

Shadow Memoirs by Tom Teal

MEMOIRS OF AN OLD SHADOW AND STINGER COMMANDER
IN VIETNAM; 1970-1973

By
Colonel Tom A. Teal

It has been 36 years since this story began at Saigon with the Shadow Gunships and a remarkable group of mostly young men. For the Stingers in DaNang, a string of 35 years has flown by for an equally remarkable group of young men. What links these two groups of Gunshippers? I link them because I was lucky enough to be Commander of Fighting C Flight for a year and then nine months later as Commander of 18th SOS, Det 1, stationed at DaNang, until the UN monitors verified our departure on 29 March 1973.

After all these years why am I writing these memoirs now? Some former Shadows at Saigon have expressed a desire to know more about the background to what happened there. Call it natural curiosity about events that affected their lives and memories of those events that seem to grow more important as time goes by. Make no mistake about the Vietnam War. It changed all our lives, particularly if we were young and it was the first war we faced our own mortality. I believe that the Stingers will also appreciate the background information to events at DaNang that occurred during the long year of duty there.

What I am not writing these histories/memoirs for is to toot my own horn or to justify decisions I made or did not make. I just thought it may be useful in this informal format for you to see your experiences from a different viewpoint. I hope that you agree, and that this presentation find you and your families in good health and spirits.

SHADOW MEMOIRS DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate these Fighting C Flight memoirs to Bernard Smith and Larry Fletcher for their outstanding work in keeping Shadow memories alive and colorful, in the hearts and minds of other Shadows down through the years. They certainly kept them alive for me for which I will always be grateful. It is no exaggeration that without the actions of these two stalwart members of Fighting C Flight, these memoirs would not have been written.

Colonel Tom A. Teal
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SHADOW GUNSHIPS AT SAIGON AND DISTANT PLACES

April 1970 to April 1971

By Colonel Tom A. Teal
C Flight Commander

This is the way I remember my year with Fighting C Flight. When I arrived by Shadow Gunship from 14th Special Operations Wing in Phan Rang, I found a relaxed flying unit that was not flying a lot. Seventh Air Force Headquarters operations orders called for an aircraft and crew on ground alert with launch, if needed, by that headquarters. That mission fitted in with C-Flight's location of operations and maintenance facilities near the end of the prevailing runway. The building we occupied was a fairly large air conditioned facility powered by a dedicated electrical generator on site. There were also five protected aircraft parking revetments adequate for the five AC-119s assigned to the Flight. There was even a room equipped to sleep the alert crew until needed. I pulled alert a couple of nights and never launched which is not a good way to keep a unit sharp and motivated.

When I became commander a short time later, I went over to visit Seventh AF operations and made a strong case for flying two sorties a night, one early and one late night. What this plan did for 7th AF was to have a Shadow gunship airborne, in radio contact, that could be used for troops in contact or other uses such as to check out locations that had lost radio or telephone contact with their headquarters. What this did for C Flight was to get us airborne, doing what we had been trained to do and a big plus, we learned methodically the geographic features and working conditions of our area of responsibility. We also learned to fly in the changeable weather conditions of that part of the world. Our Fragmentary Order was changed by 7th to flying each night and 14th SOS supported it wholeheartedly. One interesting event happened on an early night sortie. We were sent to investigate possible bad guys deep in Four Corps area down in the swamp where the Mekong has several branches emptying into the sea. As we flew over the area at app. 1500 feet altitude, we saw a large camp fire with people scurrying around it. All of a sudden the hostiles opened fire at us with rifles but did no damage. Since we had no clearance to fire on that position, we reported the contact and position back to 7th and continued the remaining time for our flight. Clearance to fire was a continuing problem unless we were sent to troops in contact (TIC); then the ground force commander there cleared us to fire around the perimeter or on specific locations which he marked for us. Other Shadow crews had similar events happen to them which were to prepare us for what was to come as our mission was to change with no warning.

Note: I was informed later that there had been over 10,000 TIC's defended by gunships in S. E. Asia and that none of the locations had ever been overrun as long as a gunship was overhead. That's good stuff.

