



A Few Memories of a Old Vulture 407th TC 1965/1966

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After you read this, if you were there at that time and your memory does not match mine, please let me know. It has been a long time, this story is as accurate as my memory is, and sometime I worry about my memory, most of us are at the age where a “senior moment” could happen at any time.

Prolog

1 November 1965 three of us reported in from Ft Hood, SP4 James Davis, SP4 Harold Devens and SP5 Marty Wright. Like a lot of other young guys we volunteered to go to RVN. We were among the first enlisted guys to show up at Ft. Benning for the 407th. The 1st Cav had either just left or was leaving as we got there. It was a wild place, lot of lonesome ladies at the club, in case any old Cav guys read this I will just let that lay.

We did some training and I volunteered to be on the Advance Party to go with the aircraft from California to RVN. I made a deal the 407th Maintenance Officer that he would let me be the crew chief on the Maintenance Bird when we got there. He was not able to keep that promise; I will talk about that later.

When the Cav left Benning they stripped the Hangars of everything that was not bolted down, even the electric water coolers and a couple of sinks and toilets. When I got to Vung Tau I learned more about the Cav’s ability to “Reallocate Assets” from someone to them.

We met the aircraft at Oakland and loaded them on the USNS Breton (TAKV42), an old WWII Jeep Carrier, a light cruiser hull with a carrier deck, it had been used to re-supply the big carriers. Now a part of the Military Sealift Command, with a civil service crew. The Hueys were loaded on the hangar and the flight deck, we also had a CV-2 Caribou lashed down on the flight deck. We didn’t know till we had been out to sea for several days that the hold had pallets of beer and some military trucks.

The ship sailed from Oakland to San Deigo to Pearl Harbor to Subic Bay, Philippines to Vung Tau. Between Pearl and Subic we ran into a storm, it seems the crew that lashed down the Caribou put spoilers on the wings but did not bother with the tail. The Caribou’s escorts were MI guys and they only supposed to ensure the security of what was inside the bird and didn’t know squat about aircraft. We had high winds and the MI

escort noted that the bird was straining against the tie-downs, the tail was trying to fly in the high winds. The MSTS crew came to us to see if we could fabricate and install some spoilers for the tail. There we were, four Helicopter Mechanics, who had never seen a Caribou up close, climbing up on the tail in pouring rain and wind trying to lash spoilers made of 2x4s and canvas on the tail, we had a few exciting moments trying not to fall off or go overboard.

A couple of days later one of our guys noticed one of the crew with a Budweiser, he was quite surprised since had been told that alcohol was not allowed, he asked if we could get a couple of beers. The crewman said sure, just go down in the hold and pull one out of one of the "Damaged" beer pallets under the trucks. Sure enough, somehow a couple of the pallets of beer had holes in the cardboard and reaching inside we found the Budweiser. From then on the trip was more tolerable, at least for those who liked beer. By the end of the trip, I was beginning to worry about the pallet collapsing under the weight of the truck, seems like a quantity of beer had somehow disappeared?

When we got to Subic, the Caribou was to be unloaded using a Barge Crane, well the bird was too heavy and the barge started to tip over. This ended up being good news for us, in that we had to stay in Subic for 3 days waiting for the crane to be lashed to several other barges. Here we were, in Subic, a dozen Army troops in a Navy shore leave town. I was 21 and had already had a tour in Korea, but compared to Subic, Korea's Bar districts were like the Vatican. To this day I have never been in a wilder bar district than there was at that time in Subic. And I have been in Thailand, Taiwan, Okinawa, Japan and Korea, compared to Alongapo City, they were boring.

The trip from the Philippines to Vung Tau was uneventful. When we anchored off shore we had some security guys come aboard. They would walk around the deck dropping concussion grenades over the side to keep swimmers and small boats away. The birds on the flight deck we cocooned to keep the shat spray off during the trip. We had started de-preserving and reassembling the aircraft on the hangar deck a couple days out of Vung Tau. Standing on a ladder on a ship without sea legs resulted in learning how to hang on with your legs while working with your hands. It was always easy to tell who was Army and who wasn't, just watch someone walk down a passageway, if they walked straight and always remembered to step over the bulkheads, they were not Army guys. The Army guys glanced off the walls and tripped on the bulkheads when they went through a passageway door (Hatch). After we anchored off shore, we started putting the Main and Tail Rotor Blades back on the birds. We had new UH-1D and the first UH-1B 540s in country. During the process of reassembly we discovered the common hardware Conex was missing. We did not have a single cotter pin, so we borrowed some nails from the crew and flew one bird into Vung Tau to get some hardware. Some time during the process our conexas were taken ashore, to be shipped to Phouc Vinh, This was when I really understood what "Reallocation of Assets" means. The Cav took all our spare parts Conexs, they were found only after they had been stripped of anything useful to the Cav, luckily for us, the Cav did not have a B540s so those unique parts were recovered.

