

A COMMUNICATIONS GUY REMEMBERS, A MORE INDEPTH ADDITION TO "A COMMUNICATIONS GUY'S INVOLVEMENT AND A PERSPECTIVE OF THE VIETNAM WAR 1967-1976

385TH SIGNAL COMPANY 1966/67

In November of 1966, just after I finished AIT at Ft. Gordon, I was assigned to the 385th Signal Company at Ft. Campbell, Ky. The 385th Signal was in training to get ready to be sent over to Vietnam as a Unit. My job was to work in an MSC-29 Communications Center Van. We did train hard and participated in several exercises held by the 501st Signal Battalion and the 101st Airborne. They were doing all they could to get us ready for our PCS to Vietnam. Then around the March time frame of 1967, the Department of the Army decided to send us as individual replacements instead of a Unit to Vietnam. Talk about the luck of the draw, out of a company of around 220-250 troops, all but 5 of us received orders for Vietnam, the remaining 5 received orders for Thailand, I was one of them. In May when the 5 of us got to Thailand, 4 went to Bang Pla, the signal relay site just southeast of Bangkok, I was assigned to the Capital Hotel as a member of the 105th Signal Detachment. Just think of the odds, that I would beat a 50-1 shot and be sent to Thailand instead of Vietnam and the 250-1 odds of myself ending up at the Capital in support of DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI. If I had not had this luck of the draw, chances are, I, like most of the other draftee's in the old 385th Signal who had gone to Vietnam, served their 2 years and got out of the Army. I have no doubt; I would have done the same. Starting off in Bangkok and not Vietnam, especially starting my military career off at the Capital Hotel, set the tone of what I would be doing and become involved in through out the rest of my active duty military career

105TH SIGNAL SERVICES DETACHMENT 1967/68

THE 105TH SIGNAL DETACHMENT'S AREA COMMUNICATIONS CENTER: In May of 1967, I arrived in Bangkok as a PFC, E-3, assigned to the 105th Signal Services Detachment, with my job at the Capital Hotel. I was going to work in the Area Communications Center on the 2nd floor as a Communications Specialist. I tend to call this DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI'S Communications Center, but they were but one customer. Some of the other organizations we covered for were 91st MI Detachment, 93rd Psychological Operations Company, the 5th and 83rd Radio Research Units, USARSUPTHAI, 9th Logistical Command, which also had their Headquarters Orderly Room at the Capital Hotel, and other Army Units that I have forgotten. We also protected for AFOSI, an Air Force Unit, OICC, which was Navy, SEATO Headquarters and SEATO Lab, plus ARPA and a few other organizations. One of the simplest ways to put it, we provided communications support for everyone in the Bangkok Area with the exception of JUSMAGTHAI/USMACTHAI which had their own communications center

in their compound on Saturn Road and the American Embassy, which also had its own communications center on Wireless Road. We provided world wide communications for all these units, capable of sending and receiving teletype messages at the Top Secret level via a microwave shot out to Bang Pla, which was a major communications relay site. The 105th Signal could also provide Radio Teletype and Switchboard operations if any of the customers requested it, able to go and set up anywhere in Thailand. As a 72B20, a Communications Center Specialist whose responsibility was to type up, send and receive teletype messages, distribute all the message traffic to the correct addressee's and ensure proper security was maintained. We gave our customers, for 1967 standards, a very secure and at that time, fast communications to anywhere in the world. We had 2 boxes for incoming traffic for each unit we covered for, one for unclassified and one for classified message traffic, that way the messages were segregated and when one of our customers picked up his traffic, he would know which were classified and which were not. They signed for all traffic, regardless of classification. Then we had what was called SPECAT/Codeword traffic. SPECAT stood for special category and the units which utilized this type of procedure, had given us list of those persons authorized to pick these types of messages up, the list included their social security number, security clearance and codeword they were authorized to pick up. There could be one person authorized to pick up one Codeword, but not any other even if the messages were addressed to the same unit. These were always handled separately and with the strictest security procedures. Providing this service enabled those units to communicate their needs, give and receive orders, sustain operations, make timely decisions, know what was expected of them, keep in touch and abreast of happening events world wide, know what their subordinate units were doing and if help was needed, they got it and keep parent units abreast of developments in Thailand . I had a job of trust, a job of keeping the organizations we serviced communicating with whom ever they needed to be in touch with, to send and receive their message traffic and to do so in a way that security was never compromised. While I worked in the 2nd floor communications center, I did this and help ensure all the organizations we serviced, received the fastest and most secure communications we could provide. I loved my work.

But I loved Bangkok more, as a 20 year old, turned loose on the streets of Bangkok; I jumped right in to the night life of the big city. When I got to Bangkok, we were working a 6 and 2 schedule, which meant 6 swings, 2 days off, 6 mids, 2 days off and 6 day shift, again 2 days off. On those 2 days off, I really partied. I would start off on Sukumvit Road, hit the bars that were open during the day, around 7PM, it was time to head to New Petchburi Road, the Rhapsody, Thai Heaven, California bars waited for me. Singha Beer was a dollar a bottle, but the bottle was liter size. You could pick up any of the girls working at these bars for 100 Baht for all night, \$5.00; I did so on numerous occasions. Around midnight, the bars on New Petchburi closed, so I would head out to Klong Toey, where the Venus Room and Mosquito bar awaited. They stayed open until 2AM, then on to Thermae's Coffee Shop. Thermae's had a message parlor on the first floor and the coffee shop/restaurant in the basement. They served good food and beer, but more important, there were always girls around you could pick up, usually just for a place for them to spend the night. Night life was good. I made the most of it.

