# A REMF* in Vietnam

## *Rear Echelon M&*^%& r F*^^*&r

By Greg Buzzell

*1966-1967: Before the Army*

I was born in Delavan, a rural town in southern Wisconsin. My father's family had a few wooded acres, not far from the lake where I grew up sailing. We lived in a house about 100 yards from my grandparent's Farm Camp. I lived in the house with my parents and two brothers, while my grandparents lived in the farmhouse next door. My parents divorced when I was twelve, so we moved in with my grandparents and they raised us until my father remarried.

By the time I graduated high school in 1966, my father's second marriage was not going well and none of us liked our father's second wife. So, I decided to follow in my older brother's footsteps and leave Delavan, though I kept in touch with my grandmother and turned to her for advice and counsel. I moved away to attend Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Illinois, where I majored in Theater with a minor in English. After a year in college, I decided I was tired of school and wanted to try something different. So, I went back home.

When I returned to Delavan, my father told me I had to go back to school, get a job or join the military. The military would not have been my first pick, but I had little choice since the Vietnam War was raging. I wasn't married with a child and I was no longer in college, which meant I was likely to be drafted anyway. I decided to enlist because then I could select my service or occupation. I'd have no control over where I ended up if I was drafted.

When I decided to enlist, my choices were four years in the Navy, four years in the Air Force, three years in the Army, or two years in the Marines. Though I wanted to get out of the service as quickly as possible, I did not want to be a Marine. The Marines had a reputation for being tough, disciplined, and very

strict. I wanted something that was tough, but would allow some freedom. The Navy might have been an obvious choice since my father was in the Navy during WWII, my brother Brian went into the Navy during Vietnam, and my brother Mick was a Merchant Marine. Plus, I grew up on the water and sailed all the time. But I did not want to spend four years in the service, which meant the Navy and Air Force were out. I made my decision based on length of time, so my compromise was the Army.

*1967-1968: Stateside in the Army*

I enlisted under the Army's delayed entry program in the summer of 1967. Delayed entry meant I didn't enter basic training (Basic) until November 1967, when I shipped off to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. My class was made up of men from the hills of Kentucky and Tennessee serving in the National Guard, which made Basic easier than being with regular Army recruits. I was surprised by how many of my peers lacked an education, but the military needed bodies for the war and had lowered their educational standards. I remember Drill Sergeants apologizing to us during written exams for having to dumb down the tests so that the all the recruits could pass. I was picked to be a platoon leader due to my education and high scores on tests. Platoon leader was an honorary position, but I soon learned that my level of education would be to my advantage when I served in Vietnam.


Since I was short for the military, they gave me the job of carrying the company banner when marching. That meant I marched about 100 feet in front of the rest of the unit. I didn't have to keep in step since I couldn't hear the Drill Sergeant's calling cadence. The downside to this assignment was that I didn't know the company had turned until it was too late. I had to look back to see where they were going, and, if they turned, I had to run to catch up.

I caught a break by carrying the company banner, but otherwise basic was tough. We never left our company area and were isolated for weeks at a time with no connection to the outside world. We rose before dawn and ran everywhere, seven days a week from sunup to sundown or longer. The only break was for church on Sunday. Otherwise, we were constantly busy doing calisthenics and physical training. Even while in line to eat, we either ran in place or went the length of a monkey bar contraption. If a recruit didn't make it, he went back and tried again and again until he got it. He didn't eat until he was finished. When we finally got to eat, we had to eat fast. We had only twenty minutes to get the

food, find a place to sit, eat it, and put it away. If we didn't finish, they'd throw the food away. I still eat fast today because of this experience.

We learned to march wearing full packs and gear and practiced hand-to-hand combat. I did not do well in the hand-to-hand combat because of my size, but I held my own with a rifle. We were issued M-14 rifles and lectured about the importance of caring for them. They taught us how the rifles worked, how to break them down and clean them, and, of course, how to shoot them. Our first time at the firing range, they randomly picked a recruit to try and hit the target. They hoped he would miss so they could lecture us about how hard it is to shoot accurately. They forgot most of these guys had been hunting and killing their dinners since they were boys. So, the first recruit got up, aimed, and hit a bull's eye. The Drill Instructor could not believe it. He said "That's a fluke, try it again." So, the guy shot again and got another bull's eye. The Sergeant gave up and asked how many of us could shoot. Most of us raised our hands. Even I had done a lot of hunting as a kid, so knew my way around a rifle. By the time Basic was over, I had earned the highest rating for shooting, an Expert Badge.

I also learned to use grenades. We stood in a pit on a concrete platform that was surrounded by an open area leading to a deeper pit. It was set up this way in case someone dropped a grenade -- the grenade would fall into the second pit and we could dive out before it blew up. This was a good set-up for me in particular, because grenades are heavy and my size made it hard for me to throw them far enough. But at least I never embarrassed myself like one of my classmates. One day, the guy next to me did the opposite of throwing his grenade: he pulled out the pin and threw it instead. The Sarge yelled, "Fire in

the hole!" and we all dove out of our pits and lay on the ground while the grenade went off. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

We lived in barracks from World War II during Basic. The barracks were two-story wooden buildings with about twenty guys sleeping in bunk beds on each floor. The buildings were drafty and heated by old kerosene heaters. Every night, someone had to pull "Fire Duty" to keep an eye on the heater and make sure the barracks did not burn down.

The winter of 1967 was exceptionally severe for Kentucky. It was so cold that the two-and-a-half ton truck drivers had to get up every two hours overnight to run their trucks; otherwise, they would not start in the morning. About four weeks into Basic, they sent us home for Christmas because of the cold. In fact, I was blessed to be home every Christmas during my entire three-year stint in the Army.

We were supposed to go on bivouac when we returned to Kentucky in January, but the weather made it too dangerous to spend a week in the wilderness living off the land. Besides, we wouldn't need to learn how to survive in cold in Vietnam. So, we didn't finish our training until the weather improved. Near the end, training included live-fire exercises. We had to crawl on our bellies under barbed wire while they shot live ammunition over our heads. The ground was wet, muddy, and disgusting, but we were not allowed to get our rifles dirty or get mud in the barrel. They checked the rifles at the end of the crawl to be sure.

We had another live exercise with tear gas. Ten of us stood in a closed room with our helmet liners on and gas masks at our sides. They closed the door and released the gas. On the Sergeant's mark, we were supposed to remove our

helmet liners and put on our gas masks. Once our masks were on, we had to give our name and serial number before leaving the room. But, they surprised us by going around and knocking our helmets from our hands when we removed them. They kicked our helmets away and we had to run around to retrieve them before we could put on our masks. Fortunately, I held onto my helmet and they didn't get it out of my hands. I got out of the room in a matter of seconds, but I still remember how painful it was to be exposed to tear gas for just a few moments.

After Basic, I was sent to Fort Rucker, Alabama. Like Fort Campbell, the barracks were from WWII, although they were not drafty. We each had our own area divided from the guy next to us. It was Army policy not to have curtains in barracks and we had no covering on our windows. We were situated on the main road through Fort Rucker, so everyone driving by could see us when we undressed. This wasn't the case for the female barracks, though.

Fort Rucker was the Army's helicopter training school for both Pilots and Crew Chiefs. I had picked helicopter maintenance school, hoping that I would not be assigned to a field unit in Vietnam. Soon after arriving at Fort Rucker in early 1968, we were called to formation where we lined up by company and platoon. During this formation, we were told the truth: we were being trained as helicopter mechanics, but we'd be sent to Vietnam to serve as Crew Chiefs and door gunners on choppers. This did not particularly appeal to me because the life expectancy of a door gunner in Vietnam was less then a month.

During the same formation, they called out a list of names, including mine. I went to the front of the formation and met with an officer. Because of my year in college and my administrative skills, the officer asked if I wanted to change my

Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) to Personnel Specialist 71H20. Not only was this a better occupation than door gunner, it ensured that I would stay in the states a little longer. I immediately agreed and was assigned to the personnel office at Fort Rucker, which was in a converted theater across the street from our barracks.

I had no experience in personnel, but received on-the-job training. I found out this was typical in the Army. My main function was processing 201 forms that tracked a soldier's entire enlistment. It was a four-page form containing all the information pertinent to a soldier's military service: everything he had done, his assignments, medals, etc. Soldiers took their 201s with them when they moved from place to place and the personnel office processed them.

