

By Bob Kelemen

Why am I writing this, more than 30 years after the experience? I actually started creating this document around 1990. I have completed this in December 2006. Over the years, I have thought about my experiences in Vietnam. I wanted to remember them. I never wrote a diary or kept a log while I was in Vietnam and I noticed that most young people I meet today don't even know what Vietnam is and many older ones want to forget it. I also noticed that there aren't many books available detailing individual experiences of those who served in the Vietnam Conflict although now there are a few Internet websites dedicated to individual stories and military units but still not very detailed. I want my children and anyone else who reads this to know what it was like being in a combat zone, at least from my point of view and I certainly hope that they never have to experience it personally. It is very difficult to relate these stories to someone who has never experienced any of these situations. Most of my experiences were educational (at least to me) and many were humorous, probably because of the attitude that I had while I was there. I have to admit that while I was in Vietnam and really to this day, I don't know exactly why the United States was there. Actually, I didn't care then nor do I care now – I did the job I was sent there to do to the best of my ability. I didn't have any political views at that time. These anecdotes are going to be in no particular order because, except for a few days, every day in Vietnam was just another wake-up closer to the day of ETS (Estimated Time of Separation) although I still had another year of service to go and I did consider extending my tour in Vietnam for 6 months to receive an early out but I wasn't going to push my luck.

I have seen all of the Hollywood movies on Vietnam and I can identify with something in most of them. Fortunately, I did not have to deal with the actual combat situations portrayed in the movies.

I entered the U.S. Army on May 21, 1967. I received my Draft notice a month or so before this and then visited my local Army recruiter who kind of talked me into enlisting. Actually, I felt that it would be better that I pick the job I wanted than to take potluck on Branch of Service and job. Since the U.S. was at War, although undeclared, I figured that it would be better to be a Military Policeman rather than a grunt soldier. I was right, even though it cost me an additional year of Military Service but I don't regret that.

For those of you who are not familiar with a Draft notice – prior to 1973, all men over the age of 18 in the United States were subject to be drafted into military service for a period of 6 years. If you enlisted, you served three years active duty; otherwise it was 2

years active duty. The next 1 or 2 years was served as standby reserve and the last two years was inactive reserve. If you were drafted for 2 years, you had no choice of Branch of Service (Army, Navy, Marines) or the job you might have. If you enlisted, you could pick your Branch of Service and job as long as you were qualified. In 1973, Military Service became all-volunteer.

I spent 8 weeks at Fort Dix, NJ in Basic Training. I then went to Fort Gordon, GA for AIT (Advanced Individual Training) in the Military Police Corps, which lasted another 8 weeks. In our 7th week of AIT training, orders for our next duty station were given to us. Three of us (including me) were given orders to be assigned to the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam (I definitely was not jumping out of a perfectly good airplane). We were told that we would just be assigned to the Airborne Division but we wouldn't actually have to jump with them. We took a lot of ribbing over this. Three days later we three were given new orders - we were assigned to the 57th MP Company, United States Military Academy (USMA), West Point, NY. Now it was our turn to laugh. After a month of leave time, I arrived at West Point in September 1967 and assumed regular Military Police patrol and gate security duty. We also were involved in military funerals as bier guards and salute firing of rifles - there were many young officers returning from Vietnam in body bags (probably killed from friendly fire, we imagined). I guess this was kind of an honor - being buried at West Point. I won't get into the experience of being stationed at the USMA - that's another story.

The duty at West Point was supposed to be an 18-month tour, but in February 1968, many of us were given orders to report to Vietnam after a month's leave. This was just after the TET offensive in Vietnam. I arrived in Vietnam on April 21, 1968 and after being bounced around to different locations in the country, finally arrived in Phu Bai, which was a large base in I Corps, about 40 miles south of the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone - the dividing line between North and South Vietnam] in South Vietnam. I was assigned to "A" Company, 504th MP Battalion, 18th MP Brigade. After a year in Vietnam, I returned home in one piece, again took a month's leave and reported to Fort Gordon, GA, assigned to the MP School and trained as an instructor in Map Reading. I couldn't stand it there and after about 3 months managed to get myself transferred to Fort Campbell, KY. I was assigned to the 553rd MP Company and was given the choice of being a regular MP or company handyman. I chose handyman and spent the rest of my 9 months duty fixing things around the company area and doing other odd jobs working out of the Supply Room. I was given separation from active duty on May 22, 1970.

I left for Vietnam from the Philadelphia Airport. Actually it was a flight to Ft. Lewis near Seattle, WA. From there we got on Northwest Orient Airlines for an 18-hour flight to Vietnam. Just about the entire trip was in darkness. There were about 300 of us on the plane. The flight attendants were older stewardesses and they didn't appear to be friendly. We found out that they were just feeling bad for all of us. Our main objective during the flight was to get one of them to smile, which we did. They couldn't understand why we had such a "happy" attitude considering the purpose of our flight.

We landed in Cam Ranh Bay at night and when we got off the plane, there were only spotlights lighting up the runway area and we thought that we would have to shoot our way to wherever we had to go. We were led to a couple of two-story buildings that had metal bed frames with mattresses. When we awoke the next day we were very surprised to see people water skiing in the bay and others sunning themselves on the beach. Is this any way to run a war? The food was terrible. We had powdered eggs for breakfast (they were actually grey in color due to the aluminum pots they were stored in), no refrigeration for the drinks and food that was not easily recognizable. I figured that this was going to be a long year.

After 3 days of processing in-country, I was headed to my Unit or I thought I was. I spent the next two days at the airport terminal in Cam Rahn because many of the C-130 cargo planes had problems. We actually got up in the air once for about ½ hour and then returned to base. Finally we got a plane that worked and flew to Pleiku, which was the headquarters for the 504th MP Battalion and the home of 'B' Company. There, I ran into many of the people I knew at West Point, who had been in country a month or two already. They told me that the one place that I should hope not to be assigned to is 'A' Company in Phu Bai. This area was being attacked on a daily basis and was probably the most dangerous because it was the farthest north base in South Vietnam (known as I Corps, North of DaNang). That same day, of course, I was told that my duty assignment was 2nd Platoon, 'A' Company in Phu Bai. I didn't worry too much because I figured that most of what I heard was hearsay and exaggerated. I was really off the mark on that call. One thing that I can say is that for the entire year that I was in Vietnam, I never felt afraid nor did I think that I would never make it home in one piece. That is not to say I was not concerned for my life, since I was in some situations that I took calculated risks and won. I just felt that I would be able to get out of any adverse situation using my skills and common sense.

I also need to say that although I was not in what you would call actual combat like what is shown in the movies, there were some scary times such as mortars and rockets attacking the base almost daily. You may also notice that many of my stories are similar to episodes on the television series of M*A*S*H which coincidentally is one of my favorite shows of all time. The police actions of Korea and Vietnam were similar in how the operations were carried out.

I also need to mention that I did have some problems with taking orders from some officers and NCOs (non-commissioned officers) because I did not consider them better than me but wanted to be treated equally even though we had different jobs to accomplish. This is probably because I was a couple years older than most and had 2 years ROTC training. I got into trouble at times but I did my job better than most and I did get away with a lot because my integrity and common sense was valued.

Phu Bai was a large multi-service base. There were Army, Navy, Air Force, SeaBees, Marines, civilian contractors from the USA, Korea and other countries, an Air Force Terminal, a Vietnamese Airline terminal, and a small Vietnamese village all surrounded by a fence, which was base security. The individual military compounds were also surrounded by fences and each unit had its own security force. Our company supplied security for the Army compound although we had our own compound in a separate area.

located on QL 1. Phu Bai base was located about 40 miles south of the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone, dividing North and South Vietnam). One of our platoons supplied security and road patrol from Hué to just above DaNang. Through the middle of the base was QL 1 (Quang Lai - means road in Vietnamese). This road was similar to US1 in the United States. It ran from Hanoi to Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) along the coast. There was a gate, which closed across the road at the South entrance and one at the North. These gates would close when it became dark outside. No one was allowed outside the South gate after it closed because this was considered unsecured territory to the South for about 45 miles to DaNang. This portion of the road was swept by a mine sweep team with MP escort every day, once the gate was opened. Most of the road was hard dirt and there were mines discovered buried in the road. The North end of the road was considered "safe" to travel and eventually was even paved with asphalt. This led to Hué, which was about 7 miles North of Phu Bai. There was a small village about a mile north of the base that was the actual village of Phu Bai.

Phu Bai was the Headquarters for Provisional Corps Vietnam which was eventually changed to XXIV Corps. This was where some of the war strategy was planned in the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) which was an underground bunker that was built to withstand 20 direct hits from enemy rockets. This bunker was one of our duty stations with one MP allowing access to it. From what we overheard from the Officers that were there, planes were sent out to identify areas of enemy activity and by the time the information was evaluated, the enemy was gone but air attacks were scheduled and carried out anyway.

Phu Bai base was sort of like the Island of Misfit Toys. It was noted that if you screwed up somewhere else in Vietnam, you were sent to Phu Bai. This applied mostly to Officers and NCOs. I guess the idea was that if you continued to screw up in Phu Bai, you would either be killed by the enemy or friendly fire or you would eventually get so bad, you would be sent home. All of these things did happen.

When we finally arrived in Phu Bai, we were issued M14 rifles and sent to DaNang to get all of our paperwork in order. We were there for about 5 days. On the first morning that we awoke there, we entered a separate building from where we slept which was the latrine (bathroom). On one side of the building were the commode stalls with no doors and the sinks were in the middle and urinals were on the other side. Surprisingly, they were flush toilets. While I was depositing my crap, 4 mama-sans came into the building to clean. Do you know how hard it is to concentrate when a woman that you have never seen before wants to mop under your feet and you have lift them so she can accomplish

this? I did say there were no doors. This is something most of us were not used to in the USA.

We had to carry the M14's wherever we went and even slept with them in the transient barracks since we had no lockers. This was no fun traipsing around in the hot sun, not knowing exactly what to do or where to go. We finally got a ride on whatever plane was headed back to Phu Bai.

During the first few weeks of being assigned to 'A' Company, there were 5 or 6 of us "new guys in country" who were given some duties that no one else wanted. One was to clean the old M14 rifles that were being changed out for M16s. The M14s had to be cleaned with diesel fuel, dried and packed up to send back to the States. It started out with each of us obtaining a rifle, taking it completely apart, cleaning it in a pail of diesel fuel, and then re-assembling it. Very quickly, it became apparent that these guys couldn't remember how to put the rifles back together in working order. Since I was able to take apart an M1 rifle and re-assemble it with my eyes closed and the M14 is very similar in design, I would help them put the rifles together. So I made a deal - I would take the rifles apart and put them together and they would do the cleaning. That worked out fine and I didn't have to get dirty. You never know when some knowledge you have will be helpful.

When I first got to Phu Bai, I was a "bunker rat" (stationary and walking guards positioned in a sandbag bunker or building for an entire shift) - we worked from 7 P.M. to 7 A.M. as guards for the Provisional Corps Vietnam headquarters complex that was part of the main base. At that time, we were getting hit with mortar rounds during the night, mostly at 12:00 Midnight, 2:00 A.M. or 6:00 A.M. Usually, they did not land anywhere near our positions, probably because of the distance they were fired from. One night at about 2:00 A.M., we heard the mortar rounds being "walked" toward us. They never reached us but we found out later that one landed on the road just outside my hooch. Two people in my hooch, who were asleep at the time, were hit with the shrapnel, although not serious. One guy hurt his leg when he tripped over an electrical fan cord while trying to get out of the hooch. All of my clothes that were hanging next to my bunk were "peppered" with tiny holes from the shrapnel. I guess I was lucky that I was working that night.



This is the spot in the road where the mortar hit. The road was about even with the floor of the hooch.

