"The Lord is my shepherd…He makes me lie down in green pastures…He restores my soul…Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil…thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Psalm 23, selections.

Ciao, Italia

It didn't seem ethical to spend perfectly good scholarship money on college when I wasn't sure *why* I was in the UMD Physics Department day after day. My Lottery number was 91, so rather than wait for the draft to carry me away, I went down to the Board with 2 buddies and enlisted after finals the spring of 1971. It was an understatement to say Mom and Dad were surprised I'd be leaving Monday morning instead of helping build a garage with Dad.

It worked out OK, though. Rather than Vietnam, the Air Force kept its promise and shipped me to the Intelligence Department in Italy where I was part of a team that discovered coded messages on shortwave radio for the war effort.

Everything's been declassified now because all the technology has changed. With our huge base antenna we listened to all Eastern Hemisphere transmissions. During some of the worst "heat" in Vietnam, our unit had the highest ever interception of encrypted messages. It was our job to find, copy and process all of them. In fact, 3 months after the high alert, our unit received a commendation due to the heavy workload and security that was kept tight as a rolled frittelli.[1]

Unknown to us, the head of the department stateside had sent a message through shortwave to review our work. The test was just an AP wire service news story, but we didn't know that; they wanted to check our accuracy. It was letter-perfect: they brought us the AP news story and our breakout to prove it. So that was gratifying to know we were doing a reliable job.

Who knows? Perhaps we had a small part in initiating negotiations toward a cease fire in Vietnam.

—Dean C., Airman 1st Class

[1]**Frittelli: Italian specialty dough, filled with ham, tomato and olives, depending upon regional recipe, sealed not to leak as it is deep-fried.**

Fritelli

Ingredients:
1 garlic clove, extra-virgin olive oil, 1 tin diced tomatoes (about 15 oz.), salt, potatoes, handful of flour, chopped fresh basil, diced ham or other meat.

Making it:
Fry a clove of garlic in olive oil until it turns to a golden brown. Add the drained tomatoes, cooked diced meat and a pinch of salt. Cook for 30 minutes. Add a touch of basil.

Boil half a kilo of potatoes (a little more than 1 pound) in salty water. Once soft, skin them and mash them into a paste with the flour. Add more salt if needed.

Form and roll the potato mixture into disc shapes 10 cm. (4 inches) in diameter. Add tomato and meat mixture. Fold dough over and match edges to make a pouch. Running a moist finger around the edges, pinch dough together to seal. (Water is volatile in hot fat, so make sure the vegetables are drained and the crust doesn't leak.)

Deep fry in hot fat for a couple minutes until dough is golden brown. Drain and serve.

Off Base

If people don't truly mingle with the locals when they travel, they have no clue how others see America. Where I was stationed in the early 1970s, almost everyone loved America. There was political unrest in pockets of the country, but not over what *we* were doing in the world.

I was surprised by Italian infrastructure compared to how much we took for granted at home as American citizens: reliable electricity, clean water, available food we didn't always have to grow ourselves.

By contrast, in the country where I was stationed, there was little reliance on refrigeration because electricity was so sporadic. Off-base we had blackouts all the time; no one paid much attention, just kept working as usual. We were counseled to drink water only from the base; food, uncooked, was available only in the open-air market from noon to 2:00 pm.

On my part, there *was* a little culture shock coming back, mostly being surprised people didn't appreciate more the conveniences of living in America.

—Dean C., Airman 1st Class

se è proprio necessario[1]

I lived overseas off base with my Air Force husband. Italian men had a reputation of pinching women. I had a baby by then, so I was cautious about when I went to market. But I found they never bothered a married woman.

Italians are culturally very vocal, passionate people, visual communicators, outspoken with definite opinions. By contrast, my husband and I are both Scandinavian introverts! After we realized that, it was an overall very good experience.

Dean learned to speak Italian fluently with our new friends; I only learned a few words. I wish I'd taken better advantage of the opportunity to experience another culture, but women there mostly stayed at home unless accompanied by their husbands. We did take several trips with friends to see as much as we could on passes.