At Fort Rucker, we assigned soldiers based on their orders and filled out proper forms for them. We then added new assignments and duties to their 201s. We then filed their forms in the office until there was some change in their status, like a promotion, or they left the base to go to another assignment. At that point, we processed them out according to their orders.

Life wasn't hard at Fort Rucker, but could be boring. We went to work every day and tried to find something to do when we got off. We had a movie theater on base, so we went to the movies often. I could drink on base, even though I was underage. Otherwise, I read a lot.

Sometimes we went off base if we had some money and knew someone with a car. We were about an hour from Panama City, Florida, so we often went there on weekends. They had the whitest sand beaches I had ever seen. Unfortunately, I couldn't drink in Panama City because it was off base and I

wasn't twenty-one. I took care of this problem, though, because I was in charge of issuing military IDs when soldiers arrived on post. We didn't verify ages when we issued IDs, and I know a lot of soldiers gave me the wrong birth dates. I just looked the other way and didn't ask questions. So, I issued myself an ID that said I was twenty-one.

My fake ID worked well for several months, until I was out in the barracks parking lot one night to work on my car. An MP came by and wanted to know what I was doing. He asked for my ID and I stupidly gave him my fake ID. He then wanted to see my driver's license to make sure I could operate the vehicle. It did not escape his attention that the birth dates didn't match. So, I was hauled off to the MP station and given a citation. Unfortunately, the citation was given to my commander so he could choose how to punish me. I was given an "Article 15"-- the written citation went in my record. My punishment was loss of some pay for couple of months, restriction to the company area for two weeks, and KP for a week. I peeled potatoes, served food, and did dishes. KP wasn't bad except you had to be there by 5:00 in the morning.

Besides going to Panama Beach, if we left base we went to the drive-in theater every once in a while and into town to shop occasionally. I quickly found out that Alabama was very different from Wisconsin, and it was an eye-opening experience. The grandparents who had raised me had been liberal, so I had not experienced much prejudice. My grandmother had friends of many races, religions, and nationalities. One of my best friends growing up was Hispanic. My school had many students of Mexican descent and a few black students, and they were treated like everyone else.

It was very different in Alabama. The military was integrated, but the South was not. Most of the black soldiers were treated well while on base, but their treatment outside the base was another thing. When I made a trip to the state capital of Montgomery, I noticed that there were separate drinking fountains and bathrooms for blacks. I had never experienced this before and was shocked.

I saw more racism when I became the manager of a rock n' roll band that had formed on the base. I got the job because I had managed a band in college. As manager, I got the band a gig at the Enterprise High School Prom. When meeting with the school principal, I learned that we would be playing for the "whites only" prom. The black students had to hold their own prom. I knew it wasn't right, but we needed the money and there was no point in protesting, so we did the prom anyway.

Later, the band had a chance to play at an Army music contest at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. We took an Army bus to get there, which was about a day's drive. One of the bands on the bus with us was Latino. They had dark skin, but were not black. Whenever the bus stopped, the restaurant or store would not serve the Latinos, so we could only stop in certain places.

One of the reasons racism held strong was that George Wallace was the Governor of Alabama during the 1960s. The white people of Alabama worshipped the Wallaces because they were true believers in segregation. George Wallace's first term ended in 1966, and he couldn't run again because of a law that did not allow Alabama governors to serve two consecutive terms. So, his wife ran instead so he could control the government through her. She won in

1966 but died in 1968. This didn't mean anything to the soldiers on base, but we had a lot of civilians working for us. None of them came to work for the better part of a week because the state closed the government to honor her. I remember thinking that, for Alabama, this death and funeral were probably bigger than JFK's.

Race was a theme throughout my time at Fort Rucker, because Martin Luther King was assassinated while I was there. There were a lot of riots around the country and all soldiers at Fort Rucker were assigned to riot duty. We went through intensive riot training for several weeks and were placed on twenty-four hour alert. We were prepared to go to Washington, DC, if more troops were needed to quell the riots. Fortunately, the riots calmed down before they needed us.

When I arrived at Fort Rucker, I knew it would only be a matter of time before I was sent to Vietnam. In late 1968, I received orders that I would ship out to Vietnam in January of 1969, after a thirty-day break for Christmas. I left for Vietnam the day before the Super Bowl. The New York Jets upset the Baltimore Colts to win.

*1969: An Khe, Vietnam*

I flew to Vietnam by commercial airline rather than military transport. The flight was chartered, however, so the plane was full of soldiers. I was scared because I had never been that far away from home and felt lonely because I didn't know anyone on the flight. We didn't travel as a unit because the units already were in Vietnam. The soldiers on my plane would be assigned all over the country based on each unit's needs.

Vietnam-era planes could not go as far as modern ones without refueling, so we had to stop on the way. I don't remember where my first flight stopped for refueling, but on flights I took back and forth later I stopped in Alaska, Hawaii, and Guam. Sometimes they let us off the plane but we had to stay in our area; other times, we couldn't even go into the terminal. Because of refueling, distance, and time zones, the flight was over twenty-four hours long. Everyone on the flight was nervous and scared, so it was a quiet journey. We didn't have iPods, computers, or portable DVD players, so most of us read or slept the whole time.

I arrived in Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, on January 13, 1969. Bien Hoa was a sprawling military base north of Saigon and one of the Army's main entrance and departure points. It functioned as a huge processing center, so most soldiers were there for less than 48 hours. They came in, got their assignments, and shipped out across Vietnam.

The first thing I noticed when stepping off the plane was the ungodly heat and humidity. I also remember the awful smell of the country – the smell of rotting things. There was very little plumbing in Vietnam, so the air had a sewage smell, mixed with the smell of animals. The base was in a flatland area without many trees, so it was dusty and dirty.

From the airport, we were put on a bus headed for temporary barracks for incoming and outgoing soldiers. It was a school bus painted military green with wire netting over the windows. When I asked the driver why, he informed me that the wire was there to keep the locals from throwing grenades into the bus. "Welcome to Vietnam," he said.

I was issued jungle fatigues, boots and a helmet. That was my gear the whole time I served in Vietnam, though we were allowed to keep some civilian clothes on our own. I also initially had an M-14 rifle because only field units got M-16s. We were issued M-16s after a few months, though.

I stayed in the replacement barracks for only two days while they processed and assigned me. From Bien Hoa I was sent to Nha Trang, where I met with a Captain looking for a Personnel Specialist for his unit in An Khe. I was assigned to his unit after a short interview and was on the next flight out to An Khe without even staying overnight in Nha Trang.

My assignment was to the 1st Field Force Headquarters Company of the 4th Battalion, 60th Artillery, part of the Dusters and Quads. It was an air defense artillery unit that provided convoy security, perimeter defense, and fire support for maneuver operations. Each Duster battery had two firing platoons, both of which could be employed independently, and six machine-gun batteries. Dusters and Quads were independent and assigned to various Army and Marine units around the country. These battalions had over a thousand men, but the only time we saw any of our Dusters or Quads in An Khe was for processing their arrival, reassignment, or sending them home. Most men were in our hands for less than forty-eight hours.

I arrived in An Khe less than three days after arriving in Vietnam. An Khe was in Vietnam's central highlands -- hills that range from 1500 to 2500 feet high. It was a remote area, at least 300 miles north of Saigon and an hour west of the coastal city of Qui Nhon. Although the jungle was thicker than around the Saigon area, it was still dusty and dirty. The weather was hot and muggy, except

during winter. In winter, it could be forty degrees in the morning and 100 degrees by noon. While most of the country had monsoons in winter, we just had periods of torrential down pours. We could count on it pouring at 5:00 pm each day.


**Greg in Full Combat Gear**

An Khe was a poor village where most homes were made from sheet metal and other scraps. No one had plumbing and the streets were dirt, except for the main east-west road, QL 19, from Qui Nhon to Pleiku. I did not spend much time in the village because it was too dirty and off-limits to our unit.

Our base camp was Camp Radcliffe, just north of An Khe. I was assigned to the Headquarters Company, which was about 100 support troops needed to keep a division going. There were several other units assigned to Camp Radcliffe besides us, but we had our own office, motor pool, pay system, supplies, etc. We

also had temporary barracks in the company area, for those soldiers in transit to an assigned Duster or Quad unit.

