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## Vietnam; the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company/"C" Company, 101<sup>st</sup> Air Cav

**August 30, 1967 – August 29, 1968**

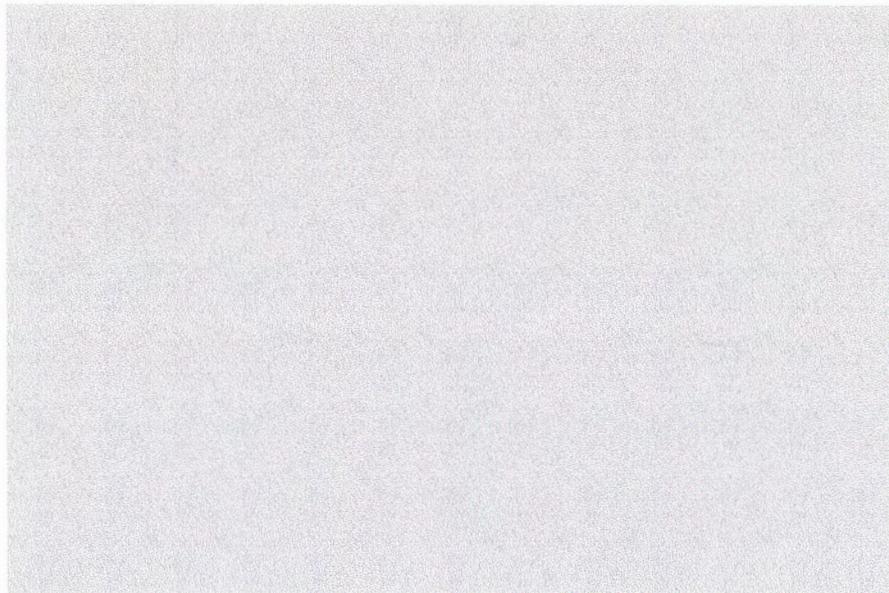
*The following is written from memory and from some letters that I wrote home. While in Vietnam I kept a daily diary. I lost the diary during the trip from LZ Sally to Bien Hoa while trying to hitch a ride from Camp Eagle to Hue. I was carrying two duffle bags and a shoulder bag and had to leave one bag behind. I picked the wrong bag to leave behind.*

### **August 1967; I arrive in Vietnam;**

Harold Camp, Ted Alley and myself arrived in Vietnam at Cam Rahn Bay. We were processed and received orders to report to the 188<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company at Dau Tieng, Vietnam; and sent on our way. As I recall (Harold and Ted will have to elaborate) we asked around and got a ride to Bien Hoa on a cargo plane. From Bien Hoa we procured transportation to Cu Chi. After processing we were instructed to wait for a ride to Dau Tieng. Late in the evening, still light but nearing dusk, a UH-1 Huey arrived, piloted by LTC James McWhorter. We were ordered to stand by and after a short time were instructed to board the Huey. The area was flat and stark; hooch's were connected by wooden pallets; we hauled our baggage across the pallets to the chopper and climbed aboard. The chopper wouldn't start. I remember that the crew had a discussion outside the chopper while the three of us sat on board. One of the crew walked over to another chopper that was sitting nearby, opened the cowling in front, pulled the battery, carried it back and mounted it in our chopper. Then our battery was mounted into the neighboring chopper.

Plate

Info removed by VNCA



*(Loading up at Cu Chi)*

And off we went.

We arrived at Dau Tieng just before dark. A  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton truck carried us to the 188<sup>th</sup> and we were dropped off in front of the orderly room, a tin roofed wooden framed, clapboard covered and gray painted "hooch". We reported in. This was my first meeting with Master Sergeant Raymon L. DePalm.

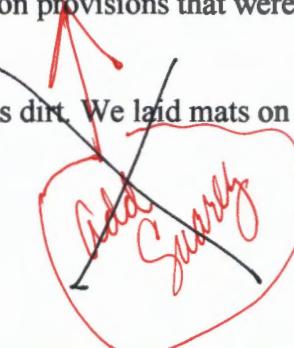
Top, as most of you know, is a formidable figure of a man. Black, hard and authoritative. He processed us in, assigned us sleeping quarters and got us fed. Then he held "orientation". Here I learned the main elements of our situation. I learned that we had the "enemy surrounded from the inside". I learned that there were "mosquitoes the size of helicopters". One of us (not me) asked what we were supposed to do for sex. Top replied that it was real simple. On Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday we went outside of the hooch and looked for a 55 gallon barrel with a hole in it. Why not on Wednesday, one of us asked (not me!). Top looked at him kinda' funny and said "that's your night in the barrel!"

