

**Before and After Vietnam 1969-70**  
**Military Experience**  
**of**  
**Thomas K. Butt**



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## INTRODUCTION

After my father died in May 2000, I found in his files all the letters I had written home to my parents from Vietnam in 1969-70. I thought it would be a worthwhile project to transcribe them as a chronicle of one person's experience in a war that has become a metaphor. Unlike the common perception that Vietnam was all death and danger, I found my one-year tour to be fascinating and professionally engaging.

I arrived in Vietnam at the height of the American commitment in March 1969 when 543,000 U.S. military personnel were spread throughout the country.<sup>1</sup> But it was also the beginning of "Vietnamization," when the U.S. commitment rapidly wound down by order of President Nixon. Although the U.S. presence was rapidly dwindling, the years 1969-1970 saw 14,000 of the nearly 50,000 total U.S. military deaths in Vietnam. This was nearly 20 fatalities a day, compared to the approximately two per day currently experienced in Iraq in mid 2004. Very few of these Vietnam fatalities, however, were Army engineers. The Corps of Engineers is recognized as one of the Army's "combat arms," and the secondary mission of the Army Engineers is to "fight as infantry," but Army engineers in Vietnam were engaged far more in construction and land clearing than actual combat. I came to believe that the Viet Cong knew the country would belong to them some day, so why impede the construction of infrastructure?

My Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) was 1331, "Combat Engineer Unit Commander," but instead of being assigned as a platoon leader (a common assignment for a lieutenant in a combat theater), I was assigned to the operations section of an Engineer Group Headquarters, responsible for directing approximately 6,000 U.S. engineer troops, 3,000 Vietnamese civilian employees and several American road construction contractors. Army organizations are typically organized into four general areas of responsibility: S-1 (administration), S-2 (intelligence), S-3 (operations) and S-4 (logistics). The role of three of these is to support fourth, operations, in order to accomplish the "mission."

The headquarters operations section provided some engineering design as well as overall management and control of the operations of the group components, including acting as a conduit from higher headquarters and other commands needing engineering support.

My official home was a "hootch" and a nearby Quonset hut office at the sprawling Long Binh Post about 25 kilometers outside Saigon, but I had the opportunity to travel often via airplane, helicopter and jeep almost daily to a wide variety of locations throughout the 159<sup>th</sup> Group operations area and some outside the Group area but within the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade area of operations. Flying around Vietnam, we would usually see air strikes visible in the distance and sometimes ongoing combat operations. I can't honestly say that I was ever actually "shot at" in the sense of bullets whizzing by, but our cantonment area at Long Binh was periodically the target of fire from 122 mm rockets. When Long

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 28, The U.S. Army In Vietnam, *Extracted From Revised Edition Of American Military History*, Army Historical Series, *United States Army Center Of Military History*

Binh came under rocket attack, sirens went off, and we were supposed to head for a bunker. After a while, I figured out that the maximum range of the 122 mm rockets nearly always launched from a nearby hill ("Rocket Ridge") was a few hundred feet short of my hootch, typically exploding on impact at the bottom of the hill below our area (fittingly called "Rocket Gulch"), so I stopped going to the bunker.

I spent a lot of time at night in Saigon, traveling the Saigon-Long Binh highway after dark and before dawn, hitchhiking rides with military vehicles. Although it seemed to be relatively safe, the 18-kilometer drive was always interesting, with the sound of small arms fire, mortars and rockets audible in the countryside and the sky always lit up by parachute flares. More than once, I arrived at the main gate of Long Binh in the pre-dawn darkness, finding it closed with the MP's in full defensive mode. "What in the hell are you doing out there?" they would say, "Don't you know we're under attack?"

Even at Long Binh, the sounds of small arms fire and explosions in the distance were frequent throughout the night. Some may have been from actual VC probes and those countering them, but most were probably from nervous or bored soldiers on guard duty. One of the most enduring memories is the periodic sound of B-52s carpet bombing miles away near the Cambodian border. Those who live in California would recognize it as similar to a protracted earthquake.

The latter part of 1969 and early 1970 was a time of almost surreal contrasts. Pitched battles were still occurring, but at the same time America was packing up to go home. The following, from an Army *History of the Vietnam Conflict* characterizes the time:

Since the 1968 *Tet* offensive, the Communists had restocked the A Shau valley with ammunition, rice, and equipment. The logistical build-up pointed to a possible NVA offensive in early 1969. In quick succession, Army operations were launched in the familiar pattern: air assaults, establishment of fire support bases, and exploration of the lowlands and surrounding hills to locate enemy forces and supplies. This time the Army met stiff enemy resistance, especially from antiaircraft guns. The North Vietnamese had expected the American forces and now planned to hold their ground.

On 11 May 1969, a battalion of the 101st Airborne Division climbing Hill 937 found the 28th North Vietnamese Regiment waiting for it. The struggle for "Hamburger Hill" raged for ten days and became one of the war's fiercest and most controversial battles. Entrenched in tiers of fortified bunkers with well-prepared fields of fire, the enemy forces withstood repeated attempts to dislodge them. Supported by intense artillery and air strikes, Americans made a slow, tortuous climb, fighting hand to hand. By the time Hill 937 was taken, three Army battalions and an ARVN regiment had been committed to the battle. Victory, however, was ambiguous as well as costly; the hill itself had no strategic or tactical importance and was abandoned soon after its capture. Critics charged that the battle wasted American lives and exemplified the irrelevance of U.S. tactics in Vietnam. Defending the operation, the commander of the 101st acknowledged that the hill's only significance was that the enemy occupied it. "My mission," he said, "was to destroy enemy forces and installations. We found the enemy on Hill 937, and that is where we fought them."

About one month later the 101st left the A Shau valley, and the North Vietnamese were free to use it again. American plans to return in the summer of 1970 came to nothing



when enemy pressure forced the abandonment of two fire support bases needed for operations there. The loss of Fire Support Base O'REILLY, only eleven miles from Hue, was an ominous sign that enemy forces had reoccupied the A Shau and were seeking to dominate the valleys leading to the coastal plain. Until it redeployed in 1971, the 101st Airborne, with the marines and South Vietnamese forces, now devoted most of its efforts to protecting Hue. The operations against the A Shau had achieved no more than Westmoreland's large search and destroy operations in 1967. As soon as the allies left, the enemy reclaimed his traditional bases.

The futility of such operations was mirrored in events on the coastal plain. Here the 23d Infantry Division fought in an area where the population had long been sympathetic to the Viet Cong. As in other areas, pacification in southern I Corps seemed to improve after the 1968 *Tet* offensive, though enemy units still dominated the Piedmont and continued to challenge American and South Vietnamese forces on the coast. Operations against them proved to be slow, frustrating exercises in warding off NVA and Viet Cong main force units while enduring harassment from local guerrillas and the hostile population. Except during spasms of intense combat, as in the summer of 1969 when the Americal Division confronted the *1st North Vietnamese Regiment*, most U.S. casualties were caused by snipers, mines, and booby traps. Villages populated by old men, women, and children were as dangerous as the elusive enemy main force units. Operating in such conditions day after day induced a climate of fear and hate among the Americans. The already thin line between civilian and combatant was easily blurred and violated. In the hamlet of My Lai, elements of the Americal Division killed about two hundred civilians in the spring of 1968. Although only one member of the division was tried and found guilty of war crimes, the repercussions of the atrocity were felt throughout the Army. However rare, such acts undid the benefit of countless hours of civic action by Army units and individual soldiers and raised unsettling questions about the conduct of the war.

What happened at My Lai could have occurred in any Army unit in Vietnam in the late 1960's and early 1970's. War crimes were born of a sense of frustration that also contributed to a host of morale and discipline problems, among enlisted men and officers alike. As American forces were withdrawn by a government eager to escape the war, the lack of a clear military objective contributed to a weakened sense of mission and a slackening of discipline. The short-timer syndrome, the reluctance to take risks in combat toward the end of a soldier's one-year tour, was compounded by the "last-casualty" syndrome. Knowing that all U.S. troops would soon leave Vietnam, no soldier wanted to be the last to die.

Meanwhile, in the United States harsh criticism of the war, the military, and traditional military values had become widespread. Heightened individualism, growing permissiveness, and a weakening of traditional bonds of authority pervaded American society and affected the Army's rank and file. The Army grappled with problems of drug abuse, racial tensions, weakened discipline, and lapses of leadership. While outright refusals to fight were few in number, incidents of "fragging"—murderous attacks on officers and noncoms—occurred frequently enough to compel commands to institute a host of new security measures within their cantonments. All these problems were symptoms of larger social and political forces and underlined a growing disenchantment with the war among soldiers in the field.<sup>2</sup>

After transcribing my "letters home" I decided that the addition of photos, graphics and additional narrative to fill the gaps would provide a better context for the actual letters.

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 28, *The U.S. Army In Vietnam, Extracted From Revised Edition Of American Military History*, Army Historical Series, *United States Army Center Of Military History*, 681

Finally, I decided to include a summary of my military experiences leading up to Vietnam, including ROTC, the Engineer Officer Basic Course and my assignment to Ft. Polk.

## ROTC

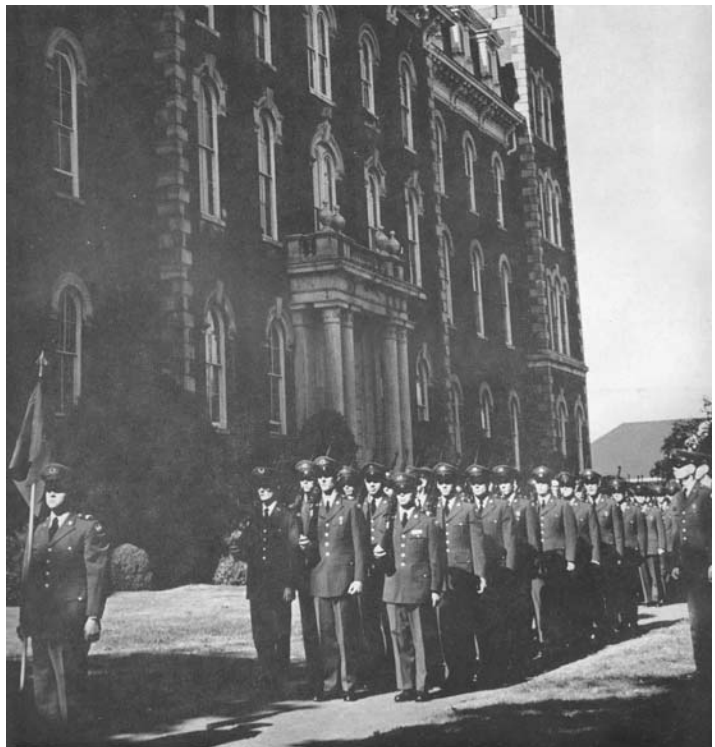
The Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) was established in 1873 at the University of Arkansas, and during the time I attended (1962-67), was compulsory for all males during their freshman and sophomore years. There was one class a week in Military Science and one drill a week in good weather.

I spent the first two compulsory years in Air Force ROTC because it looked more intellectual and perhaps more interesting than Army ROTC. In the fall of 1965, Vietnam was heating up and college students were facing the prospect of the draft. After student deferments ran out, people I knew were actually getting drafted. Some of my contemporaries got married and started families, at least partially to immunize themselves from the draft. Others joined the National Guard or Army Reserve, took basic training during summer vacation, and spent the next few years at monthly weekend drills and annual summer camps.

A number of my contemporaries, including several close friends and me, figured that if we were going to be drafted anyway, we might as well go as officers. Anyway, enrollment in advanced ROTC paid \$27.90 a month for doing the same thing we had done for free during the two years of “basic” ROTC, and we were being told that there was a light at the end of the tunnel” in Vietnam. By the time I finished architecture school in 1967 or 1968, I projected, the war would probably be over, and I would get an interesting assignment in Europe.

Although I had started out in Air Force ROTC, I transferred to Army for the advanced course because the Army required only two years of active duty while the Air Force required five years.

ROTC was a strange experience. For most students, it was a pain in the ass, particularly the weekly drills. You had to keep your uniform clean and pressed and your brass and shoes shined. But for a few, it was serious business. The cadet corps was replete with a military hierarchy of officers and noncoms. They even had pretty, well-endowed girls dressed out in tight fitting uniforms (“Sponsors” for the Army and “Angel Flight” for the Air Force), who walked around during drills to keep the men interested. I always made good grades in the classes, but I had no use for the drills and



Army ROTC cadets drilling in front of Old Main

uniforms, and my lack of enthusiasm resulted in no ranks and no organizational assignments, which suited me fine.

In the summer of 1966, we attended a six-week ROTC Summer Camp at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. It was a combination of conventional basic training and leadership training. We spent a lot of time marching, shooting, running and taking apart and reassembling weapons. It was the first time I had seen armadillos.

After summer camp, I went to Hawaii with a friend, John Backus, where we worked the rest of the summer before returning to school.



In the spring of 1967, I had completed all requirements for two degrees, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Architecture, except for one course in Psychology. I was commissioned a second lieutenant and moved to San Francisco where I completed the final course, formally graduating from the University of Arkansas in January 1968



San Francisco. 1966. We could get free rides on military planes if we were in our ROTC uniforms

## **FORT BELVOIR**

As soon as I formally graduated in January of 1968, my call to active duty came, with orders to report to Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, for the Engineer Officer Basic Course in March of 1968. I quit my job as an aspiring architect at Edward Durrell Stone in Palo Alto, California, and headed for a month's vacation in Europe. I flew to London and traveled through France, Italy, hitchhiking through most of Spain and Portugal, and flying back to the U.S. from Lisbon just in time to report at Ft. Belvoir.

Having been living and working in California for over six months, where war protests had become a major form of entertainment, and having just come back from a month in Europe, I was not enthusiastic about entering military life.

Ft. Belvoir was, however, a choice location, just about an hour south of Washington, DC. I had my own room in a BOQ with maid service, and I was able to go to Washington almost every weekend to stay with friends and act normal.

The Engineer Officer Basic Course was a lot like going back to school. It was a cram course in military engineering, including road building, bridge building, demolition and constructing defensive positions. There was also PT (physical training) every morning, small unit infantry tactics, leadership instruction, hikes, overnight camping and weapons training. I believe there were about a hundred people in my class, all second lieutenants. Many had been in school for years, and a few had PhDs. Some were in poor physical condition and had a lot of trouble with the morning jogs. I always enjoyed shooting, and I was a crack shot, scoring "expert" on every weapon with which I qualified.

Like ROTC, I took to the class work and tested well, finishing in the top 5% of the class academically. I had trouble getting into the military part of it, however, and was rated dead last in a peer evaluation exercise where each person had to rate all other classmates from one to one hundred in "leadership potential."

When assignments were handed out, it seems like most everyone went to an interesting job doing research in some nice place. Perhaps due to my lack of enthusiasm for things military, I was surprised by my next assignment as a basic combat training officer at Ft. Polk, Louisiana.

I purchased a maroon 1965 Mustang convertible for \$500 from Mart Vehik, a friend from Arkansas living in Washington, and headed for Louisiana.

## **FORT POLK**

Ft. Polk was built as a temporary training facility in World War II but instead of being torn down, it had somehow endured. The buildings were all simple wood frame barracks type structures. The only new buildings were the PX (Post Exchange), the Commissary (grocery store) and a couple of training classroom buildings. It was a major Basic

Combat Training facility and also hosted Advanced Individual Training (AIT) for combat infantrymen. That part of the post was known as “Tigerland” and was a last stop before Vietnam.

At Ft. Polk, I was assigned to Company E, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Training Brigade, as one of two training officers. Our company was in charge of training some 120 recruits every six weeks. Our company commander was an infantry captain recovering from a serious leg wound from Vietnam.

My training officer partner, Keith Cannon, a Louisiana native, also became my roommate in a hovel next to a dairy barn near the post. There was almost no housing available, and junior training personnel lived mainly in shacks and trailers. There was modest housing on base for higher ranks. As training officers, we were required to coordinate each day’s training schedule, make sure lesson plans were complete and up to date, and accompany the recruits to various training sites. Sometimes, we acted as instructors for courses like how to drive safely and how to avoid VD. The actual training was by drill instructors, sergeants specially trained for the job, or permanent staff at Ft. Polk.

There was a lot of PT, marching, firing at the rifle ranges, hand-to-hand combat training and classroom work. Much of what went on I had experienced at ROTC summer camp, but there was more of it, and it was more intense. It was also hot as hell and humid. At least one recruit (not in my company) died of heat exhaustion. The standard procedure for treating a recruit suspected of heat stroke was to make a bathtub with a poncho, throw the recruit in it, and fill it with ice water and crushed ice from the large water coolers always carried along on trucks.

We got most weekends off, and I generally went to Dallas, New Orleans or Houston and stayed with friends to break the tedium.



2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Tom Butt in front of headquarters, Company E, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Basic Combat Training Brigade, Ft, Polk, Louisiana, 1968

After Keith, my roommate and fellow training officer, went to Vietnam, I moved in with another lieutenant, Larry Taylor, in a little nicer apartment in Leesville. Larry was a first lieutenant and the aide to the commanding general at Ft. Polk, Brigadier General Fulton.

About that time, a political move was underway by the Louisiana Congressional delegation to make Ft. Polk a “permanent” post, supposedly a major advantage for the local economy. Through Larry’s contacts, and with my architectural background, I was offered the opportunity to participate in a new “master plan team.” So, I was plucked out of the hot and dusty routine of basic training and placed in an air-conditioned office with several others of similar backgrounds. It was there I met one of my fellow “master planners,” Allen Tolbert, whom I later hooked up with in Vietnam.

We had a civilian “manager,” a career employee of Ft. Polk, who made sure we had everything we needed. My recollection is that we had no idea what we were doing. We obtained some manuals that described what facilities were required to garrison a full infantry division and proceeded to make drawings of how this could fit on Ft. Polk. Somehow, having a master plan team was seen as a necessary complement to the political maneuvers going on in Washington.

In late 1968, several of us received our orders to Vietnam, and it looked like the jig was up. That is, until our manager, without our knowing, started some kind of Congressional investigation into the dismantling of the master plan team. It turned out that he was politically well connected, and apparently made the case that the master planning effort was critical to national defense and should not be delayed by diverting the planners to Vietnam.

This ploy worked for a couple of months, but was, I suppose, eventually overwhelmed by events and the need for us in Vietnam. In January, I got the requisite 30-day pre-Vietnam leave and headed for New Orleans where I spent most of the time preparing for Mardi Gras. Larry Taylor had a friend with an apartment right on Bourbon Street, next to Jean Lafitte’s old Blacksmith Shop bar, which is still there, having not changed one bit. I can’t remember why, but the apartment was unoccupied and become my New Orleans headquarters for the duration. The Clay Shaw trial was going on at the time and looked like pretty good entertainment, so one day I headed down to the courthouse. The courtroom was packed, and I couldn’t get in, but while chatting with a bailiff, I told him that I was in the Army and headed for Vietnam. He told me to go put on my uniform and he would see that I got a seat. I spent the rest of the week at the trial.



Ft. Polk Master Plan Office and hard working staff. Tom Butt in back.



Tom Butt and brother Martin Butt, on Martin's wedding day, December 20, 1968. This was the second and last time I wore my dress blues.



## VIETNAM

### *En Route*

I left on my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday from Ft. Lewis, Washington. I went out for dinner and drinks with Dick Johnson, the younger brother of an old friend I had originally met in Yellowstone. Dick was going to college in Seattle.

What was weird is that I didn't know anyone on the plane. We were all individuals, going over to replace some other individual. It was a 707, with all the normal food, drinks, pretty young stewardesses and movies. It could have been a flight to anywhere, except it was all soldiers – all in uniform. We made one stop during the night in Tokyo. There was nothing to do but wander around the transient terminal of the airbase. My first postcard:

*Tokyo, March 24, 1969*

*Dear Folks,*

*We didn't get to leave Seattle until about 8:00 PM. It's now about 1:00 AM on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. I can't exactly figure out how – but I completely missed my birthday. We've got an hour here in Tokyo, then 5 ½ hrs. more to Cam Ranh Bay – not much to do but gawk at cheap radios, TV's, etc. Be in contact later.*

*Love, Tom*

We landed at Cam Ranh Bay, and that rush of hot, humid air as we walked out the door and down the gangway clearly said “welcome to Vietnam.” We were bused to a compound of tropical buildings (“hootches” – as we later came to know them) near a beautiful beach. We were herded through a supply building, where we were given three uniforms (olive drab, jungle), two pairs of jungle boots, a baseball cap and a steel “pot” (helmet) and several pairs of olive drab socks, t-shirts and boxer shorts. Nametags and rank were issued and sewn on the uniform shirts. We were given a toothbrush and some kind of special toothpaste that was supposed to prevent cavities for one year. In the humidity, underwear gave me crotch rot, so I stopped wearing the boxer shorts altogether.

I was assigned a bed in a *hootch*, drank a few beers at the officer's club, went swimming in the South China Sea and slept for a few hours before the plane left to our next destination. I had no idea what was in store.

