

Battery B moves to Fire Support Base Judy (1969-70)

Recollection and pictures by Woody Alexander, U.S. Army (Retired)

I was on duty one night, contending flying roaches being chopped up by the large fans in the FDC and their parts messing up us and the firing charts, when LTC Callaway came in to talk with me.

It seems that the B Battery Commander, Doug Williams, had been bitten by a rabid rat and was evacuated for shots (Pasteur treatment of 28 shots in the stomach.) I was very young and very junior, but had done a good job in operations at night and in flying missions during the day. So he told me to pack my gear and head out to Tay Ninh Province to take over. Jack Callaway had been in my Vietnam Orientation Course at Fort Sill and knew I had just come from commanding a nuclear weapons detachment with the German Air Force, so he knew that I wasn't completely wet behind the ears. He also knew that my father was finishing thirty years in the field artillery next year.

I turned over the FDC to the Gunnery Sergeant, and got ready to fly out in the morning. I remember packing my nonessential things in a wooden footlocker and hoping that I would return to pick them up from storage. I did take my plastic brief case with a picture of Kathryn in a silver frame that had been by my cot. We had a brief handshake with the FDC crew and I flew out on a Huey at dawn. We flew by the Black Virgin Mountain (Nui Ba Dien – see picture below with base location) and landed at FSB Carolyn near the mountain's base. It was the morning of October 1st, 1969.



B Battery was in a direct support reinforcing mission with our 2nd Brigade and been at Carolyn for a long time, thus the build up of trash and rats. The land was flat and had seen a lot of fighting. In May, the base have been almost overrun, and the gunners of B Battery had fought well, killing 25 NVA on the base while suffering nine WIA. There were several Silver Stars given out to NCOs' for that action, including Doug Williams and Earl Crabtree.

There was no official change of command, as I started out as Executive Officer. After ten days I officially took command when it was certain that my predecessor was not returning. We soon had another nighttime ground attack for the benefit of my training. We were firing rounds with time fuses set to explode in 0.4 seconds, so the fragments would kill the attackers. One of the guns ran out of time fuses, so I ran two boxes over to it. I stumbled into a deep bomb crater filled with rain water. No wanting to drop the heavy boxes, I held my breath and calmly walked up the other side of the crater and out of the water.

Most of the men saw that and thought I was crazy, so when I smacked one of them for smoking near the powder pit, they all put out their cigarettes. We killed a lot of NVA with no losses on the B Battery side. I think some troopers on the perimeter were hurt from fragments from the base plates of our shells – maybe we should have added another tenth of a second to the fuse.

We had an Australian unit next to us and we quickly became “mates.” They ran out of beer and I had a pallet load (80 cases) of San Miguel Philippine beer flown in to them. They really liked us after that and I received an invitation to the Coral Sea Ball in Canberra from their commander.

Our 2nd Brigade was shifted 85 miles northeast to protect Song Be and the Nui Ba Ra mountain area. I made an air reconnaissance of our new homes created by 10,000 pound bombs dropped by the Air Force to blow away hilltops and bamboo. I got on the ground the day after the bombs hit and it was a mess. The 8th Engineers were already there, bulldozing away the bamboo and building our FDC and Command Post and building the revetments we would drop our three howitzers into at each FSB. This would be the biggest test of my Army career. I went back to Tay Ninh to get the Battery.

We lifted off with eight CH53 Sky Crane sorties and 40 CH47 Chinook sorties. Our first stop was my old home at Phouc Vinh. We were operational in an hour and fired all night against possible rocket locations. The next morning we hooked up and flew 50 miles to our new homes supporting Song Be from FSB's dug into the red lateritic clay. Everything was going fine until I discovered that I had not ordered ammunition for these new exposed positions at the end of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Twelve Chinook crews risked their lives bringing artillery ammunition to us in the middle of the night. “Pay attention to details” was the lesson I learned that night.