In late 1967, I made Specialist 4, E-4 and life seemed pretty good. I really enjoyed my job and the night life of Bangkok even more. The Army at this time was a work hard, play hard Army and I fit right in. If there was a war going on 2 countries over in Vietnam, you could not prove it by me. Outside of running into GI's who were on R&R from Vietnam, Vietnam could have been situated in the middle of Kansas for all I cared. Our mission was Thailand and Laos related at the Capital Communications Center and we rarely got any messages dealing with Vietnam. What a place to spend the war, I got to know a couple of Thai Army Sergeants who worked in our maintenance shop and in early 1968, started hanging out with them at their Saphon Kwai Army Base, located half way between the Capital and the Victory Monument. I started learning the local language and we would head out to Bang Poo on some Sundays, where the Thai Army had a recreation site and Thai Bands played out at the end of a pier out in the Gulf of Siam. I forgot their last names, but I called them Sergeants Chai and Chen. When we stayed on the Thai Army Base we would talk and drink Mekong Whiskey, when it was my turn, we would hit a couple of bars around the area and I would buy the Singha. We became mighty close, but in the middle of 1968 came word that consolidation of the 2 U.S. Army Communications Centers would take place. The Area Communications Center was going to close and we would be moved over to JUSMAGTHAI Compound on Satorn Road. Worse yet, the Thai Army Maintenance Shop was closing and would not be moving with us over to the JUSMAGTHAI Compound. I promised to keep in touch with my 2 Thai Army buddies, but as with a lot of good intentions, that did not happen. It was time to move on over to my new job and duties in the JUSMAGTHAI/USMACTHAI.

JUSMAGTHAI/USMACTHAI TCC 1968/69

What a change, in the old Area Communications Center, we had a single 100WPM teletype circuit to Bang Pla, with 4 or 5 people on shift. A Sergeant E-5 was our shift supervisor and an SSG, E-6 was the NCOIC with a Warrant Officer Two as the OIC. What the JUSMAGTHAI Telecommunications Center (TCC) had was 3 100WPM teletype circuits to Bang Pla, a dedicated 100WPM Teletype circuit to MACV and an AUTODIN Circuit to Korat which ran at the incredible speed of 1200 baud or 1600WPM. This was the big time; we had around 15 people per shift, an SSG, E-6 as shift supervisor and an SFC, E-7 as NCOIC and a crusty old Warrant Officer 4 as OIC. We still dealt with our old customers from the Capital Commcenter and now handled all of JUSMAGTHAI/USMACTHAI to boot. We were still a Top Secret Facility and besides providing all the services the old AREA Communications Center did, we also provided off-line encryption capabilities. I went to the American Embassy for a week's course prior to reporting to the JUSMAG TCC. Now as I reported in, instead of a 72B20 Communications Specialist, I had become a 72B30, Cryptologist or a specialist in off-line encryption. Wow, a week's course and I am the specialist in this field, wonders will never cease. Now our customers have the ability to bring me a message that they want sent out to whomever and not even our own TCC personnel will know what it said. I will type it up on a KL-7, which utilized 5 letter code groups and give the jumbled mess to one of our guys to type it up on a teletype and send it out over AUTODIN. This way, only two people know what was in that message, I and whomever brought it over. This brought a

little more security than codeword, specat traffic affords. I think I liked the old place better, but what the heck, I am still in Bangkok.

As 1968 was coming to a close, I finally hooked up with a girl and decided to shack up or move in with her and cut back on all my bar running. She was a nice little girl who used to work in the Sorry About That bar on Sukumvit Road, if you can call a bar girl nice. What normal American's do not know, there are a lot of bar girls who work in the bars to support their families, this was the case with mine. She had a beautiful 5 year old daughter and a couple of nephews that moved in with us. I did not mind; guess it was time to settle down a bit. She stopped working and for that last year in Bangkok, we were very happy. A lot of the girls will work in a bar, until they can find someone to take care of them, when that someone leaves for the states, back to the bar they go looking for another. She had security for that last year and I did not have to worry about catching anything. Late 1968 also brought an E-5 board for me and a chance to make E-5. The night before the board, I shined my brass; spit polished my shoes and went bar hopping instead of studying. I must admit, in the morning it seemed like everyone was nervous except me. I was still hung over. The Sergeant Major asked me, "You seem awful calm and not a bit nervous, did you study and do you want to make Sergeant?" I lied a little, I said, Sergeant Major, yes, I studied, but around 10PM last night I decided I either knew all the material I needed to know and another 3-4 hours studying would not help me learn what I did not know then, so I went to bed. This morning, Sergeant Major, I will both pass this board and make Sergeant or I will fail, if I make Sergeant, I will be very proud and do my duty, if not, being an E-4 in Bangkok is not the worse thing that can happen. Guess he liked my answer, I made my Sergeant. I also started playing baseball for the JUSMAGTHAI team out at the ISB School, around Soi 41, off of Sukumvit Road. What more could a GI want, I called it the 4 B's, Bangkok, Baseball, Beer and Broads. Life is good.

