



C-133 on ramp

My Best C-133A Trip



Capt. George Stoner

1971 would see the end of a great career for the C-133A. I had joined the 1st MAS at Dover AFB, Delaware in 1965 when the fleet was grounded. I took my first flight as Navigator in May. The mission went to Southeast Asia and lasted six weeks. We would return home for three days crew rest and begin the cycle over again. This was how it went during the Vietnam War. Out of those 6 years, I was out of the CONUS, 5 years, 7 months and 9 days, all TDY. I had also earned the 5000 hour flying pin.

Flying in a C-133 is an experience few people can appreciate. As crew members in C133 aircraft, we flew all around the world to many exotic places. One of the things that made the C-133 interesting was the fact that we, typically, only flew one leg a day. This meant that many times, after eight hours of flying, we were done. Of course this wasn't always true, when we flew in the Pacific there were many 24-hour crew duty days. We found ourselves with an augmented crew and very long days with multiple stops. What the crews look forward to most was going somewhere they hadn't seen before. During my flying in the C-133, we went most of the major places in the world taking outsized cargo of one kind or another. We would fly both east and west out of Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. The C-133 was unique in that the greater part of its life span covered the Vietnam War. From the time in the early 1960's when Vietnam was building, until the aircraft's decommissioning in late 1971, we were taking many supply flights into Thailand and Vietnam. Our normal schedule from Dover AFB was to fly to Travis AFB, CA. through the Pacific into Vietnam or Thailand and return to Travis AFB. There we would be turned back to the Pacific and repeat the roundtrip over again. It was the rare occasion that we would fly east over the Atlantic Ocean and have a trip to Europe. These were always exciting and interesting because, typically, they did not go to places that we normally flew.



Downtown Madrid, Spain

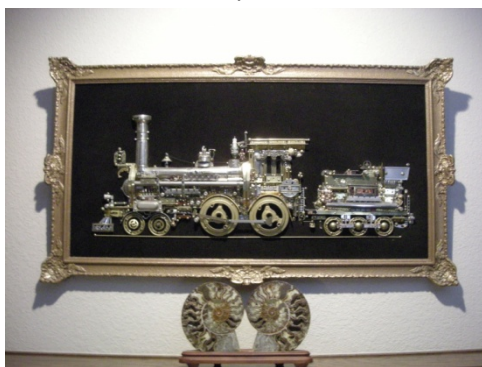
Such was the case in February of 1971. What started out to be an interesting but routine mission turned into one of the memorable flights of my entire career. The mission seemed simple enough, we were to fly two communications vans into Asmara, Ethiopia. The flight was to take us across the Atlantic into the Azores, where we would refuel and crew rest. The next leg took this into Torrejon AFB, Madrid, Spain. We always looked forward to going to Madrid because of the wonderful restaurants and great shopping.

When we went to Madrid we only stayed for crew rest and left immediately after 12 hours on the ground. On this occasion, we would stay in Madrid while diplomatic clearance was being arranged for us to fly on through Saudi Arabia. This meant a 24-hour layover instead of our normal 12 and 3. Now there was time to go to the Plaza d'Mayor and sample suckling pig at Earnest Hemingway's favorite restaurant.



Plaza d'Mayor

At home, the living rooms of most MAC fliers were festooned with a combination of articles brought back from all around the world. There were ceramic elephants from India and Thailand. There were Hibachi Pots from Japan and all manner of furniture from the Philippines. Anything that would fit on a C-133 on our return trips, when we were empty of cargo, was permitted to be brought back. Usually the results were only limited by the willingness of your fellow crew members to on-load and off-load the shopping articles at each interim crew rest point. So on this particular flight, in February of 1971, landing at Madrid at Torrejon Air Force Base presented a myriad of shopping opportunities. For those who enjoyed the Spanish wines, many inexpensive high quality wines were available at the Class VI store. There was Spanish art work and many of us brought that back. Much of the art was oil on canvas,



