

8th MOBILE AERIAL PORT SQUADRON



LINEAGE

8th Aerial Port Squadron activated, 8 Dec 1962
Redesignated 8th Mobile Aerial Port Squadron

STATIONS

Tan Son Nhut, South Vietnam

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

LTC L. C. White

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Vietnam Advisory campaign, 15 Nov 1961-1 Mar 1965
Vietnam Defense Campaign, 2 Mar 1964-30 Jan 1965
Vietnam Air Offensive campaign, 29 Jun 1966-8 Mar 1967
Vietnam Air Offensive-Phase II, 9 Mar 1967-31 Mar 1968
Vietnam Air Offensive-Phase III, 1 Apr 1968-31 Oct 1968
Vietnam Air/Ground campaign, 22 Jan 1968-7 Jul 1968

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Presidential Unit Citation for the period 21 Jan to 12 May 1968

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award

Detachment 5
May 1963-Jul 1964

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

The 8th Aerial Port Squadron, under the 377th Combat Support Group, 834th Air Division, USAF, was responsible for tactical airlift support throughout southern South Vietnam. The 8th Aerial Port Squadron supplied the teams that loaded and unloaded the planes that carried personnel and cargo into, out of and throughout the countryside of the southern areas of Vietnam.

Established in December 1962 as a subordinate unit to the 315th Tactical Cargo Group (Assault), it has 7 terminals in South Vietnam and 1 in Thailand. The sky port's airlift runs the gamut from farm yard animals to air evacuation patients and 33,000 pound trucks. Monthly, the Eighth handles more than 2000 aircraft, ranging from the Caribou to the DC 8. Headquartered near Saigon, the Eighth, with its 102 airmen and 12 officers, is located at Tan Son Thut, a civil airport that has been rapidly expanded to establish a military base of operations to support the Republic of Vietnam defense efforts. Many of the activities are in a semi-field environment.

Our equipment included just about everything required to create an 'instant cargo center' in the jungle - 10-thousand-pound-capacity Adverse Terrain Forklifts - the famous "10k AT", designed specifically for missions such as ours, the smaller "6k RT" Rough Terrain forklift, the PRC-47 "portable" radios and our personal gear - M16's for the team members, plus revolvers for the team chiefs, as well as other weapons collected in our travels... and, of course, the ubiquitous military clip board - although maintaining paper records was always a challenge under our working conditions.

Although the 8th APS handled all cargo and passenger traffic at "the world's busiest airport", it also included a lesser known special organization known as "Dets & OL's" - Detachments and Operating Locations - which included 8th APS' Mobility Operations, which we simply called "The MOB teams".

Detachments ("Dets") typically included 6-10 men stationed at larger US Army base camps with runways, running water and sufficient need to justify a full-time USAF presence to handle passenger and cargo traffic at more or less permanent bases. 8th APS had permanent detachments at Bien Hoa, Tay Ninh, Song Be, Quan Loi, Phuc Vinh and other bases to the north of Saigon as well as Can Tho, Binh Thuy and other bases deeper in the delta.

Operating Locations ("OLs") were spread all over the countryside and were manned as needed

by 7-man "Mob" teams of the Mobility Operations Branch, a part of Dets & OLs. On these missions, the mixed teams of Loadmasters and Air Freight specialists lived on the hospitality of their hosts or subsisted on C-rations and slept in very crude bunkers, muddy holes in the ground or directly under the stars - often outside of the SF defensive perimeter. Communication was supplied by 2-man Air Force "Blue Beret" Combat Control Teams (CCT) or the infamous antiquated, unreliable and very heavy PRC-47 'radio' which almost never seemed to work as expected.

These locations were typically at remote Special Forces camps or 1st Cav artillery bases, although the 8th Mob also supported the Vietnamese & U.S. Marine Corps at times, and some Mob team members received commendations from the U.S. and Vietnamese Marine Corps.

The Special Forces camps at Bu Dop, Tonle Cham, Katum, Rang and others along the Cambodian border were frequently visited by the MOB teams for 1-3 day stays. U.S. Army Fire Support Bases such as Bu Gia Map (FSB Snuffy, aka Djampa on Air Force maps) and others were also familiar to these traveling freight handlers.