One funny story I remember about reassembling the bird on the ship, two of us were

carrying a 540 blade across the flight deck when a Huey came in hot and made a flare, the rotor wash picked up the blade, with both of us hanging on to it, and blew us towards the side of the ship, what I remember the most is the Maintenance Officer hollering "Don't Drop The Blade". Seems we were replaceable but the blade was not. We didn't drop it, but it fell on us just before we went over the side. The Maintenance Officer ran over and checked the blade for damage, then asked if we were hurt.

The last couple of birds to leave the Breton were loaded with everything we could get our hands on, bulk canvas, mattresses, nails, and all the Ice Cream from the galley. The crew was super, they did all they could to help in any way possible. There might have even been a few Budweiser cans mixed in with the other stuff.

When we got to Phouc Vinh, there was nothing there but some ARVN, big rats and some pole barn type shelters. The 407th enlisted guys immediately started building a bunker outside our hooch, the 162nd crew chiefs were gone all day on missions, and because in the beginning the birds were still new, we didn't have much to do until the missions returned. But that changed real fast.

A few days after our arrival at Phouc Vinh the Conexs with our personal gear were to be brought in by CH-47. As luck would have it, the Conex with my personal gear was dropped in the jungle somewhere between Vung Tau and Phouc Vinh. About 13 years later I was telling the story to my Commander, Col McConnell, he just laughed, he said "Small World, I was the pilot of that Chinook that dropped the Conex. It started oscillating and we had to punch it off or lose the bird. We went back to try and find it, all we saw was a hole in the jungle with just the top of the Conex sticking out of the ground."

At first we didn't have even the basic needs to make life comfortable. No electricity for the Hooches, the generators were used for Flight Ops, the Maintenance area and mess area. Several of us went to the local Ville and bought little kerosene lamps, some blue plastic screen and other items like wash pans, candleholders, fruit and a couple animals for pets. One of our guys bought the cutest little yellow spotted kitten, it was small enough to fit in his pocket. I remember he lived in the last Hooch in the 407th area. When he went to work the cat stayed up in the rafters. Whenever anyone would come in the cat would hiss and growl. It didn't take long for the thing to grow to about the size of a Bobcat. As it got older it became more aggressive to the point it attacked its owner. That was the last day we saw that cat, I think it probably was an Asian version of an Ocelot. Don't know for sure but he either just let it free or shot it.

Monkeys were readily available in the Ville, Henry was a crippled monkey that lived in the rafters of the Club. He had a limp leg that he would wrap over his shoulder and run on all three. One of his favorite tricks was to swing down and grab drinks off the bar. He especially liked to grab a Bloody Mary. This was especially funny when he would let out a screech and swoop down grabbing a Newby's drink, startling the crap out of the guy. We would encourage Henry to do it just for the laugh.

One of the Officers had a large monkey chained to his bunker over in the 162nd area. This was one mean monkey and would lunge at who ever was passing, making all kinds of threatening sounds. One day the Commander came by and the monkey did his thing, the Commander didn't appreciate being attacked on his own compound and directed the pilot to get rid of the monkey. The pilot contacted one of the Grunts who came over with a leash and dog collar taking the monkey away. About half way across the open area between the 16dnd and the Arty unit, we heard a M-16 on full auto. We saw the Grunt go down and thought somehow Charlie had got him, what actually happened was the monkey bit a big hunk out of his leg, the Grunt did want any armed all American Boy would do, he shot that monkey to pieces. End of that monkey.

The locals were reasonable friendly as long as we were spending money. Of course the Boom Boom girls had immediately set up shop and were making their services available, young GI s will be do what soldiers have done for centuries. Later on we hired Coolies for heavy labor and KPs to help in the mess area. Speaking of local labor, when they didn't show up on time, we knew we were going to get it and probably that day. We would watch for the Coolies or KPs pacing off the area, we knew they were the eyes and ears of Charlie, I truly think that is how they were able to do so much damage on the second attack.

