



1LT Edgar R.
McCain, USAR

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McKaughan Family House Badge

Some Military Experiences of Edgar Royce McCoin

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The purpose of this document is to communicate information to those family members and/or descendants who may have an interest. My wish that my father and paternal grandfather had documented some of their military experiences led me to "getting on with it". I have written about several events and keep remembering other brief stories, but I had to find a stopping point. I hope it isn't too boring, but you don't have to read it unless you are interested!

What Initiated My Military Involvement:

As all young men were required to do at the time, upon turning 18 years of age, I registered with my local draft board. Some time later, I was required to report to my draft board and was sent for my military draft physical examination. Since my permanent home address was Hendersonville, TN, my draft board was located in Gallatin, TN. I reported to the Post Office in Gallatin on the specified date, along with a number of other young men, and we were bused to Nashville, TN for our physicals. That was quite an experience! I passed my physical and received a student deferment draft status, since I was a full-time student at Tennessee Technological University.

While I attended Tennessee Technological University (TTU), from the fall of 1965 until the fall of 1969, all male students attending state universities (freshman and sophomore years) were required to participate in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). After the first two years, it was possible to, either, cease participation or apply for acceptance into the Advanced ROTC program. The advanced program required an additional two years of training (junior and senior years) and led to a two year active duty commitment upon graduation.

An ROTC Instructor, Major Charles B. Rothrock, Jr., whom I had for a map reading course during my sophomore year, talked to me several times about applying for the advanced program. I was not really interested, but there was a troop build up going on in Viet-Nam and requirements for maintaining a student deferment were getting very strict and more demanding. In order to ensure that I was able to stay in school and complete requirements for my degree, I decided that it would be best to sign up for Advanced ROTC. I made this decision after turning 19 and receiving a draft status of 1-A, which means that you could be drafted at any time. Supposedly, I lost my student deferment status because of being three quarter hours behind the normal hours of credit needed for

graduation in four years (TTU was not yet on the semester system). It was the middle of my sophomore year at TTU (Winter Quarter?), and I went to talk to Major Rothrock. He took me to see Colonel Patterson, the Professor of Military Science (PMC) at TTU, and I was provided with the paperwork to make application.

Prior to the time I made my application for the Advanced ROTC program, TTU had been able to accept everyone who applied and met the requirements. Unfortunately, the program had so many applicants in early 1967 that it was necessary to cut back severely. There were some 250 young men applying, and TTU could only accept 90! We were given batteries of tests and had to await the results. I recall receiving a packet in the mail that summer at my home (my parents' home), in Hendersonville. It was from ROTC, and it notified me that I had been accepted in the Advanced ROTC program! I was happy for a moment, then I thought, "Why am I so happy?!?" Rationally, I knew why I was happy. It would remove the threat of being drafted from school, and I would have the opportunity to go into the military as an officer. (This was before I found out that the lowest rank in the military is 2nd Lieutenant! Ha) However, I did have a definite two-year active duty commitment in the U.S. Army upon graduation from TTU. One other benefit of the program was that I received \$50 per month while in the advanced program. This isn't a lot, especially in today's dollars, but it made my car payment at the time!

Part of our acceptance requirements was passing a physical examination, so we were sent to Fort Campbell for this experience. We stayed overnight in one of the barracks, and the next morning we had our first taste of mess hall food! The breakfast seemed pretty good, actually, until after several bites I realized that pancakes are not supposed to be crunchy.... I looked, and they were full of egg shells. Just to get another mess hall story in, while eating at a mess hall during one of my travels in Viet-Nam, I noticed a lot of brown specs in the bread, whole grain bread, right? No! The specs had tiny little legs. I got used to this, and specks were ignored the remainder of my time there.

ROTC Involvement:

I was not a "gung-ho" cadet. I did what I needed to do and did not participate in activities that were not required. Since I did not play the games required to make rank in the campus ROTC program, I was a cadet Lieutenant (I don't recall whether I was 2nd or 1st, but it doesn't matter.) and was in charge of a platoon of freshmen and sophomore cadets. (Remember, all healthy male students were required to take basic ROTC their first two years at TTU.) My platoon sergeant was Cadet First Sergeant Larry McNabb.

Larry McNabb was one year behind me in school and was, also, in the advanced program. He was near my age, since I graduated from high school at 17. Larry was from Jackson County, TN and was a good friend of mine while at TTU. He was my brother's brother-in-law, too! I think he was the groomsman at my wedding to Vicky Ann Jared on 1 June 1968. My brother, Don, was my "Best Man". Brenda Dyer was Vicky's "Maid of Honor", since Vicky and Brenda were best friends in high school. Brenda and Larry were married sometime later, while we were still in school (1969, I think). I was "Best

Man" at Brenda and Larry's wedding, and Vicky was "Matron of Honor". Larry went on to become Executive VP of Operations for Bank America, at their headquarters in California. I am not sure what else Larry achieved in his career.

I left for "ROTC Summer Camp", at Fort Bragg, NC, within a couple of weeks after Vicky and I were married, in June 1968. It was the summer between my junior and senior years at TTU. I think the camp was six weeks (it could have been eight?), but it seemed much longer! Attitude means a lot and is very important in how you achieve, in most anything you do in life. Since my attitude about the camp and interest in the Army were not at a high point in my life, especially just after being married, I did not expend a lot of effort to perform at my best in the camp. I think I came out ranked in the middle of the cadets at camp, maybe slightly better than average. I believe I received a "B" letter grade for the experience. This, also, had a direct effect upon my cadet rank at TTU. At "Summer Camp", I lost some 20 pounds! I started at about 175 and ended around 155. I did not think I had that much to lose, but part of the issue was the food. Of course, I am a very "picky" eater, and I am practically a vegetarian. This did not help me, but I happened to be in a company that frequently did not have enough chow in the mess hall or the field. I understand the officer in charge of that duty was reprimanded, but it was not corrected the entire time I was there. Very often, the last platoon of my company to eat did not get very much. In the field, I recall hot chow being brought out to us and having a "baked potato" (and not much else) that I ate like an apple. Yes, it was crunchy like an apple, but I was hungry!

Fort Bragg being the home of the 82nd Airborne, I had the opportunity to get a small taste of the airborne training, including jumping from the "34 foot tower". During this phase of the training, we did lots of pushups!

During "Summer Camp", we experienced gas mask training, using tear gas. I learned to get my mask on within seconds of a threat. We had real tear gas attacks during the training, when you least expected it! I recall the entire group being sprayed with tear gas during an outdoor training session while we were sitting in bleachers. Talk about a miserable bunch of guys! The tear gas gave a burning sensation on your skin, nasal passages, and eyes. You could not see for the burning and tears, and your nose would run freely. It was miserable!

Also, during the summer training session, we assaulted a hill, using our M-14 rifles. During the assault, I was firing my weapon quite freely and rapidly. While changing out the empty clip for a full one, I had gone to one knee and rested the rifle barrel on my shoulder. The rifle slid over so that the barrel rested against my neck, and I immediately felt a burning sensation. When I pulled the rifle barrel off my neck, I noticed a layer of skin on the barrel! I completed the assault and dug in on the top of the hill, with the sweat, dirt, and my fatigue shirt collar irritating the burn on my neck. In addition, we were hit with tear gas, and that caused my neck to burn even more. Later, one of our trainers came by and noticed my neck and had me report to the medics who dressed it. I had to make some follow-up trips to the medical station over the next week or so for fresh dressing. This was very minor but is another experience.

Our senior year, the cadets had the opportunity to apply for branch assignments. We selected our top three choices, in hopes of getting one of them. One of the three had to be a "combat arms", as I recall. Often, however, cadets did not get either branch they had requested. I think my original submission was 1) Armor, 2) Intelligence, and 3) ? (I don't remember the other, but it could have been Signal or Transportation.); however, an ROTC Instructor came to me and asked whether I was really interested in Intelligence. I told him that I was, and he said that if I was, I would not have a chance unless I put it as my number one choice, so he allowed me to change my list. I received my first choice, Intelligence. Most (I think) did not receive their first choice, and many did not receive anything on their top three list. Those of us who applied for Intelligence were put through a battery of tests, psychological and otherwise. Not being the model "gung-ho" cadet, I am very surprised that I received my first choice in branch assignments, especially since the choice was Intelligence.

I completed my degree requirements in December 1969 and was commissioned into the United States Army as a 2nd Lieutenant during a ceremony in the Derryberry Hall auditorium on Saturday, 13 December 1969. It seems to me that there were a half-dozen or so of us who received our commissions during that ceremony. The main event of the day was yet to come! That night, Ann Marie McCain was born!

