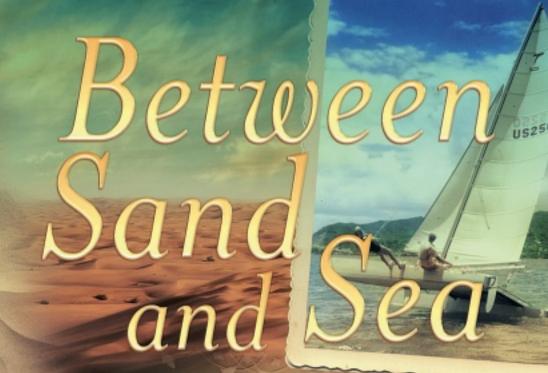


From the good life in Hawaii to the 1976 Olympic sailing trails, to Saudi Arabia's growth years, to a Transpacific yacht race, adventures in Europe, then back to Hawaii and sailing with friends through remote Fiji Islands.

# **Between Sand and Sea**

By Dan Feltham

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## Previous Books Written by Dan Feltham

When Big Blue Went To War, 2010 (non-fiction)
The Catalina Connection, 2011
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The Edge of Time, 2013
Terror in the Gulf, 2014
Trade Winds Calling, 2015 (Revised Edition)
Mexican Standoff, 2016
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Under the Southern Cross, 2021

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## **Table of Contents**

Introductory Comments	1
Preface	3
Chapter 1 – Setting the Stage	7
Chapter 2 – Spring 1976 Honolulu	17
Chapter 3 – The USA Sailing Olympic Trials	25
A Different World	33
Chapter 4 – Al Khobar, Eastern Province, SA	35
Chapter 5 – New Vocabulary and Story Time	43
Chapter 6 – Computer Business	59
Chapter 7 – The Camel	61
Chapter 8 – About Desert Sand	65
Under the Veil	67
Chapter 9 – The Muslim World	67
Oil and Data Processing	103
Chapter 10 – Discovery	103
Chapter 11 – Data Processing	109
Chapter 12 – Saudi Banking	119
Chapter 13 – IBM Sales Quota	121
Memoir Stories	125
Chapter 14 – Romance in France	127
Chapter 15 – Travel Opportunities	137
Chapter 16 – Sadikti - Desert Moonshine	169

Chapter 17 – Special Friends	173
Chapter 18 – Corporate Hammer	177
Chapter 19 – A Trip to Amsterdam	181
Chapter 20 – Trouble	191
Chapter 21 – A Desert Suicide	193
Chapter 22 – More Stories	195
Chapter 23 – The Royal Saudi Yacht Club	197
Chapter 24 – Last Days	203
Chapter 25 – Too Many Alohas	207
Chapter 26 – Another Beautiful Romance	213
Bibliography	217
Thanks and Acknowledgements	219
About the Author	221

## Chapter 2 – Spring 1976 Honolulu

One beautiful spring morning, as most of them are in Hawaii, I drove my light-blue 1975 Mustang along Kahala Avenue and through an early-hour semi-vacant Waikiki to the iconic IBM building on Ala Moana Boulevard. My surfboard was strapped to the top of the car, my swim trunks and fins in the back seat ready for use, waiting and handy after 5 P.M. Soon after shuffling some morning paperwork at my desk, I was summoned to my manager's office. Oddly enough, he had once worked for me before my three years as IBM's Southeast Asia Location Manager and the more recent close of our offices in Saigon. Those years had been played successfully in the late 1960s and early 1970s when IBM was called to help our military fight the Vietnam War with 200 well trained bachelor technicians and in-country data processing. Please consider reading my non-fiction book *When Big Blue Went to War*.

"Have a seat Dan, I may have an opportunity for you to get back into management like you said you wanted."

The two words 'opportunity' and 'management' caught my attention, but I sat without comment, holding my curiosity. What now? While waiting for his explanation, I gazed out through second story windows across Ala Moana Park. I was looking at the breaking surf and beyond to Pacific Ocean blue that I considered to be my personal playground after work hours and every weekend. And I thought, it's about time. I'm tired of cleaning up the data processing mess we left behind in Vietnam, and me taking the huge sales quota negatives for all the machines that I helped install across Southeast Asia and now returned to IBM's stateside inventory - along with a demotion. My younger manager was a good man and an off-work friend with which to gladly share a cool Primo beer. But I believe he had been promoted because he was Hawaiian born. His enthusiasm that morning was

maybe a bit thick - I didn't fit his management style — being well outside his experience level. At the time, the Honolulu office had employed too many mainlander *haole* managers, like me. We didn't fit IBM's Hawaiian racial requirements. IBM HQ had said, "Get it fixed"! He was doing what he was told to do. *Suck it up Bro*.