The First Calvary Division between 1965 and 1967 built Camp Radcliffe; though they were gone by the time we arrived. The base was so large that it had a hill inside the perimeter. The hill, called Hong Kong, was 500 to 1000 feet higher then the rest of the base with a searchlight unit and a radar unit atop it. The Americans occupied the bottom and top of Hong Kong, but the Viet Cong (VC) held everything in-between. So, we never tried to go up to the top of the mountain after dark. The Americans spent many days shelling the sides of the mountain trying to knock out the VC.

**Camp Radcliffe With Hong Kong Mountain In Background**

Not only did the VC occupy Hong Kong, the base was so big that they often snuck in to live with us. Due to Camp Radcliffe's size, there was a lot of empty area without any units assigned to it. Probably a third of the base was abandoned

in 1969 and the VC occupied many of the empty barracks on the abandoned part of the base, even though the base was "secure." So, units made a sweep of the base about every six months to clear empty areas. I was involved in one of these sweeps and found recently used fires in the barracks, left over garbage, food, etc. The VC had cleared out because they knew we were coming, but they would be back in a few weeks.

The VC got in despite Camp Radcliffe being bounded by a buffer area we called the "Green Line." It consisted of several rows of concertina wire, then fifty meters of open area with Claymore Mines in it. When set off, Claymores throw over 700 ball bearings in a sixty-degree spread at the enemy, killing anything within fifty meters of the front of the mine. They only fire in the direction they are pointed, which meant we pointed them at the jungle. After the minefield, there was another few rows of concertina wire, and then guardhouses and bunkers. There was a bunker about every 100 meters around the Green Line.

The Green Line needed to be mowed every few months to keep the jungle out of the wire. In order to do this, the Claymore mines needed to be removed. One day, we got the assignment of clearing the mines. I hadn't been trained on Claymores, so I got "on-the-job" training again. We disconnected the trigger device so that the Claymores could not be set off accidentally. Then we disabled and removed the anti-tampering explosives (booby traps). I had to lay down behind the Claymore, find the booby trap and carefully insert the pin back into the explosive. This disabled the device so it could be removed. It was very nerve-wracking duty, so, fortunately, a different unit had to put them back when the mowing was done.

Our company area was just outside the main camp near the Green Line. Behind our company area was an airfield for helicopters and other military aircraft that we called the Golf Course. The helicopter noise was constant because of our proximity to the Golf Course. Gunfire was constant, too; there always was small arms fire, artillery fire, or mortars thundering in the distance. We had a battery of artillery just down the road from us that often fired over our area. We learned to live with the noise and to distinguish what kind of fire was meant for us, and what could be ignored. We even learned to sleep through it.

**Barracks**

We slept and lived together in groups of ten in barracks near our offices. The barracks consisted of a concrete floor with wood siding about half way up the walls. Then screen material continued to the roof that allowed a little air to flow through. We came in and out through screen doors at each end of the building. Each of us had a bunk with mosquito netting over it, a footlocker, and a metal

locker. All belongings went into the locker and the footlocker. The noise and concussion from the artillery firing often would move the lockers.

**Inside of Barracks**

All the buildings in the company area, including offices, were the same as the barracks, except for their size and layout. The only different building was the officer's club, which was made from brick and wood and had air conditioning. Vietnamese locals cleaned all the buildings and did our laundry on a regular basis. We also did not have to perform KP, since they hired local Vietnamese to do this.

While we had a roof over our heads, we had no running water and no toilets. They buried several fifty-five gallon drums in the ground all around the company area in which we urinated. For a bowel movement, they had a building with outhouse-type seats in it. Below the seats were the bottom quarters of fifty-five gallon drums with diesel fuel in them. Vietnamese helpers would pull these

drums out and burn the waste every day, then put more diesel fuel back into the drums.

Since we had no running water, drinking water hung in bags from trees around the company area. To shave each day, if I didn't shave in the shower, I filled my helmet with water from one of the bags. I would lather up with cold water if I was lucky enough to have shaving cream. I'd use soap for lather if I did not have cream. I had to dry shave if I was out of both shaving cream and soap.

Though there was no running water, we had hot water for showers brought in by truck each day. The water filled a tank that was heated by a steam boiler. I was taking a shower once when someone yelled, "Get out of the shower, she's going to blow!" I ran out wearing only my towel, just as the steam boiler blew up. No one was hurt, but it damaged the shower area and destroyed the water heater and tank. We had to go several weeks without hot water and used the officer's showers. They were not happy about that.

A normal day in An Khe started with getting up early, having a formation, and going to breakfast. Most meals came with no spoons because, apparently, the Vietnamese who helped in the kitchen kept stealing them. We had hot meals most days, but it was Army food with little taste. We had powdered eggs in the morning, powdered milk, and nearly tasteless meat. We didn't complain, though, since the alternative was C-Rations. We were supposed to keep C-Rations for emergencies. We sometimes used C-rations for snacks, though, and especially enjoyed the cigarettes and the chocolate.

After breakfast, I was in the office by 7 am. About a half dozen of us worked there, and the space was similar to the barracks, except it had desks

instead of beds. The Sergeant's desk was at the entrance with our officer's "office" across from him. The office had Plexiglas windows and a door. There was a storage area in the back and a bunker for defending the company area since we were on the road right across from the Green Line. Except for eating lunch, I was in the office until at least 5:00 or 6:00 pm, six days a week. I had Sundays off, unless there was a heavy influx of replacements. Unfortunately, the war did not stop because it was Sunday.

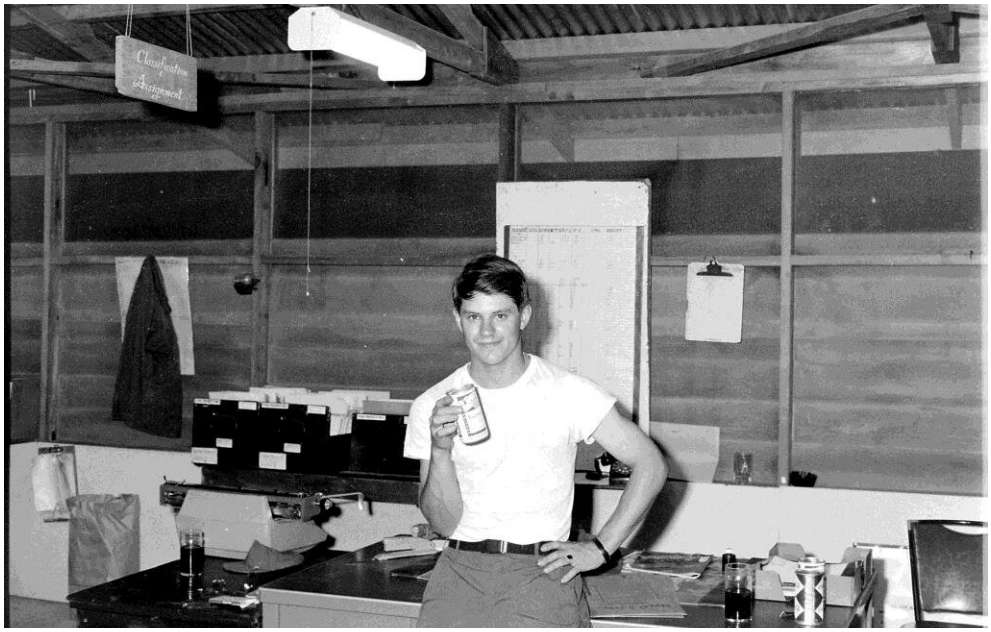

**Greg's Work Area**

I took care of the unit's 201 personnel records and screened replacements that came to the Dusters. I reassigned them to other duties as needed. The Army had a bad habit of not using an individual's skills, especially when it came to draftees. Draftees were assigned to the job for which the Army needed the most

bodies, regardless of the soldier's civilian skills. So, many of the people working in my office were trained in artillery or gunnery. I was the exception to the rule because I actually worked in my MOS.

Though I worked a lot, it could get boring when I got off. The Army didn't provide much to do during downtimes, which is why many GIs occupied their time with drugs and alcohol. I did a lot of drinking myself, but also read a lot of books. I finished most of the Tolkien books, including The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings trilogy.

