

BAN ME THUOT EAST AIR FIELD AND CAMP CORYELL 1969-1970

**TUY, 31st SPS; BMT, 31st SPS, TDY DET 9, 619 TCS/SP
MARS RADIO STATION
© 2007 by [Ken de Russy](#)**

Ban Me Thuot, 1969-1970: I was USAF Security Police, one of eight or so, assigned to Det-9, 619th Tactical Control Squadron, TDY from Tuy Hòa Air Base from Oct through Dec 1969.

Our compound, with about 50 to 70 personnel, was about halfway down the runway next to where the Pterodactyl O-2 Birddogs aircraft were parked. I spent my whole time there either in the gun emplacement on top of the concrete radar tower, or in one of the gun emplacements in the corners of the compound. From the tower looking toward the Plantation there were gunships parked in revetments between our compound and the fence. To the left was the MP K-9 kennel and the PA&E Compound.

On the night of 10 Nov 1969, I had a spectacular view from the tower, the highest point on Camp Coryell, as 25 or so mortars and RPGs impacted in PA&E—seemingly everywhere. I heard reports of sappers that night, and there were reports circulating on our radio net that they were seen on the runway. We saw an RPG leave a launcher out in the plantation 150 meters or so out, and watched it fly straight at us. It passed the top of our tower thirty feet out at eye level and impacted at our compound's back gate. It freaks me out to this day. I can't imagine how all the choppers' guys handled all the action they saw. They sure have MY respect! I have an audio recording of the action that night including radio traffic of several different radio nets if anyone is interested.

Any other USAF folks out there? I am in contact with three other Security Policemen that served there:

Gary Hacker, Tom Sapio, and Dale Burkleo.

Merry Christmas to all who served at Camp Coryell, home of Stage Coach, 155th Assault Hel CO.

Ken de Russy



1. Arrival at Ban Me Thuot East Air Field and Camp Coryell: I volunteered for Vietnam and arrived at Tuy Hòa Air Base in late June 1969. About 25 miles away was the province capitol, central highlands, Ban Me Thuot East Airfield and Camp Coryell, not far from the Cambodian border.

**From: Bill Lumas
(WJ LUMAS)**

To: Ken de Russy

Was my last night in country after 15 months? Stayed out on bunker that night because it was a safer place to be. My hootch took three hits. Have photos of the damage and a piece of my 2nd flight hootch roof, complete with blue paint on it. My partner (crew chief) Ernie Plummer was in the hootch & got hit in the *behind*. They took him to the hospital before I could say goodbye or get his home address. Searched for him from time to time ever since. Found him last year, had great conversations. He was not well, and I made arrangements to bring him to the reunion with me, but his doctor said no. He died a few months ago. Sad that he passed but it was wonderful to speak with him after so many years; he was a very special person.

Bill Lumas



2) Ken de Russy in Ban Me Thuot Air Field and Camp Coryell, SP Tower. The Tower, and that is all I considered it, but you guys might well refer to it for what was contained within. All I saw it as was an Observation Post and an important one since it was the tallest OP on Camp Coryell from the road that passed the DET-9 compound on the northside.



The sandbagged position contained a .50 caliber machine gun, a recoilless rifle, starlight scope, flares, radios, and other sundry items. It was manned by an SP and if we were hit a second SP was added. There was someone else that served as a liaison when we got hit and operated a radio on another non-SP net. The second photo in the image with the fuel truck driving by is looking almost due north and the 155 AHC area is visible on the left.

3) Camp Coryell, Detachment-9. Home of the 155 (AHC) Aviation Helicopter CO: gunships and slicks. Within that area was a detachment 9/619th Tactical Control Squadron, USAF (maintained separation in flying aircraft and artillery).