Our stately apartment had 12' ceilings, polished alabaster floors and a large portico. The wonderful, cool stone on hot days also meant it was cooler at night, with no heat source. Still, it was hard to settle for a small American apartment —at 3 times the price—after experiencing Old World "luxury", even if that meant we'd also had only a European icebox and 2 bare electric bulbs as conveniences.

—Donna, wife of an airman, stationed off-base.

[1]**Italian for "in a pinch".**

One Mom of One Son

Our second son, Lawrence Bronczyk, enlisted as an Army Paratrooper in May, 1967. After training, he came home for Thanksgiving, then was deployed for search & destroy missions in Vietnam. His Commanding Officer told them only half would come back. Larry was out in the field from November to May,

never sleeping in a bed, except for two nights in the base hospital after stepping on a Punji stick.[1]

The unit took jars of peanut butter out on patrol. At night they would open the jars and light the surface oil as a lamp. Nighttime was hard. During the day they would have befriended local kids, but at night, some of those kids would shoot at them.

Larry and a friend routinely swapped out on patrol as radio man. One day they traded places in the rotation. His friend stayed at the receiver on base, Larry stepped second in line on patrol with the radio on a routine drop—if you can call it that. Usually the helicopter found a place to land, the platoon unloaded in less than 60 seconds, and the helicopter lifted off before the Viet Cong could start shooting. It must have been quite a sinking feeling, seeing that helicopter disappear and be left deep in enemy territory day after day.

> I never saw him again once he left the States. This did not surprise me. I'd prayed every day, pleading for his safety, but one day the Lord gently said, "I'm sorry, but he will not be coming back." I knew in my heart that it was true. "Lord, he is Yours; do Your will for him," I prayed instead.

My son was killed instantly when he stepped out of the helicopter onto a land mine.

Larry had been looking forward to R & R, but wanted to wait for his 20th birthday to celebrate out of harm's way. He died 6 weeks before that, on Mother's Day, May 12, 1968. It was the week of the highest reported fatalities in the war, with the government having reported over 500 young men losing their lives that one week during the Tet Offensive.[2]

The morning the military sent a representative to tell us what had happened, I had seen the khaki government car with a man studying a map as I went to pick up the girls midmorning from school for appointments in Duluth. By the time we got back home, everyone in town seemed to know there was ominous news because the soldier had been inquiring how to find us. He had checked the school to see if there were siblings, our neighbors to see if they knew where we worked. The man spoke to my husband Stan at work, but it is government policy to personally share the news with both parents, so the officer waited 5 hours for me to come home. Stan made some coffee, I rummaged for some cookies when he came to the door. With the look on Stan's face and Pastor Ericson already at our house, *I knew* what his news would be.

It took 11 days to get Larry's body back. We were informed about when it

would arrive so we made funeral arrangements, but waited to announce a date until the casket came into the U.S. A young man, Keith Settles, same rank as Larry's, accompanied his casket on the plane from the East Coast to our little town's funeral home. We asked him to stay overnight at our house. He ended up sleeping in Larry's bed.

Larry had been a basketball and baseball player, was well-liked by everyone. The Superintendent excused Juniors and Seniors to attend his funeral. His teachers and principal came. Most of the student body ended up at the church with us. Keith stood at attention right by the casket throughout the visitation and funeral. He said it was a privilege, his duty, and also one of the hardest things a person could ever do.

The whole town responded to our loss. Flags were half-staff all down the street. There was a motorcade of all our friends. Everybody knew everybody in our small town, and our loss was theirs, too. We had lots of support. Larry was the first one to die in Vietnam in our area. VFW Post #160 added his name to their flag.

It was a closed casket. After the funeral, even though we couldn't view him, we knew he was gone. I'd written to him almost every day, but after that I had no feeling there was someone I needed to compose a letter to. I never cried; as I say, the Lord had prepared me to face his death.

