

## VIETNAM by KV Hall written in March 2021

My first stop was Hawaii then on to the Philippines to Jungle Survival, aka “Snake School”. We spent several days learning about survival skill in a jungle setting. We tied a couple of poles a few feet off the ground in which to put a piece of parachute to hold our mosquito nets and sleeping bags so the rats wouldn’t get in them. They had some Big Rats that you could see and hear at night.



We had “Escape and Evasion” training one day where you were supposed to hide somewhere and the instructors would find you and give you critique on what you did wrong. Most guys headed for a clump of grass or such but I figured that was too obvious. There was a large open area with vegetation about a foot high and I thought, ‘Why not?’ so I walked out in to the middle of it, laid down and crawled under it. They never even looked there for me and when time was up they called out for us to come in. They were amazed when I stood up in this area with basically no cover. Hey, being a hunter comes in handy when you are the prey.



My next stop was in Saigon, South Vietnam. The 20<sup>th</sup> HES still had a couple of CH-3 helicopters there to ferry VIP’s around and I met up with Major Bob Ball whom I had known at Stead. I spent a couple of days there and then on to 20<sup>th</sup> Squadron HQ at Nha Trang to pick up

my orders to Udorn and then to Bangkok, Thailand for a couple of days enroute. This was all a strange new world to me with different language and customs plus the heat and humidity.



Thai women on the 'klong' going to market. A street 'snackbar', (that we called "little Howard Johnsons") with dried octopus (Phew) and other goodies.





I was glad to finally get to Udorn and see some familiar faces and find out what I was getting into. Al Deviney, Nick Conti, and a few others were there. Since I had a lot of hours in the H-3, I was to be the new Chief of Standardization for the squadron.



The Operating Location Commander at Udorn for my first 6 months was Major John "Jack" Koontz. Nice guy. The last 6 months was L/C Sherrel Martin, a friend I had known at Stead.

On the first local flight I was qualified as Stan Check Pilot, Maintenance Test Pilot, and Aircraft Commander. The only thing I needed to be Mission Commander was to fly on a mission. Hell, I didn't even know what country I was in!! I think my first mission was with Captain Zack Rodehaver and we went to the "Nit Noy" (Thai for small) spot. I was used to flying with students and giving them plenty of room for error but the Nit Noy spot gave you about 10 feet rotor clearance to the 200 foot tall trees. Well, at least now I was Mission Qualified (thanks a lot).

The following year was quite an experience. Looking back on it 40 years later it seems like a dream. You kinda lived day to day, doing your job the best you knew how. Was it worth it? As it turned out I think not but when you have a "war" run by the politicians in Washington, DC instead of letting the Military Commanders get the job done. Well....



There were about 12 CH-3C's assigned to our unit at Udorn. They were basic CH-3 models and not equipped with any armor like the Jolly's HH's. Since our mission was supposed to be clandestine we just wanted all the weight/power ratio we could get. We wore the fabric (Kevlar?) flak vests and later had the ceramic chest protectors. The only fire power we had initially were the crewmember's weapons, (M-16's and .38 revolvers). The aircraft were equipped with the original winch/hoist setup with 150 feet of cable with the swing-out hoist arm. (The one you always banged you head on when it was swung back inside the cabin!) We retained the FOD deflector shield in front of the engines and did not carry external auxiliary fuel tanks. In late 1967 the helicopter engines were upgraded to ones with more power, from "-1" 1300 hp up to "-5" 1500 hp and designated CH-3E.

About half the pilots at that time were ex-school IP's and the other half were conversion pilots from other type aircraft. A lot were older Majors and Lt. Col. from SAC flying KC-135 or B-52s. We had a couple of Captains from C-130s.



Our primary mission was counter-insurgency intelligence gathering missions into Laos and North Vietnam. Our missions were highly classified top secret since neither the North Vietnamese nor the United States would admit that they had troops in Laos. We would fly small

groups of indigenous troops into places in Laos, North Vietnam and Cambodia near the Ho Chi Minh Trail to gather intelligence on enemy troop and equipment movements.

Technically, Laos was considered neutral so the United States military was prohibited from openly conducting operations in the country. The North Vietnamese had soldiers in country and we knew it as well as they knew we had people there but no one would admit it. Therefore the CIA pretty much ran the Secret War in Laos.



The CIA established remote jungle landing strips all over Laos called “Lima Sites” that could be used by Air America’s airplanes and helicopters to provide aerial supply to the scattered Hmong hill tribesmen outposts fighting the Communist Pathet Lao.



One of my first missions up North in Laos was where Laotian General Vang Pao was conducting an operation. There were a bunch of gunny sacks laying on the ground and I assumed they contained some supplies, maybe rice. Then I noticed some feet sticking out of the bags. Apparently they contained VC prisoners. Wow! I think I am in a war zone!



Due to the classified nature of their mission, the 20<sup>th</sup> CH-3's did not display any U.S. markings or insignia. They were equipped with slotted hangers to insert the USAF insignia when flying "in country". The pilots had no insignia on their flight suits and were "sanitized" in order to maintain deniability of U.S armed forces in "neutral" Laos. Officially "We were not there". The helicopters were painted the standard camouflage pattern, except one. CH-3C #63-09676 was painted flat black to determine the color feasibility for our mission. It soon was given the nickname of "Black Mariah". It was the only black H-3 to serve in SEA and is now on display at the USAF Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio.

There were numerous "safe" Lima sites (LS) throughout Laos that were used for staging and refueling. The helicopters and crews would spend the day there waiting to execute the mission.



