



COURTESY OF CHUCK VITEK

Revisiting the Philippines:

In the days of legends and superstition, before the conquerors from Spain, the Japanese and before the Americans, there existed a Philippine village of fishermen who plied the abundant waters of Subig, as the bay was then called. They foraged in the mountains and traded with the small, dark and mysterious people known as *Aeta*, who had inhabited the forests for more than 30,000 years.

The village *Apo*, or chieftain, was a much beloved, wise and benevolent man who ensured that all his people lived content and tranquil lives.

But, as in every such legend, there were evildoers, quarreling and feuding clans who envied the peace and prosperity of the fishing villagers. They kidnapped the *Apo*, beheaded him and left his body on the beach as a ghastly warning to sow terror in the hearts of the people.

And, as in every such legend, there was one brave village youth who set out to find the chieftain's head and return it for a proper burial. He hacked his way deep into the jungle and experienced many adventures until, to his horror, he finally came upon the *Apo*'s head impaled on a bamboo pole.

The boy reverently removed the head and carried it back to the shores of Subig where he was greeted by children who proceeded him into the village shouting "*ulo ng Apo!*" meaning "head of the chieftain."

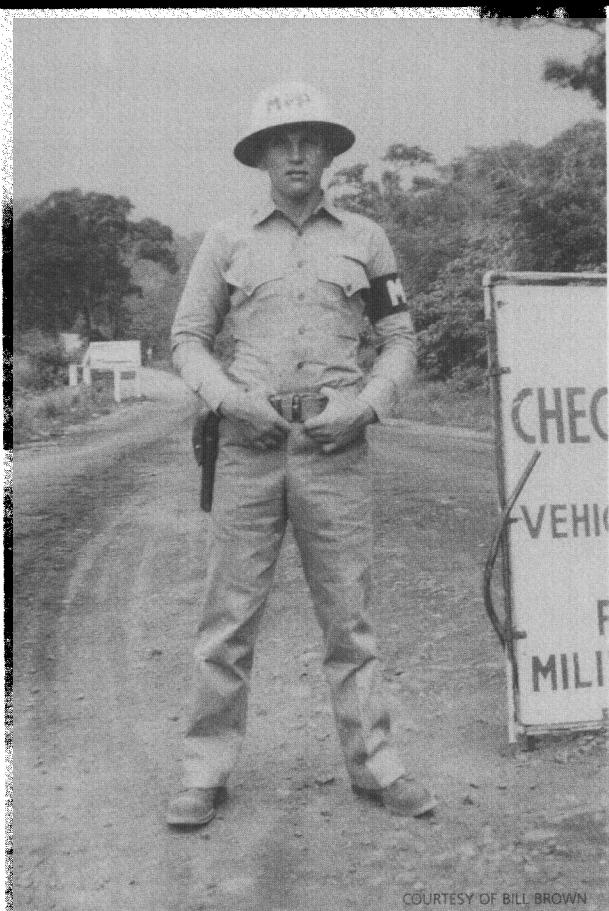
The boy's bravery in returning the *Apo*'s head also served to bring the warring clans together so that harmony could be restored to the village. In time, so the legend goes, the village came to be known as Olongapo.

It is doubtful that a Marine such as Captain John Twiggs "Handsome Jack" Myers would have heard or even cared about such legends on the morning of Saturday, Sept. 23, 1899. He was too busy leading a force of approximately 70 leathernecks ashore, under fire from a coast-defense battery and rifles, manned by descendants of those fishermen of Olongapo who had, in recent times, become insurrectionists.

The inhabitants of the 7,107 islands that comprise the Philippines were at war. Warfare was common for the Southeast Asian archipelago, with its myriad of clans whose tongues argued in 87 dialects; it was a veritable Tower of Babel. These

were the people who, in 1521, met the Spanish explorer Ferdinand Magellan, with war clubs, on the island of Mactan. Magellan's ships eventually circumnavigated the globe. The explorer, however, as the *Apo* before him, was slain on a Philippine beach. This act brought the Spaniards, the yoke of colonialism and the Spanish language, or "88th dialect," to the Philippines. Then, in 1898 the Americans threw out the Spanish after sinking their ships in Manila Bay. In response, the Philippine people attempted to throw out the Americans, not wanting yet another "dialect," or to be governed by Yankees who called them "little brown brothers."

