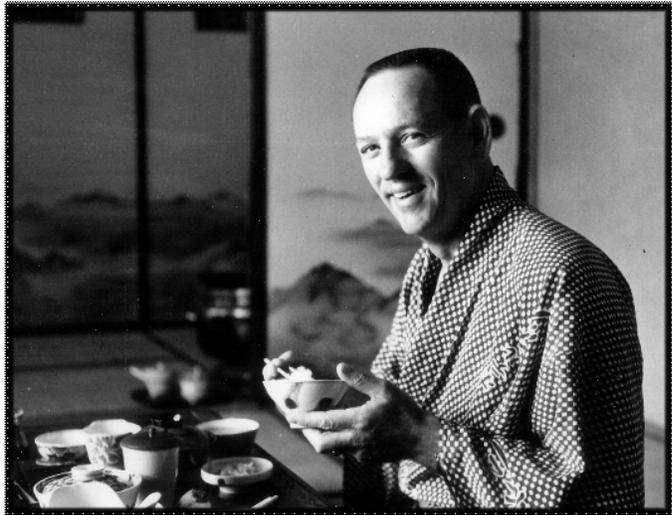
We enjoyed the experience of staying in Japanese inns

us on the microphone how valiantly the Japanese had fought and showed us where Generals had committed hara-kiri by jumping over the cliff.

On the other occasion, we got VIP treatment. Mary and I and the U.S. consul and his wife were included in a small group invited to make the inaugural flight of All Nippon Airway's new route to Okinawa. The ladies were given big bouquets of flowers and we men were each given \$20 in yen for spending money. And on arrival in Okinawa, we were all taken sightseeing in a small bus. Mary and I were the only "round eyes" on the bus. The Consul and his wife were making a call elsewhere. The usual little hostess in the front of the bus told

Then, we stopped at a cave of the type Japanese used to hide out. When flushed out by flame-throwers, they came out screaming and firing in all directions. During the war, at this cave they refused to come out and so were all killed by American flame-throwers! Investigation showed that the occupants were all young Japanese girls from a nearby school seeking shelter!

By the end of my third inspection trip, I had come to two conclusions: (1) **All** Far East Section mattresses needed to be replaced! (I sent a message to Commander 14th CG District and it was approved for them to implement.) (2) I declared the accommodations at the Far East LORAN stations to be inadequate for visiting officers. Let me explain. The choice for a bed at the



unit was to displace the Commanding Officer from his private room (the only one at the station). Or sleep in the storeroom where a cot would be set up. My declaration was approved, and I received per diem. That permitted me to seek lodging in the little local inns, where I could host drinks and exchange little gifts with the mayors (the Japanese cook interpreting and the station CO attending). One time, the hors d'oeuvres were candied grasshoppers!

Another LORAN station story, and I will go back to Home Base.

My three years as COMFESEC were without any serious disciplinary problems. But while I was inspecting one station, the Commanding Officer told me he had one man who would not obey him. The culprit grew long hair that formed boat-tails in the back that were non-military in appearance.

I took the man aside and asked him why he refused a haircut. He said that, in his opinion, it was neat and looked military and did not violate military regulations. I looked him over and said that in my opinion it did not look military and violated military regulations by not being cut gradually up the sides and back. And then I asked him whose opinion did he think would prevail, his or mine? He agreed to get a haircut.

We were at the threshold of the Vietnam War. The Communist Party was staging rallies all over the place. They naturally loved red and waved large red banners to gather crowds.

One day, I received a phone call from the CO of a LORAN station on Kyushu saying he had been told by the cook that the Communists were going to protest the station because it would be used to direct bomber planes to attack them. We, of course, had no such intent or equipment to do so.

So I said for him to send word reminding the police chief that Japan had the responsibility to protect this station, and then invited the protestors to tour the station to show that LORAN is a passive system and unable to control air squadrons. Then, I invited them to the mess hall and treated them to cookies and coffee. The plan went over big. The protestors were satisfied and grinned ear-to-ear as they marched off, still waving their red banners and munching on American cookies!

Meanwhile, back on the base...life goes on American-style—American schools through high school, Little League football and softball, Girl Scouts with Mary a Leader, Cub Scouts with me a Pack Leader, and a joint program with a Japanese Cub Pack that tested our “protocol.”



Scott learned to ride at the Imperial Stables

My Japanese secretary told me her Catholic church had a Cub Scout Pack and it would be nice to invite them to the base. From that suggestion grew this program.

In the base auditorium, we would seat the American Cubs on one half of the room and the Japanese Cubs on the other half. (Which side is the “honor side”? We are on an American base located on sovereign Japanese soil.)

Facing the stage, we put the Japanese Cubs on the right side and the Americans on the left.

Parading the Colors, we had the Japanese Cubs come down their side simultaneously with the American Cubs coming down their side. Both Color Guards mounted the stage and on meeting they crossed their flags, so now the honors were reversed! (The generals and admirals in the audience didn't say a word!)



