

MACV Bombarded With VIPs

In every military photographer's career, there are moments of chaotic bedlam, flustering quick action to be recorded along with accompanying paperwork, of full name, with special attention to proper spelling, rank and sometimes even home towns are needed. This besides weather the pictorial coverage was a long shot, medium shot or close-up of the action. Then too, changing angles meant different lighting conditions and distance, creating all new exposure settings. Changing film rolls and winding or cranking the spring motor every 30 second of film run, were all part of the days activity. With other photo equipment utilized changing film magazines and batteries was a necessary part of the days work. Luckily most of these hectic conditions were short lived, seldom exceeding 30 minutes in duration. Allowing the photographer's memory to keep accurate records of what transpired until placed on paper.

For some inherent reason the vast majority of these film frenzy's are directly related to VIPs, including change of command ceremonies, but not wholly for all that are filmed. A chain of events by common everyday people can create a filming ordeal of equal or greater magnitude, just to maintain pace with the spontaneous action on-going.

A story of the latter type, that comes to mind was when combat engineer were tasked to clear a helicopter landing zone in the jungle. (See Engineers clear helo LZ at this website.) In a two hour marathon of voluminous activity, there were 80 troops arms and bodies all in motion, swinging axes, sawing, machetes chopping, hedge trimmers, chain saws and a diverse assortment of other tools for chopping, hacking and whacking away the jungle. Other troops hauling away logs, limbs and brush, establishing a flat place for helicopters to land. The motion and movement was categorically on par with fast paced endeavors labelled hectic or chaotic.

Not even chasing President and Lady Bird Johnson around Manila and Seoul, fighting extremely tight security and thousands of press to obtain photo coverage, could compare or come close to matching the grand-daddy of all accelerated functions, fast pace and the hectic conditions that occurred during the New York City's Lay In State, viewing of the body of General Of The Army Douglas Mac Arthur, prior to the Washington, D.C. burial. This event was antecedent to DASPO becoming its own entity. Thus many future DASPO Photographers, including myself were assigned this project.

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For this job Cpt Penny and MSG Ted Shane emptied (DASP-DIV) Dept. of the Army Special Photo Division, utilizing about 35 cameramen. At the armory, we were dispersed around the building. Some how I lucked out, getting an elevated position on the concrete and steel fence at the main entrance. From my cramped position, I could get a frontal view of people disembarking their vehicles and follow them to a side view as they ascended the steps. Of course, the funeral of General Mac Arthur's notability brought out the local and national news media in hordes.

In short order limousines arrived bringing VIPs, people I saw regularly on the nightly news. Many faces were readily recognized, but the names escaped my knowledge. The mayor of New York, the police commissioner, the fire marshal and other New York City officialdom,, that were constantly interviewed by the press were there. Legislatures and governors, United Nation Secretary General and many U.N. Embassadors, dignitaries and prominent people came. Soon the line of limousines stretched as far as you could see. Celebrities from Broadway and industrial barons from all over New York, New Jersey and New England came.

I spent as much time changing rolls of film as shooting film. The press were elbow to elbow and many times I had to ask the civilian press for names of VIPs. I didn't even know Mrs Mac Arthur and son, when they arrived. The job was so rigorous and mind draining and still the VIPs came, exiting multiple limousines at once. It was impossible to get all the names of people I saw in the camera view finder, amidst the hectic situation. For over two hours this non-stop pandemonium continued, and we couldn't control one second of the action. These VIPs weren't here to give interviews.

When the VIPs ended, I was a nervous wreck, standing precariously in one spot, my leg fell asleep. I was mentally, emotionally and physically drained from the ordeal, to exhausted to raise the camera anymore. Yet for blocks and blocks, thousands of New Yorkers were lined up, including many ex-soldiers who served under Mac Arthur's command, awaiting hours in fog and chill to pay their last respects to the dead war hero. The final tally of VIPs was 2000 to 2500, with several counts at 2200. Meaning over 1000 VIPs passed our camera each hour.

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This story isn't about Mac Arthur's Funeral per-say, but the fact that so many 1964 DASPO Photographers took part. The entire CONUS Detachment that started out at the Army Pictorial Center before transferring to Ft. Bragg, including Yoho and Massey, who are no longer with us, helped film this project.

