



To Vietnam and Back

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- Old Soldiers - <http://www.tombutt.com/forum/2012/120425b.htm>
- Old Soldiers - <http://www.tombutt.com/forum/2012/120401.htm>.

The Author

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PREFACE

For thirty years after 1970, I thought little about my experiences in the Army and especially my year in Vietnam.

After my father died in May 2000, I found in his files all the letters I had written home to my parents from Vietnam in 1969-70. I thought it would be a worthwhile project to transcribe them as a chronicle of one person's experience in a war that has become a metaphor.

I unpacked old photos and had Super 8 movies digitized. In addition to my own photos, I used photos provided by Eric Nelson, Allen Tolbert, Bernhard Horstmann and the 159th Group public information officer.

I have been working on this project off and on since 2000, and it has evolved into a memoir centered around my military experiences that roughly span the years 1962, when I first was required to enroll in ROTC at the University of Arkansas, through the conclusion of a journey across half the world in 1970 that began when I was discharged from the Army in Vietnam.

Over the years, I have added appendices that describe the experiences of others who crossed my path -- a close hometown friend who was killed in Vietnam in 1968, a fraternity brother killed in Vietnam in 1969, a shooting accident victim on whose trial I served in a general courts martial board and my younger brother, Martin, who survived as a marine in Vietnam only to die in an automobile crash soon after he returned. And finally, I included my journal from a trip Shirley and I took to Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand in 2009.

Over the years, I have read dozens of books that constitute the memories of Vietnam veterans. Most were written by men who served in combat units and recall endless combat assaults, combat patrols and firebase defense, or by helicopter pilots who largely supported these combat units. I have great respect for these soldiers whose jobs were dirty, dangerous and often deadly. Of the 2.7 million Americans who served in uniform in Vietnam, approximately 40%, or a little over a million, served in combat units, but I was not one of those. My story is not one of heroics. I was one of the other 1.7 million in a support role that not so much has been written about, although I have come across books by nurses, engineers and MPs. I just did the job I was given and did it well.

Unlike the common perception that Vietnam was all death and danger, I found my one-year tour to be fascinating and professionally engaging. I did not pick my job; it was simply what I ended up being assigned to do, and I was luckier than many. I never slept on the ground or even in a tent, humped the boonies or fired my weapon. I was part of the Army engineer effort that at the height of the war constituted about 10 percent of Army troops serving in Vietnam, organized into two brigades, six groups and 28 construction and combat battalions.

By 1969-70, our engineer group, the 159th, was largely engaged in building infrastructure – roads and bridges – as well as land clearing to protect roads and highways from attack. And we were preparing to turn that effort over to the Vietnamese (“Vietnamization”).

When the topic of the Vietnam war comes up, one question is always out there. Why did you go? The reality is that I, like the overwhelming majority of those who served, were simply swept up by events. Most of our fathers served in WW II, at the time only about 20 years in the past. Military duty was something you just did. My father joined the Army Reserve after serving in Europe in WW II and retired 34 years later in 1970 as a brigadier general in the Judge Advocate General’s Corps with the mobilization designation as chief judge of the U.S. Army Judiciary, receiving the [Legion of Merit](#). (See Appendix E).

My younger brother, Martin, served in Vietnam in 1966-67, before I was even in the Army. (See Appendix D). It turned out, for him, that the highways of Northwest Arkansas were more dangerous.

I was no different than most teenagers and young twenty-somethings who made up the bulk of soldiers in Vietnam. Mortality and politics were not big issues at the time – not nearly so much as a good party, beer and girls. Before I ended up there, I knew only a few people who had served in Vietnam previously. I knew only one person who had actually died in Vietnam (See Appendix B).

This is my story. I hope you find it interesting.

INTRODUCTION

I arrived in Vietnam at the height of the American commitment in March 1969 when 543,000 U.S. military personnel were spread throughout the country.¹ But it was also the beginning of “Vietnamization,” when the U.S. commitment rapidly wound down by order of President Nixon. Although the U.S. presence was rapidly dwindling, the years 1969-1970 saw 14,000 of the nearly 50,000 total U.S. military deaths in Vietnam. This was nearly 20 fatalities a day, compared to the approximately two per day experienced in Iraq in mid-2004. Very few of these Vietnam fatalities, however, were Army engineers. The Corps of Engineers is recognized as one of the Army’s “combat arms,” and the secondary mission of the Army Engineers is to “fight as infantry,” but Army engineers in Vietnam were engaged far more in construction, land clearing and base construction than actual combat. I came to believe that the Viet Cong knew the country would belong to them someday, so why impede the construction of infrastructure?

My Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) was 1331, “Combat Engineer Unit Commander,” but instead of being assigned as a platoon leader (a common assignment for a lieutenant in a combat theater), I was assigned to the operations section of an Engineer Group Headquarters, responsible for directing approximately 6,000 U.S. engineer troops, 3,000 Vietnamese civilian employees and several American road construction contractors. Army organizations are typically organized into four general areas of responsibility: S-1 (administration), S-2 (intelligence), S-3 (operations) and S-4 (logistics). The role of three of these is to support fourth, operations, in order to accomplish the “mission.”

The headquarters operations section provided some engineering design as well as overall management and control of the operations of the group components, including acting as a conduit from higher headquarters and other commands needing engineering support.

My official home was a “hootch” and a nearby Quonset hut office at the sprawling Long Binh Post about 25 kilometers outside Saigon, but I had the opportunity to travel often via airplane, helicopter and jeep almost daily to a wide variety of locations throughout the 159th Group operations area and some outside the Group area but within the 20th Engineer Brigade area of operations. Flying around Vietnam, we would usually see air strikes visible in the distance and sometimes ongoing combat operations. I can’t honestly say that I was ever actually “shot at” in the sense of bullets whizzing by, but our cantonment area at Long Binh was periodically the target of fire from 122 mm rockets. When Long Binh came under rocket attack, sirens went off, and we were supposed to head for a bunker. After a while, I figured out that the maximum range of the 122 mm rockets nearly always launched from a nearby hill (“Rocket Ridge”) was a few hundred feet short of my hootch, typically exploding on impact at the bottom of the hill below our area (fittingly called “Rocket Gulch”), so I stopped going to the bunker.

¹ Chapter 28, The U.S. Army in Vietnam, *Extracted from Revised Edition Of American Military History*, Army Historical Series, *United States Army Center Of Military History*

I spent a lot of time at night in Saigon, traveling the Saigon-Long Binh highway after dark and before dawn, hitchhiking rides with military vehicles. Although it seemed to be relatively safe, the 18-kilometer drive was always interesting, with the sound of small arms fire, mortars and rockets audible in the countryside and the sky always lit up by parachute flares. More than once, I arrived at the main gate of Long Binh in the pre-dawn darkness, finding it closed with the MP's in full defensive mode. "What in the hell are you doing out there?" they would say, "Don't you know we're under attack?"

Even at Long Binh, the sounds of small arms fire and explosions in the distance were frequent throughout the night. Some may have been from actual VC probes and those countering them, but most were probably from nervous or bored soldiers on guard duty. One of the most enduring memories is the periodic sound of B-52s carpet bombing miles away near the Cambodian border. Those who live in California would recognize it as similar to a protracted earthquake.

The latter part of 1969 and early 1970 was a time of almost surreal contrasts. Pitched battles were still occurring, but at the same time America was packing up to go home. The following, from an Army *History of the Vietnam Conflict* characterizes the time:

Since the 1968 *Tet* offensive, the Communists had restocked the A Shau valley with ammunition, rice, and equipment. The logistical build-up pointed to a possible NVA offensive in early 1969. In quick succession, Army operations were launched in the familiar pattern: air assaults, establishment of fire support bases, and exploration of the lowlands and surrounding hills to locate enemy forces and supplies. This time the Army met stiff enemy resistance, especially from antiaircraft guns. The North Vietnamese had expected the American forces and now planned to hold their ground.

On 11 May 1969, a battalion of the 101st Airborne Division climbing Hill 937 found the *28th North Vietnamese Regiment* waiting for it. The struggle for "Hamburger Hill" raged for ten days and became one of the war's fiercest and most controversial battles. Entrenched in tiers of fortified bunkers with well-prepared fields of fire, the enemy forces withstood repeated attempts to dislodge them. Supported by intense artillery and air strikes, Americans made a slow, tortuous climb, fighting hand to hand. By the time Hill 937 was taken, three Army battalions and an ARVN regiment had been committed to the battle. Victory, however, was ambiguous as well as costly; the hill itself had no strategic or tactical importance and was abandoned soon after its capture. Critics charged that the battle wasted American lives and exemplified the irrelevance of U.S. tactics in Vietnam. Defending the operation, the commander of the 101st acknowledged that the hill's only significance was that the enemy occupied it. "My mission," he said, "was to destroy enemy forces and installations. We found the enemy on Hill 937, and that is where we fought them."

About one month later the 101st left the A Shau valley, and the North Vietnamese were free to use it again. American plans to return in the summer of 1970 came to nothing when enemy pressure forced the abandonment of two fire support bases needed for operations there. The loss of Fire Support Base O'REILLY, only eleven miles from Hue, was an ominous sign that enemy forces had reoccupied the A Shau and were seeking to dominate the valleys leading to the coastal plain. Until it redeployed in 1971, the 101st Airborne, with the marines and South Vietnamese forces, now devoted most of its efforts to protecting Hue. The operations against the A Shau had achieved no more than

Westmoreland's large search and destroy operations in 1967. As soon as the allies left, the enemy reclaimed his traditional bases.

The futility of such operations was mirrored in events on the coastal plain. Here the 23d Infantry Division fought in an area where the population had long been sympathetic to the Viet Cong. As in other areas, pacification in southern I Corps seemed to improve after the 1968 *Tet* offensive, though enemy units still dominated the Piedmont and continued to challenge American and South Vietnamese forces on the coast. Operations against them proved to be slow, frustrating exercises in warding off NVA and Viet Cong main force units while enduring harassment from local guerrillas and the hostile population. Except during spasms of intense combat, as in the summer of 1969 when the Americal Division confronted the *1st North Vietnamese Regiment*, most U.S. casualties were caused by snipers, mines, and booby traps. Villages populated by old men, women, and children were as dangerous as the elusive enemy main force units. Operating in such conditions day after day induced a climate of fear and hate among the Americans. The already thin line between civilian and combatant was easily blurred and violated. In the hamlet of My Lai, elements of the Americal Division killed about two hundred civilians in the spring of 1968. Although only one member of the division was tried and found guilty of war crimes, the repercussions of the atrocity were felt throughout the Army. However rare, such acts undid the benefit of countless hours of civic action by Army units and individual soldiers and raised unsettling questions about the conduct of the war.

What happened at My Lai could have occurred in any Army unit in Vietnam in the late 1960's and early 1970's. War crimes were born of a sense of frustration that also contributed to a host of morale and discipline problems, among enlisted men and officers alike. As American forces were withdrawn by a government eager to escape the war, the lack of a clear military objective contributed to a weakened sense of mission and a slackening of discipline. The short-timer syndrome, the reluctance to take risks in combat toward the end of a soldier's one-year tour, was compounded by the "last-casualty" syndrome. Knowing that all U.S. troops would soon leave Vietnam, no soldier wanted to be the last to die.

Meanwhile, in the United States harsh criticism of the war, the military, and traditional military values had become widespread. Heightened individualism, growing permissiveness, and a weakening of traditional bonds of authority pervaded American society and affected the Army's rank and file. The Army grappled with problems of drug abuse, racial tensions, weakened discipline, and lapses of leadership. While outright refusals to fight were few in number, incidents of "fraggings"—murderous attacks on officers and noncoms—occurred frequently enough to compel commands to institute a host of new security measures within their cantonments. All these problems were symptoms of larger social and political forces and underlined a growing disenchantment with the war among soldiers in the field.²

After transcribing my "letters home" I decided that the addition of photos, graphics and additional narrative to fill the gaps would provide a better context for the actual letters. Finally, I decided to include a summary of my military experiences leading up to Vietnam, including ROTC, the Engineer Officer Basic Course and my assignment to Ft. Polk.

² Chapter 28, The U.S. Army in Vietnam, *Extracted From Revised Edition Of American Military History*, Army Historical Series, *United States Army Center Of Military History*, 681

ROTC

The Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) was established in 1873 at the University of Arkansas, and during the time I attended (1962-67), was compulsory for all males during their freshman and sophomore years. There was one class a week in Military Science and one drill a week in good weather.

I spent the first two compulsory years in Air Force ROTC because it looked more intellectual and perhaps more interesting than Army ROTC. In the fall of 1965, Vietnam

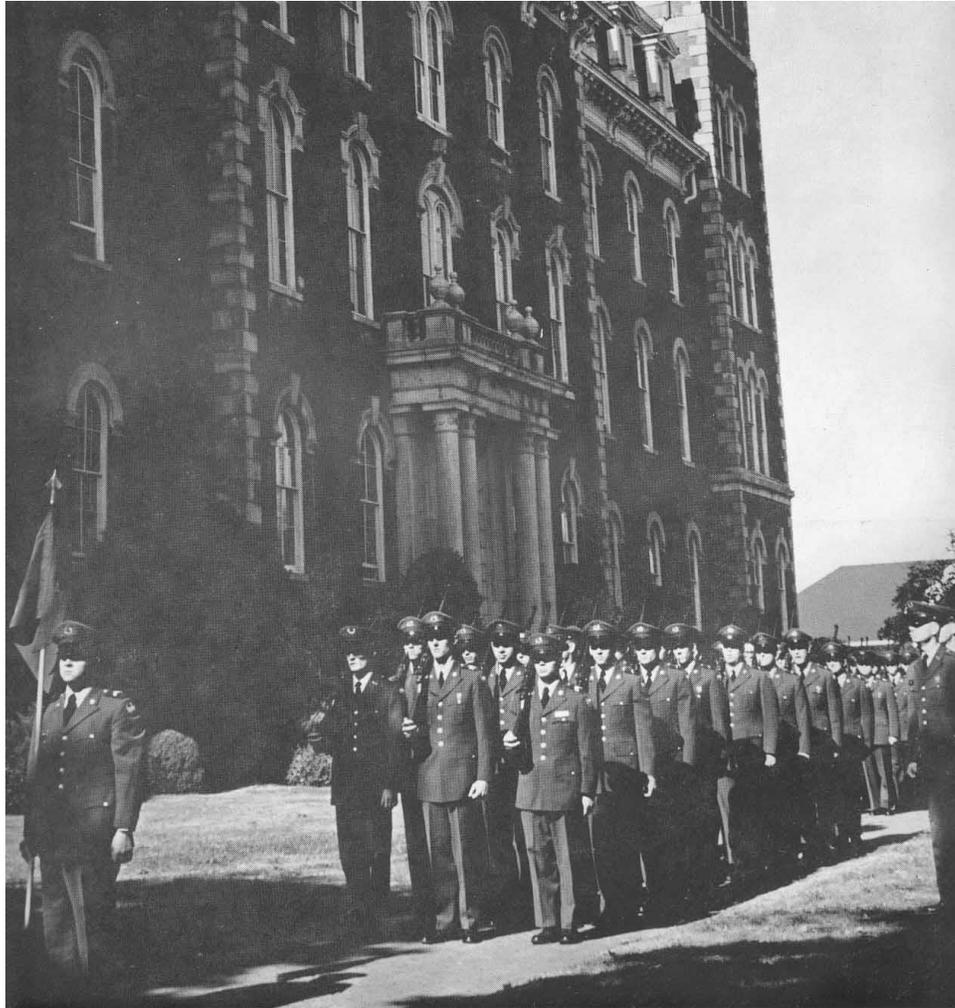


Figure 1 - Army ROTC cadets drilling in front of Old Main

was heating up and college students were facing the prospect of the draft. After student deferments ran out, people I knew were actually getting drafted. Some of my contemporaries got married and started families, at least partially to immunize themselves from the draft. Others joined the National Guard or Army Reserve, took basic training during summer vacation, and spent the next few years at monthly weekend drills and annual summer camps.

A number of my contemporaries, including several close friends and me, figured that if we were going to be drafted anyway, we might as well go as officers. Anyway, enrollment in advanced ROTC paid \$27.90 a month for doing the same thing we had done for free during the two years of “basic” ROTC, and we were being told that there was a light at the end of the tunnel” in Vietnam. By the time I finished architecture school in 1967 or 1968, I projected, the war would probably be over, and I would get an interesting assignment in Europe.

Although I had started out in Air Force ROTC, I transferred to Army for the advanced course because the Army required only two years of active duty while the Air Force required five years.

ROTC was a strange experience. For most students, it was a pain in the ass, particularly the weekly drills. You had to keep your uniform clean and pressed and your brass and shoes shined. But for a few, it was serious business. The cadet corps was replete with a military hierarchy of officers and noncoms. They even had pretty, well-endowed girls dressed out in tight fitting uniforms (“Sponsors” for the Army and “Angel Flight” for the Air Force), who walked around during drills to keep the men interested. I always made good grades in the classes, but I had no use for the drills and uniforms, and my lack of enthusiasm resulted in no ranks and no organizational assignments, which suited me fine.



Figure 2 - In the spring of 1967, I had completed all requirements for two degrees, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Architecture, except for one course in Psychology. I was commissioned a second lieutenant and moved to San Francisco where I completed the final course, formally graduating from the University of Arkansas in January 1968



Figure 2 –Army ROTC “Sponsors” from 1967 “Razorback”

In the summer of 1966, we attended a six-week ROTC Summer Camp at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. It was a combination of conventional basic training and leadership training. We spent a lot of time marching, shooting, running and taking apart and reassembling weapons. It was the first time I had seen armadillos.

After summer camp, I went to Hawaii with a friend, John Backus, where we worked the rest of the summer before returning to school.

FORT BELVOIR

As soon as I formally graduated in January of 1968, my call to active duty came, with orders to report to Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, for the Engineer Officer Basic Course in March of 1968. I quit my job as an aspiring architect at Edward Durrell Stone in Palo Alto, California, and headed for a month's vacation in Europe. I flew to London and traveled through France, Italy, hitchhiking through most of Spain and Portugal, and flying back to the U.S. from Lisbon just in time to report at Ft. Belvoir.

Having been living and working in California for over six months, where war protests had become a major form of entertainment, and, having just come back from a month in Europe, I was not enthusiastic about entering military life.

Ft. Belvoir was, however, a choice location, just about an hour south of Washington, DC. I had my own room in a BOQ with maid service, and I was able to go to Washington almost every weekend to stay with friends and act normal.

The Engineer Officer Basic Course was a lot like going back to school. It was a cram course in military engineering, including road building, bridge building, demolition and constructing defensive positions. There was also PT (physical training) every morning,



Figure 3 - San Francisco. 1966. We could get free rides on military planes if we were in our ROTC uniforms

small unit infantry tactics, leadership instruction, hikes, overnight camping and weapons training. I believe there were about a hundred people in my class, all second lieutenants. Many had been in school for years, and a few had PhDs. Some were in poor physical

condition and had a lot of trouble with the morning jogs. I always enjoyed shooting, and I was a crack shot, scoring “expert” on every weapon with which I qualified.

Like ROTC, I took to the class work and tested well, finishing in the top 5% of the class academically. I had trouble getting into the military part of it, however, and was rated dead last in a peer evaluation exercise where each person had to rate all other classmates from one to one hundred in “leadership potential.”

When assignments were handed out, it seems like most everyone went to an interesting job doing research in some nice place. Perhaps due to my lack of enthusiasm for things military, I was surprised by my next assignment as a basic combat training officer at Ft. Polk, Louisiana.

I purchased a maroon 1965 Mustang convertible for \$500 from Mart Vehik, a friend from Arkansas living in Washington, and headed for Louisiana.

FORT POLK

Ft. Polk was built as a temporary training facility in World War II but instead of being torn down, it had somehow endured. The buildings were all simple wood frame barracks type structures. The only new buildings were the PX (Post Exchange), the Commissary (grocery store) and a couple of training classroom buildings. It was a major Basic Combat Training facility and also hosted Advanced Individual Training (AIT) for combat infantrymen. That part of the post was known as “Tigerland” and was a last stop before Vietnam.

At Ft. Polk, I was assigned to Company E, 4th Battalion, 2nd Training Brigade, as one of two training officers. Our company was in charge of training some 120 recruits every six weeks. Our company commander was an infantry captain recovering from a serious leg wound from Vietnam.

My training officer partner, Keith Cannon, a Louisiana native, also became my roommate in a hovel next to a dairy barn near the post. There was almost no housing available, and junior training personnel lived mainly in shacks and trailers. There was modest housing on base for higher ranks. As training officers, we were required to coordinate each day’s training schedule, make sure lesson plans were complete and up to date, and accompany the recruits to various training sites. Sometimes, we acted as instructors for courses like how to drive safely and how to avoid VD. The actual training was by drill instructors, sergeants specially trained for the job, or permanent staff at Ft. Polk.



Figure 4 - 2nd Lieutenant Tom Butt in front of headquarters, Company E, 4th Battalion, 2nd Basic Combat Training Brigade, Ft. Polk, Louisiana, 1968

There was a lot of PT (Physical Training), marching, firing at the rifle ranges, hand-to-hand combat training and classroom work. Much of what went on I had experienced at ROTC summer camp or Ft. Belvoir, but there was more of it, and it was more intense. It was also hot as hell and humid. At least one recruit (not in my company) died of heat exhaustion. The standard procedure for treating a recruit suspected of heat stroke was to make a bathtub with a poncho, throw the recruit in it, and fill it with ice water and crushed ice from the large water coolers always carried along on trucks.

We got most weekends off, and I generally went to Dallas, New Orleans or Houston and stayed with friends to break the tedium.

After Keith, my roommate and fellow training officer, went to Vietnam, I moved in with another lieutenant, Larry Taylor, in a little nicer apartment in Leesville. Larry was a first lieutenant and the aide to the commanding general at Ft. Polk, Brigadier General Fulton.

About that time, a political move was underway by the Louisiana Congressional delegation to make Ft. Polk a “permanent” post, supposedly a major advantage for the local economy. Through Larry’s contacts, and with my architectural background, I was offered the opportunity to participate in a new “master plan team.” So, I was plucked out of the hot and dusty routine of basic training and placed in an air-conditioned office with several others of similar backgrounds. It was there I met one of my fellow “master planners,” Allen Tolbert, whom I later hooked up with in Vietnam.

We had a civilian “manager,” a career employee of Ft. Polk, who made sure we had everything we needed. My recollection is that we had no idea what we were doing. We obtained some manuals that described what facilities were required to garrison a full

infantry division and proceeded to make drawings of how this could fit on Ft. Polk. Somehow, having a master plan team was seen as a necessary complement to the political maneuvers going on in Washington.

In late 1968, several of us received our orders to Vietnam, and it looked like the jig was up. That is, until our manager, without our knowing, started some kind of Congressional investigation into the dismantling of the master plan team. It turned out that he was politically well connected, and apparently made the case that the master planning effort was critical to national defense and should not be delayed by diverting the planners to Vietnam.

This ploy worked for a couple of months, but was, I suppose, eventually overwhelmed by events and the need for us in Vietnam. In January, I got the requisite 30-day pre-Vietnam leave and headed for New Orleans where I spent most of the time preparing for Mardi Gras. Larry Taylor had a friend with an apartment right on Bourbon Street, next to Jean Lafitte's old Blacksmith Shop bar, which is still there, having not changed one bit. I can't remember why, but the apartment was unoccupied and became my New Orleans headquarters for the duration. The Clay Shaw trial was going on at the time and looked like pretty good entertainment, so one day I headed down to the courthouse. The courtroom was packed, and I couldn't get in, but while chatting with a bailiff, I told him that I was in the Army and headed for Vietnam. He told me to go put on my uniform and he would see that I got a seat. I spent the rest of the week at the trial.



Figure 5 - Ft. Polk Master Plan Office and hard-working staff. Tom Butt in back.



Figure 6 Tom Butt and brother Martin Butt, on Martin's wedding day, December 20, 1968. This was the second and last time I wore my dress blues and the last time I saw Martin. [Martin served as a Marine in Vietnam in 1966-67](#) and was discharged in 1968. He died in an automobile accident in 1969.

VIETNAM EN ROUTE

I left on my 25th birthday from Ft. Lewis, Washington. I went out for dinner and drinks with Dick Johnson, the younger brother of an old friend I had originally met in Yellowstone. Dick was going to college in Seattle.

What was weird is that I didn't know anyone on the plane. We were all individuals, going over to replace some other individual. It was a 707, with all the normal food, drinks, pretty young stewardesses and movies. It could have been a flight to anywhere, except it was all soldiers – all in uniform. We made one stop during the night in Tokyo. There was nothing to do but wander around the transient terminal of the airbase. My first postcard:

Tokyo, March 24, 1969

Dear Folks,

We didn't get to leave Seattle until about 8:00 PM. It's now about 1:00 AM on the 25th of March. I can't exactly figure out how – but I completely missed my birthday. We've got an hour here in Tokyo, then 5 ½ hrs. more to Cam Ranh Bay – not much to do but gawk at cheap radios, TV's, etc. Be in contact later.

Love, Tom

We landed at Cam Ranh Bay, and that rush of hot, humid air as we walked out the door and down the gangway clearly said, “welcome to Vietnam.” We were bused to a compound of tropical buildings (“hootches” – as we later came to know them) near a beautiful beach. We were herded through a supply building, where we were given three uniforms (olive drab, jungle), two pairs of jungle boots, a baseball cap and a steel “pot” (helmet) and several pairs of olive drab socks, t-shirts and boxer shorts. Nametags and rank were issued and sewn on the uniform shirts. We were given a toothbrush and some kind of special toothpaste that was supposed to prevent cavities for one year. In the humidity, underwear gave me crotch rot, so I stopped wearing the boxer shorts altogether.

I was assigned a bed in a *hootch*, drank a few beers at the officer's club, went swimming in the South China Sea and slept for a few hours before the plane left to our next destination at 4:00 AM.. I had no idea what was in store.

Settling In at Long Binh

Long Binh, Vietnam, March 25, 1969

Dear Folks,

I've finally arrived to a permanent location, got a job, etc.

We landed at Cam Ranh Bay yesterday AM early – processed in-country in about two hours and had the rest of the day off while assignments were being made from Saigon. I kind of wish I'd never seen Cam Ranh – the vision will linger and spoil me. It's a beautiful spot on a peninsula of land surrounded by huge mountains – a lot like Honolulu – and has one of the finest white sand beaches I've ever seen with Hawaii-type surf, etc. Everything was quiet and resort like, hot but with a refreshing sea breeze. Nobody carries weapons – it looks more like a war at Ft. Polk than Cam Ranh.

But then all good things end. I got an initial assignment to the 20th Eng. Brigade with hdqtrs [headquarters]. In Bien Hoa so we flew in there at 4:00 AM this morning. This part of the country is an entirely different story in appearance. The Bien Hoa-Long Binh complex sprawls for miles and miles in every direction – dust, red clay and thousands of slum looking temporary buildings, miles of barbed wire, bunkers, etc.

Anyway, the 20th Eng. Bde. [Engineer Brigade] Is made up of three groups, of which – the 159th – is my assignment – to be liaison officer between headquarters of the 159th and the 20th Bde. S-3. I've got very little idea of what the actual work entails except that it involves keeping track of 159th Group projects and writing progress reports, statistics, etc., for reports to the parent organization, the 20th Bde.

The 20th Brigade altogether seems to have all the support responsibility for IV and V Corps areas, or, the whole southern third of Vietnam. Our group, more specifically, has responsibility for a sector more or less surrounding Saigon and extending to the east, south and southeast. Ultimately, I will have to become familiar with each of the hundreds of projects in these areas. The lieutenant in the job now has 25 days left, so I've got that much time to get in the groove.

Even though the area here looks somewhat more garrison-like than Cam Ranh, it's still very quiet and peaceful. Most of the people here scoff at the blow-up the press gives to incidents with the VC. I don't reasonably see where they could be anyway; you can drive 30 miles in any direction and still be on this gigantic complex.

At any rate, I've got my gear, quarters and mama san. Tomorrow will start studying up on my job – let you know more about it as I find out.

Love, Tom

At Bien Hoa Airbase, someone from the 159th Engineer Group came to pick me up in a jeep. When we got to the 159th Engineer Group headquarters in Long Binh, maybe five miles away, I was ushered in to an interview with the Assistant S-3 officer, a Captain Terry Ryan. He asked me about my education and job experience and informed me that I was to be the replacement Liaison Officer (LNO) for the HHC (Headquarters and Headquarters Company), 159th Engineer Group, one of three groups making up the 20th Engineer Brigade.

I was assigned a room in a “hootch,” which was, in this case, about 10 feet by 15 feet in a long building originally constructed with louvered walls and wire insect screen. It was a double row of such rooms, each with outside entrances, all assigned to officers. The roof was corrugated steel. Because the engineers were good at snagging stuff, it had a window air conditioner, and like the other rooms, the original louvers on mine had been covered with plywood. That air conditioner ran, without respite, until the day I checked out a year later, at which time it died.

The room had a single bed, a desk, a chair and a metal wardrobe cabinet. The bedspread was a camouflage pattern poncho liner.

At the company armory, I was issued an M-14 and a belt of magazines. Apparently, there was a shortage of M-16's, and for some "garrison" soldiers, M-14's were deemed appropriate to defend the post perimeter. The lieutenant I replaced gave me his .45 with pistol belt and two magazines.

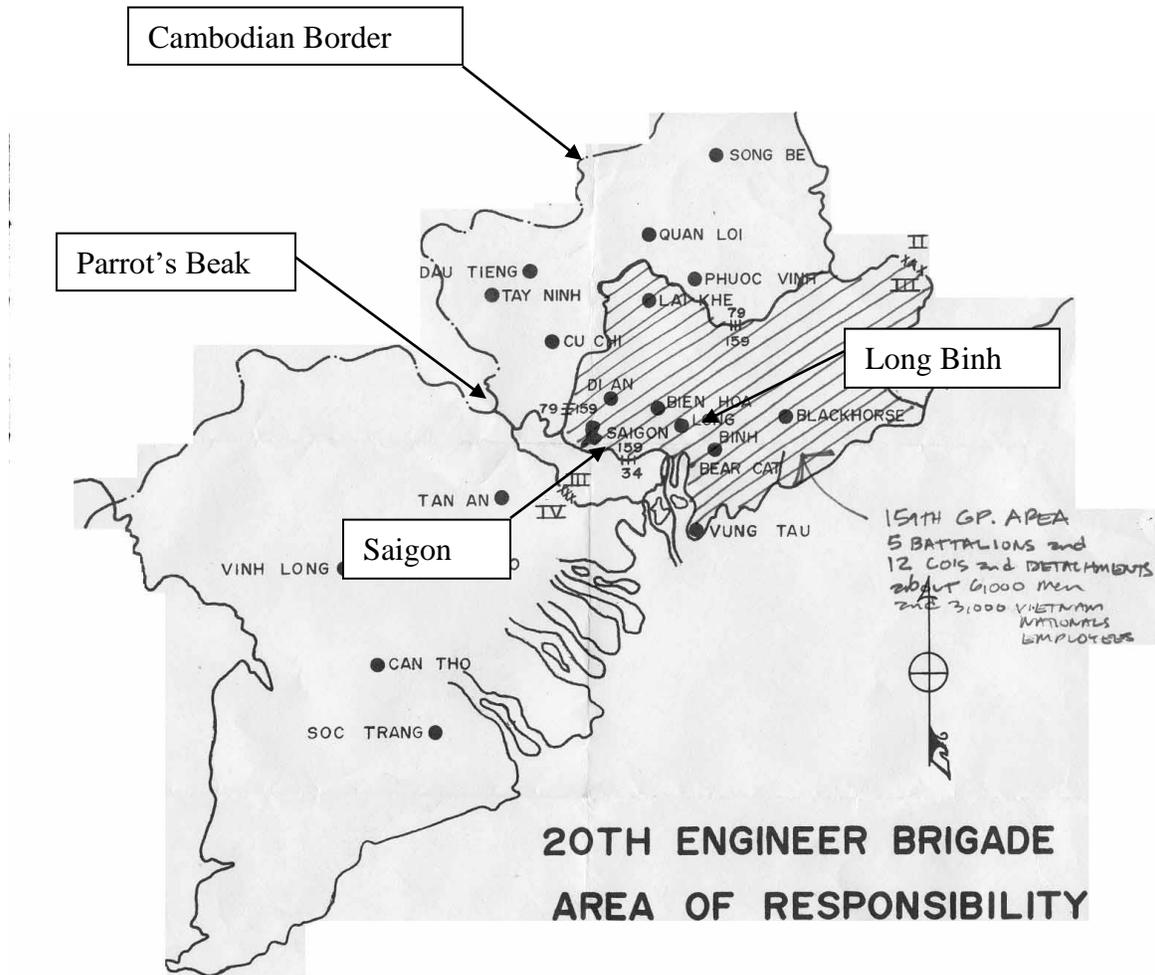


Figure 7 – 20th Engineer Brigade Area of Responsibility

Long Binh, March 26, 1969

Dear Folks,

A little of the mud is starting to clear about what's going on around here. I went out today with the guy I'm going to replace to look at some of the job sites. Most of the group's work is in this immediate area or on the main highway 60-150 miles north of here. Enclosed is a map showing the area covered by the 159th Engineer Group. A better definition of the job is becoming clear, but only on the essential matters: making reports to the chief of operations at brigade HQ and being an agent to obtain and pass on information between units on the job and the brigade HQ. Actually, I work directly for the Group operations officer and act as an inspector for him also – and might get to do a little design work, etc., as time allows. So as you can see, there seem to be elements of “do your own thing” along with the rest.

This Long Binh post is just like a primitive-type post in the states once you get inside the perimeter. In our group area are the standard office and quarters buildings, outdoor latrines and recreational buildings (movies, “O” club, tennis, basketball courts, etc., and a handball court in the design phase). I've got a 10' x 15' room in the BOQ with a bed and a wall locker. As various people leave, I'll be in line to inherit the finer things in life such as air conditioning, refrigerator, rugs, etc. It's common practice of course to strip a room when its occupant leaves, so I'll have to live in poverty for a month or so until I can play buzzard. There are about 25 officers in the headquarters and headquarters company. The engineers definitely have the highest standard of living in the army (can't compare with air force, of course). What we can't find in our own organization we have the most marketable services to barter with.

As I mentioned before, I got my first glimpse of the countryside today. This whole area, including Saigon, is considered secure enough to roam at will during the daytime, but a weapon is always carried along. It's considered not exactly dangerous, but inadvisable to drive around outside the compound after dark, unless with a convoy or something. Most of the projects are within a few minutes drive from here. The others I can reach by catching a helicopter or plane from Bien Hoa. The villages around here are, of course, amazing but exactly what one would expect. I remember Martin's term “dogpatch,” which pretty aptly describes the situation. Whatever “spring offensive” that happened around here seems to be over. For the first time in a month and a half, the base is back to the lowest class alert.

The weather is quite hot but pleasant, more so than Ft. Polk in the summertime, due to the constant breeze and cool evenings. The rainy season doesn't start until May or June.

Every possible thing for day-to-day needs is available here and cheaper than at home, so the old “care package” is an anachronism as far as I am concerned. I do want you to send me some books, which I will list, and some magazine subscriptions. See that my subscription to Architectural Record and Progressive Architecture are renewed (check copies at home for information). Also send me

*the Northwest Arkansas Times and the following books from my shelves upstairs:
1. Structures Syllabus from East Bay AIA (big red lose leaf binder), 2. History of
Architecture Syllabus from some AIA chapter in California and the three or four
books on history of architecture. Also send all the structures manuals and
textbooks that I have (including wood, concrete, steel, etc.).*

*Give me Martin and Jack's addresses (I lost them somewhere). Everything is
fine. I am looking forward to an interesting year.*

Love, Tom

In response to the build up of U.S. forces in the Republic of Vietnam, the 20th Engineer Brigade Headquarters was reactivated May 1, 1967, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and deployed to Vietnam in August 1967. During the Vietnam conflict, the Brigade numbered over 13,000 officers and enlisted men organized into three engineer groups, with 14 battalions and 31 separate companies and detachments. The Brigade provided all non-divisional engineer support in Military Regions III and IV during eleven campaigns. Units cleared more than one-half million acres of jungle, paved 500 kilometers of highway, and constructed bridges totaling more than six miles in length. As US forces were withdrawing from Vietnam, the Brigade was inactivated September 20, 1971.

I arrived at Long Binh approximately one year after the 1968 "Tet Offensive," and there were still some folks around who had been there at the time. They recounted how one self-important Engineer officer had gotten his finger shot off while "defending" our sector of the perimeter. Apparently, in an effort to commemorate the one-year anniversary of 1968 Tet, there were several forays by Viet Cong against the Long Binh Perimeter in the spring of 1969 on February 22, just a month before I arrived. Below are flyers left by the marauders in the wire and picked up by the 159th Engineer Group G-2. The 159th HHC compound was located adjacent to Highway 316, the main highway from Saigon. To get there, you entered the main Long Binh gate (Gate #1), turned right about a block. Between the compound and the highway, maybe 200 feet, was a wall of sand-filled 55-gallon drums and sandbags and lots of barbed wire. It may also have been mined. Further on, just down the hill and adjacent to the 159th compound was the 46th Engineer battalion compound. They had a really nice swimming pool.

MAP OF LONG BINH POST

REFERENCES

HQ USARV	1
HQ II FORCEV	2
HQ 1st Log Comd	3
HQ 1st Arm Bde	4
HQ 1st Sig Bde	5
HQ 8th MP Bde	6
HQ 1st Corp Canal (Pravi)	7
HQ 44th Med Bde	8
HQ Long Binh Post (Pravi)	9
HQ 5th Troop, USARV	10
HQ Saigon Support Comd	11
Long Binh Provost Marshal	12
USARV Hospital	13
USARV Command Mess	14
GDQ	15
USARV Main PX	16
USARV Stockade	17
Vis Evac Hospital	18
44th ICC	19
24th Evac Hospital	20
Long Binh Education Center	21
Long Binh Billing Office	22
VIP Tracker Court	23
44th Replacement Center	24
JMARS Radio	25
Fire Station	26
Bank	27
Stars and Stripes	28
Auto Med Det (Dispensary)	29
USARV NCO Club	30
USARV EM Club	31
HQ 5th Troop Theater	32
Swimming Pool	33
USARV Chapel	34
USARV Officers Open Mess	35
WAC Detachment (Temp)	36
Female Quarters	37
Amputee	38
Long Binh Swimming Pool	39
Miniature Golf Course	40
Post Finance Office	41
USARV Field Ration Mess	42
Service Club	43
APD	44
APD	45
LONG BINH CHAPEL	46

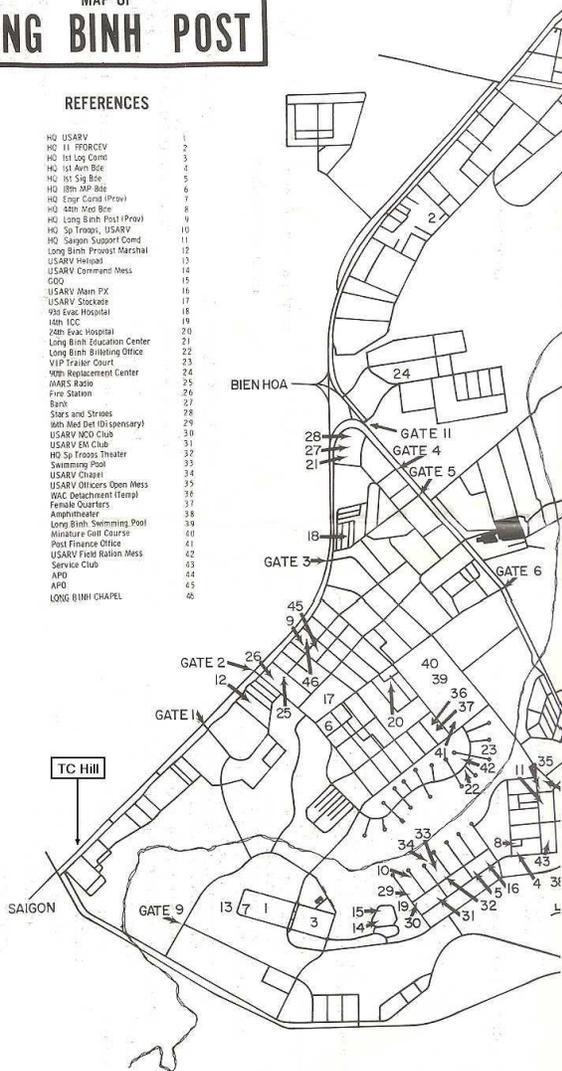


Figure 8 - Part of Long Binh Post along Highway 316

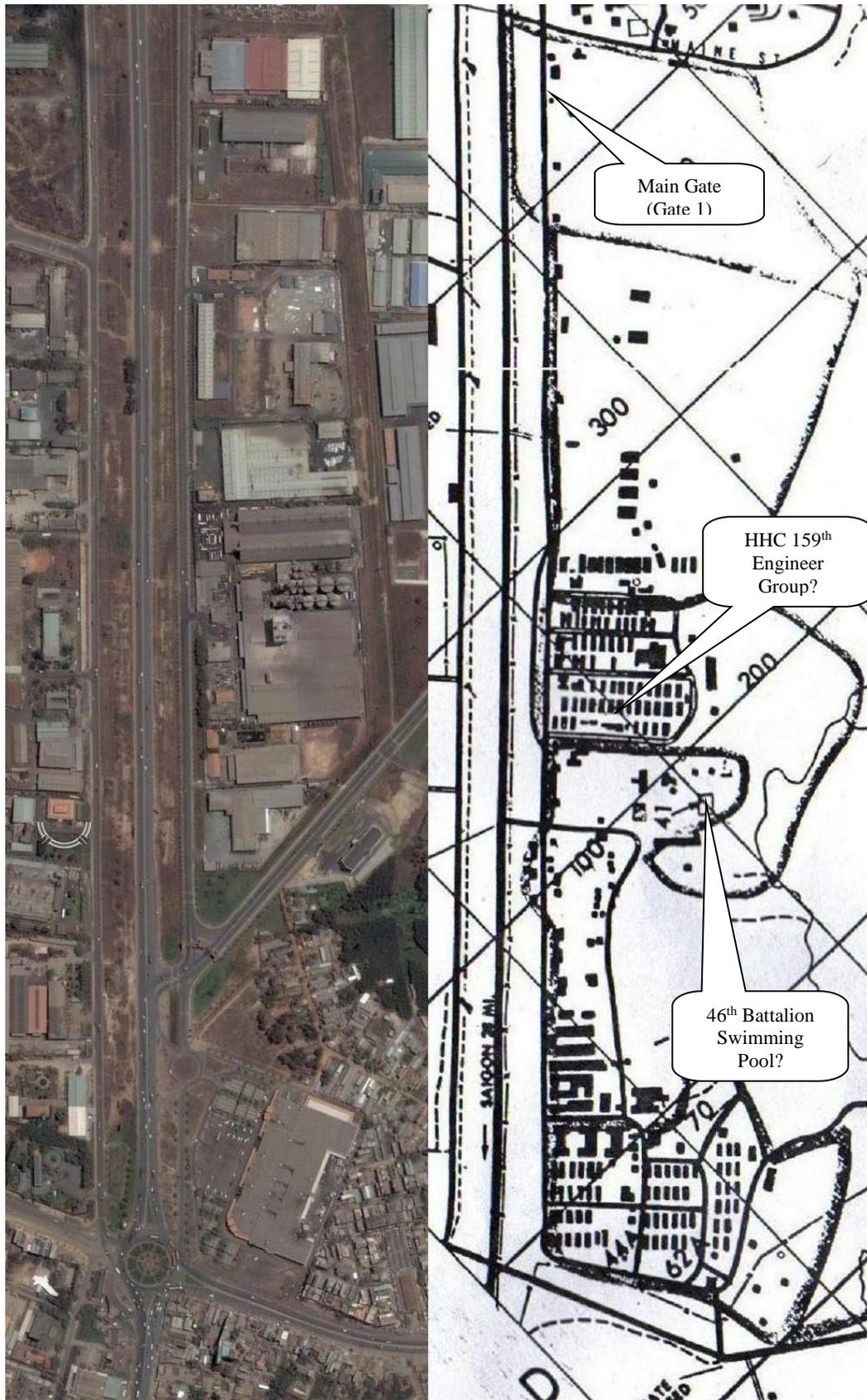


Figure 9 - Left: Long Binh 2009. Right: Long Binh circa 1970

April 1, 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

Everything is fine after completing my first week in this great place. Not much excitement, but I have been doing some more sightseeing. Went down to Saigon Sunday afternoon and spent the night. I looked up Al Tolbert who worked with me at Ft. Polk. He gave me a tour from top to bottom. It's quite a place. It's dirty, congested and smells bad, but so full of life that you can't help liking it. Al, being a city planner, is just eating it up. He's learned quite a bit of Vietnamese in two months and seems to know the back alley system by heart as well as most dealers on the black market and various other semi-shady endeavors. We had a fabulous dinner at a floating restaurant on the Saigon River then proceeded to check out other sites of cultural and educational interest.

Still don't have much to do job-wise except look around and observe until the guy I'm replacing leaves. I took a helicopter ride up to a quarry northwest of here (Dinh Quan on QL-20) yesterday – beautiful country. It was a joint U.S. – ARVN thing, which are the big thing right now. Biggest problem the ARVN have is that they work from 0900 'til 1200, take a two-hour break, and then work from 1400 'til 1700. The Americans work a 10-hour day (0700 – 1800 with 1 hour for lunch) seven days a week. The ARVN in these training programs seem to think they should get every other day off if they are going to put in so many hours.