Note: Hooch – a building approx. 15'X30', plywood floor, frame and screen sides and metal corrugated roof, set about 2 feet above ground with a hinged door on each end. Usually there were beds for 8 people in each building with enough room for footlockers and racks to hang clothes.



This was our company area when I first got to Phu Bai. Notice the hooches.

One night as we were trying to sleep, the Marines who had just finished seeing a movie, decided to throw tear gas grenades under our hooches (they did not like MP's). The 3rd & 5th Division Marines were set up in tents a few hundred yards past our hooches. I assume that they didn't like the accommodations that we had compared to their tents. This got to be a common occurrence so we would leave our gas masks on top of our footlockers in case we actually woke up during the "attack". Most of the time we were so tired that we slept through the tear gas.

We had a few interesting people in our Platoon. One was a Native American named Alan Waters. He lived in Oklahoma in a town that had the same name as the tribe he belonged

to. He was a really nice guy and he hated that everyone, except me, called him 'chief'. I always called people by their first name. Unfortunately I don't remember the names of most of the people I knew at that time.



Al Waters
("Chief")

Another was a young guy who fought Golden Gloves. He used to make money by challenging others to arm wrestling. He had a small body and those who were much bigger thought they could beat him. He had strong arms but he also knew all the secrets to arm wrestling so he couldn't be beat. He was also very lonely. One day as I was trying to sleep before my next shift, he came over and sat on my foot locker and started crying. I don't remember why he was crying but I listened for a while and tried to get him to leave so I could get some sleep.

Bruce Leonard, from New Jersey, was labeled "Mop" Leonard by the Vietnamese. Mop means Fat. He was a tall individual with a very large stomach and chest and the label followed him to the company area. Everyone just called him "Mop". Good thing he had an easy going disposition.



Mop Leonard is the one on
the right sitting

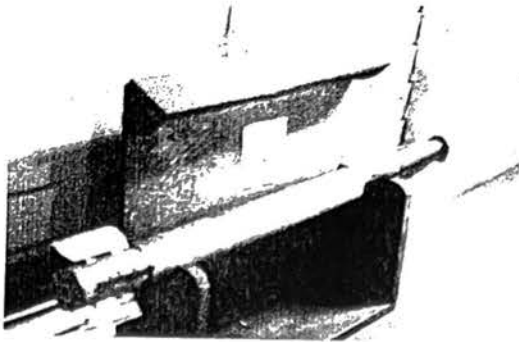
One night, while on bunker duty, I was a walking guard, which meant that I walked periodically from my bunker to another on my left and then to the one on my right. This night I met the walking guard from the other side of a stationary guard bunker and we stopped to talk and joke with the stationary guards. During the course of conversation, we were discussing comedians and the other walking guard and I lapsed into the Abbott and Costello baseball routine – Who's on First? One of the stationary guards was a young boy from the Midwest and we found out later that he never heard that routine. He just sat there trying to understand what we were saying. He was a perfect straight man and played right into the routine. We were laughing so hard and making so much noise that our Platoon Leader (a snotty rich 1st Lieutenant) heard us and had to come out of his command bunker and tell us to stop. This Lieutenant was one individual that I personally had a lot of problems with.

One job that we shared each day was to place claymore mines in front of the bunkers that we manned at night. These mines were about the size of a car license plate and about 1 ½ inches thick. They are curved slightly and the convex side actually has the words "***This side toward enemy***" in raised letters on it. There are small metal feet to stick in the ground on the bottom edge. On top there is a hole for a blasting cap with wire to be inserted and screwed in. There were four of us that went ahead of the rest to place these in position before our shift started. One particular day, I was on this detail and we placed four mines in front of each of seven bunkers. The wires and hand-held detonators were placed at the bunkers, which were about 30 feet away and slightly uphill. To check on each other, we all went to each mine to make sure they were pointing in the right direction (toward the enemy). It was a quiet night with no mortar or rocket attacks and no trip flares (occasionally set off by dogs) and as usual, very dark looking out "toward the enemy". In the morning when our shift ended, we picked up the mines and rolled up the wire. To our amazement, about half of the mines were turned around. They were not all on one bunker so it wasn't one person being stupid, and we did check all of them the night before. Everyone swore that they knew of no one that would even think of screwing around like that, so we thought at some other non-military person or persons somehow escaped detection and turned them around on us. We never did find out who did it but it didn't happen again maybe because we were more aware of it. As an added note, the blasting caps would break off from the wire occasionally since we had to insert and take them out each day.



Picture of a Claymore mine.

Probably the closest call I had to being blown up by a rocket happened while on duty at the Provisional Corps Vietnam Headquarters. Rocket attacks were fairly frequent but the rocket hits were random. They were fired from a distance of about 20 miles but there was no accuracy. These rockets were about 4 inches in diameter and about 3 feet long. It was a good sound if you heard the rocket jet stream pass overhead because you knew it had gone past where you were. The fear is that one of the first rockets hit near you. After I was in-country for a couple of months as a "bunker rat", there was an opening for a '6 hours on and 12' hours off shift and I took it. Boy was that ever confusing trying to remember what day it was. One of these posts was to prevent access to a highly secure teletype compound behind the main headquarters building. This is the post I had most of the time. One night at 6:00 P.M. exactly, we had a rocket attack. One of the first rockets landed about 100 yards from the headquarters building in a motor pool area. I was being relieved by another MP at this time. He walked into the front door of the headquarters building just as the rocket hit. If he had been about one minute later or earlier, one of us would have been hit by that rocket. It landed next to a shit house in a lot that we normally walked through to get to work. Two soldiers were in that "shitter" and were killed by that rocket. Another soldier was lying in his bunk near the hit. If he had been sitting up in his bunk, he would have been hit a large piece of shrapnel that embedded itself in the wall behind him. The attack only lasted about 20 minutes. This was one of my 'concerned' times.



Picture of a rocket on display in the PCV (Provisional Corps Vietnam) Headquarters Building

Picture of the Shitter and Pisser (to the right)



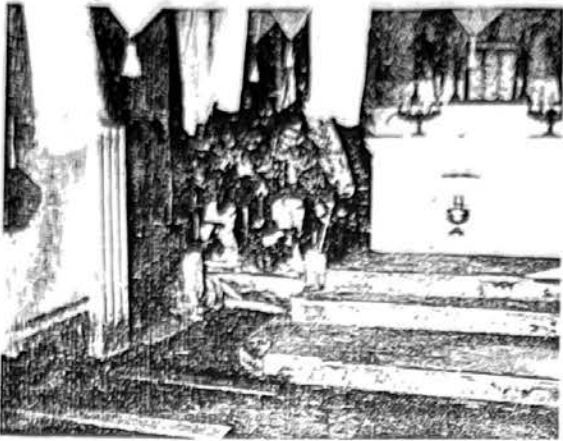
One of the first jobs we had when we took over road patrol from the Marine MP's was to search vehicles, usually trucks, for cigarettes or any other goods that we knew were not legitimately purchased. The trucks were usually in some sort of convoy traveling from DaNang to Hué. They arrived at our area at the end of the day in hopes that the dark and the fact that we were tired would allow them to sneak things right passed us. We, on the other hand, just enjoyed climbing through these trucks, poking holes with metal rods into bags of rice and other grain. There were also metal cans that held soda crackers. These cans had a round 4 inch top that popped off. The top couple of inches inside were crackers but the rest of the can held full cartons of American cigarettes. Once we found one can with cigarettes, all of them were opened and the cigarettes were confiscated. We just climbed all over the contents of the truck with flashlights and metal rods. Sometimes the cigarettes were found inside the hundred pound bags of grain. Once we hit something solid, we threw the bags out on the ground and cut them open. It was lots of fun. And of course while we were doing this the Vietnamese drivers were shouting at us in their language, but we just ignored them and continued our search.



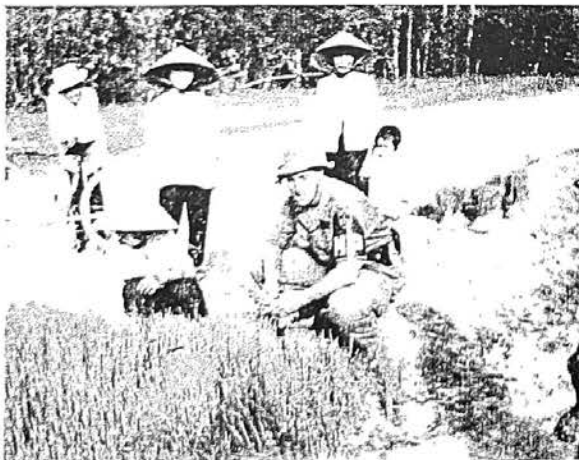
These are the type of trucks that we searched. On the left are the cracker tins that hid cigarette cartons.

On this day, I was on patrol headed south to DaNang. This was my and others favorite patrol duty since it was an area that no officers ventured into. It was about 40 miles of dirt road, unsecured, not many American compounds (actually there was only one major compound manned by the SeaBees - great food). We could leisurely drive up and down the road, check out any areas we wanted (we could do that anyway, being MP's), sometimes go out to a secluded beach and not worry about anyone looking for us or reporting us for being somewhere they thought we shouldn't be. There was also an area on the route that would not allow radio transmission, so that was a good excuse for not answering a call. This particular day, December 24, 1968, while on patrol on QL1, we passed a village (I don't remember the name of it) that had a sort of courtyard decorated with Japanese lanterns hanging from house to house. It looked interesting and I had my Polaroid camera with me, so I stopped to take a picture. As I was taking the picture, two boys about 8 or 9 years old came running toward me. They were pointing to a church, which was at one end of the village, and they kept saying, "take picture". They opened up the doors to the church and wanted me to take a picture of the Nativity scene that was set up near the altar. I told them that there wasn't enough light in the church so they went around and opened all the window shutters to let in more light. The room was still a little

dark, but I was able to take the picture. The boys were so happy when they saw the picture that I gave it to them. I took another picture for myself and we continued on patrol. I felt good that I made someone happy.



Another interesting thing on this day was a Marine dressed as Santa Claus being driven on top of an M151A1 (Jeep). It was comical to watch as Santa threw cans of C rations in the air for the kids on the road in the midst of tall palm trees in 100 degree weather.



This is me picking rice in a paddy. Oddly, I was wearing my steel pot at this time – but no flak jacket. This was taken after the Church picture above.


This was one of my most memorable days. I was working the North gate with 3 other MP's, 2 National policemen [cañh sat] (worthless individuals for the most part), and 1 Quâhn Cañh (Vietnamese MP). It was a light day for traffic because just about every other military unit had the day off (this was a war zone?). We worked from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. It was a very hot (about 100°) and dusty day. At some point during the morning I had asked an MP patrol that passed by to get us some cold sodas - they said OK but never returned. The Marine mess hall, where we normally ate, had a special lunch/dinner set up for all units that ate there. It was to last from 11:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. We got relieved for lunch at about 10:30 A.M. because it would have inconvenienced the people relieving us to do so later. Of course, when we arrived at the Mess Hall, most of the food for the holiday was not ready yet so we had some sandwiches. The main feast later was roast turkey with all the trimmings and ice cream for dessert. Needless to say, I was not a happy camper when we returned to our post. Even the guys that relieved us complained that we took too long.

Another patrol passed by in the afternoon and I again asked them to bring us some cold drinks. We didn't see them again either. By now, all of us were thirsty, full of dust and pissed off. Since I was the senior MP on the gate, I made an executive decision for all of us to just sit down somewhere and sleep or do anything except what we were supposed to do - stop and search Vietnamese vehicles. We just waved them through the gate in both directions. I didn't care who saw us or reported us. There wasn't much traffic anyway. We finally got relieved at about 7:15 P.M.

