

## **245th Redeye History — 1968**





## In Reflection

For a brief reflection of the past year's activities, we must note the tremendous strides taken by the 245th Surveillance Airplane Company. At the start of the year 1968, the company had merely begun to settle in Vietnam. The officers and men of the company have worked long, hard hours to build both the physical and mental structures of this unit. The Redeyes have achieved in a few short months what many units take years to or never do accomplish — a solid, reliable, high-spirited organization. As this year, 1968, nears a successful end, the officers and men can be proud of a job well done . . . thanks to the efforts of men such as PFC John G. Sparks.

The year ahead is destined to be one of great challenge and opportunity," was Lt. Gen Bruce Palmer's New Year's Day Message to the Troops on 1 January 1968.

Lt. Gen Palmer's message was to prove very apropos for the officers and men of the 245th Surveillance Airplane Company, who had just recently arrived at Marble Mountain Air Facility, DaNang, Republic of Vietnam. For the personnel of the 245th SAC January 1968, was a time to carry on with the task which they had merely begun during the latter portion of 1967. The 26 officers and 224 enlisted men present for duty on 1 January 1968, accepted the challenge and began striding forward toward completion of what was to prove one of the most successful years of any Mohawk surveillance company anywhere. The 3rd of January saw Major Williams McDermott turn over the reins of the company to Major James B. Carlisle, Jr. On 31 January major military action by the enemy began, and the action was to rage on into the following months.

February began with the 24 officers, 1 warrant officer, and 208 enlisted men "digging-in" under the constant rocket and mortar fire of the enemy. During the first few days of the month DaNang received heavy poundings from enemy fire, while Hue, merely 15 minutes flying time to the north of DaNang, was virtually occupied by the NVA during the Tet Offensive. Although the Tet Offensive ended in victory by the allies in mid-February, this brought little relief to the man of the 245th SAC who were continually in the rocket fan of the enemy.

The month of March brought with it the first serious combat losses for the 245th SAC. On the eve of 4 March rockets and mortars slammed into Marble Mountain Air Facility destroying two Redeye aircraft. The accurate enemy fire completely destroyed aircraft 61-2685 and heavy damage necessitated the evacuation of 62-5852. Because of continuing enemy activity in the local area, many of the aircraft and men of the company were evacuated to Ubon Air Base, Ubon, Thailand. During the five day tenure in Ubon, the 245th SAC continued to perform their mission of surveillance of I Corps by launching their aircraft from the Ubon Air Base. Amid all of the activities of March there was again a new commander for the Redeyes, with Major Lynn W. Garten assuming command from

Major James B. Carlisle, Jr. of the 24 officers, 1 warrant officer, and 209 enlisted men of the 245th SAC.

With April came more favorable flying weather and increased activity on the part of the allies. Morning report entries showed a company strength of 22 officers, 1 warrant officer, and 215 enlisted men on 1 April 1968. On 24 April Major James B. Carlisle, Jr. reassumed command of the company from Major Lynn W. Garten. Also on 24 April Captain Maurice D. Hall and PFC John G. Sparks were flying lead ship on a visual reconnaissance mission in the enemy infested Yellowbrick area near Aloui Airstrip in Thau Thien Province, with Captain Clinton A. Phalen, Jr. and SP5 Herbert F. Shirley flying in the trail ship. Heavy enemy fire engaged both aircraft. Due to the accurate fire, both aircraft received hits. Captain Hall and PFC Sparks had to eject from their disabled aircraft. Approximately two hours later, Captain Hall was plucked from the trees by the Jolly Green Giant, a USAF rescue helicopter, but PFC Sparks was not recovered from the trees after the ejection and is presently missing in action. Captain Phalen piloted his disabled aircraft to Hue/Phu Bai where he made a successful crash landing with partial landing gear and hydraulics failure. Aircraft 61-2688 was completely destroyed, while 61-2714 was so heavily damaged that it was evacuated for repairs.