Active Duty Military Training – Fort Gordon, GA:

My active duty started 4 February 1970. I remember the drive to Fort Gordon, GA, near Augusta, the day before reporting for active duty. It was my first time to drive that far from home, and driving through Atlanta was something like I had never seen before, even in those days. I recall driving into Atlanta, with up to six or eight lanes going into the city, and watching road signs to determine which way to go. I wasn't sure which lane I needed to be in, and I don't think I had ever driven on more than a two or, possibly, a three lane highway (Nashville?). That was very unpleasant for me! No, even more so, I despised it! I think that helped me to decide that I would never live in a large city, if I had a choice in the matter.

I found a small boarding house in Thompson, GA, near Augusta. It was an old building or house, and my bedroom was very large. I was lonely and a bit depressed, but I was doing my duty. The following morning, I arose, cleaned up, and put on my dress green uniform, for real, for the first time. I drove the remaining few miles to Fort Gordon, checked through the gate upon arrival, and received my first active duty salute from the MP at the entrance gate. I did not know what to expect, and I did not know anyone. Being a shy, young (22 years old) country boy from Tennessee who had not spent any significant time away from home, excluding college, I felt terribly lost and out of place. Fort Gordon was the home of the Army's Signal Officers' Basic Course. I was sent to this school as a back-up to my primary MOS (Military Occupation Series), for some reason – maybe the possibility of working with Crypto. Anyway, it was a fairly intense program that included some additional training besides signal. The signal training

covered encryption techniques for secure communications, basic electronics, types of radios, how to properly converse on the radio, likely some leadership, and other things. It, also, included an excellent map reading course and a very tough examination that had to be passed in order to successfully complete the training. Less than half (about 25 %?) of the class passed the exam the first attempt. Since I enjoyed the course, it kept my attention, and I scored very high on my first attempt. It was a relief to have that requirement completed while most of the 2nd Lieutenants in my class were still struggling to figure it out! I don't remember for sure, but I believe there were something over 100 (all males at this time in the military) in my class at Ft. Gordon. The vast majority of the class was made up of Signal branch Lieutenants. I am not sure how many Intelligence people were in the class, but there were not many. Thinking back, I believe there were three of us.

Other training experienced at Ft. Gordon was the Escape and Evasion course or POW (prisoner of war) training. This was the worst and best training that I received while in the Army! It was the worst because of what I went through. It was the best because of what I learned, physically and psychologically, about being a prisoner of war and what I discovered about myself. Unfortunately, I heard the best portion of this course (non-Geneva Convention) was stopped within a year after my experience, due to injuries.

The "Escape and Evasion" (POW) course was divided into two sections. The first was a prison camp set up and run by Geneva Convention guidelines. The second portion of the course was an example of non-Geneva Convention. The Geneva Convention run camp was uncomfortable in that we had to stand on our knees with our hands on our heads for long periods of time while being read to or "preached" propaganda. This became very uncomfortable on the knees and your arms would become numb and ache. We, actually, had one guy to "crack" under this treatment! The captors would harass the captives in other ways, too. In addition, we spent time at mundane activities, like pulling weeds from the compound's grass, without being able to talk, etc. It was uncomfortable and aggravating, but for our one-day experience, it was nothing. Even for much longer periods of time, the conditions were such that one could survive. The non-Geneva Convention run camp was another story!

During this cool night in February 1970, I was taken, along with a group of other POWs, to a quite different camp. We had been captured, while lost in the woods and swamp, and brought to this place. I was alone in the night and wandering through the woods and swamp in an attempt to avoid capture. After stumbling into the middle of a group of "enemy" soldiers in the darkened woods, I put up my hands in surrender. I thought this had to be better than being lost in the dark, anyway! Afterwards, except for the lessons learned, I found out it would have been more comfortable to have just hidden in the dark, in spite of the time limit placed on our escape, since the training would end the next day.

Upon arrival at the non-Geneva Convention camp, we were harassed and removed from the "duce-and-a-half" truck (2 ½ ton troop vehicle) and placed into metal lockers lying on the ground. These were normal, full-size metal school or dressing room lockers. Even though they were "full-size", they are very tight for a grown man! The captors would

kick the lockers, pick them up and drop them, etc. A few guys would freak a little at this experience. I suppose it was being locked up in such cramped confines that got to them. I, however, "enjoyed" the break and a chance to lie down, so I relaxed as much as possible. Since I did not get excited about this situation, they did not keep me there for long. Looking back, I wish I had yelled, "Let me out!" or something to have, possibly, gained a little more time in the locker. However, that could have led to something else more unpleasant. You never know. I just kept quiet. I only wish I had maintained that mute condition! I thought some of the antics were a little silly, and knowing that it was a training exercise, I did not take everything seriously.

Sometime after arrival, they took me to a table set up for signing in and handed me a sheet with signatures on it to sign in. Thinking this was the Army's way of keeping track of us during the training exercise, I signed the paper. At this, the officer behind the table thanked me for signing some document to be used for propaganda, and I realized that it was part of the training, so I said, "In that case, I will erase my name!" I grabbed the sheet before he did and erased my name. This ticked him off, and I was pulled away.

One "activity" was a line up of the newly captured group and a lot of yelling in our faces and accusing us of all kinds of things. They, also, would try to extract basic background information from us, other than name rank and serial number. We all gave the basic name, rank, and serial number, however. I was selected by the harassing member of the opposing force captors to "take charge" of the group and give them orders to move, etc. for the captors. I refused to obey, so they had me lie face down on the ground within this lighted compound area and began to yell at me and kick me in the sides, etc. They would ask meaningless questions in an attempt to get any response from me. This is where I should have remained mute! I thought, "What are they going to do to me? It is only training." A captain had been repeatedly yelling into my ear asking me what I was looking at. Since I was face down on the ground, I finally smirked a little thinking how stupid it was to be asked that question. He ran up to me, kicked me and asked, "What are you smiling at?" This is where I should have remained mute. I wondered to myself what in the world I could be smiling at, so I looked up and said, "A p--- ant!" I was a little perturbed at being repeatedly kicked and having this moron yell ridiculous questions into my ear. Well, that comment set him off! He and the guards led/dragged me into the compound where more interesting things began to happen!

The captors were dressed in berets and uniforms a little different as part of the effect. I must say that they did an excellent job of making the training realistic. I was taken, next, into the compound where they, again, tried to make me take charge of a group of POWs. I refused, so they knocked and pushed me down time after time. I would get up, and they would do it, again. I was getting very tired and weak at this point in the night. A little later, a group of captors came for me. They pushed me toward another area of the camp while asking meaningless questions, etc. The major directly behind me would grab my collar, pull me back and knee me in the back while throwing me to the ground. He would then jump on top of me and yell questions and/or insults into my face. This happened multiple times on the way to the next "activity". I remained quiet. I had already learned something!

The congenial (ha) and very talkative major was in charge of this portion of the training. The first thing they did was hang me upside down by my knees being bent over a horizontal metal pole. They pulled my shirt down, and I barely noticed the cool February night. I soon forgot, completely, about the temperature. As they swung me back and forth from the pole, two (?) guards held my feet to ensure I stayed on the pole. This was uncomfortable, but they would, from time to time, raise my feet so that my calf muscles would roll up onto the pole, then they would pull my feet down and “pop” my calf muscles over the pole. While this was going on, a guard in front of me was hitting my stomach with a rubber hose or hitting me in my solar plexus with his fist (I think with his middle finger second joint protruding). During these activities, the major was yelling in my face and ears and asking me whether I would talk. I remained quiet. They, finally, let me down from there. A guard warned me that he was going to let me go, but I was so weak that I still fell straight down on my head to the ground. This caused my ears to ring even more, as I recall, but I struggled to my feet a bit dizzy.

I was, next, taken to a horizontal section of ¾” or 1” pipe about two feet long, supported by two vertical wooden posts some two feet off the ground. The pipe had a crank handle on one end. I was made to stand on the pipe with my bare shins while leaning on a balance pole. This made it where my body weight was on my shins on the small area of the pipe. This was uncomfortable enough, but a guard began turning the crank handle so that the pipe would rotate. Of course, this began to take some leg hair and hide from my shins. After a little of this, they had me stand on my head and lean against a barbed wire fence.

At the completion of this section of training, I was returned to the area with the other “prisoners”. Again, the captors attempted to have me take charge of the group, but I refused. I was shoved and knocked down multiple times and very weakly got up. I was threatened with going back to the “fun” area, too, but I refused to take charge. I was returned to the torture area for more “fun and games”. This time, they kept me only a short period of time and returned me to the group. After further attempts to have me take charge and knocking me down over and over, I grabbed the captain doing the shoving and knocking and dragged him down with me. I was no longer shoved or knocked down. I was told to join the group of other prisoners and sat there for some time. By this time, I was shaking for some reason. It may have been a combination of fatigue and cold, but I don’t recall feeling cold. A few of us were, finally, taken to another area of the camp, put on our knees while leaning over with our hands behind our backs and “shot” in the back of the head with a pistol. This was a great relief! It was over.