The first mortar attack came right after we finished the first layer on the roof of our bunker. We, the 407th enlisted had a place to run to, but because the pilots had not even started their bunker, ours became very popular and was immediately packed like a sardine can, we had to turn away a couple of folks, just no more room. This attack was just the first of many. But one thing the first attack did was stimulate the bunker building business. We made a couple of sandbag filling machines, don't remember where the sand came from, but we had large piles of it with enlisted and pilots side by side filling and hauling sandbags. Maj Pheugler (162nd) and Maj New (407th) ensured that if pilots wanted a bunker outside their hooch, then whoever lived in that hooch would build it, not an enlisted detail. From the enlisted perspective they were good Commanders. Some of the pilots resented being required to build their own bunker, but they got over it.

The second attack, may have been the first one (it was a long time ago), was with 75MM pack howitzers. Charlie really had us zeroed in, when the attack hit I was in my bunk, I jumped up grabbed my helmet, flack jacket and M-14 and as I went out the back door of the hooch into the bunker (a distance of about 10 feet), a 75mm round came in through the wall, missing me by inches. It proved to be a dud, but it hit the head of my bunk, put a hole in the mattress (acquired from the Breton), bent out the bed rail, put a large dent in the top of my tool box with such force it knocked tools out through the bottom side of the box, then it deflected up off the toolbox, out through the wall and into the company formation area, the hole in the back wall where it came in was plastic screening, but the exit hole was through a wood wall, all we did was cut it square and made a window out of it. Two rounds hit the main gate guard shack one on each side of the window, one hit right next to the Commander's jeep and several more around the compound. As far as I remember we did not have any serious injuries. I provided the 162nd Historian pictures of my bunk, the wall and the guard shack.

The 407th Hooches were just across from the 175MM batteries, they would fire interdiction all night, and the concussion would suppress and sometimes extinguish the little kerosene lanterns and blow out candles. At first it was hard to sleep, but after a while we would wake up when it became quiet, startled like something was going to happen.

There were three distinct sounds that we learned to identify right away;

Ka Chunk Boom was our Infantry firing mortars outbound, a friendly sound;

Ka Chunk Boom followed by Whoop Whoop Whoop, that was our boys firing illumination flares, this was not a good sound, because it indicated something was going on outside the perimeter plus the Whoop Whoop Whoop sound was the empty flare canister falling back to earth. These canisters were heavy enough to go right through the roof of the Hooch. One of them hit one of our Slicks, missed the front blade and passed through the cowl in front of the transmission, the roof, the floor and out the bottom skin of the bird, amazingly it missed all the flight controls and major wiring bundles. Out tin benders had it back on the ready board the next day.

The most important sound was **Thud, or just a Boom without a Ka Chunk**. That was the sound of incoming. There were a lot of Thuds (the sound of a Dud), but be sure when you heard a Thud a bunch of Booms were on the way.

At first we used the air horns on the Duce and Half as an Attack Warning, but what we needed was a siren. I took it on myself to get one and wrote a letter to the Fire Chief of my home town, Pasadena California, asking if he could get us a old siren, within a week or so the mail clerk told me I had a real heavy package to pick up. There was a bright red siren with a brass plate on it saying it was from the Citizens of Pasadena California. It was still there when I left 10 months later, wonder what happened to it?

The following events may be out of sequence, my memory is fading but these few events will be with me till my memory it totally gone.

I was on CQ in Operations, I got a "Care Package" from home and wanted to share the goodies with the guys in my hooch, the Sgt of the Guard agreed to hold down the fort until I got back, I walked over to my hooch and sat down with the guys talking and eating homemade cookies. Then all hell broke loose, it was another mortar attack, everybody ran to the bunker behind the hooch, then I realized I was on CQ and the Sgt of the Guard was to go to the perimeter in case of attack. So without thinking I ran out of the bunker and across the Company Formation Area, about half way across a mortar hit a fuel bladder or ammo or something, boom, and it started to rain burning debris, I have never ran so fast in my entire life, my head was at least four steps ahead of my feet. When I made it to Operations, whoever was in there asked me what it looked like outside, I was so out of breath that I could not talk for several minutes. The Operations Officer asked me if I was crazy running across the compound during an attack, all I knew was my place

of duty was in Operations not hunkered down in my bunker. Viet Nam taught me one thing that I will always remember; **“You never know what you will do in combat, until you do it.”**

