

The MACV Rules Wern't So Bad

**by Jack King
Cam Ranh Bay AB, 1970-1972
Phù Cát and Bien Boa**

On June 8, 1970 I spent my 20th birthday assigned to a SAT team at Phù Cát Air Base, SVN. Sergeant Finley was the leader of the two-men team and our patrol started at 1245 hours on a hot sunny day.

At around 1500 hours we climbed the tower at Tango 17 to visit with A1C Edward Pantazelos, who had come up from Cam Ranh Bay AB with me in March. Tango 17 was a wood tower on the bomb dump side of the base, far out in a free-fire zone. About 700 yards to the right of the post were some rice paddies, a river and a small village.

The three of us were involved in small talk, probably the typical Vietnam discussion: How many more days? What base are you putting in for? How much we hated Vietnam, the Air Force, and the liters.

Suddenly, out of nowhere we began to receive small arms fire. Bullets were whizzing by. We quickly glanced out toward the fields and jungle areas off base and spotted a group of Vietnamese running and firing their weapons toward us. Ed yelled the appropriate, "They're shooting at us! Sergeant Finley ran from the steps of the tower with me in close pursuit. I heard De on the radio calling CSC We got into the gun jeep where our rifles and the M60 machine gun were. Ed was now yelling at us that they had veered to his right toward the rice paddies.

Sergeant Finley raced down the dirt road to intercept while I held tightly to the M60. We got to a location on a small bluff between the rice paddies and Tango 17. I set the machine gun up and glanced down the sights. I had three men in my sights, and was ready to pull the trigger. Sergeant Finley had his M16 in one hand and was calmly asking permission to return fire. Small arms fire was still in progress but we were not receiving it at this point. Just then I heard the radio crackle, "Hold fire there are friend lies in the area!"

How close I came to killing three ARVN Troops that day and how much I for one, was happy for the rules of engagement.

As it turned out the ARVN had flushed out a VC and were chasing him. As he ran toward the Air Base he saw us and turned toward the village. We were simply caught in the crossfire and in the confusion we didn't know who was whom. Incidentally, the VC ran over the dyke of the rice paddy and an ARVN hit him slightly with a 40 mm round, knocking him to the ground. He then got up village.

I learned that day about mass confusion and the importance of keeping calm in emergency situations. Ed Pantazelos was a real professional and when I got back to the States I wasn't surprised to read in the AF paper how he got the Commendation Medal for subduing a berserk Vietnam Vet who had shot at him. (I don't know why everyone wanted to shoot him.)

Sergeant Finley was a typical, capable first term NCO who took charge that day, kept his cool and did his job in an exemplary manner. I was proud to serve with men like that and all the SPS in Vietnam--*even the lifers*.

Reprinted from VSPA Guardmount - Oct 1997

We Take Care of Our Own

We Take Care of Our Own

[Click to Report BROKEN LINKS or Photos, or Comment](#)