I'm sending a money order for \$100 to be deposited to pay whatever debts I have incurred. I used my credit cards for some airplane tickets, skiing, etc., en route to Seattle. I cannot remember exact amount. Pay income tax, other items as required out of it.

I have opened up an account here at the Chase Manhattan Bank – will send checks to home account to keep balance sufficient to pay outstanding bills or other needs as required. I'll send another \$10 next month – to you – then you can deposit it. This money stuff is a real red tape problem over here. You've got to sign some form to get paid, deposit money, buy something, convert to piasters, etc. Got to go to work.

Love, Tom

For an official summary of the operations of the 159th Engineer Group in 1969-70, see “https://archive.org/stream/DTIC_AD0871412/DTIC_AD0871412_djvu.txt.”



Figure 11 - Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) 159th Engineer Group, Long Binh, Vietnam, 1969. Tom Butt is 5th from left, top row. John Clinton is 8th from left, top row.



Figure 10 - Unidentified base from the air



Figure 12 -

Saigon street scene. This is across the street from the Continental Palace Hotel, probably the premier hotel of the day – a remnant of the French Colonial lifestyle. On the veranda were wicker chairs and cocktail tables where the correspondents, ex-patriots and contractors hung out.



Figure 13 -

Typical downtown Saigon traffic. Here you can see a “cyclo” (lower left), A “deuce and a half” (under the Esso sign), taxis, motor scooters, bicycles, a jeep and a private automobile. The tall trees along the street are a French Colonial



Figure 14 - This photo was taken by Al Tolbert of Nha, a Saigon girl who worked as a telephone operator and attended law school. I liked the sound of her voice on the phone and somehow talked her into going out with me.

Country Boy Discovers Saigon

May 8, 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

I guess you're just getting back from Virginia now and probably going crazy if you are really serious about moving. It's hard to believe you're really leaving the old place, but when I saw the ad in the Times, I knew I wasn't dreaming. Just don't throw anything of mine away or let too much pass into the hands of my greedy brothers, as I am sure many fine things will be "liberated" on moving day.

I had a real busy week with some extra reports to prepare for a visitor from Washington, but I got to go along on a trip as the Group representative, which made it all worthwhile. We hit a bunch of projects in our area, most of which I'd already seen, but in the afternoon, we flew up near Cambodia to see some of the work by the 1st Infantry Division engineers.

You would have to see it to believe the vast amount of jungle clearing and road work that is going on out in these boonies. It really gave me a new perspective on the importance of the "engineer's war." The whole face of the land has been drastically changed – giant clearings 1,000 meters wide crisscross the landscape in every direction. All kinds of people are moving down out of the mountains and

migrating from the cities to farm these new areas. For the first time since the early 1950's, there are roads to the markets and increasing security against the VC. Land clearing and road building are probably doing more to insure the future security of Vietnam than any other factor.

I've come to the conclusion that the VC are idiots – right or wrong. As long as there is an acre of boondocks, they can crawl around at night and shoot at somebody, but they never win anything. Typical of the incidents in this area, a VC company force marched 4 ½ days from Cambodia and attacked a convoy on a deserted stretch of QL-13, north of Lai Khe. They ruined three or four vehicles, wounded a few G.I's, but were totally wiped out in the process. I've yet got no emotional feelings about the “preservation of freedom” here or any other country “endangered” by “communist aggression,” but I do think this is a fine place with a potentially prosperous future, and I figure they might as well be our “buddies” as the other guy's – and I think we've got an excellent chance of pulling it off.

The idealists are right in saying we've got no right or reason to be here, but then the idealists have always been in the minority and usually wrong because the other guys write the history books. I'll elaborate on my philosophy of the war at a later date.

I bought a very fine movie camera last week and worked out with it over the weekend. If any of the footage comes out, I'll send it home for an on the spot eyeball account of the situation. I've got everything from Saigon mini skirts to real live air strikes on the Cambodian border – groovy! The camera has all kinds of telephoto zoom lenses and electric motor controls – better than the eye itself.

Saigon is looking better and better. My buddy Al Tolbert shed his Sp-4 stripes for civvies last week and went to work for USAID Saigon Civil Assistance Group as a city planner. The government got a bargain on him – the other planner does the same as Al but is a civilian on an \$18,000 salary. Al is still in the army and officially assigned as a “jeep driver” to the organization. Along with his new status comes an “in” in the multi-national social scene of Saigon, which promises great things for the future. Saigon is one of the most friendly, fun-loving and alive cities I've ever been in. It's like a bunch of kids at the circus on weekends – all the young people come out to the parks and main streets and just stand around having a good time. Vietnamese women are generally quite pretty and all have tremendous figures; therefore, they are all beautiful from behind. Girl watching is probably the favorite Saigon sport for Americans and Vietnamese alike. The traditional ao dai is giving away to mini skirts, which is okay because I've never seen a Vietnamese girl with ugly legs – can't say the same for the American variety.

I started a course in Vietnamese at the Education Center last night which will last 8 weeks and no doubt leave me speaking fluent Vietnamese. It's really a simple language and shouldn't be too difficult to obtain some proficiency in. There are no verb tenses, noun genders, etc. Instead of saying the equivalent of “I went,” you say “I go yesterday,” a very practical solution – don't you agree?

I got all those books you sent some time back and recently the shorts – and I thank you. Eventually I'm going to hit up the old Hong Kong Tailor, but he's third on my priority list after I get all my cameras and my complete stereo sound system. I'll probably leave here broke – but I'll have some fine goodies.

Let me know how the Fort Lee Army treats generals and I'll eat my heart out. However, if I couldn't be a general, I think my next choice would be a lieutenant in the Engineers – this is a pretty good life!

I'm sending a check for \$30.00 to pad my account – let me know what the status of my debts are – red or black and how much.

Send me a picture of my new home of record.

Love, Tom

One of the better-known members of the 20th Engineer Brigade was Al Gore, who served as an Army Journalist for the *Castle Courier* from December 1970 to May 1971 while stationed at the 20th Engineer Brigade Headquarters in Bien Hoa. A lot has been written about what he actually did in Vietnam compared to what he claimed he did – or what others said he claimed he did. See <http://www.nytimes.com/library/politics/camp/071100wh-gore.html>.

Daily Routine

The standard Army work week in Vietnam was six and a half days a week. We typically had an eight or nine-hour day, starting at 8:00 a.m., with an hour off for lunch. If I didn't go anywhere during the day, I reported for work in the S-3 office, a hot, dusty un-air conditioned, metal Quonset building.

On Monday of each week, we typically went to an intelligence briefing conducted by the group S-2 (Intelligence Officer) in the Group Strategic Operations Center (SAC). There was a big map on the wall, and the S-2 described where all the VC (Viet Cong) and NVA (North Vietnam Army) were operating and what they were thought to be planning. There was also a review of actions the previous week, including any casualties.

We also had a meeting of the S-3 (Operations) officers and non-coms (non-commissioned officers) to discuss projects and responsibilities for the coming week. Our job was mostly planning, assigning missions, inspecting, trouble-shooting, facilitating and reporting. I was supposed to check on the status of every job assigned by the 20th Engineer Brigade S-3 to the 159th Engineer Group. Every Thursday morning, I went over to the 20th Brigade Headquarters at Plantation (about five miles way) to report verbally and in writing on the week's activities to the brigade commander, a brigadier general.

To come up to speed, I had to contact every person in charge of every job to get a report. There were hundreds of them. I kept a file on every job assigned to the Group, updated its

status every week, and prepared a weekly written report. If a project was stalled, late in getting started or behind schedule, I had to find out why and often had to take the initiative to trouble shoot it. I had to go out and look at a lot of the projects so I could accurately describe them. I reported on the quantities of gravel and asphalt produced, the number of hours the plants were down for maintenance, exactly which parts were malfunctioning and when the new parts were expected to arrive and be installed. I also reported on manpower strengths and casualties.

The office work was tedious and generally boring, but also frequently interesting and challenging when some problem needed to be solved. I spent several days one week driving and flying around Vietnam looking for a special piece of equipment to grind down a concrete floor slab after a pour had gone bad for a PX building at Long Binh.

If I was at Long Binh during the middle of the day, I usually jogged for about a mile, jumped into the swimming pool at the 46th Engineer Battalion next door and ate a hamburger and fries for lunch.

In the evening, I believe dinner was about 6:00 p.m. in the Company mess hall.

The Company "Officer's Club" was in the same building as the mess hall, with a different entrance. It didn't amount to much. There was a bar along one wall, and a Vietnamese woman worked as bartender. There were a few chairs and tables in the room. Drinks were cheap, and I recall that it was air-conditioned. Sometimes, we went to one of the larger officer's clubs on base or went to a movie, but mainly in the evening folks read books, listened to music or drank. Later, we completely remodeled the Officer's Club into a showcase.

Sometimes, there was night duty of some kind. Every night, there had to be a "duty officer" for the headquarters company, and each officer's time came up about once a month. That meant you had to stay up all night and respond to any incoming communications that required action.

Perimeter guard duty at Long Binh was allocated so that each organization had charge of a sector and was responsible for manning that sector each night. The responsibility was further delegated to and rotated among smaller units, so that our headquarters company might have the assignment once a month. For each sector, there was also an "officer of the guard," who was responsible for constantly checking the sector all night long to make sure those on guard duty were awake.

I think I pulled guard duty only once when our company was tapped. I remember one of the spec 4s who was supposed to drive me around was checking his weapon, a .45 caliber pistol, when it went off and missed his foot by a hair. Along our perimeter sector were about a dozen guard bunkers, each with a fixed M-60 machine gun and a "starlight scope" (night vision device). Each bunker was manned by several soldiers. It was real spooky running the perimeter checks. The jeep light had to be turned off, and of course, there was no light in the bunkers. I usually found the guards asleep, and I was concerned



Figure 15 - Some of the usual suspects in our Saigon apartment.

I don't remember all the names, but in the upper photo, second to the left is Janine Felix, Chantal Cogny, a couple of guys I can't remember, Nicole ("Nicky") Cogny and Phuc Bui

that someone might wake up in confusion and start shooting. So, before entering each bunker, I would try to make enough noise, but very carefully, so as not to jolt anyone awake.

Once I got into the routine, and if I didn't have to work too late or start too early the next morning, I would try to get down to Saigon as much as possible. I found that I could walk down to the main gate a block away and easily hitch a ride to Saigon in the early evening. I would get dropped off and catch a motorized *cyclo* to the apartment several of us rented and where Allen Tolbert and Eric Nelson lived.

Sometimes we partied at the apartment, but often as not, we went out on the town, eating at a restaurant or sidewalk cart, drinking in a bar, or just walking around enjoying the city. The first apartment was on a main street, Ham Nghi, near the center of town and Central market. It was in the second or third floor over a shop.

Later, and for most of the time that I was there, we rented an apartment in third story of a three-story building on Yen Do Street, which I believe was off of the main street, Cong Ly, leading to Tan Son Nhut airport. The building was concrete with a full roof patio having a pretty good view of the surrounding neighborhood. It was one room with a closet and bathroom. I think Allen Tolbert was the only one who actually lived there – the rest of us just crashed when we could. There were two single beds and a small refrigerator where we kept bottles of water filled by the *mama san*, supposedly after boiling, from the public water supply. It had high ceilings with high windows and a ceiling fan.



Figure 17 - In the lower photo, second from left is Suzanne Pernin (French/Vietnamese/Cambodian), Janine Felix, Nicky Cogny, Chantal Cogny, an unidentified male, me and Phuc Bui.



Figure 16 - Tom Butt, George Coppage and Murray Green at Bien Hoa Airbase, 1969



Figure 18 - Shantytown along a creek in Saigon. Urban legend had it that this waterway caught fire from time to time.



Figure 19 Street scene in Saigon



Figure 20 - Street scene in Saigon



Figure 21 – Somewhere over Vietnam in a Huey slick



Figure 22 - Al Tolbert "interviewing "a potential maid"



*Figure 23 - Improvement of a secondary road north of QL 2A, 34th Engineer Battalion.
December 1969*



Figure 24 - 1st Infantry Division base camp at Lai Khe?



Figure 25 - Improvement of QL-20, 169th Engineer Battalion, March 1969



Figure 26 - Not sure where this is. Maybe Nui Ba Den?



Figure 27 - Phuc Bui at Saigon apartment



Figure 28 - Tom Butt and Phuc Bui in Saigon apartment

9 May 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

Looks like the start of a real busy week. The assistant S-3 went on R&R, so I've got two jobs this week – could mean an all-nighter or two. The work scene continues to be routinely boring, but the extra-curricular scene is shaping up.

About six other guys and myself are going together to rent a fantastic apartment in Saigon. Only one will actually live there. It's mainly to be a weekend type thing. Although the girls living now (USAID) haven't vacated yet, they consented to a party to celebrate the occasion. It was really terrific – just like a United Nations. There were French, Indians, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Chinese and Americans – and probably a few VC for all I know – but everyone had a ball.

I've been meeting more and more of the Saigon natives lately – a going to start work soon with a Buddhist group who is building a training school to teach basic skills to people handicapped by the war. One of the Buddhist leaders (known as "The Venerable") has dedicated some of his estate to the school, and I am helping a Vietnamese to design the complex. I'm trying to help them with some materials and so forth through our Civic Action Program as well.

There are still a good number of the old pedal-type "cyclos" around (you would recognize these as a "rickshaw.") The best sport going is to line up about ten of these with a participant aboard each vehicle – and race to a common destination. The first driver to arrive gets most of the total fares – while the others divide up the remainder proportionate to their finish. Last night one of our group was so far behind he made the driver sit as a passenger while he pedaled to cyclo to a more respectable finish.

As a necessary adjunct to any social occasion in a Vietnamese household one has to partake of the local food, which I have found to be rather bland and tasteless as compared with other Oriental food. However, one can change that to some degree with the universal "dip everything in it sauce" – nuoc mam – which doesn't taste too bad – but strongly resembles in smell a 3 day old dead fish, which is pretty close to its chief ingredient. The only other thing that bothers me is the complete disregard the Vietnamese have for flies. A normal family has a spotless house, dresses in only the cleanest clothes, and lays out a spotless table – but a fly is just like oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide – a part of the atmosphere! They don't even see them.

The more I get to know Saigon, the more I am impressed by the contrast. Everything seems to be a paradox. Parts of the town which were once inhabited by the French still have block after block of villas shaded by old, old trees and guarded by high walls. Other parts, especially those inhabited by refugees, now have the densest population of any city on earth. The incidents of "Terrorism" as reported in stateside newspapers are grossly exaggerated. Most of the incidents involve young kids who are put up to heir acts by somebody else and usually end up blowing themselves up rather than their targets. Saigon is ringed by a series of watchtowers and radar nets that can detect a rocket launching almost instantly

– so these have been cut to a bare minimum. The place is crawling with so many cops plus all the off-duty GI's, both American and ARVN that the city is virtually saturated. About the only thing you have to really watch for is if someone slips something onto or into a jeep while it is parked in an obscure place – like one of the best known tricks is to put a grenade in the gas tank. The gas eats through the rubber band – and bang! In spite of all this, I would rate Saigon as at least as safe as most American cities and more so than some – or at least parts of some.

A good part of the incidents just involve good old American type “mobsterism” in the Vietnamese community – only natural for a place with so much easy money and corruption. Every time some guy gets his due for fudging on the criminal's code – the incident gets blamed on the VC – a handy out for everyone. I stopped taking a jeep to town because it is so easy to get it stolen, and the chance of running over a Vietnamese is quite prevalent and involves a lot of paperwork. I found that the taxi driver will take you anywhere in town for a couple of packs of cigarettes, which go for 30 cents at the PX, and he can sell on the BM [black market] for a couple of dollars. A prerequisite to any afternoon tour is a carton of cigarettes.

The traffic downtown is something else – mainly 50 cc Hondas, with the remainder being equally divided between Lambrettas (a 3-wheel cycle with bed and surrey in back carrying from 6-16 people), jeeps, Renault taxis and vintage Citroens – which are really classy. There is no such thing as a lane, a stop sign or a turn signal. Everyone just goes – and to change lanes you stick out one arm and wave it wildly at the vehicles behind.



Figure 29 - Funeral procession in Saigon

US, ARVN Engineers Combine Forces To Undo Damage Caused by Enemy

In the early morning hours of May 12, an explosion rocked the sleepy village of Lai Thieu. Within minutes bewildered villagers came running out of their homes to the site of the explosion. Once there, they rubbed their eyes in astonishment. What had happened at Phu Cuong six months before had now happened at Lai Thieu. The 850-foot Phu Long Bridge, which for so many years spanned the Saigon River, had been blown by VC sappers bent on closing up the major lines of communication in Vietnam.

Before the morning sun fully emerged from the horizon, engineers from the 100th Float Bridge Company, 159th Engineer Group, under the direction of 1LT Richard Ramirez, were on the site reconning the damage. They were accompanied by ARVN engineers of the 301st Combat Engineer Battalion, 30th ARVN Engineer Group.

Shortly thereafter the decision was reached to construct an M4T6 float bridge, thereby reopening the north Saigon By-Pass, the route which the bridge services. The 100th Float Bridge Company would provide the bridging and technical assistance and the ARVN engineers the muscle for the assembly stages.

A major problem initially arose due to the peculiarity of the bridge's location. Dense vegetation covered the shores of the river and it was virtually impossible to inflate and assemble the bridging at the site where the float bridge was to be emplaced. Consequently, the situation called for the pontoons to be inflated in an open

area three-fourths of a mile inland, and later transported to the bridge site.

The solution for transporting was close at hand when a CH-54 Flying Crane was called in to skylift each pontoon from the assembly area to the river. Rising up like a diabolical creature from the clouds of dust which shrouded the sky crane, the pontoons were lifted off the ground and carried over to the river, upstream from the bridge site.

As this operation progressed, approaches to the float bridge from the main route to the river banks were being readied by dozers from the 100th Float Bridge Company. As the Sky Crane released the payload, bridge erection boats ferried the pontoons into position and 125 engineers from the 30th ARVN Engineer Group worked arduously, marrying up the bays of the bridge and placing down the balk planking.

Finally, three days later, the last piece of planking was emplaced by one ARVN and one American engineer. The scene was reminiscent of the golden spike being driven at Promontory Point connecting the Union and the Central Pacific railroad lines.

Within minutes the roadway was open and traffic began to flow. Only the children of the village of Lai Thieu appeared unhappy about the completion of the float bridge, for their three day vacation was now over as they made the trek across the new bridge to the school on the other side of the river.

Story By 1Lt Eugene Roberts,
Photos By Sp4 Todd Sanders

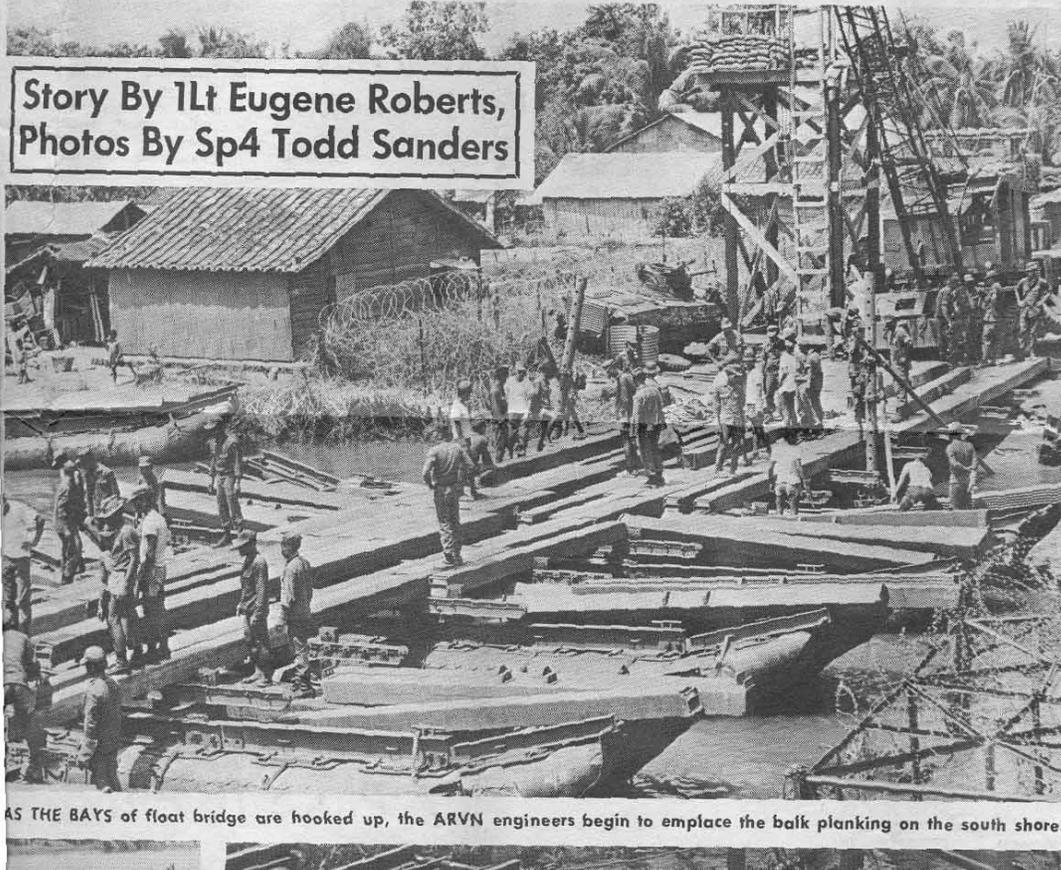


Figure 30 - Construction of a float bridge at Phu Long by the 100th Bridge Company, 159th Engineer Group, after the bridge was blown by VC sappers May 12, 1969

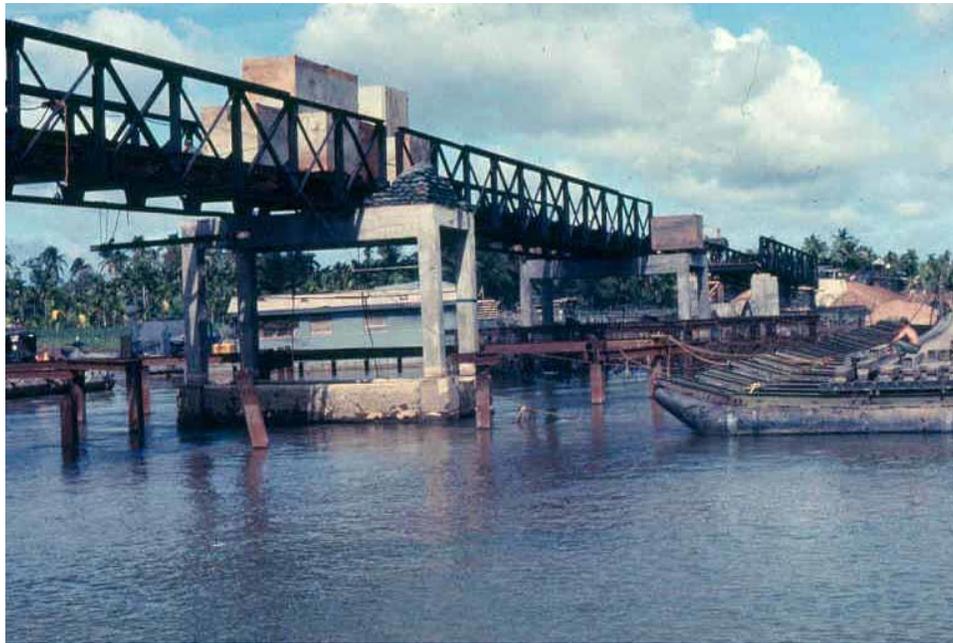


Figure 31 - Load test on new Bailey bridge at Phu Cuong



Figure 32 - Phu Cuong float bridge. From left to right, Sgt. Hancock, 159th HHC Engineer Group, unidentified ARVN soldier and 1Lt Tom Butt. For a video, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3Ft623hls4>.

20 May 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

Things are pretty quiet and routine around here these days in spite of what you read in the papers. We had a little soiree the other night to celebrate Ho Chi Minh's birthday (any excuse for a party), but he didn't show up.

How's the moving game – I bet you wish it was either a dream or all over. I don't envy you. Have you sold the house yet?

I got a letter from John Butt – primarily because he thinks he needs some jungle boots. Tell him there is no way to procure them legally except through supply and for that reason it would be indiscrete to mail them. I'll bring him some next February.

Jack tells me he is leaving for Glacier shortly and that Martin & Nancy are going to the Tetons – how about filling me in on that. I thought it was all out the window. I probably won't have time to write them before they leave.

I've been in phone contact with Backus. He is at the out-processing center at Can Ranh today, and I was going to fly up there – but can't work it into my schedule.

A financial footnote – put in a standing sell order at 71 for my Continental Can stock at the local broker. I have reason to think it is a good time to sell. I will relay some other plans for disposition of funds later – let me know if the sale is a go (I've got 54 shares). The Stars and Stripes runs a daily stock market page – so I've been keeping track.

I'm going to arrange some manipulations which involve an outstanding loan at Ft. Polk Credit Union, Soldier's Deposits guaranteed 10% interest, my stock proceeds plus some other investing, which should be financially beneficial in the long run. I don't plan any complex things that will involve any great amount of time. I just want to get some stuff straight – like foolishly paying interest on a loan when I can pay it off cash right now and collect interest on the money over here.

I've been making all kinds of movies but I can't buy a projector to see them. I may have to order one, which takes two months. It's all a matter of timing and luck to get anything good at the PX over here. Shipment of a thousand projectors might come in, and they'll be gone in 10 minutes – if you're not there, you miss out.

If you want to prepare another care package, I'd really like a dozen or so Pentel pens, mostly black with a couple of brown and red. They're impossible to get over here. The army has a million of every useless thing on earth and very few of anything really necessary. I'm going to start doing some fine sketches down in Saigon and around – since my films apparently won't ever be shown, I have to do something to record my presence.

Love, Tom

23 May 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

I just got the letter from Dad – and all the junk along with it. These bills are getting to be a chore for you I'm sure, but I guess eventually they'll all be paid up. I wrote the Master Charge people and asked them to send me a statement so I could verify my bill and get them off my back. I'll let you know what the deal is so you can mail them a check.

I'm sending along some camera info for Jack if this catches him on the way though. If not, just forward it. I just bought the Pentax camera for \$126.00. as you can see, it would cost \$290.00 in the states. I can get him one like it – or anything cheaper if he will let me know how much he can afford. Generally, I can get a camera for about 2/5 of what it would retail for at home. I finally found an incoming shipment at the PX after much daily checking and went on a binge with the camera I mentioned as well as a fabulous movie projector. I'll send some films home after I get a few more back and edit out the sloppy parts – I'm still learning.

I took a good trip yesterday to a little town on the coast about due east of Saigon (Ham Tan). It was just a slow and sleepy as another world and sure would make a fabulous resort. We checked some construction at a MACV facility and toured around the village centered around a lagoon at the mouth of a river. They had a fantastic fish market, and I couldn't resist eating a big gob of raw snails (oc in Vietnamese – escargots in French). They were dipped in a kind of salt-red pepper mix and delicious – maybe even better than Louisiana crayfish – and washed down with the local Ba Muoi Ba (33) beer.

We flew along the southern coast to Vung Tau and then back up to Long Binh. The more I see of this place, the more deserted I realize it is. You can fly a hundred miles and never see a house, road or cultivated plot of ground. It reminds me of some of the areas in Arkansas in the Ozarks National Forest or the piney woods of south Arkansas. Nobody lives there or even wants to. Its no wonder that an entire army of VC can live out there and come into town any time they want to – and it makes sense to hear that the VC could have free run of 2/3 of the country and yet not even be a strong influence on the lives of people over much of the country.

My current predictions are as follows: (1) The only thing the North Vietnamese understand is force and determination. (2) The ARVN need at least 4 more years to achieve a status of strength equal to the combined forces here now. (3) The only way to achieve even the least of the U.S.'s stated goals is to decide to stay here indefinitely and let the world know it. The war is not going badly for the South Vietnamese nor are they losing it. The North and the VC are definitely permanently in the losers' column, but with every passing day their potential victory seems to come closer. ½ million GI's brought home are just as much gone as if they had been wiped out in a gigantic battle. (5) The best hindsight summation might be that we should have either stayed out or committed ourselves for the duration. I would say we have already "won," – but we must

stay to consolidate our gains. I may sound like an ach-hawk warmonger, but I'm not – I'm just trying to be objective. The U.S. has either got to stay here or leave and lose everything – probably both courses have merit!

On the lighter side, I am consolidating my gains down Saigon way – going to have supper with a family of a lovely Vietnamese girl I've been seeing some lately. Her father is an ARVN colonel and teaches at the Vietnamese "West Point." Should be an interesting evening. She works at the main military and embassy switchboard in Saigon along with about 100 other young ladies – a great source of cultural exchange and intellectual stimulation that I happened to fall into one day in my wanderings.



Figure 33 - A park in Saigon with a Boy Scout camporee

I've got staff duty Saturday night, so I'll probably get all day Sunday off – probably go back to the Saigon Zoo – tremendous place in a large park with lagoons and all that stuff. Everybody in Saigon either heads for the boonies or the zoo on Sunday – just like Golden Gate Park in S.F. Even a few hippies around. It's really hard to determine the sex of a Viet hippie because of no beard, which is the standard distinguishing trait elsewhere. Saigon even has its own "Hell's Angels" – commonly known as "Saigon Cowboys." They ride about on their Hondas (top speed 30 mph) looting and pillaging, frightening women & children, etc.

How's my stock sale progressing? I think the bottom will fall out of the market this summer due to the fact that everybody will find out that we've either got to stay here indefinitely or lose our shirt. I hope I don't have to leave on the first plane – having too good a time.

Love, Tom

Undated, missing some pages...

...them – much less worry about them.

About the PACEX catalogue, they are extremely hard to find. I heard they were going for \$25.00 recently, but I'll keep looking for one. The copies at PX order counters are sealed in steel and chained to the counter. Anything you order is subject to duty if it is over \$50.00 per individual item. Anything I bring home with me is completely free, however.

I've spoken with Coppage several times by phone, but I haven't run into him yet. He flies down here all the time but only stays a few minutes on the ground. We're trying to get together some weekend and go down to Saigon or Vung Tau.

I tried to find Pam on the day you told me, but the Pan Am people have no reliable crew lists. I spent all day crawling around planes looking for her, but no luck. Had a good time anyway – ran into a couple of girls I know from San Francisco.

If anyone else is coming over here, tell them to call me at 926-3550/3553/3543. There is usually someone there from 6:00 AM to 9:00 – 10:00 at night. Tell M. Huntington to stop over if she can on the way to Laos.

As you can see by this page, I got the Pentels, and I wish I had opened them in private. I had to give a couple away to silence onlookers, and then I fled the scene and denied knowledge of the delivery.

I also received the magazines – won't the Post Office forward them over here? I guess I'm still getting them on my old subscription, and they're going to Ft. Polk – huh?

I'm sending along a statement from master Charge which I've verified. Please pay this from my account, but no more of these unless the receipts are included.

I'm sending a bunch of pictures and junk in another envelope to lighten the load. I don't know how much weight they'll send free, but it's a lot of trouble to have to mail something twice, so I'll try to get it through the first time.

Get Martin and Nancy's address for me as soon as you can.

If you can't sell the house, don't rent it to college students – especially males.

Love, Tom



Figure 34 - I had a couple of friends who were stewardesses for Pan Am, and every now and then I heard they might be flying in to Tan San Nhut, so I found some excuse to go check out the incoming flights. I never did see them, but it was a nice chance to chat up some crewmembers who knew them.

9 July 1969 – Long Binh

Dear Folks,

I've been working harder the last two weeks (long hours-wise) than probably any time since architecture school days – this being the reason for the communications gap. Why, I've even had to cancel some of my social obligations!

The S-3 major went home late in May, leaving a cpt. as S-3 and myself moved to assistant S-3, plus having all the duties of my former job. Cpt. Ryan usually spends the entire day at conferences or with the col. At job site inspections all over the country – leaving me back at HQ to handle all business, answer all questions, etc. My main function is receiving, assigning and coordinating all the combat & operational support missions that come down from 20th Brigade and are parceled out to one of our five battalions. I couldn't have lasted 10 minutes the first week without the sergeant major, but I've gotten pretty much in the groove now. Tremendous feeling of power and all that.

I've been alternating between 14 and 16 hour days ever since I started this, and I don't think we'll get a major until about 1 August.

I did manage to slip into Saigon, however, for a couple of nights over the weekend, and I'm happy to say that my comrades in the discussion and cultural

exchange program have made new inroads into the social elite of the peculiar city – causing me great anguish in trying to determine how I can conscientiously accept my \$65 per month combat pay. I guess it must cover the drive down or something.

I don't know whether those calls that Paul Wright sets up are worth the trouble. I can hardly hear anything, and with all the truck and choppers that seem to be drawn to my window, It's nearly impossible to communicate. They've got a great phone system here – sometimes – It's supposed to be direct dial anywhere in southeast Asia, and when it works, it's great – but, of course, when it's really necessary, it's out.

Coppage should be coming down this week finally, which is good. We're having a housewarming at our groovy new townhouse apartment in Saigon (roof garden, balcony, the whole works). It's kind of a weekend house sort of thing.

I sent Jack a fancy camera which he will probably not be able to operate if he's like me, but he can impress a lot of people by flashing it around.

If you see Backus around, ask him to advise me as to his plan for seeking his fortune or whatever other goal or non-goal he is working toward. If he has flown the coop already, see if you can get his address.

It looks from the U.S. papers like everybody is all psyched up over the troop withdrawal. I think it's a pretty slick move by Nixon to placate the radicals, and it shouldn't affect the situation over here much, if at all. I continue to be optimistic, and the only problem involved is keeping the psychological edge that I think we are developing for the first time in years.

Considering that I have the misfortune of being in the army, things couldn't be better right now, so don't worry about me. I'm just glad I don't have a house to sell. Too bad you can't get it on the Saigon black market, it would bring a fortune.

Love, Tom

14 August 1969 – Long Binh

Dear Folks,

Aside from the fact of being so busy, I've been putting off writing because I keep thinking I can get a phone call through, but Paul has been hard to find lately. He was in the hospital for a while and now they say he's on R&R. He started working the night shift anyway, which is the busiest time of day – and even when I could get him, he couldn't get a free circuit.

My job is starting to slow up a little finally. Got a new major in about 1 ½ weeks ago, and he is just about trained. I've been trying to slip inconspicuously back into my old position with only limited success, but I've still got more free time than I've had in two months.

George Coppage was down yesterday and today, and I tried to give him a Cook's tour of Saigon in one night. He's only got about 1 ½ months to go with three trips to Taiwan lined up to make it even shorter. Last Sunday, I flew up to Phan Rang with him – and drove the plane some. The air base here is really plush compared with anything in the United States and makes the army facilities look like a slum in comparison.

I picked an unfortunate day to come back, as I was caught in Tan Son Nhut during the currency exchange. About every 8 or 10 months on a secret day, they lock everybody on base in Vietnam and make them change their MPC for a different issue. The idea is to limit black marketing, which is primarily transacted in MPC. Several million dollars in MPC is instantly invalidated because it is held by Vietnamese who cannot turn it in. Saigon looks kind of like the stock market crash of '29 when this happens – people jumping out windows and all that. My two buddies collected over \$5,000 in MPC from Vietnamese on Monday before they went to work – and were able to exchange \$1,000 of it – all profit! Anyway .. I flew into Tan Son Nhut and they wouldn't let me out until I changed my money. The line for transients was ½ mile long, so I finally got on a chopper and flew back out to Long Binh – after waiting in line 4 hours and moving about 4 feet.

I took George over to Bien Hoa Air Base to catch a flight back to Phan Rang, and we ran into Murray Green, who used to room with Randy Snapp at Yellowstone, who is now a pilot. Also ran into Mike Thomas, an old Sigma Nu from Hot Springs, who is with the 11th Armored Cav over by Cambodia.³

Finally got all my sound equipment with the purchase last week of a tuner/amp and speakers. I now have a TEAC 4010S tape deck, Sansui 3000 tuner/amplifier and a 2-Sansui 2000 (70 watter) speakers. Cost here \$550 and worth about \$1,000 in the states. The only other major investment "I'm going to make is some Hong Kong suits from the friendly tailor – and then maybe I can think about saving some money. I'm still trying to get that catalog form PACEX, but I'm not having any luck. I expect a breakthrough any day, however.

I signed up for R&R to Sydney on 5 November, which will put me there for some good beach action. Through some administrative foul up, I owe the army about 5 days leave, so I don't think I can pull a leave while I'm over here.

Other than what's happened this week, there is little to relate. I've been too busy to get out anywhere – and only Saigon once or twice a week. I took my first day off in two months when I went to see Coppage. The war is real quiet here except for a few minor incidents. There have been some big indications lately of the projected pull-out continuing. We were ordered to cease all base construction projects less than 90% complete. The lumber supply has been almost depleted and apparently there is no more coming in-country. What is left is all going to combat and operational support (bunkers, minimum requirements, revetments, etc.).

³ Less than a month later, Mike was killed in combat. Information from the Vietnam Memorial states: "Michael Herman Thomas, 1LT, Army, Hot Springs, AR, 6/21/1946 - 9/14/1969, He served as a 1542 in the Army. In 2 years of service, he attained the rank of 1LT/O2. On September 14, 1969, at the age of 23, MICHAEL HERMAN THOMAS perished in the service of our country in South Vietnam, Phuoc Long."

The big mission of the engineers from now on out will be jungle clearing and highway construction, both of which have probably done more to “win” the war than any amount of combat. By this time next year, our group will be almost totally committed to highway construction, and the 79th group entirely committed to land clearing – if they are in fact here or partly here.

I don't know whether you heard or not – but Joe Butt got transferred up here when his 9th Division unit went home. He's now the XO at the 12th Aviation Group here on Long Binh and has been properly initiated into the better things of Vietnam life which are available in Saigon and not in the Delta mud – what a change for an infantry platoon leader used to living with his feet underwater.

I'm curious if Martin and Nancy have gone home yet, and what it was that made them leave such a seemingly groovy situation. Tell martin to write me and fill me in when they get back. I wish I could pull up stakes and tour around for a while – I don't mind Vietnam at all, but the work is really getting old.

Send me the Razorback clippings when football season starts.

Love, Tom



Figure 35 - A \$0.05 Military Payment Certificate

As explanation to the reader, some of the people I have referred to in my letters include:

- Jack Butt – my brother 6 years younger, attending the University of Virginia
- Martin Butt – my brother, 3 years younger, who had been a Marine, served in Vietnam, decorated with a Purple Heart, returned to the University of Arkansas, and married Nancy Stair.
- John Backus – a contemporary from Fayetteville who had also gone thorough Army ROTC and was serving comtemporaneously in Vietnam in an armored reconnaissance outfit.



Figure 37 - Doug Cummings and John Backus



Figure 36 - Murray Green, Tom Butt and unidentified friend of Murray's with Saigon girls

- George Coppage - a contemporary from Fayetteville who had also gone through Air Force ROTC and was serving contemporaneously in Vietnam as a C-123 pilot, stationed at Phan Rang.



Figure 38 - C-123's at Bien Hoa airbase. This is the type of aircraft flown by my friends George Coppage and Bill Dorn, who were stationed at Phan Rang

- Murray Green – I met Murray in Yellowstone Park in 1965 when I was working for the National Park Service as a Student Trainee Architect. Murray was a seasonal Park Ranger. At the end of the summer, we left together driving home in Murray's car – Murray, me and a girl whose name I cannot remember. Murray was from Mississippi. He had recently purchased a .22 pistol, and we somehow began stopping frequently in the Wyoming wilderness for "quick draw" contests. I think we were trying to impress the girl. At any rate, Murray was a little too quick on the draw and shot himself through the leg. We treated him with whiskey until we could get to the first town in Wyoming big enough to have a hospital, where they extracted the bullet and patched him up. I next ran into Murray in Vietnam, where he was a C130 pilot for the "Ranchhands," who were spraying Agent Orange over Vietnam.
- Bill Dorn – Bill Dorn was George Coppage's roommate in Phan Rang and a C-123 pilot. Later, Dorn lived with me and several other people in Mill Valley in 1970 – 71 when he was flying C-141's out of Travis Air Force Base.

The Vietnam War, as seen on Ken Burns' "Vietnam War" is focused mostly on combat of which there was plenty, of course. The sound effects are mostly gunfire and explosions. But for most of the nearly three million service members who

served in Vietnam, life was mostly boredom punctuated by occasional danger and a lot of weird stuff.

Following are snippets from the experiences of several friends of mine that show the ironic and sometimes comical side of service in Vietnam

Eric Nelson, from Vermont, educated as an artist, drafted into the Army in 1968, retired as professor of art at Middlebury College in Vermont.

The U.S. Army actually assigned Eric to something he was good at. As an artist, he became an illustrator for psychological warfare (PSYOPS) media prepared in Saigon, flown to New York for printing, flown back to Vietnam, and finally dropped by planes and helicopters over areas where someone figured regretful Viet Cong would be persuaded to change their allegiance. Untold billions of those pamphlets and flyers were distributed during those war years. No one knows whether it did any good, or not. But for Eric, it was good duty.

One of the best stories I remember about Eric, who was a bit of a rogue, was his unauthorized visit to the "[Coconut Monk](#)," a holy man based on an island (Con Phung) in the Mekong River between Ben Tre and My Tho. Ong Dao Dua, the monk, meditated on the island for three years during which time he ate nothing but coconuts. He headed his own sect, which was a bizarre mix of Christianity and Buddhism. About two weeks before his discharge, Eric asked his commanding officer for permission to make a trip to Con Phung. Because it was considered unsecure and dangerous, permission was denied.

Eric went anyway, and when he returned, he was busted to the lowest possible



Figure 39 Tom Butt with Eric Nelson and Al Tolbert Saigon 1969

rank before leaving for home and leaving the Army, with a dubious reputation but with an honorable discharge.

Eric said the monk had two telephones flanking his seat, one white and the other black. When Eric asked what they were for, the monk responded, “One is a direct line to Ho Chi Minh, and the other a direct line to Richard Nixon.” He said he was in the process of brokering a peace agreement.

Eric went on to become a respectable citizen, artist and academic. Recent exhibitions of his sculpture have been installed in public sculpture parks at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia; Navy Pier in Chicago; and the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Nelson has been a visiting artist at the Edinburgh College of Art in Edinburgh, Scotland; the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut; and the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, Vermont. He has been awarded residency fellowships at Moulin a Nef in Auvillar, France; the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in Sweet Briar, Virginia; and Sculpture Space, Inc., in Utica, New York. He has received two fellowships from the Vermont Council on the Arts and the [Albert Jacobson](#) Memorial Award at the Silvermine Guild Arts Center in New Canaan, Connecticut.

For more, see <http://www.tombutt.com/forum/2012/120401.htm>.

Bill Dorn, from Texas, attended Texas A&M with a degree in Aerospace Engineering, Commissioned an Air Force Officer from ROTC, flew C-123s and C-141s in Vietnam, retired.

Bill reminds me of Yossarian in Catch-22. Bill recalled that on his way to Vietnam, he stopped over at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines where all the pilots were required to take a week-long escape and evasion and jungle survival course before going in-country. Bill is kind of a slow moving, tall and lanky guy and not one to get out front, so when he reported for jungle school, he was among the last to come into the assembly room and took a seat in the back. As the pilots lined up to check in, Bill was in the end of the line and found that by the time he got to the sign-up place, the course was full, and he was told to come back next week.

After a week of partying with stewardesses in the officers club, Bill reported again and this time made it a point to sit in the back of the room. Once again, the course filled up before he was able to sign up, and Bill was passed over. Back to the party.

By that time, he had the scam down. But after three weeks of delays and hard partying, his commander sent word that Dorn better finish jungle school and get to Phan Rang, or else.

Finally, Bill reported in to Phan Rang, as luck would have it, just before the Tet holiday in 1969. His first night was marked by a Viet Cong attack on the base that breached the wire and was repulsed only with a significant effort. When the rockets started coming in, he strapped on his only weapon, his pilot's issue .38 and ran for the bunker barefoot in his skivvies. A great start.

Finally, Bill recalled the day his crew exceeded their maximum flying hours and were ordered to lay over on [Vung Tau](#) for the night instead of returning to Phan Rang. The entire crew got drunk and rowdy and were jailed by the MPs. Finally the wing commander tracked them down and sprung them just in time to take off for their next mission.

For more, see <http://www.tombutt.com/forum/2012/120425b.htm>

Bernard Horstmann, from Germany, Hong Kong and New York, drafted into the Army in 1968, retired, living in Munich

New York, 1968. Bernhard Horstmann was beginning a career as a 25-year old wine merchant living in New York City when he was drafted. As a German citizen, Bernhard didn't have to serve; he could have simply returned to Germany.

But he decided to take the plunge. He quit his job, sold his car and moved out of his apartment, taking government provided transportation to Ft. Gordon, GA, to report for basic training.

At Ft. Gordon, he was summoned for an interview with an intelligence officer. Was he born in China? Yes. Had he ever traveled to East Germany? Yes he had.

Was he a communist sympathizer? Of course not. Did he have a security clearance or other proof of non-communist sympathies? He did not.

Bernhard was excused and sent back to New York where he had to beg to get his job back and found temporary lodging in a cheap motel.

Just when things were getting back to some semblance of normal, Bernhard got a second draft notice. Apparently, the Army had investigated him and found him to be a thoroughly red-blooded American of German citizenship.

The last thing his boss advised him before he left again for Ft. Gordon was “Don’t ever volunteer for anything.”

Back to Ft. Gordon.

