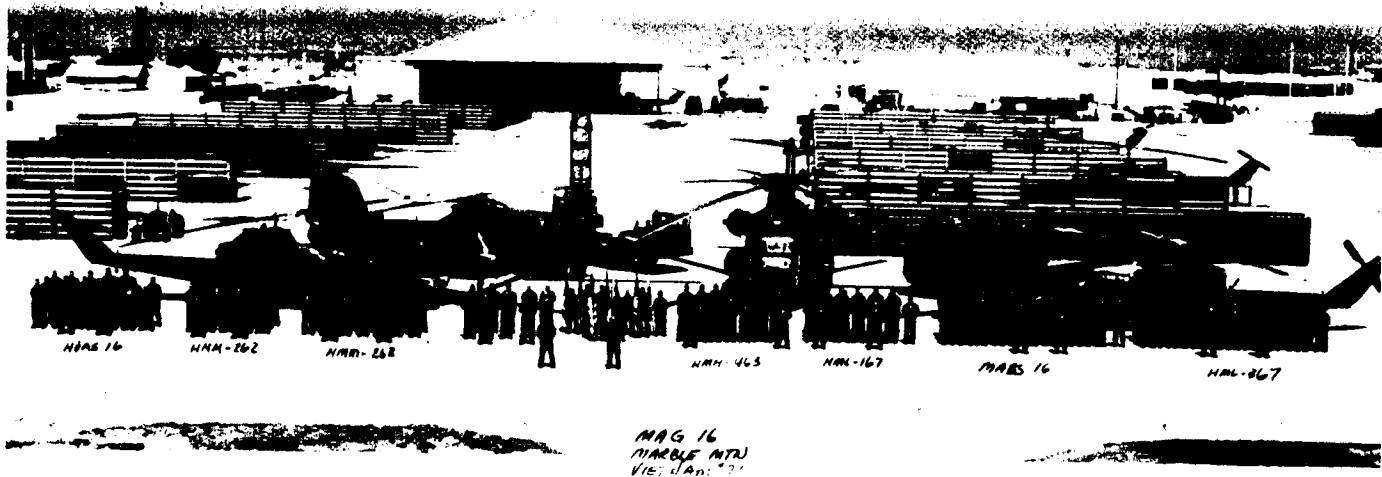


MARINE AIRFIELDS OF

Ever Wonder What They Look Like Today?

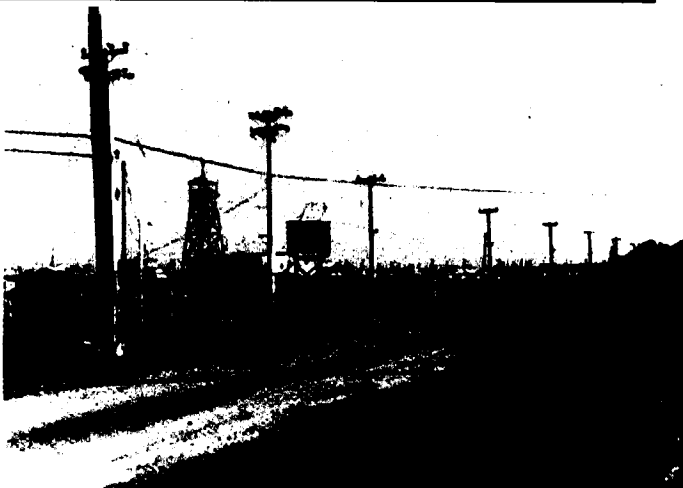
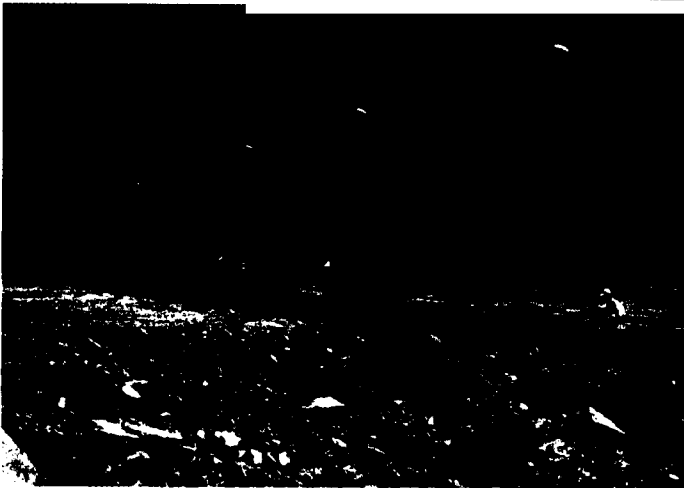
Marble Mountain