Needless to say, we arrived at the Mess Hall just in time to pick a few pieces of turkey off the bones and have some melted ice cream. One thing I should mention is that normally I take very good care of my weapons. That night when we were picked up by a deuce-and-a-half (2 ½ ton, 6X6, cargo truck), I was so annoyed that I threw my M16 onto the metal bed of the truck along with an ammo can of loaded magazines. When we arrived back at our compound, I again threw the M16 and ammo can from the back of the truck to the ground. I really didn't care if anything broke. I then stormed to my hooch and yanked the screen door open so hard, it almost broke off the hinges. Mine was the first bunk on the left. I again threw my rifle on the bunk, the ammo can on the floor, took off my pistol belt and pistol and threw it on the bunk. All of this was very unusual for me and the others in my hooch just watched as I made a commotion. They knew enough to leave me alone if I was that upset (I probably could have shot someone under the right conditions). We were supposed to put our weapons in the arms room as soon as we came off duty. I didn't and instead I went down to our beer hall (it was a tent). After a few beers, I calmed down a bit and went back to my hooch to put the guns away.

To top off the entire day, the Chaplain was supposed hold Mass in one of the buildings. There were about 8 of us who showed up, waited for a while and then the Chaplain came in and said that he didn't want to say Mass for some reason which has escaped me. He blessed us and told us to go back to whatever we were doing. So I went back to have a few more beers. What a nice Christmas Day.

One of the jobs that I volunteered for was Chief Cashier for the PX (Post Exchange – like a General Store). This job took me off of normal MP duties for 3 months and I had a normal day shift 7:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. One night, I had to stay late at the PX for inventory. When I arrived back at my hooch at about 8:00 P.M., I found that it had been raided by our company commander. It seems that the company Courier after traveling for a few days, brought back some hard liquor, which we couldn't get in Phu Bai and were forbidden to have, and had a party in my hooch. They got very loud and were reported to our company commander. In the midst of the search for liquor, a carton of apples that I had acquired and was under my bunk was confiscated by the company commander. Needless to say, I was very upset over this. I went to the Orderly Room (main office where the company clerk conducted paperwork business) to retrieve the apples and was told that I couldn't have the box. So I took as many apples as I could carry and told the person in charge that if the CO (commanding officer) had a problem that he should come and see me. He never did and I continued to take the apples for several days. The reason that the apples were there to start with is that I became the company scrounger. If you needed something - come see me. I seemed to have a knack for getting things that no one else could. I had a stash of C-Rations (boxes of complete meals in cans) and anytime someone needed extra, they would see me. I made a lot of contacts with people in other units, so I could get supplies, favors, food or whatever. By the way, the company courier lost that job because of that night.

VIETNAM REGIONAL EXCHANGE (PACEX)	
ARMY & AIR FORCE EXCHANGE SERVICE	PERMANENT PASS No. 003708
LAST NAME-FIRST NAME _____	
SIGNATURE PASS HOLDER _____	
RANK / TITLE / POSITION _____	
SERIAL NO. / I. D. NO. _____	
WHSE / DEPT. / SEC. ASSIGNED _____	
DATE PASS ISSUED _____	
"Bearer of this Permanent Pass is authorized to work only in assigned area specified."	
 Signature of Validating Officer	
FORM NO. 16 (REV. 67) - 10 NOT FOR DEPUTY USE	

This was my official ID Pass for working at the PX.

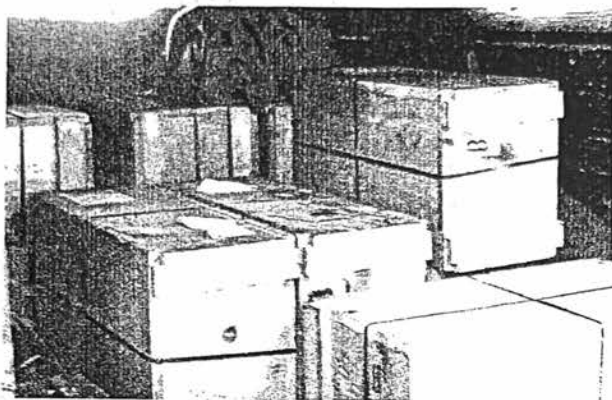
As I mentioned before, for about 3 months I worked as Chief Cashier at the PX (Post Exchange). I was responsible for all of the money taken in by the PX. This amounted to about \$450,000 a month – pretty good for a combat zone. There were Vietnamese businesses on the base that also contributed to the funds. I had to collect the money from these shops daily and record the amounts so they would get a percentage paid to them at some point. The money was in MPC (Military Payment Certificates) which looked like large Monopoly money. I kept the money in a safe in my office. When I accumulated about \$80,000 to \$90,000, I took the cash over to the finance building. They counted it by

machine to verify the amount and issued the PX a US Treasurer's check for the amount. Twice a month, I took those checks with whatever cash I had, to the main PX for I Corps in DaNang. These trips were made by MedEvac chopper because you didn't need flight orders for the ride. All you needed were your dog tags. The hospital MedEvac choppers were always making trips to DaNang for their own personnel and I was just a tagalong. Usually, it took a day or two to get back to Phu Bai since I had to hop on any aircraft going that way. It was always fun trying out different aircraft. On one trip there, I met a guy that I knew in CID (Criminal Investigation Division) at the airport and he invited me to spend the night in a house that CID had in DaNang. He was able to get me in to the NCO Club in town and we had a few drinks and I went back to Phu Bai the next day.

As I stated previously, I worked in the PX as Chief Cashier. Shortly after I took the job, I got caught up in an interesting situation. The back room of the PX was all open except for a small office that belonged to the Captain who was in charge of the PX. The safe in which all of the MPC (Military Payment Certificate) was placed was behind my chair in the center of the room. The Captain and I were the only ones that had the combination to the safe. During the day the floor was swept by a mama san. At the middle and end of each month, Mr. Cha (the Korean civilian accountant for the PX) would tally up all the receipts for the period and tell me how much money I should have in the safe. I think it was the second time that I was doing this and I counted the money and discovered that it was \$2000 short. I reported this to Mr. Cha and we both recounted all of the money. After we verified that it was missing, and tried to determine what could have happened to it, we had to tell the Captain. There was an investigation by CID (Criminal Investigation Division) and after a few weeks, I was cleared of any wrongdoing but it was determined that I was negligent in causing the money to be lost. We guessed that a bundle of \$20 bills (\$2000) must have dropped on the floor and mama san swept it into her pocket but we couldn't prove it. After that the Captain was chased out of his office and I took his place there with the safe. I also found out that our Battalion Commander (Area Provost Marshal) was on my side and personally vouched for me during the investigation.



View of the office in the PX



This is approx. \$3,000,000 in MPC that was delivered to us for the changeover

While I worked at the PX, some of the girls that worked there would ask from time to time if I could buy them something and they would reimburse me for the cost. This was not like the Black Market where I could make a profit. One such time a girl asked me to purchase a watch for her. The cost was about \$20.00. She paid me in MPC which she should not have had in any case, but that was quite normal. I bought the watch and gave it to her at the PX but I kept the receipt. At the end of the day, all of the PX Vietnamese workers would be loaded on a deuce-and-a-half and transported to the main gate to be searched. This particular day, I hitched a ride on the truck and waited until they were searched. Of course, the watch was found on this girl and when I presented the receipt, they gave me the watch. No one questioned why she had the watch and I had the receipt and I offered no explanation so the subject was dropped. They may have assumed that since I was an MP, I was testing the search procedure. No one ever brought up the incident again. I was able to get the watch to the girl outside the gate a few days later.

The day that I was assigned to airport security was probably the most actual police work I performed in one day during my entire 3 years in the Army. The airport at Phu Bai consisted of a large terminal building and the runway which was made from what we called PSP, which were steel interlocking plates with holes in them so the wheels of the planes had something solid to land on. I guess it was easier than laying asphalt.

I arrived at the terminal building at 7:00 A.M. – it was a short walk from our compound. It was my first and only day at this location. Shortly after I arrived, an MP patrol stopped by and informed me that a rabid dog had been seen in the area and if I should see it, I should try to shoot it but not in the head. I filed that bit of information in my brain and continued to walk around.

There was also a Vietnamese terminal building on the property which was a cement building with a bar that served alcohol. It was like being in the movie *Casablanca* – all it needed was someone named Sam playing the piano. This was off-limits for US Military personnel, but I could be there to check out any problems. There were two Special Forces personnel in uniform at the bar along with civilian Vietnamese. I had some conversation with them and since none of us knew for sure if they could legitimately be there, I told them to just hangout but be aware of any Officers that might come in. They had no problem with that and they did leave after they finished their drinks.

Air Force personnel actually ran the military terminal and flight operations and I had many friends there. During the morning, a group of 101st Airborne soldiers brought 5 Vietcong prisoners into the terminal and placed them in a back room with guards. They were waiting for a flight out. The prisoners were tied and had covers over their head (sandbags) and were placed on the floor in back of an unused counter in the terminal building. Around noon time, a group of Air Force personnel and a few select others, including myself, were invited to view some porno films in another back room of the building. While we were watching the film, gun shots were heard outside. At first we thought that the prisoners had escaped, but that was not the case. As I and others ran from the room to find out what was going on, I exited the back door of the terminal and watched an Air Force sergeant fire his .38 cal. revolver at the rabid dog that I was informed of earlier. The funny part of this is that he was firing the gun while he was urinating in a buried 55 gallon steel drum which was actually the outside urinal for the terminal. He missed the dog with all shots fired.

The terminal building was at the edge of a small hill and there was a mess hall (that's where we eat) below the hill about 200 feet away. The dog panicked and ran for the mess hall building. Three American soldiers started running after the dog. As the dog ran around the building with the three chasing it (it reminded me of a Laurel & Hardy film), the dog kept gaining and eventually the dog almost caught up to the men from behind, but they didn't know it. I had a good vantage point since I could see the building from above. After about 4 or 5 trips around the building, the dog headed for the runway and the men went around the building once more until they realized that the dog wasn't there anymore. At this point I wound up involved with the chase. By this time, a crowd had formed to see what all the excitement was about. The dog ran across the runway and dodged in and out of the buildings near the Vietnamese terminal. I kept the crowd back so no one got hurt. The dog finally stopped in a clearing about 100 feet from us. There was a soldier with the crowd who had his M-16 with him and he was begging me to let him shoot the dog. Since

all I had was my .45 pistol, I figured that he had a better chance to hit the dog at that distance than I did. He emptied his entire magazine of 20 rounds at the dog and only hit it twice, but it was enough to stop the dog. At least he didn't hit it in the head. One of the patrols called the appropriate authorities and the dog was removed. The crowd dispersed and all went back to normal. The rest of the day, this soldier would brag to me whenever he saw me in the terminal building about how good a shot he was. I wonder what stories he told everyone when he got home from the "War".

One day, I was assigned to man the rear gate to the Army Compound. This gate was rarely manned or used and it was the first of only two times I had that duty. The so-called gate shack was just a plywood structure that was falling apart, but it did have a seat. This particular day, a Vietnamese MP (Quân Cảnh or QC) was also assigned with me. The problem that we immediately faced was, at that time, that he could not speak any English and I spoke no Vietnamese. We didn't have much to do at this gate, so it seemed that it would be a very long day. After a while, we discovered that we both had some knowledge of the French language. We had a pen and some paper, so we began to communicate by selecting a word or object, writing it down in French, then he wrote the Vietnamese word and I wrote the English word for it. We did this for quite a while and we both learned from it and we had a good time.

The rest of the day was spent throwing an M16 bayonet at the outside rear wall of the gate shack from a distance of 10-15 feet. We both got very good at sticking it in the wood.

Another time that French knowledge came in handy was when one of the Platoon Sergeants received a notice that he had a package waiting at the Vietnamese Post Office in DaNang. That was unusual in itself since all mail was supposed to go through the Military Post Office in San Francisco, CA. The notice was printed in French and I was able to translate it and tell him what to do to retrieve it. I guess that taking a second language in high school wasn't a total waste.

