

Please type or use pen to provide the requested information. This data will be used for the Ranch Hand History Project and then placed in the Archives at Texas A&M. It is your information. If you wish to restrict any part of this material, please indicate so.

I hereby authorize the scholarly use of the following information, except as indicated.

Name (last) FARRIS first Robert middle H signature Robert W. Farris date 11-20-81

Specific Information

Please answer the following questions in the spaces provided. Be specific.

1. Ranch Hand service: From Sep 67 to MAR 68. Where? Bien Hoa
2. RH/C-123 training: Where/when? HURBERT Jan-Aug 67
3. Rank while in RH? MA1 Present/retired rank? LTC
4. Duty(s) while in Ranch? NAVIGATOR ; TARGETING dates? SEP 66 -
5. Other Vietnam service? Where/when? DEC 62 - MAY 63, Bien Hoa, Pleiku
6. If aircREW member:
 - a. Number of missions: RH 95 Other (specify) 100 B-26 (62-63)
 - b. Combat flying hours: RH 141 Other (specify) 234:05

→ PLUS SEVERAL 123 SURVEY MISSIONS THAT WERE NOT COUNTERS

Narrative Information

On a separate sheet(s) of paper, please answer the following questions with as much detail as possible. Write too much, rather than too little. Use names and dates, if possible. If you want a name "blacked out" before this goes in the archives, just circle the name. On the sheets, indicate the number of the question you are answering, and put your last name and the form number in the upper right-hand corner of each sheet.

7. Special missions/operations participated in? (name, when, where, what, who else)
8. Decorations? (If Purple Heart, DFC, or above, give date and details of the act. If you have a copy of the narrative justifying the medal, please attach a copy.)
9. Were you present during an attack against the base, Ranch site, or quarters? Explain.
10. Were you present when a Ranch aircraft was shot down or crashed? Give all details.
11. Were you present when a Ranch crew member was killed or wounded? Give as much data as possible, even if you didn't directly observe it or are not sure of date or names.
12. Did you ever see or repair unusual battle damage (more than routine skin holes)?
13. Did you ever help plan RH missions? If so, what was the procedure?
14. How did you get into the Ranch? What did you know about the mission beforehand?
15. What were you told about the chemicals used? In Vietnam? Before Vietnam?
16. Other than something already discussed (or going home), what is your happiest memory of the Ranch (or Vietnam)? What is your unhappiest (saddest)?
17. What unusual, odd-ball, weird, funny, etc., thing happened to you in VN or training?
18. Same as question 17, but you saw it happen to another person(s).
19. What were your quarters like? Your routine day? Your parties? Anything else?
20. We know that the Ranch was unique. What should I tell the reader that will help him understand why this was a special outfit of special people? What or who should I not talk about?

Other data: Do you have any good pictures (especially of RH members), any journals, notes, diaries, letters, briefing notes, maps, etc., that I could copy? If so, DO NOT SEND THEM with this form. Repeat...DO NOT SEND THEM!!!! Describe the items on a separate piece of paper, with your name and form number on it. I will write and give you instructions on when to send them, or how to get them copied, at a later date. All materials will be protected and returned to you!!! Thank you for your help and time.

Please return this form and the narrative sheets in the enclosed envelope to Texas A&M.

Nov 20, 1989

To: Ranch Hand History Project
From: Robert H. Farris, Ltc (Ret), USAF

Here is a little information in answer to the specific questions you have posed. If I can be of any further help with this, please feel free to contact me.

7. The only "special" mission was the mission immediately after Tet, in which we flew out to empty tanks before converting to trash haulers. It was designed as two 6-ship formations, with me as lead nav in second formation. Lead nav had to turn back and we led 13 shipd on the spray, in special zone north of Bien Hoa (was that D or C zone?) Not a hot mission, but I think it was probably the only 13-ship spray formation flown. I do not even know now whether it was late Jan or early Feb of '68.

