

Army? This was the US Army I was in???

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The following narrative is in answer to a request for an oral history from Richard Killblane, the Transportation Corps Historian. I've thought about my two years of military experience many times though it was some 37 years ('66-'68) ago in 2003. My memories have undoubtedly been tempered by the passage of time and the additional experiences as a street cop for 29 years. Maturity has brought them into perspective. Recounting them many times to anyone who would listen has probably embellished them. And you do know the difference between a fairy tale and a war story don't you? A fairy tale begins with, "*A long time ago, in a far away place....*" Where as a war story is usually formulated over a few beers and begins with, "*Hey man, this is no shit and I was there...!*"

How did I get into the Army?: Short answer is, I was drafted! As a young, single, white man of the 60's it was a choice of the military, college, or run north to Canada. I tried the college route for two years and after making the "wrong" end of the Deans list one too many times I could see the jig was up. Home life with a domineering father & four (4) younger brothers of six (6) siblings wasn't the best. I didn't have the nerve to join one of the military branches so I cast my fate to the wind & volunteered for the draft. Thus, [Service number removed] was created.

How did you become a truck driver?: My youth was filled with all things mechanical besides having a fascination for big trucks. With a driver's license since sixteen, driving appealed to me so I thought it would be a great way to get into the "big rigs". Besides, some nice man asked me what I wanted to do in the Army during those processing interviews & testing that filled the "honeymoon" week prior to start of basic.

When did you get assigned to Vietnam and why?: In Sept. '66 my first A.I.T. (Advanced Individual Training) assignment was at Ft. Riley, Kansas with the 63rd Armor Battalion of the 1st Division. I was a replacement for some poor soul that was pulled out to fill the ranks of the 9th Division that was then leaving Ft. Riley. As 'King Johnson' was building up our forces I knew it was a matter of time and rumors were rampant. Talk at one time was that my unit was on schedule for the Middle East at the start of the '67 Israeli war. But fate had other ideas and "orders" finally came down in June '67 for yet another reassignment of the ranks. Guess the 63rd "lost" about half its strength in that call-up.

How did you feel about going to Vietnam?: I was always one to "play Army" as a kid. The TV programs, The Big Picture and later Combat, were on each week & I probably never missed a show. My dad & some of the uncles were WWII, cousins were Korea or cold War so it was the thing to do. I was single with no real attachments. I guess it had something to do with the idealistic notion it would be an adventure. I wanted to test myself and prove something to my father. It was just something I was resolved to do, as

that was why I was in the Army in the first place. Armies are for WAR, not playing games! This may seem a naive, altruistic and simple answer but it's mine!

Where did you arrive?: My "in-country" experience covers Aug '67 to July '68. After processing through the Oakland (CA.) replacement terminal I arrived in the Saigon area at I think the Ton Sa Nut (Saigon) air base. "We" came in via the big silver bird that contracted with the military to move replacements. Unlike when whole units moved, usually on ships. The closer we got to 'Nam the quieter the group on the plane got. It was just at dawn as we approached. You could see flashes & tracers in the distance. Unlike the arrival of planes Stateside we didn't screw around with an approach. We dropped right out of the sky! The first thing that stuck me as we got off the plane was the hot, humid smell. Not at all like the cool breeze and aroma of the fir trees in Oregon!

How was your reception?: There were NCO's barking orders for this and that. Officers this way, enlisted that way. I do recall a quick run down of "what not to do's" and one was don't buy soda's from the gooks. The fluid was supposedly laced with battery acid. Yet there sat the momma-son selling bottles of soda right in the terminal. We got on the bus for transport to the Long Binh area. The windows were covered with screens, which I later realized were to keep grenades out. "Welcome to the 'Nam"!!

