

**Even after all these years,
the sound of a helicopter
will stop many of us in
mid-thought, opening
circuits to a very private
part of our minds.**





For most veterans of the war in South Vietnam, helicopters provided an omnipresent background score for that experience.

Helicopters were the music of the Vietnam War.



Between 1962 and 1974 we served
in a very special military unit...



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY SPECIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC OFFICE





“I am fed up with looking at Le May’s* documentary films showing how great the Air Force is!”

This quote is attributed to Gen. George Decker, Chief Staff of the Army as he left a White House briefing with President John Kennedy. Gen. Decker then Initiated a directive to enable the Army to produce documentary films showing the Army’s operations world-wide.



Col. Arthur A. Jones, the Plans Officer of the Army Pictorial Agency, was directed to form a unit to provide documentary films to the U.S. Army, the Pentagon, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The plan was for three separate photo detachments:

Europe



South America



Asia





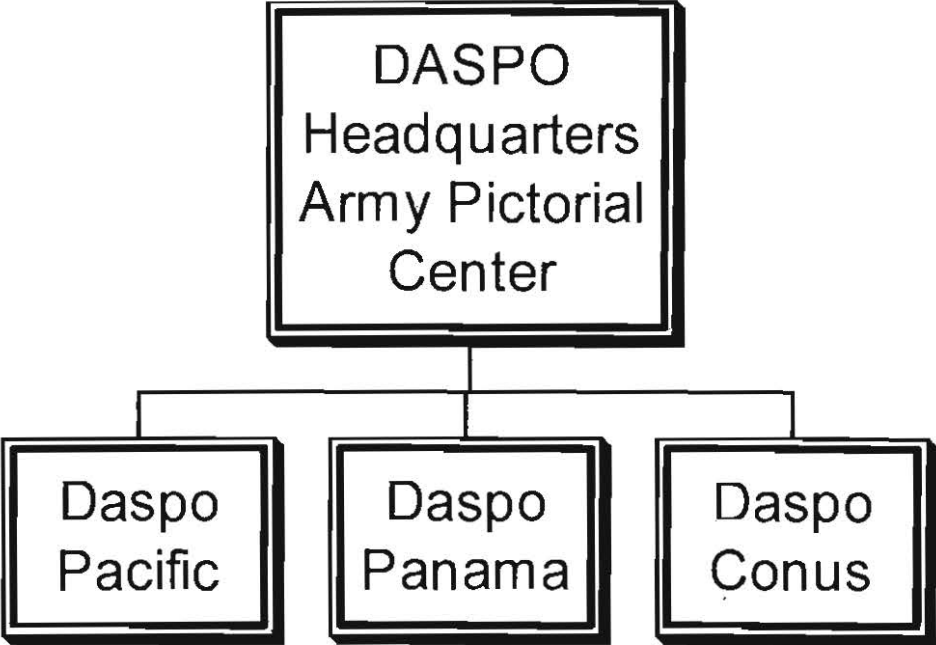
DASPO Headquarters would be located at the Army Pictorial Agency in Long Island, New York where it would receive and process the film from the various detachments.

Col. Jones was selected as commander of DASPO.



**All commands concluded with stationing
our units overseas - except Europe.**

**Europe took exception, they would not
agree to having a unit permanently
stationed within their region that was not
under their control.**



DASPO Pacific

- The Pacific detachment had the most photo teams and was commanded by Captain Claude Bache.



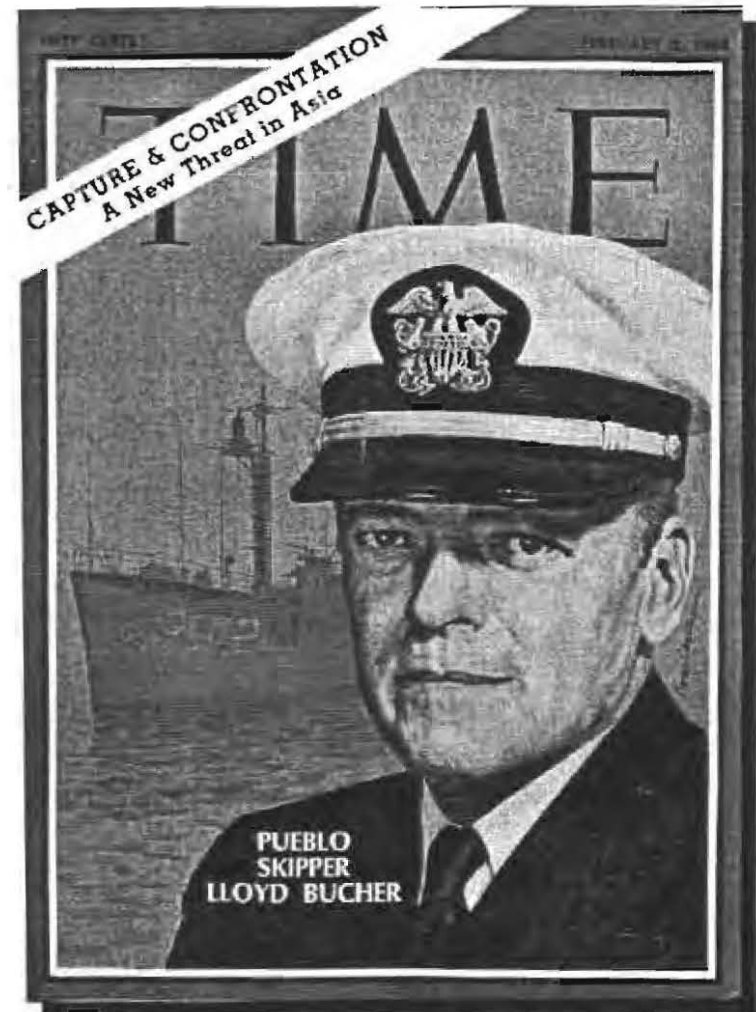
Although the primary mission of the Pacific Detachment was documentation of US Army activities in South Vietnam, the unit also covered other assignments in and around the Pacific Rim.





By 1968 there were three "permanent" foreign operations. Team Alpha, stationed in Seoul, South Korea, Team Bravo, stationed in Bangkok, Thailand, and Team Charlie, stationed in Saigon, South Vietnam.

The Korea team was the newest, inserted in South Korea after the capture of the USS Pueblo by North Korean forces on January 23rd, 1968.



