

15 AERIAL PORT SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

15 Aerial Port Squadron¹

STATIONS

Donaldson AFB, SC, #1960

Dobbins AFB, GA, 21 Mar 1963-15 Feb 1964

Da Nang AB, South Vietnam

ASSIGNMENTS

ATTACHMENTS

2585 Air Reserve Flying Center

77 Troop Carrier Squadron, Medium, 18 Dec 1959

COMMANDERS

Lt Col Jones L. Copeland

Lt Col George W. Shackleford,

¹ Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.

Lt Col Richard D. Baker, Nov 1966

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Vietnam Defense Campaign
Vietnam Air Offensive campaign
Vietnam Air Offensive-Phase II
Vietnam Air/Ground campaign

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award
Oct 1966-Apr 1967

Presidential Unit Citation for the period 21 Jan to 12 May 1968

EMBLEM

MOTTO

Subsidiis Vis—Strength in Reserve

OPERATIONS

15 APS This unit was transferred from Donaldson AFB, South Carolina, to Dobbins AFB, Georgia, on 13 March 1963. Plans for the transfer were made shortly after the announcement of Air Force plans to close Donaldson AFB. Prior to the actual transfer, considerable difficulty was encountered in obtaining orders for the transport of assigned equipment. Actual movement of the equipment was delayed until 22 March 1963. The primary mission of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron was to provide personnel qualified in the on-loading and airdropping of equipment in assigned mission aircraft. This support was provided to the 445th, 435th and 302nd Troop Carrier Wings. A new commander was assigned from the 918th Combat Support Squadron at Dobbins AFB. A nucleus of personnel was obtained from various other components of the 918th Troop Carrier Group and Headquarters Squadron, 445th Troop Carrier Wing. The following activities of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron were established at the indicated locations:

Headquarters Dobbins AFB, Georgia
Detachment 1 - Sewart AFB, Tennessee
Detachment 2 ~ Homestead AFB, Florida
Detachment 3 ~ Municipal Airport, Memphis, Tennessee
A total of 77 personnel were assigned to these component organizations

With normal land lines of transportation interdicted by the Viet Cong, reliance had to be placed

upon airlift. It was to handle the airlift requirement that headquarters 15th Aerial Port Squadron was activated at Da Nang on 15 December 1965.

On this same date, six other detachments of the squadron were activated: Det 1 at Pleiku; Det 2 at Qui Nhon; Det 3 at Quang Ngai; Det 4 at Phu Bai; Det 5 at Kontum; and Det 6 at An Khe. Less than two weeks later, Det 9 at Dong Ha was activated. An eighth detachment was added in February when ChuLai was activated. Later, in April, PACAF gave its approval for the realignment of the three aerial port squadrons in Vietnam. Changes effected by this decision included the transfer of Detachment 10, Douc My, to the 14th Aerial Port Squadron, and the shifting of responsibility for the manning of a mobility site at Dak To to Detachment 1 at Pleiku.

Lieutenant Colonel George W. Shackleford, first commander of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron, entered the new year of 1966 with his unit young and untried. By the beginning of January, the initial assignment of positions within the squadron had been completed. Lt. Colonel Shackleford's headquarters staff consisted of Major Troy Oestreich, Terminal Services Officer; First Lieutenant Frederick Morris, Traffic Management Officer; First Lieutenant Kenneth Briggs, Materiel Officer; and Chief Master Sergeant Benjamin Mast, founder of the locally famous "Ben's Bar," as Administrative NCO. Terminal Services was further broken down into specific operational functions: Air Freight under Captain Robert Sanders; Passenger Service under Master Sergeant John Bradley; and Traffic Control under Master Sergeant William Johnson.

The mission of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron is to provide fixed and mobile air terminal capability throughout the I and II Corps areas of Vietnam. The squadron is responsible for providing facilities and service for the proper handling of passengers, mail, and cargo air transported to, from, and through Da Nang and its detachments—24 hours a day—7 days a week. Further, the squadron must be able to provide mobile terminal operations wherever required on a minimum of notice.

From its inception, the 15th Aerial Port Squadron has grown in size and responsibilities at a phenomenal rate. Although at first hindered by insufficient manpower, vehicle failure, and inadequate facilities, the "Port" never failed to accomplish its mission in less than an outstanding manner.

Being outstanding became an easier task after the first six months when the squadron's vehicle assets nearly doubled. February saw the largest material handling equipment (MHE) gains with the arrival of seven 463L IOK forklifts, nine 463L IOK rough terrain fork-lifts, and one 25K loader. This input allowed the squadron to equip every detachment with at least one rough terrain forklift, including Quang Ngai, which previously had no MHE assigned at all. Other important vehicle acquisitions during this period included the first 40K loader to arrive in Vietnam, seven more 25K loaders, and three new 6K forklifts.

