

MACV Army "A" Photo Team Films LARC/BARC, Tugs, Harbor Master
Male Nurses in Qui Nhon

At one time or another it seemed as though MACV handed Army "A" Photo Team every maritime, marine and water borne craft story, that was currently operating the waters of Vietnam, or related jobs pertaining to port and dock facilities. The coming and going of vessels and/or transfer of cargo from ship to shore. Besides the Hovercraft, Dredge New Jersey, De Long Piers, Walter's Tractors and river patrol, which are on file with the Vietnam Archives, the team more than doubled the above listed number of flotilla type news stories. Many jobs were closely related that the facts have become homogenized over the period of time, with only minuscule facts and data active in my mind. Other stories are still vivid enough memories to justify and merit their own place with story content.

I had made an island landing on a LCVP (landing craft vehicular and personnel). The smallest of the three types of naval landing craft. I have some memory while in Nam of making a beach landing aboard a LCM (landing craft medium.) My initial instincts call for this to have happened in the I Field Force area between Da Nang and Hue/Phu Bai area. But, it may have occurred in the II Field Force region, when the old Task Force Oregon became the Americal Division around Chu Lai.

I'm thinking it was a multi battalion to a brigade size unit first arriving in Vietnam from the states. The photo team was on the LCM sent out to meet the ship in the harbor. I was stunned to see AKA on the ship, rather than APA. The exact terminology has long faded, but it suffices to say "K" meant cargo and "P" for personnel or troop transport. One "A" obviously meant auxiliary.

Upon our approach to the AKA, the ship tossed cargo nets and Jacob's ladders over both sides of the ship. The LCVPs were lowered into the water and troops on the port and starboard sides descended the cargo nets climbing into the waiting landing craft. The LCVPs circled off the ship, while the LCM came along side the AKA, where upon APCs, jeeps and probably a tank or two were lowered into the LCM, along with a company or two of troops. At (H) Hour all the LCVPs formed up in unison for a single run for the beach.

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These raw recruits were terror stricken and horrified, believing the enemy was waiting on the beach. Their frightened stance scarred me just to be around these green horns. But, matters only got worse. The officers yelled to the sergeants to check every troops chin strap on their steel pots, making sure they were tight. Later the officers yelled to lock and load a clip of ammo into the M-16s. If anybody sneezed or yelled BOO, these trigger happy kids would have shot themselves in the foot, or a buddy in the back, creating mass casualties.

Off in the distance you could see trucks parked along the coast highway, waiting to transport this armed gang to their living area. If a passing Vietnamese car or truck would have back-fired, God only knows what havoc these uninitiated green horns would have done, yet the charade persisted to the beach. The Army crew of the LCM was glad to get rid of this gang.

Since I had been on a Navy LCVP and a Army operated LCM, I was hoping some how to get a ride on a LCU (landing craft utility.) The largest of the three landing craft. It happened in the delta. The photo team was stranded for transportation along a river, when the LCU came by providing the photo team taxi service to the next town with U.S. military presence.

The Army crew of the LCU told us they were a floating repair and maintenance facility for other U.S. boats along the river. They had a mobile construction crane aboard that ran on tracks. Anchor chains and lots of ropes or as the Navy calls them lines. Welding equipment for both arc and torch type welding jobs. The crew said they lived on the LCU and rarely went ashore. On many MACV photo missions you could see LCMS and LCUs working the waterways of Vietnam.

In 1965, I had spent a week at Qui Nhon. The two man photo team on that assignment, was part of a 14 man photo crew on loan to Vietnam from the Army Pictorial Center, N.Y.C. We were sent to Qui Nhon to film a construction project, but were caught in the rainy monsoon season where the engineer battalion was unable to build anything. The engineers had their tent city huddled between the civilian road that circled the airport, Qui Nhon Bay and the airport taxi way.

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For six days I had a ring side seat watching the LARCs working the ships anchored in the bay, off loading cargo and bringing it ashore only yards from our tent. At the Airport Air Vietnam DC-3s made several landings a day. The Army operated twin engine Caribou planes landed with troops and cargo. The vast majority of the air traffic was the U.S. Air Force flying anything resembling the civilian equivalent of an Air Worthiness Certificate. The Air Force used C-54s called pregnant Guppies to carry priority cargo from the states to Vietnam. C-123s and C-130 were the usual aircraft. However C-133s also made the oceanic trip with cargo and troops. If my mind hasn't gone berserk, I can recall C-119s Flying Boxcars landing at Qui Nhon also.