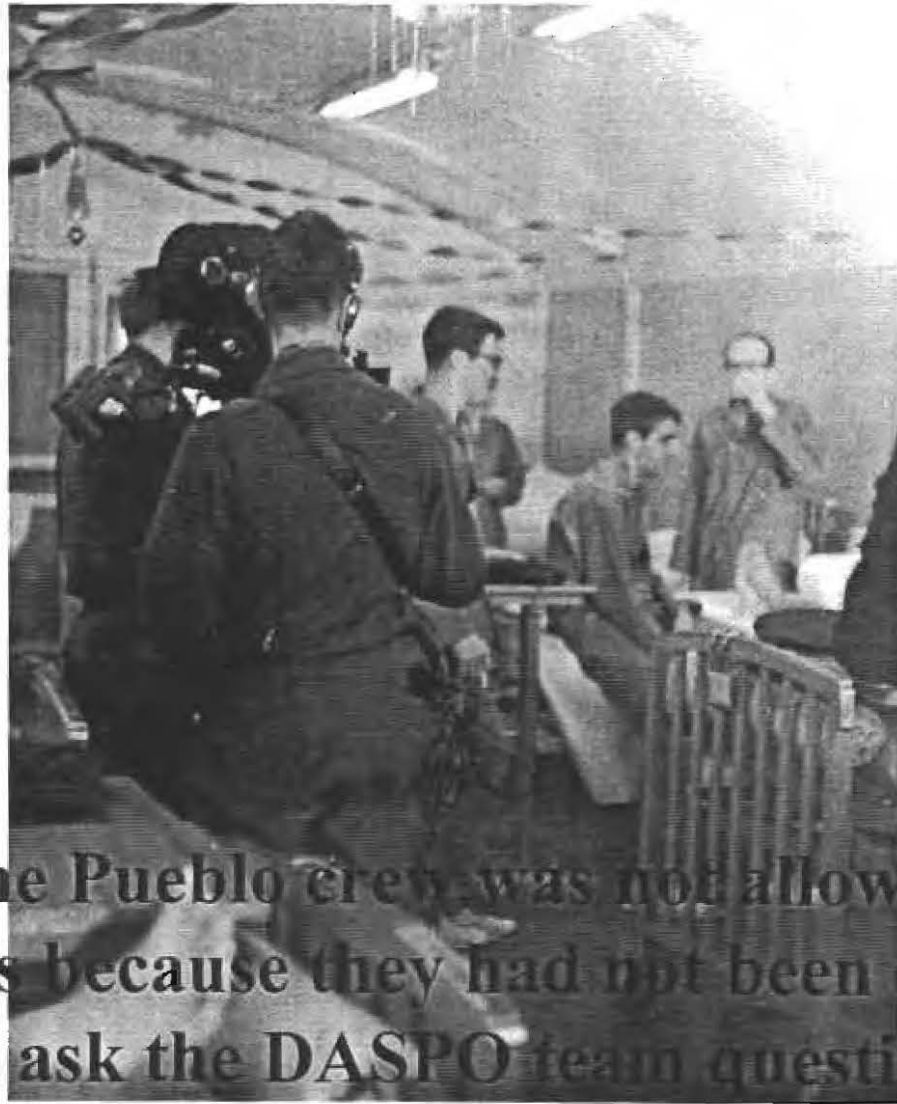


While negotiations were underway for the release of the crew, Team Alpha kept busy documenting the activities of US Army and Republic of South Korea forces. These missions took them from as far north as the demilitarized zone located along the 38th parallel to the Port of Pusan, located at the southern tip of the country.



When the crew of the Pueblo was finally released at the border village of Panmunjom on December 23rd, 1968, Team Alpha was there, filming the former POW's.

Their film was then shipped to Japan for processing and transmission via satellite to the United States.




While the Pueblo crew was not allowed to talk to the press because they had not been debriefed, they did ask the DASPO team questions like, who won the World Series. One guy even wanted to know what had happened in his favorite comic strip.



The Thailand Team had as long a history in DASPO as the Saigon team. Assignments in Thailand consisted of documenting Thai and US military training and support activities across the country.



Early on, the team was based in the Bangkok home of a Chinese national with the unlikely name of Johnny Siam. Johnny owned a rambling two-story house located in the heart of the city. He rented rooms to Americans and also ran an antique shop where you could buy, according to one former lodger, jewelry, trinkets, and artifacts stolen from remote ancient Thai temples.



At his weekend patio cookouts, Johnny would personally grill water buffalo steaks for a group of assorted types such as Air Force pilots, Red Cross workers, DASPO photographers and a journalist or two. Later the team moved into the Fortuna Hotel in Bangkok.



DASPO CONUS

- The CONUS detachment was headed by SFC Jack Yamuguchi.

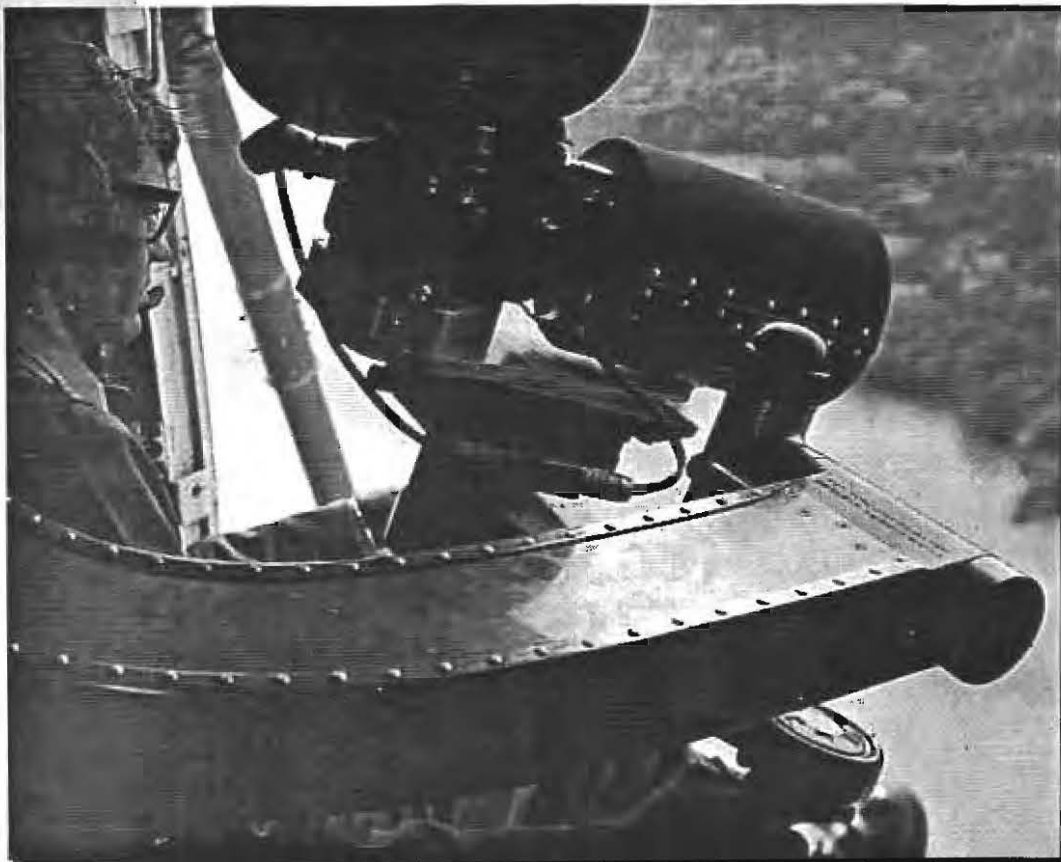
DASPO Panama

- The Panama team was headed by Captain Herb Ballinger.





Deployed at the same time as the Pacific Detachment, the Panama Detachment consisted of one officer and six enlisted men. Based at Fort Amador, Panama, their mission was to document cold war activities in Central and South America.