We were actually pretty safe for about two weeks, even though we were blocking the end of the Ho Chi Minh trail coming in from Cambodia. It usually took the enemy about two weeks to prepare an attack, so we took the time to harden the FSB's with three layers of sandbags and blast walls made out of 105mm ammunition boxes filled with dirt. We had a coordinated defense plan with the cavalry battalion that owned the location and our sister 105mm howitzer battery located on the north end of the base. We were always on the south end, close to the landing zone, as we had heavier ammunition. *Below: Earl Crabtree with Nui Ba Ra on horizon early on Judy*



We actually had deuce and a half truck (2.5 ton capacity) that had been flown in by CH53 Sky Crane to carry the ammunition. The ammo was prepared for transport by the guys in our Battery Rear at the 2nd Brigade Base Camp at LZ Buttons in Song Be. Our ammo guys would put the pallets of 155mm rounds in cargo nets and the Chinooks would pick up the nets and sling them out the 15 kilometers to our FSB's. *(See below)*

The nets would be dropped on the LZ and the Platoon ammo guys would bust open the six-round pallets and load the individual rounds on the truck for the 100 meter trip to the gun emplacements. There, the gun section crews would unload them and place them standing up in protected shelters inside the circular sandbagged gun emplacement according to the type of rounds: HE (high explosive), WP (white phosphorus), Illumination, or Firecracker (Bomblet). Some of the ammo crew got lazy and were kicking the rounds off the back of the truck onto the ground and each other. That bothered me and I told them to hand them individually down to the gun crew. I remembered that a cracked 155mm round exploded in the chamber of the gun at Fort Sill, killing eight gun crew members, and relayed this reason for my demand.



The Chinooks also brought food, clean uniforms, fuses and mail on their daily runs to the firebases. The guys in the rear, about eight of them, kept the logistics flowing. Our Battery clerk, a college graduate, filed all the reports, so I had zero paperwork to do. He also dealt with the Vietnamese women who washed our dirty fatigues and sent the clean versions back out folded in individual clear plastic bags. He also made sure the mail got to the right firebases for the NCOs' to hold mail call. We also had light beer sent out at the rate of two cans per person per day. We paid for the beer and laundry via the Battery Fund, which the clerk also ran. We had military payment certificates (MPC) that we used in lieu of coins and dollars. I remember that I lived on \$50 a month in MPC and that the \$20 bill was yellow and had a picture of the Nautilus submarine on the back.

I rotated between the firebases and the Rear every two days, unless there was an action that kept me in one place. I had a hootch in all three locations, made out of culvert corrugated metal sitting on two rows of ammo boxes. We had three rows of sandbags on top of the tin to protect against mortar rounds. At the Battery Rear the hootches were covered by GP Medium tents, which gave a protected work area out of the monsoon rains. I carried just my brief case and my .45 with me as I rotated around on the Chinooks carrying the ammo and food.

The First Sergeant ran the Battery Rear. Soon after I joined B Battery, Jesse Frost became the First Sergeant and we became a great team. Jesse was at the end of his career – he actually had wounds from German bullets. The air cavalry life was new to him as he was used to armored artillery in Germany. I remember one time he was out visiting me at a firebase, staying in the hootch with me, and all the guns fired a defensive Mad Minute to deter attackers in the pre-dawn hours. He sat upright in shock from his cot, hit his head on the tin roof and knocked himself out. He was sheepish the next morning when the gunners asked why he had a knot on his forehead. Jesse was like a father figure as he was in his Fifties and the rest of us were in our Twenties.

He was supportive of me with the NCOs, even though he thought I was unconventional. For example, instead of using Nonjudicial Punishment (Article 15 of the UCMJ), I had a policy of “Cooperate and Graduate.” Under this policy, we kept the promotion list posted to the bulletin board. If you screwed up, like falling asleep on guard duty, your name went to the bottom of the list. On the positive side, I could promote soldiers on the spot and give medals for valour in combat. When people went home, we gave them an assortment of medals, including the Vietnam Campaign Medal and a Bronze Star (officers and NCOs) or Army Commendation Medal (enlisted.) If you really screwed up, you didn’t get your ARCOM and felt naked on the plane going home.

