

One of the earliest TDY deployments to Vietnam

REQUEST AND AUTHORIZATION FOR TEMPORARY DUTY TRAVEL OF MILITARY PERSONNEL (If more space is required, continue on reverse, identifying items by number.)			DATE 3 December 1963
I. REQUEST FOR AUTHORIZATION			
TO: ARSA		1. REQUEST TDY BE AUTHORIZED AS INDICATED IN ITEMS 5 THROUGH 12	
FROM: (Requesting authority) ARSP			
2. TYPED NAME, GRADE AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL MALVERN J CONNETT, CWO W-3, ASST CHIEF ADMIN		3. SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL <i>Malvern J. Connett</i>	
		4. PHONE NR. 28955/28309	
II. TEMPORARY DUTY TRAVEL ORDERS			
5. THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUAL(S) WILL PROCEED AS INDICATED. UPON COMPLETION WILL RETURN TO PROPER STATION.			
GRADE	NAME (First name, middle initial, last name, AFSN)	ORGANIZATION	SECURITY CLEARANCE FOR PERIOD OF TDY
MAJ	WARREN G LEACH A0711716	36 Air Rescue Sq	SECRET
CAPT	PAUL I ANDERSON A03024913	"	"
CAPT	NOBLE L UTLEY 50081A	"	"
TSGT	WALTER F ADKINS	"	"
TSGT	JAMES S SACKS	"	"
TSGT	GEORGE B WRIGHT	"	"
SSGT	DAVID S ROBERTS	"	"
SSGT	NORWOOD STEELE	"	"
SSGT	VICTOR S WHITCOMB	"	"
ALC	HENRY J O'BETIRNE	"	"
6. DEPART ON OR ABOUT 4 Dec 63		7. APPROXIMATE NR. OF DAYS (Include travel time) 7	8. (0) DDALV
9. SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF TDY Rescue Support for Special Mission		10. ITINERARY: ☒ VARIATIONS IN ITINERARY AUTHORIZED FROM: Tachikawa AB, Japan TO: Clark AB, P.I. Tan Son NHut AB, Saigon Don Muang AB, Bangkok RETURN TO: Tachikawa AB, Japan	
11. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS The use of Government Quarters if available is mandatory. Certificate of non-availability of facilities will be obtained from stations visited if applicable. Direct Mission Support			
12. MODES OF TRAVEL. A. ☒ TRAVEL BY Military Aircraft DIRECTED WHEN AVAILABLE. B. ☐ TPA. TRAVEL TIME BY COMMON CARRIER (rail or bus) IS _____ DAYS. TRAVEL TIME IN EXCESS IS CHARGEABLE TO DELAY ENROUTE AUTHORIZED IN ITEM 8. C. ☐ TPA. THIS MODE OF TRANSPORTATION HAS BEEN DETERMINED TO BE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS TO THE GOVERNMENT. D. ☐ OTHER.			
III. AUTHORIZATION			
13. AUTHORITY AFM 35-11		14. DATE 3 December 1963	15. SPECIAL ORDER NR. 341
16. DESIGNATION AND LOCATION OF APPROVING HEADQUARTERS OR UNIT 36 AIR RESCUE SQUADRON (MATS) United States Air Force APO 323, San Francisco, California		17. APPROPRIATION ACCOUNTING SYMBOL 5743400 304 6536 P458 S595300 2121.55 (\$250.00)	
19. REQUEST FOR TDY IS APPROVED AND WILL BE PERFORMED. TDN. FOR THE COMMANDER			
18. DISTRIBUTION (If required) 1 - M/R 2 - Funds Mgt Off 4 - KBAAF-T 1 - ARDAS 1 - AREDC 3 - 1360 BPER 10 - Ea Indiv 27 - File		20. SIGNATURE ELEMENT OF ORDERS ISSUING OFFICIAL (Seal or signature) <i>Malvern J. Connett</i> MALVERN J CONNETT CWO W-3, USAF Asst Chief of Administration	

To: (unknown), rlapointe
From: INTERNET:Hobeirne@aol.com, INTERNET:Hobeirne@aol.com
Date: 1/15/99, 5:17 PM
Re: Re: PJ History

