

ON THE ROAD TO DALAT

Story and all photos by A1C Christopher Boles

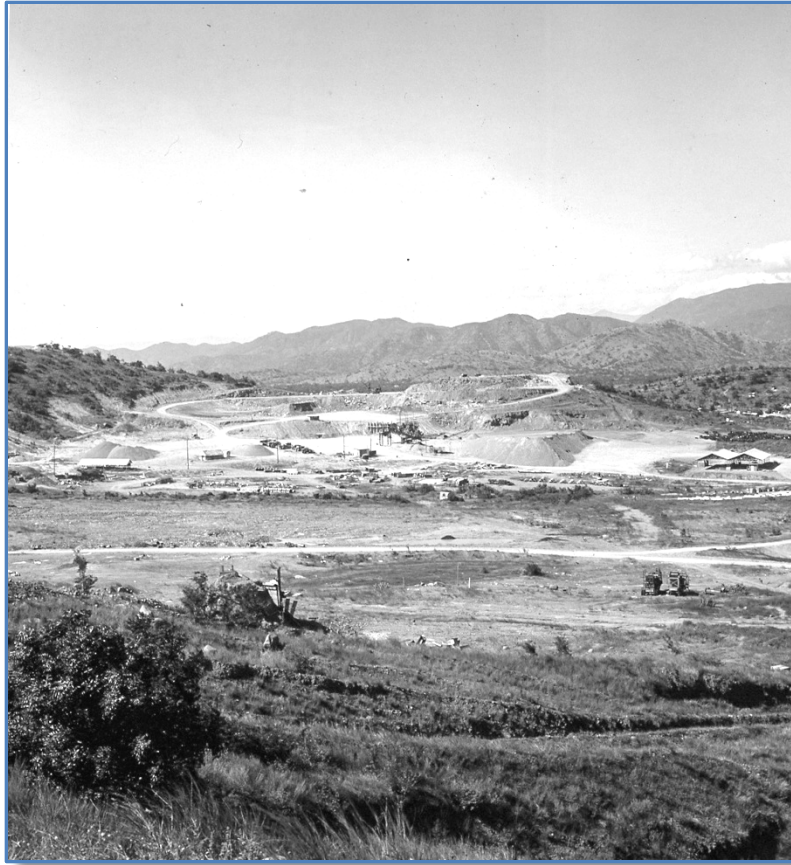
In 1969 I was on a year tour of Vietnam assigned to the 600th Photo Squadron Detachment 5 (600 P.S. Det. 5) as a still photographer (AFSC 23651).

Every day I would notice a long line of dump trucks lining up on the road around the base just outside of the asphalt plant. Then they would all head out to who knows where to dump their loads. This went on for some time and I started to get curious. I asked my NCOIC MSgt Charles R. Dees, if I could have permission to go off base and pursue a story of where these trucks were headed. I got the permission to do this on my own time. What I was after was a major two page spread in the 7th Air Force News of how we (the U.S.) were building roads in Vietnam for the people and to support our mission there.

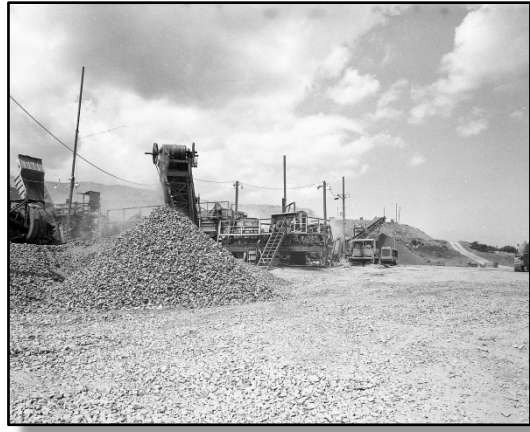


Figure 1 Phan Rang AB Asphalt Plant looking south

The first place I headed was to the gravel pit and to shoot some overall photos so you could get a sense of perspective of the base and the relationship to the layout. From what I could gather that mountain of rock had been whittled down over time to make rock for the concrete plant, road base and asphalt.



There was the rock crusher where they dumped the coarse material in one end and out the other end came the graded sand and rock in a huge pile. It seemed like the place ran every day and the pile kept about the same height.



To build the base must have required a lot of tonnage of material for concrete and road base. There wasn't any sand in any direction to be had from a river bottom so it was all made at the base rock crusher.

There was the crane operator who scooped up the crushed material and dumped it into the hopper to take it up to the top of the plant to a storage tank. Also the crane operator loaded road base into the dump trucks for deliver on site.



Figure 2 Crane loading road base onto a dump truck

At another location was the machine that melted the solid tar blocks that were stacked off to one side of the facility.



Figure 3 Tar and sand kiln in action (notice the flame)

A operator sat at a control board watching a scale of mix being made, making sure that it was the right consistency.



Figure 4 Asphalt plant operator in action

The trucks were part of the 18th Brigade 35th Group 513th Engineers, which over all was part of the 589th Engineers Battalion. The 589th built roads all over Vietnam and Phan Rang was just one of the many support locations for building roads in the province.

When the batch was ready for a run, the trucks would line up and go through the batch plant getting a full load of hot asphalt.





Figure 5 Trucks loading up with fresh asphalt

Then they would proceed out to the road and line up. When the convoy was ready they would drive out the gate and head in this case towards the mountain community of Dalat.

I managed to hop a ride with one of the drivers out to the end of the road where there was a road crew waiting for the convoy to show up. While driving out there, it was a nice ride considering it was a dump truck. One of the questions I had was “why are there sandbags on the floor?” Those were put there in case you run over a road mine as it was put there to absorb shrapnel. I also asked what do you do if “Charlie” starts shooting at you. Where upon he grabs his rifle and points it out the window, “We start shooting and we floor the truck to get out as quickly as possible.”



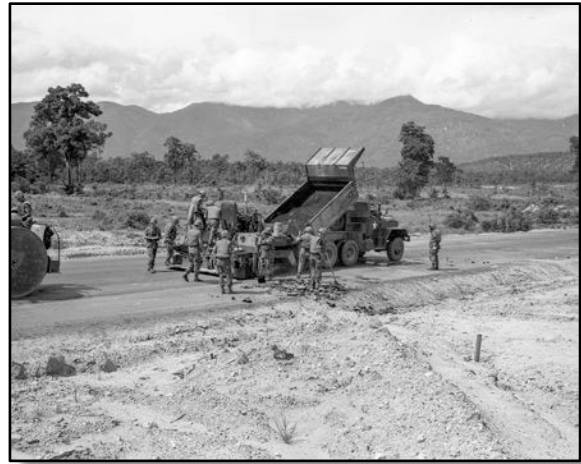


Figure 6 Trucks on the road to Dalat waiting to dump their load of fresh road base and asphalt

Then each of the trucks would wait their turn to dump their load in the hopper of the paving machine.



Then the paving machine would lay down the hot material and then rolled by the compactor until it was solid.



Figure 7 Army road crew laying down asphalt while the compactor waits

After each truck was dumped, then the convoy would head back to the base to repeat the process all over again.