VIETNAM REPORT No. 3

Vietnam Report No. 3 consists of news releases and photos originating from Hq 2nd Air Division, Saigon, and Hq 5th Air Force, Tokyo, Japan.
The Editor

Air Force Engineering Projects at Bien Hoa Top $9 Million Mark

BIEN HOA—The sound of heavy construction pierces the stillness of hot, tropical days at the big, expanding air base here.

As the U.S. Air Force Base Civil Engineer surveys the number of construction projects underway, sweat drops from his brow.

Below him, hundreds of Vietnamese workers, dressed in peasant clothes, work with the most modern of American heavy equipment.

To his left, the American engineer sees a huge rock quarry, producing stone and aggregate by modern U.S. methods for use in constructing two new aircraft ramp areas.

To his right, he views a low, swampy marshland—soon to become a parking area for Air Force F-100 Supersabres.

And all around him, the base sprawls. New buildings, hangars, ramps and roads have popped up everywhere. In 1965, Bien Hoa's Military Construction Program was $6.3 million. In 1966, it totals $9.6 million.

Supervising and coordinating the Air Force construction projects here falls on the 3rd Civil Engineering Squadron and its five officers and 112 airmen.

"We have problems here that I wouldn't have thought possible in the United States," said Lt Col Robert E. Maggart, a 25-year Air Force veteran and former combat pilot, now the Bien Hoa base director of Civil Engineering.

One unique problem facing Col Maggart is a staff of 408 Vietnamese employees, including 30 women laborers.

"Besides the language barrier, we have to train them to understand heavy equipment, plumbing techniques and electrical wiring," said the 46-year-old, Gary, Ind, native.

Approximately 200 Vietnamese have been trained at full time classes, located about five miles from Bien Hoa AB in a somewhat insecure area. The school, run by a U.S. civilian, trains the workers in all phases of American equipment and methods. Recently, some American civilian workers and a Vietnamese were kidnapped near the training area.

"Another problem area is the turnover of Vietnamese workers," said Col Maggart.

The pay scale for Vietnamese workers is based on the local economy, but is fixed slightly higher with extra allowances to retain as many employees as possible.

The Colonel, former Base Civil Engineer at England AFB, La., pointed out that "Costs run about twice as much here as for a comparable project in the U.S."

Factors contributing to the higher costs include

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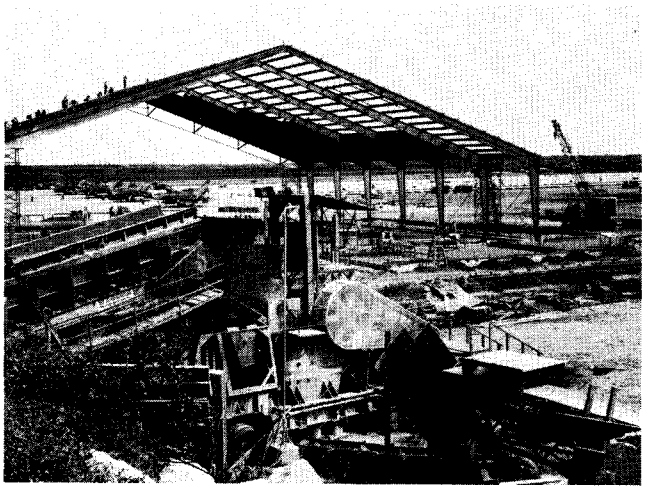

Bien Hoa—One of two 20,400 square foot aircraft hangars now under construction by several civilian American firms.

Maj John C. Lane, Deputy BCE at Bien Hoa, checks blueprint plans with Capt James N. Hicks, Jr., Construction Engineer.

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shipping expenses, higher fixed overhead, and higher wages for U.S. civilian technical employees.

"Any wartime operation creates additional problems," he said. The constant increases in personnel strength and equipment causes difficulties in keeping the construction in phase with the buildup.

Assisting Col Maggart is Maj John Lane, 42, of Denver, Colo., a veteran of 14 years of military Civil Engineering and five years of civilian CE work.

Major Lane has found that his experience with the Colorado State Highway Department and Denver Public Schools has been of valuable assistance in Vietnam.

One of Major Lane's tasks is supervising construction projects underway at the base.

They include:

—A $2 million jet parking ramp, to be constructed over a marshy swampland using sand fill-in obtained from a dredge and suction pump located in the Dong Nai river, about three miles due west of the base.

