

May 20, 2002

FROM: Thomas Le Moine

TO: Richard Killblane

SUBJECT: Interview By Mail - Vietnam

1. Q - When were you assigned to the 71 " Trans Bn?

A - I arrived in Vietnam on Feb. 9, 1967 and after three days at the 90th Replacement Center was than assigned to the 71 ' Transp. Bn., Hdqt. Det as a Transportation Movement Specialist (MOS 7IN20). The base camp for the 71sHdqt Det and assigned companies was called Camp Camelot and located at the Long Binh complex. Long Binh was located 23 miles Northeast of Newport, the port facility at which the above mentioned had duty assignment.

2. Q - What was your rank and duty position?

A - My rank while in Vietnam was Specialist 4th Class and duty position was that of gathering tonnage data from ships that were offloading or loading, radio operator and jeep driver.

3. Q - Did you deploy to Vietnam with your unit?

A - No, flew commercial airlines to Tan Son Nut airbase at Saigon, then to the goth Replacement Bn for assignment.

4. Q - When did you leave Vietnam?

A -- I departed Vietnam on February 10, 1968.

5. Q - What companies were assigned to your battalion?

A - The 71s"Transportation Battalion (Terminal Service) consisted of Hdqt. Det., 154th Terminal Service Co., and 368th Terminal Service. Co., 372nd Terminal Transfer Co., 551st Terminal Service Co., 561" Terminal Service Co., 567th Terminal Service Co., and the U.S. Army Harbor craft Company (Provisional).

6. Q - Who were your commanders?

A -Through my research, I have a copy of Stars & Stripes, January, 1968 issue describing the Tet Offensive at Newport giving credit to commander Col. C. E. McCandless for defending the port.

7. Q - What was the mission of your unit?

A -The 71st Bn Hdqt Det duties and mission I believe was to handle all administrative functions regarding the movement of U.S. military goods inbound/outbound from Newport.

8. Q - Describe the port and life at Newport.

A -The port facility itself was built by the United States at a cost of at least \$50 million dollars. It consisted of four deep drafts for ocean going vessels. It also had a berth to handle roll-on and roll-off ships, two ramps for landing LST's (landing ship tank boats), a wharf to handle up to seven barges and a landing craft ramp. These statistics with more detail can be found in my research paper that I submitted to the Transportation Museum research library titled "Newport Vietnam A Historical Overview of A U. S. Army Port Facility Operated By The 71st Transportation Battalion (Terminal Service)". As far as life at Newport, you could probably say it became pretty much routine regarding the two twelve hour shifts that handled the operation.

9. Q - Lessons learned?

A - This question is probably a question for the officers in charge.

10. Q - What accomplishments did your unit make?

A - The 71st earned two Meritorious Unit Citations during its operation of Newport. I believe it supported Operation Oregon, retrograde projects and return of other field unit's equipment to the U.S., etc. The assigned terminal service companies all excelled in tonnage unloading and other assignments such as to help the local civilians in nearby villages.

11. Q - How many times were you attacked?

A - I was assigned to the night shift for my tour of duty at Newport. On the second nite of the Tet Offensive a brief firefight lasting a few hours took place. AU rifle fire was directed up towards the Newport bridge where Vietcong were trying to cross and probably on their way to Saigon. Increased security by MP's was already in place. There was an APC with a 50caliber machine gun at the South gate. Plus, all men on the shift were issued M14's, flak jackets and steel pots prior for leaving Camelot to Newport. We were told to take positions behind conex containers or whatever and face the bridge. I was next to a conex container and had excellent vision to the bridge. You could see the VC crouching and walking fast to exit the bridge on the south end. We au commenced firing. I believe as time went on the ARVN troops arrived along with a couple of their tanks and started to push the VC back to the North end of the bridge or at least prevent more from entering. I remember a helicopter flying to the North end of the bridge and firing a rocket to the ground. When morning came and it was time for us to load up on trucks and return to Camelot when crossing the bridge you could see several dead VC lying on the bridge.

12. Q - How do you feel about serving in Vietnam?

A - I have no negative thoughts about serving in Vietnam. I suppose mainly because I did not suffer any physical or emotional problems. The job was routine as it probably was for most of the soldiers over there.

13. Q - Describe any interesting thing that happened to you in your tour in Vietnam.

A - Seeing a different country was exciting because remember I am only 19 years old. Seeing a foreign country with its culture and people. I wish I had had better sense to take more pictures and understand what was going on about me.

Once while working on the night shift, a young officer arrived to Newport by a landing craft utility. He probably came from Saigon area. He needed to go to Long Binh complex. I was elected to give him a ride up there. While driving he says to me, where is your weapon, and I replied I don't have one. I think he felt uneasy. On the drive back by myself I thought maybe I am the dumb one. But I was never issued a weapon while driving jeep to Saigon on a nightly basis until the Tet Offensive arrived.

I enjoyed the nightly ride to Saigon docks and deliver reports to the 4' Transportation Command because the City was quieter at night. I would drive past the embassy, palace and an orphanage and other buildings of significance. At the front gate of the 4th was a hamburger joint that cooked up the closet thing to a stateside hamburger and fries.

I also enjoyed the Bob Hope show at Long Binh.

END OF MAIL INTERVIEW BY THOMAS LE MOINE - 5-20-02