

# U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield

Vietnam Veterans Accounts of Their Life, Work, and Memories of U-Tapao

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## **Foreword**

The U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield was one of the largest air bases in South East Asia during the Vietnam War. It was an indispensable asset to the air war due to its location and size. However, very little information exists on the base itself. My father was one of the many people to serve at U-Tapao during the Vietnam War. I felt this personal dimension of the base could be a promising angle to approach for a research project.

The research found in this paper is a compilation of facts, opinions, and memories. The veterans who submitted information gave it on a purely volunteer basis, and although many of the memories are accurate as verified by both other group members, and published documents, there is always the possibility of human error. Whenever possible, details were confirmed, or supplemented through books and valid websites. This is merely a scratch on the surface of what persons stationed on bases such as U-Tapao experienced during the Vietnam War.

In this paper, several different aspects of the base and its personnel are addressed. I found it important to first explain the history of the draft, and how evolved. The draft or enlistment was the first step for these young people. Therefore, it is significant to the history of any person who served in Vietnam, regardless of their base and its location. Aside from the portion focused on the

draft, details apply specifically to the U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield. Approximately one half of the paper consists of a description of the base, specific details pertaining to buildings and their purposes. Living quarters, work schedules, the planes that were stationed on the base, and the feeling of security personnel felt on the base are also addressed. The remainder of the paper focuses on the human element of history, memories, and experiences. Ranging from free time activities, to the perceptions of the Thai people, various aspects of the life of the average GI are the focus of this portion of research. This area has barely been touched through over two months of research. The stories that were obtained from the veterans could not all be included, and many areas of interest were simply too broad to be included in a paper of such short length. Topics that are included are those which had the most information volunteered.

The final portion of the paper includes my personal reflections and opinions of doing this research. Although not every topic could be included in this paper, I was exposed to the group daily, which allowed my own perceptions to form from the human interaction aspect of these veterans on a continuum, as opposed to a snapshot received from reading a book or a paper. Welcome to the U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield.

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## **The Draft**

In 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Act. This created the United State's first peacetime draft. This also created the Selective Service System. From 1948-1973, men were drafted for service into the military when voluntary enlistment could not fill vacancies. 1973 marked the end of the draft, and the beginning of an all-voluntary military. The requirement of mandatory registration was suspended in April of 1975, however President Carter reinstated the requirement in 1980.[1]

Prior to the implementation of the draft-lottery system, the draft process was radically different. All men classified as 1A, ages 18 ½ through 26, could be called for duty. Local draft boards called the oldest first, but this system created great uncertainty, as you were equally eligible the entire period you were within the draft pool. School deferments were also different before 1971, when Congress passed improvements to the draft. Before 1971, any full-time student who could show they were making reasonable progress towards a degree could obtain a deferment until graduation.[2]

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1969, the first draft lottery drawing since 1942 was held at the Selective Service National Headquarters in Washington D.C. This draft lottery drawing was to determine the draftees for the coming year, 1970. Eligible draft registrants were those born between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944, and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1950. Congressman Alexander Pirnie, a Republican of New York state, drew the first of 366 capsules from the large glass container in which they were contained. The first capsule contained the date September 14<sup>th</sup>, and all men born on that date between 1944 and 1950 were assigned a draft number of 1. The drawing continued until all birth dates were assigned a number.[3] From the 1969 draft lottery, the highest number called was 195; all draft numbers below were called for possible induction into the military.[4] In the July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1970 draft lottery, the highest number called was 125.[5] The August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1971 lottery called through number 95[6], and the final draft lottery of Vietnam that was held on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1972, and although conducted for men who could be called in 1973 was never used.[7]

Not every branch of the military drafted, only two drafted during Vietnam. These two branches were the US Army, and the US Marines. This means every man and woman stationed at U-Tapao voluntarily enlisted for service in the United States Air Force (USAF). It is important to note, however, that there were non-Air Force persons stationed at U-Tapao.

One USAF enlistee, recalled several aspects of the drafting process. He enlisted in the USAF in January of 1971. While waiting at the local induction center for his name to be called, approximately 30 young draftees were called to line up by the wall. A man selected every other man in line, and told him that he was in the Army. Another man told the remaining men they were in the Marines. Assignments to these branches were as simple as that in certain circumstances. The same veteran also recalled several men who enlisted in the Air Force and after one or two weeks were discharged for several "excuses" for not staying in. These men were turned over to the Army instead of being sent home. "They sort of shot themselves in their own foot", as this

veteran stated.[8]

There were many reasons why people were in the Air Force. One veteran responded that he was commissioned through the ROTC.[9] Another explained that his decision to enlist was not in response to the draft. He said, "I would have enlisted anyway, every male and some of the women in my family served in WWII and Korea. I had no choice and no desire not to serve." [10] One other veteran enlisted right after graduation from high school.[11] The vast majority of veterans who enlisted said their reason was due to the draft, or the lottery system. One man said his chances of being drafted were 50/50, so he chose to enlist. [12] Many people knew they would be drafted eventually, and therefore decided to enlist and have a choice. For many, the options became enlist and choose a branch, or wait and be drafted.

