

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.

MOHNEY Russell Earle Russell Mohny 9 Nov 81
 Name (last first middle signature date)

Specific Information

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

1. Ranch Hand service: From July 1965 to June 1966 Where? Tan Son Nhut
2. RH/C-123 training: Where/when? Hurlburt Feb 65 / Langley May 65
3. Rank while in RH? Major Present/~~rated~~ rank? Major General
4. Duty(s) while in Ranch? Commander Post 65-Jarvis
5. Other Vietnam service? Where/when? Ops office JAR 66 - June 66
6. If aircrew member:
 - a. Number of missions: RH 348 Other (specify) _____
 - ☒ b. Combat flying hours: RH ~~700~~ 678 Other (specify) _____

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.

One mission I recall occurred in August 1965 when the Ranch was tasked to defoliate the river just west of Saigon in III Corps. Intelligence estimates were that the Viet Cong were well entrenched in the area and therefore we could expect heavy enemy fire. For this reason we decided not to strike without fighter and helicopter rescue support even though we were so close in to Tan Son Nhut Airport (about 10 minutes flying time) that we would hardly have time to get the after-takeoff and climb checklists completed prior to rolling in on target. Target time was fragged for 0800 as I recall and while we arrived with a four-ship flight on time to rendezvous with the fighters, they were fifteen or twenty minutes late getting there, so we held east of river over friendly territory while everyone got into position. Charlie Yerkes and I were flying in number three position as I remember. The fighters went in first to soften the target, but they didn't do much good, as the Viet Cong opened up on us with everything they had! Charlie and I took a hit in the prop can on number 2 engine before we even got the spray switch on---so we feathered and dumped. Joe Chalk and O.T. Taylor or Mike Clark, I think in number two, took a hit in the hydraulic system and got their flight mechanic a bath in hydraulic fluid. John DeLlamorte and (I think) Jack Spey, but not sure, also had an in-flight emergency caused by ground fire, and the remaining aircraft (not sure who was flying it) also took some hits. As I mentioned earlier, we were just about in the traffic pattern at Tan Son Nhut so we let the tower know we were in trouble and they closed the field to other traffic to give us priority. We talked our emergencies over and Charlie and I landed first, downwind, while Joe Chalk

held clear because he didn't know what problems he might experience on landing with his hydraulics shot away and we wanted to get the rest of the flight down in case Joe's bird might cause the runway to be closed.

Upshot of the whole mission was four aircraft shot up, and very little spray on target! The fighters had a field day at the shoot out at the O.K. corral! We hit that target at a later date and it was a piece of cake---but we changed our tactics by going in low and never again did we loiter in view of the target area while picking up our fighters! Following this episode, if we had trouble linking up with the fighters, many times we just went in cold turkey rather than wait around.

QUESTION 11:

MOHNEY 7111

In September 1965 we were working a target in II Corps one day when Paul Mitchell was wounded. Paul was flying co-pilot for Joe Chalk when a round came in just below the right wind screen, hit the fiberglass windshield defrost nozzle, shattering it and finally lodged itself in Paul's right hand (as I recall) just beneath the skin. It wasn't too much of a wound (my evaluation, not Paul's!) but Joe didn't know that at the time---neither did Paul since when the defrost nozzle disintegrated, the fragments hit Paul in the face and upper torso drawing quite a bit of blood. Not knowing how badly Paul was wounded, Joe diverted into Nha Trang (I think, not sure) where Paul was treated and airlifted out to Clark AB, Philippines. Paul was later awarded the Purple Heart by the Air Force Chief of Staff who was visiting Clark AB. Joe told me that they never knew where the shot came from and it was the only one they heard all day! The one good thing that came as a result of Paul's injury was we could put a crew on R&R since at the time, we were manned with only eight pilots for our four aircraft and the work schedule was such that we were scheduling 100% of the birds seven days a week. Needless to say the work schedule was beginning to get to everybody what with no time off.

QUESTION 18:

MOHNEY 7111

As usual, we never had enough of anything during the early days in Saigon. There was an old Case tractor parked next to Ranch that had been stripped of all working parts and when I asked where it came from and who it belonged to, I learned it had been stolen off the ramp at Clark AB, Philippines, loaded into a Ranch Hand C-123 and delivered in SVN several years earlier when the Ranch Hand mission was a TDY operation! Those early guys had imagination! Some poor guy is probably still looking for that tractor so he can clear his accountability!