I was more experienced and more committed to IBM than he had ever thought of being (he left the company a few years later). I had voluntarily gone to war. Those years had left me and many of my Band of Brothers with unique experiences and an independent confidence not normal to men in our twenties and thirties.

"I just completed a call with IBM New York," he said. "There's a good job opening in Saudi Arabia. You told me once that you had been there. You would be both Eastern Province Marketing Manager as well as country Systems Engineering Manager and work principally with the giant Aramco oil company. You match all the requirements, especially with your oil field background." He was referring to how I had worked my way through college each summer with Texaco.

I looked at a young man who had never been anywhere except Hawaii and thought, how do you know it is a good job?

I asked about timing, salary, and housing trying not to show too much interest. Can I really leave all this Hawaiana that I so love after these past twelve years? Had I lived in paradise long enough? I knew I would always miss it like a long lost lover — trade winds, palms, beaches, ocean, islands, sunsets and many friends. I can easily say 'No thanks' right damn now, and keep doing what I am doing — this boring easy job, and also keep sailing and surfing multiple days each week — what could be better than here and now?

"They want you to start July first."

It was late April.

"Let me think about it. That's pretty quick and I have some pre-Olympic sailing plans on Lake Ontario for June during my saved vacation. Maybe I can fit that in on the way east? I'll let you know tomorrow."

I went home early to think. IBM's logo was **THINK**. That's what we were paid for – to think, plan and then do perfectly. Where did such a radical move fit within my life's plan? Did I have a plan? I really didn't. I had already worked in North Africa's Sahara as a geologist before joining IBM. I had made a short trip to Saudi and knew in part what it was like. I had worked in Sicily, Morocco and pre-Gaddafi Libya at a time when Libya was a peaceful monarchy under a benevolent King Idris. After those three years in Libya, I was no longer who I had been. The Vietnam war assignment had been a natural easy fit.

Did I really have a better long-range plan, or had I always let circumstances blow me along like the fickle winds that filled the sails of my sail boats? Was the opportunity of free housing and an expense account clouding my thinking? I could bank my entire salary. How does a person know wisdom well before the act? Wisdom isn't given free of charge; it has to be worked for and earned – again and again – or accidently discovered and maybe sometimes guessed at with low odds of success or even regrets? Opportunity can be an early mystery. Deep deep in my subconscious a voice was asking, 'Is every life a unique experiment?'; or 'I wonder what I'll find there?' And louder, 'Why go?' Why go?'

A hot desert breeze other than Hawaiian trade winds was blowing through my memory. After Nam I had remained frustrated and restless and had returned to Hawaii almost as a stranger. I was now even more independent than after Africa. That night I decided, with the help of a double glass of rum and a little pineapple juice, to take the job to find an answer. What the hell? Why not? I wasn't running from, but toward something different - again. I was lonesome for a future. My inner thoughts may have run something along the lines of - *I don't want to* 

live only day to day. I want to experience, to laugh, cry, hurt, love, see, desire, understand, feel, win, lose — everything possible. Is there still time at my age to do all that? To fill my curiosity gap, but with caution! To fill my bucket list — and then maybe write about it — like I am doing here.

Why on earth did I want to go from beautiful Hawaii to ugly Saudi Arabia again? Did such opposites attract like the poles of a geographic magnet? I had traveled from Iran through Saudi in1961, so had learned then of the harsh desert environment and extreme social and religious restrictions. Since I had also worked three years in Libya's Sahara, I knew all too well about heat and sand – that ever-present sand again that over-laid the oil that was making Saudi Arabia very wealthy. No problems before. And finally, after my years in South Vietnam during that wasted war, I knew, and maybe IBM knew, I could work anywhere independently in unique conditions. So again, why? Curiosity I suppose – like a kid asking, 'Are we there yet?' or 'What's over that next hill?' Or, as an adult, Saudi Arabia could be a window to the world, another one to crawl through and experience.

