

## A BITTER END

As Told to David Adams by James Hazelton

After U.S. Forces withdrew from South Vietnam in 1973, the U.S. maintained a presence in Thailand as a back up in the event military actions were required in Southeast Asia. In March of 1975 a rapid moving offensive of more than 100,000 troops was launched by North Vietnam and a month later on April 30th the nation of South Vietnam ceased to exist. Once the conflict in Vietnam concluded the U.S. began closing its operations on Thai air bases in stages. Among the last contingents of U.S. personnel to depart were the Air Force Security Police K-9 units who controlled perimeter security. After control of the perimeter was turned over to the Thai forces the dog handlers were flown home, but the dogs did not share the same fate.

Under Air Force policy the dogs were carried on base records as equipment and when no longer needed the same process used with 3,500 dogs when leaving Vietnam was followed in Thailand. Those not returned to the U.S., transferred to other U.S. locations or the local forces were destroyed by lethal injection. The dogs that served selflessly and were credited with saving more than 10,000 American lives during the War were, in the end, simply classified as excess equipment, killed, and written off the inventory as scrapped material.

In Thailand the U.S. was closing operations on systematic method with the northern bases closest to the Laotian and Cambodian borders closing first. Often dogs at the bases closed first were moved to those installations scheduled to close last, thus keeping assets and resources available if needed to defend against aggression during the withdrawal. As one of the last bases to close, Korat, which had operated with approximately 85 dogs since their deployment in 1968, had a little over 100 dogs at its kennels when operations there came to an end. The process of closing a K-9 unit in Southeast Asia is no better exemplified than the closure of the 388<sup>th</sup> SPS K-9 Section at Korat. James Hazelton was one of a couple dog handlers designated to assist Veterinarian Dr. Wilson put down the dogs, conduct the required necropsy on each dog, and close the kennels. James shared the following story of this dark and bitter end to the K-9 story in Thailand.

When perimeter security was turned over to the Thai military the K-9 handlers kenneled their dogs for the last time and were moved to the former Base Officers Quarters located near the center of the base waiting air transport to Bangkok and then to the U.S. Dr. Wilson with the aid of Hazelton and another couple handlers began the gut wrenching process of putting the dogs down.

The handlers would bring a dog in and Dr. Wilson would administer the lethal injection with "The Big Green Needle." Five or six dogs would be killed, then they began the process of conducting the necropsy on an assembly line bases. Do to the detailed nature of the necropsy it took the remainder of the day to complete them for the five or six dogs. With the findings recorded and fluid and tissue samples taken, the dogs were then placed in a common grave. At the end of the first day having no appetite to take in the evening

meal, Dr. Wilson took his aids to the officers club to dull their senses from the days grizzly task.

Returning the next morning to continue their assigned duty they found the grave that was to be the dogs final resting place had been opened during the night and the carcasses taken. With its close proximity to the perimeter fence and a small village within a few hundred yards of the fence the kennels were an easy reach, and with little or no perimeter security it was easy for the locals to breach the fence and remove the dogs from their grave to take back to their village where they were eaten. The team proceeded through the same process as the day before, destroying another five dogs, completing the necropsy, and placing the animal in the common grave. On the following morning they found the graves had once again been raided. The closing team attempted to thwart the grave robbers by digging false graves, but it was pointless. The locals knew exactly which grave the dogs were in. This process continued each day for four weeks until 100 plus dogs had been destroyed and necropsies completed.