I was sitting in my office one Sunday afternoon, smoking my pipe, when our mission was changed drastically. The secure phone rang and the DCO of the 14th SOW said that our mission was to provide Shadow gunship coverage over Cambodia day and night, 24 hours a day. Stress to all your people that this is a highly classified mission and no radio or communications of any kind will mention Cambodia. Now how many sorties a day will it take to keep coverage over Cambodia? I said initially six sorties a day should be suggested to Seventh AF with Shadows flying 4.5 hours which we have been doing. That would leave a thirty minute gap between sorties over Cambodia but could be made up as necessary by launching the next sortie thirty minutes

early. For six sorties a day we will require five more aircraft with seven more crews, and assorted maintenance and parts. The DCO said that he would pass that information to Seventh AF and the DCM will be in touch. The DCM called and said he agreed with the ten aircraft for six per day or thirteen for thirteen for eight sorties per day. Then our detailed planning started.

OUR PLAN

The Base's scheduled bus routes and timing would be used on and off base to transport our personnel to and from flights. This would not call attention to our increase in sortie and maintenance activity and would not call for extensive negotiations with base over a new plan. Since we were going to be airborne around the clock every day, it was a simple thing to schedule our sortie takeoff times to utilize the existing bus schedule and to set the flying and support schedule. Turned out to be a good decision. We would request additional vehicles as needed to meet mission and future mission requirements.

Next I built a system into our plan to insure an aircraft would takeoff as scheduled by having the crew scheduled to takeoff make every safe effort to make an on-time takeoff. The crew that was scheduled to take off three hours later was required to be in their aircraft, engines running if necessary, to back up and/or take off if the primary aircraft could not meet his scheduled time. If the backup crew had to fly early, then the old primary crew became the primary crew for the next launch.

Communications, call signs and clearance to fire were to be included in the Rules of Engagement and came next. These were to come from 7th AF later but we needed to have a hand in the planning. More about this very important subject later after we had actually flown the missions and had questions/changes that needed to be addressed for more effective and safer missions.

Of top priority was the need to find and reserve appropriate housing for the incoming personnel. Captain Jose Cachuela in C Flight had been doing this for us as an extra duty already with monthly rotations in and out of the unit and he received this task also. As usual, he got the room assignments in a very short time and sent us a copy of those assignments. He did lots of things well.

We also needed five/eight more assigned, close parking spots for five/eight additional AC-119 gunships. Since we were the only shooting outfit at Tan Son Nhut and with our lonesome location near the runway, additional parking was no problem.

We were lucky to already have a large air conditioned multipurpose room that could accommodate a large increase in parachutes, survival vests, life preservers, guns, etc. Wing personnel attended to that part of our requirements.

Start time for around the clock flying would depend on crew and aircraft arrival with maintenance personnel and appropriate spare parts. Also we needed the necessary operations orders from 7th AF with the number of daily sorties required and rules of engagement, etc. I do not remember how long it was before we headed for Cambodia; but I remember very well that, once started, it continued for the rest of my tour of duty with Fighting C Flight. Do not know who attached the Fighting in front of C Flight but we owe him or them a great deal for the pride it generated in being a part of this outstanding unit.

END OF OUR PLAN

With Seventh Air Force's operations order in hand and flight, maintenance crew and aircraft in place, we began the treadmill of flying around the clock over Cambodia sometime in early July 1970 with six sorties a day. The sorties were increased to eight sorties daily sometime in August. We were given call signs and frequencies of several different locations in country

which put us in contact with each location commander. Example: Hotel 303 was the call sign for the commander at Kompong Thom (KPT) who had the authority of a troops in contact commander and who could direct us to any part of his territory and fire at his designated target or targets. Most of our first few months were spent working for Hotel 303 and preventing his town from being overrun by the bad guys. We sure shot up the old saw mill area on almost every mission there as well as other locations. We definitely save KPT from being taken. Never will forget heading out the 310 degree radial from takeoff, flying past Black Virgin Mountain and Tay Ninh, and then avoiding Phnom Penh, heading to KPT. His name was Major Phin Oom, and this very capable Cambodian officer thanked us for our gunship defense of his city. He told us that food supplies became so scarce that they had eaten all the animals in the zoo, including a tough old tiger.

