

VIETNAM

PHAN RANG AB 35th SPS

Mile Walker
"That's Charlie Over There!"

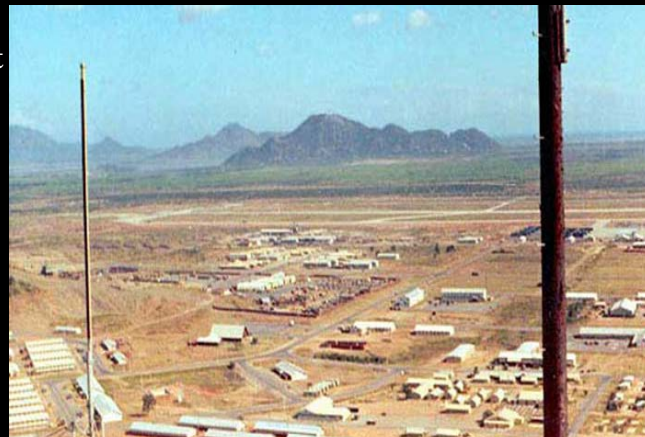
by Howard Gover
1967-1968

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From December 1967 to December 1968, I worked Panther Flight with the 35th SPS at Phan Rang Air Base. Members of the Reserve SAT (RSAT) would post out from the barracks area of the 35th SPS.

Photo Right: RSAT posts; Ralph Slater with cigarette in his mouth.



Other Airmen were assigned to the Heavy Weapons Section, and used vehicles like the Rubber Duck (Photo Left), a light armored response vehicle at 35th SPS barracks area.



And other Panther Flight personnel manned fixed posts like the new bunker at the river where fresh water was pumped to Phan Rang AB through a pipeline.

Photo Left: Fresh water Pump Bunker, at River .

As an Sgt (E-4), most of my time was spent posted in towers on the east

perimeter, where I had an encounter with Captain Garth Wright, in the early morning hours of a shift in the spring of 1968. That was one of the nights augmentees were posted on several towers due to intelligence reports of possible enemy activity against the base. I was happy to have the CO of another soul on my post at Juliet-8. My partner that night was one of the guys from the Red Horse unit.



Photo below:

Sgt Gover getting ready for overnight Juliet tower posting on the East perimeter of Phan Rang AB.



With the psychological boost provided by the illumination from a full moon, and the CO of my Red Horse friend, I felt pretty comfortable for a change, since only one person usually occupied each tower. My usual routine was to heat C-rations on a stove made from a discarded B-3 ration can. In need of a stove, I climbed down from the tower (M16 in hand, not wearing my flak vest or helmet) in search of a B-3 can. Soon after beginning my search, I heard the sound of a rapidly approaching jeep. Looking toward Juliet-7, I saw the vehicle approaching and flew back up the ladder as fast as I could. With the illumination provided by the full moon, I was certain the occupants of the jeep had seen my hasty return to the confines of the tower.

By the time I put my helmet and flak jacket on, Captain Wright and a rather heavy Staff Sergeant from the back office were in the tower with me. After we exchanged intense stares, the Captain said: "Well, I'm waiting." At this point I reported my post. After a moment, Captain Wright waved his arm and pointed his finger at the long perimeter fence line as he exclaimed, "Good Lord, Man, this isn't the Sahara Desert! That's Charlie out there!" I replied, "Yes, sir. I know that." Moments after Captain Wright departed, I learned that my buddy, Sgt Connerly, who posted on Juliet-7, had also been out of his tower when Captain Wright arrived to check Connerly's post.



Composite photo view from SPS Post Golf-3, looking East, located atop Nui Dat Mountain, inside Phan Rang AB. Juliet area perimeter, with its many Towers, can be seen in the far distance.

When Connerly and I turned in our weapons that morning, we were instructed to report to Security Police Operations. We reported as ordered, and found ourselves in the presence of the SSgt who had accompanied Captain



Wright on his post checks earlier. The SSgt put us in his jeep and drove us to the Juliet sector perimeter and handed us each an axe. He pointed out to us the many thick patches of cactus growing around the area, and said: "Start chopping."

Photo Left: Cactus, so common in the area, is visible in the foreground, near a house under construction.

After cutting down countless clumps of cactus, our friend the SSgt drove us back to Central Security Control and instructed us to report for our scheduled posts on the perimeter that night. When we got outside, we looked at each other and

simultaneously expressed the same thought: *this is a setup!* It seemed to us the plan was to catch us asleep on post

that night.

When we got back to the barracks just about sundown, we explained the situation to our Section II Supervisor, TSgt Richardson. TSgt Richardson listened to us, and told us not to worry about the matter, and to *not report for post* that night. We did not post out, and we never heard another word about the incident.

To this day, I vividly recall my meeting with Captain Wright and I maintain the utmost respect for supervisors like TSgt Richardson. To put all this in perspective, I have no evidence that Captain Wright directed the cactus-cutting detail and the subsequent order for us to post out with no sleep between shifts. I prefer to believe that **Captain Wright** [who later earned the Air Force Cross] had no knowledge of how the matter was handled. I must say that incidents like this only deepened the rift between the troops posted on the perimeter and the "back office."



Having read my story of one-night-on-post at Phan Rang, some of you may not have expected to learn that I returned to active duty as a 2LT in June 1973, proudly serving in the Security Police until my retirement in 1991.

Photo Left: Sgt Gover, in his *second life* as a Security Police Captain, Shift Commander at 8th SPS, Kunsan AB, Korea, 1977.

"Don't judge until you've walked a mile in his shoes." *author unknown.*
[Captain Howard Gover would walk more than a mile in Captain Garth Wright's shoes.]

Howard Gover and Garth Wright are both members of the Vietnam Security Police Association.

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