The Americans, however, were not about to leave. It took no genius to recognize the prize that was the Philippines and the nautical and naval potential of Subic Bay. Eight miles long and $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles wide, Subic Inlet, part of Luzon Island's Bataan Peninsula, sits strategically on the South China Sea, 30 miles from the entrance of the much larger Manila Bay. In the center of Subic Bay's mouth is Grande Island with its small companion, Chiquita Islet.



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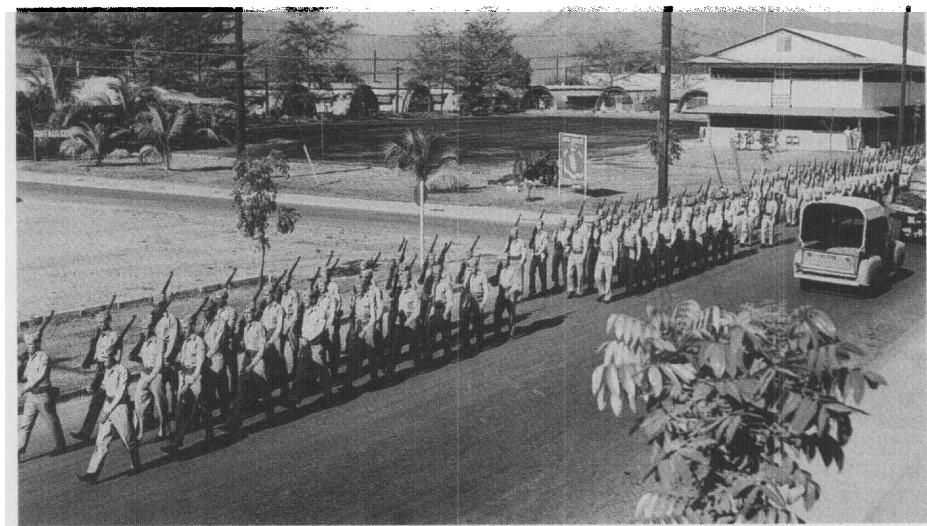
Subic Bay Marines Return to Their Old Barracks

Story by R. R. Keene

Near the middle of the bay's eastern shore is a splendid harbor. On the northern shore of the harbor sat the barrio, or village, of Olongapo. To the east is Rivera Point, with its Spanish naval station projecting into the water and marking a division between the outer harbor and inner harbor, which has always provided good shelter for vessels in the roughest weather.

Consequently, Capt Myers and his expeditionary force were not to be rebuffed. "Handsome Jack" had his orders: "Take charge of the [old Spanish] Naval Station at Olongapo. Hold the same against the enemy and take care of all public property and prevent any destruction of the same."

He did, and by spring the Marines had "civilized 'em with a Krag," referring to their rifles, and liquidated rebel forces around Subic. Myers, followed by Capt Herbert L. Draper, began pacification projects. They held elections for local officials, established schools, built roads, issued rations, controlled the flow of rice and supplies and guarded Navy facilities. The Marines at Olongapo eventually reorganized into a two-regiment bri-



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Top: In 1990, Subic Bay's harbor (left) saw the last of its heydays as a port for the 7th Fleet. Liberty-bound sailors had to clear Marine guards such as Bill Capek (center) in order to visit Olongapo (right).

Above: Barracks Marines marched to a parade in February 1954.

gade of nearly 1,600 officers and men.

Captains Myers and Draper were the first of 87 officers to command what became Marine Barracks, Olongapo and, eventually, MB, Subic Naval Base. With the exception of a period from

December 1941 to March 1945, when Japanese Imperial forces attacked and occupied the Philippines, there were leathernecks on duty at Olongapo and Subic Bay for 90 years, until the Americans left in November 1992.



Above: Subic's Navy transient BOQ has been expanded into the swank Subic Legenda Resort Casino. A large casino is being built next to it.

Left: The base chapel, which is considered a landmark, still remains and holds services for mostly Filipino parishioners.