We must have done a good job there because we were soon sent to various other locations all over Cambodia either for troops in contact (TIC) or for interdiction of hostile supplies entering Kompong Som on the Gulf of Siam, road routes over most of Cambodia or locations on the Mekong River such as Kompong Cham. We at times flew missions patrolling the Mekong from Phnom Penh to Saigon and beyond towards the headwaters of that great river. One of the most interesting missions I flew was the long flight to northwest Cambodia to the beautiful city of Siem Reap. This was close to Angkor, the capital of the Khmer empire from the 9th to the 15th century and collocated were two ancient Hindu temple areas, Angkor Wat (12th century) and Angkor Thom (13th century). These two world treasures were in bad condition both from the jungle and the ground war being fought to push the bad guys from the temples. The ground commander at Siem Reap used us around the temples, the jungle areas and the roads near the temples. We were not allowed to shoot at the temples even though we took ground fire from them.

We got so busy in Cambodia on different targets that we needed at times more fire power and five Stinger gunships became part of our operations. I remember going on one of the first Stinger missions sent to Kompong Cham. It was a daylight mission with the target/s of big ships tied up at the wharfs. What a sight to see the twenty mm gatlin guns pouring rounds into the troop carriers and supply ships. We never saw the big one sink but it did show a decided list when we left. The Stinger pilot looked like an old west gunfighter with dark eyes spaced wide apart and a thin mustache above his lip. I know this! He was the best shooter I had seen in Shadow, Stinger, or Spectre gunships. I was an amateur shooter compared to this young captain. I am sorry that I don't remember his name. There was a less gung ho Stinger crew who took off and was back on the ground in about 45 minutes. I met the aircraft. He said he could not get through the storm clouds to get to Cambodia. I told the pilot to get his crew onboard, take off and try again to get safely through the clouds. You are expected to keep trying until your sortie time is up or you have to return to base because of fuel. Incidentally, we had additional 17th SOS Shadow aircraft and crews join us from time to time in our coverage of Cambodia.

The communications and other security precautions were so well observed by the Shadow and Stinger crews, and the few higher headquarters personnel who knew, that the news media never got a whiff of the operations in Cambodia. I know that as a Shadow commander I was required to get up at 4 a.m. each morning, review the Flight's combat report for the previous day, then hand carry that report to a Colonel in 7th AF operations. That went on for over 40 consecutive days and I became ill with a cold. When I got to Shadow Ops the next morning there was a message to call Colonel Bruce K. Brown, DCO of the 14th SOW. I called at a reasonable hour and he told me; Tom, you have been working too hard and you need a change in scenery. I

have a C-47 going to Hong Kong tomorrow and I want you on it as purchasing officer for supplies we can't get in country. By the way, 7th AF has agreed to your operations officer bringing them the daily report from now on. I will send a FAC aircraft down to pick you up this afternoon. Bring civilian clothes for an overnight stay in Hong Kong. I, of course, said thank you sir for a truly thoughtful idea. I'll be there and ready to fly. I hesitate to say that the C-47 developed engine problems after landing in Hong Kong and it took us five days to return to Phan Rang. Colonel Brown met the aircraft, ignored the flight crew and said with a smile that is the last time I am sending you on a mercy mission.

Several months later, I got a call from my contact at 7th AF. He told me that he was sending a mixed group of officers from Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) for a briefing on our mission. I was to brief them completely and to answer any questions they asked. To put it mildly, they were astounded that we were running the type and number of missions daily and that we had been over Cambodia for months and they did not know about it. Obviously, we had held our cards close to our chest, and that's a big well done, Shadows and Stingers.

Major General Hardin of 7th AF flew as an observer almost monthly on Shadow missions over Cambodia. The pilots and crews that the General flew with had nothing but respect for him. I would meet the aircraft after it had parked in our area and asked how the mission went. He would say fine and climb into his car and drive off.