Now, as I write this so many years later, I still don't really know if then I made the right decision – even now it remains a mental toss-up. What other mysterious adventure would have taken the place of those two years had I not gone? Maybe there are no right or wrong decisions – just different results or endings? Sometimes you have to go to a place to find out why you are there, but once committed you cannot return and start over on an alternate path. The easiest alternative by far was certainly to remain in Hawaii where every day was like a holiday - Waikiki beach bikini babes, late night parties, good music, almost ample sex (was there ever enough?), sailing, surfing, trips to Maui, a nice home in Kahala and the all-embracing spirit of Aloha. Such a radical change was totally unthinkable, insane even, maybe plain stupid, but I had retained a fascination for the Middle East and

international travel. There would be opportunity to see more of the world.

My IBM Branch Manager promised me I could return to Hawaii at the end of the two-year assignment – if so, why not go? I should have gotten that promise in writing! In those days I thought I could trust people. He knew little of what I had accomplished for the US military in Southeast Asia and was just another desk pawn himself. There are no special hero rewards in big business, and promises could be forgotten or easily broken. In 1976, IBM employed almost 300,000 people. Who did I think I was to receive favors? Nevertheless, the winds of opportunity were blowing - hard. *Jeez God, here I go again*. Rewards came later in different forms.

My life in the Islands had been almost perfect – maybe perfect? I was 42 years young, in perfect health with an athletic build and an inclination to try the difficult. Ha! Big wave surfing North Shore was one of those, flying lessons another, and the Olympic sailing trials as well as the previous Transpacific Yacht Race of 1975. I was single with no solid hang-ups or social commitments - no significant other to keep me moored in place – I had tried a few island romances without permanent success. Belefonte's song still rang in my head or wherever those kinds of things hang out. My daily diet was a balance of smart computer work, customer sales calls, product teachings, lunch with friends and good fun after five o'clock. I had enough internal energy for ample servings of all that came my way.

The real 'why go' reason was that I thought I still wanted a measurably successful career with the IBM Corporation – really a wonderful company – a company where most every employee and customer could be a friend. There were a few jerks around or what we called in computer programming a 'No Op' instruction that filled a space in the code but did nothing – like a Post Turtle\*.

I was not too old yet to not be ambitious. I was 'all in' with my career gambling chips and still wanted to climb the greased rungs of the corporate ladder. I thought I had earned it in Vietnam, but the east coast peaceniks knew different. East Coast vests, tailored suits, a new tie every day, plus a large office with private secretary was not my objective, but another rung or two of responsibility with commensurate salary and a good retirement plan would be nice. I enjoyed the leadership role and took it seriously. Did it make any difference where, if not Hawaii? Why own a fine 3-bedroom home in Kahala if I was the only person to live in it? Also, I enjoyed world travel and guess I wanted more adventures. Once a good taste and swallow - comes more thirst.

\*Post Turtle – A symbolic term for a person like a lone turtle balanced on the top of a farmland fence post with no explanation of how it got there; it doesn't belong there, and once there what can it do but take up space and can't get down.

And to confess, in early 1976, I was also angry. I had busted my ass in Vietnam and near the end of the War (around 1972), our headquarters Saigon office was ordered closed – too soon I thought. With the Paris Peace Talks our Southeast Asia mission had come to an end, but I thought there were still Vietnam projects to complete – 'Land of the Tiller', teach computer programming at USAID, computer assisted monitoring as our Air Force had bombed the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Cambodia, interrogate more captured prisoners, find the MIAs, and more computer applications. Did the United States actually have to lose the war (and a few others since) or did we quit? In the early 1970s our Southeast Asia data processing machines were all sent home one at a time along with my fellow IBM bachelors who had installed and maintained them while living in the middle of that fascinating chaos. My acquired knowledge of U.S. Military data processing and

familiarity with every IBM product that the company manufactured was no longer needed.

I had become organizationally extraneous, squeezed back into a limited role – clean up duty and mundane assignments. IBM HQ didn't know what to do with a man that had wartime overseas experience. They squandered the experience of some others too and sent them to boring stateside jobs – so many quit. IBM told me 'Thanks' and I was demoted to a Hawaii Sales Representative with a routine sales territory in the Islands - okay, nice, inter-island travel, comfortable, not bad but not good enough. In Saudi Arabia I'd be trading happy Hawaiian easy days for overseas hard work, and adventure – again – but well away from memories of war.

