

THE AC-119K GUNSHIP PROGRAM VIETNAM - MY SECOND TOUR - 1969-70

I returned from my first tour in Vietnam during the month of August 1968 and got stationed at Davis-Monthan AFB, Tucson, Arizona. We bought a nice 4 bedroom house on the east side of town for \$18,500 and settled in for what I was hoping to be a long tour. But after 2 months domestic problems started arising again and once again I went to the personnel building on base and filled out another voluntary statement to go back to Vietnam. Only this time I volunteered for a special assignment as a gunner in the Air Force Special Operations programs.

In the mean time I was assigned to the weapons loading section, loading missiles and bombs on the F-4 fighter. I then received the Air Force Commendation medal for my tour in Vietnam plus I was notified that I had been selected for promotion to Tech Sergeant. Man, things were looking good.

A month passed and I returned to the personnel building to check on my assignment only to find out that my paperwork was still sitting in the 'out basket' and I was told by the NCOIC that the gunship program was full. I went to my shop and proceeded to write my senator, George Murphy. I must have worded my letter just right because two weeks later I was working on the flight line when I was told to report to the Captain in personnel, not ASAP but right now. After reporting the Captain told his sergeant to stay and close the door - that's when I got the feeling that this was no social call - especially when he didn't ask me to sit down. Then he looked at me and said that it seems that someone has been writing their Congressman. I told him that I had not written my Congressman, at which he said then maybe it was your wife. I told him that it wasn't her either. Then he said if you didn't write your Congressman then why is it that I have here in front of me a Congressional Inquiry Report that requires being answered within 72 hours? I said that must be in regard to the letter that I wrote my Senator, at which I thought the Captain was going to come unglued. Then I said that if his good sergeant had sent my paperwork forward like he was suppose to, none of this would have happened. The Captain then said that he had received a twix that morning accepting me into the gunship program and that there were schools that I would have to attend and personnel would be cutting my orders. Then he asked if I was happy about my assignment at which I said yes and he said that he would answer the Congressional Inquiry report to that effect. As I left the room I heard him tell his sergeant to remain, that he wanted to have a few words with him. At least I left with my other cheeks intact.

December 1968 was an easy month. The base decided to repair the runways and so half the aircraft were flown to the Tucson civilian airport. We were not allowed to load any bombs over there. So I was told to go home, be on standby, and report back to the duty section the first week of January, how sweet. So I painted the house inside

and out; plus I took the family over to San Diego a couple of week-ends to see the folks.

The first of February I got my first set of orders to attend the Altitude Chamber at Williams AFB, Arizona. It was a 2 day school and we learned that oxygen or the lack of oxygen in your blood plays a vital roll when flying at high altitudes. Also what you eat prior to flight could have an adverse effect and the symptoms when hypoxia starts setting in. We learned all this while we were in the chamber and it was pressurized to 25,000 feet.

The 25th of April 1969 I received my Aeronautical orders putting me on flying status and the middle of May I arrived, temporary duty, at Lockbourne AFB, Columbus, Ohio for flightcrew training on the AC-119K gunship. This plane is also called the flying box car or the flying coffin. It has two prop engines and can not fly with only one engine. But the 'K' model had been modified and 2 J-85 jet engines had been added.

The 119 is normally a cargo or troop transport plane. But 18 had been converted to gunships by gutting out the cargo bay and installing 4 mini-guns, 2 20 millimeter Vulcan gatlin guns, a night vision scope and a flare launcher plus a crew of 9, pilot, co-pilot, navigator, flight engineer, 3 gunners, illuminator operator and night vision operator (4 officers and 5 enlisted). Our training consisted of learning the operation of the guns, how to clear gun malfunctions, loading procedures and weight and balance of the aircraft which was critical. I was lucky in that flying didn't bother me where as some guys got air sickness every time they flew. We completed our training on the 20th of June and I returned to Arizona to await my next set of orders.

