

Ranch Hands Ride Herd On Delta Range

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The herbicides, in use since 1962,
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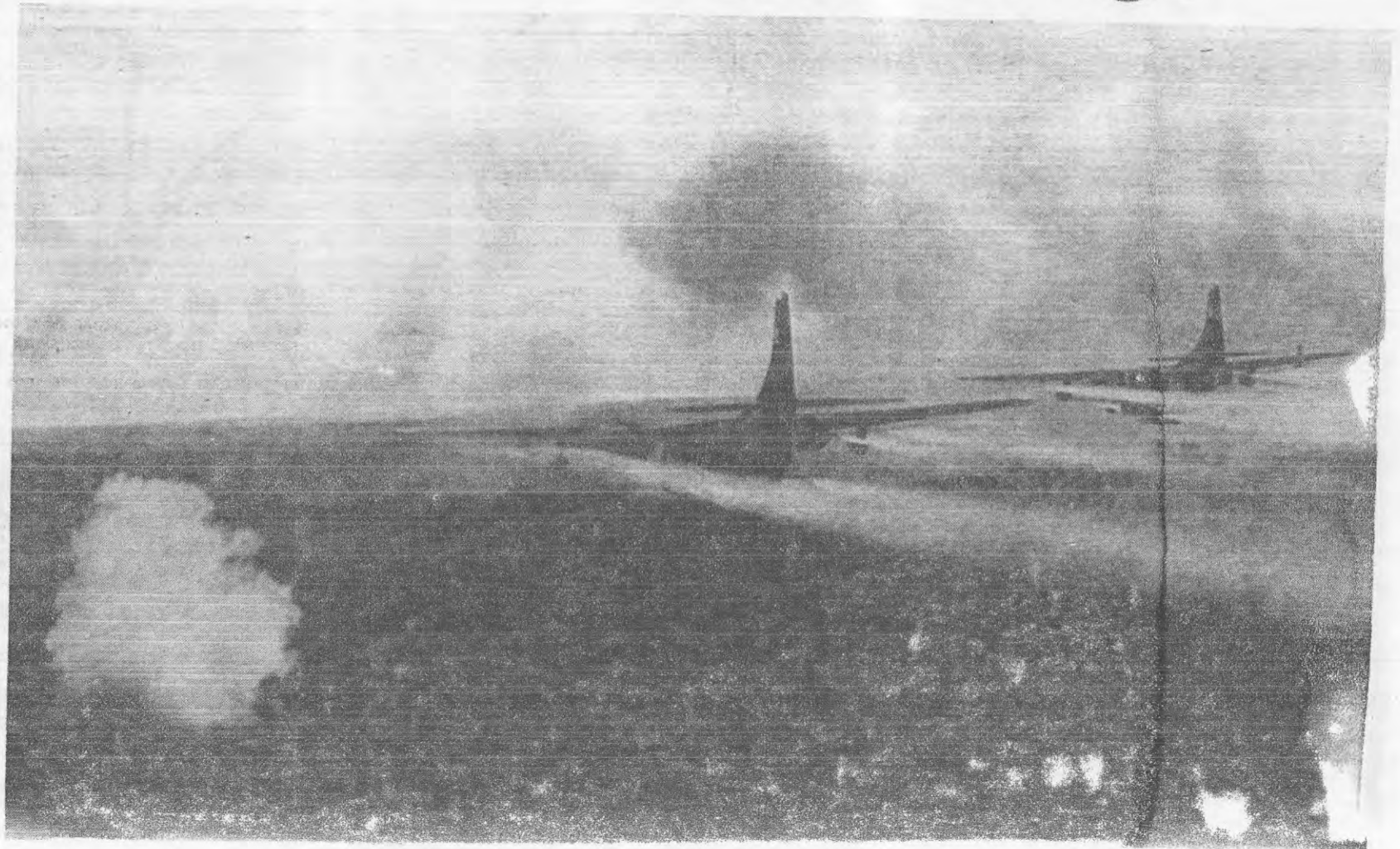