In the first six months alone, the squadron handled over 180,000 tons of cargo and nearly 640,000 passengers. Of these figures, over 25,000 tons of cargo and 30,000 passengers were accounted for by mobilities. Many "firsts" were experienced as Da Nang became a major air

terminal. Of major importance was the initiation and expansion of MAC channel traffic, beginning with cargo aircraft in January and extending to limited passenger traffic in March. By June, over a hundred MAC commercial contract aircraft a month were transiting Da Nang, including cargo configured L-1049s, DC-6s, B-707s, DC-8s and CL-44S. Finally, on 10 November, 1966, the first direct mail flight from the United States to Da Nang was flown by MAC contract Pan American 707.

With so many new personnel in the squadron, many of whom were hurriedly cross-trained out of the supply and administrative career fields in the United States, the introduction of an OJT program was mandatory. This group had been assigned to Vietnam out of an imbalanced career field and is required now to obtain a secondary AFSC in the Air Transportation career field while on the job. Though this arrangement irritated some of the men who have worked in other career fields for the majority of their Air Force career, it has been accepted by most with a grain of salt. On the whole, the men of the squadron have enthusiastically applied themselves to learning their new trade.

The OJT program has been even more strongly pushed by Lieutenant Colonel Richard D. Baker, who replaced Lt. Colonel Shackelford in November 1966. Lt. Colonel Baker has instituted a general tightening up of operations throughout the squadron. Under his command, detachments are receiving more of the material and personnel necessary to an efficient operation.

An article appearing in the 7th Air Force newspaper on 13 May 1966 depicts the tremendous accomplishments of the squadron as seen by an unbiased source: "The highly skilled loading crews utilized by the 15th Aerial Port Squadron in Da Nang form what is perhaps one of the smoothest working teams in Southeast Asia. With the aid of such modern equipment as palletized loaders, they can completely load a Cargomaster in less than twenty minutes. Some of the small aircraft, such as the C-123 Provider or the C-130 Hercules, they can empty or fill in as little as five minutes. In time of war, those minutes saved might also mean lives saved."

In December, 1966, a cement revetment was constructed self-help across the entrance of the Freight hangar, to help prevent water from entering during heavy rainfall as had happened in the past. Also, a self-help project was undertaken to repair all of the reparable 463L dollies. Fifteen were returned to service as a result of this project. A re-organization involving consolidation of the locations of Traffic Control and Load Planning proved to be most effective. This facilitated expeditious flight set-ups by the elimination of time consuming radio communication which had been necessary when Load Planning was situated at another location. A new procedure was initiated to pre-manifest palletized cargo as the cargo is brought into the outbound processing area. This eliminates last minute confusion and expedites load pulling/onload time considerably. A covered storage area was constructed in the freight yard and now doubles as a passenger terminal for personnel awaiting cargo planes, thereby eliminating the pax run from the north end of the runway to the cargo side, a distance of about two miles. Within the last two months a huge self-help painting project has been underway, resulting in a coat of paint for virtually every building in the 15th Aerial Port Squadron.

Currently underway is a project to construct a new dock system for both the inbound yard and the outsize pallet buildup. This was initiated in March, 1967.

Aerial delivery and mobility section was formed on 1 April 1967, for the purpose of rigging cargo for air drops and providing management capability for teams handling unit moves, emergency resupply missions, and field mobilities. CWO Richard Neal is in charge of the section, but due to his many other responsibilities, the day to day operations are largely handled by the NCOIC, MSgt Lewis H. Carter.

Personnel strength is 23 loadmasters, who are attached to the 311th Air Commando Wing for training, 7 riggers, and 1 clerk.

This is the setting into which Detachment 1 of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron became established on 1 January 1966, after taking over the responsibility held by Detachment 3 of the 8th Aerial Port Squadron until this time.

Currently, there are sixty-seven people stationed at Detachment 1. The personnel are divided into six working sections: Passenger Service, Traffic Control, Materiel, Administration, Records, and Freight Service.

Detachment 1 is the major transshipment point for supplies moving from Nha Trang to the twenty-nine Army Special Forces camps in the Pleiku area. Because of this role, there exists a special subsection within Air Freight to handle exclusively the C-123's and C-7A's supporting the camps. Average daily cargo handled for these camps comes to fifty tons and consists of rations, vegetables, livestock, rice, ammunition, and medical supplies. These supplies arrive ready-packed from Nha Trang and are broken down onto wooden skids for the C-7A caribou or speed pallets for the C-123 Providers.

The resupply of Special Forces camps is fraught with unusual experiences. In one instance, a bull scheduled for airlift decided not to go and broke out of his crate, holding up operations for three hours. To ride one of these livestock runs is of course an experience in itself. Anyone subjected to this dubious fortune may expect to be rewarded with an unforgettable assault upon his olfactory senses.

Considering the total traffic picture, the biggest month so far for Detachment 1 was in August of 1966. During this period, 36,100 passengers and 6,918 tons of cargo were moved. As there were no operations of major import in progress at the time, the reason for this great movement remains a minor mystery of Pleiku.