Significantly after the funeral, we received a package in the mail. He'd had his buddies take some pictures of himself on base, and then had sent them to be developed. The photos returned to Vietnam, then eventually found their way to our house. It was wonderful to see his face again. We appreciated seeing the last things he had seen, his gift to us. I'd asked once why he wanted to enlist. Larry said, "I'm single. If I go, someone with a wife and children won't have to."

—Rosella Bronczyk, mother.

[1]**Short sharpened sticks driven upright in a pattern usually on sloped ground by the Viet Cong, intended for impalement injury to unsuspecting ground troops.**

[2]**367 casualties reported 5/12/1968.**

Gold Star Moms provides support for mothers who have lost sons or daughters in the war. http://www.goldstarmoms.org

Society of Military Widows for all U.S. uniformed services 800-842-3451 http://www. militarywidows.org ; benefits@militarywidows.org

"The Tet Offensive: 1968, was the deadliest year of the Vietnam War, with over 16,500 Americans (average of 317/week) killed, but also a tactical disaster for the Communists. The Viet Cong were totally destroyed as a fighting force and were never again strong enough to mount a Phase III offensive in the Maoist style. The NVA was beaten so soundly that Comrade Giap later confessed they were almost to the point of giving up, and they reverted to only Phase II operations while licking their wounds for months to come.

But in the U.S. the battle was seen in a completely different light. Especially prominent was CBS News Anchor Walter Cronkite's misinterpretation of the results. When he decided it was a U.S. defeat and pronounced the war unwinnable, a large section of the American populace believed him, so it became a huge strategic defeat. President Johnson summed it up : "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America." Having a tactical victory turned into a strategic defeat by the media is a problem the military has still not forgotten."

—W.W.D. http://www.com/question/index?qid=20080420133740AANXoKy

"Prayer is not asking.
Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God,
At His disposition,
To listen to His voice in the depths of one's heart."

—Mother Teresa

Fire Base

I

We flew in to Bien Hoa Air Force Base on a commercial jet liner with regular stewardesses and everything. We were treated really swell, a bunch of carefree 18 year-olds, for the 23 hours in the air. Some of the stewardesses were crying when we got off the plane. It dawned on me later they knew some of us wouldn't return.

A distinctive odor met me when I disembarked. The humidity would not let the combination of cooking spices and fumes from their sewage system dissipate.

It seemed impossible to untangle the two; surprisingly it didn't take much time at all to get used to it. In 2-5 days we were off to our unit.

I arrived on Vietnamese soil directly south of Saigon in January 1969 from Basic Training in Ft. Campbell, KY, and Advanced Infantry Training in Washington State. They'd identified high mechanical aptitude in me and wanted me to go to helicopter engine repair school, which would require 3 years of service. There was no way I wanted to be in the army more than 2 years. The higher-ups were trying to counsel me to see the light—that I would be support staff instead of infantry—but I was adamant. I often wonder how the rest of my life would have turned out if I'd come out with a skill like that. What I took instead was combat engagement. I knew exactly what my government was calling me to do.

I was assigned to night ambush patrol. We would go out in the daytime to set up in a circle or on a canal. We always set up a perimeter guard system. Then we went back in after dark. Because no one was supposed to be out and about at night (the locals knew the rules), we could therefore assume movements were VC insurgents.

We set up Claymore mines; they had a variety of traps for us, too! When we were out on a mission, our fire base had new night radar to oversee us. There was a battalion of support at the fire base we could call. I can never remember a time we were short of ammo or needed supplies that didn't come. There was some comfort in that.

Buffed steel canteen with plastic stopper.

Illustration of a soldier in camouflage from Army Field Manual, FM 5-20.

