



As the conflict in southeast Asia grows larger, MAC crews and support people are becoming increasingly involved. To keep current on MAC operations and tell their story the Chief of Safety Publications made a

Visit To Vietnam

(PART II)

By Major Richard L. Anderson



Left: Col Allison Brooks, Commander ARS, congratulates men of Det 1, 38 ARS at Nakhon Phanom on a job well done. Above, left: Maj Robert Halsworth, commander of Det 5, 38 ARS, takes a well-earned break from his grueling duties in the 2d Air Div AOC at Udorn. Above, right: Col Brooks receives a first person account of combat rescue techniques from HH-43 pilot Capt Dave Allen of Det 5, 38 ARS

12

JOE BALLINGER GEORGE MARTIN

COURTESY OF JOE BALLINGER

Ed note: Last month we printed Part I of our reporter's tale in which he sped through Travis, Hickam, Wake Island and Guam, finally arriving at Clark. As we rejoin him he is preparing to leave Clark for Vietnam.

Tuesday, 14 Sep

We wanted to talk to the fine fellows of Det 7, 38 Air Resc Sq in Da Nang so we asked good 'ol ACP to fix us up. As usual, they were most happy to help out and said a big shaky machine fixing to fire up any minute was headed in that direction. We said thanks very much and boarded the nearest blue truck for the trip out to the bird. Arriving, we introduced ourself to Capt G. Thorpe Mitchell, the aircraft commander, and his crew from the 22 Air Trnsq Sq out of Tachikawa, Japan. Capt Mitchell told us that the run from Tachi to Vietnam and other points in Southeast Asia was routine for their outfit.

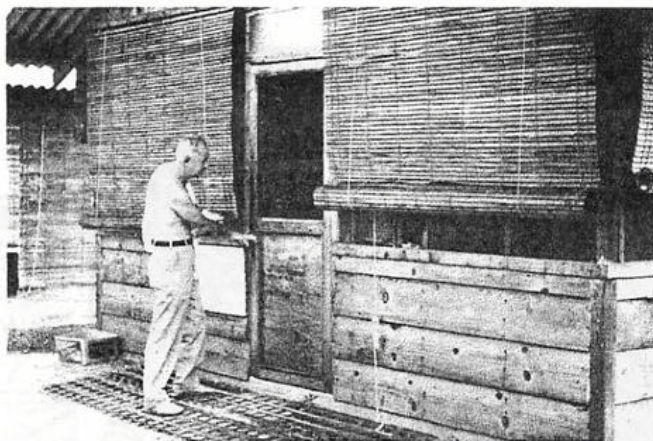
About then the loadmaster, A1C Robert L. Wilson, reported that there was only 9000 lbs. of cargo on board. Capt Mitchell grimaced as he pointed out that this was hardly worth the trip, considering that airplanes have been known to be hit by enemy fire in and around Da Nang. He promptly informed ACP that there was lots more room so how about some more goodies. They said, "OK, why not?" and about an hour or so later a truck showed up with four canned engines

The MAC Flyer

which Airman Wilson deftly hoisted into the huge hole and chained into place. Then we started engines. That was about as far as we got because when copilot Lt Douglass G. Wood called for taxi clearance the tower said hold position indefinitely due to priority traffic. So we held. And held. And held.

Finally, after about 30 minutes, we were cleared to the runup area. Everything checked out OK, but when Lt Wood asked for our ATC clearance the fun began again. Capt Mitchell had filed at FL100 over a certain route to avoid an area of bad weather over the China Sea. Manila Center, however, wouldn't approve this route. So again we waited, and waited, and waited. After a solid hour, Manila came through with a clearance for a coded tactical route which no one on our plane knew anything about. Finally, after another 15 minutes, we got the clearance we needed and took off. The crew told us that such delays are quite common between Clark and Saigon.

Four hours and 20 minutes later we touched down at Da Nang airport in northern South Vietnam. We didn't get shot at but we made a high, steep approach anyway. When we climbed down from the Alclad Haybarn we were amazed at the congestion on this forward combat base. Never in all our borned days had we seen an airpatch as crowded as this



one. The ramp looked like nothing quite so much as a concrete aircraft carrier. Planes were jammed literally wingtip to wingtip. A number of Marine fighters with folded wings added to the carrier illusion.