What unit were you assigned to and what was your job?: A replacement company first. As the bus got near the replacement barracks I noticed smoke curling up from various areas. The NCO in charge let it be known that we would find out probably in the morning what was being burned. Thus, my first introduction to that fine art of "burning shit!" I went to a generic replacement company for a few days. And yes, I did a detail on the shit brigade. I also learned the toil of filling sandbags as we built walls around the hooch's. Then it was a C-130 cargo plane ride to Cam Ranh Bay and another replacement company. So much for my desire to be with a 1st Division unit the further north I got! After another week of work details and another C-130 ride, I arrived in Tuy Hoa for my posting to the 24th Transportation Company of the Tuy Hoa Sub Area Command-THSAC.

The 24th TC was a company of the 1st Logistics Command. Neat, round patch....called the "leaning shit-house." The arrow is worn positioned towards 1000 or 1100 hours for some reason. I was a driver of the infamous deuce'n-a-half (M-35-A1). A squad of tractor/trailers from the 670th Trans Company (CRB) was stationed with us and I later got to drive for them. I did a short tour of being a dispatcher in late '67. In March '68, when I made E-5/Sgt, I was then the NCO on a gun jeep and/or a truck master/squad leader.

As far as I knew the 24th TC had been in the Tuy Hoa area since like '65. In checking some of the unit histories on the Internet now (2003) I note that the 24th TC is listed as having been in Cam Ranh Bay the entire time??? It had always been a trucking company with duece'n-a-halves from what the 'ole timers said. In May of '68 the Army changed our name to the 529th TC. That unit came up from Cam Ranh Bay and was a 5-ton truck company. For some reason the 24th TC then went down to Cam Ranh Bay as a 5-ton truck unit and we stayed in Tuy Hoa as the 529th TC still using the deuce'n-a-half. Had

something to do with the route we drove and the “thinking of the brass” that a smaller truck could travel better over the roads. Hey, as long as I drove & didn’t have to “hump!”

Who were your NCO’s and officers and what were they like?: Most all of the NCO’s were still “old Army” as were the one’s back stateside. They had an idea of what the job was and set their minds to it. The officers were another matter. Most were current ROTC, had no idea what an enlisted man’s toil was, and were there just for the sake of exercising their rank over the enlisted man! Those “butter bars” were the worst! I could see the need for a company commander & perhaps a 1st Lt for support. But we had like (5) officers! An officer ought to realize to work with & not over the E-5’s, 6’s & 7’s. Be a part of the work force. Not “make work”.

I did like the camaraderie of the enlisted man. Basic was both the best (learned about myself and abilities) & worst (D.I.’s constantly on your case, threat of being ‘re-cycled’, the physical part which did make me a better person). Being with so many different regional & ethnic types was an experience. I met, worked with, screwed around with, suffered with some of the best whites, coloreds (Negro/Bros), Indians, and assorted mixes that a guy could ask for. And there were some rotten, no good types of all races to.

It was an interesting point about the coloreds. You had the ‘ole NCO’s who mostly thought of themselves as colored or Negro and came up through the ranks the hard way as they’d like to tell it. Then there were the younger ones who thought of themselves as blacks or “Bros” and were not about to be run around or screwed with by the ‘man’ of any rank or race.

Those I was with are listed here but not limited to as I’ve forgotten some. Last names are mostly used. From Aug ’67 to July ’68.

Officers: Capt. Barrons or Barrows, Lt. Burnon, Lt. German, Lt. Johnson, Lt. Lundgren.

NCO’s: 1st Sgt Michael J. Polan, MSG Rivera, SSG Gates, SSG Rainge, Sp/6 Parrish, SGT. Cantrell, SGT. Connelly, SGT. Elmore (wounded), SGT. Evans, SGT Polin, SGT. Stutesman, SGT. Walker.

Enlisted (Sp/4 & below): Adair, Baladez, Bohem, Brown, Broking, Burford, Burdusky, Cardullo, Colfer, Critfield, Crum (wounded), Darrell, Denny, Durham, Erwood, Harley, Harris, Haviland, Heverly, Hodges, Huss, Hunter, B.G. Ingals, Jeffery, Long, McNeil, Orth, Quinn, Smith, Stanton, John Stephens, Talley, Howard Terry, Vandiver, Westermann, Witkoski.