### *Settling In at Long Binh*

*Long Binh, Vietnam, March 25, 1969*

*Dear Folks,*

*I've finally arrived to a permanent location, got a job, etc.*

*We landed at Cam Ranh Bay yesterday AM early – processed in-country in about two hours and had the rest of the day off while assignments were being made from Saigon. I kind of wish I'd never seen Cam Ranh – the vision will linger and spoil me. It's a beautiful spot on a peninsula of land surrounded by huge mountains – a lot like Honolulu – and has one of the finest white sand beaches I've ever seen with Hawaii-type surf, etc. Everything was quiet and resort like, hot but with a refreshing sea breeze. Nobody carries weapons – it looks more like a war at Ft. Polk than Cam Ranh.*

*But then all good things end. I got an initial assignment to the 20th Eng. Brigade with hdqtrs [headquarters]. In Bien Hoa so we flew in there at 4:00 AM this morning. This part of the country is an entirely different story in appearance. The Bien Hoa-Long Binh complex sprawls for miles and miles in every direction – dust, red clay and thousands of slum looking temporary buildings, miles of barbed wire, bunkers, etc.*

*Anyway, the 20<sup>th</sup> Eng. Bde. [Engineer Brigade] Is made up of three groups, of which – the 159<sup>th</sup> – is my assignment – to be liaison officer between headquarters of the 159<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> Bde. S-3. I've got very little idea of what the actual work entails except that it involves keeping track of 159<sup>th</sup> Group projects and writing progress reports, statistics, etc., for reports to the parent organization, the 20<sup>th</sup> Bde.*

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Brigade altogether seems to have all the support responsibility for IV and V Corps areas, or, the whole southern third of Vietnam. Our group, more specifically, has responsibility for a sector more or less surrounding Saigon and extending to the east, south and southeast. Ultimately, I will have to become familiar with each of the hundreds of projects in these areas. The lieutenant in the job now has 25 days left, so I've got that much time to get in the groove.*

*Even though the area here looks somewhat more garrison-like than Cam Ranh, it's still very quiet and peaceful. Most of the people here scoff at the blow-up the press gives to incidents with the VC. I don't reasonably see where they could be anyway; you can drive 30 miles in any direction and still be on this gigantic complex.*

*At any rate, I've got my gear, quarters and mama san. Tomorrow will start studying up on my job – let you know more about it as I find out.*

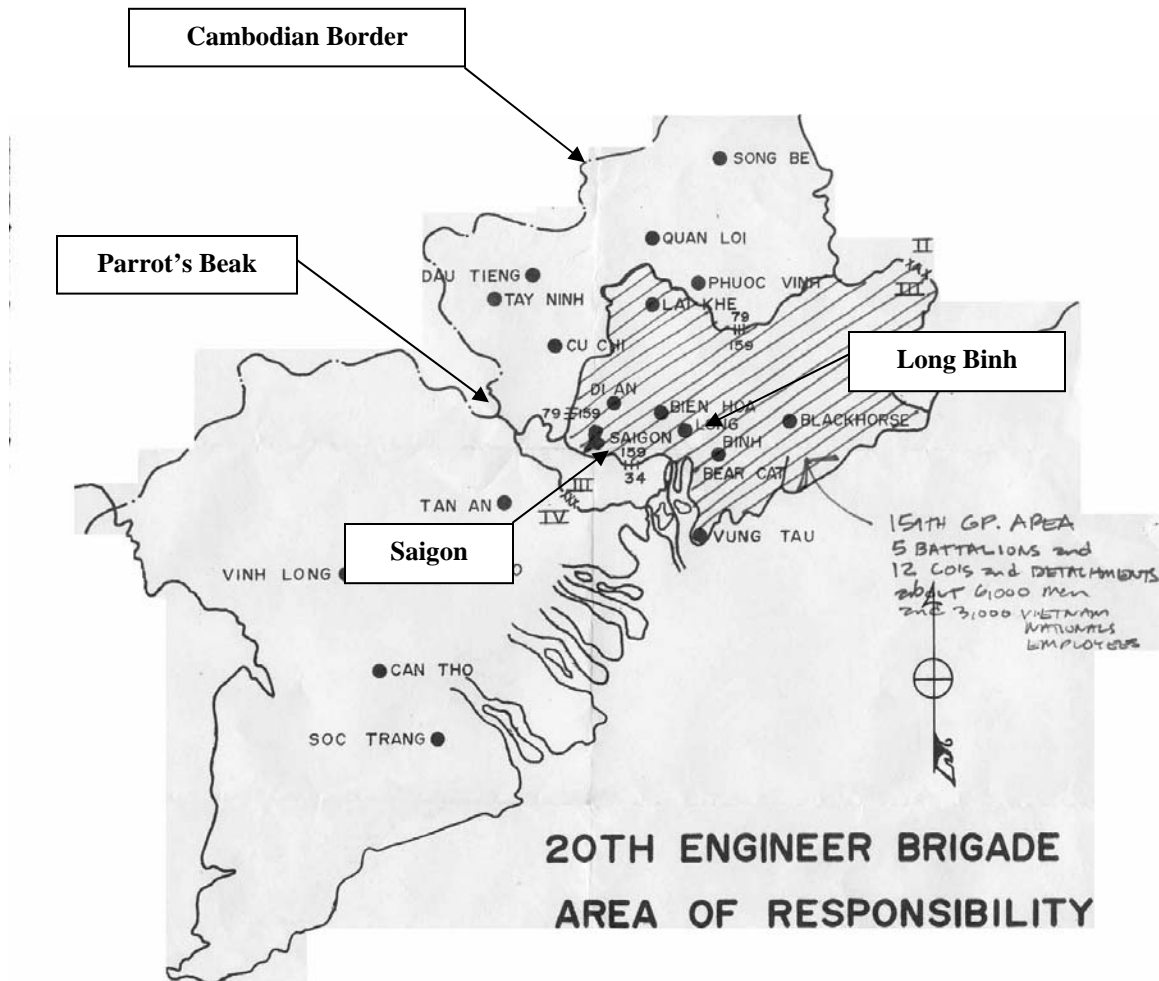
*Love, Tom*

At Bien Hoa Airbase, someone from the 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group came to pick me up in a jeep. When we got to the 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group headquarters in Long Binh, maybe five miles away, I was ushered in to an interview with the Assistant S-3 officer, a Captain Terry Ryan. He asked me about my education and job experience and informed me that I was to be the replacement Liaison Officer (LNO) for the HHC (Headquarters and Headquarters Company), 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group, one of three groups comprising the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade.

I was assigned a room in a “hootch,” which was, in this case, about 10 feet by 15 feet in a long building originally constructed with louvered walls and wire insect screen. It was a double row of such rooms, each with outside entrances, all assigned to officers. The roof was corrugated steel. Because the engineers were good at snagging stuff, it had a window air conditioner, and like the other rooms, the original louvers on mine had been covered with plywood. That air conditioner ran, without respite, until the day I checked out a year later, at which time it died.

The room had a single bed, a desk, a chair and a metal wardrobe cabinet. The bedspread was a camouflage pattern poncho liner.

At the company armory, I was issued an M-14 and a belt of magazines. Apparently, there was a shortage of M-16's, and for some “garrison” soldiers, M-14's were deemed appropriate to defend the post perimeter. The lieutenant I replaced gave me his .45 with pistol belt and two magazines.



*Long Binh, March 26, 1969*

*Dear Folks,*

*A little of the mud is starting to clear about what's going on around here. I went out today with the guy I'm going to replace to look at some of the job sites. Most of the group's work is in this immediate area or on the main highway 60-150 miles north of here. Enclosed is a map showing the area covered by the 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group. A better definition of the job is becoming clear, but only on the essential matters: making reports to the chief of operations at brigade HQ and being an agent to obtain and pass on information between units on the job and the brigade HQ. Actually, I work directly for the Group operations officer and act as an inspector for him also – and might get to do a little design work, etc., as time allows. So as you can see, there seem to be elements of “do your own thing” along with the rest.*

*This Long Binh post is just like a primitive-type post in the states once you get inside the perimeter. In our group area are the standard office and quarters buildings, outdoor latrines and recreational buildings (movies, “O” club, tennis, basketball courts, etc., and a handball court in the design phase). I've got a 10' x 15' room in the BOQ with a bed and a wall locker. As various people leave, I'll be in line to inherit the finer things in life such as air conditioning, refrigerator, rugs, etc. It's common practice of course to strip a room when its occupant leaves, so I'll have to live in poverty for a month or so until I can play buzzard. There are about 25 officers in the headquarters and headquarters company. The engineers definitely have the highest standard of living in the army (can't compare with air force, of course). What we can't find in our own organization we have the most marketable services to barter with.*

*As I mentioned before, I got my first glimpse of the countryside today. This whole area, including Saigon, is considered secure enough to roam at will during the daytime, but a weapon is always carried along. It's considered not exactly dangerous, but inadvisable to drive around outside the compound after dark, unless with a convoy or something. Most of the projects are within a few minutes drive from here. The others I can reach by catching a helicopter or plane from Bien Hoa. The villages around here are, of course, amazing but exactly what one would expect. I remember Martin's term “dogpatch,” which pretty aptly describes the situation. Whatever “spring offensive” that happened around here seems to be over. For the first time in a month and a half, the base is back to the lowest class alert.*

*The weather is quite hot but pleasant, more so than Ft. Polk in the summertime, due to the constant breeze and cool evenings. The rainy season doesn't start until May or June.*

*Every possible thing for day-to-day needs is available here and cheaper than at home, so the old “care package” is an anachronism as far as I am concerned. I do want you to send me some books, which I will list, and some magazine subscriptions. See that my subscription to Architectural Record and Progressive Architecture are renewed (check copies at home for information). Also send me the Northwest Arkansas Times and the following books from my shelves upstairs:*

*1. Structures Syllabus from East Bay AIA (big red lose leaf binder), 2. History of Architecture Syllabus from some AIA chapter in California and the three or four books on history of architecture. Also send all the structures manuals and textbooks that I have (including wood, concrete, steel, etc.).*

*Give me Martin and Jack's addresses (I lost them somewhere). Everything is fine. I am looking forward to an interesting year.*

*Love, Tom*

In response to the build up of U.S. forces in the Republic of Vietnam, the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade Headquarters was reactivated May 1, 1967, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and deployed to Vietnam in August 1967. During the Vietnam conflict, the Brigade numbered over 13,000 officers and enlisted men organized into three engineer groups, with 14 battalions and 31 separate companies and detachments. The Brigade provided all non-divisional engineer support in Military Regions III and IV during eleven campaigns. Units cleared more than one-half million acres of jungle, paved 500 kilometers of highway, and constructed bridges totaling more than six miles in length. As US forces were withdrawing from Vietnam, the Brigade was inactivated September 20, 1971.



Typical Long Binh perimeter berm with periodic bunkers and artillery positions for 155 mm howitzers and 175 mm guns like the one shown below at Nui Dat





United States Army Vietnam (USARV) Headquarters at Long Binh Post on a hill in the center of the sprawling facility. In the lower left corner is the helipad we generally used.



Long Binh Post

I arrived at Long Binh approximately one year after the 1968 “Tet Offensive,” and there were still some folks around who had been there at the time. They recounted how one self-important Engineer officer had gotten his finger shot off while “defending” our sector of the perimeter. Apparently, in an effort to commemorate the one-year anniversary of 1968 Tet, there were several forays by Viet Cong against the Long Binh Perimeter in the spring of 1969. Below are flyers left by the marauders in the wire and picked up by the 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group G-2.

DEMAND THE WAR END AND YOUR HOME REPA-  
TRIATION! THE VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS SHOULD  
BE SETTLED BY THE VIETNAMESE THEMSELVES!

Hãy đòi chấm dứt chiến tranh,  
đòi hồi hương!  
Việc Việt-nam phải do người  
Việt-nam tự giải quyết!

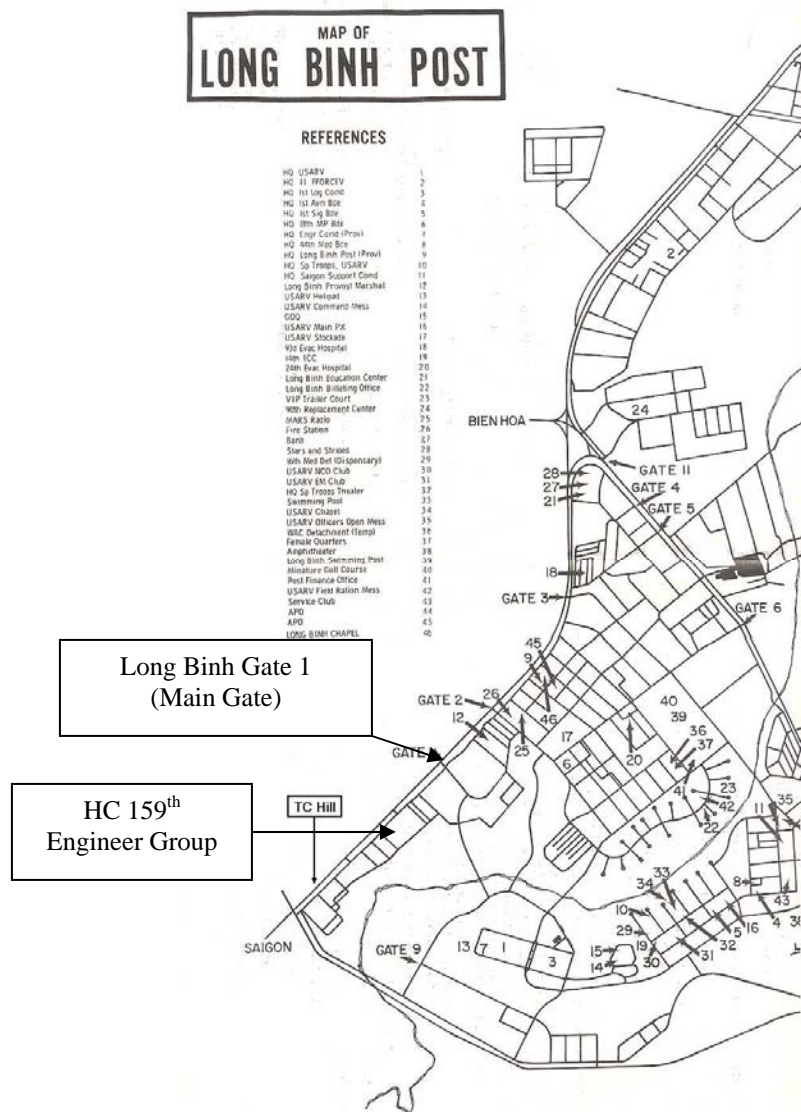
- END THE VIETNAM WAR! US GO HOME! THAT IS THE BEST  
WAY FOR YOU TO PROTECT YOUR LIVES, YOUR HAPPINESS  
AND PRESERVE YOUR OWN COUNTRY'S HONOR

Chấm dứt chiến tranh, người Mỹ  
về Mỹ là bảo vệ tính mạng, hạnh  
phúc cho các bạn và danh dự cho  
nước Mỹ.

Leaflets left at the Long Binh perimeter after a night probe by VC

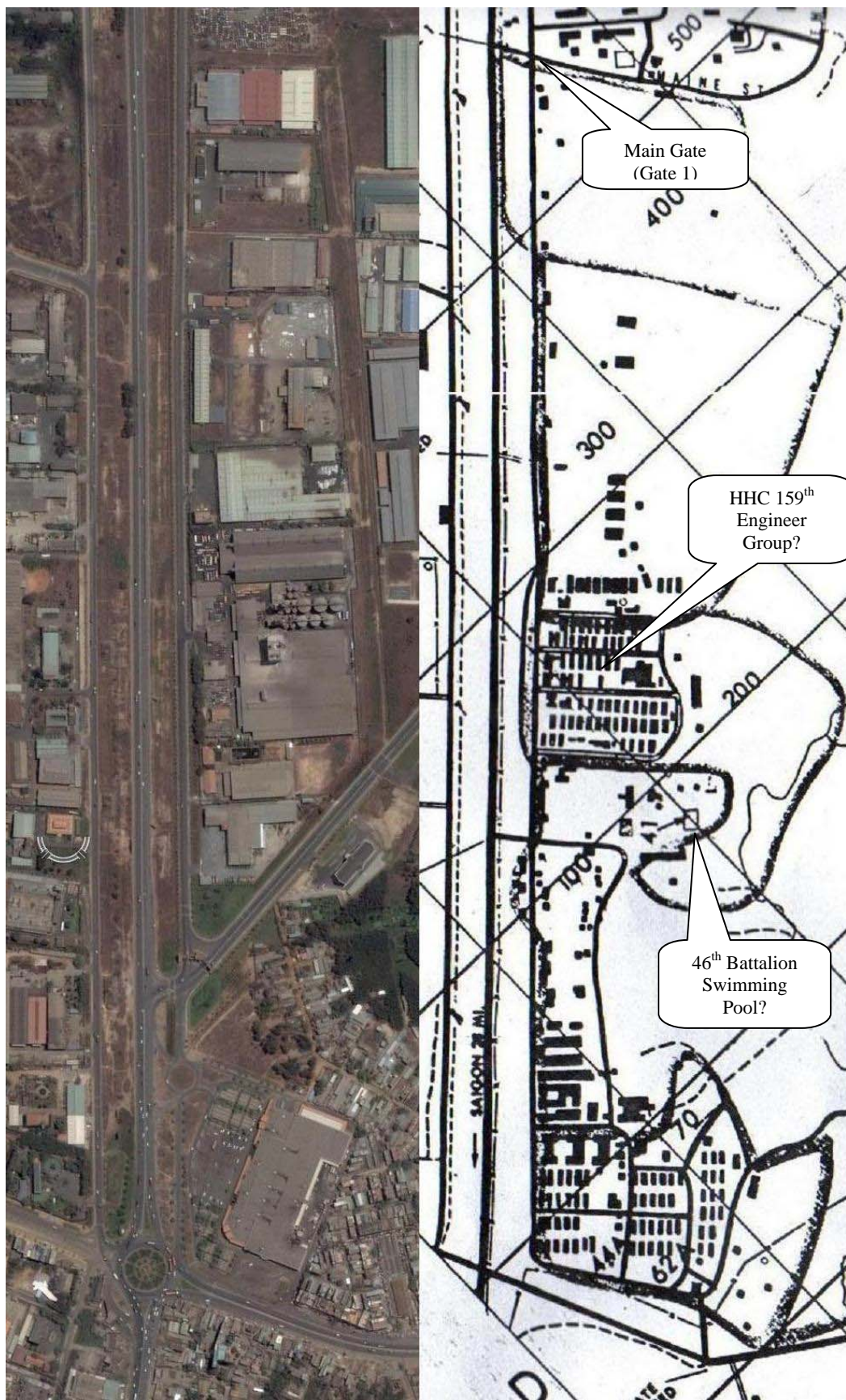
The 159<sup>th</sup> HHC compound was located adjacent to QL-1, the main highway from Saigon. To get there, you entered the main Long Binh gate, turned left about a block. Between the compound and the highway, maybe 200 feet, was a wall of sand-filled 55-gallon drums and sandbags and lots of barbed wire. It may also have been mined. Further on, just down the hill and adjacent to the 159<sup>th</sup> compound was the 46<sup>th</sup> Engineer battalion compound. They had a really nice swimming pool.





Part of Long Binh Post along QL-1





Left: Long Binh today. Right: Long Binh circa 1970

*April 1, 1969, Long Binh*

*Dear Folks,*

*Everything is fine after completing my first week in this great place. Not much excitement, but I have been doing some more sightseeing. Went down to Saigon Sunday afternoon and spent the night. I looked up Al Tolbert who worked with me at Ft. Polk. He gave me a tour from top to bottom. It's quite a place. It's dirty, congested and smells bad, but so full of life that you can't help liking it. Al, being a city planner, is just eating it up. He's learned quite a bit of Vietnamese in two months and seems to know the back alley system by heart as well as most dealers on the black market and various other semi-shady endeavors. We had a fabulous dinner at a floating restaurant on the Saigon River then proceeded to check out other sites of cultural and educational interest.*

*Still don't have much to do job-wise except look around and observe until the guy I'm replacing leaves. I took a helicopter ride up to a quarry northwest of here (Dinh Quan on QL-20) yesterday – beautiful country. It was a joint U.S. – ARVN thing, which are the big thing right now. Biggest problem the ARVN have is that they work from 0900 'til 1200, take a two-hour break, and then work from 1400 'til 1700. The Americans work a 10-hour day (0700 – 1800 with 1 hour for lunch) seven days a week. The ARVN in these training programs seem to think they should get every other day off if they are going to put in so many hours.*

*I'm sending a money order for \$100 to be deposited to pay whatever debts I have incurred. I used my credit cards for some airplane tickets, skiing, etc., en route to Seattle. I cannot remember exact amount. Pay income tax, other items as required out of it.*

*I have opened up an account here at the Chase Manhattan Bank – will send checks to home account to keep balance sufficient to pay outstanding bills or other needs as required. I'll send another \$10 next month – to you – then you can deposit it. This money stuff is a real red tape problem over here. You've got to sign some form to get paid, deposit money, buy something, convert to piasters, etc. Got to go to work.*

*Love, Tom*





Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group, Long Binh, Vietnam, 1969. Tom Butt is 5<sup>th</sup> from left, top row. John Clinton is 8<sup>th</sup> from left, top row.