Fuel was pumped from 55 gallon barrels using a hand pump. At one time, gasoline-powered pumps were used to expedite the refueling, but they were so temperamental about starting that the extra weight and trouble was not worth it. Many of the empty barrels were used by the local inhabitants to build their "hootches".



The missions to insert recon teams usually were flown with two helicopters, a high and low bird. The low bird would do the infil/exfil while the high bird flew a ways off to act as decoy and be there for possible rescue.



There was usually a couple of fixed wing "gunship" aircraft, A-1E's ( usually "Hoboes", Fireflies, or Zorros) flown by USAF pilots to cover us. Mission preparation included the usual briefing with aerial photos of the LZ, as well as a fly-over in an Air America or CAS fixed wing (mostly the turbo-prop Pilatus Porter and occasionally Beech Baron) to recon the LZ.



Insertion was usually planned for near dusk so our troops would have darkness to hide if necessary. Then we usually flew home after sundown. If we received any ground fire or hostile action upon insertion, the aircraft would pull off because the mission's safety was compromised.



In 1967, the NVA had 37MM anti-aircraft guns along the Ho Chi Minh Trail which were visually sighted and not too accurate above 10,000'. So any missions that required us to cross the Ho Chi Minh trail were either flown at tree top level or above 10,000'. After President Johnson stopped the bombing of North Vietnam in 1968, the NVA moved the 85MM guns from around Hanoi and placed them along the "Trail". These guns were radar controlled and accurate up to 30,000'. Since our H-3's couldn't fly that high, the crossings then were at low level and take our chances on ground fire.

We lived in barracks with two double bunks beds, a desk and a chair. At least they were air conditioned. You didn't spend an awful lot of time there anyway since you were usually at the Operations Office or the Officers Club. Eating, drinking or flying. I flew whenever I could rather than sitting around and trying to kill time. Initially we were TDY to Udorn. We had to go to Nha Trang every 90 days to get new TDY orders. In 1968 the Pony Express was PCS to Udorn.

The 555<sup>th</sup> (Triple Nickel) Fighter Squadron moved to Udorn and needed quarters so we were offered the opportunity to live off base. About a dozen of us found some nice bungalows in town in a secured compound where the Thai family caretakers lived inside. They would close the gate at night so you better be there.



One of the sayings was “This Place Sucks” (TPS) but someone added an “R” to TPRS, “this place REALLY sucks” so if you were talking to a Pony you would undoubtedly get a “Tango Papa Romeo Sierra” somewhere in the conversation. We also had it painted in big red letters on the top of our hooch in town where several of us lived. Even though many of the taxi drivers didn’t know the street name, if you told them the “TPRS” bungalow they knew where to go.



The troops we carried were Royal Laotian, Thai and mercenary types indigenous to the area. They were fairly short in stature and one of our pilots, Captain Allen “Hoppy” Hopkins dubbed them “Gomers”, like little Gomer Pyles. Thence we became “Gomer Getters”. (reading different websites and stories they referred to the VC as Gomers but these were “our Gomers ”). Hoppy also designed our “Pony Patch”. In his youth he had worked as a designer for Walt Disney.



We even adopted a logo of a round black furry critter with little legs sticking out named "I.R. Gomer". Some of the crew chiefs made up stencils of "I.R." and on a mission might hop out and spray paint a Gomer on a rock. It probably blew the mind of some VC that might see it.



We would take them in during the evening hours near dusk and drop them in pre-selected landing zones (clearings) and pick them up several days later. The insertion was to be undetected so they wouldn't get attacked by the North Vietnamese.



The 'exfils' could happen at any time during the day and most were routine but sometimes during their mission they would make contact with the enemy and have to be extracted while under enemy fire. That got to be exciting at times.

In the spring of 1968, some dumbass in HQ decided we should have machine guns on our unarmed helicopters. The H-3 was equipped with a mount for an M-60 at the front cabin door. As far as we were concerned it was in the way and just extra weight. I don't think it was ever really used in action while I was there. Our mission was to do it quietly not make a lot of noise.

In early 1968, the 21<sup>st</sup> SOS at NKP was activated and drafted some of our pilots and helicopters.

#### **Memorable missions:**

On December 27, 1967 three Pony Express CH-3E's were flown to PS 22 near Pakson, in southern Laos for a series of missions. The aircraft and crews would remain at the secure staging base overnight because of the distance from home base and timeliness required during the mission. On December 28<sup>th</sup>, a company of troops were inserted using the 3 Ponies, 2 Air America UH-1's and one H-34. The troops remained out overnight to be picked up the next day.



During the night of the 28<sup>th</sup>, one of the CH-3's jumped the chocks, rolled down a slope and "dinged" one of the main rotor blades rendering the helicopter unserviceable. The CH-3's had carried in about 25 troops but figured it should not be a problem to pick up the extra ones between the remaining two CH-3's and the Air America Hueys.



The aircrews lounged around until mid-afternoon anticipating the pickup later that day. Suddenly there was a call from the troops requesting an "emergency exfil" which usually meant they were under fire. The helicopters scrambled into the air and after several radio calls it was determined to be just a "normal" exfil. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief as we continued to the LZ. Our cover of "Zorro" A-1's were coming to join us.



I was lead aircraft and knew we needed to utilize the LZ space to get all helicopters in safely. As I approached into the LZ, I moved forward to allow plenty of room behind me.



All was fine until the Hueys touched down then all Hell broke loose! Automatic weapons and mortar rounds were suddenly going off all around us.