We had been flying for several months but the only Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) we received was of course from the crew reports. We really wondered how effective we were in our role as a gunship unit and higher headquarters must have had questions also. All of a sudden, the Cambodian ground commanders started including a preliminary number of enemy killed by that sortie as well as targets fired on. Later, their final report to 7th AF would reflect the actual number of enemy verified killed. At commander's call, I mentioned that we now knew that the gunships sorties had been and were becoming more effective. I quoted from a recent BDA report that a single sortie had a body count of over 240 attackers killed by air (KBA). At the end of that meeting after we had discussed flying safety and the record rate of on-time takeoffs, I stated again that our primary job was to professionally perform the job assigned to us by 7th AF and to do it safely. I knew from past wars that a lot of wonderful people, due to accidents, did not go home alive or in the same physical condition as they arrived in their units. My primary job as commander was to see that you had the knowledge, equipment, and desire to excel in performing that mission and that you did not run out of gas on the way home. Then I closed the call with a challenge to Make Shadow Proud. Shortly one night afterwards, I heard Don Fraker and cronies pass my door in the Q singing Make Shadow Proud to the tune of Bringing In The Sheaves. You know, the words fitted almost perfectly with the tune of that great old hymn.

After that Commander's Call, I overheard some officer crew members talking to each other and saying that the unit was doing a great job but who knew about it? I knew that we could not call in the reporters but there was a way to let the crews know that very important people knew about them and their missions. I came up with the idea to have a dining-in at the officers club if Major General Hardin would be our guest of honor and pin medals on crew members who had them ready to be presented. I asked my 7th AF contact to inquire if the General would attend, etc. This fine General sent back he would be glad to be our guest.

We had to reserve the upstairs room at the club, get Shadow party suits made (Jose got this assignment too with all the work of designing, individual tailoring with Shadow insignia, rank, wings, white silk scarf and at a decent price delivered yesterday). As usual, Jose did the

impossible extremely well. When the black party suits were delivered, each one was beautiful with white insignia, a superb fit (back then) and at a reasonable price. While we were waiting on the party suites, I thought it would be a good idea to present a nice Shadow plaque to certain people outside the organization who had helped us achieve our success as a unit. It became the Shadow 1 Award with the AC-119 Shadow gunship flying across the large 1. Down below the Shadow 1 Award was a smaller area to give the person receiving the award a form of citation explaining the ways that individual had helped Shadow in an uncommon way to succeed. Back to 7th AF to see if the General had any objections to receiving the award. Word came back that he would receive the award. We were now in business and ready for a party. We also invited our 7th AF contact, Colonel ?, I can see him in my mind but can't remember his name, and Lt. Col. Oom, he had been promoted, both of whom showed up and both received Shadow 1 awards along with General Hardin.

A lot of work had gone into preparing for the dining-in and it turned out to well worth it. After some short introductory remarks, I gave the background to this special event, introduced the people at the head table, and enjoyed the Club's dinner, which was served by two waitresses in tailored Shadow party suits that fit oh so well. After dinner General Hardin gave a short address about the importance of our mission and then pinned medals on flight crew members who had already earned them. What a distinct honor for these crew members. I forget who read the citation for each medal, but after the citation, the General pinned on the medal with individual remarks for each recipient. We had some high ranking officers from the 14th SOW present but I don't remember who made the presentation to General Hardin, maybe I did it, I don't know. I do know that I presented the plaques to both the 7th AF Colonel and to Lt. Col. Oom. What a night it turned out to be. These events had indeed made Shadow Proud.

Now let us get back to the real everyday world of flying, fighting and aircraft maintenance, the unsung and under appreciated men who kept us in the air and over Cambodia. It is hard to imagine how difficult it is to prepare, get parts for and keep flying for months on end old propeller driven aircraft. To add to the luster of our C Flight maintenance were a lot of on time takeoffs. Of course our backup system of standby or launch was a big help, but the maintenance task of readying 6 or 8 combat ready sorties, fueled, armed, preflighted and discrepancy free per day was a gargantuan task that to steel nerves, an eye on the clock, and the dedication to work in rain, heat, night and tiring circumstances.