Increased rocket and mortar activity on the part of the NVA marked the month of May. On 5 May approximately 110 mortar rounds slammed into the Marble Mountain area inflicting two casualties and moderate damage while 92 enemy were killed in a battle just to the south of Marble Mountain. Again, on the dates of 8, 12, and 20 May rockets and mortars hit the Marble Mountain Air Facility, destroying a fuel supply point in one attack and temporarily closing the runway in another. The enemy found their mark on 21 May when their accurate mortar fire inflicted light damage to two Redeye aircraft. During May the working areas of the Redeyes was altered slightly with the allies evacuation of Kamh Duc. Captain Clinton Phalen and WO Bennie Benefield with technical observers SP5 Herbert Shirley and SP5 Wilburn H. Paris, Jr. were instrumental in the rescue of three survivors of Kamh Duc when, due to the keen eyes of the "Visual Vipers", the three men were spotted in the dense forest and pick-up aircraft were directed into the area. Due to the hard work and efforts of the Redeye enlisted men, the new and functional EM Club was opened with a floor show on 11 May. May also saw the first game in the hotly contested series of softball games between the NCO's and officers, the first game being won by the NCO's by a score of 4 to 3.

June began with the 245th SAC morning report showing 24 officers, 1 warrant officer, and 248 enlisted men, all of whom were busying themselves in preparation for the upcoming IG Inspection. Early on the evening of 8 June a "Mayday" was received that a Redeye aircraft had been hit by enemy fire and was in trouble. Major Hubert F. Beaton and SP4 James H. Baird had received heavy ground-fire while flying an infrared mission along the Cambodian

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border. Due to his superb airmanship, Major Benton maneuvered his disabled aircraft to a relatively safe area where he and SP4 Baird ejected. Because of darkness, rescue was impossible until daylight, but Redeye aircraft kept up the search for the two men throughout the night. Early the morning of the 9th a "beeper" from a survival radio was received just north-east of Kamh Duc and Major Benton and SP4 Baird were extracted from thick jungle by Jolly Green Giant. Both men were returned to Marble Mountain in good condition to face a jubilant reception by the officers and men of the 245th SAC. Aircraft 61-2708 had flown its last mission. The day following the rescue, the 245th stood the I G Inspection and passed with flying colors.

1LT Clifford H. White, Jr. relinquished his lengthy command of 538th Signal Detachment to 1Lt Daniel J. Peterson, Jr. on 26 June. Rockets again slammed into Marble Mountain Air Facility killing two army personnel and causing moderate damage on 27 June. During the busy month of June the 245th SAC participated in the Change of Command ceremony which saw LTC Bernard Bruns assume command of the 212th Combat Support Aviation Battalion from LTC Wilber A. Middleton.

Little initiative on the part of the enemy made July a fairly stable period. Sporadic mortar and rocket fire caused little damage, but personnel of the 245th were awakened abruptly on Sunday morning of 29 July when a satchel-charge demolished a large steam shovel adjacent to the officers billets. No casualties were incurred. Other events of the month occurred when the officers, short on talent but long on spirit, fought back to whip the NCO's in the second and third games of the softball series by scores of 2-0 and 4-0.

The first half of the month of August passed quietly for the 22 officers, 2 warrant officers, and 237 enlisted men of the 245th SAC. The last ten days of August saw increased ground activity and a new aggressiveness on the part of the enemy. On 19 August seven sappers with explosives and weapons were captured behind the Navel Support Activity Hospital. A marine outpost was overrun on the south side of Marble Mountain with 10 marines and 24 Popular Force personnel killed. On 23 August the Special Forces on the south edge of Marble Mountain Air Facility was hit hard and 20 died. The safety of the 245th aircraft in question, the mission aircraft were evacuated to Ubon, Thailand for the nights of the 23rd thru the 25th of August. Major Gordon K. Lee, Jr. assumed command of the 245th SAC from Major James B. Carlisle, Jr. on 25 August. Before the month was to end, the enemy motored the area again, damaging an aircraft plus causing damage to the mess hall and another building in the area. During August the men of the 245th began a major face-lifting operation when construction started on the new operations complex, which includes an operations center, intelligence shop, escape and evasion shop, technical observers shack and pilot's lounge.