We called for the A-1E's for covering fire but they weren't quite in position due to the "normal" exfil call. We had lowered the aft ramp so the troops could enter in both entrances but when the shooting started they were delayed in getting on board and some of them began running to the helicopters behind me. This left us only half full and I knew they couldn't all get on the other birds.



About that time, the other CH-3 pilot, Major Jim Villotti, said he had taken hits in the cockpit and was full and taking off. (Major Villotti had leaned forward when a bullet came through the pilot's window and sliced the back of this flak vest almost in two. Another round had come through the co-pilot's windshield and bounced off the co-pilot's vest.) I told him I would hold my position so he could "overfly" me and to "get the Hell out". I would pick up the stragglers. The Hueys also had 10 or 15 troops and took off. After they had departed, I proceeded to hover back to where several troops had set up a fire line and were shooting into the surrounding treeline. I landed not more than 15 feet from them but they never even looked around. The troops and my crew were firing from the doors and windows when my crew chief, Sgt. Martinelli, in the face of enemy fire, jumped from the helicopter and physically grabbed the troops on the ground to get them to onload. As they were loading I saw a movement about 20 yards in front of the chopper. I made out a guy and a gun and thought "Oh, crap" and began looking for my M-16 when one of our Gomers broke from the brush with an M-1 rifle that I swear was taller than he was. I said to myself "Run, Gomer, Run" and he made it to the helicopter in time.



As I began my takeoff, apparently the bad guys emerged from the forest as the Zorros arrived and strafed the area and dropped some "Willie Pete" near where we had been. They zapped the Hell out of a bunch of the bad guys. Miraculously, our helicopter had not taken a single hit. Of course, our shorts could use some changing! We had successfully extracted all of our Gomers.



On January 5, 1968 we inserted a team into 10 foot high "elephant" grass about 15 miles south of Dien Bien Phu. You could see the runways where MIG's sometimes flew. That made us a little antsy. The troops would literally disappear as they jumped into the high grass. On January 10 we were called for emergency extraction of the team. They had come under enemy fire and had scattered to survive. Our guys had made contact with the team leader and had reconnoitered his position. He had started a small fire to give us smoke to find his position. I flew in to perform the extraction and as we hovered over the point where the team leader was supposed to be, we were unable to see him.



About this time my crew chief asked what it looked like if they were shooting at us. I didn't know how to respond, and then he said, "Does it look like little white butterfly's?" When I said "probably", he replied "Boy, there's sure a bunch of them coming from behind". About that time it was determined that the team leader had moved because of enemy activity. They had also spotted his smoke. We immediately "hauled Boogie" out of there.



As we began to fly away, one of the crew spotted a couple of guys waving at us from the top of a ridge about half a mile away. I said, "I hope they are our guys" and circled around to approach their position. They were indeed "our guys" and the crew chief prepared the hoist to pick them up. These troops were supposed to have been briefed on how to properly get on the forest penetrator and fasten the straps around themselves. My crew chief said they were on the penetrator and coming up. I didn't like sitting exposed on the ridgeline so told him I was going to start a slow takeoff. About that time my crew chief exclaimed, "Oh shit, one of them just fell off!" Apparently they had just grabbed onto the penetrator cable with their hands. Take in mind that we had just moved off the top of a narrow ridge top and the ground was rapidly dropping away. I thought to myself that the guy was a goner and quickly began to circle around to see where he hit. He had fallen probably over 50 feet but hit the top of the tall grass and bounced right up waving frantically. I again hovered over his position but this time held there until he was safely on board.

The next day, the team leader had been contacted again and was in the same general area as the previous day, on the north side of a long ridge. He showed his position to us on the pre-mission recon by spreading out a map which we saw from overhead. No smoke this time! We knew there were NVA still looking for him and we would have to contend with possible ground fire. I briefed the A-1 "Firefly" pilots to go in right with us and strafe the area past the team leader to keep their heads down and give us time to pick him up. That is exactly what they did. They were about 50 feet above us as they advanced down the valley ahead of us firing their guns. A few seconds later, I came to a hover over the team leader and he got on the penetrator.



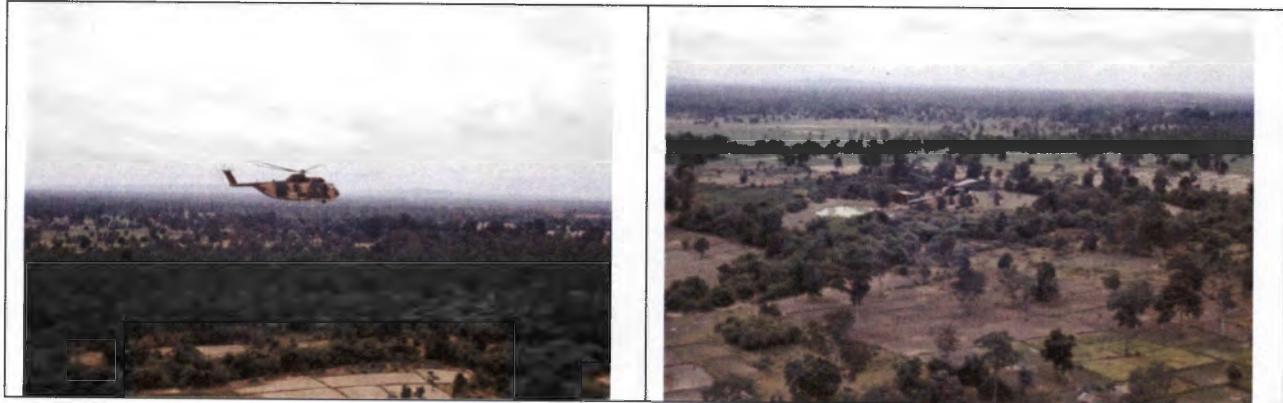
As he was coming up the hoist I began hearing this "brrrp - brrrpp" behind me. It kept getting louder and louder and I was thinking "Oh shit, we've been had" and starting to squeeze the mike button to call the Fireflies when one of them flashed past BELOW me with his 20 MM going full blast. It had been him that I had heard and what a beautiful sight he was! We lifted off and on our way with our passenger without hearing a shot from the bad guys.