So, only a few days into basic training, it appears that the entire Army cooking staff had been snatched away for duty in Vietnam. “Anybody have cooking experience?” the drill sergeant asked. Forgetting the recent advice about volunteering, Bernhard stepped forward along with six others. Five of them described their meager experience with McDonald’s and other fast food restaurants, but Bernhard, wanting to set himself apart from the crowd, lied that he had been a sous-chef at the Waldorf Astoria.

Next thing he knew, he was in full charge of the mess hall. Bernhard actually had no professional cooking experience, but he found the Army had manuals with detailed recipes for everything. If you could read it, you could cook it.

So Bernhard spent his entire basic training as a chef. Never had KP; never went to the rifle range; never had to march.

He also took the standard proficiency test, scoring high with fluency in three languages and typing speed of 80 words per minute.

But the Army needed more soldiers in Vietnam, so Bernhard had to end his career as an Army chef and head into the unknown.

Now I have to back up here and provide some more context.

Bernhard was born in China to a mother who was the daughter of missionaries and a father who was a German banker. His mother’s father was Chinese. Just before the Communists took over in 1949, Bernhard’s parents divorced, and his mother, then single with four children, had to flee, ending up temporarily in Thailand.

Charlotte Horstmann eventually moved to Hong Kong, where Bernhard received his early schooling. Later, he attended boarding school in Germany while his

mother became a highly successful dealer in Chinese antiquities in Hong Kong. Her shop was a “don’t miss” destination for stars, politicians, business magnates and high-ranking government officials from around the world. Click [here for a 1982 article in the New York Times](#).

Eventually, Bernhard moved to New York, where we began this tale in 1968.

Now, back to Vietnam.

In 1969, Bernhard found himself at the replacement depot at Long Binh, sitting around waiting for something to happen. He remembered another piece of advice his boss gave him. “Always look busy doing something, or they will tap you for something you don’t want to do.” This time he took it. So Bernhard grabbed a broom and started cleaning up the depot. As his fellow soldiers lounging around were commandeered for combat duty, Bernhard worked even harder. A man with a mission.

Finally, he was the only one left, and a sergeant asked to see his 201 file. Struck by the 80 words per minute typing skill, the sergeant whisked Bernhard off to Saigon where he was assigned to some obscure unit that seemed to do nothing but create paperwork.

Now it came to pass that as various war correspondents, diplomats and other officials visited Charlotte’s (Bernard’s mother) shop in Hong Kong, she urged them to be sure and check on Bernhard when they passed through Saigon. Almost everybody important passed through Saigon in those days.

So it wasn’t long before the sergeant overseeing Bernhard’s paper mill got a phone call from the American Embassy. “Horstmann,” he yelled, “you have phone call.” No E4 got a phone call in those days. It turned out to be the ambassador with an invitation to an Embassy party. “Do you have a suit and tie,” the diplomat asked. Somehow, Bernhard found a suit and began a pattern of attending events and participating in social activities, including membership in the exclusive Circle Sportif Tennis Club, that any other E4 could not have imagined in his wildest dreams.

Resentment, however, began to build up with the lieutenant who commanded Bernhard’s unit, and Bernhard became the target of abuse. “What did you do then,” I asked Bernhard a few days ago when he was retelling this story.

“I called my mother.”

Bernhard was transferred to another unit and treated with more respect.

For more, see <http://www.tombutt.com/forum/2012/121215e.html>

Alan Tolbert, from Tennessee, graduated from University of Tennessee with a Master's Degree in City Planning, drafted into the Army in 1968, retired.

Alan and I had been at Ft. Polk, LA, together in 1968. I was a basic combat training officer, and Alan was a trainee. Neither of us were enjoying our assignments.

It seems that in late 1968, there was a movement to make Ft. Polk a “permanent” installation. It had been built quickly in WWII as a sprawling training facility of mostly one and two-story wood frame buildings not expected to last more than five years. My father had been there briefly in WWII during the “Louisiana Maneuvers.” More than 20 years later, it was still buzzing with activity, having become known as the “last stop before to Vietnam.”

Becoming a “permanent” post would mean lots of money for the local economy and a boon to local politicians. Someone decided that the road to permanency required a “master plan team.” The word went out for architects, engineers and planners.

Alan Tolbert had a master's degree in City Planning from the University of Tennessee, and, of course, I had a degree in architecture. We both applied and



Figure 40 - Figure 2 - Ft. Polk Master Plan Team hard at work

found ourselves part of the brand-new Ft. Polk Master Plan Team. We had no idea what we were doing, but we were treated like

After a couple of months, we all got orders to Vietnam, but our civilian overseer

was well-connected politically and informed the local congressman that our mission was vital to national defense, not to mention the future economy of central Louisiana and the congressman's chances for reelection. Some kind of congressional action ensued (we were told it was an investigation), and our orders were postponed for three months.

Eventually, however, the needs of the war surpassed the need for Ft. Polk's Master plan Team, and we all found ourselves in Southeast Asia.

Alan's first assignment was quite a comedown. He was assigned to drive the jeep of a lieutenant who didn't seem to have anything to but drive around the Saigon area. But Alan, ever alert for advancement opportunities, somehow got himself assigned to the mayor of Saigon as a city planner. No one seemed to know what he was supposed to do, but he was assigned an office and a secretary. He was also allowed to trade his uniform for civilian clothes.

Taking advantage of the apparent absence of a superior to report to in the organization chart of his murky assignment, Alan drew up a list of 30 plausible activities in which he could conceivably be engaging and gave them to his secretary. "If anyone calls or comes looking for me," he told her, "go down the line to the next activity and tell them that is what I am doing today." When the entire list had been exhausted, the idea was simply to start over. For example, Alan might be "inspecting bridges in Thu Duc" on Monday or "surveying traffic patterns in Binh Thanh" on Tuesday. Remember, this was in the days before cell



Figure 41 - Figure 3 - Tom Butt and Alan Tolbert, Saigon, 1969

phones, so no one could check. A modest gratuity to the secretary sealed her loyalty and made her a willing co-conspirator. Now, neither of them had any work they had to do.

But after a short time, no one even knew Alan was there or cared. No one came looking for him.

For the rest of his tour, Alan was a free agent. A “tourist” stuck in Saigon with no schedule and no responsibilities. With little money but an impressive job title, a gift of gab and nothing else to do, Alan gravitated to leisure class activities where he could meet interesting people and

When I later looked up Alan in Saigon, he and Bernhard, along with another friend, had pooled their money to rent a modest apartment where they could hang out and entertain.



Figure 42 - Tom Butt at Long Binh, Vietnam, 1969



Figure 43 - Tom Butt at Long Binh, Vietnam, 1969



Figure 45 - 120 Yen Do (now Ly Chinh Thang) in District 3 where we shared an apartment and Allen Tolbert actually lived

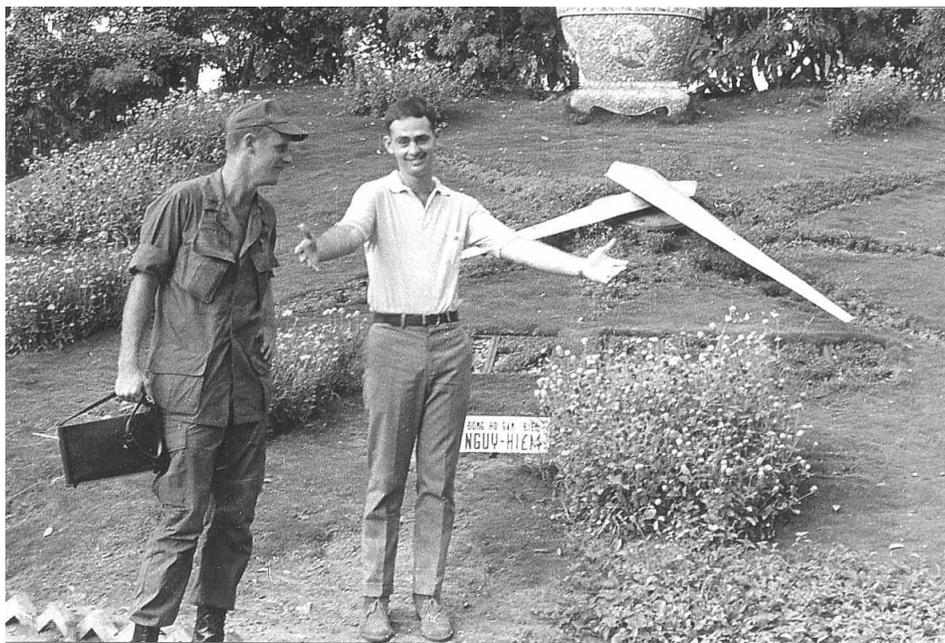


Figure 44 - Tom Butt and Allen Tolbert in unidentified park in Saigon



Figure 47 - Tom Butt and Eric Nelson in Saigon



Figure 46 - Saigon neighborhood from rooftop terrace of 120 Yen Do



Figure 49 - Allen Tolbert and friends



Figure 48 - Allen Tolbert on rooftop terrace of 120 Yen Do



Figure 50 - Alan Tolbert riding a bicycle in Saigon park



Figure 51 - Eric Nelson working on a bicycle at the Ham Nghi apartment



Figure 52 - MACV Camp at Ham Tan

28 August 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

Life has reached a more leisurely pace around here now that the new major is trained and I have settled back into my old routine. I only worked one night this week and actually took Sunday afternoon off – what a great feeling of freedom!

Coppage's roommate was down for the weekend – we spent all afternoon at the Saigon Zoo ogling at girls. The zoo is a really well kept and interesting place and is kind of a weekend social center when the weather is nice. It reminds me a lot of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco – but it's hard to find any hippies.

I'm wondering what Martin and Jack are up to but I really don't know where to write them now. I guess when school starts I can get everyone's location nailed down again. I've been running around with Joe Butt several times a week. Before he even came to the company he is in, we were doing some horse-trading with them. They've been lending us an electrician for our renovation for over a month, and we've been giving them some materials – just poured 2 transit mixers of concrete for a patio over there today. I guess the army would grind to a halt if it weren't for the old do it yourself supply system. We haven't been able to get office supplies for months through regular supply channels, but it's amazing what a little gravel “for the colonel's sidewalk” can do. We have a constant stream of scroungers in here with their own unique and always drawn out sob stories. Our gravel is always “very critical” and “for authorized projects only,” but we manage to shake a little loose every now and then.

I even got out of the office for the first time in weeks today – took a ride about 150 miles northeast of here to a MACV camp in a beautiful little valley surrounded by huge mountains. Beautiful flying weather, which is unusual for this time of year. The advisors are leading the good life up there – It looked like the only thing they had to fight was occasional boredom and too much sleep. The only purpose was to see if they still needed a well that was directed about 2 years ago. They allowed as how they could probably use it, so we came on back and put them on the well drilling list.

All base construction has virtually halted as a result by Gen. Mildren, CG, USARV. The shift in our effort for the net year will be road construction. Within a couple of months, our group will be operating 4 major quarries and 3 asphalt plants in an attempt to pave Vietnam before the engineers all leave. We're getting all kinds of tremendous civilian road building equipment which is more efficient than the rugged military stuff. Our group will just be a giant highway contractor by the time I leave – 6 months left today!

I'm enclosing some newspaper stories and a copy of our daily log for a day earlier this month when we had to build a float bridge. It's interesting to compare the journalist's version with the log notes. I was the only officer in there that particular day and spent about 10 hours with a phone in each hand. Other than things like this that crop up once in a while, business is pretty routine.

I ran into another old Sigma Nu last week – Mike Garlington from El Dorado – used to have a band at the U of A. he got drafted and is working in Special Services in Saigon – making a few entertainment tours, etc. He got us in a good party last Saturday night where his group was playing ... and the Saigon beat goes on.

Love, Tom

Change of Command

In August of 1969, Col. Joseph K. Bratton took over command of the 159th Engineer Group. For video, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seWekT94JtI>.



Figure 53 – Tom Butt at Change of Command ceremony

Building Bridges

At 0200 hours, Sunday, August 3, 1969, the Viet Cong blew up a 104-foot span of the bridge across Rach Hoa on the main highway QL-15 between Saigon and Vung Tau. The explosion alerted a nearby jointly operated U.S. and Vietnamese operations center in Baria. After a recon team from Baria observed the situation, the 1st Australian Task Force in Nui Dat, 4 miles from the bridge was alerted to restore the bridge. Lacking material and equipment for bridging, the Australians sought assistance from U.S. Army Engineers at Long Binh. The assemblage and transportation of equipment and technical advisors from several engineer organizations was coordinated by 1Lt Tom Butt, who happened to be the duty officer that Sunday. Thirty-five hours after the blast, the road was reopened to traffic using a 206-foot floating pontoon bridge.

Following is an excerpt from the duty log:

Some acronyms: FB = Float Bridge. MSR=Military Supply Route. IIFFV = 2nd Field Force, Vietnam. H8 = Helipad 8.

Sunday, August 3, 1969

Daily Journal, S3 Section, HHC 159th Engineer Group, Long Binh, Vietnam

Entries by LT Thomas K. Butt, S3 Duty Officer

1100: Call from LT Robertson, 20th Engineer Bde - O3 Mission 287-5828-0-20 support Australian Engr Task Force at damaged bridge site, QL-15, YS 383592 by supplying 225' of float bridge and technical assistance as required. Contact COL Johnson NUI DAT 922-2953 ASAP. CB Mission: 212-5829-0-20: Open and maintain Route MSR Zink. Contact MAJ York 1st DIV ADE ASAP.

1103: SGT Slatter, Australian Task Force, 922-3953: Inquired what supporting equipment was available on site or available. SGT Slatter stated that an air compressor was available, but he wasn't certain about cranes or boats. Informed him that mission would be assigned to 100th Engr Co (FB) who would contact him shortly.

1105: SFC Stewart, 100th Engr. Co. (FB) - Notified of 03 mission. Requested they begin loading trucks immediately and check status of bridge erection boats.

1125: COL O'Sullivan, IIFFV - Inquired as to the status of the Bridge mission and requested we move the bridging out ASAP. Verify that sufficient cranes and possibly boats were on site. IIFFV chopper will leave red carpet pad at 1300 for bridge site. I requested two seats for personnel from 100th Engr Co (FB) to make recon. Notified SFC Stewart.

1210: MSG Sanders, 46th Engr Bn - I requested crane to be moved ASAP to 100th Engr Co (FB) bridge yard to load bridging. MSG Sanders stated it would be here by 1300.

1250: CPT Lilygren, 92nd Engr Bn - Only one Port Construction boat is operational and is at Ong Thin. Earliest possible time to move to Long Binh would be tomorrow morning.

1300: SFC Stewart, 100th Engr Co (FB) - Notified that 100th Engr Co (FB) boats would have to be utilized. SFC Stewart stated that one would be repaired in time to leave with convoy and another would have to be taken from either Binh Loi or Phu Long. Requested he check operational status of the latter two boats and get the one that would be available sooner.

1400: MSG Sanders, 46th Engr Bn - Crane had not yet moved to support 100th Engr Co (FB) and would have to be re-rigged from a clamshell. I requested this be done and moved to 100th Engr Co (FB) yard ASAP.

1430: SFC Stewart - 100th Engr Co (FB), 1st serial of bridging departed 1425 hrs.

1600: SFC Stewart - 100th Engr Co (FB) - 2nd serial of bridging and one erection boat departed at 1600 hrs.

1745: MSG Schnake, 20th Engr Bde - 34th Engr Gp has been tasked to assist in bridge mission with crane and Mike Boat. We are to coordinate directly with them.

1750 CPT Brown, CO, 523rd Engr Co - Will check to see if Mike Boat is operational or if one can be borrowed. Will call back.

1830: CPT Brown, CO, 523rd Engr Co - Mike Boat and crane will be at ridge site approximately 2130 hrs.

1845: CPT Barker, 17th Royal Australian Engr Sqdn - Informed him of crane arrival time and asked him to inform LT Mercer.

1900: CPT Barker, 17th Royal Australian Engr Sqdn - Called with list of material that is needed at bridge site. Notified SFC Stewart to police up the material and load a truck.

1910: CPT Roth, 20th Engr Bde - Informed them of the need to transport material and requested air transportation.

1930: CPT Roth, 20th Engr Bde - Chopper will be laid on; we are to bring material to the helipad when loaded. 523rd Engr Co will supply cable and dunnage.

2000: CPT Barker, 17th Royal Australian Engr Sqdn - Australians can supply dunnage - contact CPT Taylor Vung Tau MU76 is to arrange convoy to site. Informed him of chopper supply mission and gave call sign, frequency and landing instructions.

2110: LT McDaniels, 20th Engr Bde - Gave him information on night landing pad at TS 383602 on the western side of QL-15 call sign RECON on 38.50.

2300: LT McDaniels, 20th Engr Bde - Materials were delivered at site and chopper is retuning to H8.

2400: Journal closed.

US and Aussies team up to replace vital link with pontoon bridge

BARIA — A vital bridge on Highway 15, 40 miles southeast of Saigon, was blown at 2 a.m. Sunday. By 3 p.m., Monday the 17th Construction Squadron of the Royal Australian Engineers and the 100th Float Bridge Co. of the 159th Engineer Group replaced the severed structure with a 206-foot floating pontoon bridge, reopening the highway between Saigon and the resort city of Vung Tau.

The 100th Float Bridge Co. transported the materials for the bridge and gave technical aid to the Australian Engineers, who had not built a floating pontoon bridge before.

An unknown enemy force blew two critical piers with 100 to 200 pounds of explosives dropping a 104-foot span into the gap below. The explosion alerted a nearby jointly operated U.S. and Vietnamese operations center in Baria. After a recon team from the operations center studied the situation, the 1st Australian Task Force at Nui Dat, 4 miles from the bridge, was alerted. The Australians, who had the responsibility of restoring the bridge, asked the U.S. Army Engineers to lend assistance.

The 100th Float Bridge Co. and the Australian 17th Construction Squadron assembled at the bridge Sunday afternoon. The Australians quickly

removed approximately 30 tons of concrete that blocked one avenue of approach.

The U.S. unit instructed the Australian Engineers how to build the bridge by demonstrating how one float was built. The 100th then assigned men to Australian work crews to give technical advice.

Lt. John Mercer said, "It was amazing that the Australians picked the technique up as fast as they did — they were highly motivated."

As the bridge neared completion, Col. John Perkins III, engineer, II Field Force, said, "There was a high degree of cooperation on both sides. The men worked straight through the night to get the job done with outstanding results. We made mistakes, which are to be expected, but both sides have profited from these mistakes. Any future emergencies will be handled even better."

Highway 15 now is open again. The mission was successful in many ways. Important cargo can be transported. The Vietnamese people can go about their daily routine now, and the Australian Engineers have learned a new skill.

When asked if they could do it again, one Australian, who had been working all night, commented, "If we had to, we could I reckon."



Spanning the gap, the new pontoon bridge parallels the remains of the old structure

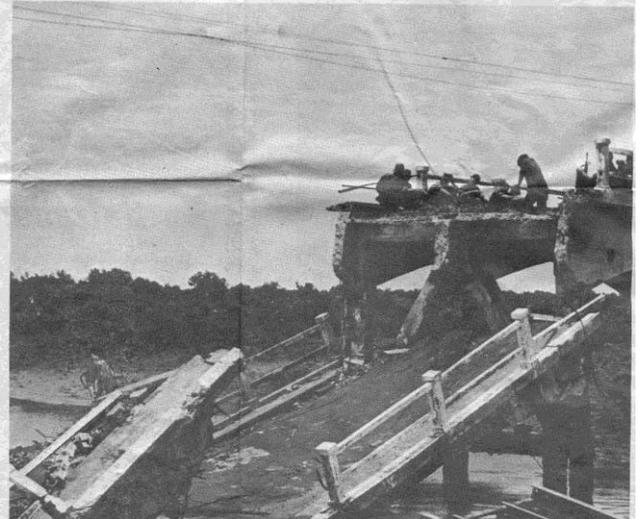


Figure 54 - Rach Hoa bridge, between Saigon and VungTau, was blown by the VC on August 3, 1969. The 100th Bridge Company provided bridge components, and the temporary float bridge was constructed by the 17th Construction Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers.



Figure 56 - Skycrane with front end loader and dump truck in foreground at Sanford Airfield, Long Binh Post, November 1969



Figure 55 - Highway 316 adjacent to HHC 159th Engineer group compound, Long Binh Post.



Figure 57 - Dinh Quan quarry operated by Company D, 169th Engineer Battalion, March 1969



Tom Butt and Al Tolbert with unidentified local women in Saigon. Photo by Eric Nelson

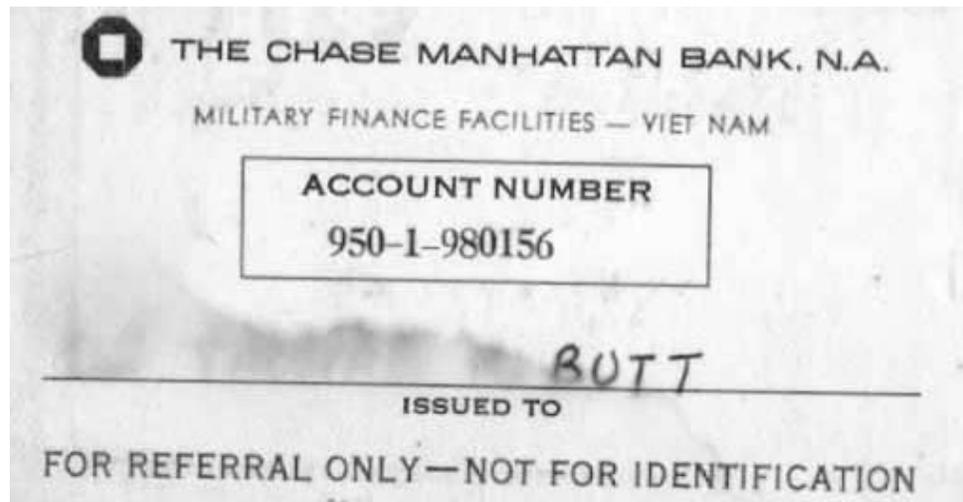


Figure 59 - Bank Card



Figure 58 - Left, Saigon Black market. Right, Saigon girls in front of City Hall

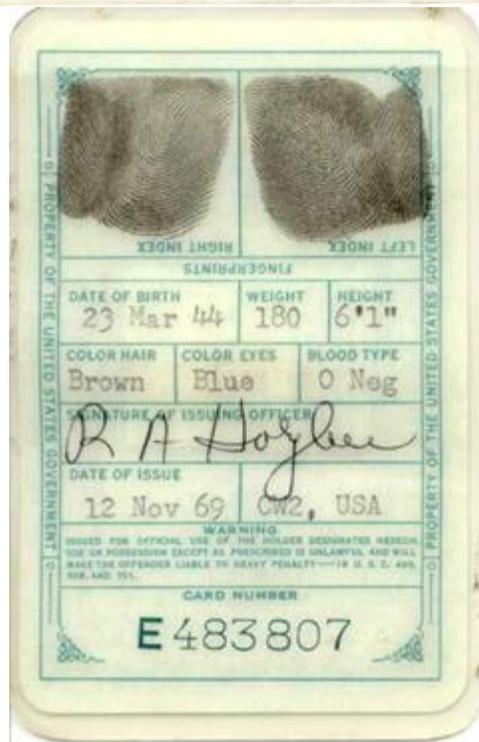
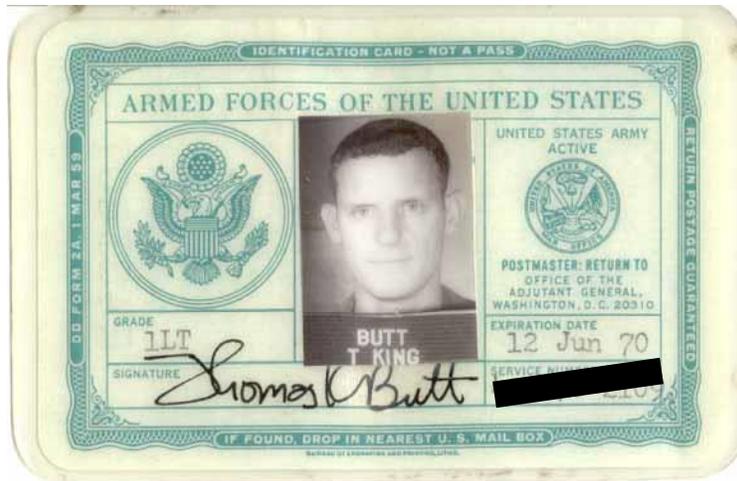


Figure 60 - Army ID Card



Figure 62 - Membership card to the International House, a private club set up primarily for foreign civilians working in Saigon. It had a dining room and bar. It was a good place to hang out to meet western women.

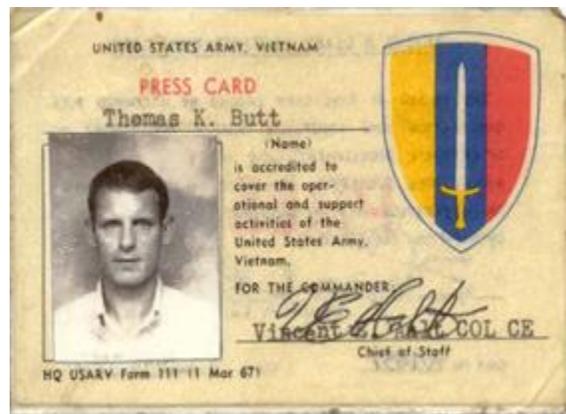


Figure 61 - Left, phony press ID card made up by a friend who had access to press cards. This enabled us to stay out past curfew in Saigon without getting in trouble if the MP's questioned us.



Figure 64 - Phuc Bui (Bui Thi Phuc)



Figure 63 – Phuc Bui and friend



Figure 65 - Phuc Bui and friend at Rach Kien



Figure 66 - Tom Butt and Phuc Bui



Figure 67 - Kids playing in Saigon



Figure 68 - Upper left: Street vendor at Saigon black market



Figure 70 -. Upper right: Woman in front of Continental Palace Hotel. Below: Girl on Saigon street



Figure 69 - Woman in Saigon



Figure 71 - Unidentified Saigon girl at party



Figure 72 - Tom Butt with Saigon girl at party

Bad News

On October 19, 1969, I was contacted by the Red Cross to tell me that my younger brother, Martin, had been killed in an automobile accident. I was informed that arrangements had been made for me to take emergency leave and return home. My cousin, Joe Butt, who was working nearby as the executive officer for a helicopter transportation battalion, picked me up in a jeep and gave me a lift to the airstrip.

It was a long ride home. I remember stopping in Pago Pago, one of the most isolated spots on earth. I spent a night in San Francisco with some of my hometown buddies who were living there at that time, then I flew on to Fayetteville. It turned out that Martin, his wife Nancy, a friend, Bobby Ferrell, and Bobby's date were returning from an evening in Eureka Springs, a resort about 45 miles northeast of Fayetteville. In Rogers, about 25 miles south of Eureka Springs, Martin apparently fell asleep, and the car collided with a semi-trailer truck. Martin and Bobby Ferrell's date were killed instantly.

Martin was the first one in our immediate family to die, and because of his recent service in Vietnam, we made arrangements to bury him in the Fayetteville National Cemetery. It was a full military funeral, the same that my father would have 31 years later.

I was only in Fayetteville a couple of days, and I had to head back to Vietnam. I stayed over another night with my friends in San Francisco, and still in somewhat of fog due to jet lag, grief and weariness, I was back in the war.

Apparently, it was over a month before I got around to writing home again.

24 November 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

I didn't realize until I did a little arithmetic that I had not written for so long. I've been so busy since I got back that the time has slipped away.

In a strange sort of way, I almost fear to communicate or receive communication these days. I think I know what is meant by "no news is good news."

It was almost a week and a half ago that Joe went home on emergency leave, and the only thing his C.O. [commanding officer] knew is that uncle Joe was critically ill. I didn't get a chance to talk to Joe before he left, so I don't know what the outcome of that crisis is.

It seems like Vietnam is the safest place around these days, even our company dogs are growing old gracefully but are being threatened by a new order from the commanding general, USARV: "Only one dog allowed per company." I don't think that will be enforced, however.

I didn't go on R&R this month. They had already cancelled it when I got back, but I rescheduled it for the Christmas – New Year's week, which should promise

god things. It will be the height of summer there then, all the schools will be out, etc.

I talked to Doug Cummings a few days ago. I'm going to try to get up there sometime. He said he could line me up a ride with one of the IFV generals who come to Long Binh and Saigon every weekend. Doug says he is sitting pretty good – compared to his former job – has his own quarters in the general's villa, own telephone, all that good stuff.

Things have warmed up a little here in the last month out in the boondocks, but still quiet here and downtown. My faith in the potential success of the Saigon government is reaching new lows with the revelation of new corruption involving public figures. The black market and currency manipulation that is being investigated still flourishes openly and is a primary source of income for most Vietnamese in positions of authority and power. I learned recently that a wealthy Vietnamese can buy exemption from the draft for about 100,000 piasters (about \$7,000). I don't know if the protection extends into another administration or not should the one under which it was purchased be deposed by coup or something.

All eyes on the Razorbacks for the big game at Fayetteville – with Ohio State upset – I guess it will really be the game of the year. We'll probably get it live on radio here – and see the films a few days later. I sure hope Arkansas doesn't miss this one chance to finally be No. 1.

In about two weeks, I'll be the oldest officer in the company as far as time in country goes. Nobody here now except one guy who was here when I came in March. I turned over all my reports to another lieutenant who works for me, and I am working on cleaning up the old completion reports – plus day-to-day business. A sgt [sergeant] and I are going to Vung Tau for about a week in early December to close out all the jobs down there. Should be able to get in some real good beach time.

I just finished 8 pages of working drawings for our officer club renovation. The 46th Engineer Battalion was a reluctant "low bidder" on the project and is now hard at work to meet a 20 Dec. Deadline set by the group commander for his Christmas party. It seems awfully fancy for this grubby place, but if that's what he wants – okay.

I've got to take a work break now. I'll try to write again sooner.

Love, Tom



Figure 73 - Asphalt plant at Phu Hoi operated by 34th Engineer Battalion, December 4, 1969



Figure 74 - Above – Construction of QL-2A, 34th Engineer Battalion, November 1969



Figure 75 - Left – Crusher at Xom Tam quarry operated by 92nd Engineer Battalion, February 1970.



Figure 77 - The HHC 159th Officers Club designed by Tom Butt per orders of Col. Bratton. All materials were locally obtained. Some lights are made from bamboo baskets, others (downlights) from artillery casings. The "carpet" is woven grass. Carpentry was by Vietnamese carpenters working in the 92nd Engineer Battalion Carpentry Shop. The only materials that did not come from local sources were the fabrics, which I picked up in Sydney, Australia. Col. Bratton went on to become a lieutenant general and



Figure 76 - Sgt. Hancock in front of a typical hootch with sand filled drums and sandbags forming a revetment as protection from rockets



Figure 78 - Military Service Road (MSR) Zinc – placing corduroy road, 34th Engineer Battalion, September 1969. A “corduroy road” is an ancient technique of using tree trunks lined up side by side to provide support on muddy soil.

“The entire effort of this battalion was committed to MSR Zinc during the critical period 20 September 1969 to 12 October 1969. During this period all other projects were suspended. From the initiation of the MSR Zinc operational support maintenance mission on 6 August 1969 until the end of this reporting period, this battalion hauled and placed 17,880 CY of rock, constructed and emplaced 500 meters of corduroy road utilizing 1,500 creosoted telephone poles, and expended 72,680 man hours. The corduroy road constructed of 12 to 18-inch diameter telephone poles and ½” cable is the first of its type to be built in RVN, and has shown excellent durability.” (Operational Report Lessons Learned, 34th Engineer Battalion (Construction), Period Ending October 1969, RCS CSFOR-65 (r2))



Figure 79 - Night work at Xom Tam Quarry by 92nd Engineer Battalion. January 27, 1970



Figure 80 - Land clearing at Providence Village, January 13, 1970, 169th Engineer Battalion



Figure 81 - Laying out a feast at the HHC 159th Engineer Group Officers Club

4 December 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

I got a letter and a Christmas box today, both of which I opened. The sweaters look really good and will be great for R&R. I keep meaning to go to the Hong Kong tailor but haven't made it yet. My supply of civilian clothes has always been somewhat limited.

I finally pulled off the Vung Tau trip, going down TDY for five days to "inspect construction." Should be a real good trip. The rainy season finally just quit one day, and I have newly discovered the new swimming pool that was built a few months ago just a couple of blocks from my office. I've got a splendid physical fitness program going where I run a mile and then jump in the pool for a few laps during each lunch hour. I'm working up a real lifeguard tan for those Australian girls.

I'm working on another deal where I separate from the service either here or in Japan and then can claim free transportation to my home at any time subsequent within one year. Since I didn't get any leave other than the Australian trip, I thought it would be a shame not to hit Japan and maybe Hong Kong before coming home. I'll probably stay in Japan only a couple of weeks and then head on back. It's amazing what the Army will do for you if you can dig it out of some musty old regulation.

I am literally working myself out of a job as the tremendous backlog of old projects dwindles, and the new regulations and SOP's I'm writing make day-to-

day processes more effective and less time consuming. I've had more time to read and finally started a little painting and sketching.

I'm not sending any Christmas presents on the theory that whatever I bring home can be better handled by shipping it free in my hold baggage in February. A new guy is moving into our apartment when Eric and Alan leave – very interesting – spent his first 12 years in Peking, then went to school in Germany and finally got drafted in the United States. His mother is one of the biggest antique exporters in Hong Kong. Maybe I can get you all some authentic Ming vases or something – right out of Red China. If you have a want list for anything, you'd better publish it soon because time is running out. My whole month of December is going to be one big vacation – ad then I'll really start tapering off seriously.

I left or lost my address book in San Francisco, so please furnish me with Nancy's address. I was going to send Christmas cards to hundreds of people, but now that's out the window. At least I've got a good excuse to confine my communications to a select few – need Jack's address also. I'm glad to hear that some things are looking up on the home front. I wish we could all be together for Christmas. Let me know where you are going to be, and I'll try to get a phone call through.

Love, Tom



Figure 82 - Saigon street scene



Figure 83 - Carpenter Shop at the 46th Engineer Battalion



Figure 84 - Vung Tau beach



Vung Tau,
1969

Figure 85 - The beach at Vung Tau

12 December 1970

I got a second Christmas package today – the shorts from Murt & Haha. Also, I got a letter from Murt. I will write to them today. I hope I can keep hold of these shorts. The house girls are real bad about stealing any kind of shorts but the olive drab type. I guess I'll have to leave these down in Saigon.

I cut my Vung Tau trip short due to excess sunburn. I've never gotten so blistered in my life. I was pretty miserable for a couple of days, but it's all okay now. The worst part was driving back in an open jeep. I was covered up like an Arab, but that sun still found me. The beaches were great – but so hot!

I'm still cutting red tape for my Japan trip. I got my passport okay, but now I have to pick up a letter from the Vietnamese government saying they consent to my separation in Vietnam if I promise to leave immediately. No problem there! I should have the whole thing approved by next week.

Both my Saigon roommates leave in the next few days. I've got a bash down there tonight and then two parties out here this weekend for departees.

I will send by separate letter a recommendation form for graduate school. I'm leaving it blank. Give it to Fay Jones if he is in town. If not, to Mr. Witherspoon. It has to be back at Berkeley by 1 January.

Love, Tom

R & R

I took a one-week R&R in Sydney, Australia, during the New Year holiday of 1969-1970. We had a brief layover in Darwin on the way. As I recall the airport was simply barren.

On the first night, our hosts had arranged sort of a “mixer” where local girls were invited to mix, chat dance and so forth. I hit it off with a local schoolteacher, and we spent the rest of the week together, since she was not working during the holidays.

I had a hotel at [King Cross](#), which seemed to be at the epicenter of activities. We did the beach, the Opera House shopping and took a hydrofoil ride across the harbor. I bought a couple of wool suits made from the finest Merino wool and bought some fabric I later used to decorate the 159th Engineer Officers Club.

It all seemed to end too soon, and it was back to Vietnam.



Figure 86 - Tom Butt in front of the Sydney Opera House under construction, December 1970

Courts Martial Duty

In the spring of 1970, I was assigned to sit on the board of the Long Binh General Courts Martial. Under the *Uniform Code of Military Justice*, the General Courts Martial is reserved for the most serious crimes. There is a presiding judge, who is a JAG officer and three other individuals, the “board,” who function somewhat like a civilian jury. I was one of those three individuals.

I recall two cases that came before us. The first was a soldier who had been accused of a “fragging,” that is tossing a hand grenade into the tent of his sergeant and seriously wounding him. We convicted him, but I don’t recall what his sentence was.

The second case was more troubling. A lieutenant at the 46th Engineer Battalion compound, just down the street from us, had accidentally killed his best friend, [1st Lt. Richard J. Roughgarden](#) (See Appendix A) on September 14, 1969, by shooting him in the head with a .45 on the balcony of their two-story hootch building. He was 26 years old. The incident had occurred after an evening of drinking at the battalion officer’s club. There were no witnesses. Both the prosecution and the defense accepted that it was an accident, but the prosecution wanted a manslaughter verdict. There were not supposed to be any loaded weapons inside the perimeter of Long Binh Post except for guard duty, and the prosecutor made a case for negligence. Eventually, I believe that we delivered a manslaughter verdict but directed only a letter of reprimand because we believed the man had suffered enough and would carry the guilt of his actions with him the rest of his life.

1 March 1970

Dear Folks,

Well today ended officially my tour of duty with the 159th Engineer Group. We had a grand hail and farewell last night with four bird colonels and all the battalion commanders present – probably the best one since I’ve been here and the first time most of the wheels have seen our new club.

I could barely walk this morning but made it to the morning briefing and shakily accepted a Bronze Star and Army Commendation Medal. As far as I know, I’m the first junior officer in the group headquarters to receive both commendations – and it rather surprised me!

I have only to wait until 7 March to get my discharge and then another two days to catch the plane to Phnom Penh, Cambodia. I’m staying in Saigon – It’s really like an R&R or something. The weather has been real nice – cool and breezy – but sunny – so I’ve been lying around the pool in the hot part of the day and touring around in the late afternoon and evenings. I was trying to get a flight to Cam Ranh today to see Doug Cummings before he left, but the flight was running several hours late, and I was afraid I might miss him, so I called the whole thing off.

My travel fever has been considerably excited of late due to the arrival a few days ago of two guys who were friends of a friend of mine at 20th Engineer Brigade. These two characters were ex-Peace Corps types who have spent the last year traveling and came in here from India, Nepal, Thailand, Cambodia, etc. They've been staying with me in Saigon and have fed me wealths of information on points west of here. I'm not thoroughly convinced – but am considering going from Japan either back through the Indian sub-continent and Middle East, or through Russia via the Trans-Siberian Railway (only \$230 from Hong Kong to London). And ... eventually catching my free ride home from Europe rather than Japan. At any rate, I'll keep in touch as my tour plans solidify.

One thing that will affect them (my plans) is the status of my acceptance from Berkeley. If I do go there this fall, I'm going to have to get back in the groove and save a little money (or avoid spending what I've already saved). One place that you can count on as a forwarding address is c/o Bernhard Horstmann, which is in turn c/o Mrs. Bri Johnston, The Gallery, Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan. I should be in Tokyo some time early in April. I promise to contact, if not sponge off of, those people that Murt and Haha fixed me up with. Mary Huntington has also given me number of contacts in Laos and Bangkok – and some other tips and information. I'm embarking on this trip immeasurably more organized and informed than on my trip to Europe two years ago.

If I do go on to Europe, I intend to hook up with Sharon Blair and Pat Rowan, who are still living in Vienna. I just got a letter from Sharon saying they are both staying indefinitely. I'll probably have to check out the situation there.

Not much else to report for now, but I'll keep you posted.

Love, Tom

PS. I'll continue to pick up my mail at the 159th until I leave the country.



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY HAS AWARDED
THE ARMY COMMENDATION MEDAL

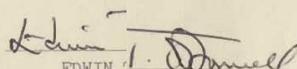
TO

FIRST LIEUTENANT THOMAS K. BUTT, 429-78-2109
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, UNITED STATES ARMY

FOR

MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT WHILE SERVING WITH THE 20TH ENGINEER BRIGADE
IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM DURING THE PERIOD 1 JULY 1969 TO 31 DECEMBER 1969

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS 22ND DAY OF FEBRUARY 1970


EDWIN J. O'DONNELL
Colonel, Commanding



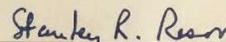

SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

Figure 87 - "By direction of the Secretary of the Army, under the provisions of 672.5.1, the Army Commendation Medal for Achievement is awarded to First Lieutenant Thomas K. Butt, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, for meritorious achievement, in connection with military operations against a hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam.

During the period 1 July 1969 to 31 December 1969, he distinguished himself by meritorious achievement while serving with the 20th Engineer Brigade, Republic of Vietnam. Through diligence and determination, he accomplished his assigned mission with dispatch and efficiency. His unrelenting loyalty, initiative and perseverance brought him wide acclaim and inspired others to strive to maximum achievement. Selflessly working long and arduous hours, he has contributed significantly to the success of the allied effort. First Lieutenant Thomas K. Butt's commendable performance, outstanding achievements and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army."



Figure 88 - "Citation, by direction of the president, the Bronze Star Medal is presented to First Lieutenant Thomas K. Butt, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, who distinguished himself by outstanding meritorious service in connection with military operations against a hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam. During the period March 1969 to February 1970, he consistently manifested professionalism and initiative in obtaining outstanding results. His rapid assessment and solutions of numerous problems inherent in a combat environment greatly enhanced the allied effectiveness gains a determined and aggressive enemy. Despite many adversities, he invariably performed his duties in a resolute and efficient manner. Energetically applying his sound judgment and extensive knowledge. He has contributed materially to the successful accomplishment of the United States mission in the Republic of Vietnam. His loyalty, diligence and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army."



Figure 89 - From hometown newspaper



Figure 90 - Above, Bronze Star certificate and, below, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, RVN Campaign Medal, Army Commendation Medal and Bronze Star

Checking Out

An interesting series of events occurred the day before I left Vietnam for Cambodia. Several weeks before, I had lent \$700 to Bernhard Horstmann, a friend with whom I shared the Saigon Apartment. Bernhard had been discharged several weeks earlier and had stopped off to see his mother in Hong Kong and his sister in Tokyo before going back to New York. Bernhard's mother lived in Hong Kong and was a well-known and highly successful businesswoman in the antique and Chinese reproduction furniture trade. For some reason, which never became entirely clear, Bernhard had left the \$700 loan repayment with an employee of his mother with instructions to mail it to me in Vietnam.

The normal way of addressing mail to a U.S. service person is through an APO (Army Post Office), in this case, with a San Francisco zip code. For some reason, the employee

addressed the package to me with simply my unit number in “Long Binh, South Vietnam.” To make it even more mysterious, he distributed seven \$100 bills in the pages of a paperback book, and included a piece of paper with the page numbers.

Instead of getting into the U.S. controlled military mail system, the parcel went via international mail to the main Saigon Post Office. I received a post card in the mail informing me I had delivery at the Saigon Post Office. I went down to pick it up, and a Vietnamese postal employee said, “Do you wish to accept this?”

I replied, “Sure,” and I signed for it as instructed. Then he said, “I am a Vietnamese Customs Officer, and you have violated the Vietnam law on currency importation by accepting foreign currency outside legal channels.”

“Great,” I said, “What happens now?”

“Well, you are under arrest, and if you don’t cooperate, we will send you to prison” If you cooperate and confess, we will assess a fine.”

“How much will the fine be,” I asked.

“How much do you have on you,” he replied. I emptied my pockets of about \$500 in MPC (Military Payment Certificates), which I had recently withdrawn from the bank in preparation for my trip the next day to Cambodia.

He allowed as how that might be about right, but he also wanted to know my military status and where I was staying. I explained that I had been formally discharged the previous day and that I was staying at an apartment in Saigon. He then decided that they would like to visit the apartment and contacted both the MP’s (U.S. Military Police) and the Con Sat (Vietnamese Military Police). A convoy of jeeps with Customs, Con Sats and MP’s pulled up at the apartment, and we all went inside. As we opened the door, about a dozen decked out Vietnamese women shouted “Surprise!” They were friends of Bui Thi Phuc, all set up for going away party.

The officials told the women to get lost and proceeded to search the apartment. They were intrigued by the phony ID’s I had accumulated and thought that was suspicious enough to warrant a more detailed search. Searching a high shelf in a closet, they exclaimed “Ah ha,” when they discovered a large black plastic bag containing about a bushel of marijuana. It was left over from one or more of my departed roommates; I was not a user of marijuana. With that discovery, they offered the American MP’s an opportunity to take some action, but after confirming that I was no longer a member of the armed forces, the MP’s shrugged and left.

Marijuana was not a big deal in Vietnam, and as far as I know, was not illegal for Vietnamese. My recollection is that it was for sale in public markets. Anyway, we all went back down to the Customshouse. Mr. Thuy told me that I would need to dictate a confession to a Vietnamese typist. Unfortunately, the typist could neither speak English

nor type very well. So, I typed the “confession” for him because the hour was getting late. While all this was going on, Mr. Thuy sent out for sandwich for me and invited me to take my pick of a beverage from one of several pallets of soft drinks confiscated from who knows where.

Then Mr. Thuy said, “We are through for today. Come back tomorrow, and you can pay your fine.” Mr. Thuy did, however, keep my U.S. passport.

That was a defining moment for me. So far, this looked like just a way to extract \$500 from me, but I was concerned that it could be much more serious. I had two choices. I could go directly out to Bien Hoa and catch the next plane to the United States, which my discharge orders allowed (I didn’t need a passport), and leave all the uncertainty behind \$500 richer. Or I could play out the routine with Mr. Thuy and follow through with my plans to visit Cambodia as the beginning of an Asian odyssey.