Sender: Hobeirne@aol.com
Received: from imo27.mx.aol.com (imo27.mx.aol.com [198.81.17.71])
by hil-img-9.compuserve.com (8.8.6/8.8.6/2.17) with ESMTTP id VAA12782
for <rlapointe@compuserve.com>; Fri, 15 Jan 1999 21:17:42 -0500 (EST)
From: Hobeirne@aol.com
Received: from Hobeirne@aol.com
by imo27.mx.aol.com (IMOV18.1) id 8TAKa06036
for <rlapointe@compuserve.com>; Fri, 15 Jan 1999 21:17:09 +1900 (EST)
Message-ID: <c8ad1d10.369ff6a5@aol.com>
Date: Fri, 15 Jan 1999 21:17:09 EST
To: rlapointe@compuserve.com
Mime-Version: 1.0
Subject: Re: PJ History
Content-type: text/plain; charset=US-ASCII
Content-transfer-encoding: 7bit
X-Mailer: AOL 4.0 for Windows 95 sub 236

Hey Bob,

FOLLOW UP! 1st PJ SAR IN NAM?

Got your note and thanks. I was in the 36th. ARS, from 1962 to 1965. They were a C-54 and H-19 unit (the really old helicopter). The 36th was based at Tachikawa AB, Japan. When I went there PCS the team leader was Ronald Jeczala (now living in Medical Lake, Wash.), Bill McDougal (deceased), Bernard T. Santos (now a lawyer living in Carson City, Nevada), Walter Adkins (in West Virginia somewhere), Wayne Whitehead (living in Nevada and on the PJ internet), and Glenn Wilkinson (living in Fort Walton, Florida). Later on these team members were assigned as others rotated out - Jim Ward (living in Las Cruces and on the PJ internet), Dan Galde (living close to Jim Ward), Andrew "bud" Martin (somewhere in San Francisco) Ken Croom (I'm told he's dead) and Dave Wheeler (somewhere in Washington State close to Jeczala. Mike Leonard came in about 1964, he's the guy who's reserve tangled about his main and he fell 1,200 feet and didn't break any bones at Eglin AFB.

The 33rd ARS were stationed at Kadena AB, Okinawa, and I believe they had the HU-16's.

The team leader was Ted Jenkins (deceased) and Charlie Hoell (living in Astoria, Oregon) Larry Huyett, Colin Lane (unknown whereabouts). There was another team at Clark AB, Philippines run by Bill Vargas. Dee Nelson ran another team at Anderson AFB, Guam. Dave Brody was stationed there. All of the teams sent personnel TDY to "Nam" as needed. We were first going in to DaNang and flying on the HU-16's. My trips in 'Nam started in December, 1963, but it won't be recorded. Jeczala, Adkins, and I went going to Thailand (I'm not sure if we were headed for Bangkok or Udorn) for a gemini orbit out to Diego Garcia. Anyway, we landed at Tan San Nhut early one morning. The USAF personnel heard that there were divers on board the plane and they came to us with a problem. A B-26 had been shot down in the Delta and they wanted help getting the people rescued. We said yes, jumped off our plane and hauled our gear over to a Huey at 1300 hours. We told them we were ready to go - and then they told us they had to wait for permission to go. We asked for an explanation. At that time in the war, the USAF had to permission from the tower to fly out, the tower had to ask Hq, they had to ask central command (somewhere in Saigon), they had to ask the Vietnamese Hq, they had to ask the local Viet commander for his permission - and when he gave permission it had to come back up the line and down to our Huey pilot. He got that permission at 1730 hours, four and a half hours later. We made a half hour flight out to the down plane, only to find the it was covered by the incoming tide. I was dropped into the water (and oil slick) to see if I could feel the plane in all the muddy waters - no luck, so I was pulled up by rope and

taken to a small army base where we spent the night. Then we returned to Tan San Nhut and on to Thailand. I' ll check my old stuff and see if I can up with any hard stuff.

