

## MACV Army "A" Team Films Water Purification

A vital job performed during the Vietnam War had nothing to do with medical staffing, food preparation nor ammo issuance, yet was a low tech skill that was definitely vastly underrated in importance and unappreciated by all that partook of the service provided, by a small group of men scattered from the DMZ to the delta. Rank had no privileges in utilizing the commodity. Every person wearing the military uniform from the busted private in the stockade to the top general, not only wanted, but essential natural bodily functions required and demanded the services furnished by this group of Combat Service Support soldiers providing POTABLE or DRINKING WATER.

The Army had two sources of procuring this precious commodity. The ground forces on combat missions carried a little bottle of water purification pills. They'd drop one or two little red tablets into their canteen filled from polluted creek or rice paddy water. The quantity used depended upon how contaminated and murky the water source was. After the pills dissolved within a half hour and the mud settled to the canteen bottom, the pill had killed enough harmful bacteria to be drinkable.

At the peak of the war for hundreds of thousands of army troops in garrison and base camps, the only means of drinking water was from mobile water purification units situated up and down the width and depth of the Vietnam countryside. Their ability to conduct this vital task required a stable location, relatively secure from ambush, a plentiful constant water supply and a means to transport the product to the consumers or good roadways.

We set up shop at the Pleiku Press Camp, one of five operated by MACV at major military centers around South Vietnam. We came to the highland plateau, after the lieutenant selected a dental feature from the MACV project board. The concept was a mobile dental facility created from a shipping container and helo lifted to artillery fire support bases and other isolated troop concentrations, providing sorely lacking dental work for these troops. The LTC in charge of the project, told the photo team, the government had developed once a year brushing tooth paste, that he distributed to these G.I.'s. For various reasons the portable dental clinic couldn't get off the ground. While waiting we needed alternative jobs and water purification was on going. The MACV Photo Team abandoned the dental clinic after three weeks in Pleiku.

This unit had two trucks with trailers. The primary truck carried a water purification van on the back of a 5 ton truck with a generator trailer attached operating the water purification apparatus. The other truck carried a pump unit to collect unsanitary water from a stream, lake or other permanent water source. The remaining space on the truck and trailer held chemicals and container, tanks or collapsable bladders. The bladders were origionally developed for helicopter refueling, but capable of holding any liquid, thus many were diverted to hold drinking water.

The clarity of the water source regulated the hourly output of the purification unit. The dirtier the water, the longer the processing time required. I think this unit size at this particular location was capable of producing over 1000 gallons of drinking water an hour.

At the Long Binh Army Base up until Labor Day 1967, when the two MACV Photo Teams departed for Saigon, the closest running water to the 221st Signal Company was the 500 man consolidated mess hall, pushing 300 yards away. We frequently carried five gallon jerry-cans of water from an outside faucet on the mess hall, back to the unit for the personnel to use. Our primary drinking water was the (LISTER BAG) about a 30 gallon vanvas bag with probably eight spigots for filling canteens. Twice a day trucks ranging from duce and a half ( $2\frac{1}{2}$ ) ton with POTABLE water tanks onboard to 18 wheelers with tank trailers, delievered water to the Lister Bags all over Long Binh Post, plus filled the elevated water tank and C-C-130 aircraft wing tanks used for showers.

Long Binh Post may have drilled wells for water, but more probably was a combination of well water and water purification units supplying the sprawling growing base. As the demand continued to increase, with each new arriving unit. When I was at the 221st, the company was the Eastern perimeter of Long Binh. When I processed out coming home, new units reached two city blocks beyond the 221st Sig. Co. position, with every person in these new units needing water.

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Written Feb 2004