Minor injuries were common during attacks. One of the guys in the 407th was running to the bunker from the shower, loosing his flip-flops in the process. Somewhere just before he ducked into the bunker he cut his foot pretty bad. After the all clear, we took him to the medics who stitched up the bottom of his foot and wrapped it in bandages. The Doc told him to lie down and keep his foot up for a day or two. On the way back to the Hooch, we were hit again, hobbling as fast as he could and still barefoot, he cut his other foot probably on the same object, just before ducking into the bunker. We took him back to the Medics again, after that I started calling him Speedy or the Gimp.

One evening I was over in the 162nd area when the mortars started falling. By that time we had improved the drainage by digging ditches to collect the rainwater and provide some sibilance of sanitation and mosquito control. We had built little bridges over them to get into and out of the hooches. These ditches were all around the compound. These ditches provided additional cover whenever you were not able to get to a bunker. They were usually muddy and slimy. Anyway, it took me at least four or five dives into these ditches to make it to my bunker. By the time I got there the attack was over, I was so nasty the guys wouldn't let me in the hooch, just got my soap and towel for me and sent me to the showers. One of the first rounds had hit right behind one of the enlisted crappers. One of the guys was taking care of business when it hit right behind him, the combination of his desire to get the hell out of there and the concussion of the impact expelled him out the door. He left the crapper with such vigor that he actually tore in pants in half running with his pants down around his ankles. It was a long time before we let him forget that day.

First couple of months we didn't have enough flight gear for the maintenance guys, only enough helmets for the pilots and the CE, so when the 407th went on test flights we wore headsets. On one of our test flights the 1st Bde Commander was in the area and saw a Huey with no doors and the guys inside were wearing headsets and white T-shirts. The first part is true but the second part of the story is second hand; I was told he tore the pilot a new one and told both 407th and 162d Commanders that flying in T-shirts and with only headsets was not acceptable and he better never see or hear of it again. After that we had to wear long sleeve fatigues and borrow a helmet or just not go on the test flight. At first we didn't have enough M-60s for door guns for the Slicks, so we used full auto M-14s, later we got some standard M-60s from the Grunts, but still didn't have any mounts. So we hung them from bungee. During hot LZ approaches or departures especially when under fire, more than once the gunner or CE accidentally brought the muzzle into the aircraft while still firing. I remember repairing doorpost, floors, the back of the armored seats and even the instrument panel. I do not remember any pilots getting shot, but it may have happened.

I was installing a stabilizer bar on a Huey, I was sitting on the blade grip, safety wiring the mounting bolts. I heard a Thud, looked up and saw a small dust cloud about half way

up the line of helipads, someone slowly walked out and looked down at the spot where the dust cloud came from, then took off like a rabbit, within a couple of seconds another round hit and the mortar attack siren came on. I came down off the Huey and hit the ground at a dead run for the bunker. It must have been a couple of hours later I was finishing off the same job, again sitting on the blade grip, when for some reason I looked up and saw someone walk out to one of the Air Force spotter planes parked at the far end of the ramp. He looked inside, and then one of the WP rockets they use to mark the target went off, it happened so fast all I could do was watch it fly over my head and off the compound. I was sure glad when I finished that job. Just another day fixing Hueys in the 407th.

I was doing something around the 407th Maintenance area when the Maintenance Office ran up and said grab a toolbox and get on the Maintenance bird, we had a bird down and we had to go get it. The maintenance bird was a float B-540 without any weapon systems. Two Pilots two mechanics and a couple of toolboxes. After we took off, he told us we were crossing into Cambodia to recover a bird that had gone to pick up an "A" Team and got shot up in the process. Right after we crossed the border, we saw what looked like bright green tennis balls rising out of the trees (CHICOM AA fire), they looked like they passed right through the rotor disk, we all looked around and with the exception of the pilot's pistols we were unarmed. In our haste we did not bring any of our personal weapons. When we got to the LZ where the bird was down, it had been secured by our guys. We inspected the bird, found multiple holes in the blades and some other minor battle damage. The security force told us we had 15-30 minutes, if not fixed by then, strip off the weapons and radios and blow it. Seems like we were getting sporadic sniper fire from the tree line. Our pilot looked at our 100 MPH tape job on the blades and ensured no fuel leaks, cranked it up and even though it was vibrating like a bitch, off he went toward home base. We jumped back into our bird and followed him back to Tae Ninh. Just another day fixing Hueys in the 407th.