What was your daily routine.....?: As “Junior” from the movie *Platoon* remarked, “Hump,... hump,...hump.... and hump for the white man – (aka-the Army)!” I mashed that clutch and jam’ed the gears of that truck. We did the usual dawn formation at 0600 hours (7) days a week, headed to the mess hall & tried for breakfast, then out to the motor pool to get the logbook for our truck, a box of C-rations, and saddled up. Our company mission was to haul freight from the deepwater port at Vung Ro Bay along Hwy 1 to the Army or Air Force depots in the vast area of the THSAC –Tuy Hoa Sub Area Command compound. It was general freight or munitions depending on the ship. Something like 25

trucks would be spread out either in ones or twos or in bunches along Hwy 1 from the Bay to the THSAC area.

Each morning we had to wait for the engineers and MP's to check for and clear the mines from the road to the "Bay". It was something like a 24 mile round trip. By 0700 hours it was out from our motor pool, through the gate, roar through the miserable dust hole town called Phu Hiep and out "Paddy Parkway" to Hwy 1. Then south along Hwy 1 through towns with names like Truong-Thinh, across the pontoon bridge over the Song Ban Thach river, then Thach Cham, Phu'-Khe, and onto the ROK - Republic of Korea soldiers - compound at Dim Dim. Continue south to the next ROK compound at Boys Town at the south end of the valley. Cross the engineer's bridge over the Song Cau creek and past the R/R ruins. Above the road in the rock hills was the very large, very tall rock monolith call Nui Da Bia (something like 706 ft high-from sea level). Word was that it was VERY off limits for target practice! Then pass by the idyllic lake of Bien Ho to the gear grinding haul up through the hair pin turns & switch-backs along the side of the hills to the road junction with the haul road down to Vung Ro Bay. There were two ROK compounds in the hills above the junction and the Vung Ro Bay complex. (I ought to know the names as I made off with the map that was replaced in the communications office of THSAC using the call sign "Phu Hiep")

You loaded up at the pier with the freight of the day. You repeated the trip in reverse order and back again for two or maybe three times a day. GAWD, was that a miserable, narrow road!! It wasn't a good road to begin with when the French built it. And the constant truck traffic made it hell with potholes. You beat your ass sore seated on that thin canvas pad called a seat. Some drivers would jam something against the pedal to keep speed and open the driver's door to stand on the running board just for a change. You were doing good to hit 35 mph! When I left, the engineers were trying as best they could to rebuild Hwy 1.

And every, and I mean most every day you had a flat and more often than not it was an INSIDE DUAL! What a fuck'in chore to change. And, if that inner nut on the lug came loose while you tried to take off the outer nut, oooo sheeet! Once the tires were checked it was time to tighten the engine mounts. On the 'deuce', the front mounts were right under the radiator. I did note that there were two large & threaded, three hole mounts on either side of the front of the engine block that would have made terrific mounts to a corresponding location on the frame. For reasons lost on me that the manufacturer didn't use that mounting point. SO, we had to maneuver our hands blindly under the hot radiator, across the front support member, feel for the heads of the puny bolts and tighten them yet once again.

Regarding tires, for some reason we were constantly short of inner tubes and tires. All of our trailers sat stripped of wheels. We scrounged, "appropriated", bargained for all the tubes we could get. Our tire shed was forever fixing tubes. Ever change a truck tire with a flat edged pick? Quite an art between timing & the force of the swing! But it can be done as well as to the jeep tire. You didn't want to miss with that pick though! Your aim

had better be good or the rim got dinged if you weren't and more often than not you whacked yourself in the shin. AND that was before you made it to the mess hall to inquire, "Say Sarge....what was for dinner?"

