

*Recently a group of us were asked what we did to remind us as FACs, who and what we are, and our purpose in life. When I lose sight of things, I read this story of mine. It is true.*

#### BACKGROUND

In 1971/72 I was flying near Phnom Penh, which was under siege from gorilla operations when I got a call. "You need to contact a Cambodian Colonel on button 4, his group is pinned down by mortar fire and would like your help. The Colonel, speaking perfect English, told me he was taking fire from beyond a white temple and asked if I would fly over and look for it? I found the offending mortar in a sandbagged pit in the center of an abandoned village and pinpointed the gun for him. He said he had a flight of four Cambodian attack aircraft available if I could provide them with directions? We seldom worked with Cambodian fighters because of the difficult rules of engagement, and I objected because I couldn't talk directly to aircraft, I would have to relay instructions through him..., but by then he already had a flight on the way. I could see his fighters airborne from PP, so I directed him to fly them due east to a prominent road, then turn south for 20 "clicks" to the enemy village.

The flight followed the directions east and started south along the road, but after 10 Kilometers they began to circle to attack. "Colonel, your flight is over the wrong village! They need to come about 10 "clicks" further south". He came right back: "Don't worry, I'll take care of it." I called again, "That's a friendly village, you have people there! Stop the attack!" I was frantic, but by then I could see the lead fighter already rolling in. "I'm sorry, I can't contact them anymore, he said, they're not listening." My voice was shaking, near crying, when I called again: "They're bombing the wrong village! There are innocent people there! You're killing your own people! Please stop them!" No one replied and I watched horror as the flight of four aircraft bombed a little group of huts and its people off the face of the earth. I flew in tears and silence before the Colonel's voice came on the radio again.

"FAC, listen to me. I am sorry about the village That was bad. But you don't understand. **You don't know war!** My people are fighting a war for their survival. If we win this war, we will rebuild that village and my people will live there again. Then the loss of that village and its people will be remembered as a small price we paid for our freedom. But if we lose this war, the Cambodian people will be lost from the face of the earth. You are brave to come and fight a war so far from your homeland and family, **but you fight for a cause.** We are fighting for our very existence! So, you see, you really don't know war!" He paused, admonishing me, "But I make you this promise. In the days to come, around the campfires of my people, my children will tell their children the story of a brave American pilot who fought for, and cried for, the Cambodian people!" And he finished: "Have a safe flight back. And Then I knew War!"