Another case in point of how short things were. Captain Joe Chalk, later to be killed in a C-123 while instructing at Hurlburt, came into the office following a mission one day with a seat head rest that had taken a direct hit while Joe was occupying the seat! Joe was lucky that day! He had turned his head and leaned off to the side to converse with the other guy in the cockpit, when the round hit the head rest, blew a big hole in it, and then exited the aircraft taking a lot of fragments with it. Joe wanted to keep the head rest as a memento, so I told him he could have it. No sooner had I told him that, when in comes the head maintenance NCO asking about the head rest that was missing. Supply had no replacements for issue and since the item was necessary for safe operation of the aircraft, Joe had to give it back to the maintenance troops so they could repair and reinstall it, as we needed the aircraft for the next day's mission. That incident made an Indian-giver out of me. Always felt bad about that, but guess it wouldn't make much difference to Joe now.

Another incident I recall and which still makes me mad when I think of it occurred one evening about 2130. I was driving the metro van we used for crew transport from the base to the villa so I would have it available to make the morning crew pick ups. A short way from the gate at the Tan Son Nhut Air Base, I heard this metallic object thrown in the back door and come clattering toward the front of the truck. All I could think of was that there was a grenade in that van with me. I pulled it over to the curb and managed to bail out only to find some SOB had tossed an empty beer can into the van. I think I would have killed him on the spot if I'd known who did it. I aged about ten years in 30 seconds!

QUESTION 17:

MOHNEY 7111

The public relations types arranged for CBS to do a film on Ranch Hand for showing on the CBS evening news hosted by Walter Cronkite. Dan Rather, a working reporter at that time, was assigned the task of putting it together. The tasking to the Ranch was to take Dan Rather to a target where we would he shot at, but not a target where the enemy ~~first might get him~~ ^{could harm him.} Not an easy task due to the fact that one day a target could be hot as hell and the next time you flew it, you wouldn't hear a thing! Dan Rather wanted to shoot film footage during the run-in and while on target, but a firm rule we stuck by was that he had to remain in the armor plated box with the flight mechanic who operated the spray equipment.

The mission went pretty well as planned. Ralph Dresser and I flew lead of a four-ship formation. The flight took some light ground fire and got a few hits, so we "smoked" and called in the F-100s which were flying cover for us. A fairly typical mission---no injuries, a lot of excitement, Dan Rather got his film, didn't get hurt, and Ranch Hand ~~g~~ got four and a half minutes of prime viewing time on CBS evening news!

QUESTION 9

MOHNEY 7111

Tan Son Nhut came under rocket and mortar attack in early 1966, March or April, as I recall, but I'm not firm on the exact month. I think the rockets were of the 40mm variety. The Viet Cong set the main fuel storage tank afire (located adjacent to the control tower); got a trash hauler C-123 in the dorsal fin (it ~~was~~ ^{flew} never ~~again~~ again!), did a little taxiway damage and blew up the latrine located adjacent to the Tactical Air Control Center (TACC). (No one in latrine at the time!) As I recall, there was one fatality. A Master Sergeant who had finished his tour up-country was enroute PCS back to the CONUS. When the attack started, he ran out of the barracks to get to a shelter - he never made it.

Don McCullough and I, on our Hondas, arrived at the base gate about 0430 as I recall, just after the all-clear sounded. I went by the TACC to pick up the day's frag order for the Ranch missions that day (that's when I saw the latrine damage mentioned above), and on my way back to the Ranch, I came upon a rocket or ~~rocket~~ ^{mortar} round lying in the roadway---one that turned out to be a dud. Needless to say, I didn't hang around to find out!

The Ranch was the first ones to get airborne that morning (just after dawn), and with the fuel storage tank on fire, etc., it was an exciting time! As I recall we worked a target in II Corp which got us back to base about 1030. The fuel tank was still burning, sending great plumes of black smoke into the air. We sighted the base at 40 miles out that morning!

QUESTION 12:

MOHNEY 7111

We kept hearing rumors that the Viet Cong were beginning to use 50 calibre HE in late 1965, but the intelligence guys absolutely refused to confirm this. After one of the missions we found battle damage to the left wing main beam. An explosive round had hit which left a clean hole about 3/4" deep in solid metal. Around the hole were the powder stains left when it exploded. We called the intelligence guys and told them to get on down to the flight line; that we had something to show them. Were they surprised? Needless to say, they confirmed it as explosive rounds and changed their intelligence estimates after that. The maintenance guys fixed the damage by simply threading the hole and screwing a plug into it. Those guys were great with their initiatives and ways of doing things.