The 21st of July I received TDY orders for Basic Survival school at Fairchild AFB, Spokane, Washington. The first 2 days consisted of classroom instructions from how to find water in the desert to how to build an igloo in the arctic. Then we were formed into elements of 13 officers and enlisted working together with rank having no privileges. From one parachute we made 13 pup tents, back packs, snow goggles and belts. We received instructions on how to bail out of an aircraft and how to land without breaking a leg. A wind machine was turned on and you had to release yourself from the chute while being dragged. Then we grabbed our tents and back packs and headed for 5 days in the mountains subsisting on 600 calories a day. All the streams had been fished out by the previous elements and we watched as one guy caught 3 fish about an inch long, put them on a stick over the fire and eat them - guts and all. Our mouths were watering we were so hungry and this was only the second day out. We sure weren't looking forward to the next 3 days, to say the least! But that night a porcupine came wandering through our camp and in less than 30 minutes it was being roasted over the fire. Now you're asking how do you skin a porcupine? Very, very carefully. We learned compass headings and on the map from point A to point B showed 3 miles - except that there was a mountain in between so by the time you got to point B you had traveled 8 miles and were so tired that you didn't want to set up your tent let alone make camp, make a fire, boil your pemmican bars and fill your stomach

with the liquid. The last afternoon the good guys found us and took us into their camp and made us a stew that tasted so delicious. The next morning about 4 the bad guys attacked our camp and we had to get out of there real fast like, using our escape and evade technics to get to the safe zone that was about 2 miles away where the buses took us back to the base and our first shower in 5 days.

Next came the POW camp training. We went through just what the American prisoners went through in North Vietnam - hood over your head, the black box, the 9x9 cell with the steel door which was banged on every 15 minutes and the interrogation sessions. This lasted 32 hours with no sleep and that's when you found out the effects of mental fatigue and what kind of a drain it can have on you to include hallucinations - I know now that you're not as strong as you think you are. We completed our training the morning of 12 August, took a good needed shower, clean clothes and hit the road for Tucson and to see my son for the first time who was two weeks old.

When I got back to Davis-Monthan I found out that I had been assigned to Lockbourne AFB as the gunship squadron was forming there and we were going to Vietnam as a unit - date of departure unknown. By the time that I got my orders cut, cleared off the base and relocated the family back to California it was the 15th of September when I signed in PCS at Lockbourne.

We were then assigned to an air crew and told that we would be flying as an integral crew from now on. I met my pilot, Captain Alan Olson, and my two gunners, Sgt. Jeff Walls and A2C Ken Preston. Captain Olson informed us that our duties would be fairly relaxed until we left for Vietnam. In the mean time he would be flying at least 3 times a week and we were welcomed to come along or we could do what we wanted. I told my gunners that we would be flying, which still gave us quite a bit of time off. So needless to say we got to be fairly well known at the NCO club.

The war in Vietnam was still going hot and heavy in 1969 and the college kids were giving it their all about protesting the war. Ohio State University was there in Columbus and a Staff Sgt. gurner hooked up with some of the students and the next thing we knew he had taken off for Canada.

We finally got the word that we would be departing for Vietnam around the 16th of November, and enroute we had to attend Jungle Survival school in the Philippines. Three C-141 transport jets landed at Lockbourne and we departed the morning of the 17th, landing at Clark AFB, the Philippines on the 18th. School started on the 20th and was suppose to last a week but because of Thanksgiving it was cut short so that we could get back to the base for turkey dinner. We spent 2 days in the jungle - and there is no way that a person will starve to death or die of thirst if he knows what to look for. The only thing you have to look out for are the snakes, cobras and bamboo pit vipers. and of course the rats - they are so big they look like a 2 pounder and they are eatable - not anything like the sewer rats in our big cities. Rule of thumb - if you see rats you won't see any snakes. We were shown how to find wild yams along the rivers - eat em

raw or cook em. A banana tree - eat the bananas then chop down the tree and split it down the center and pull out the core, it tastes just like a carrot. The trunk left in the ground becomes a drinking fountain. We were also shown the anti-personnel traps that the North Vietnamese were using against our ground troops like the punji spikes coated with human feces, hand grenades along trails with trip wires. These are just a few of the things that we learned.