During its existence, the Panama group covered riots, military coups, and natural disasters.

While their mission was not necessarily to cover combat operations, the detachment had a team on the ground with the 101st Airborne Division when it invaded the Dominican Republic in 1965.

Two years later, while filming US Special Forces training government forces in Bolivia, a Panama team found themselves unexpectedly under fire during an engagement with insurgent forces under the command of Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara.

Not long after, Guevara was killed.



All three units were tasked to produce motion picture and still photo reports of US Army activities engaged in the Cold War.



And produce they did. During the first three years of DASPO, starting in August of 1962, the Hawaii detachment produced 750,000 feet of color motion picture footage and several thousand still images for Department of Army use.

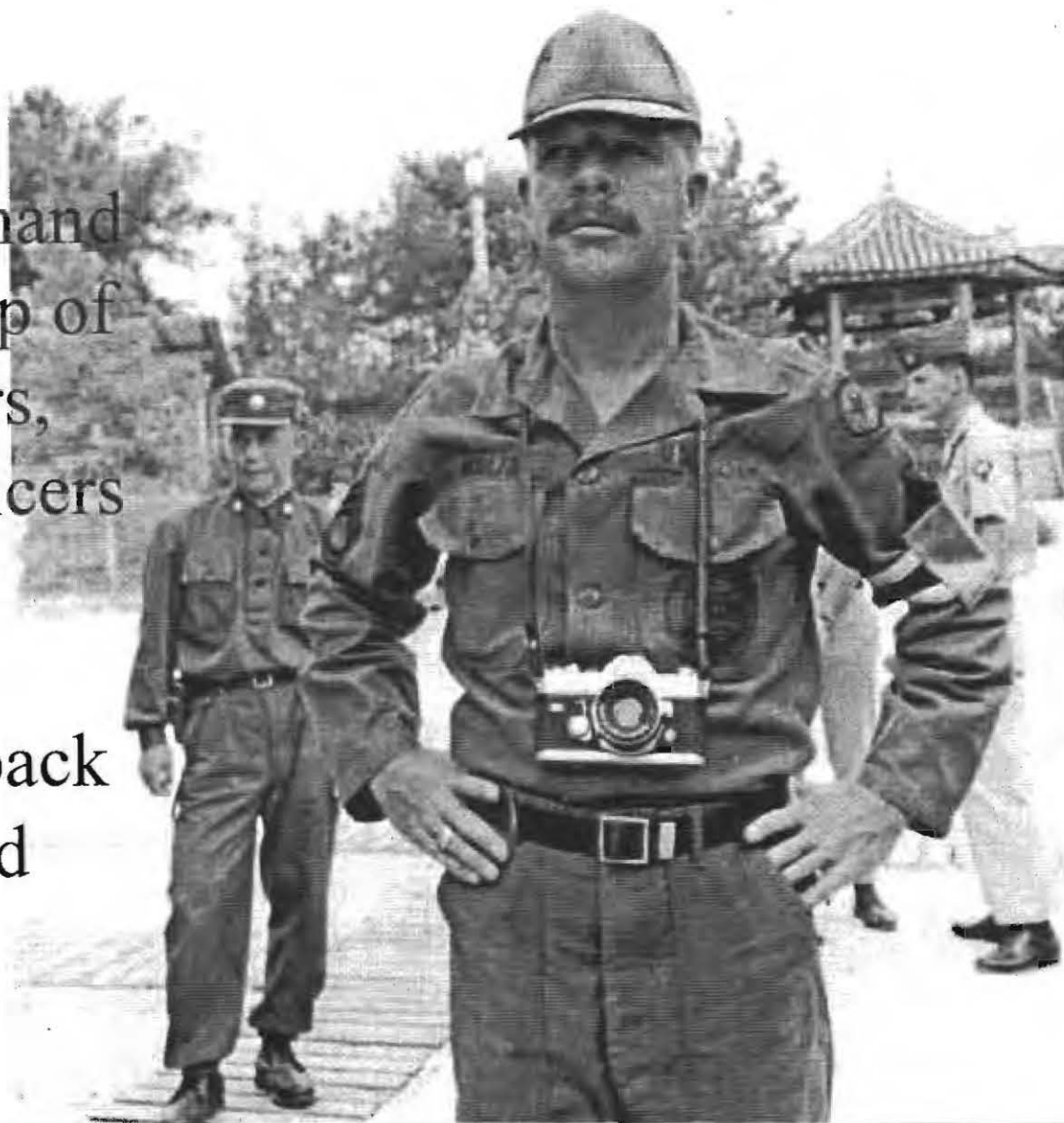


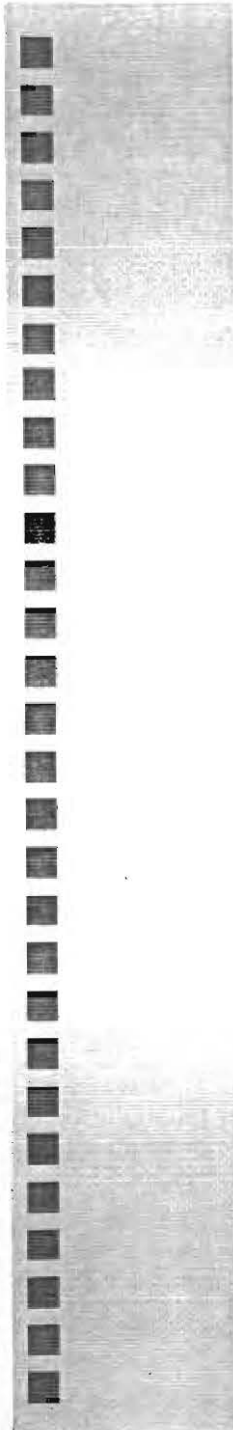
DASPO Pacific bore the brunt of the Vietnam war responsibility. Our base at Fort Schafter was located in the suburbs outside the city of Honolulu.



Duty in this tropical paradise could be both sweet and frustrating. For lower enlisted men making less than a hundred dollars a month, much of the “good life” was way out of their reach. Even for Officers and NCOs, the cost of living made life outside the perimeters of military existence difficult.

The Chain of command was largely made up of professional soldiers, with the senior Officers and NCO's having photographic experience dating back to World War II and Korea.





