

MACV Army "A" Photo Team Films Philippion Barrio Festival

When MACV handed Army "A" Photo Team, The Philippino Barrio Festival job, no body on the team, including myself had the faintest idea what a Barrio Festival was. To tell the truth, after viewing MACV's project board for months, I couldn't ever remember seeing another allied nation project listed. All we were informed of, was the event would take place in Tay Ninh City on a certain date.

Having filmed The Manila Conference with (DASPO) Dept. Of The Army Special Photo Office, TTU D102.5C1, where we chased LBJ and Lady Bird Johnson all over Manila; I well recognized that seven nations had troops and personnel in Vietnam, not just the U.S. Our only realization to these allied personnel in country was restricted to sighting them at the Saigon Main P.X. or commissary. I was clueless to where in Vietnam these Korean, Australian or Thai Troops were based, but now we were travelling to Tay Ninh to cover the Philippine personnel.

It was blatantly obvious that there would be no U.S. Military involvement concerning this project. It would be fruitless to fly to Tay Ninh and expect the U.S. Army to transport us around to an event, they had no knowledge of, therefore it behooved us to take our own 3/4 ton truck on the daily Saigon to Tay Ninh Convoy.

After completing the An Gaing Provience story TTU D102.5C10 I met a secretary working for the Saigon CORDS Office, and from time to time socialized with her. (CORDS) Civilian Office Revolutionary Developments Support, an embassy off shoot of U.S. Aid for International Development or U.S. AID. On a wild hunch that this Barrio Festival might be CORDS connected, I had the photo team drop me off at the Saigon CORDS Office. My hunch was correct. This party was being consecrated by CORDS Philippino agricultural employees in Tay Ninh Provience to celebrate having a good harvest, for those Vietnamese farmers they provided farming advise and worked with during the past growing season. In short the Barrio Festival would be a Philippine style Thanksgiving. Before leaving the CORDS Office I had the Tay Ninh CORDS address and phone number and was told they would contact Tay Ninh people to meet the convoy.

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Several years earlier, I had taken the Tay Ninh Convoy. I remembered it departed right after curfew was lifted at 6 A.M., and got to Tay Ninh around lunch. I vaguely remembered if formed up near the VNAF (Vietnamese Air Force) Gate to Tan Son Nhut Air Base It would depart Tay Ninh City early in the afternoon to make it back to Saigon before dark. We would only have about two hours to film this event, because the convoy waits for no one.

I had the driver stop by the motor pool and have the truck competely serviced and verify with them on the convoy time and place of formation.

By the time we entered the convoy there were about 70 trucks ahead of us laden with every conceivable goods and commodities known. Trucks carried booze, beer and cokes, bullets, mortars, rockets, 105 artillery round, projectiles and propellants for 155MM, 175MM and 8inch guns, along with fuses and triggering devices for these artillary sizes, fan belts, oil filters. (POL) Petroleum, oils and lubricants trucks, carrying transmission and break fluids, grease and motor oils, Fuel trucks carrying motor gas, aircraft fuel, diesel and JP-4, trucks hauling spare tracks for bulldozers, armored personnel carriers (APC) and M-48 and M-60 tanks. Refrigerated trucks for meats, milk, eggs dairy products and ice cream. Trucks carried C-Rations, coffee, sacks of potatoes, onions and beans, canned goods and much more, including mail. Everything the troops of Tay Ninh needed for the next 24 hours were on these trucks.

The convoy wasn't an unruly disassociation of trucks making the same journey together, rather it was an orchestrated 50 to 70 mile trip in each direction. The vast majority of the vehicles were assigned to the 48th Transportation Group, known as the Orient Express, that made the trip daily. The bumpy roads created medical conditions for many drivers in the form of Hemorrhoids problems or The Piles. The convoy had tow trucks for break-downs, repair trucks, MP escorts and the Convoy Commander, that oversaw the entire operation.

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The first time I took this convoy it was armed with vintage WWII Dusters and Pom-Pom weapons, once used to shoot down Kamikaza planes two wars earlier. these were twin 40mm anti-aircraft guns, with a four round clip of ammo loaded from the top of each 40mm gun also known as Pom-Pom guns. The Dusters were four or quad 50 caliber machine guns firing in unison. Both weapons the gunner sat in the middle of the motorized turret with an aiming device. That convoy relied on artillery back-up support for security.

This convoy, the convoy commander used the new MP Armored Scout vehicle, plus radio contact with artillery fire support bases along the way and (FAC) Forward Air Controller, that coordinated Air Force-fighter/bombers for convoy security.

At the suburbs of Tay Ninh City the convoy passed the only kiln for brick making, I ever saw in Vietnam. The CORDS people met the photo team at the convoy terminal point in Tay Ninh City, driving us to the agricultural experimental station where the party activities were on-going. The bushes surrounding the field office at the experimental station were all trimmed to resemble animals. On the grounds were caged monkeys and loose turkeys. A band complete with female vocalist performed, roast pig and other festive activities were under way for us to film.

While we were filming, the convoy had a complete turn around. The drivers had a chance to eat and relax for a short duration. In-coming mail was swapped for out-going. Loaded fuel trailers were switched with empty trailers. Broken, inoperative, damaged trucks, jeeps, helos, APCs and an amalgamation of other equipment damaged beyond the local maintenance facility's capability were cargo for the return trip to Saigon.

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