For the uneducated, there were no flush toilets in most of the military bases in Vietnam. Our toilet facilities consisted of plywood shed with 2, 3 or 4 cutouts with toilet seats (upscale out house) that were on a raised platform. Under those seats were 55 gallon steel drums cut in half with handle cut-outs. In the back of the shed was a hinged door that gave access to the barrels. At some point each day or two, someone would have to take these barrels out and replace them with clean ones. To get them "clean", the half barrels would be partially filled with diesel fuel and burned until all the crap was burned up. There was an empty field across the road from our compound that was such a site. One day there was rocket attack and when it was over, we discovered that several of these

barrels that were stacked up in that field were hit by a rocket and the debris was scattered for quite a distance. After that we could claim that during the attack "our shit was blown away".

Since I worked for a while at the PX, I had my nights free and whenever something unexpected came up, I was always available. One night, about 8:00pm, I was summoned to help another MP escort a jeep (M151A1) with 4 officers aboard to Hué which was about 7 miles north of Phu Bai. We were to take the only armor-plated gun jeep we had for the escort. I drove and we were in the lead. About a mile out past the North Gate, there was a terrible sound coming from the right rear wheel. My partner looked over the side and said that it looked like the wheel was falling off. So we pulled over and stopped – it was pitch black in this area. The other vehicle didn't know what was happening. The wheel lugs were loose and we did not have a lug wrench, so I went back to the other vehicle and almost burst out laughing. The four officers were sitting there with flak jackets and steel pots on, holding their M16s as if they were being attacked, and they looked scared. I explained that we didn't have a lug wrench and asked to borrow their wrench which I did and we tightened the wheel and escorted them without any further incidents. One reason why I laughed is that as MPs we rarely wore our flak jackets or steel pots and we were very comfortable with any security we provided – we were lax and took things for granted but we were used to it.

Probably one of my most memorable stories is about a young girl (about 14 years old) who came by my post at the rear gate to one of the compounds. She was riding a bicycle and was dressed in what we would call pajamas. Her face was dirty and she had a vocabulary that would make a sailor blush. She asked me if I would let her inside the compound. When I refused her request, she started shouting all kinds of obscenities at me. I held up my hand to stop her from the verbal abuse and told her to leave if she was going to continue with that kind of language. Don't get me wrong, that was the type of language that all of us used every day – I just didn't want to hear it from some young girl. I told her that she could stay and talk if she curbed the talk. She said that she thought that all GI's talked like that and wanted everyone else to do the same. I told her that I was not like every GI and each time she lapsed into that type of talk, I held up my hand and she stopped it. After a while she got the message and talked like a normal human being. I don't remember the conversation but we talked for quite a while and then she left. I forgot all about her until about a week or so later when I was on the North Main Gate on QL1. We stopped every Vietnamese vehicle and searched it and checked all ID's. On this particular day, a bus pulled in to our checkpoint and I got on and checked some ID's. There were about 10 Vietnamese on the bus (these buses were not like the ones we see here in the US). As I was checking, I heard a voice say "Hi, Bob". I looked up and saw the same girl from the rear gate. She was all cleaned up and dressed in traditional black and white silk pants and top. She was smiling a lot, very excited and I complimented her

on how nice she looked. She started to use some foul language but I held up my finger and she immediately stopped and placed her hand over her mouth and said she was sorry. Then I sat down on the bus and we had a conversation. She said that she was going to DaNang to interview for a job.

Now at this same time, since I was holding up the bus, some mama san sitting next to me and obviously annoyed, said "du ma mi" ("go f__ your mother" *literal translation*) to which I said "be nice and watch your mouth". She said "You understand what I say?" and I said "yes". So she laughed and then kept quiet after that. I wished the girl luck and released the bus. It made me feel good that I seemed to make a small difference in someone's life, if only for a short time. I never saw that girl again.

As I mentioned previously, I worked as a "bunker rat" in the 2nd Platoon from 7:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. when I arrived at Phu Bai. We had a semi-circle of bunkers protecting the Headquarters of Provisional Corps Vietnam. At that time, the 1st Platoon was stationed in Hué with a few men at Dong Ha at the DMZ and the 3rd Platoon was in Pleiku with Battalion Headquarters. After about 4 months, the 504th Battalion Headquarters was moved to Phu Bai with the 3rd Platoon. Since many of the 3rd Platoon's men had finished their tour and gone home, there were openings in that Platoon and they were taking over road patrol and main gate security from the 3rd Division Marines. I wanted to get away from the bunkers so I asked to be transferred to the 3rd Platoon and was accepted.

At that same time, we got a new Company Commander and a new Platoon Leader. The commander was a Captain who got his commission in the field or so we were told. He instituted new procedures in the company area. One was clearing barrels at all of the entrances to our compound – he didn't want loaded weapons inside our compound. This caused many problems since we had to clear our pistols each time we entered and then reload when we left. Many rounds were discharged by accident because it became routine and we would forget to empty the chamber before we pulled the trigger.

At another time, the Captain decided to test us by setting off tear gas grenades in our company area. Fortunately, our platoon leader found out about it and threatened the Captain not to do it or he was going to tell the Battalion Commander.

Another time (this is my favorite), the Captain was in his hooch and two of my comrades, after consuming some beer, decided to talk to each other near his hooch knowing he could hear. They talked about how they felt about him and how he might get shot by his own men (they were setting him up but there was truth to it). He never indicated that he heard the talk, but a couple days later he called a formation of the entire company at 6:00 PM (this never happened before). He told us that he knew that we didn't like him and babbled on for a few minutes. Then he told us that we should remember that he always carried his .45 pistol, it was always loaded (remember that we couldn't have a loaded pistol in the company area), and he was good with it. At this point he patted his holster as if he had a western quick draw on his hip. Also at this point, someone from the back of the formation shouted "How good are you at 100 yards"? We all were holding back the laughter as we watched a very silent and angry Captain turn red in the face and I thought I saw steam coming out of his ears (quite literally). He never said another word but just stood there for a minute and then walked off to his hooch. Our Platoon Leader turned to

us and said "I guess that means we are dismissed ". We all started laughing and walked away.

Some time during the next few weeks the Captain was replaced. We knew he was relieved of duty and sent back home.

The radios that we had mounted on our vehicles were very durable and expensive but they did not always work properly. Very quickly we found that if the radio was not working, you could hit the top of the metal case with your steel pot a few times and it would start working again. Of course, this activity could not go on forever and eventually the radio had to be repaired by a radio technician.

Another use for the steel pot was when the electric fuel pump on the M151A1 (Jeep) failed. The gasoline tank was mounted under the driver's seat and you could hear the pump ticking. When it stopped (which did happen more often than we wanted), the seat could be tilted back and again the steel pot was applied in force to the top of the tank where the pump was located and 'presto!' - the pump started working again.

Since the vehicles were driven at a constant speed most of the time, carbon would build up in the cylinders and the engine would run rough (it was only 4 cylinders). To fix this, we would put the vehicle in first gear and accelerate the engine to 40 mph for about a mile. A lot of black smoke came out of the exhaust but it solved the problem.

Note: M151A1 – Commonly known and referred to as a Jeep was actually a ¼ ton Utility Vehicle, 4 speed manual transmission, 4 wheel drive, 4 wheel independent suspension. When used as a Gun Jeep, the rear seat was removed and the M60 machine gun mount was bolted to the floor. Armor plating was used on some but was too heavy and the thick glass windshield was badly cracked so we couldn't see through and we had to wear goggles.

This is probably one of the funnier stories here. Soon after I transferred into the 3rd Platoon, I was assigned to the hospital for a midnight shift to guard a Viet Cong prisoner. I was new to this and no one explained that I was actually protecting him from possible harm from other US military personnel. The prisoner was lying on his back with a threaded metal rod stuck through his knee and protruding out either side about 4 inches to which was attached a rope to hold up the leg in a bent position. There were three US military personnel in the ward also (after all, this was only a field hospital). After a few hours, this Vietnamese man started shouting "die", "die". He didn't speak or understand English (I found out later) and at this time I didn't know any Vietnamese. I kept telling

him that he wasn't going to die, but it wasn't sinking in – he just kept shouting “die”. This went on for a while until a nurse finally came into the ward. She then told me that all he wanted to do was take a leak. The word for piss in Vietnamese is ‘daf’ (pronounced die). The nurse got him the container and he relieved himself and we all had a good laugh.

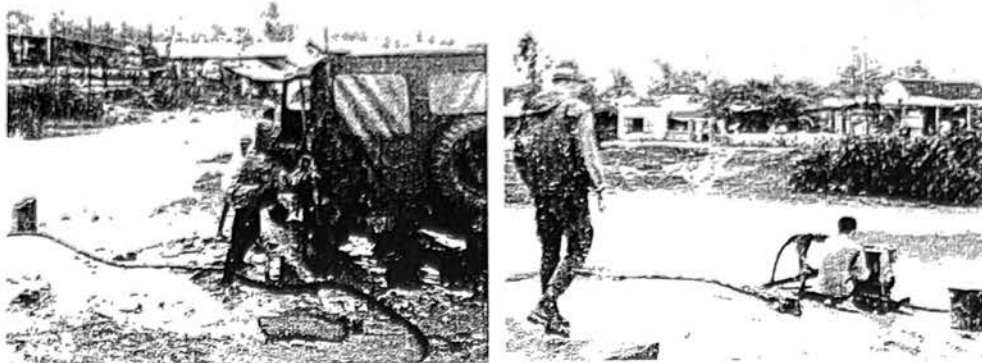
One night, I was working with another MP at the South Gate to the main base. This gate was part of the main base defense attached to the barbed wire fence surrounding the perimeter of Phu Bai Base. There was a small gate shack made of cement blocks and a sand bag wall in front of the door. There was nothing in the shack – it was just a shelter to escape the rain and sun for a while. The gate across the road was a 12 foot high hinged metal gate constructed of engineer fence stakes and barbed wire. When it was closed, there was a gap in the middle under it, large enough for a person to crawl through. To cover this gap, we had to pull two A-frame stands made of stakes and concertina wire across that area. To secure the gate in the middle, was a large link chain wrapped around the two halves with a lock. However, the key to the lock was lost and the lock thrown away, so the chain was tied in a knot. Remember, this is a combat zone with highly developed security measures. The area around this gate was pitch black at night as there were no lights and no one got in or out at night (at least that was the intent). The only communication we had was a field phone to the PMO (Provost Marshall Office) and another to a bunker across the road that was manned by the SeaBees at night. This particular night, at about 2:00am, we were disturbed by the rattling of the chains on the gate. We couldn't see anything and we asked the SeaBees to check it out since they had an infra-red scope. They indicated that there were several figures outside the gate but couldn't tell more than that. We were not permitted to send up a flare until we called base defense, which we did. After about a half hour, a jeep carrying a drunken Colonel arrived and after some discussion, we were given permission to send up a flare. As soon as the flare illuminated the area, we saw several human figures scatter to the ditches along the road as well as several water buffalo that were near the gate. After a while we were satisfied that it was only a few locals playing with us. No more incidents that night except for the colonel almost falling out of the jeep.



This is me at the South Gate
holding an M79 Grenade
Launcher

Occasionally, I would be assigned to convoy duty that usually occurred at night. Several tractor-trailers would travel to Colco Beach near Hue to pick up supplies for the base. The supplies were off-loaded from LST ships and stored there. Depending on the amount of trucks, there was an MP gun jeep (.30 cal. machine gun) in front, middle and rear of the convoy. On one such trip, we passed by a small village with no problem on the way when the trucks were empty. After we loaded the trucks and were on the way back, we were stopped by a roadblock in this village. It consisted of bicycles, tires, old washing machines and many other household items piled across the road. I was on the middle jeep. After we were stopped by the junk pile, we had to call for EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) to check the junk for booby traps. While we were waiting there was some small arms fire from the woods. We didn't see anything but we were on alert. We had to wait there for about an hour until the road was clear. During that time there were some shots fired and one of our MP's was hit in the leg. The next day we heard that he was sent home and we also heard that the wound was self inflicted. That was never verified and it was the only major casualty for our group during the year I was there.