Some veterans recalled receiving their draft notice soon after enlisting. Two veterans received their draft notice while in basic training.[13] One of these veterans remarked, in reference to receiving his U.S. Army draft notice, "Fortunately, I was already spoken for!"[14]

Despite the reason for enlistment in the Air Force, whether it be personal choice, family tradition, or choosing a military branch, one comment from a veteran put the draft in a clear perspective, "Back in the 60's and early 70's, the draft was a part of life for ever young male." [15]

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## **History Of The Base**

The U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield is located on the southern coast of Thailand, right on the Gulf of Thailand. It is located approximately 120 miles south of Bangkok, Thailand's capitol, and 30 miles east of Sattahip. U-Tapao, which was home to more than 7,000, began as a Thai Naval base in 1960. Major American buildup at U-Tapao began in mid-1965, when the construction of its 11,500-foot runway began. KC-135 Stratotankers began operating out of U-Tapao in August of 1966, with the official arrival of B-52 Stratofortresses following in April of 1967.[16]



U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield[17]

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## **What The Base Included: Buildings, and Recreation**

As facilities were built, military personnel had access to different living quarters, clubs and recreational activities. The base also contained important buildings for the operations of the base. Some of these were[18]:

NCO/Airmen Quarters  
Officer Quarters  
Crew Quarters  
Several Dining Halls/Cafeterias  
Officers Club  
NCO Club  
Airmen's Club  
USO  
Base Theater  
Bowling Alley  
Miniature Golf/Driving Range  
BaseBeach  
Gym  
Sports Field  
Library  
Clothing Sales  
Chapel  
Hospital  
Finance  
Personnel  
Legal Office  
Post Office  
Education Office  
Mars Station  
Security Police



Chapel/Theater



NCO Club[19]



USO Club



BaseBeach[20]

U-Tapao Airfield is a very large base; therefore, two shuttles ran throughout the base to assist personnel in moving from location to location. A veteran speaking of the shuttles joked how, "those Thai drivers didn't always come to a complete stop every time you were getting on or off... but the driver would slow down somewhat. I think they got paid per lap around the base."[21] To travel off the base, there were commercial buses, or taxis.[22] Baht buses, which were small covered pick-up trucks, were common modes of transportation. Several veterans commented on the fact these buses were not always safe, and you should never ride alone at night in one.

U-Tapao had many recreational activities. The base beach had boating, water skiing, deep-sea fishing, archery, horseshoes, and basketball courts available. There was also snorkeling and scuba diving available through the Diving Club.[23] The gymnasium held basketball courts, and a weight lifting room, while also providing various classes such as judo and karate.[24] There were two base theaters, one was indoor and air-conditioned, and the other was a larger, outdoor theater on the beach. A larger indoor theater was completed in 1972.[25]

In all, there were four clubs on U-Tapao, the Officers Club, the NCO club, the Airmen's club, and the USO. The Officers Club was for commissioned officers, second lieutenant through general, only. The NCO (Non-Commissioned Officers) Club was open to enlisted personnel who had some supervisory capacity on the base. This included those who were levels E-4 through E-9 on the pay grade. The Airmen's Club was for all enlisted men below the E-4 pay grade. Finally, the USO (United Service Organization) was open to everyone.[26] The USO was open 24 hours a day except on Mondays when the club would close for several hours after 11 p.m. There were lounges, free stationary, musical instruments and soundproof rooms, cards, ping-pong tables, pool tables, and TV rooms. There was also a snack bar and a pizza bar.[27] While the other clubs served alcohol and put on a sort of floor show, the USO did not serve alcohol.[28]

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## Living Quarters

There were also several different living quarters on U-Tapao. The officer quarters were located near the middle of the base, and the crew quarters were located just south on the base from the officers' quarters. The majority of the NCO/Airmen's quarters were located on the southwest corner of the base. Additional NCO/Airmen's quarters were located on the northeast section of the base, near the main gate. Two main styles of NCO/Airmen's quarters were built at U-Tapao, the dormitories that are known as barracks, and the hooches. Later, pre-fabricated barracks were flown from the United States to U-Tapao. These were two story, open bay barracks. Common bathrooms were located halfway down each side. Each half was sectioned into six separate rooms by the use of lockers and office partitions, with three people to each section.[29] These pre-fabricated barracks were similar to the original three-story barracks in many respects.

The barracks were concrete buildings, built three stories high. The hallways consisted of wooden partitions, with openings at the top and bottom. Doorways were spread out down the hallways, although there were no actual doors in the openings. Each large room was divided into cubicles, using lockers as makeshift walls. Each cubical was large enough to house six people, community bathrooms and shower areas were located at each end of the hall. One veteran who lived in the concrete barracks explained how the bunk beds and lockers were placed in one part of the room, while the rest of the room served as a sitting area. Here they would have their couch, tables, refrigerators and whatever other furniture was in the room. This allowed for a quieter sleeping area, as people were often on different sleeping and working schedules.[30] An estimate of the size of one cubical s recalled to be approximately 20 feet by 20 feet.[31] Although the barracks were louder, and housed significantly more people than a single hooch, there were benefits. As one veteran said, "we lived six men to a cube at U-T. Wasn't that bad. We became close real fast... got to know people."[32] Another remarked after describing his barracks, "life was good though."[33]

The hooches were quite different, and those who lived in the hooches generally seemed to enjoy their living arrangement quite a bit. A hooch was simply a wood framed, screened house with a tin roof. Hooches could house between six and eight people comfortably, and within the hooch, lockers often served as the only interior walls. There was separate hooch with the shower and bathroom facilities. One veteran who lived in a hooch told how they pushed all eight of their beds and lockers to one end of the hooch, and built a bar at the other end.[34] Another veteran said, "I liked living in the hooches better, especially for day sleeping

since we were only a few compared to a bunch of people going in and out and several house girls and house boys chatting and clammering about." [35]

The unmentioned Airmen's quarters for GI's stationed at U-Tapao were bungalows and houses off base. Although the significant proportion of military personnel lived on base, there were several veterans who mentioned either actually living off the base, or renting a bungalow with several other GI's to visit on their free time. Some of the hooches were very close to the runways, and with the constant takeoffs and landings, the noise was found unbearable to live with. One veteran explained how the close proximity of his hooch to the runway lead to him moving to a bungalow near PattayaBeach and riding a contract bus to the base each day.[36] Often, the houses and bungalows would also have a woman, similar to the house maids on base, who helped keep the men's living environment clean.