On September 2, first thing that morning, Harold, Ted and I reported to the Orderly Room as instructed. Top met us at the doorway and immediately asked if any of us knew how to type. There was no hesitation on my part. I nearly broke my arm getting it up in the air as fast as I could. Thereafter, Harold and Ted became military hero's and I became a clerk (now, some of you don't know this, but I had graduated from crew chief school with the highest honors. I did not get the Honor Graduate award because of a slight mix-up after graduation. The flight sergeant that was in our group got the award; I ended up with Distinguished Graduate. I complained and could have won my case but I was told that I would have to extend my tour at Fort Rucker in order to correct the situation. My wife and I were ready to leave and I left. My wife still holds it against me that I did not stay and fight for the award. I am not much for awards, though. My real concern was that the guy that had competed with me, I don't recall his name, deserved the Distinguished Graduate Award and had to settle for third – no award of any kind. But all that is another story). My wife did washing for the troops to get extra money while we at Rucker. Harold often sent his laundry home with me and my wife would wash each persons load of cloths in our washer then dry them. Harold was one of the regulars. My wife, Jean, also took in sewing and often sewed patches and name tags on uniforms.

Harold and Ted went their own ways. I started working in the orderly room as a clerk. Our commanding

officer was LTC James McWhorter. The XO was Major Joseph Sites. The company clerk is Scotty Aubrey Riggins. He will be going home in October. The Morning Report clerk was a barrel chested, short Costa Rican named Carlos Suarez who had been drafted because of an agreement that he had signed that allowed him to go to college in the US. As he told it, he would be eligible for the draft. And he was drafted. Carlos had a problem with the English language. He was always asking me how to spell certain words and from one viewpoint he was a little comical. I remember him asking me how to spell "shed-u-lay". I told him that I had never heard of the word. He showed me "schedule". I informed him as to how it was pronounced and he got quite upset because the word did not even sound close to how it was spelled. I couldn't argue with him. Carlos also considered himself quite a ladies man. He kept a mirror inside the top of the morning report box and when the box was open he was always staring into it and messaging his face. "Oh, God. What a good looking guy I am" he used to say. Suarez and I didn't get along to well. He had a violent nature to him. I never knew where it came from. Once he told me that he was at the 188<sup>th</sup> because he had gotten' mad at an officer at another company and pulled a gun on him and threatened to shoot him. I'm assuming that he didn't shoot because they reassigned him to our company because of the infusion provisions that were in effect at the time (trade all the malcontents to somebody else program).

My sleeping quarters were in a GP tent close to the orderly room. The floor was dirt. We laid mats on the floor like a carpet around our cots.



I learned some more 188<sup>th</sup> history. I was informed that we had lost all of our choppers at some point before I arrived. We had 31 Huey's sitting on the airstrip and one evening we were mortared and the VC got 29 of them.

There was a collapsed bunker behind the orderly room. When I asked why it was there I was informed that the bunker had taken a direct hit from a mortar round. Several 188<sup>th</sup> personnel were killed or wounded.

I was told that one night a few Viet Cong had snuck under the perimeter wire and slipped into the company area, slitting the throats of several personnel as they slept. I suspected that this was a fib. There was no indication of it in the morning reports.

Now Top always states that he maintained a STRACK organization. I am not one to argue with him. But my first job was to begin to assemble the company's library of military regulations. This is the gray cabinet filled with green (olive green, perhaps) binders with a yellow stripe painted diagonally across the ends – two shelves of them. The binders at that time were empty. On each side of the Orderly Room doorway was a stack of manuals and sheets of paper. Top made me read the first one: how to assemble the Army regulations. Now you can't assemble the army's military regulations by just sticking them in a binder. You have to read them. You have to read the instructions to replace one packet of regulations with another. You have to read the instructions that tell you to go to page so-and-so and strike out a line, or add a line. You have to realize that the organization of the military regulations is a very structured, numerically indexed, set of controlled instructions about how to run the military. It beat the library's Dewey decimal system all-to-hell. I learned how to supersede, write in additions, cross out with initials and insert addendums or replace entire sections. Heavy stuff! I learned how to do things.