—A new 10,000-foot parallel jet runway, costing $6.5 million. Currently, 35,000 landings and takeoffs occur monthly on the base's single east-west runway, more than most major airports in the U.S.

—A new 1,000-man airman's dormitory, valued at $170,000.

—A $210,000 diesel generator plant to supply electrical power to the 3,700 USAF personnel here.

—A new $140,000 base exchange.

—A 100,000 square yard parking apron for use by the VNAF maintenance depot, responsible for the entire republic's aircraft maintenance work.

—Two 10,000-barrel petroleum-oil and lubrication tanks.

Helped by Prime BEEF Team

Helping to oversee base construction projects is a 37-year-old US Naval Academy graduate, Capt James N. Hicks Jr, now USAF construction engineer here.

A Martinsburg, W.Va., native who transferred to the Air Force after five years in the Navy, Capt Hicks and his construction personnel are reaping extra assistance from a project nicknamed "Prime Beef."

The current "Beef" team at Bien Hoa consists of 30 construction specialists and is one of several which rotate here on temporary duty from air bases in the U.S. to augment and provide flexibility to base construction programs.

One of the Air Force's busiest fire departments also comes under the operational control of the Civil Engineers.

During November, Bien Hoa firemen responded to 198 emergency calls, of which 70 were aircraft landing with hung ordnance. The unit's 36 firemen are always armed in case of the necessity to respond to an off-base crash or emergency.

"We handle about 10 times the emergencies of a U.S. air base," said Major Lane. "We also have two firemen aboard each of the 38th Air Rescue Squadron's fleet of HH-43 (Hoskie) helicopters, which respond to each emergency along with our ground equipment."

A former rubber plantation and rice paddy, the Bien Hoa air base was used by the French prior to 1954. The first U.S. Air Force units arrived in 1961.

The Civil Engineering function at Bien Hoa began growing under command of Capt Gordon H. Ringenberg, 33, of Defiance, Ohio, in early 1965. At the time, the organization had only 77 American personnel and 85 Vietnamese civilians.

Now, with $9.6 million in construction funds to spend, the 3rd Civil Engineering Squadron is spearheading Bien Hoa's contribution to America's effort to stop the Viet Cong.

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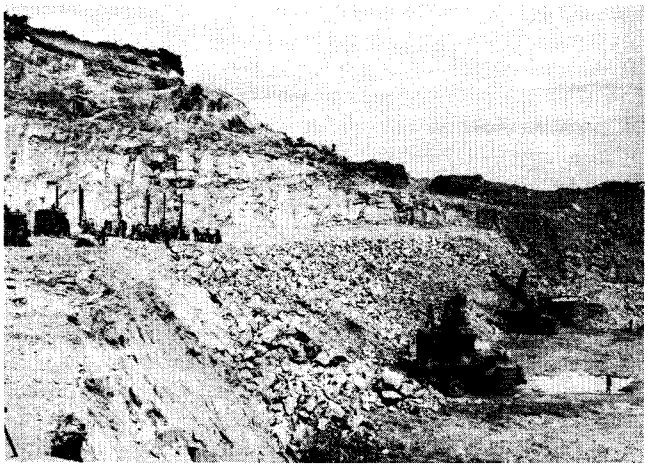
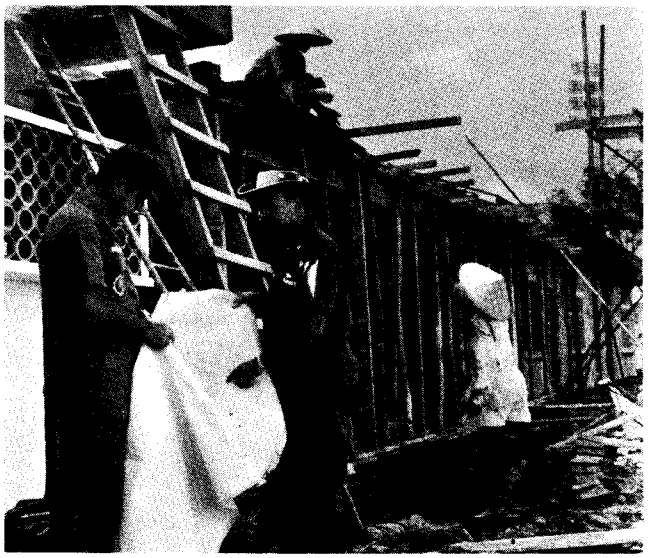


Bien Hoa—A modern quarry operation produces most of the rock used for construction. Located a mile from the end of the runway, it is operated by an American construction firm.