Airmen's Barracks



Hooch Area[37]



Inside of Hooch[38]

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## House Girls

House girls or hooch girls were a part of every GI's experience at U-Tapao. Generally, the position was held by women, although there are several mentions of house boys as well. The house girls were comparable to a mom for the guys. She cleaned the rooms, made beds, exchanged linens, acted as an alarm clock in the mornings, did laundry, and shined boots. She would also help the GI's learn to speak Thai, and ensure their experience in Thailand was enjoyable. A house girl was paid \$5 to \$6 per person each month, and usually took care of two rooms or hooches. This meant a house girl made anywhere from \$40-\$80 per month depending on how many men lived in each room. This was very good money given Thailand at this time as the average annual wage in Thailand was only \$200.[39] One veteran recalled his house girl bringing her two sons to work occasionally. He also remembered his house girl always trying to set him up with some young girl she knew.[40] While not every house girl could

be trusted, and usually the house boys were not trusted at all, a veteran recalls that his house girl was extremely trustworthy and even had access to his locker. "I liked the Thai people a lot," he stated, "but they were very poor and would pilfer items for money or their needs." Whenever possible, he would give his house girl extra supplies he did not need, especially things her husband could use.[41] One of the veterans who was in the Army said that although he did not know if it was consistent across the base, but all of the hooch girls in the three Army hooches were married or the girlfriend of Thai Marines stationed at U-Tapao. The marines would stop by the hooches during the day to see their wives or girlfriends.[42]

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## **Security on the Base**

The overall feeling of security at U-Tapao was high. There was not a single response indicating a strong doubt in the security on the base. As a part of the Welcome In-Brief to U-Tapao, GI's were told that it was okay to go off the base, but there is always a risk so they should be careful. They were cautioned to stay with another GI, and never stray from their group. As they reported to each smaller division, they were told the same, to stay with a member of their squadron, or their shop. "The feeling was if the association was closer the chance of being left to fend for yourself would be less." [43] Several veterans commented on communist activity in the U-Tapao area. Although their overall feeling of security was not compromised, the known terrorist activities caused occasional briefings to be more aware of what was going on around them, especially when traveling off the base. [44] A friend of one veteran was shot at as the two approached U-Tapao's main gate. That incident was blamed on, "communist influence from up North." [45] There was also an explosion in the bomb dump area on the base. This was called an accident, but according to one veteran, everyone he knew felt that it was actually an attack. Other than the immediate excitement the incident caused, nothing on the base changed afterwards. [46]

A veteran explained that he believed the feeling of security GI's stationed at U-Tapao experienced allowed them to move more freely, and be friendlier with the Thai people than the GI's in Vietnam could have ever expected. These people trusted their Thai hosts, and lived a more realistic experience in Thailand. [47] The most potentially dangerous places were not on the base, which some believed was the prime target in Thailand with its large number of B-52 bombers, but off-base. [48] Even then, the danger was not extremely great. "The baht bus driver might try to rob you, but only if you were drunk and alone. Same as New Jersey except we don't have baht buses." [49]

The most serious security threat on the base came from sappers. Security was always on the alert for this threat. Sappers were men, women, or children who would sneak onto the base with concealed explosives. They often tried to reach a strategic spot, such as a flight line, to detonate their charges. Sapper attacks were similar to current bombings happening in the Middle East. [50] The sapper attack on U-Tapao was on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1972. *The Bangkok Post* printed an article about the attack on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1972. It reported that two communist terrorists breached base security around 8:00 p.m. while a diversion drew the attention of two guard houses on either side of the hole which was cut in the security fence. Engine No. 7 on one B-52 was damaged to the extent it needed to be replaced, but the damage to two other B-52's was minimal, and the planes were ready to fly by noon the next day. One terrorist was killed on the base, a Vietnamese, and the other escaped. [51] In response to this attack at U-Tapao, the National Executive Council (NEC) ordered all air bases in Thailand to go on 24-hour alert. The NEC also determined that although security at U-Tapao was as good as possible, the attack on the base was a lesson that there are always improvements that can be made in the wake of such an incident. [52]

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## **Assignments And Work Schedules On The Base**

Some of the major units stationed at U-Tapao were the 635<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Group, 307<sup>th</sup> Strategic Wing (SAC), 1985<sup>th</sup> Communications Squadron, 11<sup>th</sup> USAF Hospital, 17<sup>th</sup> Air Division, and the 310<sup>th</sup> Strategic Wing. [53] With over 7,000 men and women working on the base, there were many assignments to fill. Listed below is a combination of units, sub-units, shops, and

specific jobs that veterans were assigned to at U-Tapao:[54]

1985<sup>th</sup> Communications Squadron  
307<sup>th</sup> MMS Pre-Load  
4258 Avionics and Electronics Maintenance Squadron (AEMS)  
461 Munitions Maintenance Specialist  
635<sup>th</sup> Security Police Squadron  
Aerospace Photo Systems Repairman  
Aircraft Maintenance Technician  
Air Traffic Controller  
B-52 Assistant Crew Chief  
B-52 Navigator  
Bombing and Navigation Systems Technician  
Director of Flight and Ground Safety  
Doppler Radar Systems and Navigation Computer Systems Repair  
Electronic Countermeasure Shop (ECM)  
Ground Radio Communications Equipment Repairman  
Environmental Systems Technician  
Heavy Weapons 81 mm Mortar Crew  
K-9 Supervisor  
KC-135A Aircraft Crew Chief  
OMS Tanker Phase Inspection Team  
POL 631X0  
Training NCO for TSC-54 Satellite Communications Station

Almost every job on the base ran on a schedule of 12 hours on duty, and 12 hours off duty. Shifts generally began at 7:00 a.m., and 7:00 p.m. Official work schedules consisted of 60 hours of work per week, however the nature of certain jobs sometimes meant that more than 60 hours would be worked given the demand of the base. Some shops were able to maintain a schedule of working two-day shifts, with 24 hours off, then working two-night shifts with another 24 hour off period. Since this was not a legal schedule, the schedule went back to 12 hours on and 12 hours off when the workload was heavy.[55] Almost all assignments on the base were tailored around the support of the bombing missions that flew out of U-Tapao each day. While repairing radar, loading bombs, and refueling planes were not the assignments that received praise and honors, they were essential to the war effort. Not a single plane could have flown its mission without the ground support it received at bases like U-Tapao. U-Tapao was a major staging base for B-52's during Operation Linebacker II, an operation, which helped bring the Vietnamese to the negotiation table in 1973.