But the big thing that Top found out was that I could only type with two fingers (two on each hand). Top

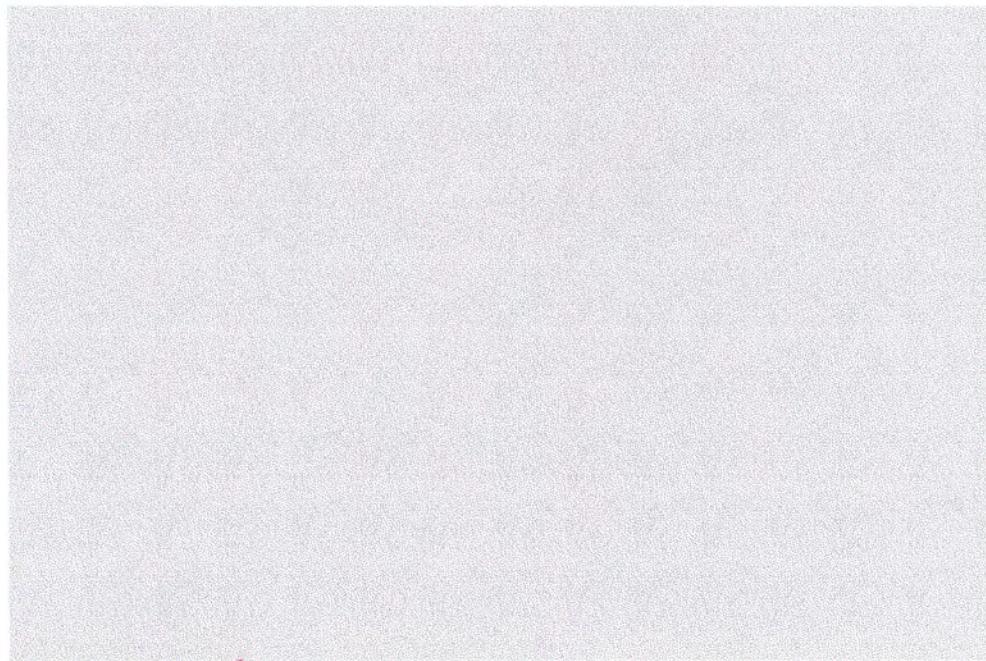
could type with twenty of his. He showed me. He gave me a week to prove that I could learn to type with all my fingers or I would be a door-gunner on the most dangerous missions that ever came up. At the end of two weeks I could type with eight fingers without looking (fortunately he didn't check spelling).

**September, 1967:**

**September 4<sup>th</sup>:** The VC try our defenses on the north end of the camp. We hear 105mm howitzers all night long and tracers that occasionally flash through the trees on the far side. Still not paid. Still no letter from home.

**September 5<sup>th</sup>:** It rains again today. At least it's cooler when it rains. When the rain stops it gets hot again. At about six o'clock in the evening a SP5 came in and wanted me to accept vouchers for payroll to the Vietnamese civilian workers. I didn't know anything about it but First Sargent DePalm took care of it. I will have to handle this in the future. Still haven't been paid.

Plate



*(Me(sans glasses) in front of the Camp Rainer orderly room)*

**September 7<sup>th</sup>:** All we get to eat for breakfast is powdered eggs and I couldn't eat them anymore so I began

to skip breakfast. We had to dip lemonade with a cup from a big kettle for drinks. Major Sites had two puppies but one of them was run over by a jeep. It was only partly alive and the Major had to shoot the little thing. I keep practicing my typing skills by typing my letters home.

Charles Van Dina is the CO's driver and he laughs as I try to improve my typing. It isn't funny. I'm trying to get better.

September 9<sup>th</sup>: Harold Camp and I talk a little. In the morning he will be a door gunner on his first mission. He's concerned about it but it is what he wants. Although he is trained as a crew chief it will be a while before they actually let him be one. It's still raining. I still have not received a letter from home.