Thinking back on the experience of the POW training, it was excellent! The guys did a great job of making it as realistic as possible, and regardless of the discomfort I went through, I realized that it was nothing compared to what would likely happen should you be captured by a real enemy. I decided that I did not want to be captured, and I would be very careful should any future decision about surrender be necessary.

I was very sore and could hardly get out of bed the next few days. My abdominal area was so sore that the water stream in the shower was uncomfortable for a week or two. The other guys in the training who were fellow POWs told me, later, that they had no idea what was going on with me when I was taken away. They said they thought the captors had powdered my face with flour or something because I was so pale when brought back to the group. I was in the PX a couple of weeks or so later, and an enlisted man recognized me and came up to me and apologized for being involved in the torture activities. Of course, I did not recognize him or have any idea that he was involved. Frankly, I never saw anyone I recognized from that portion of the training.

I had to make a decision, while at Ft. Gordon, on signing up for another 18 months in the Army. I had been assigned Combat Intelligence and I wanted Counter Intelligence. I was offered this, but I decided not to extend my commitment. I had another opportunity, later, during my active duty.

While at Ft. Gordon, I met my best Army friend, Bill Russell. Bill was a graduate of the University of Arkansas, and a very handsome young man at 6'-5" tall and weighing about 215 – 220. I was 5'-11" tall, so you can see the height difference in the pictures, below. Bill was an avid country music fan and brought his guitar along with him to Ft. Gordon. He would take any opportunity to "pick and sing" and hooked up with some other musicians during his military assignments. Bill was, also, an Intelligence officer, and we ended up with the same training assignments and flew to Viet-Nam together.

I had to take another examination while at Ft. Gordon. It was a measure of aptitude for languages. Anyway, I did pretty well on the examination and was told that I had been accepted to attend the Defense Language Institute. I was, also, told that it was an honor to be selected for this training. I didn't think much of it at the time (recall my comment on attitude, above). I joked that being a Tennessee hillbilly, the Army would, probably, send me to study the English language. Then I would be bilingual, knowing "hillbilly" and English! They, however, sent me to study the Vietnamese language.

Active Duty Military Training – Defense Language Institute

At the time, there were two locations for the Defense Language Institute (DLI). One was the very nice area of Monterey, CA, and the other was El Paso, TX. For whatever reason, I was sent to El Paso, Biggs Field Air Force Base, at Fort Bliss, TX. This suited me just fine, since I was a fan of Mexican food. I enjoyed the southwest and the desert. I could take my guns to the desert and shoot anytime I had the opportunity. I bought two pistols while in El Paso. The Model 19, 6" barrel, Smith & Wesson was given to Ann Marie in 2000, but I still have the Ruger Super Single Six, .22 caliber, pistol.

The Vietnamese language course was set up to be seven months. The classes were divided up into small groups of eight or so. We attended classes Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. until 3:30 p.m., with a break for lunch. I lived off base and never had to meet a formation or wear my uniform except for attending class. There was a

Vietnamese person who facilitated the class, using DLI books. The Vietnamese national facilitator was rotated periodically.

I was told that my group was the top class of the groups at Biggs Field DLI at the time. I found the Vietnamese language not too terribly difficult to learn, except for the tonal or voice inflections required. The vocabulary and grammar were not very difficult, but changing the inflection of your voice could change the entire meaning of a word. This was very difficult to master. In fact, I never mastered this. It would have taken a lot of practice and much more work than I was willing to put into it (Recall my comment on attitude!). I could not have mastered this in the seven month period, anyway. I could, however, converse if the Vietnamese person was patient and kept my comments in context with our conversation. It was possible to say some pretty funny (or dangerous) things without meaning to do so!

It was while at DLI that I received my orders for Viet-Nam. Big surprise, huh?!? I was studying the Vietnamese language...

Vicky and Ann Marie were able to go to Fort Bliss with me. It was great to be able to watch Ann Marie grow and learn while I was on this assignment. The trip to El Paso was made in our 1970 Chevrolet Chevelle Supersport, 396, four speed, gunmetal gray, with a black vinyl top. (I had bought this vehicle, with my maternal grandfather along with me (Dada), during my final quarter of college. Auntie Clay (Mattie Clay Smith Johnson – sister of my maternal grandmother) loaned me the money to make the purchase. The car was purchased at the Chevrolet dealership in downtown Carthage, TN. Vicky was not too happy, since she did not know how to drive a straight shift. I must admit, it was not a very mature decision on my part, and she should have been included in selecting the vehicle. I was not thinking. Anyway, it did not have air conditioning, which was not unusual at the time. I, actually, did not want a/c! I had not had it before, and I did not think it was necessary. WOW! Have things changed or what?!? I think the new car cost slightly less than \$3,000.) We pulled a U-Haul trailer with some basic furniture and clothes, Ann Marie rode in her car seat in the back seat, with baby blankets or whatever placed that would keep the sun off her. This was a little tricky, since the windows had to be down for ventilation. I suppose this was April 1970, so Ann Marie would have been around four months old. I don't think the trip was very pleasant.... In addition, somewhere in Texas there was road construction taking place and a dump truck dropped a gravel that ended up hitting our windshield and causing a small crack. The crack grew and spread after we arrived in El Paso, so I had to call my insurance agent (Dad's first cousin from Gainesboro, TN, Therold Richardson) and set up having the windshield replaced.

We stayed in a hotel (Holiday Inn?) the first night we arrived in El Paso. There was discussion on TV about the time changing from Central time zone to Mountain. So this occurred just after we moved there. For dinner, we had room service and Vicky ordered some sort of fish. It came all in tact, including the head (with eyes), scales, and tail. She ate away, but it grossed me out, and I had to look the other way to eat my meal. (I said that I was a "picky" eater!)

I believe we found an apartment the next day. I remember calling home that night, after moving into our apartment, from a pay phone located in front of the apartment building. It was dark and breezy, and a tumble weed rolled up against me while I was talking to someone (mom, I think). I thought that was pretty neat! I had heard of tumble weeds and seen them on TV, but I had never seen one up close and personal.

When we found our first apartment, there was a small sand storm taking place, and it wasn't until the next morning that we realized that the apartment building was located at the foot of some mountains. We couldn't even see the mountains behind the building the day we moved in!

Our good friends, Brenda and Larry McNabb contacted us two or three months after we had arrived in El Paso to let us know that they would be coming to Ft. Bliss for Larry's officer basic training. (Recall that Larry was in Advanced ROTC at TTU, too.) Larry had gotten a branch assignment of Air Defense Artillery, and ADA branch school was located at Ft. Bliss! Vicky and I were very excited! I am sure that Vicky was even more excited than I to have her best friend moving to El Paso. No doubt, she was pretty lonely, being away from home, and I was gone all day. Vicky and I had moved to a better apartment complex, closer to base, and we arranged for Larry and Brenda to rent an apartment a few doors down from our second floor apartment. We were elated about this unexpected turn of events!

The situation and commitment were changing with our politics in Viet-Nam, and the number of officers needed was being cut back. This meant that Larry only had to commit to something like three months of active duty. Basically, this meant that he only had to attend his officer's basic training course. I couldn't believe how fortunate he was!



This is my class at DLI. I took the picture.

Active Duty Military Training – Fort Holabird, MD

My next stop was the Combat Intelligence Officer's Basic Course. This was based at Fort Holabird, MD, located in the beautiful (ha) industrial section of downtown Baltimore. Vicky and Ann Marie could not go with me for this assignment, so Bill Russell and I located an apartment at an old motel. In addition, Dennis Coit, another Military Intelligence (MI) guy from Rhode Island shared the one-bedroom apartment with us. There were two double beds in the single bedroom. Bill took one, and I took the other. Dennis slept on the couch.

I had bought a pop-up barrel Beretta .25 caliber automatic for Vicky, but she did not like guns, so I took it with me to Baltimore. I ended up selling it to Dennis Coit. At that time, it was not unusual for people to take back-up weapons, from home, to Viet-Nam., and I think Dennis was planning to do that with this small handgun. I, later, purchased a Mauser .380 to take as a concealed back-up weapon; however, while I was on leave prior to going to Viet-Nam, there was a crackdown on this activity and soldiers were getting into trouble if caught with a weapon. I decided it wasn't worth the risk and left the pistol at home (Vicky's parents' home, in Buffalo Valley, TN). Unfortunately, upon my return home, I traded the pistol for a 12 gauge pump Winchester shotgun. I still have the shotgun, but the pistol would be more valuable. I did not have a shotgun and wanted one.

Prior to going to Viet Nam, we were lined up to run the gauntlet of needles! Each step, we would stop and get a shot in each arm, simultaneously. I don't recall how many shots we received, but it was a significant number (8-12). Some medics were using pneumatic (air-gun) syringes. They were quick but if not seated properly onto your arm or if you move, the needle would tear your flesh. Many left with bleeding arms. I was very careful to be still, but one guy had the gun cocked a little, in his hurrying, and made a minor tear in one arm.

