

2008 Grand Asia & Australia Voyage (Sept. 18 – Nov. 23, 2008)

Journal of Orlin and Barbara Stansfield

Initial Cruise Preparation: (6/18/08- 8/28/08)

Signing up for the 65 Day Asia & Australia Voyage: On June 18 we visited our travel agent Wanda Moretz in her AAA East Tennessee office. She signed us up for the cruise and booked us in the status of "Veranda Guarantee" with early dinner seating. On the 2007 Grand World Voyage two of our dinner table mates were Bob and Esther Robbins. We really enjoyed their company and we were happy that they are going on this 65 day cruise. If everything works out as planned we will be dinner mates again on this cruise to Asia and Australia.

Air Transportation: Barbara did her usual magic in making on-line reservations with Delta using Frequent Flyer miles. We fly to Seattle on 18 September. After visiting with friends and relatives in San Diego we fly back home on 27 November (Thanksgiving Day) hopefully avoiding some of the holiday crowd in the airports.

Visas: The only visas we got prior to boarding the Amsterdam were the Chinese and the Australian. The Australian visas were obtained by Wanda on June 25th and she applied to ZVS for our China visas on that day. The charge for the China visas was \$190 each and we received them about July 11. Soon after we applied for the China visas the ZVS representative called and asked us to email a copy of our invoice for the 65 day cruise showing all the ports of call. We did that and the process seemed to work. On the Cruise Critic message board some people reported problems in getting the China visas but luckily we avoided that issue. We plan to obtain the necessary visas for other countries while we are on board the Amsterdam.

Passports: We had recently been on a river boat cruise in France and were aware that the expiration of Orlin's passport was coming up. The passport was renewed and by coincidence the issue date was 18 June 2008, the same day we signed up for the Asia & Australia Cruise. The new passport came with a memory chip embedded in some undisclosed location and the following information, "This document contains sensitive electronics. For best performance, do not bend, perforate or expose to extreme temperatures." Technology marches on!

Barbara also had a concern with her passport. She had only 4 blank pages left for visas and the recommended number was 8. After receiving her passport back from the Chinese visa issuing process Barbara got the appropriate form from the Post Office and sent her passport in to the US State Department asking for additional blank pages. About 7 days later she received her passport back with 24 new pages added to the original document at no charge.

Land Tours: Barbara reviewed the available land tours on-line at the Holland America website and we discussed options. We didn't sign up for tours in all ports but we were

able to get all the tours we wanted. In 2007 we had toured the Sydney Opera House and we wanted to experience that theater in action. We contacted the Sydney Opera House on-line and obtained tickets for "Anatomy Titus Fall of Rome" on 4 November. We mentioned our plans on the Cruise Critic message board. Soon after, Larry and Carol from Hernando Beach, FL posted on the board that they had obtained seats next to ours. It will be great to have cruising buddies with us on that evening. Another tour we wanted was the Harbour Bridge Climb. Jack and Evelyn Colwell from the 2007 GWV and new cruising friend, Doug MacLean, also plan to do the Bridge so we are planning to make the climb with them. We didn't make advance reservations and payment because it may be raining while we stop in Sydney but the plan is to go to the Bridge Climb site as soon as we dock and purchase tickets if the weather is favorable.

Cruise Documents: On the fourth of August our travel agent told us that our Cruise Document Package had arrived and we could pick it up. This was another sign that the cruise was rapidly approaching so we eagerly drove in to Knoxville to see Wanda. This photo shows the happily beaming Barbara accepting the Document Package from Wanda.



The document package contained the cruise ticket book, detailed description of on-board services, personal information forms to be filled out prior to boarding as well as other helpful suggestions and precautions for preparation and enjoyment of the cruise. One item in the package that we had been waiting for described the luggage shipment arrangements made by Holland America. A phone number was provided and a helpful person on the other end of the telephone line said that luggage

pickup would be on 10 September and we should let them know by the end of August how many bags we would be shipping. Barbara was already miles ahead in this department but the looming deadline provided Orlin some incentive to start thinking about what to take.

Pre-Cruise Planning Session: On August 15 we met with Doug and Jean (aussieoz) over lunch at Mimi's Restaurant in Knoxville. The ostensible purpose of our meeting was to carry out some pre-cruise planning but mainly it was just to get better acquainted and have some fun. Here's a picture of our happy cruisers with Doug proudly showing his Beijing Olympics tee shirt.

