

NAVCOMMSTA PHIL FLEET SUPPORT DETACHMENT DA NANG

COMMAND HISTORY

Forward

The history of the Vietnam conflict would not be complete without some recounting of the role played by Signals Intelligence (SIGINT). Fortunately, forty some years after the end of hostilities, most of what was once highly classified information has now been released to the public. Unfortunately, many of those who could best tell the story are no longer available to tell it. This modest effort is a beginning, and hopefully knowledgeable readers will supply more detail where it is needed.

Some definitions might be useful before getting to specifics. We call ourselves BIG LOOK Spooks. BIG LOOK is a Navy cover name applied to the specially modified AN/APS-20 radar (mounted in the big radome on the bottom of the Willy and EP-3). Modifications were made to this radar to allow it to function as a very high gain, highly directional ELINT (electronic intelligence = radar type signals) receiver. By extension, BIG LOOK was applied to the entire aircraft (EC-121M/EP-3B). BIG LOOK, along with some other ELINT features which will be discussed later; and significant communications intelligence (COMINT) capability, made the VQ-1 aircraft the best airborne collection and early warning platform during the Vietnam conflict. Other airborne platforms could do some of what we could, but no one could do all simultaneously. As a result, we flew a lot, averaging around two missions per day, even in periods of low activity. During major air strikes the VQ-1/NSG team would provide 24 hour coverage if needed.

One thing came immediately apparent as I started on this endeavor. A lot of information is available regarding the Army and Air Force SIGINT effort in Vietnam. Not much at all is said about what the Navy did, airborne or afloat. I don't think this was due to the classification of the mission (Army and AF operations were classified at the same level as ours). Rather, it was more a reflection of politics of the SIGINT system. Navy airborne and afloat NSG operations were Cryptologic Direct Support Elements (CDSE) not under the direct control of Director, NSA (DIRNSA). During the life of Det Bravo, VQ-1 (including the NSG aircrew) worked directly for Commander, Seventh Fleet (COMSEVENTHFLT). Additionally, in the case of VQ-1, not all the flight crew were cleared for Special Intelligence (SI). On the afloat side, there were as many as 15 afloat CDSE's during the last year of the war. None of these positions were controlled or tasked by DIRNSA. The Navy tasked these afloat positions via the CHARGER HORSE coordinator. The CHARGER HORSE coordinator was a cryptologic officer (1610) or CPO (usually a CTRC or CTIC) assigned to the CTF 77 staff. DIRNSA and its field

stations provided advisory tasking and first heard support, but they had no direct control over what we did. This flexibility allowed us to adjust coverage on the fly to meet the early warning needs of the situation at hand. This, in a nutshell, was the concept of direct support – getting info quickly to those who needed it, either to attack with an advantage, or to save lives. I think this is why we don't receive much official mention by DIRNSA in their history. They didn't own us so we didn't exist. So in the end, the burden is on us to tell our own story.

Finally, a short note concerning this history. What follows is an operational history, with some personal reflections mixed in. Some things were left out, for instance, almost everyone has a “diving aircraft” story. Likewise, I've tried to limit rocket attack stories to those most significant. Some things are better left to our forum, such as bennie trip stories. Several fellow spooks have been kind enough to write a short reflection on their time as Big Look Spooks. These are included in Appendix III as I received them. Any other reflections would be welcome and will be included in future editions. This edition is a rough cut, much research remains to be done before the final story is told.

Introduction

The August 2, 1964 attack on the USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin (GOT) marked the start of the active war in Vietnam. Prior to that time, the US presence had been largely advisory, and in some cases military assigned to Vietnam were accompanied by dependents. To this day the Gulf of Tonkin incident is shrouded in controversy, but without a doubt it marked a fundamental change in the nature of the US presence in Vietnam.

Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron One (VQ-1) had been flying missions in the Gulf of Tonkin since 1952. These early missions were flown in support of the French using VQ-1's P4M-1Q aircraft. No spooks were carried on these missions. Spook crews were first proposed in 1956, but probably did not come into being until the arrival of the EC-121M in 1959. These early missions were staged from various airfields outside Vietnam. Ron Schneider, a CTI2 (Ruling??) stationed at Kamiseya, recalled a temporary assignment (TAD) to Shu Lin Kou (Taipei, Taiwan) in 1961. The mission, flown in PR-24, launched 4 January 1961 to fly over the Gulf of Tonkin. In addition to Schneider, the spook crew included Chief Garrity (Chiling) as supervisor, and two other Chilings (PO Plum and one unnamed). The mission proceeded toward the GOT, but aborted and dove for the deck when Plum detected MiGs launching from Canton, and one of the EWOPs detected a lock-on. In the process, the top radome was torn off; however, the plane safely recovered at Taipei. Missions resumed 7 January, using PR-22, flown in from Atsugi.

Flights continued to be flown in the GOT, staged out of Bangkok, Cubi and Taiwan. In the months prior to July 1964 numerous flights were staged in that area.

1964

Tasking was received in 1964 to begin developing the electronic order of battle (EOB) for North Vietnam; and to look for evidence of MiG's and SA-2 missile sites, neither of which was known to be in North Vietnam. To accomplish this, CDR Al Holt, CO of VQ-1, selected a crew especially for these missions. This became known as Crew 21, with LCDR Norm Bull as aircraft commander. In July, 1964 the crew deployed from Atsugi to Don Muang International Airport, Bangkok, Thailand to fly a series of missions in the GOT.

The first VQ-1 plane to land in Da Nang arrived 17 July 1964 after a 9.1 hour mission. The EC-121M launched from Bangkok and flew a mission enroute in the GOT. The next day the plane took off from Da Nang, but lost an engine shortly after take off and had to return to Da Nang. The plane returned to Bangkok on the 20th, and flew a 9.1 hour Bangkok to Bangkok on the 21st, also in the GOT. The following day the crew flew 8.9 hours Bangkok to Da Nang (in the GOT), and returned to NAS Cubi on the 23rd of July 1964. These July flights were flown to look for evidence of MiGs and SA-2 missile sites.

Larry Brosh, the AES with Crew 21, recalls that no billeting was available on base, and the crew stayed in off base quarters (reportedly an old French villa) in Da Nang, one block over from the Sergeant's Club. The spook crew was probably hand selected as well, Larry remembers GySgt Southerland, USMC as an "I brancher" who flew all the missions, and CTC Thatcher, who normally sat Pos 7 on the Willy. At least one additional CTI2 flew with the crew as well.

Ship borne patrols, under the cover name Desoto, conducted freedom of navigation and intelligence collection along the coast of China and in the Gulf of Tonkin. Many of these units had embarked CDSE's. Although the CDSE's received advisory and technical support, they remained under control of the Navy. USS Maddox was on a Desoto patrol with a CDSE when attacked on 2 August 1964.

Preparations for carrier operations began in late 1962, using the EA-3B Skywarrior, a converted light bomber. The first actual deployment was on the USS Kitty

Hawk (CV-63) in May, 1964.

As a result of the North Vietnamese attacks on the Desoto patrol, the US retaliated with an air strike against North Vietnamese naval targets. During this strike two US aircraft were lost to North Vietnamese AAA. No MiG reaction to these strikes was noted. On the 9th of August MiG 17's were detected flying out of Noi Bai in a defensive patrol. Things remained relatively quiet for the remainder of 1964.

1965 - 1966

In early 1965 VQ-1 commenced a series of missions in the GOT, aimed at locating enemy radars using BRIGAND. On 7 February 1965, strikes were launched in retaliation for some Viet Cong guerilla bombings in South Vietnam. The air war over North Vietnam commenced in earnest in March 1965. Nicknamed ROLLING THUNDER, it became one of the longest bombing campaigns conducted by US forces. MiG 17 defensive patrols continued but stayed north of the 20th parallel. For the most part, US aircraft lost were shot down by AAA.

