

MACV Army "A" Photo Team Films 9th Inf Div Adoption Story

When MACV Public Information Office, received clearance to utilize it's five motion picture teams, to augment a sister command, MAC-Thai, with their photographic needs, spawned the first real competition, amongst the various military service teams, to get the most stories released. The winning team, being the first team to spend a week in Bangkok. There after, each month a different team would head to Thailand for a week. The Army "A" photo team was effectively eliminated from the competition. For weeks a mysterious burr had scratched every frame of film run through the camera. Relentless cleaning of the camera, was to no avail. Good stories, stories the Hearst Metrotone News Agency wanted to release, were rejected, because of the gremlin in the camera. Finally using a jewelers magnifying eye piece, the culprit was located and removed. Minus the plaguing problem, the teams efforts could begin anew, but far behind the other teams.

One option given solid consideration, was to take a week off, to hop, skip and jump all over Vietnam, to reshoot those stories releaseable weren't it for the scratched film. That would have insured three, probably four immediate releases for the team. The concept of splitting up the team was pondered, with part of the team reshooting the releaseable stories, while the rest of the team covered new stories. That idea was too flawed to have merit. With only one tape-recorder, it couldn't be in two parts of Vietnam at the same time. Unfortunately, the MACV project board was filled, with a new list of urgent jobs. None of the new projects were in close vicinity to a reshootable release story. Thus the MACV Army "A" Photo Team had to start from square one.

Army "A" Photo Team's moral was low, because of all the camera troubles, but imploded, when MACV handed the team an adoption story. The ceremony was to take place at the 9th Infantry Division's Headquarters, at Bear Cat, about 25 miles Northeast of Saigon, within a few days after the removal of the burr. MACV Army "B" Team had commitments, leaving Army "A" to cover the ceremony. The 9th Inf Division's aviation battalion, was going to adopt a Delta based Vietnamese (ARVN) helicopter unit. Call it negative attitude, if you want, but the chances of this type story being released were nil. Worldwide military units adopt orphanges and such, with little public interest or fanfare. MACV expected the Army "A" Photo Team to create the invisible and perform tricks, that the stateside television networks would gobble up. The story's esteem was such, that the military newspaper, "The Stars & Stripes" declinded to cover the event.

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The only plausible salvation for the story, that might give the event a 50/50 chance of release, would be if the 9th Div. troops were demonstrating, illustrating proper helicopter maintenance techniques to their Vietnamese counter-parts. Without the brotherhood of one-on-one, hands on training, teaching and learning segment, all we would have is a latent partnership. If all we could film were an American and Vietnamese officer, shaking hands and exchanging documents, capped with cake and coke snacks, the story was lethargy at best, to no story at all, which was highly conducive for a negative attitude toward the event.

The news of the adoption was so thinly publicized, that numerous Bear Cat soldiers, stopped to ask, "What the big event" and "What's going on", as the team set up to cover the ceremony. With little internal interest generated at the division's headquarters, how could the photo team, intice Washington to spur any national interest in the event. The team was told, the joint training sessions would take place, but scheduled for several weeks to a month in the offing.

As the ceremony began, there were more Vietnamese news media, than Americans. The Vietnamese were represented by both civilian and military press. Besides the MACV Photo Team, the 9th Inf Div. PIO had reporters, and one civilian news man. The American reporter, stated that he came mostly out of curiosity, and doubted he'd waste his time writing a story on the event.

The team had a choice, to hold the film, until getting back to Bear Cat, to cover the joint ally training; or forward the ceremonial footage to Washington, with a note stating "HOLD MORE COMING." First there was no guarantee, the team could get back to Bear Cat, to finish shooting the story, and secondly, no states side newscaster, wants to say a month old news item has just come to light; unless the event has national and international repercussions, but the adoption story wasn't of that caliber, and ended up being the initial assessment, a lost cause.

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