Maintenance production started to slip when the maintenance officer, a senior sergeant rotated home and we received an unmotivated senior master sergeant as replacement. Rotation of people home after 12 months was a problem in all career fields but none more than in senior maintenance staffing. I started bypassing the new man and put in unofficial charge a Staff Sergeant named Mac to run the flight line. It worked. I then called the senior master sergeant in and told him that is how our maintenance would work. I told the senior that I wanted him to bust his back getting parts, talking to higher headquarters, taking care of paper work and work with wing maintenance to rotate aircraft for 100 hours inspections without a disruption in our flying schedule. I also asked him to monitor the number and specialties of people we had on hand versus the ones we actually needed. In other words, run the office and help willingly the staff sergeant that was producing the sorties on time for flight. This arrangement worked.

Our sortie production went back to normal and peace came again to the maintenance part of Fighting C Flight. Just a note here. We were blessed to be co-located with a VNAF C-119 Wing on base that was willing to share their aircraft parts with us. Propeller regulators were a big problem from time to time as well as spare engines. Our Air Force supply line would dry up at

times on these as well as other parts due to excessive demand for them. The VNAF seldom turned us down. It was a sort of reverse Lend-Lease. Thinking back, we should have handed out a handful of Shadow 1 Awards to the VNAF supply personnel. If any organization deserved that award, the VNAF wing did.

Shadow gunships from C Flight never operated over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, to my knowledge, but some cargo from the Trail ended up in Cambodia and South Vietnam. These war goods were transported by elephants, trucks, individual backs, and bicycles. It was reported that a bicycle could be pushed along the Trail with 500 pounds of ammunition, etc. loaded on it, through swamps, up and down hills, in rain and heat, battling mosquitoes, snakes and hostile fire. I have not measured it but the trail is reported to be 1,000 miles long. We fired on some of these supply areas. With the Trail information as a background, it has been told that a North Vietnamese peasant had unloaded his bicycle, after arriving in Cambodia, of everything except three mortar shells. He is told by his boss to take the 3 shells to that mortar squad over there and give them to the sergeant. The sergeant thanked him, fired the three shells, fump....., fump....., fump....and said with a smile, go get three more. I know that this is probably an apocryphal story, but it illustrates the dedication and resourcefulness of an enemy that we who flew did not give much thought or reflection on that same enemy, and his substitution of masses of people for machines.

Some of our aircraft were shot up from time to time, nothing serious as things turned out but it certainly could have been. Combat casualties are acceptable in war; however, we did not have to accept them. Luck was with us. One crew has a Night Observation Scope (NOS) operator, standing in the open doorway in the guns compartment, dropped an object on the floor and bent down to pick it up. As he bent over, an enemy round passed where he had been standing and exited the aircraft after passing between flight control cables and electrical lines. It only punched a hole in that very thin aluminum high on the starboard side of the aircraft.

We had another Shadow crew receive some .50 caliber rounds in the cockpit area on a Sunday morning mission. Once again luck was with the crew, especially the copilot, First Lieutenant Don Craig. A .50 caliber chrome plated round came through the thin aircraft skin, hit the armor protection plates which was supposed to keep the projectile out but kept it inside the cockpit and bounced back onto the leg of Don Craig in the copilot's seat, hitting him with the flat side of the projectile. He wound up with a large, very sore spot on his leg instead of a much more serious injury. I believe he received a Purple Heart for that shot and I am sure he kept the infamous round. I also believe I remember him saying that he was going to Chapel services that night.

Now we have had Shadows shot in the nose, in mid-body and then we had one shot in the tail booms. One again no one was hurt and the aircraft was not seriously damaged. I met the crew at their parking spot, looked at the damage, and then told the crew to all go get a haircut. There were a lot of surprised looks on their faces but they complied. I saw a promoted Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Smith five years later at the Carswell Officers Club and the first thing he wanted to know was why, after getting shot up for the first time, that I told the crew to go get haircuts. I told him with a smile that the crew really needed haircuts and that there were other valid reasons for him to ponder. We had other aircraft hit but once again no one was hurt and the aircraft was not badly damaged.