Long Binh from the air



Saigon street scene. This is across the street from the Continental Palace Hotel, probably the premier hotel of the day – a remnant of the French Colonial lifestyle. On the veranda were wicker chairs and cocktail tables where the correspondents, ex-patriots and contractors hung out.



Typical downtown Saigon traffic. Here you can see a “cyclo” (lower left), A “deuce and a half” (under the Esso sign), taxis, motor scooters, bicycles, a jeep and a private automobile. The tall trees along the street are a French Colonial touch.



This photo was taken by Al Tolbert of Nha, a Saigon girl who worked as a telephone operator and attended law school. I liked the sound of her voice on the phone and somehow talked her into going out with me.



Tom Butt and Al Tolbert in Saigon in front of Saigon City Hall

## **Country Boy Discovers Saigon**

*May 8, 1969, Long Binh*

*Dear Folks,*

*I guess you're just getting back from Virginia now and probably going crazy if you are really serious about moving. It's hard to believe you're really leaving the old place, but when I saw the ad in the Times, I knew I wasn't dreaming. Just don't throw anything of mine away or let too much pass into the hands of my greedy brothers, as I am sure many fine things will be "liberated" on moving day.*

*I had a real busy week with some extra reports to prepare for a visitor from Washington, but I got to go along on a trip as the Group representative, which made it all worthwhile. We hit a bunch of projects in our area, most of which I'd already seen, but in the afternoon, we flew up near Cambodia to see some of the work by the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division engineers.*

*You would have to see it to believe the vast amount of jungle clearing and road work that is going on out in these boonies. It really gave me a new perspective on the importance of the "engineer's war." The whole face of the land has been drastically changed – giant clearings 1,000 meters wide crisscross the landscape in every direction. All kinds of people are moving down out of the mountains and migrating from the cities to farm these new areas. For the first time since the early 1950's, there are roads to the markets and increasing security against the VC. Land clearing and road building are probably doing more to insure the future security of Vietnam than any other factor.*



*I've come to the conclusion that the VC are idiots – right or wrong. As long as there is an acre of boondocks, they can crawl around at night and shoot at somebody, but they never win anything. Typical of the incidents in this area, a VC company force marched 4 ½ days from Cambodia and attacked a convoy on a deserted stretch of QL-13, north of Lai Khe. They ruined three or four vehicles, wounded a few G.I's, but were totally wiped out in the process. I've yet got no emotional feelings about the "preservation of freedom" here or any other country "endangered" by "communist aggression," but I do think this is a fine place with a potentially prosperous future, and I figure they might as well be our "buddies" as the other guy's – and I think we've got an excellent chance of pulling it off.*

*The idealists are right in saying we've got no right or reason to be here, but then the idealists have always been in the minority and usually wrong because the other guys write the history books. I'll elaborate on my philosophy of the war at a later date.*

*I bought a very fine movie camera last week and worked out with it over the weekend. If any of the footage comes out, I'll send it home for an on the spot eyeball account of the situation. I've got everything from Saigon mini skirts to real live air strikes on the Cambodian border – groovy! The camera has all kinds of telephoto zoom lenses and electric motor controls – better than the eye itself.*

*Saigon is looking better and better. My buddy Al Tolbert shed his Sp-4 stripes for civvies last week and went to work for USAID Saigon Civil Assistance Group as a city planner. The government got a bargain on him – the other planner does the same as Al but is a civilian on an \$18,000 salary. Al is still in the army and officially assigned as a "jeep driver" to the organization. Along with his new status comes an "in" in the multi-national social scene of Saigon, which promises great things for the future. Saigon is one of the most friendly, fun-loving and alive cities I've ever been in. It's like a bunch of kids at the circus on weekends – all the young people come out to the parks and main streets and just stand around having a good time. Vietnamese women are generally quite pretty and all have tremendous figures; therefore, they are all beautiful from behind. Girl watching is probably the favorite Saigon sport for Americans and Vietnamese alike. The traditional ao dai is giving away to mini skirts, which is okay because I've never seen a Vietnamese girl with ugly legs – can't say the same for the American variety.*

*I started a course in Vietnamese at the Education Center last night which will last 8 weeks and no doubt leave me speaking fluent Vietnamese. It's really a simple language and shouldn't be too difficult to obtain some proficiency in. There are no verb tenses, noun genders, etc. Instead of saying the equivalent of "I went," you say "I go yesterday," a very practical solution – don't you agree?*

*I got all those books you sent some time back and recently the shorts – and I thank you. Eventually I'm going to hit up the old Hong Kong Tailor, but he's third on my priority list after I get all my cameras and my complete stereo sound system. I'll probably leave here broke – but I'll have some fine goodies.*

*Let me know how the Fort Lee Army treats generals and I'll eat my heart out.  
However, if I couldn't be a general, I think my next choice would be a lieutenant  
in the Engineers – this is a pretty good life!*

*I'm sending a check for \$30.00 to pad my account – let me now what the status of  
my debts are – red or black and how much.*

*Send me a picture of my new home of record.*

*Love, Tom*

One of the better-known members of the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade was Al Gore, who served as an Army Journalist for the *Castle Courier* from December 1970 to May 1971 while stationed at the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade Headquarters in Bien Hoa. A lot has been written about what he actually did in Vietnam compared to what he claimed he did – or what others said he claimed he did. See <http://www.nytimes.com/library/politics/camp/071100wh-gore.html>.

### ***Daily Routine***

The standard Army work week in Vietnam was six and a half days a week. We typically had an eight or nine-hour day, starting at 8:00 a.m., with an hour off for lunch. If I didn't go anywhere during the day, I reported for work in the S-3 office, a hot, dusty un-air conditioned, metal Quonset building.

On Monday of each week, we typically went to an intelligence briefing conducted by the group S-2 (Intelligence Officer) in the Group Strategic Operations Center (SAC). There was a big map on the wall, and the S-2 described where all the VC (Viet Cong) and NVA (North Vietnam Army) were operating and what they were thought to be planning. There was also a review of actions the previous week, including any casualties.

We also had a meeting of the S-3 (Operations) officers and non-coms (non-commissioned officers) to discuss projects and responsibilities for the coming week. Our job was mostly planning, assigning missions, inspecting, trouble-shooting, facilitating and reporting. I was supposed to check on the status of every job assigned by the 20th Engineer Brigade S-3 to the 159th Engineer group. Every Thursday morning, I went over to the 20th Brigade Headquarters at Bien Hoa (about five miles away) to report verbally and in writing on the week's activities to the brigade commander, a brigadier general.

To come up to speed, I had to contact every person in charge of every job to get a report. There were hundreds of them. I kept a file on every job assigned to the Group, updated its status every week, and prepared a weekly written report. If a project was stalled, late in getting started or behind schedule, I had to find out why and often had to take the initiative to trouble shoot it. I had to go out and look at a lot of the projects so I could accurately describe them. I reported on the quantities of gravel and asphalt produced, the

number of hours the plants were down for maintenance, exactly which parts were malfunctioning and when the new parts were expected to arrive and be installed. I also reported on manpower strengths and casualties.

The office work was tedious and generally boring, but also frequently interesting and challenging when some problem needed to be solved. I spent several days one week driving and flying around Vietnam looking for a special piece of equipment to grind down a concrete floor slab after a pour had gone bad for a PX building at Long Binh.

If I was at Long Binh during the middle of the day, I usually jogged for about a mile, jumped into the swimming pool at the 46th Engineer Battalion next door and ate a hamburger and fries for lunch.

In the evening, I believe dinner was about 6:00 p.m. in the Company mess hall.

The Company "Officer's Club" was in the same building as the mess hall, with a different entrance. It didn't amount to much. There was a bar along one wall, and a Vietnamese woman worked as bartender. There were a few chairs and tables in the room. Drinks were cheap, and I recall that it was air-conditioned. Sometimes, we went to one of the larger officer's clubs on base or went to a movie, but mainly in the evening folks read books, listened to music or drank. Later, we completely remodeled the Officer's Club into a showcase.

Sometimes, there was night duty of some kind. Every night, there had to be a "duty officer" for the headquarters company, and each officer's time came up about once a month. That meant you had to stay up all night and respond to any incoming communications that required action.

Perimeter guard duty at Long Binh was allocated so that each organization had charge of a sector and was responsible for manning that sector each night. The responsibility was further delegated to and rotated among smaller units, so that our headquarters company might have the assignment once a month. For each sector, there was also an "officer of the guard," who was responsible for constantly checking the sector all night long to make sure those on guard duty were awake.

I think I pulled guard duty only once when our company was tapped. I remember one of the spec 4s who was supposed to drive me around was checking his weapon, a .45 caliber pistol, when it went off and missed his foot by a hair. Along our perimeter sector were about a dozen guard bunkers, each with a fixed M-60 machine gun and a "starlight scope" (night vision device). Each bunker was manned by several soldiers. It was real spooky running the perimeter checks. The jeep light had to be turned off, and of course, there was no light in the bunkers. I usually found the guards asleep, and I was concerned that someone might wake up in confusion and start shooting. So, before entering each bunker, I would try to make enough noise, but very carefully, so as not to jolt anyone awake.



Once I got into the routine, and if I didn't have to work too late or start too early the next morning, I would try to get down to Saigon as much as possible. I found that I could walk down to the main gate a block away and easily hitch a ride to Saigon in the early evening. I would get dropped off and catch a motorized *cyclo* to the apartment several of us rented and where Allen Tolbert and Eric Nelson lived.

Sometimes we partied at the apartment, but often as not, we went out on the town, eating at a restaurant or sidewalk cart, drinking in a bar, or just walking around enjoying the city. The first apartment was on a main street, Ham Nghi, near the center of town and Central market. It was in the second or third floor over a shop.

Later, and for most of the time that I was there, we rented an apartment in third story of a three-story building on Yen Do Street, which I believe was off of the main street leading to Tan Son Nhut airport. The building was concrete with a full roof patio having a pretty good view of the surrounding neighborhood. It was one room with a closet and bathroom. I think Allen Tolbert was the only one who actually lived there – the rest of us just crashed when we could. There were two single beds and a small refrigerator where we kept bottles of water filled by the mama san, supposedly after boiling, from the public water supply. It had high ceilings with high windows and a ceiling fan.



Some of the usual suspects in our Saigon apartment.

I don't remember all of the names, but in the upper photo, second to the left is Janine Felix, Chantal Cogny, a couple of guys I can't remember, Nicole ("Nicky") Cogny and Phuc Bui.



In the lower photo, second from left is Suzanne Pernin, (French/Vietnamese/Cambodian), Janine Felix, Nicky Cogny, Chantal Cogny, an unidentified male, me and Phuc Bui.



Shantytown along a creek  
in Saigon. Urban legend  
had it that this waterway  
caught fire from time to  
time.



Street scene in Saigon



Allen Tolbert with friend in  
Saigon apartment



Improvement of a secondary road  
north of QL 2A, 34<sup>th</sup> Engineer  
Battalion. December, 1969



1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division base camp  
at Lai Khe?



Improvement of QL-20, 169<sup>th</sup>  
Engineer Battalion, March 1969

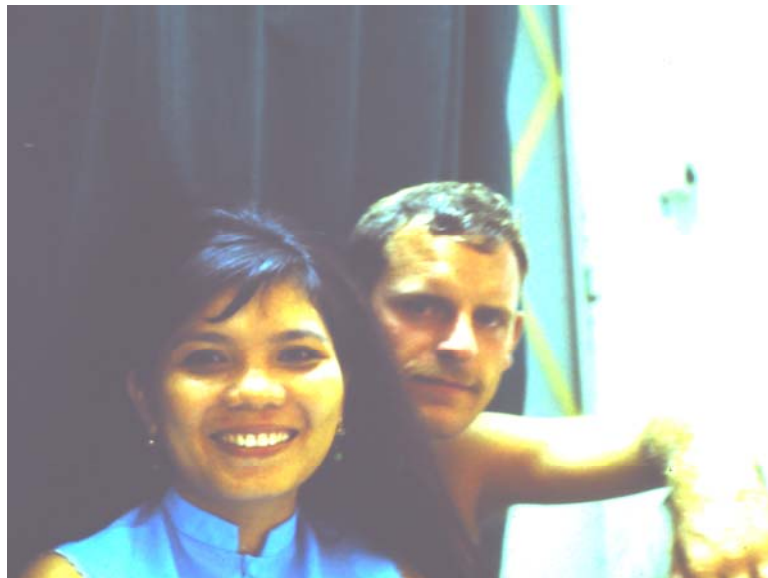




Road ? west to Cambodia.  
Mountain is Nui Ba Den?



Phuc Bui at Saigon  
apartment



Tom Butt and Phuc Bui  
in Saigon apartment

9 May 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

*Looks like the start of a real busy week. The assistant S-3 went on R&R, so I've got two jobs this week – could mean an all-nighter or two. The work scene continues to be routinely boring, but the extra-curricular scene is shaping up.*

*About six other guys and myself are going together to rent a fantastic apartment in Saigon. Only one will actually live there. It's mainly to be a weekend type thing. Although the girls living now (USAID) haven't vacated yet, they consented to a party to celebrate the occasion. It was really terrific – just like a United Nations. There were French, Indians, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Chinese and Americans – and probably a few VC for all I know – but everyone had a ball.*

*I've been meeting more and more of the Saigon natives lately – a going to start work soon with a Buddhist group who is building a training school to teach basic skills to people handicapped by the war. One of the Buddhist leaders (known as "The Venerable") has dedicated some of his estate to the school, and I am helping a Vietnamese to design the complex. I'm trying to help them with some materials and so forth through our Civic Action Program as well.*

*There are still a good number of the old pedal-type "cyclos" around (you would recognize these as a "rickshaw.") The best sport going is to line up about ten of these with a participant aboard each vehicle – and race to a common destination. The first driver to arrive gets most of the total fares – while the others divide up the remainder proportionate to their finish. Last night one of our group was so far behind he made the driver sit as a passenger while he pedaled to cyclo to a more respectable finish.*

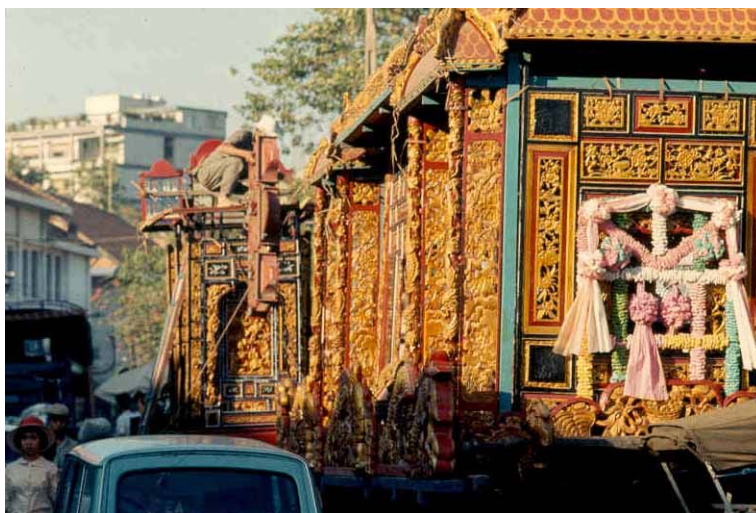
*As a necessary adjunct to any social occasion in a Vietnamese household one has to partake of the local food, which I have found to be rather bland and tasteless as compared with other Oriental food. However, one can change that to some degree with the universal "dip everything in it sauce" – nuoc mam – which doesn't taste too bad – but strongly resembles in smell a 3 day old dead fish, which is pretty close to its chief ingredient. The only other thing that bothers me is the complete disregard the Vietnamese have for flies. A normal family has a spotless house, dresses in only the cleanest clothes, and lays out a spotless table – but a fly is just like oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide – a part of the atmosphere! They don't even see them.*

*The more I get to know Saigon, the more I am impressed by the contrast. Everything seems to be a paradox. Parts of the town which were once inhabited by the French still have block after block of villas shaded by old, old trees and guarded by high walls. Other parts, especially those inhabited by refugees, now have the densest population of any city on earth. The incidents of "Terrorism" as reported in stateside newspapers are grossly exaggerated. Most of the incidents involve young kids who are put up to their acts by somebody else and usually end up blowing themselves up rather than their targets. Saigon is ringed by a series of watchtowers and radar nets that can detect a rocket launching almost instantly – so these have been cut to a bare minimum. The place is crawling with so many*

*cops plus all the off-duty GI's, both American and ARVN that the city is virtually saturated. About the only thing you have to really watch for is if someone slips something onto or into a jeep while it is parked in an obscure place – like one of the best known tricks is to put a grenade in the gas tank. The gas eats through the rubber band – and bang! In spite of all this, I would rate Saigon as at least as safe as most American cities and more so than some – or at least parts of some.*

*A good part of the incidents just involve good old American type “mobsterism” in the Vietnamese community – only natural for a place with so much easy money and corruption. Every time some guy gets his due for fudging on the criminal’s code – the incident gets blamed on the VC – a handy out for everyone. I stopped taking a jeep to town because it is so easy to get it stolen, and the chance of running over a Vietnamese is quite prevalent and involves a lot of paperwork. I found that the taxi driver will take you anywhere in town for a couple of packs of cigarettes, which go for 30 cents at the PX, and he can sell on the BM [black market] for a couple of dollars. A prerequisite to any afternoon tour is a carton of cigarettes.*

*The traffic downtown is something else – mainly 50 cc Hondas, with the remainder being equally divided between Lambrettas (a 3-wheel cycle with bed and surrey in back carrying from 6-16 people), jeeps, Renault taxis and vintage Citroens – which are really classy. There is no such thing as a lane, a stop sign or a turn signal. Everyone just goes – and to change lanes you stick out one arm and wave it wildly at the vehicles behind.*



Funeral procession in Saigon

# US, ARVN Engineers Combine Forces To Undo Damage Caused by Enemy

In the early morning hours of May 12, an explosion rocked the sleepy village of Lai Thieu. Within minutes bewildered villagers came running out of their homes to the site of the explosion. Once there, they rubbed their eyes in astonishment. What had happened at Phu Cuong six months before had now happened at Lai Thieu. The 850-foot Phu Long Bridge, which for so many years spanned the Saigon River, had been blown by VC sappers bent on closing up the major lines of communication in Vietnam.

Before the morning sun fully emerged from the horizon, engineers from the 100th Float Bridge Company, 159th Engineer Group, under the direction of 1LT Richard Ramirez, were on the site reconnoitering the damage. They were accompanied by ARVN engineers of the 301st Combat Engineer Battalion, 30th ARVN Engineer Group.

Shortly thereafter the decision was reached to construct, an M4T6 float bridge, thereby reopening the north Saigon By-Pass, the route which the bridge services. The 100th Float Bridge Company would provide the bridging and technical assistance and the ARVN engineers the muscle for the assembly stages.

A major problem initially arose due to the peculiarity of the bridges' location. Dense vegetation covered the shores of the river and it was virtually impossible to inflate and assemble the bridging at the site where the float bridge was to be emplaced. Consequently, the situation called for the pontoons to be inflated in an open

area three-fourths of a mile inland, and later transported to the bridge site.

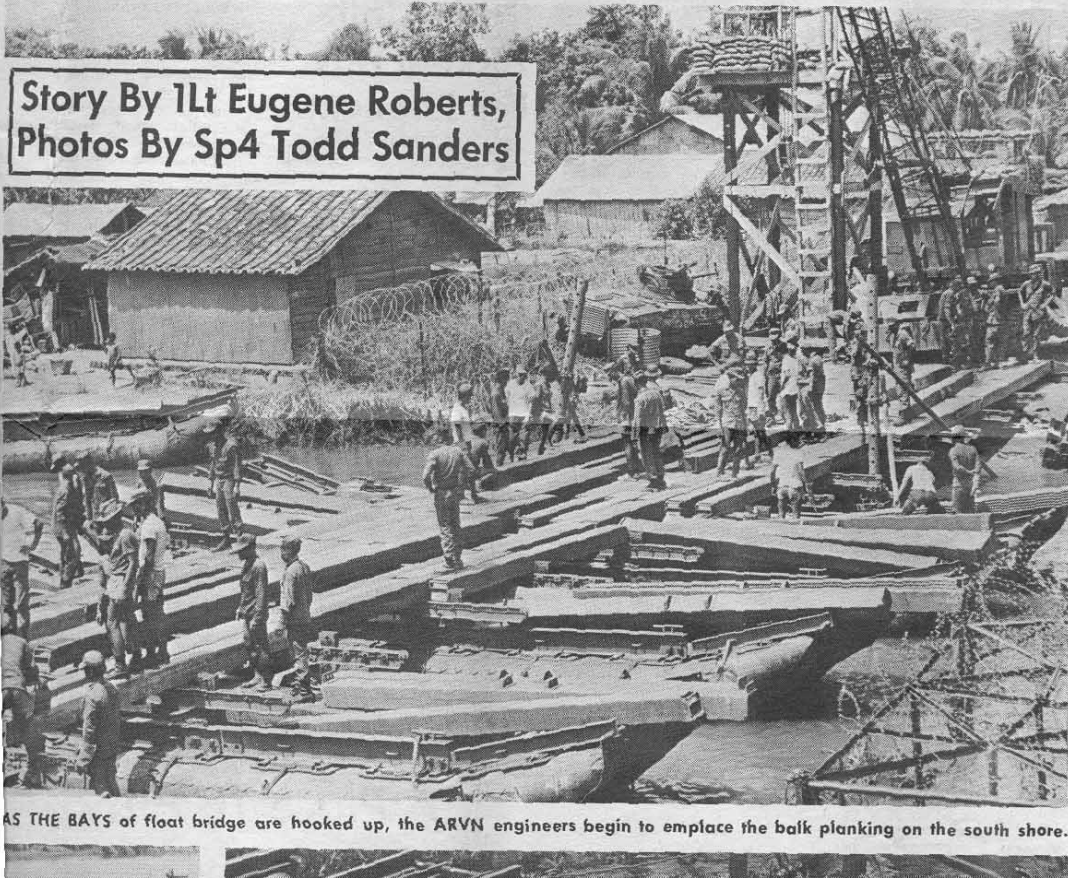
The solution for transporting was close at hand when a CH-54 Flying Crane was called in to skylift each pontoon from the assembly area to the river. Rising up like a diabolical creature from the clouds of dust which shrouded the sky crane, the pontoons were lifted off the ground and carried over to the river, upstream from the bridge site.