As the men got ready to land on the moon, our work load in the JUSMAG TCC was extremely heavy. Here, at JUSMAG, Vietnam was in the fore front, only a couple of messages a day dealt with Laos and only a few more with the Thai Communist Insurgency up North. One night the CT's (Thai Communist) got into Ubon RTAFB where the U.S. Air Force flew bombing mission out of over the Ho Chi Minh Trail and all over Vietnam, they manage to blow up a couple of airplanes. Needless to say, that was one big busy night. Even with that, Vietnam still was very much in the fore front. We got Operational Summary's, Situation Reports, Intelligent Reports; reports of every kind you can think of about Vietnam were coming through us. 90% or more of them classified. I continued to do my off-line encryption thing when needed, but spent most of my time working out on the floor, doing what ever needed to be done. In July of 1969, my tour in Bangkok was coming to an end, I made the decision to volunteer to go to Laos, and I went over to the Capital Hotel, went up to the 5th floor and told the Colonel I wanted to volunteer. I was accepted. The OIC of the JUSMAGTHAI TCC, told me if I wanted to stay for another year, he would put me in for E-6, I told him no, I had decided to play James Bond for the U.S. Army in Laos. So in September, I said Good Bye to Bangkok and Hello, Vientiane. A very good trade indeed.

VIENTIANE, LAOS 1969/70

When the time came for me to leave Thailand, I had volunteered for Laos. As a result, in September of 1969, I reported to DEPCHJUSMAGHTAI, located on the 5th and 6th floors of the Capital Hotel. I processed in, went through my briefings and turned in anything that had to do with the military; this included my military ID, dog tag's and a jacket that had 105th Signal Detachment on the back of it, which I never did get back. This assignment was going to be strictly civilian status; I could not keep anything that would associate me with the U.S. Army. I had become a member of Project 404 and I was on my way to Vientiane. Once I arrived in Vientiane, I was issued an Embassy ID card, got a Lao drivers License and most important to me, because I was on civilian status, received \$200.00 to go buy some new civvies. So far, so good. I went to work in the Attaché Communications Center, working shift, a 3,3,3,3 schedule. That meant 3 swings, 3 mids, 3 days and 3 days off. This was a better shift schedule than I had worked in Bangkok, as it turned out, Vientiane was a miniature Bangkok in every aspect, but a lot less expensive. As fortune would have it, working with me in the Attaché Commcenter was Mike Acey; we had worked together before, on the 2nd floor Area Communications Center of the Capital Hotel in 1967/68. He started showing me the town, or should I say bars. First came the Tropicana, it came first because it opened up at 9AM. From there, came Nickies, the Concorde, Rosie's, the Lido on Don Phalane and a couple of more I forgot the names of. He took me to the White Rose, the most famous or infamous bar in Vientiane and then we got something to eat at the 3rd Eye. Not a bad start, I am going to like it here, war or no war.

In Vientiane one would not know a war was going on if not for work, there we got all sorts of reports from the different Military Regions, MR I, Luang Prabang, MR II, Long Tieng/Sam Thong MR III, Savanakheth, MR IV, Pakse, MR V was Vientiane. Most reports came in via radio and radio teletype, compiled up front and given back to us to send out in SITREP and OPSUM forms. We had a UNIVAC 1004 computer on our AUTODIN circuit to Korat; we also had 3 100WPM teletype circuits in the Attaché Communications Center, one to Udorn RTAFB, an AIRA circuit, one to Bang Pla, the ARMA circuit and a dedicated circuit to MACV. For us in Vientiane, our main focus was on the secret war going on in and around the Plain of Jars or what we called the PDJ up in MR II. It was CIA run, but with a lot of help from military personnel, like myself on civilian status. Things got really hairy up there in the early part of 1970 when the NVA over ran Sam Thong and laid siege to Long Tieng. The NVA kept up the pressure for 2-3 weeks and then withdrew, but it was a very hectic time. During the siege, our personnel who supported MR II would fly up there during the day and return at night to Vientiane. Not much went on in MR I, Luang Prabang, but down in MR III and MR IV, Savanakheth and Pakse, our personnel down there were in charge of watching the Ho Chi Minh Trail and directing the bombing runs of the Royal Laotian and U.S. Air Force trying to disrupt the flow of supplies than came down that trail. There were only 2 of us on shift to handle all of this communications, so we stayed very busy at work, the Ambassador would only

allow the minimum number of military in Laos, and he controlled every aspect of the war there.

But after work, it was bar time. I had been told that at any one time, the PL (Pathet Lao) would have a company or two in Vientiane and their hang out were the bars down on the Mekong River. I do not know how true it was, but I never ran into a PL that I know of and I visited the bars down by the Mekong every once and a while. They were not really my kind of places. Out at what was known as KM-6, where people whom worked for the Embassy lived, had a nice ball diamond, every so often we would play the Japanese a baseball game there. Vientiane was definitely not a bad place to be if you had to be in a war zone. Civilian clothes, a night life that would not quit and very cheap, 60 cents in any of the bars would get you a cold bottle of Heineken or San Miquel, as for the bar girls, 1,000 kip all night if you desired. 1,000 kip was \$2.00. At the end of an evening of bar hopping, we would head to Lucky's, in the Lido Hotel, every other bar had to close at midnight, but Lucky's stayed open until 2AM, there I became kind of a celebrity. Having been stationed in Bangkok for 2 1/2 years prior to me going to Vientiane, I had learned how to speak Thai fairly well, there were Americans who could speak Lao, but I was the only one who could speak Thai that I know of. I would use it on the girls at Lucky's and they loved it, can someone say freebie for the night. Do not get me wrong, we would bust our balls at work, some of us commo guys had to head up north, mostly RATT operators, we had a courier run or two, but when it come to our off time, we enjoyed ourselves. Remember, this was at a time when the Army Motto was to work hard and play hard. Yes, this is the best way I found to fight a war. Besides the night life, a bowling alley sprung up just outside of town, so a league was formed. At first there were only 6 teams in the league, I was only an average bowler, but it was fun. One of the AIRA guys and our OIC got the madam of the White Rose to sponsor our bowling team and supply us with shirts. Now picture us in a bright blue bowling shirt with a big white rose on the back. Those were the days. Needless to say, the Embassy folks frowned on our sponsor and it only lasted one season. Guess there were political correctness way back then, but we just did not know what to call it. Yes, work was very serious and everyone I knew were dedicated to provide the best communications support they could possible provide, but our time off was, shall I say, quite entertaining.