As previously mentioned, EC-121M missions supporting these operations were staged from various airfields in Asia. Missions were flown in and out of Da Nang, but weren't supported by a permanent detachment. EA-3B missions were flown from one of several carriers, or from NAS Cubi Point in the Philippines. In April of 1965, MiG 17's were first noted in offensive posture, and on 25 July, an USAF RB-66C aircraft got the first detection of FAN SONG B, signaling the operational introduction of the SA-2 GUIDELINE missile system in North Vietnam. These significant developments, coupled with the expanding air war, made it clear more capability was needed, and so, on 3 September, 1965, VQ-1 first deployed an EC-121M "Willy Victor" (PR-21, BuNo 135749) to Da Nang full time. This marked the establishment of a permanent VQ-1 detachment at Da Nang, designated VQ-1 Det Bravo. As near as can be determined, NAVCOMMSTA Phil Det Bravo, which provided NSG aircrew to VQ-1, was established concurrently.

Missions over the Gulf of Tonkin (Da Nang to Da Nang) commenced 5 September 1965. NSG personnel were assigned TAD from NCS Philippines (San Miguel). Ops tempo was heavy from the very start. During the first month 32 Willy missions were flown, despite five days lost for an engine change. Big bird coverage was supplemented by the Whales. At first the EA-3B missions continued from NAS Cubi, flying what was known as a double shuttle. The whale would launch from Cubi, fly a mission and land on a carrier, refuel and launch on a second mission. This mission would recover at Da Nang, refuel and return to Cubi. Prior to establishment of the det at Da Nang, the whales had flown from Cubi and various carriers. The whales soon joined the Willies at Da Nang, a much shorter day for their crews.

In the beginning conditions at Da Nang were austere. Initially some 20 personnel lived in an eight man tent, and later were moved to temporary AF barracks on the south east side of the runway. There were no people permanently assigned to the det, in fact, officially there might not have been a formal det. Orders issued in the summer of 1966 directed TAD personnel from San Miguel to report to the "Senior Naval Aviator, Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron One, Detachment, Da Nang, Republic of Vietnam." Orders directly to VQ-1 apparently continued until the spring of 1967, when references to NAVCOMMSTA Phil Det Bravo start to appear on orders. The Officer in Charge (OIC) and Leading Chief Petty Officer (LCPO) were probably the senior member (in each category) among the NSG people assigned to the various flight crews. CDR Thomas F. Hahn (NSG Department Head at NAVCOMMSTA Phil) was TAD to Da Nang during the months of November and December 1965, making him one of the first OIC's. During that period he flew 16 missions (a total of 83.7 hours) and was awarded the S/F Air Medal. He recalled one day while sitting on a rubber fuel bladder, a stray shot punctured the bladder near where he was sitting. Luckily the only thing damaged was the bladder. Another early OIC was LT David R. Patterson. Although there was no staff permanently assigned, the det was continuously manned, making it a permanent det.

Records are sparse for the first months of 1966. In February, 108 EA-3B sorties were flown, but no airfield/carrier was mentioned. In May, "five EA-3B aircraft operating from NAS Cubi Pt. and CTF 77 carriers, and 2 VQ-1 EC-121M (Big Look) aircraft based at Da Nang Air Base continued to provide SAM/MIG alert warnings to PACOM strike/recce aircraft and furnished Task Force Commanders with tactical EOB. 141 SAM and 38 MIG warnings were broadcast to strike/recce pilots by VQ-1 EA-3B and EC-121M (Big Look) aircraft. Two EC-121M aircraft alternated flight operations and provided coverage form the normal Big Look Op-Area from approximately 0630H to 1830H." During that time, and actually throughout the life of the Det, Da Nang was one of the busiest airfields in the world. Chief Petty Officer Gary Cooper, who was there TAD during August to November 1966 as the leading chief, recalls sleeping in the temporary barracks only 2 nights out of a 75 day TAD. The remainder of the time he slept in the operations/admin hut shared with the USAF crews from Yokota. Two flights daily seven days per week were normal while Chief Cooper was there. The two flights provided roughly 16 hours total coverage. Approximately 28 -30 total personnel were assigned, including two CTI1 (Russian) linguists TAD from Kamiseya, Japan, Dick Williams and Russ Krause.

The Russian operators were tasked to determine what, if any, direct involvement the Russians had in the training of MiG pilots and SAM operators, since both systems were supplied by the Russians. Dick Williams remembers one particular incident:

"Several F-4 Phantoms were in the area flying cover for the EC-121 when Navy Vietnamese linguists aboard the aircraft detected two North Vietnamese MiG-21s being

vectored toward the plane by a North Vietnamese GCI controller. This information was relayed to US controllers, who directed the Phantoms to intercept the MiGs. A few minutes later, the NVAF GCI controller attempted to contact the MiG flight (in Vietnamese), using calls “Number 1” and “Number 2.” After several unsuccessful attempts, another voice, which was clearly not Vietnamese, called in Russian “Number 2” several times. “Number 2”, also clearly not Vietnamese, answered in Russian. The controller asked where “Number 1” was and “Number 2” answered that he (Number 1) had “left the aircraft” and was “under parachute”, indicating the pilot had bailed out. Since there were no follow-up communications to support an engagement, it could not be determined if “Number 1” had been attacked and shot down by the F-4’s or simply decided to abandon the aircraft rather than engage. “Number 2” was ordered to return to base. Chalk one up for the Spooks.”

In addition to Vietnamese and Russian linguists, Korean linguists were flying as well, looking for any support the DPRK might be providing.

1967 – 1968

By 1967, the operations tempo was well established. At least one big bird flight flew daily, supplemented by whales, and/or a second big bird, as needed. Living conditions were improving as well, with new barracks under construction along with other facilities. All that changed the night of July 15.

“Shortly after midnight on 15 July, the Da Nang Air Base was struck by enemy rockets. Eight military personnel were killed during the attack and 155 others were wounded. The enemy barrage, which lasted approximately 45 minutes, started numerous fires and resulted in extensive structural damage to U. S. Navy, Marine and Air Force facilities. In addition, eight aircraft were destroyed and 45 were damaged during the attack.” (NAVFORV Command History, July 1967, p. 43)

This rocket attack was probably the largest experienced during the life of the detachment. Out of a total of 163 casualties, 44 were VQ-1 and NSG Det Bravo personnel. Luckily no one was killed, but all three VQ-1/NSG detachment barracks were destroyed. This was not due to a direct hit on the barracks, but rather to a nearby ammo dump. The dump exploded and rained shrapnel down onto recently constructed bunkers, which at the time didn’t have roofs. Additional damage/injury was caused by the shock wave of the exploding ammo. Most of the detachment was evacuated, with only a skeleton crew remaining behind. When they returned, det personnel were temporarily billeted at Camp Tien Sha until new barracks could be built. In addition to the destruction

of the barracks, all the aircraft were damaged to some extent, and VQ-2 had to temporarily supply EC-121M aircraft from Rota so that operations could continue. Two people enroute to the det from the Philippines, Sgt G. R. Wright (USMC) and CTRSN Lowell "Wilkie" Wilks, were at Clark waiting for a flight when they were told their orders were on hold. They made it two weeks later.

In the fall of 1967 LTjg Ike Cole joined the Det as an evaluator, TAD from San Miguel for several months. Ike remembers flying a lot, almost every day, and the strong skills of the enlisted operators.

January 30, 1968 marked the start of the Tet offensive by the North Vietnamese. LCDR Carl Strobel, Det OIC at the time, recalls the planes being sent to Thailand due to the large volume of rocket attacks. Flights continued over the GOT as usual, though, staged from Thailand. As always, a core team stayed behind in Da Nang. CTR2 Bill Erhardt, recognizing a deficiency in the det's supply of weapons, took the initiative in true Spook fashion. Bill "took a couple of cases of booze up to hill 327 and brought back a jeep load of rifles, ammo, and hand grenades! The Chief wanted to kill me!"

