

# PHAN RANG...

## A Mess Hall Christmas!

by Carl Tripp

**35th SPS (Air Police), Phan Rang, Vietnam - 1967:** Believe it or not, it was a *very cold* night on the outskirts of Phan Rang Air Base that Christmas night in 1967. Most of us had been scurrying earlier, prior to Guardmount, to find a jacket or a extra shirt---actually, anything to keep warm. I mean, 68°F was COLD, and we weren't used to it.

We were all hoping for an uneventful Christmas, since we had been told that a Christmas cease fire had been established. Later, we found out that the only people it had been established with was ourselves. At midday we were all woken up from our fitful sleep (we worked nights) to be told that the new chow hall would be serving *real food!* WOW, wonder and excitement were in our eyes as we hurriedly jumped into our boots and ran over to the new, gleaming building which had yet to serve an ounce of food. *Rumors* ran amok about *turkey dinners, pumpkin pie, and best of all--milk!*

Into the chow hall we rushed; trays and silverware were grabbed; new trays were set down in hushed silence onto new shiny chrome rails (*just like the real world!*); and up to the smiling cooks we moved.

Suddenly, just as I got to the cook's station, near the front of the line, a loud *SSS@!#%* rang out. The cooks were handing everyone a box of C rations---just like we had every day, every night, day-in and day-out! I was instantly tight-jawed... then at sudden peace as a smiling cook handed me a box of C's (*rations, not candy*) and wished everyone a Merry Christmas. I realized that it was only rumors that had promised hot *meals from mom* (everything we were homesick for), and not the cooks that had worked hard and still could sincerely wish us Season's Greetings.

That night at China-3, a listening post (LP) at the northern end of the base, some Aussie Canberra bombers were taking off when I noticed some green tracers floating upwards towards the planes. *HEY*, I thought, *didn't those commie jerks hear about the cease-fire!* I called in to HQ and was told to contact the local ROC (Republic of Korea) fire base and give them artillery readings. After several minutes of hopeless pidgin talk with an operator who didn't understand english, I finally was talking with a English-speaking ROC Lieutenant. We didn't have any sector maps of the area, so the conversation went something like: "*Up 2 clicks ... Now left 1 click---Whoops---back right a half a click.*" Anyhow, the tracers stopped, the artillery stopped, the flares died out, and it was dead calm. To myself, I started singing Silent Night, and we didn't have any more trouble the rest of my shift. It even seemed to warm up a few degrees.

About midnight, I called in and wished everyone at HQ a Merry Christmas and the dispatcher put us all on the air as echoes of "MERRY CHRISTMAS" came in from all corners of the base.

I wish everyone who reads this a Merry Christmas and a hope that you have found Peace in your hearts.

*We Take Care of Our Own*

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