After putting down the insurrectionists and dealing with occasional bolo-armed *ladrones*, or bandits, leatherneck life in the Philippines at the turn of the century was reasonably mundane. The reservation, however, was considered an excellent training area. Marines broke the boredom with marches. One battalion march covered 100 miles in less than five days. Another detachment marched 50 miles in 36 hours without excessive fatigue. Aside from lancing foot blisters after marches, recreation in the early years consisted of hunting, fishing and swimming. There was a rifle tournament in 1902 with Marines from throughout the Philippines competing. The Olongapo team proved they could shoot as well as hike, and they swept every event.

By 1906 a volunteer band provided entertainment as well as martial music at formal events. One of the favorite songs was "The Monkeys Have No Tails in

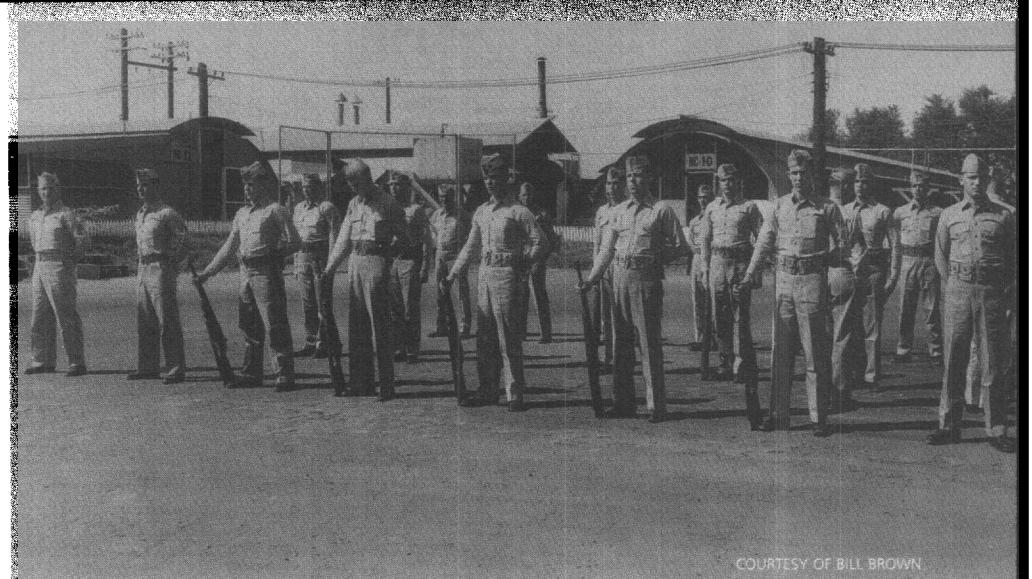


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Zamboanga," which Olongapo-based Marines parodied by singing: "Oh, we won't go back to Subic, Where they mix our wine with *Tubig*; Oh, we won't go back to Subic anymore." (*Tubig*, in the dialect of Tagalog, means water, and the concoction summed up life in the Philippines for most Marines.)

By 1919 things were looking up. Olongapo had "a satisfactory YMCA, but few other advantages." By the late 1930s things were pretty good. *Leatherneck* magazine reported there were moonlight parties on the beach where leathernecks danced with local girlfriends and sang songs in Tagalog, Ilokano or Spanish.

Then came World War II. On December 26, 1941, while Japanese troops occupied Manila and fought American and Filipino forces on Bataan, Marine Capt Francis H. Williams and a detail of leathernecks set demolition charges on



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anything of value at the naval base. They blew the base, as it was then, into oblivion. They left Olongapo in flaming ruins and headed for the last bastion of American resistance on the Manila Harbor island of Corregidor.

The U.S. Navy and Marines would return in 1945. The Commanding General, Marine Garrison, 14th Naval District in Hawaii was ordered to form the 26th Provisional Marine Company and assigned it to guard duty at the United States Naval Reservation, Olongapo. Activated on June 7, the four officers and 100 enlisted men commanded by Major John M. Rutledge arrived at Cavite on Sept. 11 in USS *Electra* (AKA-30). On Sept. 14, an advance party of two officers and 30 men proceeded to Olongapo by boat while the remaining leathernecks went to Manila to unload the company's equipment and trucked several hours over the dust-clogged road to Olongapo. The reoccupation of Olongapo by Marines dates from Sept. 14, 1945.