At one time, Detachment 1 maintained a mobility team to support emergency airlift movements in its area. The team consisted of five specially chosen men and one IOK forklift. Between March and the end of June, 1966, this team was dispatched numerous times, always on extremely short notice, often remaining in the field for weeks at a time. One of the most recent mobilities supported by the team occurred in February 1967, when ten men were sent

out to Plei De Jering. During their two day mission, they offloaded 9,544 tons of cargo and moved 1,038 passengers from a total of eighty-three aircraft. This was accomplished with an average ground time of five minutes. Other major operations in which Detachment 1 has participated include Hastings, Paul Revere I through V, and English.

Despite the size of Detachment 1, numerous projects remain to be completed for the betterment of operations. Paramount are construction of a 96' X 100' freight terminal, paving and fencing of the freight yard, construction of a 40' x 100' passenger terminal and a 7,000 square yard staging area for passengers.

When these goals are finally achieved, Detachment 1 will even more capably continue to fulfill its role as the major point of contact between the Army Special Forces and the 15th Aerial Port Squadron

Detachment 2 is located in the coastal city of Qui Nhon, which lies approximately halfway between Saigon and Da Nang. The normal population of the city is roughly 30,000, but war refugees have nearly quadrupled this figure. This massive population daily fills the local market place and streets to overflowing. Even at midnight, there is usually a sizeable crowd of the younger generation in front of the local movie theatre. In the earlier part of the evening, some of the lovelier elements of the local populace may be found in the many bars that cater to the G.I.s.

One of the nicest things about Qui Nhon is that it is "on limits." Until recently, U.S. military personnel were permitted to stay in town until 2200 hours. During the Tet holiday from 12 to 15 January 1967, several U.S. servicemen were injured in town by a grenade. This incident, plus rising inflation, caused the curfew to be lowered to 1900 hours. "Sorry 'bout that!"

Qui Nhon is a major port which handles the huge amounts of air and water freight which constantly funnel into the sprawling Army supply depot there. Ten to fifteen freighters are always in the harbor waiting to be offloaded. Ten thousand tons of cargo arrive monthly by air. It is this great amount of air freight that gives Detachment 2 its reason for existence.

With such a great amount of cargo to handle, smooth and efficient operation is a necessity. This is the criteria uppermost in the mind of every man at Detachment 2. The mention of a traffic delay at Det 2 is liable to bring forth a rash of scornful looks and epithets upon the man who dared utter the thought. Why? Simply because there hasn't been a delay since 12 January 1967! The men of Det 2 have loaded everything from 175 mm gun tubes, weighing 12,000lb. a piece, to common, everyday C-rations, onto the planes of the 834th Air Division—without incurring a delay. The attitude of the entire detachment is best summed up by the NCOIC, TSgt Howard Fetterman, who said " 'No Delays' has become a by-word at Detachment 2 to the extent that the men feel a personal pride in insuring that all planes will be given the most expeditious service possible." That this is not just idle bragging is proved by the fact that when the detachment is faced with ramp saturation, men that are off-duty in the barracks, even those that were sleeping, have been known to come out and lend a hand on their own time. That's

dedication!

Qui Nhon has rightly earned the title of the "record settingest" detachment in the 15th Aerial Port Squadron. In August of 1966, they moved the 4th Infantry Division to Pleiku and a brigade of the 1st Cavalry to An Khe. The latter move consisted of 1,770 passengers on 21 sorties in a single day. In September, they directly supported the opening of Khe Sanh with ninety C-130 missions carrying 1,238 tons of runway matting over a nine day period. A two day record for cargo airlift was set in October when 127 aircraft carrying 671 tons of cargo were sent to Da Nang. During the two months directly following this, Detachment 2 was instrumental in the aerial resupply of airfields English and Hammond. All supplies and munitions had to be flown in by air, since the monsoon season was in full drizzle, rendering all access roads impassable rivers of mud.

From its inception, the detachment has constantly supported local combat operations. These operations rely upon the quick service rendered by the aerial port, not only for the basic necessities of life, but also for the weaponry to make them successful. A splendid example of such an operation was a recent resupply to Dong Ha. Firing of the 175mm guns there had so radically depleted the supply of shells and prop charges that an emergency aerial resupply had to be initiated to enable firing to continue. Through close cooperation of Detachment 2 and Detachment 9 at Dong Ha, the resupply was a great success. The term "close cooperation" is not used loosely either, for by the time the first flight had arrived, the level of ammunition at the firing sites had fallen so low that the cargo was off-loaded directly onto waiting trucks and immediately dispatched to the gun emplacements.

The individual primarily responsible for Det 2's this growth is 1Lt. John M. Rasberry, who assumed command in December of 1966. Under him, plans laid by his predecessor were brought to fruition and an immense number of new programs were initiated. Since the Lieutenant's arrival, the detachment has changed so radically that a man who rotated in August of 1966 could hardly recognize it were he now to return.