Detachment 1 is located approximately 12 miles north of Bangkok, the picturesque capital of Thailand. Detachment 1 is the Hub of the In-Country Airlift system in Thailand as well as the terminating and intrans-it terminal for intertheater military flights. Handling up to five hundred 315th Air Division, Military Air Transport Service, U.S. Army and Royal New Zealand Air Force commercial contract aircraft each month, this detachment has moved thousands of passengers and millions of pounds of cargo and mail. Military stations throughout Thailand depend upon the "Number One" detachment for the timely delivery of urgently needed supplies and perishables. Detachment 1 works side by side with 21 commercial airlines. It has the capability to move a mobility team and terminal supplies, at a moment's notice, to any remote area in South East Asia to perform terminal services under combat conditions.

Northernmost detachment of the 8th Aerial Port Squadron is Detachment 2, located in the First Corps Sector adjacent to the post city of Da Nang. Many consider Da Nang (or Tourano as some maps indicate) as one of the choice assignments in the Republic of South Vietnam. Known as a resort center, your living quarters will be 15 minutes from the city's night life and only 30 minutes from beautiful white beaches and clean rolling surf. If you like skin diving and spearfishing there are many quiet coves and clear azure waters teeming with large fish. Da Nang and the city of Hue to the north provides much scenic grandeur and could be called a photographers paradise. The airfield has a picturesque backdrop of massive mountain peaks and lush verdant valleys which sweep down to the rich rice paddies of the coastal plain. The weather is warm but tempered, usually, with a fresh sea breeze. The base and cantonment area has new billets, pure drinking water, BX, theater, laundry, a barber shop, and excellent clubs. The Viet Cong are in the nearby hills, a fact which provides Detachment 2 with a very important logical support mission. However taking everything into consideration, it's a pretty good duty station for a remote assignment.

Pleiku Airport is a small air strip in the middle of the Republic of South Vietnam where the Crossbow, Montagnards (mountain tribes), rain swept plateaus, piastres, Ba Muoi Beer; Ye Olde Papa Kilo — all have special significance. With the barest of essentials, the terminal personnel

at this small air strip handled tonnages far surpassing anyones expectations. Here, Yankee ingenuity once again meant the difference between successful mission accomplishment and failure. Ability, initiative, and desire to get the job done proved to be a suitable substitute for equipment and facilities that were not yet available. As one of the key aerial resupply points for Special Forces who are countering Viet Cong aggressions, which threaten the country's independence, Pleiku is high in importance. The men who have manned the air terminal can be justifiably proud of their accomplishments for they have met all their challenges with determination, Johnson Bars and success.

Detachment 4, 8th Aerial Port Squadron is located at Long Van Airport, Nha Trang, Vietnam, a very popular resort area located on the coast of the China Sea. It has approximately 10 miles of lovely sheltered beach which is very popular with US personnel in the area. Nha Trang is known throughout Indo-China for their large Lobsters. "Franciouse" a French Restaurant located 7 kilometers from Nha Trang, on a docking area, is frequented by personnel from every city in South Vietnam.

Long Van is the Home of the Vietnamese military Technical Training Center for all services, as well as the VNAF Flying Cadet program and Language school. Detachment 4 was activated on 8 December 1962 at Nha Trang with 1 officer and four airmen. It is presently manned with 2 officers, 16 airmen, 15 local nationals, a monkey, and a green parrot-Paula. The detachment supports the 8th Field Hospital, largest in S. E. Asia, three US Army Aviation Squadrons, and the Special Forces, who alone handle over 2 million pounds of cargo monthly. Other station traffic averages approximately 1.5 million pounds of cargo monthly and approximately 100 passengers transient this station daily. DET 4 handles the C-123, C-130, C-124, and many others. A very high "esprit de corps" exists among detachment personnel, who are extremely proud of their accomplishments in support of the S. E. Asia Airlift system.

Formally activated on 3 June 1963 at Bien Hoa Air Field about thirty miles northeast of Saigon, Detachment 5 provides airlift support for the Air Commandos, a Tactical Air Support Squadron, the Air Base Squadron and various combat organizations. Its job may seem to involve routine air terminal operations and yet its work is vital and demanding of the six airmen and one officer assigned. Each man must be familiar with all phases of operations and does not specialize as they can in larger terminals. The men of Detachment 5 all like to keep busy because " the time goes by more quickly and seems to make rotation home that much closer."

