

The ONI/NIS Vietnam Experience

By Special Agent (Ret) Carl J. Merritt

A Brief History of the ONI/NIS Vietnam Experience

The NIS Vietnam experience began in 1962 and was initially limited to individual Special Agents being dispatched TAD to Saigon and other in country locations, from the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), Fleet Counterintelligence Support Facility in Subic Bay, RP. Bob Kain was the first Special Agent (SA) to be permanently assigned as Resident Agent (RA) to Saigon, in 1962, assisted by several 9592, Navy enlisted investigators. Kain's replacement was S/A Maynard Anderson, who was joined later by S/As Tom Brannon, Milt Steffen and Paul Carr in early 1965. When the investigative and counterintelligence arm of ONI became Naval Investigative Service (NIS) in April 1966, the NIS Offices (NISO) replaced the District Intelligence Office (DIO). NISO Vietnam stood up in April 1966, moving counterintelligence and investigative responsibilities from NISO Philippines to NISO Vietnam. Then-LCDR William H. J. Manthorpe Jr., was assigned as NISO Vietnam's first CO and S/A Ken Nickel, as its first Supervising Agent. In-country tours were voluntary only and set at one year, the same as was set for the military.

First ONI Representation in Vietnam, at Saigon



*The first ONI Special Agents and ONI 9592 Agents assigned to Vietnam (c. 1962-3)
(L-R) Agent Mord Tucker, SA Maynard Anderson, Agent Sam Houston,
SA Bob Kain, LT Leroy Hayden, USN (Photo credit Sam Houston, pictured above)*

ONI Detachment Vietnam at Saigon, c. 1964-1965



The Follow-on contingent of ONI Special Agents, ONI 9592 Agents, U.S. Navy staff and Vietnamese personnel assigned to ONI Detachment, Vietnam (c.1964-5)

Back Row (L-R) Agent Mord Tucker, SA Maynard Anderson, Agent Sam Houston, SA Bob Kain, YN1 Davis Walker, USN,

Front Row (L-R) VN Janitor (nfi), YN2 Smith (nfi), LT Leroy Hayden, USN, YNC Schief, Mr. Nguyen Van Van (VN Driver, Mr. Thu (Interpreter) (Photo credit, Sam Houston, pictured above)

NISO Vietnam, April 1967, Saigon Office



NISOV APRIL 1967

Rear Row: ENS D.L. CARR; LCDR W.H.J. MANTHORPE, JR.; W.H. FRY
Middle Row: F.F. GIVINS; K.W. NICKEL; J.A. RENWICK; D.A. MCBRIDE; L.H. THANG
Front Row: Q.V. NGAU; YN2 R.G. KRAUSE; YN1 J.M. SPRINGER; YN2 R.D. LANCING;
YN1 A. LINGWAY

April 1967, NISO Vietnam Personnel

July 1966, First Fully Staffed NIS Office in Da Nang, Vietnam



Standing (L-R) YNC Gary Hall, SA Milt Steffen, PN1 John Moore, USN, SA Bob Hall, SRA Charlie Baldwin.

Kneeling (L-R) SA Dave Roberts, LCDR Lou Costa, SA Carl Merritt, SA George Meglemre, SA Jim Leavitt. YN3 Douglas Ward (not pictured) took photo

The rapid expansion of US military combat operations in-country, from the southern most reaches of the Mekong Delta to the northern most areas of "I" Corps and the DMZ, created the need for timely and on site NIS support to these combat related operations. To that end, the legend goes, Tom Brannon was transferred from Saigon to Da Nang (the heart of Marine Corps combat operations) and with two purloined and quickly repainted U.S. Army jeeps and personnel support from Marine Corps Military Police, he established NISRA Da Nang. Tom's early investigative and anti-narcotics efforts within the Da Nang area, subsequently led to his being named the unofficial mayor of "Dog Patch," a title he dares not dispute. Arranging travel to those in-country locations, where NIS folks needed to be, could often become creative. The CONUS NIS sedan was replaced by Marine Corps and Air Force C-130s, various types of armed and unarmed military choppers, and/or "Go fast" river craft and, not to be overlooked, signing on as an added gun to Marine combat patrol going to or passing through Indian country to the location where our Special Agent had to be.



S/A George Meglemre and his bodyguard waiting for the Metro Commuter Bus at Cam Lo

It was not unusual that once a Special Agent got to where he needed to be, and finished that particular assignment, he was forced to remain at that location for an extended period of time, until return transportation could be secured. Reflecting on this, I feel confident that many of our circuit riding Special Agents filled these waiting voids with random acts of voluntary assistance to their Navy and Marine Corps host units, notwithstanding the notations that appeared on their Geneva Convention cards. It would have been impolite otherwise. Recollections and age related enhancements relative to these travels and events are the heart of the reunion experience and are often recounted in the hospitality room(s).



SRA Da Nang Jack Meyer (left) and his driver, at Cam Lo, c. April 1967

NIS maintained an active and meaningful presence in Vietnam until the Saigon office was officially disestablished in February 1973. Ken Seal, the last NIS Special Agent and CDR. Bill Derryberry, the last CO, turned off the lights, packed up the memories and departed country in March, 1973. To all who shared the NIS Vietnam experience, military and civilian: **Welcome Home and Thank You for your service.**



Note (1) The author, in an attempt to immortalize the liquid style used by the fabled tribal story tellers of the great Lakota Nations, pieced together the foregoing historical narrative based upon oral contributions from now retired ONI/NIS Special Agents, 9592 Agents and their then active duty Navy and Marine Corps counterparts who served, in-country with ONI/NIS. If some readers find historical or chronological errors in this narrative, real or perceived, I humbly pass blame to the memories and/or egos of all those grumpy old men I interviewed

Note (2) Anyone interested in a more detailed and complete narrative history of the NIS role in Vietnam might consider purchasing **Special Agent, Vietnam**, written by former NIS Special Agent Doug Hubbard. Doug's book can be ordered postpaid, for \$15.00, directly from Awani Press, P.O. Box 881, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

Semper Fi,
Carl J. Merritt