

Opinion

FIFTY YEARS AGO

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The year of 1975 will be succinctly remembered by multiplied thousands in Southeast Asia, especially in the regions closest to Vietnam. My wife and I had completed twenty years with the U.S. Navy, retiring in 1967; in addition to Pastoral duties of six churches, in multiple states.

When we checked in with Immigration in Bangkok, Thailand, we were beginning our first tour as Missionaries to the U.S. Military contingent at Utapao, the B52 Base located two hours south of the Nation's Capital. Our oldest son, Danny, accompanied us – our younger one, Don, was attending college.

I had spent a tour ten years earlier with Fighter Squadrons on board the Carrier Hancock; and, the War was still going on in 1975. Most anything can happen in a War Zone; and, from Day One, we were made aware. While our tasks at the Service Center were many, survival was on our minds 24-7. Due to complexities surrounding Missions by Active Duty Warriors, the shifting of Personnel... the agonies (and loss) during Raids... and, senseless activities on the periphery; I will limit my commentary, at this juncture, to the daily events.

We will long remember the forced exits by Immigration to Cambodia... to Hong Kong (Via North Vietnam)...Malaysia... Singapore... Journey north to the River Kwai... perilous moments at The Vine (Service Center next to Utapao); and, the final moments as "the entire Smear" fell apart, with us departing through Pattaya (jungles) at midnight... witnessing a baht bus blown to bits and scattered bodies littering the highway.

Oh yes, we were there as hostilities were elevated, Cambodia capitulated, the U.S. Ship Mayaguez captured by renegades, the C5 crash with numerous fatalities in Saigon and the entire area flooded with refugees! Many were plucked from futile jungle settings; or, from atop the U.S Embassy, as South Vietnam lost all hope for victory. There were many who did not survive!!! Conditions were far past civility!

This war was the worst of matters; and, **IT SEEMED THE WORLD HAD LOST ALL RATIONALE AND SANITY.**

We had been ordered out by the Church, due with circumstances, and was making our way to Taiwan. What a relief to land in Taipei and have some assurance of safety. Coming down mentally was not easy; and, it took a while! To breath peaceful air was a "Godsend!" We were grateful to be alive.

IT ALL HAPPENED FIFTY YEARS AGO AND WE REMEMBER THE CATASTROPHIC LOSS OF LIFE AND THE FIFTY EIGHT THOUSAND PLUS AMERICANS WHO CAME HOME IN BODY BAGS... OR, NEVER!

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