



Arrival

by **Richard Shand**

Duster Compound, February, 1969

Units I worked with in Vietnam included:

Tiger Battalion, Army of the Republic of Vietnam
The Royal Thai Army
The Australian Task Force
II Field Force
11th Armored Cav
1st Infantry Division (Big Red One)
25th Infantry Division
82nd Airborne Division
1st Air Cav

My letters home were edited versions of my experiences, purged of anything that might alarm my parents. They do, however, provide an accurate record of living conditions and non-combat related activities.

HHB 5/2 Arty
APO 96266 San Francisco
Feb. 16, 1968

Dear family:

At the present I am quartered several mile north-east of Ben Hoa near Saigon, awaiting shipment to an unknown destination. So far my luck has held out - several friends have been sent either to infantry units or to the north where most of the fighting is occurring. There is no chance of such a fate befalling me; however there is also little chance of getting on a gun. Though the 5/2 is the base camp for artillery, this category includes not only howitzers, which are my field, but other elements as well. These include [Dusters](#) which are 40mm pom pom guns mounted on tracks, Quad 50's which are four 50 caliber machine guns on a single mount on a deuce and a half, and searchlights mounted on jeeps. All work in close conjunction with the infantry out in the field as well as providing fire power for the base camps.

When I first saw a Duster I said what the heck is that? It was one of the ugliest things I had ever laid eyes on. The sergeant said I better get used to it because I was going to be on one of them. It's funny. The army spends two months training me on artillery and I end up on something I've never seen before in my life.

I am now in a very secure and safe base camp, far from any major action (*or so I thought.*) Due to the strong possibility of a strong Tet offensive by the VC, a 105 battery has moved in as well as several Vulcans (*standard M113 A1 armored personnel carriers each fitted with a new powered turret mounting a six-barrel General Electric Gatling-type gun capable of firing one thousand or three thousand 20 mm rounds a minute*), and nearby elements of the Big Red One, the First Infantry Division. There has never been a ground attack on the compound for the local forces command too much fire power and Huey gunships are based only a few miles away. Recently choppers hit a VC position near Ben Hoa, tallied up 47 bodies so the folks at

home can keep score, and captured several rocket launchers. Taking all this into consideration I am not losing any sleep from worry.

The poverty in this abused country is intense. Many Vietnamese live off the residue of the American occupation and have become dispossessed in their own land. Small figures crowd the rim of a garbage pit. An American cigarette hangs from a sullen adolescent mouth, old women stare idly into the distance, motor bikes stand burnished under the sun. There is little sound or movement while the Americans are present, kicking trash into the pit from a deuce and a half. The truck leaves and, far away through billowing clouds of dust, one can discern small figures clambering into the pit.

Though the 5/2 is a small unit it has practically all the facilities of a large post in the states, and many additional advantages available only in Vietnam. There are showers (though cold), fresh milk from California (though warm), an EM club with slot machines, a TV and plenty of beer, a swimming pool and movies every day (King Kong's Escape) and a very good selection of books in the day room.. Vietnamese women, mama sans, will do the laundry for a small fee and handle all the KP. ARVN soldiers are also stationed here but they are separated from the Americans with barbed wire because their wives live in camp with them. Around this perhaps 1/8 of a square mile complex are rows of barbed wire, concertina wire, mines, machine gun bunkers, towers and searchlights.

Duster Compound



View from the main guard tower



Submitted by Jason Crook

1/29 (Searchlight) August 68 - June 69, H 5/2 June 69 - June 70

For the past week I have been working on a bunker, digging and carrying sandbags in the tropical heat. All this effort was for the benefit of a visiting general the colonel wanted to impress. Next week the Vietnamese women will be off for the Tet holiday (*the Vietnamese new year which is like Christmas, New Years and the Fourth of July all rolled into one*) and I probably will have to pull KP. (*I didn't.*) The following week I will complete my in-country training and should finally have the good fortune to be sent into the field.

The climate here is a lot like Mexico - hot days and cool clear nights. The land is flat and dusty and covered with short jungle vegetation peculiar to the coastal lowlands. To the north lie French rubber plantations, and to the west along the highway to Hue (*Route 1*) are situated a large number of villages, ramshackle and crowded like Mexican towns. South is the extensive military buildup at Long Binh. This area is no different from any large army base in the States - paved roads, restaurants, traffic and nurses. I am very much impressed by the permanency of the American involvement in Vietnam..

Included with this letter is a twenty piaster bill, a military certificate (*MPC*) which is used in place of regular US currency by military personnel, and a Chu Hoi leaflet encouraging the NVA and VC to defect with a guarantee of safe passage.

My mailing address is temporarily:

PFC Richard N. Shand, US54403562

HHB 5/2 Arty

APO San Francisco, 96266

I was unable to find a military post office that would accept my Alien Address Report so I am sending it home to be turned in with the appropriate address change.

Love,
Rick

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