One of our many missions was to support the Special Forces, I was always begging flights so I got to go as CE on the mission with a couple of Sneaky Petes. When we picked them up at the LZ they loaded several cases of CHICOM ammo and grenades. Always being the one to ask questions, I asked why they were hauling CHICOM ammo instead of just blowing it up? The Sgt told me that they would take a captured ammo stash and pull the rounds out, place nitro in casing with the powder, replace the round and then repackage the stuff just like they found it. The grenades they would modify the fuse so it would blow as soon and the spoon was released. Then the next cash they found they would just replace the good ammo with the "improved" ammo. I had seen captured AKs and SKS that had literally exploded I didn't realize why until then. This was part of the SF Psyop warfare. He said Charlie was now reluctant to retrieve any ammo stashes that were left unattended.

Another lovely group of guys we supported were the Long Range Patrol LRPs. These guys were tough as nails, we would drop them off in the middle of nowhere and come back days later to pick them up. They used Charlie's own tactics on him, I always said never never piss off a LRP. I only went on one mission in support of them, they

appreciated us picking them up and I respected them for what they did, other than that most of us just didn't want associate with them.

We were flying somewhere across almost solid jungle, the "Guard" radio came on and instructed "Aircraft flying (gave coordinates) break left now, break left now!" The pilot immediately did a max hard turn to the left, as he did that the entire jungle about a mile ahead just rose out of the ground, the trees looked like missiles and debris was rising to at least a 1000 feet. We were flying in to a B-52 carpet-bombing "Rolling Thunder". That ATC guy saved our bacon.

One of the true characters in the 407th was Freddy Moore, he went by the name "Hog Jaws". Freddy had a dog names Francis, they were constantly together. For reasons known only to Freddy, he used a magic marker to paint Francis' ass green, Freddy thought that was hilarious. Francis was like the 407th mascot, she went on test flights and maintenance supply runs. One day Freddy volunteered to go on a CA as door gunner and Francis jumped on the Huey with him. During a gun run on the LZ with the door guns blasting away, Francis got real excited started barking and lunging towards the door. On a low pass Francis got carried away and actually jumped out. After the LZ was secured, Freddy looked for Francis but never found her. We all missed that dog. (Funny the little details you remember after 40 years.)

I got Amebic dysentery from eating local fruit without washing it in bleach water. I was on a test flight about 10 minutes out of Phouc Vinh when it hit me. I had to go and go now, I begged the pilot to return to base and he said he just couldn't do it immediately. I did convince him to let me put on a monkey strap, drop my pants and crawl out on the gun mount to let Charlie know how I felt about him and his dysentery. The pilot was really cool, he brought it to a hover at about 1000 feet or so and out I went. Most of us always carried toilet paper in our pockets, so I was able to clean up and gave to paper to Charlie as a souvenir. The downwash from the hover allowed most of the gush to miss the aircraft, but a little got on the gun mount and skids. When we got back the CE made sure I cleaned the aircraft spick and span. The guys ragged me for months about that, but I was so sick that after a while they just let it go. By the time I recovered I was less than 140 pounds, at 6'3" I was really bony. I named that Huey "Shit Bird".

With the exception of a rare convoy, the only way into our or out of Phouc Vinh was to fly. The preferred method was helo, but the Army would fly in CV-2 Caribou and the Air Force would fly in C-123s and C-130s. If you really wanted to get there and land, go Army. I have been in a C-123 circling while several Caribou took off and landed, when we asked the Air Force Flight Engineer why we didn't land, he would say they could not land if there was any ground fire. Give me a break, there was always the threat that "One Shot Charlie" would get a round off as you took off or landed. More than once the Air Force bird that I was on would not land if there had been any reports of sniper or ground fire. This is not saying that they would not bring in supplies, I remember a C-130 coming in during a mortar attack, he never shut down and was unloading and turning around all at the same time, it was only on the ground for a couple of minutes. I am not saying anything bad about the Air Force crews, they were just following orders.