In December I got to go on R&R to Hawaii to be with my wife. We stayed at the R&R camp that had its own beach.

My first mission after I got back was an infil. After the drop off right at dark I was exiting out down this river valley for a little ways and thought that I heard a couple of shots from ground fire. Upon inspection there was a bullet hole in the tail boom pylon and the bullet went right between the tail rotor control cables.

In January 1968, an RB-66 went down in North Vietnam. There had been some intermittent 'beeper' signals from the area. The 'powers' thought there might be survivors and wanted to check it out. It sounded like a klusterflock idea to me, but...I'm just the pilot. We loaded some Green Berets to do a ground search. As we neared the area we were flying down the edge of this wide valley and as I looked down through the tree canopy I could see a road and some trucks parked back under the trees. We were flying right over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, WTFO!!

We went on away from the road and the trees were like 200 feet high and our hoist cable was only 150 feet long. No good. When we came to a clearing there would be village. In the village there are people and the people had guns. Not good. We diddled around for a little while and the GB's said "Let's go home." Good idea.



We went out the same way we came in. I didn't like being that close to the 'Trail' because now they know we are here. We were about a half mile behind the Lead Pony and the 'Newbie' was at the controls when suddenly a line of red tracers shot up between Lead and me. I grabbed the controls, said 'I got it' and threw into a hard over right bank across the valley. Enough of that shit.

On one exfil mission the pickup was at the 'Nit Noy Spot'. As I was letting down inside the 200 foot tall trees surrounding the site, one of the Gomers lit off a smoke flare. WTFO? I was almost to a hover and the only thing I could see through the smoke was a big stump in front of me. Do you know how long the 3 minutes is for the flare to burn off? Seemed like an eternity with me cussing that Gomer all the while. I am glad I wasn't a lot higher when this fiasco stared.

The USAF wanted some file photos of Helicopter Special Operations doing 'our' thing. (Most didn't have a clue that we even existed). So we were tasked to take some Photographers and Green Berets out to a suitable location east of Udorn to do a photo shoot. We almost never worked with GB's but who would know.



I flew the subject bird and I don't remember who flew the camera bird. Anyway we would make patterns around to set up the approach, infil/exfil etc. On downwind leg we would reach pattern airspeed and I heard a pop-pop that might indicate a flexing or 'oil canning pop' of the FOD deflector. It happened about the same place every time. My mind began working and I told one of the crew chiefs that the next pattern when I cued him to let off a few rounds into the jungle from his AR. Zap. No popping the next patterns. Suspicions confirmed??



A couple of weeks later the Jollies were using the same area for a training flight and a round came up through the floor and hit a PJ in the leg. Come to find out that it was an area the Pathet Lao liked to travel through...

#### Another Fuel Story:

On a mission up North, one of the Ponies CH-3's had blown a transmission oil line and had to be set down in the boonies. The crew was picked up by the other Pony and returned to Udorn. The next day an attempt to recover the downed Pony was planned. Hopefully it was so far from anything that the bad guys hadn't found it. We took 2 or 3 (I don't recall) Pony CH-3's with maintenance troops and extra flight crew. We also took a bunch of armed Gomers to secure the site while repairs were being made.



Upon reaching the site, we flew around it a couple of times and didn't draw any ground fire so the plan was to put the Gomers in and after they checked it out and set up security perimeter, we would put the maintenance people in. The Gomers were dropped on the ground and the Pony bird lifted off and flew off a short distance to draw any attention away from the LZ. We flew around for what seemed like a long time before radio contact was finally made with the Gomers to verify that it was safe for us to insert the maintenance troops. They had been sitting there waiting for us to come in. We quickly flew to the LZ to unload our guys. We again lifted off to decoy away from the site.

The maintenance guys estimated it would take less than an hour to repair the oil line, refill and start up to check it out. We flew around burning fuel for what seemed like an eternity. With the flight from base to the site, the delay by the Gomers, and waiting for the repairs, our fuel was beginning to get pretty low. We would still have to fly to a refueling site some distance away. As the 'hour' neared we radioed the ground troops and they still weren't done yet. We finally figured the only way we could make it was to land to conserve fuel. We landed and throttled back to ground idle. We even shut one engine down which made us feel real antsy if the bad guys should show up. Finally, finally, the oil line was repaired and we were all ready the 'get outta' Dodge'. We bee-lined for our refueling Lima Site and watched the old fuel gauges bottom out. When we reached the Lima site, I started a spiraling descent over the strip, just in case. Ah, we made it to the ground, whew! As we taxied in, the standard procedure was to fire up the APU to run the hydraulics etc after we shut down the engines. The APU ran for about 30 seconds and flamed out. For those of you not familiar with the H-3, the APU runs on fuel from the aft tank and is designed to automatically shut down if fuel is below a certain level so the engines still have fuel. I don't know how much fuel we had but that was close enough to make the ole' pucker string tight.