LONG BINH, RVN 1971/72

LONG BINH, RVN: I had arrived at Long Binh early in 1971, assigned to the Area Communications Company, which ran and operated Russell Major Relay. It was a very busy place, we had over 30 100WPM teletype circuits going to various units located all around South Vietnam, most of these were to small, isolated units, that were not located close enough to an existing communications center that was tied off an AUTODIN Switching Center, like Russell was. Russell had 2 AUTODIN circuits, a 1200baud/1600WPM circuit to the Korat ASC and an MODE V circuit/100WPM to the ASC at Clark AFB in the Philippines. We also, took care of all message traffic for all the Units on Long Binh, with the exception of USARV, which had its own Communications Center. Life in Long Binh was very different from both Bangkok and Vientiane, Long

Binh was a huge Army Post, communications, supply, aviation, and a whole lot of support for the war effort took place out of here. We worked 12 hour shifts, 6 days a week and then got a day off. One could not just get off work and go down town to the nearest bar here, we were stuck on Long Binh and except for a special pass to go to Vung Tau or Saigon or maybe an R&R to Bangkok, you stayed put. Our company had a bar and a day room where we could have a beer and watch AFVN TV, but the night life of the big cities of Vientiane and Bangkok are gone. Our barracks are old tin hooch's, but they keep us dry and they are a safe place to sleep. We have hot showers, abet they are also in a tin hooch about a quarter of a mile from my barracks, but what the heck, it could be worse. I like my job at Russell and I think the job satisfaction I get makes everything worth while. I went down to the big PX and bought a TV for the hooch I lived in and a small refrigerator to keep my beer in. Now when I am off, I have TV, there is only the AFVN channel, but I kind of like the old 1950's TV shows that they broadcast and they do show a ton of the NFL games, I also have all the beer I can drink, life could be a lot worse. Besides, every three months I get to go to Bangkok, I alternate 6 day leave and 6 day R&R's to accomplish this.

But with the drawdown of troops in Vietnam, one by one, our in-country circuits began to disappear, along with a lot of the Units we support on Long Binh itself, as these personnel and Units returned to the States as part of President Nixon's drawdown of forces. At the beginning of 1972, the Area Communications Company, along with Russell Major Relay was deactivated, but we did not return to the states. We moved around 10 of our 100WPM teletype circuits, what was left at that time, up on the hill to the USARV Headquarters. I became a member of the Command Communications Company working in USARV's communications center along with what personnel were left of the old ACC. You could now travel around Long Binh, see once busy and active buildings, home to units that were once active in the war, abandon and empty. It presented a gloomy site. My year in Vietnam was about up, so I extended to 6 more months. Why? I enjoyed my job, I felt we were accomplishing a winning effort, besides; I had no real yearning to go back to the states. Here I could go to Bangkok every three months, besides, here on Long Binh, everything was for real, there was no playing Army, I had no desire what so ever to go back stateside and play Army. When the Eastertide offensive began, Long Binh had only half the activities and troops it had when I first arrived a year ago. The NVA never got close, never the less; it was a very hectic 2 weeks. The amount of message traffic coming in, going out and being relayed was tremendous. When the ARVN's showed they could hold and then retake most of the territory they originally lost, also gave us a sense of accomplishment. Of course the U.S. Air Force had much to do with the ARVN's success, but I would say the ARVN's did a damn good job. Then around October of 1972, word came that Long Binh was to be turned over to the ARVN's and that what was left of us would be relocated to Saigon, to go to work at MACV. Except for USARV Hill and the barracks surrounding it, Long Binh had become a desolated place. Then the ARVN's started moving in, convoys of Tanks and Artillery Pieces would drive by, moving to other parts of Long Binh, taking over our old motor pools, barracks, supply and ammo dumps. Finally around the 1st of November, it became time for them to take over USARV hill and all the Headquarters Buildings there. I watch the American Flag come down for the last time, kind of sad it was. I remember I was

interviewed by one of the TV networks, once everything was handed over, do not really remember what I said, all I knew was I was leaving my home of the last 18 months or so. I looked forward to Saigon, but I was leaving a piece of me here. No firefights ever took place here, while I was stationed in Long Binh, no Artillery or Rocket attacks, in fact, Long Binh was a very secure place. The war went on all around us, we did our job, supporting and directing, and this was an important place. It was time to say, goodbye, it was a hard goodbye. I looked around at the 10 to 15 of us that was left, we were climbing on back of a 2 ½ ton, everyone looked happy; it seemed I was the only one to feel kind of sad. PCS and moving is a fact of live in the Army, Saigon awaited, and time to move on. Farewell old girl. The irony of the ARVN Tank Platoon taking over my old Barracks at Long Binh is that after the Vietnam War was done and over with, I would spend 3 ½ years with the 11th ACR, a tank Regiment.