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### **The Planes Of U-Tapao**

U-Tapao was home to several different planes during the Vietnam War. The Boeing B-52 Stratofortress was the most numerous of the planes, however, KC-135 Stratotankers, U-2's, C-130's, and Navy P-3 Orions all flew out of U-Tapao at some point. Although there were no SR-71's stationed at U-Tapao, at least one made a brief stay on the base for maintenance purposes.[56]

In July of 1948, the U.S. Air Force contracted Boeing to build a two long-range heavy bombers. The contract the Air Force gave Boeing was for a turboprop engine plane, however Boeing preferred jet engines, and decided to go ahead and attempt a design for a heavy bomber using jet engines. The design for the B-52 with eight jet engines was presented in October of 1948, and made its first flight on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1952. Between 1952 and 1962, eight different B-52's have been built by Boeing. They are named B-52A through H. The B-52H is the only model that is still operational today. It was the B-52B that was the first model made for production, and joined the U.S Air Force's Strategic Air Command in June of 1955.[57]



The Air Force received its first KC-135 Stratotanker in 1957, and in 1965, the Air Force received its final KC-135. In total, Boeing built 732 tankers, and approximately 550 of these are still in use.[58] The primary purpose of the KC-135 is mid-air refueling. It refuels Air Force, Navy, and Marine planes, as well as the planes of our allies. The use of this plane during the Vietnam War changed the way the air war was fought, as long-range bomb targets became within reach.[59]

The U-2 Reconnaissance Aircraft became operational in the early 1960's. This plane was designed and built by the Lockheed Company. The current version of the U-2 is 40% larger than the original design, and can carry four times as much payload weight than before. During Vietnam, the U-2 served as a spy-plane for battlefield surveillance, targeting, and damage assessment due to battles.[60]

The Lockheed C-130 Hercules began its service with the U.S. Air Force in June of 1959. In total, the Air Force received 135 C-130's. The originally the C-130 Hercules was to be an assault transport, however the plane was modified to serve many other purposes. These included special operations (low-level attacks), close air support, and search and rescue.[61]

Lockheed received a contract from the U.S. Navy in February of 1959. The P-3 Orion was to be developed to replace the P-2 Neptune. By 1962, the P-3 was ready for use. This land-based plane is a long-range anti-submarine warfare patrol aircraft, and is still presently used although the design has been through three major updates since 1959.[62]

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## **The Buff**

The B-52 Stratofortress was an extremely important plane to those stationed at U-Tapao. On average, there were approximately 50 B-52's on the base at a time.[63] The planes was commonly referred to as the "Buff's", which stood for various things depending on who you asked. Generally, Buff stood for "Big Ugly Flying F\*\*\*er", and a slight variation, "Big Ugly Fat F\*\*\*er\*." [64] One veteran said the Buff was known in the polite circles as the, "Big Ugly Fat Fellow." [65] The nickname is attributed by most to the sheer size of the plane, and that it looks like it should not be able to take off.[66] As contracted, the purpose of the B-52 was to perform long-range bombings. The B-52 carried 500, 750, and 1,000 pound bombs. A typical load consisted of 84, 500 pound bombs carried in the bomb bay, and 24, 750 pound bombs on the wing pylons. This meant each B-52 carried 108 bombs on average. If 750 pound bombs were loaded into the bomb bay, a load would consist of 42 bombs. The 1,000 pound bombs would be carried six on each wing.[67] In the later years of the B-52's use, only 500 pound bombs were loaded onto the wings when it was discovered that cracks had begun to form on the plane from the stress of repeated flights, and carrying the 750 pound bombs on the wing pylons.[68] When on bombing runs, the B-52 flew in cells of three, and the cells were named after colors. For example, there could be a Blue cell, and within that cell, the planes would be labeled Blue 1, Blue 2, and Blue 3. Having three planes in each cell meant every target was hit with 324 bombs if the plane was loaded with the typical 108 each, 500 and 750 pound bombs.[69] Thirteen, three plane cells would fly out of U-Tapao every 24 hours, and on average, each operational B-52 flew once in every 24 hour period.[70] The typical bombing mission lasted from two to four hours. When the B-52 returned from a mission, within the first hour the plane would have its oil checked, be refueled, and then be re-loaded with its weaponry. The drag-chute would also be loaded and then the Crew Chief would begin the post-flight inspection, which took approximately four hours.[71]



B-52 on descent, KC-135 in foreground



B-52 being loaded[72]

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## U-2 Landings

An interesting design feature of the U-2's used during Vietnam was their center line landing gear. When the plane took off, it had outrigger wheels to keep the plane stable as it went down the runway, as well as keep the wings from scraping since they were flexible and heavy with fuel before a mission. As the plane took off, the wheels were designed to fall off, leaving only the landing gear. This created an interesting difficulty in landing, since although the pilots could balance the plane reasonably well, they could not control gusts of wind that could potentially tip the plane on its side. To fix this, an interesting and memorable solution was found. Small trucks, usually El Caminos or Rancheros would wait at the end of the runway when a U-2 approached for landing. As it landed, the truck would race down the runway and a person in the back of the truck would "catch" the wing to help the plane maintain balance as it slowed down and the wheels were reattached to the wings.[73] "Seems like that's the way we always knew the bird was coming back", one veteran recalled, "The El Camino would park at the end of the runway, then all of the sudden fire up and start screaming down the ramp." [74]

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## Free Time

For every 12 hours of work on the base, there was 12 hours of down time. There were also 24 and 48 hour breaks, which were much needed after a week of hard work in the heat of Thailand. Free time at U-Tapao was spent in many different fashions.