Harry
Obee

In mid December 1963, the 36th ARS, Tachikawa Air Base Japan, was tasked to deploy an HC-54 and 3 man PJ team to Thailand. The mission was to provide rescue support for the launch of a Gemini spacecraft being launched from Cape Canaveral. One of the Gemini contingencies called for an emergency splashdown in the Bay of Bengal. Enroute to Thailand, the HC-54 refueled at Tan San Nhut airbase in Vietnam.

While gassing the HC-54 the PJ's were requested to assist in a SAR for a B-26 that had been shot down in the delta, about 50 miles south of Saigon. It had gone down in the water and they needed some rescue personnel with water rescue gear. Walter F Adkins was the PJ team leader on the HC-54. After getting the permission from the HC-54 aircraft commander, he volunteered the use of his team for the rescue. Adkins, Ronald R Jeczala and Henry J O'Beirne moved their gear to a UH-1 Huey helicopter and told the crew they were ready to go. The pilot told Adkins that they were waiting for permission to launch. The USAF had to request permission from the airfield control tower operator. The tower had to request permission from their headquarters. Tower HQ had to request permission from central command in Saigon. Saigon had to get concurrence with the local commander in the delta. After the local commander in the delta agreed, permission to launch had to come up through the line and then down to our Huey pilot. He got that permission four hours later. The flight to the downed plane lasted only thirty minutes. When the Huey arrived on scene they found that the downed aircraft had been covered by the incoming tide.

II. The Genesis of Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia

Although commonly called the Vietnam War, the fighting in Southeast Asia actually involved several wars. In Laos there was a three-way civil war between rightists, Neutralists, and the Pathet Lao. There was an insurgency in South Vietnam guided and eventually dominated by North Vietnam. The United States conducted an air war against North Vietnam, another against infiltration system along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, provided air support to forces in South Vietnam and, after 1970, carried out an air war against Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. These interrelated conflicts each posed different problems in rescuing and recovering aircrews shot down in enemy territory. The required rescue tactics differed according to the location of the survivor, the nature of the terrain, enemy defenses, and the technological state-of-the-art in rescue at the time of the shoot down. For the U.S. Air Force the wars of Southeast Asia began in the kingdom of Laos.

Laos, a land-locked country, in 1959 shared a common frontier with other nations. The People's Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, along the north and northeastern frontiers, had been dominated by the communists since 1949 and 1954 respectively. Bordering Laos on the southeast and south were the Republic of Vietnam and Cambodia. Anticommunist Thailand formed the southwestern frontier while neutral Burma lay along the northwestern border.¹

Laotian land area totals 91,400 square miles, approximately the size of Great Britain or the state of Idaho. Sixty percent of Laos, particularly the north, is covered with dense tropical rain forest and humped-back mountains, some of which rise to over 7,000 feet. In the frontier areas especially, the Laotian people are ethnically similar to their neighbors. This similarity is most apparent along the northern border with Vietnam where inhabitants on both sides look the same and speak similar languages. Communist cadres found the geography and the social circumstances along the border areas well suited for infiltration and subversion.² The lowland areas of Laos lie primarily along the Mekong River, which itself runs practically the length of the country and serves as the border with Thailand for most of its length. The major towns of Laos, including Luang Prabang the Royal capital and Vientiane the administrative center, grew up along the Mekong because it

provided the main trade artery from China to Cambodia and Vietnam.

The monsoon climate determines the weather patterns for Laos and provides three overlapping seasons. There is a rainy season lasting five months from May through September. In October, the rain tapers off, and the cool season begins and continues through January. March brings warmer humid weather with temperatures that reach a high of ninety-five degrees in April, the hottest month. Dust and haze dominate the dry season, when the Lao farmers practice their slash and burn agriculture.³

Laos is a nation of pronounced ethnic and linguistic as well as geographic diversity. Even in 1975, at the end of many years of revolution, invasion, aggression, and foreign intervention, when the people of Vientiane and the major towns turned out to welcome the victorious Pathet Lao armies, Laos was not a state in the traditional sense. No central government had ever successfully administered the entire nation. Political, national, and ideological concepts meant little to a people whose existence was marked by poverty, famine, disease, and war.