Each of us had 4 canteens, personal ammo, rations, plus I had 60 pounds of machine gun and its 1000 rounds of ammo to carry. I'd usually lay down to slide my arms into my pack and 2 guys would pull me up and stand me on my feet. An infantry machine gunner at age 18-19 is pretty fit and builds up the necessary muscles pretty fast. The assistant machine gunner would have another 500 rounds, and the medic could carry ammo for us sometimes but he had packs of supplies, too. We tried to help the medics with their packs as well, until they got light enough to manage.

Everybody realized how crucial medical stuff was. We could refill at the First-Aid station at Battalion Fire Base. It was pretty well stocked and supplied. Helicopters took us on missions and landed just outside our perimeter. Artillery could be called on by our radio man if we got in trouble. We had bunkers to sleep in we had dug ourselves—we checked for snakes and spiders before we jumped in if we could. We used poncho liners as blankets and were warm all the time except if we got wet in monsoon season or crossing a canal. Besides rations and water, hot meals were flown out to us sometimes. We got mail call once in awhile even though we were out on patrol for 2 weeks at a time, maybe longer. If we got in trouble I'd have the radio man call in jet strikes. The best drinking water was in bomb craters. The fresh rain water smelled like gunpowder, but it had no germs. (Sulfur, an antibiotic, and charcoal, a water purifier, are both in gunpowder.)

Brimmed hat.

Pant legs equipped with drawstrings to prevent leeches from getting inside.

II

We'd find things to do to lighten things up a little. The assistant machine gunner and I looked a lot alike, so we would trade off shaving mustaches to confuse people. We had some fun in the middle of it all.

A person goes into combat pretty much the same as they will come out. In other words, if you are prone to nightmares, you will surely have them when you get away from the situation. If you have a calm take-charge demeanor, it will serve you well there, too.

Merely days before we came in, the previous group of guys got slaughtered. You might remember the Tet Offensive. Some guards had fallen asleep one night; the camp was overrun. Most of the rest were shot while sleeping in their tents. The few guys who managed to jump in the river and swim downstream became our trainers. It helped a lot to have experienced people show us the ropes, teach us how to look for booby traps, understand strategy and build on it. We ended up learning and applying what they had discovered from trial and error in the jungle, added to it, then passed that body of knowledge on to the next recruits. No one was stingy with advice on how to

do the job or stay alive. Those few survivors made our training effective and elite. If someone else got in trouble, we were called.

If I had some advice for young recruits, it would be to listen to the old guys that have been there ahead of you, watch and learn what they do in a situation, and watch each other's back. There is a purpose for everything. For example, we tightened the strings on the bottom of our pant legs to discourage leeches while trudging through standing water. For those that wiggled in we used lit cigarettes or matches to get them off our skin. They weren't too bad—there are more leeches in Minnesota than in Vietnam. The VC leeches are just bigger, that's all.

Growing up in Minnesota, I was used to paddling a canoe; it's not much different than a sampan. The guys noticed "Hey, Gary can stand up in one!" There'd been lots of foibles, so I taught the guys to sit down Indian-style and I paddled them over to outposts. I told them if they didn't move during the trip, they'd stay dry. I never tipped anyone over. Mine was the longest waiting line to ferry across the canals!

We also rode the river boats a few times. One night we set up on a river. I carried a machine gun, the assistant machine gunner had extra ammo, the radio man was with me. We were on a back side, the rest of the platoon was on the canal. We heard a transmission: "Sampans coming down river." That meant be on the alert because the Viet Cong often used river transportation couched as innocent traffic. They would load the boat with their wives and children to remove suspicion. In fact, any women and children they could commandeer would do.

Fire opened up and there was quite a volley. Then there was a lull. After a couple of minutes we heard babies crying on the boats. Then another burst of machine gun from the other side of the canal and the sampan fell deadly quiet. One of the hardest things I then had to do was to walk through a village. We were all on very high alert. There was a great and ominous silence. We kept walking and looking straight ahead, knowing the villagers had also heard those children's cries.