Our C-124 had to offload in the middle of the ramp since there wasn't nearly enough room to park it normally. A gang of wiry Vietnamese did the bulk of the work offloading under the close supervision of an Air Force traffic specialist and AIC Wilson.

Meanwhile, we walked over to the rampside headquarters of Det 7 and asked, "How's tricks?" Capt Bruce Purvine looked a little startled to see us but recovered quickly and filled us in on their operation. The detachment commander, Maj Ron Ingraham, was off on a mission, he said. He then described how the detachment uses its HH-43 helicopters and TDY HU-16 amphibians to pluck downed airmen from the jungles of North Vietnam and the waters of Tonkin Bay. In one day, he continued, they made four such saves. In between actual pickups they log a lot of time just milling around in the sky waiting for a call for help. They usually don't have too long to wait as the activity in North Vietnamese skies is considerable these days.

We didn't have too much time to spend as we planned to return to

Clark on the C-124, but Capt Purvine insisted on showing us how they have improved their little headquarters building. We weren't too impressed at first since all he showed us was a sink and a flush toilet. But when he explained how hard it was to get such ordinary things out there and to keep them in working condition afterwards we changed our mind. It reminded us how easy it is to take the comforts of stateside life for granted.

We were sorry we couldn't spend more time with these brave lads but promised to come back real soon. (At the time we didn't realize just how soon that would be!) The flight back to the Philippines was routine again until we neared the coast of Luzon. At that time Clark ACP informed us that there was no room to park us at Clark so how about diverting to Cubi Point NAS? How's that for a gasser? No room at the inn. And besides, it was dark and raining like crazy at Cubi. Such are the decisions the MAC Aircraft Commander faces every day. G. Thorpe, muttering darkly under his breath, wheeled his Gallop-in' Globemaster onto the new course and briefed for the tricky approach into the naval air station. It wasn't easy but we made it ok. The Navy people were very kind to us, although their facilities were also bulging at the seams. They did manage to round us up a bus which took seven of us on a wild, 70-mile ride



Above: The Officers' Club at Udorn is rarely visited by hard working MACmen. Upper right: A 38 ARS officer enters primitive VOQ at Da Nang after an early morning shower. Even permanent party have barely bunk space and a foot locker apiece. Mosquito netting is a must.



Above, l to r: Capt Jack Beall, Capt Vernon Semrad and Capt Harold Gale, TDY from the 79 ARS, Andersen AFB, Guam, flew Col Brooks and the author on their swing through Vietnam and Thailand. Center: Maj Ronald Ingraham, 1Lt Arthur Machado and

MSGT Lenore Vigore watch an emergency landing in front of their CP at Da Nang, Vietnam. Right: A Vietnamese village seen from the cockpit of a departing MAC airlifter.

through narrow mountain roads, spooky jungles and sleeping villages all the way to Clark where we finally arrived just after 0200. Tired!

After a solid eight hours sleep we again hit up Clark ACP for a ride, this time to Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon. Our luck was still good as a C-135 was all set to depart for there in a short while. Just enough time to have some lunch in the local snack bar. Then we climbed on board, along with about 70 other Vietnam-bound passengers, and were soon on our way. It was a short two-hour hop at FL260 for the 1611 Air TrnsP Wg jet commanded by Capt George T. Martin, Jr., and crewed by the 40 Air TrnsP Sq. It was just long enough for us to discover, quite pleasantly, that our seat-mate was Col Allison Brooks, Commander of the Air Rescue Service. Col Brooks said he was traveling, like Howard Hughes, "fast and alone," in order to visit the southeast Asia branch of his far flung command. We said, "Great! How about us tagging along with you cause that's what we had in mind, too," and he said fine.

Saigon was murky and rainy but Capt Martin and copilot Dick Kauffman set the sleek jet down smoothly and taxied into the saturated ramp. As at Da Nang, we were lucky to find a place to park. Airplanes of all sizes, shapes and descriptions were all over the place, some camouflaged and armed, others still in peacetime dress.