In 1960 the interests of the United States, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam converged and conflicted in Laos. Domestic politics in Laos, when divorced from East-West ideological, political, and military rivalries, followed a traditional pattern of competition among a few ruling families, including the Souvanna (Souvanna Phouma and his half-brother Souphanouvong, the Pathet Lao chieftain), Phoumi, Champassak, Sannikone, and Somsanith.⁴

On August 9, 1960, most members of the Royal Laotian government were in the Royal capital of Luang Prabang, a hundred miles north of Vientiane, attending funeral ceremonies for King Sisavang Vong. Capt. Kong Le, a paratrooper battalion commander, disgusted with the continuing civil war, used this opportunity to take control of Vientiane, dissolve the right-wing cabinet of Prime Minister Prince Somsanith, and invite Prince Souvanna Phouma to form a neutralist government.⁵

When news of the coup reached Luang Prabang, Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, a right-wing military leader who dominated the Sannikone government, flew to his home in Savannakhet. There, with most of the conservatives in the National Assembly, he established a "Committee Against the Coup d'Etat". The U.S. government began backing the Savannakhet group with money and arms while maintaining formal diplomatic relations with the Vientiane government under the Neutralist Souvanna Phouma. In late November Phoumi's troops marched northward up National Route 13, reaching Vientiane in early December. A battle raged around the city for three days before Kong Le retreated northward to the strategic Plain of Jars with the remnants of his followers.⁶

Kong Le, already in a temporary and tenuous alliance with the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese Army units operating in northeast Laos, began,

in early December, receiving arms and supplies from a Soviet airlift. Later that month his forces, with their communist allies, attacked Royal Laotian Army units on the Plain of Jars. On December 16, 1960, the American Air Attaché, Col. Butler B. Toland, Jr., photographed a Soviet IL-14 dropping supplies to the Kong Le forces near Vang Vieng. A few days later, on December 23, Toland, while flying the American Embassy's VC-47 on a reconnaissance flight over the Plain of Jars, was fired upon by Kong Le and Pathet Lao troops. A .50-caliber machine gun bullet wounded Colonel Toland's radio operator. This was the first U.S. Air Force aircraft fired at by the communists in the Southeast Asia conflict.⁸

President John F. Kennedy held a televised news conference on March 23, 1961, at which he announced that the Soviet airlift for the Kong Le Pathet Lao forces had passed the 1,000 sortie mark.⁹ Meanwhile, on March 23, Capt. Stanley P. McGee, Jr., pilot of a specially modified intelligence-gathering SC-47, took off from Vientiane for Saigon with his plane loaded with passengers bound for a rest and recuperation visit to "the Paris of the Orient". Before heading for Saigon, McGee turned north toward Xieng Khouangville, a Pathet Lao stronghold on the eastern edge of the Plain of Jars. The crew, experienced in intelligence collection, planned to use their radio-direction finding equipment to determine the frequencies being used by Soviet pilots to locate the Xieng Khouangville airfield through the dense fog that often blanketed the region. Suddenly, shells from a Pathet Lao antiaircraft gun slammed into the aircraft, shearing off a wing and sending the plane plummeting toward the jungle. A U.S. Army major who always wore a parachute when he flew, jumped from the falling aircraft and was captured by the Pathet Lao. He spent seventeen months as a prisoner in Sam Neua, the Pathet Lao headquarters near the North Vietnamese border, before being repatriated after the signing of the Geneva Agreements on Laos in 1962. This shoot-down marked the first American plane lost to enemy action in the war in Indochina.¹⁰

Had this incident occurred a few years later, a large armada of Air Force rescue helicopters, fighter escorts, and airborne controllers would have responded in an attempt to save the lone survivor. However, in 1961 the Air Rescue Service had no units in Southeast Asia. According to the Department of Defense National Search and Rescue Plan of 1956, search and rescue in the Pacific was the responsibility of the Commander in Chief, Pacific who was, in 1961, Adm. Harry D. Felt. He, in turn, assigned the search and rescue mission to the service or major area commanders: the Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces; the Commander, Naval Forces Philippines; or the Commander, Hawaiian Sea Frontier. They, in turn, directed their search and rescue duties to the sub-area or numbered Air Force level. In early 1961, the Thirteenth Air Force was assigned the search and rescue mission for the Saigon, Bangkok, and Rangoon Flight Information Region. Later, the Thirteenth Air Force gave the search and rescue task

from Udorn under the code name "Field Goal".