Fortunately, my instincts were right. I went back to the Customs House, paid my fine, took a taxi to Tan Son Nhut and caught the next plane to Cambodia. I was happy but almost broke.

Below is the receipt from the fine I paid to the Republic of Vietnam.

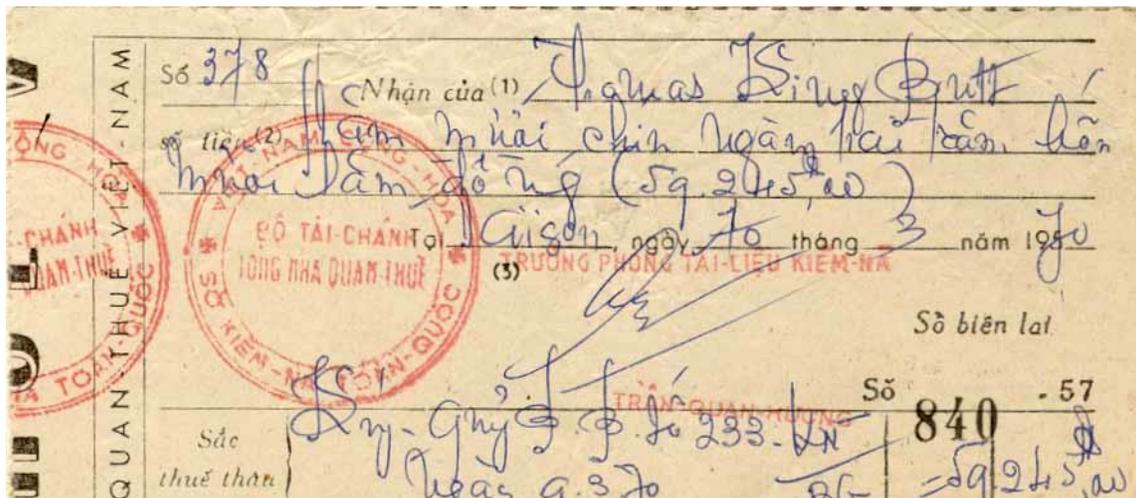
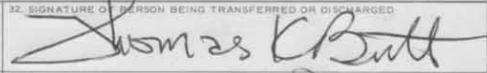
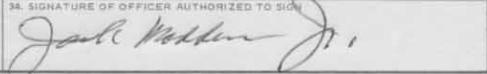


Figure 91 - Receipt for 59,245 piastre fine paid for “illegal importation of foreign currency.” At the official exchange rate of 118 piastres per dollar, this was about \$501

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT RECORD
SAFEGUARD IT.

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME BUTT, THOMAS KING			2. SERVICE NUMBER [REDACTED]			3. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER																																					
4. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS ARMY-CE			5a. GRADE, RATE OR RANK 1LT		5b. PAY GRADE O-2		6. DATE OF RANK DAY MONTH YEAR 8 Mar 69																																				
7. U. S. CITIZEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO			8. PLACE OF BIRTH (City and State or Country) Albuquerque, NM			9. DATE OF BIRTH DAY MONTH YEAR 23 Mar 44																																					
10a. SELECTIVE SERVICE NUMBER 3 74 44 86			10b. SELECTIVE SERVICE LOCAL BOARD NUMBER, CITY, COUNTY, STATE AND ZIP CODE LB#74 Fayetteville, AR			11. DATE INDUCTED DAY MONTH YEAR NA																																					
11a. TYPE OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE Relieved from Active Duty			11b. STATION OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED HQ, Sp Trps USARV Long Binh Post RVN																																								
12. REASON AND AUTHORITY AR 635-100, SPN 611			13a. CHARACTER OF SERVICE HHC, 159th Engr Gp USARPAC		13b. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED Honorable		14. EFFECTIVE DATE DAY MONTH YEAR 7 Mar 70																																				
15. DISTRICT, AREA COMMAND OR CORPS TO WHICH RESERVIST TRANSFERRED USAR Control Group(Reinf) USAAC, St Louis, MO 63132			16. REENLISTMENT CODE NA																																								
17. TERMINAL DATE OF RESERVE UMTS OBLIGATION DAY MONTH YEAR 7 Mar 74			18. SOURCE OF ENTRY: <input type="checkbox"/> ENLISTED (First Enlistment) <input type="checkbox"/> ENLISTED (Prior Service) <input type="checkbox"/> REENLISTED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER Commissioned			19. TERM OF SERVICE (Years) NA		20. DATE OF ENTRY DAY MONTH YEAR 8 Mar 68																																			
21. PRIOR REGULAR ENLISTMENTS NA			22. GRADE, RATE OR RANK AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO CURRENT ACTIVE SVC 2LT		23. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO CURRENT ACTIVE SERVICE (City and State) Ft Belvoir, VA																																						
24. HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE (Street, RFD, City, County, State and ZIP Code) 1004 Rebecca Fayetteville (Washington) AR 72701			<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th colspan="2" style="text-align: left;">25. STATEMENT OF SERVICE</th> <th>YEARS</th> <th>MONTHS</th> <th>DAYS</th> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">a. CREDITABLE FOR BASIC PAY PURPOSES</td> <td>(1) NET SERVICE THIS PERIOD</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"></td> <td>(2) OTHER SERVICE</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"></td> <td>(3) TOTAL (Line (1) plus Line (2))</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">b. TOTAL ACTIVE SERVICE</td> <td></td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">c. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE</td> <td></td> <td>0</td> <td>11</td> <td>15</td> </tr> </table>						25. STATEMENT OF SERVICE		YEARS	MONTHS	DAYS	a. CREDITABLE FOR BASIC PAY PURPOSES		(1) NET SERVICE THIS PERIOD	2	0	0			(2) OTHER SERVICE	0	0	0			(3) TOTAL (Line (1) plus Line (2))	2	0	0	b. TOTAL ACTIVE SERVICE			2	0	0	c. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE			0	11	15
25. STATEMENT OF SERVICE		YEARS							MONTHS	DAYS																																	
a. CREDITABLE FOR BASIC PAY PURPOSES		(1) NET SERVICE THIS PERIOD							2	0	0																																
		(2) OTHER SERVICE	0	0	0																																						
		(3) TOTAL (Line (1) plus Line (2))	2	0	0																																						
b. TOTAL ACTIVE SERVICE			2	0	0																																						
c. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE			0	11	15																																						
26. SPECIALTY NUMBER & TITLE 1331 Cbt Engr Cndr			27. RELATED CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND D.O.T. NUMBER NA																																								
28. DECORATIONS, MEDALS, BADGES, COMMENDATIONS, CITATIONS AND CAMPAIGN RIBBONS AWARDED OR AUTHORIZED NDSM, VSM, RVNMC, ARCOM, BSM, 2 O/S Bars																																											
29. EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMPLETED USAES-EOEC 9 weeks 1968																																											
30a. NON-PAY PERIODS TIME LOST (Preceding Two Years) None			30b. DAYS ACCRUED LEAVE PAID -6 1/2		31. INSURANCE IN FORCE (NSLI or USGLI) <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO		32. AMOUNT OF ALLOTMENT NA		33. MONTH ALLOTMENT DISCONTINUED NA																																		
34. VA CLAIM NUMBER C NA			35. SERVICEMEN'S GROUP LIFE INSURANCE COVERAGE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000 <input type="checkbox"/> NONE																																								
36. REMARKS Highest Civilian Education: College Degree Blood Group: O Neg Inclusive dates of service in Vietnam: 22 Mar 69 to 7 Mar 70																																											
37. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES AFTER TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE (Street, RFD, City, County, State and ZIP Code) 1004 Rebecca Fayetteville, AR 72701					38. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING TRANSFERRED OR DISCHARGED 																																						
39. TYPED NAME, GRADE AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZING OFFICER JACK MADDEN JR, CW4, USA Asst Adjutant					40. SIGNATURE OF OFFICER AUTHORIZED TO SIGN 																																						

DD FORM 1 JUL 68 214 PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE EFFECTIVE 1 JAN 67. GPO : 1968 O - 233-125 ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES REPORT OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE 1

Figure 92 - Form DD 214 showing official end of active duty

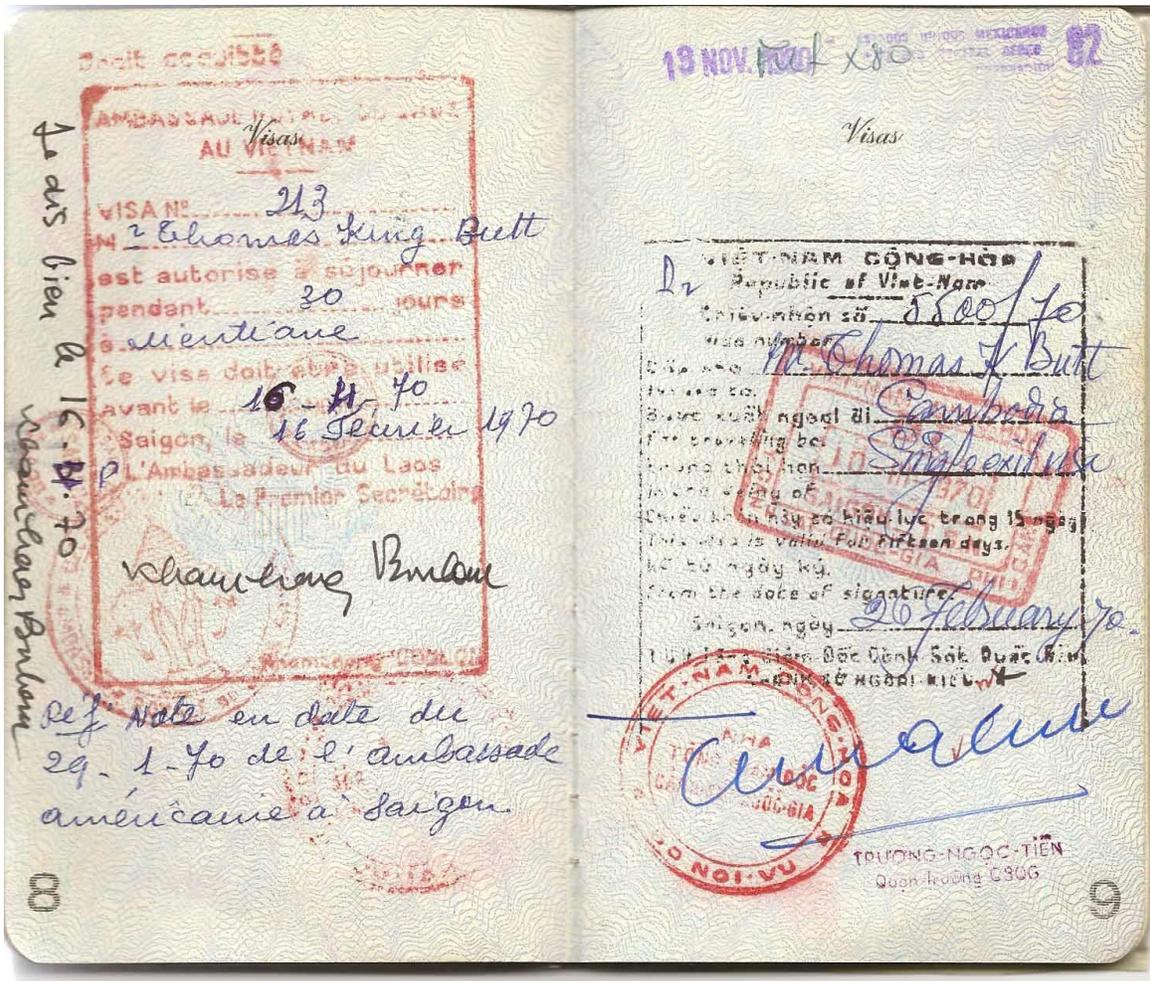


Figure 93 - Right, entry visa for Laos, which I did not use, and right, exit visa from Vietnam that I needed to get out of the country as a civilian

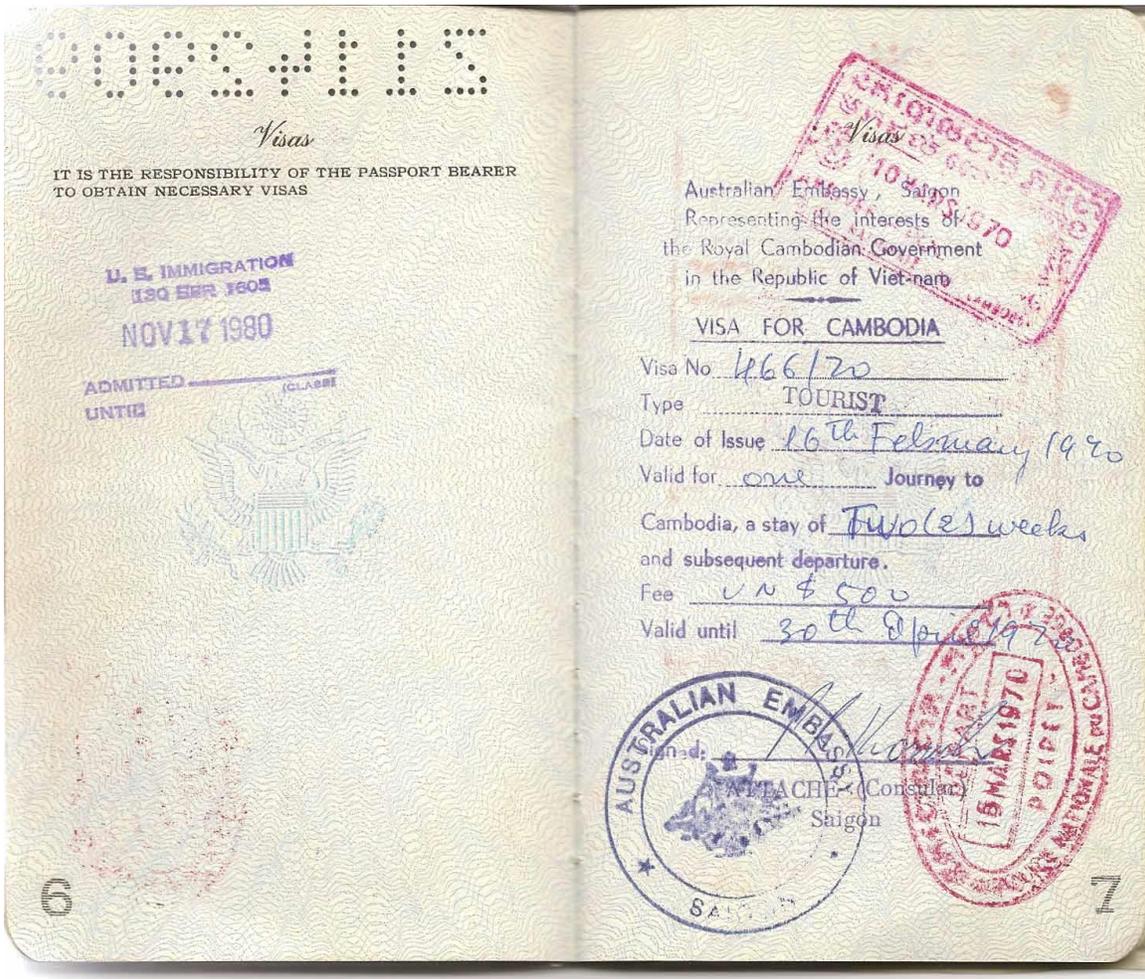


Figure 94 - Entry visa for Cambodia with entry stamp (upper right) dated March 10, 1970, and departure stamp from Poipet (lower right) dated March 15, 1970

Men of HHC 159th Engineer Group – Epilogue



Figure 95 - Officers of HHC 159th Engineer Group

Men (there were no women) of the HHC 159th Engineer group went on to distinguished and successful careers, both military and civilian. Following are some I have been able to follow.

- **Col. James E. Devine** – was commanding officer of HHC 159th Engineer Group when I arrived, taking command in February 1969.⁴ He served in WWII. He retired in the early 1970s and served as town manager of River Forest, IL, from 1979 to 1987. He died in 2002.⁵
- **Col. Joseph K. Bratton** – succeeded Col. James E. Devine as commanding officer of HHC 159th Engineer Group in August 1969. He advanced to Lt. General, ultimately serving as U.S. Army Chief of Engineers. He died in 2007.

Bratton was born in [St. Paul, Minnesota](#). He graduated third in the class of 1948 at the [United States Military Academy](#) and was commissioned in the [Corps of Engineers](#). He served with an engineer battalion in Austria from 1949 to 1952 and with the divisional 13th Engineer Combat Battalion in Korea in 1953 and 1954, both before and after the armistice there. He later commanded the 24th Engineer Battalion, 4th Armored Division, in Germany (1964–65) and the 159th Engineer Group in Vietnam (1969–70). Bratton also held numerous staff assignments. He was a military assistant to [Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor](#) from 1967 to 1969 and secretary to the [Joint Chiefs of Staff](#) from 1970 to 1972. Having received a [master's degree](#) in [nuclear engineering](#) from the

⁴ https://history.army.mil/html/books/090/90-22/CMH_Pub_90-22.pdf

⁵ <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/chicagotribune/name/james-devine-obituary?pid=679878>

[Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) in 1959, Bratton served as Chief of Nuclear Activities, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE), from 1972 to 1975 and Director of Military Applications at the [U.S. Department of Energy](#) from 1975 to 1979. Note - the U.S. Department of Energy was called the "United States Energy Research and Development Administration" at this time, not the current name of Department of Energy (DOE). His last assignments before becoming [Chief of Engineers](#) in October 1980 were as Division Engineer of the Corps' South Atlantic Division (1979–80) and then briefly as Deputy Chief of Engineers.

Bratton died on June 2, 2007, of an [aneurysm](#), at the age of 81 in [Virginia](#). His wife had preceded him in death in 2006. He, alongside his wife, are interred in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.⁶



Figure 96 - Joseph K. Bratton

- **Maj. Donald (Don) J. Palladino** – was operations officer (S-3) and was promoted to Brig. General before he retired. He died in 2018 in Wellfleet, MA.⁷

“Don was a leader in the community's efforts to restore the Herring River estuary to its natural tidal flows and was a founding member and President of the Friends of the Herring River, working with the Herring River Restoration Committee of the Cape Cod National Seashore, the Town of Wellfleet, and Town of Truro. He was also a Trustee and Treasurer of the Wellfleet Conservation Trust, and a member of the Board of the Association to Preserve Cape Cod, the Wellfleet Zoning Board of Appeals, and Our Lady of Lourdes parish in Wellfleet.”

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_K._Bratton

⁷ <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/wellfleet-ma/donald-palladino-7862918>

“Don graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1958 and earned his Ph.D. in civil engineering from the University of Illinois. He enjoyed a distinguished career in the military, including duties at West Point, service overseas in Vietnam and South Korea, and engineering assignments worldwide with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, retiring with the rank of brigadier general.”

“Following the military, he took a position as vice president for architecture and construction at NBC in New York City. He capped his career in service to the international child assistance organization, Save the Children.”

“Don was preceded in death by his wife Martha Catherine Palladino, née Halloran, and by his parents, Ralph Albert Palladino and Helena Palladino, née D’Amato.”⁸

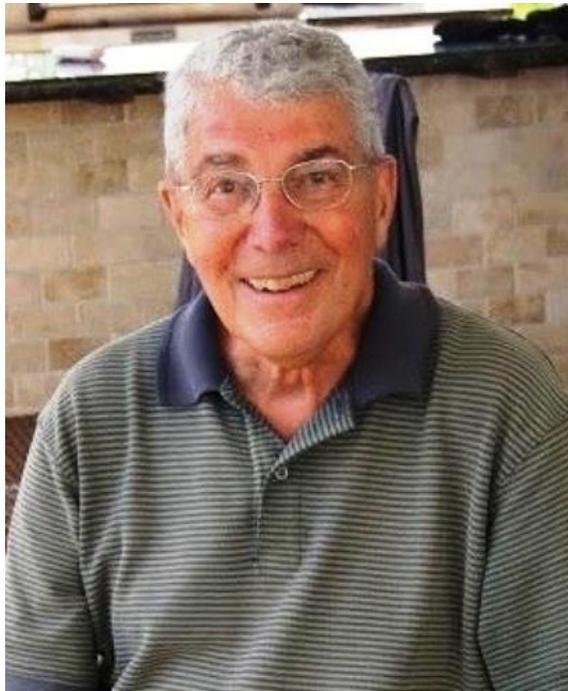


Figure 97 - Don Palladino

- **Maj. Herbert C. Puscheck** – succeeded Maj. Donald J. Palladino as operations officer (S-3). He went on to earn a PhD and retired as a Lt. Colonel. He served as a deputy assistant secretary of defense at the Pentagon and [authored several books, mostly on travel](#). Herb entered the Army in 1958, graduated from West Point, earned a Master’s Degree in 1964 from Purdue University and a Ph.D from Purdue in 1969. He lives in Fairfax, VA.
- **Capt. Terrance (Terry) Ryan** – assistant operations officer (S-3) under Maj. Don Palladino, completed his service and retired as a Lt. colonel after 20 years in Saudi Arabia where he was Project Manager for a \$1.4 billion Saudi Arabian Military Academy project

⁸ <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/wellfleet-ma/donald-palladino-7862918>

in 1982 with over 12,000 construction workers. After retiring from the Army in 1985, Terry worked for about a year as VP of Planning, Development, and Facilities for Erol's Video Clubs until it was purchased by Blockbuster. He then worked for several years as East Coast Regional Director for Globetrotters Engineering and during the same period was a member of the faculty of George Washington University as Distinguished Visiting Professor of Engineering. In 1999, he became the Executive Director of the Engineers and Surveyors Institute, a public/private partnership with over 90 organizations and 1500 individual members. He lives in Aldie, VA.

- **1Lt. John E. Clinton** – was the “engineer officer” in the S-3 Section, responsible for engineering design projects, after serving as a platoon leader in the 92nd Engineer Battalion. I met John again in San Francisco in 1971 where he was working for the chief architect of the BART system in the same building where I was working. We went on to found the architecture-engineering firm Interactive Resources in Richmond, CA, from which John retired in 2012.
- **1st, Lt. Steven Brady** – became CEO of Anderson Engineering, Inc., with 110 employees in Springfield MO, retiring in 2015⁹ but remaining as chairman of the board. Anderson Engineering provides civil engineering and surveying services, including planning, civil/site design, GIS services, Phase I environmental site assessments, municipal street and sewer design, wastewater treatment, storm water drainage and detention analysis and design, boundary/topographic surveys, cadastral, ALTA, GPS and control surveys, drilling services (including geotechnical investigations and environmental sampling and monitoring well installation), construction materials testing and field construction monitoring.¹⁰

⁹ <https://sbj.net/stories/longtime-exec-out-at-anderson-engineering.65855>

¹⁰ https://www.linkedin.com/company/andersonengineeringinc?trk=public_profile_topcard-current-company



Figure 98 - Steven Brady awarded Bronze Star by Col. Bratton



Figure 99 - Steven Brady at Phu Cuong Bridge

- **1st Lt Eugene (Gene) P. Roberts** – was Public Affairs Officer and G-5 Civil Affairs Officer. He lives in Brookfield, CT where he is active in the VFW serving as vice commander of the Jason D. Lewis Brookfield Memorial VFW Post 10201.

After Vietnam, Gene served on both active duty and Army Reserve as a 38A-Civil Affairs Officer, retiring in 1987 as a Lt, Col. He lives in Ft. Myers, FL.

Gene emailed me, “I have been involved with the VFW back here in Brookfield, CT trying to help some of our local Vets file for VA disabilities and partaking in Community outreach programs. We sponsor a Veteran of the Year Musical Salute Concert around Veterans day and a Patriotic concert in the summer.”



1LT. Gene Roberts at Long Binh



Gene Roberts and Todd Sanders at Din Quan

Capt. Lt. Doug Hopley – Was the HHC commander for the first half of 1969. He was a National Guard officer on AD from Wyoming with only a one-year obligation but he extended for a 3-year tour with the 4th AD in Germany where he was the 24th EB S-3. He retired as a Lt. Col. In 1989. Following AD, he worked for the US Civil Service for the National Park Service and the Corps of Engineers in several places in the US and again in Germany. He first worked in the Southwest Regional Office in Santa Fe followed by assignments as Admin Officer at three separate NPS areas; Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area in MT, Padre Island National Seashore in Texas, and finally at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco. He went to work for the Army at the Presidio of SF for promotion followed by another promotion at the Sacramento Engineer District and finally at 7th Army HQ in Heidelberg, Germany. Following retirement, he and his wife owned a couple businesses.



Figure 100 - Capt. Doug Hopley

Meritorious Unit Commendation - On December 11, 1971, HHC 159th Engineer Group was recommended for the Meritorious Unit Commendation (Third Oak Leaf Cluster) for “exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service in operations against an armed hostile enemy in the Republic of Vietnam, during the period 1 January 1970 to 1 July 1971.”¹¹

I could not find any record that it was eventually approved.

CAMBODIA

I wrote the following to Bernhard Horstmann while in Phnom Penh:

14 March 1970

Dear Bernard,

¹¹ <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/167276928>

Hard times are upon me my friend, but this charming country makes things a little easier to bear. I was going to wait until I saw you in person to pass on my tale of woe, but since I might not see you, I might as well inform you herewith.

A combination of our stupidity has cost me some \$1,500 and scared the shit out of me for a twenty-four hour period. It all started with the way you tied up, registered and mailed the package with the \$500. You should not have “put “Long Binh, South Vietnam” after my military address, and you should not have registered it, etc. Anyway, it got into the Vietnam Postal System instead of the Army one – which may or may not have been fortunate. I got a letter at Long Binh saying I had a package at the Saigon Post Office – so I went down to pick it up. When I arrived, they called in all these customs people, assembled in a little room and asked me a lot of questions. I decided the best thing to do was ply stupid – so of course I admitted that I was the addressee and that you were an acquaintance of mine from some time past. I said I guessed I would accept the parcel – but only if there was nothing illegal in it – which I knew by then of course there was. I figured that qualified statement would cover the situation –so they proceeded to open it and “oohh and aahh” about that nice green money. I was completely “surprised” of course – and really surprised when they quoted their law to me which made me a “possessor of illegal currency,” even though I had never touched it. At this time the American “customs advisor” told me I could either fight the charge – in which case I would go directly to jail pending trial – or I could pay a penalty which usually worked out to be an equal amount to the seized currency – but out of my pocket! Well, things were bleak – but not so bad – then they started asking me about my military status, etc. I had my passport, discharge, etc. in the apt. and so we convened to the apartment with about 30 people from the Canh Sat, CID, Customs, etc. etc. The military people were on the verge of leaving when the Vietnamese police, after a thorough search of the apartment, pulled out a half a bushel of your grass which I didn’t even know was still there. Then the MPs arrested me, advised me of my rights, etc. – Then just as they were taking me away – somebody found out that I was some kind of Class (IV, I think) of American civilian which was not under their jurisdiction after all (as were the other classes, etc.). So the MPs left – and I went back down to the VN Customs house for an “investigation.” To make this story shorter – on the advice of the customs advisor – I signed about 50 typewritten sheets of paper – none of which said anything particularly significant as far as the case goes – but apparently they needed some reason. They also found during the search a note I had prepared to Mike Case, etc (as I was on my way to the airport after picking up your package and changing money) telling them where to change green (Carlos, Yvonne, Itelen, Windy Bar, etc.,) so as you can see – they had me cold. But they didn’t ask me anything about you, or where the money came from, or had I done it before, or anything. Thy just seemed interested in getting my money and getting rid of me – and that was what I was interested in. Anyway – they kept my passport overnight and the next day (10 March) I changed \$500 into piasters, paid them, and got the hell out of there. The whole thing scared me all to shit, especially the pot part. Bernhard, if I had still been in the Army when all this happened, I’d be in LBJ awaiting a general court martial – I swear! The moral of the story is that you were stupid for sending the money like that, and I was stupid (or maybe greedy is the word) for going after it. I should have just left it there and split – but what would you have done? The rate

was 2 to 1, and I would have left VN with over \$1,700.00 – as is I got out with \$228.00.

As things stand now, I am going to Thailand in two days – from there either HK and Japan or down to Indonesia and Bali. I'm traveling with the "budget bunch" now, \$1.00/night hotels and that sort of thing, but it's great. Cambodia is a very, very pleasant place, and Angkor Wat is fascinating – It' a good life, this traveling.

My basic decision is how much I want to dip into my savings when I run through my basic cash. I just don't know now and must think about it a while. Right now I am leaning towards coming to Japan via Hong Kong as soon as I look around Thailand a little.

If I miss you in Japan, I will stop and see your sister anyway to seek advice on travel, etc. All's well that end well, and I'm happy to be out of the Army and not in jail, etc. I'll keep in touch as I move out. Why don't you see if you can stay in Japan until about 1 April so I won't miss you?

Tom

While I was Phnom Penh, there was a coup in which Prince Sihanouk was overthrown. From what I could see, it was essentially bloodless, and the public display consisted mainly of crowds marching through the streets. The North Vietnamese Embassy was burned (see below).

In March 1970, when Sihanouk was touring Europe, the [Soviet Union](#), and [China](#) a mob attack against the North Vietnamese embassy, initially planned by Sihanouk as a demonstration to pressure Moscow and Beijing, commenced but was led out of control by government agents who managed to organize the complete sacking of it. In it a contingency plan was found for the Communists to occupy Cambodia, which further inflamed the government in Phnom Penh which engaged in combat with the Vietnamese and demanded their withdrawal. Instead of returning to Cambodia to confront the growing crisis, Sihanouk continued his tour of Communist nations.

On March 16, the Cambodian Secretary of State and police chief, Mannorine, was questioned by the national legislature about corruption occurring under Sihanouk. Worried that prime minister, [Lon Nol](#), was preparing to depose Sihanouk, he attempted to depose Lon Nol only to be defeated by the army and arrested. Lon Nol's deputy, Prince [Sisowath Sirik Matak](#), then advised Nol to remove Sihanouk from the government.

The next day, the army took up positions around the capital. A debate was held within the National Assembly. The assembly had been purged of leftists in the 1960s by Sihanouk and was made up at that point almost exclusively of rightists. One member of the assembly walked out of the proceedings in protest and was not harmed after. The rest of the assembly voted unanimously to invoke Article 122 of the Cambodian constitution which withdrew confidence in Sihanouk. Lon Nol then took on the powers of head of state on an emergency basis, while much of the government of Sihanouk remained the same. This marked the foundation of the Khmer Republic.

Wikipedia

My primary destination in Cambodia was Angkor Wat, so following the coup. I joined several other westerners and rented a station wagon with a driver to take us to Siem Reap.

16 March 1970

Dear Folks,

I have for three days now been in Siem Reap, which is the town near the temple complexes of Angkor Wat. For reasons that I will relate when I have more time and paper, I left Vietnam with substantially less money than I had anticipated, so I am not exactly traveling in the grand style – but at the same time enjoying it more.

My first leg out of Saigon took me to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, which was only 20 minutes by air. It could as well be half way around the world by appearance. I was at once impressed by the cleanliness and friendliness of the city and amazed at what a different attitude the Cambodians seem to have about taking care of their environment. The Vietnamese hold the Cambodians almost in contempt and consider them to be culturally inferior – but quite the opposite is true. Phnom Penh is a real pleasure. There are broad boulevards and many parks – and all very quiet with little motor traffic, congestion and smog. Every street is completely lined with trees and flowers, and on every corner is a sidewalk café in the best European tradition. The people are a mixture of Khmer (true Cambodian), Vietnamese and Chinese – and most speak varying amounts of French. English is not too common except around the hotels – and for the first time in ages my old French is really getting a workout and doing quite well.

The only westerners I saw in Phnom Penh were all French – and there were a good many Japanese. After a couple of relaxing days, I took a taxi (station wagon with 16 people in it) to Siem Reap and I am now staying on the roof of a Chinese hotel. This roof is known far and wide as “the place” for budget travelers in Cambodia. You get a cot, one sheet and one thin blanket for \$1.00 a night. It’s really quite nice. Most of the patrons are ex-Peace Corps types from all over the world. You can feed yourself for less than \$1.00 a day at the local market on tasty tidbits of dubious quality and cleanliness. The temples near here date from the 10th to the 12th Century and are one of the most impressive things I have ever seen. Reclaimed from the jungle starting over 60 years ago, most have been partially rebuilt in painstaking detail. They are huge beyond belief – and the walls, gateways and artificial lakes spread out through the jungles for miles in every direction. The main roads are laid out so as to form a series of loops by which you can see each of the major complexes in series. This is the place that is famous for temple rubbings – and I have purchased a number that I am ending home from Thailand in a day or two. I paid less than a dollar apiece for them. They are probably worth much more in the states.

Tomorrow, I am going to Thailand by bus, taxi and train via the overland route between here and Bangkok. After a few days in Thailand, I’ll probably fly to Hong Kong and Japan where I really have to make a big decision. For only a little over \$200, I can take the railroad across Russia in a trip that includes food, lodging, etc. I think this would really be fantastic! I would have to stay in Japan for maybe up to a month to get my visa and all plans worked out with Intourist. But the trip across is only 10 days from Vladivostok to Moscow. I could then catch my free ride back to the states from Germany, Spain or England, according to how things work out. I’ve got another big temptation to take a trip down the Malaysian peninsula through Indonesia and visit Bali, which is the really “in” place in Asia and also very cheap. But I don’t think I’ll do it at the expense of my Russia trip.

Anyway, I’m thoroughly enjoying myself and enjoying being a civilian once again. I’m eager to come home, but there is so much to see in this part of the world. I don’t see how I can afford to miss it. Will keep you informed as I move around.

Love, Tom



Figure 101 - Envelope for letter above



Figure 102 Fishermen on the Mekong River between Phnom Penh and Siem Riep (Angkor Wat)



Figure 103 Ferry across the Mekong River at Kampong Cham, between Phnom Penh and Siem Riep (Ankor Wat)



Figure 104 Above, Angkor Wat main entry, March 1970. below, Cambodian currency.

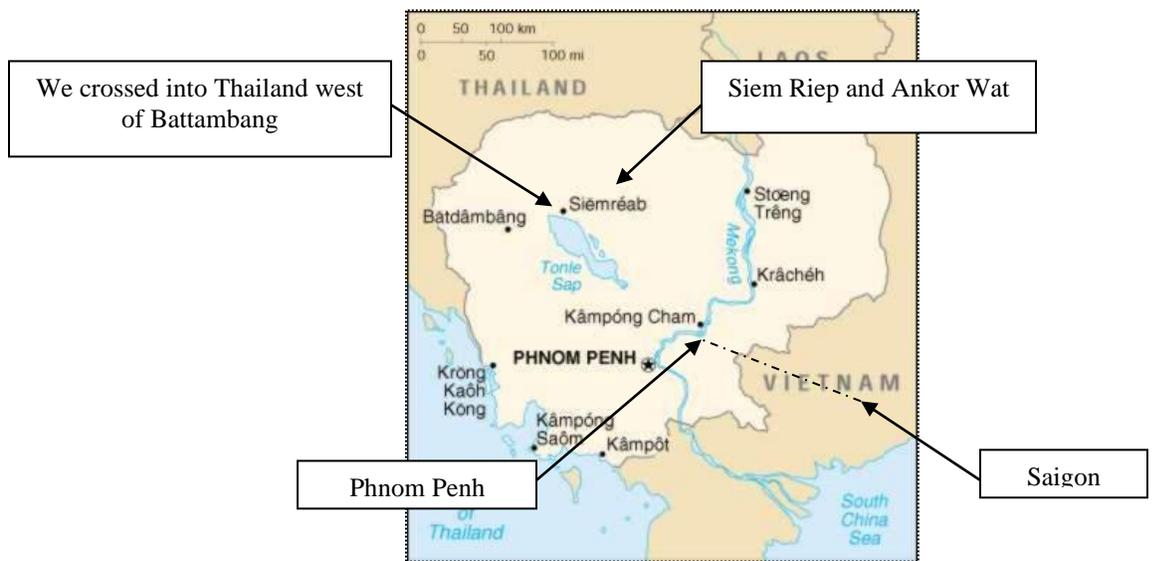


Figure 105 - Cambodian currency

Heading west to Thailand via land was our only option, as the airports remained closed following the coup. Again, with a small group of westerners, we rented a station wagon and a driver and headed west. At some point, the roads became too bad and too narrow for the car, so we engaged a driver of a motorcycle with a trailer to continue the trip. Finally, as we neared the Thai border, we had to get out and walk across a bridge over a small river where we passed into Thailand at a decrepit border station.

At the small Thai border village, we boarded a steam train with wooden cars pulled by a wood burning locomotive. Within a few hours we had traveled from the heart of the jungle to downtown Bangkok.



Figure 106 Entry visa for Thailand (upper left) stamped March 16, 1970, at Aranyaprathet, Thailand, just west of Poipet, Cambodia

THAILAND

In Bangkok, I met up with Capt. John Evans, Corps of Engineers officer and an architect I had known from Vietnam. I was finally able to withdraw some money from the bank to continue my travels. I stayed in a small hotel and spent a few days seeing all the sights, the wats (temples), the silk factories and the water markets.

I was in a marketplace one day taking a photo, and a kid grabbed my camera and ran down the narrow alley of the market. I gave chase for several hundred feet when a policeman appeared and grabbed him. The cop gave me my camera back and let the kid go. He told me I was lucky to be alive and advised me to get back to the tourist areas.

19 March 1970

Dear Folks,

I'm putting some things in the mail today at the APO in Bangkok.

- 1. Two pieces of Thai silk, one for Mother and one for Nancy. These are supposed to be sufficient for making one dress.*
- 2. A Cambodian Buddhist monk's orange robe with belt. Maybe Nancy can make something out of this.*
- 3. Temple rubbings from Ankor Wat (large roll). You may select one of these for framing – then hold the rest until I return.*
- 4. Temple rubbings from Bangkok wats – (small roll). There are nine of these. Why don't you give way about half of them to the Shirleys, Stairs – and anybody else that seems appropriate.*

I'm leaving tomorrow for Hong Kong. Everything is fine. I will write later.

The return address on the packages and this letter is a friend, so that I can use the APO.

Love, Tom

HONG KONG



Figure 107 - Hong Kong Harbor from Victoria Peak

In Hong Kong, I looked up Bernhard Horstman's mother, [Charlotte Horstmann](#), with whom I stayed for the next few days. Bernhard's father was a German banker, and his mother was the daughter of a German missionary and his Chinese wife. They were living in China in 1949 but had to evacuate when the communists took over. They spent several years in Thailand before returning to Germany. Eventually, Mrs. Horstmann made her way back to Hong Kong where she went into the antique business and made quite a name for herself.

While I was in Hong Kong, Herbert Marcus, Jr. and his wife visited [Charlotte Horstmann](#) for some antique shopping. Herbert was the son of Neiman-Marcus founder Herbert Marcus and brother of Neiman-Marcus CEO at the time, Stanley Marcus. Charlotte took us to dinner at the Peninsula Hotel, Hong Kong's grand historic hotel. The next day, Herbert went to get some suits made at a tailor Charlotte recommended, Tailor Chan. I went along and ordered a Cashmere topcoat after Tailor Chan said he would sell it to me at fraction of what Marcus paid for his. Chan said he knew I didn't have much money, so he would do it as a favor for Charlotte.



Figure 108 - Drying clothes

JAPAN

I caught up with Bernhard Horstmann in Tokyo, where he explained a couple of things. The money he was supposed to send me he left with one of his mother's employees. They guy got confused and sent it through regular international mail instead of to my APO address. That's how it ended up in the Saigon post office and caused me so many problems. The other thing was that he had come down with hepatitis that he blamed on the water from our Saigon apartment. It turned out that all that water "mama-san" was supposed to be boiling and putting in our refrigerator was right out of the Saigon water system. I felt lucky to have dodged that bullet.



Figure 109 - Temples in Kyoto

The following letter pretty well covers what I did in Japan.

8 April, 1970, Tokyo

Dear Folks,

I'm in Tokyo now and getting ready to leave for Vienna tomorrow via Russia. I've checked this thing out real well and have been assured by everyone that there will be no problems. The Russian trip is very popular with many people who have retired from the service in Japan and are taking the long route home at that time.

It's been a while since I wrote last, so I'll try to catch you up with what's happening. I left Cambodia only the day before the coup d'etat – because I was in Siem Reap instead of Phnom Penh, I was unaware of the developing situation, which took me completely by surprise.¹² The first two days in Phnom Penh, however, I did watch the mob sack the North Vietnamese embassy. Something was obviously afoot, but I couldn't imagine Sihanouk getting run out of the country. I thought it was only an indication of a change in policy. Anyway, the trip to Thailand was interesting. Instead of flying like all the other tourists, I took a car and then a wagon pulled by a Honda to the western border at Poipet. We

¹² On April 30, 1970, President Richard Nixon announced to a national television audience that US troops were invading Cambodia, the country west of Vietnam through which the North Vietnamese military was supplying their troops in the South. In fact, the US had been conducting bombing raids in Cambodia for over a year. For the past year the Nixon had been promoting the "Vietnamization" of the war, promising to replace US troops with newly-trained South Vietnamese soldiers. Citizens had expressed relief at the thought of American fighters coming home. On the heels of Presidential promises of de-escalation, the April 30, announcement caused many in the United States to respond with shock and anger. Protests erupted across the country, including one at [Kent State](#) that ended in the fatal shooting of four students by National Guardsmen.

had to walk the last ½ mile into Thailand across a kind of no-man's land and then took a 3rd class train on to Bangkok.

Bangkok was too big and too westernized to be really interesting, and at the time I wanted to get on up to Tokyo before Bernhard left for the states. So I spent nearly a week anyway looking around, etc. I met a friend from, 'Nam, John Evans, the last two days there who was on his way to Africa for a 30-day leave. In Bangkok, I lost my travel notes that had all those names I was supposed to look up in Japan, so that was all out the window. I know you will condemn me for that because of the trouble Murt and Haha went to round them up – but what can I do?

So – Hong Kong was the first stop – where Bernhard's mother was nice enough to put me up for a week. She is a fantastic person with energy seemingly endless. Besides her shop, she owns a furniture factory which turns out very expensive things for very rich people who seem to make up the bulk of her clientele. The shop of Charlotte Horstman, Ltd., is a must stop for anybody that is somebody in Asia. I met ambassadors, princes, etc., while hanging around the place, and there was no end to my astonishment! Because I had no clothes, I planned to get some made while in Hong Kong. Mrs. Horstmann called up a tailor and shirtmaker to whom she referred me and asked them to give me a good price on whatever I ordered. The tailor is one of the best in Hong Kong and gave me about 1/3 of his normal prices. I know this for a fact because one of the Marcus brothers (Neiman-Marcus, Dallas) was having cloths made there also and paid \$150.00 for topcoat which cost me only \$120.00 for the identical item. I had two suits, two sport coats and a topcoat made. They were expensive by my standards, but really top quality and a fantastic bargain. I had to go in for fittings once or twice a day for almost a week. They're the best fitting clothes I've ever had.

Two weeks ago, I flew on up to Tokyo and caught Bernhard just before he was leaving for the states. He had a place all set up for me to stay with the family of a girl he had been dating. I was a little leery of the whole thing – not even knowing these people, but everyone assured me there was no problem, no imposition, etc., so I moved on in. They have a huge house with beautiful garden, lots of servants, etc. right in the middle of Tokyo. One of their daughters and her husband are staying in Japan between college and graduate school, and the other daughter is in between changing colleges. They all speak fluent Japanese, and the three young people are working part-time teaching English to Japanese businessmen. A real good bunch – and lots of fun.

I stayed here for about 4 days while getting my Russian trip set up, and then went to Kyoto for a week. Kyoto is kind of like the "Philadelphia" of Japan and is full of old palaces, temples, gardens, etc. – basically everything that is typical of Japanese architecture and gardening. I spent two more days with another friend of Bernhard's near Kyoto – and from there and Kyoto – I visited Expo 70 for parts of three different days. Very impressive – but you didn't miss much by not being here – if you know what I mean. "If you've seen one world's fair, you've seen them all." The gardens and shrines of Kyoto were much more worthwhile as a justification for a trip to Japan.

Tomorrow, I board a ship at Yokohama that takes 2 days to go to Nakhodka, then I take a train for one day to Khabarovsk and fly the rest of the way to Moscow. The alternate arrangement is a seven-day train trip for the same cost, which I didn't think would be a very good idea. I have one day in Moscow and two full days in Leningrad before flying on to Austria. I wanted to take the train, but it would have involved an extra two weeks here getting transit visas for Poland & Czechoslovakia. The Buzzartes (the people I'm staying with) made this trip a couple a years ago and have been full of helpful hints and encouragement.

I should arrive in Vienna on 16 April – and you can write me there c/o Sharon Blair at UNIDO, PO Box 837, A-1011, Vienna, Austria. I am sending with this letter a copy of my discharge and discharge orders just in case I lose the original – because it is my free ticket back to the states.

Another thing I would appreciate for you to do is to put a phone call in to George Coppage or Charles Allen at 415/383-4180 and see if my hold baggage from Vietnam has arrived yet – and see if they will have or are having any problems storing it. The address I had it sent to was Cove Apartments, 10 Seadrift Landing, Tiburon, CA 94920, but since I've been gone I've had no communication with Coppage. I just want to affirm this, since I have over \$2,000.00 worth of stereo equipment and other thing in it. I had it sent to California instead of home because there was so much stuff – and I was going on back to S.F anyway. Please advise – or have Coppage write me at Sharon's address. I got your two letters here. They were waiting for me when I arrived. Another thing – let me now as soon as I get something one way or another about Berkeley. I'm not optimistic about getting in, but you never know. I should be hearing something between now and June.