We departed the Philippines and finally landed at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam the 29th of November. We were assigned to our barracks and then waited for the AC-119's to arrive from Lockbourne after which the guns had to be reinstalled and zeroed in. Then we took each aircraft up, dropped a smoke log into the South China Sea and fired each gun at the log to ensure accuracy. Now to get down to the serious business of going out to kill. First, our incountry indoctrination. Second, our intelligence briefing. Third, the big surprise - we were told that we would be flying strictly night missions in a blackout condition and we would be flying mainly in Laos. In Laos! Wait a minute - the war is in Vietnam. Right, but the North Vietnamese are moving tons of supplies in trucks down the Ho Chi Minh trail. Your mission - to kill as many trucks as possible. Oh boy, this should be easy and a lot of fun. I'm not finished, the North has anti-aircraft gun inplacements along the trail. What for? To try and shoot you down. What!? Wait a minute, what's going on here - this wasn't covered in any of our training! We don't even know what anti-aircraft artillery (triple "A") rounds look like. Don't worry, you'll see it coming up at you because every 5th round is a tracer. Oh, OK that's better - like hell! You can imagine the excitement when the first crew returned from their mission - half the squadron met them on the flight line at 0200 hours. Did you kill any trucks, did you take any triple 'A', how many rounds, what did the tracers look like, how accurate was it? Well this should be very interesting because I'm flying my first mission tomorrow night.

The commander put out the word that he wanted ideas for a squadron logo. So another gunner, Phil Fielder who was also from San Diego, and myself got together to see if we could come up with something. Lets see, we left the states during the calendar month of Scorpio, so lets use the scorpion, and instead of a stinger we'll draw a 20 mm round and we'll call the AC-119 "Stinger". Out of 50 entries the commander picked ours. Phil and I were sure proud.

Before the end of December I received orders awarding me the Air Crew Members wings permanently. The regulation reads "5 years flying or 10 combat missions". It didn't take long to get 10 combat missions under our belt since we were flying four nights, 2 days off, four nights flying, 2 days off.

Before we could be combat ready we had to complete a check ride and evaluation by a person from the Stan-Eval section. He goes on a mission with you and grades the overall mission. We took off about 2300 hours and headed for the fence (Laotian Boarder) when we were diverted to an army outpost in the highlands of Vietnam that had come under attack by the VC. As we approached the area we could see tracers

from the bad guys going into the compound and also our troops shooting back. We circled while our navigator tried making radio contact which took a few minutes. After ascertaining that none of our troops were anywhere near the parameter we started shooting up the jungle using one mini-gun at a time. Then the unforeseen happened - one of my gunners got air sick and puked all over the floor, then my second gunner slipped, fell and started puking, then the illuminator operator got a smell of it and he started puking. What a situation - the bad guys are shooting hot and heavy at our troops and a third of our air crew are puking their guts out. So I grabbed the Stand-Eval person and between him and I we kept the guns reloaded for the pilot. We were almost out of ammo when the shooting on the ground subsided. The army troops asked if we could stay on target until day break at which time they would go out and make a sweep of the area. So we continued circling and dropping flares until it started getting light at which time we were almost out of fuel. So, after a thank you from the army troops we made a beeline for Phu Cat Air Base to refuel. I didn't realize that my flight suit was soaking wet from sweat until I got off the plane. But after a good breakfast at the chow hall we took off for Phan Rang. Man, that was one long night but we passed our check ride with flying colors.