We washed our vehicles in a small river bed that had a gasoline powered pump available to us. The vehicles got very dusty during the day and so did our bodies. We also paid the Vietnamese kids to do the washing. The water in the river was just as muddy as the vehicles but it was wet and got most of the dirt off. There were only two modes of cleanliness in Vietnam – dusty and muddy, depending on the weather.



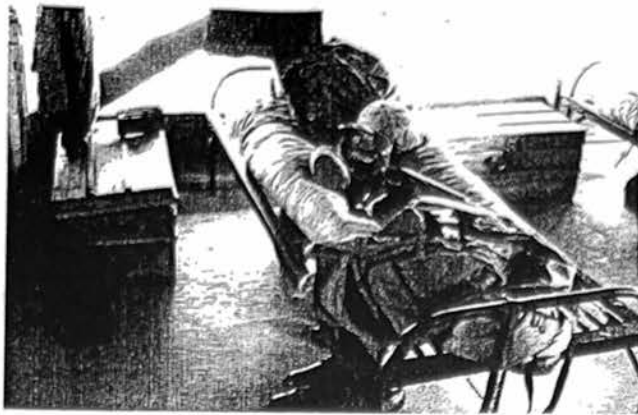
In order to keep the M60 machine guns free from the dust and make them easier to clean at the end of a shift, we tied a poncho (rubberized rain gear) around the gun on its mount on the jeep. Luckily we didn't have to use the machine guns much – it would have taken a few minutes to unwrap them or we could just shoot through the poncho.



Our patrol vehicles – note the gun jeep on the left. The M60 is wrapped with a poncho.

When we had a flat tire on a vehicle, it was easier and quicker to have the Vietnamese in the village fix it for 50 cents (MPC) than to get someone in the motor pool to do it.

When I first got to Phu Bai, I was given an arctic sleeping bag, a pillow and a metal cot with no mattress to sleep on. In addition, during the night tanks would fire outgoing harassment rounds every few minutes which shook the ground. At first I couldn't tell those rounds from incoming, but after a week or so, I could at least sleep through the outgoing rounds.



You maybe thought I was kidding about the sleeping bag.

Since we worked until 7:00 A.M., trying to get some sleep during the day at 100+ degrees was difficult. Usually we slept until around noon, had lunch and then filled sand bags during the afternoon. Most of our free time was spent laying on the sandbag bunkers in our OD shorts (olive drab underwear).



A few drunks holding each other so they wouldn't fall.

When we worked 7:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M., we got a lunch break at about midnight which consisted of soft white bread with warm tuna fish or a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and warm (sometimes hot) kool aid drinks. Yum, yum.

Sometimes it seemed that we were more at risk from our own people than from the enemy. We had to shoot up a lot of ammo at our makeshift range so we could get a new allotment for the month. Our Platoon Leader (a 1st Lieutenant) decided to fire an M79 grenade straight up into the air. Everyone tried to duck under cover (there wasn't much available) but luckily the grenade did not go straight up and it just missed the ground we were standing on by a few feet and landed over a hill. No one was hurt but we did yell a lot at the individual who fired it.

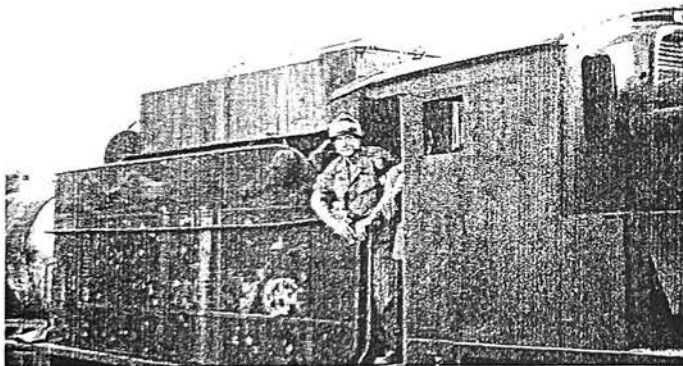
The rats in Vietnam were literally as big as cats. There were also very fast and could detect the slightest movement such as movement of your eyes. One guy actually killed a rat with his bayonet in one of the bunkers.

We confiscated a lot of marijuana from the American troops and when we accumulated a sufficient amount, it had to be disposed of. This was accomplished by starting a fire in a 3 pound coffee can and burning the pot. Of course, as the smoke billowed out of the can, there were about 7 or 8 MP's standing over it inhaling the smoke.

At one point we did encounter a bit of bad weather – a typhoon. This lasted about 4 days and managed to keep us very wet. We tried to seal up the sides of the hooch with sheets of plywood but there just wasn't enough to go around so we slept on wet sheets and put on wet clothes and walked in mud. Monsoon season was a little better, it just rained a little each day but since it was so hot, we dried off quickly. The nights were cool, but the dampness created a lot of mosquitoes. These were a strange breed since they sucked the blood from our lips and eyelids.

The going rate for service from a whore was 800 piaster (approx. \$8.00 MPC); for MP's it was half that amount. Again remember that this was I Corps where even visiting a Vietnamese building was illegal (off -limits) if you were caught and we (the MP's) were the ones doing the catching and of course we knew the location of most of the whorehouses.

There was a railroad that ran through the base, parallel to QL1. Every time the train came through, we had to supply one MP on the front and one on the rear to make sure no one got on or off during the mile or so through the base. One time I even got a chance to drive the locomotive. It was an old steam driven, French made locomotive and all of the pipes that leaked had rags tied around them. One time I almost fell off the last car since the train was moving when I jumped on and my boots were wet.



That's me on
the engine.

One night we watch the fireworks as a parachute flare (these are long metal canister flares that are dropped by planes) drifted over the main generator tent supplying power to the base and shorted the main transformers that were on a platform. Sparks flew everywhere for a few seconds and the base went black. It took a while to restore power but it was fun to watch. I was working the South gate that night.

Since I was one of the few who had a normal day job when I worked at the PX, whenever a bartender was needed for the beer tent, I was asked to fill in. This was a volunteer job

and I did it a few times. I got to drink the beer, converse with everyone and got to keep any tips. The beer was only 10 cents a can.

On another day, my partner and I had to take 2 Viet Cong prisoners to Camp Eagle (101st Airborne Camp), which was a few miles north of Phu Bai. They were tied and had sand bags over their heads so they couldn't see where we were taking them. They sat in the rear seat of our vehicle and tried to maneuver the bags off their heads so we had to watch them closely. We had no idea what the 101st did with them afterward and that is probably a good thing.

On another occasion I had to escort a wounded Viet Cong to Nha Trang. He was on a stretcher and I was there to make sure no one attacked him on the flight. We flew to Nha Trang on a C120 and it was an overnight stay for me. After I dropped him off at the hospital, I stayed at the MP Company there. They had a nice club so I spent the afternoon and night at their bar and watched a show.

The word "out on the street" was that MP's had a bounty on their heads. The price ranged from \$10,000 to \$50,000. I don't know if that was really true. We were a threat because we could go anywhere we wanted and other units were restricted since all of I Corps was off-limits. We never had any real trouble and never went out of our way to look for it, so maybe it was a case of we left them alone and they left us alone.

I remember that our radio call signs were changed each month. They picked hard to pronounce words for a Vietnamese. One was Rapid Skates - our patrols were named Rapid Skates 4 Zero (the Desk Sergeant), Rapid Skates 4 one, Rapid Skates 4 two, etc.

When General William Westmoreland left Vietnam (he was the commander there for a while), I was in the honor guard that was formed to escort him to his plane. Not a big deal but at least I got to see him.

We had a few Vietnamese interpreters also living with us and they also went on patrol with us. I used to spend some time with them at the end of a day to try to learn some of the Vietnamese language. In return, I would try to explain to them the meaning of some American phrases. Do you know how hard it is to explain the meaning of "What's your bag, man?" to someone who has no clue and really doesn't "get it" even after you explain it.

It seemed that almost everyone had a tape recorder of some sort. The most popular singing group was the DOORS. I guess that their style of music just fit the situation.

Our unit, while I was there, was essentially drug free. There were a couple of individuals who smoked pot occasionally but they were the exception. We certainly had plenty of opportunity to obtain it. Alcohol was the biggest problem. Usually we only drank beer since we could get that readily but we had access to an Air Force club that served liquor so some of us took advantage of that on occasion. One guy did get sent home for a variety of reasons and the main one was drug use but he was on drugs even before he got to Vietnam.

We were given Malaria pills to take. There was a small white pill that was taken daily when we remembered and a larger orange pill that was taken weekly and was missed most of the time. No one ever contracted the disease. They thought I had Malaria once but it turned out to be dysentery due to eating too many Vietnamese popsicles. Hey, it was hot and the popsicles were cold and wet.

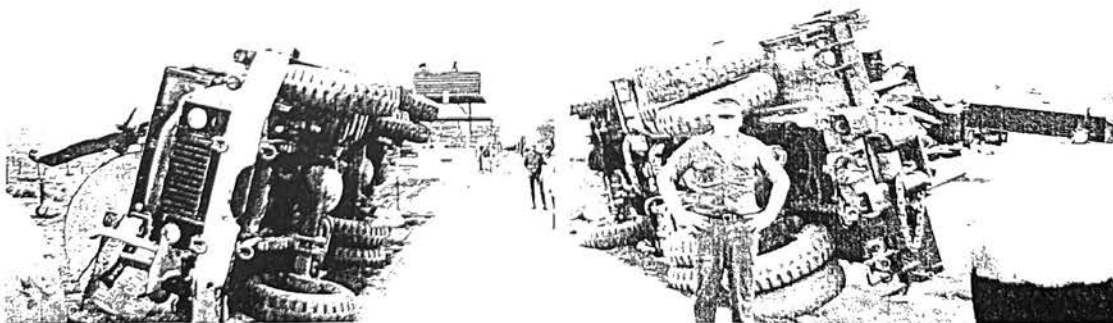
One sight that we were not used to is someone squatting in a field to take a crap. Think about that next time you eat rice. Equally surprising was a woman standing by the side of the road lifting up her loose fitting silk pants and urinating. This is normal for these people since there is no indoor plumbing in the small villages.

In order to send fuel from Hué to Phu Bai Base, an 8 inch pipe line was laid next to the road but not buried completely. The connections would leak and the people living along the road would fill pots and other containers with the fuel. There was a variety of fuels from diesel to jet fuel for them to use as they needed.

One guy in our platoon visited a girl for sex and caught the clap. He went on sick call and had it cured. Soon after that he got it again and when asked why he went back to the same girl, he said he was in love. He did this about 4 times with the same girl. You would think he learned the first time. Love does strange things to people.

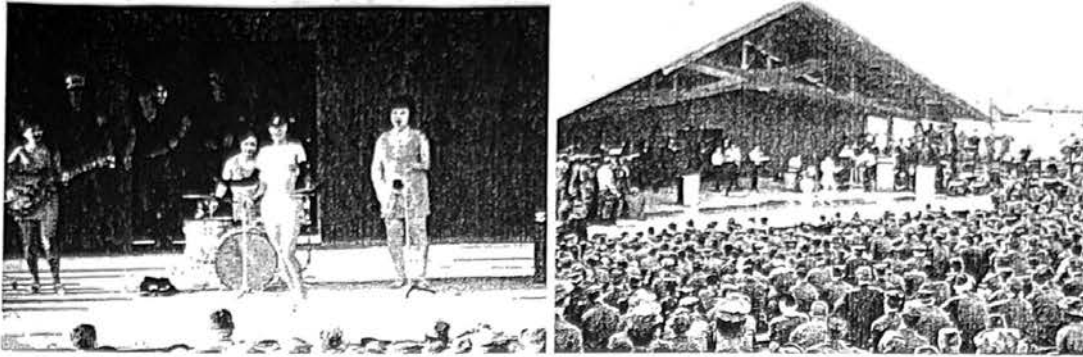
One night at the North Gate we were surprised by an Air Force pickup truck that was traveling down the road slowly and ran into the gate. The driver was an Air Force Sergeant who was drunk and fell asleep. The gate wasn't damaged too much so we called a patrol to the site and one MP drove the pickup and the drunk back to his unit.