As this operation progressed, approaches to the float bridge from the main route to the river banks were being readied by dozers from the 100th Float Bridge Company. As the Sky Crane released the payload, bridge erection boats ferried the pontoons into position and 125 engineers from the 30th ARVN Engineer Group worked arduously, marrying up the bays of the bridge and placing down the balk planking.

Finally, three days later, the last piece of planking was emplaced by one ARVN and one American engineer. The scene was reminiscent of the golden spike being driven at Promontory Point connecting the Union and the Central Pacific railroad lines.

Within minutes the roadway was open and traffic began to flow. Only the children of the village of Lai Thieu appeared unhappy about the completion of the float bridge, for their three day vacation was now over as they made the trek across the new bridge to the school on the other side of the river.

Story By 1Lt Eugene Roberts,  
Photos By Sp4 Todd Sanders



Construction of a float bridge at Phu Cuong by the 100<sup>th</sup> Bridge Company, 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group, after the bridge was blown by VC sappers May 12, 1969





Load test on new Bailey bridge at Phu Cuong



Phu Cuong float bridge. From left to right, Sgt. Hancock, 159<sup>th</sup> HHC Engineer Group, unidentified ARVN soldier and 1Lt Tom Butt



20 May, 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

*Things are pretty quiet and routine around here these days in spite of what you read in the papers. We had a little soiree the other night to celebrate Ho Chi Minh's birthday (any excuse for a party), but he didn't show up.*

*How's the moving game – I bet you wish it was either a dream or all over. I don't envy you. Have you sold the house yet?*

*I got a letter from John Butt – primarily because he thinks he needs some jungle boots. Tell him there is no way to procure them legally except through supply and for that reason it would be indiscrete to mail them. I'll bring him some next February.*

*Jack tells me he is leaving for Glacier shortly and that Martin & Nancy are going to the Tetons – how about filling me in on that. I thought it was all out the window. I probably won't have time to write them before they leave.*

*I've been in phone contact with Backus. He is at the out processing center at Can Ranh today, and I was going to fly up there – but can't work it into my schedule.*

*A financial footnote – put in a standing sell order at 71 for my Continental Can stock at the local broker. I have reason to think it is a good time to sell. I will relay some other plans for disposition of funds later – let me know if the sale is a go (I've got 54 shares). The Stars and Stripes runs a daily stock market page – so I've been keeping track.*

*I'm going to arrange some manipulations which involve an outstanding loan at Ft. Polk Credit Union, Soldier's Deposits guaranteed 10% interest, my stock proceeds plus some other investing, which should be financially beneficial in the long run. I don't plan any complex things that will involve any great amount of time. I just want to get some stuff straight – like foolishly paying interest on a loan when I can pay it off cash right now and collect interest on the money over here.*

*I've been making all kinds of movies but I can't buy a projector to see them. I may have to order one, which takes two months. It's all a matter of timing and luck to get anything good at the PX over here. Shipment of a thousand projectors might come in, and they'll be gone in 10 minutes – if you're not there, you miss out.*

*If you want to prepare another care package, I'd really like a dozen or so Pentel pens, mostly black with a couple of brown and red. They're impossible to get over here. The army has a million of every useless thing on earth and very few of anything really necessary. I'm going to start doing some fine sketches down in Saigon and around – since my films apparently won't ever be shown, I have to do something to record my presence.*

Love, Tom

23 May 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

*I just got the letter from Dad – and all the junk along with it. These bills are getting to be a chore for you I'm sure, but I guess eventually they'll all be paid up. I wrote the Master Charge people and asked them to send me a statement so I could verify my bill and get them off my back. I'll let you know what the deal is so you can mail them a check.*

*I'm sending along some camera info for Jack if this catches him on the way though. If not, just forward it. I just bought the Pentax camera for \$126.00. as you can see, it would cost \$290.00 in the states. I can get him one like it – or anything cheaper if he will let me know how much he can afford. Generally, I can get a camera for about 2/5 of what it would retail for at home. I finally found an incoming shipment at the PX after much daily checking and went on a binge with the camera I mentioned as well as a fabulous movie projector. I'll send some films home after I get a few more back and edit out the sloppy parts – I'm still learning.*

*I took a good trip yesterday to a little town on the coast about due east of Saigon (Ham Tan). It was just a slow and sleepy as another world and sure would make a fabulous resort. We checked some construction at a MACV facility and toured around the village centered around a lagoon at the mouth of a river. They had a fantastic fish market, and I couldn't resist eating a big gob of raw snails (oc in Vietnamese – escargots in French). They were dipped in a kind of salt-red pepper mix and delicious – maybe even better than Louisiana crayfish – and washed down with the local Hai Muoi Ba (33) beer.*

*We flew along the southern coast to Vung Tau and then back up to Long Binh. The more I see of this place, the more deserted I realize it is. You can fly a hundred miles and never see a house, road or cultivated plot of ground. It reminds me of some of the areas in Arkansas in the Ozarks National Forest or the piney woods of south Arkansas. Nobody lives there or even wants to. Its no wonder that an entire army of VC can live out there and come into town any time they want to – and it makes sense to hear that the VC could have free run of 2/3 of the country and yet not even be a strong influence on the lives of people over much of the country.*

*My current predictions are as follows: (1) The only thing the North Vietnamese understand is force and determination. (2) The ARVN need at least 4 more years to achieve a status of strength equal to the combined forces here now. (3) The only way to achieve even the least of the U.S.'s stated goals is to decide to stay here indefinitely and let the world know it. The war is not going badly for the South Vietnamese nor are they losing it. The North and the VC are definitely permanently in the losers' column, but with every passing day their potential victory seems to come closer. ½ million GI's brought home are just as much gone as if they had been wiped out in a gigantic battle. (5) The best hindsight summation might be that we should have either stayed out or committed ourselves for the duration. I would say we have already "won," – but we must*

*stay to consolidate our gains. I may sound like an ach-hawk warmonger, but I'm not – I 'm just trying to be objective. The U.S. has either got to stay here or leave and lose everything – probably both courses have merit!*

*On the lighter side, I am consolidating my gains down Saigon way – going to have supper with a family of a lovely Vietnamese girl I've been seeing some lately. Her father is an ARVN colonel and teaches at the Vietnamese "West Point." Should be an interesting evening. She works at the main military and embassy switchboard in Saigon along with about 100 other young ladies – a great source of cultural exchange and intellectual stimulation that I happened to fall into one day in my wanderings.*

*I've got staff duty Saturday night, so I'll probably get all day Sunday off – probably go back to the Saigon Zoo – tremendous place in a large park with lagoons and all that stuff. Everybody in Saigon either heads for the boonies or the zoo on Sunday – just like Golden Gate Park in S.F. Even a few hippies around. It's really hard to determine the sex of a Viet hippie because of no beard, which is the standard distinguishing trait elsewhere. Saigon even has its own "Hell's Angels" – commonly known as "Saigon Cowboys." They ride about on their Hondas (top speed 30 mph) looting and pillaging, frightening women & children, etc.*

*How's my stock sale progressing? I think the bottom will fall out of the market this summer due to the fact that everybody will find out that we've either got to stay here indefinitely or lose our shirt. I hope I don't have to leave on the first plane – having too good a time.*

*Love, Tom*



A park in downtown Saigon with a Boy Scout camporee

*Undated, missing some pages...*

*...them – much less worry about them.*

*About the PACEX catalogue, they are extremely hard to find. I heard they were going for \$25.00 recently, but I'll keep looking for one. The copies at PX order counters are sealed in steel and chained to the counter. Anything you order is subject to duty if it is over \$50.00 per individual item. Anything I bring home with me is completely free, however.*

*I've spoken with Coppage several times by phone, but I haven't run into him yet. He flies down here all the time but only stays a few minutes on the ground. We're trying to get together some weekend and go down to Saigon or Vung Tau.*

*I tried to find Pam on the day you told me, but the Pan Am people have no reliable crew lists. I spent all day crawling around planes looking for her, but no luck. Had a good time anyway – ran into a couple of girls I know from San Francisco.*

*If anyone else is coming over here, tell them to call me at 926-3550/3553/3543. There is usually someone there from 6:00 AM to 9:00 – 10:00 at night. Tell M. Huntington to stop over if she can on the way to Laos.*

*As you can see by this page, I got the Pentels, and I wish I had opened them in private. I had to give a couple away to silence onlookers, and then I fled the scene and denied knowledge of the delivery.*

*I also received the magazines – won't the Post Office forward them over here? I guess I'm still getting them on my old subscription, and they're going to Ft. Polk – huh?*

*I'm sending along a statement from master Charge which I've verified. Please pay this from my account, but no more of these unless the receipts are included.*

*I'm sending a bunch of pictures and junk in another envelope to lighten the load. I don't know how much weight they'll send free, but it's a lot of trouble to have to mail something twice, so I'll try to get it through the first time.*

*Get Martin and Nancy's address for me as soon as you can.*

*If you can't sell the house, don't rent it to college students – especially males.*

*Love, Tom*



I had a couple of friends who were stewardesses for Pan Am, and every now and then I heard they might be flying in to Tan San Nhut, so I found some excuse to go check out the incoming flights. I never did see them, but it was a nice chance to chat up some crewmembers who knew them.

*9 July 1969 – Long Binh*

*Dear Folks,*

*I've been working harder the last two weeks (long hours-wise) than probably any time since architecture school days – this being the reason for the communications gap. Why, I've even had to cancel some of my social obligations!*

*The S-3 major went home late in May, leaving a cpt. as S-3 and myself moved to assistant S-3, plus having all the duties of my former job. Cpt. Ryan usually spends the entire day at conferences or with the col. At job site inspections all over the country – leaving me back at HQ to handle all business, answer all questions, etc. My main function is receiving, assigning and coordinating all the combat & operational support missions that come down from 20<sup>th</sup> Brigade and are parceled out to one of our five battalions. I couldn't have lasted 10 minutes the first week without the sergeant major, but I've gotten pretty much in the groove now. Tremendous feeling of power and all that.*

*I've been alternating between 14 and 16 hour days ever since I started this, and I don't think we'll get a major until about 1 August.*

*I did manage to slip into Saigon, however, for a couple of nights over the weekend, and I'm happy to say that my comrades in the discussion and cultural exchange program have made new inroads into the social elite of the peculiar city – causing me great anguish in trying to determine how I can conscientiously accept my \$65 per month combat pay. I guess it must cover the drive down or something.*

*I don't know whether those calls that Paul Wright sets up are worth the trouble. I can hardly hear anything, and with all the truck and choppers that seem to be drawn to my window, It's nearly impossible to communicate. They've got a great phone system here – sometimes – It's supposed to be direct dial anywhere in southeast Asia, and when it works, it's great – but, of course, when it's really necessary, it's out.*

*Coppage should be coming down this week finally, which is good. We're having a housewarming at our groovy new townhouse apartment in Saigon (roof garden, balcony, the whole works). It's kind of a weekend house sort of thing.*

*I sent Jack a fancy camera which he will probably not be able to operate if he's like me, but he can impress a lot of people by flashing it around.*

*If you see Backus around, ask him to advise me as to his plan for seeking his fortune or whatever other goal or non-goal he is working toward. If he has flown the coop already, see if you can get his address.*

*It looks from the U.S. papers like everybody is all psyched up over the troop withdrawal. I think it's a pretty slick move by Nixon to placate the radicals, and it shouldn't affect the situation over here much, if at all. I continue to be optimistic, and the only problem involved is keeping the psychological edge that I think we are developing for the first time in years.*

*Considering that I have the misfortune of being in the army, things couldn't be better right now, so don't worry about me. I'm just glad I don't have a house to sell. Too bad you can't get it on the Saigon black market, it would bring a fortune.*

*Love, Tom*

*14 August, 1969 – Long Binh*

*Dear Folks,*

*Aside from the fact of being so busy, I've been putting off writing because I keep thinking I can get a phone call through, but Paul has been hard to find lately. He was in the hospital for a while and now they say he's on R&R. He started working the night shift anyway, which is the busiest time of day – and even when I could get him, he couldn't get a free circuit.*

*My job is starting to slow up a little finally. Got a new major in about 1 ½ weeks ago, and he is just about trained. I've been trying to slip inconspicuously back into my old position with only limited success, but I've still got more free time than I've had in two months.*

*George Coppage was down yesterday and today, and I tried to give him a Cook's tour of Saigon in one night. He's only got about 1 ½ months to go with three trips to Taiwan lined up to make it even shorter. Last Sunday, I flew up to Phan Rang with him – and drove the plane some. The air base here is really plush compared*



*with anything in the United States and makes the army facilities look like a slum in comparison.*

*I picked an unfortunate day to come back, as I was caught in Tan Son Nhut during the currency exchange. About every 8 or 10 months on a secret day, they lock everybody on base in Vietnam and make them change their MPC for a different issue. The idea is to limit black marketing, which is primarily transacted in MPC. Several million dollars in MPC is instantly invalidated because it is held by Vietnamese who cannot turn it in. Saigon looks kind of like the stock market crash of '29 when this happens – people jumping out windows and all that. My two buddies collected over \$5,000 in MPC from Vietnamese on Monday before they went to work – and were able to exchange \$1,000 of it – all profit! Anyway .. I flew into Tan Son Nhut and they wouldn't let me out until I changed my money. The line for transients was ½ mile long, so I finally got on a chopper and flew back out to Long Binh – after waiting in line 4 hours and moving about 4 feet.*

*I took George over to Bien Hoa Air Base to catch a flight back to Phan Rang, and we ran into Murray Green, who used to room with Randy Snapp at Yellowstone, who is now a pilot. Also ran into Mike Thomas, an old Sigma Nu from Hot Springs, who is with the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cav over by Cambodia.<sup>3</sup>*

*Finally got all my sound equipment with the purchase last week of a tuner/amp and speakers. I now have a TEAC 4010S tape deck, Sansui 3000 tuner/amplifier and a 2-Sansui 2000 (70 watter) speakers. Cost here \$550 and worth about \$1,000 in the states. The only other major investment “I’m going to make is some Hong Kong suits from the friendly tailor – and then maybe I can think about saving some money. I’m still trying to get that catalog form PACEX, but I’m not having any luck. I expect a breakthrough any day, however.*

*I signed up for R&R to Sydney on 5 November, which will put me there for some good beach action. Through some administrative foul up, I owe the army about 5 days leave, so I don't think I can pull a leave while I'm over here.*

*Other than what's happened this week, there is little to relate. I've been too busy to get out anywhere – and only Saigon once or twice a week. I took my first day off in two months when I went to see Coppage. The war is real quiet here except for a few minor incidents. There have been some big indications lately of the projected pull-out continuing. We were ordered to cease all base construction projects less than 90% complete. The lumber supply has been almost depleted and apparently there is no more coming in-country. What is left is all going to combat and operational support (bunkers, minimum requirements, revetments, etc.).*

*The big mission of the engineers from now on out will be jungle clearing and highway construction, both of which have probably done more to “win” the war than any amount of combat. By this time next year, our group will be almost*

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<sup>3</sup> Less than a month later, Mike was killed in combat. Information from the Vietnam Memorial states: “Michael Herman Thomas, 1LT, Army, Hot Springs, AR, 6/21/1946 - 9/14/1969, He served as a 1542 in the Army. In 2 years of service, he attained the rank of 1LT/O2. On September 14, 1969, at the age of 23, MICHAEL HERMAN THOMAS perished in the service of our country in South Vietnam, Phuoc Long.”

*totally committed to highway construction, and the 79<sup>th</sup> group entirely committed to land clearing – if they are in fact here or partly here.*

*I don't know whether you heard or not – but Joe Butt got transferred up here when his 9<sup>th</sup> Division unit went home. He's now the XO at the 12<sup>th</sup> Aviation Group here on Long Binh and has been properly initiated into the better things of Vietnam life which are available in Saigon and not in the Delta mud – what a change for an infantry platoon leader used to living with his feet underwater.*

*I'm curious if Martin and Nancy have gone home yet, and what it was that made them leave such a seemingly groovy situation. Tell martin to write me and fill me in when they get back. I wish I could pull up stakes and tour around for a while – I don't mind Vietnam at all, but the work is really getting old.*

*Send me the Razorback clippings when football season starts.*

*Love, Tom*



A \$0.05 Military Payment Certificate

As explanation to the reader, some of the people I have referred to in my letters include:

- Jack Butt – my brother 6 years younger, attending the University of Virginia
- Martin Butt – my brother, 3 years younger, who had been a Marine, served in Vietnam, decorated with a Purple Heart, returned to the University of Arkansas, and married Nancy Stair.
- John Backus – a contemporary from Fayetteville who had also gone thorough Army ROTC and was serving comtemporaneously in Vietnam in an armored reconnaissance outfit.
- George Coppage - a contemporary from Fayetteville who had also gone thorough Air Force ROTC and was serving comtemporaneously in Vietnam as a C- 124 pilot, stationed at Phan Rang.



Murray Green, Tom Butt and unidentified friend of Murray's with Saigon girls



C-123's at Bien Hoa airbase. This is the type of aircraft flown by my friends George Coppage and Bill Dorn, who were stationed at Phan Rang

- Murray Green – I met Murray in Yellowstone Park in 1965 when I was working for the National Park Service as a Student Trainee Architect. Murray was a seasonal Park Ranger. At the end of the summer, we left together driving home in Murray's car – Murray, me and a girl whose name I cannot remember. Murray was from Mississippi. He had recently purchased a .22 pistol, and we somehow began stopping frequently in the Wyoming wilderness for "quick draw" contests. I think we were trying to impress the girl. At any rate, Murray was a little too quick on the draw and shot himself through the leg. We treated him with whiskey until we could get to the first town in Wyoming big enough to have a hospital, where they extracted the

bullet and patched him up. I next ran into Murray in Vietnam, where he was a C130 pilot for the “Ranchhands,” who were spraying Agent Orange over Vietnam.

- Bill Dorn – Bill Dorn was George Coppage’s roommate in Phan Rang and a C-124 pilot. Later, Dorn lived with me and several other people in Mill Valley in 1970 – 71 when he was flying C-141’s out of Travis Air Force Base.