QUESTION 13:

MOHNEY

The target area to be sprayed would be furnished the Ranch by the U.S. Army chemical types operating out of downtown Saigon. We in the Ranch, normally the operations officer, lead navigator and lead pilot and intelligence officer, along with the U.S. Army representative, would then visit the province headquarters and meet with South Vietnamese Army officials who would provide latest enemy intelligence (size of force, location, type weapons, etc.) that we could expect during spray operations. Following this, if it was a new area we had not operated in before, we would fly a high altitude, 3500 feet or above, survey mission to determine terrain characteristics, best ingress and egress routes, areas to be avoided, etc. Then, it was back to detailed mission planning using the maps. During this phase of planning, we would determine the number of aircraft needed to do the job and the number of missions required to complete the project. Upon completion of this planning, we would present a formal mission briefing to the entire Ranch Hand personnel and throw it open for the discussion which followed. The day prior to flying the mission, the lead pilot and lead navigator would do the detailed planning necessary to fly the mission and work up the mission flight cards (radio frequencies, break away headings, emergency landing fields, etc.).

QUESTION 14:

MOHNEY 7111

I was undergoing C-123 transition training at Hurlburt Field in March 1965. Don McCulloch (also a Ranch Hand) was in the same class with me and we heard about the Ranch Hand mission from guys already in the Ranch---Mike Clarke and John Dellamorte. (Mike was a navigator on my RC-121D crew at Otis AFB, MA., in the late 50s/early 60s.) Neither Don or I were interested in hauling trash and since I had volunteered for A-1s earlier (but Air Defense Command wouldn't release me), I figured the Ranch mission was the next best thing. Also, since I was waiting to pin on my majors leaves at the time, I would be the ranking member of the Ranch and would get command after the incumbent, Major Larry Hay-Chapman rotated. Where could you get a better deal than that!

QUESTION 15

MOHNEY 7111

I knew very little about the chemical used prior to arriving in Vietnam except that it was a commercial weed killer commonly used in the U.S. Upon arriving in country, I learned that we were using (blue) which I believe was lactic acid for the crop missions and agents purple and white. I can't remember when the term "Agent Orange" got coined.

Don McCullough and I shared a villa in Saigon along with another fellow from the 309th Air Commando squadron who was stan eval for the trash haulers. No complaints about the living conditions, what with two maids to keep the quarters clean and do the cooking. Our mode of transportation in those days was the ever faithful Honda 90 motorcycle. I think everyone in the Ranch owned one with perhaps the exception of Dick Pishkin who persisted in riding a French or Italian motor scooter. But then, a Honda would have been too hot for Dick to handle!

A routine day began with a 0330-0400 get up. A breakfast consisting of a glass of Tang, toast, coffee and usually eggs. Then on to the Honda and out to the Base (10-15 minutes max at that hour of the morning because there was no traffic); pick up the morning Frag Order at the Tactical Air Control Center and then ^{on} to Ranch Hand operations where we briefed the mission (mission planning accomplished the day before), and then took off so as to make a time over target (TOT) when it was just light enough to see and still cool enough so the spray would be effective. When we were working close-in targets to Saigon (III Corps), we could get two missions in and have the flying for the day all wrapped up by 1100. The maintenance guys would then turn the birds and have them ready for the next day's mission and usually would have their work done by 1300 at the latest. I have to add that this was a typical day in the '65 time frame when we were operating a fleet of 4 to 7 aircraft max. Operations intensified in the '66 era when the unit grew to 10 aircraft and eventually became a squadron, but I was gone by then. Once we had the birds bedded down, four of us, ^{Jim} ~~Pete~~ Porchurek, Don McCullough, Ralph Dresser and I,

would usually play a few sets of handball, lunch, and then return to Operations to work up the next day's missions. We usually locked up the Ranch about 1600 and headed for the Club and a few cool ones before heading back to the villa. On most nights when we weren't partying, we hit the sack about 2130 or 2200, since the early get-ups came quickly and it had been a long day.

The troops who didn't have any mission planning or administrative duties to perform would hit the Club after landing at 1030 or 1100 and proceed to drink up the booze like it was going out of style---especially if it was a "first hit" party, with the new guy taking his "first hit" footing the bill! The higher ranking headquarters types (2d Air Division in those days) never got used to seeing the guys partying it up at that hour of the morning and this created problems for me as the commander of the unit at the time, as I would have to run the traplines explaining that the Ranch Hand day began at 0400 when everyone else was still asleep and ended at about the time everyone else was having lunch. Many of the staff weenies never did understand the phenomenon of flying low, being shot at and being hit (several times in many cases), and getting the bird back home in one piece. It psyched the body up and when the adrenaline wore off, the guys really relaxed. We also didn't have many requests from the staff to come fly with the Ranch!

not for attribution

QUESTION 17:

I doubt you will find it acknowledged in any official documents, but the Ranch conducted aerial spray operations over North Vietnam in the fall of 1965. We were operating TDY out of DaNang and working targets in I Corps. On this one particular mission, we were working the Laotian trail and could see the highway network below the trees. Don McCullouch was flying as co-pilot and O.T. Taylor was flying lead. We flew right up to the border on our first mission and Don and I took a hit in the engine manifold line on number 2, so we feathered and dumped. O.T. in lead never heard a thing! Back on the ground, I sent a messenger to 2nd Air Division telling them we had a good target and would be crossing the border into North Vietnam the next morning unless we heard otherwise. We never got an answer, so the next morning we went out to continue where we left off the day before. Don and I were flying lead and air cover was a couple of B-57s also out of DaNang. On target, the same guy who probably hit us the day before was still at his gun, and he was good. O.T. in number two was taking heavy fire and it was kind of funny since he denied even hearing any the previous day when we were taking it all!