New crypto systems installed April – Jun 1968 further improved the capabilities of the detachment.

Liberty was never really great at Da Nang, and after Tet restrictions were probably tightened. One set of TAD orders issued 30 August 1968 had two paragraphs added to the standard TAD order form, specifically spelling out the following restrictions:

"8. You must perform all operational flights and other travel via U.S. Military, fixed wing, non-combat mission, multi-engined aircraft only while in South Vietnam except that if required, helicopter travel authorized for Danang complex provided helos operate in pairs making maximum use of over water routes to ensure maximum protection against possible capture by hostile forces. You must remain within a secure U.S. Military controlled compound at all times when not in a travel status with the following exceptions:

- Headquarters, NAVSUPACT, Danang
- Camp Tien Sha
- Stone Elephant (CLOSED MESS)
- Marine Exchange
- Air Force Exchange
- China Beach Exchange

9. Should you be required to travel to any of the locations listed in paragraph above, you must travel with a group of two or more persons, two of which must be armed U.S. military personnel. Travel will be in company of large groups of non-indoctrinated personnel whenever possible. Travel to Camp Tien Sha will be performed during daylight hours only unless exceptional operational necessity dictates night travel."

Late 1968 also marked the departure of two experienced operators, Chuck Dibble and Joe Wagner. Both had flown in Da Nang for over two years, and their contribution was not unnoticed. In a personal message to Commander Johnson, the NSG Department head at NCSP, Captain De Lorenzi, the Commanding Officer of VQ-1 cited both Petty Officers, stating in part “Both of these outstanding Petty Officers have made extraordinary contributions to the detachment operation over a sustained period of time. Their professionalism, devotion to duty and perseverance has on numerous occasions resulted in the development of extremely valuable intelligence, which, under other circumstances could have gone unnoticed.”

He then added in a later paragraph, “Regret that I did not personally have the opportunity to speak with CT2 Dibble and Wagner prior to their departure from Da Nang. Would be most appreciative if you would convey to each of them, on behalf of myself and all VQ1 squadron members who have served with them a sincere ‘Well Done’ and best wishes for every success in the future.”

Despite the belief of some, our efforts didn’t go unnoticed, and the squadron was appreciative.

1969 – 1970

Squadron capabilities were significantly upgraded in the spring of 1969 with the arrival of two EP-3B Orion “Bat Rack” aircraft. PR-31 (149678) arrived 17 Mar 69 and PR-32 (149669) arrived on 21 June. After initial checkout at Atsugi, both aircraft deployed to Det Bravo. Back end equipment in the EP-3B was similar to that of the EC-121M. The real advantage of the EP-3B was its cruising altitude, nearly twice that of the venerable Willy. This resulted in a significant improvement in signal quality. From the squadron standpoint, the EP-3’s were more reliable, requiring less maintenance. The EA-3B Skywarrior back end equipment was upgraded in August 1969. This upgrade was nicknamed SEAWING, a name sometimes applied to EA-3B missions in general.

Major damage occurred to the NSG spaces on Sunday, April 27, 1969. Unlike other significant explosions, this one was not caused by a rocket attack, but by a brush fire. According to one account, some Vietnamese were burning trash outside the fence surrounding Ammo Supply Point One (ASP-1) when the fire got out of control, and caught the dry grass on fire inside the fence of ASP-1. Initial attempts by assigned Marines to put out the fire were unsuccessful, and the Marines soon abandoned the cause when a pallet of white phosphorus illumination rounds caught on fire. Things went downhill from there and soon spectacular explosions and shock waves raked the area. The fire spread to the Air Force bomb dump and bulk fuel area, and soon debris from exploding 1000 pound bombs filled the air. Some of the explosions looked like small mushroom clouds, although no special weapons were present. The fires burned for almost

two days. Our spaces were safely evacuated, but in the end were destroyed by debris from the explosions. As a temporary measure, the detachment worked from an equipment van, with a desk and one recorder to check tapes, and a second desk for the evaluator to write post mission reports. Communications support was provided by the AFSS on the opposite side of the runway. New spaces weren't long in coming, though. After losing a high stakes poker game (our new building was part of the pot), the Seabees built a new operations space of approximately 1300 square feet, with room for comms, operations, and admin. Security fencing, generators and defensive positions completed the package. The new building went up in one day, using some 35 Seabees. This compound was home to the detachment for the remainder of its existence.

Another milestone occurred when LCDR Donald C. McKenne assumed command of the detachment June 1, 1969, becoming the first permanently assigned OIC. In addition to the OIC, the detachment was allotted a small cadre of PCS enlisted personnel. All of the CT branches (except T) were represented. Sometime in 1969, Naval Facility (NAVFAC) Da Nang was established at Camp Tien Sha, combining NAVCOMMSTA Philippines Detachments Bravo and Delta, with Commander George L. Jackson as Commanding Officer. The old Det. Bravo was renamed Fleet Support Detachment (FLTSUPDET or FSD), and the OIC of FSD also served as Executive Officer (XO) of NAVFAC.

Tragedy struck just before noon on March 16, 1970 when PR-26 (145927) crashed on landing, with the loss of 23 VQ-1 air crewmen. The plane was repositioning from Tainan in Taiwan to Da Nang, and there were no NSG personnel on board. Witnesses and survivors (there were 8) stated the plane was trying to recover with only 3 engines working. They self aborted their approach, and while trying to come around for a second approach, the wing tip clipped the edge of an F-4 revetment. At that point the aircraft crashed and broke into pieces, with the tail section (and the survivors) relatively intact. Det. Bravo was involved in a small way with the investigation afterwards, when CTIC Harvey "Rusty" Buckley was tasked to transcribe the tape containing the final minutes of voice traffic between Da Nang Tower and the ill-fated PR-26.

LCDR Kent B. Pelot assumed command of the detachment June 1, 1970, relieving LCDR McKenne. Later that summer, in August, CDR Jackson was relieved as CO of NAVFAC by CDR Joseph C. Lewis. CDR Lewis was the last CO of NAVFAC, which was decommissioned in May 1, 1971. FLTSUPDET was resubordinated to NCSP, retaining the FSD title.

1971 – 1972

LCDR George Purring relieved LCDR Pelot as OIC in June of 1971, shortly after

NAVFAC was decommissioned. One of the reasons for the demise of NAVFAC was to reduce the number of billets in Vietnam. This actually benefited FSD, which gained eight billets from NAVFAC. All cryptologic operations at Da Nang were now consolidated at the air base, where security was better.

The first three months of 1972 were rather peaceful (for Da Nang), with only a few rocket attacks of no real consequence. Despite the seeming lull, flight tempo was heavy, with 200 missions flown by March 20. During Tet there were indications the North Vietnamese might start a serious offensive, so on February 12 two aircrews were deployed from Da Nang to Cubi. Missions were flown from Cubi for about two weeks, using PR-31 and PR-32. The rumored threat never materialized and the crews returned to Da Nang about 1 March.

Shortly after, on 6 March 72, CTIC Charles “Chuck” DeCourley relieved CTICS Huff as leading chief. Chief DeCourley was the det’s last leading chief, leaving when the det closed 12 February 1973.

Despite the peace initiatives in Paris, the war escalated in April 1972 with the start of the DRV spring offensive. The two northernmost provinces of South Vietnam fell quickly, but despite these initial successes, the offensive was contained. In reaction to this offensive, RVN and US forces countered with a serious resumption of the air war over the north, including bombing and the mining of Haiphong harbor in May. Rocket attacks increased and were numerous throughout the remainder of 1972. Of the many rocket attacks, one in particular was unusual, in that the rocket did not explode. The rocket landed between the spook bunker and the VQ-1 barracks, and stuck in the concrete pad outside the door of the barracks. No one was injured seriously, but one VQ-1 sailor got a chunk of concrete in his back.