September saw the arrival of many new faces and the departure of many old and experienced personnel who had made possible the outstanding achievements of the company over the past year. The company strength now stood at 18 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 236 enlisted men, many of whom were new to Southeast Asia and eager to carry on in the highest tradition of the Redeyes. 5 September saw the men tying down for the first tropical storm of the season, typhoon Boss. Marble Mountain was battered by sustained winds of 45 knots and heavy rain for two days, and due to the united efforts of all personnel no significant damage was sustained. The unit did dry out by 15 September in time for the Organization Day festivities. Major Richard Julio, the Grand Dragon of the Redeyes, presided over the function held in the Redeye EM Club. Speeches by the group and battalion commander were heard and numerous promo-

tions and decorations were made. September was the month the reins of the 647th Transportation Maintenance Detachment were passed from Captain Fritz J. McDonald to Captain Donald G. Van Matre. Before the end of September the efforts of the headquarters platoon were rewarded with the occupation of the new and functional operations complex.

With the heavy rains of October came the end of an era. The illustrious Redeye "Super Bunker", an officer refuge near the BOQ, after valiant attempts to save her, did succumb to the torrential rains of the season. The Super Bunker will occupy a special niche in the hearts of the Redeye aviators. While nature was destroying one structure, men were building others. A new and elaborate command bunker was completed under the watchful eye of First Sergeant Richard S. Elam. 1Lt Peterson completed a complex and expansive 538th Signal Detachment building, which was dubbed "Pete's Palace". To almost everyone's surprise October saw the long awaited MPC series conversion arrive. All old series MPC was turned into pay agents who in return, issued the new series.

With November came a complete bombing halt of North Vietnam by the allies. This move by the allies necessitated some changes in mission by the Redeyes in order to gain more complete surveillance of vital areas. The 245th SAC received and had accepted by Major Lee, the Six Month Accident Free Safety Award for the period January thru June 1968 from USARV. Congratulations were offered Major Douglas E. Casey for his unrelenting efforts as safety officer, for at the end of 1968 the 245th was still accident free. Major Casey, a SLAR pilot, received other honors later in the month when he was presented the "IR Ball Barrel". The 20 officers, 3 warrant officers, and 185 enlisted, including 11 newly promoted SP5's, took Thanksgiving dinner in "Bennie's Beanery", a name given to WO2 Bennie Benefield's mess hall, where a stateside type feast was enjoyed. By the end of November the 16th Combat Aviation Group had left Marble Mountain for Chu Lai, thus leaving the 212th Combat Support Aviation Battalion an independent battalion under direct control of 1st Aviation Brigade.

On 3 December while on a dual ship photo mission near the Cambodian border in Southern I Corps, Captain Norman Svarrer and Captain Noble J. Atkins, Jr. with their Special Forces observers came under heavy ground-fire in the Kamh Duc area. Captain Svarrer received numerous 50 caliber rounds which caused the loss of one engine. Three rounds of 23 mm AA fire hit the fuselage which started a fire in the main fuel cell. Captain Svarrer piloted his aircraft to a less hazardous area and, after ordering his T. O. to eject, he also ejected. With the help of Captain Atkins flying overhead, aircraft were directed to the scene of the mishap and both flyers were lifted from the area within the hour. Both men were unhurt, but aircraft 62-5858 was engulfed in flames and crashed. Aircraft 61-2721 was immediately acquired through supply channels to replace the downed plane. On the 24th the Bob Hope Show visited Freedom Hill and many men of the unit were able to forget their duties for a brief time and enjoy the gala presentation. As it happens every year on the 25th of December, Santa Claus made his appearance (in the form of Major Carl A. Weaver, Jr.). Another grand meal was served by the mess hall staff and numerous floor shows were entertainment for the men in the clubs. The officers moved into the new and gracious 212th Battalion Club on Christmas Day. On the last day of the year the 245th SAC took delivery of aircraft 60-2729. At the year's end the Redeye morning report showed 18 officers, 4 warrant officers, and 210 enlisted men, 6 of whom had recently been promoted to specialist fifth class and 17 to specialist fourth class.



