



EXPERIENCE

PHOTO: INTERNET

A RARE PRIVILEGE

ASFA HUSSAIN

I visited my sister, Hasna in the Philippines in the summer of May 1987 along with my son, Asif, for nearly 3 weeks. My brother-in-law, late Major General Manaf was posted there as Bangladesh's Ambassador to Philippines from 1986-1991. Being a top ranking defense personnel, he had easy access to the administration, also as most civil posts were manned by ex-defense officials. I was there at the time of political unrest to oust Mr Marcos, the President of Philippine and to establish democratic governance. His opponent was Mrs Aquino.

It so happened, the official visit by my brother in law to the US Naval base at Subic Bay took place during my stay with them. General Manaf generously included me and my son in his itinerary. I was overwhelmed to be at the US Naval base. Philippines hosted the American forces as a base in the Pacific in 1941 to counter any attack from Japan.

The base was lined along the coast of the Pacific Ocean on Philippines' side. It was a huge American township with the best possible facilities that could be offered. Along the base grew local

business establishments to cater to certain needs for the base and also generate economic activities for the locals. I was amazed at the size and the well appointed establishment-- luscious greenery, beautiful neat lawns and gardens. The waterways lined with smart, large and small ships and boats, one stood above all, The USS MIDWAY CV-41, US Navy's oldest operational (combat) carrier, having been commissioned on September 10, 1945. Later the ship became a fleet of the U.S. Seventh Fleet off the coast of South Vietnam. During the final days of the Vietnam war, MIDWAY played a major role in evacuation of over 3,000 refugees. MIDWAY's aircraft flew 11,000 combat sorties over Vietnam.

We were welcomed at the base by Captain Richard A. Wilson, commanding officer of USS MIDWAY. We were housed for 2 nights at their beautiful guest bungalows overlooking the ocean. General Manaf, my sister Hasna and we were entertained to a wonderful luncheon by Rear Admiral Dennis M. Brooks, USN, Commander, Battle Force Seventh Fleet and his ever so friendly wife Dolores Katherine Gober. Others at the luncheon were Captain Richard A. Wilson, Commanding officer, Captain Micheal B Nordeen, Executive officer and their wives.

Just before sunset, we boarded USS MIDWAYCV-41. General Manaf was given a full Naval Guard of Honour, with bugles

and whistles. We were told it was one of the smaller combat aircraft carriers but to me it was a massive structure of iron and steel. It is a 67,000 ton vessel housing 4500 people and up to 80 aircrafts. Its mission is to act as a first line of defense for United States and its allies. We went around the entire ship and witnessed from the bridge the takeoff and landing of F/A-18 HORNET and A-6 INTRUDER which was demonstrated for us. The Sikorsky SH-3H Helicopter is the versatile aircraft aboard USS MIDWAY. Its primary mission is to combat submarine forces that may pose any threat to USS MIDWAY and its battle group. There were other rescue helicopters flown by non-combat women pilots.

We later went to dine at one of the office's mess halls. The streets within the base were dotted with stylish Bars with live bands, cinemas, stores, restaurants, a large hospital and residences.

USS MIDWAY is now docked at Navy Pier San Diego. The decommissioned ship now serves her final tour of duty in San Diego, home to one third of the Pacific Fleet and a large cadre of the MIDWAY's former crew.

The writer is a Member of the Reading Circle, Dhaka.

HERITAGE

LAST OF ITS KIND

APURBA JAHANGIR

PHOTO: KAZI TAHAIN AGAZ APURBO

Though the famous Northbrook hall was established in 1874, the Northbrook Public Library was not added to the establishment until 1882. It is located in Farashganj, a little north of the Buriganga River.

It was established by the help of donations from prominent Zamindars such as Raja Rai Bahadur, and it soon became one of the most prominent literary hubs in Dhaka. "We heard from the locals that the library was famous for its literary collection," says Nazrul Islam, PNO of Northbrook Public Library. First edition books by Hemming Way, E M Froster, J A R Marriot still sits inside the library shelves. If one goes through the names inside the shelves, they will get to know the glory of Northbrook Library once had.

"Back in the British period, this was a gold mine for book lovers, for its collection. We heard from the locals that it was always packed by people." It is said that Rabindranath Tagore praised the library's book collection when he came to



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Dhaka in 1926. A club house was built alongside the library named Johnson Hall where most of the cultural activities were held. From theatre to government programmes, this place served as the nucleus of everything," says Nazrul Islam.

After the 1971 war, most of the books were burned by the Pakistani Army. The authorities were planning on shutting the place down. To re-build the library's glory, Maharaja of Tripura, along with Brajendro Kumar Roy and other prominent figures helped with donations. Each of the library shelves are named in their honour.

The place which was once filled with

literature enthusiasts now looks like an abandoned grave yard. The library is poorly maintained and other than everyday's newspaper, there's nothing else to read. "We cannot take the books out of the shelves as they are in very poor condition," says the PNO. The last couple of floods destroyed a lot of the books. "We have complained to the authorities many times, but apart from the foundation's maintenance, nothing happens." The books inside these shelves are worth keeping in the museum. If the place is not properly maintained we will soon be losing one of our glorious historical assets.

ABOUT TOWN

LIVE²

MUSIC MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

September 4 to 5
Lighthouse Bangladesh

REALMS OF MEMORY PAINTING EXHIBITION BY BIPASHA HAYAT

August 8 to 29
Bengal Art Lounge

ALLURE EID FEST

September 4 to 5
Amari Hotel