Working for MACV Information Office, was a relaxed, layed back operation with little stress and strain as mentioned above. There were few projects that were mentally draining, fast paced, multi-tasking, quick response or so hectic in nature where at days end, you were to exhausted to do anything but flop on the bed. The brain disfunctional beyond writing captions with any clarity, eat or clean camera equipment. Yet special tasking and projects did crop up on MACV's agenda from time to time. I guess I was in the right place at the wrong time, because I was assigned both of these unusual assignment all by myself. The rest of Army "A" Photo Team either sat out the job, or worked independently on another project.

When BG Kinderdine, of the Pentagon personnel department made a fact finding visit to Vietnam, since he was an Army General, I was assigned to provide pictorial coverage of his visit. I recall the Aide-de-Camp and Chief of Staff were part of the general's entourage. Upon completion of the tour, the general was flying directly back to the Pentagon. Thus it was stupid for me to mail the film back to Washington for processing. As I finished each roll of film with captions, I handed both to the general's aide.

BG Kinderdine was in Vietnam, I think four days. The units around Saigon we drove to. At each stop, I had to jump out of the sedan to film the driver opening the door for the general. Then film the local commanders greeting the general, and get their last name off uniform name tags, from left to right. Then if the party went into a building, try to get each officers first name and position or title on this installation. Frequently after the meeting, there was a trip around the post and more names and positions of every person the general talked to. The trip was grueling. The best time to write captions was while it's fresh in my mind. However the only time I had to accomplish this was while travelling. However the bumpy rutted roads on post and stop and go city traffic made it difficult to scribble anything. Making it nearly impossible to write more than one word between bumps or stops. This was extremely slow and I never finished captions for one stop, before arriving at the next stop on the itinerary

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I never saw the itinerary, so I never knew where we were going next. I was just part of the entourage and followed the general around. I definitely remember the agenda was set up very tight time wise. We visited five to six posts, compounds a day, even during three hour flight time to and from Da Nang. As I pen this story, I recall BG Kinderdine was prompt. I don't remember finishing the day, much more than 30 minutes difference from previous days. At nights my mind was so warped, I couldn't think where we had been that day, much tell in what order we visited the units. I was even dumb-founded to recall what city we went to. Still I had to grind out captions for every foot of film I shot that day, by name, rank and title for every person I had film of. It became a night mare, yet I had to function to finish today's work today. Tomorrow it would be a repeat, and I didn't want nor could afford to have a backlog of paperwork.

Other days we took helicopters and aircraft to visit different army troop encampments. Often the Chief Of Staff or aide would ask me, once we were airborne, what city did we just visit? They also asked for peoples names, ranks or titles of certain officers they met, or what was the flying time between stops. There I was going nuts trying to get my mental and scribbled, more like chicken scratch notes down on paper, before we landed to begin all over again. The only other uninterrupted time during the day to catch up on the caption paperwork was during lunch hour, when the officers and general were eating. I seldom got caught up during lunch, but I made good progress that helped a lot and much less to do at night.

My hand writing was never good, so I hand printed all the captions for each roll of film. That was really time consuming. I've always tried to do the best I could on a job, but after four ferocious days following BG Kinderdine up and down Vietnam I was almost ready for the funny farm. If it wasn't mandatory for army photographers to prepare captions for exposed film, this special mission could have been so easy. No stress, nothing hectic or chaotic. But that was not the case. The general met and talked with from 50 to 100 people daily, requiring full name, rank and duty position of each person. In essence in four days, I put together a small phone book, besides if the pictorial record was a long shot, medium shot or close up of the people on film. That was a laborious operation.

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As I handed the general's aide the last roll of film with captions, the general thanked me for my time and cooperation I'm thinking, but can't confirm that the general wrote a letter of appreciation for my work during his visit. I have several boxes of stuff, I haven't looked at in years. I almost wished I had screwed up the job, so that they would never ask me to do another mission of this type, because a month later, by name I was selected to film another VIP visitor to Vietnam.

This time Governor Dockings of Kansas was coming to Vietnam. The purpose of his visit was to meet and talk with as many of his constituents as possible. To me that was crystal clear. The governor wanted to talk to men and women from all branches of service that live in Kansas. I don't know how things got messed up, but at many stops we made, the governor had to eat humble pie.

The first day at the initial stops, the governor would go up to an assembled group of military persons, with a big smile and shaking hands with the troops one at a time. The governor would ask the person's name? Then ask how long the individual had been in Vietnam? After three or four typical questions of this nature, the governor asked what part of Kansas are you from? Invariably the G.I. would say Iowa, Louisiana, Vermont or any state but Kansas.