Meanwhile, the Air Force mission in Thailand and Laos continued. Additionally, on April 16, six F-100 Super Saber fighters, under the code name "Bell Tone", flew from the 510th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Clark AFB, Philippines to Don Muang International Airport outside Bangkok, Thailand to provide air defense.¹⁷ The Royal Thai Air Force agreed to provide search and rescue services to this unit. However, their rescue capability proved too limited to meet the needs of either Air America or the Air Force.¹⁸

On the political front, President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev realized their two countries were on a possible collision course in Laos.¹⁹ In April 1961, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to defuse the situation by arranging a cease-fire and calling for an international conference to work out a political solution to the Laotian problem. The Geneva Conference on Laos opened on May 16, 1961, and lasted through July 23, 1962. While the Geneva talks proceeded, the three Lao factions — Neutralists, Pathet Lao, and rightists — alternated armed conflict with separate negotiations until all factions, in Laos and in Switzerland, finally agreed on a delicate settlement. As a result, Prince Souvanna Phouma established a coalition government which lasted from July 1962 until fighting resumed in April 1963. During this period the focus in the Indochina conflict shifted to South Vietnam where U.S. support for the Saigon government was evidenced by a growing American military presence, an increasing number of combat deaths and, in early 1962, the assignment of Air Rescue Service personnel.

In May 1959, at its fifteenth meeting, the Lao Dong (communist) party of North Vietnam, decided to take control of the infant insurgency in South Vietnam and guide its growth. Southern cadres, who had gone north for indoctrination and training, trekked south along a network of footpaths soon to be expanded into the Ho Chi Minh Trail.²⁰ These footpaths ran north to south along the Annamite mountains and fanned out into the jungles of South Vietnam. This terrain favored unconventional warfare. The guerrillas could hide in the monsoon forest and jungle that covered sixty percent of the nation. The forest canopy rose as high as 200 to 250 feet above the jungle floor — a factor that complicated the efforts of rescue forces whenever a plane was shot down in tree-covered areas of Vietnam or Laos.

Much of South Vietnam is mountainous. The Annamite chain runs southward from North Vietnam, straddling the Laotian border on the west and extending to the South China Sea on the east. These jungled mountains and limestone outcroppings, sometimes rising to 8,500 feet, presented a hazardous obstacle to low flying planes. Following bail-out some pilots were killed when they landed on the jagged karst and others suffered broken bones as they came down through the branches of the multi-layered jungle canopy. Disaster often resulted when helicopters attempted to rescue a

downed airman from a tree-shrouded peak because the higher altitudes overextended their limited hover capabilities.²¹

The southern third of South Vietnam consists of flat lands and the Mekong River delta. One of the great rivers of Asia, the Mekong provides the southern part of Vietnam with 26,000 square miles of delta, 9,000 miles of which can be cultivated. Nowhere is the land higher than ten feet above sea level. The southernmost tip, the Ca Mau Peninsula is covered by thick jungles and mangrove swamps. Rescue forces, therefore, had to prepare for operations that ranged from mountainous jungles to swamps.