Detachment 6 was activated 1 August 1963 primarily to provide support for the II Corps Area in South Vietnam. The C-123 is the workhorses of this base. In addition to providing integrated AF. Army, and Civilian passenger and cargo airlift functions, rations discharged from LSTs are accepted by Detachment 6 for air distribution to points within the II Corps Area. Joint location of the Aerial Port and TMC provides smooth, efficient, scheduled, and special airlift services and permits easy diversion of other flights to meet area requirements. Air crews operating through Qui Nhon consider Detachment 6 and TMC as the best in Southeast Asia for efficiency, courtesy and service. The crews know their aircraft will be handled with speed and vigor, and by the time they get a bite to eat and a cool soft drink, for that pause that refreshes, their aircraft is cleared and all set for departure,

Deep in the mud flats of the Mekong River Delta we find Can Tho International Air Port with its modern terminal and recreational facilities. Relatively speaking, it is considered the show place of the delta area. It is the proud home of Detachment 1, 8th Aerial Port Squadron. The Aerial Port here is small in size but is the conversation piece of Can Tho with its magnificent freight terminal, a baby blue conex box. It is no wonder that Airmen Smerk and Ruby who manned this unique Aerial Port facility were most enthusiastic along with their Commander, Capt Morris. All had fine senses of humor and understood the importance of their strategically located air terminal which is the most southerly terminal operated by the 8th Aerial Port Squadron.

At Bu Dop, in November, 1969, 6 team members were wounded during a particularly effective VC attack. SSgts Jim Greene & Doug Cave were wounded, along with A1C Scott McCoy and 3 others. At Bu Dop, in November, 1969, Sgt Neil Brown, operator of the 10K Adverse Terrain Forklift designed specifically to be used in such environments, became trapped between exploding munitions and burning fuel as he was trying to separate them during a rocket attack. Sgt Brown was forced to abandon his rig, which was burned to a crisp. A dramatic photo of this incident (which many of us may have already seen hanging on the wall outside the Squadron Commander's office at 8th APS HQ over thirty years ago), will be posted on this site in the future.

At Bu Dop - in December, 1969, SSgt Web Layton was killed during one of the increasingly frequent rocket attacks directed at the dirt airstrip near the Special Force Camp A341 at Budop. At Tonle Cham in May, a C-7 Caribou came under mortar attack during offload, and in their haste to escape, dropped their cargo load on the ground as they taxied away and took off "like a bat out of hell." At this time, the Tonle Cham camp already had a few planes laying in wreckage on the side of the runway. Their quick takeoff kept this crew alive and their plane intact and flying.

During late spring of 1970, at SF Camp That Son, deep in the delta, a Mob Team member was credited with rescuing the crew of an Australian C-7 Caribou which came under attack and was damaged and immobilized on the runway. The rescue vehicle in this case was a 6k Rough Terrain forklift.

In the spring of 1970, an 8th APS team member at Song Be jumped into a foxhole during a particularly devastating VC attack and manned an M-60 machine gun for hours, warping the barrel by the heat of continued long bursts at the attacking VC.

During a May, 1970 communications mission at the infamous northern base at Kham Duc CCT SSgt Dave Gfeller was wounded by shrapnel from a VC RPG rocket. Although wounded and medevaced to an Army hospital, Dave made it back to Saigon - on his own - by late that evening and was warmly welcomed by his friends who had simply heard a radio transmission earlier that day requesting "We need a replacement controller at Kham Duc". Since the transmission was by SSgt Charlie Brown, we all knew it had been his regular teammate, Dave Gfeller who had been wounded. We were all happy and relieved to see him in bloodied hospital garb, but alive and home with his teammates. A photo of Charlie making this radio transmission is in the official USAF history of tactical airlift in Vietnam... During the 12 months beginning in the summer of 1969, 14 Purple Heart medals and at least a half-dozen Bronze Stars were awarded to the 21

members of the 8th APS Mob and dozen or so Combat Control team members for their wounds and brave action under the combat conditions of the 8th APS MOB missions.

Det 1 Don Muang

Det 2 Da Nang

Det 3 Pleiku

Det 4 Nha Trang

Det 5 Bien Hoa

Det 6 Qui Nhon

Det Can Tho



Air Force Order of Battle

Created: 4 Sep 2010

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Sources

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