

PRD-1 Experience

Contributed by Phil McGibney

Jon Shaefer and I usually worked the PRD-1 besides doing 05G stuff for the 1st Brigade 11th RRU Team in 1966 as we were both code qualified, etc. and could work the one time pads, etc, etc. We had left Phouc Vinh (1st BDE HQ) by road following the infantry battalion HQs we were supporting at the time and ended up in one of the plantations in War Zone C or D, I don't remember which. We had been out a week or so or maybe more and word came that we had to move to another place that was more in line with the PRD-1 operating scheme.

The only problem was there was no road going directly to the new location nor was there any chance for infantry escort even if there was. They were moving out. Walking. Across country. We were to be left behind. So the powers that be tasked the Australian AF and one of their "Caribou" aircraft to airlift us from where we were to the new area.

As anyone who has ever flown in or seen a Caribou knows, it is a high-tailed, twin engined, narrow bodied, cargo aircraft capable of very steep takeoffs and landings. Entrance from the rear via a fairly steep ramp which just happens to be about the width of a jeep. Nobody in the "head shed" had thought to query the Aussies on loading and off loading procedures which just happened to be "back in-drive off."

Now this is just fine with a jeep, but with a jeep and a trailer! So the Aussie load-master says, "Mate, back her on and away we go. Or, away we go and you stay here. And since we are in a big hurry, you got one shot at it."

Jon and I looked at each other and he says "You're the Sp5." To which I promptly replied, "Thanks a lot, Jon." So I pulled the jeep and the trailer around and lined it up with the ramp which the load master had all ready for us. The plane had engines idling and they weren't kidding, we had one shot at it.

So I backed it up, very slowly, trailer wheels hit the ramp and started up. Angle of the ramp made the trailer and jeep look like a shallow "v". Ever so slowly (and I must admit sweating all the while) the trailer goes up the ramp and starts into the aircraft. Now the trailer and jeep is at the same shallow "v" but in the opposite angle. And I can hardly see it. At least the Aussie load-master felt sorry for me and gave me hand signals. I did it.

They lashed the trailer and jeep down and away we went. The loadmaster says, "Keep it to yourself but we were hoping you would fail as this is our last mission for the day and we were heading back to Bien Hoa. Now we have to drop you off and be late for 'happy hour'".

Obviously, Jon and I thought "happy hour" would have been nice as well and didn't feel too sorry for him and the rest of the crew. I think I did that backing up job thinking all the while it

was going to be very lonely that night for Jon and I if I didn't. Tends to get that way with just a jeep and trailer for company in the middle of a rubber plantation that belongs to "Charlie" after dark. Just finished the book "The Tunnels of Cu Chi" by Tom Mangold and John Penycate. I don't think we would have been lonely for very long. We would have had lots of company.