



## **CONVOY!** **Phan Rang Air Base** **to Đà Lạt - 1966**

© 2009 by **Newell Swartz**  
**PR, 35th SPS; PC, 37th SPS,**  
**1966-1967**  
**VSPA Life Member 262**

*Photo: SSgt Newell Swartz waiting outside Cam Rahn Bay for convoy to form up to return to Phan Rang.*

**Lead gun jeep for Convoy Phan Rang-Đà Lạt:** *SSgt Swartz is M60 gunner and Lt Thompson is Convoy Commander. I must have had delusions of immortality: how would anyone possibly survive an ambush on the road we were traveling?*

Welcome to Phan Rang, *Gray Eagle Camp* (... say what? I am supposed to be assigned to Phan Rang Air Base).

**Phù Cát, Phan Rang and Đà Lạt Convoy photos:** The first day photos when we (53 SPs) arrived to open Phù Cát and also Phan Rang as a Gray Eagle Camp.

About 13 Jan 1966, SSG John Achelpohl and I thought our plane, a C-123 had been shot down as it dived toward the runway at Bong Song Airport located adjacent to what would later become runways for Phan Rang Air Base. We were tired, hungry and thirsty. We had just spent the last three days hitching rides starting at Alameda Naval Air Station, CA finally ending up at Phan Rang. We got a jeep ride over to the Air Police area which was a few ugly looking disorganized tents set up on concrete pads. I couldn't wait to get something cold to drink, get assigned a tent and take a shower. There wasn't even anything that even looked like an orderly room to report in to. There is this group of about ten guys just standing around and I said where do we report in. One guy said you just did. I asked where our tent is and he said you are looking at it, pointing to a huge burlap bag with a tent that had to weigh several hundred pounds. I walked over and tried to move it and it didn't even budge. I looked at John who is the eternal doer and optimist and he said, let's get started.

We picked up a few of the poles and knew we were in big trouble. After a few minutes, the guys started laughing and said they would give us a hand. I asked where we could get a cold drink and they said there is none. I said well where is the snack bar. There is none. I said well what about a glass of cold water. They said there isn't any. The water you can get out of the trailer or from the bag over there which cools the water by condensation. I go get a drink of this water which is the temperature of blood. You can drink a gallon but it doesn't quench your thirst. I don't know why but I am ready to panic. Never in the civilized world have I been somewhere where I couldn't quench my thirst even in the deserts of Turkey and Libya.

Welcome to the world of six-holers, pee tubes driven into the ground, c-rations and nothing cold to drink. Tent ropes are a hazard for the drunk or unwary because they leave a nasty rope burn. Electrical cables on the ground! What do we do when the monsoon comes? Last tent in the row can't see zip anyway because the bulb is too dim.

I get adjusted to the sweat and grime and carrying enough equipment to qualify for a Panama pack horse up Nui Dat Hill every night at sunset and come down at sunrise. One morning I thought I would have breakfast at the mess tent. I go over and sweat is just rolling off this cook's face onto an old fashioned field kitchen grill. I asked what was for breakfast. "Coffee, no sugar, no cream and pancakes, no butter, no syrup". I asked what else. He says "That's it".

I get over to the tent for a couple of hours sleep. By 0930 the tent is so hot, I'm still soaking in sweat. It's either head for "The Strip" or go crazy in frustration at being thirsty and sweating so bad I can't sleep due to the heat. After a couple of beers, I walk out back of the bar to the "Restroom"; a pit five feet by five feet and no telling how deeply filled with (how do I word this) used beer. I have to get close but not too close because Dude if you fall in there you will dissolve before you can crawl out—and no one will ever know you're missing in action.

Well, back to the camp because guardmount for Nui Dat and the other outposts come early since you have to walk up there and after dark, you will be in serious danger of breaking a leg or worse and you have to have your equipment laid out so you know where it is and what's yours. But you get used to it (or learn to put up with it) and take convoys to break the monotony.