The enemy did not hurt us but a 14th SOW standardization pilot did. He wrote up a well-qualified pilot for taxiing too fast. When this major from wing came by my office to introduce himself before the flight, I was not impressed. When I heard about his write up of taxiing too

fast, I called him in and told him factitiously that I was not aware of a speedometer on a gunship by which to measure taxi speeds. He knew that I was protesting the write up. He answered that in his opinion the pilot was taxiing too fast and the write up would stand. I told him that I would protest to the DCO which I did. I called Colonel Brown, told him about the write up and wondered about the background of the check pilot. Colonel Brown said that he did not know but to send him in writing ASAP the facts I had given him over the phone. I wondered about the ASAP but complied immediately and, in fact, embellished some of the things I did not like about the check pilot. I considered Colonel Brown a friend as well as my superior. I got an irate phone call from the 14th SOW Wing Commander, Colonel Frank Eaton asking me who I thought I was to write such official correspondence about his stand board pilot. I wondered how he got the written information and he told me. He said that Colonel Brown had just departed PCS for the States and that he, Colonel Eaton, checked Colonel Brown's desk to see what correspondence needed to be answered and discovered the unfortunate document. After about five more minutes of wondering who I thought I was, comments in that vein, the boss hung up. Funny thing, Colonel Eaton flew down to C Flight unannounced early the next night, found me in my office and said let us go out and walk the flight line. It was a beautiful night in Saigon during the dry season. As we got some distance from Shadow Ops, he told me without preamble that C Flight was the only wing unit flying that night out of sixteen units in the Wing. That comment was not meant to be an apology but it was as close as I would ever get.

The longer we flew over Cambodia, the more complicated the missions became. Working troops in contact makes it easy to get clearance to fire from the ground commander, but our areas of operations were now getting free fire clearance for designated areas and stretches of lines of communication outside of those areas. What this meant was that 7th AF and the Cambodian representatives were designating areas that were completely in enemy hands and targets of opportunity, such as sampans, could be shot at will because of the pre-approved status. To make sure that the crews had accurate and up-to-date information for these free fire zones, I had classified folders assembled with appropriate maps marked, the latest messages included and other important information generally pertaining to the missions. I had installed a large map that covered the wall in my office. This map was used for each crew to brief me or Lt. Col. Bill Gregory, Flight operations officer, on the free fire zones and other parts of their mission. It worked. I do not remember any reports of firing mistakes outside the areas. Major Earl Farney, a navigator who was our Det. Admin. Officer took care of this time consuming chore as well as flying and overseeing all the paper work for the unit. Everything he did was outstanding and very much appreciated by me.

Things were never dull in C Flight. One day the maintenance officer brought in one of his men and said that the young man had told him that he could no longer work on Shadow gunships because they were killing people. He said that he was a conscientious objector and that was his right. I told the maintenance supervisor to take him off direct work on the gunships but to keep him fully employed for eight hours a day until I could contact the Base legal officer for guidance. The legal officer said that the procedure we had established to use him on cleaning the revetments, washing vehicles, etc. was correct but that the young man needed a new I.D. showing his new status as a non-combatant. We were curious as to how the change to peaceful orientation took place so suddenly since this was his second volunteer tour in Vietnam, in Saigon. We asked questions of acquaintances and discovered that he had come back to Saigon to be with a girl friend that he had admired so much on the first tour. Things went well at the start of the second tour with his girl friend until her ardor cooled and he was left alone with a lot of

the second tour to endure by himself. He thought being a conscientious objector would get him a quick trip home. At that time we had a big school bus assigned us and washing, waxing and cleaning it plus the other vehicles plus the revetments gave him another change in heart. I had an open door policy for my office. I heard a firm knock on the door edge, looked up and saw this sharply dressed individual, you know who, requisitioning permission to enter and speak. Permission granted, he approached the desk, saluted and said, "Sir, I am no longer a conscientious objector."