I grew my first of many mustaches while at Ft. Holabird. Having received my orders for Viet-Nam, my attitude had not improved. I did what I was supposed to do but without the zeal of someone excited about an opportunity. I was not interested in leaving my family to go to Viet-Nam and do who knows what, knowing that I may not return. I didn't balk at my duty, however, I just wasn't "gung-ho" about it. Those of us with orders to "Nam" had a few sayings. One of them related to attitude was, "What are they going to do, send us to Nam?" We would say this if guilty of some minor infraction or threatening not to finish an assignment (threaten only to each other!). Another comment, related to an assignment someone may have received, was, "Better you than me!" We used these, and others, a lot. Sometimes they were used as a defense against the nervousness we actually felt.

While at Ft. Holabird, it was recommended that each of us go to JAG (Judge Advocate General Corps) and have a Last Will and Testament made out. Bill and I, along with

another acquaintance or two, did that. Of course, I did not have much of anything, but lawyers like to have things nailed down, anyway.

An officer once told a group of us youngsters that some of us would be sent on dangerous missions. If we made it back, we will have gained valuable experience. If we didn't, he said, "We ain't lost nothing!" We just looked at each other, without saying a word.



Bill & Ed relaxing at the apartment in Baltimore, MD. (Rough looking characters!)

On Leave before Going to Viet Nam:

The Intelligence course ended in December 1970. At that point, I was given a thirty-day leave prior to going to Viet-Nam. Vicky and I spent that time based at her parents' home and visiting family and friends. Also, Bill Russell came and spent some time with us prior to going to Viet-Nam. Our last night in the states prior to our departure was at my brother's house. Don and Sue lived in Hermitage, TN, near Nashville, at the time. Their home was in the Hermitage Hills subdivision. Bill and I got up the next morning, put on our summer khaki uniforms, and were taken to the Nashville airport by my brother and dad. My request was that no one stay at the airport for the farewell, so they just dropped us off and left. I noticed that my dad had tears in his eyes when he turned to get back into the passenger's side of the front seat. This was something that I remember because it wasn't like my dad to show emotion. He tried to hide it, but I got a glimpse of his eyes as he turned away. No doubt, he had empathy for the situation because of his service in World War II.

My mother gave me her Bible to take with me. I returned it to her some years later, but she gave it back to me. I still have it, of course.

Bill and I would repeatedly ask each other, in a very slow monotone, "What in the Hell are we doing here?" the entire trip to Viet-Nam.

I took out some life insurance for the flight to Oakland, CA at a vending machine near our gate. I thought that I would leave something if the flight did not make it. Thank goodness, it was not needed!

While Bill and I were awaiting our flight to California, "Dada" (H. Nathan Roberts, my maternal grandfather) and Bonnie arrived at the airport. Dada didn't say, but he was not about to let me leave without holding on as long as possible. He kept his composure well, and we had a nice visit. I think they left prior to the flight leaving. Dada was a wonderful man and grandfather. He was the glue that held our family tight. He passed away on the Saturday before Easter, in April 1985, at the age of 86.



Ed and Don McCain (December 1970) I was on leave prior to going to Viet-Nam.



Ed McCain and Bill Russell the morning we left for Viet-Nam, in January 1971.



Ed and Bill in December 2002. We had taken our wives on a cruise.

Bill and I, along with a few others headed for Nam, stayed at the Holiday Inn near the San Francisco airport that night. We went to the lounge and everyone was buying us drinks. We had several backed up waiting for us. We could not (nor should we have) drink them all. There was a band in the lounge, and when they took a break, Bill took

over, with some assistance from the rest of us. The crowd loved it, and Bill couldn't help himself, he had to entertain.

The next day, we made the rest of the journey to Oakland Air Force Base and awaited our flight. The flight did not leave until just after dark, so all but the last couple of hours of the twenty-some-odd hour trip were in the dark, since we were flying west. We flew to Anchorage, Alaska, Tokyo, Japan, then on to Viet-Nam's Bien Hoa air base. I was sitting next to the window, on the left side of the plane when facing the front, about one-fourth of the way back. I believe that I was just in front of the wing. Bill was sitting next to me. Anyway, I spent the entire trip looking out the window, trying to determine where we were or wondering what my assignment would be upon arrival in Viet-Nam.



Don & Sue McCain (August 1970)



Dad (Donald McCain) in 1972



Mom & Dad (1944) – Dad soon shipped out (US Navy – Pacific)

Arrival in Viet Nam (January – October 1971):

We, finally, had some daylight during the last couple of hours of our flight. We were flying at high altitude, but I could see the countryside, below. When we arrived at our destination, Bien Hoa Air Force Base, we circled at high altitude for a short while. I was looking below and seeing puffs of smoke scattered around. I watched these for a few moments and then realized they were explosions! I pointed them out to Bill, and we looked at each other and said, “We are going down there?!?” The plane made a steep descent in a quick approach to the landing strip. It landed; a soldier boarded the plane and gave us some very quick instructions about debarking the plane quickly, where to go once off the plane, and what to do in case of mortar attack. We listened in somewhat of a daze of disbelief that it was real.

We spent that day (possibly two) at Bien Hoa awaiting instructions on what to do next. We slept in barracks bunks with mosquito netting. Unfortunately, some of the mosquitoes would find their way in or would be trapped inside with you when you closed the netting. I spent the night(s) trying to keep the little blood suckers away from me. I can still hear their little high pitched buzzing in my ears. I pulled my sheet over my head, but it was a lost cause. Our first morning, everyone had swollen faces from the bites. Some of the guys’ eyes were swollen shut. I have another mosquito story from a mission in the Delta that I will mention later. We all took quinine tablets regularly to avoid malaria.

The new guys just arriving in “the Nam” were mixed in with the old guys waiting there for their flights out. This was a very unpleasant experience for the new arrivals because the guys leaving cut them no slack whatsoever! Some pretty terrible things were said to the new guys. It certainly did not help morale! One of the many things was that the guys who had been in country for a while (referred to as “short”, since they had a short amount of time remaining) liked to ask obviously new guys (they could tell by the fresh jungle fatigues) how much time they had remaining. Then they would say sarcastic things and relate that they only had so many weeks, days, or hours before leaving. Rather than prey on the downtrodden, I devised a plan for my days of being “short” to enable me to get back at some of those who enjoyed this cruel game. I saved one of the five sets of jungle fatigues that I was issued for this purpose. More on this later...

Being an old country boy, I was used to “outhouses”. In fact, one house in which we lived on our old farm in Jackson County, TN only had an outhouse for a restroom. Anyway, Bien Hoa had the largest outhouse I had ever seen or imagined. It must have been a fifteen-holer, at least! They were all lined up, without any partitions, in one large open-room outhouse.

We were moved to another barracks on some base for a day or two and then to a BOQ (Bachelor Officer Quarters – this is what any quarters for officers without their wives were called) in Saigon for our next location. We stayed there a couple of days or so

awaiting assignments. While there, we were taken to the Combined Intelligence Center – Vietnam (CICV) to be assigned. I was assigned to the Ground Order of Battle (GOB) branch of CICV as “Chief, Guerrilla/Recruitment Team”, and Bill Russell was assigned to MACV Headquarters as a “Talking Dog” or Briefer. He read some of the daily briefs to General Abrams and other top generals and dignitaries in “The Tank” (a highly secure conference room in the MACV HQ building. Bill took me in there to show me the area during one of my visits with him. Over a period of three or four years, Bill wrote a book on his experiences as a “Talking Dog”; however, he has not investigated publication, yet, even though it has been ready for a couple of years, now.) We were, both, assigned to the 525 Military Intelligence Group, 519th Military Intelligence Battalion, and 45th MI Company.

Combined Intelligence Center – Vietnam (CICV):

My job, at CICV, was to keep track of Viet Cong (VC) guerrilla activities and strength all over the country of South Vietnam (tracked activity, strength, and recruitment). Quite a daunting task, wouldn't you agree?!? There was a program, called Operation “Big MACK”, we used in an attempt to get regular reports from the MACV and Phung Hoang (Phoenix) Advisors in the field on VC activities and numbers from all the different areas of the country. I would review these reports and check further into areas where a lot of activity was reported or where the numbers seemed to be building. This would require me to go out to collect more detailed information to assist in determining what may be going on with the VC. My job was to collect information and return with it. I was not to make contact with or engage the enemy. I was not set up for this type of an operation. I was told that my position was actually a Major's slot, but there was a shortage of personnel with my MOS. I thought that was, most likely, just bull, but it was verified by the GOB Operations Officer, Major Dwight T. DeVoss, in 2007 during one of many conversations I had with him after we got back in touch in November 2006.