Ops tempo only got heavier toward the end of the year, as the U.S. increased bombing over North Vietnam in an attempt to force an accord in Paris. By the end of the year, over 1000 missions had been flown in 1972. Chief Decourley met the crew of the 1000th mission with a bottle of champagne.

End Game

On 27 January 1973, representatives of the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed “An Agreement Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam” in Paris. The agreement called for the withdrawal of the last 23,700 U.S. troops and advisors left in South Vietnam by the end of March.

The ceasefire negotiated by the Paris Peace Accords took place 31 Jan 1973. Det

operations wound down quickly after that, and the last scheduled combat support mission from Da Nang was flown _ Feb 73, a whale mission with CTISN John V. Phipps (tacair) and CTI3 Gary Nelson (sam) as the BLS participants. The NavFor historical summary for the first quarter of 1973 marked the end of operations in Da Nang, under the 16 Feb entry, "Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron ONE, Detachment Da Nang, RVN and Naval Communications Station, Philippines, Detachment Da Nang, RVN, departed FASU Da Nang and relocated at NAS Cubi Point, Philippines." FASU Da Nang terminated all operational support to squadron detachments and transient aircraft the following day, and was formally disestablished 4 March 1973. All remaining FASU personnel were withdrawn the following day.

The BLS presence in RVN was over, but missions continued to be flown out of Cubi in support of Operation HOMECOMING, the return of the POWs from Hanoi negotiated as part of the PPA.

Afterward

The Det continued operations in support of VQ-1, flying out of Cubi and operating from aircraft carriers. The last mission actually flown out of Da Nang was 6 May, 1973, and it happened more or less unplanned.

Gary Nelson was one of the spooks on the mission, and recalls it happening this way:

"I remember CDR Otto as being the senior of the two pilots for the 2 VQ-1 EA-3B's that bingo'd to Da Nang along with 5 USS Constellation based A-7s because of the weather. After we had refueled and were ready to depart, setting at the end of the runway, the tower refused to give us permission to take-off. CDR Otto argued with the tower controller, then making a "command decision", he radioed the 2nd VQ-1 EA-3B's pilot and told them we were all leaving, with or without permission. It was the only time I ever remember 2 EA-3Bs rolling down the runway for takeoff simultaneously. We were closely followed by all 5 of the A-7's. The det had long been closed when we landed at Da Nang on May 6th. All seven planes landed because the weather was too severe to conduct any carrier landings, and it was land in Da Nang or bail out over the Gulf of Tonkin (we didn't have enough fuel to return to Cubi Pt.). None of the crew were allowed to leave the vicinity of the airplanes during our time on the ground. We packed the chute, refueled, and got back on the plane. CDR Otto took charge of the situation and got us out. I think the problem was the lack of a diplomatic clearance to land because we weren't supposed to have used Da Nang as our bingo field."

Because of the distance to track, EP-3B missions from Cubi could only manage

about 6 hours on station. The EA-3B missions were flown similar to the “double shuttle” concept used during the first year of the det. The whale would launch from Cubi and proceed to station, refuel in-flight, for a total 4 hour mission. After being relieved by the second whale, they would trap aboard the carrier, refuel and relaunch for the second four hour mission (while the second EA-3B trapped and refueled). They would then be relieved by the second EA-3B, plug and return to Cubi. The second whale would be relieved by the EP-3B.

Gary Nelson also recalls his longest mission in a whale. “(It) was a 14 hour-plus mission when the 2nd EA-3B had mechanical issues and couldn’t make its schedule that day. We flew to station, flew our mission, refueled in-air, flew the second four hour mission, refueled in-air, then completed the 3rd four hour mission before the P-3 arrived to relieve us on station. We refueled in-air again, and returned our tired sore buttocks to Cubi Pt.” This might be one of the longest EA-3B operational missions on record.

The final sustained operations were flown in the spring of 1975 as part of Operation Frequent Wind and in support of the Mayaguez rescue operation. With the conclusion of the latter, the U.S. involvement in Indochina came to an end.

SIGINT interest in Southeast Asia faded during the remainder of the 1970’s. Concurrent with the waning interest, the pool of linguists also shrank. In 1976 there were 60 some Vietnamese linguists, most of whom were senior enlisted, many of them BLS. By the early 1980’s most of these had retired or were no longer active linguists, and the available pool had shrunk to less than 30. Only a few of these were available when VQ-1 was tasked to reactivate a PARPRO track off the coast of southern Vietnam, none of them former Det Bravo spooks. Several missions were flown in November of 1982 using an EP-3 staged from Cubi, but no significant information was collected. Going north to the old track used during the war was not considered due to the risk and lack of supporting air cover.

DLI stopped training Vietnamese linguists in 2004.

Postscript

One of the most interesting things about any story is the ending. For most of us, Da Nang was the beginning. We were all young, fresh out of high school or college, and didn’t think too much about the distant future. Outside of a few bad moments, Da Nang was an exciting job, one that we volunteered for. For nearly everyone, it was a stepping stone to success.

Those who chose to stay in the Navy and become lifers rose to the top of the enlisted and officer ranks. At least two alumni became Rear Admirals and commanded

the entire Naval Security Group. Others achieved top enlisted or warrant officer status.

Those who decided the Navy was not for them were equally as successful in civilian life. Some worked for the government in other capacities; others launched successful businesses or became valued employees. Several became authors, including Wayne Care, who wrote a fictional account of a year flying in Da Nang. I'd like to think their Da Nang experience gave them some good guidelines to follow – do what you have to do to accomplish the mission, and don't sweat the small stuff.

In early 2013, thanks to the internet, a small group of former Big Look Spooks connected and started a web site and forum. Things snowballed from this small beginning, and in October 2013, nearly 40 of our group got together for a reunion in St. Petersburg, FL. Most of us hadn't seen each other for over 40 years, and after some reintroductions (somehow we didn't look the same, except for Huong); it was like we had never been apart.

Hopefully we won't wait another 40 years!

Part II –

The Orphanage

Early on the Detachment established an informal relationship with the Sacred Heart Nursery Orphanage in Da Nang City. Staffed by nuns of the order of Saint Paul of Chartres, the orphanage cared for over 150 children at any given time. Depending on the liberty policy, Detachment members frequently visited the orphanage, bringing cash and needed supplies to help support the children. Those who visited frequently established friendships with the children, and in at least one case, successfully adopted a child.

After the fall of Saigon, in 1975, some of the orphanage property was seized by the new government, and converted to other uses. Orphanage records were confiscated as well, but some of these were reconstructed by the nuns, who were able to gain some access to the records held by the government.

Today the convent and orphanage facilities still stand, but part of the orphanage is now an old-age home for the nuns. The nuns who cared for the orphans are still there, but quite old in many cases. A visitor in 2006 remarked that the orphanage was clean and seemed to be a happy place (unlike some others in Ho Chi Minh City). She stated,

“We passed through a yard with dozens of toys and games, all in good condition. The rooms were clear and didn’t smell of disinfectant or urine. Most of the children we saw were sleeping on mats on the floor for naptime, although the toddlers and infants were in cribs.”

Appendix I - Awards:

Individual:

Air Medal – The Air Medals awarded to BLS were “strike/flight”, that is, they were awarded based on time spent flying in the designated combat zone. S/F Air Medals (AS) were authorized in Vietnam between July 4, 1965 and Jan 28, 1973. Early on they were awarded based on a points system, with one point given for “support” flights, and 2 points given for “strike” flights. A total of 20 points qualified one for the Air Medal. At some point this was changed to a system based on flight hours, with 250 hours required to earn the Air Medal. S/F Air Medals are worn with a bronze number designating the number earned, to distinguish them from individual Air Medals, awarded for specific acts.