**The younger enlisted
men and officers came
mostly from the signal
school at Fort
Monmouth, New Jersey.**

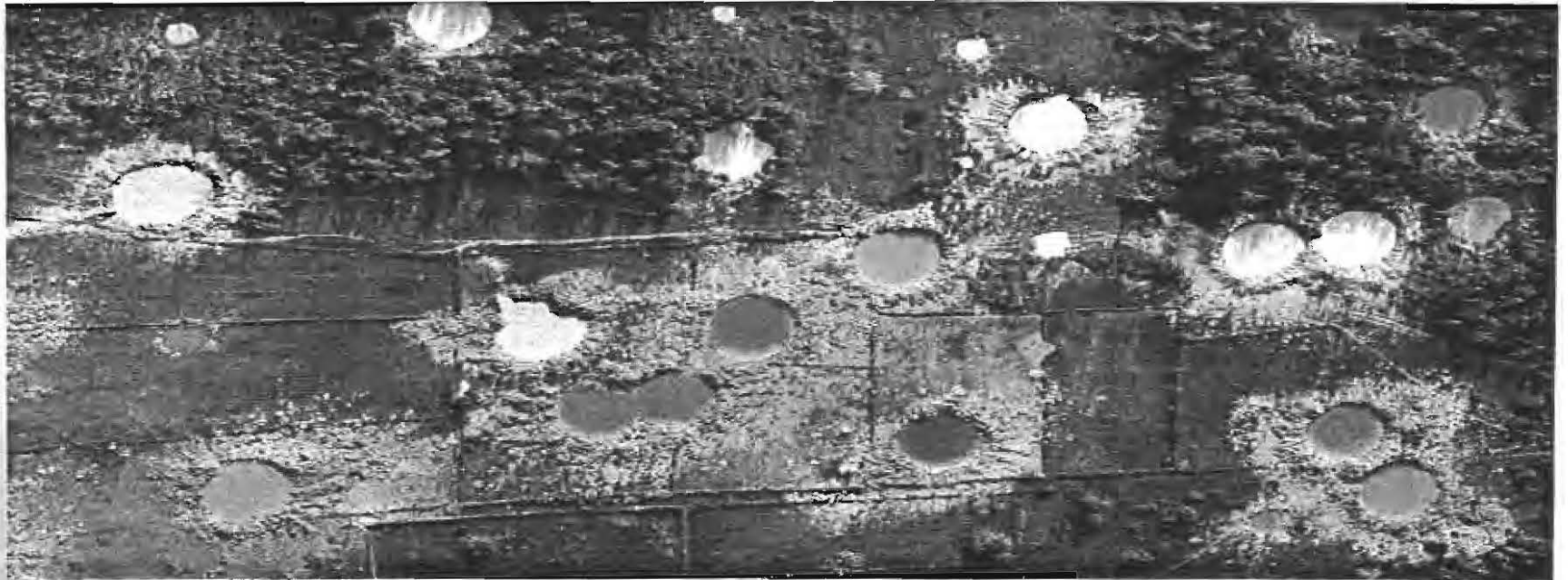


We all had much to learn from each other. The older professionals were there not only to lead but to train us as well.

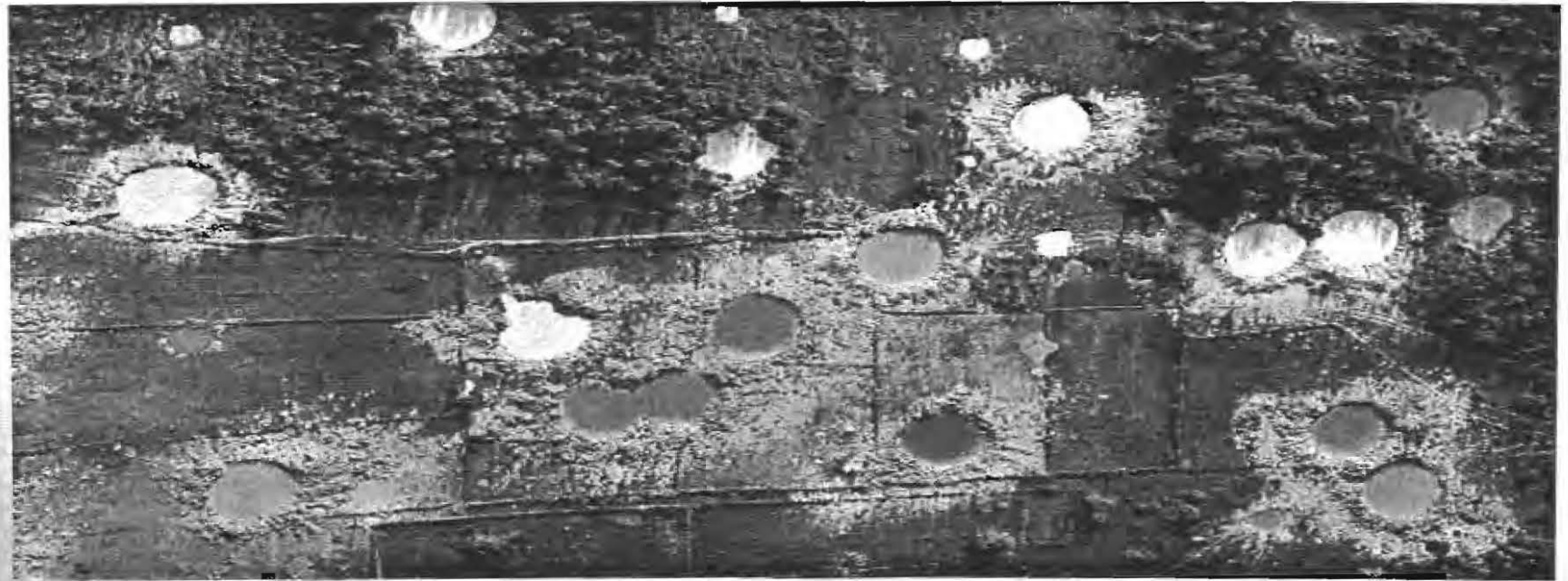
For the professionals, they had to contend with a large group of sometimes-unruly, non-professional soldiers, with civilian life and attitudes still on their minds.



At 32,000 feet in the air-conditioned comfort of a commercial airliner, the landscape of South Vietnam appeared as a cloud-swept impressionist swirl of pastel greens and browns.



This vista was punctuated by the staccato-dipped points of small, perfectly round blue holes, which reflected the glare of the sunlight coming from above. These swirls of blue were actually water filled bomb craters - visual evidence that this beautiful landscape was really a country at war.