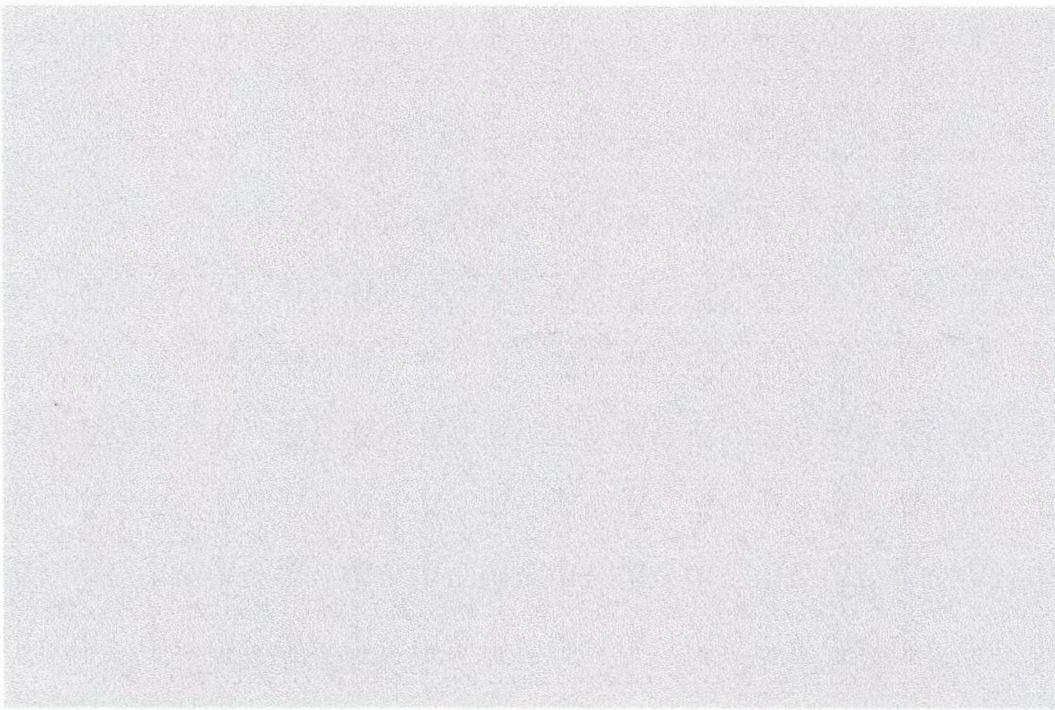
One of the things that came up was Awards and Decorations. Seems nobody from the 188<sup>th</sup> had gotten an award or decoration since it had come in country. I was asked to apply for one for somebody, I don't remember who. I typed up something and sent it to battalion. It was rejected. Top looked at my results and told me that there was a proper way to do it and it was in the regulation manual. I looked it up and sure enough there was a specific dissertation as to how to do it. I did it and sent it in to battalion. Someone got a medal.

The next thing I knew every one was asking me to submit them for medals. My problem was that I didn't know what anyone should be decorated for. I mean somebody has to have a reason for recommending someone for a medal. I just couldn't invent reasons. At the same time the company was so far behind on officer efficiency reports (and enlisted efficiency reports, which I did not even know existed) that it they became my number one priority. Now OER's (officer efficiency reports) were, from a mechanical viewpoint, required to be typed with no strikeouts, no erasures, and no blot-outs. If you started typing one and made a mistake you had to start all over again (fortunately, the army began excepting white-out as a correction medium and I used it to the best of my ability – that was later, though).

September 13<sup>th</sup>: I got paid today; \$118.00. We get paid with "funny" money, MPC (Military Script), not in American dollars. I have been typing a Mess Hall SOP for WO Charity. Carlos is on sick call and out of company. He is supposed to get back this afternoon. Still have not received a letter from home.

#### Plate

(Headquarters 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division; across from our Dau Tieng orderly room).



September 14<sup>th</sup>: Major Sites has left for R&R and will be back in a week. Scotty Riggins and I had to type and produce about 200 stenciled lists and we worked until about 3:00 A.M. to get the job done. Top had purchased a radio and is spent the day listening to Frank Sinatra.

September 15<sup>th</sup>: I bought a Minolta MK-7 camera, 35mm and a cheap flat top guitar. Still no mail. The company mail clerk is a fellow named Kaplan. He keeps the post office just outside of the orderly room. We hadn't been in-country two weeks and Harold Camp gets wounded. It wasn't a major wound, shrapnel in the right leg, but it kept him in the company area for bit. He told me that he didn't even know he was wounded until they inspected the chopper after they had landed. There were several others that were wounded also but Harold was the only one that I knew. At that time we were bunking in the same tent and we got to talk a little. We decided to go in together for one of those little refrigerators that everyone else had. Seems there was one available due to the fact that someone who had one was DEROsing out. We got it. It was great. Had cold stuff!

September 21: No mail. It's still raining. Suarez will leave for R&R tomorrow. I have been doing the morning reports now, under his training. A fellow by the name of George Stewart, who works in the supply room, likes a lot of Beatle songs and has dropped by to play my guitar for the last couple of nights. I don't know that many songs so the rest of us just listen. The new orderly room is under construction as well as new hooches for us troops.