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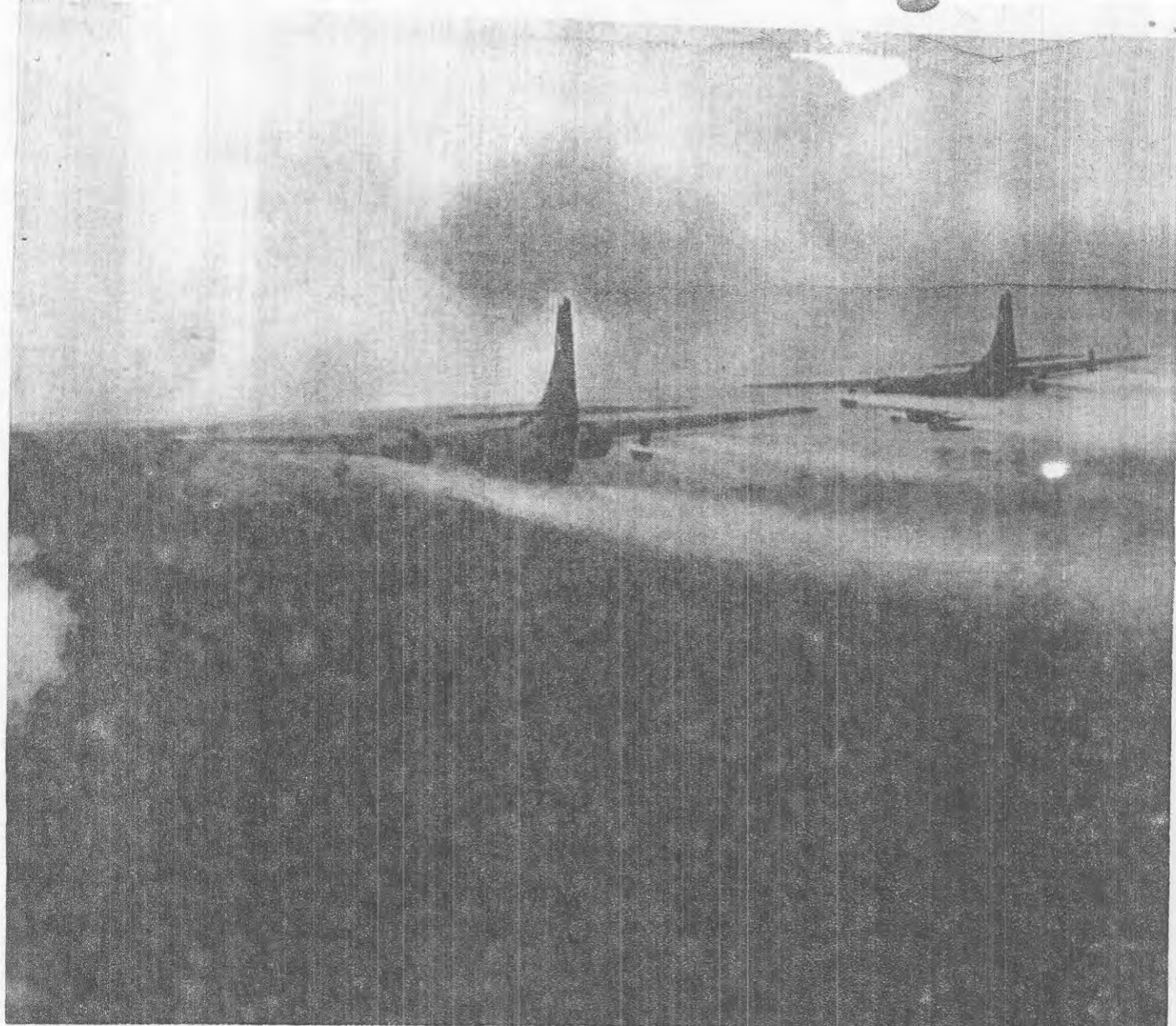
Among the rows of the squad-
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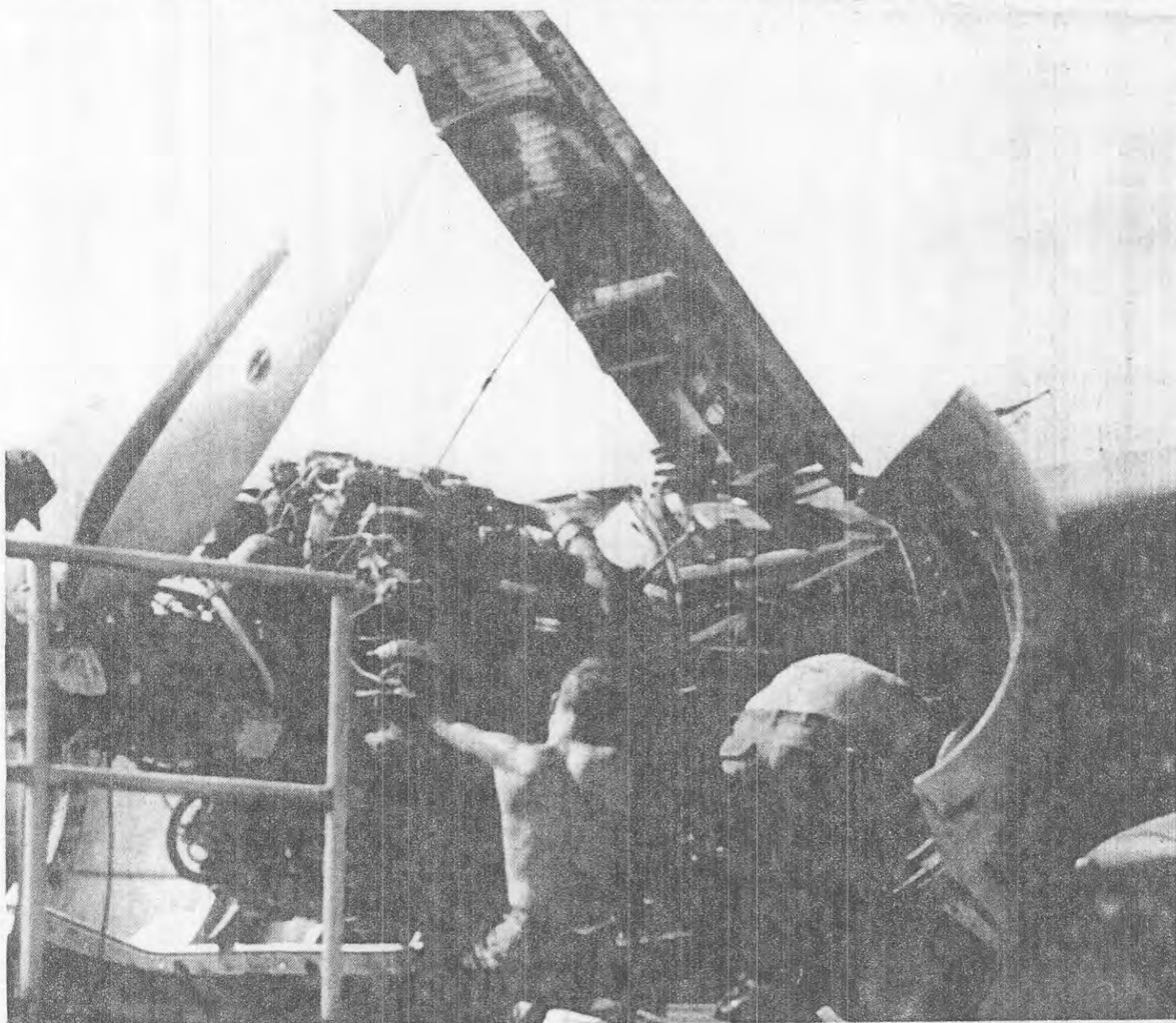
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The green signifies the lush,
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ie fancy hedge-hopping in their metal horses over suspected 'Injun country' during a heavy suppression mission.