Cherry blossoms are just coming out here – I hate to head north again, but it will be spring again in Vienna. I'll write from Russia if I have time.

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Figure 111 - Cards from Hong Kong

USSR

The voyage from Yokohama to Nakhodka was a couple of days. Passengers were a combination of Japanese and a few westerners. The crew was Russian and put on a little Russian style entertainment for us on the way – singing and dancing. I made friends with a couple of Swiss guys and some Japanese girls. One in particular, Toshiko Yamamoto, I ran into again in Vienna. We didn't waste much time getting on the train. Most of the people who had come on the boat were going to go by train all the way to Moscow, about a week's journey.



Figure 112 With Toshiko Yamamoto in Nahodka Harbor



Figure 113 On the Trans Siberian Railway Nahodka to Khabarovsk

Khabarovsk

Strategically located on the hills overlooking the Amur River, Khabarovsk was founded as a military outpost in 1651, during the first wave of Russian colonization. The town gained importance during the nineteenth century as a trading outpost, and today it is one of the most important and promising cities of the Russian Far East. Khabarovsk is a pleasant city, with wide, tree-lined boulevards, a popular beach, and an interesting museum of ethnography and local history.

See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kxc-iKzLQBE&feature=em-upload_owner for a video of my time in the USSR.

In Khabarovsk, it was cold and snowy. I boarded a plane for Moscow. I think it must have been a Tupolev Tu-114, a very large propeller-driven plane, very old-fashioned looking, like something from the 1950s. I sat in one of two opposing seats with table in between with three high-ranking Russian military officers. They found it interesting that just a month before I was part of the U.S. Army in Vietnam in a war in which the USSR was not only sympathetic to but assisting the other side.

Moscow was also cold and snowy. I had only two days there. I think I stayed in the Hotel Metropol. I visited the Kremlin, Red Square and just walked around a lot. I remember there were stores that were off limits to everyone but tourists and communist officials, including “supermarket” where all the labels were just black print on white – no graphics and no advertising. In fact, advertising of any kind seemed to be forbidden. The stores the ordinary people could go to were bare bones – literally. I went to meat market, and there was nothing left but bones. The protocol in all stores was to stand in line to pay first, then stand in line again to collect the merchandise. The only thing I bought were some

records. On the night before I was schedule to take a train to Leningrad, I met a girl, partied late and missed my 7:30 AM train the next morning. I thought Intourist was going to arrest me. Apparently, deviating from a schedule was a big deal.

Leningrad had a distinctly different feeling than Moscow, more liberal. Some shops and cafes had graphic signage that looked like advertising. I visited the Winter Palace and the Hermitage Museum, both excellently cared for, only 25 years after Leningrad was virtually destroyed in WWII.

There was a nightclub in my hotel that was of limits to all but tourists and communist party officials. The night I was there, I had dinner with some well-dressed “Young Communists,” children of communist officials.

On more than one occasion, I was propositioned to sell my blue jeans for attractive sums. But I resisted.

I think the whole trip through the USSR, April 11-16, 1970, arranged by Intourist, including transportation and lodging only cost about \$260.

On the final day, I took a train back to Moscow and took a plane to Vienna.

I N F O R M A T I O N

BEFORE DEPARTURE

Please check your passport, international certificate for vaccination, cash and travellers check, steamship tickets, train tickets and air plane tickets, hotel vouchers, copy of confirming cable from Intourist and itinerary.

AT YOKOHAMA

- a) Check in the immigration office, Quarantine station and Customs, between 09:00 to 10:00. You must be on board by 10:30. Please read the attached "Passenger Information" about further details.
- b) After you are on board the ship, you must office your passport, International certificate for vaccination, steamship ticket to the Intourist desk.
- c) Your sitting for meals will be assigned.

AT SEA

- a) There is no restriction of activity on the steamship.
- b) US Dollar and Japanese you are acceptable. Please keep your sitting time for meals, otherwise you will miss your meals.

AT NAKHODKA

- a) Before the ship arrives at Nakhodka, an announcement will be made by Intourist Office and you will be given back your passport, certification for vaccination and application form for customs. Custom clearance will be done in your cabin.
DO NOT LOSE THIS APPLICATION FORM UNTIL YOUR DEPARTURE FROM THE USSR.
- b) It is better not to take a picture of Port of Nakhodka when the ship embarks. Please remember that it is prohibited to photograph, film, or draw types of military equipment on military objects, sea ports, large hydrotechnical projects, railway junctions, tunnels, railway and highway bridges, industrial enterprises, research institutes, designing bureaus, laboratories, power plants, radio-beacons, radio-stations, telephone and telegraph stations. Prohibited also is aerial photography, on-the-ground perspective graphy and drawing within the 25-kilometer frontier strip.
- c) Besides custom clearance, you will be asked to office your train ticket from Nakhodka to Khabarovsk together with a voucher, which is good for your transfer.
As you are in a group, we reccommend you to keep your tickets together to take the same compartment.

Intourist will give you your compartment number and baggage tags which the compartment number is written. You can leave your baggage in your cabin after attaching tags in them. Baggage will be carried to your first destination by Intourist.

Thus all passengers will be transferred to the railway station.

ON THE TRAIN

- a) You may take your meals in the dining car. In case you don't use meal coupons you can exchange it to any types of food in the dining car.

AT KHABAROVSK

- a) Intourist staff will guide you to your bus for a city sightseeing tour. After city sightseeing, the bus will take you to the hotel/Air Port.

Intourist staff will meet you and transfer you at each point, in each city.

FOREIGN CURRENCY

- a) You can convert your US Dollars into Russian rubles at the cashier counter of the hotel, Air Port, Sea Port and Main train station.

We advise you not exchange a large amount of money at one time, as sometimes, there is a difficulty to re-exchange into dollars.

- b) You can buy souvenirs cheaper at shops called "Beryoska" with US Dollars. Beryoska shops are located in the main hotels.

AT HOTEL

- a) When you check in at the front desk, they will keep your passport until your departure. Do not forget to pick it up when you check out.

VOUCHERS

- b) Please exchange vouchers to coupons for hotel accommodations, meals and city sightseeing. (One city sightseeing at one city) at the Intourist office in your hotel.

meals coupons You may use your meals coupons in the restaurant in your hotel, and at restaurant of other Intourist's hotel such as Hotel Russia.

You can order your meals by menus at the restaurant and if your meals are cheaper than the price of a coupon, the waitress will give you change in Rubles. We recommend you to ask Intourist to write the price of coupons on each coupon when you exchange your voucher to coupons.

Figure 114 itinerary

15 April 1970, Leningrad

Dear Folks,

I'm in Leningrad now. Thought I would send this portrait of two of your favorite people. It's been a very interesting and enjoyable trip so far, although the weather was terrible in Moscow, and I didn't get around as much as I wanted. Today, the sun is out – cold but beautiful, and I'm looking forward to a good day. I should have planned to spend more time here, but it's too expensive. I leave tomorrow morning for Vienna – fly all the way.

Love, Tom

AUSTRIA

I arrived in Vienna on April 16, 1970. The letter below is more about the USSR than about Vienna. I stayed with Pat Rowan and Sharon Blair, whom I knew from the University of Arkansas, for the duration. I had dated Sharon in college, and I visited her frequently in Dallas where she and Pat were roommates when I was at Ft. Polk. I also ran into the Japanese girl, Toshiko Yamamoto, with whom I shared the boat trip from Yokohama to Nahodka and the two days on the Trans-Siberian Railway. I ended up spending a day in Vienna with Toshiko.



Figure 115 - Left, Pat Rowan, and right, Sharon Blair (1966 Razorback Yearbook photos)

22 April 1970, Vienna

Dear Folks,

In Vienna now – for some five days. Spring arrived the day I did, but the weather is suffering a relapse these last two days,

Sharon met me at the airport, and I've been staying with her and Pat, and getting shown around royally. Vienna is one of the most beautiful cities I've ever visited – but awfully quiet (literally and figuratively). Apparently, lack of excitement has

gotten to Pat – She’s leaving for Paris sometime next month. As for me, I’ve got the same problem I had before – two fantastic girls whom I would like to date separately – straighten my mind out – but what can I do in this situation? Very Strange!

I don’t have a single plan for more than 24 hours in advance right now. I may stay here for a while – or go to Spain – or Paris – or the U.S. Just don’t know. I wish I knew something about the Berkeley application. I’ve been thinking of trying to get into some graduate school over here, or working for a while – in that case – it would have to be either in England or France because of the language problem. I’m going to write Gordon Watson to see if he’s still in London – and also Mart Vehik – who is still at Oxford, I think – to see what the educational and employment situation is there now.

My trip to Russia ended much too quickly. There are so many strange things going on that I wanted to know more about – but no time!

I’ll try to give you some impressions of the trip while they are still fresh on my mind, in more or less chronological sequence. We left Yokohama on a passenger ship with about 10-odd people – mostly Japanese with a few Australians and Europeans thrown in – and maybe 2 or 3 other Americans. The crew was all Russian – and a very friendly and talented bunch (I think musical talent was a prerequisite for employment). It was a two-day trip to Nahodkha – during which time I met a good many of the Japanese folks – and became good friends with several (mostly female type). Nahodkha is quite near Vladivostok but is used as a tourist port of entry because the navy is at Vladivostok – a much larger city.

The bleakness of Siberia is absolutely appalling! Not so much the land – but the city – which typically sprawls over a tremendous area with no apparent center or cohesiveness – kind of like an infinite college campus. There are few cars – lots of streets – and the next most immediately striking thing is the complete lack of commercial retail outlets, as we know them. Almost every residential building has a store of some sort on the lower floor – but you wouldn’t know it until you walk in and look around for it. Within the system, however, the people seem to be in not so bad shape – the basic essentials of life are available, and the Russians appear to be well dressed (perhaps better than people in many parts of the U.S.), and there are no starvation cases readily noticeable. Luxuries, as we know them, are just not available (which I will elaborate on later). From Nahodkha all the way through the trip, there was absolutely no restraint applied to any of us as to where we could wander, whom we could talk to, or what we could photograph – although written instructions were distributed that forbade photos of airports or bridges.

We then took an overnight train trip north to Khabarovsk – and boarded a plane for a nine-hour trip to Moscow. The train was almost in the luxurious category – but it was especially laid on for the boatload of people coming in – it’s hard to judge how it would compare to what is available normally. The plane was a mixture of Russians and the same group from the boat – a large turbo-prop with considerably more room than an American plane would have. Everyone seemed to get along famously with the Russians on the plane – including a number of armed forces personnel.

Moscow was rainy and cold like nothing I've ever seen before – and after one soaking walking tour through the Kremlin, I gave up touring as much as possible. The outskirts of Moscow have much the same appearance as the towns in Siberia – but with a little more finesse – and the newer apartment complexes have a standard of design that would show up many similar projects in the U.S., but that isn't saying a whole lot. Downtown Moscow has preserved enough of the historical heritage, which leaned so heavily on French and European ideals for a couple of hundred years – principally in the reigns of Catherine and Peter. The Kremlin is huge and impressive in the center of town, and two thousand people stand in the most miserable weather to look at Lenin's waxen face. I wouldn't have stood ten minutes in that stuff to see anyone or anything! In Moscow, there are plenty of cars (though not anything like in the west), and they are all the same brand. There are more shops – more variety – and some of the newer complexes are just like shopping centers anywhere – though a little sparse – like they are anticipating a big shipment of merchandise to arrive any minute.

The hotels are all big in the grand style but a little Spartan, and the food is terrible and expensive. Better to eat outside where the Russians do – but there is always a line, and service is not up to the standards one would expect elsewhere. Here again, the people are well dressed and seem to be provided with everything they really need, but no luxuries. Moscow has a subway that looks like a palace and is spotlessly clean, fast and efficient, probably the best in the world – and other items of public transportation seem to be well planned and executed. I stayed an extra night in Moscow under the rationalization that the weather would clear, but it was actually due to a Japanese girl that I had taken a fancy to – and a group of jolly Russians who insisted we join them for vodka – which they chugged just like water – or maybe faster. Intourist takes it as a personal affront if you change your itinerary in the slightest, but I managed to get things worked out somehow.

Leningrad was a little chilly, but clear and spring-timey – and is probably the most liberal, European and prettiest city in Russia. Here again, the stores were a little better recognized than anywhere I had been previously – and there were actually window displays, neon lights, etc. – and even in profusion on a recognizable city center and main drag. Leningrad is full of history art and architecture – and is a very pleasant place. New – and the food was good. I was the only American I think in Leningrad at the time, and one of the few foreign tourists, who usually come in great profusion later in the year.

A few interesting points – the older Russians are generally suspicious and cold to visitors unless they are thrown together in a situation like the airplane – hotel, etc. But the younger ones are friendly and outgoing, and if they are in or graduated from college have a varying knowledge of English. There is a black market on western goods and western money – about 3-4 times the legal exchange rate for dollars – and any luxury item (radios, records, American cigarettes, chewing gum, etc.) brings a premium in rubles. I didn't indulge – but I was approached constantly by students and younger Russians. Most of the things they wanted were things we take for granted – but for one reason or another are not available. Caviar, for instance, is not available in the Russian stores – but

can be bought by foreigners with foreign currency in special stores – usually located in hotels.

All in all, its really difficult for me to really draw up an opinion without studying the facts more, but unquestionably, the Russian people have been forced to give up the normality of life as most people in the world know it in order to pursue and industrial might and military power that are no joke. Whether they would be where they are today, as a primary world power if the Revolution of 1917 and subsequent communist dictatorship set up afterwards had not taken place is a question no one can answer – nor can one answer as to whether it was all worth it. But at any rate, the Russian people seem to be – for all their problems – a very proud bunch, cognizant of their history, patriotic and dedicated to the heroes of the Revolution (witness the crowds in Red Square to view Lenin). They all are ready to admit – and some did to me – that there have been problems and mistakes made in the past, but I think look to the future with kind of a resigned confidence. The excessively luxurious living standards of the Russian aristocracy have been arduously preserved everywhere, which is a great boon to art, but I suspect there is a more subtle reason – because they all figure in a quite realistic and encompassing “propaganda” campaign to glorify the accomplishments of the Revolution. Everywhere that tourists are apt to congregate in Russia, a tremendous amount of literature is available on every subject giving views of Lenin or contemporary communist thought. Being able to read only the French or English translations, it was difficult to say what the Russians are actually given to ingest for journalism of current events and history, but everything I could read never just said “United States” or “American.” It was always [refaced by “imperialistic” or “warmongering” or something. But other than that, the substance was surprisingly candid, biased of course, but not so much as much of what one reads in the U.S.

From what conversation I was able to have with them on the subject, a number of Russians had remarkably similar views to my own on the state of world affairs – vis a vis the war in southeast Asia (you can no longer confine it to Vietnam) and the war in the Middle East. They were personally unhappy that the leaders of their country had involved them to the extent they were – and had absolutely no wish to confront with the Americans or anyone else in these places, but they were not, of course, protesting, on much the same grounds that most Americans blindly follow our foreign policy under the dubious and ephemeral justification called “patriotism.” I am firmly convinced that although the Russians want to be perhaps the most powerful country on earth – and want to protect their national interests to the extent that anyone does – that they are not interested in “burying” America – or anyone else. The only danger lies in the seemingly inevitable parade of tyrants which history knows so well – that, like Hitler, were able to capture the imagination of and achieve mastery of the people and their destiny. And I’m not so sure that the American people are any better able to resist the advances of such men and their policies – even though we have theoretically set up the machinery of government to prevent it.

Which bring up the new “Indochina” war ..., which we are now involved in and makes me absolutely sick. The recent events in Asia have created a situation which almost no one has any control over – and could go on interminably. I think the U.S. would be extremely well advised to stay out of Cambodia, to dissolve the

army of mercenaries in Laos and to continue the “Vietnamization” of Vietnam as expeditiously as possible. No one in Laos has any interest in defending himself from the North Vietnamese, and they should therefore have the place if they want it. The Cambodians will defend themselves if they have the means to fight, which we should supply without the benefit of “advisors.” The South Vietnamese have developed an interest in defending themselves only because it’s now easier to be on “our” side than “their” side due to efforts in that country which have been amazingly successful lately – but everything considered – hardly worth the cost. I think this whole thing will end within a year if we will allow the North Viets to have Laos, part of Cambodia and maybe a little of South Vietnam. The fighting will stop for a while – if there are concessions made – and then the situation may stabilize if the governments of the free countries are smart enough to appear to their citizens to be a better alternative than any other possibility – which is doubtful considering the nature of the southeast Asian in a position of leadership (.e., corrupt). If the United States, however, continues to fight the half-clandestine, half-open war and trying to teach the will to resist as well as the means of resisting to a bunch of people who don’t give a damn, it’s going to be a long ball game.

The way it looks now – Nixon and Fulbright might turn out to be strange bedfellow type co-heroes of the Vietnam era. Fulbright, because he turned out to be right all the time that it wasn’t worth it, and Nixon because he got us out of it. The co-anti-heroes, or maybe villains, turn out to be Johnson, his advisors and generals – who all seemed to be ill informed and incapable of rational planning and execution of their adventure. In the incidents involving My Lai and other such “massacres, atrocities, etc.” I fully support anybody below the rank of general – and fully condemn anybody on up – nothing personal, you understand, Dad, I deference to your rank!

As near as I can determine – not having been directly involved – the publicity about an obsession with body counts is quite true – and the encouragement from higher up to compete on this is also. We had the same thing in the engineers as applied to almost any statistic – the pressure to accomplish anything which would make the line on the briefing chart rise was fantastic – while the concern for quality and actual fulfillment of any long term goals was brought up only occasionally and soon forgotten. While the U.S. forces should have been “Vietnamizing” years ago, they were too busy counting bodies and competing for rank and publicity – training doesn’t make as good headlines as combat. Even in the engineers, we wouldn’t even associate with the Vietnamese when I came to “Nam, but when I left, we had whole units integrated within ours, and there was tremendous pressure to train them and do so successfully, which I think was the most important single policy implementation of the whole conflict. Amazing that it took some 6 years to think of it!

But enough of world politics – I wish I could tell you what my plans are, but I really don’t know. I’m torn among being completely degenerate for an indeterminate amount of time, being only partially degenerate (which means working at some nondescript job), going to school somewhere, traveling some more, coming back to the states, writing a book, doing independent research, doing nothing at all and playing it by ear, etc., etc., etc.

Also, I have to decide what to do about these two women – run away from the situation? Pick one and see what happens? Play it cool and see what happens, etc., etc.

Also, for finances, I don't have any idea how much money I have in the bank, but I'm not anywhere near to running out, nor am I spending much.

I should be paid up on my American express bills, so don't pay any if they come in. But I would appreciate it if you would write a check for any Diner's Club statements which come in – but the total shouldn't run over \$300 or \$400, all from Bangkok or Hong Kong. If you pay more than one statement, check to make sure there isn't a duplication due to a repeat of the charges from the previous statement. I have not paid any Diner's club charges to date. Also, if you get anything in the mail from American Express, disregard it unless it has a card in it, then in that case, forward it here. You already have the address, I think.

Other than that, not much happening.

Love, Tom

On April 24, Sharon Blair wrote this letter to my parents:

Dear Folks,

I enjoyed your letter so much and perhaps Tom has written to you since he arrived in Vienna on the 16th.

His travel tales are really something even though I have had hardly any time to spend with him. During April and for the first two weeks of May, my working day begins at 8:30 AM and usually ends sometime around 10:00 PM. But as fate would have it, I have worked past midnight at least two nights. Since Tom arrived. And unfortunately, the end of this particular madness comes around the middle of May.

Yesterday he ran into a fellow he met somewhere before Russia. I talked to Tom a couple of times on the phone, but then I think they disappeared. At least he didn't show up at the apartment before I left this morning at 8:15. The last time I talked to him, he was in the UNIDO bar with a friend of mine from San Francisco, and Vicki hasn't shown up for work this morning! So.

The last 48 hours have changed the direction of my life again. I have been asked to be here in September to work this job again and since I have the summer free, I am returning to Fayetteville, Arkansas, for both sessions of summer school – in an attempt to get my degree. I hope there are no problems – naturally I haven't heard from them yet. I also inquired about the possibility of working as a counselor in one of the dorms in order to solve the housing problem. Do you know of anyone who has a room near campus that I could rent for 12 weeks? It has to be cheap. And since I won't have a car, I'm leaving my car here) will have it if I return or sell it if I don't), the proximity to campus would be a big factor in getting a place to live.

I will probably need to work so I'm writing the paper and radio station. I heard, perhaps just a rumor, that there's a television station n Fayetteville now. Is that true?

Must get to work. I'll keep you posted on Tom's whereabouts.

Love, Sharon

GREECE

In early May, 1970, I was getting antsy to move on, so I left Vienna via train with Pat Rowan. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9E6Y57Lm0og> for home movies taken during the trip.

The train going south out of Vienna was extremely crowded with workers from points south going home for a holiday.

The former country of Yugoslavia is between Austria and Greece, and we must have passed through what are now Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia. I think we had to change trains in Zagreb and had to sleep in a railway station most of the night.



Figure 116 Tom Butt at the Parthenon



Figure 117 Pat Rowan Mycenae

After spending a couple of days in Athens, we went inland to several archaeological sites, including Mycenae, Epitauras and Corinth.

A postcard to my grandparents:

12 May 1970, Hydra

Dear Murt & Haha,

I've been on this little Greek island called Hydra for the last two days – never seen such a charming lace. No motor vehicles – only boats and donkeys. Greece is the best European country I've visited with the exception of maybe Spain. The food, the people are great and everything is amazingly cheap. I was in Athens for a week and toured around also to Mycenae, Edidauras and Corinth – places full of history and ruins from Greek, Roman and Byzantine periods. In a few days, I'm going to Venice, then back to Vienna to gather my luggage and probably to Germany to try and get my free ride home.

Love, Tom

After spending a couple of days in Athens, we went inland to several archaeological sites, including Mycenae, Epitauras and Corinth, then we took a ferry to visit several islands.



Figure 118 - The Temple of Aphaia or Afea is located within a sanctuary complex dedicated to the goddess Aphaia on the Greek island of Aegina, which lies in the Saronic Gulf. Formerly known as the Temple of Jupiter Panhellenius, the great Doric temple is now recognized as dedicated to the mother-goddess Aphaia.

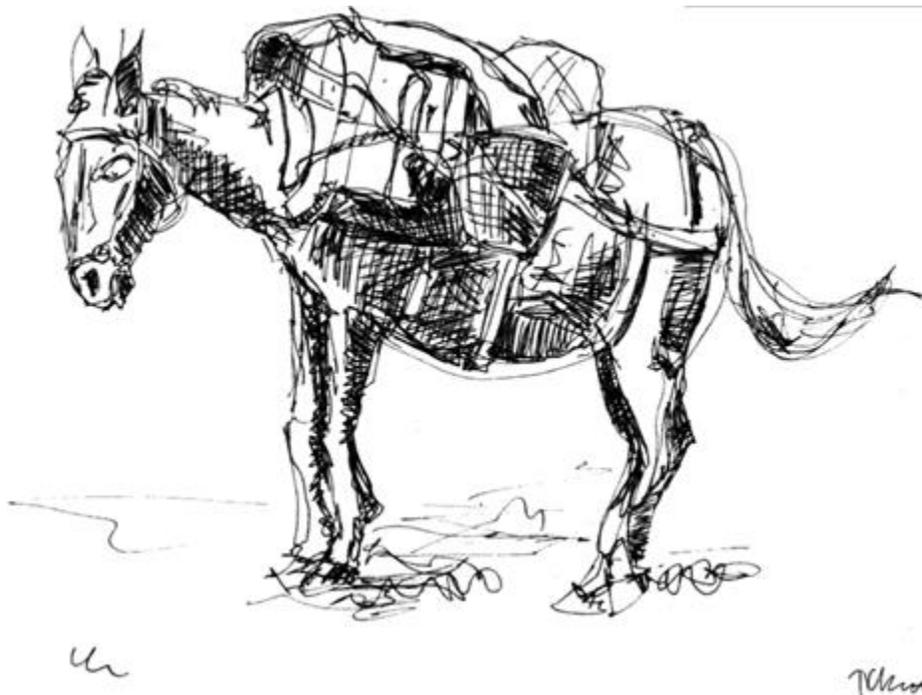


Figure 119 We met this donkey packing supplies up to the monastery of Panagia Zourva is one of the most remote of the Greek Orthodox monasteries on Hydra Island Greece. It is reached over land or via 645 steps up from Zourva Bay if you go to the end of the island by boat.



Figure 120 Chapel on the trail to monastery of Panagia Zourva

A postcard to my grandparents:

12 May 1970, Hydra

Dear Murt & Haha,

I've been on this little Greek island called Hydra for the last two days – never seen such a charming lace. No motor vehicles – only boats and donkeys. Greece is the best European country I've visited with the exception of maybe Spain. The food, the people are great and everything is amazingly cheap. I was in Athens for a week and toured around also to Mycenae, Edidauras and Corinth – places full of history and ruins from Greek, Roman and Byzantine periods. In a few days, I'm going to Venice, then back to Vienna to gather my luggage and probably to Germany to try and get my free ride home.

Love, Tom

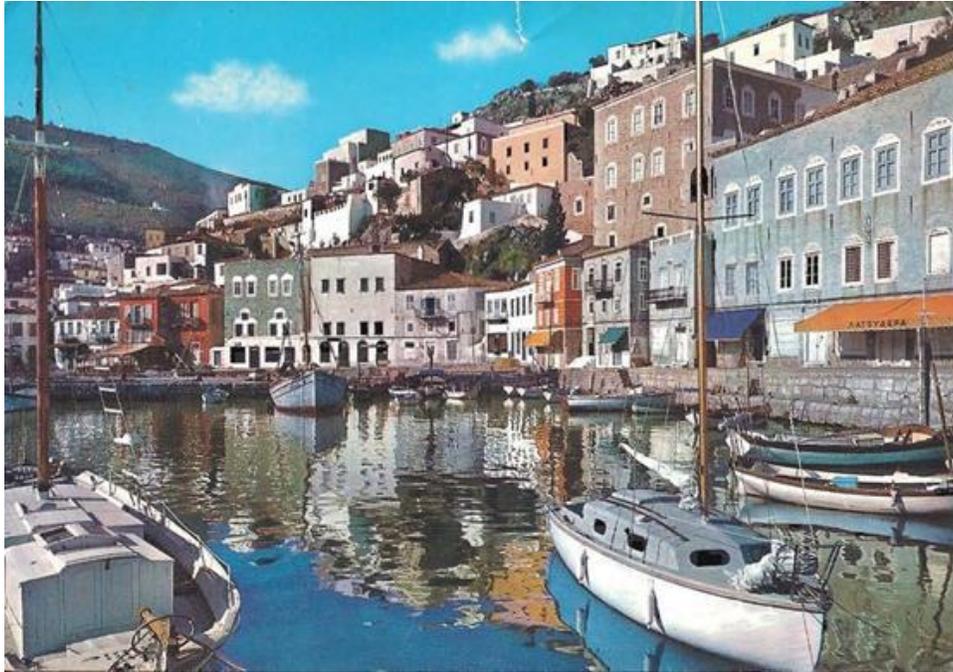


Figure 121 Figure 3 - Postcard from Hydra



Figure 122 Pat Rowan in an Athens restaurant

From Athens, Pat and I took a ferry to Venice, and she headed back to Vienna. Sharon Blair and I had planned to meet at Harry's Bar in Venice for a few more days of touring, but something came up, and she didn't make it.

Running out of money, I took the train northward to Frankfurt, where I was sure the U.S. Army would fly me back to the U.S. for free.

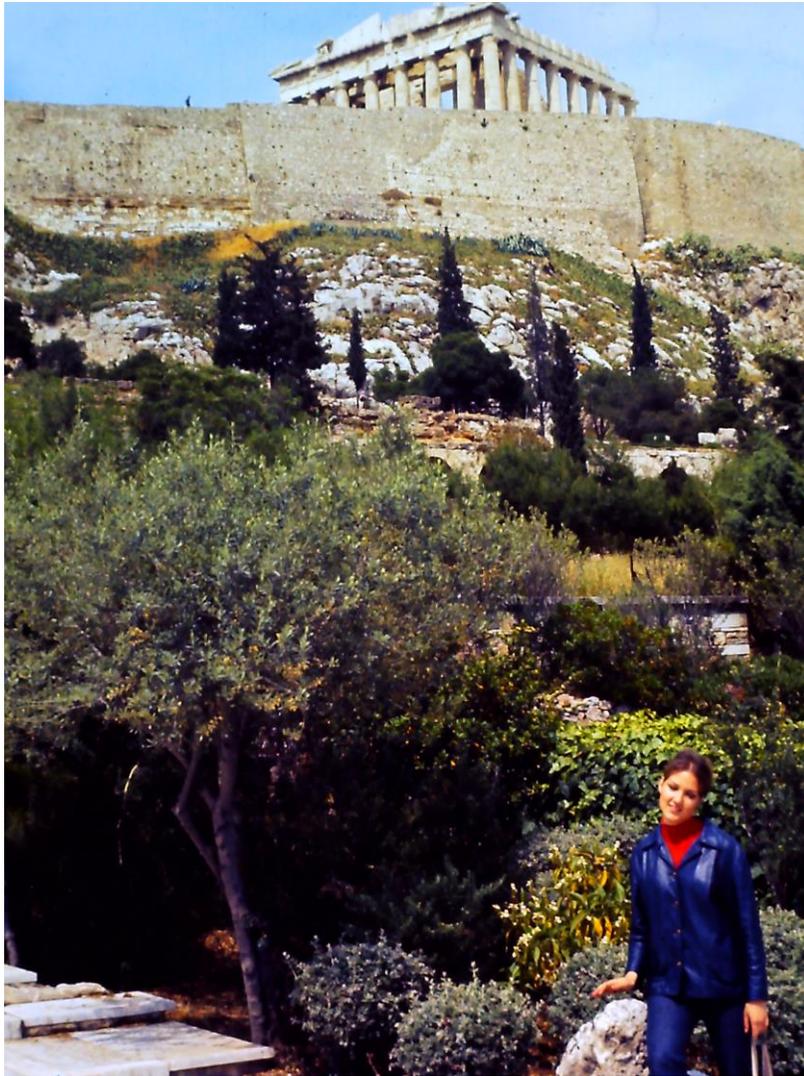


Figure 123 - Pat Rowan at the Acropolis



Figure 124 - Venice

And so ends an odyssey that started with ROTC in 1962 and ended after two years in the U.S. Army, including a year in Vietnam, followed by a trip around the world.

I flew home to Arkansas, spent a few days, and then headed to San Francisco to resume my previous (1968) employment with the architecture firm of Edward Durrell Stone in Palo Alto.

The End

Appendix A – Richard Roughgarden

Richard J. Roughgarden, was a fellow architect who died before he had a chance to practice his profession.

War is a dangerous place. Not all casualties are a direct result of combat.

Richard (Rich) Joseph Roughgarden graduated from Notre Dame with a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1966, a year before I graduated from the University of Arkansas with the same degree. A friend of Rich's, [Don Mulcare, wrote many years later:](#)

I met Rich Roughgarden at Notre Dame. He illuminated his architectural drawings much like an ancient monastic scribe. They were works of art, science, and social commentary. Shortly after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Rich took me along on a road trip east. I visited friends in Brooklyn and attended the Notre Dame-Syracuse game in the old Yankee Stadium. Rich and I lost track of each other, but years later, I noticed his obituary in the Notre Dame Magazine. He served in an engineering unit and died in an accident. His name is on the Wall.

Roughgarden entered active duty November 21, 1968, and in 1969 was a 1st Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers assigned to the 46th Engineer Battalion, 159th Engineer Group, 20th Engineer Brigade at Long Binh, Vietnam.



Figure 125 - Richard J. Roughgarden

On the night of September 14, 1969, after a night of drinking at the battalion Officers Club, Roughgarden and his best friend, another lieutenant, were on the second floor balcony of their two-story “hootch” (“hootch” is slang for any primitive living quarters in a Vietnam combat zone). Somehow, Roughgarden was fatally shot in the head by his friend with his friend’s .45 pistol.

Although the 46th Engineer Battalion compound was next door to my 159th Headquarters compound, I didn’t know either Roughgarden or his friend, but I was nevertheless drawn unforgettably into the tragedy when I was appointed to serve on the board of a [General Courts Martial](#) in the spring of 1970.

I recall two cases that came before us. The first was a soldier who had been accused of a “[fragging](#),” that is tossing, a hand grenade into the tent of his sergeant and seriously wounding him. We convicted him, but I don’t recall what his sentence was.

The second case, Roughgarden’s killing, was more complicated. There were no witnesses, and Roughgarden’s friend testified he couldn’t remember anything. Both the prosecution and the defense accepted that it was an accident, but the prosecution wanted a manslaughter verdict. There were not supposed to be any loaded weapons inside the perimeter of Long Binh Post except for guard duty, and the prosecutor made a case for negligence. Eventually, I recall that we delivered a manslaughter verdict but directed only a letter of reprimand because we believed the man had suffered enough and would carry the guilt of his actions with him the rest of his life.



Figure 127 – Richard Roughgarden on the Wall

Roughgarden, who was from [Hawthorne, New Jersey](#), was born August 19, 1943, the son of Frederick and Anna Mae Roughgarden. He had one brother. He was 26 years old when he died, one of 58,220 Americans who died in Vietnam. His name is on the [Vietnam Memorial Wall](#) at [Panel W18, Line 86](#).

Appendix B – Harmon Rimmel

Harmon L. Rimmel, III, from Fayetteville, Arkansas, my hometown, died over 50 years ago in Vietnam. There were eight residents of Fayetteville killed in Vietnam from 1967 through 1971, but Harmon was the only one who was a close friend of mine.

<http://callforphotos.vvmf.org/PhotoEffort/AssociatedImages/Medium/harmon%20remmel.jpg>



Figure 128 – Harmon Rimmel

Harmon came from a distinguished Arkansas family. His grandfather, Harmon Liveright Rimmel (1852–1927), led the Arkansas State Republican Party from the 1890s until his death October 14, 1927, which must have been frustrating in a state totally controlled by Democrats through the 20th Century. He ran unsuccessfully for governor in 1900. Rimmel Dam (Hot Springs County, Arkansas), which was named in honor of the senior Mr. Rimmel, was the first hydroelectric power dam in Arkansas.

On March 13, 1878, Harmon Liveright Rimmel married Laura Lee Stafford of Virginia, who died in October 1913, and in 1915, he married Elizabeth I. Cameron of New York.

He adopted her daughter, Elizabeth. They had one son, Harmon L. Remmel Jr., born November 14, 1916, who married Sheila Bucknall.

Harmon L. Remmel Jr., and Sheila Bucknall Remmel moved to Fayetteville from Little Rock after they had two sons, Harmon L. Remmel III and James Bucknall Remmel. The Rimmels became good friends with my parents, and I went to Fayetteville High School with Harmon. He was a year older and had a car, maybe a 1956 Chevy, giving several of us rides to high school on a daily basis.

The Rimmels lived on the outskirts of town on Highway 45 East, in what we would now call a Mid-Century Modern home, single story with lots of wood and glass and a flat roof. Harmon's father, James L. Remmel, Jr., appeared to have sufficient means not to have a regular job. Instead, he had a well-outfitted professional gun shop and firing range at the home and apparently practiced gunsmithing as a combination hobby and business. Harmon and I spent a lot of time exploring the woods to the south of their home that eventually led down to the White River.

Everyone had guns back then, probably more than are on the streets of Richmond today. But they were used only for hunting and target practice. One day, Harmon and I drove in his car down to the river to "shoot snakes," which I recall we did. On the way back, Harmon spotted something (I don't remember what – probably some kind of "varmint") in a field next to the country road. He opened his door, steadied his rifle (maybe a .30-06) across the roof of the car to shoot. Not knowing he was preparing to fire, I exited at the passenger door to get a better look. Just as I stood up, I felt the muzzle blast just inches from my head. Obviously, I survived, but it was probably the closest I ever came to being shot. My ears rang for days.

After high school, I lost track of Harmon, who attended Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, majoring in history, instead of, as many of us did, the University of Arkansas.

At Westminster, Harmon was elected vice-president of Sigma Chi fraternity in 1964. The same year, he was named to "Who's Who in Among Students in American Universities and Colleges." He participated in ROTC, graduated, was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant and entered military service on January 3, 1966. He spent three months at Fort Knox and was assigned to the 64th Armored Third Infantry in Schulenburg, Germany, becoming a battalion operations officer. After a leave in July, 1967, he spent six weeks at Ft. Gordon, GA at Civil Affairs Officer School and 12 weeks at Ft. Bliss, TX for Vietnamese language training. At some point, he became Ranger Qualified. He spent Christmas 1967 in Fayetteville, leaving December 27 and arriving in Vietnam December 31, 1967.

After less than two months "in country," at age 25, Harmon was killed on February 7, 1968, in an incident described as follows:

(<https://www.vhpa.org/KIA/incident/68020777KIA.HTM> and <http://www.134thahc.com/History.htm>)

On 7 February 1968, the 134th suffered its first combat casualties. An entire crew and aircraft were lost while on a MACV support mission at Phu Bon near Cheo Reo. The aircraft flew MACV senior advisors and local commanders to a village that was to have been secured earlier in the morning by nearby PF (Popular Forces) ground troops. On arrival over the village there was no radio contact with the ground unit supposedly at the site but smoke was popped by someone on the ground and the crew landed. However, the PF troops had not yet arrived and the village was occupied by VC who had taken it over the previous night. After landing and shutting down the aircraft, the crew and six others were ambushed and killed. The aircraft was set on fire and destroyed. Members of the crew were CW2 Roy E. Worth, CW2 Guido S. Reali, SGT Ronald R. Loveland and SGT Harold O. Hoskins. This was a very traumatic experience for everyone in the unit since the 134th was a close knit group and everyone knew the lost crewmembers well. The war hit home to all in a very personal way. After this, aircraft from the 134th were not allowed to land in remote locations without establishing radio contact with ground personnel or positive identification. In a bizarre twist, less than an hour before the ambush of the crew, WO Trainee Hall and WO Mike Harding had been searching for a MACV advisor with the PF troops and had landed at the same village after smoke was popped on the ground. However, they did not shut down or get out of the aircraft. They saw what appeared to be local troops, waved to them (their waves were returned) and realizing their intended passenger was not there, they took off again. One of our crews from the 92nd AHC, picked up the bodies and flew them back to Cheo Reo. Jim Koch has a photo of 675 burning on the ground.

Crew Members:

P WO1 Reali, Guido Silvestro Jr KIA
P WO1 Worth, Roy Edward KIA
CE SP4 Loveland, Ronald Ray KIA
G SGT Hoskins, Harold Orion KIA

Passengers and/or other participants:

LTC Whan, Vorin Edwin Jr, AR, PX, KIA
1LT Rimmel, Harmon L III, AR, PX, KIA

Another source described it as follows (Forrest Woods says: <https://macvteams.org/team-31/>, December 15, 2016 at 8:28 am):

Hi; My name is Forrest Woods, I was the Dep Asst Senior Pro Advisor In Phu Bon Prov from Mar 67 to late Feb 68. Stanley Howroski (SP) was the senior Pov Advisor a COORDS Civ. Ltc Vorin Edwin Whan was the Asst Prov advisor, Until Feb 7 1968 when he and 1Lt Harmon L Rimmel were Killed By hostile Fire in the village of Buon Blech In southwest Phu Bon Prov. There were 4 other people killed that day 2W1's and 2 Sgt's E-5 all from and AVN Co. The 134th Assault Avn Co If my memory serves me correctly. They had been on a mission for relocate a village of Montanyards (SP). When they received fire from the ground, The helicopter crashed in the village of Buon Blech and burned (all that was left was the Tail section). I received a radio call that a helicopter has crashed. I was in Phu Bon at the time, there was slick and a 2 gunships available. I and a DR (LTC) of the Korean MEDCAP team Immediately flew to Boun Blech to see

if there were any survivors. AS I arrived in Buon Bleck it was apparent there would be none. I landed on the far side of the village and started making our way to the crash site. Upon reaching them I discovered all had been shot in the head at close range. The Village was Deserted. By this time the CIDG that had been securing the village began to filter back in. All that was left to do was to call in Husky and evacuate to Graves registration in Pleiku, Maj Charles Mason was the S3 and a Cpt Westover (I think) was in the the Ops cntr. I also seem to recall a SFC Rivera was head of the security detail at that time. I am sorry but I don't remember who came in to replace LTC Whan. We all are getting older (84) and memories are not as clear as they used to be.

Harmon was buried on February 19, 1968, at Oakland Cemetery in Little Rock. Pallbearers were his high school classmates James Dickson, Chaim H. Siegel, Gary Kennan and Coy Kaylor, Jr., his father Harmon L. Rummel, Jr., and John T. Jernigan, P.K. Holmes and Rummel T. Dickinson.

On June 21, 1968, the *Northwest Arkansas Times* reported that Harmon L. Rummel III had been posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star for Valor with First Oak Leaf Cluster for heroism. Initial reports had said he died in a helicopter crash, but apparently there was much more to it.

The citation reads in part:

While serving as civic affairs action advisor, Phu Bon Province, on a mission to Ban Hiao Hamlet located in a remote, sparsely defended area, Lieutenant Rummel and the small party he was with were engaged by the North Vietnamese Army. Realizing they were faced by a numerically superior force, Lieutenant Rummel assisted in rallying his party and getting them aboard the helicopter while he remained behind to lay down suppressive defensive fire to cover their withdrawal. As the aircraft was taking off, it came under intense automatic weapons fire which disabled the aircraft, causing it to crash land a short distance from takeoff. Lieutenant Rummel then moved through the fierce fire to the downed craft's position and provided covering fire as the men deployed into defensive positions. He executed a fire and maneuver plan and managed to move a portion of the party into a better protected position before again being pinned down. He continued his courageous actions in the face of overwhelming odds until he fell, mortally wounded.

Lieutenant Rummel held the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star for Meritorious Service, the Army Commendation Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnamese Service Medal and the Vietnamese Campaign Ribbon for his service as Civic Action Advisor, Advisory Team No. 31, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

The awards were presented to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harmon L. Rummel, Jr., of Fayetteville in ceremonies Wednesday at the Army ROTC Department at the University of Arkansas.

Harmon L. Remmel, III, is honored on Panel 38E, Row 12 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

I can't verify it, but I heard that after Harmon was killed in Vietnam, his father got rid of all his guns, which had been a lifelong hobby and business and never touched one again. I last saw Harmon L. Remmel, Jr, at my mom's funeral in 1992. I believe he died in 2003.

In 1970, Harmon's parents established the Harmon L. Remmel, III, Prize for Most Outstanding Senior History Thesis at Westminster College.

R.I.P. Harmon L. Remmel, III.

Appendix C – Mike Thomas

Mike Thomas was a Sigma Nu fraternity brother from Hot Springs, Arkansas.

On August 14, 1969, I wrote my parents from Long Binh, Vietnam:

I took George [Coppage] over to Bien Hoa Air Base to catch a flight back to Phan Rang, and we ran into Murray Green, who used to room with Randy Snapp at Yellowstone, who is now a pilot. Also ran into Mike Thomas, an old Sigma Nu from Hot Springs, who is with the 11th Armored Cav over by Cambodia.

Looking back, it's amazing That four old friends would run into each other a half a world away. George Coppage was from Fayetteville and was a Sigma Nu at the University of Arkansas. George and I were old friends.

Murray Green was from Alabama, and I knew him from Yellowstone in 1965, where he was a seasonal ranger, and I was working as a Student Trainee Architect with the National Park Service. I rode back to Arkansas with Murray at the end of the summer. It was a memorable trip because Murray shot himself in the leg while practicing "fast draw" on a Wyoming roadside.

Mike Thomas was a also a Sigma Nu at the University of Arkansas, although a couple years younger than George and I. He graduated from Hot Springs High School in 1964 with Bill Clinton.

George and Murray were C-123 pilots in the Air Force. Mike Thomas was in the Army Infantry.

George, Murray and I stopped by the Officers Club at Bien Hoa to get a beer and ran into Mike Thomas, who joined us. That was the last time we would see him.



Figure 129 Tom Butt, George Coppage and Murray Green at Ben Hoa Airbase, 1969

Exactly a month later, Mike was killed near Phước Long, a district-level town in Bình Phước Province, in the Southeast region of Vietnam on the border with Cambodia. He was 23 years old.

Among his posthumous awards were a Silver Star, our nation's third highest award for bravery, a Bronze Star Medal, an Air Medal, and a Purple Heart. Lieutenant Thomas already had been awarded the coveted Combat Infantry Badge for combat action against an enemy. - See more at: <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/51684/MICHAEL-H-THOMAS#sthash.GAs5eGAq.dpuf>.

Spa Officer Dies in War Through Surprise Ambush

First Lt. Michael H. Thomas, 23, son of Mr. and Mrs. Herman D. Thomas, of Lakeview Rd., was killed in Vietnam, Sept. 14.

Thomas was born in Kansas City, Mo., June 21, 1946 but moved to Hot Springs with his family in 1956.

He was a member of the First United Methodist Church, of Hot Springs and was a 1964 graduate of Hot Springs High School. He also attended the University of Arkansas for three years prior to his enlistment into the regular army in March, of 1967.

He had been in Vietnam since last Jan. 4.

The family was advised that Lt. Thomas was in a vehicle that encountered a surprise ambush, resulting in his death. He was a platoon leader in his unit which served in long range reconnaissance.

Survivors, in addition to his parents, include, his wife, Mrs. Sissy Thomas of Hot Springs; one sister, Mrs. Clay Moore, of Houston, Tex., and one nephew.

Funeral arrangements are incomplete.