By the time MACV handed Army "A" Photo Team five stories all in the Qui Nhon area, four dealt with maritime and port operations. The team was well adjusted to the marine environment. Two stories were LARCs and BARCs. I knew the LARC was an amphibious craft, though I never heard the term BARC. Army Tug Boats and Harbor Master were other stories, with the fifth job being Male Nurses. The nurse story caused unnecessary problems, through our ignorance as described later.

During my five year army career, I had been on loan to the Navy for six months, and sailed the high seas on seven Naval ships. Voyages ranged from five days to 65 days. During this naval tenure several Chief Petty Officers, informed me that the army had a bigger flotilla than the navy. One CPO told me, the navy had 450 ships, but the army has in excess of 2500 floating vessels. Here in Vietnam it was evident, the CPO's told the truth.

With most of the jobs in Qui Nhon transportation associated, I felt the photo team should stay with a trans. unit. Outside the airport the photo team didn't have to wait long for a truck's bumper having trans. unit markings to show up. The driver took us to the units headquarters, which were adjacent to the terminal, where the engineers had been in 1965.

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The photo team were set up in the units Headquarters Company area. When I asked what was the best way to contact the LARCs and BARCs? I was told, be ready in the morning and just flag one down on the MSR (Main Supply Route). As such I never got to their motor pool or nightly mooring area. I never remembered the meaning of LARC/BARC, but a plausible nomenclature might be (Landing Amphibious Remote Craft) and the "B" might stand for Barge. The LARC is the smaller of the two craft were painted white. The larger BARC were painted green.

Flagging down a LARC heading toward the bay, on board there were more men than I expected to see man one boat. We were told, they had an extra crew, because the ship that anchored had BARCs on the main deck to be off loaded and the crew was needed to man the new BARC. The LARC, I think had a three man crew. The helmsman and two stevedores or deck hands.

Once the photo team had climbed aboard the LARC, the two stevedores were at the bow of the craft acting as road guards, giving the helmsman hand signals to steer right or left, slow down, stop or speed up. The driver at the rear of the LARC/BARC was totally blind to pedicabs, bicycles, or even Vietnamese taxi cabs in front of them.

At the end of the runway, where the road turned to circle the airport and where the beach began, the LARC just left the road onto the beach down to the surf's edge. Once the LARC was in the water, where the wheels were no longer effective providing traction, the helmsman switched a lever or two. That dis-engaged the driving wheels and connected the crafts propeller and rudder system. The LARC continued into the harbor toward the anchored ship, that was probably a $\frac{1}{2}$ miles off shore. The LARC travelled at something close to five knots or six miles an hour, taking about 10 minutes to reach the ship. On the way we passed an in-bound LARC filled with cargo.

At the vessel, an Army Tug Boat was holding in place a huge Army floating crane, with a LARC tied up to the crane. The crane was lowering a BARC from the ship's deck to the water. The extra crew was let off on the crane and we pulled up to the ship's forward hole with the ship's boom lowering I think six pallets onto the LARC. In total weight the LARC either carried 2500 pounds or $2\frac{1}{2}$ tons of cargo per trip. I deem the LARC was about 20 feet long and maybe six feet wide.

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At the shore line, once the wheels hit the sandy beach in the surf, the helmsman reversed the levers engaging the wheels and dis-connecting the propeller and rudder system. Then drive right up onto the beach and MSR. Entering traffic the deck hands again acted as road guards. Past the airport terminal into Qui Nhon City the LARC travelled, dodging traffic along the way. In the city center, the LARC made a right turn and went a few blocks to an open air storage facility. MPs guarding the gate waved the LARC to enter. A crane quickly off-loaded the LARC's cargo. The photo team climbed off to await a BARC.

A BARC soon entered the open air depot. We climbed aboard the larger amphibious craft. I think it had a five man crew. I believe the BARC had twin engines with one crew member manning the engine room. I'm certain the BARC hauled $2\frac{1}{2}$ times more cargo than the LARC, thus the BARC hauled 6250 pounds or 12,500 pounds of goods. I believe the latter to be correct. The BARC was probably closer to 30 feet long and 8-9 feet wide.