When I wasn't reading, I was writing letters to Arlene, my mom, my dad, and my grandparents. Mail from home usually arrived about ten days after it was mailed, and I looked forward to every letter I received. I also looked forward to my hometown newspaper "The Delavan Enterprise" arriving, even though it could be up to a month old. Even better, someone occasionally sent cookies that we all enjoyed. When I wasn't waiting for packages from home, I spent a lot of time talking about home with the other guys.



**Greg Relaxing**

Every few months we had the opportunity to call home using MARS operators, but it wasn't the same as being there. In place of calls, Arlene and I each got a small tape recorder. Sometimes, I sent her tapes instead of letters and she replied the same way. I quickly found out that my tapes were disconcerting to Arlene because she could hear gunfire in the background. I was used to it by then and didn't really hear it anymore. After that, I'd always start the tape by telling Arlene that the firing was not for us. I tried to find private places to cut the tapes, which was hard. I often did it in my office after work when no one was around. Inevitably, someone would barge in and yell, "We're getting hit!" That didn't go over well with Arlene.

In the evenings, we went to the enlisted man's club to have a few drinks. We also had entertainment. There was a movie on an outdoor screen once a week. I was chosen to run the projector, because I was the only one in the company that had done it before. Every so often during the movies, the First Sergeant would throw a tear gas grenade into the outdoor theater area to see what we would do. We ran to our barracks to get our gas masks and put them on. After the first time he did this, we got smart and brought our gas masks with us. Then they quit doing it because it wasn't fun for them anymore.

Besides movies, sometimes they brought in a Filipino Band to entertain us with the latest hits from home. Occasionally, we got together as an office to have a small party or watch TV and listen to the radio. I remember one time "Donut Dollies", young American civilian women, came by to cheer us up. They also brought donuts with them, hence the name "Donut Dollies". These ladies would travel around Vietnam in rear areas, stop and see the guys just to bring them

some remembrances from home. Once in country, the only women you saw were Vietnamese women, unless you were injured, and sent to the Hospital. I can remember how great it was to spend a few hours with some Young American Women.

**Greg with Donut Dolly**

There were many nights that I didn't have time for reading, writing, or entertainment, however. All units pulled guard duty each night to ensure security around our company area. We had a tree in the compound that had a guard station built in it about thirty-to-fifty feet off the ground. We also had some foxholes around the camp with M-60 machine guns and night vision scopes. These posts were manned every night, but the most important post was the motor pool, which was our first line of defense. All that separated us from the enemy was the Green Line. I spent many nights in the motor pool, or in one of the other guard positions, where it either was difficult to stay awake or very

stressful because there was a lot of firing going on. It also was cold in the winter because we didn't have any heavy clothing.


We pulled guard duty not only in our own company area, but also were assigned on a rotating basis to duty in bunkers around the perimeter of the base. The bunkers had bunks, slits for rifles, and controls for the Claymore mines buried in the grass around the Green Line. Two of us were assigned to this duty, and we slept in shifts through the night – two hours on, two hours off. There was no light, so we used all our senses and waited silently. Every two hours or so, everyone in the bunkers facing away from An Khe village fired his weapon for a few minutes, just to let the VC know we were awake.

Guard duty was different in bunkers facing the village. We actually sat outside in a small hole in the bunker. We were only feet away from the concertina wire, down so low that only the tops of our heads showed. They used

this set-up because they assumed an attack on our base would come from the village side. The village side had a stream through the Green Line which made it easier for the VC to infiltrate and harder for us to attack. Plus, we were not allowed to fire at or into the Village. We could fire only if there was someone actually in the wire of the Green Line. The VC knew this, so they would shoot at us all night and we couldn't shoot back. They didn't even try to hide their positions, so we saw their muzzle flashes. Sometimes the rounds actually hit the bunker. As far as I know, no one was actually killed by this tactic, but it did make guard duty stressful.

Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Soldiers served guard duty with us, although they were unreliable. We also had Montagnard – the indigenous people of the Central Highlands – with us. They were not ethnic Vietnamese, but they were excellent soldiers. One night, we had an ARVN solider with us on guard duty when we were ready to fire on the Green Line. I still had my M-14, but it had a full automatic mode. I decided to see what happened if I fired it in full auto mode, since most M-14s didn't have it. I quickly found out why. When I let it rip, I lost control and the rifle went all over the place. By the time I was done, I looked to my right and the ARVN solder was nowhere to be found. We never saw him again. From then on, I kept my rifle in semi-automatic mode.

If we were not on guard duty at night, we could be assigned to Company Quarters (CQ). The man on CQ had to stay in the company office all night in case something happened that required immediate action. This person also had to get the First Sergeant up in the morning, so he could get the day going. All of us pulled CQ at one time or other.

We quickly learned why everyone was so vigilant about standing guard duty and CQ, because the VC attacked every few weeks. We knew it was a major attack when the Army flew in a "Spooky" or "Puff the Magic Dragon." Around An Khe, these were C-47s outfitted with mini-guns, one of the most serious weapons used during the Vietnam War. They could fire up to 6,000 rounds per minute; if they shot into a football field, they could land a round in every square foot of the field. They shot in two-second bursts and it sounded like someone was farting. They lit up the sky with tracer rounds as they circled close to the ground. We were both glad and worried to see the gun ships. We were glad because the battle would not last as long, but worried because we knew the base was under heavy attack.

Regardless of a soldier's MOS, he is an infantryman first so each unit had an area to protect when we were hit. Our company protected an open area of about 100 meters between the Green line and our company. Fortunately, most attacks were against the Golf Course, so we weren't directly involved; still, the mortars from the VC went over our heads.

The guys in my office had charge of the .50-caliber during attacks because they were trained in gunnery. It was set up in the bunker just outside our office and they got it ready pretty fast when we were hit. I was not involved, because I was never trained on the weapon. I got to fire a .50-caliber once, however, and it was quite an experience. It's so powerful that it can cut down trees and a human cannot survive being hit by one. A Quad 50, the Quads in Dusters and Quads, was a two-and-a-half ton truck with four of those .50 calibers mounted on it.

I was a floater assigned to duties as needed during attacks. During one attack, I was assigned to the Green Line to provide protection and cover. I was handed an M-79 Grenade Launcher when I arrived. The Sarge said to me, "You're our grenade launcher man for the night." I told him, "I've never been trained on one of these." He responded, "It breaks apart like a shotgun. The shell goes in here. Close it up and shoot it from your hip. After the first shot, see where it lands and then adjust." That was my on-the-job training on the M-79 Grande Launcher. Fortunately, I did not need to use it.

If I had no assignment, I went to the bunker next to the barracks to await the all clear. One person's job when in the bunker was to stand guard at the door to make sure the VC did not throw in a satchel charge. Many times we ended up in the bunker in our underwear during attacks at night. A siren went off and we jumped out of bed, yanked our boots on, and grabbed our flak jackets, weapons, ammo, and helmets. We got out of the barracks ASAP because we didn't want to be there if Sappers came through and tossed explosive charges into the barracks.

I remember one night when we did not hear the siren. We just heard the incoming rounds, which was not a good sign. We were taught to deal with this by grabbing our mattresses and rolling out of bed with them on top of us. By the time I rolled to the floor and covered myself, I heard the shrapnel hitting the barracks. At the first lull, I grabbed my gear and headed for the bunker.

The first round of the attack landed in the motor pool where the guard normally stands. Guard duty ended at 5:00 am and the shelling happened about 5:10 am, so fortunately he had just gotten off duty. The round destroyed the entire dispatch shack and put shrapnel into many of the vehicles in the motor

pool and barracks in the company area. The shelling moved away from our area into other areas and then out to the Green Line. Fortunately no one was injured, but there was a lot of damaged equipment. Later we learned that the shelling came from an American fire mission. Essentially, we had shelled ourselves.

The shelling wasn't the only friendly fire incident I faced. I had another, more personal, incident with a soldier in our unit. Alcohol was a common problem due to the boredom and stress, and this solider had too much one night. He was getting ready for guard duty when I walked into the office. His M-16 was loaded and ready except for closing the bolt. He was very upset at being away from home, going on guard duty, and he also thought he was being persecuted for being Italian. He aimed the M-16 at me and said he was going to kill me.