South Vietnam's climate was as debilitating as its geography was rugged and hostile. The temperature in Saigon occasionally reached 104 degrees Fahrenheit and rarely dipped below 80 degrees, while the humidity was always high. Major air masses blew from the northeast in the winter bringing dry weather to most of Southeast Asia. From May through October, however, the winds blew from the southwest frequently bringing more than forty inches of torrential rainfall. During this period most of South Vietnam experienced heavy precipitation, low cloud ceilings, chronic fog, and poor visibility. When the rains came, equipment often became inoperable, roads impassable, and flying nearly impossible.²²

Before the war, South Vietnam was a place of exotic beauty. The streets of Saigon, its capital, bustled with crowds of hawkers, vendors, and taxicabs each adding an ingredient of charm to the city. Saigon was the administrative capital of the Republic of Vietnam but, for all it shared with the countryside, the city might as well have been situated on the banks of the Seine as on the Mekong. In contrast to the busy charm of Saigon, the countryside possessed a bucolic beauty. There the peasants passed their lives unaltered through successive generations until politics, revolution, and military technology brought them misery, privation, and death.²³

The Viet Cong intensified its guerrilla war against President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime early in 1961. By March, U.S. intelligence analysts estimated that the guerrillas were killing, assassinating, or kidnapping five hundred pro government village officials, teachers, and soldiers every month. Secretary of State Dean Rusk reported at a Washington press conference on May 4, 1961, that the Viet Cong had grown to 12,000 in number and had killed or kidnapped more than 3,000 persons in 1960.²⁴ Although the rebellion in South Vietnam was originally an indigenous revolt against the Diem regime, its stepped-up pace after 1959 was the result of North Vietnamese intervention.²⁵

On October 11, 1961, President Kennedy authorized the sending of a U.S. Air Force unit to South Vietnam. The following day, a detachment of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron, code-named "Farm Gate", flew to South Vietnam. Stationed at Bien Hoa Air Base just north of Saigon, the 4400th CCTS flew combat modified T-28 fighter-bomber trainers, SC-47s, and B-26s, redesignated "Reconnaissance Bombers"

(RB-26s) in deference to the 1954 Geneva Conventions prohibition against the introduction of bombers into Indochina. On December 16, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara authorized participation in combat operations, provided a Vietnamese crewmember was aboard the strike aircraft.²⁶

On November 15, 1961, Detachment 7 of the Thirteenth Air Force was established at Tan Son Nhut Airfield, Saigon. Five days later Brig. Gen. Rollen H. Anthis, Vice Commander of the Thirteenth Air Force, became Commander, Detachment 7, 2d ADVON (Advanced Echelon). On December 1 he was named Chief, Air Force Section, Military Assistance Advisory Group/Vietnam.²⁷

Air activity increased as the American presence grew during the early years. On January 13, 1962, Farm Gate T-28s flew their first Vietnamese forward air controller directed mission, supporting an Army of the Republic of Vietnam outpost that was under Viet Cong attack. On January 29, T-28s and RB-26s struck targets from Saigon north to Quang Tri Province near the demilitarized zone. By the end of the month Farm Gate crews had flown a total of 229 sorties.²⁸ Meanwhile, the detachment's SC-47s were used in transport missions, leaflet drops, psychological warfare broadcasts, and flare drop operations.

When the U.S. Air Force began flying combat missions, American casualties were inevitable. Were Air Force planners remiss in not securing adequate search and rescue forces for Vietnam prior to the commitment of American units? Throughout Southeast Asia several factors, political and technological as well as doctrinal, complicated the campaign for adequate search and rescue support.

The same doctrinal considerations that made it difficult to send the Air Rescue Service to Thailand in support of air operations in Laos, also made it difficult to assign rescue units to Vietnam. Furthermore, the leadership at Air Rescue Service headquarters was not convinced that it had a legitimate wartime rescue mission.²⁹ Because their approach was for peacetime search and rescue and because they had no official wartime mission, Air Rescue Service planners had not planned for a wartime situation.³⁰

In South Vietnam political considerations also hindered the early involvement of rescue units. Farm Gate's role in combat was semi-covert and politically sensitive. Since U.S. aircrews were supposedly conducting training missions only, there should have been little chance that anyone would be shot down. The presence of regular search and rescue forces, however, complete with helicopters and HU-16 amphibians, would have advertised the existence of air operations with a casualty potential far greater than that to be expected in the course of normal flight training.³¹

The rescue vehicles in the 1961 Air Rescue Service inventory were ill-suited for search and rescue in jungles and mountains. The rescue concepts and limited fiscal resources of the late 1950s had forced the ARS to give up most of its helicopters. Acquisition of the local base rescue function

restored some choppers, but these HH-43 "Huskies" were primarily used in fire-fighting and picking up pilots who had bailed out in close proximity to an air base.