Purple Heart – awarded to those wounded in action. Wounds from rocket shrapnel qualified one for this award.

Bronze Star - At least one Bronze Star was awarded to an enlisted flyer, and most of the PCS OICs were given a Bronze Star as an end-of-tour award.

Navy Commendation/Navy Achievement Medals – Some personnel were awarded these medals, usually as end-of-tour awards, and almost always were authorized to wear the Combat “V” on the award.

RVN Air Cross of Gallantry (aka Blue Max) – The Blue Max was awarded to a number of Det personnel between 1967 and 1973. It was awarded based on total missions, 150 missions were required. This award was given by the Republic of Vietnam.

Unit:

The parent command, NavCommSta Phil, received unit citations covering almost the entire period of the Vietnam War. The detachments were also included in these. The following unit citations were awarded to NCSP during the war:

NUC	1 Aug 1964 – 1 Aug 1966	
NUC	2 Aug 1966 – 1 Sep 1967	Det Alfa, Bravo, Delta
NUC	1 Mar 1968 – 1 Mar 1971	
MUC	30 Mar 1972 – 28 Jan 1973	FSD Da Nang (1 Apr 72 – 27 Jan 73)

Personnel who were permanently assigned to NCSP 21 July 1972 – 15 Aug 1972 are authorized to wear the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation (PPUC), awarded for flood relief efforts following a series of bad typhoons. Personnel who were TAD (to Da Nang or elsewhere) were authorized the award, so long as they were permanently assigned to NCSP.

In addition to these unit awards, all Navy and Marine Corps personnel who were stationed “in country” Vietnam were eligible for two Vietnamese unit citations. The Republic of Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation was awarded by the Chief of the Joint General Staff, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces in two colors: Gallantry Cross Color with Palm and Frame (8 Feb 62 – 28 Mar 73) and Civil Actions First Class Color with Palm and Frame (1 Jan 65 – 28 Mar 73). Anyone serving in country during the eligibility periods is eligible for both awards.

Some confusion exists from time to time regarding these awards, since there was also an individual award for valor, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, which had a medal with an accompanying ribbon the same color as the unit citation. The unit citation has no medal authorized, there is no accompanying certificate or citation, and the ribbon is always worn with a gold frame and palm. The ribbon for the valor award (which typically was awarded to Army personnel on a case by case basis, similar to the Blue Max) would be worn without the frame.

Campaign:

There were two campaign awards received by almost all while they served at Da Nang, one awarded by the US, and the other by the Republic of Vietnam.

The Vietnam Service Medal (VSM) was awarded by the US to members of the Naval service (Navy and Marine Corps) for service between 3 July 1965 and 28 March 1973 meeting one of the following qualifications:

Be attached to or regularly serve for 1 or more days with an organization participating in or directly supporting military operations,

Be attached to or regularly serve for 1 or more days aboard a Naval vessel directly supporting military operations.

Actually participate as a crewmember in one or more aerial flights into airspace above Vietnam and contiguous waters directly supporting military operations.

Serve on temporary duty for 30 consecutive days or 60 nonconsecutive days in Vietnam or contiguous areas, except that time limit may be waived for personnel participating in actual combat operations.

Individuals qualified for the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (AFEM) for reason of service in Vietnam between 1 July 1958 and 3 July 1965 (inclusive) remain

qualified for that medal, but at their option, may have that AFEM converted to a VSM. No person is entitled to both awards for Vietnam service.

The VSM has a yellow ribbon with three red stripes and green borders. Stars are worn on this ribbon denoting participation in specific campaigns, which are listed below, with the associated time periods:

Vietnam Advisory Campaign	15 Mar 62 – 7 Mar 65
Vietnam Defense Campaign	8 Mar 65 – 24 Dec 65
Vietnamese Counteroffensive	25 Dec 65 – 30 Jun 66
Vietnamese Counteroffensive II	1 Jul 66 – 31 May 67
Vietnamese Counteroffensive III	1 Jun 67 – 29 Jan 68
Tet Counteroffensive	30 Jan 68 – 1 Apr 68
Vietnamese Counteroffensive IV	2 Apr 68 – 30 Jun 68
Vietnamese Counteroffensive V	1 Jul 68 – 1 Nov 68
Vietnamese Counteroffensive VI	2 Nov 68 – 22 Feb 69
Tet 69 Counteroffensive	23 Feb 69 – 8 Jun 69
Vietnam Summer-Fall 1969	9 Jun 69 – 31 Oct 69
Vietnam Winter-Spring 1970	1 Nov 69 – 30 Apr 70
Sanctuary Counteroffensive	1 May 70 – 30 Jun 70
Vietnamese Counteroffensive VII	1 Jul 70 – 30 Jun 71
Consolidation I	1 Jul 71 – 30 Nov 71
Consolidation II	1 Dec 71 – 29 Mar 72
Vietnam Ceasefire	30 Mar 72 – 28 Jan 73
Operation Frequent Wind	29 Apr 75 - 30 Apr 75

The second campaign award routinely earned for service in Vietnam was the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, awarded by the Republic of Vietnam. The period of eligibility for this award is 1 Mar 1961 to 28 Mar 73, inclusive. Naval service personnel are eligible for this medal under one or more of the following conditions:

Wounded or injured in hostile action

Captured by the opposing force during actions or in the line of duty, but later rescued or released

Killed in action or in the line of duty

Served a cumulative six months in South Vietnam

Served a cumulative six months outside the geographical limits of South Vietnam, but contributing direct combat support to the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces during such period

Assigned in Vietnam on 28 Jan 73 and served during the entire period from 29 Jan to 28 Mar 73, inclusive.

Combat Action Ribbon:

Some detachment aircrews were awarded the combat action ribbon, usually based on a situation where a plane was landing or took off during a rocket attack. Although the criteria for award of the CAR was not clearly defined, generally an exchange of fire needed to be involved, or fire directed at an aircraft. Merely being on the ground during a rocket attack did not qualify.

Naval Air Crewman Wings:

Nearly everyone who flew qualified for air crew wings. The requirements to be awarded wings varied from time to time. In 1972 the requirements were these:

Orders to flight duty

Completion of air crew training, which included SERE, DWEST, aircrew swim, Low Pressure chamber and night vision training

Successful completion of ten missions

Successful ditching and bailout drill

Recommendation of the chain of command

Appendix II – Leadership

Officers-in-Charge:

TAD Officers in Charge

The first Officers in Charge were temporarily assigned, usually from San Miguel. They frequently rotated in and out, most doing a couple of stints. Exactly who was assigned when is difficult to determine, due to the lack of official records. The below named were assigned at one time or another, based on personal recollection, Navy awards records and some limited documents available.

Thomas F. Hahn (Nov – Dec 65)
David R. Patterson (1966)
Charles J. Malloy (AS 6/1/66 – 6/1/67)
James E. Woodhouse (1/1/66- 2/1/68) (CV1/1/66 -2/1/68, AS 7/1/66-4/1/67)
Donald R. Larsen (July 1967)
Carl Strobel (Aug 67, Feb – Mar 68)
Selby W. Jacobs (AS 6/1/68 – 3/1/69)
Leonard B. Swanson (AS 4/1/68 – 2/1/69)
Karl Bernet (1969)

Almost certainly others served as well, hopefully further research will uncover more names.