I recall at the first stop the governor's entourage made about 20 troops were there to meet and talk with the governor, the first handful of military people, the governor shook hands and started a conversation with none came from Kansas. In desperation, the governor called out, " is any one here from Kansas?" Way in the back several raised their hands and the governor finally could talk with some constituents. To have one on one conversations. With Gov. Dockings finding his Kansas residents, we could both stop wasting time and film., on troop not his principle audience.

There after, upon deplaning or exiting the car, Gov. Dockings asked, " Who all are from Kansas?" Troops raising hands or coming forward at each stop. I could film Gov. Dockings communicating with each person and still have time to ask the next in line for their name, with correct spelling and hometown. Then the next and next etc. As the governor completed the first person, I asked for his or her data I needed. Since I already had the information, all I needed was to film the next two talking. At this rate, I wasn't behind the eight-ball as I was when covering BG Kinderdine. I had hand written notes, that had to be transferred to caption paper. Thus I was barely keeping abreast of the action.

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In the next few days while Gov. Dockings was in Vietnam, we travelled up and down the country, stopping to talk with naval personnel, marine corps, airmen and army troops from Kansas. The governor's trip to Vietnam was shorter than BG Kinderdine's had been, but it was still a hectic, frantic pace, keeping up with the governor, and still fulfilling my requirements as a photographer. Again I hand printed the captions for each roll of exposed film. Doing as much as possible during lunch or travelling between locations. What ever wasn't completed was homework at night. As each roll was done, I handed it to the governor's aide. Some nights I was to dead tired to eat.

No body in the governor's party had been to Vietnam. For them it was a distance place on the globe commanding a lot of attention. I even asked myself, if they had an itinerary. But I deeply believe they were so confused to even understand the schedule. At some points in the trip, I felt more like their escort, than the photographer. I was constantly quizzed by the governor's party. What town did we just leave? How do you spell Tay Ninh, Cu Chi, Dong Tam, Cam Ranh Bay, Kontum, Phu Bai etc. They asked what was the flying time from point "A" to point "B". Luckily I had been in Vietnam nearly two years and could answer most of their questions. I think they just expected the driver or pilots to get them to the next destination with the governor's entourage having no concept as to where they were headed next.

I must say filming Gov. Dockings visit to Vietnam was more relaxed than the general. I fell there are several reasons for that. First the governor was a politician, keeping his best face forward. Then too, MACV might have been able to provide the number of troops from Kansas in country, but how many never received word he was coming; or mission requirements would have Kansas residents on rivers, in the air, convoy drivers or in the jungles miles away from the governor, during his visit was any body's guess. Thus it was iffy how many Kansas residents would appear at any stop. Understanding this situation, I think MACV intentionally set up the governor's itinerary not as tightly planned as the general's. Finally I don't think the governor knew what to expect of the military.

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During my 18 month tenure with MACV, these were the only two special projects of this nature. How I was picked for both is a mystery to me. For BG Kinderdine, I had a 50/50 chance. Army Team "B" NCOIC could have been chosen, as well as myself. to follow the army general around. But Gov. Dockings, I don't know. The Gov. talked to personnel from all branches of service. MACV had photo teams from all service branches. I guess MACV wanted a proven product for the governor's visit, if BG Kinderdine sent a letter of appreciation.

Undoubtedly BG Kinderdine saw patterns and trends from computer print out, showing serious imbalances in some jobs and trained troops to fill those positions. The over and under staffing of MOS (Military Occupation Specialties) could be critical. Over staffing meant idleness, inefficiency and possible drug use. Under staffing insured unit readiness was compromised, overwork fatigue and shoddy workmanship. The general's visit confirmed the trends and let the field commanders know the Pentagon was working on the problem.

Governors and generals were far from the only VIPs to visit the war zone. Vietnam seemed to be a magnet for celebrities, stars and entertainers. Many, but not all came in connection with U.S.O. sponsored shows. The Bob Hope Christmas extravaganza being the largest and most noted. Yet USO shows took place throughout the year. Over the years, the Bob Hope Show surely brought over 100 national and internationally famous entertainers and stars to Vietnam. Many celebrities made multiple trips to Vietnam. Others came on fact finding missions. Still others came for adventure, curiosity, or where many men were. Even Playboy got into the act.