Among those who found themselves in the Philippines at the time were Privates First Class Pete Diaz and Dan Boland (who in March returned with

approximately 50 former members of the Subic Bay Marine Association who were stationed at Marine Barracks from 1945 to 1992).

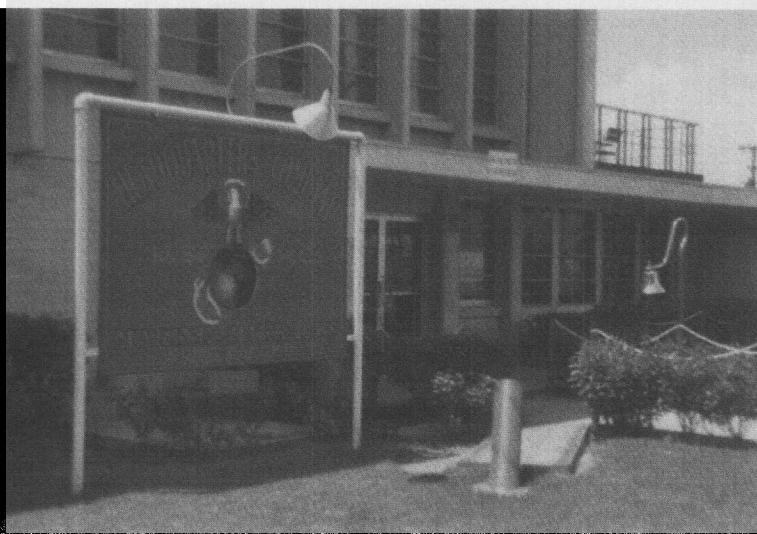
"We were scheduled for the invasion of Japan," said Diaz. "When the war ended, half of us went to China and the rest of us arrived with the Provisional Marine Company. The Philippines received its independence in 1946 and, at the time, there were problems with *Huks*, or *Hukbalahaps* [a Communist-led People's Liberation Army more properly known as *Hukbong Magpapalayang Bayan*]." There was widespread discontent between the land owners whom the Filipinos called "the damn rich," and the poor farmers whom the Filipinos called "the damn poor."

In the meantime, the Navy, with Sea-Bees, constructed a new base on the spot where Olongapo originally stood, and a new city sprung up 1,000 yards from the beach.

"It is not a pretty town in the daylight," wrote *Leatherneck* correspondent Sergeant Harry Polete in 1946, "just a group of squalid huts. But, when darkness hides the squalor, and the colored lights of the innumerable night clubs are



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Marine Barracks (above), well-known to leathernecks since the 1960s, has been renovated and is one of the casinos and hotels on the old naval base that caters to high-rolling gamblers around the clock. The barracks (left), shown here in the late 1960s, was also manned around the clock but for far different reasons.

heightened by the garish music of three- and four-piece orchestras, Olongapo takes on a definite air of hurdy-gurdy. It lasts throughout the night, or as long as anyone is willing to part with his pesos and disappears like a wraith when the first light of dawn again reveals the place in its drab reality." Since then the town has grown, but the "hurdy-gurdy" has remained.

Old-timers, men who pulled duty at Subic Bay before the war, recognized very few features of the rebuilt naval base. The old Spanish Gate remained,

and the old guard shack at the main gate still stood but was demoted to a tool shed. A new gate, farther up the road, led to Olongapo.

The old Marine barracks was destroyed during the war. The returning leathernecks were initially garrisoned under tents. Eventually, Quonset huts were erected to serve as barracks. Some were converted into homes for the few fortunate to be accompanied by their wives.

Single Marines, such as Boland and Diaz, kept busy protecting the base.

Black-market activities were rampant. To combat contraband trade, two check stations were established: one on Manila Road and the other on Subic Road. Both stations were to inspect all persons entering or leaving those thoroughfares. Marine patrols were instituted, and all intelligence reports were followed by investigations. Raids were common. Leathernecks packing pistols, shotguns and "billy" clubs confiscated government property. Suspects were cuffed and arrested, and, if found guilty, convicted of black-marketeering.