PCS Officers in Charge

Donald C. McKenne (1 Jun 69 – 1 Jun 70) BV 6/1/69 – 6/1/70, AS 6/1/69 – 1/1/70
Kent B. Pelot (1 Jun 70 – 1 May 71) BV 6/1/70 – 5/1/71, AS 6/1/70 – 12/1/70
George A. Purring (1 May 71 – 1 May 72)
James C. Gamrath (1 May 72 – 1 Mar 73) BS 5/1/72 – 3/1/73, AS 5/1/72 – 10/1/72

Leading Chiefs (TAD)

The same situation exists for the Chiefs as did for the officers. Records are sparser, since most official correspondence was signed by the OIC. Most of the below is

based on recollection.

TAD Leading Chiefs:

CTTC Gary Cooper	(Aug – Nov 1966)
GySgt Forest Overall, USMC	(1967)
CTC F. W. Batchelor	(1967 – 68)
CTRCS Ralph Edwards	(Jul 67 – 68)

PCS Leading Chiefs:

CTOC Swartout	(1970 – 1971)
CTICS William G. Huff	1971 – Mar 1972
CTIC Charles D. DeCourley	Mar 1972 – Feb 1973
CTIC Dennis R. Culbertson	Post Det (in PI)

Appendix III - The Planes:

(This section dedicated to the memory of Bob Sluter, who read Jane's Fighting Ships and Jane's Aircraft like the rest of us read cheap pulp fiction!)

Three types of planes were flown by VQ-1 during the life of the Det. These were the EC-121M Super Constellation (aka Willy Victor or Willy), the EA-3B Skywarrior (aka Seawing), and the EP-3B Orion. The name BIG LOOK was also used in reference to the EC-121M and EP-3B.

Listed below are the specific aircraft flown by VQ-1 during the duration of the Det. Naval aircraft generally have two numeric designations, the Bureau Number (BuNo) which is a permanent 6 digit number; and the modex, a letter-number combination assigned by the squadron. The latter can be changed, as was sometimes the case with the EA-3B's. The BuNo remains with the aircraft until the plane is retired or lost.

Willys:

PR-21/135749 - Was the first VQ-1 "Big Bird" in Da Nang, flown in from Atsugi in September 1965. PR-21 was shot down by the North Korean AF 15 April 1969 with loss of all on board, including several BLS.

PR-22/

PR-23/

PR-24/145936 - survived the war, caught fire at Atsugi in 1974. No loss of life, but the aircraft was considered a loss and stricken. The derelict aircraft was still there in 1975. (BuNo 135747 was also assigned Modex PR-24 in 1961, ex VW bird??)

PR-25/145940

PR-26/145927 - crashed at Da Nang 16 March 1970 while trying to recover from an aborted approach. 23 crew killed, 8 survived. There were no Spooks on board; the flight was a repositioning flight from Atsugi via Tainan, Taiwan.

PR-27/143186 - PR-27 was specially configured and did not spend as much time in Da Nang. It was more commonly flown in the SOJ.

EP-3B

PR-31/149678 - Transferred to VQ-1 17 March 1969. First flight in the squadron was 21 March 69 from Atsugi to Atsugi.

PR-32/149669 - Transferred to VQ-1 21 June 1969

The two EP-3B's were the only aircraft of their kind. Later EP-3 aircraft assigned to VQ-1 (and VQ-2) were EP-3E, with different avionics (AIRES/DEEPWELL). The "B Birds" (also called BAT RACK), started life as P-3A in the early 1960's. In May 1963 they were obtained by the CIA and converted from straight ASW P-3A's to a SIGINT configuration by LTV Aerosystems, Greenville, TX. The transfer to the CIA became official in the summer of 1964. Their use by the CIA has still not been fully disclosed, but in 1966 they were sent to Taiwan and assigned the ROCAF 34th "Black Bat" squadron. While assigned they were armed with Sidewinder missiles, and flew missions along the China coast, collecting SIGINT and air samples. Their use by ROCAF ended in January 1967, and they were transferred back to the Navy and sent to NAS Alameda for long term storage. Demands of the Vietnam War dictated otherwise, and in September 1967 they were sent to Lockheed Burbank for conversion into EP-3B's. Conversion and testing was completed and the two aircraft were delivered to VQ-1 in spring of 1969.

These two aircraft flew long after the Vietnam War, and were very reliable. Sometime in the early 1980's PR-31 went over 20,000 flight hours (that were recorded by the Navy, no one knew how many CIA hours were on the airframes). PR-32 had almost as much time in the air. Both were retired in the late 1980's/early 1990's, when VQ-1 and VQ-2 EP-3's were replaced with a new set of EP-3's. The modex numbers were reassigned to the new BuNo's. So the "PR-32" which collided with the Chinese F-8 off Hainan Island in 2001 was not the plane we flew during Det days in Vietnam.

EA-3B (aka Skywarrior, Whale) – in the list below, only the BuNo is listed for each Whale. The modex numbers were frequently changed, depending on where the aircraft operated, especially when assigned to aircraft carriers.

142671

142673 - specially configured for use by an Army backend crew (SEA BRINE)

144831

144834

144840

144854

146449

146452

- specially configured for use by an Army backend crew (SEA BRINE)

Appendix IV - Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAA Anti-aircraft Artillery

AMS Airborne Mission Supervisor. Senior member of RC-135 back end crew, usually a senior enlisted NCO.

ARC LIGHT B-52 missions flown over North Vietnam

ARVN Army, Republic of Vietnam

AS Strike/Flight Air Medal

ASP Ammo Supply Point

ASRP Airborne SIGINT reconnaissance platform.

BARLOCK NATO cover name for the primary North Vietnamese air search radar, supplied by the Soviets.

BIG LOOK Cover name applied to the specially modified AN/APS-20 radar used for acquiring electronic signals. In a broader sense, the term came to be used to describe the multiengine aircraft assigned to Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron ONE (VQ-1).

BLACK TRACK Missions flown over Laos, usually using the EA-3B.

BLS Big Look Spook, any of the cryptologic personnel (officer and enlisted) who flew or ground-supported VQ-1's mission in Da Nang.

BRIGAND Bistatic Radar Intelligence Generation and Analysis, New Development. A means of passively capturing the image from an enemy circular scanning radar, by displaying the target radar's return pulses.

BS Bronze Star Medal

BUNO Bureau Number. The six digit number assigned to every naval aircraft by the Bureau of Naval Air (BuAir). The BUNO is permanently assigned and remains with the aircraft throughout its naval service.

BV Bronze Star Medal with Combat V authorized.

CDSE Cryptologic Direct Support Element. A SIGINT team, usually embarked temporarily as a division on a ship, for support to the embarked commander, and for intelligence collection in a specific area.

Chiling Chinese linguist

COMBAT APPLE USAF cover name for SIGINT reconnaissance missions flown from Okinawa, using RC-135 aircraft. These missions were flown in the Gulf of Tonkin, using a track similar to Big Look, but at higher altitude.

COMEVAL COMINT evaluator, the senior NSG officer on a VQ-1 flight crew.

COMINT Communications Intelligence. Intelligence derived from exploitation of intercepted enemy voice, Morse and non-Morse communications, such as teleprinter and data communications.

COMNAVSECGRU Commander, Naval Security Group. C.f. NSG

COMSEVENTHFLT Commander, Seventh Fleet. Based in Japan, the Seventh Fleet controlled all Navy ships and squadrons in the western Pacific, including those supporting the Vietnam War.

CRITICOMM The world wide system of communications between elements of the SIGINT system. Controlled by the National Security Agency.

Crypto Slang for cryptographic equipment. Cryptographic equipment is used to encrypt friendly communications to deny exploitation. Cryptologic equipment is that used to exploit enemy communications.

CT Communications Technician, later Cryptologic Technician. Enlisted Navy personnel assigned to elements of the NSG, responsible for SIGINT operations. (c.f. NSG).

CTE Commander, Task Element

CTF Commander, Task Force.