MICHAEL H. THOMAS

Figure 130 - Hot Springs newspaper clipping

It was a long time ago, but Michael Herman Thomas has not been forgotten. His name appears on Panel 18W, Row 88 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. He has also been remembered over the years by the people he served with. Take a look at the following posts as recent as 2014:



Figure 131 Michael H. Thomas

Posts on 11th Armored Cavalry Website:

Posted on 12/16/14 - by Greg Schlieve C Co, 5/7, 1st Air Cav schlieve@charter.net

I served with Mike in Vietnam in 1969 with the 1st Cav. I remember him well. I visited his parents twice after the war. To my surprise Mike led the same life as his father. His father signed up for the Army, and became a Lt in WWII. He married his sweetheart before going overseas into the Battle of the Bulge.....where he was wounded. Mike also signed up to serve, quitting college. He trained as both an infantry officer and artillery too. Before he was shipped overseas he married his sweetheart. He was so much like his father that it stunned me when I first met Herman. Mike was a great man. I went back to Vietnam in 1994 and found the spot where he was killed. With me was a fellow 1st Cav officer----who was with us in 1969 too. His name is Tim Millar. We held a belted service for Mike.

Remembering An American Hero

Posted on 9/14/13 - by Curt Carter

Dear 1LT Michael Herman Thomas, sir

As an American, I would like to thank you for your service and for your sacrifice made on behalf of our wonderful country. The youth of today could gain much by learning of heroes such as yourself, men and women whose courage and heart can never be questioned.

May God allow you to read this, and may He allow me to someday shake your hand

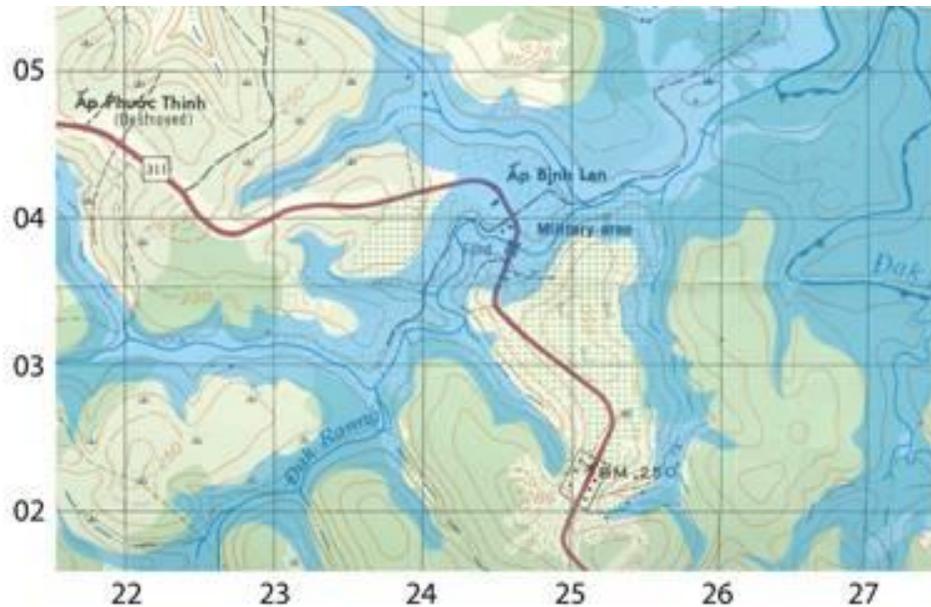


Figure 132 - Map of ambush site

when I get to Heaven to personally thank you. May he also allow my father to find you and shake your hand now to say thank you; for America, and for those who love you.

With respect, and the best salute a civilian can muster for you, Sir

Curt Carter

Road 311

Posted on 10/28/11 - by Andrew J. Hudson

Road 311 map & footnotes, 1969 map sheet 6432 iv, titled dong South Vietnam, scale 1:50,000 & 2011 Google earth satellite image. The map & footnotes are included to accompany the remembrance for first lieutenant Michael Herman Thomas. In 1969 there was no water over road 311. Between lines 23 & 24, the southern path of 311 through the water no longer exists. 311 now is 749 & continues northwest & intersects with 741 where buttons was & Nui Ba Ra is located. Major east-west trail shown below Pp Binh Lan. Two dots left of military area mark RFPP camp. Creek & ford is shown below RFPP camp. Significant curve & battle area is just north of bm 250 between grid lines 25 & 26.

Michael Herman Thomas

Posted on 10/28/11 - by Andrew J. Hudson

Forty-two years ago First Lieutenant Michael Herman Thomas was killed in action in the Republic of South Vietnam about 1:00pm on Sunday, September 14, 1969. Among his

posthumous awards were a Silver Star, our nation's third highest award for bravery, a Bronze Star Medal, an Air Medal, and a Purple Heart. Lieutenant Thomas already had been awarded the coveted Combat Infantry Badge for combat action against an enemy.

23 years and 86 days old Michael Herman Thomas, an Infantry officer, was serving with my cavalry Troop on a combat mission the day he was killed in action on Road 311 south of Phouc Long and Song Be in Phouc Long-Binh Phouc Province.

My name is Andrew J. Hudson. I did not personally know Lieutenant Thomas but we were colleagues and professional soldiers who worked together. I was the Troop Commander of Troop D, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division.

First Lieutenant Michael Herman Thomas, some called him Mike, was the Scout Platoon Leader, Company E, 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division. He was with his Scout Platoon attached to my troop the day he was killed. This reflection and recollection is offered from my memory to remember Lieutenant Thomas and to give some details about where he was in South Vietnam, what he was involved in, his dangerous work, and who he was with during the last two days of his life.

Please refer to the separate posting titled Road 311 to see a small part of the 1969 map sheet, with footnotes, that was used then to show the battle area on Road 311 where Lieutenant Thomas was on September 14.

Troop D, or Delta Troop as it was sometimes called, was the only ground cavalry troop in the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, an air cavalry squadron. The troop was organized with three ground cavalry platoons and instead of horses the troopers were mounted in trucks and jeeps. Each platoon in Troop D had a Scout Section with two Scout Squads, an Infantry Squad, a Mortar Squad, and an Anti-Tank Section with two 106mm recoilless rifles.

The authorized, forward operating, front-line combat strength of Troop D was 125. However, like all combat units in Vietnam, and like all armed forces combat units in all wars the United States has participated in, Delta Troop was never at full strength. Every day the Troop always performed combat operations short-handed.

In 1969 there was no internet, no web-cam, no email, no smart phone, no cell phone, no cell phone camera or video, no texting, no I-pods, no I-pads. There was no technology then that we see our soldiers, who are fighting other wars, using today. In addition to those devices and tools we now have internet satellite mapping applications like Google Earth. So, using Google Earth we are able to identify, and help provide a feel of where Lieutenant Thomas and Troop D were on the ground then.

Lieutenant Thomas and his Scout Platoon conducted both air assault and ground combat operations from Fire Support Base (FSB) Buttons. Delta Troop, also based on Buttons, conducted dismounted operations in the jungle and rubber plantations, and mounted reconnaissance, scouting, screening, patrolling, and security missions along the vast and

intricate network of trails, roads, highways and other lines of communication throughout what is now Phouc Long-Binh Phouc Province. At night when on Buttons Lieutenant Thomas and his Scout Platoon, as well as Delta Troop, was assigned defensive positions for a sector of the large, expansive perimeter on Buttons. Occasionally Delta Troop would conduct a night ambush outside of Buttons.

FSB Buttons was located a couple of kilometers west and north of Nui Ba Ra mountain and about 6 kilometers west of Phouc Long and Song Be. Buttons was the headquarters base of the 5th Battalion, of Troop D, and of a howitzer battery consisting of six towed 105mm cannons. This artillery battery provided fire support for the 5th Battalion Infantry companies, the Scout Platoons, and for Delta Troop. The 5th Battalion's crest was titled Garry Owen, for the Irish tune George Armstrong Custer chose as the 7th Cavalry Regimental song in 1867. In 1969 the 5th Battalion commander was Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Healy.

Nui Ba Ra is a small mountain rising up from relatively flat ground to a height of about 760 meters (about 2,300 feet) at its tallest peak. Obviously a volcano millions of years ago, it stands alongside an east-west secondary road now numbered 741. Road 741 forms an intersection with Road 311 in Phouc Binh about three kilometers west of the mountain. However, today, Google Earth images, dated 2011, shows Road 311 now to be north-south Road 749. Road 741 runs east of Nui Ba Ra to the cities of Phouc Long and Song Be, and to the Song Be River. At the north-west base of the mountain is an airstrip that was then capable of landing aircraft as large as the C-123 and the C-130 Hercules, the workhorses of the United States Air Force. Buttons was on the north side of Road 741. On Google today a large community of houses, shops, businesses, and warehouses occupy some of the flat ground where Buttons was in 1969.

When the artillery battery on Buttons needed to provide fire support for 5th Battalion units working to the south the mountain interfered with the angle of fire so several cannons would have to be moved to the south side of Nui Ba Ra. This is where Lieutenant Thomas and Private First Class John Anthony Halladay, his assistant and Radio Telephone Operator (RTO), were on Saturday, September 13, 1969. Three of the 105mm howitzers assigned to FSB Buttons had been positioned on the southwest side of the mountain to provide fire support for infantry companies working along the Song Be River, and in the jungles, and rubber plantations south and southeast of Buttons. The Scout Platoon had been assigned the mission to provide security for these three guns and their crews at this temporary base which was on flat, open terrain with no protection, except for the foxholes dug by the Platoon.

That Saturday morning, September 13, 1969, Delta Troop had proceeded from Buttons with two cavalry platoons, the second and third, on its mission to establish strong points along Road 311 from its southern junction with the principal Highway QL14, which was about 100 miles northeast of Saigon. Troop D's first platoon was on detached duty providing reinforced perimeter security for Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, which was located at a Fire Support Base near An Lôc, west of FSB Buttons.

About three weeks earlier all six of Troop D's 106mm recoilless rifles and their crews, the entire Troop Anti-Tank Sections, had been airlifted to the top of Nui Ba Ra. On occasion Lieutenant Thomas and his Scout Platoon drew the rotational duty to provide security for the major communications complex established on top of the mountain. This complex provided extended distances for military radio transmission for all combat and combat support units working in the 1st Cavalry Division Area of Operations (AO), and it housed highly secretive and sophisticated surveillance and detection equipment that monitored the continuous infiltration and movements of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces into South Vietnam from Cambodia. Security for this complex protected the communications detachment soldiers as well as the massive amount of electronic equipment from enemy assaults and sapper attacks. That's why the 106s were there.

While Lieutenant Thomas and his Scout Platoon secured the three howitzers on that Saturday, four provincial policemen from Song Be were assigned to Troop D. Their mission was to intercept movement along Road 311 and to check papers and conduct inspections of bicycles, motorcycles, wagons, cars, trucks, buses, and pedestrians. The police were not there to find enemy soldiers, D Troop was; and its mission also was to support the police as they searched for bandits, questioned strangers and looked for contraband.

This area in Phouc Long-Binh Phouc Province west and south of Phouc Long and Song Be was a major infiltration route, a virtual highway no less, for North Vietnamese Army forces moving down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and entering South Vietnam from Cambodia in an area known as The Parrot's Beak several kilometers west of Buttons. Some estimates placed the number of enemy soldiers pouring into South Vietnam along this route into the 1st Cavalry Division's AO at a thousand every few days. Paradoxically, President Richard Nixon had ordered the withdrawal of thousands of American troops every few days during this time and ordered US forces to avoid major engagements.

In 1969, from its southern junction with QL 14, Road 311, a secondary, asphalt road barely able to handle two-way traffic wound its way northwest over rolling terrain, through open plain, jungle and rubber plantations and connected with Highway LTL1A (today on Google it's Road 748). LTL1A (Road 748) connects with Road 13 and Road 13 runs south to the outskirts of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and north to Cambodia.

Today, however, using Map Sheet 6432 IV, Titled DONG SRE VIET, Vietnam, Scale 1:50,000 dated 1969, and superimposing images from Google Earth, we see that Road 311 from its junction with QL14 exists but is no longer numbered. Where the path of Road 311 was in 1969 is now under water, apparently from flooding because of dam removal or dam building on the Song Be River and its tributaries. Instead, on Google Earth, we see that from junction QL14 Road 749 (Road 311) has been built west of the original Road 311 skirting around the water and connecting with the old Road 311. From QL14 US Army engineers, using Rohm plows, had cleared the large jungle growth from both sides of Road 311 and created tree lines. Within some of the clearing lay remnants of downed trees; and the grass and undergrowth had already sprouted.

On this quiet Saturday, with the provincial policemen, elements of Troop D were

positioned in strong points along Road 311 from its junction with QL14. The policemen and the Third Platoon infantry squad manned a reinforced inspection point just slightly north of the significant curve on Road 311 (see map, the curve is between lines 25 and 26 and just north of BM250 on the map). Each strong point position was located to enable 360 degrees of observation and supporting fire. From my position, with a third platoon scout vehicle, we could see the next position to the north. And that position could see us and the next position to the north, and the next position could see the supporting positions in both directions, and so on. Distances between positions varied depending on the terrain, the lay of the land.

It was late afternoon. The day had been uneventful and it was time to wrap it up and head for Buttons. The section of Road 311 where we were was not travelled that day by anyone or any vehicle. Quickly we learned why. It was uncanny. But, then, and now, on reflection, it was quite simple. Usually we would see a farmer, a traveler, someone on a bicycle, a motorcycle, children, water buffalo, a truck, some living, moving soul when we were out on our missions. Of course, when either the Viet Cong, or soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army, were, or had been, in the area we saw no one. There were times when Troop D or Lieutenant Thomas' Scout Platoon had established night ambushes and nothing had happened. In the morning hours at sun-up, children would appear, safely away, but visible, with baskets of bottled soft drinks. Soldiers always were issued cases of soda in cans through regular military supply channels. But the children, ages from around four through ten or twelve, always had soft drinks in bottles. And usually the bottles were cold even in the early morning.

I gave the order over the radio to the platoon leaders to pack up and mount up and begin moving north along Road 311. The third platoon scout vehicle with me followed as we moved north toward Sergeant Donald Sidney Skidgel's position. Sergeant Skidgel was a senior Scout Squad Leader in Troop D's third platoon. We saw his jeep moving slowly along the road before disappearing down over a small knoll.

Suddenly, we heard heavy firing erupt from AK47s and machine guns ahead of us. I shouted Go! and Ferguson gunned the jeep. When we topped the knoll where Sergeant Skidgel had been we saw his jeep a few meters down the road stopped on the right edge. We pulled up near his jeep and hastily dismounted. I ran forward. Sergeant Skidgel was kneeling behind the right front wheel of his jeep and was firing his rifle across the front of the vehicle. His machine gunner and jeep driver also had dismounted and were firing into the tree line across the road. The enemy fire was from the west tree line across where BM 250 is shown on the map.

It is still in my memory of kneeling beside him and seeing him smile and nod, a look of excitement on his young face. Sergeant Skidgel, who was expecting a birthday in one month, when he would be 21 years old, would be killed in action the next day, a couple of hundred meters north on this road where he was now kneeling. He reported the contact and estimated the enemy force to be about eight to twelve soldiers. No one in his scout squad was hurt.

From the north two other scout jeeps arrived and for the next few seconds we all poured heavy rifle and M60 machine gun fire into the suspected enemy positions. We stopped firing and cautiously moved forward to search for the enemy soldiers. We found foxholes, weapons positions, equipment, equipment harnesses, backpacks, communications wire, and evidence of wounded or killed enemy soldiers but no bodies. It was determined that they had spent some time in the location because of the marked improvements that had been made and the firing positions that were established. Now the sun was setting. By the time our search for enemy soldiers and of the enemy positions was completed a pair of fighter-bombers arrived, called for by Captain Tom Mahoney, the FO. He directed the fighter-bombers' to attack west and south of the tree line where they dropped their bombs. On this day these United States Air Force fighter-bombers carried no napalm.

Our day ended and we resumed the march toward Buttons. The policemen with us were exhilarated by the brief combat show and also were happy for their mission to be ended. We said goodbye as we dropped them off at their headquarters near Song Be. Upon arrival at Buttons a complete battle report was submitted. Later that evening during a command briefing and meeting with Colonel Healy and his operations staff a reconnaissance and scouting mission was decided and planned. It was decided that Lieutenant Thomas and his Scout Platoon would slip into the area to determine what size force was there and fix the enemy's locations. Once that was done an infantry company would be air lifted by Huey helicopters to the site to destroy the enemy force.

It would be Delta Troop's mission to pick up Lieutenant Thomas and his Scout Platoon the next morning, Sunday, September 14, at the mini-camp of the three artillery guns, on the south side of Nui Ba Ra, and transport them to the site where the fight had been that day. The plan was that Scout Platoon members would ride on Troop D's scout jeeps and surreptitiously slip off as we moved south along the road. From the slow moving jeeps they would step into the sprouting jungle grass alongside the road and quickly fade from view. Then they would consolidate under concealment of the jungle and infiltrate into the area to conduct a thorough reconnaissance to pick up the trail. Troop D would reestablish strong points along 311 to be available to respond quickly and provide support or relief if the Scout Platoon got into trouble before being able to enter and fade into the jungle. Troop D arrived at the temporary howitzer position on the south side of Nui Ba Ra about 10:00am on Sunday morning, September 14. The artillery gun crews had not completed packing but Lieutenant Thomas reported that his Scout Platoon was ready to move. Colonel Healy and his operations staff had decided the towed cannons would not need a security escort on their return to Buttons.

With my map sheet spread out on the hood of the jeep we discussed our mission and our plans. At the same time I took stock of the size of our combat force that was present for duty: there were 22 troopers in the Second Platoon (of an authorized combat strength of 40), 24 troopers in the Third Platoon (of an authorized combat strength of 40), and Lieutenant Thomas and the 14 other members in the Scout Platoon (which probably had an authorized combat strength of 40). So, counting the FO, Captain Mahoney, and his two-man team and Ferguson and me our combined combat strength on this day totaled

just 66.

In every war the fighting strength of American combat units always has been reduced. Troop D's combat power was reduced because of the loss of the First Platoon that was near An Lôc; the loss of all six 106mm recoilless rifles and crews that were on top of Nui Ba Ra; because of work details and perimeter security responsibilities on Buttons; and, illnesses, injuries, emergency leaves, and scheduled Rest and Relaxation (R & R) absences. These shortages were bad enough but Monday, September 15, was to be payday and Delta Troop's Second Platoon Leader had been dispatched to the 1st Cavalry Division base camp at Phouc Vinh as Troop pay officer to pick up the Troop payroll.

Because of a normal rotational practice it was the Second Platoon's time to lead the mission. Because the Second Platoon Leader was at Phouc Vinh picking up Delta Troop's pay, the second platoon was being led by the Platoon Sergeant who was a seasoned combat veteran. We decided Lieutenant Thomas and Private First Class John Anthony Halladay, his assistant and RadioTelephone Operator (RTO), would ride in the Second Platoon Sergeant's jeep to facilitate communications and command and control.

The Scout Platoon members would be mounted in the Troop's Second Platoon vehicles and at the agreed upon point, which was at the significant curve near where we had been in the brief fight the day before (between the numbers 25 and 26 on the map), and upon the agreed signal the 15 Scout Platoon members would individually slip off the slow moving vehicles and fade into the sprouting jungle grass alongside the road. The Troop's vehicles would slow, but would not stop, and continue for a short distance pretending nothing was out of the ordinary. Then the Troop would take up strong point positions similar to the day before and be prepared as a reactionary force for the Scout Platoon.

At about 11:30am we mounted up and departed the temporary artillery position with Troop D's Second Platoon leading. I had asked the leaders huddled around my jeep if they wanted their platoon to eat our cold C-Ration lunch there, in the mini-artillery position, or get on with the mission and eat later once we all were in position. It had been collectively decided to eat lunch later when we all were in position.

Lieutenant Thomas sat on top of the right rear radio that was mounted on top of the right rear fender directly behind the Second Platoon Sergeant. Private First Class Halladay sat on top of the radio that was mounted on top of the left rear fender of the jeep, behind the jeep driver. One of the Scout Platoon's radios was strapped on his back. Another Scout Platoon member with a radio also was in this jeep.

We crossed the east-west creek near the hamlet of Ap Binh Lan, which is now under water (see the map). A Regional Forces (RF) Provincial Forces (PF) camp was located on the west side of Road 311 (marked as Military Area along the creek on the map). The RFPF soldiers (their nickname was RuffPuffs) and many of the families who lived at the camp were along the side of the road as we moved past. The RFPF soldiers were somewhat similar to a state guard unit and were used mainly as a security listening post, as an outpost, for the Provincial government. In fact the RFPF was not really a combat

force, although they did fight when defending their camp. The main mission for this RFPF force was manning a listening-post on a major east-west trail that crossed Road 311 (see map) and reporting any movement. United States Army Advisors lived, trained, and conducted operations with the RFPF. We all waved. None of the several Advisors assigned at this RFPF camp were visible.

As his two lead scout jeeps climbed to the high ground south of the creek (marked as a ford with the image of a bridge on the map), south of Ap Binh Lan and the RFPF Camp (Military Area), the Second Platoon Sergeant requested permission to conduct a reconnaissance by fire with his lead scouts' pedestal mounted M60 machine gun. The second platoon infantry squad followed him and my jeep was behind the infantry squad truck. The FO followed my jeep, and behind Captain Mahoney was the second platoon 81mm-mortar squad in their three-quarter ton truck, followed by the two jeeps of the other scout squad of the second platoon. The Third Platoon was in tactical formation following the Second Platoon. In the cavalry column the standard operating combat distance was maintained between each vehicle.

In just a matter of seconds permission was received from the 5th Battalion Tactical Operations Center (TOC) at Buttons to conduct the reconnaissance by fire. I relayed this approval to the Second Platoon Sergeant. The lead scout jeep was by then over the crest of the hill and descending toward the shallow valley. Before the lead scout jeep began its ascent out of the valley the machine gunner began firing his machine gun into the right side of the road (including up and forward toward where the enemy soldiers had been located the day before), and then across the road to the left in a sweeping 180 degree arc. The second scout jeep machine gun also was firing into the clearing near the road and into the tree lines, first to the left, on the north side of the road, and then on the south side of the road into the grass and along the tree line.

The lead scout jeep topped the second hill and was just about to enter the significant curve which was slightly north of where the brief fight had occurred the day before. As planned the Cavalry column began to slow in anticipation of Lieutenant Thomas and the Scout Platoon members to begin dismounting the vehicles.

The area exploded in a fusillade of AK47, heavy machine gun, and rifle fire, and a barrage of B40 Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) from both sides of the road. The entire Troop column was engulfed in this withering assault.

The reconnaissance by fire by the lead scouts' machine guns provided the early trigger to a classic horseshoe shaped ambush that had been established by a large enemy force, later estimated to be about 600 soldiers. The premature execution of the ambush permitted the rear of the Troop to extend beyond the northern most enemy positions along both sides of the road. This blocked the North Vietnamese Army forces from surrounding us.

A devastating shower of rockets, machine gun and automatic weapons fire had hit the two leading scout jeeps and the Second Platoon Sergeant's jeep. The Troop Second Platoon Sergeant and his driver were gravely wounded. Six other second platoon troopers

and several Scout Platoon members also were wounded. Lieutenant Thomas and Private First Class Halladay were instantly killed.

A rocket exploded next to my jeep. Ferguson and I hastily dismounted and took cover on the right side of the jeep. The enemy automatic weapons fire was intense. I hurriedly pulled a portable radio out of the back of the jeep and we moved away from the vehicle expecting it, and us, to be hit at any moment. We were somewhat concealed in the grass at the edge of the road, but the thin blades of grass could not stop rockets or bullets.

I switched channels on the portable radio and called the Battalion TOC at Buttons to report our contact and to request helicopter gun ship support. I advised that I had only one radio and that I would be switching back to the troop radio frequency to manage the fight. Eventually the Troop had to use the 5th Battalion command radio frequency to communicate because of a shortage of portable radios in the Troop. This was a serious shortcoming for ground cavalry units that had to conduct combat operations with only vehicle mounted radios. As a mounted cavalry troop we were not authorized to have and were not issued portable radios. The portable radios, antennas, handsets, harnesses, and batteries we had were scrounged or bartered for.

Ahead of us I could see the second platoon infantry squad truck. I could see the Second Platoon Sergeant's jeep, which was on fire. I also could see the second scout jeep which was ablaze. I could not see the lead scout jeep, or any of the troops. I could hear some of their machine guns and rifles firing mixed in with the long bursts of many enemy AK47s and exploding rocket propelled grenades.

Behind us, down into the shallow valley, I could see some of the third platoon's vehicles. The FO's jeep, which always followed my jeep, was on fire. I could see troopers moving near the edge of the road. They were firing into the tree line on both sides of the road, red tracers slamming into the target locations.

Sergeant Skidgel's jeep was the second scout jeep leading the third platoon and that platoon's order of movement was similar to the second platoon. Everyone in the third platoon had dismounted under fire, seeking cover and concealment. Ferguson and I were pinned down, as were the Second Platoon and Scout Platoon troopers at the head of the column. When we tried to move we all drew a hail of automatic weapons fire. Ferguson provided observation and cover as I talked on the radio with Lieutenant Ross, the third platoon leader. I could not establish contact with the Second Platoon Sergeant or with anyone in the Second Platoon or Scout Platoon. I did not know the Second Platoon Sergeant and his jeep driver were gravely wounded. I did not know Lieutenant Thomas and Private First Class Halladay had been killed.

Soon I was able to talk to Colonel Healy who had hurriedly arrived on station in his command helicopter when he heard my report of heavy enemy contact. Soon, too, I was talking with Cavalier Red, the First Platoon Leader of Troop C. Captain Gayle Jennings, Cavalier Red, was piloting a Cobra gun-ship and was maneuvering to provide close air support with his rockets and cannons. A Blue Max aerial rocket artillery gun ship also

joined in providing supporting fire into suspected enemy positions along the tree lines on both sides of the road. And Colonel Healy's helicopter door gunners even got into the fierce fighting by pouring their machine gun fire down into enemy positions. It was pile-on time.

More help came in the form of an Armored Cavalry Troop from the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment that just happened to be loading onto C-130 aircraft on the airstrip at the northern base of Nui Ba Ra across the road from Buttons. The armored cavalry troopers in M113 Armored Personnel Carriers (APC) each mounted with the .50 caliber Browning heavy machine gun rushed to support us on Road 311. With firepower from Delta Troop, the Scout Platoon, the Armored Cavalry Troop, a Cobra gunship from Troop C, a Blue Max Cobra gunship, and from two sets of Air Force F4E Phantoms with napalm, the battle ended. The reinforced enemy unit simply faded into the jungle.

Colonel Healy decided to insert an infantry company into the battle area and directed that my troop move to the north to the high ground, south of the creek crossing and the RFPF camp, and secure an area for the Huey helicopters to land on Road 311 so the infantry company could safely dismount. This infantry company's mission would be to pick up the trail and close with and destroy whatever was left of the enemy unit.

This was done. Lieutenant Thomas, Private First Class Halladay and Sergeant Skidgel had been evacuated from the battle ground. Later a combat medic reported that Lieutenant Thomas' wounds had been instantly fatal.

I believe that if he could have, in that desperate moment under heavy enemy automatic weapons and B40 rocket fire, Lieutenant Thomas would have bravely stood up-right in the back of the jeep and poured his rifle fire into the enemy positions to protect his fellow soldiers.

Colonel Healy was deeply moved upon learning of Lieutenant Thomas' death. Later a memorial was held on Buttons for him that, security permitting, as many soldiers as possible attended.

It was so hurtfully sad then, and it seems even sadder now, that First Lieutenant Michael Herman Thomas was killed in action at the significant curve on Road 311 south of Phouc Long and Song Be in Phouc Long-Binh Phouc Province, Republic of South Vietnam on Sunday, September 14, 1969. He was only twenty-three years old, so very young.

He was far from home but he was not alone. He was among a close brotherhood of combat soldiers who cared about him and who now, and will always, remember him and honor his service to our country. First Lieutenant Michael Herman Thomas answered the call of our nation to stand in harm's way and served in the United States Army with great honor and bravery. We truly mourn his ultimate sacrifice. For 42 years not a single day has gone by that I haven't thought about him.

Friends and former Scout Platoon members who served with him posted remembrances

on this Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund website, recalling that Lieutenant Thomas was a leader who cared about his soldiers. I remember Colonel Healy later proclaimed Nui Ba Ra was thereafter to be known as Mount Thomas.

This year, in June 2011, Lieutenant Thomas would have been 65.

To his family, to us, and to me, he always will be very special.

We will always honor, we will forever be indebted to, and we will always remember, First Lieutenant Michael Herman Thomas, United States Army.

Andrew J. Hudson
Lieutenant Colonel, Cavalry-Armor
United States Army (Retired)
September 14, 2011

Never Forgotten

Posted on 8/9/11 - by Robert Sage rsage@austin.rr.com

Michael is buried at Memorial Gardens Cemetery, Hot Springs, AR. SS BSM AM PH

NATIVE AMERICAN PRAYER

Posted on 5/25/04 - by Chris Spencer cws71354@bellsouth.net

It is said a man hasn't died as long as he is remembered. This prayer is a way for families, friends and fellow veterans to remember our fallen brothers and sisters. Do not stand at my grave and weep I am not there, I do not sleep. I am a thousand winds that blow, I am the diamond glints on snow. I am the sunlight on ripened grain, I am the gentle autumn rain. When you awaken in the morning hush, I am the swift, uplifting rush of quiet birds in circled flight, I am the stars that shine at night. Do not stand at my grave and cry, I am not there, I did not die

Reflection of a leader and friend

Posted on 5/28/00 - by Ken "Doc" Raupach ANamDoc@aol.com

Reading Bill McClung's remembrance brought back similar memories of Mike (1-6). I too was his platoon medic when he was with "C" Co. 5/7, 1st Air Cav. The day I got to the field (as a FNG) I didn't know a thing. 1-6 immediately took me under his wing and made sure that my stuff was squared away. Two days later we made our first combat assault and we were in the first bird that landed in the LZ. 1-6 looked like a miniature "John Wayne" as he jumped out of the helicopter. He told me to follow him and keep my head down. I'm glad I did. As the last bird off loaded the troops, the lead gun ship erred and fired into our men and killed and wounded several men. 1-6 told me it was time to do

my thing. As I treated the injured, Mike acted as my runner to get my aide bag, IV supplies and whatever else was needed. Other memories of Mike proved over and over again, just what a great man he was. I think about him often and how kind he was to new guys like me and how he made sure that I knew what I was doing during Vietnam. My last memory of Mike was seeing him in a body bag on LZ Buttons. When Darryl (another platoon member) said 1-6 was gone, it was too hard to believe. I wonder what contribution Mike would have made to our nation had he lived. May be his legacy is carried out through people like Bill and me and all the others that Mike looked after and helped. Mike was a good man, he loved his family and is truly missed by this vet. I hope that I contribute as much.

In Loving Memory...A Friend

Posted on 1/18/99 - by Bill "Doc" McClung bmcclun@corus.inj.com

Mike Thomas (1-6) was the best officer I ever was associated with in the U.S. Army. He was the Platoon Leader of the Recon Platoon of the 5/7 Cav of the 1st Cavalry Division when I had the pleasure and honor of serving with him from June-September 1969. He had the full respect of every member of the platoon...he did not ask any of his men to do anything that he did not or would not do himself. He was the best leader I have ever experienced in my life! I am absolutely devastated by his loss and the fact that I will never be able to be with him again. I'll never forget the time that Mike, Opha Peden (RTO) and I were back in LZ Buttons in Song Be on a stand down when we decided late one night after a couple of beers to get some C-rat Ham slices to "barbecue" when we almost got caught by the MP's...that would have looked nice, a 1st LT caught stealing C-rats...we laughed so hard we cried that night! Not too many officers I knew of stayed with their medic and RTO while they could have been in the O Club...Mike always did. That's why he was special to me and probably the main reason I am alive today!

The Wall of Faces

Brought to you by the organization that built The Wall, the Vietnam Veterans Virtual Memorial Wall is dedicated to honoring, remembering and sharing the legacies of all those who died in the Vietnam War. Here you can go beyond the names on The Wall to see the faces, share the stories and read the remembrances posted by friends, neighbors, classmates and family members.

All of these photos will be showcased in The Education Center at The Wall on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. To learn more about the effort to collect these photos and ensure their faces will never be forgotten, visit www.buildthecenter.org.

- See more at: <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/51684/MICHAEL-H-THOMAS#sthash.JTrJAVXp.dpuf>.

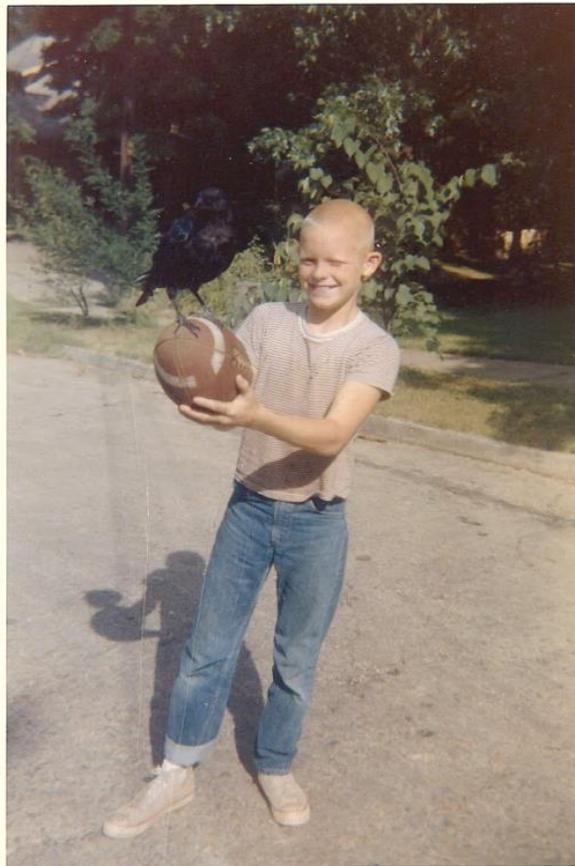
Appendix D – Martin Andrew Butt

Martin Andrew Butt 1947-1969

This started out as a way to share the chronicle of a year in the life of a 20-year old Marine in Vietnam as described in letters to a friend in 1967. I picked up the letters in a recent trip to Fayetteville ([Hillbilly Vacation](#), July 19, 2012), after finding out about them in a Facebook message.



Figure 133 Martin Andrew Butt in 1950, 3 years old



Martin with Satan

*Figure 134 Martin Andrew Butt, 1960, 13 years old.
Sitting on the football is our pet crow, Satan*

Then I decided to provide some additional context about my deceased younger brother. So here goes.

There were three of us. I am the oldest, born 1944, just before my father left for Europe in the Army during WWII. Martin was born in 1947, and Jack in 1950.

Martin died in an automobile accident in 1969.

Martin was three years younger than I, so he graduated with the Fayetteville High School Class of 1965. He attended the University of Arkansas beginning in the fall of 1965, but I believe he may have partied or gone fishing more than he studied and either dropped out or flunked out during the fall semester.

I think my dad declined to pay for any more education unless he saw a motivational shift, and in any event, Martin enlisted in the Marines, probably in early 1966. I don't recall where he spent his first year, but some of it was at Cherry Point, NC. I think later he was in southern California, maybe Camp Pendleton or El Toro.

I met Martin at Disneyland in southern California in 1967 before he shipped out.



Figure 135 Probably Cherry Point, NC, 1966



Figure 137 Martin at the beach in southern California



Figure 136 Shipping out



Figure 138 - At Disneyland in 1966

In the spring of 1967, I (Tom Butt) was finishing up at the University of Arkansas and getting ready to go to San Francisco. I had already been commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in the Army but was not due to report until March of 1968. I was going to work for a while and enjoy the [“Summer of Love.”](#) - ["If you're going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair"](#). I met Martin at Disneyland in southern California in 1967 before he shipped out.

In early 1967, Martin found himself in Vietnam at Da Nang, assigned in a support role, apparently mostly guard duty, to Marine Aircraft Group 11 (MAG-11) Group Supply.

I first read his letters and then scanned them. Like I said, it was like opening a 43-year old time capsule. I want to share them and to provide some context.

[Click here to access the letters.](#) The photos, which I have had for years, were all taken by Martin or were from his camera.

The letters, totaling 45 pages, span about nine months, from February 24 to December 13, 1967.



Most of the content is just chatty, involving daily humdrum, friends and acquaintances from back home and philosophizing after too many beers. The letters paint a picture of a 20-year old Marine mostly bored, horny and ready to go home from the time he arrived. Days of tedium were periodically relieved by life-threatening attacks and the excitement of firefights defending the perimeter.

Da Nang had the nickname “Rocket City” because it received so much enemy fire.

Figure 139 In 1967, the air base at Da Nang was the world's busiest airport in the single runway category. In the mid-1960s, 1,500 landings and takeoffs were recorded on peak days, besides having two extra traffic patterns for helicopters at the edge of the airstrip. When a parallel runway was added in 1966, Da Nang rivaled Tan Son Nhut as the world's busiest airport.

Martin’s first letter in the collection was February 24, 1967, where he writes, sarcastically, “My work is mostly interesting consisting of 14 hours of guard duty a day.”



Figure 140 - Hooch at Da Nang

On March 9, 1967, Martin described his first action, defending a perimeter attack.

We had a real good fight on the perimeter 2 days ago that I really enjoyed hearing. However, they came and got about 15 of us as reinforcements which I really didn't appreciate, I was a machine gunner and in 3 hours out there, fired 8,000 rounds of ammo. I don't know if I hit anyone, but I'm sure I got a few of them. I was pretty busy dodging bullets to tell for sure. Anyway, we killed 130 of them, and as I reflect now, it was a pretty sobering experience.

On May 5, 1967, he described a mortar attack:

We got mortared last night and one of the men working with me got his legs cut all up since he didn't hit our bunker quick enough. Only other casualty was our outhouse which suffered a direct hit and was blown all to hell.



Figure 141 *Martin with M-14*



Figure 142 Broadway, MAG-11



Figure 143 - Martin's hooch



Figure 144 Night crew, night before 13 July 1967

On July 1, 1967, he wrote that they had been hit twice by mortars, killing one American. He noted that his Fayetteville High School classmate, Corporal Howard Withey had been killed. According to information from the Vietnam Wall, Howard was killed by enemy fire in Quang Tri Province, June 6, 1967.

We have been hit twice by mortars which did some damage and hit some guys, one guy killed, but we were lucky to get enough warning to pretty well dig in. Howard Withey got killed you probably heard. He was a good friend, and intelligent guy and a damn good Marine. I guess it's bad to go with your whole life before you, but sometimes things we don't understand happen like that. I wrote to his dad, but the words were hard to find.



Figure 145 Martin: "Papa san moving family into town"



Figure 146 Martin's "Hootch"



Figure 147 Above: *Martin posing in an F-8 Crusader*



Figure 148 *China Beach*, best known for a television series based on My Khe^{LI} beach in the city of [Đà Nẵng, Vietnam](#), which was nicknamed "China Beach" in English by American and Australian soldiers during the Vietnam War.



Figure 149 MAG 11 PX



Figure 150 - Hootch maid

On July 16, Martin wrote,

Damn, did we get raked last week. Charley hit us for 45 minutes with his big Russian rockets, blew up \$60 million worth of jets, our bomb supply, part of our runway, a hanger, killed 11 men and wounded 175. Very, very close call for me. Our bunker, of sandbags and wood, fell in on us when 2 rockets hit about 50 yards away. Screw Vietnam and Charley. He was to blow us away last night and everyone was jumpy as a cat. We had extra men down on the line and the B-52s bombed his ass off 8 miles away...I looked like a Mexican bandito with ammo over my shoulders and waist with a few grenades in my pockets.

It turned out that the rocket attack of July 15, 1967, was the most damaging attack of the war on Da Nang. Although he did not discuss it in his letters, Martin was awarded a Purple Heart, and it may have been in this attack that he was wounded, although apparently not seriously.



Figure 152 *Martin wrote: "John went to Sing[apore] with me. That shrapnel went through our hut"*



Figure 151 *Martin wrote: "Morning after, direct hit F8 Crusader"*

There are detailed and graphic account of the July 14-25 rocket attack on Da Nang on the websites <http://www.vspa.com/dn-manganiello-sanger-1967.htm> and http://mofak.com/rocket_city.htm.

The photos below are from that <http://www.vspa.com/dn-manganiello-sanger-1967.htm>.



Rocket Attack on Da Nang as Observed from Monkey Mountain

Stand Off Rocket Attack begins, 0020 hours, July 15, 1967. 83 Rounds of 122mm Rockets, 140mm Rockets, and mortars were received. USA: 10 Aircraft Destroyed, 49 Aircraft Damaged, 8 KIA, 175 WIA. RVN: 00 Aircraft Destroyed, 01 Aircraft Damaged, 0 KIA, 0 WIA.

At 0040 hours, the second volley of rounds hit a stack of 250 lb. bombs in the ammo dump which went off like the Fourth of July. Bomb frags everywhere. A brilliant flash turned night to day as if a nuke had exploded. A shock wave swept the base with heat and blast as the bomb dump exploded hurtling fire and debris thousands of feet into the air. Shrapnel rained for several minutes.

The following morning, the devastation from the previous night's attack was evident throughout Da Nang Air Base. The wing headquarters concrete buildings were heavily damaged with the tile roofs nearly void of tile. The hangars were all a tilt at 30 degrees or more. The new Air Force barracks were blown off foundations and ruined. All living and working buildings were heavily damaged by the intense shelling. 59 aircraft were damaged or destroyed. Of the twelve aircraft destroyed two were C-130 Hercules aircraft, 8 were F4-C Phantoms and two were F-8 Crusaders. A dump was created north of the runways where the smoking hulks were dragged and abandoned. Some were burning or smoldering days later. 83 mortar and rocket rounds were fired in the July 15 raid on Da Nang. Eight American military men were killed and 175 were wounded.

Aircraft Hangers, barracks, revetments, and countless structures were damaged with gaping holes in walls and ceilings or peppered with shrapnel. The shrill whistling of incoming whining rockets impacted Da Nang's dual runways and taxiways. Security sirens wailed. Rockets continued to pound and crater the runways.

Da Nang's twin runways and taxiways were closed for 12 hours. The Stand Off Rocket attack of July 15, 1967 was the deadliest attack of the war at Da Nang Air Base.

Ralph Manganiello (<http://www.vspa.com/dn-manganiello-sanger-1967.htm>)



Da Nang Air Base, AKA: Rocket City, often had more than six Silk-Moons of false dawn orbiting the base. Freedom Hill 327 can be seen beneath the left flare, with convoy lights winding up the perimeter road. Donald Cathcart LtCol USMC Ret





Da Nang Air Base, flight line, rocket crater and debris. Donald Cathcart LtCol USMC Ret



Da Nang Air Base, Gunfighter Village hut rebuilding from a 122mm rocket.



Da Nang Air Base, SP Post damaged from a 122mm rocket.

Shortly after the devastating rocket attack on Dan Nang, Martin took a five-day R&R in Singapore.

On September 4, 1967, Martin wrote:

I sweated out the last week along with the rest of I Corps due to elections and Hanoi Hannah's promise to eliminate every damn one of us. We got hit once by rockets but only 3 of them; poorly aimed and gratefully received in an empty field. I have been on guard duty the last 2 nights and settled score last night. We spotted the gooks setting up a rocket position and called in artillery fire on them. Blew 8 of them to Nirvana or Hanoi in the sky or wherever faithful gooks go.

Remember Jack Todd? Somehow, I remember you not liking him too much, but I always got along with him o.k. He came down to see me from the DMZ last week. He's changed a lot Anne. I couldn't believe how quiet he is now. We got drunk and commenced to play a slot machine in the club. Took \$46.00 out of the nickel one and they unplugged it. Success is so sweet! Hope he made it out at Dong Ha last week. The N. Viets blew the hell out of it the last 4 days.



In December, Martin wrote,

Went up with the crew on the flare-drop ship last night and made it up to Dong Ha on the DMZ to pick up some wounded and dead to bring back to Da Nang. Got shot at taking off by some N. Viets and got to blow off 160 rounds back at them. That's my excitement for the week.

Martin apparently got to go to Bangkok sometime in late November. On December 4 he wrote:

Made a personal sojourn to the Bridge on the River Kwai fame and other points of interest as well as 3 nights drinking with interesting, if inebriated companions.

In an undated December letter, Martin wrote:

Had a little action tonight earlier. Charlie (I dislike the name, too) made another stab at our airstrip and we went out and shot at shadows. Guess we got some because they didn't make it past the wire.

Martins' last letter from Vietnam was dated December 13, 1967. Based on his ongoing estimates of when he would rotate out, he probably left Vietnam around the 1st of January and was out of the Marines by January 15, 1968.

About the same time, I (Tom Butt) quit my job with the architectural firm of Edward Durrell Stone in Palo Alto. I had saved a little money and was determined to take a trip to Europe before I had to report for active duty in the Army. I flew to London and started a Europe-on-\$5-a-Day trip that took me to France, Spain and Portugal. I hitchhiked through most of Spain. I flew to New York from Lisbon, stayed overnight with a friend and reported the next morning to Ft. Belvoir, VA, for the Engineer Officer Basic Course in March of 1968.

Meanwhile, Martin returned to Fayetteville and enrolled in the University of Arkansas where he apparently pursued his studies with more success than previously.

Before the end of 1968, Martin was married. I drove up from Fort Polk, LA, where I was stationed at the time and served as best man. I'm not sure, but that might have been the last time I saw Martin.



Figure 153 Tom Butt and brother Martin Butt, on Martin's wedding day, December 20, 1968. This was the second and last time I wore my dress blues.

