

My Introduction to Vietnam

My last duty station stateside was at Fort Ord in California. I was a school trained Fixed Wing Airplane Repairman and I was working in the Base electronic repair shop. That is, until they became overstocked with people. Then, the army decided I should become a fireman. (Should have kept quite and stayed there, but no not me.) I had to complain to Senator Jackson of my home state of Washington, that there were seventy Airplane Repairmen at Fort Ord, working in other places other than what they were school trained to do.

Senator Henry Jackson (his nickname was Scoop) contacted General Ferguson (the base commander) to find out why. That was the first time in my life I realized how much power a Senator had, within two weeks' I had my orders to ship out. I guess we both got our way. The General got the Senator off his back and I started working as an Airplane Repairman in Vietnam, along with sixty-nine others.

I was to be assigned to the 605th transportation company in a place called Phu Loi. Some of my first thoughts after landing in that big 707 at Benh Hoa air base were: Where is my weapon? Is this area clear of the enemy? It was about that time the plane door was opened and again my thoughts were clear: What is that smell, and my God, is this place hot! It took a year for me to rub my mind clear of these thoughts. It also took me a year to stop sweating.

Before long, we were all transported by buses that were equipped with heavy mesh screen covering the windows. As the buses rumbled along the roadway I could hear people yelling at us, "SHORT," and saying things like "three days left," "good luck, hope you make it." Soon, the buses came to a process center in a place called Long Benh. Long Benh was my new home for the next few days. It was that night that I felt my first earthquake. I told the guy that was sitting on a footlocker, "I was born and raised in Seattle, Washington. It was known to have earthquakes once in a while, but I had to come to Vietnam to feel my first one." He told me, "That's a B52 strike, get use to it!"

A few days later, my name was called and I was loaded on another bus that took a group of us to Saigon where I was given a ride to my new home in Vietnam (Firebase Phu Loi). This will be the place, where I will work on fixed wing aircraft.

About a month or so later, the army had a plan to alter my life a little more. I was to become a bunker guard for the next 30 days, or should I say nights. It was just long enough for me to develop a strong interest in what might be lurking out side the wire at night.

It just so happened that during this time General Westmoreland came up with an idea that any large base that had no infantry to function outside the parameter would form an infantry unit from within the unit of that base. Each of these units will furnish the new infantry unit with equipment armaments and supplies that were needed.

Boy was I lucky! I wanted to see the activity outside the wire, so I volunteered, and was accepted. Anyway, I was bored safety wiring turnbuckles inside hot fuselages of airplanes.

For the next two years, the Phu Loi Patrol (Hell's Rangers) and I would become one in the same. As I recall there were thirty of us in the patrol and that was the number of members that we tried to keep at any given point in time. The number of members would change as time allowed. Some would return to their original units and fill their positions they left. Some would fulfill their year obligation in Vietnam and return to the States, some were wounded and never returned and some left to return to their Maker. As I was saying, we were to be thirty members strong at best, however I did see as few as five members strong.

We continued to do day patrols, worked with the armored cavalry on different sweeps into and around tree-lined area and brush (some of that activity brought us into areas of Agent Orange), and we performed night ambushes and roving night patrols.

We did have some stand-down time, and when we were able, some would go to the nearby village or Saigon. We were promised to be able to leave Vietnam for rest and recuperation (R&R) once during our year in Vietnam.

I chose to take my R&R's in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and another in Sydney, Australia. After all, I was in Vietnam for more than two years. One of the things I liked to do on R&R was eat good food; the other things I will reserve to tell at another time.