

Remarks to the 15th Annual Reunion of the Vietnam Security Police Association And the American Airmen of the 56th Security Forces Squadron

Thank you all, for this opportunity to talk to such a huge gathering of people that I consider to all be heroes. My name is Phil Carroll; I'm a former Air Force Staff Sergeant, and Security Police Sentry Dog Handler.

I'm sure you know that America's involvement in the war in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand lasted for many long years, starting more than 50 years ago. Thousands of Air Force Air Police and Security Police protected the front-line combat air bases throughout South Vietnam and Thailand over the course of the war.

One of those bases was Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base – or NKP. It was the closest US Air Force base to communist North Vietnam. The base was well positioned for its many missions, but easily accessible to sapper attacks and within range of known heavy weapons at communist positions in Laos.

The 56th Air Commando Wing was at NKP, later becoming the 56th Special Operations Wing. As always, the Skycops - Air Police and Security Police - were part of it. I was one of them, as were a number of our Association members here today.

In some ways we were like you. We weren't draftees - we volunteered to serve in the Air Force, and for the Air Police and Security Police career fields. Some of us went on to volunteer for K-9, and some volunteered to serve in the war zone. In at least one sad way it was like the wars you're involved in today - some of us didn't make it home.

I have a plaque I'm going to present to you in a few minutes but first I want to read you the names of some of those men who were not able to return to their country and their families and their fellow Airmen because their lives ended while they were at NKP, serving their country in wartime, in a foreign land.

- A3C Roosevelt Harden Jr. 11 JUL 1967
- Sgt Charles R. Morgan 12 AUG 1968
- Sgt Robert M. Robertson 27 JAN 1970
- Sgt Robert A. Palmer 02 MAY 1970
- A1C Clarence McKnight 12 JUN 1973
- CMSgt John B. Davis 14 JUN 1973
- Sgt Melvin J. Blakeney 07 JUL 1973

I need to pause for a moment, because now we come to 1975. At NKP, some volunteers from the 56th Security Police Squadron were beginning to be trained as an assault force, outside the wire. The turmoil and communist rebels in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand threatened the stability of all three countries. The 56th SP's were among those training for Operation Eagle Pull, which was preparing to evacuate the embassies of all three countries at once if the balloon went up.

Cambodia collapsed first, and Operation Eagle Pull was triggered there on 12 April, 1975. The 56th SP's were not assigned, but the mission was a success and served as a dress rehearsal for the next historical evacuation, in just two weeks. On 29 and 30 April, Operation Frequent Wind, the final evacuation of Saigon by Americans was successfully carried out. It was supposed to be the end of the Vietnam War – but not quite two weeks after that, a Cambodian gunship seized the American

cargo vessel Mayaguez on the high seas, and the 56th Security Police Squadron was the closest combat-ready unit that an angry and impatient President Ford could call on – in part because of their specialized training.

Security Police troops at NKP were asked to volunteer for an urgent rescue mission, and although it was beyond what even they were trained for, 75 were chosen from among the many who stepped forward. Weapons were issued, including some the men weren't trained on. Aircrews loaded the troops aboard the Special-Ops helos. Some current members of the Vietnam Security Police Association were among those not chosen to go, and they watched their friends load up. A few are here today.

About 2115 the night of 13 May, 1975, the helos took off from NKP and headed toward U-Tapao in southern Thailand, the closest U.S. air base to where the Mayaguez and its kidnapped crew were being held. All 18 Security Police volunteer rescuers and five aircrew aboard perished when the CH-53 helo "Knife 13" crashed in the dark jungle 36 miles from NKP.

These brave men were our brothers ... and yours. They were:

- Sgt Jimmy P. Black
- SSgt Bobby G. Collums
- Sgt Gerald A. Coyle
- Sgt Thomas D. Dwyer
- Sgt Bob W. Ford
- Sgt Gerald W. Fritz – K9
- TSgt Jackie D. Glenn
- Sgt Darrell L. Hamlin
- Sgt Gregory L. Hankamer
- Sgt David A. Higgs
- SSgt Faleagafulu Ilaoa – K9
- Sgt Michael D. Lane
- Sgt Dennis W. London – K9
- A1C Robert P. Mathias
- Sgt William R. McKelvey
- Amn Edgar C. Moran II
- A1C Tommy R. Nealis
- Sgt Robert W. Ross

They were American Airmen.

They were Warriors.

They answered their Nation's call.

Major Borders: If you would please accept this memorial plaque from all the members of the Vietnam Security Police Association.

We will always remember these men.

Now, I also would like to talk for just a minute to the men and women of the 56th Security Forces Squadron about “you.” All the members of the Vietnam Security Police Association believe in you and have tremendous admiration for how you carry out your mission.

But beyond that I have something even more personal, from all 67 members of the VSPA who served with the 56th at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base.

Would the Vietnam War Veterans of the 56th please stand up for a minute? Although we’re all part of the VSPA, we created this plaque on our own as a message from us to you because you’re “our own.” Its message is simple:

“Your professional excellence honors our legacy.”

We want you to remember that, as the years go by and as you come and go from this squadron. We’re very proud of you, and of sharing this legacy with you. After all ...

We were American Airmen.

We were Warriors.

We answered our Nation’s call.

Major Borders, if you would please accept this plaque on behalf of all the American Airmen of the 56th Security Forces. Please note it has on the reverse side a letter listing all the VSPA members who served with the 56th, and it’s been signed by the few who were able to come visit you here today.

Hooah!

9 OCT 2009

Phil Carroll – VSPA Life Member #336

Takhli RTAFB, 355th SPS K-9, Charlie 2M45, 1970

Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, 56th SPS K-9, Tina X768, 1971