TON SON NHUT, MACV 1972/73

In November of 1972, I arrived in Saigon, Ton Son Nhut to be precise. Long Binh was now behind me, I am now a member of TCF 39th Signal Bn. USASTRATCOM-SEA, based on Ton Son Nhut AFB. What a change, nice wooden billets instead of old tin corrugated buildings, an NCO club with 5 bars and 3 stories instead of the old tin and steel frame one we had at Long Binh. Snack bars, PX or is it a BX that will not quit, fully stocked class VI, local Vietnamese bars right on base with good looking girls, I am going to like it here. The Air Force sure does know how to live. So with all this in mind, I walked right down to our Headquarters Personnel Section and put in for another 6 month extension, it was approved. From what I see here, I may never leave, this is not Bangkok or Vientiane, but its getting closer. My job now is in the MACV TCC, quite a big operation. We have a Captain as Shift Supervisor, first time in my military career that we have had an officer on shift. Our message traffic is enormous, but I am working in the hub of the main organization that the running of the Vietnam War. There are not very many of us American Military left in Country, but the situation seems steady enough, in fact you can not even tell there is a war going on around us. Saigon seems pretty secure, much like Long Binh was. We work 12 hour shifts, 6 days a week, but on the 7th day, we can head down town Saigon to see the sights, I am not impressed with TuDo Street, but after Bangkok and Vientiane, who would be. I like the small bars on base more than the ones on TuDo, more quite and friendly they are, but it might be I am just getting older. There is a lot of talk about the Paris Peace Negotiations; personally, I hope nothing comes of them. I like it here. Part of that is that I ran into an old friend from Long Binh, SGT Fry, who has worked here at MACV for awhile, he introduced me to a nice built Vietnamese girl who works on base, we hit it off and in a week, I move into her apartment, bringing my refrigerator and TV from Long Binh. Her apartment is only about a 15 minute taxi ride from Ton Son Nhut, so I can spend all my off duty time with her, guess I am shacking up again. I am enjoying Vietnam more and more, in fact, I even passed up a chance for another R&R in Bangkok. .

December brings a break up in the Paris Peace Negotiations, the North Vietnamese have walked out, good, and I do not want the negotiations to succeed. Then President Nixon

authorized the massive bombing of the North by B52's and our work load really increases. I am thinking it is about time, I have been in Southeast Asia since 1967 and this is really the first time that we are bringing our power to bear. I want it to work and again I do not. While the bombing is going on, I take my new girl to the Saigon Zoo, nice place. This war is not too bad for a communications guy. Then at the end of December comes the dreadful news, the North have agreed to resume negotiations. I sure do not want to go back to the States; I am just starting to enjoy Saigon. January brings more bad news for me, the Paris Peace Negotiations have succeeded, I got just 90 days left at the most, this was my worst fear. I just got here and now I am going to have to leave. Wonder what my new girl will think? But as luck will have it, an old friend I used to work on and off for in Vientiane and Long Binh dropped by the MACV TCC, and asked me where I wanted to go once I leave Vietnam. Naturally I said Bangkok. Ole Bud said he will see what he can do. February, FEC civilians are arriving to replace us, now we are teaching them how to work and operate the equipment in the TCC, some of the FEC civilians are ex military that used to work here. The hand writing is on the wall. I sure hope Bud comes through. March brings very good news, I got my orders and am heading back to Bangkok, wonder what Bud meant that I would have more good news when I arrive; anyway, leaving Saigon is not so bad now. Still wonder what my new girl will say about my leaving Saigon, have not told her yet, but she must know that all of us military types are leaving. I think it was on 25 March 1973, I boarded a 707 destined to Bangkok, a 2 hour flight. I did not say or tell my new girl I was leaving, I just left. Well, that life, she will have to make due with the FEC civilians. Good Bye Saigon, Welcome back to Bangkok, home, sweet home.

BANGKOK 1973/74

I am now back in Bangkok, taking a 30 day leave prior to reporting back to the JUSMAGTHAI/USMACTHAI TCC, the place I left in 1969 to go to Vientiane. It nice to be back in the old city, but lots of changes has occurred since I left in 1969. Bangkok has become more westernized, the klongs that ran down the middle of a lot of streets have been filled in and 2 lane roads are now 4 lanes or more. In 1967, the Capital Hotel was the tallest building in Bangkok at 8 stories, now they have the Chok Chai building, close to 30 stories. There sure has been a big building boom, a lot of the bars I used to frequent are now closed, the old strip, New Petchburi has only the Thai Heaven left, but across town, Pat Pong has become the new strip with twice as many bars, not the same. I think Bangkok has lost some of its charm, but it is good to be back. I cannot think of any other place in the world that I would want to be. Since Bangkok has changed so much, I wonder if JUSMAGTHAI has followed suit and changed a lot also. I sure did not notice all the changes going on when I was on R&R or here on leave.

I reported in after my leave and found out I had made SSG, E-6, after I left Vietnam, guess this is what Bud was referring to. The old TCC is in the same place inside the JUSMAGTHAI Compound, but has been upgraded since I left. There are now 2 AUTODIN circuits, one to Korat and one to Clark AFB in the Philippines. The teletype circuits are all gone and Bang Pla has closed up. Some of the military units in the Bangkok area that were here in 1969 when I first left have closed and departed for the

States. I guess the Vietnam drawdown has also affected some of the units here in Thailand. But the TCC is still a busy place; we still have JUSMAGTHAI and DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI, along with numerous other units. MEDTC has a LNO here in the compound and there is still a war going on next door in Cambodia and Laos. In Vietnam we get reports all the time of cease fire violations and I have begun to wonder if the Paris Peace Pact is all it was cracked up to be. I guess only time will tell. The Paris Peace Pact has not really effected our operations here in Thailand and I am thankful for that. The CT's, Communist Thai's has continued to be a nuisance in the Northern Provinces, but it more of a pesky nuisance than anything real serious.

