THE 1991 ERUPTION OF MOUNT PINATUBO AND THE RESULTING EVACUATION OF PERSONNEL FROM CLARK AIR BASE AND NAVY BASE SUBIC BAY

The following first-hand account was transcribed and edited from an audio interview conducted by Frank O’Gara with Linda Beaulieu, an ISS and the coordinator of the Teacher of the Year Program at DoDEA HQ.

Linda Beaulieu, Teacher, MacArthur Elementary (Clark Air Base) August 1984 - June 1992

A big surprise one day

Yeah, April 1, 1991 -- April Fool's Day, we got to school, when we got to the parking lot, we smelled rotten eggs. Somebody said, “there's a dormant volcano that is waking up over in the distance.” I remember at lunch that day in the faculty lounge saying, "Can you imagine the letters? Dear Mom, we're being evacuated because of a volcano!” news.

We had a little time because the volcano was giving some warning signals

Mount Pinatubo gave us a warning, and the world was paying attention. Scientists and seismologists were coming from everywhere. I remember the shows warning that it was not a matter of if, it was a matter of when. There were preparations by the military, checklists, and to do lists. Then we got word that they were going to evacuate. They had mapped out Clark Air Base as to who would evacuate first and what the process would be. It just kept getting more and more serious. And the rumor was that a general flew in the helicopter to the other side of the mountain, saw what was going on and said, "We're leaving this weekend."

So, Monday morning at 6:00 AM, depending on where you lived, you were to evacuate, and we were all being sent down to Naval Base Subic Bay.

Subic Bay, a temporary safe-haven

We were at Subic Bay -- at Cubi Point (a Navy aerial facility) up in the marine station. Well, we didn't know at the time -- we thought we'd be safe at Subic. We were there for about a week with beautiful weather, sunny, and everything else.

We were a week away from graduation. So, there were basically no finals. On Thursday night they graduated the Subic seniors and

### 1991 Eruption of Mount Pinatubo

Start date: April 2, 1991
End date: September 2, 1991

A column of gas and ash rising from Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines on June 12, 1991, just days before the volcano's climactic explosion on June 15.

### Clark Air Base

was a major U.S. Air Force base on Luzon Island in the Philippines, located near Angeles City, and abutted by Mount Pinatubo. The base was about 40 miles from the U.S. Navy Base at Subic Bay.

### Naval Base Subic Bay

was a major ship-repair and supply base for the U.S. Navy located in Zambales, Philippines. The naval base was the largest overseas US military installation after Clark Air Base.
Friday night they graduated the Clark Air Base seniors. We all went to the ceremonies and found a lot of friends who were sleeping on floors, in churches and other spaces. So, we brought back 10 other people to our little BOQ and they were sleeping on our floor, but we had a kitchen and a bathroom.

**The big eruption**

Well, we were all frightened. I remember we stood in doorways holding our passports and talked to each other about where we would try to meet up if we had to leave the building.

The big eruption started early in the morning on June 15th. The volcanic damage was at Clark for sure. But when the volcano erupted, there was a typhoon. So, there was a lot of wind and rain and it covered Subic as well. It was pitch black. You couldn't see in the middle of the day. When you finally you could see again, it was just a desert wasteland and the lava had fallen with rain. It was like cement everywhere. Our cars were covered, it was truly gray, and all the beautiful palm trees were just sticks with their leaves straight down. And so, we waited a couple days and by then, there was no water, no electricity. So, we were taking trash cans to a pool to fill with water to bring back so we could empty our toilets. It was bad for about three days and then, they got a bus up to Cubi Point, and brought us directly to the Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier for evacuation.

**Life on the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln**

On its maiden voyage, the Abraham Lincoln was the newest carrier at the time. They took us south to Cebu, an island of the Philippines, where they reactivated an airfield that used to be an American airfield.

Well, I was just surprised at how massive it is. It was a city unto itself. It was just amazing how you could be out on the sea and hardly feel it.

I think everybody was kind of in survival mode and hoping to get that first shower. I remember saying to the sailors, “You know, we haven’t had showers for a couple days, we're going to use up all the water.” A sailor said "We have to hose down our aircraft normally, but we flew those off because of the pets and everything else. You all won’t use a 10th of what we use normally. Don't worry about that."

When we were on the ship, it was just the families and civilians who were evacuated. Only the women and children mostly, or very few men, because all the military stayed behind. Many of the women didn't speak English. There was a lot of anxiety there. But I can remember the shipmen, you know, tossing kids into the air and playing with them, with weary mothers just kind of watching.

**On to Guam, Hawaii, and San Francisco**

And then from Cebu, they flew us to Guam. That was another staging area. We were waiting a few days in Guam, mainly at the airport. And then we finally went to Hawaii, and then on to San Francisco. I think we arrived about 3:00 in the morning. And every three feet there was a person, saying, "Welcome to America."
**Repatriation**

The military really does know how to do it. They had rooms setup with doctors, chaplains, and counselors. We got a cash advance in Subic, and then there was an opportunity to get more money and anything else we needed.

Then they booked us into a hotel and arranged travel in the morning with our pets to our home of record, which was Virginia.

**What was the most heartwarming thing that you saw in the aftermath?**

When the whole community showed up for graduation, I think that was a heartwarming sign.

I was so grateful that the military really took care of us. I mean, it was just -- from everything from planning, and saying, I guess to us it was, “yes, your pets are going with you.” I don't know what we would have done if that answer had been different. I mean, we had family in the Philippines, we probably would have given our pets to our family if it came to that. But we were hoping and praying that wouldn't be the case, and they came through in that way. And then we saw it again, when we were at Subic, just this incredible amount of care.

And when we were in San Francisco, just the preparation that went into everything and the DoDEA people who were placing us – we were so grateful. Director Gerald Bloom tried to place every employee who was evacuated into a new assignment. We got a call in early July that I was reassigned to Amelia Earhart in Okinawa!