A hamlet might be 4-5 hootches with related families. If all we saw were women and children, boys up to 10 years old, we would suspect either VC sympathizers or that the VC had helped the men and boys "volunteer" for service. We'd check on it. Sometimes we would use a village as an outpost to lay up for a few days. It felt like home away from home because normal things were going on like cooking supper and children playing. It was good R&R to see family life. They kept their ducks tethered to keep them close to the hootch. A soldier could buy a whole duck and Mama-san would cook it for 50¢. We could also get duck egg breakfasts. There was a rain barrel by each hootch where we

were welcomed to fill our canteens. We learned to stir the water with a stick to see if a snake would come up to the surface before we took a drink.

Vietnamese women appreciated the protection, so they would come out to our remote outposts with Coca Cola. They always wanted the bottles back because there was a 5¢ deposit on them. If we were on the move, we'd have to ante up the deposit!

We would visit with the families, give kids candy, see if anyone needed health care for ailments, try to get those folks airlifted to the MASH units for help. Scratches could get infected quickly in the jungle. My only wound, if you could call it that, was a spot on my left calf—probably a skin ailment that I scratched and got infected—about the size of a 50¢ piece. It was about 1/4" deep. I had to stay in the MASH unit for a week and see medics about it every day. I got 2 penicillin shots a day with a long thick needle, but it cleared up.

A benefit our company enjoyed was a "Tiger Scout", a VC converted to our side. "Sao" was a real nice guy. He'd walk with us, find and point out booby traps on trails, interpret for us to the locals. Some of our guys who could speak French or passable Vietnamese said he always conducted himself honestly and interpreted correctly.

One night we set up on a trail: I was on backside on a secondary trail. Although I was exhausted, it was my turn for guard duty. The guys to the left and right of me laid down and were instantly sleeping. My machine gun was the only thing keeping me company and it wasn't all set up yet. In the moonlight, I spotted 2 VC coming on the trail and grabbed the starlight scope, which made them almost daylight-visible. As I was quietly and frantically trying to install the last pieces of the machine gun, they saw us, too, and ran away.

There were times we'd be out and a whole column of VC would be coming down a trail. We'd lay low 200 yards away, dead quiet. I'd call in artillery and out would come helicopters: one bombardier in a small glass bubble on the underside of aircraft would drop flares to light up the area so the airplanes could improve accuracy. At night every 5th shell was a red tracer which created a solid red line to the ground for our benefit. Dubbed Iroquois Warriors, the Cobra Helicopters[1] had 2 pilots, one in front of the other, flying support for us.

As machine gunner, I was always last on, first off, in a hot landing zone. Sometimes we were dropped off by helicopter and then walked back to base camp; sometimes the chopper came back for us. One time they flew a lot of us in, dropped us off as a battalion. We could hear the VC dropping mortars down the tube before the launch—*thoomp*—but couldn't seem to locate the position of the source in the

dark. Fire Base sent the same number of helicopters back for us, but there were only 1/3 of us left alive.

I heard that some Minnesota guys had gotten killed farther North than we were. The farther north, the rougher the fighting. We were assigned to keep Highway 4 (running east and west) secure at what became the border between North and South Vietnam. After 6 months securing the border between South (no-firing zone) and North (free-fire), I was part of the first 25,000 they pulled out of Vietnam. Guys were rotating out all the time, of course, but we were south of Saigon, and by then there was not much going on there; the South Vietnamese army was taking over for us, we were just helping the transition with night ambush patrols. Our purpose was to help the South Vietnamese army so they could do the lion's share of defending their own country from Communism. We were on the right side of the conflict. The villagers were supportive. People can do a lot if they feel they are on the right side[2], doing some good.

III

Close to the end of my tour, an Agent Orange-like chemical was dropped in our proximity, and the wind changed. We weren't allowed to cross the highway, so that stuff landed on us—our eyes burned. I set the machine gun on the highway—I was near-sighted anyway, but suddenly I *really* couldn't see for tears due to that cloud. I pointed the gun in the direction of an oncoming vehicle. Everyone was lying on the highway, incapacitated. We were sitting ducks, needing some cover. I recognized the jeep as American only due to the blowing horn. Out steps a colonel. A lieutenant came over and got between us and told me to get some glasses on. When I recovered a little, I apologized.