Meals were something of a sore spot. When I first arrived, my company had it's own mess hall. In fact, all the companies in the THSAC area had their own. It worked great for us as we started the day a good 1-½ hours prior to the usual 0800 hours of the remainder of the area. Therefore, we got something to eat early and coming in usually after 1800 hours the cook kept a meal for us. When the new base commander arrived, in like Oct '67, his grand idea was for a "consolidated mess" for all personnel. That was fine for the 0800-1700 base guys but for us... The damn place didn't start the line going until 0700 so most mornings breakfast was out. And don't even think about finding anything to eat at the end of the day. We did get a C-ration "box lunch" when getting the logbook from dispatch in the mornings, as we were not supposed to stop for lunch. The whole idea was to move freight to support the war effort. Some of the time we made it to the Air Force mess if the load was for them. I rather enjoyed the C-rations over the mess hall.

After dealing with the truck it was time to wash up. That is if there was sufficient water. And for grins & giggles, try for something to eat at the 'consolidated mess.' Prior to hitting the bunk we wrote letters, played cards, & generally B.S'd.. Once the EM (enlisted men) club was built we had something of a diversion to ease the mind on some evenings. There was even an Air Force group that played a fair number of rock'n'roll tunes that would make an appearance once in a while.

I only made it to the actual town of Tuy Hoa once. Guess passes were hard to get, as there was talk of V.C. or sympathizers in the area. That one trip was to a warehouse and a real "quickie" it was. Some M.P.'s busted the place but I made it out of there by simply crashing through a wall. Hey, wasn't that what "Escape & Evasion" tactics were taught for? Most times the 'enemy' was the V.C. but on occasion it was your 'own'!

How did the trucks line up in convoys?... As our unit's mission was mainly to move freight from the "Bay" to the THSAC area we didn't go on convoys as a whole unit that often. On occasion a couple of trucks would be detailed to assist another unit for a day or two in making up a convoy. We did have some convoys come through going north or south along Hwy 1. They would park in the area for the night.

I was on two or three convoys (remember, it's now 37 years later so memory may be faulty & someone else may remember more) as a 'deuce' driver. When I was with the 670th Transportation detachment – tractor/trailer – I went on two, maybe three convoys. Now that was truck 'in!! Once to Cam Ranh Bay and the other to haul an artillery unit west, in land from the area quite some miles north of Tuy Hoa but south of Qui Nhon. As I recall, on the convoys we drove like hell. Pity the poor papa-son & his Lambretta scooter or those flat nosed buses the size of a stateside bread truck! There were never any gun trucks as that fad started as I was ETS'ing in July '68. There was only a jeep – M-151 – with a M-60 mounted on it for protection. As a R.E.M.F. (rear echelon mother-

fucker) I guess the brass didn't consider our travels on Hwy 1 to be very dangerous and in need of protection.

How many ambushes were you involved in?...: Best to my memory I was in the midst of just one and it was about the most memorable thing to happen to me. It was on Hwy 1 doing the daily haul from the Bay to THSAC. I was driv'in 'ole # 309, a 5-ton tractor/trailer, hauling what I recall were barrels of some kind of fuel. I was totally alone. No other US military rigs/personnel/equipment in the immediate area. It was late in the afternoon. I had just come down from that gawd awful twisty-turny road along the hills from the Bay to where it flattened out to the valley a mile or two prior to the ROK compound of Boys Town. There was a sharp corner that turned the road to the north – it was a right-hander for me at the time.

I had just made the corner & was jamm'in & grabb'in 4th or 5th gear. At the same time a small/short Korean vehicle group was passing me going south towards the very same corner. A ¾-ton truck in lead with two or three deuce's behind full of Korean troops. They had no sooner passed then all hell broke loose at that corner! I mean tracers, possibly RPG's, round after round behind me! Those ROK's had been ambushed and had I been a minute late, it would have included me and this probably wouldn't be written now! That was a sight. Just me, the truck, an M-14 (didn't get M-16's until late Spring '68) and two clips of ammo. It would have been a real barbecue had I been at that corner on V.C. time!!!!

Needless to say I got everything out of that truck engine it would give and made for the Boys Town compound, which by then was like a beehive with activity!!! I just continued on to THSAC. Those ROK's spent the next week TOTALLY destroying everything in that valley. There were no villages in the valley save for some kind of a religious compound on the coast below that large monolith rock and 'word' was they hit it. Those ROK's just swarmed over the area.