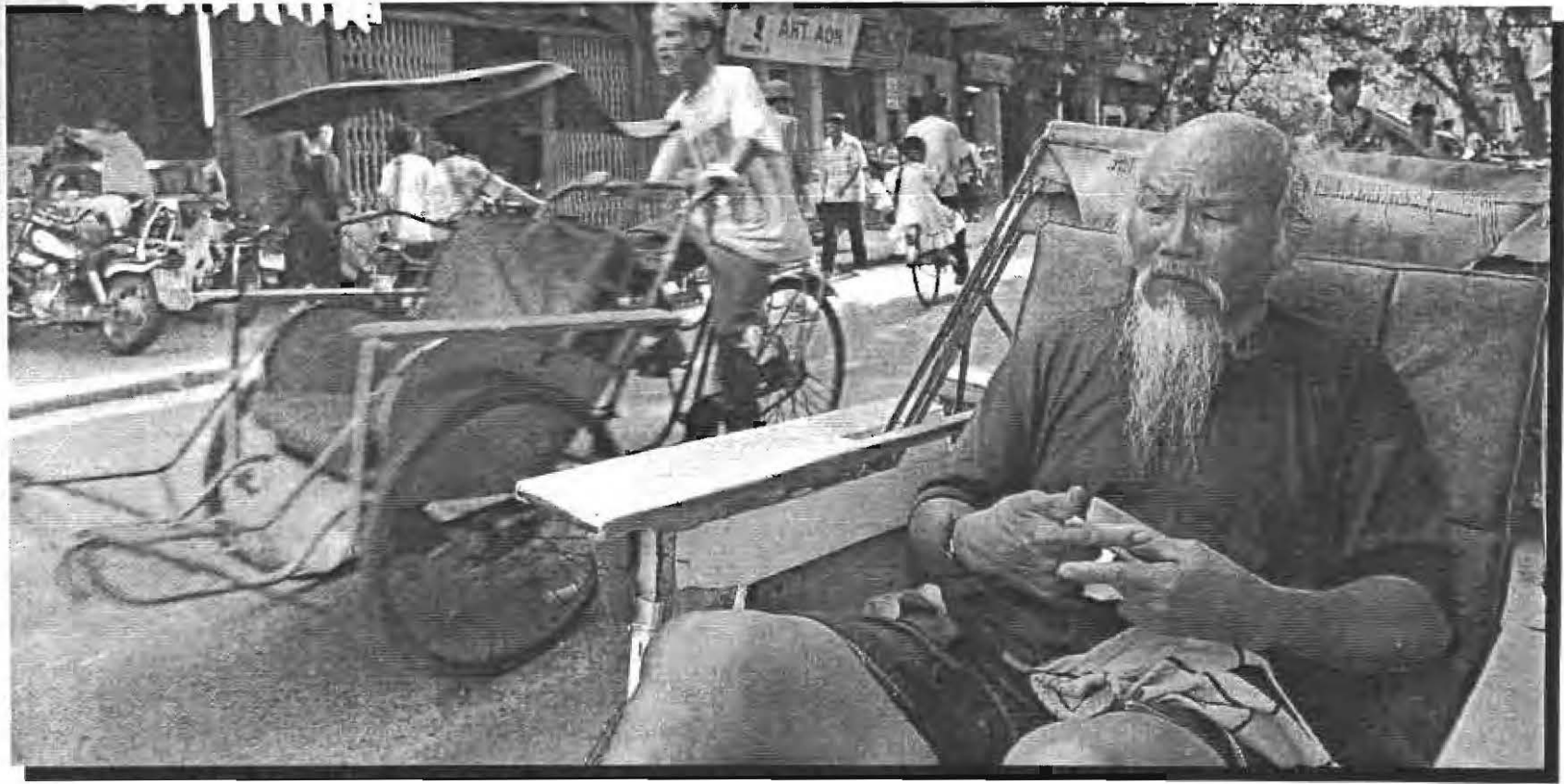
A popular GI cliché of the time was that
if it weren't for this “freaking” war,
Vietnam would be a great place to visit.



Stepping out of that same plane
and onto the tarmac of Tan Son
Nhut Airbase, the reality of
Vietnam swiftly became evident...



...You were immediately hit by a blast of searing hot air, accompanied by a symphony of intense noise consisting of the whine of combat jet aircraft and the roar of large, lumbering cargo airplanes – all competing for the limited runway space of the world's busiest airport.



The smothering heat would cause your sunglasses to fog up and the withering humidity would make the shirt of your khaki uniform stick to your body.

Welcome to South Vietnam!

Those of us in the
DASPO Pacific
detachment generally
traveled to South
Vietnam on three
month-long
Temporary Duty
(TDY) orders.



The DASPO “Team Charlie” team worked out of a
rented, privately owned home located in Gia Dinh,
a suburb of Saigon.

We called it the “Villa,” a three story-tall building of non-descript design.

The Villa served as our office and home away from home.

The Vietnam team usually consisted of an Officer in Charge, a Non commissioned Officer and anywhere from 10 to 18 enlisted sound specialists, motion picture men, and still photographers.





From this Villa, we roamed and
photographed across the face of
South Vietnam.




Part of why DASPO worked so well is because it had been created and organized to work outside the control of local US Army command in the host countries we operated in. We were designed to work only for the Department of Defense in the Pentagon.



Early on, this independence was tested by the Staff of General William C.

Westmoreland, then Commanding General of US military operations in the Republic of South Vietnam.

Staff Sergeant Ray Goddard, who due to a temporary shortage of officers was the acting team leader, was “collared” by one of the general’s aides and ordered to have his team cover an upcoming cocktail party the general was throwing.



While DASPO was supposedly immune from covering local military publicity events, Sergeant Goddard could not shout down a general staff officer, so a photographer was sent to shoot the party.

Later, an extra set of prints were sent up the chain of command at the Pentagon, eventually reaching the Army Chief of Staff who reprimanded General Westmoreland and told him to keep his hands off of DASPO photographers.



Later, Goddard, while on assignment in the local boondocks, had to hitch a last minute ride on a departing helicopter.

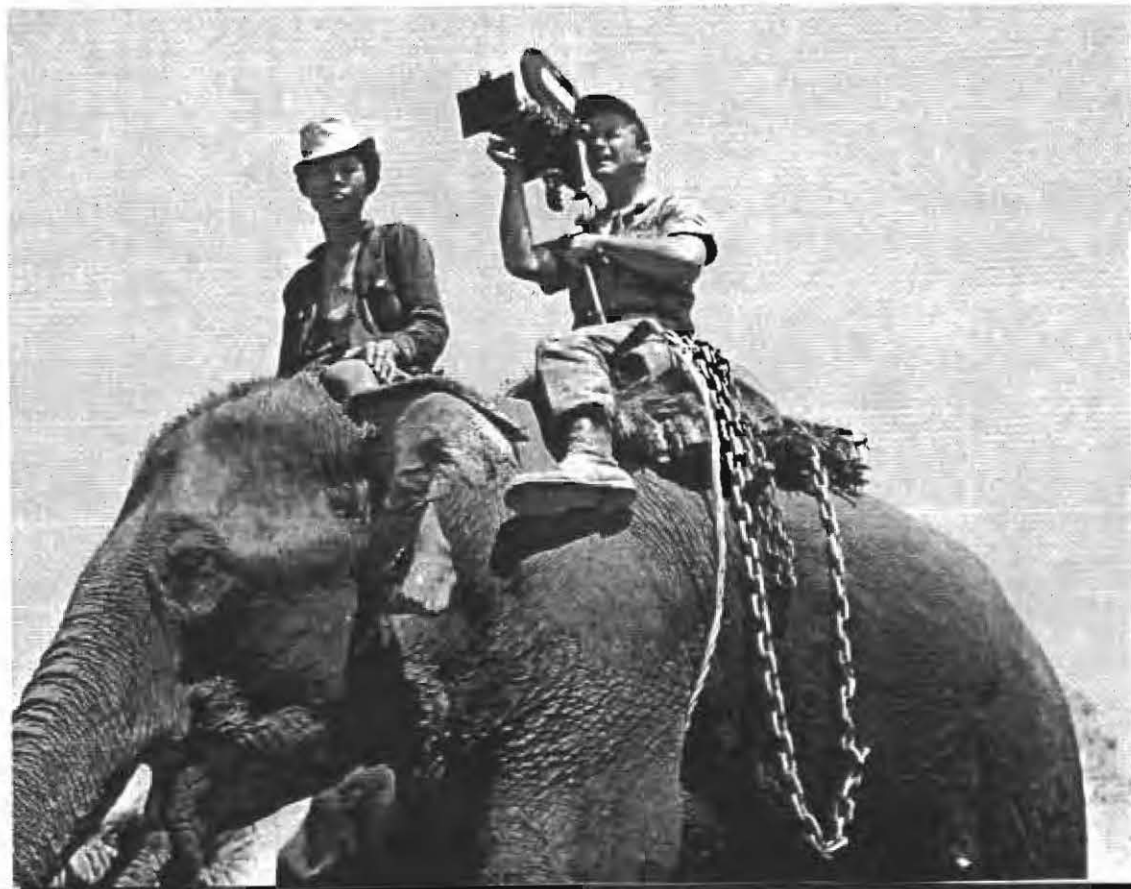


After scrambling aboard the slowly rising chopper, he landed at the feet of an officer sitting in the rear.