I focused on keeping him from closing that bolt – he couldn't fire as long as it was open. There were others in the office with me and we talked him out of killing me. We finally got the rifle away from him and unloaded it. We told him to get out and get on guard duty since we knew he had been drinking and all of us were stressed. We obviously weren't well guarded that night, but we tried to let the incident pass. Someone turned him in to the Company Commander, though, and I had to make a report the next morning. I don't know what happened to him, but he was gone soon after.

I don't think the threat to me was personal – I had been in the wrong place at the wrong time. But I knew of other times when soldiers planned to kill each other, particularly officers. They called it "fragging," killing one of your own with a fragmentation grenade. I had heard of it before arriving in An Khe, and after a week or two I overheard several of the guys talking about fragging the outgoing

First Sergeant. Apparently, he was not well liked and had made numerous enemies among the enlisted men. The men had set a Claymore under the Sergeant's bunk, with the trigger device set beneath the mattress so it would go off when he sat on it. Luckily, the Sergeant saw the Claymore under his bunk and was able to disarm it. He didn't leave his room from then until he shipped out. He wasn't killed, but had gotten the message.

One weekend, the military picked An Khe for a firepower show because of our Dusters and Quads. The show was for some generals, but we got to observe the display from the Green Line. They brought in every type of firepower we had to attack a hill. They started with aircraft, then artillery, then gun ships, then tanks, then Dusters and Quads, and, finally, the infantry. All these weapons let loose on this hill for about an hour. The Quad fifties cut trees down with their fire and the Dusters uprooted them. The hill was gone by the time they were done. If I were the enemy, I would never want to be up against this type of firepower.

**Quad 50 with Shower Boiler in Background**

Life on base was boring and stressful, repetitive and surprising. Every few months or so, I was able to leave because I had a license to operate military vehicles. I was the driver for trips to Qui Nhon to get supplies or anything else the unit needed. Qui Nhon was about 60 miles from An Khe, but it could take two or three hours to get there. The trip took us through the An Khe pass, down to the lowlands to the coast. The road was paved but dangerous because the VC controlled the countryside. There was nothing between An Khe and Qui Nhon except some pump stations, firebases, and a Republic of Korea (ROK) compound. We liked having the ROK compound along the pass because the VC did not like fighting them, which made the trip a little safer.

We did not leave in a convoy, but we usually hooked up with one on the way down or up the pass. Convoy travel was safer, but slower. The traffic slowed down most when it reached what we called the Hairpin Turn. The vehicles actually turned back on themselves to get around the corner. Speeds picked up once through the pass and into the flat lands where we encountered villages.

**Fire Support Base**

The Hairpin on QL 19

There was a gas line along the side of the road. Frequently, the VC destroyed the line at night and then the Army repaired it during the day. There also were many vehicles along the road that had been destroyed by firefights or landmines. The VC would mine the road one day, so we would drive on the shoulder. The next day they would mine the shoulder. So, the Americans were clearing the road and shoulder of mines all the time. Luckily, I never hit one.

Once, we ran into a stopped convoy and a roadblock on our way out of An Khe. There was a firefight about 100 meters off the road to our right. The jungle in the highlands was more open than in other parts of Vietnam, so we saw tanks and soldiers chasing VC. Though we were heavily armed, we grabbed our cameras instead of our weapons and shot pictures of the firefight. After the fight was over, we continued to Qui Nhon.

Qui Nhon was a coastal city and a main supply point for bases in the central highlands because of its accessible harbor. We took bathing suits with us, because they had some nice beaches there and we used the supply trips as an excuse to get some rest and relaxation. Qui Nhon was safe, so it was nice to take some time and enjoy ourselves.

We stayed too long on one visit, however, and didn't head back to An Khe until late in the day. There was a bridge to cross before heading into the pass and it closed at 5:00 pm. If we didn't get across that bridge before it closed, we'd have to stay in Qui Nhon and we'd be considered AWOL. So, we raced back as fast as the vehicle would go. Most military vehicles didn't go much faster than sixty miles-per-hour and ours was loaded down with supplies and four men. Everyone was off the road because traveling after 5:00 wasn't recommended. We came through the last village before the bridge and a machine gun opened fire. Everything went into slow motion but we kept going. I waited for the rounds to hit us, but nothing happened. We rolled on, thankful we hadn't been hit. We made the bridge on time and got back to An Khe safely before dark.

I made trips out of An Khe both by jeep and plane. Traveling by air in Vietnam could be a challenge. If I could get on a plane, I often wouldn't know

where I'd have to stop or even how I'd get to my final destination. At An Khe, I might have to wait a day or two for a flight to arrive when one was arranged for me. Other times, I hopped aboard the next supply plane, hoping to get to a main base at some point. When I arrived at an airport, I checked in and told them where I was headed. They would then let me know what flight might get me close to my final destination. Then I might have to wait in the airport for two days to find a plane that was going my direction and could take me.

From that point, I never wanted to leave the airport because the plane I needed could show up any time. I'd have to sleep on the floor at the airport and scrounge for food. That was tough because the waiting rooms usually consisted of a wood building with a concrete floor, some chairs, and little else. Most of them did not even have bathrooms. The conditions were better at major airports, but many that I traveled through were in remote parts of the country.

An Khe itself had two landing strips: one was the Golf Course and the other was a metal, makeshift strip that they dropped into place on the ground across the base just inside the Green Line. It was unprotected and remote with no tower and no cover. This was the strip I had to use when traveling, of course.

The first time I used it, I was delivering a soldier's records to the morgue in Saigon. He had just been killed and his body arrived at the morgue before his records. I was transported to the landing strip in a jeep. They let me off and I waited for my plane out in the open all-alone. Finally, I heard a C-130 coming. It landed and dropped its rear-loading gate. It was dangerous for planes to stay on the ground for fear they'd be shot up, so it never stopped moving. As the plane turned around, I ran toward it, lugging my pack and gear. I had one shot at

jumping onto the loading ramp of the moving plane. They took off as soon as I jumped on. If I had been dropped off late or hadn't jumped on quickly enough, they would not have waited for me. The inside of the plane was a big cargo hold full of lashed down cargo. I sat in a canvas sitting area along its side. There were no seat belts or other amenities. The cargo door was left open, so it was a noisy, rough ride.

Australians rather than Americans piloted the C-130. We had to stop at some firebases on the way to Saigon. As we approached a firebase, the pilot made a low level pass to see if he was going to draw any fire. I could see out the window that the firebase was busy, with a lot of choppers and men running around. The C-130 didn't draw any fire, so the pilot stood the plane almost vertically on its right wing and turned it around. We landed but never stopped to unload cargo. Instead, the cargo master just pushed things out the back while we were taxiing and turning to take off again.

I delivered the records to the morgue at Tan Son Nhut and was in Saigon for about twenty-four hours before I had to return to An Khe. I had the day to see

Saigon and slept in replacement barracks for the night.

Saigon was a nice break from An Khe because it was like an American city, except for how disorganized everything seemed to be. There were a lot people and a lot of traffic, and no order to either of them. It was dirty and smelly like the rest of Vietnam and had inadequate plumbing. I also was struck by the contrast between traditional Vietnamese culture and the modern Vietnamese. Their dress and styles were totally different – sometimes even in the same family.

Life for soldiers in Saigon also was a contrast. Most soldiers there were unarmed or simply had side arms. I was more heavily armed then most of the soldiers since I was from the field. That soon would change, however.

*1969-1970: Vung Tau, Vietnam*

In October of 1969, the Army was starting an Armed Forces Language School (AFLS) in Vung Tau to teach South Vietnamese soldiers how to speak English. The Army decided it needed its own school even though there were several in Vietnam run by the Navy and Air Force. The Navy and Air Force Schools had teachers who worked in their MOS – they were trained to teach English. The Army didn't have this MOS and knew it would take too long to train soldiers in the states, so again they chose on-the-job training. They sent dispatches across Vietnam looking for qualified individuals to start this unit. The requirements were that a solider have at least some college and be a Spec 5 or Sergeant. I fit these requirements and was asked if I wanted to transfer to Vung Tau to help get the school started.