The lead B-57 saw where the fire was coming from, so he came back over target a second time to get the bastard and ended up being hit himself! Pulling off target and trailing fire and smoke, we told him to bail out at which time he responded that he had shut down #2 engine and discharged the fire extinguisher agent and that the fire was out. His wingman at this point came over the radio and said, "I don't care what the gauges show, you're on fire and get the hell out." They did, but the pilot stayed right until the

Last moment. I found out later at a party in the Philippines with the B-57 guys that he had been criticized for not trimming an aircraft to crash when he punched out over Nha Trang due to aircraft damage on a previous mission. The aircraft continued to fly when #2 couldn't shoot it down and finally impacted in Nha Trang killing some 40 people as I recall. He was hanging around on our mission to make sure the trim was nose down before he bailed! It almost cost him his life. Both the guy in back and the pilot got out. We saw good chutes, so while the B-57 wingman climbed to altitude to establish communications with rescue, we took over as on-scene commander and orbited the rescue point. Weather was about 3500 feet overcast. Fighters started showing up from everywhere that day. We must have had about 3 flights of four at least. Here we are in a C-123 flying an orbital pattern at 130 kts, and all we see our fighters coming at us doing 450 kts. Talk about the possibility of a mid-air collision! In short, we got the choppers in to airlift the guys out, but the USAF and USN lost 8 aircraft that day to enemy ground fire. In fact, the chopper that lifted our B-57 guys out, first picked them up and apologized for having to go pick up a Navy flier enroute back to DaNang! Wished we had had the NVN gunner on our side---he earned his pay!

As an after thought---never did get a response out of 2nd Air Division to my message. When I returned to Saigon I inquired why; the answer was that they weren't going to officially acknowledge or order us into NVN and we said we were going unless told differently so why worry!

QUESTION 20:

MOHNEY 7111

The Ranch was unique in that it took a lot of guys with dissimilar backgrounds and training, etc., bomber pilots, transport pilots, fighter pilots, navigators and put them into a different mission than we had ever done before. We wrote the book on aerial spraying in modern warfare. I guess I would equate it to glider operations in WWII. We tested a new concept of warfare that worked. I doubt that defoliation would work in a European scenario or that it would be needed. Also, I doubt whether the Ranch mission would survive in today's world where the man on the ground has a hand-held ground-to-air missile at his disposal. We were lucky in that our exposure was only to small arms fire. I doubt we could have survived otherwise!

QUESTION 17:

MOHNEY 7111

In the spring of 1966 we were working a target in III Corps. I was flying co-pilot for Ralph Dresser, and while over target, clouds of yellow smoke started pouring into the cockpit to the extent you couldn't even see the gauges. SSgt Dick Woods (Woody) was the flight mechanic/spray operator on the mission and when we called him up over interphone to ask what was happening, there was no response! The smoke finally cleared out, since the cockpit windows being open made a good vacuum, and finally Woody came up on interphone. We had been taking some ground fire and as he popped a smoke grenade to mark it for the fighters, we hit some turbulence and he missed the door when he threw the grenade with the result it went off in the cargo compartment! Woody went off interphone and left the armor plated spray box to retrieve the grenade and toss it over board! There were a few anxious moments there when we didn't know the status of Woody!

Working a target in III corps in the Spring of '66, I was leading a four-ship flight in on target. The intelligence troops predicted it would be a hot one, so we had gone out over the water, descended and came in on target hugging the ground all the way. We probably hedge-hopped for a good 15 miles and just as we were coming up on target and preparing to climb to 150 feet and spray, we crossed a swampy area where all of a sudden a cloud of small birds flushed. We flew through the middle of the entire flock and all you could hear were the "thumps" as they hit the windscreen and the wings! The airplane was a mess on landing back at Saigon! The wing leading edges looked like someone had taken a mallet and proceeded to dent them as much as possible. We had dead birds hanging from the wing spray booms and packed into the engine cowlings. I guess we were pretty lucky since we were so close to the ground when it happened -- but I'll never forget turning that bird over to the maintenance guys. It was nothing but bird s---, feathers and blood, and it smelled god-awful!