One day on patrol North we saw what appeared to be an accident so we investigated it. It was a 2 ½ ton truck with a crane that was tipped over on its side. It seems that the operator was attempting to pick up a steel tank from the side of the road and failed to extend the outriggers to stabilize the truck. The tank was too heavy and it pulled the truck over. The operator was not hurt but he did seem very proud of what he did.



We did get to see some shows. Some were in our amphitheater and others were private in the Korean compound that was next to ours. Bob Hope never made it to Phu Bai since it

was too far north and too dangerous. Usually the shows consisted of an all-girl band and some dancers and singers.



One day on patrol to the North (toward Hué), we (my partner and I) had to take a prisoner (American) to our Hué headquarters (remember we had one platoon stationed in Hué). We delivered him to the PMO and locked him up in the makeshift jail. This was a Conex (Seabox or steel container) that had windows cut out and bars installed. While we were there, a Vietnamese prisoner was being interrogated by the National Police. He had been arrested for stealing Honda motor bikes. I'm not sure what questions he was being asked but he wasn't giving the correct answers. The interrogator was using a club to strike him on the legs and back every time he didn't answer correctly. When the man put his hands behind him to rub the part that hurt, the interrogator hit his hand with the club. Eventually the man wound up on the floor crying and both of his wrists were broken. I think that he finally gave the correct answers.

After this, we started to go back to our compound in Phu Bai but we were contacted by radio that the base was under rocket attack so we had to stay in Hué until it was clear to return. Since we had some time to kill, my partner decided to visit a whore who he knew lived in the area. We parked our vehicle at the PMO and walked to find this house which was right on the main street. Understand that all of I Corps was off-limits to all GI's, including us. Of course, we were the police, so we could be more risky and sometimes more stupid. We found the house and went in. He found the woman and disappeared into the bedroom with her. There was another woman in the house who was offered to me but she was so ugly that I declined. I was left helping two kids with their homework in the kitchen. Of course, we could have gotten into much trouble just for being in that house, much less being serviced by a whore. After he finished, we left and by then it was dark outside so we got our vehicle, the all clear was sounded for Phu Bai and we went back. All in the day's work of an MP.

While we were on patrol, we were always looking for things out of the ordinary. One day while cruising on QL1 North end, we spotted a Medical vehicle on a dirt road speeding along. The vehicle had a high roof and canvas covered sides. The canvas was flopping in the breeze and we noticed 2 Vietnamese females in the back (totally illegal). So we followed them – there were 2 GI's in the front seats. They spotted us and continued off the road to an area that was used as a garbage dump where they left the 2 women and they proceeded up a very steep hill (60 degree incline) that had a radio tower on top. Since there was only one way up and down, we waited for them at the bottom. We started questioning the women and found out that one (very pretty) was a pimp and the other (very ugly) was the whore. Now when I say ugly – you couldn't tell her age (maybe in the 30's) and she had these large bumps all over her face. These bumps were similar to the bumps you see on a crocodile's skin. She didn't even have a good body. These guys must have been very desperate. After about 20 minutes the guys drove down because they had to get back to their unit. We felt like apprehending them for not being able to select a decent looking whore, but we let them go and told the women to get lost.

One item that seemed to be at a premium in Vietnam was a poncho liner. This was a quilted lightweight silky, camouflage olive drab piece of material that could be used as a blanket. Military supply units could not get them. One day when I was working the gate to the Army compound, I walked over to a Vietnamese gift shop and asked the proprietor Lyly (pronounced 'Lee Lee') to get me one. She said that she couldn't because they were not supposed to have certain American products in their possession especially military items. I pointed out that the raincoats that were sold in her store were made from ponchos with liners on the inside and that I know that she could get me one. She insisted that she could not accommodate me but I also insisted that she should try. Two days later, I was on the gate again and when she entered with her vehicle, she told me to see her later. I did and she gave me a brown paper package and told me not to open it until I left the store. There was no charge. When I got back to my hooch I opened it and found a brand new poncho liner (I still have it). Being an MP has its privileges since you know who to go to for anything you need or want. I knew Lyly from working in the PX, since she had to turn in her money from the sales in her store each day to me.

When we were on duty, our .45 cal pistol was our primary weapon. On patrol, we carried an M16 and an M79 as well. The M16 is a fully automatic rifle cal .223 and the M79 is a single shot 40MM grenade launcher that looks like a shotgun with a short barrel. It fires either a buckshot round or a grenade round which is about 2 inches in diameter. One day, a patrol stopped by the 2nd Platoon hooches to visit for some reason and then went to

lunch. The M79 was left on a bunk in one of the hooches. One of the company clerks who was not familiar with the weapon, picked it up and didn't check it. Before anyone could say anything, he pulled the trigger and fired a grenade round that was in the chamber. The projectile hit the plywood wall at the other end of the hooch and fell to the floor. It did not explode because the projectile has to travel a distance and spin to be armed. Then another dummy ran over and picked up the projectile, opened the door and threw it into the middle of the company area. We were extremely lucky that it still did not explode. We called EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) to get rid of it. After that we made sure that all weapons that were left unattended were unloaded.

The M151A1 (Jeep) has a 24 volt electrical system and a generator instead of an alternator. One day, while on patrol in the south, the generator or voltage regulator stopped working. We were about 25 miles from the main base. That was usually an hour ride on the dirt road. This day we had a new guy with us and he was very much afraid. We had a gun jeep and I was driving (I almost always did). We stopped for lunch at the SeaBee camp (*remember* – good food) and the battery still had enough voltage to start the vehicle so we continued on patrol. I didn't feel like driving all the way back to base since that would have killed the day. Soon after lunch we discovered a tractor trailer broken down on the road and the driver was waiting for the tow truck to come to his rescue. We decided to provide security for him since it was a very isolated area. I parked our vehicle off to the side of the road and shut off the radio to conserve battery power. While we were waiting, a young Vietnamese boy appeared and started talking to us. He had a slingshot with him and I asked to look at it. I made some adjustments to it and for the next hour or so, the boy and I took turns using the slingshot on a sign that was nearby. Meanwhile the new guy sat in the vehicle scared that he might be shot at any moment. My partner fell asleep. Eventually the battery did not have enough power to use the radio or start the vehicle. It was starting to get dark when the tow truck finally came. He hooked up the other truck and took it away. We had to push our vehicle on to the road and push fast enough to jump start it. That worked and we limped back to base.

One of the favorite things that MP's like to do is to raid whorehouses. In I Corps, everything was off-limits to most US Military personnel, so any house of ill repute was fair game. Needless to say, there were many of these houses in the area and the MP's knew where most of them were. A lot of the off-limit issues were safety related and for good reason. There were personnel who were seriously hurt or killed by patronizing these establishments. It seemed to be our job to know which ones could be trusted and make sure no one got hurt. We weren't out to turn in or apprehend anyone, but we did have some fun scaring the soldiers and chasing them from the houses.

One day while on patrol North to Hué, my partner and I decided to check out one of these houses. This particular one was about the size of a small ranch, on the main road to Colco

Beach, set back about 40 feet from the road. Behind the house there was a boardwalk raised above a swampy area that ended at the water's edge. Our plan was to pass the house as though we didn't know what it was. We did this and caught a glimpse of uniforms through the windows. We continued past the house and traveled to the beach where we waited a few minutes. I was driving and when we started back toward the house which was now on our left side, I sped up and crossed the road and screeched to a halt in front of a low stone wall. My partner was actually out of the vehicle before it stopped. I followed him as he went in the front door and I went around the side. As we entered, there were several people in different stages of dress (undress?) in a rush to exit the building. Four of them tried to run down the boardwalk in the rear but when they got to the water, they gave up and returned to the house. We rounded up all of the "Johns" except for one who we found behind a curtain still being serviced. He didn't hear all of the commotion but when he looked up and saw two MP helmets staring at him from the curtain - well, I wish I had a camera to capture his expression. We told him to finish what he was doing and come out. After a couple of minutes he emerged from behind the curtain and started thanking us. He said the he was having a hard time getting his rocks off but the sight of our MP helmets gave him an incentive to finish. There were two sailors and five Army personnel in the group. We took their names and units but we never turned them in. We just enjoyed scaring them.

After we left that area, we stopped to check out two GI's trying to grab a Vietnamese girl and put her in their vehicle. They claimed that she was connected to the Viet Cong in some way and they were bringing her to their superiors for questioning. We accepted that but we went along. We were led through the woods to what looked like an amphitheater. There were many soldiers there and they were questioning a few Vietnamese. We watched for a while and were convinced by the Officers present that all was legitimate and so we left them to their business. Sometimes it was better not to get involved in the business of other units since they had a different agenda than we did.

One day I was sent on patrol south with a partner who was not even an MP. He was a company clerk and we were short of personnel. This kid had no clue what to do on the road. He couldn't even answer the radio. We were about 30 miles south of the base when we stopped to examine a truck that had hit a mine in the road. No one was hurt but the front of the truck was demolished. By the time we got there the SeaBees had filled the hole in the road with stone. We were supposed to report this kind of thing immediately but this area had no radio communication so we had to go back to the PMO (Provost Marshals Office). It took about an hour to return and I got hollered at for not reporting the incident earlier. Normally I am very calm but I lost it and yelled at the Desk Sergeant about having to do everything myself since they gave me a clerk as a partner and I couldn't use the radio. They calmed me down and we had to return to the scene with an investigator. This whole episode really killed the day.



Damaged truck and local kids.
Investigator on right, my partner,
the clerk on left.



Some of the
beach area in
the south





Platoon picnic. Notice how everyone was dressed up.



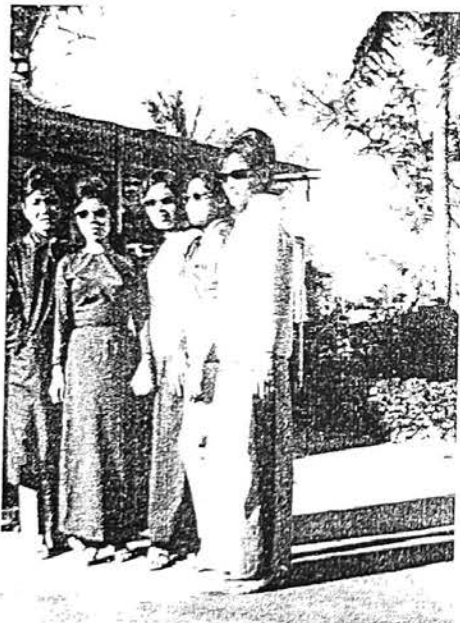
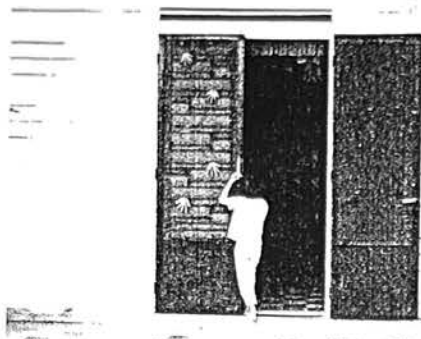
View of some of our "house maids" going home for the day. View is from my hooch.

R&R was offered to individuals in all of the units. You had choices of Bangkok, Thailand, Hawaii, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and some other exotic places. Of course you needed to have the money to go there. I went to Bangkok for a week. There was even an in-country R&R, Vung Tau. There were allotments for each place and if you wanted, you could have gone to several during the year (at least our unit did). Most of us stayed in Vietnam since we either didn't have the money or it was too much trouble. It was just a place to get away from the war for a week and live in the luxury of a hotel and possibly have the company of a female without the interference of some military personnel.