When the offer came through, I was "getting short." That meant I had less than 90 days and a wakeup before I would be out of 'Nam'. I thought that the

assignment would be an adventure to finish off my time before leaving in January of 1970; plus, I had heard that Vung Tau was good duty and was safe. I took the job, but remained a part of HHC 4/60 Artillery, because my duty with AFLS was considered temporary. I was sad to leave my friends in An Khe, but was excited for a new opportunity. I was also looking forward to not getting shot at anymore.


**Vung Tau**

I flew from An Khe to Vung Tau in November 1969. Vung Tau is on a sandy peninsula about two hours south of Saigon, bordered on the east by the South China Sea and the west by the Mekong Delta. The Mekong Delta was swampy with a lot of small streams in it. We were connected to the mainland by a small causeway that had a paved road on it.

Vung Tau had a population of about 50,000, so it was metropolitan by Vietnamese standards. The city was a contrast in cultures: the inner city was very poor but along the coast and up in the hills there was wealth. The government of Vietnam had some houses for dignitaries in the hills along the

coast, where the President of Vietnam also had a residence. Just like Saigon, the traffic and people seemed chaotic. There were a lot of damaged buildings in the city from either a previous war or our war. There were shrines on the hills surrounding Vung Tau: one shrine for Buddhism and one for Catholicism. A lot of Vietnamese traveled to these shrines.

Vung Tau served as the in-country rest and relaxation center for our military in Vietnam. It also was the location of the Australian military headquarters. In fact, I shopped at the Australian PX because they had better products and better prices than ours.

We turned over our weapons in Vung Tau because we didn't need them. This didn't mean they weren't available; we just didn't carry them with us because it was a neutral area since Vung Tau served as the rest and relaxation center for the VC, too. So, Vietcong soldiers walked around downtown wearing their uniforms, which looked like black pajamas. We weren't armed, and they weren't armed, and each side left the other alone.


**Viet Cong in black Pajamas**

There was no existing AFLS unit in Vung Tau, so we had to create one. The administrative branch of the AFLS unit consisted of an Officer, a First Sergeant, and me, the Company Clerk. Then there were teachers and two civilian advisers assigned to us. We didn't all arrive at the same time, so we hung around in some temporary housing for a few days until everyone was there. Then, we were assigned to a permanent area right next to the airport.

Once situated, we set up our unit, which was a challenge because we weren't officially part of the AFLS. That meant we had to find our own supplies.

We traded, begged, borrowed or stole all the things we needed to start the company. This included cots, lockers, vehicles, etc.

The barracks were the same as those in An Khe, with the concrete floor, the siding half way up, and screen the rest of the way. They were right on the tarmac of the airport, so we had C-123 transports, C-130 transports, and helicopters about fifty feet from us. Not only was it noisy, but sand blew into everything whenever the planes started up.

**Vung Tau Airport**

Even so, the barracks were much nicer than those in An Khe. We had running water and flush toilets, which I didn't know how much I missed. The barracks were split up into rooms, with two men to a room. I occupied my room with one of the teachers and we became good friends.

Once we had the company area set up, we started to assemble the school in a beautiful old French Hospital in the heart of Vung Tau. The Commanding Officer's office and my office were on the first floor, and the rest of the hotel

rooms were used for the classrooms. The basement housed an audio center for taped learning.

**Greg's Room**


**Armed Forces Language School**

I had many duties as the company clerk, and every so often had to break the rules to get the job done. For example, only an officer can pay soldiers. When the Captain was out of the area one payday, we couldn't pay our men. The Captain felt it was better to violate protocol than to not pay our men on time, so he had me pay the guys for him. It was an order, so I had no choice. The Captain said to me, "Here is how you pay. Count out each individual's pay, with him watching, have him sign the voucher, and then give him his pay. The First Sergeant will be the witness to the pay being given correctly." He also told me to make sure I had a .45-caliber pistol on the desk next to me, because that was part of the rules, too.

So, I sat at his desk with a .45, with the First Sergeant standing next to me. The look on the men's faces was priceless when they saw me. They were glad to get their pay, though, and preferred getting paid by me to waiting several days. I was just happy we didn't get caught.

Another time, the Captain had some top secret documents that he needed delivered to the ARVN compound. He could not leave to do it, so he called me into his office and said, "You have a top secret clearance don't you?" I replied, "No." He repeated, "You have a top secret clearance don't you?" This time I finally caught on and said, "Yes," even though I didn't. He continued, "Since you have a top secret clearance, you can deliver these papers to the ARVN compound." So off I went with the papers.

We had a General come to visit the school once and it was my job as company clerk to drive him around. I put on my .45 and picked him up in a mid-60s Ford station wagon. It was a stick shift with a bad second gear, which made

it hard to look like I knew what I was doing. Fortunately, he was fairly casual and I did not have to do all the saluting and stuff. I drove him around the peninsula, the beaches, the school, and downtown. It turned out to be a relaxing day.

By the time we got the school set up, I had less than sixty days left in Vietnam and faced a difficult choice. I could go home in sixty days and spend nine more months in the Army stateside, or I could get out of the Army three months earlier by staying in Vietnam longer. I disliked being in the Army more than I disliked being in Vietnam, so, after a lot of thought and a discussion with my Captain, I decided to extend. My decision would have been different if I still had been in An Khe, but Vung Tau was good duty.

Taking the extension meant I got a thirty-day leave, so I went home to Delavan in mid-December 1969, fortunate to spend another Christmas with friends and family. I worked for a friend of mine in Delavan so I'd be occupied and make some spending money. I spent a lot of time with Arlene and her family, too. It was wonderful to spend time at home, but it also reminded me of everything I missed when I was gone. I missed many things I took for granted at home: running water, hot showers, TV, good food, clean clothes, air conditioning, etc. Mostly, it reminded me how much I missed my loved ones.

On my return flight to Vietnam, the pilot informed us that the airport was under sniper fire. The plane was full of rookies who hadn't served in-country yet, so this information did not sit well with them. To me it was just an annoying reminder of how dangerous war is. We were instructed to leave the plane at a run and head to the nearest bunker. Fortunately, we were not shot at while deplaning.

I returned to Vung Tau to resume my duties as company clerk for the AFLS, but after a few months was asked if I would be a teacher instead. The Captain liked me and thought I would make a good teacher; plus, it was easier to find another company clerk than a teacher. I thought this would be a fun challenge so I agreed. I was teaching by April of 1970.

**Civilian Advisor**

I worked with Vietnamese soldiers who were learning how to operate and maintain signal equipment. Since most electronics terms did not translate into Vietnamese, the Army decided it would be easier to teach the signal corps English rather than trying to translate. Most classes lasted for three to four months. The students were about my age, nineteen to twenty-one. The top students in each class were sent to the U.S. Army Signal School at Fort Dix, New Jersey, for further training. The other students were sent back to their units to work on signal equipment there. This was part of the long range Vietnamization of the war.

It was not necessary, nor desirable, for teachers like me to know Vietnamese. The theory was that students would learn English faster if we did not speak to them in Vietnamese. I understood the reason, but not speaking Vietnamese made my job difficult. I didn't know what they were saying about me behind my back, for instance. So, they were not allowed to speak Vietnamese in the class, but they didn't always follow the rules. Fortunately, there were always a few students who did a good job of translating for me, especially when students had questions. I quickly learned how little I knew about the English language, but we had two advisors to help when the students asked questions we could not answer.

**Greg's Students**

Teaching was an excellent experience for the short time I did it. Plus, it was good duty. All I had to do was show up for my job six days a week for half a day. There were two teaching shifts each day, and mine lasted from 8:00 am until noon. I could do what I wanted the rest of the time. Often, we hung out in

each other's rooms to listen to music, play cards, read, and talk to pass the time. Our barracks was used a lot because we were on the outside of the airport. Outside one door was the company area and the other was the road.

I also went to the USO, that was right across the street from the school, almost daily. It had an area in which we hung out and a restaurant that served a taste of home: burgers, fries, and Coke. They had a jukebox that played the latest hits from the U.S. Our favorite songs were "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" and "Leaving on a Jet Plane."

Vung Tau had beautiful beaches and a lot of fishing, so I also went to the beach during my free time. Each army had its own beach area and ours was located next to the Australians. So when we went to the beach, the Aussies would get drunk and try to pick fights with us. We usually did not take the bait.

