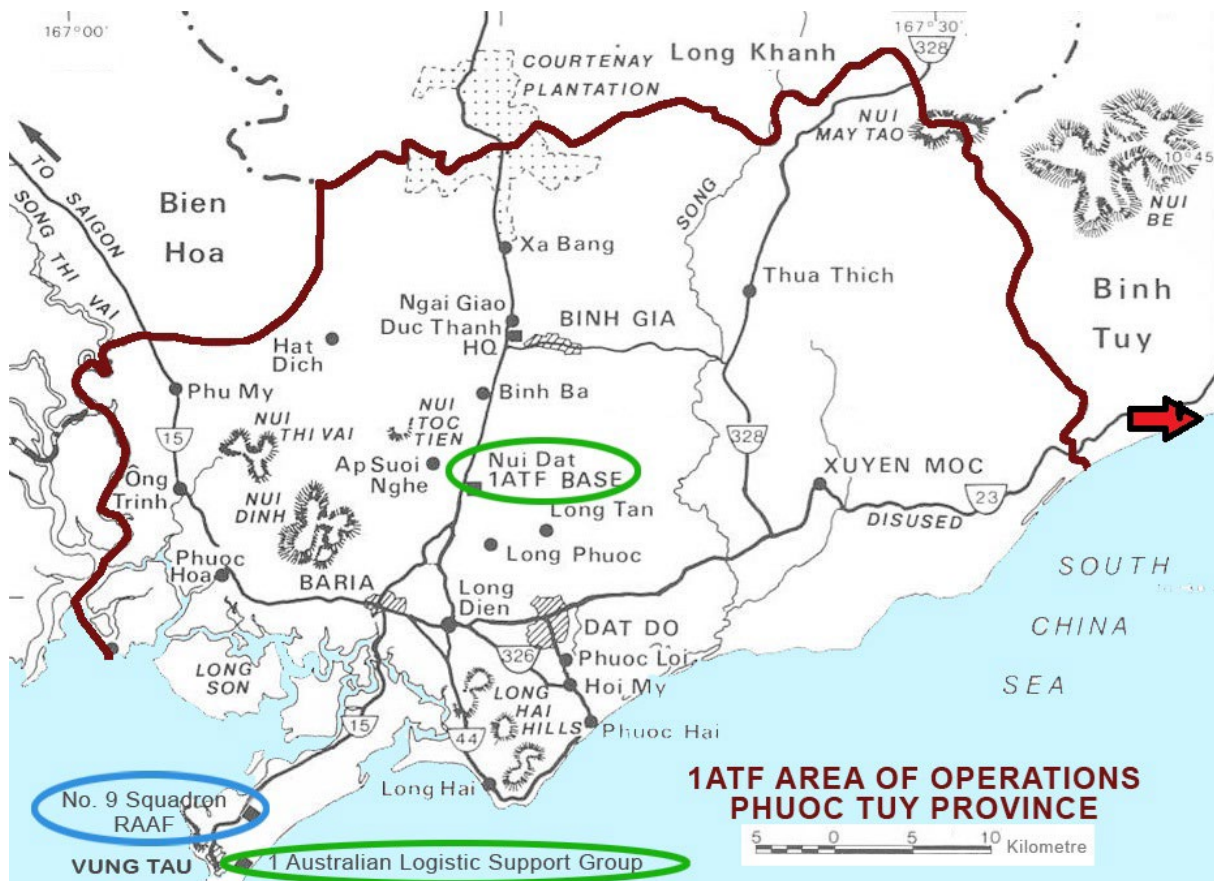


US NAVY 'DASH' SHOOT DOWN, 21May69

On 21May69, Bushrangers 71 & 72 were tasked to support a US Navy operation beyond 1ATF Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR) up along the coast past the Mao Tao Mountains in Binh Tuy/Ham Tan Province.

A USN destroyer had been operating a highly classified DASH drone helicopter which the enemy had downed. The warship had put a ground party ashore to attempt recovery of some components but they were ambushed and had to withdraw back to the ship with casualties.



The DASH QH-50 originated in 1961, intended as a Drone Anti-Submarine Helicopter (DASH), capable of carrying homing torpedoes or nuclear depth charges. See:

http://www.gyrodinehelicopters.com/dash_history.htm



Beginning in January 1965, the US Navy started flying reconnaissance 'SNOOPY' missions from selected destroyers. This involved the modification to the QH-50 system by the installation of real-time video and film cameras for reconnaissance and surveillance. Also installed was a telemetry system so remote pilots could monitor their actions upon the aircraft and a transponder for radar tracking of the drone.

By the time the Bushrangers arrived on the scene, there were no allied forces ashore but the warship was stern on to the beach, perhaps within 30 metres of the shoreline and maybe even aground. We were able to establish communications with the ship but they only offered limited information regarding possible location of the downed drone helo.

There was a vegetated area a few hundred metres wide paralleling the shoreline that adjoined a relatively clear inland area where the little chopper was presumed to have crashed.

I cannot recall time of day although the sun was not high in the sky, that being a search consideration. We began a creeping line ahead search along the axis of the clear terrain area paralleling the coast, perhaps between 500 and 1000 AGL for best search effect.

The enemy commander had thus far had a good day knocking down the little drone and then ambushing the shore party. I punted that he would not be foolish enough to engage helo gunships and risk severe retribution.

A short time after beginning this methodical search, 2 x US Marine Corps OV-10 'Black Pony' aircraft (their callword) from Vung Tau appeared on the scene and after establishing comms, I briefed them on what we were doing. They began searching in similar fashion, but perhaps 500 feet or so above our height.



After turning toward the coast on a leg of the search, we heard the following transmission: ***'If this goddamn Aussie chopper does not get out of my way, I'm going to shoot him down.'*** The Black Pony leader then passed us a bit higher.

'Hmmm!'

When we had turned on to the next leg of our search, I could see the Black Pony leader heading to cross just ahead of us at co-altitude so called for: *'Miniguns Armed'*, but no response; then more assertively: *'MINIGUNS ARMED'* and a hand slowly selected the switches.

The OV-10 Flight Leader had positioned himself perfectly for a beam attack. As he came into range at about 400 metres I gently cranked on bank and began tracking him with the gunsight through about 60 degrees of turn until he or his No. 2 must have realized what was happening because in the blink of an eye, they just vanished, without any radio calls.

Sometimes, actions speak louder than words!

'Miniguns Safe'

We reversed our line of advance for the creeping line ahead search and with the sun behind us, soon found the remains of the little drone spread in small bits over about 100 metres. This was reported to the warship and we then departed the scene of action.

During my first visit to Vung Tau township after arrival in country early March 1968, somebody took me to the USMC 'Black Pony' outfit club in Vung Tau. I think we only had one beer and left, unimpressed at bigheads who were pretty derogatory toward Australians.

I did not record the outlined incident and never heard any mention of same from officialdom.



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