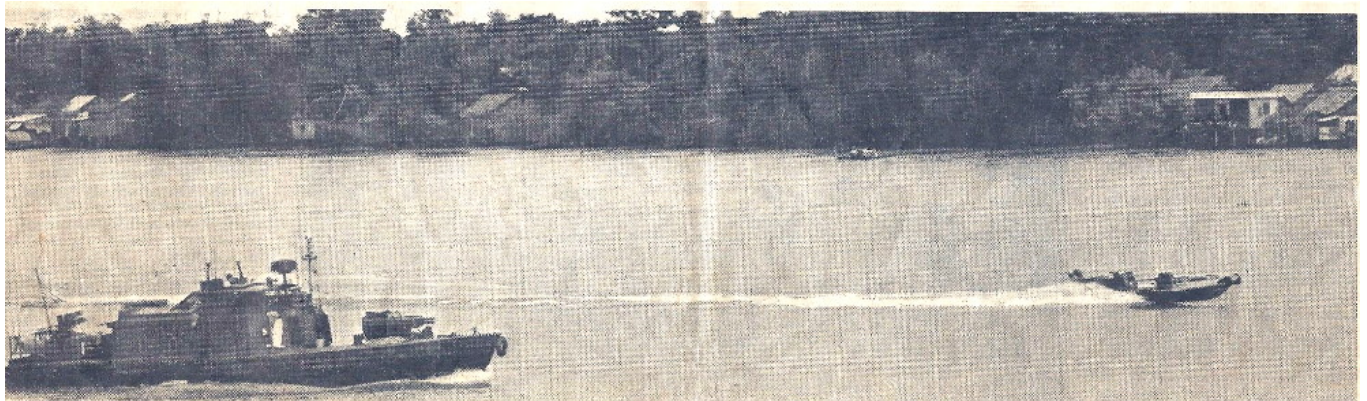




There Is Absolutely No Place Like Phu Bai¹

By Spec. 5 Alan Magary
Stars & Stripes Staff Correspondent



PHU BAI, Vietnam - There is nothing happening here. There is the place itself; a support base straddling highway 1. It's not so big that you can say it's a "sprawling U.S. base camp" and it's not so small that it's "an isolated outpost on the edge of the war."

As it happens, Phu Bai is the headquarters of the XXIV Corps, but it is hardly a bustling center of activity. Other than that Phu Bai is a state of mind. Down south around Saigon, if you say you are based at Phu Bai, somebody is likely to say, "Phu Bai? What's a Phu Bai?"

¹ Transcribed and prepared by Dennis Currie, Assistant Editor, Catkillers.org, from the original article *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, Friday, 7 November 1968 - from Nelson Kunitake.

When a visitor actually comes here, he sees signs on jeeps and walls reading **"PHU BAI IS ALL RIGHT."** Nobody knows why. It would be more apt to say, simply "Phu Bai Is," period. Meanwhile, nothing is happening here.

"What's happening here?" A correspondent asked a tired looking sergeant at the small press center that's wedged between warehouses here. "Not much," the sergeant yawned. "Well" the correspondent tried again, "what's going on when nothing is happening?" "Not much," the sergeant yawned. "Umm," tried the reporter again, "when did you have rockets last?" "July," he said.

Apparently, there is no war around here, the 105mm howitzers go off in the middle of the night, but nobody carries a rifle. "What's happening here?" the reporter asked a lieutenant. "I'm Short," he said. "I'm so short I could crawl under the belly of a snake and never touch him." The reporter had better luck with two bright finance clerks. Spec. 4's Mathew Deluca and Ken Spanjers. "The rain," they said, "without a doubt. It rained something like 21 inches in one night-that was an event." "The 413th Finance went home. That was a big event." "Pay day this month was a big event," Deluca said hopefully, "and there was this Australian chick-first chick I've spoken to in five months. Oh, and the University of Pittsburgh beat Syracuse." "What's so big about that?" "People think Pitt never wins," said Deluca. "The Bell Tower," said Spanjers. "Yeah," said Deluca, "the chapel has a new bell tower. You gotta see it; it's really great. Four steel beams he gestured skyward, "two stories high. It's really got an exotic ring about it." There was silence, then Deluca said, "nothing ever happens here." Silence. Then Deluca said, "the finance agents come in from Hue and tell us what is happening in the big city-they always make a big deal out of that." "Here's the man you should talk to," he said pointing at Sanjers, after a long pause. "He's been all over the world." "He's been to Europe, he's been to Africa, he's been all over the U.S. And now he's in Phu Bai." A stunned silence. Sanjers didn't say anything. They mentioned one big event of the recent past. A lieutenant ordered eight cartons of toilet paper and received eight truckloads. Even the New York Times wrote it up.

"Well," yawned Deluca, "there's another thing you can do in Phu Bai-go to bed early." "And it's easy to save money," added Sanjers. "You think of these and other places-Quang Tri, Chu Lai-they sound sort of exotic-but "Phu Bai, it sounds sort of dumb," said Deluca. He suddenly remembered what's happening here in November. "It's Clean Speech Month, he announced. "Clean Speech Month? said the reporter. "What are you supposed to do?" "You can think anything you want," said Deluca, "but when you speak it's got to be clean." There was another long silence. "Well," said Deluca finally, "There's one thing about Phu Bai, it keeps the tourists away."