IV

When we were in Nam, black and white people relied on each other. We had each other's backs. But when we landed in Hawai'i, the blacks regrouped to themselves, listened to their own music, celebrated apart from whites. It surprised me and I didn't like it—I'd grown used to mixed company, their friendship. Maybe they retreated to another kind of survival mode, ready for re-entry into the States. It was 1969, things weren't rosy for Blacks back home. That's for sure. They may have thought *I* wouldn't stay friends when we got back.

Our unit never had a reunion. I lived in Georgia in the 1980s and saw one of the guys a few times a year. As movies came out about the war, we'd see them. "Platoon" was accurate. "Apocalypse Now", "Saving Private Ryan", "Forest Gump", "American Sniper"; some fit us, some didn't.

I realize now having been in Vietnam is part of who I am, but I no longer think of those times every moment, every day, every month.

—"SPEC 4" (Rank Specialist 4) Gary Theis, Chanhassen, MN

[1]In Shakopee, MN, at Dangerfield Park there is a Cobra Helicopter from the era.

[2]**Myth:** "The Domino Theory" was proved false.
Fact: "The Domino Theory", asserting one country would fall to Communism after another if a war was not fought in Vietnam, was accurate. The ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries: Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, stayed free of Communism because of the U.S. commitment to Vietnam. Without American intervention, Communism would have swept all the way to the Malacca Straits, south of Singapore and of great strategic importance to the free world. If you ask people who live in these countries, they have a different opinion from the American news media. The Vietnam War was the turning point for Communism.

—Captain Marshall Hanson, USNR (Ret.) and Captain Scott Beaton, Statistical Sources.

Pilot belt.

Silver electrostatic discharge gloves for loading cartridges without detonating them inadvertently.

A Sister of the World

Lawrence's (from "One Mom of One Son". p. 164) sister Roseanna went to Vietnam as one of 3 Wycliffe missionary teachers at a K-6th grade jungle school "to see where Larry had been". Parents living deep in the jungle sent their children to the school for at least a month at a time.

War was encroaching; things were getting tenuous. One day the teachers received a telegram to move out the next morning: all American non-coms were being evacuated. Our commanders estimated the Viet Cong would be overrunning the

area by the next day. The teachers had no choice but to bring along all the children. They were airlifted to Saigon just as the city was falling. After a quick discussion about the legalities involved with the children (they clearly weren't orphans at that moment), it was decided to airlift the teachers and children to the Philippines for safe keeping. Roseanna thought she would be sent with her students, pleaded with the authorities to let her board, too, so they would have someone familiar with them. But there was no more room on the plane, so she had to wait for the next flight. The children had only ropes strung across the cargo bay to hold on to. Having no experience with flight, they were unprepared for the force of takeoff. The load shifted and the plane crashed barely after liftoff, killing all her students before her eyes.

Perhaps had she been on that flight, instructing them what to do, showing by example, helping them stay calm, they would have survived. The remaining students were relocated to the Philippines with Roseanna and the other two teachers where they finished the school year. The children were later reunited, as best as possible, with their parents.

My advice? Love your kids while you have them. It doesn't take a war to remove them from you. Anything can happen. Any time.

—Rosella Bronczyk, mother

Vietnamese Bible, 1975.

The Day Into Which Saigon Fell

The sky was full[1]
The streets were overflowing.

Our operation:
To be a ghost of the night, a Spectre from the north:
A phantom lethal air asset with experimental night tactical capabilities.
Our job:
To provide air cover[2] for helicopters into and out of our embassy that last night.
Our problem:
Those blades created a vacuum that sucked in the North Vietnamese.