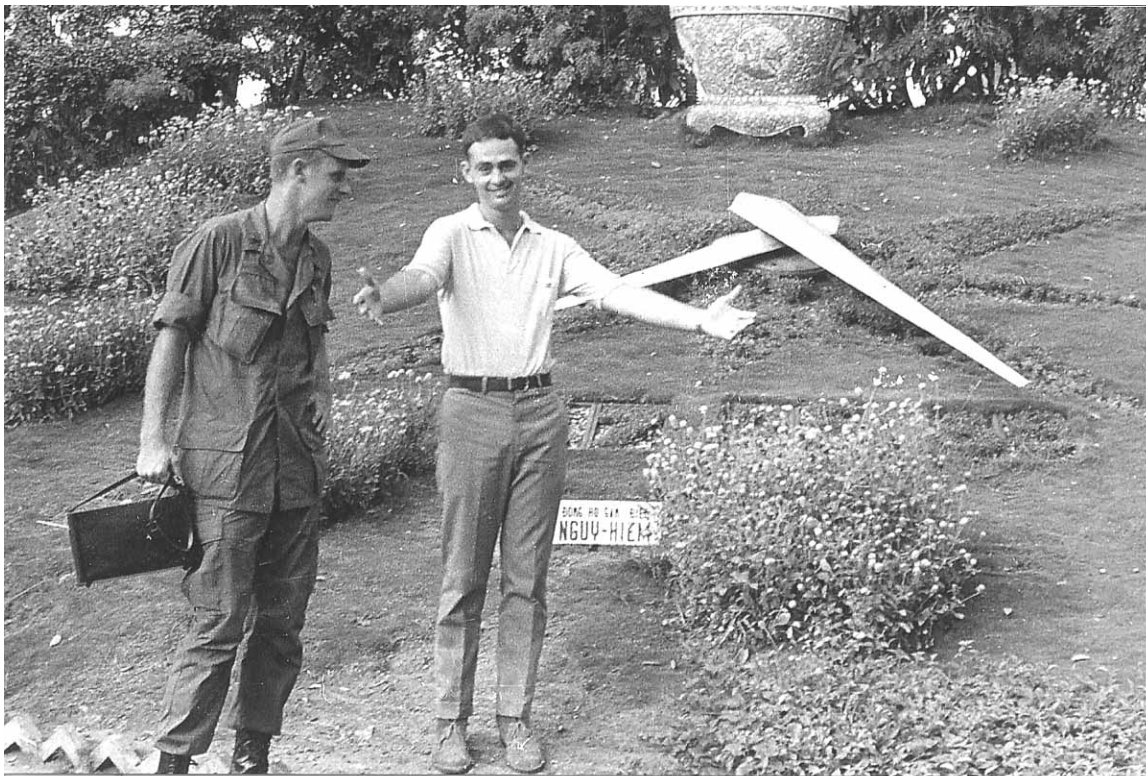
Tom Butt at Long Binh, Vietnam, 1969



Tom Butt at Long Binh, Vietnam,  
1969



120 Yen Do (now Ly Chinh Thang) in District 3 where we shared an apartment and Allen Tolbert actually lived



Tom Butt and Allen Tolbert in unidentified park in Saigon





Tom Butt and Eric Nelson in Saigon



Saigon neighborhood from rooftop terrace of 120 Yen Do



Allen Tolbert and friends



Allen Tolbert on rooftop terrace of 120 Yen Do

28 August 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

*Life has reached a more leisurely pace around here now that the new major is trained and I have settled back into my old routine. I only worked one night this week and actually took Sunday afternoon off – what a great feeling of freedom!*

*Coppage's roommate was down for the weekend – we spent all afternoon at the Saigon Zoo ogling at girls. The zoo is a really well kept and interesting place and is kind of a weekend social center when the weather is nice. It reminds me a lot of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco – but it's hard to find any hippies.*

*I'm wondering what Martin and Jack are up to but I really don't know where to write them now. I guess when school starts I can get everyone's location nailed down again. I've been running around with Joe Butt several times a week. Before he even came to the company he is in, we were doing some horse-trading with them. They've been lending us an electrician for our renovation for over a month, and we've been giving them some materials – just poured 2 transit mixers of concrete for a patio over there today. I guess the army would grind to a halt if it weren't for the old do it yourself supply system. We haven't been able to get office supplies for months through regular supply channels, but it's amazing what a little gravel "for the colonel's sidewalk" can do. We have a constant stream of scroungers in here with their own unique and always drawn out sob stories. Our gravel is always "very critical" and "for authorized projects only," but we manage to shake a little loose every now and then.*



MACV Camp

*I even got out of the office for the first time in weeks today – took a ride about 150 miles northeast of here to a MACV camp in a beautiful little valley surrounded by huge mountains. Beautiful flying weather, which is unusual for this time of year. The advisors are leading the good life up there – It looked like the only thing they had to fight was occasional boredom and too much sleep. The only purpose was to see if they still needed a well that was directed about 2 years ago. They allowed as how they could probably use it, so we came on back and put them on the well drilling list.*

*All base construction has virtually halted as a result by Gen. Mildren, CG, USARV. The shift in our effort for the net year will be road construction. Within a couple of months, our group will be operating 4 major quarries and 3 asphalt*

*plants in an attempt to pave Vietnam before the engineers all leave. We're getting all kinds of tremendous civilian road building equipment which is more efficient than the rugged military stuff. Our group will just be a giant highway contractor by the time I leave – 6 months left today!*

*I'm enclosing some newspaper stories and a copy of our daily log for a day earlier this month when we had to build a float bridge. It's interesting to compare the journalist's version with the log notes. I was the only officer in there that particular day and spent about 10 hours with a phone in each hand. Other than things like this that crop up once in a while, business is pretty routine.*

*I ran into another old Sigma Nu last week – Mike Garlington from El Dorado – used to have a band at the U of A. he got drafted and is working in Special Services in Saigon – making a few entertainment tours, etc. He got us in a good party last Saturday night where his group was playing ... and the Saigon beat goes on.*

*Love, Tom*

## **Building Bridges**

At 0200 hours, Sunday, August 3, 1969, the Viet Cong blew up a 104-foot span of the bridge across Rach Hoa on the main highway QL-15 between Saigon and Vung Tau. The explosion alerted a nearby jointly operated U.S. and Vietnamese operations center in Baria. After a recon team from Baria observed the situation, the 1st Australian Task Force in Nui Dat, 4 miles from the bridge was alerted to restore the bridge. Lacking material and equipment for bridging, the Australians sought assistance from U.S. Army Engineers at Long Binh. The assemblage and transportation of equipment and technical advisors from several engineer organizations was coordinated by 1Lt Tom Butt, who happened to be the duty officer that Sunday. Thirty-five hours after the blast, the road was reopened to traffic using a 206-foot floating pontoon bridge.

Following is an excerpt from the duty log:

Some acronyms: FB = Float Bridge. MSR=Military Supply Route. IIFV = 2nd Field Force, Vietnam. H8 = Helipad 8.

Sunday, August 3, 1969  
Daily Journal, S3 Section, HHC 159th Engineer Group, Long Binh, Vietnam  
Entries by LT Thomas K. Butt, S3 Duty Officer

1100: Call from LT Robertson, 20th Engineer Bde - 03  
Mission 287-5828-0-20 support Australian Engr Task Force at damaged bridge site, QL-15, YS 383592 by supplying 225' of float bridge and technical assistance as required. Contact COL Johnson NUI DAT 922-2953 ASAP. CB Mission: 212-5829-0-

20: Open and maintain Route MSR Zink. Contact MAJ York 1st DIV ADE ASAP.

1103: SGT Slatter, Australian Task Force, 922-3953: Inquired what supporting equipment was available on site or available. SGT Slatter stated that an air compressor was available, but he wasn't certain about cranes or boats. Informed him that mission would be assigned to 100th Engr Co (FB) who would contact him shortly.

1105: SFC Stewart, 100th Engr. Co. (FB) - Notified of 03 mission. Requested they begin loading trucks immediately and check status of bridge erection boats.

1125: COL O'Sullivan, IIFFV - Inquired as to the status of the Bridge mission and requested we move the bridging out ASAP. Verify that sufficient cranes and possibly boats were on site. IIFFV chopper will leave red carpet pad at 1300 for bridge site. I requested two seats for personnel from 100th Engr Co (FB) to make recon. Notified SFC Stewart.

1210: MSG Sanders, 46th Engr Bn - I requested crane to be moved ASAP to 100th Engr Co (FB) bridge yard to load bridging. MSG Sanders stated it would be here by 1300.

1250: CPT Lilygren, 92nd Engr Bn - Only one Port Construction boat is operational and is at Ong Thin. Earliest possible time to move to Long Binh would be tomorrow morning.

1300: SFC Stewart, 100th Engr Co (FB) - Notified that 100th Engr Co (FB) boats would have to be utilized. SFC Stewart stated that one would be repaired in time to leave with convoy and another would have to be taken from either Binh Loi or Phu Long. Requested he check operational status of the latter two boats and get the one that would be available sooner.

1400: MSG Sanders, 46th Engr Bn - Crane had not yet moved to support 100th Engr Co (FB) and would have to be re-rigged from a clamshell. I requested this be done and moved to 100th Engr Co (FB) yard ASAP.

1430: SFC Stewart - 100th Engr Co (FB), 1st serial of bridging departed 1425 hrs.

1600: SFC Stewart - 100th Engr Co (FB) - 2nd serial of bridging and one erection boat departed at 1600 hrs.

1745: MSG Schnake, 20th Engr Bde - 34th Engr Gp has been tasked to assist in bridge mission with crane and Mike Boat. We are to coordinate directly with them.

1750 CPT Brown, CO, 523rd Engr Co - Will check to see if Mike Boat is operational or if one can be borrowed. Will call back.



1830: CPT Brown, CO, 523rd Engr Co - Mike Boat and crane will be at ridge site approximately 2130 hrs.

1845: CPT Barker, 17th Royal Australian Engr Sqdn - Informed him of crane arrival time and asked him to inform LT Mercer.

1900: CPT Barker, 17th Royal Australian Engr Sqdn - Called with list of material that is needed at bridge site. Notified SFC Stewart to police up the material and load a truck.

1910: CPT Roth, 20th Engr Bde - Informed them of the need to transport material and requested air transportation.

1930: CPT Roth, 20th Engr Bde - Chopper will be laid on; we are to bring material to the helipad when loaded. 523rd Engr Co will supply cable and dunnage.

2000: CPT Barker, 17th Royal Australian Engr Sqdn - Australians can supply dunnage - contact CPT Taylor Vung Tau MU76 is to arrange convoy to site. Informed him of chopper supply mission and gave call sign, frequency and landing instructions.

2110: LT McDaniels, 20th Engr Bde - Gave him information on night landing pad at TS 383602 on the western side of QL-15 call sign RECON on 38.50.

2300: LT McDaniels, 20th Engr Bde - Materials were delivered at site and chopper is retuning to H8.

2400: Journal closed.

## US and Aussies team up to replace vital link with pontoon bridge

**BARIA** — A vital bridge on Highway 15, 40 miles southeast of Saigon, was blown at 2 a.m. Sunday. By 3 p.m., Monday the 17th Construction Squadron of the Royal Australian Engineers and the 100th Float Bridge Co. of the 159th Engineer Group replaced the severed structure with a 206-foot floating pontoon bridge, reopening the highway between Saigon and the resort city of Vung Tau.

The 100th Float Bridge Co. transported the materials for the bridge and gave technical aid to the Australian Engineers, who had not built a floating pontoon bridge before.

An unknown enemy force blew two critical piers with 100 to 200 pounds of explosives dropping a 104-foot span into the gap below. The explosion alerted a nearby jointly operated U.S. and Vietnamese operations center in Baria. After a recon team from the operations center studied the situation, the 1st Australian Task Force at Nui Dat, 4 miles from the bridge, was alerted. The Australians, who had the responsibility of restoring the bridge, asked the U.S. Army Engineers to lend assistance.

The 100th Float Bridge Co. and the Australian 17th Construction Squadron assembled at the bridge Sunday afternoon. The Australians quickly

removed approximately 30 tons of concrete that blocked one avenue of approach.

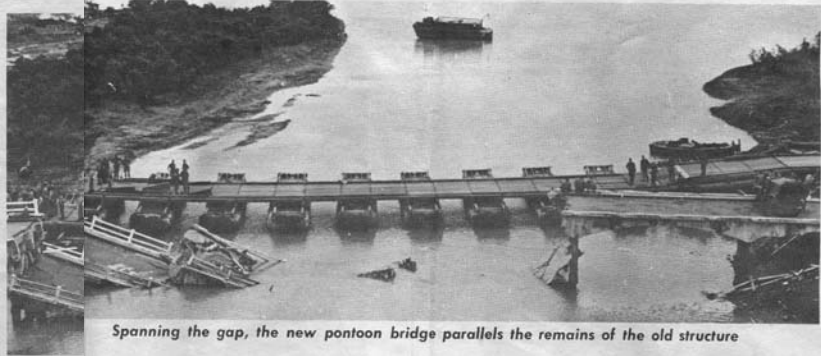
The U.S. unit instructed the Australian Engineers how to build the bridge by demonstrating how one float was built. The 100th then assigned men to Australian work crews to give technical advice.

Lt. John Mercer said, "It was amazing that the Australians picked the technique up as fast as they did — they were highly motivated."

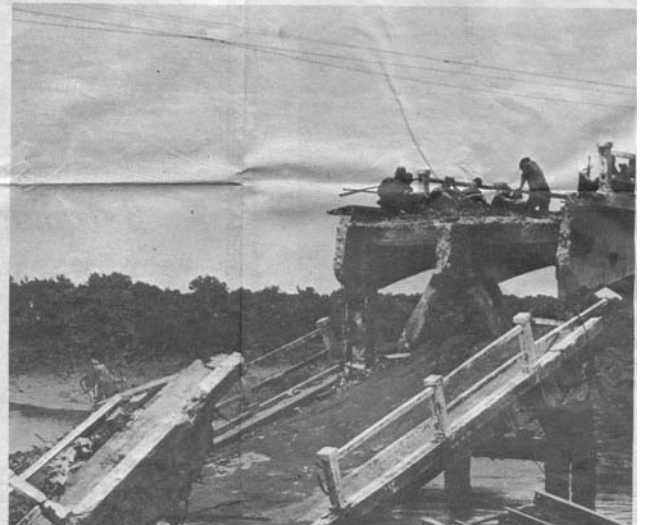
As the bridge neared completion, Col. John Perkins III, engineer, II Field Force, said, "There was a high degree of cooperation on both sides. The men worked straight through the night to get the job done with outstanding results. We made mistakes, which are to be expected, but both sides have profited from these mistakes. Any future emergencies will be handled even better."

Highway 15 now is open again. The mission was successful in many ways. Important cargo can be transported. The Vietnamese people can go about their daily routine now, and the Australian Engineers have learned a new skill.

When asked if they could do it again, one Australian, who had been working all night, commented, "If we had to, we could I reckon."



Spanning the gap, the new pontoon bridge parallels the remains of the old structure



Rach Hoa bridge, between Saigon and VungTau, was blown by the VC on August 3, 21969. The 100<sup>th</sup> Bridge Company provided bridge components, and the temporary float bridge was constructed by the 17<sup>th</sup> Construction Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers.



Skycrane with front end loader and dump truck in foreground at Sanford Airfield, Long Binh Post, November 1969



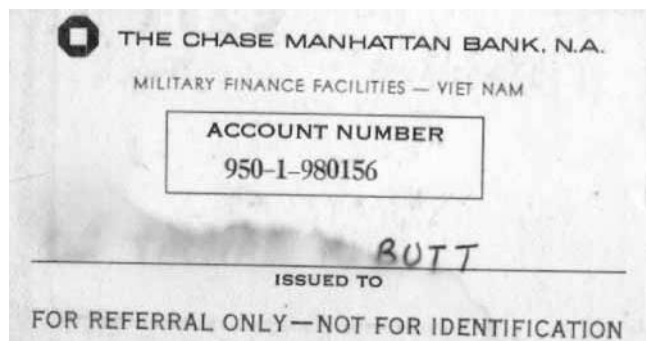
QL-1 adjacent to HHC 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer group compound, Long Binh Post.



Dinh Quan quarry operated by Company D, 169<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, March 1969



Tom Butt and Al Tolbert with unidentified local women in Saigon. Photo by Eric Nelson





Saigon Black Market



Saigon girls in front of City Hall

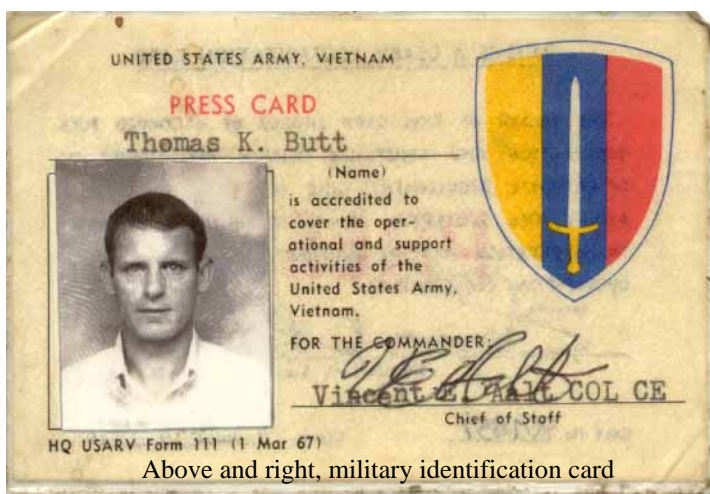
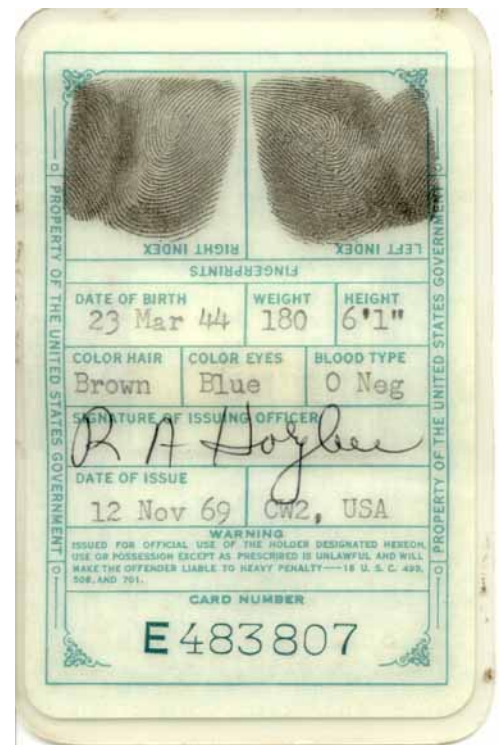
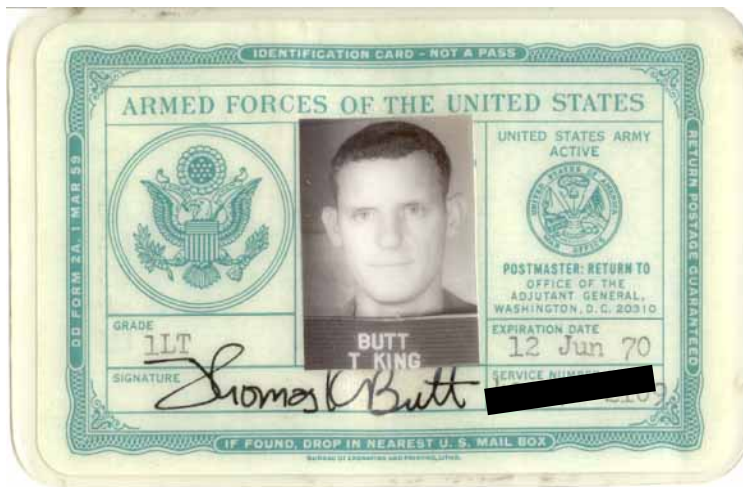


Bui Thi Phuc (Phuc Bui)



Kids playing in downtown Saigon





Above and right, military identification card



Left, phony press ID card made up by a friend who had access to press cards. This enabled us to stay out past curfew in Saigon without getting in trouble if the MP's questioned us.

Membership card to the International House, a private club set up primarily for foreign civilians working in Saigon. It had a dining room and bar. It was a good place to hang out to meet western women.



Phuc Bui and friend



Phuc Bui and friend at Rach  
Kien

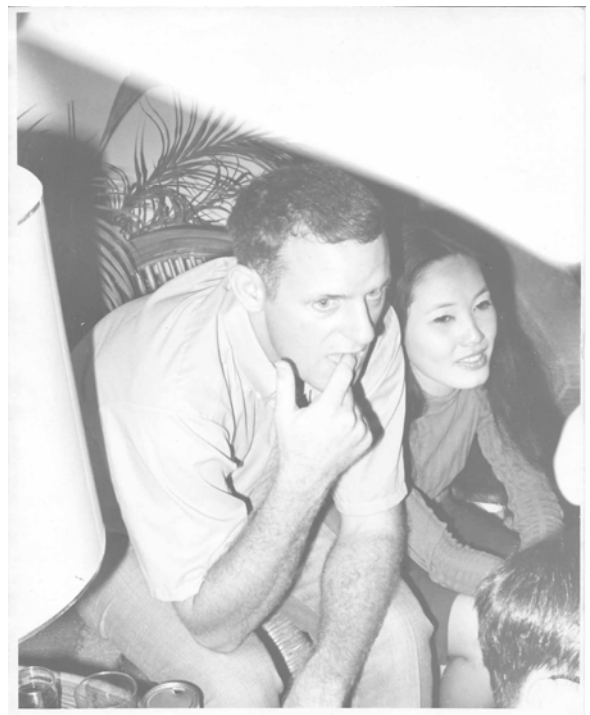


Tom Butt and Phuc Bui



Upper left: Street vendor at Saigon black market. Upper right: Woman in front of Continental Palace Hotel. Below: Girl on Saigon street.







## Bad News

On October 19, 1969, I was contacted by the Red Cross to tell me that my younger brother, Martin, had been killed in an automobile accident. I was informed that arrangements had been made for me to take emergency leave and return home. My cousin, Joe Butt, who was working nearby as the executive officer for a helicopter transportation battalion, picked me up in a jeep and gave me a lift to the airstrip.

It was a long ride home. I remember stopping in Pago Pago, one of the most isolated spots on earth. I spent a night in San Francisco with some of my home town buddies who were living there at that time, then I flew on to Fayetteville. It turned out that Martin, his wife Nancy, a friend, Bobby Ferrell, and Bobby's date were returning from an evening in Eureka Springs, a resort about 45 miles northeast of Fayetteville. In Rogers, about 25 miles south of Eureka Springs, Martin apparently fell asleep, and the car collided with a semi-trailer truck. Martin and Bobby Ferrell's date were killed instantly.

Martin was the first one in our immediate family to die, and because of his recent service in Vietnam, we made arrangements to bury him in the Fayetteville National Cemetery. It was a full military funeral, the same that my father would have 31 years later.