One day while I was working at the PX, I decided to do a little sightseeing. I had the PX jeep which didn't even look like a military vehicle – it was painted blue with no unit markings on it and I borrowed the .45 cal. pistol that was in my office at the PX. I picked

up the 18 year old Vietnamese boy – Terry - who gave haircuts to the MPs in our company area. He lived in Hué and agreed to show me around. Now, all of what I just said I did was highly illegal as far as military procedures go. This is the kind of stuff I was able to get away with.

To start with, we traveled to Hué and went to the Citadel, which is the walled area of the city where Terry lived. The walls of stone and cement showed the signs of a city under attack. Many parts of the wall were blown away from mortars and rockets. Surprisingly, the houses were in pretty good condition. His house was simple and clean, with some furniture. Like all of the houses, it was built from pastel colored cement. His family had plenty of money.



These are
Terry's sisters

We then went for lunch at one of Terry's sisters' house. Terry had 5 older sisters who were very pretty and they owned the edible garbage removal business for the Base. This particular sister was married to a Captain in the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). She had six children under the age of 8 years. They were the most well behaved kids I have ever met. We had lunch and then headed out into the city. On the way we were met by

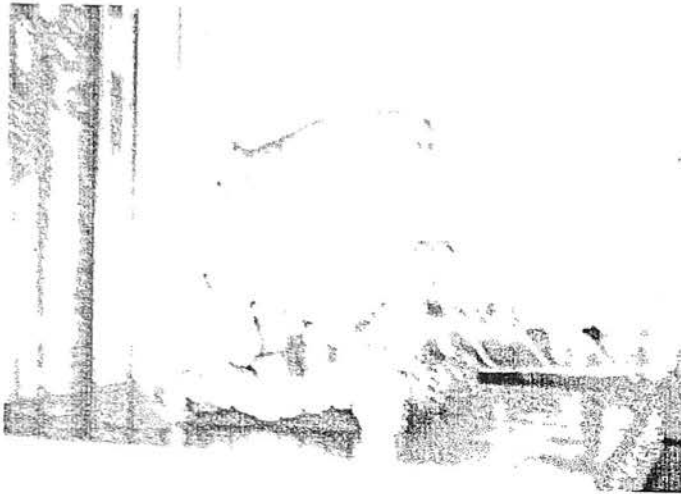
one of the MP patrols from the 1st Platoon in Hué. They wanted to know where I was going and when I told them they asked to come along since they had not been able to do any sightseeing. We went to the Hué Museum but it was closed due to building and roof damage from an attack. We were able to look inside and wander around the yard. After a few side street trips and traveling over a pontoon bridge, the patrol had to leave us and we continued on to the Palace area. All of the buildings in this area were locked up and some had extensive damage. We visited the King's throne room which was in a large building that looked like a ballroom decorated with gold and red designs. Since the room was locked, Terry located a caretaker and convinced him that I was some American big shot who was leaving the country soon. He opened one of the doors to the room and we went in and I took some pictures. The door was very narrow for me – after all, Vietnamese men are only 5 feet tall. I took some pictures; we thanked the caretaker and continued on our way.

Our next stop was a building and scene from a typical Asian movie. There was a long straight staircase which led to the second floor (I don't know what was on the ground floor). We then walked down a hallway that had Buddha statues of different sizes on one side and open wall on the other. At the end of this was a turn in the wall that led to another hallway with more Buddhas and candles. They were gold in color and I never did find out whether they were painted or real gold. I don't remember what was at the end of all this but I do remember being concerned that I may not make it out alive expecting to be attacked by ninjas or some other Asian group. There was no one else around or at least none that I saw so I took some pictures and we left.

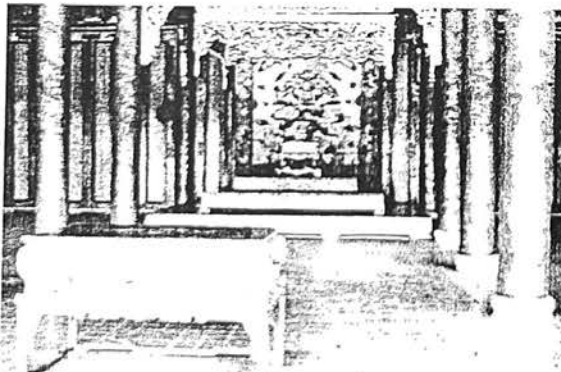
We rode around the city for a while and I was very surprised at the scenery. It was beautiful, even with the occasional damage to stone walls and buildings.

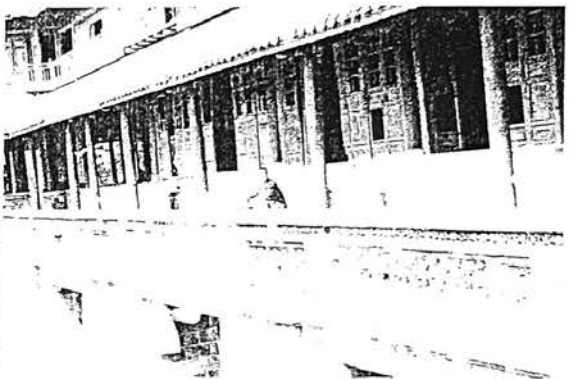
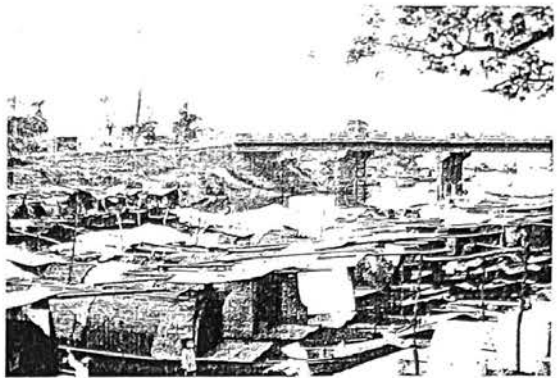
When we were finished, I drove back to the base and we stopped at the North Gate checkpoint and as luck would have it, my Platoon Sergeant was there and he questioned me driving a civilian in a military vehicle. I explained the situation and he just shook his head and told me to get out of there. As I said before, I got away with a lot.

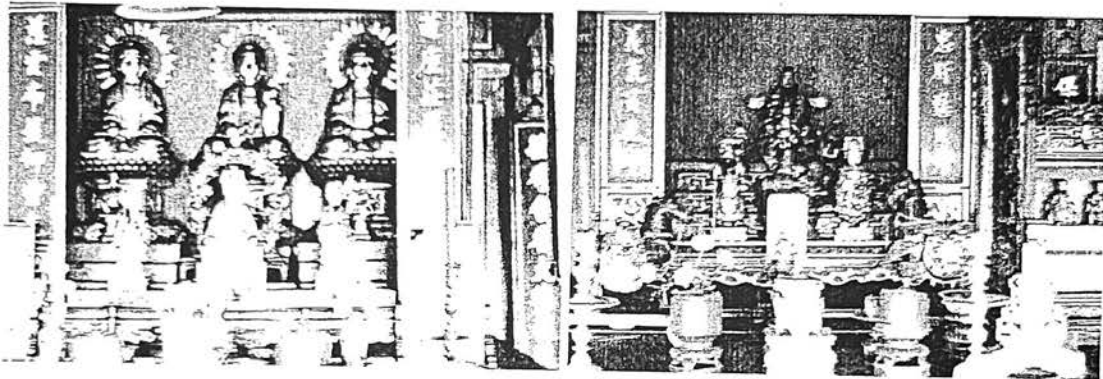




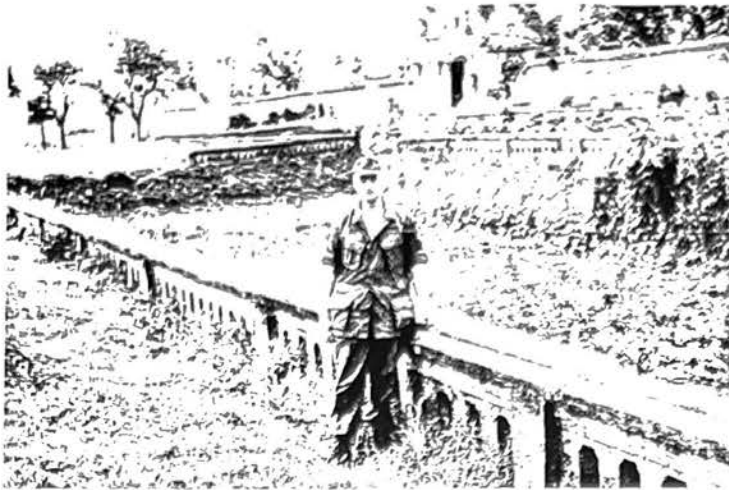
The King's
throne -
slightly out of
focus







The Perfume River in
Hué flooding over road



The Citadel
area of Huế

In I Corps, it was very difficult to have a true girlfriend since everything was off-limits and most Americans did not have a chance to see the Vietnamese people where they lived. Usually the only way to know any Vietnamese was to work with them or see them at the PX or concessions on the Base. As MP's we had the unique opportunity to work with some, meet them at the checkpoints and actually visit some at their homes. Some of us had Vietnamese friends and girlfriends that we actually just enjoyed being with when we could. I had such a girl friend who worked at the PX and she lived in Huế. We became very good friends and since I worked at the PX for a while, we saw each other every day. One Sunday we both were off from work for some reason and I was going to go to Hue to her house. I hitched a ride from one of our patrols with another MP who wanted to visit a girl in Huế. He was meeting someone for a different reason than me. We were dropped off in Huế near where we needed to be. We walked down a few streets liked we owned the place. Neither of use had a weapon since we weren't on duty and couldn't draw out a weapon from the arms room. So here we were, weaponless and walking through an off-limits city in broad daylight. Luckily no one stopped us and I found the house only to find that my girlfriend had gotten mixed up and went to Phu Bai to meet me. So I spent about 2 hours talking with her parents.

The guy I went with finished his business which was a couple of blocks away and met me on the street. We now needed a ride back to Phu Bai. We walked back to the main street where there was a 5-way intersection. An MP I knew was working traffic control there so I stopped to talk. After a few minutes, a Vietnamese civilian jeep stopped for the traffic and I recognized the driver as our barber, Terry. I waved and motioned for him to wait for me. We went over and I asked him for a ride back to the base (highly illegal). We got in the cramped jeep (Terry's sister was also in the other front seat) and we were off. When we got to the North gate checkpoint, Terry pulled in and we sort of got yelled at but since it was me, everyone just laughed and shook there heads and we continued on to our compound. When I saw her on Monday we laughed about missing each other.

Just to indicate how much clout I had (and didn't know it), my girlfriend was very outspoken and there were people in the PX who didn't want her there. I found out that a few hours after I left country, the PX fired her for no reason. They wouldn't do that while I was there.



Luu Ti My Hanh
(Annie)



These three were sisters. The one on the right (Phuoc) was supposed to marry an MP but there was too much red tape to allow that to happen. The girl on the left is Thy and the one in the middle is Tiep. They ran a laundry concession on the Army base.