Toward the end of 1973, the Thai Students have started demonstrating for democracy and against the Thai Military who have ruled Thailand since WWII. Their main objective is to oust Thanom Kittikachorn, a General in the Thai Army who has ruled Thailand since 1963. Thanom has been a good friend to the U.S.; I wonder how his ouster will affect that relationship and our troops we have stationed here. The fact it is college students doing the protesting and demonstration are not lost on me, fortunately the students are leaving us Americans alone. To keep a low profile during all of this, Chief JUSMAG issues an order for us to wear civilian cloths to work instead of uniforms. In the end the students are successful and Thanom flees Thailand, it was reported that hundreds of students had died at the hands of the military during all of this, but as I move and travel though out Bangkok, I see or hear of no funeral ceremonies or other rituals that should accompany that many deaths, not even the Bangkok Post is reporting on any deaths of the student protestors. As 1973 comes to an end, the Thai People are now getting ready to elect their first civilian government for quite a long time. I wish them well. I ran into a girl that I first got to know way back in 1967, when I first arrived in Thailand and we have started seeing each other. I am not longer a bar hopping fool, I do visit some small bars on Sukumvit Road now, like the Westerner and the City Bar, but mostly to listen to Johnny Cash, drink beer and shoot darts, darts are a habit I got from Vientiane. I am actually starting to behave my self, must be old age.

The news at work as 1974 begins is not good. Lon Nol's forces in Cambodia are on the retreat, the Khmer Rouge has blocked all road traffic in and out of Phnom Penh, and resupply of his forces and people of Phnom Penh is by river barge up the Mekong River or by Airplane. This is not good news at all, in Vietnam, cease fire violations are on the rise and I wonder why the U.S. does not start bombing the NVA again, we got the planes right here in Thailand and are doing no body any good on the ground, although they are used in Laos and Cambodia. The news from Laos is not any better, the Pathet Lao and their NVA compatriots have taken over quite a bit of the country since the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, and things are starting to look down right gloomy. There has been a few more units leave Thailand, but for the most part, we still have quite a punch left, that is if we can get permission to use it. Now the big question is what the civilian government will do, will they let us stay or ask us to go? No word on that yet, but no word is good. As far as the CT's go in the Northern Provinces, the Thai Army and the Thai Border Police are reporting that it is mostly taken care of, just a few renegades left. The Bangkok Post has reported that the U.S. is thinking of pulling out some Air Force Squadrons and maybe turning over Korat, Tahkli and Ubon back to the Royal Thai Air

Force, this must be the beginning of the un official drawdown of our forces in Thailand. With all of this going on, I extend for another year in Thailand.

BANGKOK 1975

With another year to go in Thailand, things did not start off that entire well. In January the NVA launched several probing attacks in thee Central Highlands. Our traffic started to increase as we received IR's from Vietnam and Cambodia continued to deteriorate. We did not hear much from Laos, but that was the norm for us in the TCC. I wondered with the situation going from bad to worse in Vietnam and Cambodia, if the withdrawal of the Air Force troops from Thailand would slow or stop. It did not. In February, all hell broke loose in Vietnam, but it seemed we, the United States would do nothing. I kept wondering why, it was clear to me the North Vietnamese had violated the Paris Peace Pact big time, what was wrong with the people in Washington D.C.? We had tons of reports going in and out, keeping everyone informed, why no action. March brought more bad news, Phnom Penh was surrounded and seemed on its last legs, the Bangkok Post was publishing articles wondering is the Southern Half of South Vietnam could hold out and remain free. Still, we just sit here in Thailand, doing nothing but passing reports back and forth. We still have quite a punch at the Royal Thai Air Force bases that house our planes and troops, what are we waiting on. I just can not understand why we are not doing anything. Maybe it's me; maybe it is my black and white view of the world. The good guys, the freedom loving people of the world versus the bad guys, the commies of the USSR, China and North Vietnam. I want to shout at the top of my lungs, HEY GUYS, SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA ARE ON OUR SIDE. Guess I will just go home and have a beer. I can not believe we are letting this happen.

April was hell for me, around the 10th of the month; the J-6 visited us in the TCC, asked for volunteers to form a communications team to go into Cambodia to provide commo support for the evacuation. Eagle Pull he called it. I volunteered without hesitation as I would say 75% of the people working in the TCC at JUSMAG. Our hope was finally; maybe the United States was going to do something. Our hopes were dashed. Although he had put us on 2 hour alert and we had two ¾ ton shelters ready to go, one a RATT rig and the other a Magic 17 van, we went no where. The Air Force, who was also on alert, went no where. We did nothing. Eagle Pull, what a misnomer, should have been called Chicken Flight, Chicken Shit, and Chicken Feathers. For the entire evacuation, we just sat in the TCC and passed reports back and forth, what a farce. Once the operation was over, the J-6 came back down to the TCC and thanks us, thank us for what, sitting on our hands and passing reports back and forth, I asked about Vietnam, what are the chances we might do something as it seemed it was doomed also, the J-6 could only say, that situation is out of his hands, it seems our job will be just to pass reports back and forth while 2 allies fall to the communist and we do nothing. Time for another beer.

At the end of April, another evacuation, this time Saigon, named Frequent Wind. This time the J-6 did not bother to set up a communications team. We all knew the U.S. would do nothing, except the evacuation. Message traffic wise, remained fairly normal, no big influx like Eagle Pull occurred. I am not even sure if the Air Force were put on alert for Frequent Wind, they also knew they would do nothing. A lot of Vietnamese flew their planes into Thailand, landing at Ubon, NKP, U-Tapao and some even made it to Korat, but that was it. That was the U.S. Military response to the fall of Saigon, letting some planes land. I guess the Navy had a great deal to do, but for us in Thailand, it was sitting and watching, this time, that was exactly what we expected. That 2 countries of old Indochina down, 1 more to go, I'll be the Patet Lao will not take long to dissolve the coalition government and take over the whole shebang.

