

MACV Photo Teams Sit Out TET

Tet for the five MACV Photo Teams turned out to be a rest period. In a strange twist of fate, the creation of the teams and underlaying fundamentals for the five photo teams inception it would adversely affect the teams mission and be detrimental to film combat operations under our (SOP) Standard Operating Procedures. A Undersecretary or Deputy Secertary for Public Relations at the Pentagon got frustrated, going home to dinner and watch the news, to see the major networks showing only the negative news about Vietnam. The secretary knew the U.S. was spending millions of dollars on Nation Building Projects and Pafication events, yet the civilian news media ignored the positive side of Vietnam, by showing blood, gut and gore. Since the civilian news media refused to cover the good news, he created military news teams to counter the negative aspects of the media news, by covering the positive realm of the American's Vietnam Policy.

While the rest of the U.S. Forces in Vietnam scrambled to mount a counter-offense to the VC and NVA's Tet Offensive, attempting to topple the Saigon Government and turn the country into a blood bath, the Navy, Marine, Air Force and Army MACV photo teams stayed in our hotel/billets rooms.

When I ventured out to the mess hall across the street in an adjacent hotel, the streets were vacant. MP some ARVN and White Mice (Viet Police) cars. Nothing else was moving on the usually busy Saigon Streets. They were deserted See photo (1). When the military bus began running a day or two later, I went to the Brinks (BOQ) to our office. As the fighting around Saigon subsided, the teams made contact with MACV HQS. The last vestige of conflict was near the race track in the Southwest portion of Saigon called the Cholon District. See photo 2 & 3. Elsewhere a tall building sustained a pock-mark from a rocket propelled grenade see photo (4). Days prior to the Lunar New Year fire crackers were set off all over the city. Sidewalks and streets were turned red from fire crackers papers see photo (5).

Refugees from the war torn country side flocked to Saigon in droves, They swelled its population straining resources. Electric brown outs were common as were water outages. Many refugees slept on sidewalks, the docks or lived in ally ways, where ever they weren't evicted. See photos 6-8.

MACV Photo Teams snooze during TET

Before and after TET, two terms come to mind. These terms were only heard at higher echelons of command. The average G.I. probably never heard the terms MOOSE and GOOSE. With a half dozen flights a day bringing additional to Saigon, the street traffic became overly congested, taking a half hour to travel two or three miles from downtown Saigon to MACV HQS, see photos 9 & 10. To relieve the pressure, Long Binh Post was constructed for housing many combat support and combat service support troops, under MOOSE for Military Out Of Saigon Expeditiously. During and after the TET offensive the term GOOSE was heard. It's simple to say, "Get The Troops Back To Saigon In A Hurry." Tanks and APCs sat at strategic locations around Saigon for months after TET See photos 11 & 12.

While the MACV Photo Teams sat out the largest battle of the entire Vietnam War. I remember that the 11th Armored Cav. Regiment darted about 40 miles, passing Bear Cat, HQS 9th Inf Div and Di An Home of the 1st Inf Div., in its race to Saigon to save the partly overrun Tan Son Nhut Airbase from being completely over taken by the VC and NVA,

Prior to TET, it wasn't strange to see funeral wagons, while travelling around Saigon. See photo 13-17. However just before TET it was normal to see two or even three funerals a day. It was later learned, the VC had used caskets and funeral processions as a means to smuggle and transport arms and weapons into Saigon and other Vietnamese cities. Hiding the caches in cemeteries.

The years of strolling the streets of Saigon, I never saw anything that resembled or could be construed as an insurance office. There may have been, but I couldn't identify them as such. The Buddhist Church seemed out of action. They appeared over-whelmed by the catastrophe. The Buddhist were ill-prepared or had no plan of action to aid in dealing with the vastness of refugees, homeless and devastation brought on by the TET Offensive. The Vietnamese Catholic Church, through its Catholic Charities, was the only civilian group able to provide, at least to their own congregation some assistance. I saw their vehicles and Red Cross vehicles in the Bien Hoa area more than once. With virtually no help those who lost everything had to fend for themselves as best they could.

MACV Photo Team Rest During TET

It was well within the MACV Photo Teams parameters to cover humanitarian aid. The scope and situation was so over incumbering that MACV HQS, didn't give the teams specific assignments, just GO. Since our time lapse was roughly 10 days between filming to natio wide T.V. air time, I choose close to Saigon locations, not requiring extensive travel time.. In the days and weeks following the TET Battle subsiding, ruins, damage and destruction was evident everywhere. In My Tho, between Can Tho and Saigon. Army "A" Team filmed a make-shift hospital set up for refugees See photo 18. Elsewhere the U.S. Military provided a bladder for drinking water to a refugee settlement, see photo 19. See TET damage done in My Tho photos 20-27.

In Bien Hoa, 15 miles North of Saigon, a portion of that city was destroyed due to heavy TET fighting. See photos 28 to 36. From all corners of Vietnam there were refugees and displaced persons. See photos 37-46.

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