I was only in Fayetteville a couple of days, and I had to head back to Vietnam. I stayed over another night with my friends in San Francisco, and still in somewhat of fog due to jet lag, grief and weariness, I was back in the war.

Apparently, it was over a month before I got around to writing home again.

*24 November 1969, Long Binh*

*Dear Folks,*

*I didn't realize until I did a little arithmetic that I had not written for so long. I've been so busy since I got back that the time has slipped away.*

*In a strange sort of way, I almost fear to communicate or receive communication these days. I think I know what is meant by "no news is good news."*

*It was almost a week and a half ago that Joe went home on emergency leave, and the only thing his C.O. [commanding officer] knew is that uncle Joe was critically ill. I didn't get a chance to talk to Joe before he left, so I don't know what the outcome of that crisis is.*

*It seems like Vietnam is the safest place around these days, even our company dogs are growing old gracefully but are being threatened by a new order from the commanding general, USARV: "Only one dog allowed per company." I don't think that will be enforced, however.*

*I didn't go on R&R this month. They had already cancelled it when I got back, but I rescheduled it for the Christmas – New Year's week, which should promise*

*god things. It will be the height of summer there then, all the schools will be out, etc.*

*I talked to Doug Cummings a few days ago. I'm going to try to get up there sometime. He said he could line me up a ride with one of the IFFV generals who come to Long Binh and Saigon every weekend. Doug says he is sitting pretty good – compared to his former job – has his own quarters in the general's villa, own telephone, all that good stuff.*

*Things have warmed up a little here in the last month out in the boondocks, but still quiet here and downtown. My faith in the potential success of the Saigon government is reaching new lows with the revelation of new corruption involving public figures. The black market and currency manipulation that is being investigated still flourishes openly and is a primary source of income for most Vietnamese in positions of authority and power. I learned recently that a wealthy Vietnamese can buy exemption from the draft for about 100,000 piasters (about \$7,000). I don't know if the protection extends into another administration or not should the one under which it was purchased be deposed by coup or something.*

*All eyes on the Razorbacks for the big game at Fayetteville – with Ohio State upset – I guess it will really be the game of the year. We'll probably get it live on radio here – and see the films a few days later. I sure hope Arkansas doesn't miss this one chance to finally be No. 1.*

*In about two weeks, I'll be the oldest officer in the company as far as time in country goes. Nobody here now except one guy who was here when I came in March. I turned over all my reports to another lieutenant who works for me, and I am working on cleaning up the old completion reports – plus day-to-day business. A sgt [sergeant] and I are going to Vung Tau for about a week in early December to close out all the jobs down there. Should be able to get in some real good beach time.*

*I just finished 8 pages of working drawings for our officer club renovation. The 46<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion was a reluctant "low bidder" on the project and is now hard at work to meet a 20 Dec. Deadline set by the group commander for his Christmas party. It seems awfully fancy for this grubby place, but if that's what he wants – okay.*



*I've got to take a work break now. I'll try to write again sooner.*

*Love, Tom*



Above – Construction of QL-2A, 34<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion,  
November 1969

Left – Crusher at Xom Tam quarry operated by 92<sup>nd</sup> Engineer  
Battalion, February 1970.



Asphalt plant at Phu Hoi operated  
by 24<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion,  
December 4, 1969



Military Service Road (MSR) Zinc –  
placing corduroy road, 34<sup>th</sup> Engineer  
Battalion, September 1969. A  
“corduroy road” is an ancient  
technique of using tree trunks lined  
up side by side to provide support  
on muddy soil.



Night work at Xom Tam Quarry  
by 92<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion.  
January 27, 1970



The HHC 159<sup>th</sup> Officers Club designed by Tom Butt per orders of Col. Bratton. All materials were locally obtained. Some lights are made from bamboo baskets, others (downlights) from artillery casings. The “carpet” is woven grass. Carpentry was by Vietnamese carpenters working in the 92<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion Carpentry Shop. The only materials that did not come from local sources were the fabrics, which I picked up in Sydney, Australia. Col. Bratton went on to become a lieutenant general and Chief of Engineers in 1980.



Sgt. Hancock in front of a typical hootch with sand filled drums and sandbags forming a revetment as protection from rockets





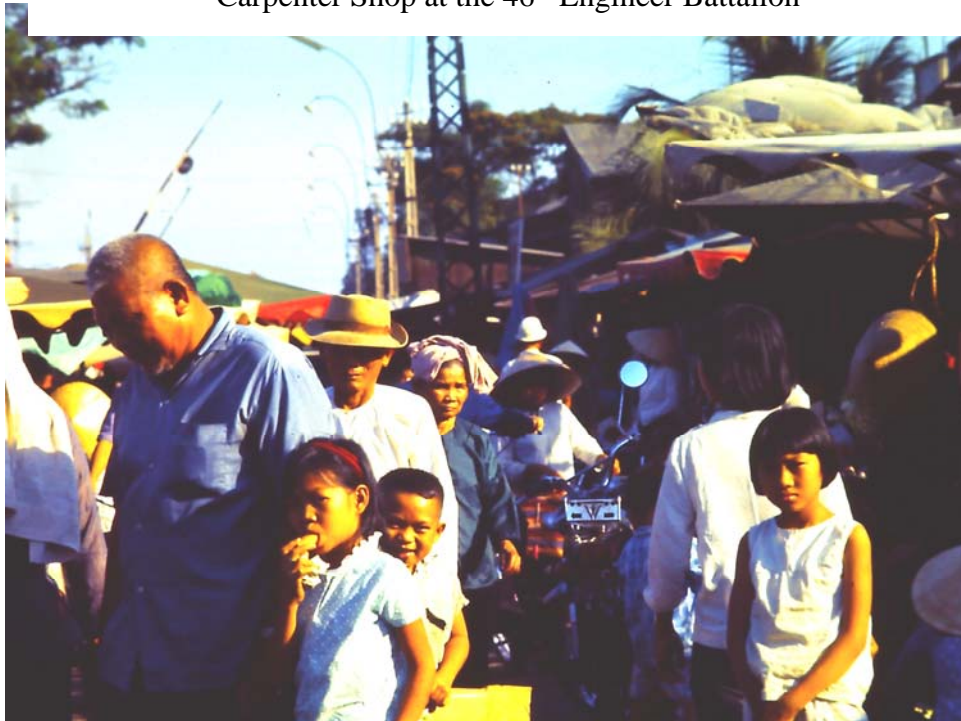
Land clearing at Providence Village, January 13, 1970, 169<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion



Laying out a feast at the HHC 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group Officers Club



Carpenter Shop at the 46<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion



Saigon street scene



4 December 1969, Long Binh

Dear Folks,

*I got a letter and a Christmas box today, both of which I opened. The sweaters look really good and will be great for R&R. I keep meaning to go to the Hong Kong tailor but haven't made it yet. My supply of civilian clothes has always been somewhat limited.*

*I finally pulled off the Vung Tau trip, going down TDY for five days to "inspect construction." Should be a real good trip. The rainy season finally just quit one day, and I have newly discovered the new swimming pool that was built a few months ago just a couple of blocks from my office. I've got a splendid physical fitness program going where I run a mile and then jump in the pool for a few laps during each lunch hour. I'm working up a real lifeguard tan for those Australian girls.*

*I'm working on another deal where I separate from the service either here or in Japan and then can claim free transportation to my home at any time subsequent within one year. Since I didn't get any leave other than the Australian trip, I thought it would be a shame not to hit Japan and maybe Hong Kong before coming home. I'll probably stay in Japan only a couple of weeks and then head on back. It's amazing what the Army will do for you if you can dig it out of some musty old regulation.*

*I am literally working myself out of a job as the tremendous backlog of old projects dwindles, and the new regulations and SOP's I'm writing make day-to-day processes more effective and less time consuming. I've had more time to read and finally started a little painting and sketching.*

*I'm not sending any Christmas presents on the theory that whatever I bring home can be better handles by shipping it free in my hold baggage in February. A new guy is moving into our apartment when Eric and Allan leave – very interesting – spent his first 12 years in Peking, then went to school in Germany and finally got drafted in the United States. His mother is on of the biggest antique exporters in Hong Kong. Maybe I can get you al some authentic Ming vases or something – right out of Red China. If you have a want list for anything, you'd better publish it soon because time is running out. My whole month of December is going to be one big vacation – ad then I'll really start tapering off seriously.*

*I left or lost my address book in San Francisco, so please furnish me with Nancy's address. I was going to send Christmas cards to hundreds of people, but now that's out the window. At least I've got a good excuse to confine my communications to a select few – need Jack's address also. I'm glad to hear that some things are looking up on the home front. I wish we could all be together for Christmas. Let me know where you are going to be, and I'll try to get a phone call through.*

Love, Tom



The beach at Vung Tau,  
December 1969



Locals vacationing at Vung Tau

12 December 1970

*I got a second Christmas package today – the shorts from Murt & Haha. Also, I got a letter from Murt. I will write to them today. I hope I can keep hold of these shorts. The house girls are real bad about stealing any kind of shorts but the olive drab type. I guess I'll have to leave these down in Saigon.*

*I cut my Vung Tau trip short due to excess sunburn. I've never gotten so blistered in my life. I was pretty miserable for a couple of days, but it's all okay now. The worst part was driving back in an open jeep. I was covered up like an Arab, but that sun still found me. The beaches were great – but so hot!*

*I'm still cutting red tape for my Japan trip. I got my passport okay, but now I have to pick up a letter from the Vietnamese government saying they consent to my separation in Vietnam if I promise to leave immediately. No problem there! I should have the whole thing approved by next week.*

*Both my Saigon roommates leave in the next few days. I've got a bash down there tonight and then two parties out here this weekend for departees.*

*I will send by separate letter a recommendation form for graduate school. I'm leaving it blank. Give it to Fay Jones if he is in town. If not, to Mr. Witherspoon. It has to be back at Berkeley by 1 January.*

*Love, Tom*

**R & R**



Tom Butt in front of the Sydney Opera House under construction, December 1970

### ***Courts Martial Duty***

In the spring of 1970, I was assigned to sit on the board of the Long Binh General Courts Martial. Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the General Court Martial is reserved for the most serious crimes. There is a presiding judge, who is a JAG officer and three other individual, the “board,” who function somewhat like a civilian jury. I was one of those three individuals.

I recall two cases that came before us. The first was a soldier who had been accused of a “fragging,” that is tossing a hand grenade into the tent of his sergeant and seriously wounding him. We convicted him, but I don’t recall what his sentence was.

The second case was more troubling. A lieutenant at the 46<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion compound, just down the street from us, had killed his best friend by shooting him in the head with a .45 on the balcony of their two-story hootch building. The incident had occurred after an evening of drinking at the battalion officer’s club. There were no witnesses. Both the prosecution and the defense accepted that it was an accident, but the prosecution wanted a manslaughter verdict. There were not supposed to be any loaded weapons inside the perimeter of Long Binh Post except for guard duty, and the prosecutor made a case for negligence. Eventually, I believe that we delivered a

manslaughter verdict but directed only a letter of reprimand because we believed the man had suffered enough and would carry the guilt of his actions with him the rest of his life.

*1 March 1970*

*Dear Folks,*

*Well today ended officially my tour of duty with the 159<sup>th</sup> Engineer Group. We had a grand hail and farewell last night with four bird colonels and all the battalion commanders present – probably the best one since I've been here and the first time most of the wheels have seen our new club.*

*I could barely walk this morning but made it to the morning briefing and shakily accepted a Bronze Star and Army Commendation Medal. As far as I know, I'm the first junior officer in the group headquarters to receive both commendations – and it rather surprised me!*

*I have only to wait until 7 March to get my discharge and then another two days to catch the plane to Phnom Penh, Cambodia. I'm staying in Saigon – It's really like an R&R or something. The weather has been real nice – cool and breezy – but sunny – so I've been laying around the pool in the hot part of the day and touring around in the late afternoon and evenings. I was trying to get a flight to Cam Ranh today to see Doug Cummings before he left, but the flight was running several hours late, and I was afraid I might miss him, so I called the whole thing off.*

*My travel fever has been considerably excited of late due to the arrival a few days ago of two guys who were friends of a friend of mine at 20<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade. These two characters were ex-Peace Corps types who have spent the last year traveling and came in here from India, Nepal, Thailand, Cambodia, etc. They've been staying with me in Saigon and have fed me wealths of information on points west of here. I'm not thoroughly convinced – but am considering going from Japan either back through the Indian sub-continent and Middle East, or through Russia via the Trans-Siberian Railway (only \$230 from Hong Kong to London). And ... eventually catching my free ride home from Europe rather than Japan. At any rate, I'll keep in touch as my tour plans solidify.*

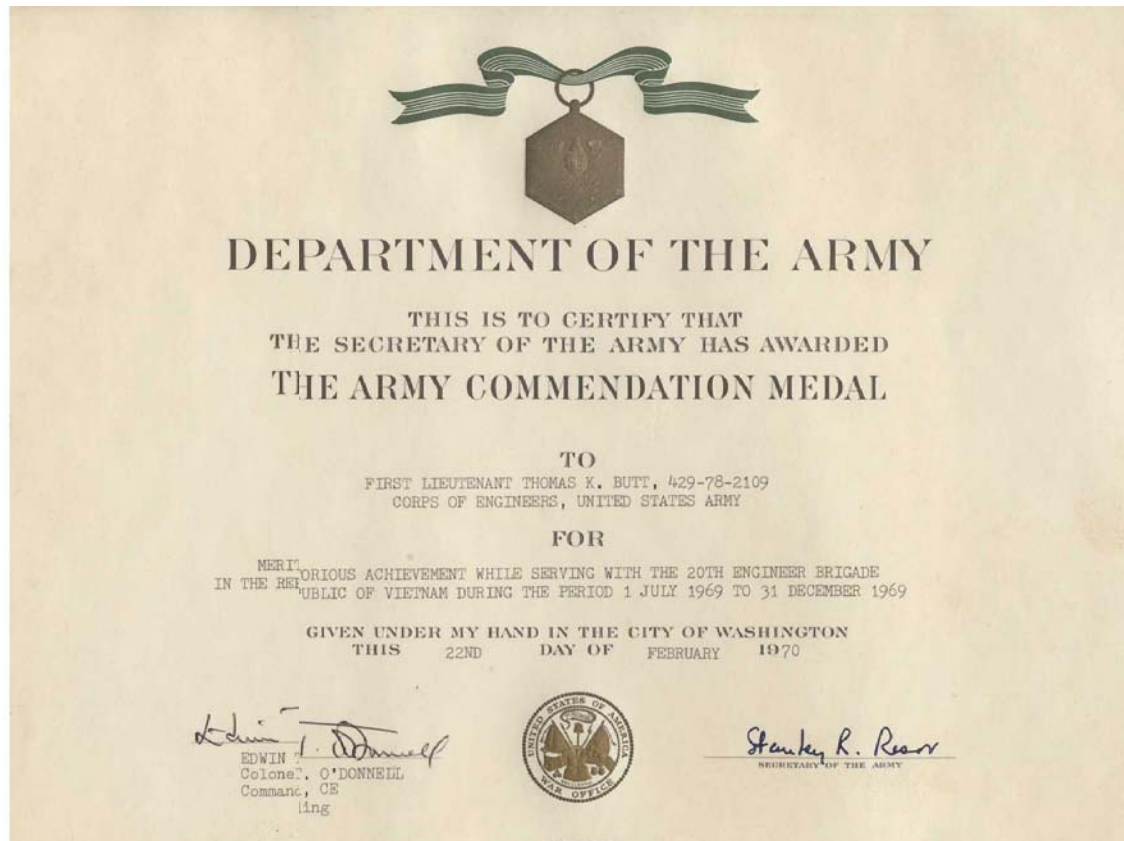
*One thing that will affect them (my plans) is the status of my acceptance from Berkeley. If I do go there this fall, I'm going to have to get back in the groove and save a little money (or avoid spending what I've already saved). One place that you can count on as a forwarding address is c/o Bernhard Horstman, which is in turn c/o Mrs. Bri Johnston, The Gallery, Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan. I should be in Tokyo some time early in April. I promise to contact, if not sponge off of, those people that Murt and Haha fixed me up with. Mary Huntington has also given me number of contacts in Laos and Bangkok – and some other tips and information. I'm embarking on this trip immeasurably more organized and informed than on my trip to Europe two ears ago.*

*If I do go on to Europe, I intend to hook up with Sharon Blair and Pat Rowan, who are still living in Vienna. I just got a letter from Sharon saying they are both staying indefinitely. I'll probably have to check out the situation there.*

*Not much else to report for now, but I'll keep you posted.*

*Love, Tom*

*PS. I'll continue to pick up my mail at the 159<sup>th</sup> until I leave the country.*







Above, Bronze Star certificate and, below, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, RVN Campaign Medal, Army Commendation Medal and Bronze Star



### Checking Out

An interesting series of events occurred the day before I left Vietnam for Cambodia. Several weeks before, I had lent \$700 to Bernhard Horstmann, a friend with whom I shared the Saigon Apartment. Bernhard had been discharged several weeks earlier and had stopped off to see his mother in Hong Kong and his sister in Tokyo before going back to New York. Bernhard's mother lived in Hong Kong and was a well-known and highly successful businesswoman in the antique and Chinese reproduction furniture trade. For some reason, which never became entirely clear, Bernhard had left the \$700 loan repayment with an employee of his mother with instructions to mail it to me in Vietnam.

The normal way of addressing mail to a U.S. service person is through an APO (Army Post Office), in this case, with a San Francisco zip code. For some reason, the employee addressed the package to me with simply my unit number in "Long Binh, South Vietnam." To make it even more mysterious, he distributed seven \$100 bills in the pages of a paperback book, and included a piece of paper with the page numbers.

Instead of getting into the U.S. controlled military mail system, the parcel went via international mail to the main Saigon Post Office. I received a post card in the mail informing me I had delivery at the Saigon Post Office. I went down to pick it up, and a Vietnamese postal employee said, "Do you wish to accept this?"

I replied, "Sure," and I signed for it as instructed. Then he said, "I am a Vietnamese Customs Officer, and you have violated the Vietnam law on currency importation by accepting foreign currency outside legal channels."

"Great," I said, "What happens now?"

"Well, you are under arrest, and if you don't cooperate, we will send you to prison" If you cooperate and confess, we will assess a fine."

"How much will the fine be," I asked.

"How much do you have on you," he replied. I emptied my pockets of about \$500 in MPC (Military Payment Certificates), which I had recently withdrawn from the bank in preparation for my trip the next day to Cambodia.

He allowed as how that might be about right, but he also wanted to know my military status and where I was staying. I explained that I had been formally discharged the previous day and that I was staying at an apartment in Saigon. He then decided that they would like to visit the apartment and contacted both the MP's (U.S. Military Police) and the Con Sat (Vietnamese Military Police). A convoy of jeeps with Customs, Con Sats and MP's pulled up at the apartment, and we all went inside. As we opened the door, about a dozen decked out Vietnamese women shouted "Surprise!" They were friends of Bui Thi Phuc, all set up for going away party.

The officials told the women to get lost and proceeded to search the apartment. They were intrigued by the phony ID's I had accumulated and thought that was suspicious enough to warrant a more detailed search. Searching a high shelf in a closet, they exclaimed "Ah ha," when they discovered a large black plastic bag containing about a bushel of marijuana. It was left over from one or more of my departed roommates; I was not a user of marijuana. With that discovery, they offered the American MP's an opportunity to take some action, but after confirming that I was no longer a member of the armed forces, the MP's shrugged and left.

Marijuana was not a big deal in Vietnam, and as far as I know, was not illegal for Vietnamese. My recollection is that it was for sale in public markets. Anyway, we all went back down to the Customshouse. Mr. Thuy told me that I would need to dictate a confession to a Vietnamese typist. Unfortunately, the typist could neither speak English nor type very well. So I typed the “confession” for him because the hour was getting late. While all this was going on, Mr. Thuy sent out for sandwich for me and invited me to take my pick of a beverage from one of several pallets of soft drinks confiscated from who knows where.

Then Mr. Thuy said, “We are through for today. Come back tomorrow, and you can pay your fine.” Mr. Thuy did, however, keep my U.S. passport.

That was a defining moment for me. So far, this looked like just a way to extract \$500 from me, but I was concerned that it could be much more serious. I had two choices. I could go directly out to Bien Hoa and catch the next plane to the United States, which my discharge orders allowed (I didn’t need a passport), and leave all the uncertainty behind \$500 richer. Or I could play out the routine with Mr. Thuy and follow through with my plans to visit Cambodia as the beginning of an Asian odyssey.

Fortunately, my instincts were right. I went back to the Customs House, paid my fine, took a taxi to Tan Son Nhut and caught the next plane to Cambodia. I was happy but almost broke.

Below is the receipt from the fine I paid to the Republic of Vietnam.