but the regular assortment of nudes painted on black velvet abounded. On this trip the officers club was having a huge art show. On display were artists from all over the area. As we came in the door, one particular piece attracted my attention - it was a 36" x 24" piece of junk art. The artist Vincent Hayden, was doing a whole series of artwork based on vintage American and European cars. Most of them were in a 12" x 8" format. The particular one that I looked at was a vintage 1860's steam locomotive. It was made up of a thousand

pieces of everything from thimbles, to garter clips, to flashlight lantern housings, to wheel weights, to lamp bases. They were put all put together to form one of the most interesting and eye-catching pieces of art that I've ever seen. I ask him the price for the piece and was reluctantly told it was the model for a piece that he had done for the American Museum of Modern Art in New York City and was not for sale. The museum piece had all the pieces gold plated and was on display in New York that very day. We went into the club to eat and after came back out and talked with him again. This time I offered to buy

several of the vintage cars, if he would also allow me to purchase the larger the vintage locomotive. After much haggling we agreed on a price. The smaller automobiles, I purchased, have been packed away in the attic for some years, but the steam locomotive has prominently hung over our fireplace for almost 40 years attracting the attention of anyone who comes in the room. We always have to ask them: "what's the first piece that you noticed." Most of the time, they aren't aware that it's made up of pieces of junk. Then they look more carefully and pick out one or two things that attracted their eye. Interestingly enough, the two most frequently picked pieces are a thimble of which their several and the garter snap to hold up silk stockings. I was not alone in picking out and taking home some of this art.

Our crew consisted of Major Jerry flood, pilot in command; First Lt. Larry McFarland, co-pilot; myself, George Stoner, Navigator; Technical Sergeant Charles Payne, First Engineer, Tech Sergeant Thomas Gamble, Second Engineer; Technical Sergeant Frank Merritt, Loadmaster and Staff Sergeant John Seddon, Loadmaster. All of the officers took at least one piece of the junk art automobiles with them, and as I recall, even a couple of the enlisted crew managed to come in and take a look to.

We didn't get diplomatic clearance while we are at Torrejon. We were told to fly on to Incirlik, Turkey and the diplomatic clearance would be available when we arrived. The flight to Incirlik was uneventful. That evening we were able to get a good meal at the officers club and buy our favorite delicacy, pistachio nuts by the kilo. Other things available for sale there were; Turkish carpets, camel saddles and all kinds of woodcarvings. Mercham (a white soft carved stone) pipes and chess sets were particularly valuable.

The next day we got up and were told that our clearance had been procured. We were on our way to Kagnew Station, Asmara, Ethiopia. Now for the navigator, going across Saudi Arabia and down into Ethiopia presented many challenges. Those of you reading this today look at the GPS mounted on the window of your car or popping up from its dash, and say "How hard can it be to find your way across country." For those of you who flew C-133s, you remember that navigation had just come out of the dead reckoning of World War II. Most of the navigation depended on taking celestial fixes with the D-1 periscopic sextant and using whatever radio waves may be available, such as Loran A or C. Loran radio stations were located around the Mediterranean and the Atlantic seaboard, primarily to promote crossing the Atlantic Ocean by ships at sea. Any signals that were available through the Middle East were weak at best and far beyond the normal range. Remember, the C124 was still in operation when the C-133 was flying and it used a handheld sextant for celestial navigation and a drift meter to look down at the wave caps to help determine wind drift. There were a few TACANs and VORs near commercial airports and along commercial aviation routes. Our flight took us across Saudi Arabia, to Bahrain, then down across the Red Sea into Ethiopia.

Asmara, Ethiopia is at 7546 feet above sea level. This created a take-off and landing problem for the C-133 in the heat of the sub-tropics. We would be able to land without problem with our heavy load, but coming back out we would have to be empty if we were to have full fuel tanks and be able to climb out easily. We landed without problems and taxied in front of base operations. When we went inside, we were told that we would have to cut our crew rest short and only spent 10 hours on the ground.