Marines were also posted at the two gates leading into the navy yard, and everyone entering or leaving was subject to examination. One sailor recalled: "It was no easy matter getting off base. For both actions, a person had to get in line and wait until it was his turn to be inspected, even frisked. Marines searched for contraband. I was caught 'smuggling' a box of chocolate-covered cherries. I had three choices: stay on base, eat the contents before leaving base or dump the contents before proceeding through the gate. I did a combination of the second and third choices."

Consequently, black-market activities became practically nonexistent.

The Marines also resumed one of their prewar duties, acting as reservation po-

lice, which consisted of patrolling the town of Olongapo as civilian police. They also operated the civilian prison.

Although the Philippines had been declared independent, the Americans retained the use of the military facilities under the 1947 Military Bases Agreement. The importance of Subic Bay manifested itself in the 1950s as it became a logistics hub providing support to the United States Navy during the Korean War. The expansion of the Navy's Seventh Fleet made Subic Bay the busiest port in the western Pacific. It remained so in the 1960s during the Vietnam War and in 1991 during the Gulf War.

Marines found, once a man became acclimatized to the heat and humidity, that the starched khaki uniforms, with white web duty belts and pith helmets, would not soak up as much sweat under the tropical sun. Early mornings were the best time for inspections and physical training. Wednesday mornings were reserved for close-order drill. It was also a good time to present arms and eyeball pretty Filipinas headed for work on base.

As the base grew in size and importance so did the leatherneck presence. For the Corps' Asia hands, Subic Bay was an ideal training base. It had everything from jungle, escape and evasion training and live-fire ranges to miles of beach for amphibious assault training as well as miles of trails for small-unit jungle tactics. Marines from the barracks provided security at the Naval Air Station, Cubi Point, which opened in 1956 and secured the small-arms storage areas, magazine areas and posts at ship piers. They also protected the base's 10,000-acre virgin rain forest and 5,000-acre watershed from loggers. Additionally, they helped train three auxiliary Security Force companies of the Ground Defense Force and provided security at nearby Capas and San Miguel compounds as well as Subic Bay's U.S. Naval Magazine.

It was a good place for young Marines to learn: The report of a sentry's M1 rifle rang out from the dog-watch guard at the Naval Magazine. It was circa 1953 when Staff Sergeant Charlie Silver, the guard commander, received a call from one of the posts manned by Private Bill Brown. "I need more ammunition. I'm under attack."

"Under attack? From who?" Silver asked.

"Monkeys."

"This I gotta see," said Silver hopping into his jeep. On the scene he found Brown standing combat ready under the moonlight, with his rifle still smoking and its clips empty.



One of the most popular places today to get a cold beer and possibly the best burgers in the Philippines is the Scuba Shack (above), which sits on the beach. That was true in 1953 when it was a slop chute (left). The only thing that remains from the old Spanish Naval Station is the "Spanish Gate" (below).



Bill Brown returned to the Philippines in March and got a glimpse of the monkeys whose ancestors he shot at while on guard in 1953.



"I'm not kidding, they attacked, but I let 'em have it," said Brown.

"Well, where are the dead and wounded?" asked Silver.

Brown had challenged those on or near his post, but there was no indication that a battle of major proportion had taken place. "I guess they carried 'em off."

Somewhere in the jungle, a monkey howled with laughter.

It was, as the old veterans will tell anyone who asks, a good duty station.

Capt Cliff Cormier, the training officer and Cubi guard commander in the mid-1950s, found his overseas assignment much more welcome than his assignment as an artillery officer on Iwo Jima. At Subic, he captained men like former Sgt Dixon Poole, who still calls him "skipper" and "fondly" remembers serving EPD (extra police duty) by launching clay pigeons at the skeet range.

Marines confronted situations unique to the Philippines, such as a water buffa-

lo running amok on base or finding a snake steamed on the engine block of a lieutenant's automobile. For some non-careerists, like former Corporal Larry Mauro, duty in the "P.I." (Philippine Islands), as it was called, is still the main source of their memories while they served in the Corps.