I do not remember exactly when BG Aderholt arrived and became Chief JUSMAG, but it was during this time frame. The famed Air Commando had been called out from Retirement to take this position. I felt real good about him being in charge, he had great relations with the Thai Military and a lot of Government officials. That is until I was talking with one of his Aide's, an Air Force Staff Sergeant who informed me that DOD had sent him over to Thailand to oversee the drawdown of U.S. Forces. The hope was he could get the Thai Government of PM Pramoj permission to keep the Air Force at Udon and U-Tapao and a couple of Army Bases, only time will tell if he is successful. In May my enlistment in the Army was up, it was time for me to make a decision whether to stay in and make the Army a career; I had 9 years at this time or get out. The fact that the U.S. had done nothing to deter the fall of Cambodia and Vietnam, I started looking for a job outside the Military. I really did not want to be part of a Military that will let its friends and allies fall to the communist. So I started looking in Thailand, at some of the civilian companies in and around Bangkok, no luck, a lot of their contracts had been with the U.S. Military and with the drawdown, they were sending people back to the states also. I check with the Embassy, maybe a job with the State Department, but I was informed I could go ahead and apply, but they had to find jobs for all their employees who were out of a job due to the fall of Vietnam and Cambodia and they had priority placement. I got within 2 weeks of the time for me to ETS and go back to the states, when I was informed I could re-enlist for present duty station and be guaranteed a year more in Thailand. I went for it, I re-enlisted, but instead of 6 years as I had in 1969, this time for only 3. To me, re-enlisting smelled after letting Vietnam and Cambodia fall, but the lure of another guaranteed year in Thailand finally got my name on the dotted line.

Also in May, the Mayaguez incident happened. Khmer Rouge Communist captured the SS Mayaguez, a cargo ship just south of Kompong Som and held its crew hostage. I remember getting some of the initial reports, my first thoughts was "Big Deal", as in we are not going to do anything anyway, why all the fuss. I was wrong. The U.S. was going to finally utilize some of its forces in Thailand for the rescue operation. Now the reports we started getting in actually meant something, a rescue operation from NKP, all right. Then a flash message came in, a helicopter carrying 20 plus Air Force Personnel from NKP to U-Tapao who were going to attempt the rescue of the Mayaguez crew, had crashed, all aboard dead. After making sure all the appropriate staff sections that needed that message got it, the first words out of my mouth was, how many damn civilians are

we trying to rescue? I wondered how many of the crew were anti-war protestors, but kept my mouth shut. Things were not going right. Then I heard the Thai Prime Minister has lodge a protest about U-Tapao being used for the rescue operation. I do miss the days when Kittikachorn was Prime Minister, but those days are past. I think about 2 days after all of this took place, another report came through stating we left some Marines behind on that Island. Throw that into the mix with what I heard about radio frequencies being messed up and the Air Force not being able to talk to the Navy and so forth, I must wonder how far we have fallen in the last couple of months. I guess the good news was the crew was released by the Cambodians, but the Cambodians were going to release the crew anyway, rescue operation or no rescue operation. Well, at least we did something, that sure beats sending reports back and forth, we just did not do it well.

Late 1975, brings word that DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI in the Capital Hotel is being deactivated. Project 404, Pepper grinder and Water pump personnel are not needed anymore. Not more than a couple of weeks after I got that word, of the Pathet Lao take over Vientiane. Laos no longer has the coalition government; it is now like Cambodia and Vietnam, a communist nation. No one gets or got excited about Laos falling full fledge under communism, it was expected. It does not make us happy, but we all knew it was going to happen. Reports on Cambodia are reporting somewhere between 500,000 and a million Cambodians have died since Pol Pot has taken over; I wonder where are all the protestors and demonstrators now? It was estimated somewhere between 50,000-75,000 Cambodians lost their lives during the 5 years of war, all sorts of protests and demonstrations took place against that war, now 10 times as many Cambodians have died in less than a year and I guess since it is what the anti-war crowd considers peace, it is ok. Vietnam is in the same boat, I see reports where it has been estimated that over 100,000 Vietnamese fleeing Vietnam via the ocean have died at sea. Re-educations camps are stuffed full, an estimated couple of million are populating these camps, deaths of pro American and ex government officials are being reported in the hundreds of thousands. Peace is sure grand, more people are dying since the commies have taken over and peace has been restored than would of if the war would of continued for another 20 years. PEACE IS HELL. As 1975 comes to an end, the only thing good about 1975, is I am still in Bangkok.

BANGKOK 1976

The drawdown of the U.S. Military in Thailand continued. I do not know the order in which the Air Force Bases were handed back to the Thai Air Force, but in early 1976, this was going on full tilt. Word also has it that the Army Camps at Sattihip, Camp Same San and maybe Camp Vayama, the Camp at Lopburi and Camp Friendship at Korat are also going to be closed or turned over to the Thai Army. One thing is for sure, the Thai PM is sure pissed at us for our using Thai Soil for our attempted rescue of the Mayaguez. The good news about 1976 is on the 18th of January, I finally married that girl I met back

in 1967, if I am going to have to finally leave Thailand, I want her with me. There are all sorts of rumors going on who or what units will stay and which will have to depart; it sure is raising hell with my moral. I like it here, I do feel pretty safe working at JUSMAG, I can not see them being disbanded and they will always need communications. I know BG Aderholt is doing his best to keep as many as possible, but I also wonder about the State Department puking down at the Embassy, are they also fighting for a residue force? There is that term again, only if we had left one in South Vietnam.