At the ship I had the jacob's ladder dropped and climbed up to get pictures of the cargo boom lifting pallets of goods from the ship's hole, then swing out to lower the goods onto the BARC. Back on land the photo team shot film of the LARC/BARCs entering and leaving the water. To round out this story we filmed the two amphibious craft traversing in the city traffic.

I asked the deck hands of the LARC/BARC if high surf would beach the craft. They told me Qui Nhon was an ideal place for their operation. The bay usually had a surf of only a foot or so. Any higher surf and the LARCs could be capsized

With the LARC/BARC story in the can as photo jargon would call a wrap or finish to a story. I knew the photo team had done a story on Army Tug Boats someplace in Vietnam. But, I had no earthly idea where, until I began writing the LARC/BARC story. Then an isolated obscured tidbit of information that eluded my memory since 1968 came to light that enhances the credibility of the enclosed tug boat story.

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Master and Male Nurses in Qui Nhon

That minuscute long forgotten bit of information, was that I had travelled around the airport runway road to the other side. Beyond a high craggy hill that obscured another mile long bay with a pier at the far end of the bay, that had a ship or two moored at the pier. Just recalling having travelled around the road to the opposite side of the airport, woke up my memory.

A truck ride to a building on the pier served a two-fold purpose. The officer, I recall probably an Army Transportation Corps Captain or Major was the Harbor Master. That was one of our teams photo projects to film. However upon talking with the officer about his duties, pictorially it was unexciting to down right dull for film. He had a desk job, coordinating many facets of transportation from scheduling tug boat crews and harbor pilot (a separate story) to trucks to haul off the cargo once it was off loaded. Numerous logistical problems and depot space availability for the incoming cargo were amongst his headaches. What if the depot only had room for 10% of the cargo? What products and merchandise were most needed and did this ship even have the goods that were in dier need?

I heard several horror stories while in Saigon of the wrong ship being brought into dock at the wrong time. One had frozen food, steaks, chops, chicken and fish, plus ice cream but absoutely no freezer space in the depot. The pallets upon pallets of frozen food rotted in the open sun.. Perishables. I remember hearing of a ship at sea to long with perishables. When it finally docked and the hatches finally opened, rank, stink of dead ripe bananas and rotten tomatoes filled the air. The entire ship load had to be dumped. Thus the harbor master wore many hats trying to joggle many factors, before deciding what ship to bring into port.

At one point while MACV Army "A" Photo Team was at Chu Lai awaiting Task Force Oregon to receive the Americal Division Colors, USARV (U.S. Army Vietnam drafted the entire 221st Signal Company (Pictorial) as stevedores, inorder to relieve the back log of ships in the Saigon River and New Port Docks. That stevedoring job lasted for over a month.

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The Harbor Master had to have the foresight beyond just the needs of Qui Nhon and Army requirements. This port and associated depot, supported the troops located in Pleiku and Kontum and not just the army units stationed in these cities, but the air bases at both cities. The air force needed bombs and jet engines, that were totally out of the army's inventory. With seven nations having troops in Vietnam a certain portion of each ship's cargo would be destined for our allied country's troops.

While we never filmed the Harbor Master Story, it did reveal a deep insight into the complexities of balancing bullets verses bacon and everything else in between that is involved with port and dock operations. I also learned that the Army's Transportation Corps was far more diversified than just truck drivers. I also learned that one ship was leaving in the morning with another scheduled to take its place the same day.

The next morning the photo team was on the pier early. Boarding the tug boat, the film crew met the crew of the tug. If memory serves me right, the captain was an Army Warrant Officer, with an NCO that manned the tug's engines and supervised the four other enlisted deck hands.

The Tug boat captain was in constant radio and hand signal contact with the ship's captain and crew. The operation was simple. The ship released all lines (ropes) attached to the pier, except for the bow lines. The tug boat crew attached lines to the ship's fantail and the bow of the tug boat. The tug then reversed engines (astern) pulling the ship's fantail (rear) away from the pier. As the ship pivoted on the bow lines still attached to the pier.

When the ship was at about a 45° angle to the pier all was stopped. The ship's crew and pier workers untied the ship's bow lines. The tug boat crew and ship's crew released the lines that were attached between the ship's fantail and the tug boats bow. Once the tug boat moved away, the ship was free to back away from the pier and turn toward the open sea.