As to other dangers we for the most part had to contend with a bad road for the entire time. One occasion there was a sniper or what ever that shot at our trucks. About once a month a road mine took out a truck but surprisingly it rarely mangled/killed the driver. My company lost more (now this is years later as to memory) trucks to accidents than most everything else.

What are some of the more interesting events to occur in Vietnam?: The first event would have been that chaotic arrival in country. Just the smell of the place! Having left the States and being set down in a 'war' zone in such a quick space of time...didn't have much time to prepare mentally. Culture shock it's called now.

An interesting thing about the Vietnamese was how racially/culturally biased they are. There is just as much prejudice among the Orientals as between the whites & blacks in the South or many whites have in general to varying degrees!! To me, all the Orientals "looked alike" but there were even differences between close villages. And we don't even want to mention how the ROK's just loathed the Vietnamese! The Vietnamese as a

people seemed to treat the G.I. with indifference. The kids wanted handouts. The adults just wanted to be left alone.

A close call event came while driving on my first convoy to Cam Ranh Bay with the 670th. I was driving a 5-ton tractor 'bob-tail' that was going in for some kind of work. We had gone south beyond the checkpoint with the Vung Ro road. Hwy 1 in that area is right along the coast and some few hundred feet above the water. I was coming around a right hand turn when the steering just broke on that truck! At the speed I was going it was a fortunate event indeed that the wheels were turned to the right as the truck just banged into the rocks. If they hadn't I would have done a real spectacular "final swan dive!"

Got really 'chewed' out by a bird colonel once. I was driving then for the 670th. I was trying for a third load from the Bay to the Air Force depot as a lieutenant there was on me for not trying hard enough. On Hwy 1 the engineer group had their earthmovers working on the section of the highway not too far from the THSAC compound. I got into a race with a big earth mov' in belly dump. Must have made quite a sight as we roared along the road. I won and the prize was around the corner as the colonel had the road blocked by various vehicles. That colonel ordered me out of the cab, locked my heels and proceeded to go up one side and down the other. He didn't care the least that I was trying to make a third trip to the Bay. He informed me that the next time I should do this there would be no roadblock. His men would just blow me off the road! "Yes, sir!" was about all I said. But ya know, I never could leave well enough alone. After his vehicles moved out of the way & my truck had kinda rolled a little ways along I popped that clutch and got a nice little 'chirp' out of those duals. Never did understand why the commander of the road gangs and the commanders of the depots couldn't get together & realize we were moving freight and didn't like to be held up.

My face met a beer can during a USO show on New Years Eve '67. Boy, that little Philippine girl could really make those pastes twirl! I was up front right against the stage. Down the line some distance one of the guys yelled out if I wanted another beer. "Sure!" was my answer. Being he was too drunk to just lob it he tossed it at me. The edge of that can caught me just above the right eye and the scar is there yet today. Needless to say I bled like the proverbial pig and a buddy got a jeep and took me to the base hospital. I recall a papa-son was laying on the table beside me. The nurse mentioned that he had taken rat poison and wasn't expected to "make it." Once the doctor got around to me he commented that since I smelled like I'd already had enough pain killer he would just proceed and sewed me up just fine.

Learned what the advice of "think it – don't say it" meant. As the trucks never got washed except by the rain there was quite a layer of dirt built up on the sides. I spend one day going round the cargo bed writing various comments/jingles/epitaphs on the surfaces. Things like "F.T.A.", "Make Love Not War", "Him, Fuck Him", and other graphic things. Got in that evening and who was there to meet me but my platoon sergeant. There he stood with a bucket in one hand and a G.I. brush in the other. Hardly said a word to me. Just pointed to the back of the motor pool where a water line was and I knew just

what he meant and went to work. That was one clean truck when I got done about 2200 hours that night!

