

Music can be the only sane part of one's life

This was intended to be about my favorite guitar player. I have a feeling it may turn out to be more about me, as the music and my life during this time in my life, were too closely entwined to pull apart.

There are some great players out there. I have talked a bit about some of them, but I will focus now on the most influential one of them all in my life.

The year is 1968 ... pretty much any part of 1968. Well, not any part. Lets forget the rainy season where the rain starts one day and does not stop for four months. It's a typical balmy 105 plus degrees, with the humidity hovering also around the century mark. I fire up the starboard GM 6V53 diesel of what will be our 31-foot plastic "home" for the next 8-16 hours. Larry Pruett shoves us off from the LST-821 Harnett County, a ship left over from World War 2. She is in even worse condition and more tired than our crew on PBR 130, from Task Force 116, River Division 511.



From the deck high above of the LST, Greg Wiles yells "hey Sunshine, one of your engines dead"? "Sunshine" was my nickname, short for Sgt. Sunshine, which was also technically incorrect, as I was a Navy AMS2, the same rank as a Marine Sergeant. I guess in "greens", or fatigues, this nickname sort of stuck. I was also known as "hippie" and "college boy", being from California and because the word got out ... I had three weeks of junior college before entering the service. I guess the "Sunshine" part was also something of a hippie slant on things. Running off one engine leaving the ship was my trademark departure. This allowed for my compensation for the current on the port side of the ship. After all, I did not want to impact my "smooth" departure. I had a reputation as a crack sailor, which unfortunately was what got me stuck in this position in the first place... AFTER I enlisted in April of 1967. The guys from the US Coast Guard hated me even more than the Marines ... my departures were, well to be humble, breath taking. I guess the USCG guys were also sort of upset, to say the least, as most joined up in an effort to avoid Vietnam. It was a big surprise when they found out there were a lot of little "plastic boats" just waiting for them.

Once free of the ship, the remaining engine was started, and we were on our way up the Bassac River. From our nylon pack that cost us 4 cases of beer from the Marine Base at Can Tho, we pulled our personal gear. The Marine base at Can Tho (about 100 km southwest of Saigon), was where us Navy guys always got beat up a few times a week. Most times we deserved it. From this Marine pack we pulled our trusty Craig mono cassette player, and one of our three copies (we had redundancy on critical equipment), of our classic **Illinois Speed Press** album. Yup ...this recording was the Holy Grail. Muntz Eight track players were not too cool. They were okay for cars, but not the cool deal like a Craig mono cassette player! We kept the original vinyl LP back on the ship or at the Maine base (when our mothership was gone to Subic Bay for replenishment or whatever they did), for safekeeping. When the ship left, it was for 3-4 weeks at a crack. We were the "Squids", to the Marines, and were left with our little PBRs, at the Marine base at Can Tho. 30 or so Navy guys 300 Marines. You do the math. It was a far cry from a walk in the park, especially when BM2 Scott would walk into the Marine NCO club, stating.... "grunts suck", as he loved to do. He loved to fight for the sake of fighting. In sickbay, he was known for his own bit of logic "I may be in here now, but so are six of them". It was only the loaning out of the **Illinois Speed Press**, the Beatles White album, and the Amboy Dukes, Journey to the Center of your Mind, that kept us from more broken limbs from the Marines on more than one occasion.

Off we headed, up or down the river for our “daily” patrol. One sees a lot of familiar junks and smaller sampans on the river. This is the same sort of environment as if you were a CHP officer on the same route each day on the San Diego Freeway. One of our stops in late afternoon many days was at a small boat for a snack. We detested our “white box lunches” off the ship. Kim (as we called her) was a local girl who lived and worked on the boat. She had two sisters, one of them the “girlfriend” of Larry Barber. They all spoke very little English, and did not know what most English words meant. They were able to “sort of” sing along to our favorite songs though, which also became their favorites:

“If I don’t seem to be, a manna to be know, tell me why when you are high, you are corror row”

Yup The Vietnamese version of “Be a Woman”

Or my favorite ... “Hard Luck Story”

“I catch my wormonn pray-ring, and it tears up to my heart, but remme terro yerow, that this can be to start...”