So, one more time, why Saudi Arabia? Because, that was where the real 'Big Time' complex data processing action was happening. Saudi Arabia was in the process of becoming very 'oil rich' and could buy and build anything they wanted (and that trend has continued until now their infrastructure far surpasses much of what we call the 'Western World'). IBM in Saudi needed my acquired American technical expertise, and the overseas salary and benefits were good.

There was no Hawaiian Nēnē Goose State Bird from the slopes of Maui's Haleakala to wisely whisper in my ear - "Dumb move Dan." I'm not sure I would have listened. I hadn't realized yet what the Nene Goose somehow knew, that employees with overseas experience were soon forgotten by mainstream career path decisions – I would be out of sight, out of mind, well proven two years later.

While in Vietnam, my fellow IBM-Brothers and I had become known as "Wild Ducks", a term coined by Thomas Watson, IBM CEO. I was proud of the title, but on the morning of April 30, 1975, the war had a sad and sudden ending with the broadcast of *White Christmas* to signal a massive helicopter lift and final evacuation from our embassy's rooftop. The stigma of war and East Coast corporate conservative

attitude had remained when I returned home to my Islands, and I would be leaving the main stream career path once again.

## **Chapter 3 – The USA Sailing Olympic Trials**

So, on the way to New York City for my IBM assignment briefing, I did take two weeks of acquired vacation – use it or lose it. Independent from IBM, I had made a commitment to myself to participate in the 1976 U.S.A. Olympic Games Sailing Trials in the 20' Tornado catamaran class – seven straight days to determine what skipper, crew and boat would represent the USA in the soon to be held summer Olympic sailing events. The racing venue was a sandy lake-side beach called Association Island (fondly called 'Ass' Island) on the southeast shores of Lake Ontario, New York State. After the warm waters of Hawaii, the 65 F. degree lake waters were definitely refreshing! The national competition was what I had practiced for and something I wanted and had to do.

"Hey career, step out of the way for a short time and let me do something unique! Something I'm pretty good at."

In those years, the Tornado catamaran was arguably the fastest most athletic small sailboat anywhere on water – a pure speed machine. The Waikiki Yacht Club raised money and helped send five two-man teams and our boats almost 6000 miles via ship and then by trailer across most of the U.S. nation. I paid for my crew's round trip airline ticket, the New York interview paid for mine – one-way. I needed my crew's accumulated skills to trim the jib-sail while he hung out on a trapeze wire. His name was also Danny. I hung my larger older butt over the side of either fibreglass hull while playing the main and traveler, deciding tactics, doing twenty knots maybe plus on choppy wind kicked waters. The catamaran is the closest thing to flying Aladdin's magic carpet. There is something magical about balancing on one hull at speed, smoothly kissing the wave tops, while planning strategy and steering to the variable winds. Sailboat racing can be a serious lifetime wonderful disease.

Prior to the racing, each skipper and crew assembled their twin hulls, trampoline, mast and boom, twin rudders, and various sheets and go-fast trim lines on the lakeside beach. Each set of sails to be used were carefully measured to exacting specs, as were the rudders and mast height. The Tornado was a one-design, and each boat an exact replica of the original British design – sailing skill would make all the difference. Then two days were allowed for practice on the course and final trim adjustments.

Each triangular course race was in different weather conditions, as they usually are. Occasionally, on long upwind legs, I would yell to my partner "Hey Danny, we have to tack." He would yell back, "No skipper. We are good." And I would respond, "Get ready to tack, my back is killing me!" (see photo) There were heavy winds one day, rain another, the next a lightning and thunderstorm, and another day totally becalmed until late afternoon. That particular day, while waiting for the wind, most participants lowered sails and all 25 boats rafted up catamaran hull to hull to hull in the middle of the lake. A long line of frustrated racers formed; we sat patiently on our black meshed trampolines to chat across a few feet of water with other competitors. I thought – 'this lake sailing sucks; give me the warmer open ocean of Hawaii. Where are the waves?'

Finally, a fair wind filled in from the north and the race was on. A thirty-minute get-ready warning gun from the committee boat sounded, mains and jibs went up and the maneuvering for the start began – each skipper and boat with a preconceived tactic, most on 'right-of-way' starboard tack crowding for the weather end. Then the ten-minute signal, five and one minute, and the starting gun - BOOM – all boats clear across the line and racing toward the first marker buoy. I had done it hundreds of times. I think we placed eighth that race and felt good about how close we were to the leaders. Where and how had I lost seconds or a minute? Or could it be that they were better sailors than I?