Our secondary mission was to support the TACAN navigation sites in Thailand and Laos. We would fly food, fuel and supplies to these remote sites. It was a relatively safe flight since these sites were rarely attacked.



Some were pretty remote.



One of the favorite staging areas was Lima Site 36 (Na Kouang) which was 30 miles south of LS85. It was a secure base with a Laotian military presence and a 4500 foot long dirt airstrip used extensively by Air America and CIA. It was a good stopover on the way to '85' to refuel if needed. The Jolly Green's out of Udorn also used it for Rescue standby.

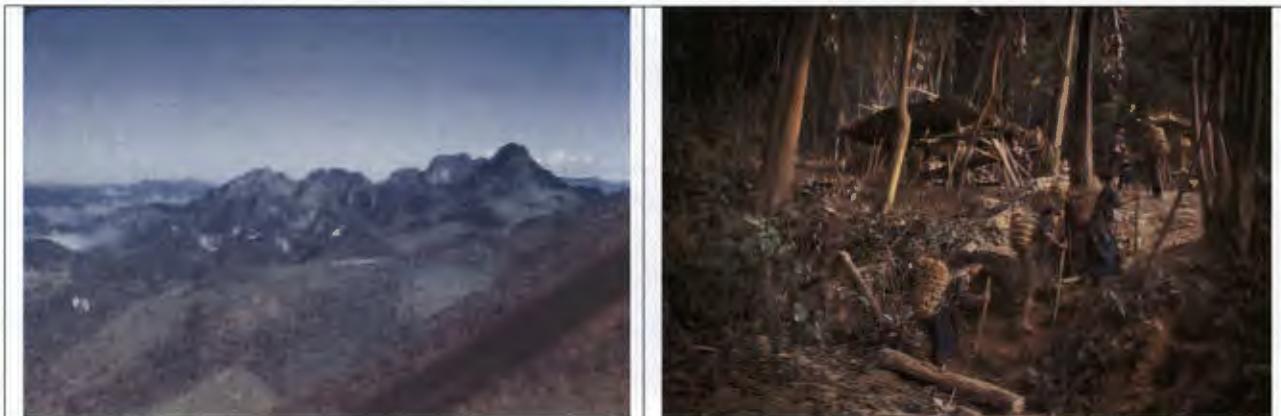


With all the waiting there, the crews were known as the "36 for lunch bunch". Many C-rations were consumed. An empty can filled with sand and JP4 made an excellent stove to warm up the C-rations.



The picture above is the '36 for lunch bunch". Unknown, MSGT Harwood, me. Our Maintenance Line Chief MSGT John Harwood flew on numerous missions with us and we shared lunch at '36' many times. Sometime in about 1978 (after my retirement) I was at the Motor Vehicle Office in town and saw this guy that I know I knew from somewhere. After a while I approached him and said "don't I know you?". About the same time it dawned on both of us. It was retired MSGT Harwood. We discovered that we lived on the same street only 2 blocks from one another. We also both had recreational property at Seeley Lake.. Talk about a small world.

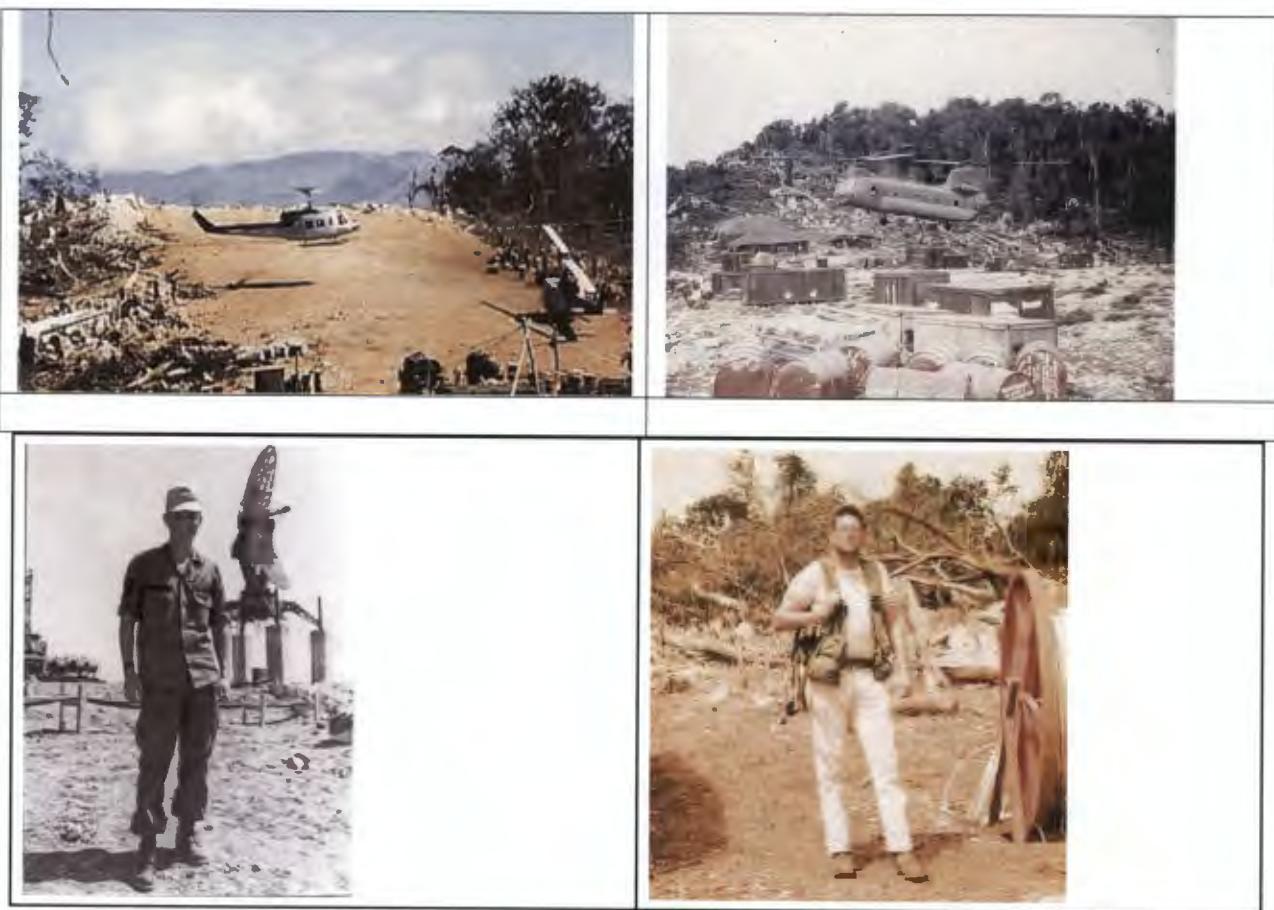
Lima Site 85 was a small landing strip, 700 feet long, near the top of 5600 foot Phou Pha Thi, a mountain located in north-eastern Laos 125 miles from Hanoi. For the local Hmong and Yeo tribes that lived in the area, Phou Pha Thi was a place of religious significance; they believed it was inhabited by spirits who possessed supernatural powers to exercise control in their lives.