I knew Phan Rang was the 366th APS for awhile, and before that it was a 1969-something Combat Support Group from Oct 1965 to early 1966, then became the 366th SPS. I was looking for my per diem voucher when I hitchhiked over there. I still have a copy somewhere which I sent to John Achelpohl who died last year [2011]. We hitchhiked over there together. I was also looking for a copy of our original orders to Phù Cát from Phan Rang which I was hoping to find.

Bob is probably right. To tell you the truth, Phan Rang was so primitive I don't think I ever saw a squadron sign or unit emblem. I never went to the orderly room which was just a tent, Guardmount was a drift down to the tent where the Panther Flight Commander assigned posts for that night, sundown to sunup on most of them. Bonner was a Lt when I saw him, which was rare. Those guys all worked days and I worked night except for convoy duty which I liked.

When I saw your post, I thought it might be Nui Dat but I compared the photos and it was just not a lot of resemblance. When I was there, there was no road up Nui Dat Hill [in 1966] there was a faint trail which you humped up and made sure you got there before

been driven into the ground and a sandbag bunker about where the K-9 sign is located if that is Nui Dat. I never saw a K-9 kennel anywhere around Nui Dat.

The 101st abutted our camp and they had tangle foot between us. I don't know if that was to keep us out or the VC out but a huge Bengal tiger came through there one night and a troop from the 101st killed it with a grenade. Close huh. If you can throw a grenade and get him, think about how fast he could be ripping your head off. They brought the tiger over to our camp the next morning. It was in the back of a weapons carrier with the head slumped up against the cab and the hind quarters slumped up on the tailgate.

Nui Dat was on the west side of our camp, the 101st was to our south and their artillery was about south of Nui Dat. You could hear the shells whooshing through the air when they had fire missions and prayed they didn't have any "short" rounds. Nui Dat was the southernmost hill, and there were two others that we manned just north and west of our Gray Eagle Camp. That is where the bomb dump was or temporarily was. The base dump was over in that area also. I am thinking the hill you show is one of those two.

Vietnamese civilians used to sneak into the dump to scavenge and they became pretty accustomed to being yelled at, flares popped over them in the daytime and pointing guns at them. I was there one day when a K-9 handler turned his dog loose on them. The dog took off like a flash and when he caught up to them he just bounded along with them like a dog waiting for one of them to throw a ball. The handler was pissed off at the dog and embarrassed. We laughed until we almost peed our pants. That damn dog would bite one of us but not one of those Vietnamese running from him.

Bob Sullivan was a good CO, he took care of us and didn't screw guys around unless you really got out of line. But he has selective memory on some of this stuff like our first Thanksgiving at Phù Cát, standing outside in a heavy downpour getting served out of the side of two 18 wheelers with steam tables inside. The rain washed the food off your tin tray before you could get to cover. He read it somewhere or we were talking about it and he said he didn't remember anything like that. I told him he was probably over in the Red Horse area with Bruce Pritchett eating dinner with them or with the Colonel. He also didn't know we used to walk down to Highway One and hitchhike into Qui Nhon and spend the night (the first couple of times with our M16, but we were afraid of getting drunk and losing them so about the fourth time we didn't take them anymore). Nor about our baths in the river, the first couple of days (Sam Lewis or Van Digby might know because they were there after the roads were built).

The purpose for us being on Nui Dat was in case the VC lobbed mortars over the top of Nui Dat from the side away for the base. There were mortar sheets out in the valley and we would use those to call in artillery from the 101st, so I don't think the kennels were on the far side of Nui Dat.

Newell.

**Photo of the 35th Air Police Tent City area.** Check out the overhead wiring with wires crossing and coming down to the ground. Also tent ropes cause painful injuries for new troops and drunks. This was called a *Grey Eagle Camp*.



**Photo of bunkers outside tents.** Sgt Leon Corn, *Panther Flight* and Convoy duty on bunker.



**Photo Right: SSgt Newell Swartz, USAF & Spec Grover Aderholt, 101st Airborne; both halfway around the world, and grew up across the street from each other in Brandywine, Md. Who would have thunk it?**



**LEFT: Lead Convoy Gun Jeep, Phan Rang-Đà Lạt.**



SSgt Swartz is M60 gunner and Lt. Thompson is Convoy Commander. I must have had delusions of immortality. How would anyone possibly survive an ambush on the road we were traveling?

