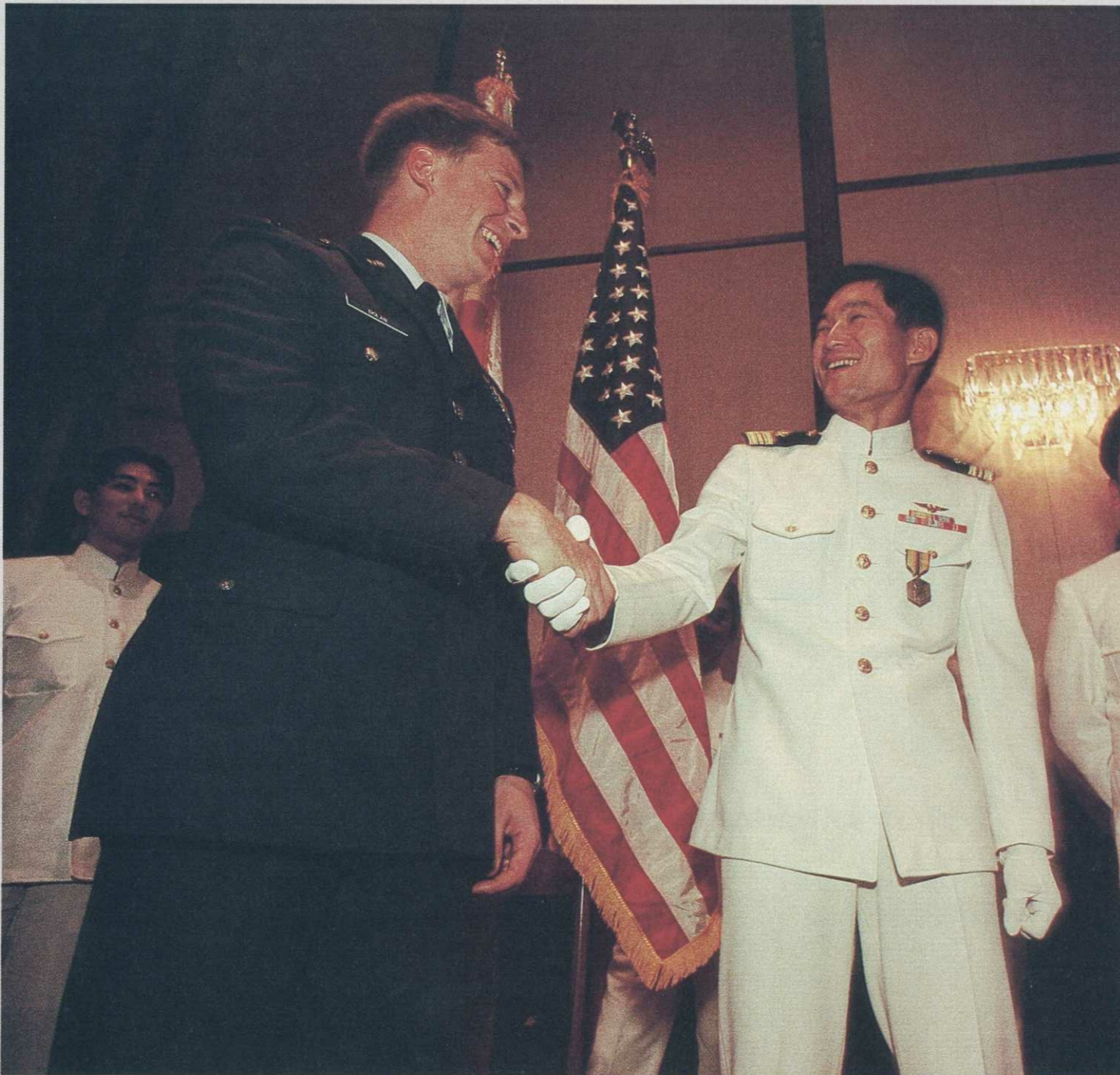
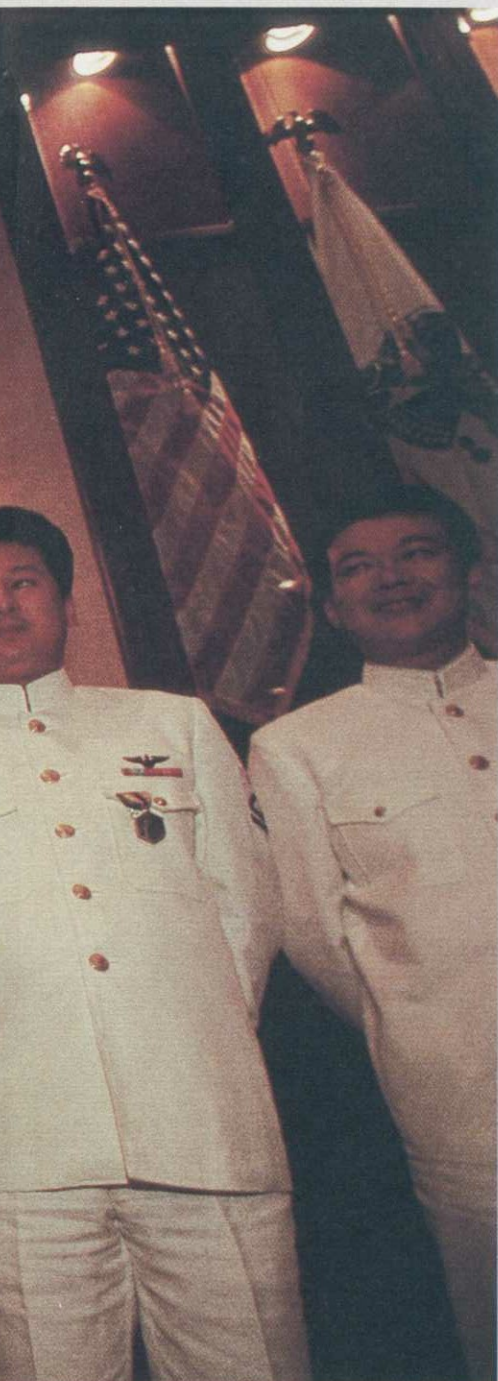