Another disciplinary measure was the morning assignment of burning the shit from the latrine in the half 55 gallon drum that slid under the one-holer. Each section except the mess section had to take turns having a cannoneer stir the burning diesel mixture with an engineer stake until it was a fine white ash. We also added the rats killed during the night to the burn. If a section killed a rat, it was worth a case of beer (we made special quiet M16 ammunition to kill rats so the gunshot would not start a firefight at night. Anyway, this really was a “shit detail” that no one wanted to be punished with. I wonder if Today’s Army has outsourced the job to Iraqi’s.

Rats and crap burn. Rat killing started after CPT Doug Williams had been bitten by a rat and had to leave to get shot treatment



Sometimes, the guys did things that were so stupid that they didn't even deserve punishment. Claymore mines protected our perimeter. These directional mines had a plastic case with a plastic bag with 800 small ball bearings inside. Behind the ball bearings was a layer of plastic explosive (C4). When the enemy attacked, the perimeter guards would press down on a firing mechanism that sent an electrical charge down the wire to the blasting cap attached to Claymore, mowing down the attackers. The perimeter guards pulled eight hour shifts and ate canned C rations for a meal. The guys in our bunker decided that they wanted to heat their cans of food, so they went out to the wire, pulled a Claymore apart, and took some C4 out to heat the food. They went back into the bunker, lit the explosive and proceeded to cook. They didn't know that burning C4 emits deadly fumes. They also didn't know that if you try to stomp out burning explosive, it blows up with bad consequences for your foot. How you court martial someone after their stupidity has already been punished.

All morning, we cleaned the guns in each platoon location, brought in supplies, fired registration missions, and got ready for our all-night missions. Because we also had a battery of 105mm howitzers at each FSB, our 155mm howitzers usually fired at their maximum range (about 16 kilometers.) That required the white bag powder at charge 7, rather than the lighter green bag powder, that came in smaller metal canisters. So, most of our powder re-supply was in the larger canisters, which could then be used to ferry water out to the troops in the jungle because they tightly sealed and held about five gallons of water. A UH1 helicopter could ferry about 20 of these heavy canisters of waters out to the infantry and drop them through the trees without having to find a clearing in which to land.

We would also shoot GAP's (ground air preparations) during the day to prepare landing zones for insertions of our cavalry troops near suspected enemy positions. Air Force fighter jets would drop bombs first, we would fire artillery second, and after I signaled that we were done by firing a white phosphorus round, the helicopter gunships would shoot up likely enemy positions just as the Hueys carrying the troops were landing. Because I had done this work before, I often ran gaps after I became Battery Commander. I didn't log these missions – otherwise I could have gotten more than just the one Air Medal.

We also fired missions, both day and night for the Rangers (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols) camped out along the Ho Chi Minh trail and the Hunter-Killer teams of LOH's (Light Observation Helicopters) and Cobras (AH1's) from the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry. Another group we supported was the 1st Battalion, 20th Aerial Rocket Artillery (Blue Max), which sported the German Iron Cross with blue background on their rotor masts. After the morning missions, the aviators came back to our FSB's for lunch because my Battery had the best food on the FSB's.