GISET HENRY A. MAHAN PHOTO COURTESY OF USMC/COMBAT HELICOPTER ASSN.

"I didn't leave anything in Vietnam and I'll be damned if I'll ever go back!" Those who say that probably won't go back, so just for them, specifically those who were there with the First Marine Aircraft Wing, here's a quick look back at their bases from where they flew countless combat missions, worked, lived and marked their short-timer calendars. "Current" photos were taken in May 2006 by R. R. Keene.

Marble Mountain Air Facility, located on the South China Sea just south of China Beach and across the Han River from Da Nang (pictured above in 1971), was home to Marine Aircraft Group 16. The old road from Da Nang (below, right) went south past MAG-16 to Marble Mountain. The new road (below, left) runs south from Monkey Mountain along the beach through what was once the living area for MAG-16 aircrew, past Marble Mountain and eventually links with National Highway 1. Until recently, the base was a Vietnamese military facility. It is giving way to progress and development, and will, for all intents and purposes, soon be gone.



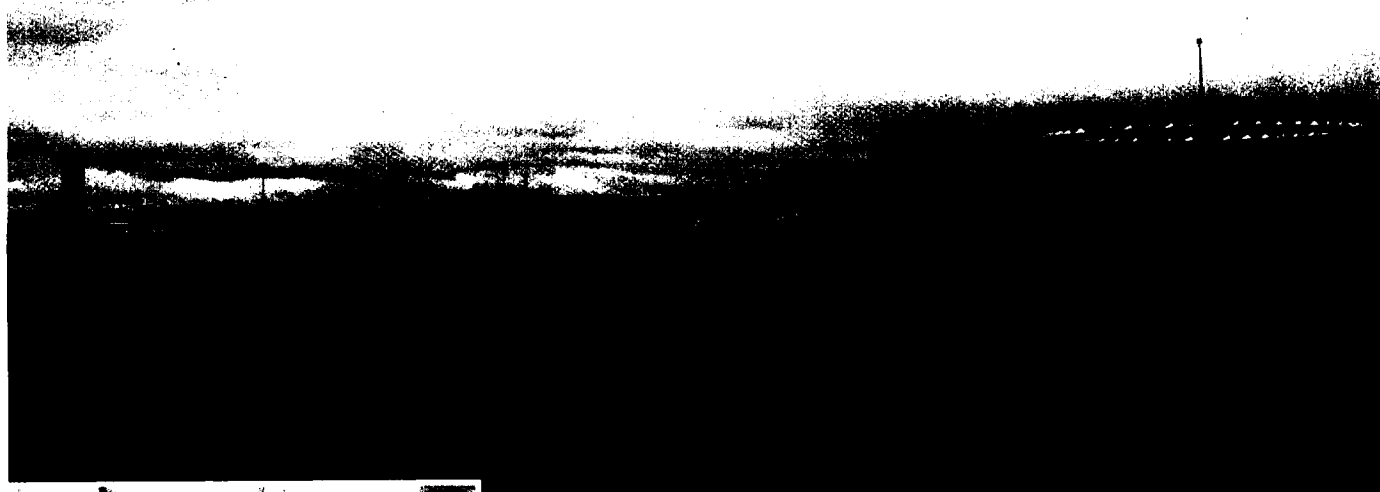
SUBMITTED BY ROBERT TUCKER, COURTESY OF USMC/COMBAT HELICOPTER ASSN.