An old salt, George Lunt, served more than one tour, married Trinni, his pretty Filipina girlfriend, raised a family and retired in California. A few, such as former Capt Jim Bassett, were able to bring their families on an exotic adventure they'd remember for a lifetime. Chris Acosta is a veteran of three tours at the barracks. Of course, he is also originally from the Philippines. So too is Santiago "Sam" Togonon, who wanted nothing more than to be a Marine and became one. He reported into the barracks in 1957 wearing full dress blues, much to the amusement of the barracks' senior enlisted leatherneck, future Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Herbert

Sweet, who was also duly impressed with Sgt Togonon's military bearing. Both Acosta and Togonon eventually retired as master gunnery sergeants.

By the 1960s, Vietnam was becoming the destination for ships of the Seventh Fleet. As bases and port cities go, Subic and Olongapo were in their heydays. During the Vietnam War, up to 170 ships were anchored at any one time sending (in 1967) more than four million sailors ashore on liberty. Subic's operating budget was near \$160 million a year, and it provided employment for 30,000 civilians.

When Ferdinand E. Marcos became president in 1965, he not only had to contend with a Huk problem but also had to deal with student and other popular uprisings against economic conditions and government policies, in addition to a Muslim secessionist movement.

The political situation affected the state of readiness of the leathernecks at Subic. Marines serving at the barracks in the 1960s, such as Jim Provencher, Chuck Vitek and Curtis Erickson, trained and prepared for a myriad of contingencies. The garrison was beefed up to 630 men and moved into larger, more modern two-story buildings closer to the main gate.

By the early 1970s, the war in Vietnam was beginning to wind down, but the Philippines was on the verge of igniting. In August 1972, Marcos declared martial law. He remained president for 21 years. Marines remember saying: "You know you've been in the Philippines too long when somebody says 'president' and you think of Marcos."

Marcos eventually was forced, in 1986, to step down. But, the Philippines remained an unstable and poor third world nation. Even today, 40 percent of its people live below the poverty line, and the middle class can't afford to buy automobiles. Citizens did have one thing going for them: English had become the median language of the people. More than 30 million, or 41 percent, speak English fluently, are well-educated and work in professional occupations.

There was one more thing. Poor as they were, many people of the Philippines, as they had at the dawn of the 20th century, felt it was time for the American bases to close. They reasoned that Subic and Clark Air Base to the northwest would benefit more people if they were used for commercial rather than military ventures. The idea was not initially taken seriously.

There had, however, been signs, as far back as 1972, when a Filipino named Richard J. Gordon, son of an American, became the youngest member of the



The Olongapo Market still thrives. Sold here is a uniquely Filipino delicacy, *balut*, a fermented duck's egg with an embryo still inside. Shown by the bushels above, it tests the intestinal fortitude of those who claim to be "old Asia hands."



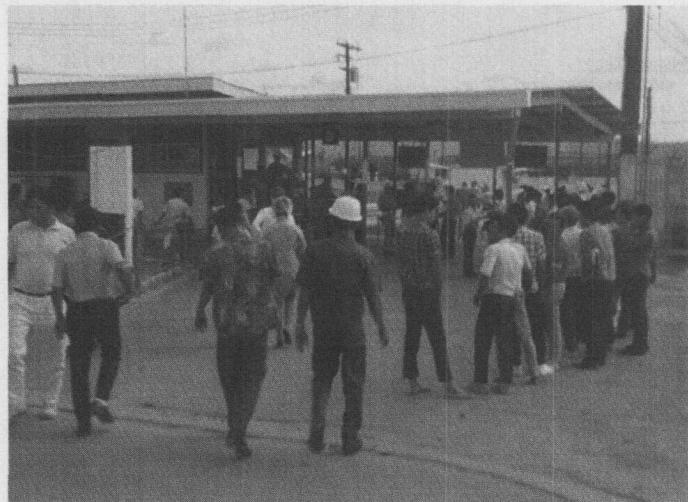
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Philippine Constitutional Convention at age 26. He conceptualized the idea of a free port, anticipating the eventual withdrawal of the U.S. Navy. At the time the idea went unnoticed by the Philippine government.