I got to know a couple of the Security cops there at Phan Rang and I was telling them how terrific our mini-guns were. They wanted to know how they operated. I explained that they were battery operated but controlled by the pilot. The ammo drum held 2,000 rounds although the gun was capable of firing 4,000 rounds a minute slow fire. But with short, one second bursts you could really tear up the jungle. They asked if one could be mounted in a jeep. I said yes. So I went to our gun shop and got ahold of one that was going to salvage but was still operational. With permission from the security cop commander it was mounted. Now all they had to do was depress the firing plunger and with a hand crank it could be fired as fast as you could crank. That was one bad looking jeep and sure got the stares around base.

Phan Rang Air Base had the most non-combat casualties of any base in Vietnam and all because of the NCO club, believe it or not. First of all the club was built on a hill overlooking the base with a 45 degree path leading to it. One of the gunners was almost killed after trying to drink the club dry and then walking back to his barracks. I saw him the next morning. He had cuts, bruises, abrasions, strawberries, a black eye - everything but broken bones. And this same thing happened to a couple dozen GIs a night.

A sad incident happened about the 10th of January 1970. The base was situated by the South China Sea and every morning a bus left the base full of GIs for a beach area about 7 miles away. Papasan had a flat boat full of hookers off shore and the gals would swim to shore as soon as the bus arrived to entertain the troops. The bus returned to the base at 1700 hours and you had better be on it because it was an Article 15 if you weren't. One trooper decided to stay on the beach a little longer and hoof it back and try to sneak back into the base. His movements were detected outside the parameter by the security cops and their dogs who in turn notified the Q.C. police

(South Vietnamese) to respond. We had just gotten airborne heading for Laos when we were diverted back to the base with Captain Olson telling us there was a possible attack. We were instructed to make the guns ready and on the line ready to fire. It took me and my gunners a minute to do this. We returned, started circling the area and turned on our million candle power spot light but couldn't see anything because of the high grass. Then the GI stood up and the cops thinking VC sappers fired. We landed as we didn't have time left to complete our mission. We found out later that the GI was a three striper from the Field Maintenance Squadron with a week to go before rotating back to the States. When his body was recovered it had 60 holes in it. And to think that we almost let him have it with our mini-guns.

The 15th of January our crew got orders assigning us to Phu Cat Air Base. Some of our missions were fairly interesting and we even got to fly a few missions in Vietnam. The Army claimed that their artillery was killing trucks and that the Air Force was taking the credit for the battle damage. So one evening we were getting ready to go on a mission to Asha Valley when an Army Colonel showed up to go with us. It was one of our better missions in that we killed 8 trucks and took a few hundred rounds of triple 'A'. After that we never heard any more belly aching from the Army.

To make things a little more interesting the VC started hitting Phu Cat with 122 millimeter rockets. These babies were 6 feet long, with a war head of 100 pounds of TNT. You could hear them coming in but you didn't know where they were going to hit. All you could do is run for cover and hope, plus those things could be launched from 10 miles out.

Another heart breaking story; two GIs were due to rotate back to the States the evening of the basketball championship games - talked their Commander into letting them stay to play and leave on the next plane in the morning. They won their game and celebrated at the NCO club. The next morning they were at the terminal waiting to board the "freedom bird" when the base took in-coming. One of the rockets hit the terminal killing both players.

Laos was divided into grids so that no two gunships would be in the same area at the same time. The north half was call 'Barrel Roll', the southern half 'Steel Tiger'. Then you had east and west and that was further broken down into boxes, A, B, C, D -.

It was sometime during the first part of February 1970 that we were fraged for a mission in Steel Tiger east that we experienced our first flak trap and almost got blown out of the sky. When we got over the fence we went blackout as normal and soon after we found three trucks moving slowly down the trail. We circled twice getting into our 30 degree bank. One of my gunners was scanning out the left side for triple 'A' and the illuminator operator was scanning out the right. One of them saw 10 rounds about half mile behind and told the pilot no threat. Then another 10 rounds off in front of us - again no threat. So Captain Olson banked again getting ready to kill the trucks when all hell broke loose. About 10 guns right below us opened up, fanning the sky towards

the sound of our engines since they couldn't see us. The tracers were going under us, over the top, behind us and in front. It lit up the inside of the cargo bay to where I could see my other gunner like it was day time. Then Captain Olson yelled over the radios, "hang on" and he hit the jets to 100 per cent and zig zagging through the triple 'A' we got the heck out of there. To this day I can't believe that we got through all those tracers without taking a hit, not even a scratch. When we landed back at Phu Cat I was still shaking.