VIETNAM—

By R. R. Keene

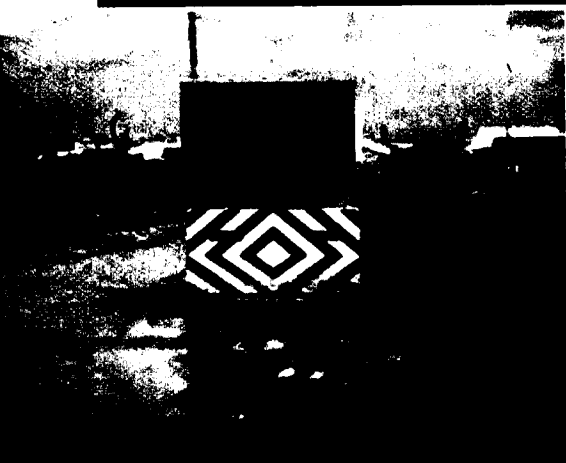


Phu Bai



The Phu Bai Air Facility, between Da Nang and Hue, is still an active airport. A new terminal has been built around the old tower, which is the same one Americans used during the war. However, a new tower, at the far left in the photo above, is handling most of the air traffic. The photograph below shows the view that MAG-36 veterans saw when looking across the airfield. Today (above), the view is similar. The MAG-36 area is now the site of upscale housing. There remain a few traces of berms and roads to mark the fact that the Marines were once there. The entrance road is exactly where it was in 1968, just off Hwy. 1, but military and tactical amenities, such as the sentry post at the entrance (inset), are history.

GEORGE T. CURTIS MEMORIAL PHOTO GALLERY
COURTESY OF USMC/COMBAT HELICOPTER ASSN

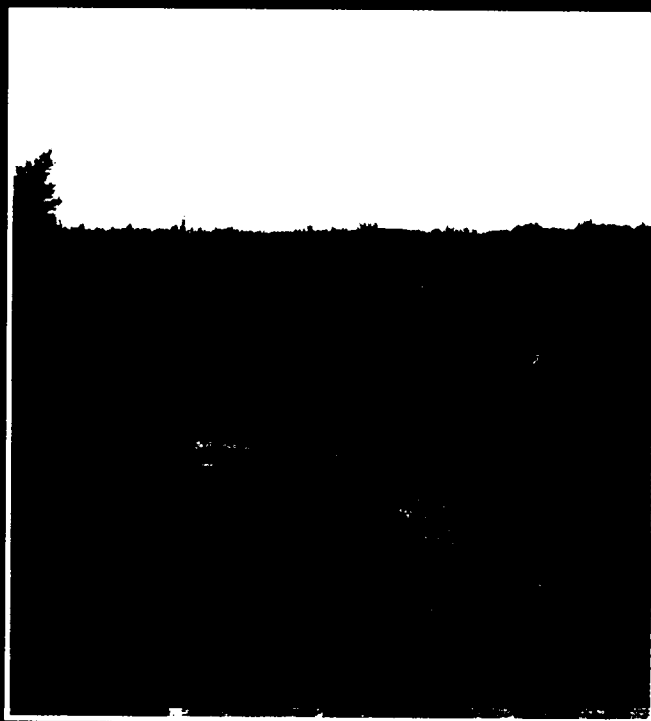


GEORGE T. CURTIS MEMORIAL PHOTO GALLERY, COURTESY OF USMC/COMBAT HELICOPTER ASSN

Chu Lai



Chu Lai Air Base (above) is approximately 50 miles south of Da Nang. It started as an expeditionary airfield. Only a few yards from the beach was the runway, tarmac and home to MAG-12's A-4 Skyhawk attack jets as the above 1967 photo shows. Chu Lai was named by Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, who selected the area for a base. *Chu Lai* is reportedly the Mandarin Chinese abbreviation of his surname. LtGen Krulak dubbed it after being told that the area had no previously associated name on the maps. The name is still used, but the tarmac (right) has all but disappeared.