I will relate several brief stories as I tell about this phase of my military life in order to give a flavor of my Viet-Nam experience. I want to point out that I was very fortunate and the good Lord watched after me for whatever reason, as he had done with my father (WWII) and his father (WWI) before him. Compared to many, I had it very easy and was truly blessed. I was never caught in a situation where I had to attempt to shoot my way out. Had I been, I would, most likely, not be here to write this document. As I stated, above, attacking the enemy, directly, was not my job, and I did not have the firepower to do so, since I only carried a .45 pistol and, on occasion, an M-16.

CICV had a computer and computer operators. Of course, in those days, the machine took up a room at CICV, and it did not have the power of the desktop PC I am using to write this document (original writing is April – June 2003). As I mentioned, above, one of my responsibilities was collecting information on Viet Cong strength and recruitment activities. These were very detailed data estimated by province, district, village, hamlet, all over South Vietnam. I had to provide that information, via a large computer printout each month (footnote #3), to five locations (MACV HQ, Army HQ in Hawaii, the

Pentagon, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, and another location). The VC strength (total number in South Vietnam) information was something that interested the news media, and the major networks reported it regularly, including body counts, etc. No doubt, the Pentagon released this info to the news media. I know that I did not! I don't suppose that my family knew that the information they were hearing on the news was coming directly from me! It seems that I told some of them after my return, while watching the news and seeing this information reported. The accuracy of these numbers was greatly suspect! If you can imagine pulling all of this together on a monthly basis, you could understand that reliability of sources would vary, even with our MACV advisors in the field. The vast majority of the data were guesses, albeit educated guesses in most cases. However, it was obvious when VC activity was on the increase, and that was one of the things that activated my jaunts into the field or other locations. ("Big MAC" or "Big MACK" program)

I was the CICV, GOB (Ground Order of Battle) "gofer" when collecting more information was necessary. Major DeVoss, the Operations Officer and often acting Chief of the GOB Branch of CICV, used me as a "Projects Officer" quite often, in addition to my regular assignment as Chief, Guerrilla/Recruitment Team. Many times, I traveled alone, but I often took one person with me. On occasion, up to four of us would go out. When additional support was desired, I would ask for volunteers from within GOB, since due to the cut-back in personnel, I actually had no "team". Surprisingly, there were those bored enough with being stuck in CICV that they were anxious to get out into the field. Specialist 5th Class (Spec 5) Ron Chambers went with me on several occasions, just the two of us. He was from West Virginia. He is a story all by himself, but I will not get into that! At times, I would have him remove his rank insignia and travel with me with only the U.S. collar insignia on his jungle fatigues where his rank should have been. When we were out in the field with a unit, it would sometimes drive the old NCOs (non-commissioned officers – different levels of sergeants) nuts not knowing his rank! I remember one master sergeant in particular that worried Ron to death trying to determine his rank. Was it legal for me to have him remove his rank? I am not sure, but we did it, and it worked! I had seen it done, so I had it done, without asking permission.



Spec 5 Chambers (I don't recall where.)

During my first four months or so, I carried my camera whenever I could (35mm SLR Mamiya-Sekor 500DTL); however, that soon became a real pain to do, so I stopped. That severely limited the pictures, but I had taken several pretty good shots up to that time. I will include very few in this document. A couple of countryside shots are shown, below. I took these while traveling to different destinations to gather information on VC guerilla activities or recruitment. These are from different missions.



I did not wear my intelligence insignia very often while in Viet Nam. Depending upon what I was doing, where I was going, and my mission, I would select a branch insignia to wear. I wore infantry insignia most of the time with the logic that, if I were captured, an infantry lieutenant would, probably, be expected to know the least. I don't know how I expected to explain why I was where I was and possibly having documents of interest in my possession. Thank the good Lord I did not have to explain or try to avoid an explanation. I also recall using Military Police (MP) and, possibly, Signal Corps branch insignias.

I had blanket travel orders that allowed me to travel anywhere in South Vietnam at any time and by any means available. The orders, also, allowed me to travel armed to protect "material affecting the national security". Being in Viet Nam, I would not have considered going anywhere unarmed! I had a .45 Colt 1911 sidearm and an M16 rifle. Depending upon the mission and where I was going, sometimes I only carried my sidearm, especially if I was acting, basically, as a courier. I traveled using many different means to get to my objective. I have used a jeep, helicopter, several varieties of fixed wing aircraft, including propeller and jet. I flew very often with Air America (known affectionately as "CIA Airlines" – see references "1" and "1a" at the end of this document. The author of on-line books about Air America got some information and photos from me for his latest book, "The History of Air America"). Often, I would use my orders to take a seat on an existing flight that would get me closest to where I needed to go. There were a few times when it was just the pilot and me on the aircraft. In these cases, I often rode in the co-pilot's seat. My favorite ride became the Air America Pilatus PC-6C turbo-prop designed for short take-offs and landings. We often landed and took off on short, temporary landing strips made from Marston Matting (steel strips with holes in them that are interlocked to make a quick runway.).

Probably the neatest flight was one evening, when in Da Nang, there were two or three of us, and we "bummed a ride" on an empty Air Force Lear jet that was on its way to Saigon. This was a VIP plane, obviously, but we got on board! There were a couple of airmen on board as stewards, and we were in "tall cotton"! Unfortunately, I didn't enjoy most of the flight due to the cabin pressure causing my head to feel like it was going to literally explode! I sat there holding pressure on my head, with a hand on either side pushing. I am not sure the cause of this cabin pressure issue for me and not others, but I had a similar experience on another flight, but I had a head cold on that occasion. On that trip, I could hear the high pitched sound of air escaping from my left ear, and that would relieve the pressure. Then it would build, again, and repeat the cycle. That did not occur on this flight.

W.E.B. Griffin mentions in his book, Special Ops, that there were very few Lear jets in the U.S. Air Force, and all but two were assigned to special missions squadron in Washington. "The other two were assigned to the four-star generals commanding the U.S. Air Force, Pacific, and the U.S. Air Force, Europe."² I am not sure which of these I was on, but my guess would be the one for the general in command of the Air Force, Pacific. Griffin also notes that, "No one with fewer than three stars would be aboard the

Learjet. Riding in a Learjet was a symbol of power.”² At the time, I thought it was “neat”, but I had no idea what a privilege it was. Apparently, it is a rare Viet-Nam vet who had been given a ride in a Learjet!

One of the least favorable flight “connections” was when Spec. 5 Ron Chambers and I had to catch a mail plane on a secluded and abandoned air strip. We were told by an officer in the unit with which we had made contact on this mission, that a military mail plane was due to drop any mail the soldiers in the unit may have received. Specialist 5th Class Chambers and I made it to the old air strip and waited. (A picture of me standing on the old runway is shown on a page below.) Finally, an hour or so before dark, we spotted the lights on the cargo plane. We were very happy to see it! The plane came in, and while rolling down the runway, a soldier tossed a mail bag out of the cargo door in the back, and Chambers and I ran to the cargo door and climbed in, while the plane was rolling down the runway. The plane took off, and we gave the soldier a brief explanation that we needed a ride. There were several times that we just grabbed whatever transportation we could wherever it was available.

Other than a C130 on which I was riding nearly missing the runway on a landing, an Air America pilot trying to scare me or make me sick while riding “co-pilot”, and another flight on an 8-10 passenger fixed-wing, twin-engine propeller plane when we flew straight through a thunderstorm (my scariest fixed wing flight), probably the most scary flight situation was riding in a fully loaded huey chopper, when I had to jump in and ride on the floor. I had no seat or safety strap and the chopper was flying very high to avoid small arms fire. Both side doors were open, and I was sitting on the metal floor. The chopper made a couple of banking maneuvers which caused me to slide toward the open door while trying to hang on to all of my gear, including my classified materials black leather bag. I was able to hang on to everything as I tried to dig my fingernails into the metal deck of the helicopter while looking down at the long drop to the ground. That was very nerve wracking, but I made it! I didn’t know the guys with whom I was flying, and no one offered me a hand...



The helicopter I nearly slid out of...



The front entrance to the CICV building, once you entered the fenced compound. (no windows)



← I was preparing to go on one of my "trips". This was taken in the CICV compound. It was early in my tour. I can tell by the nice, shiny, fatigues...

I was promoted to 1st Lieutenant while serving in Viet-Nam. The Marine Colonel in charge of CICV conducted the fairly informal ceremony in his office and pinned on the silver (actually black - camouflaged) bar to replace the gold (subdued tone for camouflage) bar of the 2nd Lt.

The next story I will document is somewhat embarrassing and shows how inexperience could be costly. I think it was one of my early missions to collect information. I had identified a couple of areas where VC activity and numbers seemed to be on the rise. I discussed the two areas with my superior officer (in this case an Army major, later it was a Marine major), and he insisted that I go check out one area, even though the other seemed more critical. In addition to the area I had selected seeming to be more critical, I was able to locate some form of air travel to the area. I could not find any aircraft (helicopter or fixed wing, military or Air America) available to take me to the area he preferred. For some reason, the major (Major Dwight DeVoss) continued to insist that I go to his selected area. This required that I set up a plan for cross-country ground travel to the area in question.