Two of the big rice bowls in South East Asia were the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam and the Plain-of-Jars in northern Laos. Around the middle of February the North Vietnamese decided to invade and take the rice from the Plain-of-Jars. Our crew was given temporary duty orders assigning us to Udorn Air Base in northern Thailand. We departed Phu Cat the morning of 27 Feb. and flew our first mission into the Plain-of-Jars that evening killing trucks all the way to the North Vietnam Boarder. We were so effective in our missions that after a week the North Vietnamese moved SAM sites over to the boarder. Now that scared the heck out of us because we didn't have the equipment to fight that missile, so we stayed out of their range. We were staying in a hotel down town and a base bus was taking us back and forth. To get to our operations building on base we had to go past the Air America area. It was strange to see all those silver aircraft with no markings. The towns in Vietnam were off limits so it was a nice changed of pace to be able to go into town and relax. Plus the town was open 24 hours a day so no matter what time you got back from your mission you could grab a cab and head for town. But these good times were short lived as our crew got PCS orders assigning us to Da Nang Air Base. So on the morning of 15 April we departed Udorn flying across Laos for the first time during day light hours. I'd sure hate to get shot down in that country cause they'd never find you in all that jungle.

Anyway we landed around noon at Da Nang Air Base and got assigned to our barracks in the Gun Fighter Village area. This base is also located on the South China Sea. Not only is the Air Force stationed here but also the Navy and Marines. Now how do we get back to Phu Cat and get the rest of our stuff since we didn't take it all with us when we went to Udorn. But we did. A few days later we got a hop on an Army Caribou to Phu Cat, got our clothes and returned.

Before each mission the whole crew had to attend an intelligence briefing and after five months of these sessions I started realizing how politics and politicians from both the U.S. and South Vietnam were keeping us from beating the North Vietnamese. I always felt that we were over there for a good cause but the bottom line was that the Americans were fighting their war for them. We were giving the South Vietnamese forces uniforms, boots, weapons, ammo, vehicles and planes and then we would put them up against the VC and they would get their butts kicked. Plus the rules of engagement were a hindrance as the following mission will show.

About every 2 months each crew had to pull an in-country alert stand-by. Our gunship was parked on the ramp next to the alert hooch with our parachutes and gear

on board. There were bunks inside the hooch and we could sleep but we had to keep our clothes on and ready to go. On a normal mission it takes the crew 40 minutes to pre-flight the aircraft. But when on alert you get scrambled you're out of that hooch like a shot, start aircraft engines and pre-flight as you taxi out for take off - and you are airborne in about 12 minutes. One night in April we got scrambled to a village about 10 miles from Da Nang that was being over run by the VC. As soon as we were airborne my two gunners and myself made the 4 mini-guns and the two 20 millimeter Vulcan cannons on the line and ready to fire. It didn't take us long to get to the area and most of the village was on fire. We were flying so low that we could see the VC running and throwing hand grenades into the buildings. We called our operations for permission to fire which was standard operating procedures. What happened next blew my mind. Our operations said that they would have to check with the Vietnamese Corp Commander and in turn with the Regional Chief who in turn would have to check with the Section Chief and then the Village Chief. I could not believe that this was going on. By the time that we got permission to fire, the VC were gone. So we returned to Da Nang. How many civilians the VC killed - we never found out.