Air America routinely used the helipad on top of the mountain to resupply a small command post, used by the Hmong officers and CIA advisers, which in turn controlled harassing operations against the PL and North Vietnamese. L.S. 85 was one of the most critical bases for the Hmong guerrilla army for some time before the US Air Force took interest in the site.

In August, 1966, a TACAN site (Channel 97) was placed on the southwestern cliffs of the mountain using U.S. Army Chinook helicopters to lift the heavy equipment.



In reality, they operated as members of the 1st Combat Evaluation Group based at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base who rotated to the site every seven days. They had no weapons and had no training in E&E.



The isolated base was protected by local Hmong guerillas living on the mountain and Thai contract soldiers under the direction of CIA paramilitary officers. Laotian General Vang Pao had Laotian troops at the base of the mountain.



Since the TACAN was on top and a sheer drop on three sides, with the troops on the mountain, everyone considered the place impenetrable.

The 20<sup>th</sup> 'Pony Express' made weekly runs to LS85 to carry supplies, personnel and fuel for their generators.



Because of the altitude and the 100 foot trees surrounding the LZ it was not uncommon to really droop the rpm when landing, especially with the -1 (C model) engines. As a matter of practice, the pilots would crank up the APU prior to approach in hopes that if they drooped rotor/engine rpm too low that the APU would continue to power the hydraulics and electronics and control would not be lost. Whether it helped or not is anybody's guess but at least gave you piece of mind. This wasn't a real problem once the engines were upgraded to -5's.



In 1967 the site was upgraded with the air-transportable all-weather TSQ-81 radar bombing control system.



This enabled American aircraft to accurately bomb North Vietnam and Laos at night and in all types of weather.



January 12, 1968, two Soviet-made AN-2 Colt biplanes attempted to destroy Site 85 by dropping 120mm mortar shells from a hole in the bottom of the aircraft. The attack was basically ineffective. They 'bombed' the visible helipad instead of the camouflaged TACAN/radar site.



An Air America Bell 212 helicopter, (Huey) was on the helipad at the time of the attack. The crew leaped aboard and gave chase. The helicopter was faster than the biplanes. As it flew past the An-2s, the flight mechanic blasted them with an AK-47, firing out the door and hitting both of them. One An-2 crashed and burned, and the other crashed 16 miles to the northwest while trying to clear a ridge.



I had been there 2 days before. Two of our Flight Engineers went in an Army Chinook to recover one of the An-2's back to LS36. I have a piece of it for a souvenir.



In March 1968 this site was attacked by the NVA. Air America Huey picked up some of the guys and the Jolly's pulled the last survivor out, most were lost.

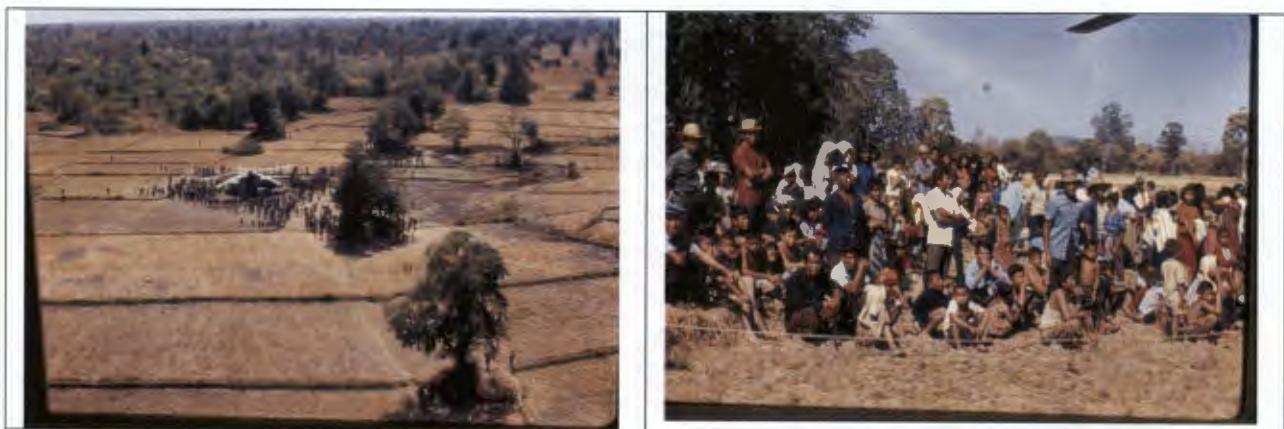
Eleven of the nineteen brave men on Phou Pha Thi (site85) were KIA/BNR or POW/MIA.