Asmara, Ethiopia was the Summer Palace for Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia. He was due to land the next afternoon with his entire entourage and would be spending the next several weeks in Asmara. While getting this debriefing, Sergeant Paine came in and told us we had a hydraulic leak in one of the pumps. It would require him replacing the pump and there were no pumps available at Asmara. This would mean requisitioning a pump from the United States and having it shipped over on the next Embassy flight by C-141. The estimated time of arrival for the part was 14 days. Needless to say Base Operations was not happy to hear this information. They told us to take our plane and taxi it to the furthest most point on the apron and park it totally out of the way, so that the U.S. presence wouldn't be prominent when Haile Selassie landed.

We gathered our gear and got in the vehicle to take us to the Empress Hotel which was just outside Kagnew Station in Asmara. The road is about 10 kilometers long between the airport and town. For most of the way there is a high bank on either side of the road. The bank is probably four to 5 feet tall as a result dredging the drainage ditch on either side of the road. When we got into Asmara, we went immediately to the Empress Hotel and checked in. There are seven floors in the hotel. Our rooms were on the fifth floor. The hotel was the best hotel in town and was reminiscent of the best of the European hotels available. It had a huge marble entry and a vaulted common room in front of the mahogany paneled, marble topped, registration desk. The common room was filled with overstuffed leather smoker lounges. The ceilings went up two floors to a highly decorated canopy over the room. Polished marble was everywhere from the floors, to the countertops, to the check-in counter, to the spittoons. The elevator was typically European. Instead of having the double doors that open as our American versions do, it had a single door that opened on a set of right-hand hinges much as a front doorway. When you got on the elevator you would push the button to go to your floor, but unlike American elevators there was no memory. Once the button was pressed, the elevator was going to the floor you selected. It did not stop at intermediate floors, and could not be interrupted by someone else pushing a button requesting a floor stop. When you got to your floor, you pushed back the wire cage and opened the door as you did downstairs. As long as the door was open, no one else could operate the elevator. When the inner cage was closed and the outer door closed, then someone could request the elevator. Our rooms were typical European style rooms with tall elongated windows running from a three foot sill-to-the ceiling. By opening a lever in the middle, you could push both sides of the window outward and sit on the sill. There was no protection from falling to the pavement below. The three officers were all in the same room, so Jerry and Larry and myself each had a bed. Since we were working military, our rooms were on the back of the hotel overlooking a large parking with a 10 foot retaining wall at the far side.

Next on our agenda was finding something to eat. Kagnew Station was only a few blocks away from the hotel and so we headed that direction. It was run by the Navy as a communications post. When we got to the gate we showed our identification



Kagnew Station Main Gate

and the officers headed to the officers club and the NCOs headed to the Top Five Club. After walking several blocks, we came to the officers club and went in, only to find they were not serving meals and there was virtually no one in the club. Being hungry, we headed to the Top Five Club to get an invitation from our NCOs to join them. Thus began one of the most interesting and exciting crew rests I have ever had.



Top Five Grader Club

The NCO club, unlike the officers club, was full of people and going full tilt. We were all dressed in civilian clothes but when our NCOs introduced us, we were immediately told the rules of the club. The Top Five Club never closed. You could get food anytime you wanted and the bar was open 24 hours a day. The primary rule of the club was that you could not leave the club with an unfinished drink in front of you. It did not matter whether you purchased the drink or someone purchased it for you. As a result, there was