Chu Lai has some of the finest beaches in Vietnam, and the Vietnamese are starting to realize it. This hotel sits off the old main supply route (MSR) that ran through MAG-12 and is at the base of the hill that led up to the headquarters for Task Force X-Ray, First Marine Division and MAG-36.





MAG-13 arrived in Vietnam in 1966. It was located less than half a mile west from the Short Airfield for Tactical Support (SATS) matted runway for MAG-12. MAG-13's F-4 Phantoms and A-6 Intruders were soon flying off the longest concrete runway in country and continued to do so until 1970. Below (left) is a photo of the newly opened Chu Lai airport sitting off the old but rebuilt MAG-13 MSR. Today, Chu Lai is an international airport with two runways of 3,800 meters (12,647 feet) and 4,000 meters (13,125 feet). The photo below on the right, taken in 1969, was shot from the hangars across the MSR and shows the administrative and living quarters.



GEORGE I. CURTIS MEMORIAL PHOTO GALLERY, COURTESY OF USMC/COMBAT HELICOPTER ASSN.

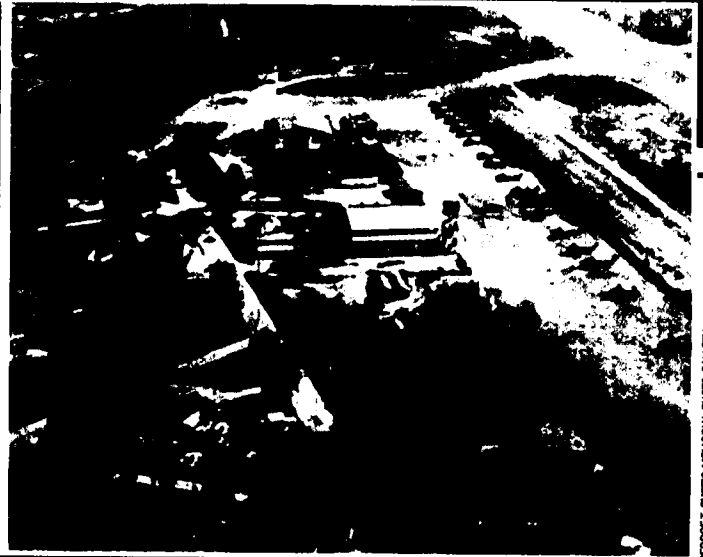
Ky Ha

Only a couple of miles up the MSR, north of the Chu Lai runways, sat Ky Ha, the original home of MAG-36 and its helicopter squadrons, as shown in the photo below on the right. The MAG established the base at Ky Ha on Sept. 1, 1965, and was the first complete MAG to arrive in Vietnam. Ky Ha was its home until 1967 when MAG-36 redeployed north to Phu Bai with Task Force X-Ray. The photo below on the left is at ground level looking back across the old helo pad toward the hill where those Southeast Asia huts in the photo on the right once stood. For now, the old pad (left) is a driving school.



GEORGE I. CURTIS MEMORIAL PHOTO GALLERY, COURTESY OF USMC/COMBAT HELICOPTER ASSN.

