

The Story of Daspo

Daspo began, as the story goes, which may or may not be true, when Gen. George Decker, Chief of Staff of the Army, came out of the White House after a military briefing of President John F. Kennedy, and said, "I am fed up with looking at Le May's (Gen. Curtis LeMay, Chief of Staff of the Air Force) documentary films showing how great the Air Force is! If we can't do that now, do whatever it takes to start it." As a result, in short order, a directive signed by Gen. Edleman, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army, arrived at the Army Pictorial Division of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, where I was a Major in the Plans and Requirements Branch. The directive was assigned to me as the Action Officer to write and justify a plan that would enable the Army to produce documentary films showing the Army's operations world-wide,

There were three of us in the Plans & Requirements Branch. Major Stanford Roberts, the Chief, and two action officers, Mr. Bill Colbert, a civilian, and me. The plan I drew up, in frequent consultation with Stan and Bill, called for three Photo Detachments, one to be located in Europe to cover operations there, another in Hawaii to cover the entire Pacific area, and the third in Panama to cover Central and South America. Daspo Headquarters would be located at the Army Pictorial Center in Long Island City where it would receive and process the film shot by the various detachments, and use it to produce documentary films. During the course of this planning, I remember discussions with Bill and Stan regarding an appropriate name. We wanted something that would give our teams distinction as they traveled overseas, and also a name that would provide a catchy and pronounceable acronym. The result: Department of the Army Special Photo Office, or DASPO.

When the plan was completed it had to be approved throughout the Army Staff, that is, by the Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Operations, Personnel, and Logistics. As I recall, except for Personnel it breezed through with no problems because of Gen. Edelman's initials on the directive. Personnel had to provide the military space authorization, and this seemed to give them severe pain, but again Gen. Edelman's initials prevailed, and the plan was approved. However, before we could station Detachments overseas concurrence had to be obtained from the commands that were involved. The Pacific Command and the Southern Command agreed readily, but the European Command took exception; they would not agree to having a unit permanently stationed within their area that was not under their command. Thus, when Daspo was activated about July, 1962, the Pacific and the Panama Detachments were deployed, but in place of sending one to Europe a CONUS (Continental United States) Detachment was activated at The Army Pictorial Center capable of being sent anywhere in the world.

The largest of these was the Pacific Detachment with the most Photo Teams. It was commanded by Major Claude Bache. The Panama Detachment was smaller and was

commanded by Capt. Herbert Ballinger. The CONUS Detachment was headed by SFC Jack Yamaguchi. I was transferred from the Pentagon to the Army Pictorial Center in New York to be Chief, DASPO - the second choice. The assignment called for a LCol. and I was a Major. The Chief of the Army Pictorial Division, Col. Arthur A. McCrary, selected a LCol. who at the time was in the Office of the Chief Of Information (CINFO), and offered him the assignment. Fortunately for me, that officer had a forthcoming prestigious assignment to the Presidio of San Francisco and begged out of DASPO. At that point they must have run out of LCol. because then Col. McCrary and LCol. Ken Hunter, his Executive Officer, called me in and asked if I would like the assignment. I told them that I would if I could be assured that a LCol. would not be assigned at a later date over my head. Col. McCrary agreed to this, and that is how I got the job that I now look back on as the best and most productive of my Army career.

Once the teams were deployed in Hawaii and Panama, film started arriving at the Army Pictorial where we viewed it, critiqued it, and sent the critiques back to the photo teams as tech channel messages that would go directly to the teams. and not through a chain of command.. The film then went to Washington (the Pentagon), where its viewing was coordinated by Maj. Paul Applin of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (DCSOPS). Depending on the subject matter of the film, he would notify the various agencies that would have an interest in seeing it. In effect, he was the channel to find out what was wanted by the people who would make use of the final product, and I was the channel to the photo teams to see that photo coverage of the right subject material was obtained. Again and again, emphasis was placed on obtaining coverage of Army operations at the working level - the squad, platoon and company level.

I did a great deal of traveling while with DASPO, to Washington frequently, and to Panama, Hawaii, Japan, Viet Nam, and Thailand. Visiting the photo teams was especially rewarding. The men were the best cameramen in the Army; they were all experienced professionals, and their morale was high. The DASPO mission gave them the work they enjoyed and the freedom to do it.

However, my principal occupation was at the Army Pictorial Center, viewing film, letting the teams know what was needed to tell the story that Washington wanted, deciding when there was enough, then working with the writer, then the editor, then the narrator to produce the finished product. These specialists were all civilians. The editor, Vic Salamone, was an employee of the Army Pictorial Center. The writer and narrator were professionals who worked in the New York movie and TV industry, who would come to work at the Pictorial Center when they were not otherwise busy. The Army could only pay a limited amount to a contract civilian (at that time, \$100.00 a day). Working on a project in New York earned them much more, but if they were not busy there they were happy to come to Astoria. The writer who probably did most of the scripts for our films was Chuck Avedon, who, after a time, was almost like a member of Daspo. We had a number of different narrators; the most notable was probably Alexander Scourby who, I would estimate, did three of our films. The key man in producing the films, however, was probably Vic Salamone, the editor. He took the raw film that arrived from Asia and South

America and studied it, cut it, and arranged it so that it told a story. Generally, his instructions were what I relayed to the teams in the field - more footage of a particular subject, or a different angle of another subject, or longer or shorter scenes.

The other instructions that went to the field were the requirements of the Army as relayed by Paul Applin, i.e., to cover an American advisor with the Vietnamese Army, to cover helicopter operations in Vietnam, to cover U S Army support in Thailand, to cover the delivery of Military Assistance to Niger and Upper Volta, to cover Civic Action in Guatemala, to cover Special Warfare Activities around the world, to cover U S Army Engineers in military civic action, and many more. Fortunately, we were able to communicate directly with the teams through what were called tech channel messages, thus avoiding the delay that would have occurred using the customary method of command channel messages.

I was the Chief, DASPO, at the Army Pictorial Center, from July, 1962 to July, 1964. At that time Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara reorganized the Army, which, among many other changes, resulted in the Army Pictorial Center's transfer to the Army Materiel Command, while DASPO was to remain under Dept. of the Army. To accommodate this, DASPO was transferred to the US Army Photographic Agency in the Pentagon. Claude Bache, now a LCol, was brought back from Hawaii and became Chief of DASPO, while I became CO of the Army Photo Agency. Though DASPO was a part of my overall Command until I went to Vietnam in 1967, I was no longer involved in its day to day activities. Col Bache assumed those duties. However, looking back over 28 years in the Army, I think my tour with DASPO was the most rewarding. The people I worked with were all dedicated professionals and it was both rewarding and a pleasure to be associated with them, the travel that was necessary took me literally around the world, and the documentary films that we produced told the story of the Army's activities. The films bolstered the morale of the people doing the hard work of the Army, they helped to sell the Army to the people in high positions above it, and they were a product in which we took great pride.