celino, Sam Fragua and Robert Rand provide technical maintenance for one of the huge C-123 power plants.

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The 12th Special Operations Squadron plans carefully to make sure that rice paddies and crops belonging to friendly farmers are not harmed. But rice grown by the VC for their troops sometimes becomes a target for the Ranch Hands. The herbicides, in use since 1962, are non-toxic, non-corrosive and not harmful to human or animal life.

Having served in Vietnam since 1962, the 12th Special Operations Squadron has often been referred to as the most "shot at" air unit in Vietnam. Since the squadron members have

scarf from around his neck and presented it to the aircraft commander. The squadron adopted the scarf and the members of the flight crews proudly wear the scarf, embossed with their squadron emblem.

Another mark which sets the Ranch Hands apart is the distinctive emblem worn on the breast pocket. The emblem is round. It has a red border inside of which is a yellow ring with the words: "Ranch Hands Vietnam" embroidered in red letters. The red and yellow represent Vietnam. The inner circle is green, bisected by a wide, diagonal strip of brown. The green signifies the lush, green vegetation of the country and the brown, the remains of a defoliated area. Upon the brown diagonal is a Chinese symbol meaning "purple." This relates to the scarf.

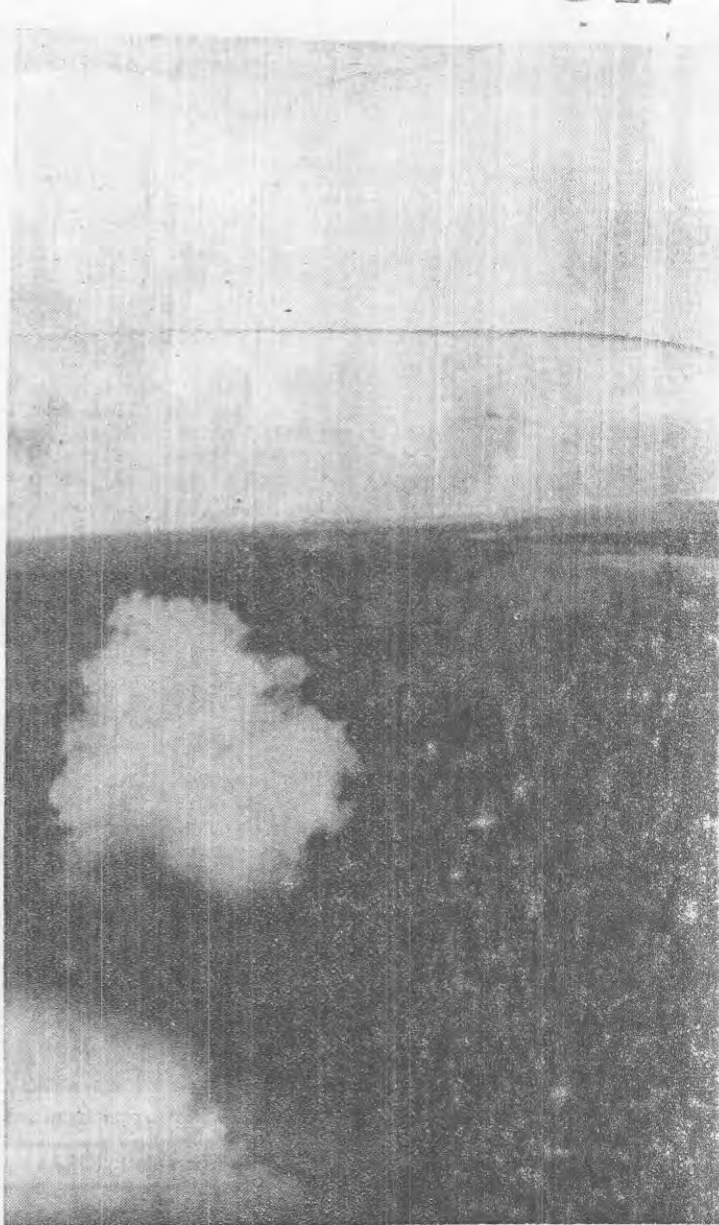
The Ranch Hands fly defoliation missions daily. After flying 200 combat hours, the pilots and navigators are presented with Vietnamese Air Force wings. Before a Ranch Hand mission is flown the target is carefully examined and approved by various components of both the U.S. and RVN government. The desire for a mission is initially proposed by a Province Chief, then the potential target is examined by the ARVN CTZ and Joint General Staff, U.S. Advisors and Field Forces Vietnam Commanders, U.S. Agency for International Development, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, and the Embassy.

"The work of the Ranch Hands uncovers base camps, trails, storage areas and forces the enemy to move," said Lieutenant Colonel Arthur F. McConnell, former commander of the squadron. "This makes him more susceptible to contact by our forces. The results of the Ranch Hands are repeatedly praised by ground force commanders and they want more of it."

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Among the rows of the squadron's camouflaged aircraft, a silver ship stands out. Her name is Patches. One of the oldest C-123s in the squadron, Patches has been hit more than 547 times during her career as a defoliation craft.

