

Robert Drummond telephone interview by Richard Killblane, 31 October and 1 November 2005.

Bob Drummond enlisted in the Army in March 1966. He completed 8-week basic training and went home for two weeks. He then arrived at Fort Eustis in May 1966 for AIT training as a stevedore (MOS 57). He was married at Fort Eustis, VA on June 1966. After graduation in June 1966, he joined the 264th Terminal Service Company at Fort Eustis while it was building up for deployment to Vietnam. They trained on USS Never Sail with wenchs and cargo nets. They did not have any forklifts to train on until arrived at Cam Ranh Bay. He took a two week leave before the company shipped out in September. The men flew out on six C-130s with all their personal equipment. They had no company equipment.

The 264th TC arrived at Cam Ranh Bay [in October 1966]. The 264th worked in holds of ships offloading ammunition loaded on pallets. A wench lowered two looped cables down and the stevedores looped them on both sides of the pallet then the wench lifted it out of the hold and lowered it onto LARC Vs, BARCs and barges pushed by an LCM. Once the stevedores cleared the pallets out of the center, they either used a forklift or hooked one cable to the pallets along the wall to drag them into the center, called snatching. The company used small forklifts brought to them. CONEXs did not arrive until end of his tour in 1967.

While working at Cam Ranh Bay, someone ran a forklift blade into a napalm bomb in the hold of the ship. A panic ensued and everyone was taken off the ship until someone cleaned up mess. Bob spent the Christmas of 1966 at Cam Ranh Bay.

Operation OREGON

Some time early the next year (between January and February), the 264th Terminal Service Company flew up to Duc Pho on C-123 with back door down. There was a small airstrip at Duc Pho. There was only an artillery unit there. The 1st Cav was already operating in the area out of Chu Lai. Bob heard the 1st Cav operating had got their butts kicked and Charlie had retreated into the mountains around Chu Lai/Da Nang. The 101st Airborne Division came in to conduct mountain operations. The 264th TC arrived ahead of the 101st Abn Div to build the ammo dump while the engineers built a C-130 capable airstrip out of PSP. The purpose of the stevedores was to sustain the 101st until the engineers built the air strip and supplies could arrive by air.

The engineers built an ammo dump with bull dozers right on the beach. The company set up 30-man tents right on the beach next to the ammo dump. The 264th had never offloaded cargo on a beach before. They had Pettibone rough terrain forklifts to drive onto LSTs and LSDs to offload ammo then drive it p to the ammo dump. Seas were not too rough. Once a week they offloaded perishables from the reefer barge for their own sustainment.

The 101st Abn Div on LSTs arrived a week to two week after 264th. They landed then a film crew arrived and they had to go back out on the LST to film the landing. The

paratroopers went inland and set up their base camp. The 264th TC kept unloading ammo.

In March 1967, Bob flew out of the small airstrip on a C-123 to Cam Ranh then to Hawaii for R&R to meet his wife. He returned the same way.

In June, the ammo dump was full and the stevedores were finished working. They thought that they would go home since some unit had replaced them at Cam Ranh Bay. They laid around camp doing nothing but swimming in the surf, writing letters and listening to music. The only problem swimming was with jelly fish. Around 18 or 19 June 1967, the ammo dump blew up by accident. Some one came running in yelling, "Ammo dump, ammo dump!" Every one ran.

There was a Catholic orphanage outside Duc Pho. When the ammo dump blew up, Bob and two others ran over and rescued the orphans. The kids later made rosaries for the three soldiers who rescued them.

The ammo dump was right on the beach next to the company area. The LSTs came in and took them out at night. The LST sat out in the water. Next day when explosions died down enough, LST brought them in and 101st took them to their camp at Chu Lai by truck for a week. The ammo dump blew for a week. When EOD determined it was safe, they came back to set up a new camp.

The explosions had blown away all the tents and equipment and personal property. When Bob returned, the only personal possession he found was his New Testament. His foot locker was a square of ashes.

The Field Artillery unit came back a week later and went into the ammo dump to pick up any unexploded ordnance. They needed some ammo real bad and wanted to see if any projectiles were salvageable. They set off another explosion.

The stevedores lived at the far end of the beach at the base of the mountain without any camp equipment. They waited until the explosions finished. This lasted another week. Because dead rounds went off for another week, no ships could come in. The stevedores did nothing until then. They received personal supplies by air. Once the ships started coming in, they received new tentage. They then had to restock the ammo dump.

Bob remained at Duc Pho until 9 September 1967. Since the company came over as a unit, everyone rotated out at the same time. They flew everyone back to Cam Ranh on C-123 then flew out of Cam Ranh Bay to Fort Lewis, Washington.