One time while at the beach, I noticed a Vietnamese civilian about fifty yards out in the ocean. She was shouting in Vietnamese, waving frantically, and I sensed she was in real danger. I ran into the water to try to rescue her and my Boy Scout life-saving skills kicked in. When I got to her, I noticed the undertow was too strong and she was drowning. I grabbed her and tried to drag her back in, but it was very difficult to haul her and myself against the undertow. About half way back, another soldier came out and helped. We got her ashore and made sure she was all right. She was very thankful.

**Vung Tau Beach**

On paydays, we'd go downtown to get a good meal rather than going to the beach or eating at the USO. Vung Tau had been established by the French, so it had some really fine restaurants. That's where I first tried "33" beer. If I had too much to drink, I'd stay downtown with the guys who had living arrangements there. Some of those guys had Vietnamese girlfriends who would cook us dinner. One time, a girl fixed us fresh crabs that she either had caught or bought fresh from the local outdoor market. We really enjoyed them, but I was sick by morning and had broken out in hives. The doctor didn't know what was wrong, so he just gave me some pills and I was fine in a day or two. It was not until 1980 that I figured out I'm allergic to fresh crabs.

I often made my trips downtown using public transportation because I gave up my access to a jeep when I moved from being a clerk to a teacher. So, I

got around on three-wheeled scooters called Lambrettas. A crowded Lambretta could hold about six soldiers. When the Vietnamese rode in them, however, they would cram in ten to fifteen people and hang off the roof and sides. Safety was not their primary concern.

One time when I needed to get into town, there were several Lambrettas waiting at the gate for their next fare. I didn't want to take one alone because, every once in a while, the drivers kidnapped and robbed Americans who were alone. But, I had no choice that day, so I gave the guy my fare, told him where I wanted to go, and he delivered me. I was scared the whole ride, though, because I was unarmed.

Danger always was in the back of our minds, even though Vung Tau was a neutral zone. For example, there was a strange vehicle parked in the schoolyard one morning. We called the Military Police because it could have been a car bomb. They cordoned off the area, brought in a bomb squad, and blew up the car.

On a different occasion, an alarm went off one afternoon while I was taking a shower. Unlike the scrambling in An Khe, I finished my shower, got dressed, and went to the armory to get a weapon, because I didn't think the alarm could be real. We all met at our assigned position along the road, facing the wetlands on the west side of Vung Tau. We heard choppers in the distance checking out the wetlands, but still couldn't believe we were under attack. We were right: it turned out that some Vietnamese fishing boats called sampans had wandered into the wetlands without permission. Everything went back to normal once they were removed.

Unlike An Khe, my work in school and visits to the USO gave me a chance to get to know some of the local Vietnamese. One woman from the USO became friendly with us and asked us to come to her house a few days a week to teach her English. She lived in a one-room apartment in a back alley with her family. The family slept in a loft, had a kitchen behind a curtain, and had no plumbing. Their water came from a cistern. They fed us Chinese soup of noodles and broth when we visited.

Four of us taught English in the little apartment – sometimes it was just her, sometimes her mother joined, and sometimes even more relatives came. We all enjoyed teaching them and meeting the family. This continued the entire time I was in Vung Tau.

Unfortunately, things did not work out with all of the locals we met. I became friends with the sixteen year-old daughter of our company's "Hooch Maid" – the Vietnamese woman that did our laundry and cleaned the barracks. Moon came with her mother to help with the work and often we sat and talked. But a GI raped Moon and her mother stopped working for us. I drove Moon and her mother home and never saw them again.

*1970: After the Army*

I prepared to leave Vietnam in August of 1970. I felt bad about leaving my friends behind, but I knew in their own time they would be leaving, too.

First, I was sent to Cam Ram Bay to process out. I thought I had it made as my flight home got close, until the sirens went off. I could not believe it was happening: I could see my plane, but we were getting attacked. We already had turned in our weapons, so thousands of unarmed GIs ran for the bunkers. Fortunately, the attack was over within an hour or so and no one was hurt. When everything calmed down, I boarded my plane for home. The flight attendants had to deal with 300 excited GIs, but they were very good-natured and allowed hugs and kisses all around. They also let us drink -- a lot.

I arrived in Fort Lewis, Washington, a day before I had departed Vietnam, because I lost a day crossing the International Dateline. It was my fourth, and final, trip across that line. I was processed out and headed to the airport to fly home, ready to leave the Army behind. I was still in uniform, though, as I could not change for twenty-four hours. As I walked down the concourse of the airport, some young officer approached me and said I was out of uniform. I corrected him, but he said my AFLS Patch was not regulation. I told him that it was a legitimate patch in Vietnam. He told me to take it off and give it to him. I had no choice but to turn it over since I was still in the Army and they still could discipline me. That's how I lost my AFLS patch.

I boarded a plane for Wisconsin, not knowing what to expect when I reached home. I had heard the stories about how returning GIs were treated very negatively. I wasn't treated badly when I arrived, but my homecoming was a

letdown. My dad picked me up at the airport and I was pretty much ignored, even though I was wearing my dress blues. Even my own family treated me as though nothing had happened in the last year-and-a-half. I was disappointed . . . but I was still home.

I was fortunate to be in relative safety during my time in Vietnam. I wasn't out in the field fighting the enemy on a regular basis, but the experience still took its toll on me. No matter my job, I was a soldier first and foremost. When we were under attack, we were all infantrymen. So, I suffered from the anxiety of not knowing what was going to happen next. I lived in constant fear that my number could be up. I went from periods of boredom into adrenaline-driven periods of intense activity while under attack. I went many nights with no sleep, still expected to perform to my best the next day. War never stops, nor does it give you a break. So, I came back changed. I slept lightly and I reacted strongly to any loud noises like fireworks or backfiring cars. I had flashbacks.

One night, Arlene woke me from sleep because she thought someone was getting into our car in front of our apartment. Being awakened shocked me and I jumped out of bed, thinking we were under attack. I went for my rifle, flak jacket and helmet, even though they weren't there. Confused, I saw Arlene and thought she was the enemy. Thankfully I snapped out of it before it was too late, but I gave her quite a scare. To this day, I sometimes jump when awakened in the middle of the night.

Similarly, I had a bad experience decades later. Ginny and I went to the Isla Mujeres near Cancun, Mexico to shop. We wandered down an alley lined by shops on both sides. It was crowded, closed in, and we were the only Americans

in sight. Without reason, I didn't feel safe and began to panic. I told Ginny we had to leave – now. As soon as we got into an open space I began to feel better.

For many, the war had both a psychological and physical toll years later. All of us were exposed to Agent Orange, a chemical used to clear the jungle so we could pursue the enemy or set up bases. No one knew how dangerous it was to inhale, and that it would cause many diseases in veterans, including cancer. In An Khe, I was exposed to medium levels of Agent Orange, and in Vung Tau low levels. They say that if I get any form of cancer, it can be blamed on Agent Orange and the government should cover my care.

I don't know what happened to most of the guys I met over there. I made friends in Vietnam, but they were around for only a few months before moving on or going home. Even when together, we all suffered from being lonely. I think almost daily about these guys, and the ones that did not make it or came back wounded. It has been said by others, but I now know from experience that they are the real heroes of any war. They gave their all for their country, whether they believed in the mission or not. Like me, they did their jobs and did them well, even if they didn't want to be in the Army or thought the war was wrong. I will never forget them just as I will never forget my time in Vietnam.

AVFA-AT-AWUP

4 November 1969

SUBJECT: Letter of Appreciation

Specialist Five Gregory Buzzell
[redacted] HHB, 4th Bn, 60th Arty
APO San Francisco 96294

1. Upon the occasion of your departure on TDY to Vung Tau, Republic of Vietnam, I would like to take this opportunity to express my personal appreciation for the outstanding manner in which you performed your duties as Senior Records Specialist while serving with the Unit Personnel Section, 4th Battalion, 60th Artillery. Your knowledge of records adminstration, devotion to duty, and unfailing initiative were an inspiration to me as well as to others with whom you served.

2. May your tour in the Vung Tau area be challenging to you and fulfill all of your deepest desires. I have complete confidence in your ability to excel in your new assignment and, although I will not be here when you return, be assured that my thoughts will be with you always.