CTG Commander, Task Group

CTU Commander, Task Unit

DEEPSEA Squadron call sign for VQ-1 aircraft, drawn from JANAP-119. Deepsea plus the modex number was used to create a call sign used on radio circuits, e.g. PR-31 would be Deepsea 31. On some occasions the number was a mission number, the callsign of PR-21 when shot down by the North Koreans was Deepsea 129.

DESOTO Cover name for shipboard patrols conducted along the Asian periphery to collect intelligence and reaffirm free navigation thru international waters.

Det Detachment

DIRNSA Director, National Security Agency.

DWEST Deep Water Environmental Survival Training

ELINT Electronic Intelligence. Information derived from the exploitation of intercepted enemy radar signals.

EOB ELINT Order of Battle. An intelligence document detailing the known locations of enemy radar equipment.

Eval Evaluator. Senior member of a flight crew, who directs operations not involving flying the aircraft. Normally a junior officer, but can be a warrant or senior enlisted in some cases.

FAGOT NATO covername for the MiG-15

FAIRECONRON Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron. Also abbreviated as VQ. There were as many as six such squadrons in the Navy. Four were associated with the SIGINT mission: One, Two, Five and Six. VQ-3 and 4 were part of a command and control project known as TACAMO (Take Charge and Move Out), associated with command and control of ballistic missile submarines.

FAN SONG B NATO cover name for the fire control radar associated with the SA-2 surface to air missile.

FARMER NATO covername for the MiG-19

FASU Fleet Air Support Unit. The organization responsible for maintaining naval aviation ground facilities at Da Nang AB. Pronounced 'Fay-sue'. Their enlisted club was called the Zoo Club, with 'Zoo' being a

corruption of 'Sue'

FISHBED NATO covername for the MiG-21 series fighter aircraft

FLTSUPDET Fleet Support Detachment.

FREQUENT WIND Cover name for the final evacuation of Saigon.

FRESCO NATO covername for the MiG-17 fighter aircraft

FSD Fleet Support Detachment.

GCA Ground controlled approach. A technique used to land an aircraft, usually during bad weather, where the ground radar controller gives the pilot precise course and altitude adjustments on approach.

GCI Ground controlled intercept. A technique whereby a ground controller vectors a fighter aircraft toward an enemy target.

GDRS General Directorate of Rear Services. Element of the North Vietnamese Army responsible for moving supplies along the Ho Chi Minh trail in the mountains of Vietnam and Laos.

GOT Gulf of Tonkin

GUIDELINE NATO cover name for the Soviet built SA-2 Surface to Air missile system, used by the North Vietnamese.

Korling Korean linguist

LCPO Leading Chief Petty Officer. The senior enlisted man assigned to the Detachment.

MERCURY GRASS Cover name for the multichannel communications system used to interconnect SA-2 sites. The Soviet equipment designator was R-401 or R-401M.

MACV Military Advisory Command, Vietnam. The overall command in charge of all US forces in Vietnam. NAVFORV was the subordinate naval element of MACV.

MiG Abbreviation for the Soviet design bureau (Mikoyan and Gurevich) which developed the fighter aircraft used by the North Vietnamese. Models in service during the Vietnam War included the MiG-17, 19, and 21.

MODEX The number on the nose of a Navy aircraft, assigned by the squadron.

NAF Naval Air Facility

NAS Naval Air Station

NAVCOMMSTA Phil Naval Communications Station, Philippines. Often called San Miguel, due to the location of the small base at Barrio San Miguel, San Antonio, Zambales, about 15 miles north of the Subic Bay Naval Base.

NAVFAC Naval Facility. NAVFAC Da Nang was a short-lived command which grew out of NCSP Det Delta, located at Camp Tien Sha.

NAVFORV Naval Forces, Vietnam.

NCSP Naval Communications Station, Philippines.

NSA 1. National Security Agency. The element of the Defense Department charged with oversight of all SIGINT operations. 2. Naval Support Activity. In Da Nang, the Navy element responsible for the administrative support to Navy elements based at Da Nang.

NSG Naval Security Group. The Navy element responsible for conducting SIGINT operations. Officers were designated as 161X, Limited Duty Officers as 644X, Warrant Officers as 744X, and enlisted as one of six Communications Technician (CT) branches, T= technical, A= administrative, M=maintenance, O=operator, R=collection, I=interpretive. Each enlisted branch focused on a specific area. T exploited non-Morse signals, A was responsible for administration and publications control, M for equipment maintenance, O for communications between cryptologic elements, R for Morse code signals, and I for foreign language communications.

NVAF North Vietnamese Air Force

OIC Officer in Charge.

OPSEC Operational Security.

PARPRO Peacetime Aerial Reconnaissance Program

PCS Permanent Change of Station

PPA Paris Peace Accords. The treaty which ended the US presence in Vietnam, signed in January 1973

PRC People's Republic of China (Beijing)

PURPLE DRAGON Cover name for a program which examined Operational Security

ROCAF Republic of China Air Force (Taiwan)

ROLLING THUNDER U.S. bombing campaign over North Vietnam.

RP Republic of the Philippines

Ruling Russian linguist

SAM Surface to Air Missile

SEA BRINE Project name for special Army missions flown by VQ-1.

SEAWING EA-3B carrier based missions.

SERE Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape. Also the name of the school, either at Warner Springs in San Diego, or Little Creek in Virginia, or later at Brunswick, Maine, which taught tactics to enable downed aircrew to evade capture if possible, and to resist exploitation if captured. It was a very intense one week course, one experience most never forget.

SEVAL Senior Evaluator, the officer in charge of back end operations in a VQ-1 aircraft.

S/F Strike/Flight. Refers to Air Medals.

SI Special Intelligence. Special Intelligence was synonymous with Signal Intelligence. Those involved with the collection and analysis and use of SIGINT were given SI access.

SIGAD SIGINT Activity Designator. A unique letter/number designator assigned by NSA to each location involved in SIGINT operations.

SIGINT Signals Intelligence. Information derived from exploitation of enemy

electronic signals. Components include COMINT, ELINT and TELINT.

Spook Mess An unsanctioned bar, built into the top floor of the detachment barracks in Da Nang.

SPOONREST NATO cover name for the target acquisition radar associated with the SA-2 missile system.

TACAIR Tactical Air. In the context of this history, it refers to activity of the North Vietnamese Air Force.

TAD Temporary Assignment of Duty

TDY Temporary Duty, used interchangeably with TAD.

TELINT Telemetry Intelligence. Information derived from the exploitation of intercepted enemy telemetry.

USSS United States SIGINT system.

Vietling Vietnamese linguist

VPAF Vietnam Peoples' Air Force, c.f. NVAF

VQ Squadron abbreviation for Navy Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadrons.

WEE LOOK Cover name for missions flown in the GOT using EA-3B aircraft.

WESTPAC Western Pacific.

Whale Nickname for the EA-3B Skywarrior.

Willy Victor Nickname for the EC-121M aircraft used by VQ-1. Often shortened to just 'Willy'.

Throughout this history, many abbreviations and acronyms are used. Some of these, radar, for instance, have become common terms in English. Others, especially some of the abbreviations the Navy is so fond of, are expanded and defined in Appendix IV. Since this history is intended for limited distribution, the author assumes readers have some experience with the Navy and its unique language.

Combining Big Look and Whale missions

Although this narrative is told from the NSG side, it is impossible to separate NSG and VQ-1. The strength of the platform derived from the COMINT/ELINT fusion developed by the entire aircrew, making us the only true SIGINT collector in the GOT. Other platforms had one or the other, but not both.

We did follow technical guidance governing the United States SIGINT System (USSS). We used standard

USSS formats, were connected via CRITICOMM, were assigned a SIGINT Activity Designator (SIGAD – USN-843), and forwarded transcribed material to NSA for further analysis.