Hey ... who said Vietnam was all a “bummer” (60’s phrase)? Cute gals, great music, free floorshow, free food, and no rent! Does it get any better?

Our little group, Larry Pruett, Jim (Jaimie) Parker, Larry Barber, and even myself were known to join right in ... if there was nobody watching too close.

That was THE record, the **Illinois Speed Press**. Kal David and Paul Cotton, and the rest of them. The guitars were amazing, the keyboard, the drums, all just amazing, evens in MONO!

This is to me; this is **THE** definitive rock recording of all time. Two killer guitar players ... Kal David and Paul Cotton, playing off each other. Killer lead work ... killer rhythm work and killer tone (even back in those days, somehow they got it on record)! Paul Cotton went on to play for Poco, replacing Jimmy Messina who went on to other things and got all Poco’s engineering done right. Jimmy Messina is still my favorite clean player, but I do not want to digress too much!



Kal David was the father of many styles from the 60s, which are still imitated today. He was one of the first players to use pedals and effects. Listen to that old 1968 **Illinois Speed Press** record if you can find one, and you will hear “his” tone and technique. This is still used all over the place today. Most folks have no idea where this came from. It came from Kal David and Paul Cotton. Most folks that attempted to use effects prior to Kal and Paul just ended up with that fuzz tone Yardbirds sort of nonsense or wah pedal chaos in so many cases.

I played and played that tape for 13 months in Vietnam, brought it back home, and my brother up in the Bay Area still has the original record today. Kal is still around today, in Palm Springs, with his own club ... The Blue Guitar. The club also has 60s vibe ... remember when you could actually SIT down when you listened to music. Today’s “festival” seating just sucks.

Over the years I lost track of Kal David. I kept a tape in my car, in fact it is in there now. I came to Groove Tubes in 2002. I had known the folks there for almost two decades and Rick Benson over at GT all this time too. (Don’t worry ... I am not too far off track, this will come together).

GT has a pretty intense artist clientele. In any given week, one may work with the latest or biggest “names” in the industry. It is all part of a day’s work. In some cases, folks would say to me ... “wow, you were working with Buzz

Lightyear", or whoever. "What did you think". My comeback is now standard logo expected out of me from GT folks ... "they were pretty cool, but they're no Kal David".

The first time I said this, Rick Benson whipped his head around and said "WHAT"? He was surprised to hear the name from me I guess. Not everybody knows the name Kal David I guess? I explained than "Kal saved my life" in the service. Rick needed a bit of clarification. I explained that without his recording, I would have gone insane, tried to "walk home" and would have probably either died or have been captured. I am not joking. When I was down and out, Kal got me back to the living. Rick told me that Kal had his own club in Palm Springs and Rick and Kal were friends. This is where I first heard about Kal in a few decades. Rick gave me a copy of Kal's latest CD, with his band "The Real Deal", I rushed home, and sure enough ... it was Kal, better than other, although even more blues oriented, which was very cool from my point of view. It gave me hope too ... you can get older AND better.

So.... If you are ever in the Palm Springs area, I know there are a lot of clubs down there, and places to eat, but please stop by The Blue Guitar, say hello to Kal for me, and thank him from me for saving one life, or actually three lives on PBR 130. Unfortunately, one did not make it home. If you think I have ever helped you with a technical problem, helped you with your amp, gave you a free something or other, now is your chance. If you want some good Karma to come back your way, buy Kal and his band a round of drinks for me and thank him personally from me. If it were not for Kal, who knows ... your amp may not sound like it does today if I have ever helped any of you in any way.

Kal is as good as ever, and I hope to now head to Palm Springs soon and thank him in person.