3. If you should find your way clear to visit Hawaii sometime in the future, my home is open to you.

4. May God richly bless you and keep you safe during the remainder of your Vietnam tour.

Thomas N. C. See Jr.

THOMAS N. C. SEE Jr
CW3, USA
Asst. Adjutant

HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96222

LANGUAGE TRAINING DETACHMENT (LTD)

MACT-S (AFLS-VT) 18 July 1970

SUBJECT: LETTER OF APPRECIATION

SP/5 Gregory A Buzzell [redacted]
Armed Forces Language School
APO San Francisco 96291

On the completion of your assignment as an administration clerk in the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Language School, I take this opportunity to thank you for your outstanding contribution toward the success of the English language training program for personnel of the Armed Forces of Vietnam. As you well know, this training is the preliminary step in our Government's program of Vietnamization, the future of which means so much to the people of the United States of America and the world.

Your mission as an administration clerk was successfully achieved only as a result of the dedicated and persevering efforts which you put forth on a daily basis. The high degree of professionalism which you have displayed throughout your tour of duty has commanded the respect of the members of the Defense Language Institute staff with whom you have been associated in your work. The commendable manner in which you consistently performed your duties reflects highly on you as an administration clerk. You may justly be proud of your accomplishments. Thanks again for being an outstanding member of the administration staff responsible for the success of this program.

Miss Lynn Simpson
FOR EDWARD A. HAHN
Senior Academic Advisor
RVN Armed Forces Language School

# G. Buzzell Teaches English To S. Vietnamese Soldiers

A Delavanite serving with the U. S. Army in Vietnam is currently involved in educating soldiers of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) at the U. S. Army language school at Vung Tau. Sp/5 Gregory Buzzell is one of 60 Army soldiers who is employed at the school, teaching English.

Sp/5 Buzzell expressed his feelings about his work this way: "I think the school here is a fine idea. I get good response from my students and most of them are very enthusiastic."

Greg, 21, is scheduled to leave his duties at the Army school in August to return to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical institute at Daytona Beach, Fla.

His parents are Mr. and Mrs. W. Allen Buzzell, Route 5, Delavan.

A story about the school, its personnel and students was written by Army Sp/4 Terry Denbow, which follows:

A few months ago they were infantry "grunts", artillery "cannon cockers", helicopter crewmen and combat engineers. Today they are taking part in a unique Vietnamization project in Vung Tau, Vietnam - they are school teachers.

The U. S. Army language school at Vung Tau is the place of employment for some 60 Army soldiers, many of whom have seen combat. These GI's are now given the task of teaching English to soldiers of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Present indications point to a successful mission.

The school is designed to educate the ARVN student-soldier in the fundamentals of the English language. The soldiers will need a command of the language in order to comprehend highly technical training texts which are printed in English.

Capt. Daniel Farrell, Seattle, Wash., commanding officer at the school, pointed out that the soldiers will some day be given the responsibility of taking over most of South Vietnam's communications system. The training texts in this field are in English and contain hundreds of terms that have no counterpart in Vietnamese.

The school at Vung Tau opened its doors Dec. 8, 1969 and the first class will be graduated June 6. It has a maximum capacity for 660 students. There are 574 soldiers studying at present. The Vung Tau school is one of five armed forces language schools in Vietnam. The other four are located in the Saigon area and are individually operated by the U. S. Navy and Air Force, as well as the Army.

Capt. Farrell said "The program here at Vung Tau is unique in that we bring soldiers in from the field to teach. Most of them have had no previous teaching experience of any kind. Few are college graduates. But, from all indications, they are doing a terrific job."

The soldiers brought in from various units throughout the country are given a two week pre-service training (PST) course before entering the classroom on their own. During this period, they are introduced to various methods and techniques of classroom teaching.

This PST is administered by three civilian representatives of the U. S. Defense Language institute. One of the representatives is Barbara Simpson, San Antonio, Texas, an academic adviser at the school.

"Considering that many have no college education at all, we have come up with outstanding instructors," she said. "They try very hard and their enthusiasm for the job at times makes up for their lack of formal training."

The civilain advisers also evalute the teachers regularly much the same way experienced teachers in the U. S. judge student teachers.

"Our teachers show new approaches constantly," Miss Simpson said. "For example, they make up their own visual aids or set up inter-classroom 'College Bowl' competitions. One instructor brought in a full table setting when conducting a class on American eating customs."

Miss Simpson also told about the teacher who learned that he could get the most from his pupils when he offered an American style picnic as a reward for high test scores. She said the teachers like to work away from the classroom and take their students on short field trips where a free flow of conversation allows the students to "open up" in a non-academic atmosphere.

"I felt I wasn't getting to my class," said S/Sgt. Jim Mac Arthur, Erie, Pa., one of the school's top instructors. "Then I met some of my students downtown and started talking about various things. I soon realized they knew far more English that I thought. I was glad to see they were learning the practical uses of English, as well as the rules we teach in the classroom.

It is not an easy six months for the ARVN students. They are required to attend five hours of classroom training each day and are assigned at least two hours of homework.

Classroom teaching includes hours in the modern language laboratory. The large lab has 40 listening booths and two master control stations for monitoring purposes.

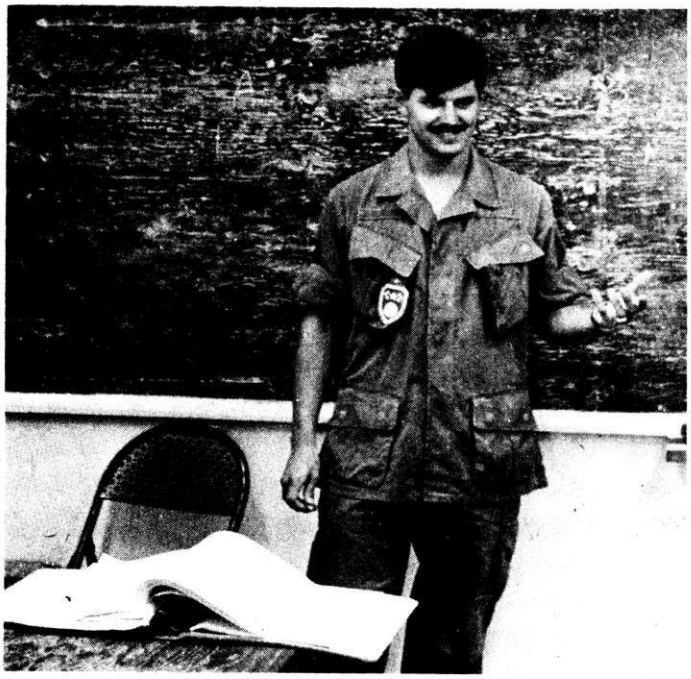
The student is tested regularly and is aware that he must make adequate progress or he may be "washed out" of the program. The day the pupil enters the school he is given an aptitude test and an English comprehension level examination. He then undergoes three weeks of introductory training before he is placed in one of the three class levels: fast, average or slow. During the six-month schooling, the student may be moved from one level to another, depending upon his classroom progress and test results.

There are three stages in the overall training scheme: elementary, intermediate and specialized English terminology. The elementary stage includes completion of four textbooks. During the intermediate stage, four more texts are completed. At the middle stage, the slow and average levels are combined. Textbooks are completed at different speeds at the three levels.

While taking the specialized English terminology classes, the student is introduced to the technical terms he will be faced with when he uses the sophisticated training manuals. The student knows he will undergo three to six months' training in the communications field after leaving the language school. It is at this time that his English will start paying dividends.

The full effectiveness of the school cannot be fully evaluated until the soldiers complete their communications training and perform on-the-job duties. But at present, progress in the classroom has far exceeded expectations.

Is the school really one of the "hearts of Vietnamization," as Capt. Farrell said it is? The teachers seem to think so and so do the civilian advisers. Most importantly, the students are proving it is so. Just ask them; they'll tell you - in English.



**SP/5 GREGORY BUZZELL, serving with the Army in Vietnam, is teaching English to South Vietnamese soldiers in a school conducted by the U.S. Army at Vung Tau. Greg feels the school is a fine idea and says he is receiving enthusiastic response from his students. He is the son of the W. Allen Buzzells, Delavan Lake.**