



Claudette

by **Richard Shand**

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Claudette was the American name for a Vietnamese village where [Dusters](#) provided security at the north and south ends. Except for a few incoming mortar rounds on one occasion, Claudette was peaceful and provides me with my most idyllic memories, as the following letter suggests.

Presently I am a few miles south of Saigon in an area of swamp and abandoned rice paddies. We are supporting the 82nd Airborne in a village that has been held in the past by the French, the Special Forces, the ARVN's and now by the GI's. I enjoy this place. We mingle freely with the villagers who are Catholics and have various political affiliations with the Saigon government. However, they seem friendly enough and wash our clothes and help prepare our food.



Papa San

An elderly villager who had seen the Japanese and French come and go before the Americans.

(Claudette was not without its dangers. The village previously served as a base for the French in the first Indochina War and many old mines lay scattered in front of the abandoned fortifications on the outskirts of the village. On one of our visits a dog handler and his German shepherd were killed near our position, where the photograph above was taken.)

The 82nd has one company here and they help us pull guard as well as go out on ambush patrols. We in the Dusters are allowed to go swimming in the broad and deep canals where often in the early evening the Vietnamese would bath. *(The canals were*

part of the tidal basin of the Mekong Delta and contained a warm mixture of salt and fresh water. The young women would bath separately, and seeing them so natural and at ease somehow seemed perfectly fitting in this setting.) Also our squad acquired a TV before we left Bear Cat and radar has provided us with an unlimited supply of batteries so we can sit back when we want and watch at our leisure. The two most popular programs by the way are "Star Trek" and "Mission Impossible". The TV has made our hooch popular with the infantry in the evening and there is beginning to be some competition as to who will pull guard on our track. We also have plenty of cold beer and pop.

This place is certainly better than the Cambodian border where we almost were sent and besides I finally got a chance to see Saigon.

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