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Author's Title of submittal: **FAC's On Parade**

As a member of the TACP and USAF Advisory Team 94 at Song Be, Phouc Long Province, I was party to some rather unusual happenings during 1965-1966. Although we were meant to be advising and supporting ARVN Infantry and Ranger Battalions, we were co-located with, and effectively a part of U.S. Special Forces Team B-34. As the ARVN at Song Be were not inclined to do much fighting, except amongst themselves, we could be utilized much more effectively by taking an active role in Special Forces operations being conducted in the Province. This was done with the support and encouragement of the Province Chief who was also more than a little disillusioned with the performance of the ARVN. The constant squabbling amongst the ARVN was a major source of irritation that some times even involved the civilian populace.

Although fights and minor shoot-outs between the ARVN units were fairly common, it took a whole new turn one spring day. The night before, there had been some sort of altercation (probably over a woman) in the village that resulted in another shooting incident, one or two dead and a couple wounded. First thing in the morning the U.S. Army Advisors from both of the ARVN battalions arrived in our camp trying to figure out a way to calm the situation before it got completely out of control. Members of the ranger and the infantry battalions were gathering on opposite sides of the airstrip and looked to be preparing for a full on battle. Both sides had brought up machine guns and it was simply a matter of time before an itchy trigger finger, on one side or the other, sparked the flame. The Province Chief also arrived at our compound and he too is at wits end as to how to avoid the confrontation. The first thing that our B-Team C.O., the senior U.S. Advisor, did was to call a meeting in the mess hall of all team members to see if anybody could come up with a peaceful solution to the problem. As most team members had acquaintances, or friends, on both sides of the dispute, perhaps we held the key to calmly getting through the next few hours until cooler heads could prevail.

The situation was at the point that suggestions, from all sources, were welcome. The Operations Officer (S3) asked for the ALO to offer his thoughts, as the group seemed to have no ideas. He mentioned that the FACs probably had as much, if not more, respect amongst the soldiers as any one else there. Captain Pocock (the ALO) made the suggestion that perhaps we could create a diversion to get their minds off the confrontation. He then suggested that a possible way to do this might be by holding a parade. Everyone chuckled and sort of looked at each other, obviously thinking the AF must be off in the wild blue yonder or something. The Captain went on to explain that if we all marched out there

and down the airstrip, Special Forces, Air Force, Rangers and Infantry advisors alike, we would be showing them what team work is all about. He then suggested that he and 1/Lt. Kaiser (the other FAC) would taxi their planes at the lead and rear of the parade just to remind them that air power was available should they wish to pursue the disagreement to its ultimate conclusion. Just to reinforce the point, we would arrange a fly over by a couple of fighters to focus their attention. After much discussion, it was decided to give it a try as no other real alternatives had been put forth.

While quickly planning the parade, one thing was immediately apparent, if this didn't work we could all be caught in the crossfire. Viper-9 (1/Lt. Kaiser) suggested that they swing the O1's (armed with rockets) towards the opposing sides when the parade was mid-way between the two groups. Those ARVN soldiers knew very well what followed the marking of a target and with the fighters overhead it would be pretty unlikely that anyone would be mad enough or foolish enough to invite trouble from that quarter. Now, to put together the details, it was decided that the Province Chief and our B-Team commander (Lt. Col. Roy) would lead the marching unit with the Sergeant Major commanding the troops. The parade would consist of two columns with the Ranger Advisors leading the left column and the Infantry Advisors leading the right (the Rangers were on the left side of the airstrip, the Infantry on the right). The rest of us would fall into line according to height, regardless of rank or branch of service. We were all to wear full web gear and carry loaded weapons, at sling-arms, with the barrels pointed downward as a gesture of peace, yet making it clear that we were prepared for any eventuality.

As the Province Chief had already, through his channels, let III Corps at Bien Hoa know that we had a highly volatile situation to deal with, my request for air cover was approved at once. At first, we were offered a flight of four VNAF A1E's, which I thought, considering the circumstances, might not be the wisest choice. (The VNAF A-1s had FM radios and often monitored the ARVN frequencies.) We didn't need to add an inter-service rivalry situation into this as well. I asked for F-100's, if at all possible, for three reasons: First, F-100's carry a formidable array of weapons. Second, the ARVN were aware that F-100's were our alert air cover if we came under attack. Three, they carried enough fuel that they could loiter in the area if needed. Ramrod 23, a flight of two F-100's was approved with a TOT (time on target) of 30 minutes. I informed the DASC that I would be off the air for approximately one hour but Four-Harvest-Night (the B-Team radio operator) would be monitoring the radios and the fighters should contact Viper-7 on UHF 271.0.

We all assembled outside the front gate of the compound and started marching the two blocks to the airstrip. Now, I had never cared much for marching but it was different this time – there was a purpose to what we were doing. We had a wide variety of head gear, but unlike most marching formations, we all managed to stay in step with very little need for cadence of any kind, just the clump – clump – clump of the heels hitting the ground. As we approached the airstrip the O1's engines came to life and Viper-7 started taxiing towards the end of the runway. As he taxied past, our columns followed him down either side of the runway toward the ARVN troop formations. Viper-9 was taxiing after us a few yards to the rear.

As we came abreast of the opposing ARVN groups the Sergeant Major gave us the command to halt. Viper-7 swung his plane around facing towards the Rangers. Viper-9 swung his airplane around facing the ARVN infantry. Our column on the right was given the command to "Right-face", the column to the left "Left face." The Ranger and infantry advisors then took a few paces toward their respective units while the rest of us all stood fast. The Province Chief, with Colonel Roy by his side, then proceeded to give a speech that sounded more like a scolding. Just as the PC finished his speech and some of the troublemakers started to wander off, the approaching fighters could be heard. They were flying side by side and dove down to about 300 feet then leveled off, flew straight down the airstrip. When they were almost directly overhead they lighted their afterburners, then climbed out to the left and right. They made a wide turn then came barreling in from opposite directions to again cross right above our formation. Let me tell you, it was thrilling stuff and I felt a great deal of pride in the Air Force right then, I think all of us did. The Province Chief gave another short speech and the remaining would-be combatants began to move out more rapidly now and head back toward their compounds.

We then marched back to our compound. We were all much more relaxed now and I believe we marched even better on the way back than we had earlier. When we reached the camp, the C.O. and the P.C. expressed their appreciation and the Sergeant Major told us we could stand down for the rest of the day while he arranged a barbeque and open bar for later in the afternoon. As we only had one air strike scheduled, for the early afternoon, the AF team would get to have a little fun too. Later on, the ARVN Advisors and their counterparts arrived for the festivities and a bit of fence mending. All in all, it had been a very worrisome yet satisfying day, no shots had been fired, but it hadn't quite been an Easter Parade either.