While working a short tour as a dispatcher I had made up a sign during the slack times that reflected my thinking about the Army. I used the 50's & 60's smart aleck icon Alfred E. Newman from MAD magazine. The sign had his face and the words, "What – Me Re-Enlist?" Looked great to me! Had it positioned right over my desk. The new base commander came through for a tour of our area one day accompanied by the usual entourage of officers & upper NCO's. He entered the shack, looked around then his gaze was fixed up at that sign. The gaze of everyone accompanying him in turn also became fixed on that sign. He turned, marched out the door and left followed by the entourage. A moment later the Sgt Major stuck his head in the door & hissed at me to, "Get rid of that damn sign!" Sure thing. Kept it and most everyone who ETS'd later had his picture taken with it. I still have the face on a picture panel made up to show my short military career.

Just missed getting blown up from a road mine by one truck while on a convoy. It was in June '68 as I recall. We were using maybe a dozen deuces on a 'convoy' to move a mechanized artillery unit further inland to a firebase some miles west of Tuy Hoa. I believe we were on or near Hwy 7. We got inland all right and along the way there were a few blown up rigs on the side of the road to remind us of the danger. The platoon Sgt rode in a truck as I did – (a Sgt/E-5 by then). Better protection from road mines than a jeep provides. Coming back we had two APC's in the lead out from the fire base followed by the truck I was in, another truck and then the one PFC Crum was driving. Getting closer to Tuy Hoa the APC's pulled off. That put my deuce in the lead, then the one behind us with Crum's becoming the third truck. Not a ¼ mile down the road there was an explosion & the left front/side of Crum's truck disappeared!! There was a hedge line along our right side and a small creek to our left. First thought was ambush!! We scrambled out to do something to secure the area. Crum's left side was injured so we called for a medivac helicopter. Had those APC's not pulled off as they did I & my driver would have been the third truck and the one's getting blown up. Not sure if it was a controlled mine or we just happened to miss it. Some engineers came out & found another mine a hundred yards further down the road.

An odd moment came during a night convoy. As the bombing of the North escalated we hauled bombs like they were going out of style. There were so many bombs coming into Vung Ro Port that we had to haul them at night. Those black out lights on the trucks & jeeps were not worth a damn!! One night, I'm the NCO for the convoy. You couldn't sleep during the day as it was too gawd awful hot!! So you grabbed whatever sleep you could when you could. We were on the first run of the night. The trucks were 'off loading' at the Army Ammo Depot. My jeep was at the entry to the Depot and facing south towards the Army flight deck- helicopters and those twin engined recon planes. There was perhaps two or three hundred yards separating us. So there I am, laid back on the windshield when I hear the unmistakable "thump" of a mortar. I could see the rounds hitting on the Army aviation line!!! First it was the "thump" then the kaboom as the round hit the runway/airfield. I got on the radio to call the Phu Heip net and asked, "What's up????!!". The reply was that not to worry, as the ROK's and 'reactionary

forces' would take care of it. OOO-KKKKK, I just had the trucks assemble after unloading and off we went back down to the bay for another load.

On a recovery mission just before TET '68, I went further inland along Hwy 7 west of Tuy Hoa with my tractor and a 'low-boy' trailer to haul back an APC. I was with some other trucks. A 1st lieutenant was in command. For whatever reason the APC couldn't be moved and it was blown up in place. Then we started back to THSAC. This was at a time just a day or two before TET '68. We just didn't realize what was in store for us then. There was 'that feeling' in the air though. The local population was coming out on foot & making it to the coast as they knew what was in store for them – it wasn't just 'Charlie', it was the NVA on the move!!!! Our little convoy headed back east and passed long lines of civilians on foot headed for what they hoped was safety in Tuy Hoa. Do you think the lieutenant would permit us to load the people on our trucks to move them..... Not on your life! We sped by them/ knocked them aside/got them out of our way. It was then that I felt like I wasn't doing much for the war effort. I just recall the expression of fear on the faces of those people as they tried to hurry along the road that we were on and empty of cargo at that. "Hope you sleep comfortably at night Lieutenant...Sir!" The look of fear on those faces is still with me today!!