Perhaps the most significant achievement to date has been the completion of the new passenger terminal and its dedication by Brig. Gen. Moore, Commander of the 834th Air Division. In his words, the new terminal set the standard of passenger service which he would like to see offered to all travelers in the Republic of Vietnam. For anyone remembering the shabby, leaking tents of the old terminal, the new one must seem a minor miracle. A traveler passing through today can buy a sandwich, a cold drink, a magazine, a variety of BX supplies, and a haircut or a shoeshine—all under one roof. SSgt Robert Parker, NCOIC of Passenger Service, sums up the new attitude of passenger service personnel in one concise phrase, "Every passenger is a VIP."

Improvements have not been made solely for the benefit of customers either. The detachment offices have been renovated, both inside and out, bare plywood floors and inadequate lighting have given way to inlaid tile, fluorescent lighting, and air conditioning. A completely new 16' square, two story addition was constructed to more favorably situate the traffic control section

and to house the new materiel section. Self-help accomplished all these projects.

The major accomplishment thus far has been the completion of a 20' X 201' two story barracks which houses the majority of the detachment personnel. Det 2 carpenters, under the able direction of TSgt Jack Flint, did an exceptional job of completing the building in record time. Other projects of this nature included construction of a large vehicle wash rack, the building of a carpenters shop, and several small buildings for the use of the processing sections.

In December 1966, the resources of the detachment were spread a little thinner by the establishment of a new operating location at Phu Cat Air Base. At the same time, they were also faced with continuously heavy involvement in massive aerial resupply missions. Recognizing their plight, Lt. Col. Richard D. Baker, commander of the squadron, went all out to provide the additional men and equipment needed.

During the month of November 1964, a number of provinces in the northern central part of the Republic of Vietnam were devastated by one of the greatest floods ever experienced in the country. Of these provinces, Quang Ngai was the hardest hit. By the 10th of that month, an estimated 8,000 people had met a watery grave, and countless others had been injured. Families, homes, livestock, and crops were all destroyed to the point where beginning anew seemed hopeless.

It was at this point that the U. S. military responded with a tremendous aid program. C-123 and C-47 aircraft were pressed into service flying in food, medical teams, and supplies, and then evacuating the sick, injured, and homeless.

With the passing of this disaster, Quang Ngai found itself more deeply involved in the Vietnam conflict. Army Special Forces camps were established in the surrounding area to combat the Viet Cong. Under the code name "Operation Hamlet", the Army began buying hamlets from the Vietnamese inhabitants, relocating them in areas previously secured by the Special Forces, and destroying the old villages to deny shelter and food to the enemy.

Naturally, a way had to be found to provide the now homeless villagers with the necessities of life, while at the same time enlarging the secured areas to accomodate more refugees. The scope of this project was so large that there evolved a basis for the formation of Detachment 3 of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron.

Traffic handled by Detachment 3 consists almost exclusively of C-123 and C-7 that ferry people, livestock, rice, arms, and medical supplies to outlying Special Forces camps. An average of one airdrop a week is flown to typical sub-sectors, such as Ha Thanh, in the Son Ha district of Quang Ngai province. As Ha Thanh contains some 300 American special forces troops, either fighting or serving as advisors to the local forces or to the Hrey tribes-people, these drops are of vital importance in sustaining the war effort. Two C-130 missions also land daily to transport passengers. Other than this, only an occasional cargo carrying C-130 will come in on a resupply mission.

As is the case at several other detachments, the five men at Det 3 live in a nearby MACV Army compound. Living conditions are far superior to working conditions. The "office" at the airfield is a five foot square cement hut. The cement is cracked, the paint is peeling, and the tin roof threatens to fall off with every discharge of the 155mm guns across the runway. The men describe the cargo area as "the biggest mudhole south of Da Nang." However, they hope to move in the near future into a larger and more substantial building (minus one wall) donated to them by the United States Agency for Industrial Development. Staff Sergeant Carl Miller, commander of the detachment, has already made enthusiastic plans for the placement of office furniture and equipment, and benches for waiting passengers "as soon as we can lay our hands on some concrete to put up that wall."

In the town of Quang Ngai, population 8,760, opportunities for recreation are limited. A 2000 hours curfew curtails activity even further. The general attitude of Det 3 toward the town is therefore one of condescending toleration; they can take it or leave it. Since the only major items of interest are a provincial hospital and what is reputed to be the largest sugar plantation in the Republic of Vietnam, the attitude of the men is somewhat understandable, as these are hardly subjects calculated to arouse the interest of the average GI.

Detachment 4 of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron is located at Phu Bai airfield, six miles south of the ancient imperial city of Hue, along National Route 1. The contrast between the peaceful atmosphere of the old city and the electric atmosphere of the detachment is striking.