Plate



*(Me in front of the case of military regulations. Note the green water in the water cooler)*

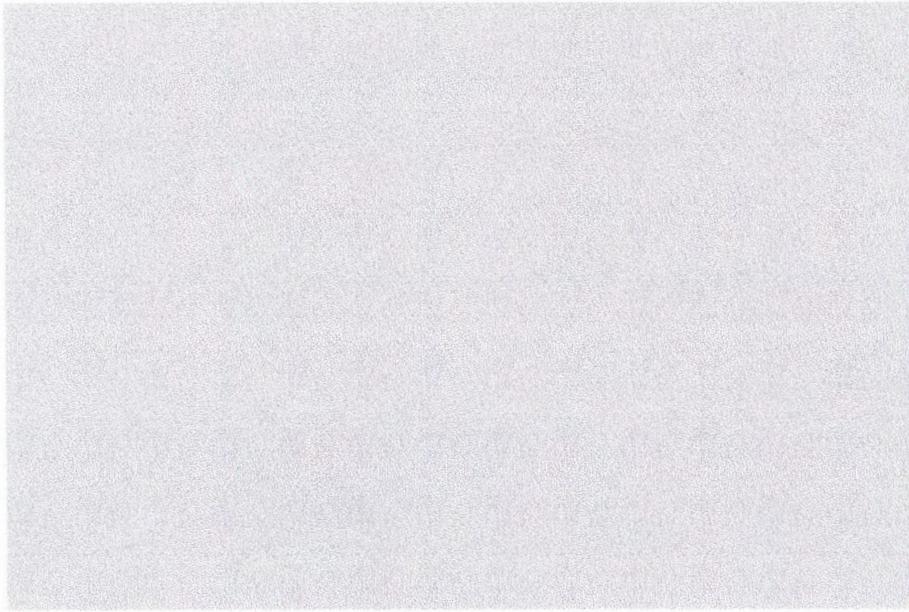
One night I woke up hearing a loud breathing noise. My ears seemed to tell me it wasn't from my bunkmates. It was somebody lying close to the dirt floor. I lay awake all night thinking that it was a VC sneaking into the tent. I waited all night long, one hand on my rifle, the other on my bayonet. In the morning the company dog yawned, got up, licked his chops and left the tent. I fell asleep and was late for work.

We also had a company monkey but I never met him.

We had a water cooler in the Orderly Room. It was a big metal stand with a glass top filled with green water. It got refilled from time to time from some place called the "ice plant". I wouldn't drink from it unless I had to. But we had to take those big white pills so we wouldn't get malaria. Since you could not find a "coke" machine you had to take the pills with *something*. I drank it only to take the pills and green water is *something*.

### Plate

(Indigenous Personnel from Dau Tieng working in our orderly room yard).



Almost every night we would hear sudden bursts of cannon fire. 105mm guns would blast off for whatever reason 105mm guns go off for. Most of us "greenies" would "hit the deck" every time the cannons would fire. Being the only ones on the floor we would realize that there was something that told everyone else that it was an out-going round. It wouldn't be long before we learned the difference.

September 23: I received a package from home. It had paper and pencils and pens and stuff that smelled like home. There were cans or orange juice and a pack of fig bars (my favorite cookie at the time). It is humid. Keeping cloths dry is a real problem. Some of the guys who had been here for awhile recommended that I get a large plastic bag, put my clean cloths in it, and fill the bottom with packs of silica-gel. I found the items I needed at the newly opened PX. In my shipment from home my wife and folks had included some plastic bags (the canning kind) and I put my socks and underwear in those. Harold is flying again – his wounds were not severe (enough to get a purple heart, though). Someone has a record player here and keeps playing a couple of songs that I can't get out of my mind. The group is the "Pozo Seco Singers" and the song they are singing is called "Time". The other song is called "Lonesome would mean nothing to me at all". They sound like folk singers; one girl and two guys. I love the sound.

September 25: I receive a letter from home. My wife's paternal grandmother, Bessie Gambrell has passed away.

September 27: The poured concrete for the new orderly room. We manage to scrounge up ice now and then.

Suarez, Riggins, Stewart and Van Dina rummage ice up from somewhere. We have our own private little bar and get beer and cokes from the PX to stock our little 'fridge. A lot of red alerts have been issued the last several nights. At night lots of flares sent up and it is eerie watching the shadows swinging back and forth on the ground. There is a lot of chopper action and you can watch them firing into the surrounding area. Tracers light up the sky. Artillery fire from our compound has increased dramatically.

We support the 25<sup>th</sup> infantry division, Lightning Brigade. Their headquarters is across the street from our orderly room. It is a mansion built by the French. We are in the middle of a stand of rubber trees known as the "Mechelin Plantation". Our living quarters are setting between rubber trees that are lined up in nice cultivated rows, each tree about sixty feet tall. I picked up one of their newspapers (I still have a copy), the Tropic Lightning News. There are some articles that I think are of interest to the folks back home. One article credits the 188<sup>th</sup> AHC for supporting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, commanded by LTC James F. Greer during operation "Diamondhead".

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