8. Usual Ait Medals and one DFC (3 Dec 67). Narrative attached. The unusual thing about the mission was that it was a three-ship, southwest of Saigon, along a very winding river bank. Lead pilot was Gene Dowling (name may be wrong), but he was a young Lt., AFA grad, and crazy as hell. This was his last mission and instead of the usual left or right echelon, we did a series of criss-crosses throughout the spray run. We all took hits--lead had flap cable severed, No. 2 had an engine hit as I recall and landed at Saigon, and number 3 seemed to get back to BH with us. But as we approached BH, Dowling called for a low level pass, in order to have his gear checked--actually he was set for his last low-level run and buzz job, since this was his last mission. The usual purple smoke was attached to all booms--so, when we made the pass (for damage inspection), the crazy one let go with the smoke. He had his last pass, and got a DFC for the mission. (The next time I tried to brief a similar target, using a similar criss-cross pattern, the lead pilot, Saul Speyer, decided such tactics were better left to the young, wild, and not-so-bright pilots.)

9. Attacks: several during my six month stay. TET had to be the most spectacular. There was also a one-time mortar attack on the Ranch ramp. The Tet attack wiped out some of the quarters, including the field-grade hooch, to which I had not attached myself, although invited earlier. The most devastating effect of the Tet attack was that it hit our septic tank cover--and blew out my favorite urinal. Bastards! Would also point out the role the VN beer stand just outside the compound played as an early warning device--when the lights were out, and only a few candles used, and not many customers or girls around, it seemed to be a good indication that we were going to get hit. Also, point out that a number of injuries were caused by people trying to get to the bunkers--and into the bunkers--and not too many by the 122s, although one bunker was hit during the Tet attack, I believe.

10. No a/c lost during my stay, to the best of my knowledge. None crashed.

11. Only "wound" I recall was Mik Mikolasz (spelling?) who got a Purple Heart for getting sprayed in the eyes with some defoliant during a run when lines were hit. It was somewhat of a joke at the time, but he did get the award. Other injuries, as I mentioned, were numerous when people ran over each other getting to the bunker. Also, the young Intel Lt. was burned pretty good during the Tet attack, trying to save his and others belongings from hootch when it caught fire--probably the most outstanding feat of bravery I saw during the stay.

12. One a/c was hit by a fruit bat on spray run below Rach Gia--target was the woods that served as an alternate for Ca Mau. Bat was imbedded in the nose of the aircraft, brought home, and mounted in operations. Wing span, as I recall was about six feet.

13. I worked in targeting during my stay, and thus the low number of missions. I only flew about every other day. Did engage in planning, from aerial and ground surveys (did Spec. Forces camps, for example, with a walk around inspection on-site, as well as aerial inspection.) Went to several province cap. cities for initial discussion with province chief and officilas before missions were formally added to our folder. Also attended monthly meetings with Chem Adv. in Saigon, as one of Ops and Targeting staff.

Procedure was normally, as I recall, request came to Saigon for area to be sprayed. This then brouhgnt about discussion with Province Chief and Army advisors. Aerial inspection was made and approval finally came from Saigon. We added to folder and sprayed when able, depending on priority. On occasion, we were told to spray specific targets at specific times; otherwise, squadron Ops and Targeting decidee what missions to frag, sent this to Saigon, and then they approved and sent back as daily frag.

14. Got inot Ranch by mistake. Trained at Hurlbert, but was supposed to go the 504 TASG as a FAN (so I thought.) However, when arrived at Bien Hoa, where TASG was located, Ranch said they had a claim--after a week of sitting around, waiting to go south to O-2 orientation, I was assigned to 12th. It was a bit embarrassing, since I knew several of the pilots and navs already assigned, and had told the Ops. Officer, (LC Avery (a small but ugly little son-of-a-bitch) that I wanted no part of his flit-gun outfit, and then found myself working for him--not just as nav but as targeting nav. My tour was not as smooth as it might have been.

I had a fairly good idea of the mission beforehand, since I did go through the low-level training at Hurlbert Field. I might mention that Pers had queried PACAF prior to my assignment to Hurlbert for training, since my orders clearly read 504 TASG--and PACAF said they were correct. When I arrived, knowing I was eventually going to O-2's at Danang, I was very surprised to find the 12th with my name on their incoming roster, and already with a folder at Ops. Also, we were fairly well briefed while at ACSC on VN ops, from week to week.

MIGHT ADD
HE DID
NOT CARE
FOR NAVS

15. All that I recall being told about the various chemicals we would be spraying, was what the different types were used for, i.e., trees, crops, etc. I was not at anytime made to feel that they were dangerous either to us or those we might have sprayed during a mission. In fact, when there was a great outcry in the states about "chemical" warfare, one story told around the Ranch, after a group of correspondents or environmentalists had made a visit, was that one of the USAF loaders, an EM, had swallowed a cupfull to prove that it was harmless. I did not see this, or know whether it was really true or not, but I know we were all pretty well exposed, and the a/c in general were full of it. The only precautions that I ever noted were for the crew of Patches, since they sprayed malathion--they were given monthly med checks, but they used to enjoy spraying the hell out of us in the Ranch hootches, whenever BH's turn came up for another mosquito run.