AH-1 Cobra drops in for lunch with B Battery on Judy

We served four full meals a day (one at midnight.) We logged in the aviators because they added to our supported personnel numbers and got us more Ration Supplement boxes. We got one box for each 100 men fed. These boxes were like a small PX, with cigars, cigarettes, writing paper, shaving supplies and other goodies. We built cigarette dispensers out of ammo boxes and cannoneers could come into the Command Post and get what they wanted. When our Vietnamese allies joined us, I found out that they preferred Newport Menthols. We didn't use all the Ration Packs that we were issued, so we used them to barter for equipment: some of our biggest trades were for:

A 10 KW generator for our Battery Rear

A 20mm electric cannon for defense against ground attacks

A Light Observation Helicopter for flying registration missions and general scouting (getting a pilot was even more interesting)

I also had a command meeting in the CP every night to discuss the evening missions and problem areas with the Section Leaders. At the FSB's that made a total of about eight leaders. We would often share goodies from home during those discussions. I remember one evening meeting featured three canned cakes from Neiman Marcus that my Texas grandmother sent. One NCO sliced thin pieces of each type of cake with his K-Bar knife for each person as they were pushed from the cans that looked like one pound coffee tins. My parents sent cases of fresh apples from Adams County, Pennsylvania, for Christmas and they were shared at the staff meetings.



Avery Hall, Bill Cosh and XO Paul Pedrotti relax in command bunker where NCO meetings were held every evening. Note mail box and cigarette rack.

After our move to the northeast part of the 1st Cavalry Division in support of the 2nd Brigade, we kept busy firing in support of our troops as they broke up columns of North Vietnamese entering the country from Cambodia after their long trek down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Ho Chi Minh died that autumn of 1969, so they mounted an offensive in his honor. Most of the fighting we did was at night creating protective fires around our cavalry troops in their Night Defensive Positions (NDP's.) My battery, split into two three-gun firing platoons on FSB's about 15 kilometers apart, also fired a lot of illumination rounds to light up the night when the NVA would attack our troops. Each of these rounds provided one million candlepower and drifted on a parachute over the battlefield for two minutes, so we were pretty popular with troopers (or "grunts" as they called themselves.)

One day I was at a new position, standing on a berm (dirt wall) that our engineers had just thrown up with their airmobile bulldozers. I was scanning the tree line when a 75mm recoilless rifle round was fired directly at me. It hit the berm below me and the blast threw me about ten feet. 1SG Frost yelled, "The Captain's dead!" I got up, brushed my flak jacket off, and said "The hell I am." My ears were ringing but I didn't have scratch. The Cannoneers had already returned fire but my would-be killer had escaped. I still have a large fragment from that round somewhere.



I.

1SG Jesse Frost holds Battery guidon and jeep. He still carried German shell fragments in him from WWII. He retired in Lawton and started selling real estate but died of a heart attack three months after retiring from the Army. He was a father figure to B Battery.

That same location came under ground attack several times and we fired pointblank at the enemy with time fused high explosive that scattered fragment across 800 meters and decimated the NVA attackers. We had ground surveillance radar, so we knew when the enemy was massing for their night attack. We also shot Firecracker rounds and shot illumination rounds. The AH-1 Cobra helicopters and AC-130 gunships also got into the act, spraying 20mm HE rounds and tracers down on the pinned down attackers. In the morning, our infantry guys went out to finish off the survivors and load the 300+ bodies into our cargo nets for their Chinook helicopter trip out to feed the sharks in the South China Sea. Occasionally, we would have an enemy surrender (“Chieu Hoi”) and would be evacuated for treatment and interrogation.

During another attack, when I was at the other base, our medic got enraged and grabbed a M60 machine gun and went charging at the enemy, firing from the hip like John Wayne. James (Doc) Holland was a black kid from Philadelphia who had declared that he was a Conscientious Objector so he wouldn't have to go to war. He got drafted and sent to the combat medic course in San Antonio. So it turns out that he was really a Warrior. I thought he had been killed and put him in for a posthumous Silver Star. I recently learned that I had survived his wounds and the war.



Because we shared the base with a 105 battery, most of our rounds were fired with the maximum charge (7) with a lot of concussion and recoil.