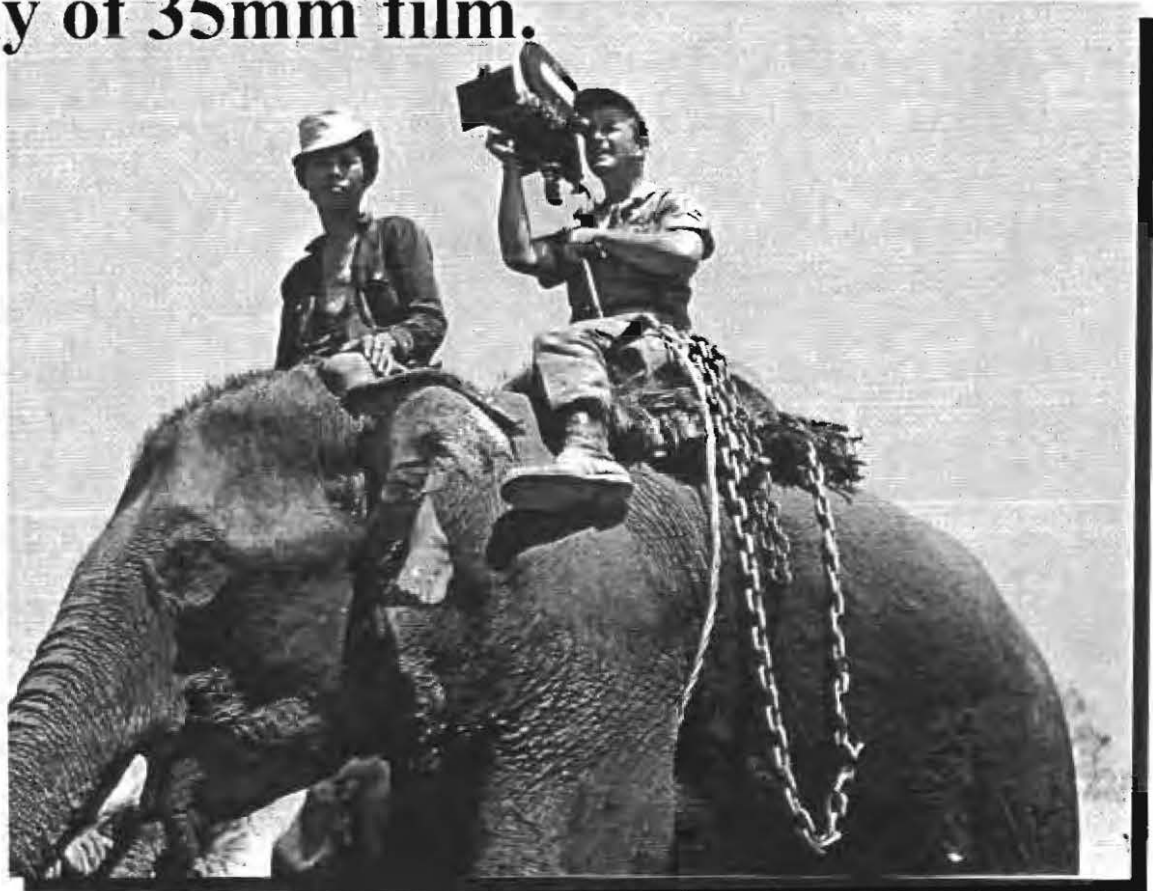
Looking up, Goddard saw the four stars on the officers uniform and recognized General Westmoreland.

The general peered down at Goddard, noticed the camera and read his name tag. His only remark was, “so you’re Goddard.”

**Because DASPO
operated
slightly outside
the official chain
of command in
South Vietnam,
our officers and
NCO'S often
had to resort to
non-military
style ingenuity
to accomplish
our mission.**



We had military vehicles to get around. But, these were not “legal” in a military sense - somewhere there was a motor pool sergeant with a fresh bottle of scotch in his locker, or an unlimited supply of 35mm film.





When on assignment around the country, our teams would operate much the same as civilian journalists covering the war.



We flew out of nearby Tan Son Nhut Airbase, either from Hotel Three, a helicopter departure area, or via the 834th Tactical Airlift Command, a fixed wing aircraft unit that had regular, scheduled passenger flights around South Vietnam.



Most projects were set by our team OIC, who would contact the host unit we were planning on photographing. If the Pentagon didn't have anything for us to do, the team was expected to come up with story ideas of their own.



**If we didn't have anything else to
do, our teams were expected to
cover combat.**



**As members of DASPO Team Charlie,
we often bore witness to some of the
best of times there as well as the worst.**

**We often moved between two worlds of
the grunts who sweated in the bush and
the rear-echelon clerks who worked in
air conditioned offices.**

As relatively independent military photographers in a war zone, we were often free to choose our possible fate.



Like World War II photographer Robert Capa, who, when writing about his participation in the news coverage of the invasion of Normandy in June 1944 wrote, “The war correspondent has his stake – his life – in his own hands, he can put it on this horse or that horse, or he can put it back in his pocket at the very last minute.”



One of our own, Rick Rein, chose to ride on one of two helicopters being used to shoot a story on a device to literally “sniff” out enemy soldiers.



His was the one flying closest to the ground. Somebody on that three-man DASPO team had to photograph this device in action, and Rick volunteered. Midway into the operation the other two DASPO photographers watched in horror as Rick's helicopter was hit and destroyed by enemy ground fire.



**However, choice isn't
always protection from
death in combat.**

**DASPO photographer
Kermit Yoho was killed by
a misdirected US artillery
round - so called friendly
fire - while walking in a
secure area with a civilian
photographer who was
also killed.**



**Over the years
many more
DASPO
members were
wounded.**



During the Communist Post-Tet Offensive of May 1968, three Team Charlie photographers were wounded in one week.



Looking back, it is not difficult to be proud of what we accomplished. Much of what DASPO produced has become part of the visual history of that conflict.

As military photographers we were not expected or allowed for that matter, to judge what we saw.



**However, images often speak for themselves
without forced editorial comment.**





As General William T. Sherman said during the Civil War, “War is Hell.” It is indeed ironic that something as cruel and demeaning as warfare can also serve as a platform for the most noble of human interaction.