16. Christmas '67. Our hootch gave a party X-mas eve for the rest of the squadron. We used up all our booze but it was a helluva party--and no one was hurt. That plus the friendships in the hootch were probably the greatest aspect of the tour.

Saddest memory is when someone stole X-mas tree from the hootch just before X-mas '67. We had two trees--both sent from states by families. Someone obviously thought we had one too many, and stole mine.

Perhaps even sadder was my recognition that I was flying with some lead pilots who should not have been in the left seat. I flew through a lot of unsafe maneuvers when nothing but stupidity and inexperience could account for them. For example, flying at 50 feet on a survey in territory that was not secure, max rate descent through clouds in echelon, turns into the formation coming off the target, and even the criss-cross tactics described earlier--and flying through approach pattern at BH repeatedly, with 100's on approach. I also came to realize that a few of my brother navs (and not just the young ones) put a lot of imagination into their after mission reports, in regard to actual coordinates of ground they sprayed. One of my sadder moments was reporting my own erroneous spray out of target, and being scheduled by Air Division for a no-notice flight check!

17. Being asked to contribute to United Fund.

18. The night Denny Haycraft lost a girl off the back seat of a borrowed motorscooter. After a club party, he was returning her to other side of base--when he arrived, he had lost her somewhere along the way.

Secondly, incident of FAC's and their commander, who was not too well liked. There was a Major, I believe, who was returning home, and his departure was not being greived. His fellow FAC's threw a party, got him stoned, took a pic of him naked in bed with pretty sales person from BX (young lady who sold new cars and was the promoter of the original rebate system), and put the pics in the pocket of one of his coats, already packed for departure.

ALSO, DAY THE Army Col (NEW CHEM. ADVISOR) LET OUR
MASTER CHART BLEW OUT THE BACK OF 123 - IN FLIGHT - SOMEWHERE
OVER II CORPS. IT HAS ALL TARGETS SHOWN.

18 cont.

Also, the night Candlesticks came down from NKP and painted their decal on the nose of all Ranch aircraft.

19. Quarters were crowded and dirty, but better than being in the field. Hootches were wood, louvered sides, with asbestos tile roofing. Same quarters in '67 that I lived in in '62; however, where we had four men in '62, we had eight usually in '67.

We did have a small living room at front of hootch which most had closed off with drapes or something from sleeping area. We had refrig., bar, chairs and coffee table--which one of our members managed to scrounge from new rattan furniture being delivered to other side of base for fighter squadron quarters. In our hootch, we had built partial partitions to separate our sleeping areas, giving each man an area about 6' x 7' or 8' of privacy--or semi-privacy.

We also had the everpresent hootchmate who cleaned daily and did our laundry. (During Tet, the hootch next door even had live-in Red Cross girls or secs--caught there by the attack.)

20. A special bond had to develop between people who flew around in an overloaded 123, at low level, without any protection other than the escort aircraft. I think the purple scarf, and special ranch shirts, epitomized this bond.

Pictures:

Three 8x10's, taken late 67 or early 68.

- (1) All officers
- (2) All EM
- (3) Squadron Staff

Multiple 35mm colored slides of hootches, 123's on ramp, Patches plus 123 in flight, Danang Ranch quarters, the delta, Ops Planning area, a few of Ranch personnel of period, X-mas Ranch party in hanger, Ranch nav in green ranch shirt, Bunkers, Bien Hoa in '63.

Copy of Ranch songs.

Copy of certificate given to each Ranch Hand on departure.

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

TO

ROBERT H. FARRIS

Major Robert H. Farris distinguished himself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as a UC-123 Navigator near Saigon, Republic of Vietnam, on 3 December 1967. On that date, Major Farris led a formation of unarmed aircraft on a low-level defoliation mission designed to deny valuable foliage cover to hostile forces moving towards Saigon. Despite intense hostile ground fire throughout the mission, Major Farris coolly directed his formation through the target area, placed the defoliant precisely on target, thereby completing a highly successful combat operation. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Major Farris reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.