

6TH BATTALION, 11TH ARTILLERY

Hawaii



Viet Nam

On Time, Sir!

Coming Home

by Jim Wambold, HQ Btry '67 - '68

As background, I spent my first 6 months in-country as Artillery liaison officer to the 1/20 Infantry and the 1/1 Cavalry. I then "volunteered" to become an advisor to the Vietnamese RF/PF forces in the Quang Ngai area. My MOS was changed to that of an Infantry Advisor and the last half of the tour was spent in the field with the most poorly supplied, ill-trained, unmotivated bunch of soldiers on earth.

Finally, on 8 November 1968, my replacement arrived. I spent the next three weeks introducing him to the leadership of the RF/PF Battalions and Companies we advised and taking him along on the daily field missions. On 26 November, with the Major's permission, I took myself off the field duty list and began packing my meager belongings for the anticipated trip home.

After several days of out-processing I hopped a transport plane from Da Nang to Saigon (The Tan Son Nhut Complex) on 1 December. I was assigned to a sleeping barracks and given a departure time for the "Freedom Bird" on 3 December.

While in the barracks I was approached by a Major who seemed to remember me from our time in Hawaii. He was from either the 4/3 or 1/3 but I immediately remembered how much I hated the guy (I forget why). We shook hands, talked for a while and congratulated each other for "surviving". Toward the end of the conversation he inquired if I'd join him for dinner that evening in downtown Saigon. Well, putting my hatred aside, I agreed to a free dinner.

We, and two other officers he had invited, walked several blocks to a large hotel. We trekked up the seven flights of stairs to a huge ballroom on the top floor. The maitre d', dressed in dark slacks, white dinner jacket and black bow tie, greeted us and put us at a table near a large open window. The whole perimeter of the room was lined with windows and the view of the bustling town below was strange to me.

After several gin Martinis we ordered steaks, French fries, salad and a couple bottles of French red wine. I even started to like the Major ... at least he had style !! After dinner and dessert we headed back to the barracks via every honkey-tonk beer bar we passed. We managed to get out of town before the mandatory curfew of midnight.

The next day was spent with additional out-processing, debriefings, and picking-up our packets of orders for the flight home and our next duty assignments.

On the morning of 3 December I boarded the "Freedom Bird" for an uneventful flight to Oakland, California and, believe it or not, more processing. I do not remember any feeling of emotion in leaving RVN or returning to the states. I was still alive with only minor dings and dents ... another survivor.

Before departing Oakland on a flight home to Philadelphia I found a discarded field jacket in a trash can, ripped-off the name tag and stripes, and draped it on my skinny, tanned body. It was chilly in California and I knew it would be even colder in Philly.

My parents met my flight at the Philadelphia airport. They didn't recognize me at first. The field jacket was a size or two too large, I was carrying a huge duffel bag, my SKS rifle war trophy, and my handle-bar mustache extended a full 10 inches from side-to-side.

The first words out of Mom's mouth were, "you can leave that gun here, the war's over. You can shave when you get home". I guess she "didn't get it".

Anyhow, I arrived at my home, stowed my gear, cleaned-up a bit (left the handlebar on), put on a set of civvies and began telephoning my old buddies from town to see if they wanted to get together for a night of drinking. Shit, after nearly four years, most had graduated college and had begun their careers, others were still in graduate school (a deferment ploy), and the rest were serving our country.

After one week at home I decided to fly to my next duty assignment at Fort Sill, Oklahoma where I spent the next three weeks of leave decompressing in the B.O.Q. and on base ... among those who "got it".

I stayed in the service for another couple of years. This helped tremendously in my readjustment to being back in the "world". I've been married to the same gal for 45 years, retired eleven years ago from a job I had held for over thirty-two years, and still wear that little silver and blue CIB every chance I get.

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