Relaxation was the key to free time for many GI's. Many opportunities on the base existed for those who did not feel like journeying into town. The movie theaters showed movies several times a day, and the clubs were always open for the men and women. Some took advantage of the base beach, which due to pollution was not safe for swimming, to lay out and enjoy the sun. Free time was also spent keeping in contact with loved ones by calling, and writing home.[75] A veteran and four of his friends from his workshop pooled \$150 per month to rent a three bedroom bungalow off base, which included a house maid. Since the rotation of days off rarely lined up, so there were never more than two guys there at a time. "Can you imagine how sweet that was after living in a giant crowded barrack all week?" he said.[76]

Not everyone chose to spend their free time on the base. U-Tapao was near several cities. The town of Killosep was right outside the main gate, although portions of the town were off limits, at least during certain years that GI's were at U-Tapao. Sattahip and Pattaya were also close to the base, and these towns were popular locations for shopping, and rest and relaxation resorts. Newland was a town that most was built for the US forces stationed at U-Tapao. The specialties of this town were essentially alcohol, and women.[77]



Kilosep Market



PattayaBeach



Newland Entrance

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## Prostitution

Prostitution in Thailand did not begin with the arrival of U.S. forces and the Vietnam War. The poverty of the country had created a situation where families would sometimes sell their daughters into servitude since they could not support them financially. Drug addictions, alcoholism, and other problems often ensured that women never left the life of prostitution. Prostitution did not, and still does not carry the same stigma in Thailand as it does in other parts of the world.[78] Sexually transmitted diseases ran rampant in the towns like Newland, and GI's in certain squadrons faced disciplinary actions if they contracted an STD three times in their one year tour.[79]

Prostitution existed on another level in Thailand. Many houses and bungalows that could be rented "included" girls in their rent. The understanding was these women were not merely house maids. One veteran recalled that his bungalow he and a friend rented at PattayaBeach for \$35 per person, included two girls. One girl was between 17 and 18 years old, and spoke reasonably clear English that allowed him to learn a bit about her life. Her family was extremely poor, and by living in the bungalow, she avoided being prostituted to the public. She just had to hope that whoever rented would treat her well.[80]

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## The Thai People

"Land of Smiles" (LOS) is how Thailand is referred to for most of the members of the U-Tapao Alumni Association. It only seems fitting given the people of Thailand. The Thai people were described by almost every veteran as friendly, happy, gentle, and honest people, who always had a smile on their face.[81] Several also attributed the disposition of the Thai people to their religion, Buddhism. The Thai's belief that sometime in this life or the next life, they will have to answer for their misdeeds may play a role in their honesty and respectfulness.[82] "The Thai's were wonderful people. They didn't seem to live beyond their means, but they lived life to the fullest and loved everything." [83] Many veterans recalled how no matter how little a family had to share, they would always share their food and drink with the GI's, and several were invited into the homes of Thai families on holidays such as Christmas. There were of course exceptions; crime was a part of daily life in Thailand. Some said this was just another example of how kind the Thai's were, to stay as happy and welcoming despite the crime and theft that ran through their towns. Not every GI felt the same way towards the Thai people, however a veteran gave his opinion on this. "Those who may have felt they were treated poorly I usually learned were the "Ugly Americans" who often forgot whom the country of Thailand belonged to." [84]

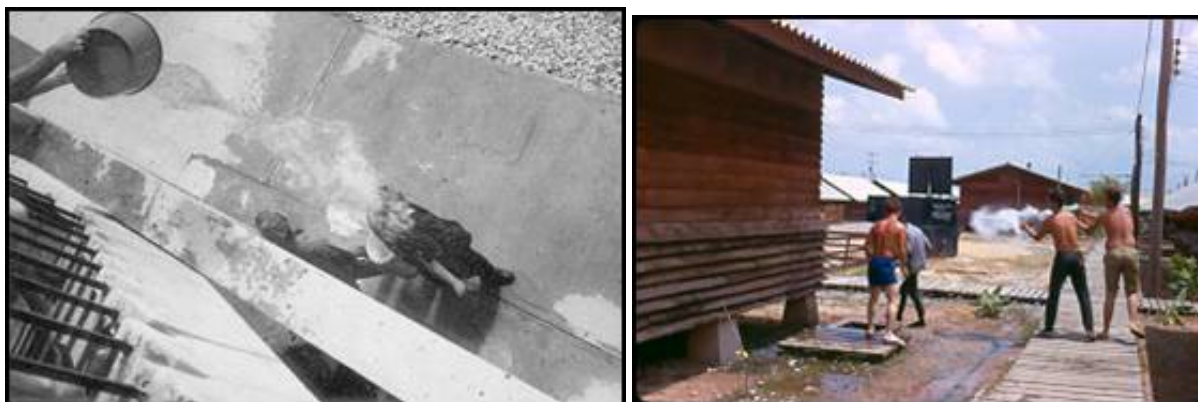
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### The Water Festival

Many veterans recalled the Water Festival that happened in the spring. The festival is in celebration of the changing of the seasons and the coming of the rain season. The tradition was to sprinkle a few drops of water on the top of your head to symbolize the coming of the rain, and the cheeks were patted with a rice flower to symbolize the rice that would grow from the rain. The Water Festival escalated to another level on the base, with hoses, and buckets of water replacing the drops intended by tradition.