I spent the remainder of 1968 at Fort Polk, and in March 1969, I shipped out to Vietnam.

In October 1969, I was notified by the Red Cross of Martin's death in an automobile accident, and I was able to get a week's leave to return to Fayetteville for the funeral. Following is the obituary:

Two U of A Students Killed in Rogers Crash

Northwest Arkansas Times, October 20, 1969

ROGERS – A Fayetteville man and a University of Arkansas coed were killed and two persons injured in a car-truck collision here early Sunday.

Dead are Martin Andrew Butt, 22, son of Chancellor and Mrs. Thomas F. Butt of Fayetteville and Miss Dedra Sue Thomas, daughter of David Thomas of Fort Smith.

Injured were Butt's wife, Mrs. Nancy Stair Butt and Robert Farrell, both of Fayetteville. A spokesman for Rogers Memorial Hospital said Mrs. Butt was in fair condition and in satisfactory condition today.

Farrell is a son of the late University trainer and Mrs. Bill Farrell of Fayetteville.

Rogers city police said the accident occurred at 1:25 a.m. on Hwy. 71 west inside the Rogers city limits, when Butt's late model sports car veered across the center line of the highway and collided head-on with a semi-trailer truck driven by Johnny Ray Green, 22, of Cave Springs. Green, alone in the rick, was not injured.

UA JUNIOR

Butt was born July 14, 1947, in Fayetteville, and was a junior in the College of Education at the University of Arkansas, a member of Central United Methodist Church and served two years with the U.S. Marines in Vietnam.

In addition to his parents and widow, Butt is survived by two brothers, Thomas K. Butt with the U.S. Army in Vietnam and William J. Butt, a student at the University of Virginia; his paternal grandfather, Festus O. Butt of Eureka Springs and his maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Harry King of Batesville.

A Martin Butt memorial fund has been established with the Westark Area Council, Boy Scouts of America, exclusively for Camp Orr. Memorials may be sent to Box 369, Fayetteville.

Funeral arrangements will be announced by the Watson Mortuary.

Miss Thomas, a resident of Pomfret Hall, was a University senior who lived with an aunt, Mrs. Gwen Thomas, in Fort Smith.

She is also survived by two sisters, Mrs. Larry Russell of Nevada and Miss Davida Thomas of California. Her funeral service will be at 2 p.m. Tuesday at Cox Funeral Chapel in Paris with burial in Ellsworth Cemetery.

Martin was buried with military honors at the Fayetteville National Cemetery. The information reads:

BUTT, MARTIN ANDREW LCPL US MARINE CORPS, VIETNAM,
DATE OF BIRTH: 07/14/1947, DATE OF DEATH: 10/19/1969 BURIED AT:
SECTION 20 SITE 555 FAYETTEVILLE NATIONAL CEMETERY 700
GOVERNMENT AVENUE FAYETTEVILLE, AR 72701.

Martin's widow went on to graduate from the University of Arkansas, remarry and have a successful professional career and family. She and her husband are close friends and currently reside in Australia.



Figure 154 - Martin Butt 1947 - 1969

Appendix E – Thomas Franklin Butt

I wrote this on March 26, 2017, when my father, Thomas Franklin (Tom) Butt, who died at the age of 83 in 2000, would have been 100 years old. His father (my grandfather) lived to be 97. I think my father inherited the family genes, but it was lung cancer that ended his life earlier than expected.

Thomas Franklin Butt was born in Eureka Springs, AR on March 26, 2017, the last of seven children born to Festus Orestes (known as F.O.) Butt and Essie Mae Cox Butt.



Figure 155 The Butt family in Eureka Springs late 1930s. Top: Jack Butt, Joe Butt and his wife Mary, John Butt, F.O. Butt, Tom Butt and Bob Butt. Lower: Frances (wife of Jack), Dorothy Butt, Faye (wife of John), Essie Butt and Kathleen Butt

Eureka Springs had peaked in the 1880's as a popular spa and at that time was one of the largest towns in Arkansas. My grandfather was a self-made lawyer and businessman who did not attend law school but instead "read the law" under the tutelage of a local attorney, passed the bar at age 19 and became an attorney. In addition to his law practice, my grandfather served two terms as mayor of Eureka Springs; a term as superintendent of schools for Carroll County; two terms (1897-1900) as representative for Carroll County in the Arkansas House of Representatives; two terms (1901-1904, 1927-1930) in the State Senate where he was president pro tempore. He was a delegate to the Arkansas

Constitutional Convention of 1917-18 and was elected chancellor and probate judge of the 13th Chancery Circuit by the Bar of the Circuit to serve in 1942-43, during his son John's service in the United States Navy in World War II. One of his more interesting law clients was Carry Nation, the saloon smashing crusader of Women's Christian Temperance Union fame.

The Butts came from Illinois by way of Kentucky and Virginia, and my great-grandfather William Alvin Butt fought in the Civil War for the North in the 126th Illinois Infantry. My great grandfather Cox came from Alabama and fought for the Confederacy. The Civil War was still a topic of hot discussion in my grandparents' home nearly 100 years after it had been settled.



Figure 156 1929 in Eureka Springs, left to right, my grandmother Essie Butt, my dad and his dog "Don," my Uncle Jack Butt

My father grew up in Eureka Springs, where he attended local public schools. During summers while he was in high school, he had a job life guarding at a local resort on Lake Leatherwood. He graduated from high school at age 16, and began attending the University of Arkansas some 45 miles away in Fayetteville. At least one of his siblings was also at the University, and for some time, my grandmother moved with them to Fayetteville and "tended house," bringing along the family cow.



Figure 157 Thomas F. Butt

He graduated cum laude from the University of Arkansas School of Law in 1938 and was admitted to the bar at age 21. For the next two years, he practiced privately in Fayetteville and served on the faculty of the University of Arkansas Law School. Commissioned in the U.S. Army Reserve as a second lieutenant of Infantry at graduation, my father was called to active duty in 1940. My mother and father met at the University of Arkansas and were married in April of 1942 at the home of my King grandparents with my grandfather King, a Methodist minister, presiding. My mother was a student and my father was on the Army ROTC faculty.



Figure 158 -Cecilia King wedding announcement



Figure 159 Wedding of Thomas F. Butt and Cecilia King, April 25, 1942

In the early years of World War II, my father was stationed in several locations training infantry, among the last of which was at the New Mexico School of Mines in Socorro, near Albuquerque, where I was born. My mother had followed my father to New Mexico, where they rented an old adobe ranch building that had been divided into a duplex.

My mother had spent the summer of 1941 in Hawaii visiting her aunt Susan and Uncle, Col. Edgar King, who was Chief Surgeon for the Hawaii Department. She recalls dating young men who were on their way to China to serve as pilots in the clandestine [Flying Tigers](#), formed to help defend China from the Japanese aggressors. (At Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, Col. Edgar King handled all the casualties (for all service branches). He had believed months in advance of the Japanese attack that Hawaii was vulnerable and had requisitioned adequate medical supplies. He was later cited for outstanding service, promoted to brigadier general and held the title Command Surgeon, United States Army Forces, Central Pacific.)

About the onset of WWII, my son Andrew transcribed the following from my father in 1991:

I was in Fayetteville, Arkansas, on a Sunday afternoon on December 7, about two o'clock. My roommate and I had just finished a late lunch and were just starting to play bridge with our two girlfriends and had the radio on. We were both in the army at the time and were second lieutenants. Of course we were shocked, that is shocked in the sense of being startled and depressed that this had happened so unexpectedly, and beyond that we were not particularly surprised because it had been thought by many people both in the government and just ordinary citizens for a year or more that there was a good chance that the United States might sometime get drawn into the war. I had been in the army over a year before Pearl Harbor was bombed and worked as an instructor at the University of Arkansas for the ROTC program. We were sorry to know we were at war and that it would probably be a long war and that many people would be killed and that it was a bad thing, but having realized that, we were very patriotic and we were very full of energy and very anxious to be a part of it and to get on with it and to whip the hell out of the enemy.

After Pearl Harbor we were just kept on duty at the University, because all of the military services, the Army, the Navy, the Army Air Corps, the Marines set about immediately to augment and increase the number of young men in the ROTC and training programs, so we stayed right here at the University and in the space of six months we had about two thousand young students training in the program where before that we only had about five hundred.

My parents were lucky to stay at the University of Arkansas for a time, but my father was moved around from assignment to assignment, with my mother following until I was born on March 23, 1944, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he was at the New Mexico School of Mines in nearby Socorro as an instructor in an Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). This was a program designed to give special college training to young men already in the military. Many colleges and universities across the nation had similar units.



Figure 160 Thomas F. and Cecilia Butt with Tom K. Butt, 1944, prior to leaving for the European Theatre of WWII.

My mother later wrote:

The then Capt. Butt had received Army orders in December 1943 to go to Socorro where he would work in an Army officers training program at the School of Mines there. We made the long trip out slowly as I was about seven months pregnant. Upon arriving, we went to a little old hotel (the town's only) at the end of the road, staying there for a few days looking for housing. We eventually moved into an adobe duplex which had originally been a one-family house, the home-place of a ranch complex. It was a dreary vista for any eyes and a difficult one for a pregnant, sickly female. Shopping was traumatic, with only naked, cold rabbit offered in the grocery meat counters, or fried, the only meat on the menu in the two town restaurants. Overly hot Mexican food was an alternative. There being no doctors or hospital in Socorro, our frequent weekends to Albuquerque to see the obstetrician offered a chance to enjoy the hospitality of the lovely Alvarado Hotel there. The Santa Fe charged right up to the doorway of the hotel where Indians in native garb waited to show and sell their arts to incoming tourists. Literally, it was a "Gateway to the West" as the sign over the entrance gate stated.

To return to our arrival in Socorro, and the little hotel there where we went on our arrival night, there was much scurrying about as a large party was to be held that evening. Since visitors at the hotel were few and Tom's position at the local college made him already known, we were invited to join in the festivities. The party was a birthday celebration to honor the grand dame of Socorro, the beloved Senora Baca. All the town seemed to be there to pay tribute to the tiny little lady of 90, beautifully dressed in an ankle length black silk of an earlier day, with lace and jewels to make a picture perfect image. She and her family were among the earliest, and surely the most distinguished, of the Socorro citizens and one of the few aristocratic Spanish families to still be social, political and economic leaders. Her late husband, El Fago Baca, had been their sheriff in territorial days, as well as U.S. Marshall and legislator.

The senora reigned that evening as a queen might, graciously greeting all well-wishers from her throne-like seat in the large hall. We were enchanted. It was nearly a year later, back in Batesville, that I learned from Aunt Dan that the same Senora Baca had been her dearest friend in those much earlier days when they were frontier wives together at Socorro, the senora of landed Spanish gentry and Aunt Dan, who followed the Santa Fe through the wilderness of New Mexico. Time and the world become swiftly small for us. The new orders for overseas duty had arrived the day after the baby's arrival in a hospital in Albuquerque.

My father spent a short time in Ft. Worth at another high school ROTC program before shipping to Europe as a legal specialist in foreign claims. He disembarked at Omaha Beach in Normandy in September, 1944, about three months after D-Day, and then followed the front through France and Belgium where he commanded a small detachment (Claims Office, Team 6816) settling claims of Europeans against the American military.

He moved from place to place through northwestern France and eventually into southern Belgium until the war ended in the spring of 1945.

More of Andrew's 1991 interview:

I saw service in the United States, and in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, and Germany, (pause) Oh, and England. I went overseas in 1944 after the Normandy invasion. I arrived at a little bitty town on the west coast of Scotland, called Greenock spelled G - R - double E - N - O - C - K, and it was a port capable of handling large ocean - going vessels, and I went over on a former French luxury liner called, the Isle de France, and it had been put into war service and stripped of all its elegant interior and arranged for enough bunks and space to carry about four thousand or five thousand soldiers. Because I was a lawyer, the army had sent out word to various installations all over the United States saying that there was a need for lawyers and insurance agents and doctors and real estate claims adjusters to work with what were called foreign claims teams in the foreign claims service, and our job was to set up a place to work on the European continent and there received the complaints of the civilians who claimed that the American soldiers had stolen or damaged or ruined their property. They were making a claim against the United States to pay them the value of their lost, damaged, or stolen property, caused by the thievery of American soldiers or the

wrongful damage of property. That entire operation was called the foreign claims service, and our job, as I say, was to receive the foreign citizens, to investigate them, and to determine if the claim was fair and to determine if the American soldiers had done the damage, and if so authorize payment, but equally to determine if the American soldiers didn't do it and if they were not negligent in doing so, than the claim was denied. There was an absolute rule that any damage caused by combat action, the United States would not pay for, because that was just a necessary result of warfare and of course the United States had treaties with all these countries, and it was agreed that the U.S. would not be obliged to pay for any damage caused by combat. But for example if a soldier got drunk on pass and broke windows or ran his jeep into the fence of a citizen, or whether he was drunk or not, if he was just a no good bum and he broke into a bakery shop and stole a bunch of bread or whatever, he was just a plain thief, and when that was established the United States would pay.

I found it extremely interesting to get to know something of the country of France and Belgium and Luxembourg and Holland simply by being in a foreign country that I'd never been in before, and getting to know a good many of the citizens of those different countries, England too of course. The foreign claims service and the unit I belonged to was not a combat army unit, we were not a fighting unit, but since we were on the continent and in the area of operations following immediately behind the area of combat we saw firsthand the results of fighting and battle damage and saw the results of the heavy bombardment by the English and American air forces, and of course we could see and hear the bombers flying over, day and night, and that was inspiring. Those are ours, those are our airmen up there; we're just whippin' the hell out of those Germans, (laughs).

I never did see any of the enemy in wartime, but I saw a good many German prisoners immediately after the war, and they, of course, had either surrendered or been otherwise captured and for a few months after the war in Europe was over, I was still there waiting to get sent home, and we were mainly just marking time waiting for our orders to be sent home. We had to have a place to live and to eat and keep alive, (laughs) like anybody does any time and for quite a while we, meaning a large number of American officers were assigned quarters in, oh I guess what you could call hotels and apartment buildings, that sort of thing, and German prisoners were there to cook and serve and make the beds and keep house for us.

When I arrived in September, of 1944, and you will remember that what we called and what history calls D-Day was June 6, 1944 and the actual fighting, the invasion was very, very heavy fighting, so, although I didn't actually land in France until about the first week in September, which would have been three months after the invasion, the fighting was still going on less than fifty miles away. So the first thing I saw were bombed out bridges and burned villages and chewed up ground, where the tank warfare had taken place, and just the general wreckage of heavy warfare. We landed on Omaha beach, where the invasion forces had, and the great big steel barriers that the Germans had put up were still in the water, and lots of barbed wire, and all the German pill boxes, heavy concrete bunkers were up on the ledge overlooking the coast with the knocked

out German guns, they were all still there. There was very extensive battle damage of bombardment and artillery damage all through France and Holland. We were stationed in the Ardennes forest, where the heaviest tank fighting and infantry fighting during the so called Battle of the Bulge, took place. And we were stationed after the fighting of course, but there were just burned out tanks all over the place, and you could see where trees had been just mowed down by artillery fire and so on, so that was just quite a thing to see that, in the wake of battle, the damage that had occurred.

Our family was fortunate to accompany my father to Europe in the 1990s, after my mother died, where we visited the areas in which he had traveled in World War II. We started at the Normandy invasion beaches and went on to Rouen, Paris and the Belgium Ardennes, where we took a canal boat trip on the Meuse River. My father recalled a quick trip to Paris shortly after its liberation and how he could still smell the wonderful hot *baguette* given to him by a local baker. We visited Bastogne and the site of the Malmédy Massacre, where my father teared up with still painful memories. We ended by finding the Chateau in Belgium where he had last been stationed in one of the outbuilding. It was virtually unchanged but had long since become a summer youth camp.

Col. Thomas Butt on Duty With The Fourth U.S. Army in Texas

Col. Thomas F. Butt, judge of the 13th Chancery Circuit of Arkansas, is at Headquarters Fourth U. S. Army, Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Tex., for two weeks' annual active duty for training as a U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) officer.

During this period he will work in the capacity he would assume under emergency conditions. He is a mobilization designee for the position of trial judiciary for Judicial Area IV. This judicial area is divided into two districts, the 4th which includes Arkansas, Texas east of the Pecos River, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Panama Canal Zone, and the 7th which includes Texas west of the Pecos, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Wyoming.

Colonel Butt was commissioned in 1938 through the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program at the University of Arkansas, from which he received his LL.B. that same year. He was called to active duty in August 1946 and served to 1948, successively as ROTC instructor at his alma mater (1946-47), training officer in Infantry basic combat training, and in the European Theater of Operations. He has retained his affiliation with the U.S. Army Reserve since.

He is a member of the Arkansas State Bar Association,

American Bar Association, Military Government Association, Reserve Officers' Assn. and a past president of the State Judicial Council of Arkansas. He is also a Mason.

Colonel and Mrs. Butt live at 26 W. Davidson, Fayetteville, Ark. They have three sons: Thomas K., 22, a graduate architect awaiting call to active Army duty as a member of USAR; Martin A., 20, a lance corporal in the U.S. Marine Corps, Vietnam, and William J., 17. Colonel Butt is the son of Festus O. Butt, 26 Eureka Street, Eureka Springs, Ark. Mrs. Butt's parents are Dr. and Mrs. Harry King, 225 N. 8th St., Batesville, Ark.



CAPTAIN BUTT

COMPANY "F"

OFFICERS

THOMAS BUTT	.....	Captain
JACK CARSON	.....	First Lieutenant
PAUL K. HOLMES	.....	First Lieutenant
THURMOND WALTERS	.....	First Lieutenant
THOMAS R. ASHCRAFT	.....	Second Lieutenant
DALE ELLIOTT	.....	Second Lieutenant
BYRON MORSE	.....	Second Lieutenant
JAMES ROY	.....	Second Lieutenant
LEIGHTON RUDOLPH	.....	Second Lieutenant
WILLIAM O. SHIRLEY	.....	Second Lieutenant
JAMES P. WALKER	.....	Second Lieutenant

After leaving active duty as a major, my father and mother made their home in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he began a private law practice in 1946. He remained in the Army Reserve, however, retiring after 34 years as a brigadier general in the Judge Advocate General's Corps. He held the mobilization designation as chief judge of the U.S. Army Judiciary, the highest Army Reserve assignment in the Judge Advocate General Corps, receiving the Legion of Merit in 1970.

One of his first cases went to the U.S. Supreme Court. The telephone company sued a woman who allowed university students free use of a telephone at her cafeteria. The telephone company accused her of cutting into its profits, saying a pay phone should be installed at the cafeteria for student use. The woman hired my dad, and the high court sided with him. It ended up as his only case before the Supreme Court. "I was able to brag after that that I won every case I ever had in the Supreme Court," my dad liked to say.

In 1949, my father's older brother, who had been elected as chancery Judge before going into the Navy, was killed in a vehicle accident. My father ran for election to fill the empty seat and was elected chancery and probate judge in 1949 at age 32. After taking office on January 1, 1950, he was re-elected each six years thereafter and served continuously for 50 years until his retirement and death in 2000.



Figure 161 Thomas F. Butt 1950

During my growing up years, my father was kept busy by both his professional work as a judge and his Army Reserve assignments. He often brought work home to prepare opinions on court cases, and he used his vacation time to attend various schools and other postings related to his Army Reserve duty. We did get in a vacation every other year or so, making a trip west to the national parks, and a trip east to Washington, D.C., and all of the American heritage sites like Monticello and Mount Vernon. On the trip to the west, we visited New Mexico Governor [Edwin Mechem](#), who had been in my dad's law school class at the University of Arkansas.

My dad was a dedicated Civil War scholar, and we also visited a number of battlefields. When we were in Washington, D.C., visiting the Capitol, Senator J. William Fulbright asked him if there was any particular senator he would like to meet. My father named Barry Goldwater, and the introduction was arranged.

He was active in Scouting during the years my brother and I were that age, and he took the whole family to Philmont Scout Ranch one summer where he was taking an adult leadership course. He taught me all of the basic survival skills – how to drive, swim, shoot, hunt and fish, and how to guide a boat through the whitewater. The most common family outing was a weekend fishing trip, sometimes combined with a float trip on one of the local Ozark Rivers – the White, Kings, West Fork or Buffalo. My parents both liked to fish and float the Ozark rivers, and sometimes on a Sunday Afternoon, we would float right though a river baptism conducted by one of the country Baptist churches.

We also spent a lot of weekends at either my grandparents Butt's home in Eureka Springs or my mother's parents' home in eastern Arkansas. All of my father's brothers were lawyers, except one who was a doctor. They loved to gather at my grandparents' home in Eureka Springs and talk politics, law and anything else well into the night. I remember one time they had an extended argument about whether pigeons were good to eat. The opinions ranged from gourmet (squab?) to inedible. Finally, one of the brothers grabbed a .22 and shot a pigeon off the roof. After plucking, roasting and consuming the bird, the range of opinions remained about the same – with no one willing to back down.

When I was in junior high, my father took me duck hunting in eastern Arkansas near a town called Stuttgart, a famous part of the Mississippi flyway. A lawyer friend of my father's was a member of the club. It was run by "trusties" on leave from the State Penitentiary. Among the other guests were a group of rocket scientists from Huntsville, Alabama, including the famous Werner Von Braun. It was a pretty basic place, just an old shack on a levee, and we were all in bunk beds in the same room. I was, of course, thrilled.

My father was pretty much a "straight arrow." The only time I saw him intentionally break the law was when he shot a squirrel out of season because my grandfather King insisted he had to have it, along with twelve other kinds of meat, for a Mulligan Stew he had made for some special occasion. He was a lifelong Democrat at a time when even judges had to declare their political affiliation. However, in those days, there was only one party in Arkansas, and that had been the case since the Civil War. I asked him one time if it bothered him that Arkansas had only one political party. He replied that Arkansas actually had two political parties – the Democrats that are in office and the Democrats that are out of office. Although he was Democrat, he was far more conservative than I, and probably would have been a Republican if the politics of the time would have allowed it.



Figure 162 Thomas F. and Cecilia Butt about 1972 when he retired as a brigadier general in the U.S. Army Reserve

My father, as well as my mother, had been smokers probably beginning in their teens. They only stopped in the late 1980s when my mother had to go on oxygen because of emphysema. My mother died in 1991 of complications with asthma and emphysema.

My father contracted lung cancer in the fall of 1999 and died in May of 2000. He did not officially retire from the bench until March 26, 2000, his 83rd birthday. At that time, he was the senior judge of the Arkansas judiciary and had served 50 years, longer than any judge in Arkansas history.

His official title was chancery/probate judge, but he served as judge in all the trial courts of general jurisdiction, including circuit court, criminal/civil court and juvenile court. During his tenure as a trial judge, Judge Butt's career included: serving as President of the Arkansas Judicial Council, 14 years as a member of the Supreme Court Committee on Rules of Civil Procedure, Chair-man of the Arkansas Association for Exemplary Service to the legal profession. He was also a graduate and former instructor of the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada.

An profile in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* from September 21, 1998, recalled a close call he had from a deranged woman who had been before him in a custody case:

As far as Washington County Chancellor Tom Butt knew, Shirley Curry was just a person he ruled against in another emotional custody case. On July 20, 1974, the day after the ruling, a detective woke Butt by calling him at 4 a.m. Curry went on a shooting

rampage, killing her ex-husband, her ex-sister-in-law and her three children -- 17, 14 and 11. She outlined her murderous plans on a cassette tape police found. "We heard the tape," the detective told Butt. "She said, 'The next person I'm after is that man in the black robe.' " Police arrested Curry before she could follow through with her threat. At 61, she's serving life without parole in an Arkansas prison.

By 1998, he was just two years short of 50 years on the bench and was getting attention for his longevity. *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette article continued:*

Twenty-four years later, at 81, Butt is still trying custody cases. In 2000, 50 years will have passed since Butt, the longest-serving judge in Arkansas and perhaps in state history, was elected chancellor. He recently had a rebirth of sorts. On Aug. 31 he marked the first anniversary of his second marriage. Lawyers and others who work with Butt say he remains personable, knowledgeable, hard-working and sharp on the bench. While he hasn't lost his sense of humor, he's retained his grit, a no-nonsense attitude and a demand for decorum and proper legal procedure. Lawyers know better than to play games in Butt's court. It's a lesson a man upset over the judge's ruling in a property dispute quickly learned one day some 40 years ago. "This fellow came into my office pretty hot around the collar," Butt recalled last week. "He thought I was crooked and had been bought out by the other side. I lost my cool and said, 'You son of a b****, you get out of this office.' " The judge paused in the middle of the story, embarrassed by the memory. He was young and inexperienced. I would not do that now," Butt said, pausing again, gazing upward in thought. "Well, I'm not sure I wouldn't do it, either, because that cuts pretty close to the bone when somebody accuses you of selling out to the other side."

In 1949, his brother, John K. Butt, the chancellor in Fayetteville, died in a car wreck. The next year, Butt ran to fill the vacant spot. He won, he said, not by his own merit, but by the great respect the people had for his brother. Over the years, however, the younger Butt slowly distinguished himself. The military awarded him the Legion of Merit for his service as chief judge of the Court of Military Appeals, although he was never called to active duty. That court hears appeals from court martials in each branch of the armed forces. He retired in 1972 as a brigadier general. Other honors include the Arkansas Certificate of Merit for his work as chairman of the Judicial Discipline Commission and the American Bar Association's Award for Judicial Excellence, a national distinction given a handful of judges each year. Lewis Jones, a lawyer in Fayetteville for 43 years, says Butt has a calming influence in the courtroom. He recalled one case about 20 years ago when about 50 or 60 angry "mountain-type people" gathered in Butt's courtroom over a custody battle. The judge, like he does after all cases, explained his decision in detail and complimented both sides. "I'm convinced that's what prevented bloodshed in the courtroom," Jones recalled. State Supreme Court Justice Bob Brown and others cite Butt's colorful speech and marvel at his vocabulary. His Southern gentlemanly manner and down-home phrases impress others. "He has a really refined sense of justice and has the mannerisms and decorum of a Shakespearean actor," Brown said. "He's a real credit to the state. He's unique."

In the 1990s, challengers tried to pick him off, but he continued to prevail.

Over the last decade, some lawyers grumbled that maybe Butt was too old and had worn out his black robe. Some cite his continued opposition to court consolidation. In 1990, Butt faced a challenger for re-election for the first time in his political career. Butt won by a 3-2 margin. 1996 was tougher. He faced opposition in the Democratic primary and from a Republican in the general election. His opponents told people he was slipping. It was time for new blood, they said. There was some talk that Butt should switch parties, since Northwest Arkansas has become strong GOP territory. Butt refused and campaigned door-to-door for hours each day in the sun, shaking as many hands as he could, asking for votes. A small group of county lawyers secretly supported his Republican opponent Jim Burnett, a former judge in Lonoke County, Everett said. But the majority in the bar openly supported Butt. The incumbent lost Washington County but received enough votes in Madison County, the other county covered by his judicial circuit, to squeak by -- 25,731 to 25,473.

The close vote didn't insult Butt, despite his years of service. He said he understands that someone could legitimately make a political issue out of his age. He said people have a right to choose their leaders, even if that means he may lose. "I'm just hanging around as long as I can," he said. "My guess is that when my present term ends I'll retire as gracefully as I can." In 1997, Butt disposed of 1,321 cases compared to 1,369 filings, a rate better than average, according to the state Administrative Office of Courts. "Chronologically he's 80-plus but his mental stamina is 60," said Everett, a lawyer since 1974.

"You can't imagine the respect he has. He's a nice guy. He's learned. He's interesting to talk to. He'll take young lawyers by the ears ...to show them what needs to be done and mold them. That's what he did with my generation." For example, one day last week a lawyer asked to call his client for rebuttal testimony. Butt quickly reminded the lawyer he may call his witness but not for rebuttal testimony. He then defined the legal term. "Thank you, your honor," replied the humbled lawyer. Butt believes lawyers still have much to learn after passing the bar exam. "He proceeds to teach them," Jones said. "He's not liked generally by the young lawyers."

One lawyer, Kathryn Platt, 30, said she enjoys going before the judge. She just has to remember to stay alert and respectful, she said. Technology and society, however, have changed since Butt took office in 1950. Last week he questioned a witness at length about her caller ID box and how call-blocking works. He's also frustrated by court delays caused by interpreters for the growing Hispanic population in Northwest Arkansas. "If you ask a [Hispanic] fellow what time did he get up this morning, instead of saying '6:30, he'll ripple on for about 30 seconds and then the translator says, 'He got up at 6:30,'" Butt said. Butt doesn't appreciate his time being wasted. He'll do what the law says, even if he doesn't agree with it. He said he "detests" a law requiring him to issue domestic protective orders if shown evidence of violence. Ordering people to stay away from each other solves nothing, he said. He grew impatient last week after a couple testified they had been married for 20 years but that they never liked each other. He approved the protective order against the husband but said they should hire a lawyer and get divorced. "What these people need are to be taken out with

a wet rope and given a whuppin'," the white-haired, thin-mustached, red-faced Butt said, peering behind his glasses as he rocked in his courtroom chair.

Older lawyers such as Everett openly disagree with the judge on some topics. Almost every afternoon, Everett joins Butt for lunch at Hoffbrau steakhouse on Center Street, a block from the old courthouse. Other regulars include Circuit Judge Bill Storey and Municipal Judge Rudy Moore, old Bill Clinton confidants, and attorney Woody Bassett. "It's the Round Table," Butt joked. "Although, it's not round; it's oblong. Everybody's an expert on something. All amounts of wisdom is passed around." Recently, the group was lamenting Clinton's troubles and offered theories on what the scandal will bring next. Then, they plotted mock attempts to steal a fellow lawyer's Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Bassett said he can always count on Butt for lunchtime facts or theories on the Civil War. A Confederate sympathizer, Butt would have pleased his Alabama grandfather. "My perception of the Constitution is that a state had a right to secede," Butt explains. "Well, it didn't work, and we're better off for it.

My mother died in 1991, and my father remarried an old friend, Frances Trotter, on August 31, 1997. They remained married until his death in 2000.

Away from the courthouse bunch, Butt spends his time tending his vegetable garden and spoiling his five grandchildren. Three are nearby, the children of his youngest son, Jack Butt, a Fayetteville attorney. Two grandchildren are in San Francisco with his son, Thomas K. Butt, an architect. A third son, Martin, died in a car wreck in the early 1970s after returning from the Vietnam War. His first wife, the former Cecilia King, died in 1991 after a prolonged battle with emphysema. For the last 18 months of her life, she required constant attention. Butt took her to hospitals in Denver and Tucson, Ariz., but the treatments failed. Initially, he never thought about remarrying. Later, however, he began corresponding with Frances Trotter, a friend of his late wife who had moved to Mississippi some 30 years earlier. She had recently been widowed and after a while they arranged a meeting. For their first anniversary, they spent a few days at a lakeside bed-and-breakfast Oklahoma. "After being married to Cecilia for 50 years, I forgot how to court," he said. "[Frances and I] just met each other and let each other know we found each other's company pleasant. I don't care about movies; neither does she. I like reading and she's an avid reader. We both like classical music. We figured we'd better quit seeing each other or get married. "Friends say he doesn't take himself too seriously. When he's not wearing his black robe, it lies crumpled on a chair. "I'm going to burn this damn robe someday," he growled, frustrated with the robe's difficult zipper as he left his chambers for a hearing. The day's court business had lasted longer than he thought. At 5 p.m., he quickly tossed his robe and donned his hat and wrinkled light blue pin-striped blazer. Come back tomorrow, he tells a visitor. "I've got a date with my wife," he said, smiling.

After my dad announced his retirement, the *Northwest Arkansas Times* wrote:

Colleagues speak of civility, eloquence of retiring judge Chancery Judge Thomas Butt will perhaps be best remembered for the decorum and civility he brought to the 4th Circuit bench during his 50-year tenure. As news of the 82-year-old judge's retirement trickled through the law offices of Washington County

Thursday and Friday, colleagues spoke highly of him and the eloquence and respect he brought to the bench. "He has one of the best reputations statewide as far as a fair and impartial judge and he's well thought of by every judge in this state," said Circuit Judge Kim Smith, who's served alongside Butt the last 13 years. "He's very highly respected by all his peers on the bench. "

Circuit/Chancery Judge Mary Ann Gunn concurred with Smith, reiterating his importance to the local bench. "I feel that his presence on the bench for the last 50 years and his leadership to the bar has been, and will continue to be, an invaluable asset to this community and the state of Arkansas," Gunn said. "He inspires not only attorneys but me as a judge. He inspires that higher calling to the law, one of honor and integrity. "Citing his battle with cancer, which he was diagnosed with three months ago, Butt announced Thursday he will retire on his 83rd birthday March 26, leaving the position open for a temporary appointee and this year's general elections.

A signed letter of retirement was sent to local lawyers, judges and media Thursday, thanking the citizens of the 4th Judicial Circuit for their support. "I have been privileged, beyond my desserts, to serve as judge for 50 years, for which I am profoundly grateful, not alone to the people who have elected and re-elected me, but as well to the members of the bar and my fellow judges, who have uniformly accorded me all courtesies and support in the administration of justice in the 4th Circuit," Butt wrote.

The Washington County Bar Association is holding a reception for Butt on March 1, his last scheduled day on the bench, and is planning another tribute to the retiring judge. "He's the most respected jurist in the state," said Kitty Gaye, bar president. "We're all very sorry to see him go. "Lawyers who've practiced in Butt's court for decades remember him as a civil and respectful judge. "I've known Judge Butt since the '50s, and have practice before him since 1962," said lawyer Bill Bassett. "While to some, his manners might have seemed old fashioned, to me they weren't. They just kept demonstrating his respect for the law."

His tenure on the bench was highlighted with his service as president of the Arkansas Judicial Council in 1956 and 1957. The council later handed him the Community Service Award in 1993. Smith said local judges entered him into a national contest after he won that distinction, and he was bestowed the Award of Judicial Excellence by the National Conference of State Trial Judges during their national conference in August 1996.

Lewis Jones, a local lawyer who coordinated Butt's last run for office - one of only a few he was opposed in - said Butt made a run for the Arkansas Supreme Court years ago, but his lack of statewide recognition led to his only electoral defeat.

Butt became known for his steadfast devotion to courtroom decorum and a gift of eloquence, both in speech and writing. "He has been (a mentor) as far as the conduct of the trial and the decorum in the courtroom and the civility that a judge should always show the litigant and attorneys," Smith said. "Judge Butt never

gets mad, he never gets ruffled. He's very courteous to everyone. "Lawyers remember him for the notes of congratulation or compassion he often hand-wrote them. Beneath a nearly illegible scribbling were spirit-filled words few forgot. "His ability to be eloquent, his ability to write, is something that all of us ought to strive for," Bassett said. "It's somewhat a lost art in this day and time. But he is just so articulate in the way that he writes, and the way that he speaks, and we could all learn from that."

Younger up-and-coming lawyers were also shaped by Butt's service on the bench. "In my mind, he's always been the grand ol' man of the law," Gaye said. "And he's taught generations of young lawyers how to do things, including me. "Circuit/Chancery Judge Mary Ann Gunn practiced law for 18 years in front of Butt, specializing in Chancery law. She remembers, as a young lawyer, feeling intimidated by the judicial icon. "As young lawyers, our legal education continued under his tutelage," Gunn remembered. "He was strict but fair - a kind judge who nurtured us as trial lawyers. And he engaged us intellectually as advocates of the law." Bassett's son, Woody Bassett, agreed, saying the judge had instilled important lessons in new lawyers who practiced in his courtroom. "Judge Butt has taught several generations of lawyers how to practice law," the younger Bassett said. "I know I - and any other lawyer - feel that he's an inspiration and a leader to younger lawyers."

Gunn will be one of the last two judges sworn in by the senior member of the bench. Along with fellow Circuit-Chancery Judge Stacey Zimmerman, she stood before the veteran jurist last year to take her oath of office. "I love him and will miss him very much," she said. "As a judge, he's an icon. "In his letter of retirement, Butt said he is stepping down so citizens can have a full-time judge, something that in light of his health, he can "no longer give them." "Thus, I take early retirement with regret that I cannot fulfill my contract with the people, but with the sure knowledge that a successor will be named and elected who can and will do a creditable job the better to serve the people," Butt concluded in his letter. "I am more grateful that I can adequately express to all who have supported and helped me during my tenure of office, and I entertain the hope that my services have been generally acceptable to the public whom it has been my duty and pleasure to serve."

When he finally had to admit he was not getting any better, my dad submitted his resignation:

"This early retirement (by two years) for reasons of health, is deemed proper in the best interest of the people of the 4th Circuit," Butt wrote. "I have been privileged, beyond my deserts, to serve as judge for 50 years, for which I am profoundly grateful, not alone to the people who have elected and re-elected me, but as well to the members of the bar and my fellow judges, who have uniformly accorded me all courtesies and support in the administration of justice in the 4th Circuit.

"I have enjoyed good health for all of my adult life until quite recently when a wholly unexpected illness struck me, without warning, requiring me to leave my

office for the past three months," Butt continued. "The people are entitled to a full-time judge, and that I can no longer give them.

"Thus I take early retirement with regret that I cannot fulfill my contract with the people, but with the sure knowledge that a successor will be named and elected who can and will do a creditable job the better to serve the people. I am more grateful than I can adequately express to all who have supported and helped me during my tenure in office, and I entertain the hope that my services have been generally acceptable to the public whom it has been my duty and pleasure to serve."

Thomas F. Butt had a distinguished career on the bench and the bar, as the first chair of the Arkansas Discipline and Disability Commission, president of the Arkansas Judicial Council, a fourteen year member of the Supreme Court Committee on Rules of Civil Procedure, chair of the Bar Probate Law Committee, Executive Council and House of Delegates of the Arkansas Bar Association and delegate to the Arkansas Constitutional Convention in 1979. His lifetime achievements were recognized by the American Bar Association when it selected him in 1996 as one of three trial judges nationwide to receive its Award of Judicial Excellence. At his retirement on his 83rd birthday, Hon. Dub Arnold, Chief Justice of the Arkansas Supreme Court, read an order from the Arkansas Supreme Court: "He has touched the life of thousands, and in doing so, has made his portion of the earth a better place to live." President Clinton wrote: "Your distinguished career and your commitment to the law have set an example for so many, and your work has been a true investment in the future of our state. As your remarkable tenure comes to a close, you can be proud of creating a lasting legacy of public service."

After my dad died, the Arkansas Legislature passed a mandatory 70-year retirement age, known informally as the "Judge Butt Rule."



Figure 163 My dad and I in 1995

Appendix F - Vietnam Revisited

This is my Southeast Asia Journal July 30 – August 15, 2009.

Good Morning Vietnam Day 1

Shirley and I are taking advantage of the City Council August hiatus to make a trip I have wanted to do for many years, revisiting southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand) for the first time in 40 years. I first visited Vietnam in 1969-70 in a government-sponsored first trip

After my parents died, I found all of the letters I had written home that they had saved, and those and many old photographs formed the basis of a narrative I wrote many years later that I called “[Letters Home](http://www.tombutt.com/pdf/letters%20home.pdf).” (Click on the link <http://www.tombutt.com/pdf/letters%20home.pdf> for the entire narrative).

For the most part, I enjoyed my military tour in Vietnam. As an Army engineer officer, my job was mainly managing the construction of infrastructure (roads, bridges and buildings), some of which are still there. I was fortunate to land a military assignment that was equivalent to working in the top management of a major construction company employing over 9,000 people. I got to see a lot of a beautiful country, meet a lot of people and learn a lot of skills that I still use in my work today. We worked very hard and accomplished a lot, but we also played very hard and tried to make the most of a year-long involuntary vacation.

I was also fortunate to have an opportunity at the end of my tour to visit Cambodia and Angkor Wat in the spring of 1970, virtually untouched by the war at that time but barely a month before the U.S. invasion set into motion a series of political events that several years later turned into one of the world’s most horrendous genocides.

From Cambodia, I went on to visit Thailand, Hong Kong and Japan. I sailed to Russia and took the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Moscow and then toured Europe before finally coming home to Arkansas and later California.

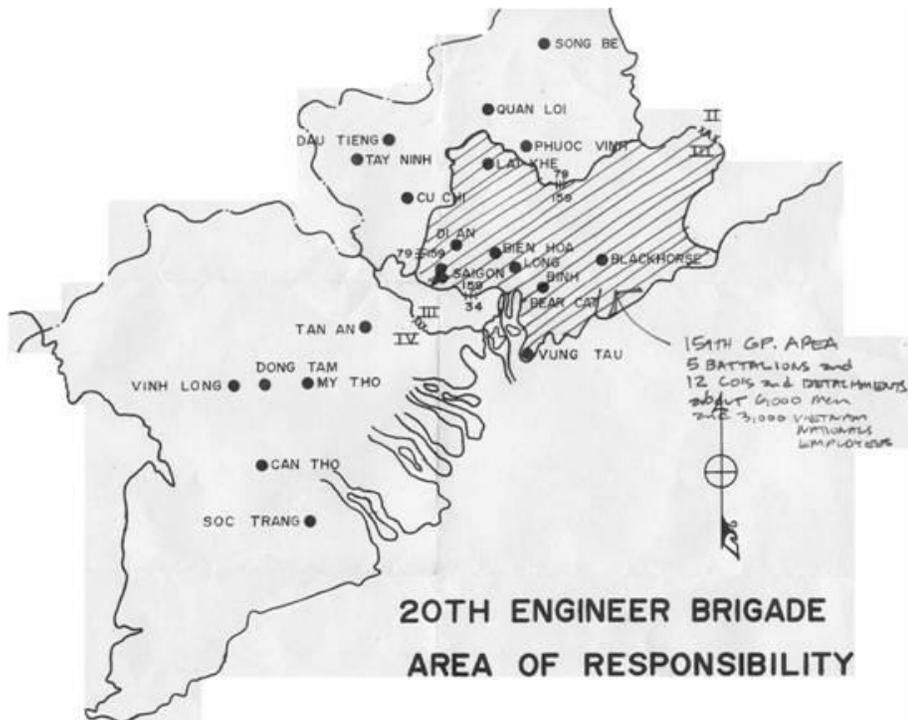


Figure 164 -159th Engineer group Area of Operations 1969 (cross-hatched)



Figure 165 – Tom and Allen Tolbert at Saigon City Hall, 1969



Figure 166 – Ho Chi Minh City Hall 2009 - Tom and Shirley Butt



Figure 167 - Hall), 2009 Continental (Palace) Hotel in 2009



Figure 168 - Rooftop restaurant, Rex Hotel 2009



Figure 169 - Entrance to industrial park at former location of Long Binh



Figure 170 - USARV buildings used for Vietnam Army compound 2009



Figure 171 - Location of 159 Engineer Group compound at Long Binh is now an industrial facility for the CP Group

Good Morning Vietnam Day 4

It is now August 4, and this is the first time that I have had time to write anything down. The last few days have been a whirlwind, trying to cram everything into a trip that is clearly too short.

We are now in Dalat but return to Saigon via air late this afternoon.

Stepping back a few days, my friend Phuc and her nephew who was getting married here picked us up at the Tan Son Nhat about midnight Thursday (we lost a day crossing the date line), and we checked into a hotel next to a new house she built in the Binh Tan District of (southwest) Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City).

Gone is the old French-built terminal that I remember from 40 years ago. Tan Son Nhat now has a modern new international terminal that could be anywhere. There is no more “welcome to Vietnam” rush of hot humid air. Everything is air conditioned.

People take Swine Flu very seriously here. Every airport employee wears a surgical mask. In fact, I found out later that they electronically scan every incoming passenger for elevated temperature (indicating a possibility of fever), and one of individuals in the wedding party who had the misfortune to be too hot was detained in a hospital for two days until tests indicated an absence of Swine Flu.

Friday, we headed downtown to see how once familiar places had changed. The first thing you notice is the traffic. Forty years ago, traffic was already legendary, but it was nothing like today. Where once bicycles ruled, an endless sea of motorcycles, motor scooters and motor bikes prevail. There are some taxis, buses and trucks, but Saigon predominantly moves on two wheels that carry families of four, cargos of hundreds of pounds, construction materials, you name it.

The traffic flows organically, like a river, seemingly with no rules of the road, few traffic lights and no traffic cops. If you want to make a left turn, you just do it in the face of a thousand oncoming vehicles. They part and weave almost magically with no one slowing or stopping. About half the people driving motorcycles, and probably 2/3 of the women wear surgical masks to protect against air pollution. These masks are available in every imaginable designer color and pattern. Everyone, by law, has to wear a helmet.

Similarly, pedestrians just wade into the stream, and the traffic just flows all around. Everyone seems to be protected by an invisible shield that keeps them safe. I saw only two very minor accidents where someone’s motor scooter had gone down with no damage and no injuries.

Saigon has more than doubled in population in 40 years, from about 3 million to over 6 million. What hasn’t changed is the basic urban pattern, perhaps the ultimate mixed-use new urbanism with every building street frontage a business of some kind, more often

than not spilling out onto the sidewalk and sometimes into the street itself, with at least four stories of residential above.

The taxi to downtown took about an hour, and we were dropped off at the Hotel Continental that as much as anything marks the heart of old Saigon, one of the old French hotels and once the hangout of Graham Green. Although high rise hotels have been planted all over downtown, the main streets and landmarks were like old friends with a fresh coat of paint. We took in the Notre Dame Cathedral, the Old Post Office and the City Hall (now Office of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City). We had lunch on the rooftop of the Rex Hotel, once an American military billet with a famous rooftop bar that has changed little. I used to hang out there and used the same rooftop swimming pool that is still there. We spent a good part of the afternoon walking the entire length of a street named Yen Do in 1970 but now Ly Chinh Thang looking for the apartment several of us rented where Al Tolbert lived and the rest of us use as a base. It could not be found – probably torn down for a new building.