**Left: SSgt Newell Swartz** waiting outside Cam Rahn Bay to form up Convoy's return to Phan Rang.



**Photo from atop Nui Dat Hill** facing East over the 101st (right side), and Grey Eagle Camp (left). South China Sea in background. One night, a 101st soldier killed a fully grown tiger which was walking thru the tangle-foot which separated their camp from ours, by using a grenade while he was on guard duty. They brought the tiger in the bed of a weapons carrier (like a one ton truck with stake bed) over to our camp the next day, probably because they thought we wouldn't believe them otherwise. The tiger's head was against the cab of the truck and the hindquarters was slumped up on the tailgate. You had to just stop and think what you would do in a similar situation. Shoot and just wound him and you have problems, throw a grenade and spook him and he can cover a lot of ground before the grenade goes off.

If he is that close -- *he's not afraid of men.*



Photo of SSgt Swartz (camo) and another AP walking to an outpost about one mile southwest of the base and South of the Nui Dat Hill outpost which is located on the west perimeter of the base. Equipment is usually M60 w/2cans of ammo and swivel mount for M60, each man M/16 w/120 rounds of ammo, hand flares, grenades, PRC 25 radio for 101st Airborne to call in artillery, c-rations, canteens, ponchos, (could have used a Panama pack horse).



Photo from atop Nui Dat Hill which is located on the west perimeter of the base. Three man outpost from sundown to sunup with M60 with swivel mount, 2 cans of M60 Ammo, Each man with M16 w/120 rounds, hand flares, PRC 25 radio, canteens of water, c-rations, grenades, ponchos and whatever else you wanted to carry for yourself, flashlights, knives etc.

**TOP PHOTO:** Photo of the three- man outpost south of Nui Dat Hill  
outpost manned from sundown to sunup only. Scorpions in the rocks and  
one morning we killed a nine foot long rock-cobra. No soft spots at this  
outpost which made for a long night. Foxhole *blastable*, not *dig-able*.



**BELOW:** Phan Rang  
1966 N. Swartz is a  
photo of the foxhole  
on Nui Dat Hill, a lap of  
luxury compared to the  
other outpost. Three  
man post. One sleep,  
two awake (oops).  
Primary purpose was  
observation to locate  
mortars which VC could  
lob over Nui Dat Hill  
into Grey Eagle Camp  
and 101st Airborne  
Base Camp.

PRC 25 radio to be used  
to direct artillery from  
101st onto VC mortars  
which would be located  
by mortar sheets in the  
valley below Nui Dat  
Hill. Second purpose  
was obviously  
defensive, but K-9 posts  
were located between  
us and base camp.





**Gun jeep** having to force traffic to very edge of drop off on mountain road. Edge is soft from rain.



**Ambush Heaven,** potholes for mines, thick foliage for claymores and machine guns.

Three weeks after our convoy, another convoy carrying the equipment we transported from Cam Ly and Ling Cong Airports to Đà Lạt was devastated in an ambush on a mountain highway like this.



**LEFT:**  
**Top heavy over loaded**  
**Vietnamese bus on very edge**  
**of drop-off.** Everybody held  
their breath.

**BELOW:**  
**Convoy from Phan Rang to Đà**  
**Lạt in the mountains of the**  
**Central Highlands.** "S-curves  
have a new meaning especially for  
the 40' low boy tractor-trailer in  
the convoy.