Water Festival



Water Festival

## **Views of Vietnam**

The emotional charge the Vietnam War caused still remains, however it has greatly diminished in the past 30 years. The events that made the Vietnam War controversial are no longer relevant as they once were. Regardless of the threats that have vanished, and diminishing hostile views of the war, veterans still have mixed emotions of the war. The majority of the veterans state they are now neutral and many feel they were doing their duty by serving in the war. One man said, "I felt I was making a contribution in something worthwhile, and I still feel that way,"[85] and another stated, "I believe that the military has to do what it is told to do, and we did that."[86]

The overwhelming positive feeling of duty, and obligation to serve in the military perhaps reflects the fact that not a single person who served in the USAF was drafted. Enlisting, regardless of the motivation, is still an act of volunteerism. Some veterans explained how did not support the war while they were there, and at least one became an anti-war activist after returning home from his service. Regardless of their history after their service in Thailand, many of the veterans who gave their views of Vietnam focus on their disappointment of how we fought in Vietnam. The feeling among veterans is the U.S. government did not fully commit itself to winning the war, and it was obvious to those stationed in South East Asia, regardless of whether they were on the battlefield, or on a base in Thailand. Some statements addressed the actions at the beginning of the war, "I thought that we were stopping the spread of communism in that part of the world. Right thing to do. Wrong way to do it. General Westmoreland wanted to use B-52's on Hanoi in 1966. The politicians should have let him. It would have stopped the war and saved about 50,000 American troops."[87] Other statements show the resentment felt towards the politicians in their commitment in Vietnam throughout the entire war, "I still despise the politicians for allowing so many soldiers to be killed or maimed in Vietnam. We were not allowed to fight to win air power wise. The war should have been either abandoned or fought flat out."[88] Not every veteran could possibly fit the same psychological mold, however one could reasonably assume that although a sense of duty and obligation accompanied military personnel during their service, they at some level resented the way they were forced to fight. That is, they were not allowed to fight to win the Vietnam War.

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## **The U-Tapao Alumni Association**

The U-Tapao Alumni Association was formed on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2000. The group was formed for people stationed at U-Tapao, and those who passed through, or even knew someone who had been on the base. Currently, the group has 305 members from all over the United States and several in Thailand. The site allows for pictures, surveys, and messages to be posted for conversations. Almost 100 messages are posted daily, ranging from comments on the amount of snow that fell the night before around the United States, to current news in Thailand.

Through the group, several U-Tapao reunions have been held. The most recent reunion made a trip to Thailand for several weeks. A few weeks after the reunion, several group members had the opportunity to participate in a ceremony held in Pattaya. The veterans were able to meet the Princess of Thailand, hold a conversation with her, and all received a gift in appreciation of their participation. The excitement that coursed through the group before and after the event was truly amazing.

Several of the group members live in Thailand, and quite a few are married to Thai women. Other group members have not been back to Thailand since their service at U-Tapao ended, while several veterans make return trips once a year. It is obvious that many of the members in the group still feel a strong tie to Thailand even after 30 years.

The reasons veterans participate in the group vary greatly. Some veterans who contributed information through personal e-mails have never posted a single message on the board, and simply like to drop in to read occasional posts and look at pictures. Others participate in the group to keep their memories fresh. For some, it is as simple as, "I like being with these guys." [89] Others finally were able to put the war in perspective by participating in the group. "I thought I hated Thailand when I was there... but it wasn't Thailand that I hated. It was the fact that this spoiled young kid from upstate New York was halfway around the world in

the military that I didn't want to be in and supporting a war I didn't believe in. When I read and talk on this website now I rarely think of the work part and when I do I look through the mature wise eye of today and realize what a great opportunity I was blessed with to serve in that country and at that base." [90]

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## **Personal Reactions and Impressions**

My original intent of this paper was to form one cohesive idea that encompassed the average veteran stationed at U-Tapao during the Vietnam War. It became clear this was not feasible for several reasons. First, the veterans were not all the same, and secondly, these veterans are not a representative group of all the people who spent time at U-Tapao.

The first reason, veterans not all being the same, is an understatement. In certain cases, the only similarity between people was that they were both stationed at the same base. The differences between people existed both during the war, and now. Experiences on the base depended greatly on rank, assignment, and even the year that a person lived in Thailand. The level of involvement, and type of people who were serving changed quite a bit from the beginning to the end of the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Even within the same period, the experiences of those serving depended heavily on their assignment, how they lived, and their personal willingness to engage in the Thai experience. The multitude of different experiences by every person ensured that no two veterans are the same.

In addition, veterans are very different now, even if they had similar experiences while stationed at U-Tapao. Some veterans are now married to Thai women. Others have sons or daughters who serve in the military. Several veterans now live in Thailand, quite a few have made a return visit, and the vast majority of veterans will never step foot on Thai soil again. Geographic location, career, age, marriage, and children all ensure that the Vietnam veteran cannot be summed up by one generic description.

The second reason, a non-representative group of veterans, is clear from a simple look at the raw numbers. Over 7,000 GI's were stationed at U-Tapao at one time, with the average stay on the base lasting no longer than one year. This means well over 7,000 GI's were stationed at U-Tapao throughout the entire war, and only approximately 300 belong to the U-Tapao Alumni Association.

The veterans who participate in the U-Tapao Alumni Association do so on a volunteer basis. They willingly talk with other veterans, share their memories, and enjoy discussing their participation in the Vietnam War. A great number of veterans will mention their service, however have no desire to discuss the details of their experience. Asking the same questions of these veterans may yield different responses, and a different reaction to their involvement in the war. There are still the veterans who will not speak at all of their involvement, and certainly their interpretation of the Vietnam War would look drastically different from those who voluntarily join an internet alumni group.