more than a fair share of boisterous people in the building. All the serving staff in the club were native Ethiopians. Our Navy counterparts were quick to show us how they exploited some of the superstitions of the Ethiopian staff. The Ethiopians, even in the cities had few indoor bathroom facilities. Those who lived outside of town, which included most of the serving staff, lived in small wood frame or stone houses usually one or two rooms. Their sanitary facilities consisted of digging a trench behind their house which they squatted over. While they squatted over at the trench, they kept a rock in both hands and while they were doing their business, they pounded the rocks together making a large “clacking” sound. This is because they believed that the sound of gas escaping from their body was their spirit leaving. The “clacking” sound, caused by the rocks, was to hide the sound of their soul escaping. Sailors, being what they are, found that they could take a short piece of wood similar to a popsicle stick, and wrap it with a rubber band stretched between the index finger and the thumb. They could then wind the piece of wood up tightly. They would then hold the wood next to the countertop or table and let the wood spin which made a buzzing or “farting” sound. They would wait for an unsuspecting Ethiopian server to come by with a tray full of drinks and let the rubber band unwind. The resulting buzz created a catastrophic result. The Ethiopian server thinking his soul was escaping looked for the quickest exit from the building he could find. This resulted in the tray with all its contents being tossed up in the air, immediately to settle on any unsuspecting diners. During the next several days I watched this harassment cause more than one fight among dinner guests.

Our own contribution to the chaos came from Jerry Flood who made the casual inquiry if anyone had ever seen a beer can cannon before. Well after a several minutes of canvassing the diners nearest us and not finding anyone that had seen a beer can cannon, He and Larry McFarland proceeded to build the first cannon seen by Kagnew Station sailors. Now a beer can cannon, for those of you who don't know, is made up of seven beer cans. The first six cans have the tops and bottoms cut out of them.



Top Five Dining Room

This seventh can is punched with a “church key” to in four places on top and a slot is cut in the bottom. The first six cans are taped together in a tube. The seventh can is taped to the others with the four holes facing down the tube. Two layers of tape are then wrapped around the whole column. To operate the cannon, you place a small amount of lighter fluid in the slot in the seventh can. Next you roll the tube between your hands coating the inside of the seventh can with fluid. Then you move the whole tube up and down to create airflow into the tube. A lighter is then placed at the slot in the bottom and the flame ignites the lighter fluid vapor. The first couple of attempts generally result in a muffled “whoosh”. About the fourth or fifth time, the ignition provides a sound similar to a 12 gauge shotgun going off.

Well, setting the beer can cannon off immediately polarized the room. Most of the group was excited and wanted to see how it worked. The rest, wanted to throw us out on our ear. Once we had several of the cannons made, we started to load them with balled up paper napkins. Every time we set the cannon off, there was a spray of confetti shot clear across the room. From that point on, no one on our crew could buy a drink, but more importantly, there were several drinks always in front of us. Given the rules of the club that meant we weren’t going anywhere for a long while. We found that things tapered off around two or three in the morning and we could finish the drinks in front of us quickly and leave the building.



Haile Selassie - Emperor of Ethiopia

The next day Haile Selassie landed at the airport. This was toward the end of his reign as Emperor and he was extremely concerned about being assassinated. He had a large contingent of a secret police that covered the town as soon as he landed. He then stationed a regiment of his army along the route between the airport and his palace. Every fifth man had a machine gun and was under strict orders to shoot anyone whose head was higher than Haile Selassie’s. With all that in place, Haile Selassie drove into town. People on the upper floors of buildings were warned not to look out the window onto the street where Haile Selassie’s cavalcade ran. We heard of several unfortunate Ethiopians who hadn’t heeded the warning and were shot dead. We came to find out that the secret police were being billeted in the Empress Hotel along with us.

We spent the next several days exploring the town of Asmara. We looked at all the shops to find what was worth buying and bringing back home. One of the things Jerry flood and I found was Australian WWII wool campaign hats. We each selected material for a hat band. I selected a strip of leopard skin. He and I wore these hats while hunting Elk in the Southeastern mountains of Washington State for the next 20 years. I still have mine in my closet.