Then, in June 1991, the people, for the most part devoutly Catholic, thought the hand of providence had intervened when Mount Pinatubo erupted. Only 20 kilometers from Clark, it all but buried the air base and dumped 12 to 18 inches of ash, or *lahar*, on Olongapo. In September 1991, the Philippine government rejected the renewal of the United States Military Bases Agreement. Shortly thereafter, Gordon, then mayor of Olongapo, and thousands of local residents rallied for Congress to create a free port. In March 1992, Republic Act No. 7227 was passed, creating Subic Bay Free-port.

Almost no one, Filipino or American, believed it would really happen. When it did, Colonel Sands A. Robnick realized that he was to be the last commanding officer of MB, Subic Bay.

Most of the *lahar* from the volcano was cleaned out of Subic and Olongapo by August. The Air Force gave up Clark. "But, there was still no indication then that Subic was closing. Families, evacuated prior to the eruption, returned in September, and life returned to normal,"



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said Lieutenant Colonel Robert Richardson, then-barracks executive officer, now retired from the Corps. "However, contract negotiations didn't look good. The Philippine Senate denied the treaty in January 1992 and told us, 'You have until December 31, 1992, to leave.' There was a sense of disbelief, cold water in the face."

The closure was left up to Marines, such as LtCol Richardson, then-First Lieutenant Jorge Lizarralde and former Cpl Paul Lowe, to ensure a proper close-out of this chapter in Corps' history.

"We tightened security, made up plans

to phase people out. Families left in June," said Richardson. "Then it was spooky and not the same."

The Navy did its best to clear Subic of all that belonged to the United States. In less than 11 months, they relocated more than 5,800 military and U.S. civilian employees as well as 3,900 dependents, which, at the time, was the largest peacetime movement of people from a military base. Ordnance technicians cleared more than 40,000 tons of explosives from the Naval Magazine. More than 450,000 tons of material ranging from floating dry docks to pork tenderloin

The main gate today (above) hasn't changed since 1968 when it was manned by U.S. and Philippine Marines (left). Today, Filipinos buy passes that will allow them limited shopping rights in the duty-free port.



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Above: Building 229 was the headquarters of the Commander, Naval Forces, Subic Bay and is now Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority headquarters.

Right: If one thinks barracks' life is spartan today, it cannot compare to life and inspection in a sultry Quonset hut in 1953.



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were sold or disposed of. However, the Navy still handed over facilities worth an estimated \$1.3 billion, including a 26.5-megawatt power plant.

The amphibious landing helicopter assault ship USS *Belleau Wood* (LHA-3) and her Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) pulled into Subic Bay to load up the last Marines. Lowe, now a sergeant in the Army, recalled: "The gates had been closed for weeks at a time during the talks, and the majority of Marines were disappointed in leaving. It was intense, but when we finally went to the *Belleau Wood*, it was nice to have it done."

Most of the 800 *Belleau Wood* Marines and the 550 former members of

Marine Barracks busied themselves with plans for new assignments and a port call on Okinawa, a little more than 800 miles north.

"It was a congenial but benign transition," said Richardson. "Company A marched to the Cubi Point tarmac [from temporary billeting near the Upper Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) Camp]; B, C and Headquarters Companies had moved into a hangar. On November 24, 1992, we lowered the flag and sailed out."

Richardson, hoping to claim the distinction of being the last Marine out of Subic, waited until every leatherneck was aboard *Belleau Wood* and then

stepped onboard. "I found out later that I wasn't the last. There was a Corporal Rizzo who caught the last 'papa' boat out."

The ships of the USS *Belleau Wood* ARG hadn't gotten underway when Gordon, who had become mayor of Olongapo, declared: "Subic Bay is now open for business for the whole world." In came investors from the United States, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia, followed by Europeans.

The conversion and development of Subic Naval Base was undertaken by the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), a government body. The free-port status made the former base a special customs area that allows a free flow of goods and capital within its territory. Investors enjoy tax and duty exemptions on imported raw materials, supplies, capital equipment and other items for consumption within the free port.

The current population of 3,000 also enjoys an exceptional quality of life, safe and virtually crime-free.