*This was the largest single ground combat loss of USAF personnel during the Vietnam War.*

On the -1 engines. Sometimes when operating in the rice paddies during the dry season and taking off with a load, I would need to 'droop' the rpm to 'jump' over the surrounding dikes while accelerating to get translational lift. Then lower the collective to regain rpm and maybe do it again. The newbie might ask 'Do you have to do that all the time'. I would say, "Oh, no, sometimes it gets exciting".



The 20<sup>th</sup> also participated in humanitarian projects, such as hauling pipe, cement and such for a village water facility. We would usually draw a crowd of the locals. We also carried troops for parachute jumps for a national holiday celebration.





A few times, the helicopters retrieved downed aircraft.

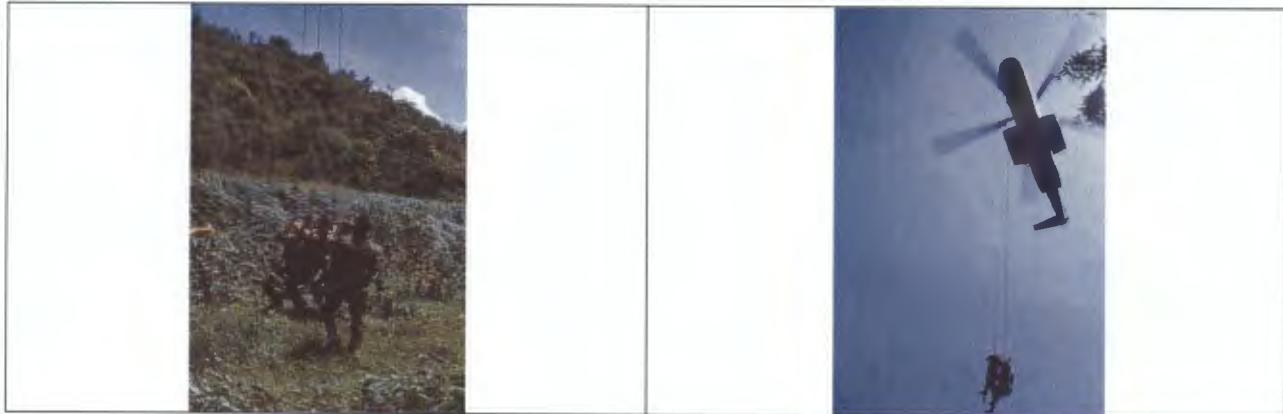
An A-1 Skyraider had battle damage and the pilot made a 'gear up' belly landing north of Udorn. I first slung out the engine. Then after carefully computing the minimum fuel load required to carry the fuselage. They hooked it up and away we went. A small drogue chute was attached to the tail stabilized the aircraft. I had figured to fly at about 60 knots but when I exceeded 30 knots the plane's wings would start to fly. This created excessive vertical vibrations so I had to keep it slow. This meant extra time and fuel consumption. By the time I approached the base the fuel low warning lights were on and both gages showed empty.. For some time! As soon as I reached the base perimeter I set the plane down and moved off so if I flamed out I wouldn't land on it.



One of the highlights was the Bob Hope Show. A taste of home. Plus we got to see "Rocky" aka Raquel Welch shake her 'booties'. She has great "booties".



Once we even carried an Army sergeant and two attendants to re-enlist while hanging on a "McGuire rig" (a 100 foot cable with a seat). (The guy was double nuts! Enlisting again and on a McGuire rig..)



After the aforementioned "re-up" mission, we had occasion to land at a nearby SAC base at Utapao, Thailand for fuel. It was only minutes away so the tower had very little notice and we weren't on any regular flight plan. They let us land but then proceeded to make us taxi all the way down to the far end of the ramp. Of course, we were going by all of the B-52's and KC-135's and taking our share of pictures.



After parking our helicopters with no insignia or markings and the crews the same, the Security Police were taking pictures of us. A SAC Colonel (probably non-rated) that was Base Ops "AO" arrived and started quizzing us on "what the Hell we thought we were doing. "Where is your flight plan?" Our Squadron C.O. (Lt. Col. Martin) who fortunately was with us replied, "We don't file regular flight plans, we are on a tactical mission". "Well, how the Hell do they know where you are?" (You know in SAC they tell how and when to wipe your butt). Martin said, "We know where we are." After a few more exchanges the SAC Colonel wasn't getting any more information and finally walked off shaking his head and mumbling "Goddamn Jolly Greens" and we all had to laugh.

My heartfelt 'symbolism' pretty much sums up what I thought about the whole situation.



While I was there we never lost a crewmember to enemy action although we did lose a couple of aircraft.



It was a beautiful and interesting countryside with the flat open spaces to the towering karst mountains. But unlike some others, I have no desire whatsoever to ever return there.



I planned to fly to the end of my tour but my “buddy” in scheduling effectively grounded me the last two weeks to “keep me safe”. I would have much rather been in the air than sitting around waiting to leave.