One day we were on base at Kagnew Station exploring the BX, when we received word that everyone had to go out into the compound just outside the BX. The compound was a walled enclosure that surrounded approximately 1 city block with the PX building in the middle and smaller buildings lining the wall, all the way around. When we got outside we were told we would have to wait there while Haile Selassie had his teeth worked on. We looked up on top of the BX building to see a dental chair in full view of everyone below. Presently, Haile Selassie came and sat in the chair and Navy dentist began to work on his teeth. Over the loudspeaker we were told that no one could leave the compound until all the dental procedures were finished on Haile Selassie. In addition, we were told that if Haile Selassie should die, we would



Haile Selassie - arriving at BX (center of photo facing left)

all die with him. To enforce that, Haile Selassie had placed machine gunners on the roofs of the smaller buildings on the four corners of the compound. They were set up to enfilade the entire grounds below. They had brought all American personnel into the compound that were stationed on the base. At the same time the dentistry was being done, all of Haile Selassie's family was in the BX taking anything that they wanted. Under the status of forces agreement with Ethiopia, Haile Selassie was able to clean out the BX once a year. To that end they had a line of trucks backed up to the front door and a group of his soldiers were loading everything in the BX into the trucks. For the next two hours we watched Haile Selassie having his dental work done and his troops plundering the BX while standing in the heat of the Ethiopian highlands. I'm proud to report that all the dental work came off without a hitch. We were told the BX would be closed for the next two days while they restocked it from the warehouse.

The next morning I got up late to find the rest of the crew gone from the hotel. Not knowing where they had gone, I started a brief search in the markets in town and then went to the base. It was early morning and I hadn't had breakfast. I went to the officer's club first, of but as usual, no one was there. I then went over to the Top Five Club. That turned out to be a serious error in judgment. When I walked in the door I was immediately surrounded by a group of my new found friends from several nights before. None of my crew was there but that didn't matter. I was part of the "Heroes of the Top Five Club." I ordered breakfast and immediately found five drinks placed in front of me at the table. Because Kagnew Station was a missile and satellite tracking station, they worked shifts around the clock. The guys, who surrounded me, had just come off shift. They were ready to party. My crew came in about an hour later and fell into the same trap. The rest of the day became one long cannonade. The cannon battle raged throughout the afternoon, into the night, and well into the early hours of the following morning. None of us have been able to leave because our friends saw to it there were always two or

three drinks in front of us. When we were finally able to finish our drinks and get out the door it was close to 5 a.m. The entire crew was hardly able to stand, let alone walk back to the hotel. When we reached the hotel and crawled up the stairs to the front entrance, we found everyone asleep. Porters were all asleep in the overstuffed leather lounges, the desk clerk had his head lying on the front desk. Snoring reverberated on the huge molded ceilings lined with marble and the beautiful marble walls and pillars. When we realized everyone was asleep, we tried to make as little noise as possible getting to the elevator. We opened the door to the elevator, got in, and pressed the button for the fifth floor. On the way up Jerry, Larry, and I looked at each other. Without saying a word, we each knew what was going to happen next. The engineers just shook their heads and when the door opened on the fifth floor hurried to their rooms. Jerry, Larry and I closed the door to the elevator and pushed the button for the lobby. Clinging to our beer can cannon we quickly began to activate it. By the time the elevator reached the lobby it was fully charged and ready to go. Larry pushed open the door, Jerry pointed the Canon into the lobby, and I put a lighter to the back. The beer can cannon had been well broken in and went off with a thunderous, reverberating explosion that sounded like a field artillery piece in the cavernous marble lobby. We immediately closed door and pushed the button for the seventh floor. When the elevator got to the seventh floor we opened the door and placed a potted palm to hold the door open. We then made a fast exit to the stairs and ran quietly down two flights to the fifth floor and our rooms. What happened next can only be described in World War II movie. The entire hotel came alive. There were shouts from everywhere, men running up and down the halls, officers shouting orders, alarm bells going off in a general cacophony that reached a crescendo with the Secret Service banging on doors in a room to room search. When the searchers came to our room, we innocently asked them what had happened. The soldier who was standing in the door with a rifle said that a man had been shot in the lobby downstairs and they were looking for the murderer. Two other soldiers came in and proceeded to go through each piece of luggage and take every piece of clothing out of it, looking for a weapon. They left all the clothing strewn around the room and then ransacked closets and moved all the furniture. Standing quietly in the corner, behind an overstuffed chair, was the beer can cannon. The head of the search team picked it up, looked at it, and bemused expression came over his face. He looked down the tube and then brought it to his nose to smell it. Not smelling any gunpowder, he simply put up the cannon back where he found it. By this time, all we could think about was getting into bed and getting some sleep. It wasn't until morning we had some realization of what could have happened. I opened the window and was sitting on the window ledge, looking into the parking lot behind the building, when I saw six vertical lines on the concrete wall retaining at the back of the parking lot wall about an even 10 feet apart. The length of the lines was about 6 foot from the ground of the top. I asked Jerry to come over and take a look. He said they looked like bullet marks to him. We both agreed the wall had been used for a firing squad. We decided we were extremely fortunate to have survived the night.