The Naval air station was renamed Subic Bay International Airport and accommodates both domestic and international flights. A newly constructed passenger terminal can handle up to 700 people per hour. It is also the Asian Regional Hub for Federal Express, averaging 30 aircraft movements a night. There are also flights to most major Asian cities.

When the U.S. Navy pulled out, it left 1,876 housing units nestled in the forests at Kalyaan, Binictican and Cubi. More than 1,000 of those units are now available for lease to investors. Additional residential sites will be available in the near future. The marina will also be available for development.

Brent International School, which provides primary and secondary education to children of foreigners residing in the free port as well as to those from around the area, will also be improved. The Subic Legend Health and Medical Center is being developed at the former Cubi Naval Hospital and will have a 150-bed capacity. It will become an international-class medical facility, which will cater to general and specialist medical needs and include a "health-wellness" center.

There is also a wide range of tourism and recreational facilities to include hotels, beaches, water sports, casinos, restaurants, bars and a marina. Golfing, diving, go-kart racing, bowling and duty-free shopping are also available, as well as eco-tourism.

The Japanese International Cooperation Agency is studying the waterfront area to create a Subic Port Master Plan for optimizing port investments.

The Naval Magazine is open to development compatible with the preservation of the National Integrated Protected Areas System. Under the master plan for the free port, the magazine area was designated for recreational and tourism use. The proposed development includes a Subic Bay Nature Park, a low density and high value resort complex and a marine park, as well as adventure tourism and areas for future low-impact industrial warehousing. Also, Shell Oil has invested \$4 million for the construction of a platform to be towed to Palawan Island for the Shell-Malmpaya oil rig project.

The Redondo Peninsula is a 3,800-hectare area that has been the target of developer interest for up-scale subdivisions, golf courses and resort hotels.

Olongapo proper has improved and prospered, too. Kate Gordon, the wife of Richard Gordon, is now the mayor. One year after the U.S. Navy left, she closed the bars and ordered the town cleaned up. With the expansion of the free port, investment opportunities for urban redevelopment are increasing, and Olongapo has shed its bawdy reputation as a Navy town.

The SBMA recently celebrated its seventh anniversary, and it looks like it will celebrate many more.

Approximately 50 former members of



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The pier (above), where the behemoth American aircraft carriers once moored, now welcomes merchant vessels. This sign (below) remains as a friendly parting shot from the Naval Supply Depot.



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Marine Barracks returned in March for a possible final look at the site where they spent a few years of their youth. They noted that the old Navy transient Bachelor Officers' Quarters had been expanded and is now the swank Malaysian-owned Subic Legenda Resort Casino, whose manager, Walt Powell, is a former Marine. The old Officers' Club is now the popular Seafront Restaurant. The Master Chief Petty Officers' Quarters now house the Subic International Hotel. The once-popular Marine Staff Noncommissioned Officers' Club still stands but has a date with a wrecking ball.

The lower MAU Camp has converted the Quonset huts, added air-conditioning and made them, if one believes such a

thing possible, into posh mini-quarters. The same goes for the upper MAU Camp. And, the Marine Barracks, where last stood those leathernecks who checked posts and patrolled the fence line of the largest American naval base in the western Pacific, is now a casino and hotel.

"You know," said Richardson, referring to his duties, "the barracks was unique because there was a serious and viable mission. The patrolling, shooting and training were designed to counter opposing forces. We had 'E.I.s,' or economic intruders, always trying to enter the base because they were so poor, and we had so much."

"Family-wise it was the best tour of my career," he said. "We had two young ones and lots of leisure time to be with family."

Others who served at Subic Bay with less say being members of the Marine Barracks was more. They say a Marine Barracks is more than a few spartan buildings with a dour sign that warns "A Marine on Duty Has No Friends." A Marine Barracks is a fraternal order of men and friendship who can, as in the case of the Philippines, trace their common bonds, tribulations and heritage back to those leathernecks who came ashore with Krag rifles in denim shirts and under Stetson hats with "Handsome Jack" Myers.

Former Pvt Bill Brown, who once skirmished with monkeys and is now president of the Subic Bay Marine Association, nudged former Sgt Dixon Poole, who pulled EPD on the skeet range, and said: "Dixon, for old times sake, let's go over the fence."