The image shows a handwritten receipt from the Republic of Vietnam. The document is on aged, yellowed paper. At the top left, the number 'Số 378' is written. The main body of the receipt contains handwritten text in Vietnamese and English. The English text reads: 'Nhận của (1) Thomas S. Smith'. Below this, the Vietnamese text reads: 'Mười chín ngàn hai trăm bốn mươi lăm đồng (59.245,00)'. The date is written as 'Giới, ngày 30 tháng 3 năm 1970'. There are several red circular stamps on the document. One stamp on the left reads 'QUAN THỦ VIỆT-NAM'. Another stamp in the center reads 'BỘ TÀI-CHÍNH' and 'TỔNG NHÀ QUAN-THỦ'. A third stamp on the right reads 'TRƯỞNG PHÒNG TÀI-LIỆU KIỂM-NHÀ'. At the bottom right, the number 'Số 840 - 57' is written. The receipt is signed by 'Đ. Nguyễn' and 'Nguyễn A. 370'.

Receipt for 59,245 piastre fine paid for “illegal importation of foreign currency.” At the official exchange rate of 118 piastres per dollar, this was about \$501.

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT RECORD  
SAFEGUARD IT.

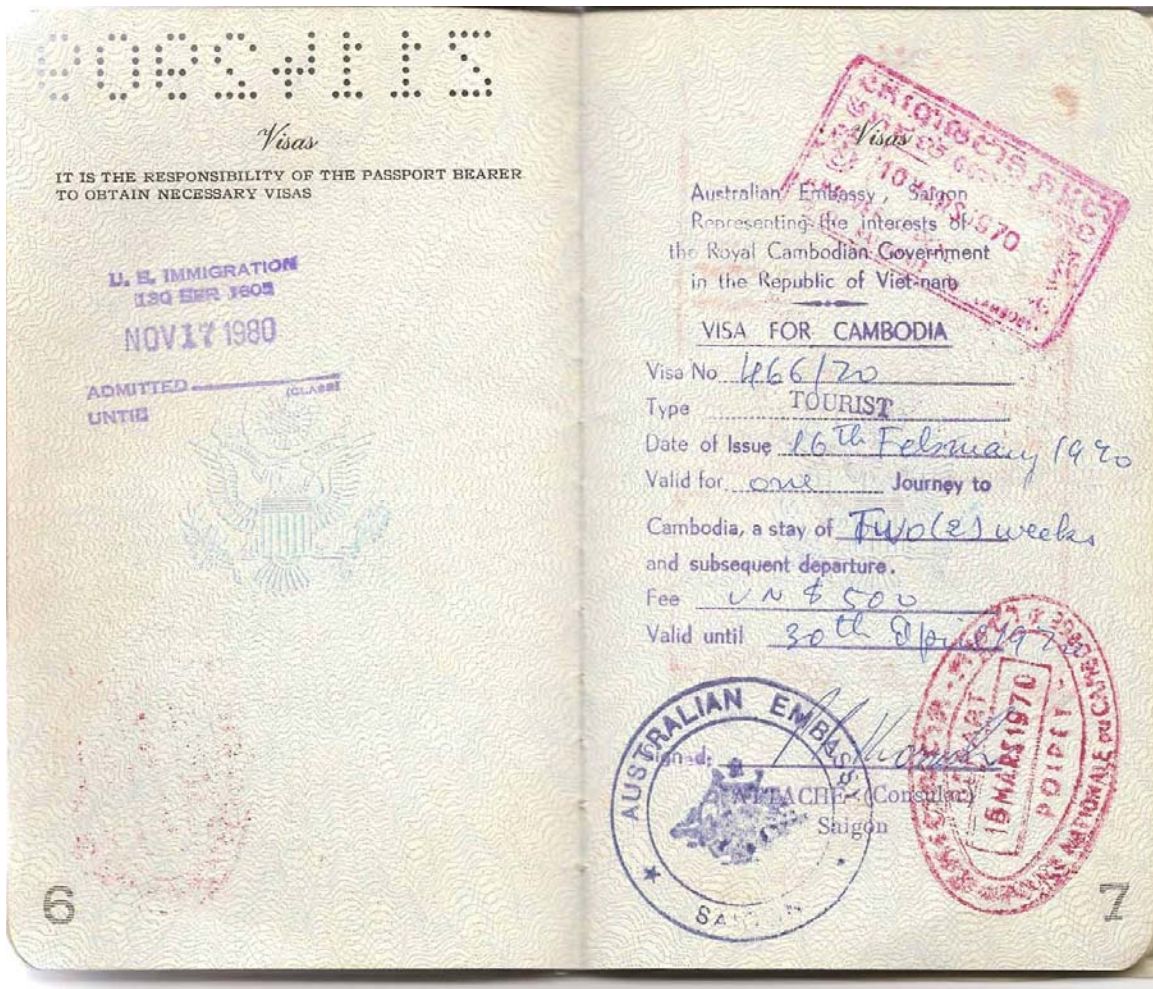
1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME <b>BUTT, THOMAS KING</b>		2. SERVICE NUMBER <b>[REDACTED]</b>		3. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER	
4. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS <b>ARMY-CE</b>		5a. GRADE, RATE OR RANK <b>1LT</b>	5b. PAY GRADE <b>O-2</b>	6. DATE OF RANK DAY MONTH YEAR <b>8 Mar 69</b>	
7. U. S. CITIZEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		8. PLACE OF BIRTH (City and State or Country) <b>Albuquerque, NM</b>		9. DATE OF BIRTH DAY MONTH YEAR <b>23 Mar 44</b>	
10a. SELECTIVE SERVICE NUMBER <b>3 74 44 86</b>		8. SELECTIVE SERVICE LOCAL BOARD NUMBER, CITY, COUNTY, STATE AND ZIP CODE <b>LB#74 Fayetteville, AR</b>		c. DATE INDUCTED DAY MONTH YEAR <b>NA</b>	
11a. TYPE OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE <b>Relieved from Active Duty</b>		b. STATION OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED <b>HQ, Sp Trps USARV Long Binh Post RVN</b>			
c. REASON AND AUTHORITY <b>AR 635-100, SPN 611</b>		d. EFFECTIVE DATE DAY MONTH YEAR <b>7 Mar 70</b>	e. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED <b>None</b>		
12. LAST DUTY ASSIGNMENT AND MAJOR COMMAND <b>HHC, 159th Engr Gp USARPAC</b>		13a. CHARACTER OF SERVICE <b>Honorable</b>		15. REENLISTMENT CODE <b>NA</b>	
14. DISTRICT, AREA COMMAND OR CORPS TO WHICH RESERVIST TRANSFERRED <b>USAR Control Group(Reinf) USAAC, St Louis, MO 63132</b>					
16. TERMINAL DATE OF RESERVE/UMTS OBLIGATION DAY MONTH YEAR <b>7 Mar 74</b>		17. CURRENT ACTIVE SERVICE OTHER THAN BY INDUCTION a. SOURCE OF ENTRY: <input type="checkbox"/> ENLISTED (First Enlistment) <input type="checkbox"/> ENLISTED (Prior Service) <input type="checkbox"/> REENLISTED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER <b>Commissioned</b>		b. TERM OF SERVICE (Years) DAY MONTH YEAR <b>NA 8 Mar 68</b>	
18. PRIOR REGULAR ENLISTMENTS <b>NA</b>		19. GRADE, RATE OR RANK AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO CURRENT ACTIVE SVC <b>2LT</b>		20. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO CURRENT ACTIVE SERVICE (City and State) <b>Ft Belvoir, VA</b>	
21. HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE (Street, RFD, City, County, State and ZIP Code) <b>1004 Rebecca Fayetteville(Washington) AR 72701</b>		22. STATEMENT OF SERVICE			
23a. SPECIALTY NUMBER & TITLE <b>1331 Cbt Engr Cmdr</b>		23b. RELATED CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND D.O.T. NUMBER <b>NA</b>			
		24. DECORATIONS, MEDALS, BADGES, COMMENDATIONS, CITATIONS AND CAMPAIGN RIBBONS AWARDED OR AUTHORIZED. <b>NDSM, VSM, RVNMC, ARCOM, BSM, 2 O/S Bars</b>			
		25. EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMPLETED <b>USAES-BOEC 9 weeks 1968</b>			
26a. NON-PAY PERIODS: TIME LOST (Preceding Two Years) <b>None</b>		b. DAYS ACCRUED LEAVE PAID <b>-6 1/2</b>		27a. INSURANCE IN FORCE (NSLI or USGLI) <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	
		28. VA CLAIM NUMBER c. <b>NA</b>		b. AMOUNT OF ALLOTMENT <b>NA</b>	
		29. SERVICEMEN'S GROUP LIFE INSURANCE COVERAGE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000 <input type="checkbox"/> NONE			
30. REMARKS <b>Highest Civilian Education: College Degree Blood Group: O Neg</b>					
31. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES AFTER TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE (Street, RFD, City, County, State and ZIP Code) <b>1004 Rebecca Fayetteville, AR 72701</b>		32. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING TRANSFERRED OR DISCHARGED <i>Thomas K Butt</i>			
33. TYPED NAME, GRADE AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZING OFFICER <b>JACK MADDEN JR, CW4, USA Asst Adjutant</b>		34. SIGNATURE OF OFFICER AUTHORIZED TO SIGN <i>Jack Madden Jr.</i>			

DD FORM 214 1 JUL 68 PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE EFFECTIVE 1 JAN 67. \* GPO : 1968 O - 233-125 ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES REPORT OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE 1

Form DD 214 showing official end of active duty







Entry visa for Cambodia with entry stamp (upper right) dated March 10, 1970, and departure stamp from Poipet (lower right) dated March 15, 1970



## CAMBODIA

While I was Phnom Penh, there was a coup in which Prince Sihanouk was overthrown. From what I could see, it was essentially bloodless, and the public display consisted mainly of crowds marching through the streets. The North Vietnamese Embassy was burned (see below).

In March [1970](#), when Sihanouk was touring Europe, the [Soviet Union](#), and [China](#) a mob attack against the North Vietnamese embassy, initially planned by Sihanouk as a demonstration to pressure Moscow and Beijing, commenced but was led out of control by government agents who managed to organize the complete sacking of it. In it a contingency plan was found for the Communists to occupy Cambodia, which further inflamed the government in Phnom Penh which engaged in combat with the Vietnamese and demanded their withdrawal. Instead of returning to Cambodia to confront the growing crisis, Sihanouk continued his tour of Communist nations.

On March 16, the Cambodian Secretary of State and police chief, Mannorine, was questioned by the national legislature about corruption occurring under Sihanouk. Worried that prime minister, [Lon Nol](#), was preparing to depose Sihanouk, he attempted to depose Lon Nol only to be defeated by the army and arrested. Lon Nol's deputy, Prince [Sisowath Sirik Matak](#), then advised Nol to remove Sihanouk from the government.

The next day, the army took up positions around the capital. A debate was held within the National Assembly. The assembly had been purged of leftists in the 1960s by Sihanouk and was made up at that point almost exclusively of rightists. One member of the assembly walked out of the proceedings in protest and was not harmed after. The rest of the assembly voted unanimously to invoke Article 122 of the Cambodian constitution which withdrew confidence in Sihanouk. Lon Nol then took on the powers of head of state on an emergency basis, while much of the government of Sihanouk remained the same. This marked the foundation of the Khmer Republic.

*Wikipedia*

My primary destination in Cambodia was Angkor Wat, so following the coup. I joined several other westerners and rented a station wagon with a driver to take us to Siem Reap.

*16 March 1970*

*Dear Folks,*

*I have for three days now been in Siem Reap, which is the town near the temple complexes of Ankor Wat. For reasons that I will relate when I have more time and paper, I left Vietnam with substantially less money than I had anticipated, so I am not exactly traveling in the grand style – but at the same time enjoying it more.*

*My first leg out of Saigon took me to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, which was only 20 minutes by air. It could as well be half way around the world by appearance. I was at once impressed by the cleanliness and friendliness of the city and amazed at what a different attitude the Cambodians seem to have about taking care of their environment. The Vietnamese hold the Cambodians almost in contempt and consider them to be culturally inferior – but quite the opposite is*

*true. Phnom Penh is a real pleasure. There are broad boulevards and many parks – and all very quiet with little motor traffic, congestion and smog. Every street is completely lined with trees and flowers, and on every corner is a sidewalk café in the best European tradition. The people are a mixture of Khmer (true Cambodian), Vietnamese and Chinese – and most speak varying amounts of French. English is not too common except around the hotels – and for the first time in ages my old French is really getting a workout and doing quite well.*

*The only westerners I saw in Phnom Penh were all French – and there were a good many Japanese. After a couple of relaxing days, I took a taxi (station wagon with 16 people in it) to Siem Reap and I am now staying on the roof of a Chinese hotel. This roof is known far and wide as “the place” for budget travelers in Cambodia. You get a cot, one sheet and one thin blanket for \$1.00 a night. It’s really quite nice. Most of the patrons are ex-Peace Corps types from all over the world. You can feed yourself for less than \$1.00 a day at the local market on tasty tidbits of dubious quality and cleanliness. The temples near here date from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century and are one of the most impressive things I have ever seen. Reclaimed from the jungle starting over 60 years ago, most have been partially rebuilt in painstaking detail. They are huge beyond belief – and the walls, gateways and artificial lakes spread out through the jungles for miles in every direction. The main roads are laid out so as to form a series of loops by which you can see each of the major complexes in series. This is the place that is famous for temple rubbings – and I have purchased a number that I am ending home from Thailand in a day or two. I paid less than a dollar apiece for them. Hey are probably worth much more in the states.*

*Tomorrow, I am going to Thailand by bus, taxi and train via the overland route between here and Bangkok. After a few days in Thailand, I’ll probably fly to Hong Kong and Japan where I really have to make a big decision. For only a little over \$200, I can take the railroad across Russia in a trip that includes food, lodging, etc. I think this would really be fantastic! I would have to stay in Japan for maybe up to a month to get my visa and all plans worked out with Intourist. But the trip across is only 10 days from Vladivostok to Moscow. I could then catch my free ride back to the states from Germany, Spain or England, according to how things work out. I’ve got another big temptation to take a trip down the Malaysian peninsula through Indonesia and visit Bali, which is the really “in” place in Asia and also very cheap. But I don’t think I’ll do it at the expense of my Russia trip.*

*Anyway, I’m thoroughly enjoying myself and enjoying being a civilian once again. I’m eager to come home, but there is so much to see in this part of the world. I don’t see how I can afford to miss it. Will keep you informed as I move around.*

*Love, Tom*

ក្រុមហ៊ុនខេមរ រាជរោងនាគា  
SOCIÉTÉ KHMÈRE DES AUBERGES ROYALES

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JUDGE & MRS THOMAS F. BUTT  
1004 REBECCA  
FAYETTEVILLE, ARK

USA

72701









the roof of a Chinese hotel. This roof is known far and wide as "The place" for budget travelers in Cambodia. You get a cot, one sheet, and one thin blanket for \$1.00 a night. It's really quite nice - most of the patrons are ex-peace corps types from all over the world. You can feed yourself for less than \$1.00 a day at the local market on tasty tidbits of dubious quality and cleanliness. The temples near here date from the 10th to the 12th century and are one of the most impressive things I've ever seen. Reclaimed from the jungle starting over 60 years ago - most have been partially rebuilt in painstaking details. They are truly beyond belief - and the walls, gateways and artificial lakes spread out through the jungles for miles in every direction. The main roads are laid out so as to form a series of loops by which you can see each of the major complexes in series. This is the place that is famous for temple weddings - and I have purchased a number that I am sending home from Thailand in a day or two. I paid less than a dollar apiece for them. They are probably worth much more in the states.

Tomorrow I am going to Thailand by bus, taxi, and train via the overland route between here and Bangkok. After a few days in Thailand, I probably fly on to Hong Kong and Japan where I really have to make a big decision. For only a little over \$200.00 I can take the railroad across Russia in a trip that includes food, lodging, etc. - I think this would really be fantastic! I would have to stay in Japan for maybe up to a month to get my visa and all plans worked out with Inaburst. But the trip across is only 10 days - from Vladivostok to Moscow. I could then catch my free ride back to the states from Germany, Spain, or England according to however things work out. I've got another big temptation to take a trip down the Malayan peninsula through Indonesia and visit Bali - which is the really "in" place in Asia, and also very cheap - but I don't think I'll do it at the expense of my Russian trip.

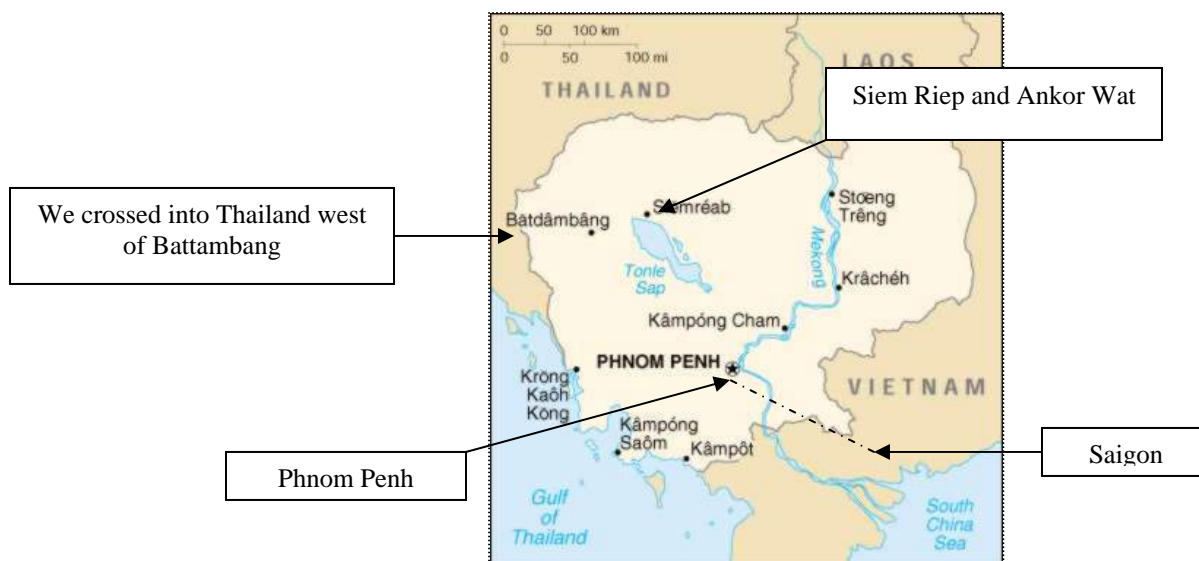
Anyway, I'm thoroughly enjoying myself and enjoying being a civilian once again. I'm eager to come home but there is so much to see in this part of the world - I don't see how I can afford to miss it.

Keep you informed as I move around ~

love  
Tom



Above, Angkor Wat main entry, March 1970. below, Cambodian currency.







Fishermen on the Mekong River between Phnom Penh and Siem Riep (Ankor Wat)



Ferry across the Mekong River at Kampong Cham, between Phnom Penh and Siem Riep (Ankor Wat)

Heading west to Thailand via land was our only option, as the airports remained closed following the coup. Again, with a small group of westerners, we rented a station wagon and a driver and headed west. At some point, the roads became too bad and too narrow for the car, so we engaged a driver of a motorcycle with a trailer to continue the trip. Finally, as we neared the Thai border, we had to get out and walk across a bridge over a small river where we passed into Thailand at a decrepit border station.

At the small Thai border village, we boarded a steam train with wooden cars pulled by a wood burning locomotive. Within a few hours we had traveled from the heart of the jungle to downtown Bangkok.



Entry visa for Thailand (upper left) stamped March 16, 1970, at Aranyaprathet, Thailand, just west of Poipet, Cambodia

## THAILAND

In Bangkok, I met up with Capt. John Evans, Corps of Engineers officer and an architect I had known from Vietnam. I was finally able to withdraw some money from the bank to continue my travels. I stayed in a small hotel and spent a few days seeing all the sights, the wats (temples), the silk factories and the water markets.

I was in a marketplace one day taking a photo, and a kid grabbed my camera and ran down the narrow alley of the market. I gave chase for several hundred feet when a policeman appeared and grabbed him. The cop gave me my camera back and let the kid go. He told me I was lucky to be alive and advised me to get back to the tourist areas.

*19 March 1970*

*Dear Folks,*

*I'm putting some things in the mail today at the APO in Bangkok.*

- 1. Two pieces of Thai silk, one for Mother and one for Nancy. These are supposed to be sufficient for making one dress.*
- 2. A Cambodian Buddhist monk's orange robe with belt. Maybe Nancy can make something out of this.*
- 3. Temple rubbings from Ankor Wat (large roll). You may select one of these for framing – then hold the rest until I return.*
- 4. Temple rubbings from Bangkok wats – (small roll). There are nine of these. Why don't you give away about half of them to the Shirleys, Stairs – and anybody else that seems appropriate.*

*I'm leaving tomorrow for Hong Kong. Everything is fine. I will write later.*

*The return address on the packages and this letter is a friend, so that I can use the APO.*

*Love, Tom*

## HONG KONG

In Hong Kong, I looked up Bernhard Horstman's mother with whom I stayed for the next few days. Bernhard's father was a German banker, and his mother was the daughter of a German missionary and his Chinese wife. They were living in China in 1949 but had to evacuate when the communists took over. They spent several years in Thailand before returning to Germany. Eventually, Mrs. Horstmann made her way back to Hong Kong where she went into the antique business and made quite a name for herself.