I believe that it was sometime the middle of April when we took off for Laos about 2100 hours. Another 119 was about 10 minutes ahead of us and we heard Captain Olson say it sounds like they're having problems. I switched channels to listen in and heard the pilot of the other 119 telling the tower that he had a runaway engine and was returning to base. By the time they approached Da Nang the rpm's were too high to land and still climbing - the next thing to happen would be that the prop would fly off the engine and slam into the fuselage. So the pilot, per emergency procedures, instructed the crew to bail out. By that time the aircraft was over China Beach and the crew bailed out landing in the water. The pilot put the aircraft on auto-pilot before bailing out and the 119 with a full load of fuel turned north and started climbing and heading for Hainan Island (China) which had MIG bases. The next morning our operations wouldn't tell us what happened but we heard that the red phone in operations to Washington DC was ringing off the hook. Of the crew the illuminator operator, a Staff Sgt., was lost and presumed drowned. His body was never recovered.

The morning of 30 April 1970 at approximately 0600 hours our aircrew was alerted to be ready to depart Da Nang at 0800 hours for Tan Son Nhut Air Base outside of Saigon. The Viet Cong had set up operating bases in Cambodia close to the boarder of Vietnam to effectively attack areas in southern Vietnam. We were told that our infantry troops had entered Cambodia and that we would be flying cover for them while they looked for bad guys. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th of May we flew missions over our Army troops. This was the only time during our tour that we flew day missions which proved to be pretty exciting. The Army troops did their thing wiping out the Viet Cong. That part was boring for us because all we did was fly circles over them. But on our way back to Tan Son Nhut we had our fun because we were allowed to recon the Mekong river and anything on it was FREE GRATIS for us. We shot up about a dozen bad guy San Pans, getting secondary explosions out of a couple of them indicating that they had ammunition on board. News evidently wasn't getting into the Stars & Strips

news paper very fast as you can see by the date on the article in the back of this booklet, or maybe they didn't want this news to get back to the States too soon as we were not suppose to be in Cambodia.

In June we got the good ole alert standby again and settled in for another boring night. But about 2200 hours we got scrambled, and again as soon as we were airborne my two gunners and myself made the guns on the line and ready to fire. Over the head sets we heard that one of our Marine recon team were on a hill surrounded by VC who were making their way up to the Marines position. The excitement started my adrenaline pumping as we heard our navigator make radio contact with the Marines who were yelling for us to start shooting as the bad guys were closing in on them. The navigator asked how close are they - we didn't want to have a 'short round incident' and shoot some of our troops. But the Marines yelled - who gives a ratsass, one way or another we're dead - start shooting! So we started shooting up the jungle all around their position. The barrels on our mini-guns got red hot - you could see them glowing - and you had better not touch them when you went to re-load the gun. I can't remember just how long we were over the target area, but I do remember that we expended all 20,800 rounds of our ammunition, and then started dropping flares, lighting up the jungle as the choppers came in to evacuate the Marines and return then to Da Nang with no casualties. Boy, that was one good mission and made it worth while being in Vietnam.

At the NCO club one night we met the head cook of the Marines chow hall. He was 36 years old, had been busted down to Staff Sgt. (E-5) and was Italian who loved his wine. But the Marine regulations stated that you had to be an E-6 in order to get a ration card authorizing the purchase of wine and hard liquor. So we made a deal with him. He was to get us all the steaks and potatoes we could eat and we would get him all the wine he could drink. One night a week later we backed two jeeps to the chow hall ramp and as he threw cases of steaks into the jeeps, we threw cases of wine onto the ramp - and this was a continuous thing once a month. Next we had to get something to keep the steaks in. So we went to supply and for a case of steaks we got 4 refrigerators, turned them up high and kept the steaks frozen. Now when we got back from a mission and were hungry we could just throw a steak and a potato on the grill.

In 1970 the United States still had 450 thousand American troops in South Vietnam - forces from other free world countries were South Korea 48,000 - Thailand 11,000 - Australia 7,000 - New Zealand 450 - Philippines 31. And this was suppose to be a United Nations effort!

Each of our missions I felt were unique and I couldn't wait to get across the fence, go blackout and then start hunting. For political purposes they were called tactical recon missions. There were nights that we didn't locate any trucks and sometimes the weather played a factor especially during the 6 months of the monsoon season when it rained 160 inches. Other missions we would kill anywhere from 3 to 10 trucks a night

and it was pretty exciting when we would get secondary explosions from a truck indicating that it was carrying munitions.