Karen studied Japanese dance and performed at the Meiji Shrine

Next, with recorded music, each side in turn sang their anthem.

I was next “on stage” to lead them in yelling. When I raised my right hand, that side of the room yelled. Ditto left side, with variations of long, short, unexpected reversals, etc. This lung exercise was concluded with singing a song both sides knew. (Can you guess?) “ABCDEFGH, HIJK...” etc.

Now to end the joint meeting, the American boys were instructed to pick out a Japanese boy and lead him through the Cookie & Punch line and say “Sayonara.” End of joint meeting...a great success.



Christy was elected Worthy Advisor in the International Order of the Rainbow for Girls

their entire bodies. They drove modern hook-and-ladder trucks in addition to walking, and at a designated area performed handstands and other acrobatics atop extended ladders. Quite a show!

Another great tradition to watch was an archery-on-horseback contest. There was a runway for the horse to gallop past a mounted bulls-eye target. The mounted archer had to draw and fit the arrow to the bow and shoot at the target while at a full hands-off gallop! Very exciting!

I could go on, but suffice to say we made the most of absorbing a little of the Japanese culture. We read about the forty-seven ronin before visiting the Nagoya Castle. Mary, Terry, and I took a course in the ancient martial art of Aikido. Scott took judo. We all trained for and climbed Mt. Fuji! Scott learned to ride a horse at the Royal Emperor’s Stable. They played “musical chairs” on horseback, and Scott made his mount jump a little fence!

Ancient Japanese. Their history is loaded with old traditions that are often celebrated with parades in ancient costumes, with warriors in battle dress riding horses and a dozen or so men carrying a huge palanquin bearing three or four bass drummers, or a portable shrine, or even a newly trained Geisha.

New Year’s Day celebrated firemen with a parade in traditional costume consisting of large white diapers and exposed tattoos covering

Remember **R.H.I.P.** (Rank Hath Its Privileges)? There was a charter airline connecting bases where we could go to Manila or even Hawaii on space available. I was several times the ranking passenger. On deplaning, all passengers would be held back while an intercom announcement would state, "Captain Sinclair and family deplaning!" One Christmas, I took leave and we went as a space-available family to New Delhi and Thailand. It was wonderful!

Just one more story about my Far East Command: When the Commandant of the Coast Guard came through on his annual inspection trip, it was my responsibility to set up a reception for him. We always used the Sanno Hotel in Tokyo, which was a U.S. military billet. Ranking officers would be invited and cute waitresses would circulate with trays of drinks and snacks and they would take refill orders. It would be easy to drink too much, so we had trained the waitresses to recognize an order for "Mizu on the Rocks" (mizu meaning "water"). We could safely drink with our unsuspecting guests by drinking "water on ice."

For a great departure gift, the Japanese government presented me with a medal, ribbon, rosette, and a scroll with the Emperor's han stamp entitled the "**Third Order of the Sacred Treasure**," for my work obtaining sites for the new LORAN-C system.

Our flight home completed our 'round-the-world flight, piecing together segments from Tokyo to Manila to Madrid to London to New York! A time break made a tour of Western Europe possible. There were only five of us rather than the usual six, because Terry was at the Coast Guard Academy. Upon arrival in the U.S., we stayed with Mary's aunt Bertha and uncle George as we had going and coming from Puerto Rico years before.

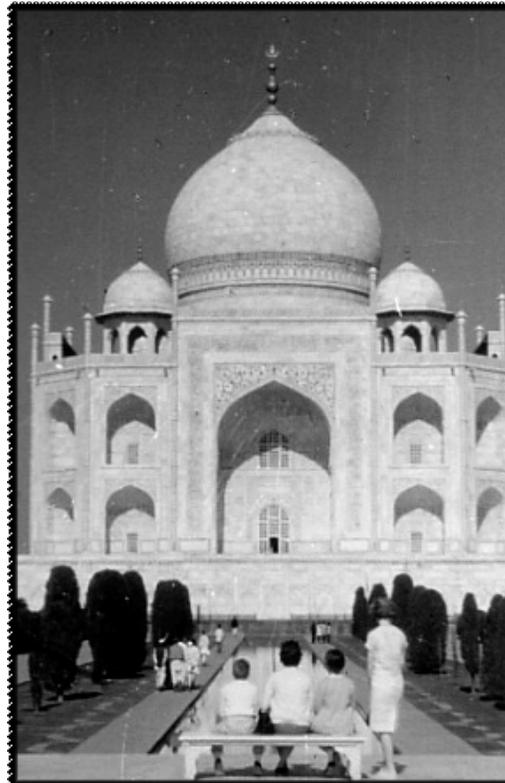
Now it is Sayonara to Japan as I turn my focus to my first "desk job."



Terry graduated from Narimasu High School in Tokyo



Our family on Mt. Fuji, with nephew Roy Sinclair (seated second from left)



Scott, Mary, Karen, and Christy viewing the Taj Mahal, Agra, India