Sometimes we would be firing Danger Close, with rounds landing within 50 meters of friendly troops. When these guys go back to base, they were wounded by shards of bamboo from our explosions, but thanked us for the good shooting. We killed a lot of North Vietnamese that fall and the troopers would give us the credit on our fire mission reports by listing the number of enemy Killed by Artillery (KBA), the metric used to measure our effectiveness. It seems that our best metric would have been Saved by Artillery. The next autumn I was going through Ranger School in Georgia and one of our instructors was an NCO that our fire had saved. He made sure that I got a daily dose of GI Gin to make it through the tough mountain phase which washed out a lot of the candidates.



B Battery Leaders in 1969: 2LT Bill Cosh, 1LT Paul Pedrotti, CPT Alexander, 1LT Don Shacklette, and SSG Avery Hall

Around Christmas, the fighting slacked off as we broke the back of the NVA offensive. We had fired so much, that we had to rotate our howitzers back to the rear to have their barrels changed. The 155mm barrels could only fire 7500 rounds at max charge (7), and Charge 7 was the only thing we shot unless we were defending our selves in a ground attack.

A week before Christmas, I got a radio call from 1SG Frost who was running the Battery Rear in Song Be. He had a telegram from the Red Cross that had been sent by Dr. Tuttle in Murray, announcing the birth of my first son on 16 December 1969. Sheryl Kathryn named him after me, but since he is a Third (III), her mother came up with the nickname Trey. Jesse Frost filched some stogies from the Sundry Packs and flew out to smoke one in celebration with me and let me hand out others to any cannoneer that wanted one. Kathryn Senior wrote me a letter about our new family member, but I flew out of my pocket as we were moving into a new position very close to Cambodia. My parents and siblings made the winter drive down to Murray from Carlisle to see Trey. Unlike today's mobile phones and Internet connection photo conferences for deployed soldiers, our communications were pretty primitive. We exchanged small reel to reel tapes that came in three inch square boxes. I wrote Kathryn at least weekly, but she burned my letters because they smelled so bad.

Christmas was observed with turkey dinners and eggnog (but no booze.) At FSB Judy, I ate Christmas Dinner with Paul Pedrotti and Terry Barcellos. At midnight, the guys fired off hand-held flares that were red and green and lit up the night sky. Kathryn had sent me a small Christmas tree that I put in my bunker at Song Be. We had a chaplain come out later that week and he conducted a service in a howitzer pit, with my cannoneers perched on the ammunition bunkers circling the gun. The Chaplain's assistant played a portable pump organ and we sang some carols. On my other firebase, which was located at a Special Forces camp on the Cambodian border, we had a visit from an Air America C-7 Caribou with its radar bulb nose painted red. The plane landed on the dirt road, taxied to our position and lowered its rear door. Three American girls dressed in Santa's Helper skimpy dresses set up table at the back gate of the plane, and we filed by to get a greeting, a half-pint of vanilla ice cream, and a red ditty bag of shaving gear and toothbrushes packed by churches in the US. I was startled to open my drawstring goody bag and find that mine came from the First Baptist Church in Sulphur Springs, Texas. That was my grandmother's church in which I was baptized at age 12 and which had a stained glass window dedicated to my grandfather. Needless to say, the coincidence was startling and let me know I was not alone.

It was the rainy season and we had several Red Cross girls (aka Donut Dollies) come for a visit to put on a skit for us and have lunch with us on FSB Judy. We had to put a screen around our one-holer in case they had to use the latrine. The girls visit was well received by the guys, who showed respect and even put shirts on. One of the Dollies slipped and fell in the mud. I was wiping her off with my towel when the guys started applauding. We all laughed, especially the girls.



Battery formations in the morning during the rainy season were not exactly spit and polish affairs at FSB Judy. We stayed soggy for months.

Just after the arrival of 1970, we were still fighting the enemy, but in platoon size engagements, not the company-level fights we had before the new year. Our troops would set up ambushes using Claymore mines hooked together with detonating cord; these “automatic ambushes” were set off by a trip wire or sometimes manually by the ambush patrol. When the ambush went off, we fired pre-arranged artillery concentration on the area before the infantry went in to check out the site.