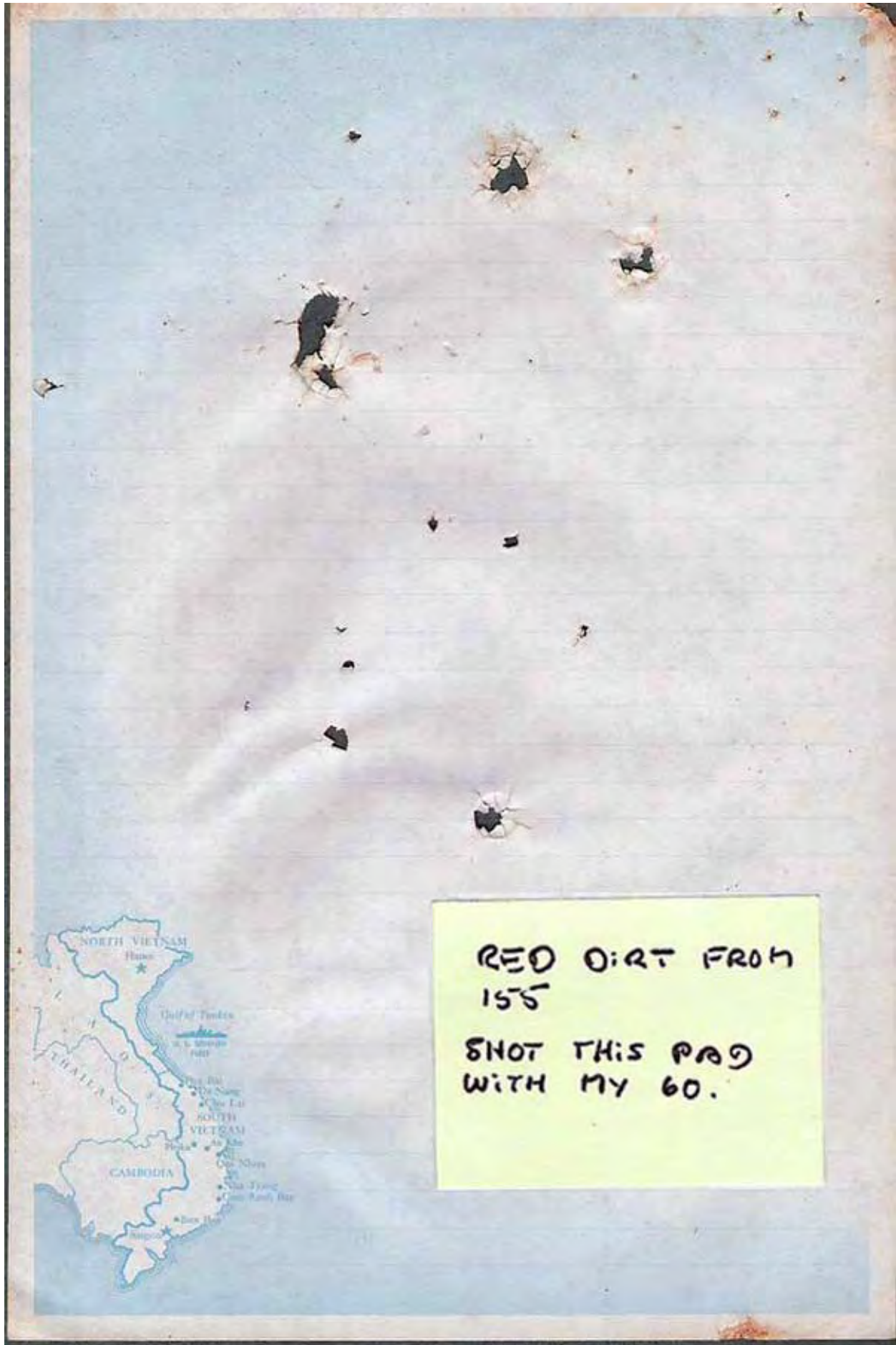
4) Camp Coryell. *Red dust blowing everywhere!*



5) Chi Com mortar fins and detonator, dug out of the ground.



6)



7)

4/25/97

DEAR KEN:

DID NOT GET YOUR FAX CORRECT. SENDING SOME BLACK & WHITE 155 PHOTOS, BLIMP SPECS & ODDS & ENDS.

TAPE IS FROM 3 DIFFERENT ATTACKS AT 1155 + RECORDING OF A FRUN.

HAVE LOT'S MORE STUFF. BEST WAY IS TO GET TOGETHER & TAKE PHOTO'S TO A KINKO'S FOR COLOR COPIES.

BLIMP TOURS OUT OF SANTA BARBARA WOULD BE A MONEY MAKER - KNOW ANY POTENTIAL INVESTOR / OPERATORS - BIG BUCKS FOR US!

LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING YOU!

YES - IT REALLY DID HAPPEN - THE BAD DREAM WAS COMING HOME.



MY REAL PROBLEM WITH BALOWIN AND MULLIN IS THEIR VERSION OF THE HISTORY OF 155 IS TOO MUCH OF A TRIBUTE TO THEMSELVES & THEIR DILGUSTIOUS OLD GRADUATE. WE LOST THE WAR AND 1/2 OF THE 155 SURVIVORS HAVE MENTAL PROBLEMS - TO THIS DAY.

REGARDS:

Bill Luma

8) Cobra Gunships.



9) Detachment-9.



10) Detachment-9.



11) Det-9, across the runway.



12) Downtown Ban Me Thuot.



13) Mortar damage. Top Left: That is an inert 122 Rocket I am standing next to. They were rather large especially when compared to an 81MM mortar!



14) MAC-V, Vietnam.



15) Middle Right:

Shot up Esso station that was kind of shocking to see. Right to the left of that image there is a crew of Vietnamese workers rebuilding the perimeter fence that was shot up in previous action.

Fence repair crews had plenty of work as the perimeter gunners usually just opened up when the first round came in. Of course, they took no care to avoid the fences! I suppose there was a logic to it as the VC used pre-located positions that were just outside the fence line. I remember stories of patrols finding the actual places where the base plates had made an impression in the ground. In fact, the routine was that they would fire some number of rounds and then relocate to another pre-located position so as give us less chance to zero in on their location. [Ken de Russy]

Photo Right: *Get that camera outta' my face!*



16) Senator Barry Goldwater visits Det-9, MARS radio station.



17) Senator Barry Goldwater visits Det-9, MARS radio station. *[If Senator Goldwater had won the presidency... would we have won too?]*



18) Peter Biasi, Dec. Cook, 1969.



19 News article:
Pacific Stars and Stripes.

Fire Destroys MACV Lodge

SAIGON (AP) — A former imperial hunting lodge housing the U.S. military and civil operations headquarters in Ban Me Thuot, capital of the central highlands, was leveled by fire Friday.

The huge two-story teakwood structure dated back to the mid-1950s, one of several hunting lodges built at one time or another for Bao Dai, during and after his reign as Vietnam's last emperor.

Since the early part of the war, it has been used as quarters and offices for the U.S. Military Assistance Command (MACV) headquarters at Ban Me Thuot.

About 200 Americans are based at Ban Me Thuot, most of them in and around the former lodge, but no casualties were reported in the fire, official sources said. Cause of the fire was unknown.

6 Pacific Stars & Stripes
Sunday, Dec. 21, 1969

20) SPS Detachment-9.



21) Ken de Russy: SP Tech School graduate, Lackland AFB, Texas, 19..



Ain't I sooooo Pur-taa!

We Take Care of Our Own