We kept checking each day to find out when our parts were expected. Each day we were told the original Embassy run was the earliest they could expect the parts. That meant there were seven more days before we could expect replacement parts. The critical element was the diplomatic clearance required to fly over Saudi Arabia.

During my second day I'd gone to the Kagne Station Rod and Gun club run by the U.S. Army. There I talked to Staff Sergeant Dewitt Boyd about taking a Safari, never dreaming it would be possible on the time I had. Sergeant Boyd was the club manager and had information on a professional hunter in Addis Abbaba, who might be able to take me for a minimum of two days. That was the beginning of the most exciting big game hunt I've ever been on. Arrangements were made for a two-day hunt with professional hunter Yotis Myriallis, one of the four white hunters in Ethiopia. He specialized in short safaris of five days or less. He was only one of the four professional hunters to guarantee your hunt. Yotis was of Spanish decent and was the only professional hunter in Ethiopia who was born and raised in that country.

Just prior to leaving for Addis Ababa, I found that our aircraft was due in commission in two days, so I was forced to make a decision on whether to cancel the safari or try for one day. I decided to take advantage of the opportunity and go. I arrived at Addis Ababa on an Ethiopian Airlines 707 at 10 o'clock in the morning. Yotis picked me up at the airport and the whirlwind began.



George Stoner (with Aussie Hat) and PH Yotis Myriallis

Our first stop was the garage where his Land Rover is being repaired. After that we headed for the game commission office. Big game licenses in Ethiopia usually take three to six weeks to process. Yotis had submitted the application the day before and after an hour's wait, and much talking, we secured the necessary \$40 license. The native game protector and tracker was in the office at the time, so we arranged for him to come along. It was now noon, so we rushed back to Yotis' house to pick up our rifles and other necessary gear. While Yotis was packing the Land Rover I changed into khakis I had purchased for the trip. Yotis and the tracker didn't

feel they had time to change, so they went in their street clothes. By one o'clock we were leaving the city behind this. The rush of people and the signs of civilization faded quickly as this we descended from the plateau heading for the Delta. After the first hour, the towns were left behind us and so we were so were the paved roads. The terrain changed slowly from rugged hills with craters and volcanic rock, to the African Velt with miles and miles of open



expanse, gently rolling with occasional trees dotting the land. Herds of African cattle, with their enormous horns pointing skyward, could be seen roaming the grasslands. By now the unpaved road had become little more than a trail cut through the land. After four hours of driving we topped a slight ridge and Yotis pointed off in the



distance at a strip of lush green land. This is where we would be hunting. It's the area east of the Awasi Game Preserve and has the most variety of game animals found in Ethiopia. I was interested in harvesting an Oryx, a gazelle, a warthog, and a waterbuck.