One such ambush and a following nine artillery rounds led to the discovery of a patrol of about 10 women carrying AK47's; they had been blown to pieces. This led us to believe our enemy was getting pretty desperate for "manpower". During the ten years of the American War, about 10% of the enemy population was casualties – we won these battles, but could never win the war against this determination.

American determination at home had been slipping away since our military victory during Tet 1968, which turned out to be a political defeat. LBJ had declined to run again for President in 1968, but engineered his Vice President Hubert Humphrey into the Democratic nomination. Earlier in the year, it looked like Bobby Kennedy (RFK) might get the nomination over Eugene McCarthy, but RFK was killed by Sirhan Sirhan in The Ambassador Hotel in LA. Richard Nixon had been resurrected and won the Republican nomination over the California Governor Ronald Reagan and took the Presidency on the promise of fixing the Vietnam War. Nixon and his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, continued the negotiations in Paris, the bombing of the North, and implemented the "Vietnamization" of the War.

"Vietnamization" meant that the RVN forces would take the offensive over from the Americans. Our 2nd Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division was married to the 2nd Brigade of the ARVN Airborne Division. It had immediate effect on Battery B, 1st Battalion, 30th Artillery. Our American units were pulled from FSB Judy and our other platoon location and were replaced by Vietnamese Airborne battalion and 105mm howitzer battery. Tactics stayed the same, but we had to learn their discipline and culture. They were a lot neater and more disciplined than 1st Cavalry troops. Their CP and FDC were well-made and kept very neat – each sandbag was perfectly aligned. They also told us that if we didn't wear our helmets and flak jackets, we would be shot as NVA infiltrators.



Above: FDC at Judy with standoff to explode incoming mortar rounds. Neat sandbags were done after 1st ARVN Airborne Division took over Judy

We also got a lot of publicity. In January, President Thieu flew in with his staff and our commanders. He awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm to B Battery, and the Cross with Bronze Star to my officers and NCOs' for the fire support we provided during the NVA fall offensive. I was awarded the Silver Star by President Thieu – I was looking down when the picture was made because I thought he was going to stick me with the two long spikes on the medal. He also gave me a personalized Zippo lighter and reviewed our battery area, which was pretty shabby in comparison to the Vietnamese Airborne's area. We fed his staff green Kool-Aid. Still, it was a nice honor for my guys, even though it had happened because of our being the first test of Vietnamization.

We got along well with the Vietnamese soldiers, especially the officers as they shared a bottle of Hennessy brandy at staff meetings. They flew down to Saigon to see their wives / girlfriends and often asked me to accompany them down to meet the girls at the *Circle Sportive* on the Saigon River. They didn't understand why I couldn't go.



Thought President Thieu was trying to stab me with that Cross of Gallantry that had two long prongs instead of a clasp.

1LT Don Shacklette got to know the Vietnamese pretty well. One evening he went to a barbecue party they had, feasting on a wild deer they had hunted down. I'm glad I wasn't on the base and couldn't go, because Don later was diagnosed with a tapeworm, and had to be flown down to the hospital in Long Binh. I went down to visit him and the nurse proudly showed me the "silver stallion" she had shoved up his butt to cut the tapeworm out. She invited me to a party with the other nurses – that was the first time I had seen round eyed women since the Doughnut Dollies had visited.

One evening I was at the forward base of the firing platoon that moved the most. It was hot and I decided to sleep on the top of the FDC, using my backpack as a pillow. I woke up when one of the Vietnamese was trying to steal stuff out of my pack. I drew my pistol and almost shot him in the face – hopefully he learned a lesson.