With Heartfelt Thanks

Photo and essay by Michael E. Stanley





This is the happy ending. The story behind it could very well have ended otherwise, but due to a courageous decision by the Japanese half of the pair, a tragedy did not happen. I watch them shake hands, smiling and laughing.

Just before half-past five on the morning of January 23rd, 1992, U.S. Air Force Captain John Dolan was snug in the cockpit of his F-16 fighter, cruising eastward toward Hawaii from his squadron's home base at Misawa, near Honshu's northern tip. Other F-16s and two escorting tanker aircraft made up the rest of the deployment formation.

They were 15,000 feet above the Pacific and 625 miles east of Tokyo when something went very wrong. Aircraft were not where they were supposed to be; a tanker turned abruptly toward Captain Dolan's F-16, shearing the fighter's nose off with its wingtip. Instantly the F-16 flipped backward, gyrating wildly out of control. The captain gripped the yellow handle between his thighs and pulled, triggering the ejection seat.

Catapulted into the predawn half-light, he watched his parachute open as he started a long, slow descent. His only injury being a mild neck sprain caused by the shock of the ejection, the captain contemplated his fate as the cold, leaden ocean drew ever closer. The other aircraft circled overhead, calling for rescue assistance.

Responding to the call, a four-engined US-1 flying boat of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's Rescue Squadron 71 lumbered off its runway and headed out over the Pacific. The pilot of the Japanese-built aircraft, Lieutenant Commander Hideki Kida, knew that Captain Dolan's position was near the limit of his aircraft's range. After the three-hour flight to the reported position, he would have little time to search for the tiny speck of a one-man

raft, little time to wait, circling, if the sea proved too rough.

Hours passed. Alone and wet and cold, Captain Dolan watched as the ungainly looking airplane made three passes over him, gauging the height of the waves, which were in excess of 12 feet. The US-1 is designed to land on waves no more than half that size.

Lieutenant Commander Kida tried to imagine Captain Dolan's thoughts; he put himself in the wave-tossed little raft. What would he feel? The US-1's fuel would not last much longer. He knew that Captain Dolan could not survive until the waves abated. He thought; he decided. On the fourth pass he set the flying boat down, gingerly feeling for the waves' first touch, then plunging onto the rolling rough seas. The rescue divers sprang into action, and in a few minutes, Captain John Dolan was dry and warm and en route back to Japan.

Months later, after reams of paperwork, a grateful U.S. Air Force is presenting blue- and yellow-ribboned Commendation Medals to Lieutenant Commander Kida and the 11 others of his crew. And after the medals have been clipped on, after the obligatory press photos, after handshakes from Lieutenant General Richard Hawley, the commander of the U.S. Forces, Japan, the two pilots stand together, beaming. Their communication needs no words.

Michael E. Stanley, born in California in 1947, studied cultural anthropology and archaeology, and is a photographer based in Japan since 1979.