By this time civilization was gone. When we reached the hunting area the only people were nomadic tribes who sustained themselves on goats and camels milk and bartered for goods. They lived in small



Stick and mud native huts

thatched huts of four or five in a group surrounded by thorn bush to keep out the wandering animals. The man and the boys watched the small herds, while the women washed their few clothes in the nearby streams. The land itself was hot and dry and the water flowed down from the mountains miles away. All the people wear little clothing, mostly loose lengths of cloth draped over their bodies during the heat of the day.

These are removed toward sundown and the clothes are not worn from the waist up.

We drove through this area searching for game. The first game we spotted was the Somering gazelle. A small herd ran out ahead of us. None had good horns. A few miles further we came on another herd. This time Yotis pointed to one slightly to the right of the car. He said it had good horns and I should shoot it, if I got the chance. We stopped the car and got out. The gazelle herd had been spooked and ran flat out for the first hundred yards. They bounced up and down like jackrabbits. Then the one I had been watching slowed to a trot but still jumping. He was still going straightaway from me. I raised my rifle, a Sako 30-06 with a four power Kahles scope. I leveled the rifle placing the cross-hair directly on the white fur on his backside. He jumped just as I squeezed off the shot, but then went down hard.



George with Somering gazelle

However, as I approached he got up and started to run. I dropped him with his second shot through the heart, broadside. When we reached him we found he was a nice buck with horns measuring 13 inches. Our tracker proceeded to cape-out the buck while we relaxed. Within 15 minutes we were on our way again. This time we were after warthog. We drove to a bushy area and stopped the Land



Yotis and tracker - skinning gazelle

Rover. From there we went on foot into the brush. After traveling several hundred yards, Yotis motioned me to come up beside. Ahead of us about 200 yards was a

clearing where the water made it swampy. There, off to our right, I spotted some movement in the brush. We approach silently. The warthogs hadn't seen us but they seem skittish. Yotis pointed out one hog running our way and said "shoot." I fired, but the brush between us deflected the bullet. They were then running full speed and my second shot missed also. Just then a herd of camels with a driver appeared on the opposite side of the waddi. That explained why the warthogs had been so nervous. As well as being the professional hunter, for a 500 square-mile area, Yotis was also the "absolute" law. As we were standing looking at the camel driver bringing his camels to water, Yotis raised his rifle and looked at the camel driver through the scope. I thought this was unusual and then I heard the click of the safety being released. The camel driver had spoiled the hunt and Yotis was going to kill him. As he was squeezing the trigger, I gently brought my arm up under the rifle forcing it to go off into the air. Now Yotis was furious at both the camel driver and me. This would have unforeseen results later that evening.

We now only had about an hour of daylight left. The trophy I wanted most, the Oryx, was a half an hour's drive from where we were, so we abandoned the warthog and raced off toward the higher Meadows. That is when I was introduced to "African Fog". A dust so fine that, once disturbed, it takes 10 minutes to settle back down. We were fortunate a slight breeze was blowing, so when we hit this dust it only took a few minutes to clear away and we could proceed again. Everything was covered with the dust. Our clothes, our faces, even the insides of our mouths turned brown and we pressed on.



"African Fog" (dust) in the vehicle tracks on left

Then we came to an area that looked like a grassy plain. As we drove on, I found it was unlike any ground I had been on before. The grass had roots that went straight down instead of spreading out. Therefore, between each clump of grass was an eroded ditch four to 6 inches deep. The tires of the Land Rover would top the mound of grass and drop into the ditch on the other side. Inside the Land Rover, we alternately bounced off the top of the roof and our seats, from the left side to the right side and back again. Yotis went into low-low gear and still our snail's pace didn't help the severe jostling we were getting. After 15 minutes I spotted our first Oryx. It was running a ridge about a mile away. We drove in that direction and when we topped the ridge we saw them. About 500 yards away, a group of five Oryx were running directly across our path. I jumped out and ran to a nearby termite mound. I rested my rifle on the side of a termite mound and squeezed off a shot. My first shot was high. By then they were running to the top of the next ridge. I fired again. I was high again. They topped the ridge and were gone. Dejectedly, I walked back to the Land Rover. I am a pretty good long-range shot and don't usually miss. When I got to the car I asked Yotis where he sighted his gun. I had borrowed the gun that morning and because of the time, had not gone to the firing range before we left. The rifle scope reticle was a post and cross hair. The post extended above the cross hair. Yotis stated the gun was sighted on the top of the post at 100 meters. Normal American sighting is at the point where the cross-