Before going back to our hotel, we stopped at the Reunification Palace, formerly the seat of the South Vietnamese government and the home of South Vietnam's last real president, Nguyen Van Thieu. There wasn't much to see there, although it was supposedly furnished the way it was in 1975 when Saigon fell, and the formal spaces are used from time to time for government events. The basement was still full of American made radio equipment, and the "War Room" with tactical maps was intact. On the grounds were the two tanks that broke the gates down in 1975.

Other than being even more bustling and cleaned up, Saigon at the street level is much the same place, although 40 years ago and a year after Tet 1968, there was barbed wire and concertina everywhere, sandbagged checkpoints at every corner and official building and armed military personnel and police everywhere. The streets were swarming with military vehicles and uniformed military from South Vietnam, Australia, Thailand, Korea and the U.S. Last time I was here, I had a loaded .45 on my waist, and we had to check our weapons in at the Rex Hotel lobby before heading for the rooftop bar. The entrance to the Rex was sandbagged and ready for an attack. All gone today and replaced by attractive hostesses.

We headed back for dinner with the family and to catch upon sleep.

The next morning, Saturday, we rented a car and driver primarily to go out to what was once Long Binh where I lived and worked. I knew there was almost nothing left from reading accounts by others, but I had to make the trip.

A trip that once took less than 30 minutes from downtown Saigon was over an hour on a new four lane toll road with traffic that makes I-880 look like fun. What was once open countryside is now filled in solid with industry, new residential development and even a Disneyland-like theme park. Using maps and the GPS on my I-phone, I was able to almost pinpoint to location of the former compound of the HHC 159th Engineer Group. It is now some livestock product-related industrial compound owned by the C-P Group, one

of Asia's largest companies. Ironically, I met the president of the C-P Group in Arkansas several years ago, and we will be guests at his home on August 11 in Bangkok.

Most of what was the headquarters for the U.S. military in Vietnam and the home of about 75,000 soldiers in an area almost as large as Richmond is now an industrial and business park. When I was here 40 years ago, I don't think there was a tree in sight, but the jungle has returned with a vengeance. Trees and grass are everywhere. The only thing left is the cluster of buildings on a hilltop that once housed the headquarters of the United States Army Vietnam (USARV). It and the area around it have been taken over by the Vietnam military and are mostly inaccessible, although driving up to the gate we could see some military training facilities such as firing ranges. What was most interesting is that most of it seems to have been turned over to agriculture with uniformed soldiers doing the farm work. A herd of cows crossed the road right down the hill from the gate.

I spent some time in one of the USARV buildings in early 1970 when I was assigned to the board of a general courts martial for two trials, and we often used a helipad adjacent to the buildings when making inspection tours out into the countryside. Long gone are the perimeter protective berms, rows of defensive wire and the 175 mm guns, although one of them is on display at the war museum in Saigon.

Heading back into Saigon, we had the driver wait for us at the 100-year old Jade Emperor Pagoda before dropping us off again at the Continental. An interesting feature at the Pagoda is its famous turtle sanctuary.

I had to get some visa photos made for future border crossings, then we walked over to the Binh Than Market, a Saigon landmark since the early 20th Century. It's a giant public market in the heart of Saigon adjacent to a huge traffic circle where you can find almost anything. It looks the same as it did 40 years ago, except then the interior of the traffic circle was also packed with market stalls. Now it is immaculately landscaped.

We had lunch at one of the hundreds of food stands and had just enough time left to walk over to the War Remnants Museum (formerly War Crimes Museum) located in the former USIA building. I think this museum has been toned down some over the years to make it more palatable for tourists, but is still a pretty sobering place. It is pretty well designed for a museum. It tells the story of the Vietnamese quest for independence from the Vietnamese perspective and treats neither the French nor the Americans with sympathy.

Despite the war, everyone here could not be friendlier. Anybody serving the public speaks "get along" English, and I am enjoying using my modest Vietnamese when I need to.

If you are not familiar with recent Vietnamese history, the key points are that independence was declared after the occupying Japanese were defeated in 1945, Ho Chi Minh wanted to form a republic with a constitution based on the U.S. Constitution and asked for U.S. assistance. Instead, obsessed by fear of communism, the U.S. helped

return France to run Indochina as a colony and largely financed the French war until the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Spurned by the U.S., Ho Chi Minh successfully sought assistance from Russia and China.

The UN called for a national election in 1954, but the U.S. backed a partition of the country and set up Diem as president in the South. As pressure against the South Vietnamese government increased from the North, the U.S. stepped in to protect its anti-communist investment, and the rest is history.

The big wedding was Saturday night. Phuc and the women of her family spent the day getting ready with a house call manicurist and beauty parlor. The actual wedding ceremony was a small family event early in the morning, so what we went to was really a reception. It was held in a conference center called the “White Palace,” (yes, in English), a huge modern building near Tan Son Nhat, along with several other wedding receptions. By my count, there were around 600 guests seated at between 30 and 40 tables, each seating 16 persons. I’ve never been to a wedding event so big and so professionally choreographed.

The bride and groom both live in California, but apparently the bride’s mother considered it important to hold the event in Vietnam. Dozens (or maybe hundreds) of friends and family flew in from the U.S. Phuc’s two daughters and their families from California were there as well as her two brothers (one being the father of the groom) and one sister. The event included dinner and professional entertainers, toasts, visits to each table by the bride and the groom, and professional video clips of the bride and groom posed in various romantic backdrops. Other than one other person, we were the only westerners there.

Sunday turned out to be a special treat. Phuc hosted about 40 people, including family, friends and the bride and groom at her ancestral home in a rural village, Rach Kien, about a 30-minute drive southwest of Saigon. I had visited there 40 years ago when her parents were still alive and living there. The house, extremely modest by American standards, was built by her grandfather, a district chief, 100 years ago. When I was last there, it was surrounded by farmland, but now the village is encroaching. A nephew’s family lives there now.

Rach Kien is a poor place, and when we arrived there were maybe a hundred people gathered quietly in the front yard. Phuc had arranged to have 100 large bags of rice brought to the house, paid for by her and her daughters. They were stacked in the living room and handed out to each of the gathered villagers. When those were gone, the family handed out a stack of paper money about two inches thick until it was gone.

The house is one story with a rooftop deck over a more recent addition in the back. Everything is open to the air with no glass windows, but there are shutters. The original house had one large room and two bedrooms. The addition, separated by a small courtyard, has two more bedrooms, a kitchen and bathroom.

All the water comes from rainwater stored in a cistern. There were several small dogs and chickens in the yard, which was lush and informally landscaped with native shrubs and trees. Out back was a pond that meandered through the immediate neighborhood. While we were waiting for lunch, coconuts were harvested from a palm in the yard and the milk served.

Lunch, prepared both in the courtyard and the kitchen, was a real banquet, which included barbecued duck and pork bought at a roadside stand on the way down, a curry with chicken and yams, rice and noodles, salad and a dozen different kinds of fruit. Fruit is just amazing here, with such exotics as Durians, Mangosteens, Pomelos, Rambutans as well as bananas and dozens of others available everywhere.

I want to tell you a little about Phuc. Her father was a school teacher in Rach Kien. She was born in 1948 and married at age 18, moving from Rach Kien to Saigon. Coming from a middle class family, her mother sent a maid with her. She had never worked, inside or outside the home.

By 1968, she had two daughters, and her husband disappeared somehow in the fog of war. For the first time, she had to support herself, and her natural bent as an entrepreneur emerged. She opened modest restaurants and bars in a couple of locations south of Saigon where the 9th Infantry Division was then operating, catering primarily to American soldiers. When I met her in 1969, she was moving around between her shops constantly, leaving her daughters with her parents as necessary. By then, the parents had also moved into Saigon. Rach Kien was not always a safe place to be.

In the early 1970s, she married again, this time to a lieutenant colonel in the South Vietnamese Army. They had a son shortly before the fall of Saigon in 1975, and her husband was shipped to Hanoi for twelve years of “reeducation.” She visited him twice, traveling to Hanoi by train.

Under the new regime, times were hard. The communists cut off her father’s pension, and she was constantly watched and made to perform menial labor by the conquerors. She had no viable means of supporting herself and her family. Her father was sick, and I managed to obtain special medication from a local doctor and have it sent to Vietnam for his use. By 1980, she had had enough and paid a contractor in gold to take her to Indonesia by boat, but he took the money and disappeared. (In an unlikely sequel, she tracked him down in Los Angeles years later and successfully sued him to return the money to her).

On the second try, she was more successful, and she and her 4-year old son became “boat people,” ending up after a life-threatening voyage in an Indonesian refugee camp for nearly a year. In 1981, she wrote to us, asking us to sponsor her to come to the U.S., which we agreed to. She had friends in the growing Vietnamese community in San Jose and wanted to go there but got sent to North Carolina instead. We sent her plane tickets and picked her up in San Francisco in 1981.

Phuc had only a suitcase of clothes with her and no money, but her entrepreneurial skills kicked in, and she plunged back into the restaurant business, first with the type of food coaches you see at construction sites and later with restaurants. She has been very successful, and in fact, one of her restaurants, Pho Saigon, is in the Pacific East Mall in Richmond.

In the 1980s, Phuc's parents died, and her daughters emigrated to California, where they are now married with families as is her son.

Phuc has used a lot of the proceeds from her economic success to help people in Vietnam who are still struggling.

That's it for now. The sun is out in Dalat, and we have to fly back to Saigon this afternoon. More about Dalat later.



Figure 172 - U.S. Army Engineer bulldozer on display at War Remnants Museum 2009



Figure 173 - Saigon Street 1969



Figure 174 - Wedding 2009



Figure 175 -Saigon street 2009

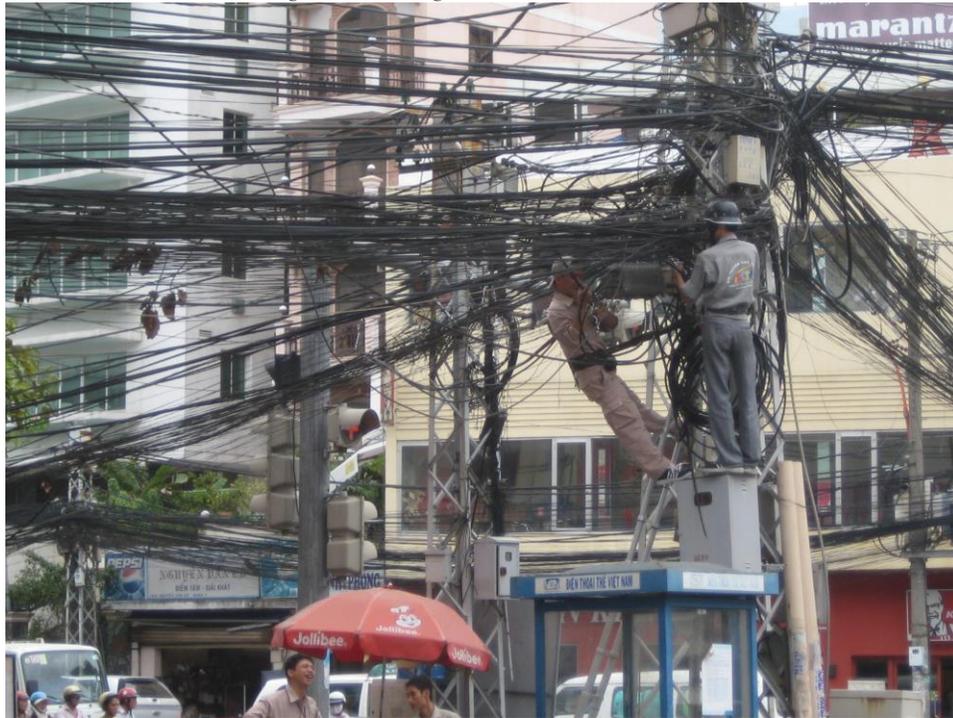


Figure 176 - Saigon electrical infrastructure



Figure 177 - Shirley and Phuc 2009



Figure 178 - Picking up barbecue, Phuc and Shirley



Figure 179 - Phuc's ancestral home in Rach Kien



Figure 180 - Ready for lunch, Phuc's brother, Phuc Tom and Shirley



Figure 181 - Going to market on two wheels



Figure 182 - Pond in back of Phuc's Rach Kien home



Figure 183 - Tom and Shirley at wedding



Figure 184 - Display at war Remnants Museum



Figure 185 - Running cattle at former Long Binh Post



Figure 186 - Guard gate to military installation at former USARV compound at Long Binh



Figure 187 – Ben Thanh market, Saigon



Figure 188 - Inside Ben Thanh Market



Figure 189 - Ben Thanh Market



Figure 190 – Dragonfruit at Ben Thanh



Figure 191 - Lunch at Ben Thanh Market



Figure 192 - Baskets



Figure 193 - Display of American military units in War Remnants Museum (pointing at 20th Engineer Brigade)



Figure 194 - Streets of Saigon 2009



Figure 195 – Phuc with daughter, son-in-law and Shirley



Figure 196 - Photos of Phuc's parents at ancestral home



Figure 197 - Kids waiting for lunch at Rach Kien



Figure 198 - bought some lottery tickets from this guy in Rach Kien



Figure 199 - City Hall from Rex Hotel rooftop 2009



Figure 200 - Sidewalk cobblers 2009

Now in Can Tho

Today is Wednesday, August 5, and we are in Can Tho in a hotel next to the Mekong River. This computer doesn't have a USB port, so I still can't send any photos.

Backing up to August 2, we flew out of Tan Son Nhat in Saigon to Dalat, a quick 50-minute flight, arriving late Sunday Afternoon.

I always wanted to go to Dalat. Back in the day, Dalat was synonymous with Shangri La. When I was here in the Army, I wanted to see everything, and I never missed a chance to hitch a ride somewhere or look for an excuse to go inspect something somewhere. Unfortunately, there was no military business in Dalat, and I never got to go there.

Dalat is up in the southern part of the Central Highlands, established by the French in the 19th Century as a resort to cool off from the Saigon heat. As far as I know, both the French and American wars passed it by. Today it has a special attraction for lovers and honeymooners.

It sort of reminds me of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, a 19th Century resort town up in the Arkansas Ozarks with hills and pine trees. Dalat is full of kitsch, such as the Valley of Love and Lake of Sighs, both replete with hundreds of photo op backdrops for the romantically inclined. It's so bad that it's good.

On an overcast and rainy Monday, we booked a tour of the local attractions. We were the only non-Vietnamese on our small tour bus, and we visited a Buddhist monastery, a Buddhist pagoda, a Catholic monastery, Bao Dai's Summer Palace, a waterfall-based amusement park where we rode an elephant, the Valley of Love and a cluster of shops for local art, especially silk embroidery.

[Bao Dai](#) was the last Vietnamese royalty who, according to the exhibits, was a figurehead during the French period who spent most of his time hunting and womanizing. After 1954, the palace was used as a summer retreat by Diem.

Eureka Springs has its giant Christ of the Ozarks and Dalat has its giant Buddha, both on mountaintops. I'm glad we went so I could finally check it off my list after 40 years, but I'm not sure I would add it to the A-ticket.

Monday night, it all caught up with us, and we slept 12 hours. I spent a lot of Tuesday morning composing my last email on a slow computer, and we walked around town and had some lunch before catching a shuttle bus the small airport, some 30 kilometers down the mountain.

The only non-Vietnamese we saw in Dalat were a few Australians and French that we could identify by language and some other westerners we couldn't.

Coming back in to Tan Son Nhat in the daylight, I noted that the only vestige of the war were rows of steel and concrete vaulted structures, similar to Quonset huts, once used to protect helicopters from rockets. Some were still being used for helicopter hangers, but most were empty or used for storage. Luckily, our bodies were sufficiently cool to pass the fever scan.

Arriving back in Saigon about dark, we checked into the [Hotel Continental](#), called the Continental Palace when I was last in Saigon. Graham Green had Room 210 a few years ago, and we had Room 237. The weather was as good as it gets, clear and warm with a slight breeze. Contrary to popular opinion, Saigon has some really nice weather. We ate in a place we found in Frommers, but it was too spiffy and overpriced for my taste. I'll have to let Frommer's know. We hit the rooftop bar at the Caravelle, but it was cramped and the music too loud. I prefer the Rex.

This morning, we were picked up at 8:00 AM to begin our delta tour. I really didn't know what to expect, but it turned out that it was just a tour guide, a driver and us.

On the way south, we passed through Saigon South, which is a whole different world. Think Pleasanton or San Ramon, only bigger and better. More cars and fewer motorcycles. Everything is new and expensive, and it goes on for miles. This is where the new money is. Condos go for several hundred thousand dollars. Auto Row features dealerships for every make of car, including BMW and Mercedes, bigger and grander than anything even in the Bay Area. Unfortunately, the planners have spread everything out like the worst American planning, losing an opportunity to preserve the historically intimate streetscape of Vietnam and European cities.

We drove south on Highway 1 to [Vinh Long](#), where we transferred to a boat on a branch of the Mekong. Forty years ago, what is now Highway 1 was a narrow two-lane bad road surrounded by agricultural fields and small villages. Now it is a continuous strip of industry, roadside stands and new development.

Our guide is about 30 years old, originally from Danang but now living in Saigon. His family were Viet Minh sympathizers during the French war, and when Diem came to power after the partition, the government had his uncle killed, despite a UN resolution that there was to be no political retribution. His father was killed in the American war by a mine when his Red Cross Vehicle was blown up.

Like other Vietnamese, he recalls the total disaster of the Communists' first 15 years of ruling the southern part of Vietnam. They tried to institute classical socialism with collective farms and real estate appropriation, but it failed miserably. New leadership scrapped all that about 1989, and Vietnamese capitalism flourished with a vengeance. Today, the country has one of the world's hottest economies.

He is Catholic, as are many Vietnamese. In Dalat, 60 percent of the population is Catholic, a very high proportion.

The delta tour really got exciting when we boarded a boat and began to thread our way through the Mekong River waterways, ranging from the mile-wide main channels to narrow winding branches reminiscent of Louisiana bayous. This is the fictional setting of *Apocalypse Now*, and it looked the part.

Although these waterways are still essential for commerce and transportation, we passed hundreds of tour boats like ours, many of them much larger. Touring the delta via water is clearly very popular. Most of the westerners we ran into were Australians or Europeans. There were very few Americans.

We stopped at a candy factory, a fruit tree nursery and a restaurant for lunch, all accessible mainly by water.

We are now in our hotel in Can Tho with an early morning wakeup to get the local floating market while it is most active.



Figure 201 - Bao Dai's Summer Palace, Dalat



Figure 202 - Riding the elephant in Dalat



Figure 203 - Valley of Love, Dalat



Figure 204 – Exotic snacks



Figure 205 - This little pig went to market



Figure 206 - Cai rang Floating market in Vinh Long



Figure 207 - Saigon South on the way to the Delta



Figure 208 – The new Saigon South



Figure 209 - Waterway near Can Tho



Figure 210 - Lunch stop on an island



Figure 211 - The new Saigon South

Goodbye Vietnam Day 8

I guess I am lucky to have Internet access at every hotel, but dealing with emails is not easy. That's why I started attaching these MSWORD files.

We are in the Mekong Delta border town of Chau Doc, and we leave early tomorrow morning by boat, traveling up the Mekong to Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

When I was in Vietnam 40 years ago, I never visited the Delta, but the waterways triggered a lot of memories about bridges I'll explain later.

Driving from Can Tho to Chau Doc is not unlike taking Highway 4 through the Sacramento River Delta. Water, islands and canals are everywhere. Until recently, there were no bridges over the Mekong, so ferries are big business, and the vendors who service long lines of traffic are also big business. But that is all coming to an end. One large cable stayed bridge has been completed and another one will open soon, putting thousands of roadside vendors out of business. In fact, the government is building new limited access expressways parallel to Highway 1 that will change Delta travel forever.

The Mekong River Delta is not only the rice and fish basket of Vietnam but also a major exporter to other Asian countries. Like other parts of Vietnam, the economy seems to be booming, with new construction everywhere.

We got up early this morning to catch the morning floating market of Cai Rang where wholesale growers from all over the Delta converge to transfer fruit and vegetables to retailers, all via boat.

Leaving Can Tho, we split off Highway 1 onto Highway 91, heading west toward Chau Doc. The agriculture turns from fruits and vegetables to rice. As we headed west, we found the road shoulders and front yards being used for drying the recent rice crop. People work it with hoes or just walk through it to keep the rice stirred up for drying. Usually it was on tarps, but often it was on bare asphalt or concrete. Once the rice is sufficiently dry, it is bagged and sent to plants where the husks are removed, and it is polished.

The husks become a major source of fuel and are used to heat kilns where hollow clay tile are manufactured. Hollow clay tile is the major building material in Vietnam and is typically laid up to form walls that are later covered with cement plaster within a spindly concrete frame. If they ever had an earthquake here, there would be nothing left. This is similar to the original construction of the Richmond Plunge that has been removed to increase earthquake safety.

In addition to the smoke from the brick kilns, rice straw is burned in the fields, creating a smoky haze not unlike the smoke from the fires we experienced last summer in California.

We had a delicious lunch at a storefront restaurant in Chau Doc and headed for Nui Sam (Sam Mountain) to walk it off. This mountain pops up unexpectedly from the dead flat Delta kind of like Mt. Diablo. Because of its unusual topography, it is considered a holy place, and its slopes are covered with shrines, grottos, pagodas and ancient tombs. It was a 700 meter climb but well worth it.



Figure 212 - Ubiquitous rest stop along Highway 1



Figure 213 - Cham Village



Figure 214 - Drying rice in the road



Figure 215 - Mekong River in Cambodia



Figure 216 - Breakfast at the Hotel Victoria on the Mekong in Chau Doc



Figure 217 - Crossing the Mekong at Can Tho

After Nui Sam, we were back on the water visiting a huge houseboat community on the Mekong devoted to fish farming. Each large houseboat is also a floating fish farm where fish are fed pellets of food made from fish scraps, rice powder and water morning glories. These folks are ethnic Vietnamese who had settled in Cambodia but were driven out by the Pol Pot Regime.

Nearby, we visited another community resulting from ethnic relocation, the Chams who are Muslims and came originally from Central Vietnam. They live along the river in stilted houses kind of like the town of Locke in the Sacramento River Delta. They are totally different in appearance from the ethnic Vietnamese and wear head gear like Muslims in other parts of the world. Instead of churches or Pagodas, the village has mosques.

Several of the old bridges we passed under by boat were being replaced by new concrete bridges. The old ones were probably vestiges of the Vietnam War and built by American Army engineers because they were Bailey (or panel) bridges, made from interlocking truss sections used to assemble military bridges. What was long gone were the pier protection assemblies that protected every bridge from sappers, made from steel framework and barbed wire. During the war, every bridge has guard bunkers at either end, some left over from the French war, and pier protection standoffs. The guards were always ARVN soldiers who caught whatever fish they need for dinner by tossing a hand grenade into the water and scooping up the stunned fish. Each bridge also had a large flock of geese who were supposed to sound the alarm if a Viet Cong Sapper was trying to sneak up to blow the bridge. Obviously, it didn't always work because a lot of bridges were blown up.

With the huge amount of construction going on in the Delta, I was taken by the piles of crushed rock I saw everywhere. There is no indigenous source of rock in the Delta, and at one time, the 159th Engineer Group operated the only quarries, crushers and asphalt plants in the southern part of Vietnam. All of the rock was allocated to Army construction missions, mostly road building. My shop controlled disposition of this rock, and we had a constant stream of military personnel begging us for rock for some project that had not made the official cut. Most of them, including Koreans, ARVN and Australians, we turned down, but every now and then we cut someone some slack. Rock could be traded for steaks, shrimp, beer and air conditioners, and the Army runs on barter. I gave an old classmate, Larry Townley from Arkansas some as well as my cousin, an officer in a 9th Infantry Division Aviation company. Remember Yossarian in Catch-22?

Time to go to dinner. See you in Cambodia.

Into the Heart of Darkness

Actually, the boat trip up the Mekong was uneventful. I kept looking for remnants of that bridge from Apocalypse Now, but there wasn't much to see from the middle of a mile-wide river, red with the mud of the half dozen countries it passes through. In the hour we were still in Vietnam, the banks were mainly vegetable and rice farms.

In Cambodia, you see more trees and cattle. Crossing the border, we stopped at both a Vietnam exit station (a houseboat) and the Cambodia entry station. Although there is nothing to it, just the concept of entering Cambodia is exciting. While waiting to get our passports stamped, we talked to French couple about our age and found that the man was actually born in Hanoi. His father had been a lawyer in the old French Indochina, leaving Hanoi for Phnom Penh when the country was partitioned in 1954. In 1975, he was the last Frenchman to leave Phnom Penh, barely escaping the Kymer Rouge. This was their third visit back to southeast Asia.

The boat trip was from 8:00 AM until 2:30 PM, at least 1 1/2 hours more than scheduled. There are no taxis in Phnom Penh, so we took a tuk-tuk to the Raffles Hotel Royal. A tuk-tuk is a gussied up trailer with seats and a canopy pulled by a motorcycle and is the main transportation for visitors in Cambodia. The Raffles is the most expensive hotel we are staying in, but I chose it for nostalgia. I stayed there in March 1970 for about three days. Then, it was Phnom Penh's best hotel but was in genteel deterioration and cheap by American standards. Now it is expanded and thoroughly modern.

When I was here in 1970, Cambodia probably had not changed in 100 years. It still was French Indochina in appearance and culture. French was still the language of culture, commerce and tourism (what little there was of it), and I found my vestigial French quite useful. The same time I was here, the U.S. backed coup when Sihanouk was deposed by Lon Nol. It was also the month the U.S. started B-52 raids in Cambodia and invaded six weeks later.

The resiliency of what is now the population of Phnom Penh is astonishing. When Pol Pot and the Khymer Rouge capture the city in 1975 and drove its inhabitants into the countryside, killing most of them, the population dropped from 600,000 to some 30,000, mainly Khymer Rouge soldiers. This is about the same scale of depopulation present in New Orleans when I was there after Katrina, only they weren't killing people. By mid 1975, Phnom Penh was no longer functional, and many buildings and monuments were destroyed. Today, the population is back up to 1.5 million, and the city is thriving.

Tourism is big, mainly Europeans and Australians. The unofficial currency is the U.S. dollar, which makes transactions easy. But Phnom Penh is still gritty, with potholed streets and garbage that remind me somewhat of wartime Vietnam. Cambodia has the highest proportion of war-related amputees of any country in the world, and they are everywhere begging for money.

we have a whole day here before flying to Siem Reap and will visit the National Museum, the Royal Palace and the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum



Figure 218 - Sunrise over the Mekong in Chau Doc



Figure 219 - Welcome drink at Raffles Hotel le Royal in Phnom Penh



Figure 220 - No smiling or laughing allowed at the Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh



Figure 221 - Tuk-tuk in Phnom Penh

Exploring Angkor Wat

Today is August 10, and we got up at 4:30 AM to go out and watch the sunrise (with about a thousand other people) at Angkor Wat. Because it was overcast, we didn't get the full glory, but I'm glad we did it.

Yesterday, we explored Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom in detail and came back to the hotel late afternoon for a nap before going to the Old Market area for dinner. Transportation is by tuk-tuk. There are virtually no taxis here. Tour groups use buses, and individuals and couples use tuk-tuks. The cost was \$12 for the day. Some of the younger travelers rent bicycles.

When I was here in 1970, Siem Reap was about the size of Pt. Reyes Station on a good day. The city was substantially destroyed in the wars but has rebounded to a robust 150,000 today. Visitors to the temple complexes were in the hundreds then; today they are in the thousands or maybe tens of thousands. A pass to the temple complex costs \$20 a day or \$40 for three days, per person. There were only a few hotels before, and most of them were destroyed in the 1970s. Today, there are hundreds of large new hotels, many of them as fine as anywhere in the world, lining the main streets and Highways. Think Orlando.

Maintaining the temples is a constant fight against rain, humidity and the jungle. A number of international organizations are involved. Before 1970, the French were exclusive, but now many countries are involved in this UN World Heritage Site.

Cambodia, and especially Siem Reap is really hot for the international late teen and twenty-something crowd. Travel for the "backpacker" persuasion of young people can be really cheap. They are mostly non-Americans, including Japanese, Canadians, Europeans and Australians. Yesterday, we met a vacationing Cambodian family that lives in San Diego but still has relatives nearby. The restaurant district last night was crammed with mostly young people. Happy hour with \$0.50 beer lasts from 4:00 PM until 10:00 PM. Hundreds of packed restaurants line narrow streets and alleys in an atmosphere that is almost Bourbon Street without the strippers.

They say tourism is down due to the global recession, but it certainly doesn't look that way.

Traffic in both Phnom Penh and Siem Reap is much better than Saigon, which probably holds a world's record for congestion. There are proportionately more cars in Cambodia than Vietnam, which is counterintuitive, but the motorcycle still rules.

Some urban design observations about both Vietnam and Cambodia. Streets are typically built with generous sidewalks, all nicely paved in attractive unit pavers of various kinds, often 20-30 feet wide. But they are totally occupied with parked cars and motorcycles, market stalls, and people simply eating dinner. The result is that pedestrians have nowhere to go but the street and compete with cars, trucks and motorcycles.

On our last day in Phnom Penh before leaving for Siem Reap, we went to the National Museum, the Royal Palace and the Genocide Museum. Phnom Penh has retained most of its Parisian planning, with many wide boulevards, parks and street trees everywhere. It is a thoroughly modern city in many respects.

I am impressed by the seeming liquidity with which capital and business seems to circulate around Asia. These two cities were devastated only 20-30 years ago, yet today they are repopulated, rebuilt and humming with business and tourism. There don't seem to be a lot of older people around. Millions of the older generations were killed by the Khmer Rouge or otherwise in the wars of the 1970s. The resilience of people who live here is astounding, but there

must be source of virtually unlimited capital to finance all this growth – by most accounts, Chinese. It’s “build it, and the will come” approach that seems to be working. I wonder if New Orleans will come back so fast.

Global warming and sea level rise is a big concern in this part of Asia. Hey say Vietnam is the fifth most vulnerable country in the world, primarily because of its agriculture rich but low lying deltas.



Figure 222 - Angkor Wat



Figure 223 - Buddhist monk in the temple complex



Figure 224 - Shirley bargains with kids selling souvenirs

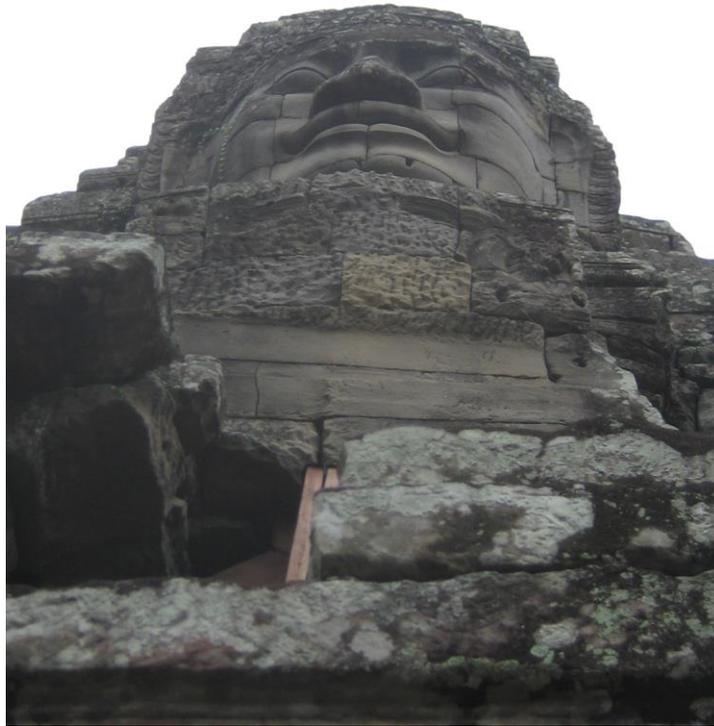


Figure 225 - Ta Prohm

On to Bangkok

Last time I did this, I was caught in the coup when Sihanouk was overthrown in favor of Lon Nol in March 1970. The airport at Phnom Penh was closed, and I had no choice but to travel overland to Thailand. Back then, it was not much more than a pig trail, but I understand it is a new highway today.

We were going to retrace that route, but it takes at least 8 hours, not including any delays for the border crossing and changing means of transport. We are due for dinner with Sunthorn Arunanondchai and his wife tonight at 7:00 pm at their home in Bangkok, so there isn't time. Instead we are flying, which takes only an hour. We met Sunthorn Arunanondchai when we both were recognized at the annual University of Arkansas Alumni Awards a few years ago, I for volunteer work and he for being one of Asia's most successful businessmen. Too bad it wasn't the other way around. Sunthorn is President and CEO of the C-P Group, one of Asia's largest corporations. Look them up on Google.

After coming back from the Angkor Wat sunrise yesterday, we visited the furthest out temple, Banteay Srey, which is almost like a scale model of a larger temple with exquisite carvings in pink sandstone. The trip, alone, was worth the time, offering a look at the countryside, including traditional Kymer houses, water buffalo, ricefields and people living their normal lives. On the way back, we hit Ta Keo, Ta Prohm and Banteay Kdei. Ta Prohm is the temple complex that still has giant fig and silk trees growing from the sprawling shambles, giving it that authentic Indiana Jones Temple of Doom look. At all the temple stops, we succumbed to the souvenir peddlers and loaded up on cheap bracelets, hats, scarves and t-shirts.

It is hotter and maybe more humid in Siem Reap than in Phnom Penh, which is cooled by the river, but the afternoon monsoons cool everything down nicely.

We had dinner again last night in "Pub Alley," and sat next to a couple from Osaka and another from Paris, both twentysomethings.

At breakfast this morning, Shirley reminded me of a story about her uncle who in frustration over being unable to find white Cambodian pepper many years ago wrote a letter to then Prince Sihanouk and received free about a hundred pounds. Even after distributing it to many friends, the supply lasted decades.

One thing that is striking about both Vietnam and Cambodia is the almost total lack (at least obvious) of armed police or military anywhere. I have not seen a rifle or machine gun yet on this trip, which is different from even Europe. I have the impression that there is little crime, certainly violent crime. I am sure there is corruption, and apparently sex trafficking is a big problem in Cambodia. We were told that everyone in the tourist industry is trained to watch for sexual exploitation of children by tourists and to notify authorities if they are aware of anything suspicious. Tourists are generally deemed safe in both Vietnam and Cambodia. In Vietnam, the communists took away all civilian guns years ago, and the penalty for even possessing a gun is minimum five years in prison.

We have a couple of hours to walk around, then it's off to the airport.



Figure 227 - Angkor Wat at Dawn

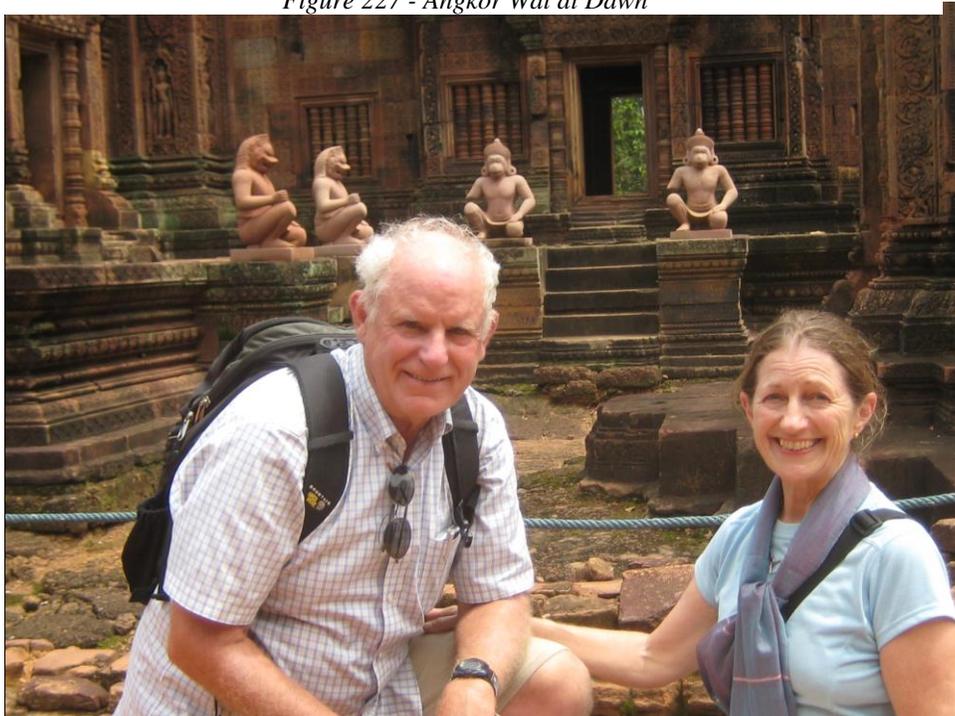


Figure 228 - Banteay Kdet



Figure 229 - T-shirt peddlers



Figure 230 - Angkor Wat

Cooling It in Chiang Mai

Like Dalat, Chiang Mai in northern Thailand is another place I didn't get to before that everybody said was not to be missed. It turned out that Sunthorn's company owns the hotel we are staying in, so at dinner the night before last, he phoned ahead and told them to treat us right. They sent a car and driver to pick us up at the airport and upgraded our room. Nice to know people in high places.

It was the Queen's birthday yesterday, and her photo was everywhere on billboards with lots of celebrations going on. We only had time to tour the Royal Palace complex in Bangkok yesterday before flying to Chiang Mai. We took the water taxi (really a water bus) from our hotel to the Royal Palace, which was really a breath of fresh air in the hottest place we have been yet. Bangkok, at over 10 million, is pretty hard to grasp. Kind of a cross between Los Angeles and New York City. The Royal Palace complex is an exquisite piece of architecture, but we left Bangkok feeling we weren't missing much else.

Chiang Mai is approaching 1 million (officially 150,000) but seems like much smaller city. It is refreshingly quieter, cleaner, cooler and has far less traffic than Bangkok. Today we took a tour that included an elephant training center, an elephant ride of about a kilometer to a fake village, a picnic on a bamboo raft on a jungle river and a visit to several ethnic villages where we once again loaded up on local crafts. Some of it was hokey, but it was fun. Where else can you watch an elephant paint a pretty good picture? There are only about 1,000 elephants left in Thailand, and tourist spots like these may be their last hope. It rained most of the day and cooled off quite nicely.

At the recommendation of the Kaiser travel desk, we have been taking malaria pills since entering Cambodia, but we haven't seen any mosquitoes. It's ironic that mosquitoes are unbearable at our home in Richmond, but don't seem to have found us at all in Southeast Asia.

I have to give up this computer, so more later...



Figure 231 - Tamarind Village Hotel in Chiang Mai



Figure 232 - Trying on hats in Chiang Dau



Figure 233 - Riding the elephant in Chiang Dau

Back in Bangkok

In Chiang Mai last night, the manager of the Night Bazaar, who works for Sunthorn, had met us at the airport and made a date to show us around Chiang Mai. Apparently he turned up sick - I hope its not the dreaded swine flue - and instead sent three friends to entertain us, a British woman and a couple consisting of a Thai woman and a man from Quebec, Canada. They work for an NGO called Chiangmai Family Services - www.familycare.org/asia/thailand/chiangmaifamilyservices - and showed us a wonderful evening courtesy of Sunthorn, including dinner and a tour of the Night Bazaar.

After sleeping in and touring several temples in Chiang Mai, we flew back to Bangkok and checked in to our hotel about 5 PM. Just for the diversity in experience, I booked a guest house about 1/10 the cost of our hotel the first night in Bangkok. Everything is relatively cheap in Bangkok, which is one if the reasons there are so many tourists. Our previous hotel was a huge high rise grand affair on the river but still only about the same cost as the Hotel Mac.

Tonight, we are slumming it, but the neighborhood is worth ten times that of the grand hotel. It is on an essentially pedestrian street lined with restaurants, food stalls and guest houses, what they call in Asia the backpacker district. It is where the action is. I heard on CNN today that Travel and Leisure Magazine had rated Bangkok the third best city in the world to visit and Chiang Mai the 5th best. And we have been in both within the same 24 hours! CNN also noted that Bangkok had the highest happiness rating of any major city in the world.

Even more than Vietnam and Cambodia, Bangkok is swarming with twentysomethings experiencing a summer abroad. We were eating across the table at a street stall from a 22-year old Croatian Italian woman student traveling alone and asked her if she had considered traveling to the U.S. Probably not, she said. Too many guns and too much violence - not really safe.

Tomorrow we head back to Saigon for our last day in Asia before flying home.



Figure 234 - Soi Rambutri in Bangkok



Figure 235 - Dinner on the Street on Soi Rambutri in Bangkok

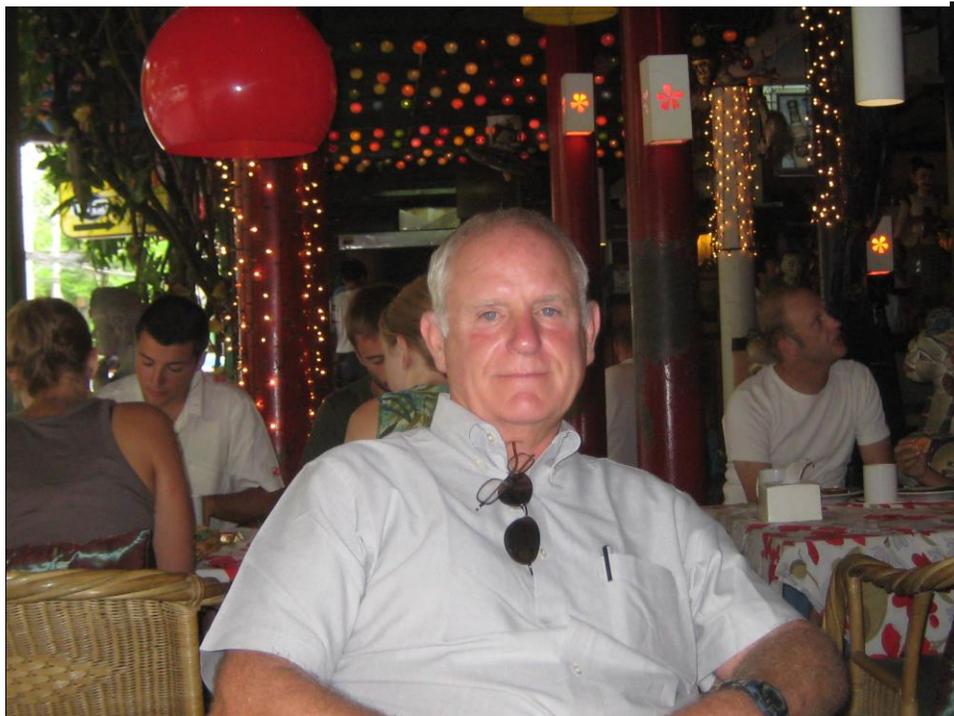


Figure 236 - Bar on Soi Rambutri in Bangkok

Sleepless in Saigon

We are back in Saigon with a 3:30 AM wakeup for a 6:00 AM flight.

A little more about last night's "backpacker hotel." It was about \$20 for the night with a room the size of a large walk-in closet. When we went to turn in, we discovered there was only one sheet on the bed, the bottom one. With no phone in the room, I had to get dressed and go down three floors to the front desk (no elevator). About 20 minutes later, they brought up another sheet.

The fan and air conditioner worked just fine. When you're asleep, it doesn't matter where you are. The bathroom was also the shower, all in one space. The shower had hot water but the lavatory didn't. No biggie.

The sign next to the door read, "Checkout time is 11:30. If you would like to extend your stay, let us know before. Otherwise we have to apologize if we rent your room to others."

The sign also advised, "No Smoking, " No Drugs" and "Please take off your shoes while you're in bed." Obviously, a clean establishment.

And this was the most expensive room in the hotel!

I used to stay in these places back in the day, but I think I've moved on.

We had breakfast, walked around a while and caught a taxi to the airport, driven by an aspiring race car driver who hit 140 km/hr on the straightaways.

We had a great final dinner near the Continental where we stayed before, and we are off to bed.

Asia at a glance - In a few words, here is my list that sums up Southeast Asia, not in any particular order:

1. Three girls on a Honda, one driving, the second putting on lipstick and the third on a cell phone.
2. Everyone has a cell phone, but I never saw anyone wearing one of those goofy looking Bluetooth things stuck in their ear.
2. Motorcycle cops riding tandem. RPD should try this to save gas.
3. World's largest billboards in Bangkok - maybe over an acre. Think what we could rent that for on the Parkway.
4. Summer abroad for international student set.
5. Rice, noodles, pork, chicken, beef, fish and vegetables, preferably fried or barbequed.
6. Cheap beer.
7. Cheap everything.
8. Friendly, helpful and polite people.
9. Young.
10. Hot, humid, cool, rainy and agreeable.
11. Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink.
12. Entrepreneurial.
13. Optimistic.
14. Tourists from everywhere but U.S.
15. Motorcycles (Vietnam is the only country with a helmet law).
16. No sirens, no guns, no visible crime.
17. Can't have too many Buddhas.
18. Money: Dollars and Dong in Vietnam, Dollars in Cambodia and Baht in Thailand.
19. Family Planning: A Honda can only carry mom, dad and two children.

My new i-phone served me well, except for a couple of days in Cambodia it couldn't find a carrier. Asia skipped land line infrastructure and went straight to cell phones. I was never out of range of a tower. I even saw the mahout driving our elephant with a cell phone to his ear 60 miles north of Chiang Mai in Cambodia.

That's it folks. See you back in Richmond.