

THE LATRINE

By Jim Regan

Long ago and far away, in the Vacation land of Southeast Asia

Shortly after my arrival at the company (E Co, 52nd Inf. LRRP) the commander, CPT "P", took me on a guided tour of the company area. Usual places like the; Supply Tent, Mail Hut, Orderly Room, TOC, Platoon Billets, Bunkers, et al. He saved the best for last. Strolling through the AO, we headed back toward the Latrine and Shower Area. I knew as we approached that we were coming into an area of concern for the Boss. I smelled the latrine before I saw it. The usual aromas of RVN aside, this was truly an area where we needed some change/help. The Ol' Man just inclined his head and I got the message loud and clear.

We were "blessed" to have one of the most flexible and creative R&U guys in PV. Otto! He did everything that needed to be done to keep things moving along. Mail, laundry runs, scheduling water drops from the engineers and all of the small repairs needed to keep the Southeast Asia huts and buildings up to snuff. He and I took a jeep and traveled around the airfield to the Pacific Architect and Engineers (PA&E) area. These civilians built/fabricated all sorts of stuff. There were a couple of brand new "4 holers" just sitting there, begging to be taken. I checked with the head guy and found that a lots of paperwork was required for stuff that left his yard. There was a Vietnamese Guard at the entrance to the area. "Let's go Otto!" Over to the airfield we ride and contact the Airman who operates the giant forklift for the Phuoc Vinh airfield. We make a deal. Tomorrow at noon, bring your forklift to our company area and meet us. We'll give you a case of Coca Cola for your time. "Deal!" he says.

Next day, we get a detail together to "G I" the latrine, (after the morning rush hour). Bunch of happy guys!! I know they would rather be in the "Bush" than "G I ing" a latrine. We opened a section of the barbed wire fence and laid PSP across the ditch. Oh, you should have heard the grippin' and bitchin'!

At noontime, there comes this giant forklift down the road. I walk the guy back and show him where we will put the latrine. "What Latrine?" he asks. Wait and see. Just follow us, do as I tell you and don't talk to anyone. Off we go, around the airstrip road, headed to the PA&E yard. We pull up and the Vietnamese Guard stops us. We're in the jeep with the forklift in trail. Since it is noon hour, all the workers are at lunch or goofing off somewhere. I wave a clipboard at the guard and tell him that I need to get in because, as you can see, we have a pick up something. He looks at us, then the forklift and waves us through. The operator goes to the first 4 hole in line, gets it picked up, secured to the forklift, and turns around to head back to the gate. I tell him not to stop for anything and follow me.

Out towards the gate we bolt! The guard steps out in front of us! The forklift guy "guns" the engine and the guard disappears! As we scream through the gate I wave the clipboard and smile. Here we go. Barreling down the road, headed for the Company CO. Me and Otto laughing like the devil and driving as if he were chasing us. Then it happens. I hear strange sounds. TWANG ... TWANG ... Double THWANG!!! The top of the latrine is catching hold of commo wire that was strung across the road, about latrine high, and snapping the wire clean through. Lord, we are going to jail for sure! Drive on!

As we turn down the side road toward the latrine site, it looks as if the whole company has turned out to greet us. In goes the new latrine, forklift guy gets his case of Coca Cola and he's gone in a cloud of dust. Then, what appears to be Ali Babba and the Forty Thieves, start to repair the barbwire fence, remove the PSP and cover up all the tracks of the forklift into and out of our AO. Good job!

The old latrine is "G I'd" to my satisfaction and I get the troops to "set up" the new latrine for business. Then I have a thought, and to this day I'll never know what made me do it. I tell Otto to get me a hammer and a couple of nails. He and the rest of the guys look at me as if I'm nuts. Anyway, I just develop a case of the hips and nail the old latrine door shut. That'll fix them I think.

Every evening, 'bout 1800 hrs, there is a briefing, Intel & Ops up at the head shed (TOC). That evening, the briefing is over, the Old Man grabs the Stars and Stripes and says that he's going to "Christian" the new latrine. A few minutes later, the sirens go off announcing "Incoming!" We all scurry for the bunkers and wonder what in the world "Sir Chuck" is doing mortaring us at this time of day. Rounds impact and they don't sound like 82 mm. Then we get one that sounds as if it's in our company area. PANIC! PUCKER FACTOR! Stay cool, wait for the "all clear", hang on guys!

The "All Clear" sounds and we hustle to check for casualties and see what took the hit. It's easy to see where the round impacted, smoke, dust, debris, fire. But it's not a hit in the troop billets. Happy Days! Guys are crawling out of the ditch alongside the road. They had been at the shower area or the new latrine and decided to take cover there instead of trying for a bunker. The CO is standing there surveying the

damage. Nobody hurt. Maybe a few "skid marks" in shorts, but that's it. The only casualty was .. THE OLD LATRINE!!! Took a direct hit from a 107 mm rocket! Nothing was in the latrine, no $\frac{1}{2}$ barrels from the 55 gal. drums, not even a roll of TP.

CPT "P" looks at me as I stare at the latrine. "We sure must be living right Sergeant Regan", he says. As I told you before, to this day, I have no idea what drove me to do that stupid, crazy thing. Nailing shut a perfectly good latrine. No, we did not press our luck and replace the latrine.