One of the guys in the Avionics shop was a collector of captured weapons, he thought the AK47 was superior to our M-14 or M-16, he insisted on carrying an AK. He had quite a collection, AKs, SKSs, K-50s, BARs, Thompsons, Carbines, a Swedish K and some CHICOM pistols. I got a 9MM Polish Radom from him, weird pistol it had Nazi marking on it, and I carried it until I got my 357 in another trade. I doubt the Officers had any idea what he kept in the Avionics van. I heard later when they did find out and he was forced to dispose of them all. Well during one of our attacks, he ran into a bunker and waiting for him was a snake of some type, he decided he was going to kill it with his AK, he let out a full burst inside the bunker, the rapid reaction force heard the AK shots coming from the bunker and swooped down on him. They surrounded the bunker and someone threw in a smoke or CS grenade, he thought they were going to kill him, he came running out hollering GI, don't shoot. He never shot an AK or SKS again on the compound.

After we were upgraded with electricity in the Hooches, some of the guys started the history old war between Country, Rock and Soul music. The First Sgt put out the law that the music must stop by 22:00, well of course that didn't happen unless he was in the area. One night the generator mechanic got fed up, went down to the generator shed, cranked the volt adjust knob all the way up and back again, the lights got real bright for a moment, then returned to normal, what was different is there was no more music. Mysterious power surges seemed to happen after 22:00, which resulted in lots of inoperative music boxes. Our avionics guy could fix some of them, but at a price, he was a wheeler-dealer always wanting to trade for something.

We built showers using black rubber blivets and 55 gal drums to hold the water. We had a water truck that would go down to the local river and get water every day. Before we had showers all we could do was a French Bath or when the heavy rains came grab a bar of soap and run out in the rain for a truly cold shower. The showers were just wood frames supporting the blivets and drums. The water truck had a secondary use that either the officers never figured out or just looked the other way. We would put 3 or 4 girls in one of the tanks and water in the other and bring the girls into the compound, then take them back the next morning. One of the side benefits was if none of the girls would come, we knew we would be hit that night. Young GI s with active hormones will figure out how to take care of business.

After we had been there a short while, we set up a Conex as a temporary club, we had a couple of coolers and opened it in the evenings. One guy would be the bartender and another would be the bouncer. The rule was you go in, get one beer and go outside, no more than 3 people inside at anytime. Well one guy got drunk and refused to leave without more than 1 beer. The bouncer grabbed him in a headlock and dragged him out. The guy was really pissed and took a big bite out of the bouncers belly and wouldn't let go. The bouncer was beating on the guy's head to no avail, so the bouncer bit off the drunk's ear. That got his attention. Long story short the guy was sent home, probably got a Purple Heart for a Combat wound.

I kept bugging the Maintenance Officer reminding him he promised I could crew the Maintenance bird, finally he said he just couldn't keep that promise but the unit needed a scrounger to pick up and acquire supplies in Saigon. Since I had scrounged a Siren from the states he asked if I would accept that job and quit bugging him to be a crew chief, if I would, he would send me TDY to Saigon for 30 days, it ended up being several months, but the orders were for 30 days at time.

SP5 Don Malley and I went to Saigon and set up an apartment and started getting supplies taking them to the heliport where a Vulture would pick them up. In addition to the supplies that were ordered through the supply system, there were requests that could only be accommodated via a scrounger. I made the rounds and coordinated with several Saigon warriors who wanted captured weapons, and VC gear and would trade what we needed in exchange. Through this process I acquired two 45 KW trailer mounted generators, at least one pallet of flight helmets, a jeep, cases of steaks, fresh produce, beer, construction supplies, wood, and bags of cement and a plethora of other stuff. Later my replacement was SP5 Bob Hardin.

One of the funny stories is about an Air Force Saigon warrior who wanted a Thompson 45 sub-machine gun. I forgot what he traded for it, but he came by one night at the apartment to pick it up. I showed it to him, explained how to load it and showed him the safety. I guess I did a poor job explaining how it worked because within minutes after I left the room, I heard a short burst of 45, I came running back and there he was, ashen white holding the Thompson. He had tried to chamber a round, well the Thompson is a fixed firing pin gun, when the bolt closed it fires. The gun was old and the sear didn't catch the bolt after the first round, he laced the coffee table, the floor and up the wall before the sear caught the bolt. Scared the crap out of him and me. No one was injured. I would have played hell explaining to the MPs how a wounded Air Force NCO ended up shot with a worn out captured Thompson in our apartment.

