

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY AND THE CENTER OF
MILITARY HISTORY
WASHINGTON, DC 20005-3402
27 August 1997

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

Operational History Branch

Mr. Joe Thompson

Cadillac, MI 49601

Dear Joe:

Now you know I didn't throw away your address! We had a great trip last week--from Cadillac we went up to the U.P.--driving thru miles of forests and walking along the Lake Superior beachline. Wherever we travel, we like to drop in at VFW posts to settle dust in the throat and meet local vets. That's what we were looking for when we found you and your Amvets buddies. After you, we met interesting Vietnam vets in Escanaba and southwest Pennsylvania. The guy in Escanaba left a daughter by a girlfriend in Vietnam, and has visited her every year since 1990. In Pennsylvania I learned of a Marine Vietnam vet who has supported himself as a country singer since the 1960s and has recorded a couple albums--ever heard of Roger Martin? He should be an interesting interview.

This letterhead indicates my employer and office location, but nothing of how I got here. I'm sure you had far more difficulty than I in re-entering this often-screwy country with its millions of uncomprehending stay-at-homes,


my sanitized term for those who have no idea what a war in general, or the Vietnam War in particular, is like. For me, there was a long period of finding a suitable niche, which included a stop of nearly six years in Japan, where I met the lady you saw with me. Fortunately the search ended ten years ago when I found a way to get paid for doing what I like--reading and writing history. I am one of eight guys (sounds better than middle-aged men!) working on a twelve-volume series entitled The United States Army in Vietnam. Six volumes have been published thus far. Half of us authors are Vietnam vets but that is not a prerequisite for the assignment. We try to combine genuine interest in the project with solid academic preparation and writing ability, and for the most part have succeeded. When I first learned that all the services have publication projects on their Vietnam War involvement, I looked into working for the Marine History Office but backed off after sensing a preference for creating heroes and getting a bigger budget out of Congress. Remember the glory stories about Chesty and others at TBS? Our beloved Corps is still paranoid about getting swallowed by the Army! The Army is much more willing than the Marines and Navy to examine mistakes, even in public. Interservice rivalry has flared in the Army and Marine Vietnam histories over some Westmoreland decisions and approaches to pacification, with the Marines convinced

Westy didn't like them, and the Army embarrassed that the Marine Civic Action Program was much more effective than their own policies toward civilians. My part of the Army series is the 1961-1965 period, when the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were hoping advisers would be enough to help the Vietnamese beat the Viet Cong, so my own later experience is only partially relevant.

Have you seen the Wall yet? Or ever been to D.C.? If not, you're invited to stay with us, just twenty miles from the capital. We have no kids, thus plenty of room. If you don't show, I'll be back in Cadillac to hear more of your story, though I'll have to put in some time here before I can get another full week off. I hope you'll convey to the Amvets commander our thanks for a nice reception as well as dinner recommendation. We did go to the Sands Resort. And, as a historian, I like to see old buildings like your train station being maintained and used. Address here:

Springfield, VA 22150.

Sincerely,



Charles R. Anderson

Historian