A new arrival at Phu Bai is met by a cacophony of sound that is guaranteed to make his head spin. From the high pitched whine of the engines of the C-130 that brought him, to the staccato of small arms fire at the Dong Da National Training Center across the highway from his quarters at the MACV Compound, there is scarcely a moment's peace. Even sleep is difficult to come by, for a nearby battery of 105mm guns intermittently shatters the stillness throughout the night.

The city of Hue, in contrast, is one of the best places in Vietnam to learn something of Vietnamese culture and history. Crossing over the River of Perfumes on the Bridge of the Golden Waters is like entering another world. On one side is the chaotic world of war—on the other, unruffled calm.

Of course, there are reminders of war in the city; coils of barbed wire in front of key buildings, an occasional military vehicle and orphans. There is a Catholic orphanage where 300 children and many aged people are cared for. The work being accomplished by the nuns at this orphanage is nothing short of miraculous. Through their efforts the orphanage is largely self-sufficient; they make their own thread, weave their own cloth, grow much of their own produce, and even bake bread in a bakery built by themselves from concrete donated by MACV and hauled in Det 4's "1 1/2 ton staff car."

A short distance from the orphanage is the walled city. In order to enter, one must cross a hyacinth choked moat and pass through a narrow portal in the forbidding walls of the Citadel

into the dead world of ancient emperors. Once having passed through the gates of the Imperial City and those of the Forbidden City, the palace and quarters of Vietnam's past emperors and their retinues looms ahead. That these historical links with the past were irritating to the Communists is unmistakable. Evidence of their 1945 attempt to destroy the area may still be seen in the ruins of nearly a hundred once beautiful buildings.

Some of the more elegant buildings still remaining are the Imperial Gate and the Emperor's Audience Hall. In days of old, one's station in life determined through which of the three portals in the gate he would enter when coming for an audience with the Emperor. Through one gate came the nobles and through the other came commoners, with the center portal being reserved exclusively for the use of the Emperor. From the center portal, a wide promenade leads across a moat to the Audience Hall. In front of the hall is a spacious courtyard in which stones are imbedded at intervals to mark where visitors, according to station, would bow in obeisance to the Emperor. The steps leading to the hall were reserved for the highest dignitaries.

Upon entering the hall, a modern-day visitor couldn't help but be immediately impressed by the delicate intricacy of the gilt and laquer work. On a dais at the end of a row of dragon decorated pillars stands the throne of the Emperor. The dead silence of the chamber does nothing but add gravity and depth to this already magnificent setting.

In comparison, the somewhat lesser splendor of the working facilities at Detachment 4 in Phu Bai will fail to excite the average visitor. The office is a dusty, windblown shack. The passenger terminal is a large, decrepit hangar left over from the days of French occupation. As the hangar lacks a front wall, passengers waiting inside are subjected to a minor dust storm every time an aircraft taxis on the ramp just outside.

Despite the conditions under which they work, Det 4 people have always managed to handle their passengers and cargo quickly and efficiently. Operation Hastings caused the detachment to handle 1,000 tons of freight and 4,000 passengers above its normal workload. This overload was efficiently handled in stride as just another burden in the life of an 15th Aerial Port detachment.

A more unique record was the movement of 546 passengers in a single day—by helicopter. On 10 March, 1967, all 834th Air Division aircraft for Dong Ha and Khe Sanh were suddenly diverted, causing Det 4 to seek alternate transportation in a hurry. Being resourceful, they found the "choppers" to be the answer to their problem.

Resourcefulness will most likely be the key to a more substantial problem at Det 4. The present commander, Second Lieutenant Nicholas Van Valkenburg, has a new prefabricated terminal building lying in his half of the hangar awaiting assembly. He has already obtained help from the Marines in filling in a construction site. His task now remains to find someone to help erect the heavy steel framework. After overcoming this temporary obstacle, Detachment 4 will rapidly move from the dirt and dust into a new terminal which will without doubt increase the

detachment's efficiency and the morale of its members.

Detachment 5 at Kontum has been in existence as a detachment of the 15th Aerial Port for less than a year; before this it had been Detachment 15 of the 8th Aerial Port Squadron. While Kontum itself has never been the site of any major military buildups, Detachment 5 personnel are constantly kept busy. They frequently serve as a relay station instrumental in the movement of large numbers of troops and supplies.

In September, 1966, the entire 5th Special Forces now in Kontum's outlying area, were moved from Nha Trang to Kontum in C-130, then loaded into C-123 and Army CV2's and shipped to the then forming Special Forces camps in the area. During this same month, over 600 tons of cargo were shipped in from Nha Trang for airdrops to surrounding locations. Then, during two days, 28-30 December 1966, they moved 2,150 tons of cargo and 3,100 members of the 101st Airborne Division on Operation Spigot. On 19 January, 1966, with the help of fifteen men TDY from Da Nang, a complete Army Battalion, involving 232 tons of cargo and 193 passengers, was moved to Cam Ranh Bay. After a comparative day of rest, and the completion of Operation Spigot, the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne was moved to Phan Rang on 21 January, involving 543 tons of cargo and 2,216 passengers. After completing this, an unexpected, unscheduled mobility move from Tan Son Nhut, Pleiku and Da Nang occupied the remainder of their workday.