I've put down here in writing the more unique missions that I can remember like the night that we found 10 trucks on a small trail. We didn't take any fire so we took our time killing the first one, then the last one and then took our sweet time killing the other eight, since now they couldn't go forward or back.

All the missions that we flew and all the times that we got shot at I never could figure out why the bad guys manning the triple 'A' guns never did learn to lead the sound of our engines. They always fired at the sound and by the time the rounds got there we were somewhere else - which was naturally in our favor. Had they learned to lead I probably wouldn't be here today.

One last mission that was unique. We took off from Da Nang and headed above Hue Phu Bai and just below the DMZ we entered Laos, immediately finding a trail which was off the beaten track of the Ho Chi Minh trails. Seven movers were spotted by our NOS operator. We went into our circle at a 30 degree bank and gave them a short burst with a mini-gun. Three of the movers took off into the jungle. Wait a minute - those aren't trucks, and our heat sensor was indicating something alot bigger than a truck engine. Captain Olson then said, "Give me a 20 millimeter" and we dropped the other four right there in their tracks - elephants. That area of Laos was not known to have elephants because of the jungle. So for the records we put down as battle damage - 4 tactical pack animals.

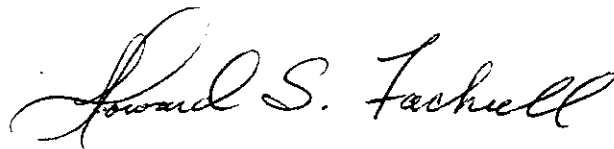
My gosh it was a fast year. Here it was the first part of November 1970 and our replacements were starting to arrive. I had my Stateside assignment which was Nellis AFB, Las Vegas, Nevada. Man, I'll be clearing off this base in another week or so. But the Ops officer had other ideas - he was going to fly us up to 3 days prior to boarding the Freedom Bird, when everyone else was getting two weeks to clear. So the next day I went to see the Flight Surgeon. I told him that our replacements were just sitting around the barracks and what our Ops officer was trying to do - the Doc asked me to cough, then said you have a cold and gave me a 'duties not to involve flying' excuse. The end of November I boarded the Freedom Bird and depart Da Nang with 134 combat missions to my credit plus 10 Air Medals.

On the 22nd of June 1971 Nellis had a base wide parade at which General Blood presented the Distinguish Flying Cross to two Lt. Colonels, a Staff Sgt. and myself. This medal I'm very proud of.

Between 1972 and 1975 I went twice more to participate in the South East Asian war games. But this time as a gunner on the AC-130E gunship flying combat missions out of Thailand and only into Laos and Cambodia killing supply trucks. But those two tours weren't as exciting as my year on the AC-119K.

I could have made this chapter in my life a lot longer had I gone into detail about the culture shock that I experienced, not only upon my arrival in South East Asia but also during the whole of the year that I was there. I only skimmed the top of the part that politics was playing - the My Lai incident didn't hold a candle to the atrocities that the VC did to the South Vietnamese civilians, yet I never heard of any North Vietnamese officers being court-martialed in Hanoi. And last but not least some food for thought - did we lose the war in Vietnam!? FACT; we were there to assist the South Vietnamese fight the North. FACT; all American combat troops were pulled out of South Vietnam March 1972. FACT; the North and South Vietnamese continued fighting each other. FACT; The North over ran and defeated the South Vietnamese forces April 1975 - two years after the American troops had pulled out. So if we weren't there, then how can history or anyone say that the U.S. lost the war?!

My own personal opinion - we don't owe the South or the whole of Vietnam a thing!!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Howard S. Fackrell". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'H' and 'S'.

HOWARD SUMNER FACKRELL
MASTER SERGEANT
UNITED STATE AIR FORCE, RETIRED