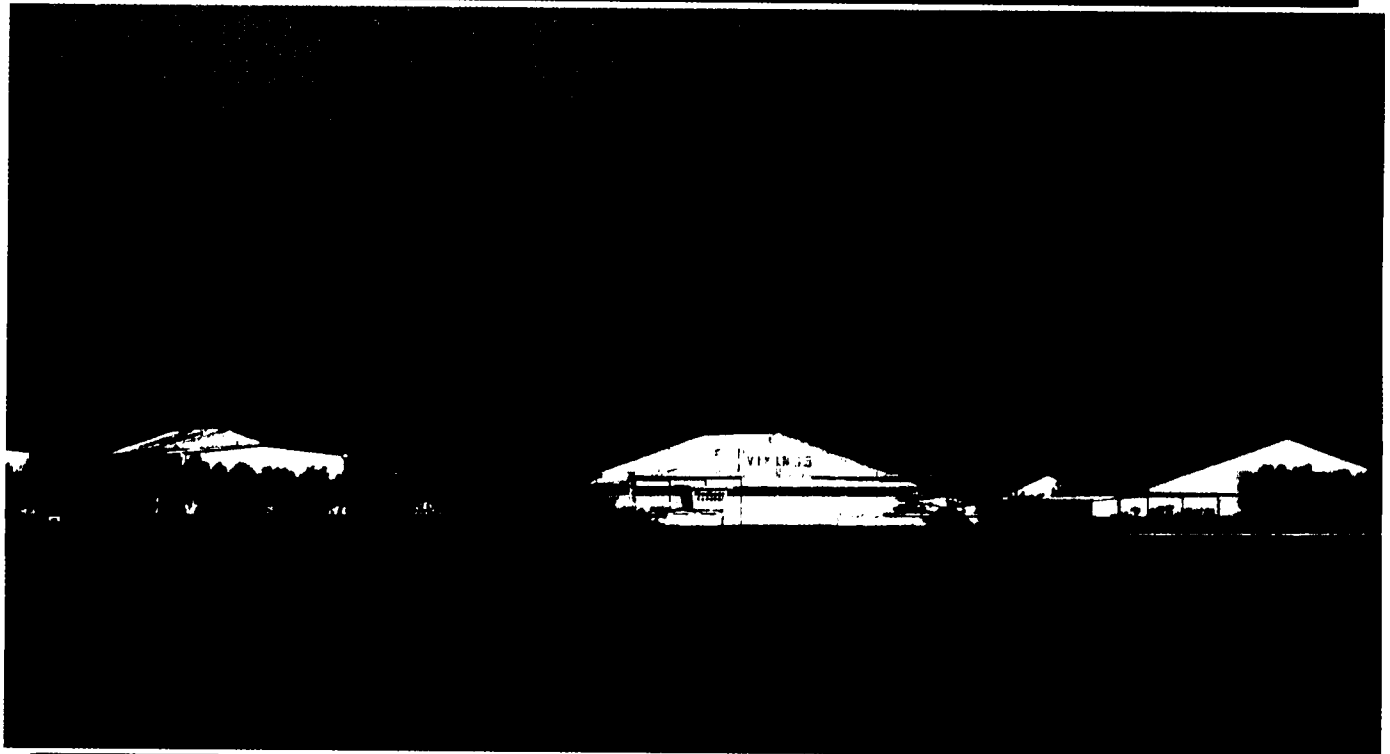
Da Nang



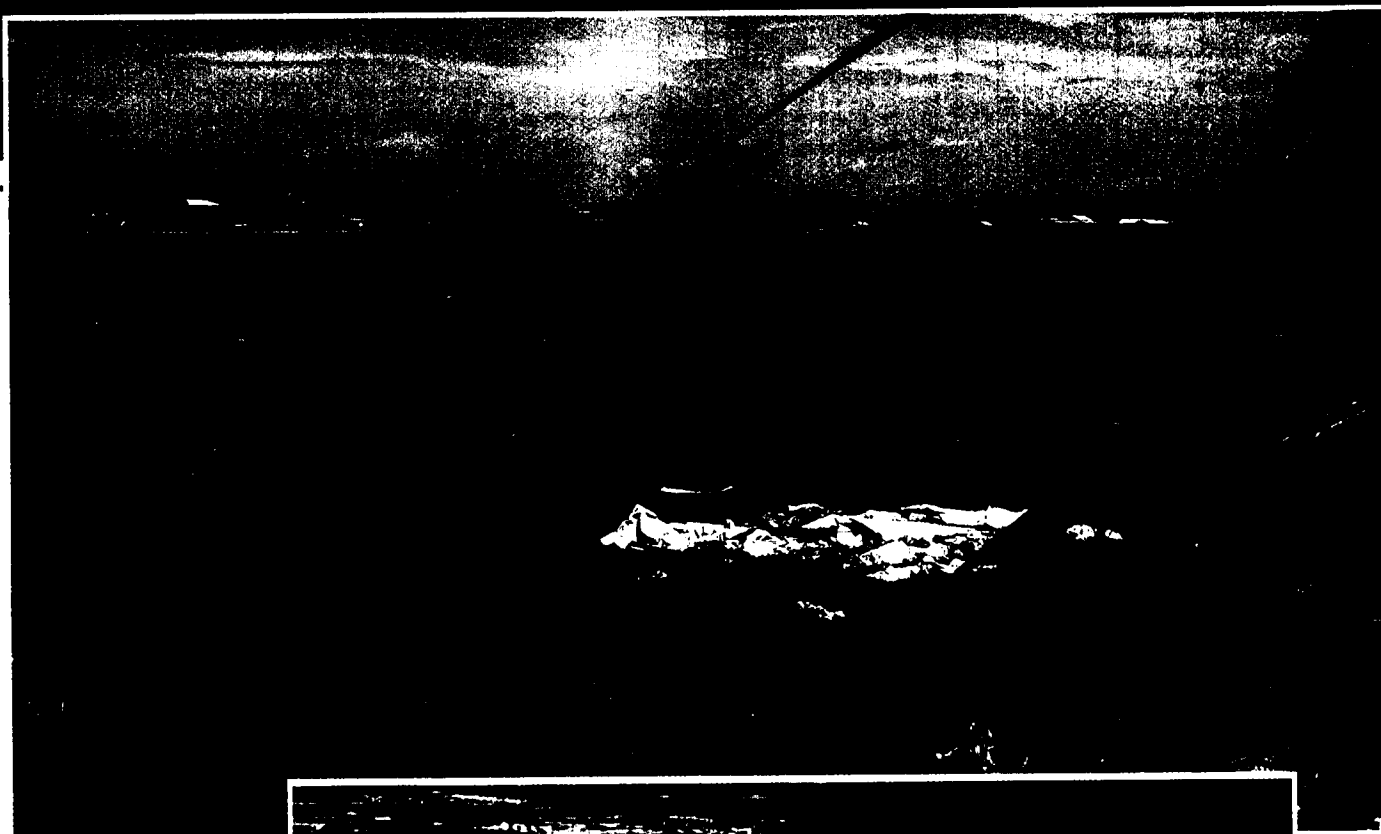
GEORGE L. CURTIS MEMORIAL PHOTO GALLERY
COURTESY OF USMC/COMBAT HELICOPTER ASSN.



At the height of the Vietnam War, Da Nang was the busiest airport in the world. With two major world-class 10,000-foot runways, a large tarmac and enormous hangar facilities, it housed the gamut of American and Vietnamese aircraft. The west side of the field was called "the Marine side" and was home to MAG-11 and headquarters for the First Marine Aircraft Wing. Today, the hangars (above, left) are still standing, and in the photo below, the name "Vikings" for Marine All-Weather Attack Squadron 225, which flew A-6 Intruders, can still be read on the face of an old hangar. It is a far cry from 1962 (above, right) when the Marine UH-34 Seahorses arrived from Operation Shufly down south near Soc Trang in the Mekong River Delta and took up residence in Da Nang.



Quang Tri



MAG-39 was born in country. Activated in April 1968 at Quang Tri Airfield (above), between Phu Bai and Hue, it was a provisional MAG whose helicopter crewmen took on some of the most difficult and dangerous missions of the Vietnam War. Today, there is absolutely nothing to mark the fact it ever existed in Vietnam. Looking across the old runway toward Hwy. 1 (top), there are some chunks of runway in the field where a few scrawny cattle feed. MAG-39 was deactivated in October 1969. It came back briefly for the evacuation of Saigon, or Operation Frequent Wind, in April 1975 and was permanently reactivated at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., in 1976.

This is all changing rapidly. If you want to see Vietnam as you recall it—hurry! And, while not great for reliving memories, everyone agrees the changes are for the better. Our thanks to Popasmoke, the Web site of the USMC/Combat Helicopter Association; its Webmaster Wally "Bytes" Beddoe; CWO-4 James "Crash" Casey, USMC (Ret), Deputy Executive Director, Marine Corps Aviation Association; and Military Historical Tours. 