No one assisted me with the plan, not even the major. This was my first cross-country ground mission, but I thought through what I could envision we may need. I got three volunteers to travel with me, I determined what weapons may be needed, should we run into an issue, and procured them, got the necessary map and compass, signed out the radio (PRC25, I think?), picked up a case of C-rations, arranged for a jeep, etc. (The Lt. in charge of supply was a hide in his hole, do-nothing jerk and made it difficult to check out the necessary supplies for the mission. That is another story that I will skip.) Upon checking the sit map (situation map) in the area of CICV that kept watch on the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) units in country, I could readily see that we would be going through areas that were thought to be controlled by the NVA. There were several NVA units of significant size indicated to be in the area; however, we had our orders and left

for our destination! I rode "shotgun" and navigated, using the map and compass. We would take any road (dirt) or trail that led us in the direction of our goal. At one point, we stopped at an artillery fire base out in the boonies to ask them about anything going on in the area. They could not believe we were out there driving around in a jeep! We continued on our journey until we made it to our destination. It was a trip of some 120 miles or so, one-way. Not a long trip on our local highways in the states, but it was quite a journey over there, especially over the terrain and roads we traveled! Not to mention going through areas considered enemy territory. No doubt, the NVA and/or VC watched us on portions of the trip and couldn't believe we were there. It is possible that the only thing that saved us was the enemy watching to see whether anything was coming up behind us.

On this journey, our jeep battery overheated (under my seat), but I was able to use some of my canteen water to get it back in shape. (What happened to Motor Pool maintenance? Maybe I should have checked the battery, but I should not have had to, since this is expected of maintenance.) However, the embarrassing thing referred to earlier is that I did not check out the radio prior to setting out on the mission! While somewhere out in the middle of nowhere, I discovered that the antenna did not fit the radio! (The supply jerk struck, again! Maybe I should have taken care of him upon my return, but I know that the radio should have been checked before leaving, and that was my responsibility. I just did not think to do it!)

Upon arrival at our destination, we reported to the Lt. Col. in charge of the unit with which we made contact. He could not believe we were there and had driven through the territory we just came through! He worked on me a little, but he chewed my "boss" out pretty good over sending us out there like that. The worst thing about this is that we had to get back! Normally, you do not return from a ground mission using the same route you went out, to avoid an ambush, etc., but we had no choice.

One nice part of the trip is that I got to stay in guest quarters of the nice, old French farmhouse the LTC was using as his headquarters. I and my team were, also, able to share breakfast with him, cooked by a middle-aged Vietnamese couple working for him!

We got our information on the VC and headed back to CICV. On the way out of the unit's HQ, a radio like ours was spotted sitting in the corner of a room. One of my guys relieved the LTC of his antenna and left ours with that radio. They had plenty of radios, so it should not have been an issue for them. Anyway, who wanted to tell this guy about us being out there without a radio and explain how that happened? Not me!

Believe it or not, I have left out some details for the sake of brevity. I did promise another mosquito story, so here it is:

The mosquito story occurred on an information gathering mission in the delta (southern portion of South Vietnam). This is a low and wet area where a lot of rivers and streams flow. I visited the area around Can Tho, a city in the delta. I found a place to sleep that was a shell of an old building, without doors or windows. I was tired and alone, and I

arranged a makeshift bed, took off my jungle fatigue jacket, and went off to quite a deep sleep. When I awoke the next morning, I discovered that the mosquitoes had feasted upon me! Just for the sake of curiosity, I counted the bites on my left arm, and there were sixty-three (63)! This was just on my left arm! I was miserable and had a difficult time sleeping for the next week or so.

On another mission, there were four of us driving quickly over a dirt road (about 50 mph) and bouncing around. I think this was in the vicinity of Ham Tan, but I am not sure, now. The reason for our quick movement was that there was VC activity in the area. The road we were on had been mined and a truck had hit one the day before. With VC in the area, we were not wasting any time. If we were ambushed, we wanted to push through it quickly, since we did not have the fire power to stop and shoot it out. While moving along, gun shots were heard from the tree line to our left, and a grenade went off, but we kept rolling! On down the road we were all checking ourselves for holes and blood. Fortunately, there were neither!

Okay, here is a weird little event that just came to mind. Three or four of us were walking along, and something fell (or jumped?) from a tree and hit me on the right shoulder and chest area with quite a thud! It fell to the ground near me, and when I looked down, somewhat startled, I called out to the others and said, "Hey guys, look at this!" It was some form of reptile with which I was not familiar. It looked like a miniature "Godzilla"! It jumped up on its rear feet and stood with its smaller front feet sticking out. It stood between eighteen and twenty-four inches tall and, with its tail, it must have been near three feet long, if stretched out. It ran off on its rear legs, and I was very happy that it had not clung to me when it hit me. I might have killed myself trying to get it off!



Ed on an intelligence gathering mission near Cao Lanh. Spec 5 Chambers was with me on this mission.



Ed near CICV (notice the infantry insignia) This was our first Khaki Sunday.

On one of my ventures, it was my Army Major CO (Commanding Officer), Dwight T. DeVoss, and me. We actually stayed in a small hotel in a residential neighborhood of Nha Trang. He had been to the area before, but it was very risky not to find an American unit in the area and stay at their base. I slept with my .45 under my pillow. I did, however, get bored just before bed time while the Major was in his room (This was not is first tour in Viet-Nam.). I had been offered "company" by the owner of the hotel, but I turned down the offer. I decided to see what was in the area and walk down the tree lined street of the neighborhood to the ocean. I thought I might find a beer (Ba-Muoi-Ba). It was only a few blocks to the ocean. This was dumb, but I was young. Walking down the dark street, I could hear children yelling to their parents, "Nguoi My, Nguoi My" ("American, American" – I could not type in the accent marks.). I just stood and walked straight, looking straight ahead and did not stop or say a word. It was dark, and I was very alert and cautious. Of course, there were no Americans anywhere near. I made it to the ocean and stood there and watched the waves. While there, I was approached by several off-duty ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) soldiers who seemed a bit drunk. They were, apparently, on leave, but you never know. We talked, as best I could, and went to a bar for a few drinks. The sergeant wanted to give me his jungle hat for my cap, but I declined. I wish I had done it, now. After a while, I thought I had better move on. You never knew who to trust, so you didn't trust anyone. I could have easily disappeared that night. Anyway, I carefully and politely left their company and returned to my hotel room.

Dwight T. DeVoss was from Pratt (and Pratt County), Kansas. I knew he was from Kansas, but I used Google to search and find him in November 2006. I talked with him, for the first time in a little over 35 years, on 20 November 2006! He remembered me immediately and said, "We went right through Viet Cong territory!" – he was talking about one of the missions we went on – and I added that the CICV sit map (situation map) also indicated NVA units in the area! We traveled together on at least five missions. Three of those, it was only the two of us. Once, we visited a base which had been overrun by the VC the day before. Anyway, he ended up serving three tours in Viet Nam. 1971 was his second, and it was an eighteen month tour, and he served one after that. He has two daughters, two sons, and four grandchildren. The Major, OB Operations Officer, often ran the GOB Branch due to the frequent absence (on assignment) of Marine LTC Bob Darron, Chief of the Branch. LTC Darron spent some time at the Paris Peace Talks, and he was involved in the Lam Son 719 Operation, which was an attempt at the Vietnamization of the war. LTC Darron won the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) while participating in combat versus an NVA tank from a Huey. It is quite unusual for a Marine in a Huey to win this award; however, it took a couple of years or more for the medal to be approved, so I have been told.

As junior officers (2nd or 1st Lieutenants), we had to pull security duty at our quarters (BOQs) on a rotation basis. This meant that we were in charge of ensuring that security was maintained during the night, while everyone else slept. We would carry a sidearm and make sure the guards stayed alert, even the contracted South Vietnamese guard at the entrance to our BOQ grounds. From time to time, some incident would happen. It could be a drive-by shooting (on a motorcycle) or grenade being tossed, etc. One night, in one

of the other BOQ buildings, the Lt. in charge got a drink of water from the potable bottled water in the lobby of the BOQ and it exploded. Whomever delivered the water or someone else thought to be a South Vietnamese “friendly”, had booby-trapped the bottle of water. The young Lt. walked around bloody and in shock for a period of time, but he did not make it.

I, also, had to pull the same security duty at CICV. I would, occasionally, check the outside guard posts. I could, sometimes, smell marijuana, so I would make sure the guards knew it was me coming around in the dark. It was extremely stupid for them to make easy targets of themselves drawing on a cigarette or joint in the pitch black dark. The end of the cigarette would get bright red and was a great sighting point for a sniper or anyone interested in shooting them.