Xuan



Thuy



Vy



Lán



Mỹ



Vinh



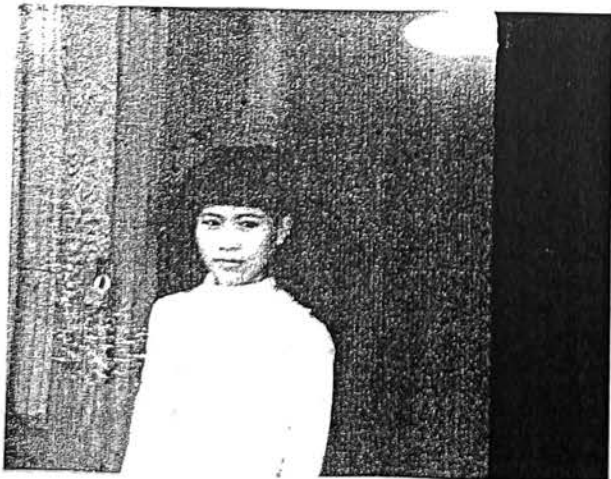
Trang



18 year old hooch
maid - don't
remember her name



Hoa



Hue



Trinh

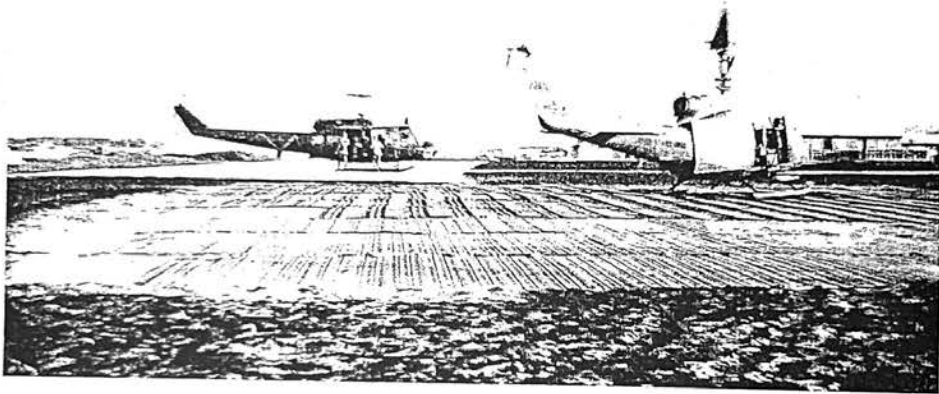
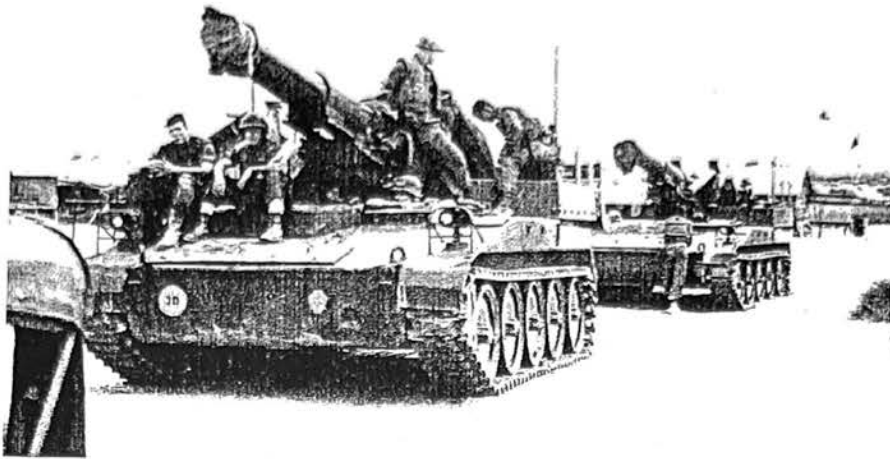
When I had 6 days left in country, I was on patrol in the South with a Sergeant and a new guy. We had a gun jeep. The new guy couldn't quite understand why the M60 machine gun was covered with a poncho (remember it took too long to clean the sand from it). He was very nervous and scared. I was always interested in new places to go. There was a mountain that jutted out into the South China Sea and there was a dirt road that ran along the base of the mountain. I had always seen the entrance to the road which was winding and went across railroad tracks but I didn't know anyone who had ever ventured down that road. So we decided to explore the area.

The road next to the mountain had trees and bushes grown over it so as to form a tunnel so you couldn't see it from the air. The other side of the road had houses scattered along the tree row. We kind of guessed that at the end of this road was a small village. As we started down the road a man who lived in one of the houses came running out to the road and was shouting "VC, VC, VC" and was pointing to the end of the road. I stopped the vehicle. He told us that there were Viet Cong in the village. It was decision time. It was possible that there actually were VC in the village or there were GIs in the village and they were not supposed to be there or this guy was just jerking us around. We deliberated for a few minutes. My partner didn't seem to care and the new guy was just scared to death. So I said "I only have 6 days left in Vietnam and I'm driving so we are leaving this place now". No one argued with that logic so we left not ever knowing what was really going on in that village. All the while, the new guy was sort of hugging the M60 machine gun. If I remember correctly, I think he took the poncho off of the gun. Below is a picture of that area.



After reading this document, you probably got the idea that all was fun and games in Vietnam. It wasn't. It wasn't the same kind of war for everyone that was there. I did leave out some information such as the constant incoming mortars and rockets that landed randomly, the threat of not knowing when you might be shot at or hit a mine in the road. The heat, smell, rain, dust and mud we had to get used to, running to a hot, dark bunker every time there was incoming rounds. Many of these thoughts became the everyday way of life that we came to accept as normal. My mother would ask me to write her about the real things that happened because she read newspaper accounts of the fighting. I would tell her nothing was going on because to me it was just another boring normal day. Actually once she sent me an article that stated that the base I was at was overrun by the enemy. I replied that I must have slept through it or it never happened. We filled sandbags in our "spare time" and we didn't really sleep well during the short time we had for sleep. Sometimes we couldn't take showers. The time spent in a combat zone is what you make it. You take calculated risks, take advantage of situations and do whatever is necessary to survive. For me, this was a learning experience – one that I will never forget. And I guess many would say that I was lucky since I was not in the heat of combat and maybe that is true but I like to think that I made the right choices in the things that I had control of. There were plenty of other things, besides being shot at, that could have made it difficult for me to survive.







Vietnamese MP (Quân Cảnh) shoulder patch



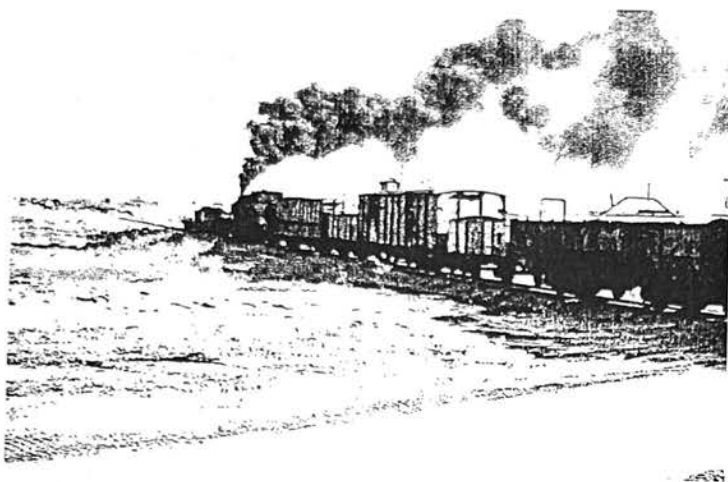
Vietnamese National
Police (Cañh Sat)
shoulder patch



QC (Quân Cảnh) and National
Policeman posing for picture. They
actually did fire their pistols at this
time. The National Police had
many different uniforms.



Corps
Headquarters



The trains were of French
manufacture and the gauge is
smaller in width than American
tracks



Gate shack at
South Gate –
Phu Bai



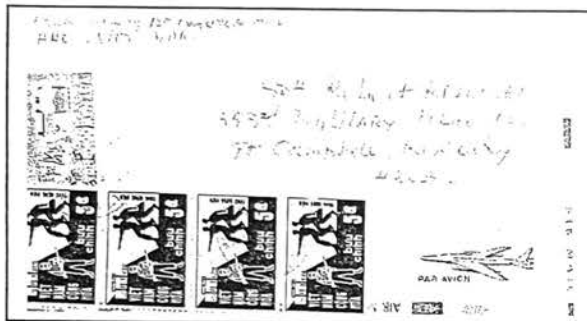
Scenery near Huế



Vietnamese money
(coins)

Vietnamese Christmas Card →

Envelope sent to me from Terry (Vietnamese barber) after I returned to the US.



Some of these are pure Vietnamese, others are combinations of American, French and Vietnamese and others are bastardizations of all the languages. These are not literal translations.

Du Ma Mi – Mother f***ker

Beaucoup DinkyDow – Very Crazy

Chao Co Dep – Hello Pretty Girl

SockMau – To hit or punch

Di Di Mau – Go Go Quickly (Get the hell out of here)

You are number 1 – You are the best

You are number ten thou – You are the worst

An Di Dow? – Where are you going?

Chao Co – Hello to a girl

Chao An – Hello to a man

Beaucoup Balap – Much Bullshit

18th MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE



VIETNAM

HEADQUARTERS
18TH MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE

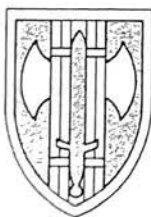


CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

IS AWARDED IN RECOGNITION OF MERITORIOUS PERFORMANCE OF DUTY TO
 WHO, DURING THE PERIOD _____ DISPLAYED AN EXCEPTIONAL
 DEGREE OF DEVOTION TO DUTY IN SUPPORT OF MILITARY POLICE OPERATIONS
 IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM.

DATE _____

18TH MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE



VIETNAM COMBAT CERTIFICATE

Let it hereby be known that _____ has faithfully served his country with the
 of the 18th Military Police Brigade in the Republic of Vietnam for the period _____
 He is deserving of the honors and respect afforded all Soldiers whose courageous deeds and sacrifices have pro-
 served the liberty of South Vietnam and advanced the cause of freedom throughout the world.

GAIN UNIT

The 18th Military Police Brigade, the largest and only combat tested MP brigade in the Corps' history, has been operational
 in Vietnam since September 1960. The force of over 5000 men is stationed throughout the Republic from the Mekong Delta to
 the First Corps Zone in the North. Elements of the Brigade perform diversified missions to include direct support to com-
 bat units and have taken part in many major combat operations, including Cedar Falls and Attleboro. In 1967, the Brigade
 was assigned its own tactical area of responsibility, a twenty square kilometer area near to the DMZ front. During the
 Tet hostilities, our men proved their capabilities by successfully meeting the first enemy thrust against major cities in
 Vietnam. Employed in a ground combat role, they fought in the streets and on the highways, identifying the enemy's efforts at
 every turn. Since that time, men of the Brigade have been involved, in increasingly greater numbers, working with Vietnamese
 National and Military Police. On occasion, they stand side by side, facing the common enemy, and confident in the others'
 ability to perform with the courage borne of professionalism. Thus, the outcome of Brigade operations now, and in the
 future, will be an extension of mutually supportive operations with police forces of the Free World and Vietnam. Reconna-
 itance that peace is encouraged by stability, and that law enforcement represents internal order, the members of the 18th Mil-
 itary Police Brigade will continue to work in concert with our allies to assist in bringing peace with justice to Vietnam.



State of New Jersey

Distinguished Service Medal

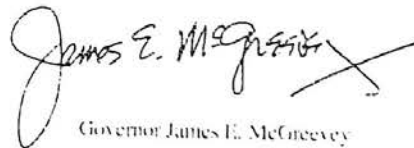


AWARDED TO

Sergeant Robert P. Kelemen

CITATION

The Governor of the State of New Jersey, James E. McGreevey, under the authority of 38A:15-2, New Jersey Revised Statutes, awards the Distinguished Service Medal to Sergeant Robert P. Kelemen for distinguished meritorious service in ground operations during the Vietnam War in the Southeast Asiatic Theater of Operations.


Governor James E. McGreevey



State of New Jersey



Vietnam

25th Anniversary Commemorative Medal



is awarded to

Sergeant Robert P. Kelemen

In recognition of your patriotic and dedicated service in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam Conflict (31 December 1960 to 7 May 1975).

The citizens of the State of New Jersey are forever grateful.

The Adjutant General



View of 504 MP Bn area



Satellite view of Vietnam in 2006