#### Between Sand and Sea

We loved the daily competition and the post-race camping life with our bright yellow rented VW pop-top bus – perfect housing for beach time living – plus making friends and telling stories around an evening campfire. I think we finished a disappointing 16<sup>th</sup> overall – not very good – but my best sailing friend from our yacht club won those American trials and the following month won an Olympic silver medal, a moral victory for Hawaii. I enjoyed the camaraderie of other competitors from all over the United States, but didn't care for the crazy conditions of the variable winds of lake sailing. With a 42-year old back, I was probably much older than most all of the other sailors, at least that was my rationale.

After the final race-day's finish, I said goodbye to my wonderful crew, new sailor friends, my faithful boat to be trailered back west, and I continued east to find other winds – to trade sailing gear for suit, tie and wingtip black leather shoes. I am so glad to have experienced another 'Once in a Lifetime'.



US250 'Williwaw' on a perfect port tack

I flew to New York City for my final interviews and to sign IBM's World Trade Corporation's paperwork and update my shot record. I committed for two years to be both Systems Engineering and Marketing Manager for our Saudi Arabia customers and waited in the Big Apple a couple days for my Saudi visa to arrive.

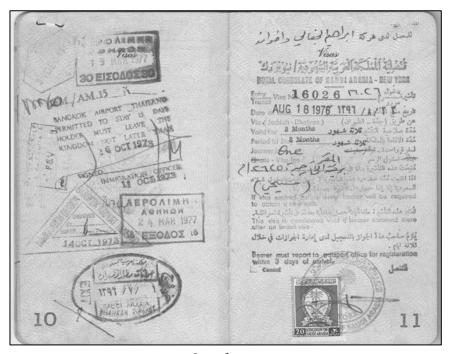
After looking at my suntanned arms and face, one gray haired IBM interviewer asked, "You've been doing what?"

I tried to explain about catamarans, competition and the Olympic Trials on Lake Ontario. He quickly excused himself mumbling as if to say, "You can't be so involved in multi-disciples," and he walked away lost in his own computer interests.

Another asked, "If you have been to Israel we will have to get you a second US Passport."

"No, I understand. That won't be necessary, but I will need additional pages for this old one."

It already had almost every page multi-stamped with entry markings from around the world – purple, blue, red and green approvals with scrawled multi-language signatures and dates to unfold and remember like any new endorsed pages would one day be. I still have those old green passports and a few more blue ones since.



One of many

At my youthful middle age, two years didn't seem like such a big deal. While in New York, I took the opportunity to go to the top of the now destroyed World Trade Center's South Tower, then only 3 years old. I remember the views were amazing – all those tall competitive buildings trying to shadow-hide the uptown streets of Lower Manhattan, China Town, Greenwich Village, the Financial District so far below me. I shifted my gaze to the longer-range views of the harbors, the Statue of liberty, and across the Hudson River to New Jersey. I was one of 1.8 million visitors that year; I scanned the city from the 110th floor standing awe struck (even now it's hard to believe the towers are gone - may we never forget). I walked the four-sided walled perimeter of the almost one-acre observation deck at 1355 feet (not quite as tall as the spire and antenna of the Empire State Building). I waved at people on the nearby twin rooftop of the 6-year old North Tower, and looked straight down at the stop-and-go flow of traffic and tiny sidewalk busy humans. Thank goodness, from that height the troubled future of America's largest city could not be imagined - it looked peaceful, packed and thriving, with no garbage or illegals on the streets.

New York City in those years was a good experience to remember. The windswept air was clear and fresh, but my chosen future seemed cloudy. I think in 1976 most of the world was at peace - with a few exceptions, like the Holy war between Israel, Syria, Lebanon and the PLO that would slightly affect my life.

I also took an informative tour through the United Nations Building on the shores of the East River – watched a full house international meeting in progress, and as I remember was impressed how each Nation's language was translated direct to foreign earphones. It was and is the one place on Earth where all the world's nations can come together, discuss common problems, and hopefully, not always, find shared

solutions that benefit most of humanity - if only they could do so now in 2024!