It is rumored that upon returning to the compound after this workout, an Army acquaintance greeted them with a casual remark to the effect that "You Air Force guys are always loafing." He was never seen or heard from again.

An item of interest to "farm boys" in the 15th Aerial Port who frequent state fairs when in the States would be Sister Marie's Leprosarium. Among the livestock used to feed the lepers and the staff is what has to be the fattest hog in Vietnam, an enormous sow weighing in the neighborhood of 600 pounds. There are also a number of horses there, which anyone can ride, providing he can stay on. Although Sister Marie's and Doc Smith's institutions are largely self-sufficient, members of Det 5 have, on occasion, helped out these people by moving some heavier items that needed to be moved, and doing a little carpentry work when necessary.

Personnel at Detachment 5 have a very close working relation with the Special Forces in the area, and morale runs quite high at this detachment. On Saturday evening, all the men can be found at the airfield barbecue pit, intensely occupied with merrymaking, sundry liquid refreshment, and thick juicy steaks.

Anyone familiar with American military lore has heard of the 1st Cavalry. Units of this famous division were among the first to ride West to the bloody battles of the Indian Wars, and since then have been first in Manila, Tokyo, and Pyong Yang. Currently, the 1st Cav is in Vietnam, and at last report successfully completed their fifteenth major operation there. The majority of their operations in Vietnam have been directly supported by Detachment 6 of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron at An Khe. Detachment 6 has assisted them in supply and troop movements during

Operations English, Hammond, Oasis, Thayer, and Phan Thiet.

Security at An Khe is rather tenuous. On 20 April, 1966 at 0200 hours, a satchel charge planted inside the Air Freight office exploded, completely demolishing the office and damaging two C-130 aircraft. Fortunately, Det 6 had not begun twenty-four hour operations at this time and the building was free of personnel.

For the kickoff of Operation Thayer, on 13 September, 1966, Detachment 6 was required to load sixteen C-130 sorties in the first four hours. Due to outstanding coordinated effort by members of Det 6, air crews, and the Army, the sorties were loaded in two and one-half hours, and the entire mission, involving twenty seven sorties, was completed in less than seven hours.

Because of the numerous operations in which Det 6 was becoming involved First Lieutenant Gary B. Van Cleave, then commander, began night operations on 1 January 1967. This move allowed better service for 1st Cav operations and also enabled them to support late-flying CV-2's when required.

The permanent runway, known as the "golf course" is currently under repair due to damage caused by C-130's. Although the detachment personnel are working under adverse conditions on the alternate runway there has still been no appreciable delay in traffic.

The personnel at Detachment 6 are largely self-sufficient, and plan to move from the barracks they now share with other Air Force personnel in the Air Force compound called "Zoomie Village" into a new 46 man barracks being constructed by themselves.

Lieutenant Van Cleave, commander of Det 6 until Captain Millard J. McKissack took over in March of 1967, has seen the many changes An Khe has undergone and considers it "the most desirable assignment in Vietnam". Although he did not hesitate to depart on his DEROS, he named An Khe the place to which he'd most like to return if selected to serve again in Vietnam.

Under the command of First Lieutenant Raymond E. Gregory, Detachment 8 at Chu Lai consists of nine men. No plans for an increase of personnel are in sight at present.

There is no actual town in the vicinity named Chu Lai; the name being initially coined by the American forces in the area. It is a combination of French and Vietnamese words used to associate the airfield with all military action in this particular area. The air strip and surrounding area lie in Ky Lien Province. Several small hamlets in the Province are available for the men to fulfill their everyday needs, such as laundry, etc.

The local villages are some distance from each other with dense forest between them. Consequently, though the area surrounding Chu Lai is by no means secure, the people therein seem not to be too concerned or knowledgeable about the war going on around them. They live from day to day, existing solely from their agricultural and fishing activities.

Living conditions at Chu Lai fall far short of Utopia. Detachment 8 personnel perform their daily ablutions using a plastic bowl situated on a stand outside the barracks into which they pour water from a five gallon gasoline can, and wash and shave by daylight. When a shower is called, for, there is a 12'x 12' shack decorated with several small pipe-ends extending from the ceiling, from which cold water drips sporadically. Their latrines are reminiscent of the more refined type of half-moon facility found in rural areas of Tennessee. Meals are taken in a Marine mess hall, with food surprisingly good—for a Marine mess hall.

At one time Chu Lai was a French airfield; when the need for expansion arose, hamlets that were in the planned enlargement area were moved out to what is now the perimeter of Chu Lai Airfield. The improvements made since then are miniscule.

With plans to better their living quarters as an incentive, the men prepared to disassemble the tent that they lived in and replace it with a tropical hut built of wood. After having built the framework of the hut, they were dismayed to discover the materials needed to complete their project were not available; thus, for two months they resided in a sideless structure, often during inclement weather.