The crews of the 12th can be distinguished by the purple scarves they wear around their necks. The scarf is a tradition. When Nguyen Cao Ky was Premier of Vietnam, he flew a mission with the Ranch Hands. Impressed by the squadron, the premier removed the purple



"Cowboys" do some fancy hedge-hopping in their metal

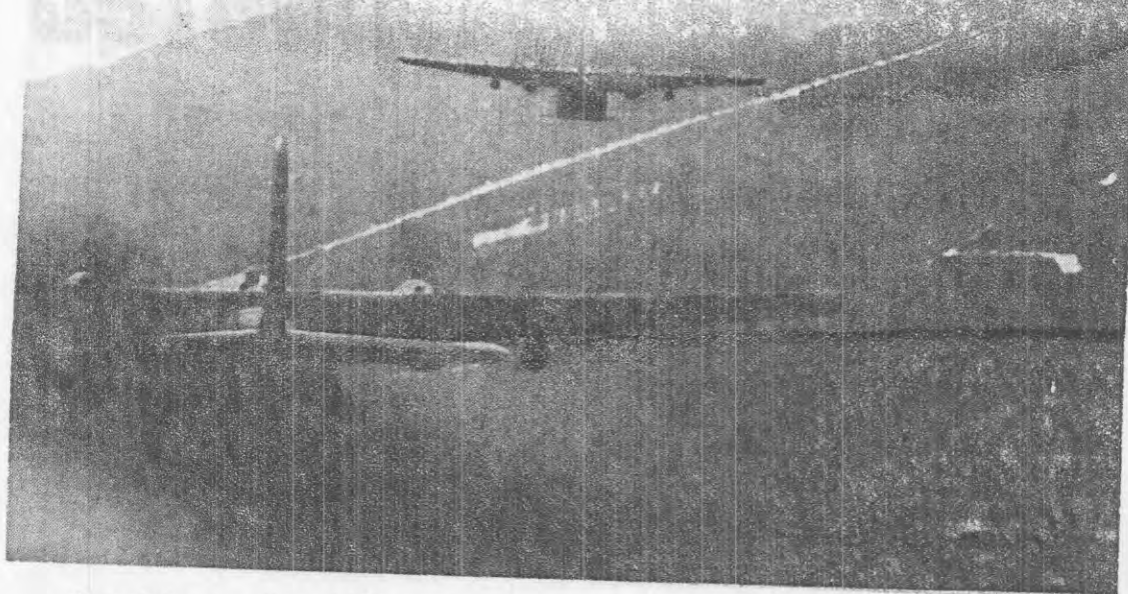
Story & Photos By SFC D.D. Perez and SP5 D.M. Gerrol



Fenton H. Hutchinson, flight engineer, checks Patches after mission.



Sgts. Mike Marcelino, Sam Fragua and Robert Ranc



Graceful as eagles, C-123s soar over rendezvous point waiting for F-100 escorts.



Ranch Hands' favorite steed gets supply of oats from modern day aircraft chuck wagon.