After that incident the owner of the apartment would not let us stay there any longer. We found another place a short distance away on a dead end alley with a chain link fence about 8 feet tall angled up to the roof. Its purpose was to keep grenades away from the front wall of the apartment. It ended up being a better location, and as of when I went back to Phou Vinh, we had not had any more incidents.

We were in Saigon when Charlie hit Tan Sohn Nhut Air Base. We could hear the explosions and small arms fire and see the flashes reflected off the clouds. We went to the roof of the apartment to see if we could get a better view. What I remember the most vividly was the AC-130, some guys called them "Spooky or Puff the Magic Dragon". We couldn't see the aircraft, but when the mini-guns opened up, we would see a solid beam of red light, looked like a ray gun beam from a Space Ship in a SciFi movie. Considering we were only seeing the tracers, every fifth round, the firepower was absolutely awesome. The next morning we went to the flight line to meet a Vulture, there was lot of damage. I remember a C-47 that was burned in half. I had a small Minolta pocket camera and took a few pictures before a MP noticed. He advised me to put it in my pocket immediately or loose it. I complied, got those pictures somewhere?

We had been trying to get a bigger generator for Phouc Vinh, I found a new Blue Painted Air Force 100 KW on a Blue Painted lowboy trailer parked on a vacant field on the Airbase. I borrowed an Army 5 Ton tractor and just backed up to it and drove off. We made it to Long Binh, and dropped it off at the convoy staging area while we drove to the mess hall to get something to eat. When we got back, the staging area was crawling with MPs and APs, seems like someone in the CAV tried to steal it from us and the MPs who were looking for us were watching the trailer. As soon as the Cav hooked up to the trailer, the MPs swooped down on them like stink on shit. Did my heart to see my competition captured in the act, knowing they had ripped off the 162nd when we first got in country made it even sweeter. Needless to say we just drove by and went back to Saigon.

A scrounge from another unit told me how to get a Jeep out of the holding area on the Saigon docks. Following his instructions, I went to the Self Service Store and bought a Log Book and some stick on Bumper Numbers. When I got to the New Vehicle Holding area at the docks, I just stepped over the concertina wire and boldly walked around the jeeps like I was looking for one to pickup (legally). I copied down the USA number, filled out the forms, put the stick on bumper numbers, and took the crate holding the tools and canvas out of the jeep. I scheduled my departure to be right after guard shift change. I drove up to the gate, the guard looked the log book and check sign in register. When the guard couldn't find where I was logged in he asked when I came in. I told him something, I explained I was in a hurry to deliver this jeep to some Col., if I was late it would be hell to pay. Out the gate I went with the new jeep. I only did it once, don't believe in pushing my luck, but I heard it had been done several times. The CAV used a different system; they would just land a Chinook and when they left take anything and everything in sight that would fit. They took a mule and other ground maintenance equipment from Phouc Vinh. Whenever a Cav bird was in our area, we posted a guard on it to ensure nothing disappeared when they left.

We would buy cheap booze in Saigon Class VI and trade it with the grunts at Phouc Vinh, they would give us Jungle Fatigues, Jungle boots and captured VC stuff, we would then trade that stuff with the Saigon Warriors for stuff we needed.

Since the Pilots were trying to improve their quarters, they would buy the booze to be traded with the grunts and then traded again for construction supplies. I remember one large black pilot who insisted in buying the cheapest Vodka or Gin at a buck a bottle and expected the same supplies that we had to trade Jim Beam or Johnny Walker to get. He was a tough cookie, as far as I remember he was the hardest to make happy of any of the pilots.

We would also pick up pallets of beer and take them to the heliport, load the bird up to the max, the pilot would pick it up to a hover, if RPM warning light didn't come on, we would add another case, when the light finally came on, we would take one off and away he would go to home base.

I had a couple of pretty good scares while driving; one was on convoy to Phouc Vinh. Someone had hung a grenade on the data plate on the passenger side of the instrument panel. The had bent the plate out just enough so the spoon of a grenade would go behind it, no telling how long it had been there. Going down a bumpy road I heard a thump on the passenger side floor and saw a grenade bounce off the sandbags, my assistant driver and I both hollered "Ah Shit", he immediately grabbed it throwing it out of the truck onto the roadside. After a couple of seconds there was no Boom. We looked around and saw the grenade spoon and fuse hanging on the data plate with no grenade attached. We both cracked up laughing.