Staff Sergeant Arthur E. Smith, from Brooklyn, New York, sums up the hardships of being assigned to unrefined Chu Lai with: "You get used to it."

The northernmost region of South Vietnam has tremendous value to all concerned in the Vietnam War. It is a serious geographical obstacle Communist forces infiltrating from the North. Yet the enemy looks toward this region as an easy access route for his men and equipment, for the alternative point of entrance would be the much more hazardous trek through mountainous Cambodia. Therefore, this valuable piece of real estate must be sufficiently safeguarded against entrance from the North. Nicknamed the "Little Alamo" because it once was attacked on the same date as the famous fort in Texas, Dong Ha has proved to be a strong point in our defenses immediately south of the DMZ.

Detachment 9 of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron plays a vital part in Dong Ha's operation. Since its inception, the detachment has supported many important operations, among which were operations Hastings and Prairie, resulting in a combined total of 2,176 enemy killed. The bulk of the more than eleven Marine divisions involved were transported by aircraft using the facilities of Detachment 9.

Until September of 1966, a dirt runway provided the only air access to Dong Ha. This did not hamper the fine job always done by members of Detachment 9 however, for it was in July of the same year that a record 6,428 tons of cargo was moved in support of operations to the North Nearby.

Camp Carroll is an artillery center with every conceivable type of weapon on hand. From this well known camp, 155 and 175 millimeter guns fire on targets over the DMZ. The ammunition and charges that these huge guns require is supplied through Detachment 9. In one case, due

to a severe shortage, ammunition and charges were flown in from Detachment 2 at Qui Nhon, taken directly from the aircraft, and immediately driven to the big guns for firing.

Until recently, Detachment 9 personnel had been utilizing a half-shell hootch hastily erected by the French. On 10 March 1967, they took possession of their own newly built passenger terminal and freight office, and on the same date, began night operations, thereby enabling Detachment 9 to better service the fighting forces it supports.

How to feel comparatively safe and retain a peaceful frame of mind is a question frequently pondered by personnel stationed at Tarn Ky. While it cannot be accepted as a totally accurate figure, informed sources in the Tarn Ky area estimate Viet Cong strength to be as high as seventy percent of the local populace, making for the most tenuous security in all of Central Vietnam. All outbound aircraft circle the runway to gain enough altitude to safely fly over the notorious Viet Cong infested Pineapple Forest, which, despite frequent bombing raids and land assaults, has long been an obstacle to operations.

The population in the Tarn Ky area is 355,000, including some 12,000 Montagnards. In the 3,094 square mile area of Tarn Ky province, responsibility for control of several industries, medical care for as many of the people as possible and the total support of some 16,000 Vietnamese in the Tien Phuoc sector rests with ninety-five American advisors.

A now abandoned French railroad was of great assistance in hauling supplies from nearby Chu Lai, until it was destroyed in the 1964 floods. Roads were then used for bringing in supplies. They are still used to some extent, though with a great deal of difficulty, due to frequent ambush and heavy mining by the enemy. The alternative mode of transportation for supplies and personnel is by air; consequently, in the latter part of July, 1966, three members of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron arrived from Da Nang to form what is now Detachment 12.

Until the arrival of Detachment 12 in Tarn Ky, the local power plant inadequately fulfilled the needs of the people. With the advantage of being able to fly in heavy transformers and necessary parts, however, in a short six months the output of the power plant has doubled.

Despite the danger to which they are exposed daily, including being the frequent targets of snipers, Detachment 12 personnel seem quite content to be stationed at Tarn Ky; their food is excellent, the living facilities are modern, there is a movie every night, and the bar is open till 0100.

At one time Khe Sanh and its environs was the sole responsibility of Army Special Forces. While in the course of an extensive program to restore peace to the local populace and show them a better way of life, Army Intelligence received word of a suspected plot to overrun the Khe Sanh area. In view of this, two battalions of Marines were moved in to reinforce the Green Berets and secure the entire area. Khe Sanh's location is of high strategic value since it is situated just south of the DMZ, and close to the Cambodian border, points used by the North Vietnamese to infiltrate the South.

It was necessary, after the arrival of the additional troops, to find an efficient method of transport for supplies and personnel needed to complete their vital mission. Late in October of 1966, a three man mobility team from Da Nang was sent to Khe Sanh to handle essential supplies and equipment flown in daily. Eventually, the continuing flow of aircraft called for permanent residency of the men and on 1 January, 1967, Detachment 13 came into being. At first, it appeared as though the number 13 was showing its superstitious connotation. The detachment's living and working facilities were constantly shifted, and for a long time the four detachment members used a temporary off-loading dock into which aircraft had to back in order to unload supplies. However, toward the latter part of February, things began to look up; a ten thousand pound forklift was received from Da Nang, plans for permanent living quarters evolved, and a combined passenger and freight office was completed.

