

RANCH HANDS

The neck scarf has become rather commonplace in the Air Force, but not in Vietnam where the men of only one outfit are permitted this distinctive item of wear. These are the Ranch Hands, the crews of specially configured C-123s who fly the defoliation missions. The scarfs were personally presented to the Ranchers by Premier Ky for their outstanding performance.

Ranch Hand crews located at Da Nang and Bien Hoa fly one of the most dangerous missions in Vietnam, risking enemy fire as they skim along the tree tops frequently as low as 100 feet above the surface. At last count they had taken 3000 hits but had lost only four aircraft.

Generally there are only three men aboard, two pilots and a loadmaster who operates the pumps that spray a common weed killer that most Americans use in their own yards. The lead ship also has a navigator who sits on an armored box that fits over the radio console between the two pilots. The spray is non-toxic to animals and humans but is very effective against plant life.

Each aircraft can cover an area 800 feet wide by 10 miles long in the course of one mission, the spray being used to kill vegetation that the enemy uses to hide his activities. It is also used to clear the area around Special Forces camps to deny Charlie cover from which to bombard the camp, and since the Communists have seen fit to conduct operations in the demilitarized zone, much of it has been defoliated to discourage that activity.