



CAM RANH BAY AB **483rd Security Police Squadron**

This Little Light of Mine...

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1970-1971

*I could see the Sampan drifting silently in the night.
Fishermen... or Viet Cong?*

*If I Could Just Change One Thing...
"If only I hadn't heard... "*

*OP7 (Oscar 7) on the South China Sea -
OP9 (Oscar 9) was located on the tip of the peninsula,
in the distance, between the OP's wooden supports .*

"If only I hadn't heard... "

One night, in early spring/summer 1970, we were parked at Oscar 7 near the beach on the South China Sea. I was the .50 cal man and back up driver on Quebec Echo, one of the four M113A Armored Personnel Carrier (APC), or track as we called them, assigned to patrol the south east quadrant of the CRAB perimeter. We were working our usual shift from 8:00 PM until 4:30 AM. We suddenly overheard OP9 (Oscar 9) call in to CSC, via their Motorola hand held radio, that there was a small dim light shining out in the sea, just to the southeast of OP9.

We dropped whatever we were doing, jumped into the track and expedited up to OP9 which was on the southeast corner of the CRAB perimeter. When we arrived at OP9 we positioned the track facing out to the sea just to the south side of the OP.



Photo Below: Quebec Echo parked just south of OP9 on the South China Sea.



We lowered the rear gate and climbed up to the observation deck of OP9 which had an 81MM mortar tube and starlight scope. We all took turns viewing through the Starlite scope to see what was being reported. Sure enough there was a small dim light about a 1/3 to 1/2 of a mile out from the OP to the southeast, bobbing in the moonlit sea, but within the restricted 500 yard limit of the shoreline to the south. CSC contacted JADOC, Army Intelligence, who reported back after quite some length of time, which was their norm, that there should not be anything in that area. In the mean time the Flight Chief and OIC on duty arrived and surveyed the situation and verified again with CSC if there was any reason for activity in that area. All CSC could get was a negative on that reverification.

After further viewing

through the [Starlite scope](#) and illuminating the object via the lightning rounds from the 81MM mortar tube, it was determined that it was a light coming from a sampan or small boat of some kind, unidentified, in waters off limits to all. At that point the OIC asked who the .50 man was on the track and I replied, "I am sir". He asked me to take up a position on the .50, which I promptly proceeded to do. The Flight Chief and OIC conferred once more with CSC/JADOC for clearance and then the OIC gave me the order to put a 100 rounds into the small object with a dim light.



With the naked eye I could just barely see the light bobbing up and down in the waves. The sea was fairly calm with a wind chopped surface. I jacked in the first round from the 100 round belt looping up from the canister in it's housing, which was attached to the .50 cal turret mount on the track.

Quebec Echo with .50 cal, CAR15, M16 and M60 displayed.



I took aim and pressed down on the butterfly trigger with both thumbs. As the first burst of API rounds, with every 4th round a tracer, hit the water the tracers showed that the rounds were falling short, so I walked the tracers up and into the target. After expending the 100 rounds, the Flight Chief and OIC searched the target area through the Starlite scope. The dim light had disappeared. After launching a few more 81MM lightning rounds, the object had subsequently vanished also. We must have observed the area for close to an hour longer and nothing was spotted. We departed OP9 and continued our patrol for the remainder of that nights shift.

Photo Below: Arizona Hill where the tracks were parked during "off" duty hours.

The next morning we parked the track on Arizona Hill. and made our way down to the chow hall for breakfast before heading back to the hooch and getting some shut eye. We usually awoke around noon, took a shower and went to the chow hall to get lunch. Then we would go to the afternoon matinee at the theater, and sometimes we would head down to the beach after the show.



This was our head hooch maid Tanh.

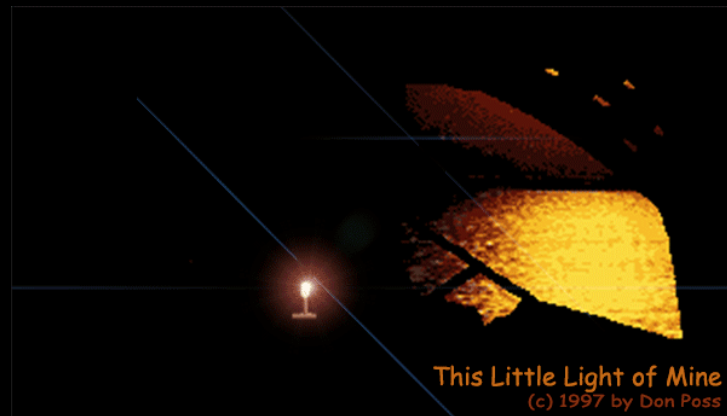
This particular noon, 2 days after the OP9 incident, as we awoke, we heard the hooch maids in their sing song, melodic chatter seem quite a bit more vocal than normal. One of our hooch maids, named Tanh, was an elderly, pretty articulate lady who was well educated and could speak very good English. She was the wife of the mayor of Cam Ranh village/city. I really liked Tanh and learned a lot from her about her culture and the Vietnamese people from the many talks I had with her at the hooch. She used to bring us traditional Vietnamese food to try for lunch and some was good and some was just barely or not palatable. I was the only one of guys to have the guts to try the food.



Anyway, we asked what all the ruckus was about and Tanh explained in her very good English that the village was very upset and outraged about a local fisherman, his wife and 5 children that had been out fishing and had motor trouble while out on the sea side of the peninsula. She then exclaimed that all of them had been killed. The words hit me like the recoil of my .50 cal. I, of course, never responded or mentioned a thing, mostly due to shame and guilt. None of my hooch mates said a word either, since some of them were track team members also. This was pretty shocking and unexpected news. The truth of that night out on OP9, to my knowledge, was never known by Tanh or any of the other hundreds of hooch maids. The incident was never brought up by anybody that was aware of what happened after that day. Because of Tanh's ability to speak very good English, the news that day was a burden I carried for the rest of the year I was at Cam Ranh Bay AB and for all these many, many years since, right up to today.

I really don't dwell on this nor do I lose sleep over it, but there is always that lingering doubt that festers in the back of my mind. I try to convince myself that things do happen in war that you can't predict or avoid. Deep inside it haunts me to think that the cries of outrage from the people of that village lay directly on my shoulders and my conscience forever, if it was true. I have silently told myself many times that this was just one of the many tragedies of war or it may really have been some propaganda or maybe that it did not even happen. I know I was only doing my duty and following orders. I also understand that many, many innocent people suffer and die in war torn countries. I only hope the incident the hooch maids were upset about that day was really propaganda or some anti American untruth. I guess only God knows the truth and will forgive.

So... *If I could change just one thing* about my tour at CRB, from March 1, 1970 until March 2, 1971, it would be to have never heard that news... that it may have been by my hand that an innocent family, a man, his wife and 5 small children, in trouble may have perished due to my direct involvement. I know that all of us that served in the RVN realized that we all technically had some indirect responsibility for some innocent peoples lives being lost, due to bombing runs, suspected enemy village strafing etc. and just by being in country during the war. The direct responsibility, when it involves you personally, is a little harder to cope with.



"If only I hadn't heard"....

Steve Turner
483rd SPS, Cam Ranh Bay AB
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We Take Care of Our Own

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