

TOM PLANE

Bone Algeria 1962: Ahmed Ben Bella after being released from French custody came back to Algeria and led a coup that established that country's independence. The Altair in the dark of night managed (unassisted by tug) to tie up to a pier in Bone and waited till dawn to off load two hundred wall tents. The tents were to be used by the misplaced persons and refugees left homeless by the coup.

As daylight came slowly upon us a sound reminiscent of Tarzans call to action that turned into a rise and fall tempo of wailing. The sun began to reflect off the tallest structures and you could see that they were minarets with Muslim Imams on each one calling the city to prayer. It was one of the strangest sounds I had ever heard.

A jeep came flying down the pier and four men in ill-fitting French uniforms jumped out and began screaming in Arabic at the skipper who was standing on the 02 level. (that's one deck up from the main deck for you non nautical folks) They were heavily armed and obviously pissed about something. All four were shaking their fist and shouting at the same time they reminded me of the keystone cops. The captain kept repeating "we have tents for your people and I don't speak Arabic".

After a while they loaded up again did a u-turn and hauled ass toward the city. The decision was made to off load the tents without help from the Algerians. To accomplish this required some of our crew to go down to the pier to unhook the cargo nets. I was one of the men who went ashore, so now I can say I've been to Algeria.

We had about half the tents unloaded when two jeeps came flying up behind us and eight more Key Stone cops got out. This time an officer who spoke English with a thick French accent (this accent can only be accomplished if you have Mick Jagger's Lips) "What is the meaning of this? We asked for no assistance from you Americans"

Seven of the men stood with their rifle muzzles pointed down but not far enough to keep from taking our legs out. One of the soldiers in a low voice asked "you have cigarette?" I said "No I don't smoke." "You have gum?" "Not allowed on the ship" You are American no? "I am". All things are not permitted in America"? Now I'm thinking why didn't this turkey speak up the first time they came out or was he part of the second group. They all looked alike to me. The Algerian officer and skipper came to an agreement not sure if money changed hands. We unloaded the last of the tents and the word was passed to get underway. That was the extent of my shore leave in Algiers.

ANOTHER VIEW ON THE VISIT TO BONE ALGERIA

BOB RATI

Commander Holbert approached me and I asked if I would like to go ashore. I said that I really did not want to. He said someone has to pay the bills, I was the Disbursing Officer, so I was really the one who should do it. So, I said ok. (What else could I say?) I got into the motor whaleboat and the crew took me across the harbor to the other side. I left the boat and ask some people where I could pay the bill for the water for the American Navy ship. I finally found the right place and paid that bill. We then went to the other end of the harbor to the building of the port commandant to pay the bill for the pilot we had used to enter port. Just as I left the boat, someone came up to me and said the commandant wanted to see me. I had no idea why. They took me to his office, which was huge. His desk was in one corner of the office, and I stood in the opposite corner of the office as he started yelling at me. He pounded on his desk with his fist, shouting in French and sometimes in English. I had no idea what he was saying or what this was all about, but it was easy to see that he was really mad. Then he started crying. He said, "How would you like it if the French Navy entered New York harbor, passed the Statute of Liberty, then took a pilot from a country other than the United States. Wouldn't you be upset?"

It turns out that we had used a pilot to enter port from the revolutionary group and not one from the French Navy. I tried to apologize, even though I did not feel it was my position to speak for our ship. I said I knew we did not do that intentionally and that it was an accident, but I had no idea if what I said was the truth. Maybe we knew exactly what we were doing. I returned to the ship and told Commander Holbert and some of the other officers about the incident. I said I thought maybe the Captain or someone should make a call on the commandant to smooth things over. None of the officers expressed much concern.

Later I was called to the quarterdeck as someone wanted to be paid for our trash removal. I was expecting to pay that bill. I looked at his invoice and all appeared to be in order, so I cut a check and paid the bill. A little while later I was called to the quarterdeck again as a second person wanted to be paid for the trash removal. He said the first person was a fraud and that he was the real person who should be paid. His invoice also looked valid and was for the same amount. I did not know what to do, so I talked with Commander Holbert. We could see no way out of this except to also pay the second bill, which I did. This was the only time as Disbursing Officer I ever paid the same bill twice. I think the two of them were probably in cahoots. I was glad to leave there.