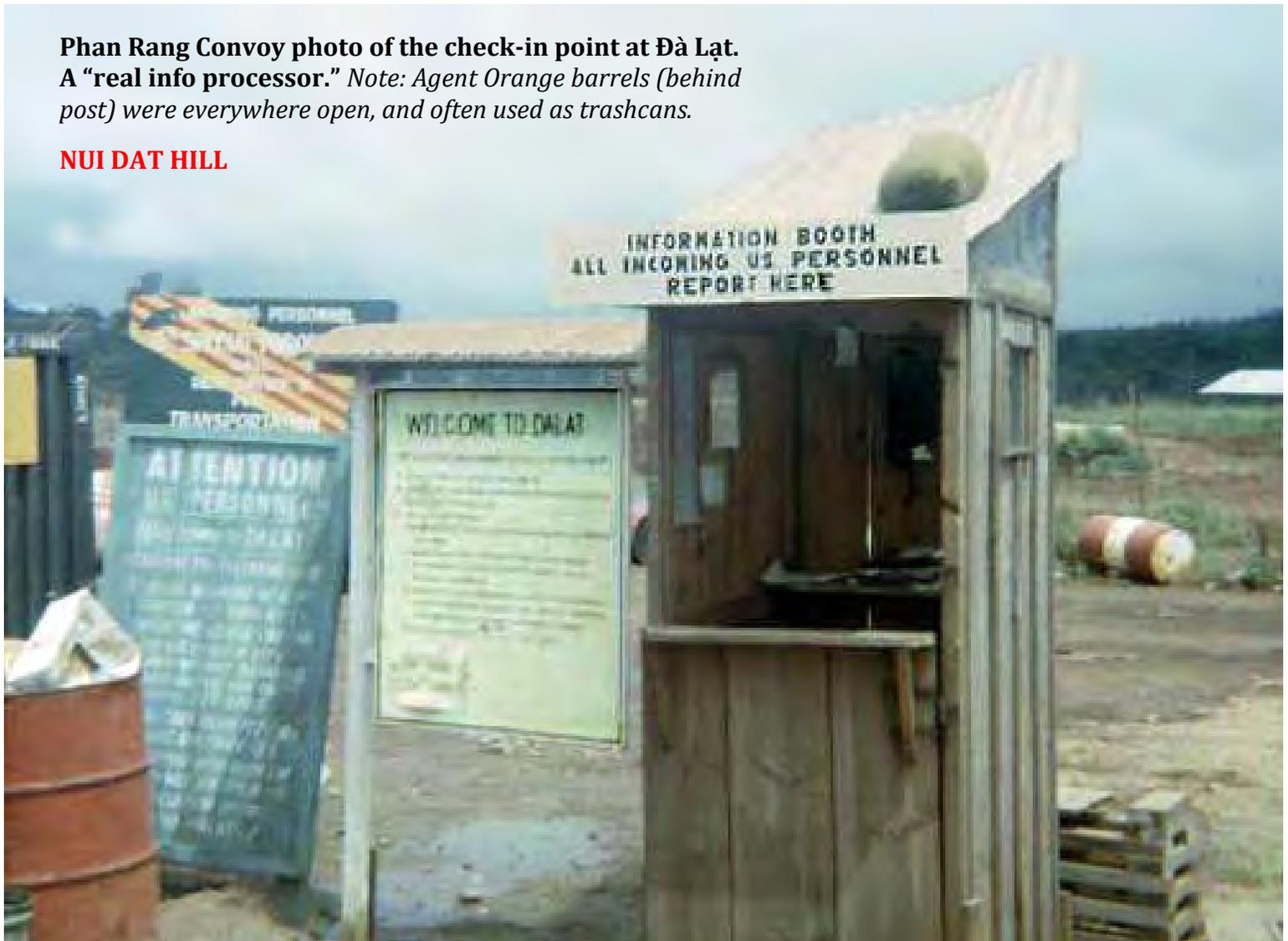




**Photo of “Cowboy Swartz out of Phoenix, AZ aboard Uncle Ho” who is now upset and took off down the road with Swartz for the 8 second ride.**

**Phan Rang Convoy photo of the check-in point at Đà Lạt.**  
A “real info processor.” *Note: Agent Orange barrels (behind post) were everywhere open, and often used as trashcans.*

**NUI DAT HILL**



**Photos of SSgt Swartz, who stepped off the jeep onto the back of the bull who appeared gentle.**



**Photo of a Vietnamese four legged tow truck.**