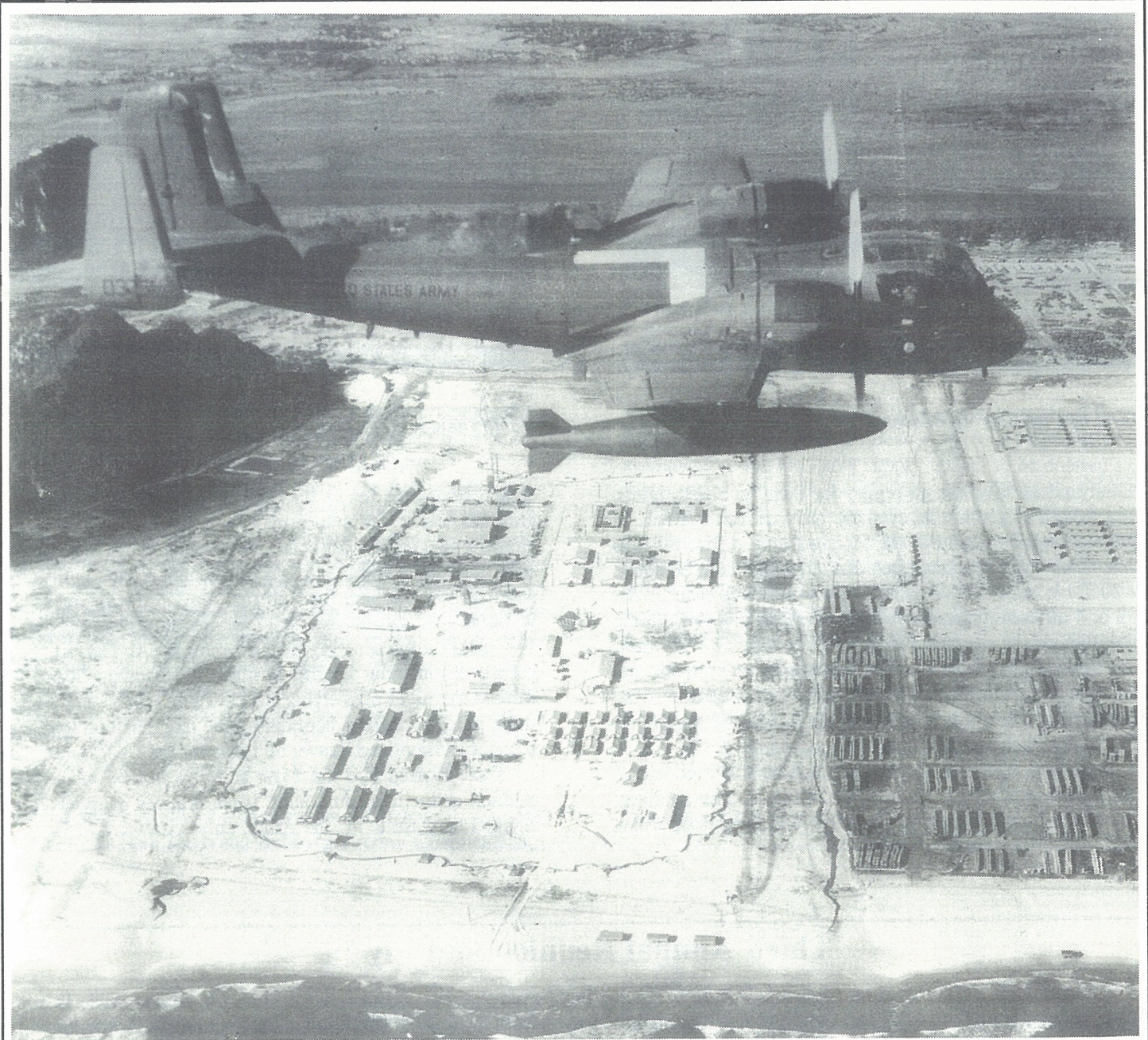
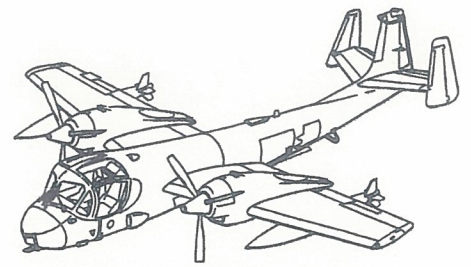
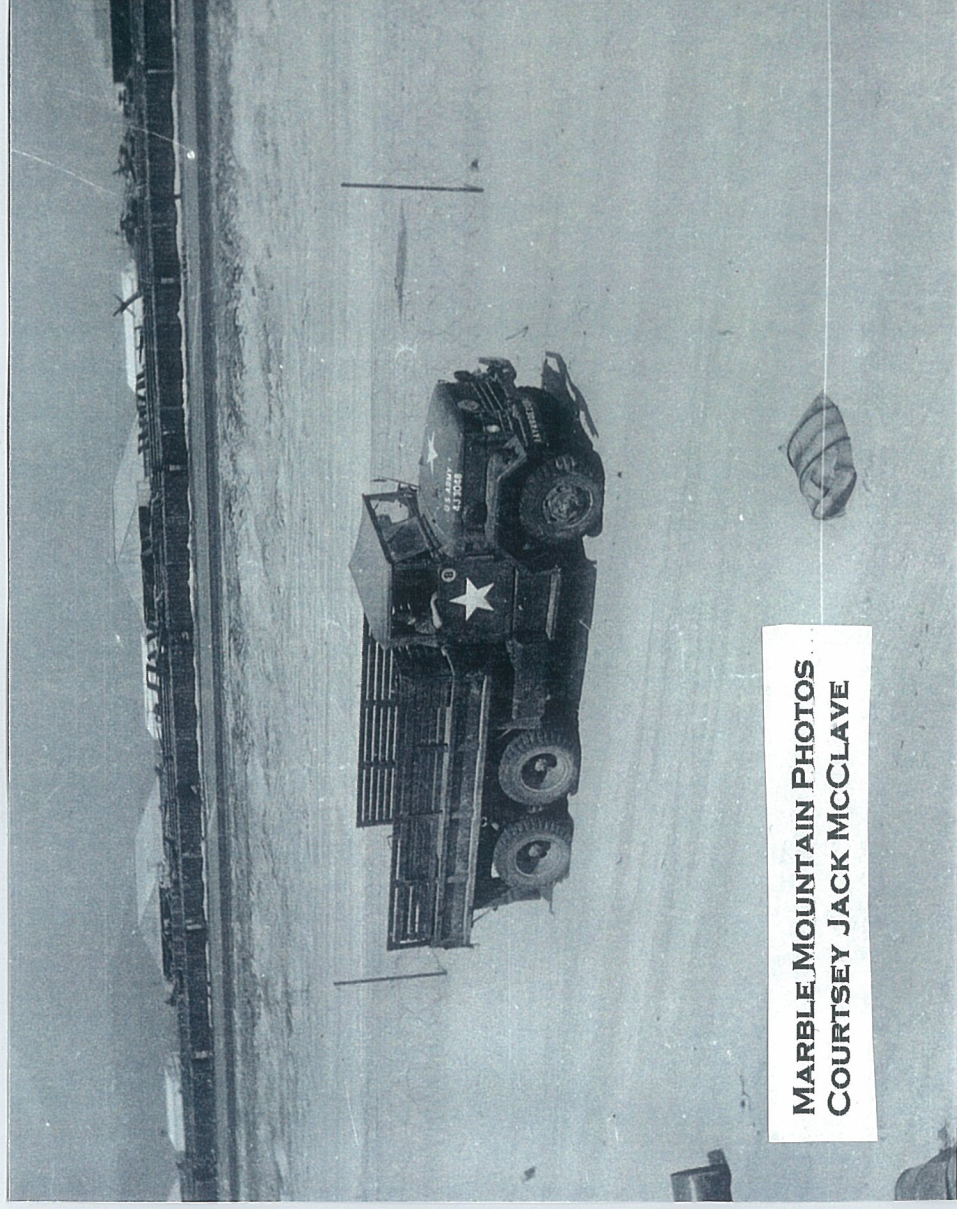


Photo: Dick Wolfe. A "C" model Mohawk over Marble Mountain in DaNang, 1969. This was home base for the 245th "Red Eye" Company.









MARBLE MOUNTAIN PHOTOS  
COURTSEY JACK MCCLAVE