By the late 1960's much of the work done by Team Charlie revolved around documenting how military equipment worked in the field.



While photographing in field locations was not as secure as being in Saigon, it was while photographing combat operations in the bush that each of us had to confront.



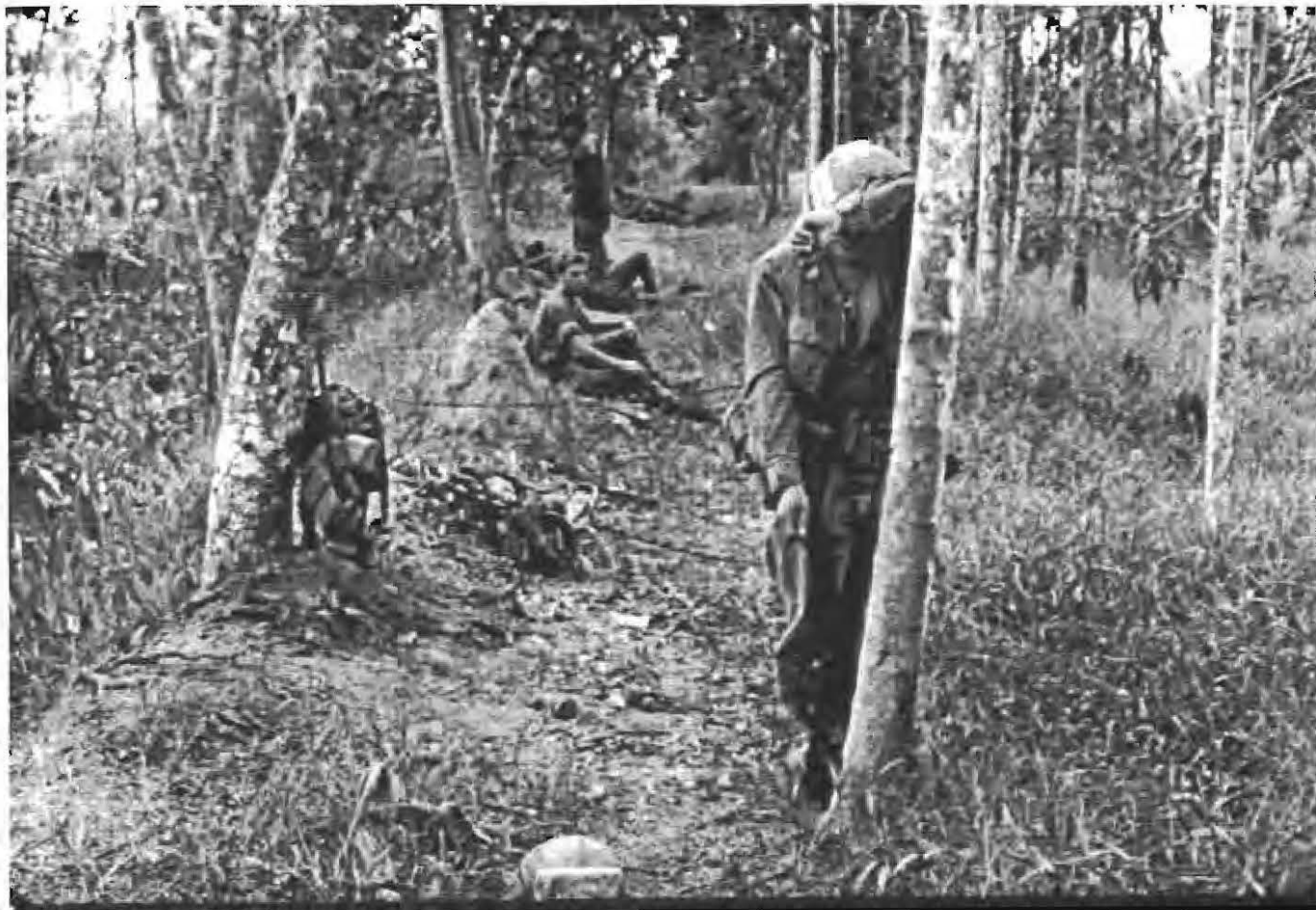
“The Elephant”those moments of real combat that demand that you overcome the most debilitating fear, whether you are carrying a rifle or camera.

Your body begins to betray you. Hands want to shake. Your sense of time becomes distorted. Your sense of space is compressed into a very small area immediately around you.



**Unlike
commercial
motion picture
depiction of
combat, a soldiers
eye view of what
is going on around
them is generally
focused within
they're own
personal
perimeter of fear.**

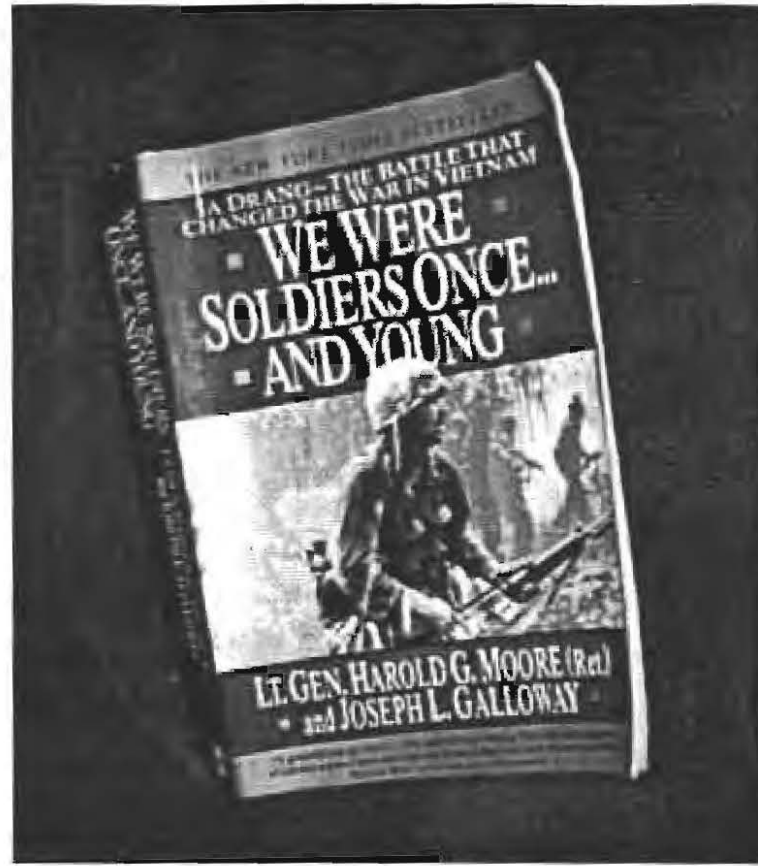




As photographers we were taught to somehow detach ourselves from these very human emotions and just record what was happening.

**Unlike civilian
photographers and
reporters who make
a reputation for
themselves and
further their careers
by covering combat,
military
photographers were
merely doing their
jobs.**





Ia-Drang
The Battle That Changed The War
In Vietnam
BY
Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore (Ret.)