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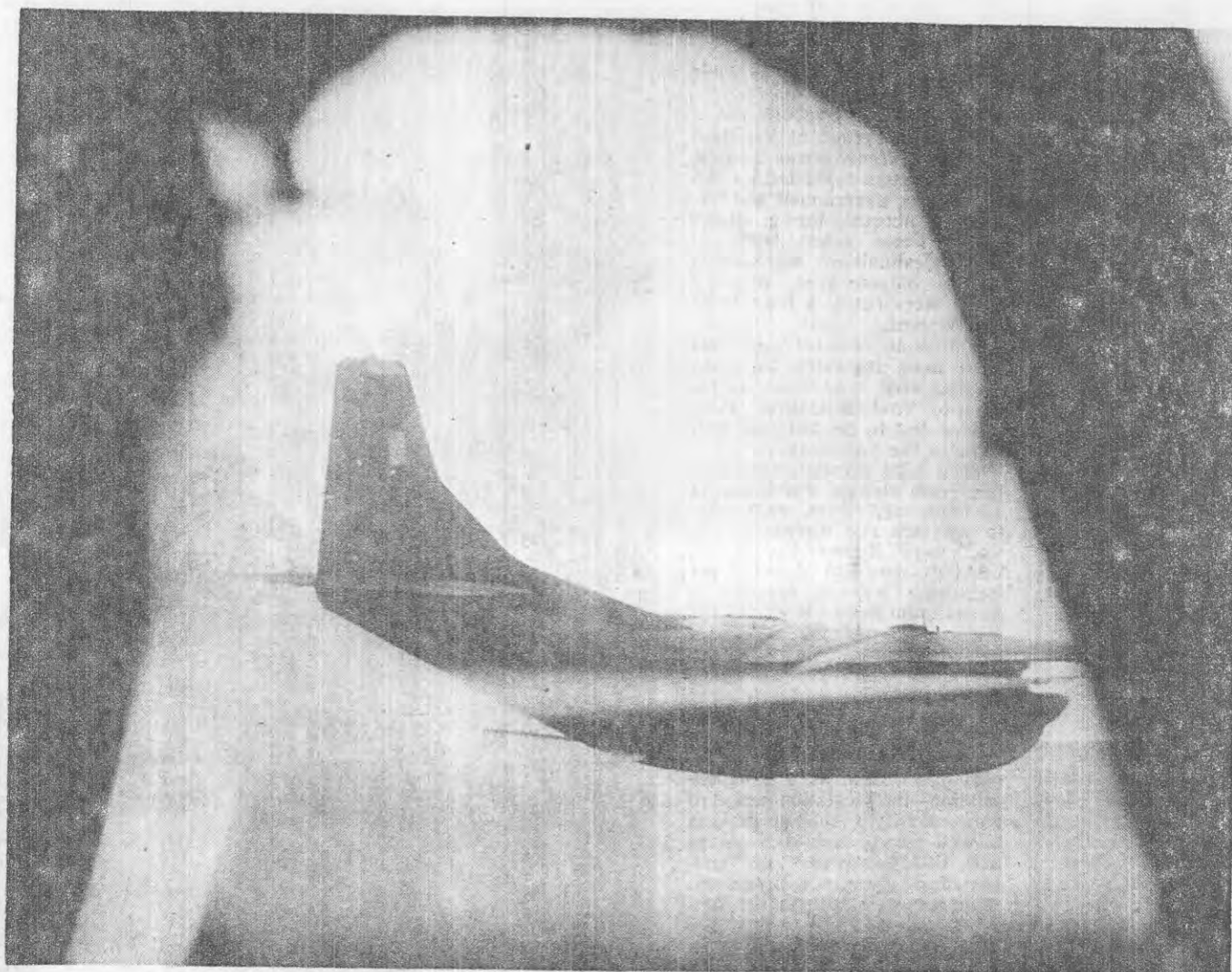
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Another Provider, viewed from a cockpit window, sprays the herbicide which will keep 'Charlie' on the move.

Ranch Hands Ride H

SAIGON (MACV) — "Saddle up, Cowboys!" With this command from Lieutenant Colonel Jack Langhorne, lead pilot in a formation of five C-123 "Providers," the "Ranch Hands" of the 12th Special Operations Squadron prepared to rein into action.

With the grace of hawks, the seemingly lumbering C-123's plummeted 3,500 feet in less than a minute to level off just above the jungle canopy which shrouds the enemy-infested southernmost portion of the Mekong Delta.

The spray jets were opened and defoliant spewed forth to deny to the enemy his natural concealment and expose his camps and movements to the watchful eyes of allied ground troops and aircraft.

This was "Charlie country" and support was needed to insure the safety of the Providers and their crews. Ten F-100 Supersabres streaked around both sides of the left echelon formation, pummeling the ground below with 750-pound bombs. The ordnance kept the heads of the enemy down to deter them from firing against the Ranch Hands. The ground explosions looked a taut string of erupting volcanoes as the F-100s thundered past the wingtips of the Providers.

Three-and-a-half minutes later, the spray jets connected to the 1000-gallon tanks of herbicide mounted inside the fuselages were closed. The Vietnam land mass was left behind to the north and the C-123s wheeled about over the South China Sea and headed back to the "ranch" at Bien Hoa Airbase, home of the 12th Special Operations Squadron.

The dense jungle area which was their target would begin to show effects within 10 or 12 days. Leaves would wither and drop from the trees and visibility would be drastically increased. The lasting effectiveness of the herbicide will deprive

the enemy forces the sanctuary provided by the lush jungle for a period of 12 to 15 months.

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