

# 6258th AP/Det, 1st Mobile Comm Grp

## Vietnam

Phan Rang AB: RVN, 6258th CSG/AP c.01 Oct 1965-1966

### The 6258th/AP DET-HQ, Combat Support Group PHAN RANG AIR BASE/Group HQ

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**The 6258th/AP DET-HQ, Combat Support Group**, was the first home for the Air Police assigned to Phan Rang AB: RVN starting in Oct 1965. The Air Police were assigned to the Group HQ.

I arrived in Dec of 1965 and there were 13 enlisted personnel and two officers there when I arrived. One of the officers was CAPT Reg Maisey who returned to RVN in time for the Tet season of 1968 when he was killed while trying to get ammo to one of his bunkers. (He received the Air Force Cross for this heroic action and - personal opinion - had he been on flight status he would have won the Medal of Honor). The other officer was 1LT Fred Rieling. They were both TDY to Phan Rang and left soon after I arrived, to the best of my knowledge. (Memories for that kind of detail get a bit fuzzy after 35 years).

The 6258th was commanded by one of the "wildest" and most beloved officers I've ever had the pleasure to work for. COL Ben Matlick was responsible for getting Phan Rang built and he gave us the impression that the sun went up when the cops ran it up - and God help anyone that tried to mess with "his" cops. (He was so respected that about 90% of the 600+ cops volunteered to go with him to Phù Cát when he finished at Phan Rang).

COL Ben gave us the support we wanted and made sure that we had first "dibs" on whatever we needed and he really was good at looking the other way when we needed to find needed supplies and equipment. For example, anyone remember the M151 jeep with the 66K5432 hood number? Uh - my last four of my serial number at the time - why, it was 5432 of course! (We used real serial numbers not the SSAN now in use).

We had a small perimeter around the compound and the runway area was the responsibility of the RVN forces until we received more troops in Jan of 66. The runway was PSP and the famous CO RMK/BRJ was building the "real" runway and the permanent housing.

The cops were living in hooches we built ourselves - first basic tents on concrete pads and then we framed them in. Seems to me we had 10 cops or so per hooch and we managed to survive.

One special thing I remember was that the first Purple Heart awarded at Phan Rang went to a Dog Handler that met a punji-stick the hardway. Now, this may have been after we became the 35th APS, but I tend to remember that COL Ben made the presentation.

On 8 Feb 1966 the squadron's designation was changed and we became the 35th APS and the rest, as they say, is history.

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**OFFICIAL HISTORY & LINEAGE of the 6258th/AP DET-HQ, Combat Support Group** is unknown. What little is known is courtesy of the [1st Mobile Communications Group & 1882nd Communications Squadron](#).



"Sand Bag Crew - Guard Post at Ft Cross" (Article from Intercom Paper 6 May 66) A2C William Banks 6258th AP, SSgt Tillman B. Johnson, MSgt Nelson T. Cross, A1C Floyd W. Scheer, A1C Ronald A. Watkins) Phan Rang, RVN - Jan/Apr 66 – Team 56-65



**Comm Build-Up**- Extract from AFCS Intercom article May 6, 1966 "Emergency Communications--Business of the Far Flung Black Hats in the Pacific"

[\*\*1st Mobile Communications Group & 1882nd Communications Squadron\*\*](#)

The [1st Mobile Communications Group Team 56-65](#) came to Phan Rang with its own equipment and the basic necessities for sustaining life. Food consisted only of C-Rations until the base-support facilities moved in 30 days behind the 1st Mobile Black Hats. The bare-base support facility is known as the Grey Eagle Cantonment Package and consists of food, medical and living facilities plus the men to use and administer the supplies.

### **Phan Rang AB**

Phan Rang Air Base is not a new base for air operations. During World War II, the Japanese operated from a 3,500 foot runway at a site not far from the present base. Team 56-65, composed of 60 men, upon arrival at Phan Rang immediately began the gigantic task of filling 45,000 sandbags and putting each one into place. These sandbags made a revetted fort large enough for two communication vans, several power units and two [Jamesway huts](#). This fort became the center of the 1st Mobile operations and included a complete line of mobile communications equipment.

### **Fort Cross**

This communications complex soon became known as "[Fort Cross](#)," named after MSgt Nelson T. Cross, team NCOIC. This honor was bestowed upon Sergeant Cross by fellow-team-members because of his devotion and loyalty to the team. Sergeant Cross, 6 feet 5 inches tall and weighing 245lbs., the Air Force Judo Champ for 1965, is now teaching the art of throwing sandbags instead of people. Often, he became the final link in a chain of sandbag throwers in building revetting walls. As the wall reached six feet he would move into the key position and stack each sandbag to a summit of eight feet.

First Mobile equipment, inside Fort Cross, ranges from a single side band radio which is carried in a suitcase, to a communications van that weighs 17,000 pounds.

The initial equipment and personnel required to set up communications at Phan Rang were flown in to Cam Ranh Bay AB, Vietnam, by five C-130s and two C-124s; one ship was also used in the movement. After the equipment was off-loaded at Cam Ranh Bay AB, it was trucked to Phan Rang, 30 miles south of Cam Ranh Bay AB.

After the final shipment of 1st Mobile equipment, a Ground Control Approach unit, (GCA), was flown to the new Phan Rang Air Base in a C-124. In just hours the GCA unit was off-loaded, pulled into place and declared operational - on the air.

### **Ready for Action**

At that time, the 1st Mobile team entered the final stage of bare-strip operation, the communications equipment was transferred to the newly activated 1882nd Communications Squadron. Then the new 1882nd personnel were trained to operate their newly acquired semi-mobile gear. As the training was completed, some of the 1st Mobile men packed their bags, folded their tents and returned to Clark where they prepared for another "Black Hat" deployment. Others continued on at the 1882nd until PCS personnel arrived to take their place.

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