On March 3, 1967, about 60 mortar rounds fell in the Khe Sanh airfield area, damaging a helicopter and causing minor damage to the runway and taxiway. One hundred Vietnamese civilians were killed and eighty-one injured in the nearby city of Khe Sanh. After the attack, word quickly spread throughout the country of Khe Sanh's dilemma. In response, over one-hundred-and-ten tons of food, clothing, and medical supplies began to arrive. Members of Detachment 13 worked hand in hand with the Marines, Army, and the local people in receiving and delivering these goods. Extra aircraft made it necessary for the detachment to work unusually long hours. The restoration of the city was completed, however, and the personnel of Detachment 13 felt proud to have been able to play an important part in the rebuilding of Khe Sanh. Whenever possible, the men of Detachment 13 extend a helping hand to other branches of the service as well, through use of their forklift and themselves. Technical Sergeant Clarence W. Crockett, commander of Detachment 13, says about the cooperation received of his small band of men, "It is the best I have seen in sixteen years of service."

Probably everyone is familiar with the old saying, "Getting there is half the fun." When applied to the still operating segment of the Vietnamese National Railway between Qui Nhon and Phu Cat, this quote might read "Getting there is all the fun." The pleasant experience of taking this immensely scenic two hour ride is one that isn't easily forgotten. Leisurely rolling along at twenty miles per hour through splendorous, colorful countryside gives rise to a false sense of security. Somehow, though, the armored car pushed along in front of the engine to take the impact of possible land mines tends to dampen the illusion.

During the latter part of December, 1967, a need was recognized for aerial port facilities at Phu Cat Airfield, twelve miles northwest of Qui Nhon. In view of this, seven personnel from Detachment 2 at Qui Nhon were sent TDY to Phu Cat for the primary purpose of serving the two squadrons of C-7As permanently assigned there. Shortly after this, they officially became Detachment 14 of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron. The men soon set up temporary quarters and passenger and freight facilities, and became responsible for receiving the mail and cargo for all other units on the installation.

The runway currently in use is 2,300 feet, with capabilities for C-7A and C-123 aircraft, but a

12,000 foot runway is nearing completion, which will enable a huge increase in air traffic. Anticipating this, Detachment 14 has submitted plans for a 90'X100' passenger terminal, and a buildup to the thirty-six people called for in their UMD is currently underway at Da Nang. The seven men now stationed at Phu Cat work from 0615 hours until often as late as 2100 hours, depending on when the last plane is taken care of.

According to a "sneak preview" of blue-prints outlining the proposed expansion of Phu Cat, it is scheduled to become a permanent-type installation. The property is on lease to the United States for ninety-nine years, and facilities included in the futuristic blueprints include a golf course, swimming pool, bowling alley, and United States military dependent's quarters. Wonder if we'll still get combat pay?

The city of An Hoa is the largest industrial center in South Vietnam. It is the home of the Nong Song coal mine, which produces 350,000 tons of coal annually. This coal is shipped daily to Da Nang by convoy.

Projects currently under way consist of what is to become the largest Hydroelectric plant in Vietnam, due for completion by 1968, and an industrial complex which was begun in 1963, under a joint U. S., British, German and Vietnamese contract and which upon completion is expected to contain factories which produce glass, fertilizers, ammonia, and various other products heretofore unmanufactured in this country. Much of the supplies needed to bring this complex into being will be airlifted in; hence the requirement of the 15th Aerial Port Squadron sending a team of five men to An Hoa to assist the 152nd VMGR (Marine Air Freight unit) with what certainly will become constant air traffic involving C-130 and C-123 aircraft. Eventually a buildup of Vietnamese civilians working on this complex will come to pass, and estimates at this time put the number of employees required for completion of this operation at close to two thousand.

Supplies that are not brought in by air will arrive by convoy on Liberty Road, (more commonly known as National Route 1), the land route from Da Nang to An Hoa. Every morning mine-sweepers are necessary to clear this road of Viet Cong land mines placed there overnight, before regular traffic is allowed to commence.

At present, the 15th Aerial Port personnel working at An Hoa are not listed as a detachment, but as an Operating Location. These five men have an admirable relationship with the Marines they work with. Although their living conditions are primitive, they seem to be well-adjusted to doing without. The BX facility available to them offers a selection of either two rationed Cokes or cans of beer each, per day. Hardly an evening goes by that they aren't wakened by the cry, "Mortar Attack!" and forced to take shelter in their well-fortified underground bunker.

Passenger traffic at An Hoa is largely Vietnamese civilians headed for Da Nang. 15th Aerial Port personnel occupy one-half of a concrete hootch, and any illnesses encountered during the day are quickly and efficiently dispensed with by the Marine Corpsmen in the medical facility which occupies the other half of the building.

Because of the industrial importance of this ninety square mile area, the Marines are of necessity building up their fighting forces in An Hoa. This, in addition to the material and personnel needed for the industrial complex, means that members of this Operating Location undoubtedly have their work cut out for them.²