

To:

MR. MIKE G. LAW



80227/3383



# SPECIAL VNAF DETACHMENT AUGMENTS KAF

## By JOHN KONEK

AFTER ITS WITHDRAWAL FROM CAMBODIA ON 30 JUNE 1970, THE U.S. CONTINUED TO CONDUCT SOME AIR ACTIVITY IN CAMBODIA, ESPECIALLY IN THE AREA OF KRATIE-STUNG TRENG, NORTHEAST OF PHNOM PENH, IN ORDER TO INTERDICT NVA INFILTRATION AND PREVENT THE RETURN OF THE NVA TO ITS DESTROYED BASE AREA NEAR THE BORDER. BECAUSE OF POLITICAL SENSITIVITIES, U.S. AIRCRAFT WERE NOT ALLOWED OR AUTHORIZED TO LAND IN CAMBODIA AFTER 30 JUNE 1970; BUT THEY COULD PERFORM OVERFLIGHT SUPPORT MISSIONS.

DURING THEIR SUPPORT MISSIONS, SUCH AS FLYING AIR COVER FOR RIVER CONVOYS, U.S. GUNSHIPS WERE ALLOWED TO RETURN FIRE ONLY WHEN BEING FIRED AT FROM THE GROUND. THE KHMER AIR FORCE, MEANWHILE, HAD ONLY A MODEST CAPABILITY. IT INCLUDED A FEW MIG-15 AND 17 AIRCRAFT WHICH WERE GROUNDED MOST OF THE TIME FOR LACK OF REPLACEMENT PARTS, HENCE, UNAVAILABLE FOR OPERATIONAL SUPPORT. HELICOPTER ASSETS INCLUDED NINE MACHINES OF VARIOUS MAKES AND MODELS LEFT OVER FROM FRENCH OCCUPATION WHICH INCLUDED 4 TURBO ALOUETTE II's, 2 TURBO ALOUETTE III's, 2 CONVENTIONAL UH-19's AND 1 CONVENTIONAL HOUB M1-4 RUSSIAN HELICOPTER.

TO INCREASE SUPPORT OF THE FANK (CAMBODIAN GROUND FORCES), AND WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE KHMER GOVERNMENT, THE VNAF, IN EARLY AUGUST 1970, DETACHED TWO A-1 SKYRAIDER FLIGHTS (SIX AIRCRAFT), SEVERAL OBSERVATION PLANES AND TWO AC-119 FLARE-GUNSHIPS TO POCHENTONG AIR FORCE BASE NEAR PHNOM PENH ON A PERMANENT BASIS. ALL VNAF SUPPORT MISSIONS IN CAMBODIA WERE COORDINATED

By the "Air Support Operations Center (ASOC), VNAF Air Operations Command", which was installed at Khmer Air Force Headquarters. In addition, to help the FANK solve their medical evacuation and resupply problems, MACV loaned six UH-1H helicopters to the VNAF, all placed under control of the VNAF ASOC at Pochentong. These six helicopters were earmarked for the Khmer Air Force but temporarily operated by VNAF crews for the support of FANK ground troops, since Khmer helicopter flight crews were undergoing training in Saigon. Repair and maintenance on these helicopters was performed by VNAF specialist teams at Pochentong. They were eventually taken over by Khmer Air Force maintenance crews still undergoing training. But air rescue missions were all performed by VNAF aircraft with ground security provided by FANK or RVNAF units in their respective tactical areas of responsibility.

During the night of 21-January 1971, NVA sappers penetrated the Pochentong Air Base which was located 10 kilometers from the western boundary of Phnom Penh proper, and conducted a most damaging sabotage which affected Khmer capability to provide air support. While the civilian aviation terminal sustained only slight physical damage, almost all Khmer Air Force aircraft (nearly 98%) were destroyed. The only Caravelle jet transport of Air Cambodge escaped sure destruction because it was in Bangkok when the attack took place. The Caravelle had just completed its official mission, bringing General Lon Nol back from Saigon in the morning and flying to Bangkok that afternoon. Strange as it may have appeared, the VNAF aircraft among the 20 fighter-bombers, observation planes, gunships and helicopters

SUFFERED ANY DAMAGE BECAUSE THE UNIAF AREA WAS HEAVILY GUARDED BY ITS OWN TROOPS. BUT THE SEEMINGLY SELECTIVE SABOTAGE ~~BY~~ NVA SAPPERS, UNFORTUNATELY, GAVE RISE TO FALSE RUMORS THAT IT WAS CONDUCTED BY RUN TROOPS.

UNDER THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, THE UNITED STATES BOLSTERED THE KAF'S ABILITIES BY PROVIDING 14 UH-1H HELICOPTERS IN 1972. ANOTHER 5 UH-1H HELICOPTERS WAS PROVIDED IN 1973 AND ANOTHER 15 IN 1974 WITH 10 UH-1G (GUNSHIPS) ADDED TO THE FLEET. BY THE END OF 1974, KAF'S HELICOPTER ASSETS WOULD TOTAL 44 UH-1's. ~~HELICOPTERS~~

ONE OF THE MOST UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE KHMER AIR FORCE, WAS THAT IT PROVIDED AS MUCH SERVICE TO THE CIVIL POPULACE AS IT DID ITS MILITARY FORCES. THIS HAD A TRAGIC RESULT ~~ON~~ WHEN ON 8 AUGUST 1972 A KHMER AIR FORCE HELICOPTER ~~WAS~~ CARRING REFUGEES WAS SHOT DOWN KILLING 14 PEOPLE. THE HELICOPTER WAS DOWNED BY A SA-7 MISSILE. MOST ALL KAF PILOTS WERE POOLED FROM CIVIL SOURCES SUCH AS AIR CAMBODGE. THEY WOULD FLY MILITARY MISSIONS ONE MONTH AND FLY CIVIL AIR FLIGHTS WITH AIR CAMBODGE THE NEXT MONTH.

I CANNOT EVEN IMAGINE, THIS MADE IT POSSIBLE TO CARRY OUT OUR ORIGINAL PLAN.

ON 18 APRIL, THE EXPEDITION BEGAN AT 5:00 AM SHARP. THE ONLY INCIDENT OCCURRED WHEN THE GUARDS AT THE AIRPORT DID NOT WANT THE GROUPS WALKING ON FOOT TO PASS. BUT THEN THEY BECAME REASONABLE AFTER THEY RECEIVED A LARGE SUM OF MONEY. IN TOTAL DARKNESS, THE C-123 TOOK OFF WITH A CARGO OF PEOPLE WEARY FROM GRIEF, LACK OF SLEEP, AND FEAR. THE TRIP WAS SAD AND SILENT, ALL OF US LOST IN OUR THOUGHTS, BARELY AWARE OF WHAT WE HAD JUST EXPERIENCED. THE ARRIVAL AT UTAPAO MARKED THE END OF THE NIGHTMARE, BUT ONLY FOR US, A FEW INDIVIDUALS.

BETWEEN 1970 AND 1975 WITH THE RENEWED RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES, THE KHMER AIR FORCE (LATER FANK AIR FORCE) RECEIVED A TOTAL OF 44 UH-1H HELICOPTERS. 34 WERE USED AS SLICK, MEDEVAC, SUPPLY ETC. WITH 10 BEING CONVERTED TO GUNSHIPS. THESE WERE DESIGNATED BY THE KHMER AIR FORCE AS OH-1GS. THE ROYAL KHMER AIR FORCE HELICOPTER PILOTS RECEIVED THEIR TRAINING IN THAILAND BY THE USAF AT UDORN ALONG WITH LAO AIR FORCE PILOTS, AND IN SAIGON.