TET '68. Now that was a time! Looking back now I can realize that the indicators were there to show that a major operation was about to happen. The population just kind of melted away. Few showed up for KP duty. There were few along the roads. Just a "feeling" about things. When TET struck all **H-E-L-L** broke loose at the west edge of THSAC, the Air Force base north of us and especially in Tuy Hoa city!!!! There was occasional firing from the guard/gun towers all along the line at the western edge of our base particularly at night. This was augmented by the flights of gun ships that just tore the area beyond our perimeter to pieces with their mini-guns. This was into the villages that were all along our western line as you might recall this was their country and 'we' had displaced them from the coastline! We were called out & issued weapons and ammo for two or three days straight in preparation to 'hold the line'! Needless to say we didn't do any freight hauling from the "Bay". Never fired a shot either the whole time.

Being that we had electricity we had tape recorders. I recall that 'Casey Casum' of a State side rock-n-roll channel would send you a tape of the week's top 50 songs if you wrote to him. We had access to the Army base exchange and sometimes the Air Force exchange so some of us had 'reel-to-reel' players/recorders. The sounds of mid-60's Rock'n'Roll music is still comforting to my ears!! Specific songs will put me right back there.

What phases of stress...?: I didn't realize it at the time but maturity has now made me realize what stress is. At the time booze seemed a quick and easy answer. The Army even provided us with a ration card for the stuff in 'Nam. Guess that is how I dealt with things and tempered the jitters. There were other drugs readily available but I preferred booze.

When did you get short and what precautions did you take?: By around April 13th 1968 I "broke" 100 days so with 99 left I was short!! Your exact ETS date wasn't known for sure as some came early (me), some were on time and some unfortunately came late.

By then I was a Sgt so life was bearable. Some days I was the gun jeep NCO, some days I was a platoon Sgt, and some days I was just myself. It was while I was an NCO that I took R & R to Sydney, Australia. I don't recall taking any precautions towards the end as for safety as I still had that desire to get the job done.

How many pounds did you lose?: I don't recall taking any weight off or on during my entire military "career". I stayed at 190 lbs the entire time.

When did you depart Vietnam and how did you feel about it?: I transferred down to Cam Ranh Bay at the first of July '68 to an ETS (End Term of Service) Replacement Company. Now it was for getting out not in. That same 'silver bird' came back for me on around the 8th or 9th of July 1968. As I recall I felt like it was time. My 'years' service was over. Odd thing about that notion. The military took out the experienced guys just when they had a feeling for it and replaced them with "FNG's (fuck'in new guys)" that had to learn everything all over again. Not like WWII or maybe Korea when you were there and stayed until the job was done!! As for the whole "short" thing I'd guess I was swept up in the general feeling the troops had of just getting out and it wasn't anything really personal. By then I was rather disillusioned with the "B.S." in the military. In the light of today (2003) I guess there is a tinge of what I've heard called "survivors guilt". I'd missed my chance to prove what ever it was I had wanted to prove or overcome. Though I'd become more or less disgusted with the Army by then I probably would have stayed if that's what the orders would have been.

For NCO's/Truck Masters/First Sgts.:

What were your duties?: To make E-5/Sgt I had to go through the Board of Review at the time. There were three candidates from our company for the board in early '68. I was second choice as Connelly made it right off. As 'slots' became available I got rank then Evans. Later on there wasn't a 'board' as there was such a need for NCO's that the company just made the E-5's on the spot. We E-5's were the squad leaders. Some of us went out on gun jeep patrol or just did busy work in the company area to learn the ropes to fill slots of NCO's leaving.

My company had two or three jeeps with M-60's mounted on them. Once I made Sgt I was then assigned most days as the NCO of a 'gun jeep'. I had a driver and a gunner. We 'patrolled' the THSAC area, Paddy Parkway, and Hwy 1 to and from the Bay. This was to deal with any problems the trucks had, to keep the drivers moving and out of the villages, and to be something of a security force I guess. Looking back now I realize just how puny that jeep must have been compared to a gun truck. That little M-151 jeep could really move though!

