

Food for Thought

Cam Ranh Bay AB

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12th SPS, Cam Ranh Bay AB;

Thailand, NKP, 1972-1973

The old saying "*an army travels on its stomach*" is true. Uncle Sam does his best to ensure troops in the field are well fed. Today, troops in the field are issued Meals Ready To Eat or "MRE's" for short. I hear that current active duty folks refer to MRE's as Meals rejected by Ethiopians or Meals Rwandans Eat. I've never eaten a MRE, therefore I can not judge them.

I do have a definite opinion of the predecessor of the MRE: the C-Ration. Canned goodies in a box. SP folks are no stranger to C-Rats--Security Police had to eat C-Rats during training and while working on post. Most of the time there were alternatives, like getting food from the running Roach Coach, which would make the rounds of the training sites. Sometimes there was no choice.

In 1972 President Nixon's Vietnamization Program was in full swing and members of the 483rd SPS at Cam Ranh Bay AB AB, were busy providing OJT to ARVN soldiers. The ARVN were being trained to take over SP posts on the base perimeter, at checkpoints, and the gates. To say that training the ARVN was interesting would be an understatement, but that's another story.

While SP's were busy training the ARVN, our friends in the construction business were busy tearing down buildings. One of these buildings was the mess hall. Needless to say there were no cooks or hot food. C-Rats were a full time menu. My favorite meal was beans and franks, officially designated as a B-2 unit. The only problem with the B-2's was they came with Chesterfield cigarettes. No one would trade for those smokes. I had to give them to a local Mamasans that was always hangin' around. If I wanted my favorite smoke, Marlboros, I had to take another meal, like Ham and Eggs. The eggs were green and the taste would gag a maggot.

It was a real dilemma: Eat good or smoke good. Then again if you received a care package from home you could trade for lots of Marlboros. One day I discovered that American C-Rats weren't that bad at all. We were issued Korean C-Rats while manning a joint gate. Eventually we were sent over to the flight line and loaded onto a C-130. We were on our way to Thailand.

Upon our arrival in Bangkok I immediately became aware of certain smells. Could this be real? We were going to get hot food at last. Delicious, simply delicious. I ate Ice Cream for the first time in months. I'll never forget those C-Rats.

Steve Ray lives in Huntsville, and presumably eating well today!

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