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Soon another ship had entered the Harbor of Qui Nhon. In the vicinity of the ship to the pier, the Army Tug Boat pulled along side the ship. Again the tug and ship's bridge, including the captain and harbor pilot were in constant radio and hand signal contact with each other. The first maneuver was to stop the ship from crashing into the other ship or the pier. To do this the tug came along side the ship. Lines were attached between the two vessels, from the forward hatch of the ship to the tug's fantail and bow to bow of both ships. Then both vessels reversed engines, halting forward motion.

With the ship now stopped only yards off the pier, the Army longshoreman and ship's deck hands threw lines to each other. Meanwhile the tug's crew freed the lines securing the tug's back. This allowed the tug to pivot on the bow lines and push the ship's bow to the dock.. Once the bow of the ship was secured to the pier, the lines between ship and tug were released.

The tug boat backed away and moved to the ship's fantail. There using the tire bumpers alone, the tug's bow pushed the ship's fantail toward the pier. In hardly an hour the ship's gang-plank was on the pier, the ship tightly secured to the dock. Beside the pushing, pulling and shoving that the tug boat crews did, they also worked on salvage operations. The case in point; either a helo or small plane had crashed into the bay. A BARC and tug boat were attempting a salvage job, by securing lines to the sunken craft and pulling the craft from the bay or drag it to the floating crane that could readily lift it out of the water.

On the way back to the units camp site, I asked the rest of the photo team for the hundredth time if they could think of anything a male nurse could do better than a female nurse. They were all silent. All afternoon I sat in the army cot procrastinating as I had done since receiving the male nurse assignment. I was ready to pull my hair out, if that would help solve the dilemma of what a male nurse could accomplish better than the dis-staff gender.

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The next day, by mid-morning, I had to make a decision to either give up on the male nurse story and fly back to Saigon and tell the bosses at MACV, that I didn't even try or call or go by the hospital and see if there was some angle I and the photo team had overlooked. I finally found the fortitude to walk out to the MSR and hitch-hike a ride to the Army Hospital.

In the hospital commander's office, I don't remember if he was a Bird Col or Light Col. (COL. or LTC). I told the commander very apologetically, " Sir I really don't know why I'm here. I'm with MACV Public Information Office and I've been given an assignment to film Male Nurses." I continued "I can't think of a single thing a male nurses can do that a female nurse can't."

As if I just told the joke of the day, the hospital commander stood up with a big grin on his face stating, " Well Serge, for one thing we don't allow the female nuses to work the POW Ward."

From then on things happened so fast I hardly can recount the events. Everything was greased, as if MACV IO or the senior medical officer on MACV staff had contacted the hospital alerting them we were coming. The hospital commander asked, how many on the team? Where were we housed? When can we start filming? The commander then called his top sergeant, whether he was a First Sergeant or Sergeant Major, I fotgot.

The commander told the top NCO to have the commander's driver take me back to pick up the team and equipment. Tell dietary to serve three extra meals and tell the POW Ward we'll be filming right after lunch.

Of the nearly 80 stories I done for MACV never had anything come together so fast. In less than three minutes in the hospital commander's office; I had a story line, a shooting time, transportation to get the team and gear and lunch to boot. What I had dreaded for weeks, was actually the quickest to coordinate and film.

DASPO Stops At Qui Nhon

Since my last time in Vietnam, in 1969, many changes had occurred. The Nixon Administration was now in the White House. The Paris Peace Talks were an on-again/off-again news event. Bombing of North Vietnam was as changeable as the Peace Talks. Egress Recap, the code name for bringing the troops home was in full swing.

We all heard the U.S. Troops were going home, yet in the Saigon area it was hard to notice any change. On the fall 1971 trip to Vietnam, for some reason I can't phantom why, the craft I was flying in landed at Qui Nhon. Going into the terminal building, it was vacant. Gone were the hundred or so G.I.s awaiting flights. Missing was the newspaper stand and mini-snack bar. Absence were the wooden counters for booking flights, baggage check-in and claim. No army or air force personnel, in fact I was the only American in the place. A few elderly Mamasans and Papasans lounged on wooden benches. A few armed ARVN soldiers milled around guarding the open air French Indo-China era structure. For over half a decade this building had been the hussle, bussle beehive and core of American activity, had reverted back to a sleepy port city airline terminal for Air Vietnam. It finally sank into my brain, that indeed the American were leaving Vietnam. I was dazed and confused, what would I find or not find at my destination.

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