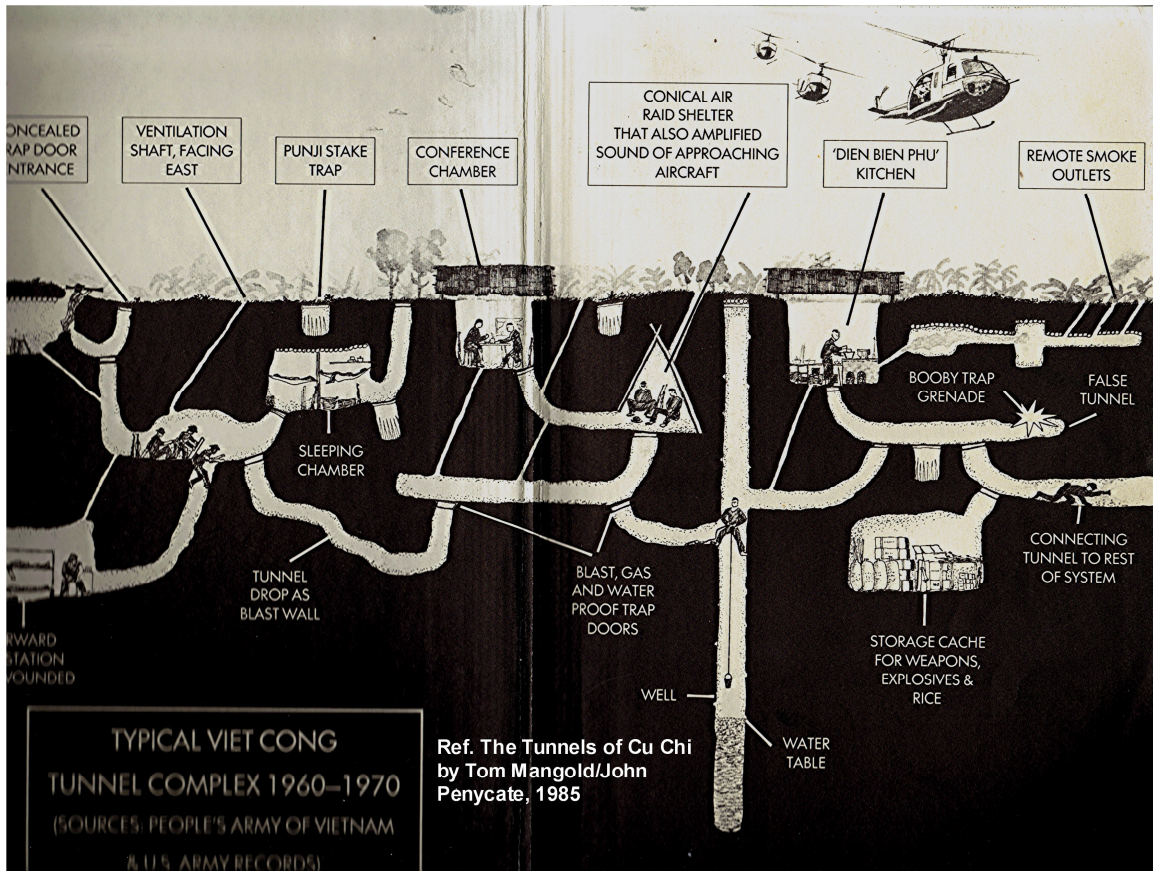


Like us, they are getting excited about the upcoming 2008 Asia & Australia Cruise. Doug and Jean were on the 2007 Asia-Australia cruise so we were eager to hear about their adventures and get some advice. Doug is a Sydney-Bridge-Climber-Veteran and he assured us that we could scale those heights. They plan to play it safe and take much of their luggage with them on the plane to Seattle. We had good luck with the HAL complimentary luggage service on the 2007 GWV so most of ours is being picked up on 10 September for shipment to Seattle and the Amsterdam. We assume we will know our cabin number by 10 September so the luggage can be marked appropriately. The waitress assured us we could stay as long as wanted but reluctantly we had to draw the proceedings to a close. We are looking forward to meeting again in September on the Amsterdam.

Clothes Audition for Packing: As the time for the cruise approached, Barbara's finely tuned clothes fashion genes kicked into gear. On-line shopping web-sites and local department stores got more than their share of her attention. Finally it was time to "audition" the clothes and decide which of the lucky ones would be chosen for packing and 65 days of cruising excitement. Here you can see the confident lady making her crucial decisions.



Preparation for Touring the Tunnels of Cu Chi, Vietnam: While the Amsterdam is docked at Phu My in Vietnam (10/16/08) we are going to take the HAL tour called "Cu Chi Tunnels Discovery". Our interest in the tour was sparked by stories about the tunnels that we had heard during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. We told Doug and Jean (aussieoz) about our interest and they recommended preparing for the tour by reading the book "The Tunnels of Cu Chi, the Untold Story of Vietnam", by the British journalists Tom Mangold and John Penycate (1985). The authors report the interviews they conducted after the war with Viet Cong fighters and American soldiers, known as tunnel rats, who fought in the tunnels of Cu Chi. The 200 miles of Vietnam tunnels, often dug just beneath the feet of the Americans, became the Viet Cong's sanctuaries, barracks, arms factories, theaters, and hospitals, all built into a triple-level maze of passageways with hidden trapdoors deep within the earth. Here is a schematic picture from the book that portrays what a cross section of the tunnels might look like.



The small group of heroic GI's, known as tunnel rats, volunteered to fight hand to hand, armed only with knives and pistols against an ingenious and brave enemy inside the dark booby-trapped tunnels. After reading the book by Mangold and Penycate we would also recommend it to anyone taking the Tunnels of Cu Chi tour or anyone just interested in that part of the Vietnam War history.