

## He Brought Hope To Southeast Asia

Bill Herridge  
Board of Contributors

My mind has been wandering back to December, 1968, ever since I heard the news that my old friend, Bob Hope, had passed away.

Although I never met him personally, I do consider him a friend, along with millions of other veterans from three generations. He brought everything that was good about America into the lives of those of us caught up in this country's wars.

Let me take you back to that hot, steamy day on the Korat Plain in Central Thailand. We had heard months earlier that Bob Hope would be coming for Christmas. We didn't know the details, but the fact that he was coming was enough for us.

My running buddy, John Gearey, and I staked out a place about 10 feet from the stage at the makeshift outdoor theater the night before Hope's arrival. We sat out there under the stars all night, along with a few hundred other brave souls who wanted the best view possible. We watched the dawn break, and felt the first rays of the sun as they first brought warm relief from the night's chill, then slowly turned to sweltering heat in the Southeast Asian jungle. We didn't care, because Hope was on the way.

We watched as the "roadies" arrived with a couple of trailers full of lights, cameras and other equipment. With the anticipation of today's generation of rock star worshippers, we watched as the equipment was assembled, microphones checked and cameras set up.

Then the band arrived in an air-conditioned bus. Having left my safe haven in the Lab Band program at North Texas State when Lyndon's War beckoned, I instantly

recognized Les Brown and knew immediately we were in for some real music. The band members took their places, tuned their instruments, and awaited the arrival of Bob Hope along with the rest of us.

Finally a couple of big Jolly Greens appeared on the horizon and flew in close to the theater, but out of sight of the audience that by then numbered in the thousands. A few brief words by the Command Sergeant Major of Camp Friendship introduced the day's entertainment. "It's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Bob Hope. Bring him on," the Sergeant Major said.

Les Brown's Band of Renown struck up "Thanks for the Memories" and the man of the hour strolled out onto the stage, swinging a golf club and dressed in a set of solid white jungle fatigues. "Ladies and gentlemen, I wanna tell you I'm glad to be here in beautiful downtown Thailand," he said, "Where in October you get the monsoon and in December you get ME. Whaddaya think about this outfit? I look like the Korat Good Humor Man."

Howls of laughter followed, and lingered after every one-liner he delivered, whether actually funny or not. We were just glad to have him there, doing his best for the troops.

As if his presence weren't enough, he brought us Anne-Margaret. He also brought us the Gold Diggers—that gaggle of beauties from the Dean Martin Comedy Hour. With the stage full of thinly-clad beauties, Hope delivered the same one-liner he had used since the early days of World War II. "I just wanna remind you guys of what you are fighting for."

The show ran for nearly five hours. Some of the numbers were repeated for better camera angles. He was, after all, putting his annual Christmas with the Troops television program together. It was hot, we were all drenched in sweat and getting sunburned, but nobody complained. It was just fine by us if he wanted to get the Gold Diggers to do that high-kick routine again for the cameras.

The show finally ended and the multitudes began to drift back to the flight line, or the barracks, or the chow hall. Six months later we read in “Stars and Stripes” that Anne-Margaret had a baby—she had been three months pregnant and still came to that unfriendly environment to help Bob Hope give us all a few hours respite from Lyndon’s War. All of those talented people gave up their Christmas to show their support for us.

Yes, all of us who have served in foreign lands in times of trouble have lost a dear friend. I have to think that he’s up there on the heavenly stage, delivering those one-liners as only he can do.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I wanna tell ya that I really didn’t want to make this trip, but now that I’m here, I wanna tell you a few jokes.” God bless you, Bob Hope. Thanks for the memories.