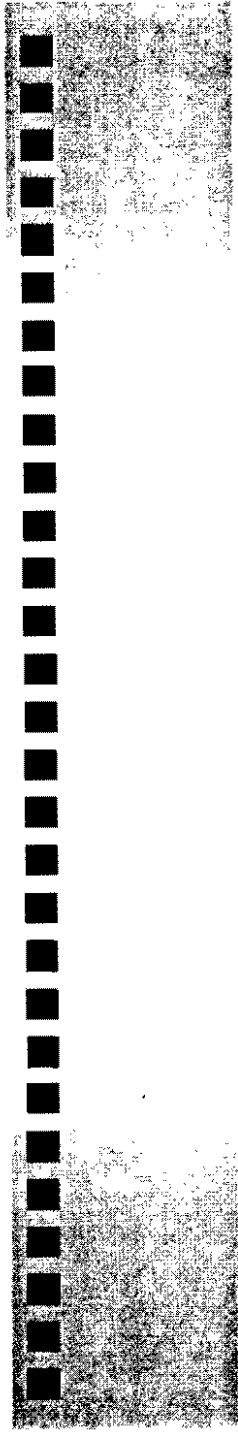


General Moore States “Another unit came into landing zone X-Ray about the same time, unasked, unheralded, and, in fact, unnoticed by me. It was a DASPO team of two sergeants, Jack Yamaguchi and Thomas Schrio, armed with their 16mm silent movie cameras.



**It would be a Quarter-century before we
unearthed their film from the military archives
And saw the eerie color images of ourselves in
battle.”**

After the final US military pullout of South Vietnam in 1973, DASPO experienced the same post-war downsizing that was going on in the rest of the army. On December 6th, 1974 DASPO Pacific ceased to exist. The last commanding officer of DASPO Pacific, Louis Poirier remembered packing up the last of the Hawaii equipment and shipping it to DASPO CONUS at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Then, as he wryly recalled, he shipped himself up to the 25th division at Schofield Barracks.



The three DASPO detachments were then consolidated into one unit stationed at Fort Bragg, and the name was changed to Army Special Operations Pictorial.

Today the 55th Combat Camera Company stationed at Fort Meade, Maryland carries on the visual documentary mission that was started by DASPO in 1962, traveling to hot spots around the world.



None of us who worked and lived through our experience's in Vietnam can't say they were not affected in some way. Most of us have forgotten the worst parts of it and gotten on with our lives.

A few were
nearly crippled
by the emotional
and
psychological
impact of that
war. Some of us
found our
“vision” and
craft as
photographers
while there.

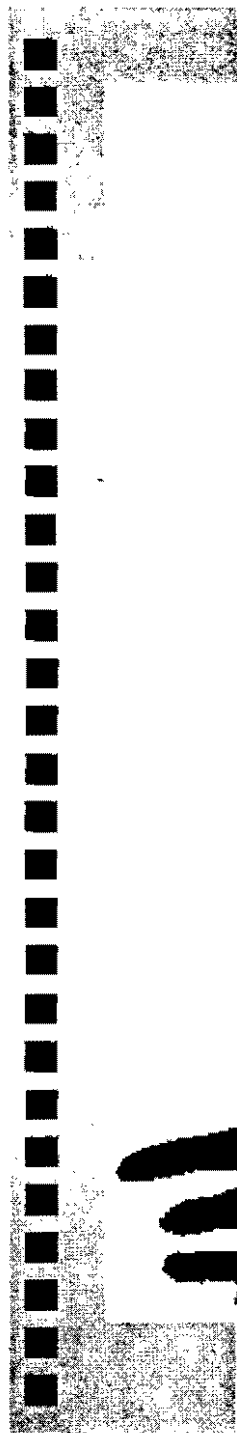




Most of us think back to that time more often than we probably want to admit. Veterans of war and former soldiers, have a common bond between them that is difficult for those who have never lived that experience to understand.



Looking at newsreel footage from the early decades of the 20th century - footage showing Civil War veterans, bent and crippled by time, marching slowly together down small-town streets, veterans of any war since then would understand why those old men would subject themselves to such physical pain. It was pride in a shared experience, and most importantly, a sense of love for their fellow veterans. It is this common thread of experience that holds the veterans of DASPO together today...even after all these years.



Ted Acheson Commercial Film Producer

Greg Adams Interactive training and learning CEO

Michael Baker owner Nat.Video Conferencing Co.

Stewart Barbee Hollywood Director of Photography

Ken Bridgham White House Press Corps (Ret.)

Clyde Delk County School Board Exec.Administrator

Dick Durrance National Geo. and International
Commercial Still Photographer

Ron Fenster Owner of Cable TV System and Oscar
winner for a technical device

Brigadier General Bob Gaylord active duty

■ **John Gilroy** Commercial Photographer

■ **Bryan Grigsby** Photo Editor Philadelphia Enquirer

■ **Carl Hansen** Executive Curator Smithsonian

■ **Bert Harris** Chairman of the Theater Dept Univ. of Louisville

■ **James Horton** Author & lecturer, Senior Director Robert Martston & Assoc. NY, PR Firm

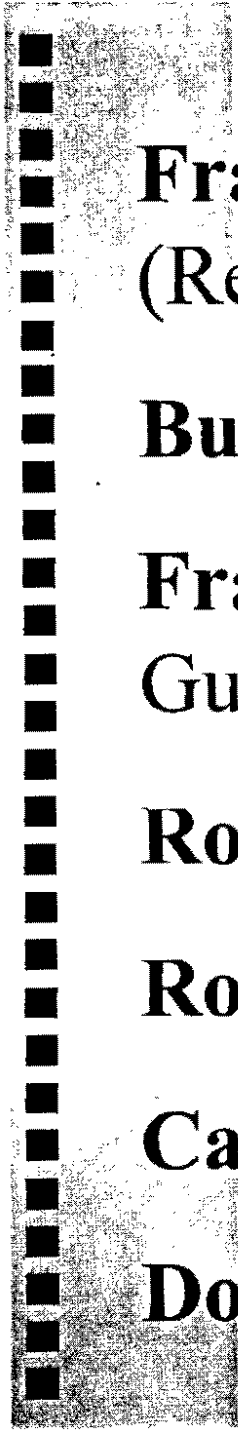
■ **Edgar Lewin** Lead Designer and Engineer for National Data Systems

■ **Ken Muryama** Animation designer Dream Works

■ **Logan McMinn** Commercial Photographer

■ **Tom Mintier** Bureau Chief CNN Thailand

■ **Paul Molton** White House Press Corps (Ret.)



Frank Nickerson NY Ad Agency Art Director
(Ret.)

Burt Petersen Commercial Photographer

Frank Salas Executive Information Officer
Guam

Robert Smith Commercial Photographer

Rod Windman Commercial Cinematographer

Carl Williams TV Producer

Don Zepfel Staff Producer Universal Studios



Goals

- Establish a Scholarship Fund in the name of Rick Rein and Kermit Yoho
- We will help raise funds for the scholarship with the University
- Be our historian/archivist collecting personal material and retrieving our photography from the national archives
- Digitize our photos and create a DASPO web site