



Vietnam Was Boring

Mr. Ronald C Griffith

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Vietnam was Boring If I had to describe my thirteen months in Vietnam with one word, that one word would be, “Boring”. I know this idea of having a boring time in Vietnam does not fit with your perception of Vietnam. All you hear about in books, movies, or documentaries revolve around combat actions. It takes about seven men or women, to support one man in the field. I was one of those seven. The Army was so concerned about our safety, the Marine division, in the compound next to ours, had orders to get us out safely or take us out. They were not to let us be captured. One professional critic considered my credibility in question because he knew more about my experiences in Vietnam than I did. He expected a tale of combat operations with men suffering or dying along with other acts of heroism. Our compound in Phu Bai was considered so safe that there was no need for us to carry ammunition. We were required to have our rifles with us when we went to work but not during the day. Ammunition was readily available. In Vietnam, I worked an average of 28-29 swing shifts a month from 16:00 to 23:30. In one stretch, I worked 62 straight swing shifts without a day off. After eating the midnight meal, almost everyone stayed up until at least 03:30-04:00 before feeling safe enough to go to bed. By the time I woke-up, took a shower, and got dressed, I either went to a late noon meal or waited until the meal for the swing shift starting at 15:30. This was my routine for thirteen months. I was out of our compound once to visit the rifle range and maybe six times to the Marine PX located next to our compound in the Phu Bai complex. I left the Phu Bai complex for a week of R and R in Japan. My first and only look at Vietnam was on my way home. They gave me a two day leave in Saigon, before sending me home. These were the only two times I was off a military base during my 13 months in Vietnam. The daily routine in Vietnam was boring. The only thing I found fascinating and a challenge about Vietnam was the mission in Operations. I found my work as a “Ditty Bopper” a great break from the dull camp routine. A “Ditty Bopper” works with Morse code. All I had to do was sit back, relax, and listen to the radio while I enjoyed another cigarette with my fresh hot cup of coffee. Yes, life was tough in our air-conditioned rooms, comfortable beds with clean linen, regular mail, an Enlisted Men’s Club, four hot square meals a day, and a swimming pool for part of the time I was there. Work was the only thing that broke the boredom of Vietnam except for the month after the start of the Tet Offensive in January 1968. I believe most of my fellow soldiers did the best they could in Operations. In reality, most of us were just putting in our time until it was our turn to climb onto the “Freedom Bird” for our trip back to the “Land of the Round Eyes”. Join me in my three year, nine month, and four day adventure in the Top Secret world of the Army Security Agency. I will take you through my decision to join the Army in August of 1964, basic training at Fort Ord, CA., and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Devens, MA. My training was as a Manual Morse Intercept Operator. I was able to receive code at 30 words per minute. I was Top Honor Graduate in my class. This netted me a “Plum” assignment in Bad Aibling, Germany. This duty station was located half way between Munich, Germany and Salzburg, Austria. My specific assignment was to copy the Russian and East German messages to and from their spies throughout the world. After two years of my three-year tour of duty, I requested reassignment to Vietnam. The next thirteen months were spent copying the North Vietnamese Army Reserve units while stationed at Phu Bai, about 35 miles south of the Demilitarized Zone near the ancient imperial capital of Hue. (pronounced, “whey”) Now you can enjoy my experiences during my adventure in the elite, Top Secret world of the Army Security Agency.

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