



In Plane Sight...

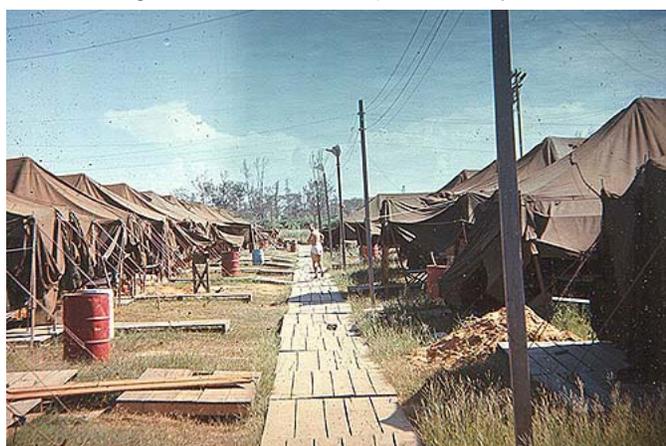
POW * MIA

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Đà Nẵng AB, 1965.

"There's your tents, men--go get'em!" and the Air Force Air Police Sergeant got back in his AP pickup and drove off.

Photo: Đà Nẵng AB, 23rd ABG/Air Police (MAAT/Military Assistance Advisory Group), tent-city.



With ninety Air Police at Đà Nẵng Air Base, it was safe to say: "This Ain't Kansas" or any US Air Force Base in the states. We assembled our tents with the x-boy scouts taking the lead. For the next year, we would see the squadron change names four times (same personnel, and always adding new-guys). My tent faced the asphalt road, as did the other new tents. The view to the rear generally was a C-130 with its butt end pointed right at us and reeving its engines in preflight engine testing. Eating red-clay dust courtesy of the C-130's was the order of the day--and night--until the squadron built up enough to start a second row of tents, then a third, and more until it was fifty yards deep and nearly a hundred yards long.

Years after my DEROS in 1966, I would learn that the bone-yard of O-1E Birddog aircraft battle-damaged, crashed, worn-out and mortar-sapper destroyed planes was common place at every Air Base in Vietnam and Thailand. I've never forgotten the dozen or so Birddogs scrapped and often cannibalized by crew chiefs looking for parts to keep their babies flying. The number of destroyed aircraft yo-yo'd up and down... some virtually gone in a day. Newly-dead Birddogs were added and others seemingly melted into the earth as parts were scavenged to help other aircraft remain airworthy. Somehow it only seemed right those broken O1-E Birddogs that served and paid the price could somehow be reborn and fly again.

For going on 50 years, I've visualized a broken airframe somewhere in jungle-forest (... and they were jungles, although decades later we politely call them Rain Forests). The missing Birddog would be decaying like last year's dead-fall, urged along by the everlasting torrential rains, creeks, streams and rivers. I never thought of the pilot as standing around his *downed* aircraft. In fact, he was just nowhere around--*fate unknown*--whether POW, MIA, or still strapped into the pilot's seat waiting for someone to *Welcome Him Home* to a burial in his hometown. *If only all fallen airmen could somehow fly again.*

Photo: Đà Nẵng AB, 23rd ABG/Air Police, tent-city. O-1 Birddog boneyard of battle- damaged and destroyed aircraft. Freedom Hill 327 looms in the background.



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