As May rolled around, I do not know for sure, but I think all the Air Force Bases had been handed back to the Thai Military with the exception of NKP and U-Tapao. Those were in the process of being handed over. With all this drawdown going on, I took a chance and put in for another extension, to my great surprise, it was approved. I should be good through 1977 now. New Wife is extremely happy. Then in June the hammer falls, Prime Minister Pramoj is reported in the Bangkok Post as having requested the withdrawal of all U.S. Forces from Thailand, there are not too many of us left, I just hope that does not include JUSMAG. I do not remember the exact date, but BG Aderholt had a meeting with the Thai Military and requested that certain units remain as a residue force, which included JUSMAG. The Thai Military is going to put this forth in the Thai Government Cabinet meeting to be held in a day or two. Prior to this meeting, the J-6 of JUSMAG came down to the TCC to answer questions, he did give us some good news, if the Thai Government agrees to allow 80 U.S. Military to remain in JUSMAG, and we would be part of it. He did seem pretty confident, after all, JUSMAG needs communications, but he did hint that JUSMAG would be all that was left, U.S. Military wise in Thailand.

The beginning of July brought that Thai Government Cabinet meeting; I remember listening on Thai Radio for around 3 hours as the debate went back and forth. Finally the PM announced the final decision; all American Military Forces would be withdrawn, with the exception of 40 personnel who will be assigned to JUSMAG. All I could do once I heard that was to wait on the official word from BG Aderholt and the J-6, whether or not we communications guys are to be included. The next day came the official announcement, JUSMAG had agreed to let the American Embassy supply their communications needs, and we were not needed. Damn, if only the Thai Government would have allowed 80 personnel instead of 40. I guess I had a good run, 10 years is not all that bad, but I did have one more year approved that I will not be able to serve. At least I am married and my new wife will be going back to the States with me. Do I blame the Thai Government and Prime Minister Pramoj in particular for not allowing more U.S. troops to remain in Thailand? No I don't, I understand all too well their thinking, we were here to support the Vietnam War and the war going on in Laos, Cambodia was added to that mix in 1970 and we were to ensure Thailand remained a free country. The United States let the communist win and take over Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia; the U.S. did nothing to stop Saigon from falling, nothing to stop the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot and nothing to stop the Pathet Lao. So you tell me, why would the Thai Government, especially the civilian government of PM Pramoj trust the U.S. when it came to their security. Maybe the previous

government of General Thanom Kittikachorn, would have accepted more U.S. troops, but the days of the Thai Military ruling Thailand had come to an end in 1973. I fully understood why we were asked to leave, I did not even trust my own government, why should the Thai's? My last official act, was to escort a couple of semi trucks with our communications equipment crated up out to Don Muang Airport where a couple of Air Force cargo planes awaited to take our equipment back to the states. This included 2 DSTE'S and our cryptographic equipment, the teletypes were going to be turned over to the Thai Military, all of our files and keying material were burned prior to our trip, so no paper went back. Then it was back home, for the Army to pack my household goods for shipment back to the states and my family and I spent our last 2 weeks in Bangkok, living in the Raja Hotel. On the 25th of July, 1976 we boarded a Pan Am 707 headed for San Francisco. This was the saddest day of my life, I was not happy; going back to the states was the last thing in the world I wanted to do. But my family and I were on our way, Hong Kong was the first stop, around Vietnam and not over it, then on to Japan and finally San Francisco. I was finally back on U.S. soil, not happy to be back, but back and I would guess, due to my personality or moral code or call it what you will, I made the best of it. I would always work hard, perform my duty to the best of my ability, but my playing hard days were over, I had a family to take care of and to go home to. I would go on to spend another 10 years in the Army, retiring from active duty in September of 1986, then went to work for the Army as a civilian, 2 weeks after I retired from active duty. I still work for the Army as I write this and am still married to my lovely Thai wife. I do plan on retiring once Ft. McPherson closes in 2011 and returning to Thailand, where my wife and I will live out the rest of our lives in that lovely country.

ACRONYMS

AFB-Air Force Base

AFOSI-Air Force Office of Special Investigation

AFVN TV-Armed Forces Vietnam Network Television

AIRA-Air Attaché

AIT-Advance Individual Training

ARMA-Army Attaché

ARPA-Advance Research Project Agency

ARVN-Army of the Republic of Vietnam

ASC-Automatic Switching Center

AUTODIN-Automatic Digital Network

BX-Base Exchange

CT-Thai Communist

DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI-Deputy Chief Joint United States Military Advisory Group Thailand

DOD-Department of Defense

DSTE-Digital Subscriber Terminal Equipment

FEC-Federal Electric Corporation

IR-Intelligence Report

ISB-International School of Bangkok

JUSMAGTHAI-Joint United States Military Advisory Group Thailand
LNO-Liaison Office
MACV-Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MEDTC-Military Equipment Delivery Team Cambodia
MI-Military Intelligence
MR-Military Region
NCOIC-Non Commissioned Officer in Charge
NKP-Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base
NVA-North Vietnamese Army
OIC-Officers in Charge
OICC-Office In Charge of Construction
OPSUM-Operational Summary
PM-Prime Minister
PX-Post Exchange
RATT-Radio Teletype
R&R Rest and Relaxation
SEATO-Southeast Asian Treaty Organization
SITREP-Situational Report
SPECAT-Special Category
TCC-Telecommunications Center
TCF-Telecommunications Facility
USARSUPTHAI-United States Army Support Command Thailand
USARV-United States Army Vietnam
USMAGTHAI-United States Military Assistance Command Thailand
USASTRATCOM-SEA-United States Army Strategic Communications Command
Southeast Asia
WPM-Words per Minute