George - standing by termite mound

hair crosses the post. Once I understood the sight picture, further shots would not be a problem. It also explained why I hit the gazelle as he jumped, I was shooting high. Yotis turned toward a nearby ridge and drove off. As we topped the ridge, Yotis came to a stop, got out of the Land Rover and pointed. There are about 300 yards away were seven Oryx. Yotis first pointed to one, then changed his mind when he saw a larger one off to one side of the main herd. I found another termite mound, steadied my rifle and fired. The bullet hit 12" behind the shoulder directly on a horizontal plane with the head. I wasn't leading far enough on the walking animal. I pulled forward and fired again. This time the Oryx dropped. The second shot was through the heart. When we reached the Oryx, we found she was a good female with 36 inch horns, a good trophy.



George with record book Oryx

Yotis said it would make the record books.

As the sun dropped behind the ridge I took my last pictures. Yotis went about fixing supper while the tracker skinned out the trophy. After dinner we cleaned up camp and started back. We still had five hours driving ahead of us. There was no moon and no roads, yet Yotis somehow never made a wrong turn. Before long, I was recognizing terrain we had covered earlier. After an hour or so driving, we came to a river that we had forded earlier. As we were driving across the river, Yotis stopped the Land Rover and suggested we get out and wash the dust off ourselves. By now the dust was caked into a thick layer all over my sweating body. I opened the Land Rover door, and put a foot into the river. As I did so, I happened to look back into the Land Rover. I noticed neither the tracker nor Yotis was getting

out of the Land Rover. Then it dawned on me why. I quickly brought my leg back into the Land Rover and shut the door. Without a word, Yotis simply turned the spotlight beam out across the river next to the Land Rover. Coming towards us from all directions were golden glowing eyes, crocodiles! I had made the professional hunter mad enough, by stopping his killing of the camel driver, that he was going to feed me to the crocodiles. When he got home he could easily explain my loss as a stupid American who got out into a river of crocodiles to take a bath.

Soon we were back on the trails, then the dirt roads, and finally four hours later paved road. We arrived in Addis Ababa about 2:30 a.m. I had no trouble sleeping, even though I had to get up at 7 a.m. in order

to catch at 9 a.m. flight. When I awoke in the morning, I reached for my jacket that I had placed over a night stand. I was just looking at the nightstand when Yotis came in. He looked straight at me and laughingly said “the nightstand” was the rear leg of a crocodile he had taken from last night’s river crossing, several months before. The leg was 24 inches in diameter and a footprint would spread close to 30 inches. He said it had weighed 1200 pounds and had taken 20 men and the Land Rover to get it out of the river. There was no mistaking his intent from the night before.

I still have the pictures I took on that hunt. The trophies that I paid to have shipped back to the states never arrived.

I arrived back at the airport in Asmara exactly 25 hours after I’d left. They were the most exciting, action-packed, hours I have ever spent. And they certainly made this trip one I will long remember as the best trip I ever had.

As we climbed the C-133A out over the Emperor’s Summer Palace, Jerry gave one final salute with a wing wag and all four props out of sync.

The trip back took us through Bahrain, Athens, the Azores and home.

The career of the C-133 was coming to an end. By the Fall of 1971, the majority of the planes would be in the process of decommissioning. The aircrews would disband, with a large share going to Southeast Asia and the war in Vietnam. Later there would be so many C-133 crew members in NKP, DaNang, Ben Hoa and Saigon, that it seemed like old home week where ever we landed.

George Stoner, LTC, U.S.A.F Retired

C-133A Navigator (1965 - 1971)