The Vietnamese hated the indigenous people called Montagnards. We had hired them to fill sandbags for us before the Vietnamese showed up. One day we received a fire mission from the Vietnamese Army to destroy a Montagnard village – I refused to comply because I knew the Montagnards weren't harboring any Viet Cong. I was threatened with a report to my American bosses, but I told them to go ahead and report me. Nothing happened and one less atrocity was committed.

The 30th Field Artillery Battalion had been in country since 1965. My Battery was selected to fire the One Millionth Round in Country and we received the decorated shell with the insignia of the ARVN Airborne, the First Cav and the Hard Chargers. I selected a target near the base of Nui Ba Ra, the mountain just north of Song Be. We loaded up the special round and attached two red lanyards to the firing mechanism. At my command, the ARVN Brigade Commander and our Assistant Division Commander, BG George Casey, each pulled their cords and the 1 Millionth Round went downrange.

I wish I had a picture of the ceremony, as General Casey died not long after that in a helicopter crash on Nui Ba Den. His son, Gen George Casey, commanded our forces in Iraq for several years and became Chief of Staff of the Army.

I had a disagreement with the American artillery commander about laying all our guns on defensive targets around the Brigade base camp at Song Be, as we needed some guns to be available to defend the fire base. I was pretty passionate about defending our football field sized exposed positions. In retrospect I realize we could easily have done both.

Song Be (FSB Buttons) did come under a ground attack from a Viet Cong sapper battalion which came under the wire with satchel charges to blow up American positions on November 4th, 1969.. My Battery Rear element manned one of those positions and defended it well. 1SG Frost took all the guys we had in our administrative and logistics teams to reinforce the position when the attack came in the middle of the night. At first light I flew in with bandoleers of extra ammunition to join the fray. It had just ended and all the enemy had been killed, although some had made it into the compound. One disappointment was a 2LT who was just joining us and was too scared to move out with Jesse Frost and the team. I made sure he had a second chance to show he was a man.

Some interesting coincidences happened to foil that attack. The base defense had done a practice alert about four hours before the attack, so everyone knew where they were supposed to be. SFC Frank Piccone, our ammunition sergeant, deployed eight B Battery soldiers as a fire team along the northern berm and they placed direct fire on the enemy crawling through the wire. When the forces were running low on ammunition, 1SG Frost opened the Battery's main supply trailers and distributed it amongst all units along the berm. SP4 Madrill, another ammunition guy, used his strength to carry one dead and four wounded Americans to the aid station. SFC Piccone captured one of the attackers and held him for the interrogation team. Frank told me that all the attackers had small sacks of dope tied around their necks and were high as a kite.



1SG Jesse Frost, Ammo Sgt Frank Piccone and Supply Sgt made sure the firing platoons got what they needed with no paperwork involved.

Frank Piccone also showed his heroism when enemy fire hit the ammunition dump at Song Be. He got on his forklift and shuttled our ammunition out of danger while explosions were happening near him. He also climbed a security tower to pull down a wounded guard; we put him in for the Silver Star for that action.



B Battery 155mm in action firing Charge 7 at the NVA from FSB Judy

In March 1970, I was scheduled to meet Kathryn in Hawaii for R&R (Rest and Recreation), sometimes known as I&I (intercourse and Intoxication.) It was determined that, as I had been in command for six months, that this would be a good time to pass on the command of the Battery to the next guy that needed a command tour on his record. This was a very counterproductive concept, because after 6 months, you were just starting to really understand all the facets of your duties. But like the 365 day tour and individual replacements (as opposed to unit replacements), these inefficient policies were a relic of our draftee force, and have been replaced in today's professional Army.

Kathryn and the other wives were waiting in the Recreation Center at Fort DeRussy, an old coast artillery post in the middle of Waikiki Beach. We hadn't seen each other in nine months. The Post Chaplain, Wesley Geary, broke the tension by telling the women that "if you can't find your own man, find the best looking one." We did find each other just after our bus arrived from the airfield. We went over to the Illikai Hotel, famous in the opening shots of Hawaii Five-O. I enjoyed flushing the toilet as I hadn't seen one of those in nine month's, either. I also left a big red stain on the sheet due to the laterite soil embedded in my pores – it was still there after two showers. They were celebrating Chinese New Year, and threw firecrackers in the courtyard. Instantly, I was under the bed. Loud noises made me dive for the ground for a year after I got home.

