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Tales of Ramasun II: More Tales of US Spooks and Spies in Thailand During the Vietnam War

M H Burton

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I published my original “Tales of Ramasun” in February 2012 and moved on to other things like “Mixed Foursome: The Zach Roper Mysteries” about a golf-loving detective and his sexy sidekick, the Thai Princess, but more “Tales” kept drifting into my mind and I just had to write them down. Eventually I found that I had enough to make another book which I have unimaginatively entitled “Tales of Ramasun II”. Hey if it’s good enough for Hollywood and all those “Rocky” movies it might work on Amazon, anything might work on Amazon…or not. For those of you who read and appreciated my first effort this will be a chance to take another trip back to dear old Ramasun. I got some really positive and encouraging emails from you so I know that there’s interest out there. You are a small, select group at present, but at least you are enthusiastic. For non-Ramasun-ians take heart. You can dive right into “Tales II” or read the original “Tales of Ramasun” first. Either way you will return to the Thailand of the 1960s, enter the shadow puppet world of espionage, and visit the spooks and spies of long-gone Ramasun Station and its military unit, the 7th RRFS. The 7th Radio Research Field Station, that is. Our ‘research” was electronic eavesdropping on everything that was going on in Southeast Asia in those days, and there was a lot going on. You may have heard of the Vietnam War, that was the main thing that was going on, and the 7th spied on everyone…friend, foe and neutral. Our spying was done from Ramasun Station, a top secret outpost in far Northeast Thailand (better known as Isaan...ee-sahn), and from our sister station, the 8th RRFS at Phu Bai in Vietnam. All the heavy lifting of signal intelligence gathering was done by the military in those days, at listening posts like Ramasun and Phu Bai. Now it is done by the civilian National Security Agency (NSA) and most of the people who do it don’t ever have to leave the comfort of their offices at Ft. Meade, Maryland where they look at computer screens that bring them intercepted information from orbiting satellites and drones. It was harder then. No computers, no satellites, you had to be close to what you were listening in on, but it was basically the same job, then and now, and you needed the same mix of folks to do it…Translator/Interpreters, Intelligence Analysts, Traffic Analysts and a host of techies, though the techies of Ramasun were radio techies, not computer nerds. I don’t know what they call them now at NSA, but we called them Lingies, Dittyboppers, radioheads and TAs among other things, How do I know this? I was one of them, a Lao Lingy for 27 months during 1969-71, at Ramasun and a few other places on TDY (temporary duty). I was Army, the US Army Security Agency (ASA) to be precise, but there were men from all branches at Ramasun, probably more Air Force (AFSA) than Army, though it was officially an Army Base…there were also civilians, and even a few women, but they did not arrive until after I left. The NSA, better known as The Puzzle Palace, was our ‘customer’ then. We did the front-line work and shipped the results back to them for analysis. Now they do all the work and ASA and AFSA have been put out of business. Ramasun Station went out of business too, long ago. It existed for ten years from 1966 to 1976 when the Thai government closed it. There’s no trace left of it now, not even a brass plaque to mark the spot where it once stood. Only the old spooks and spies of the 7th remain, and they may not be around for much longer. It is time tell their story, my story. They were a wild, oversexed, undisciplined, oddball bunch. In many ways the 7th RRFS was like the M*A*S*H 4077th, brainy smartass troops who thumbed their noses at ‘by the book’ military authority, but always rose to the occasion when there was real work to be done. Sloppy-looking troublemakers with bad attitudes about everything except the mission, they worked as hard as they played.

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