I almost got in trouble with Wing again. I got maybe five calls over four months from my superior and rating officer. I cannot remember who it was at the time but each call was complaining that the effectiveness reports that I wrote were much higher than the rest of the Wing's reports and that the Air Force was setting standards for reducing inflated reports. I kept answering each phone call with the same reply, this is an outstanding unit doing an outstanding job and each individual deserves the high effectiveness rating I marked and signed on his report. Finally, on the last phone call he told me that if I persisted in the high ratings, it would reflect on my own effectiveness primarily in the judgment area. I said very respectfully that I could not rate outstanding people other than outstanding and he hung up the phone. I sweated out my next evaluation report. It turned out all right. This was 1971. I came up for promotion to colonel in October 1972 and was not promoted. Strange thing, I had a friend call me and tell me he had seen my name on the promotion list. A second promotion list was coming out in two months to be announced in December 1972, and again another person told me I was on the list. I told him he was crazy but he was not. I was number 23 on that promotion list and very happy to have made the eagle zone.

Earlier I had remarked about the VNAF 119 Wing collocated at Saigon which had shared its supplies with us while waiting for the Air Force to ship what we needed. We paid them back when our supply request was filled. For a brief period, spare engines were needed at an increasing rate when the rebuilt engines from the States started having a much shorter effective life before failing, thus causing the supply of them to dry up. In fact, we would have to test fly over the base every engine that was changed until the quality of the rebuilt engines improved and the flight became unnecessary. Even that short flight did not always provide a long running engine. I was getting a check ride one hot afternoon, when on takeoff the right engine started winding down just as the wheels went into the well. We feathered the correct prop and shut down that engine and watched that fat aircraft climb out slowly from approximately 200 feet. By final approach we were at normal altitude and airspeed and made an uneventful landing after declaring an airborne emergency. It seemed to me to have been a very quick trip around the traffic pattern and landing, punctuated by the before landing and after landing checklists.

I do not remember how the need of a Shadow Hooch came up but I do know that I made an appointment with the Base Commander and asked for this place where off duty crewmembers could relax without going to the club with its dress code, etc. The Base Commander was reluctant to assign us such a place. I reminded him that Shadow was the only combat group on base that was firing real ammo at the enemy and flying around the clock, 7 days a week and holidays. He said that he knew that but did not want to set a precedent, etc. I must have been persistent in calls and visits to him because he relented and Shadow got its party Hooch which brings me to the last event to be covered before returning to the States for five months.

That event was the second Dining In at the Officers Club. I inquired at 7th AF if General Clay, the Commander, would like to attend, pin on medals, etc. He sent word that he would like to attend and would accept a Shadow One award, pin on medals, etc. Of course, the 14th SOW

Commander, DCO, and DCM also would attend and participate. We invited the TSN Base Commander, in appreciation for the Shadow Party Hooch, so he could be thanked publicly by our unit. I was not prepared for his reply when I introduced him at the head table, thanked him for the Hooch when he said in front of God and everyone that he would have liked to have fired me, long pause, but only to hire me to work for him. Got out of that alright and proceeded with the business of the night, pinning on medal, etc. As our main speaker we had an interesting talk by a very high ranking civilian on other clandestine operations that were going on in Southeast Asia. Then Bill Gregory caught me completely unaware when he read the citation from the Shadow Men of Fighting C Flight, presenting the Shadow 1 Award to me. Without thinking I protested that the Award was meant for persons outside our unit. General Clay said take the award and I always obey four stars. I am so glad I did.

That award has been hanging next to my desk for thirty years and is a constant reminder of an outstanding unit whose performance set all kinds of records. I was very lucky to have been a part of it. For me as Commander, the most important record we set, flying in combat in all conditions of weather and enemy fire is that we relentlessly performed in combat operations but did not have any one killed or seriously wounded and lost no aircraft in accidents or in combat. As I told you in Commanders Calls, I wanted to return each and every one of you to your loved ones in the same healthy condition that you joined our unit. Despite the rigors and dangers of combat, weather and chance, you made it happen and established combat and safety records at the same time. What a performance by an outstanding group of people. You indeed made Shadow proud.