

rcp3rd

From:
To:
Sent: Monday, March 07, 2005 7:45 PM
Subject: Re: Responding To Your Queries....

Rufe:

I think questions #1 thru #5 on your original list have been answered. However, I wish to make some corrections at this point.

Pulling out my scrapbook, I find a number of documents which may pinpoint the progression of events leading to my RA assignment.

First, a letter from Oggie in the Office of Vietnam Affairs, to me, dated 23 August 1962 summarizing your proposed operation and giving you as the point of contact.

Quote:

"We are in the process of setting up a team to operate within the USAID Mission in Saigon and in the outlying areas of Vietnam, to engage in a broad range of priority rural development activities designed to back up the Strategic Hamlet Program and win over the people in the current struggle....If you are interested in a position in Vietnam let us know...I suggest you get directly in touch with Mr. Rufus Phillips at the USAID Saigon, after October 1."

Next, my contract status:

A conformed Contract issued at USAID Vietnam on 16 November 1962, hiring me as a contract employee and listing the "activities to be preformed as a "Development Officer (Area) and my local residence as 86 Doan Thi Diem (the apartment you provided).

Meanwhile, back in AID/W. a cable had gone out on 5 Nov 62, to Saigon, - telling you they were expediting my appointment as an FSRL Grade 4, Step 6. "subject to necessary clearances," etc..

You told me that this grade would not be compatible with your organizational structure (I think you were looking ahead to the four Regional Reps who would be FRS-4's) and asked me to accept a lower grade (FSR 5) instead.

I was truly caught up in the RA program and the chance to work at the province level...and agreed to accept a lesser grade. (It's worth mentioning that it was 1966 before I got promoted...)

Now to your questions: I arrived in Saigon on 9 Oct 1962 (passport

stamp).

Then PHU BON Province...and subsequent developments.

You recall Phu Bon was created as a new province in September 1962 by incorporating 3 districts from neighboring Pleiku, Darlac and Binh Dinh Provinces... These remote highland areas contained about 95% Montagnards.

We flew to Hau Bon (formerly Cheo Reo) in an Air America Helio Courier in November 1962. Your purpose was a "get acquainted" visit to introduce me, and explain to the Province Chief-- Major Pham Dinh Chi and his US military advisor--Major Clement Will, the unusual concept of the Provincial Agreement --to be funded by USAID with GVN concurrence. That the three of us (Prov rep, Mitt Advisor and Province Chief,) must formally agree to all proposed expenditures of US funds and materials in accordance with a formal plan we would develop

It would be approved by USAID and the GVN. This was a whole new ball game in the annals of AID...,a hands-on aid program with joint concurrence at the working level...

Your decision to assign me to Phu Bon (as one of the first five RA Prov Reps to be permanently stationed at the province level) was, as you surmised, probably my military background and work with similar groups in Laos.

The long flight up from Saigon landed at the Phu Bon "airport"... a PCP covered dirt airstrip, operated by the nearby US Army Special Forces A Team..It became clear that all supplies would have to be air dropped or air-landed since the VC owned the roads. It was old home week when some of my colleagues from Air America in Laos flew the resupply missions...

Phu Bon Province headquarters was for some time a local school house commandeered by Major Chi;

The US Advisory Team (Maj Will, two Captains and one SGT) were living in a Squad Tent..they offered to loan me a smaller tent that would be both USAID Office and my residence...Complete with gasoline lamp..

Happily, Major Chi spoke fluent French and passable English, a godsend in my case. Our bathing facilities were in the Song Ba River with one man always on guard as a lookout for crocs. Latrines were the usual snorkle tube and slit trench. (Strangely, I cannot recall how we got our meals...certainly no restaurants in Hau Bon nor an Army mess hall.

As an aside , I learned that by 1970, the US Army Advisory Team had increased from four

to more than 200 G.I.'s!

Since it was necessary to return with my own gear, I arranged to meet Major Chi and Major Will in Ban Me Thuot on the 20th of November. Major Chi had his house and family there for security purposes. I would return in a larger aircraft to bring my gear. The rest of the Phu Bon adventure is covered in the book.

In retrospect, I had a hellish good time in Phu Bon...working with the SF "A" Team and an agreeable Major Chi. Apparently, we became some sort of celebrities among the regular USAID staff in Saigon; The story of my tent and bathing facilities astonished those used to living in more traditional AID-provided quarters.

But I did not receive any sympathy from the USAID Finance Office, who denied my claim for the standard per diem due field people...they said my tent was "government-furnished" quarters. I told them I would buy my own tent at the first opportunity..

I have a large photo of you in Phu Bon with our crew and the District Chiefs. Also photos of bathing in the river..We could probably create a composite of me with the tent, given the capabilities of digital art.

Now the next stage: my reassignment to Long An Province (and a place in the history books...or at least in The Best And The Brightest)

To set the stage: the trusty scrapbook holds a letter you sent to AID Director David Bell on 31 July 1963..it forwarded a copy of one of my reports on progress in Phu Bon...your cover letter was very complimentary, and reminded the Director I had been a member of his staff in the BOB...

I have always thought that your satisfaction with my efforts in Phu Bon happened to coincide with an increasingly sticky situation in Long An and thus your decision that a full-time man there would allow John to give his attention to his own province; killing a couple of the winged-critters with one shot.

So much for this episode. I will be happier getting it out to you less an earthquake rumble my webtv tonite...