As it was, I went back Nha Trang, (our Headquarters) then over to Cam Ranh Bay to catch the "Freedom" bird back home. At least I got to spend a day with my old friend and Cadet Classmate, Armand Fiola, flying H-43's at Cam Ranh. While sitting in his trailer watching TV and BSing, someone tried to open the screen door which hung up then slammed back making loud bang. We all hit the deck under the table. Then we looked at each and laughed at our reaction. Been in combat long enough.

My new assignment was to Elmendorf AFB, Anchorage, Alaska and I was ready to go home. I didn't want to wait around on the "Freedom Bird" and would like to go through Anchorage on the way home.



I went to Tanker Ops and they had a bird going to Guam and I could catch one there to Anchorage. Cool. I sat in the cockpit of the C-141 with the pilots. As we neared Guam and were following the TACAN beam, the pilots, who had been carrying on a conversation, realized that they were several thousand feet too high on the approach. Throttles came back, gear dropped and flaps lowered and we came down like a rock! Wow! Neat. Almost like an autorotation...

I got on a bird to Elmendorf. I had called ahead to the squadron and Dick Bourne who was to be my sponsor met me when we landed. A quick tour around the base and to Housing to sign up for quarters when I brought the family up. Then on a commercial airliner to Portland. My SEA tour was officially over.

On my SEA tour I logged 442 hours of combat time, 105 combat missions, was awarded the AF Commendation Medal, 5 Air Medals, 2 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and the Silver Star.

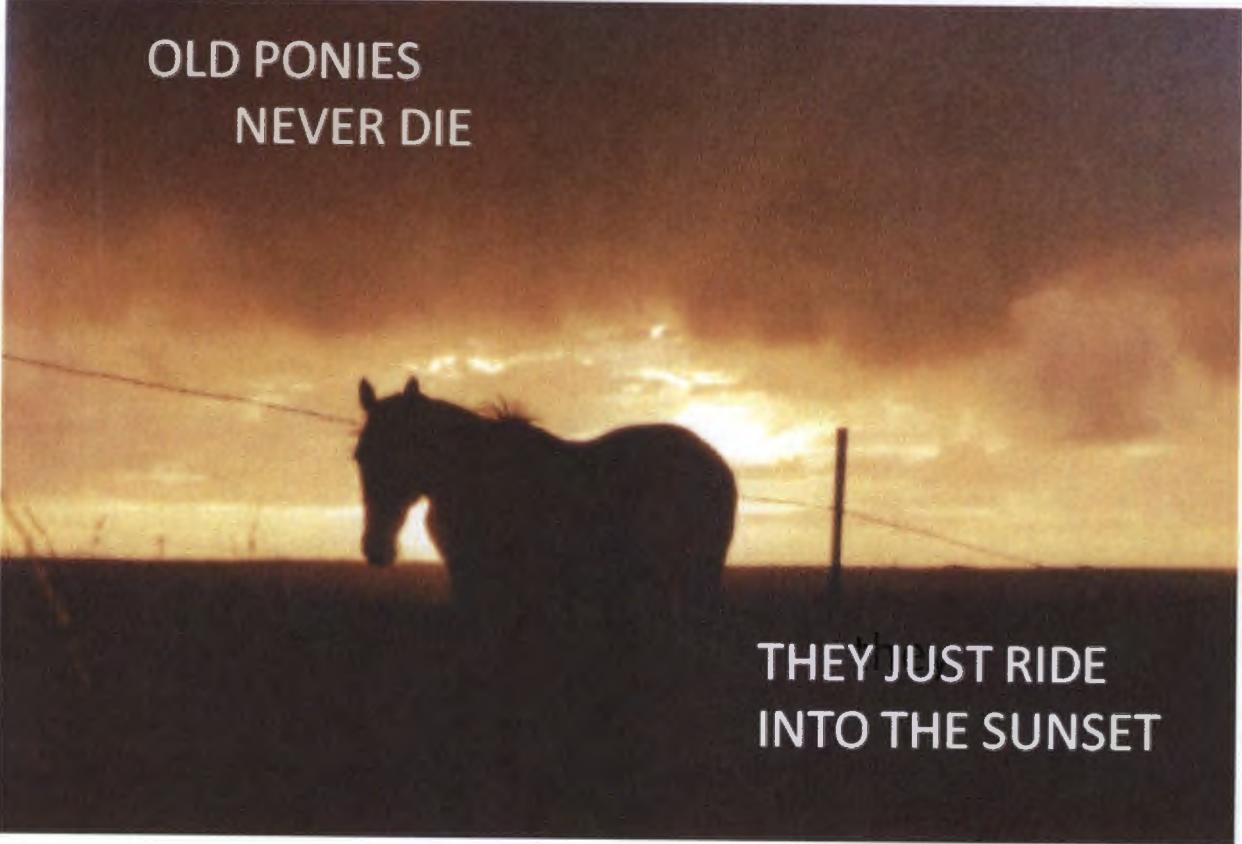
I was also the first USAF helicopter pilot to surpass 6000 hours of helicopter pilot flying hours.



That is an interesting story. I was sitting around at Ops when the phone rang. The fellow on the other end said he was with some news outfit and a pilot from the Jollies had reached 5000 hours in helicopters. 'Is that a lot'? I said 'Yes' and hesitated then said 'If that's all you've got'. He said 'Do you know anyone that has more?' I said "Well, I have 6000 hours". The guy said 'Screw him, I want to talk to you.' (Sorry, Marty D...I had to laugh)



OLD PONIES  
NEVER DIE



THEY JUST RIDE  
INTO THE SUNSET

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