Three basic rules to remember when driving in Viet Nam:

First is; The Saigon Right Away Rule. "Whoever has the biggest vehicle goes first." No exceptions.

Second is; Never carry anything in the back of your truck without an armed guard, that mean GI guard not ARVN.

Third is: No guard with your cargo, mean no cargo when you get where you are going.

One day when delivering supplies to the heliport, we were receiving fire from a tree line. I carried a 357 magnum and had never fired it in anger, so I decided to return fire, again I was young, while driving a $\frac{3}{4}$ truck at about 45 MPH, and I fired the 357 out the passenger side window form inside the cab of the truck. The concussion made see stars, the guard in the back of the truck thought we ran over a mine. I swerved all over the road and scared the crap out of us both, Charlie probably got a good laugh out of that one. I never did that again.

One day sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic in Saigon, there was a thud on the floor just behind by left heel. What looked like a 45 cal round had came through the passenger door window across the top of my right leg and impacted on the floor about a half-inch behind my heel. I had not heard any gunfire, I looked around, and the other drivers were just calmly sitting there. It probably was some idiot or cowboy firing his gun in the air somewhere in the city. You never knew what to expect, the city was full of cowboys, VC and just plain loonies.

One of our guys went alone to a bar in the Cholon district. He was in the can relieving himself when a local cowboy stuck a knife in his back. Our guy was a big man and with the knife stuck in him, he turned around and grabbed the guy and almost beat him to death bare handed. But the loss of blood was significant, the cut was from his spine half way around his side. Luckily for him a couple of GI s passing by saw him stagger out of the bar covered with blood and got him to the hospital in time. He was evacuated to the states, we heard he lost a kidney but other than that he fully recovered. He got a medical discharge.

I spend about 4 of my 11 months in country TDY scrounging. The other 7 months I was on the 407th flight line fixing Hueys. Except for a R&R to Taiwan for a couple of weeks.

My final flight from Phouc Vinh was not uneventful, we were on a slick flying down the

river with two fairly new pilots. I was not really paying attention until the RPM warning light and buzzer came on, there was a bridge ahead of us that the pilot had not noticed until we were almost on top of it. We just cleared it by a couple of feet, for a second I thought I was going to get out of Viet Nam in one piece. But once more someone upstairs was taking care of me and I made it to Tan Sohn Nhut. I caught a C-130 to Japan on Christmas Day 1966, then another to my next assignment in Korea.

When I got to Korea it was really cold and I did not even have a Field Jacket. The MPs at Kimpo would not believe I had come straight from Viet Nam. I really wasn't too patient with the MP especially when he threatened to write me up for being out of uniform by being in Kakis.

I had to show him my orders just to get him off my back. Being the day after Christmas the clothing sales store was not open, so I conned my way out the gate to the local Ville where I bought a get of OGs and a Field Jacket.

Lot of other stories, some funny some not. I wanted to be a crew chief, but I didn't make it, but I feel I did my part to ensure the 162nd and 407th accomplished their assigned mission.

A couple of months ago my son-in-law, an Army WO1, and I went to see the movie "We Were Soldiers". I did real well until they showed the GIs washing blood out of a Huey. That got me! Many of us in the Helicopter units in RVN can relate to that. More than once we helped the wounded out of the birds and cleaned up blood and body parts. Many times during maintenance I would remove floor panels and find caked blood in the belly of the bird. That was probably the closest to a flash back I have ever had. I actually clouded up. I guess us old GIs have earned the right to cry once in a while.

I was lucky, did my tour, and went on to a successful Army career of 26 years, retiring as a SGM. My son-in-law is following me in an Army Aviation Career, he spent 11 years as enlisted, he was on the E-7 list when he finally got off his butt and applied for flight school. Before he signed the papers I had to give him a waiver, so he could remain being part of a SGM's family while being an Officer and just to make sure he did not forget a WO does not out rank a SGM (at least not in this family). Currently he is a CW2 Blackhawk Driver in the 10th Mountain Division, scheduled to deploy to the sandbox within the next couple of months.

Thanks again for the opportunity to contribute to the 162nd & 407th history.

Marty Wright 2-14-06