This was later changed, after Vietnam, and all crew were cleared

1610 was the former designator for cryptologists, they are now designated 1810.

At least one BLS, John Shipman, was a dependent in Vietnam in the early 1960's

Info supplied by CAPT Norm Bull, USN (ret) via e-mail. CAPT Bull did two tours with VQ-1 and was an aircraft commander on both the P4M and EC-121M. On one P4M mission in early 1957, CAPT Bull and Dean North (rank unknown) overflew downtown Hanoi and Haiphong.

VQ Association Newsletter Summer/Fall 2004, pp 4-5

Retired CAPT, USN

Bull, *ibid*.

Retired LCDR, USN. His recollections via e-mail

At one time as many as 13 were assigned to the squadron

One of those shot down was LTjg Edward Alvarez. He spent the entire war in the Hanoi Hilton and was released at the end of hostilities.

BRIGAND = Bistatic Radar Intelligence Generation and Analysis, New Development. Invented by Chuck Christman, the legendary "Crab" of VQ-1, BRIGAND passively located circular scanning air search radars by capturing the return pulses. For a good technical description of BRIGAND and BIG LOOK, see Price, Alfred [History of US Electronic Warfare, Volume III](#), pp 14 - 17

Price, *ibid*

Plane Commander was LCDR Robert Hullander. Information about the first Willy deployment provided by AFCM Allan "Putt" Prevette, USN (ret) who was on the crew.

This detachment may have had several letter designations; at least one source refers to the det as Delta.

Called "spooks" by the VQ-1 enlisted aircrew, who weren't cleared in some cases, and thus weren't really sure just what we were doing. The name stuck, and we became Big Look Spooks.

Interview with CWO4 John T. Wise, USN retired (10/31/13)

H (or Hotel) time is the local time in Vietnam, 8 hours ahead of GMT (or Zulu)

Selected Naval Documents: Vietnam, United States Naval Operations Vietnam, Highlights; May 1966.

Available online from the Naval History Command.

CTTC, retired as CTTCS

GCI = Ground Controlled Intercept

Those wounded included CTI? Neil Bickerton, CTI2 Joe Romero, CTR3 Bill Ayers, CTI? Wagner, CTR? Parker, CTC Batchelor, an unknown officer, CTM2 William "Turk" Tokarsky, Jr.

William Tokarsky in email

Leppert, William B. "CT Duty at Rocket City", NCVA Cryptolog Spring 2009, p 5

Guestbook entry by CTR1 Andrew E. Altes at www.navycthistory.com.

Isaiah C "Ike" Cole retired as RADM, and served as COMNAVSECGRU before he retired.

CDR Hahn referenced similar restrictions during his travel to Phu Bai in the summer of 1964.

CT2 Wagner was awarded 14 S/F Air Medals during his time with the detachment

The Willy typically flew at 9000 feet, sometimes climbing to 11,000. The EP-3 flew at 18 – 20K feet. Many airframe parts, including engines, were interchangeable with regular P-3's. Since a squadron of ASW P-3's was always deployed to NAS Cubi in the PI, a much larger pool of engines were available if needed.

SEAWING avionics carried the JAN designator AN/ALR-40. Built by Sylvania (later GTE Sylvania).

Account by Sgt. Bill Letendre, USMC as posted on [HYPERLINK "http://www.grunt.com"](http://www.grunt.com)

www.grunt.com. Sgt Letendre was assigned to ASP-1 and was one of the initial firefighters.

E-mail exchange with Karl Bernet, last TAD OIC of the det.

CTT aircrew were assigned to VQ-1 (instead of NSG). They were ELINT specialists who operated the "Lab" position on the big birds, responsible for fingerprinting various enemy radars.

Based on Flight Orders issued in the fall of 1969, which had as letterhead Naval Facility Da Nang, and were signed by CDR Jackson.

There is a PR-26 memorial website at [HYPERLINK "http://pr26-vietnam.com"](http://pr26-vietnam.com) <http://pr26-vietnam.com> which provides more detail on the crash, and personnel recollections of surviving aircrew and ground personnel who assisted.

Retired CWO2. Info from e-mail exchange.

After assuming command, CDR Lewis did fly enough to earn an Air Medal.

One of the other reasons given for the Cubi deployment was President Nixon's visit to China.

CNFV Quarterly History for Jan-Mar 1972 under the 13 Feb entry states "COMUSMACV issued alert condition Gray status for all U.S. Forces in RVN in connection with increased enemy activity during Tet holidays and during President Nixon's trip to China. The alert was lifted at 1200H 2 Mar 1972.

See "Reflections" section for a personal account of Chief DeCourley's time in Da Nang.

No one is sure what happened to this rocket, but the detachment did have a 122mm rocket (rendered safe) that was taken from Da Nang to San Miguel. In May of 1973 this rocket, along with numerous other weapons, was still in the 58 Division spaces in the Receivers Building at San Miguel.

Purple Dragon p 81

NAVFORV command history

Taken from e-mails from Gary Nelson to John Phipps. Gary stayed in and retired as CTICS.

Nelson, ibid

Nelson, ibid

PARPRO = Peacetime Aerial Reconnaissance PROgram. All flights flown along the Asian periphery, except those in the GOT during the Vietnam War, were flown under the rules of this program. PR-21's ill fated flight was a PARPRO flight.

The COMEVAL was a former BLS

The book, Vietnam Spook Show, is available on Amazon.com. Recommended reading for anyone who was there.

<http://babyliftrevisited.typepad.com>

Air Medals are also awarded for individual acts or achievement involving flight. For example, the crew of PR-32 which landed in Hainan Island after a mid-air collision with a PRC F-8 received individual Air Medals, based on their actions during that flight only.

Bob Sluter got a Bronze Star in lieu of a 9th Air Medal

Note that the eligibility dates are slightly different for FSD. These dates correspond to the dates for a MUC awarded to CTE 72. (VQ-1 Det Bravo, Da Nang), indicating the FSD MUC was awarded as part of the VQ-1 corresponding MUC. If that were the case, personnel assigned from NCSP would be eligible for two MUCs, one from NSCP and one from FSD.

In addition to this time period, the Naval Service also awarded the medal to those participating in Frequent Wind.

Taken from data provided on the Navy History Center website, and Wikipedia

Although the Ceasefire campaign ended 28 January, there were still people stationed in Vietnam, including VQ and FSD personnel. The peace accords specified all US personnel were to be withdrawn from Vietnam by 29 Mar 73, except those stationed at the Embassy. The eligibility for the VSM ended on 28 Mar 73, so it was still possible to be awarded the medal for service during a two month period when there was no campaign designated. Those so awarded would wear the medal with no campaign star.

SECNAVINST 1650.1H, dated Aug 22, 2006. Sometimes referred to as the Navy-Marine Corps Award Manual

Only those personnel who meet the criteria established for the AFEM (Vietnam) or VSM are considered to have contributed direct combat support.

Any NSG personnel with an S/F Air Medal earned during Vietnam is presumed to have been in Da Nang. There is one known exception, a medically grounded aviator who transferred to the NSG after earning an Air Medal as a helo pilot.

There were two CPO assigned during this period. CTIC Richard Miller was assigned in the CTIC billet.

Generally this is the case; however, there are some exceptions. Prior to full involvement in Vietnam, while VQ-1 was based at Atsugi, Japan, the Japanese government would not permit US aircraft based in Japan to actively participate in Southeast Asian missions. To circumvent this, the aircraft were flown from Japan to Cubi, where the Bureau Number was changed. Once the missions were completed, the aircraft returned to Cubi where the correct BuNo was restored.

A third P-3A (149673) also served with the ROCAF, and was returned to Alameda with the other 2 planes. It was later converted for another special purpose (not related to VQ operations).