Drugs were definitely an issue in Viet-Nam. There was lots of marijuana, but there were other, much stronger, drugs as well. In the MACV Headquarters building restroom, there was a young enlisted man found in one of the stalls dead. His syringe, rubber hose, and other paraphernalia were on the floor next to him.

It was truly amazing to see an entire family of five riding on a small Honda 50 motorcycle, but it was not an unusual sight!



27 May 1971, cleaning my M-16 rifle, in the CICV office, after a mission



Lounging around my BOQ room during the first two or three months in Viet-Nam

One night, I was sleeping peacefully and began to hear a screaming sound. At this time, I had a room to myself in the BOQ. The rooms were not air conditioned, of course, so I had a window open. It was such an eerie sound that I could not sleep. It sounded like a young woman screaming, so I had to investigate. I took my .45 and began to sneak around in the dark toward the direction from where the screaming was coming. It was within our BOQ compound, and there were supposed to be guards on duty, but I saw no one. To shorten the story, it turned out to be a stray cat! I had never heard a cat sound like that. Cathy accuses me of being paranoid, but I am not nearly as jumpy or "nervous" as I used to be. Anyway, I live by the adage of "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean that they are not out to get you!"

Another evening, I was sitting in my BOQ and there was a quiet tapping at my door. I cautiously investigated and found a DLI (Language school) classmate (a sergeant) there. He very quickly told me to meet him at some secluded location at a certain time later that night, and then he left. I had seen him somewhere with a group of people in civilian clothes a day or two before. We walked past each other, and he did not look at me, and I did not speak to him. You never knew, for sure, what may be going on. Anyway, when we met, all he said was that it was good to see me, but I did not know him, and he was not in the Army. I saw him several times after that, but I never acknowledged him, of course, and just walked past as if I did not know him. I never found out what he was doing.

Another strange little incident happened one night when I came in from a mission to my BOQ. I was tired and carrying some of my gear while walking toward my room. There was a courtyard in this old French hotel building we were using as a BOQ (in the Cho

Lon area of Saigon – I later moved to another BOQ closer to CICV.), and movies were shown on a wall, at night, on occasion. One was being shown that night, and I looked over at the wall to see what was showing as I was walking through, and there was the Gainesboro, TN court house! I stopped in my tracks in amazement. I went over and sat down, somewhat stunned to see my hometown courthouse and downtown square. The movie turned out to be “I Walk the Line”, starring Gregory Peck. That was a weird experience!

I was told that I had a price on my head, as did most any of us at CICV, I suppose. I never saw any evidence of it, but I think those at CICV knew what they were talking about. It was very easy to have someone hit, I was also told. It was supposedly possible to have someone (a “nobody”) killed for as little as \$20, and I have no reason to doubt it, especially if it was \$20 in U.S. money.

I had a couple of occasions to visit the U.S. Embassy, in Saigon. I was delivering information of some sort. I, also, have been past the Vietnamese Presidential Palace a few times, but I never went into that building. These buildings are important due to images of the fall of South Viet-Nam of which the reader may be familiar.

I took my five-day R&R (Rest and Relaxation) in August and met Vicky in Honolulu, Hawaii. To my surprise, my mom made the trip with Vicky. She stayed at another hotel and had a tour package. Vicky and I stayed in the Holiday Inn on Waikiki Beach. We got with mom several times over the five days, however. It was really strange seeing traffic lights and normal “civilization”. I recall ducking at the sound of a truck backfiring, but I did this for several years after coming home.

One odd situation that occurred was that, prior to leaving Viet Nam, I saw the write-up for me to receive the Joint Service Commendation Medal. It was written by the Marine Major to whom I reported at the time, I think. Since I left early, due to cut-backs in U.S. military operations, I expected that the medal would be sent to me, but it never came. I don’t understand what happened or why, but it was disappointing. I wrote a letter to Army records several years later (1984), but there was no record of the award. In the scheme of things, however, this was very minor. (See attached “Addendum”!)

It is pretty cool that I, only recently, found a web site about specific, individual Air America aircraft and located this one. I know from the identification numbers on the side of the plane. It had been crashed in 1966 and rebuilt prior to my flying in it, and it was left on the runway at Tan Son Nhut airbase when the NVA rolled into town in 1975. Dr. Joe Leeker, author of this info, plans to quote me and use some of my photos in his Air America in Viet Nam section he is currently working on. (See footnote reference “1a”)



Ann Marie McCoin,
14 months old (Feb. 1971)



My favorite plane (Pilatus PC-6) in which to fly to remote locations - It is an Air America plane and was designed for short take offs and landings. It was built in Switzerland.

I did a lot of praying when heading out on my missions and various trips. Unfortunately, I am ashamed to admit, I did not read Mom's Bible. I picked it up, once, and flipped through it, but I did not read it. I knew that I should, but I did not. Thank the Lord for His grace!!!

Leaving Viet Nam and Returning Home:

I kept several calendars where I marked off the days until I left Viet Nam. I saved the primary one and brought it home. I was there from January until late October 1971.

I mentioned, earlier, about saving a crisp, clean, new set of jungle fatigues for the purpose of getting back at those who liked to give the new guys a hard time. When I was down to a couple of weeks until leaving country, I brought out the new fatigues! I wanted to make sure that I was shorter than some jerk who might ask how much time I had remaining. It worked! I had several of these numbskulls ask, and you should have seen their faces when I told them and asked how much time they had! It was great!! Some of these guys would start this non-sense when they still had two or three months or more remaining in-country, and when I would say something like, "10 days, how about you?", it was a tremendous feeling to see their jaws drop! Ha!

Due to the cutback of American troops in Viet-Nam, I was returned home a couple of months early. This was very welcome! I had been given another opportunity to extend my active duty with the Army a few weeks before I left Viet Nam, and I may have done it, but I was afraid that I would have ended up there, again, since they were short on people with my MOS (9301, Combat Intelligence). I was told that I could have Counter Intelligence and that I would be a captain in six months, but I decided that I should go home and not risk being sent back to Viet-Nam. I have wondered, on many occasions, how things would have turned out had I stayed in the military. I was in the line of work

that interested me, and it may have been fine, but I am happy with where I am, now, so I am glad that I made the decision that I did.

When I left Viet Nam, I flew from Bien Hoa to Tokyo, Guam, Hawaii, Anchorage, and New Jersey. I processed out of the Army at Fort Dix, NJ in late October 1971.

When our plane left the ground at Bien Hoa, there was a cheer that went up, but I did not cheer, yet. I sat back, unlike the trip coming, and slept almost the entire trip home.

I had an old captured VC French-made rifle, but I was told that I would have to hand-carry it on the plane, so I decided not to bring it home. It was a "war trophy", but it wasn't much of a rifle, so not much was lost.

When our plane arrived in New Jersey, I noticed emergency vehicles lining the runway and wondered what was going on. As it turned out, an engine had quit somewhere between Alaska and New Jersey. We were not told, and it is just as well!

After completing my out-processing at Ft. Dix, I made arrangements to fly from Philadelphia to Nashville. I took a taxi to the Philadelphia airport. I planned to surprise everyone by just showing up at Don and Sue's doorstep, but I started thinking that someone needed to know that I was coming, just in case there was a need to contact me or my flight did not make it to Nashville. I started trying to contact someone, but I couldn't find anyone at home! This got me a little concerned, but I finally got in touch. My surprise was gone, except for Vicky.

Mom, Dad, Mary (my sister) and, possibly, Don and Sue (I don't recall.) met me at the old Nashville Airport. One of dad's first comments was about my hair being a little long. He smiled when he said it. It didn't bother me, and he did not make a big issue of it, either. I think mom jumped him about it, though. Things were back to normal! (Ha!)

I made my way to Buffalo Valley, after calling Vicky to let her know that I was on my way from Nashville. I arrived that night, around 10:00, I think, and Vicky and her mother were waiting on me. Ann Marie was already in the bed and asleep. Vicky's dad must have already been in bed, too. When Ann Marie woke up the next morning, she looked over from her baby bed and told her mom, "Shh, boy asleep!" Vicky told me about this, since I was asleep and did not hear it. It took some time for Ann Marie to understand who I was and that I was real and not just a picture.

Looking for employment was quite an interesting experience. Unemployment was up and the economy was not the best, so employers who had jobs available wanted experience. Of course, my only experience, excluding summer and part-time work, was the military. Unfortunately, being in the military and, especially, just being back from Viet-Nam was detrimental to me being able to find employment. I recall one interview, in particular, that seemed to be going well. The Personnel Manager was very pleasant, and we were having good conversation and all, but when he discovered that I had just returned from Vietnam, his expression, attitude, demeanor, and conversation changed. It

was like you had thrown cold water on him. The interview was brought to an abrupt halt, and I was shuffled out the door very soon afterwards.