This paper therefore cannot be the complete story of U-Tapao and its veterans. The paper that claims to be the complete story would indeed be a miracle. This is only one sliver of the life a GI may have experienced during the Vietnam War.

At times, the research became frustrating. I wanted straightforward answers, if there exist such a thing. I wanted organized detail, statistics, and picture perfect descriptions. This is nearly impossible when relying on memories that were made 30 years ago. However, I was often surprised by the detail that accompanied many stories. Detail became a double-edged sword. Can a veteran really remember such details so clearly after 30 years? Is this simply a glorified account of an actual event? The group members were very quick to catch mistakes of memory, and I realized that even if amazing, much of the detail offered was reliable.

It is obvious however, the memories and experiences of these veterans on the whole appear very positive. I fully expected this fact to emerge from this research. I first noticed the light-hearted, positive memories of U-Tapao from the stories and experiences of my father. I attributed this to the fact that he was young, energetic, and half a world away from home, combined with the simple fact that he was relatively safe from the dangers of war while in Thailand. There was always danger, but as shown by

impressions of security expressed by the group members, almost everyone felt secure at U-Tapao. I believe this greatly effected the perceptions of the war, and the service these men provided at U-Tapao.

Another factor that I attribute to the positive memories is the effect of time. As time passes, people generally remember the more positive and memorable experiences than the minor setbacks and annoyances of daily life. It would be an odd forum if people joined an Alumni group only to complain about their bad memories.

The final factor which I feel may have effected the pool I researched from was the fact the veterans knew I was the daughter of a veteran. There was a sense every so often that information was edited for content with the knowledge there was a visitor on the forum. In addition, I was told on several occasions that there was a certain level of censorship since I was someone's daughter, and there is always a feeling of protection in that circumstance. I do not believe this factor greatly changed the information I received, on whole the group was very informative and gave me any information they could to help my research.

Without the help of the veterans in the U-Tapao Alumni Association, my research could not have yielded the amount of information contained in this paper. The wonderful resource I found, the human mind, is far richer than any number of books a library can hold on its shelves. History reaches a point where the personal account on a primary level can no longer be used. I was incredibly lucky to have been granted the opportunity to explore this resource, and make a tiny dent in the history of the Vietnam veterans of the U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield.

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## Appendix A

### Lottery Numbers for Draft Lottery held on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1969

	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
<b>1</b>	305	86	108	32	330	249	93	111	225	359	19	129
<b>2</b>	159	144	29	271	298	228	350	45	161	125	34	328
<b>3</b>	251	297	267	83	40	301	115	261	49	244	348	157
<b>4</b>	215	210	275	81	276	20	279	145	232	202	266	165
<b>5</b>	101	214	293	269	364	28	188	54	82	24	310	56
<b>6</b>	224	347	139	253	155	110	327	114	6	87	76	10
<b>7</b>	306	91	122	147	35	85	50	168	8	234	51	12
<b>8</b>	199	181	213	312	321	366	13	48	184	283	97	105
<b>9</b>	194	338	317	219	197	335	277	106	263	342	80	43
<b>10</b>	325	216	323	218	65	206	284	21	71	220	282	41
<b>11</b>	329	150	136	14	37	134	248	324	158	237	46	39
<b>12</b>	221	68	300	346	133	272	15	142	242	72	66	314
<b>13</b>	318	152	259	124	295	69	42	307	175	138	126	163
<b>14</b>	238	4	354	231	178	356	331	198	1	294	127	26
<b>15</b>	17	89	169	273	130	180	332	102	113	171	131	320
<b>16</b>	121	212	166	148	55	274	120	44	207	254	107	96
<b>17</b>	235	189	33	260	112	73	98	154	255	288	143	304
<b>18</b>	140	292	332	90	278	341	190	141	246	5	146	128
<b>19</b>	58	25	200	336	75	104	227	311	177	241	203	240
<b>20</b>	280	302	239	345	183	360	187	344	63	192	185	135
<b>21</b>	186	363	334	62	250	60	27	291	204	243	156	70
<b>22</b>	337	290	265	316	326	247	153	339	160	117	9	53
<b>23</b>	118	57	256	252	319	109	172	116	119	201	182	162

24	59	236	258	2	31	358	23	36	195	196	230	95
25	52	179	343	351	361	137	67	286	149	176	132	84
26	82	365	172	340	357	22	303	245	18	7	309	173
27	355	205	268	74	296	64	289	352	233	264	47	78
28	77	299	223	262	308	222	88	167	257	94	281	123
29	349	285	362	191	226	353	270	61	151	229	99	16
30	164		217	208	103	209	287	333	305	38	174	3
31	211		30		313		193	11		79		100