John Wayne spent about three weeks in Vietnam in 1965, while shooting the film The Green Berets. At the time I was part of a 14 man team in Vietnam, from the Army Pictorial Center. The production crew was short handed, because of the movie's remote shooting location. To help out, they utilized some army cameramen, that had worked on APC's New York sound stage. I wasn't qualified, but those that did work on the sets spoke of their experiences.

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In 1965 Playboy promoted a special deal, if you bought a life time subscription to the magazine, the first issue was hand delivered by a Playboy Bunny. I recall reading in the Stars & Stripes Newspaper, that some unit, I'm guessing the 101st Airborne Division in the Central Highlands, collected enough money for the life time subscription. All over Vietnam there was much gossip on the topic, wondering if Playboy would send a bunny and which one might come? One bunny did volunteer. The event of her delivering the initial issue, created more headlines and carried on Armed Forces Radio and T.V.

One flight I had to Vietnam, either Dear Abby or her sister Ann Landers was on board. Naturally as an advice columnist, she received lots of mail concerning the war. I can only infer, she was on her own fact-finding mission to answer the questions posed from the mail. She was seated near the front of the plane, with families and officers. The only solitude this woman got was when she went to the bathroom. The brass and women were constantly at her seat. I don't know how she ever slept.

One day MACV Army "A" Photo Team walked into the Information Office at Dong Tam. Seeing the camera, everyone in the office started asking if we were there to film Jayne Mansfield? I didn't know she was in country, much less the delta base of Dong Tam. No the photo team wasn't there to cover Jayne Mansfield! I vaguely recall someone tryed to bribe us, offering to buy the film we took of her. This happened about six weeks before she was killed in a car accident. Later in the day, the photo team spotted her, her agent/manager and MP escorts walking to a jeep on an adjacent street.

Sammy Davis Jr. hosted a U.S.O. show to Vietnam, that was coupled with a fact finding mission. DASPO was tasked to provide pictorial coverage of Mr. Davis's trip to Vietnam. (Photos and story of Sammy Davis Jr. U.S.O. show at this web-site.)

In the 1960's Joey Bishop hosted his own TV show. During summer reruns, he made a trip to Vietnam. Exactly what the purpose was, is unbeknownst to me? Joey Bishop's entourage was housed in the same BOQ as our photo team's officer. While waiting for the lieutenant, Joey Bishop's party came out of the hotel/BOQ several morning in a row. One day I stopped Mr. Bishop to discuss people writing letters to troops in Vietnam, and why most letters never got a reply from the troops. Mr. Bishop's manager was impatient, but Joey Bishop listened.

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Martha Raye, she came to Viey on a regular basis. It seemed like she showed up in country about every six months. Holding a commission as a nurse in the reserves, she didn't shirk her duties. Reservist have a commitment to a monthly meeting. Plus two weeks active duty each year, usually in the summer. I wonder if Martha Raye didn't make arrangements to split the training. One week in the summer and a week in the winter time, spent not in California, but in Vietnam, working in hospitals. The last of many time I saw her, I was sitting at Continental Palace, as she walked past.

Stars, governors and generals were but a few VIPs descending on Vietnam. Congressional delegations were as prevalent as Pentagon Brass. Few if any wanted or requested photo coverage. Corporate Technical Represenatives also came. Within weeks of the M-16's introduction into Vietnam, Colt Firearms and Aberdeen Proving Grounds had people in country to determine why the weapon was mal-functioning in combat? This well documented story, resulted in the government's rush into production of the M-16, they forgot cleaning kits. Beckman & Whitley also sent Tech Reps (See Team Size and Equip. at this website.) Training commands needed to keep abreast of new tactic employed.

A case in point. All army helicopter operating manuals required after shutting down for refueling, a 10 minute engine cool down period before re-starting. This was mandatory. With six helos refueling simultaneously, that was one hour wasted, plus blocking fuel pumps from other helos needing fuel. I saw this happen. The reason was fundamental, static electricity from refueling could cause a fire. Then some ingenious person came up with the solution to the dilemma. By driving a metal stake into the ground with electric wire and alligator clip attached to the chopper, grounded the helo from static electricity. Now the choppers could be HOT REFUELED, with the motors running.

This contradicted everything in the technical manuals and being taught to helicopter crew in school. Yet within weeks, HOT REFUELING was universally accepted all over Vietnam. The helicopter training school had to see for themselves, this new tactic, innovation or just plain field expedience.

William Foulke
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DASPO/MACV Army "A" Photo Team
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