While I was in Hong Kong, Herbert Marcus, Jr. and his wife visited Charlotte Horstmann for some antique shopping. Herbert was the son of Neiman-Marcus founder Herbert Marcus and brother of Neiman-Marcus CEO at the time, Stanley Marcus. Charlotte took us to dinner at the Peninsula Hotel, Hong Kong's grand historic hotel. The next day, Herbert went to get some suits made at a tailor Charlotte recommended, Tailor Chan. I went along and ordered a Cashmere topcoat after Tailor Chan said he would sell it to me at fraction of what Marcus paid for his. Chan said he knew I didn't have much money, so he would do it as a favor for Charlotte.

## JAPAN

I caught up with Bernhard Horstmann in Tokyo, where he explained a couple of things. The money he was supposed to send me he left with one of his mother's employees. They guy got confused and sent it through regular international mail instead of to my APO address. That's how it ended up in the Saigon post office and caused me so many problems. The other thing was that he had come down with hepatitis that he blamed on the water from our Saigon apartment. It turned out that all that water "mama-san" was supposed to be boiling and putting in our refrigerator was right out of the Saigon water system. I felt lucky to have dodged that bullet.

The following letter pretty well covers what I did in Japan.

*8 April, 1970, Tokyo*

*Dear Folks,*

*I'm in Tokyo now and getting ready to leave for Vienna tomorrow via Russia. I've checked this thing out real well and have been assured by everyone that there will be no problems. The Russian trip is very popular with many people who have retired from the service in Japan and are taking the long route home at that time.*

*It's been a while since I wrote last, so I'll try to catch you up with what's happening. I left Cambodia only the day before the coup d'etat – because I was in Siem Reap instead of Phnom Penh, I was unaware of the developing situation, which took me completely by surprise.<sup>4</sup> The first two days in Phnom Penh, however, I did watch the mob sack the North Vietnamese embassy. Something was obviously afoot, but I couldn't imagine Sihanouk getting run out of the country. I thought it was only an indication of a change in policy. Anyway, the*

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<sup>4</sup> On April 30, 1970, President Richard Nixon announced to a national television audience that US troops were invading Cambodia, the country west of Vietnam through which the North Vietnamese military was supplying their troops in the South. In fact, the US had been conducting bombing raids in Cambodia for over a year. For the past year the Nixon had been promoting the "Vietnamization" of the war, promising to replace US troops with newly-trained South Vietnamese soldiers. Citizens had expressed relief at the thought of American fighters coming home. On the heels of Presidential promises of de-escalation, the April 30, announcement caused many in the United States to respond with shock and anger. Protests erupted across the country, including one at [Kent State](#) that ended in the fatal shooting of four students by National Guardsmen.

*trip to Thailand was interesting. Instead of flying like all the other tourists, I took a car and then a wagon pulled by a Honda to the western border at Poipet. We had to walk the last ½ mile into Thailand across a kind of no-man's land and then took a 3<sup>rd</sup> class train on to Bangkok.*

*Bangkok was too big and too westernized to be really interesting, and at the time I wanted to get on up to Tokyo before Bernhard left for the states. So I spent nearly a week anyway looking around, etc. I met a friend from, 'Nam, John Evans, the last two days there who was on his way to Africa for a 30-day leave. In Bangkok, I lost my travel notes that had all those names I was supposed to look up in Japan, so that was all out the window. I know you will condemn me for that because of the trouble Murt and Haha went to to round them up – but what can I do?*

*So – Hong Kong was the first stop – where Bernhard's mother was nice enough to put me up for a week. She is a fantastic person with energy seemingly endless. Besides her shop, she owns a furniture factory which turns out very expensive things for very rich people who seem to make up the bulk of her clientele. The shop of Charlotte Horstman, Ltd., is a must stop for anybody that is somebody in Asia. I met ambassadors, princes, etc., while hanging around the place, and there was no end to my astonishment! Because I had no clothes, I planned to get some made while in Hong Kong. Mrs. Horstmann called up a tailor and shirtmaker to whom she referred me and asked them to give me a good price on whatever I ordered. The tailor is one of the best in Hong Kong and gave me about 1/3 of his normal prices. I know this for a fact because one of the Marcus brothers (Neiman-Marcus, Dallas) was having cloths made there also and paid \$150.00 for topcoat which cost me only \$120.00 for the identical item. I had two suits, two sport coats and a topcoat made. They were expensive by my standards, but really top quality and a fantastic bargain. I had to go in for fittings once or twice a day for almost a week. They're the best fitting clothes I've ever had.*

*Two weeks ago, I flew on up to Tokyo and caught Bernhard just before he was leaving for the states. He had a place all set up for me to stay with the family of a girl he had been dating. I was a little leery of the whole thing – not even knowing these people, but everyone assured me there was no problem, no imposition, etc., so I moved on in. They have a huge house with beautiful garden, lots of servants, etc. right in the middle of Tokyo. One of their daughters and her husband are staying in Japan between college and graduate school, and the other daughter is in between changing colleges. They all speak fluent Japanese, and the three young people are working part-time teaching English to Japanese businessmen. A real good bunch – and lots of fun.*

*I stayed here for about 4 days while getting my Russian trip set up, and then went to Kyoto for a week. Kyoto is kind of like the "Philadelphia" of Japan and is full of old palaces, temples, gardens, etc. – basically everything that is typical of Japanese architecture and gardening. I spent two more days with another friend of Bernhard's near Kyoto – and from there and Kyoto – I visited Expo 70 for parts of three different days. Very impressive – but you didn't miss much by not being here – if you know what I mean. "If you've seen one world's fair, you've seen them all." The gardens and shrines of Kyoto were much more worthwhile as a justification for a trip to Japan.*



*Tomorrow, I board a ship at Yokohama that takes 2 days to go to Nakhodka, then I take a train for one day to Khabarovsk and fly the rest of the way to Moscow. The alternate arrangement is a seven-day train trip for the same cost, which I didn't think would be a very good idea. I have one day in Moscow and two full days in Leningrad before flying on to Austria. I wanted to take the train, but it would have involved an extra two weeks here getting transit visas for Poland & Czechoslovakia. The Buzzartes (the people I'm staying with) made this trip a couple a years ago and have been full of helpful hints and encouragement.*

*I should arrive in Vienna on 16 April – and you can write me there c/o Sharon Blair at UNIDO, PO Box 837, A-1011, Vienna, Austria. I am sending with this letter a copy of my discharge and discharge orders just in case I lose the original – because it is my free ticket back to the states.*

*Another thing I would appreciate for you to do is to put a phone call in to George Coppage or Charles Allen at 415/383-4180 and see if my hold baggage from Vietnam has arrived yet – and see if they will have or are having any problems storing it. The address I had it sent to was Cove Apartments, 10 Seadrift Landing, Tiburon, CA 94920, but since I've been gone I've had no communication with Coppage. I just want to affirm this, since I have over \$2,000.00 worth of stereo equipment and other thing in it. I had it sent to California instead of home because there was so much stuff – and I was going on back to S.F anyway. Please advise – or have Coppage write me at Sharon's address. I got your two letters here. They were waiting for me when I arrived. Another thing – let me now as soon as I get something one way or another about Berkeley. I'm not optimistic about getting in, but you never know. I should be hearing something between now and June.*

*Cherry blossoms are just coming out here – I hate to head north again, but it will be spring again in Vienna. I'll write from Russia if I have time.*

The voyage from Yokohama to Nakhodka was a couple of days. Passengers were a combination of Japanese and a few westerners. The crew was Russian and put on a little Russian style entertainment for us on the way – singing and dancing. I made friends with a couple of Swiss guys and some Japanese girls. One in particular, Toshiko Yamamoto, I ran into again in Vienna. We didn't waste much time getting on the train. Most of the people who had come on the boat were going to go by train all the way to Moscow, about a week's journey.

I can't remember why now, but I got off the train in Khabarovsk, where it was cold and snowy.

**Khabarovsk**

Strategically located on the hills overlooking the Amur River, Khabarovsk was founded as a military outpost in 1651, during the first wave of Russian colonization. The town gained importance during the nineteenth century as a trading outpost, and today it is one of the most important and promising cities of the Russian Far East. Khabarovsk is a pleasant city, with wide, tree-lined boulevards, a popular beach, and an interesting museum of ethnography and local history.

I boarded a propeller-driven Russian airliner that was fitted up inside like pictures I have seen of airplanes from the 1950s. I ended up sitting with some high-ranking Russian military officers in a pair of facing seats with a table between.

**USSR**

*15 April 1970, Leningrad*

*Dear Folks,*

*I'm in Leningrad now. Thought I would send this portrait of two of your favorite people. It's been a very interesting and enjoyable trip so far, although the weather was terrible in Moscow, and I didn't get around as much as I wanted. Today, the sun is out – odd but beautiful, and I'm looking forward to a good day. I should have planned to spend more time here, but it's too expensive. I leave tomorrow morning for Vienna – fly all the way.*

*Love, Tom*

**AUSTRIA**

*22 April 1970, Vienna*

*Dear Folks,*

*In Vienna now – for some five days. Spring arrived the day I did, but the weather is suffering a relapse these last two days,*

*Sharon met me at the airport, and I've been staying with her and Pat, and getting shown around royally. Vienna is one of the most beautiful cities I've ever visited – but awfully quiet (literally and figuratively). Apparently, lack of excitement has gotten to Pat – She's leaving for Paris sometime next month. As for me, I've got the same problem I had before – two fantastic girls whom I would like to date separately – straighten my mind out – but what can I do in this situation? Very Strange!*

*I don't have a single plan for more than 24 hours in advance right now. I may stay here for a while – or go to Spain – or Paris – or the U.S. Just don't know. I wish I knew something about the Berkeley application. I've been thinking of trying to get into some graduate school over here, or working for a while – in that case – it would have to be either in England or France because of the language problem. I'm going to write Gordon Watson to see if he's still in London*

– and also Mart Vehik – who is still at Oxford, I think – to see what the educational and employment situation is there now.

*My trip to Russia ended much too quickly. There are so many strange things going on that I wanted to know more about – but no time!*

*I'll try to give you some impressions of the trip while they are still fresh on my mind, in more or less chronological sequence. We left Yokohama on a passenger ship with about 10-odd people – mostly Japanese with a few Australians and Europeans thrown in – and maybe 2 or 3 other Americans. The crew was all Russian – and a very friendly and talented bunch (I think musical talent was a prerequisite for employment). It was a two-day trip to Nahodkha – during which time I met a good many of the Japanese folks – and became good friends with several (mostly female type). Nahodkha is quite near Vladivostok but is used as a tourist port of entry because the navy is at Vladivostok – a much larger city.*

*The bleakness of Siberia is absolutely appalling! Not so much the land – but the city – which typically sprawls over a tremendous area with no apparent center or cohesiveness – kind of like an infinite college campus. There are few cars – lots of streets – and the next most immediately striking thing is the complete lack of commercial retail outlets, as we know them. Almost every residential building has a store of some sort on the lower floor – but you wouldn't know it until you walk in and look around for it. Within the system, however, the people seem to be in not so bad shape – the basic essentials of life are available, and the Russians appear to be well dressed (perhaps better than people in many parts of the U.S.), and there are no starvation cases readily noticeable. Luxuries, as we know them, are just not available (which I will elaborate on later). From Nahodkha all the way through the trip, there was absolutely no restraint applied to any of us as to where we could wander, whom we could talk to, or what we could photograph – although written instructions were distributed that forbade photos of airports or bridges.*

*We then took an overnight train trip north to Khabarovsk – and boarded a plane for a nine-hour trip to Moscow. The train was almost in the luxurious category – but it was especially laid on for the boatload of people coming in – it's hard to judge how it would compare to what is available normally. The plane was a mixture of Russians and the same group from the boat – a large turbo-prop with considerably more room than an American plane would have. Everyone seemed to get along famously with the Russians on the plane – including a number of armed forces personnel.*

*Moscow was rainy and cold like nothing I've ever seen before – and after one soaking walking tour through the Kremlin, I gave up touring as much as possible. The outskirts of Moscow have much the same appearance as the towns in Siberia – but with a little more finesse – and the newer apartment complexes have a standard of design that would show up many similar projects in the U.S., but that isn't saying a whole lot. Downtown Moscow has preserved enough of the historical heritage, which leaned so heavily on French and European ideals for a couple of hundred years – principally in the reigns of Catherine and Peter. The Kremlin is huge and impressive in the center of town, and two thousand people stand in the most miserable weather to look at Lenin's waxen face. I wouldn't*

*have stood ten minutes in that stuff to see anyone or anything! In Moscow, there are plenty of cars (though not anything like in the west), and they are all the same brand. There are more shops – more variety – and some of the newer complexes are just like shopping centers anywhere – though a little sparse – like they are anticipating a big shipment of merchandise to arrive any minute.*

*The hotels are all big in the grand style but a little Spartan, and the food is terrible and expensive. Better to eat outside where the Russians do – but there is always a line, and service is not up to the standards one would expect elsewhere. Here again, the people are well dressed and seem to be provided with everything they really need, but no luxuries. Moscow has a subway that looks like a palace and is spotlessly clean, fast and efficient, probably the best in the world – and other items of public transportation seem to be well planned and executed. I stayed an extra night in Moscow under the rationalization that the weather would clear, but it was actually due to a Japanese girl that I had taken a fancy to – and a group of jolly Russians who insisted we join them for vodka – which they chugged just like water – or maybe faster. Intourist takes it as a personal affront if you change your itinerary in the slightest, but I managed to get things worked out somehow.*

*Leningrad was a little chilly, but clear and spring-timey – and is probably the most liberal, European and prettiest city in Russia. Here again, the stores were a little better recognized than anywhere I had been previously – and there were actually window displays, neon lights, etc. – and even in profusion on a recognizable city center and main drag. Leningrad is full of history art and architecture – and is a very pleasant place. New – and the food was good. I was the only American I think in Leningrad at the time, and one of the few foreign tourists, who usually come in great profusion later in the year.*

*A few interesting points – the older Russians are generally suspicious and cold to visitors unless they are thrown together in a situation like the airplane – hotel, etc. But the younger ones are friendly and outgoing, and if they are in or graduated from college have a varying knowledge of English. There is a black market on western goods and western money – about 3-4 times the legal exchange rate for dollars – and any luxury item (radios, records, American cigarettes, chewing gum, etc.) brings a premium in rubles. I didn't indulge – but I was approached constantly by students and younger Russians. Most of the things they wanted were things we take for granted – but for one reason or another are not available. Caviar, for instance, is not available in the Russian stores – but can be bought by foreigners with foreign currency in special stores – usually located in hotels.*

*All in all, it's really difficult for me to really draw up an opinion without studying the facts more, but unquestionably, the Russian people have been forced to give up the normality of life as most people in the world know it in order to pursue and industrial might and military power that are no joke. Whether they would be where they are today, as a primary world power if the Revolution of 1917 and subsequent communist dictatorship set up afterwards had not taken place is a question no one can answer – nor can one answer as to whether it was all worth it. But at any rate, the Russian people seem to be – for all their problems – a very proud bunch, cognizant of their history, patriotic and dedicated to the heroes of*

*the Revolution (witness the crowds in Red Square to view Lenin). They all are ready to admit – and some did to me – that there have been problems and mistakes made in the past, but I think look to the future with kind of a resigned confidence. The excessively luxurious living standards of the Russian aristocracy have been arduously preserved everywhere, which is a great boon to art, but I suspect there is a more subtle reason – because they all figure in a quite realistic and encompassing “propaganda” campaign to glorify the accomplishments of the Revolution. Everywhere that tourists are apt to congregate in Russia, a tremendous amount of literature is available on every subject giving views of Lenin or contemporary communist thought. Being able to read only the French or English translations, it was difficult to say what the Russians are actually given to ingest for journalism of current events and history, but everything I could read never just said “United States” or “American.” It was always [refaced by “imperialistic” or “warmongering” or something. But other than that, the substance was surprisingly candid, biased of course, but not so much as much of what one reads in the U.S.*

*From what conversation I was able to have with them on the subject, a number of Russians had remarkably similar views to my own on the state of world affairs – vis a vis the war in southeast Asia (you can no longer confine it to Vietnam) and the war in the Middle East. They were personally unhappy that the leaders of their country had involved them to the extent they were – and had absolutely no wish to confront with the Americans or anyone else in these places, but they were not, of course, protesting, on much the same grounds that most Americans blindly follow our foreign policy under the dubious and ephemeral justification called “patriotism.” I am firmly convinced that although the Russians want to be perhaps the most powerful country on earth – and want to protect their national interests to the extent that anyone does – that they are not interested in “burying” America – or anyone else. The only danger lies in the seemingly inevitable parade of tyrants which history knows so well – that, like Hitler, were able to capture the imagination of and achieve mastery of the people and their destiny. And I’m not so sure that the American people are any better able to resist the advances of such men and their policies – even though we have theoretically set up the machinery of government to prevent it.*

*Which bring up the new “Indochina” war ..., which we are now involved in and makes me absolutely sick. The recent events in Asia have created a situation which almost no one has any control over – and could go on interminably. I think the U.S. would be extremely well advised to stay out of Cambodia, to dissolve the army of mercenaries in Laos and to continue the “Vietnamization” of Vietnam as expeditiously as possible. No one in Laos has any interest in defending himself from the North Vietnamese, and they should therefore have the place if they want it. The Cambodians will defend themselves if they have the means to fight, which we should supply without the benefit of “advisors.” The South Vietnamese have developed an interest in defending themselves only because it’s now easier to be on “our” side than “their” side due to efforts in that country which have been amazingly successful lately – but everything considered – hardly worth the cost. I think this whole thing will end within a year if we will allow the North Viets to have Laos, part of Cambodia and maybe a little of South Vietnam. The fighting will stop for a while – if there are concessions made – and then the situation may stabilize if the governments of the free countries are smart enough to appear to*



*their citizens to be a better alternative than any other possibility – which is doubtful considering the nature of the southeast Asian in a position of leadership (i.e., corrupt). If the United States, however, continues to fight the half-clandestine, half-open war and trying to teach the will to resist as well as the means of resisting to a bunch of people who don't give a damn, it's going to be a long ball game.*

*The way it looks now – Nixon and Fulbright might turn out to be strange bedfellow type co-heroes of the Vietnam era. Fulbright, because he turned out to be right at the time that it wasn't worth it, and Nixon because he got us out of it. The co-anti-heroes, or maybe villains, turn out to be Johnson, his advisors and generals – who all seemed to be ill informed and incapable of rational planning and execution of their adventure. In the incidents involving My Lai and other such “massacres, atrocities, etc.” I fully support anybody below the rank of general – and fully condemn anybody on up – nothing personal, you understand, Dad, I deference to your rank!*

*As near as I can determine – not having been directly involved – the publicity about an obsession with body counts is quite true – and the encouragement from higher up to compete on this is also. We had the same thing in the engineers as applied to almost any statistic – the pressure to accomplish anything which would make the line on the briefing chart rise was fantastic – while the concern for quality and actual fulfillment of any long term goals was brought up only occasionally and soon forgotten. While the U.S. forces should have been “Vietnamizing” years ago, they were too busy counting bodies and competing for rank and publicity – training doesn't make as good headlines as combat. Even in the engineers, we wouldn't even associate with the Vietnamese when I came to “Nam, but when I left, we had whole units integrated within ours, and there was tremendous pressure to train them and do so successfully, which I think was the most important single policy implementation of the whole conflict. Amazing that it took some 6 ears to think of it!*

*But enough of world politics – I wish I could tell you what my plans are, but I really don't know. I'm torn among being completely degenerate for an indeterminate amount of time, being only partially degenerate (which means working at some nondescript job), going to school somewhere, traveling some more, coming back to the states, writing a book, doing independent research, doing nothing at all and playing it by ear, etc., etc., etc.*

*Also, I have to decide what to do about these two women – run away from the situation? Pick one and see what happens? Play it cool and see what happens, etc., etc.*

*Also, for finances, I don't have any idea how much money I have in the bank, but I'm not anywhere near to running out, no am I spending much.*

*I should be paid up on my American express bills, so don't pay any if they come in. But I would appreciate it if you would write a check for any Diner's Club statements which come in – but the total shouldn't run over \$300 or \$400, all from Bangkok or Hong Kong. If you pay more than one statement, check to make sure there isn't a duplication due to a repeat of the charges from the previous*

*statement. I have not paid any Diner's club charges to date. Also, if you get anything in the mail from American Express, disregard it unless it has a card in it, then in that case, forward it here. You already have the address, I think.*

*Other than that, not much happening.*

*Love, Tom*

## GREECE

*12 May 1970, Hydra*

*Dear Murt & Haha,*

*I've been on this little Greek island called Hydra for the last two days – never seen such a charming place. No motor vehicles – only boats and donkeys. Greece is the best European country I've visited with the exception of maybe Spain. The food, the people are great and everything is amazingly cheap. I was in Athens for a week and toured around also to Mycenae, Edidauras and Corinth – places full of history and ruins from Greek, Roman and Byzantine periods. In a few days, I'm going to Venice, then back to Vienna to gather my luggage and probably to Germany to try and get my free ride home.*

*Love, Tom*



Pat Rowan in an Athens restaurant



The Acropolis in Athens, Pat Rowan in foreground