In December 1961 the Commander of the Pacific Air Rescue Center sent three officers and two enlisted men to Saigon to establish a Search and Rescue Center in the Air Operations Center at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The rescue personnel arrived at the operations center the next month only to find that there were no phones, desks, or chairs available for them in the prefabricated Jamesway huts that served as the control center for air strikes in Vietnam. After gathering the necessary phones, tables, and chairs, these men began operating as a coordinating center for rescue activities. In order to limit the magnitude of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, no provision had been made for the use of Air Rescue Service aircraft. To overcome this limitation the rescue coordinators contacted Army advisors in each of the four corps areas and obtained agreements whereby U.S. Army helicopters could be used to assist in 2d Air Division rescue efforts, provided they were not needed elsewhere.²²

The first Air Force casualties in Vietnam occurred when a twin-engine Fairchild C-123 Ranch Hand crop defoliation airplane crashed on February 2, 1962. Capt. Fergus C. Groves, Capt. Robert D. Larson, and SSgt. Milo B. Coghill died in that crash.²³ There was no record of any search and rescue effort. Nine days later the first Farm Gate aircraft was lost. Shortly before dawn on Sunday, February 11, a Farm Gate SC-47 with eight U.S. Air Force and Army advisors plus two Vietnamese left Saigon on a leaflet-dropping mission. At eight-thirty in the morning a province chief reported a twin-engine aircraft had crashed in the mountains near his village, about seventy miles northeast of Saigon. The Saigon search and rescue center arranged for a helicopter to carry a Vietnamese Army ground party to the crash area to locate the wreckage and search for survivors. They arrived by mid-afternoon and reported that the wreckage was the Farm Gate SC-47 and that all on board were dead. The next day a combined Air Force-Army search team at the crash site was puzzled to find only nine bodies instead of the ten manifested for the mission. Further investigation revealed that one of the two Vietnamese had decided, at the last minute, not to make the flight.²⁴

The number of U.S. and Vietnamese Air Force combat sorties increased rapidly in early 1962. At the beginning of the year the Vietnamese Air Force combat inventory consisted of twenty-two A-1 Skyraiders. Under the Military Assistance Program, thirty T-28s were delivered in early March. This increase in Vietnamese Air Force strength enabled Saigon to mount a fifty plane raid on a Viet Cong headquarters in the central highlands on May 27, 1962. During this same period, A-1 sorties increased from 150 in January to 390 in June.²⁵

As the Farm Gate T-28s and RB-26s pressed their low-level attacks, the

Viet Cong improved their countermeasures. The principal Viet Cong antiaircraft weapons were the 12.7-mm Soviet or Chinese-built heavy machinegun and small arms.³⁵ In the last four months of 1962, the enemy scored 89 hits against Farm Gate and other U.S. Air Force planes. In the first four months of 1963, this figure jumped to 257 as the Viet Cong increased their accuracy. The pilots found the enemy fire most deadly as they pulled out of their bomb runs below 1,000 feet.³⁷ Before the year ended the Air Force had lost six aircraft to enemy action.³⁸

In response to the increasing pace of air activity, the three officers and two noncommissioned officers at the search and rescue center at Tan Son Nhut were officially established as Detachment 3, Pacific Air Rescue Center, on April 1, 1962.³⁹ This lent a certain legitimacy to the First Air Rescue Service cadre and gave a sense of permanency to the rescue effort in Vietnam. Nevertheless, considerably more rescue personnel and helicopters were needed to pick up downed aircrew members, yet these were not forthcoming. The rescue controllers at Tan Son Nhut had to rely on the resources available: Farm Gate aircraft and a few Army H-21 and Marine H-34 helicopters. The Vietnamese Air Force possessed a limited chopper inventory which was available for rescue work, but the Vietnamese had no trained rescue personnel.⁴⁰