Vicky and I were divorced in 1972. I met Catherine Lane Tye Belt in 1973, and Cathy and I were married on 20 April 1974. We already had one child, each, Ann Marie (born 13 December 1969) and Lauren Patricia Belt (born 17 August 1972), and we added two children of our own, Carrie Lane (born 6 August 1976) and Clay Donald (born 8 March 1979).

Ann Marie and Robert Gregory (Greg) Vinson were married and lived in Cookeville, TN, but they were divorced in about 2006 or 2007. They have two sons, Gregory Alexander (Alex) Vinson, born 19 September 1998, and Luke Sullivan Vinson, born 16 July 2003.

Lauren is married to Jon Kirkland Rucker. Jon is in the Air Force, and they tend to move around! They have lived in Phoenix, Texas, Virginia, and Ohio thus far. Jon was promoted to Major on 1 September 2005. They have one son, Jon William Rucker, born 5 February 2003.

Carrie was married to Nathan Horst Davis the Saturday after her graduation from TN Tech University, 16 May 1998. They live near Charlotte, NC, in Cornelius. They spent their first two or three years of marriage in Tucson, AZ. They have two daughters, Mazie Lane, who was born 23 December 2003, and Zoie Catherine was born 27 February 2006.

Clay lives in Birmingham, AL where he attended Samford University after graduating from Cookeville High School in 1997.



Catherine and Ed McCain, in December 1975, dressed for a Christmas Ball.
(That is a shadow behind my head, not hair!)



Cathy and Ed McCain at dinner on the cruise when we were with Lynn and Bill Russell (Dec 2002)



The family, including Cathy's mother, Gladys Randall Tye, in December 2001 – In back: Lauren & Jon (at the top of the stairs), Carrie & Nathan, & Clay; in front: Greg, Ann Marie, Alex, Gladys, Cathy & Ed

The experiences you share with your military buddies are something that develops the closest of relationships. This closeness never seems to fade, even with time. Cathy and I met Lynn and Bill Russell last December (2002) on a southern Caribbean cruise, and even after all the years that have passed, it was like we were back together after a much shorter period of time. Our outer appearances had changed with age, but inside we are the same guys, with a more mature attitude and understanding of things, including what is really important in life. We both have grown closer to our Lord and Savior, and we

know, first hand, that life is really short on this earth. We, also, understand that there is something better awaiting us!

An interesting and surprising fact discovered in 2005 is that Bill Russell and I have a common set of GGGG grandparents (Ingrams)!

I must end this documentation of the military phase of my life. I keep thinking of little stories, but there are enough included to give an idea of what went on. I didn't really mean to write a book!

Ed McCoin

References noted:

1. Griffin, W.E.B., Special Ops, G.P. Putnam's Sons, NY, 2001, page 19
 - 1a. Possibly interesting reference to me in one of Dr. Joe F. Leeker's on-line books, "The History of Air America", "Air America in South Vietnam II – from Vietnamization to the end, 1969 – 1975", pp. 19 – 24, The web site is:
<http://www.utdallas.edu/library/collections/speccoll/Leeker/history/index.html>
2. Griffin, W.E.B., Special Ops, page 212
3. Herrington, Stuart A., Stalking the Viet Cong, Presidio Press, pp 16 & 255, talks about related data collection with the Hamlet Evaluation System

ADDENDUM

This update is being added to discuss the Joint Service Commendation Medal that was mentioned, above. I decided that, if this issue was to ever be corrected, it would be up to me to work on it. Unfortunately, I had not been able to remember but one person's first and last name in my unit's command, and I had no idea how to locate him. Prior internet searches had been fruitless. I remembered him as Major Dwight DeVoss, and I recall him stating that he was from Kansas. He was the Operations Officer, Order of Battle Branch, CICV, and you know about him, if you have read this document.

My friend, Bill Russell, has been encouraging me to pursue avenues to correct the JSCM situation, and he asked me for Major DeVoss' name. In mid-November 2006, Bill found a "Dwight T. DeVoss, Sr." who was buried in a Pratt County, Kansas cemetery in 1965.

It was interesting enough that I searched and found the Pratt County, KS web site on the internet. From there, I decided to e-mail the Sheriff and ask him to look in the local telephone directory for a "Dwight DeVoss". I explained that we were in Viet Nam together and wanted to contact him. The following day, I had an e-mail from Sheriff Vernon Chen providing a telephone number! It turned out that the Sheriff was, also, a Viet Nam vet, and he took a personal interest in the situation.

I called the number, and I recognized the Major's voice! We talked for some time, and I found out that his health was poor, and he was on oxygen 24 hours per day. We had a great conversation, and it was a blessing and pleasure to speak with him once again! Toward the end of the conversation, I related my story about seeing the paperwork but never receiving the JSCM for my service in Viet Nam. He took a special interest in the situation, and we started making contacts to discover what to do, after some 35+ years!

I contacted the local office of my U.S. Representative in Congress, Bart Gordon. I sent in a package of information and a request for a thorough records search in St. Louis and anywhere else there may be appropriate unit files stored. St. Louis, again, had no luck finding a record of the JSCM of any sort in my file there. In the mean time, it was also determined what would be necessary to begin a retroactive action recommending that I receive the JSCM award at the Major's suggestion. The key to this was Major Dwight DeVoss, who witnessed my service in Viet Nam. A DA Form 638, Recommendation for Award, and Letter of Recommendation would be necessary from Dwight. Dwight worked on this as he felt like doing so. In addition, he called me one evening in late January 2007 and told me that he had discussed the situation with Marine LTC Robert Darron, CICV OB Branch Chief for most of my tour, and the LTC said he would sign off on the action, too! This was, also, an important key in getting the Pentagon's attention, especially since you must be assigned to a Joint Command to be eligible to receive the award.

As of 12 March 2007, I am awaiting the completed and signed DA 638 (a WORD document has been okayed, since the form requires use of a typewriter), with Letter of Recommendation, from Dwight DeVoss. The Major called me, today, and said that he is near completion of the paperwork and wants to add a cover letter. When that is completed, he will print off the documents, sign them and send them to LTC Robert Darron for his input.

I was greatly flattered and humbled when Major DeVoss told me, after me stating that I was a little surprised that he remembers me after all these years, that "I remember the exceptional ones!" I laughed and said that could go either direction, depending upon to which end of the spectrum you refer! He laughed and said that he meant it in a positive manner and as a compliment. In another conversation at a later date, he stated that he was not in my rating chain of command, but if he had been rating me, I would have been in the top ten percent! He said that he plans to make that statement in his cover letter.

On 20 March 2007, Dwight DeVoss called me to let me know that he is ready to send the packet, with cover letter, to Marine LTC Robert R. Darron for his input and signature.

When it is returned to him, Major DeVoss will send the packet to me and/or Pete McGuire, of the Pentagon Joint Awards Section.

As of 3 April 2007, Pete McGuire, of the Pentagon, received a fax of the completed package and the original was mailed via Express Mail. I talked to Pete on 4 April, and he was very favorable with his comments about the possibilities of the award being approved in a couple of weeks. It must go through a number of people, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Pete McGuire called me on Friday afternoon, 20 April 2007, to notify me that the award of the JSCM to me had been approved! He said the Certificate signature would be secured early next week, and I should receive the medal by the end of the week!

I contacted Congressman Bart Gordon's office on Monday, 23 April 2007, and was told that he, personally, wants to make the presentation of the award! I contacted the TN Tech University ROTC Department, and the Professor of Military Science wants to have the ceremony at TTU. In order to ensure that Bill Russell can be here, since he told me that he wants to come for the presentation, I have asked all parties to plan for Friday, 11 May 2007. I am awaiting word that Rep. Gordon can make that date work for him.

The presentation of the award was made by the Professor of Military Science of TTU, in a classroom of that Department, on Friday, 11 May 2007! Unfortunately, the Representative had a conflict on that date and could not make the ceremony. It was more important that Bill Russell and Lauren, Jon, and Jon William be present, so I stayed with that day.

As of this update, 13 January 2008, I am staying in close touch with Dwight DeVoss. We have become close, but we have not been able to have a face-to-face visit. His health has not allowed it. He had a very bad night this past Thursday, 10 January 2008, and was carted to the hospital. He is, already, in a Hospice facility in Pratt, Kansas. I talked with him, today, and he seems fine and accepting of his situation. He says we will all meet later (in eternity). I am working on a way to get out there to see him within the next couple of weeks.

Unfortunately, Dwight "Ted" DeVoss passed away on 17 January 2008, before I could arrange a trip to Pratt.

LTC Robert R. Darron is staying in touch with me regularly, via e-mail. Also, Dwight's sister, Vickie, is staying in close touch. Their mother is still living and in her mid-90s.

Some photos taken after the JSCM award ceremony at TTU are shown below.



Alexander, Cathy, JW, Ed, & Luke



Major Dwight T. DeVoss (1971)



Col. Bill Russell, USAR (ret.), Ed, Major Jon Rucker, USAF, & Col. Steve Rausch, USA (ret.)