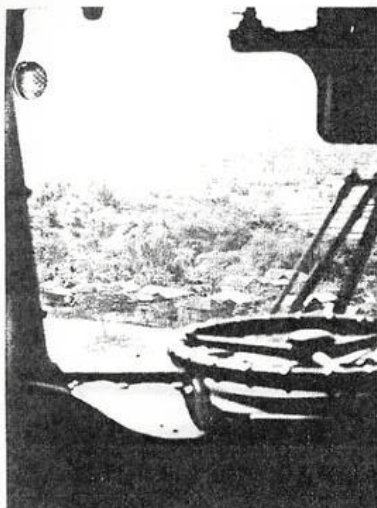
We deplaned and headed for the terminal, noticing as we did that commercial passengers a few yards away were being met by pretty Vietnamese girls in sexy blue and white pajamas. We made a mental note to take this up with Traffic on our return to Scott.

The next morning we again met Col Brooks at the 38 Air Rescue Sq command post. Operating from two rooms roughly the size of a broom closet, Lt Col Edward Krafka commands all ARS forces in Vietnam and Thailand. Here in his CP, part of the 2d Air Division's AOC, are the nerve ends of an operation which, for sheer drama, is hard to beat. We had hardly settled down over a cup of coffee to interview Lt Col Krafka when word came over the HF radio

that two fighter pilots had been shot down in North Vietnam. ARS helicopters and amphibians converged on the scene but could not get into the area because of heavy ground fire. Everyone in the room was suffering right along with the downed pilots as their plight became steadily more hopeless. Col Brooks expressed the feelings of all of us when he said that ARS needs a more modern and versatile aircraft for this type of work. Studies are being made on this, of course, but studies don't pick-up today's ejected pilots.

Later in the day we had a little breathing time and used it to browse through the squadron files looking for some rescue stories which would give a sharp picture of the job ARS is doing out here. Here are some examples:

Item. An F-105 pilot ejected just offshore in North Vietnam. He landed right in the middle of a large fleet of enemy fishing boats. The Rescue HU-16 was right on top of the scene and prepared to land, despite a heavy sea and the obvious danger from the armed watercraft.



Fighter support was called in and made several passes at those VC boats heading for the downed pilot. The HU-16 landed in the huge waves almost directly in the line of fire. The pilot was picked up and flown safely back to base.

Item. A fighter pilot ejected and landed in dense jungle with tree tops up to 125 feet. The trees were so dense that the HH-43 crew couldn't see the other end of their hoist cable. Guided by the steady beep of the fighter jock's locator beacon they "fished" for him from their hover just over the tree tops. Viet Cong troops were all around the area and were converging on the scene. The copilot of the chopper did his best to discourage them by continuously spraying the area with his M-16 automatic rifle. The pilot was picked up and flown back to base.

Item. A fighter pilot bailed out and landed in a tree about 150 feet high. When the first rescue attempt failed an ARS helicopter came on the scene. A hoist pickup proved out of the question due to the injuries suffered by the pilot, so the whirly-bird sat down about a half mile from the site and the pararescueman went on foot, through VC-occupied territory to the tree. The chopper then hoisted him 100 feet up into the tree where

he cut down the injured pilot who was then lifted out of danger. Then back to the clearing to pick up the PJ.

All in a days work for the men of ARS in southeast Asia. We say WELL DONE and then some!

Thursday, 16 Sep —

Saturday, 18 Sep

We left Saigon aboard an ARS HC-54 commanded by Capt Vern Semrad of the 79 Air Resc Sq based at Andersen AFB, Guam. For the next three days we followed Col Brooks around as he made personal visits to each rescue activity in the area, bringing them words of wisdom, guidance, praise and encouragement. At each base the rescue detachment invariably presented a small, but determined and highly motivated group

of men. Their stories were all much the same for, in ARS, competent performance of hazardous duty is daily routine.

Sunday, 19 Sep

After spending the night with Maj Ingraham's Det 7 crew back at Da Nang and exchanging more war stories we boarded a C-130 and started our long trip home. This took us from Da Nang to Kung Kuan, Formosa to Kadena, Okinawa to Midway Island to Travis AFB and finally, after 21,775 nautical miles in fifteen days, Scott AFB, Ill and home.

It was a most enlightening trip and its lesson was clear: Today's MACman in the Pacific, as elsewhere, is doing his best, day in and day out. Not too surprising when you consider the type of people we have. ✪