I ate in fancy restaurants courtesy of IBM and played a set of pickup singles tennis – on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor of my hotel! There was definitely plenty to see and do in New York for an adopted Hawaiian Islander on expenses – much more than a few days' worth, but it was time to move on.

I had left things in kind of a mess in Hawaii. Two roommate friends were living in my 3-bedroom Kahala Honolulu house on Honua Street near the base of Diamond Head; my personal stuff and grand piano were in storage, and an ex-girlfriend agent was supposed to sell the house; I had given her the listing for past sleeping privileges. I found a buyer for "Patriot" my Cal-33 sailboat but hadn't yet been paid. I had one 20' Tornado Catamaran in Hawaii under a sailing friend's care and after the Olympic Trials another Tornado was on its way to Huntington Beach to be covered and stored in a back yard. I wondered what I was doing owning three sailboats. Actually, now that I recall, I also left a Laser sailing dinghy, my 10' surfboard and my SCUBA gear in the care of friends. I retained my memberships to the Waikiki Yacht Club and Outrigger Canoe Club as status 'semi-active' being absolutely sure that I would return two years later to Oahu after a brief Saudi experience.

I was also in the middle of a very questionable romantic liaison with Debra, whom I mistakenly thought was my solo girlfriend. She had been an IBM secretary on the island of Guam; we met there the previous year during the Vietnamese refugee evacuation. I was only partially right. She said she might come to Europe or Saudi and might consider marriage. Being born and raised on Guam, I thought she probably had some indigenous Chamorro blood in her veins because she was a smooth light brown from head to toe and had no tan line anywhere in between. In retrospect she probably also didn't have a clue

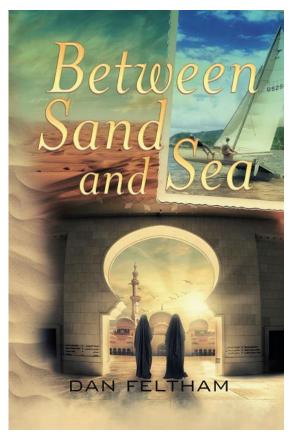
where those places were, didn't have a passport and said she was afraid to travel that far alone. Bad timing and excuses – an early romance can be so optimistically naive. If you could see her photograph, you would understand – love is not necessarily blind, just sometimes unrealistic or stupid. And love/loving is a noun as well as a verb and good sex can easily be confused like the word. Things were really screwed up, but nevertheless, I was looking forward with mixed emotions to the newness and unknown challenges ahead.

#### **About the Author**

Dan Feltham is retired and living the quiet life in Southern California. He was born in Long Beach CA in 1934. He is a graduate Geologist of Stanford University with further studies at UCLA. After living three years in North Africa in petroleum exploration, he switched disciplines and pursued an extensive career with the IBM Corporation doing what he prefers to call 'problem solving' with systems, marketing and people management including several years each in Hawaii, Southeast Asia, Saudi Arabia and Southern California. He has enjoyed international travel and also owned and raced sailboats most of his life. Dan is the author of twelve adventure novels, Trade Winds Calling, The Catalina Connection, Mount Rushmore's Legacy, The Edge of Time, a San Diego County award winner - Terror in the Gulf, then Mexican Standoff, Sahara Sands a Memoir, Copper Canyon, Egyptian Gold, O'Taheiti Dreamin', Under the Southern Cross, and Socorro. As background material for sailing episodes within a few of his books, Dan can refer to bareboat sailing charters in Caribbean, Mexican, Hawaiian, Tahitian and Fijian waters, extensive cruising and racing including the 1976 Olympic Qualifying Trials and three TransPacific yacht races to Hawaii. Dan also self-published a nonfiction account of his personal Vietnam War experiences entitled, When Big Blue Went To War, the History of the IBM Corporation's Mission in Southeast Asia During the Vietnam War. The book has been praised by many as a one-of-a-kind upfront look at war from the civilian contractor's personal point of view while living within the war zone. It describes a life changing experience for Dan and his Band of **IBM** Brothers. Dan be reached via e-mail can at danfeltham77@gmail.com.



Dan Feltham – "WELCOME ABOARD"



From the good life in Hawaii to the 1976 Olympic sailing trails, to Saudi Arabia's growth years, to a Transpacific yacht race, adventures in Europe, then back to Hawaii and sailing with friends through remote Fiji Islands.

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