How did the drivers receive their tasks?: It was a matter of getting them to the motor pool in the morning after formation, get the log book from the dispatch shack, get them into the truck and onto the road! As a Sgt I had the usual, "Aw, Sarge, I don't feel good" or, "Can't I have a day off???" or, "I don't like that truck...!" from the drivers.

What were some of the problems you faced...?: As I recall the operation of the company went fairly well. I just didn't 'get it' sometimes with regard to managing people/soldiers. I had the rank, I had an idea of what the job was and was willing to do it. But to prod the G.I.'s to accomplish the task was exasperating at times. I didn't realize it at the time but I was learning the meaning of the idea that you can't be both a "buddy" and a supervisor. Decisions have to be made to accomplish the job at hand regardless of feelings or emotions. The transition was being made from the last of the WWII & Korea vets who were NCO's to the "flower power" baby-boomers who could really give a fuck about the Army in particular & the military in general.

This is my story and as the saying goes, "I'm sticking to it!" I don't regret being in the military. Being a "draftee" I was subject to what ever the military needed at the time. I played my cards as fate had dealt them along with the rest of those in the military. I could have 'taken a bullet', a road mine, or had a grenade tossed in the cab as well as the next guy. I never was put in for the Good Conduct Medal for reasons I think I know now. Might say that the spirit was willing to bend to the task but the attitude at times got really lost in the work! No real harm to the effort was done & I still managed to get the job completed. Hey, I was a citizen soldier and don't tread on me! At least I was there & nobody can take it away. In '72 I got my Honorable Discharge just the same. Thus, US 56410946 may have ended but the memories, stories & effects are still with me.
James Ralph Engel.....

Personal History -- (not posted by request)

Absolutely, please & thank you. Here's an interesting point about my story I didn't put in. I was born in Edmonton, Canada. Dad was in the Army Air corps & mom was Canadian. After he got out in late '46 we came south to his folks in Kansas, then California & eventually to Oregon. They didn't do anything with regards to my birth & mom's 'ole passport mentions "with child". Mom was Americanized in like '55 or '56. Still nothing done with regard to me. After H.S. there was the draft. You've got that part. BUT, the third week of basic I was taken to main post on Ft. Lewis & this 'nice' bird colonel spoke to me about country, serving, mom & apple pie. Had me sign a few papers, take an oath, then I went back to my company. My DD-214 shows place of birth but the US Citizen box is checked.

Years later, like just a few before I retired an interesting story was in our local paper about a woman of foreign birth but American parents caught my attention. On a lark I contacted the immigration people & was informed that I WAS NOT a "certified" US citizen! Had my parents taken me in their arms, went to the US consulate in Edmonton & registered my birth---NO PROBLEM! But they didn't and geez Louise it took me about a year to get my folks info, my info, make application, and then go see an official immigration person to apply. I didn't have to immigrate, I had to 'certify' that at least ONE parent was an American so I could be considered an American. That deal at Ft. Lewis was only my pledge to serve & not be considered conscripted or forced. Otherwise, once in battle I could have said bye, bye and it wouldn't have been AWOL (ya, right!). The issue of being certified was a gas as during my 29 years as a cop had I

been in a really big case & some defense attorney really been sharp he could have barred my testimony & even my actions as I wasn't a US citizen! Now ain't that something!!

I guess there are a few others like me who were "sworn at or in" during basic and are under the mistaken assumption they are citizens when in fact they have to go through the certification process. Only the INS can immigrate people not the military for having served.

So ya know what I did. After getting my proper US citizenship papers (really says Certified US Citizen) & a passport I went and obtained "official" Canadian citizenship. Canada recognizes dual citizenship but America doesn't.

Great place to live this nation is.....AND I still don't regret having served! [Service number removed] Your efforts are to be commended, saluted, and hopefully recognized. Thanks. Jim Engel