To facilitate rescue operations, South Vietnam and the United States signed the Joint Vietnamese/U.S. Search and Rescue Agreement in 1962. It established policies for mutual coordination and control of search and rescue efforts within the Republic of Vietnam.⁴¹ According to the agreement, the Vietnamese were responsible for civil search and rescue and for rescue operations for their own forces. Search and rescue efforts in support of U.S. forces became the responsibility of the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and the Commander, 2d Air Division.⁴² This agreement also defined procedural matters and emphasized the importance of cooperation and prompt action by any agency "to relieve distress wherever found."⁴³ This document meant little to the men flying combat missions in 1962 since both Vietnamese and American forces were ill-equipped to fulfill their responsibilities under the terms of this agreement.⁴⁴

Rescue operations varied greatly, with geography, weather, time of day, and the disposition of friendly and enemy forces as contributing factors. However, a general search and rescue pattern developed early in the Vietnam war. When an aircraft was overdue at its destination, this was reported to Detachment 3, Pacific Air Rescue Center at Tan Son Nhut. The rescue controller then asked the senior controller to have all available aircraft search for the crash site. As soon as the wreckage of the missing plane was found, the commander of Detachment 3 marshalled whatever forces he could for the rescue effort. As noted earlier, the Army and the Marines had agreed to make their helicopters available whenever they were not needed elsewhere. Usually, American forces were used for these rescue at-

tempts, but if they were unavailable, the search and rescue commander had to rely on the Vietnamese. Once the rescue force was on the way, the Detachment 3 commander would then fly to the crash area by chopper. If the site was located more than a hundred miles from Saigon, he took whatever transportation he could muster, usually a C-47 or C-123 to a base nearby.⁴³ He then assembled a small force and flew by helicopter to a clearing near the wreckage. Occasionally a Vietnamese Army company or even a battalion was required to secure the area before a landing party could be set down near the downed aircraft — the survivors or the bodies were carried back to the helicopter landing zone.⁴⁴

Some of the problems encountered during rescue attempts in the period before Air Rescue Service helicopters and trained rescue personnel reached Southeast Asia were illustrated in a rescue operation that occurred in October 1963. On the afternoon of October 8, GRAD OK 01 and GRAD OK 02, a pair of Farm Gate T-28s, rolled in on a target in the mountainous jungle area near the Laotian border west of Da Nang. The American pilot of GRAD OK 02 bore in low on his bomb run unaware that it was to be his last. The second pilot watched as GRAD OK 02 went out of control near the end of its dive and disintegrated upon impact. GRAD OK 01 returned to base and at the mission debriefing reported the aircraft down in the jungle near a swollen stream that flowed into the Buong. Maj. Alan W. Saunders, Commander, Detachment 3, Pacific Air Rescue Center, was notified at his office in Saigon. Saunders gathered the members of his rescue team, a two-man explosive ordnance detail, a flying safety officer, and a photographer. Within the hour they took off for Da Nang on a C-123.

When Saunders reached Da Nang he assumed the role of on-scene commander. Briefers told him that two U.S. Marine H-34s had flown to the crash site only a few hours earlier and disappeared in an area known as "V.C. [Viet Cong] Valley". This upped the ante.

At dawn Marine helicopters lifted two Vietnamese Infantry companies to the area of the downed aircraft. As the helicopters landed, enemy troops firing from the surrounding hillsides wounded three U.S. Marine crewmen and killed a Vietnamese soldier. Farm Gate T-28s, B-26s and a Vietnamese Air Force propeller-driven A-1 Skyraider responded by strafing the enemy positions. An American L-19 light observation plane directing the strike aircraft took a hit that punctured a fuel line and wounded the Vietnamese observer. The American pilot nursed his crippled craft with its suffering Vietnamese observer back to a forced landing in friendly territory. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese Army force landed and began hacking out a larger landing zone to facilitate future landings. When that task was finished the troops started working their way to the site of the H-34 crashes. They reached the downed helicopters the next morning, October 10, only to find the remains of 10 of the 12 persons who had been aboard the two aircraft. The other two, if they survived, were probably carried off by the Viet Cong.