Incidentally, the Post Exchange profits from Viet Nam were returned to Hawaii and a new hotel called the Hale Koa ("House of the Warrior"), was built on the site of the Rec Center. So, on our next R&R, in December 1975, we stayed there. I contributed by buying Kathryn a fur jacket at the PX in Phouc Vinh.

After a day at the Illikai, featured in the opening scenes of *Hawaii-50*, we got on a plane and flew to the Big Island to spend the rest of the week at Kona Village. We had our own thatched roof hut on the black sand beaches with no TV, radio, or newspapers to interfere with our vacation. We had a communal dining hall and drank Mai Tai's out of coconut shells. We looked at pictures of our new son, Trey. We hiked the lava beds on a tour and saw the remains of one of Captain Cook's men in a cave. It was a great week. We parted at DeRussy, knowing we only had about three month's to go.

HHB, 1st Battalion, 30th Field Artillery

I settled back in my nighttime job at Battalion as night Operation Officer at Phouc Vinh, with a new appreciation for what the firing battery people went through. After about a month at work there, we got the word that President Nixon had approved an “incursion” in Cambodia to disrupt the enemy’s safe haven there and put pressure on the Paris Peace Talks. We had 48 hours to move seven firing units to:

Special Forces camps with fixed wing landing strips

Configure the loads to pallets

Fly the units to new fields on the Cambodian border, where they fired a preparation of 30 rounds per gun

Re-configure the loads for helicopter lift

Fly the guns into new firebases inside Cambodia



Captured weapons from Cambodia

We kept pretty busy on this operation for a month, doing things that were a challenge, but were ultimately successful. The First Cavalry seized or destroyed tons of weapons and material, disrupting enemy operations against us for a year. I flew some air missions over Cambodia, but didn't set foot inside the country. We were all given Chinese rifles and pistols from the captured caches (see photo) with the paperwork to take them home. On my way home, an Air Force sergeant at Ton Son Nhut offered me \$150 for my SKS rifle and K54 pistol and I sold them to him; that \$150 was the first money in Trey's college fund.

I also flew my last air missions and had a hail and farewell party at Headquarters. One of the guys at the party was CPT Josh Robles, who had just received orders to Kent State University in Ohio to complete his degree. The National Guard had just killed four students during a protest over our Cambodian excursion



Last air mission – May 1970

I shipped my stuff home in a footlocker – there was a serious check to make sure no contraband or military equipment was being shipped. I got to keep my poncho liner.

When I was about to board my plane, I was informed that I had been bumped by a soldier who was going home on emergency leave. The dispatchers bumped from the top of the rank structure, which showed soldiers that their leaders cared about them. I called my friends at the 93rd Evacuation Hospital and the nurses came over in an ambulance and evacuated me to their place for a party. They got me back the next day in time for my flight home on a TWA contract flight.

There was a big cheer when the plane lifted off – I was thinking about all that had happened in the last year. I talked to a stewardess that a vest with unit crests on it that must have weighed 20 pounds. We refueled in Guam and I bought a bottle of champagne for home celebration. When I was changing into my khaki uniform at Travis AFB, I left the box of champagne in the dressing room.

We bussed over to San Francisco International, and I caught a flight to St. Louis. There I caught an Ozark flight into Paducah, Kentucky, where Kathryn and her parents were there to meet me at the wire gate outside the small terminal. They drove me home to Farmer Avenue to meet Trey. He was asleep in his crib with his butt in the air. When I walked in, he turned his face, smiled, and went back to sleep. I was home.