### Lottery Numbers for Draft Lottery held on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1970

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1	133	335	14	224	179	65	104	326	283	306	243	347
2	195	354	77	216	96	304	322	102	161	191	205	321
3	336	186	207	297	171	135	30	279	183	134	294	110
4	99	94	117	37	240	42	59	300	231	266	39	305
5	33	97	299	124	301	233	287	64	295	166	286	27
6	285	16	296	312	268	153	164	251	21	78	245	198
7	159	25	141	142	29	169	365	263	265	131	72	162
8	116	127	79	267	105	7	106	49	108	45	119	323
9	53	187	278	223	357	352	1	125	313	302	176	114
10	101	46	150	165	146	76	158	359	130	160	63	204
11	144	227	317	178	293	355	174	230	288	84	123	73
12	152	262	24	89	210	51	257	320	314	70	255	19
13	330	13	241	143	353	342	349	58	238	92	272	151
14	71	260	12	202	40	363	156	103	247	115	11	348
15	75	201	157	182	344	276	273	270	291	310	362	87
16	136	334	258	31	175	229	284	329	139	34	197	41
17	54	345	220	264	212	289	341	343	200	290	6	315
18	185	337	319	138	180	214	90	109	333	340	280	208
19	188	331	189	62	155	163	316	83	228	74	252	249
20	211	20	170	118	242	43	120	69	261	196	98	218
21	129	213	246	8	225	113	356	50	68	5	35	181
22	132	271	269	256	199	307	282	250	88	36	253	194
23	48	351	281	292	222	44	172	10	206	339	193	219
24	177	226	203	244	22	236	360	274	237	149	81	2
25	57	325	298	328	26	327	3	364	107	17	23	361
26	140	86	121	137	148	308	47	91	93	184	52	80
27	173	66	254	235	122	55	85	232	338	318	168	239
28	346	234	95	82	9	215	190	248	309	28	324	128
29	277		147	111	61	154	4	32	303	259	100	145
30	112		56	358	209	217	15	167	18	332	67	192
31	60		38		350		221	275		311		126



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- [1] ["Background of Selective Service"](#)
  - [2] ["How the draft has changed since Vietnam"](#)
  - [3] See Appendix A for lottery numbers for the drafts in 1960, and 1970
  - [4] ["The Vietnamlotteries"](#)
  - [5] ["Results for men facing the draft in 1971"](#)
  - [6] ["Results for men facing the draft in 1972"](#),
  - [7] ["Results for men facing the draft in 1973"](#),
  - [8] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 1.13
  - [9] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 1.7
  - [10] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 1.3
  - [11] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 1.6
  - [12] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 1.2
  - [13] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 1.3. 1.9
  - [14] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 1.9
  - [15] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 1.11
  - [16] U-Tapao Airfield Book, page 2
  - [17] Picture on right taken by Dominick Scalise, permission of use granted by [William Miller](#)
  - [18] See Appendix B for U-Tapao reference map with complete listing of base buildings and location
  - [19] Permission for picture use given by [William Miller](#)
  - [20] Permission for picture use given by [William Miller](#)
  - [21] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.12
  - [22] U-Tapao Airfield Book, page 21
  - [23] U-Tapao Airfield Book, page 21
  - [24] U-Tapao Airfield Book, page 22
  - [25] U-Tapao Airfield Book, page 23

- [26] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61738
- [27] U-Tapao Airfield Book, page 23
- [28] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61743
- [29] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61819
- [30] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61785
- [31] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61814
- [32] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61845
- [33] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61824
- [34] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61818
- [35] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61796
- [36] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 6.4
- [37] Permission for photo use given by [William Miller](#)
- [38] Permission for photo use given by Paul Huber
- [39] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal e-mail 12/4/03
- [40] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 5.2
- [41] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 5.4
- [42] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #61898
- [43] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.6
- [44] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.6
- [45] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.5
- [46] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.5
- [47] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.5
- [48] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.15
- [49] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.7
- [50] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.9
- [51] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.18

Although this is what happened as reported by *The Bangkok Post*, other documentations by K-9 handlers and investigators of the incident report several different variations on facts and how the Vietnamese terrorist was killed.

- [52] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.19, 3.20
- [53] Units as provided by [http://www.fdevault.net/HW\\_silde/Aircraft/UTapao.htm](http://www.fdevault.net/HW_silde/Aircraft/UTapao.htm)
- [54] This is not a complete list of units, sub-units, shops, or assignments at U-Tapao. Presently, there is not a complete nor accurate list of assignments at U-Tapao accessible for purposes such as this research. A veteran in the U-Tapao Alumni Association is working to compile a list of jobs, and how the interacted on the base. Due to limited information it was not possible to obtain a great amount of detail on the assignments on the base. However, several veterans did give an overview of what their job entailed which greatly helped the process of understanding the operations of U-Tapao.

- [55] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.3
- [56] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.7
- [57] [http://www.boeing.com/defense-space/military/b52-strat/b52\\_50th/flash.html](http://www.boeing.com/defense-space/military/b52-strat/b52_50th/flash.html)
- [58] <http://www.boeing.com/defense-space/military/kc135-strat/kc135info.html>
- [59] [http://www.af.mil/factsheets/fs\\_110.shtml](http://www.af.mil/factsheets/fs_110.shtml)
- [60] <http://www.lmaeronautics.com/products/recon/u-2/index.html>
- [61] <http://www.theaviationzone.com/factsheets/c130.asp>
- [62] <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/ac/p-3.htm>
- [63] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.37
- [64] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.15
- [65] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.2
- [66] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.15
- [67] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.1
- [68] An oral interview with a veteran stationed at U-Tapao in 1972-1973 as a bomb loader revealed the fact that he did not remember loading 750 pound bombs on the wings of the B-52. After raising the question on the U-Tapao Alumni Association message board, it became clear that towards the end of the bombings based out of U-Tapao the bomb configuration changed from

what it had been in the late 1960's due to small cracks in the wings.

- [69] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.1, 3.2
- [70] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal e-mail 12/4/03
- [71] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.8
- [72] Permission for pictures given by [William Miller](#)
- [73] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #60571
- [74] Post on U-Tapao Alumni Association, Post #60578
- [75] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.3
- [76] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.9
- [77] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.14
- [78] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 5.4, 5.7
- [79] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.9
- [80] U-Tapao Alumni Group, personal responses page 5.7
- [81] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.38
- [82] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.38
- [83] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 5.1
- [84] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 5.18
- [85] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.7
- [86] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.9
- [87] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 2.5
- [88] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 3.6
- [89] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 5.13
- [90] U-Tapao Alumni Association, personal responses page 5.14

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