Lt Col Robert E. Maggart (R), Director of Civil Engineering at Bien Hoa, checks BX plans with Capt Gordon H. Ringenberg.

Bien Hoa—A Vietnamese surveyor checks dimensions for what will soon be a jet parking apron for F-100 Supersabres.

PACAF Engineering Conference

HQ FIFTH AF (FUCHU AS, JAPAN) 21 March 1966—One of most significant organizational developments in the Civil Engineer field was the activation and deployment of two U.S. Air Force Civil Engineering Squadrons (heavy repair) to Vietnam in February.

This was expressed by Col Alfred Kaufman, Chief of Pacific Air Forces' Engineering Operations Division, to delegates attending the PACAF Civil Engineering Conference in Tokyo.

He is one of some 65 AF Civil Engineers and representatives from industry attending the three-day conference from PACAF bases throughout the Pacific and Far East.

Colonel Kaufman identified the two squadrons as the 554th at Phan Rang and the 555th at Cam Rahn Bay—and termed them completely air transportable and self-contained right down to medical and food service units.

While the primary mission of the squadrons is to repair airfield damage by enemy action or natural disaster, he explained, the squadrons have a secondary mission to accomplish construction of an emergency nature.

This includes construction of expeditionary airfields, associated taxiways, parking areas or landing strips; support facilities; theater of operations type cantonments; development of water supplies and utilities systems, construction of revetments, installation of aircraft arresting barriers, and other such construction necessary to overcome the bare situation at a newly constructed base.

He also pointed out that the squadrons have oil analyses labs, can drill wells, install field fuel and oil systems, and in 30 days can construct an emergency airfield surfaced with AM-2 matting and involving the movement of 100,000 cubic yards of earth.

In describing capabilities of the squadrons, Col Kaufman told delegates to the PACAF Civil Engineering Conference that they also have the ability to deploy to a location where no base exists and operate for a period of 90 days.

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HQ FIFTH AF (FUCHU AS, JAPAN) 23 March 1966—Discussion and summation periods today on lessons learned under limited war conditions in Vietnam climaxed the Pacific Air Force Civil Engineering Conference in Tokyo.

During the three days of the conference—the first since 1963—USAF Civil Engineers and industry representatives spoke on problems, accomplishments and industry support, in respect to the military effort in Southeast Asia.

Subjects ranged from the design, construction and maintenance of airfields to the use of portable, collapsible buildings and inflatable structures.

In a keynote speech last night Gen Robert H. Curtin termed the Base Civil Engineer as the "key to our ability to do the job for the Air Force."

"This is true," he added, "whether the base be at home in the United States, in Southeast Asia, or at some remote site in Alaska."

Cautioning the delegates against getting "fascinated with design and construction," he pointed out that historically the Air Force has kept oriented toward the operation and maintenance side. doing enough construction to keep "our finger in it and to maintain a sharp professional edge for the accomplishment of the day-to-day job that we are here for—to operate and maintain bases."

In this regard, General Curtin said, "we are only putting our very best people in Base Civil Engineering jobs."

General Curtin also touched upon four points which he declared have a "very vital" impact upon the philosophy of complete Civil Engineering support to the Air Force:

"Education, experience, professionalism and research."

In respect to the second, General Curtin said that experience gained in the Civil Engineering business, and in many others, in Southeast Asia is the greatest that a lot of people will ever see in their whole lifetime.

He also told conference delegates that in "PACAF we not only have in being, but we reflect a truly outstanding Civil Engineering capability" and that "you are all part of a professional force dedicated and motivated to provide the Air Force the best possible Civil Engineering support that can be given."

"What's more," he emphasized, "the results are here for people to see."

Top delegates attending Tokyo conference included: Maj Gen Fred J. Ascani (seated L), Vice Cmdr, 5th AF; and Maj Gen Robert H. Curtin, USAF Director of Civil Engineering. Standing (L to R): Col Archie S. Mayes, Director of CE, 7th AF; Col Joseph L. Campbell, Director of CE, 13th AF; Col Dana F. Hurlburt, 5th AF, DCS/CE; and Col Henry J. Stehling, PACAF Director of Civil Engineering and the conference chairman.