

This was the welcome package given to new members of the 537<sup>th</sup> upon their arrival in-country. C. Barry Wetherington was kind enough to supply a copy so that it could be placed in the archives of the C-7A Caribou Association. Judging from the references to the 537<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron and the 483<sup>rd</sup> Troop Carrier Wing, this document dates from the first part of 1967, as the squadron and wing designations changed in the latter part of 1967 to Tactical Airlift Squadron and Wing.

Our thanks to Mr. Wetherington for sharing this important piece of history.

The following eleven pages constitute the “welcome” package.

Transcribed 14 March 2004.

Welcome to the 537th Troop Carrier Squadron and Vietnam. As you'll learn, you have been selected for one of the safest yet most interesting flying assignments in country. We support the First Air Cavalry Division – the Army's first and only Airmobile Division.

The Air Force assumed responsibility for the Caribou and its operations 1 January 1967. The professional skill and competence of operations and maintenance personnel quickly made good impressions country wide – especially with the Cav. Our increased response was immediately noticed and accepted. You have a solid standard of skill and judgment to maintain. Your success is encouraged and appreciated.

Good luck on this important assignment.

ROBERT C. OLSEN, Lt Col., USAF  
Commander

## ADMINISTRATION

R&R's - two allowed - need about 6 months in-country as DEROS is determining factor.

Leaves - a seven day leave allowed - transportation available to other countries

TDY - One 10 day to Bangkok. Possibly a couple of ferry flights from the states.

Mail - 5 - 7 day service with 5 days sometimes. Worldwide letters, manila envelopes, and personal tapes are all free. \$50.00 customs gift exemption.

Water - Latrine not potable yet. Use lister bags.

## HISTORY

The 537th Troop Carrier Squadron was reactivated under Project "Red Leaf". Prior to reactivation, the 537th was assigned P-47's in WWII and later flew C-46's as an Air Force Reserve unit. As yet it has neither an emblem nor a history though the squadron is presently rectifying this situation.

Prior to the 537th assuming operational control of the Caribou, the 17th Aviation Company operated out of An Khe. Those were the days of tents, cold water, rats, and other fond memories the first of us will always remember. Lt Col Charles C. Smith was one of the first to arrive and, after five months transitioning period, assumed command. The squadron immediately moved to Phu Cat, maintaining a full schedule during the move.

Phu Cat, the present home of the 537th, was once a Viet Cong stronghold. Under Operations Thayer and Irving, the First Cav, operating primarily out of Hammond, cleared area to help establish the base. The first runway was a 3000 foot dirt strip which operated out of for five months. May '67 saw opening of our 10,000 foot strip and the arrival of two fighter squadrons. This will certainly be the showplace of Vietnam one day.

## ORGANIZATION

The 537th is one of six Caribou squadrons assigned to the 483<sup>rd</sup> TCW. The 459th is the other squadron at Phu Cat. The 457th and 458th are at Cam Ranh Bay with 483rd HQ and the 535th and 536th are at Vung Tau. The 483rd is one wing assigned to the 834th Air Division; the primary airlift division in country. The 834th Air Division is assigned to 7th Air Force – both of which are at Tan Son Nhut.

The Squadron is divided into A, B, C, and D flights. Flying schedules are rotated throughout the flights on a daily basis. The 537th is the only squadron controlled directly by its using agency, the First Air Cav and operates almost exclusively in the II Corps area of Vietnam.

## OPERATIONS

The primary area of operations in the squadron is within 50 miles of An Khe with daily trips to Phan Thiet and periodic trips to Cam Ranh, Saigon and other areas. In the Primary Area we operate passenger couriers and cargo logistics flights plus a 30 minute med evac standby and a one hour radio relay standby.

## SAFETY

Safety in a combat zone? Yes, here more than anywhere else, because hazards are everywhere you look. Charlie is so effective at taking lives and destroying equipment we simply cannot afford to suffer to suffer more losses through careless, unthinking acts.

Our accident prevention program is intended to build and maintain the maximum operational capability to perform our air lift mission with a minimum loss in manpower and materiel.

Because this is a combat zone, the success of our accident prevention program will depend on a proper understanding of ACCEPTABLE RISK. There is a tendency, especially in newly assigned personnel to over estimate the urgency of a mission; they therefore, in their eagerness to do the job, accept a risk that is too great. Short cuts in maintenance, excessive cannibalization, disregard for technical orders, flying below minimum altitudes and over loading aircraft are examples of actions that cause needless accidents. In each situation you must carefully balance Acceptable Risk against Mission Demand and act accordingly.

The mechanics of our accident prevention program are explained in Operation Safe Haul, the 483rd TCW plan, which is required reading and may be obtained from the Flying Safety Officer. In addition, 7th Air Force Pamphlet 127-1-1A is required reading.

## INTELLIGENCE

Upon reporting to the squadron there are several things required of each pilot and flight mechanic before they can begin flying combat missions.

Each crew member should contact either the Squadron Intelligence Officer or his Assistant for issuance of his personal Escape and Evasion kit. At this time he can also fill out forms for his Personal Authenticator which is kept on file for his entire tour.

A Secret Intelligence Reading File is located in the safe at Operations which contains briefings and intelligence information which is mandatory reading for all aircrew members. This file must be checked at least once per month and new personnel should familiarize themselves with it as soon as possible.

Located in each flight trip kit is a Hit/Incident Report. This report which is self explanatory, is to be filled out each time a mission receives hostile ground fire and should be turned in immediately to operations for transmission to higher headquarters.

Each crew is required to receive a daily intelligence briefing prior to their mission. At present our facilities for this briefing are limited, however, available to the aircrews, and located in Operations is Hit/Incident Map of the 537th Area of Operations. This map is classified "CONFIDENTIAL" and is kept under lock and key. The key may be obtained from the duty officer. This man will inform the crews of the latest hits and incidents which have been reported in the vicinity of the airfields they will be operating into that day. When the Squadron moves into more permanent quarters we will have available to us the complete intelligence facilities of the fighter wing. A better daily intelligence summary can then be obtained by aircrews.

In summary, here are the things which each pilot and flight mechanic MUST have prior to flying missions in Vietnam.

- (1) Personal E&E kit
- (2) Personal Authenticator on file.
- (3) Up to date on Secret Intelligence Reading File.
- (4) Knowledge of the JNRC Code Letter for the current month (from Reading File).



(5) Daily Intelligence briefing.

Very interesting and informative required reading is the Denglar report. This is the confidential report of Denglar's captures and escapes from the North Vietnamese. Rich in tips and experience.

Each aircrew member is issued a personal survival vest containing in addition to the standard items:

HT-10 Radio/Beeper

Signal mirror

Water proof matches

Portable strobe light

Signal flares

Wrist compass

An excellent medical survival kit including pain killers, stay awake pills, infection pills, malaria pills, iodine, burn and infection ointment, water purification pills, and other standard items.

In addition to the survival vest, most crew members carry their .38, a full canteen (usually water), an M-16 with 100 rounds of ammunition, Parts I and II of the personal survival kits, a few boxes of C-rations and other items.

## PHU CAT

Phu Cat Air Base is located in the central coastal plains of Vietnam approximately 240 miles northeast of Saigon.

The base has a 10,000' runway. 33 and 15 with TACAN, ADF, and GCA navigational equipment.

Prominent pilotage check points around Phu Cat are Highway 1 and its parallel railroad which runs from Qui Nhon, 17 miles to the southeast, through Phu Cat. The highway and railroad pass Phu Cat on the East from south-southeast to north-northwest. The river is another landmark that can be used to locate Phu Cat in deteriorating weather conditions. The river runs on a southeasterly course and passes approximately one mile south of the base.

Phu Cat has two basic weather seasons, the northeast monsoon season running from October to March and the southwest monsoon running from April to September. The northeast monsoon brings restrictions. Winds during this period are generally from the north west. The southwest monsoon is characterized by northwesterly winds in late evening and easterly winds during the day with thunderstorms during the night.

The northeast and southwest monsoons are separated by the spring transitional and the fall transitional periods. During these periods between monsoons Phu Cat has its maximum and most severe thunderstorms.

It is estimated that Phu Cat will have about 95% VFR weather during the year.

For a more detailed weather indoctrination, see attachment #1 at the end of this pamphlet.

## FACILITIES

Transportation – excellent – call Motor Pool with generally a 5 minute wait. Shuttle bus runs basewide and twice daily to Qui Nhon.

BX – small but good. Periodic shortages of scotch, bourbon, soft drinks, envelopes, tape recorders and some other items.

Clubs – Officer's, NCO's, and Airman's club with somewhat limited facilities.

Chow – OK and getting better. Standard field ration mess.

Billeting – Most officers have private 8 x 11 rooms with air conditioning and refrigerators. NCO's share rooms; airmen in open bays. Maids shine shoes, sweep room, change sheets, cost \$4.00/month.

Recreation –

Softball – 537<sup>th</sup> has good team

Tape and Record Lending Library with recorders available.

Outdoor movie with nightly movies – average selection.

Outdoor park for parties.

Laundry – free but minimal satisfaction. Two or three day service. Off base has better service. Two bits per fatigue uniform.

## FLIGHT IN RVN

You have probably never flown (and hopefully never will again) under the rather special conditions prevailing in Vietnam. Each flight entails a certain risk – the trick being to minimize this to acceptable standards.

You'll probably never file an IFR clearance but be prepared to fly in weather – both IFR and marginal VFR. There is no way to get around it and continue our vital combat support mission. The Wing has set 300 and 2 as minimum VFR conditions – which happens to coincide very closely to prevailing fall and winter conditions in our area of operations. Be constantly familiarizing yourself with land marks around the primary fields.

There are a number of facilities available to assist you for incountry flying. On a typical weather flight, tower will clear you to take off and advise you of any artillery. If the clock method of giving artillery is used, twelve o'clock is 15° either side of North, one o'clock is 15° either side of 030, and so on around – 6 o'clock being either side of South. You'd probably contact local departure to keep you clear of traffic and in case of an emergency return to the field. They can also assist in terrain clearance if you have to climb out through a layer of clouds. Gaining a little altitude, you might break out "On Top" or stay in the layer. Passing through transition altitude, set 29.92 altimeter and call the nearest area radar advisory agency. The airfield frequency sheet will help you here. If you have to stay IFR on your trip, They'll pick up your IFF and advise you of any traffic though legally you're still VFR on a VFR flight plan at VFR altitudes (which are the same as the States' altitudes). They'll also give you enroute artillery and air strike warnings and get terminal weather for you. They can provide "pigeons" (distance and course to destination) anytime you ask. Keep in mind they are advisory not control agencies. Advise them when you change frequencies for the next radar.

The Army maintains a flight following system on FM which initiates a search for you if you're 30 minutes overdue for a reporting point or termination.

This section is not meant to be directive or even suggestive but merely to familiarize you with typical operating conditions.