Knowing *we* were in the sky to protect those civilian passengers,
And fearing our stealth bite, the enemy ignored
The snack of Hueys overstuffed with women and children

And spent all their hunger barraging us instead,[3]
Trying to buy a final trophy
With a May Day budget of rockets.

—With retired Lt. Col. Robert White

[1]The 16th Special Operations Squadron 388th Tactical Fighter Wing out of Royal Thai Air Force Base, Korat, Thailand. One of a 9-member flight crew on an AC-130 (code name Spectre) gunship. Reference to the intensity of battle, similar to Fort McHenry in 1812, when the "Star Spangled Banner" was penned.

[2]If the enemy fired on our helicopters, we had permission to return fire on any and all enemy positions. For this mission in April 1975, helicopters were to drop passengers on an aircraft carrier 15 miles out in the Bay and return for more. The job got bigger fast as the Embassy gates were stormed and people poured in with the hope of escape.

[3]"I believe there have only been 280 Presidential Unit Citations ever granted in our nation's history. While I was assigned to the 16th SOS, our unit received two. One was for the evacuation of our embassy in Saigon." —Lt. Col. Robert White

Note: The Presidential Unit Citation is the highest honor a unit can receive. A unit must be set apart in performing with gallantry, determination and *esprit de corps* in accomplishing its mission with marked distinction under difficult and hazardous conditions against an armed enemy of the U.S. It is the unit equivalent of the Distinguished Service Cross for an individual, no greater award for heroism in battle.

Mayaguez Incident[1]

Cambodian Swift Boats seized
A U.S. merchant container ship
In international sea lanes.
Khmer Rouge rubbed its red tide
Over the end of the War.

—With Lt. Col. Robert White

Marine scarf.

[1]May 12-15, 1975. A coordinated effort secured the release of the crew, but officially, 3 Marines were stranded, and later executed on land. On May 14 jets were joined by an AC-130H Spectre gunship from the 16th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) attached to the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing to engage Khmer Swift boats with cannons, flying in support of the Marines who landed on Koh Tang Island. Unfortunately, some of those Marines became the last casualties of the Vietnam War. A second Presidential Unit Citation was issued for that contact. Other teams were also involved in assaults and strategies over the 4 days.

Biplane, By See, Biped

Fighting a war on foot is completely different
Than fighting one from 10,000 feet.
I have the greatest admiration for those who did it on the ground.
Not that we didn't lose our share of friends also,
But most of the time we returned "home" to a bed and a hot meal.
Pilots see exactly what's going on but can't go in to help
Until given the word.
Sometimes that word doesn't come
Though the carnage goes on.
Looking back,
A bird's eye view can outlive the last rod or cone.

—A Pilot

Repeat: No Visual

Somewhere
Deep inside
A box
Amongst dozens of other boxes
Is my picture
Of the Mayaguez.
Not sure I could even look at it. Still.

—Anonymous

The Mayaguez, U.S. Air Force photo, Public Domain.

Snatched, Dispatched, MASHed, Patched

As medics, we were trained to keep a casualty alive until the Medevac helicopter came. Usually within 15 minutes he was in the sky on his way to a MASH[1] unit. Even with ambushes, rocket-propelled grenades, booby traps, and pressure-detonated mines, if we weren't pinned down and could touch the victim while he was still alive, there was a 97.6% chance we could save his life,[2] an amazing statistic. We did everything right, but news reports shot through with politics back home got it wrong.

—Ronald J. Glasser, MD, author of Wounded: Vietnam, Iraq, "Medics". pp. 27, 28.

[1]Mobile Army Surgical Hospital

[2]Only 2.4% death rate for Vietnam casualties who made it to a surgical or evac hospital.

Myth: The United States lost the war in Vietnam.
Fact: The American military was not defeated in Vietnam. The American military did not lose a battle of any consequence. From a military standpoint, it was almost an unprecedented performance.

—Capt. Marshal Hanson USNR (Ret) and Capt. Scott Beaton, Statistical Source.

My Son is No Less Loved Than Yours

I'm not mad at you.
I'm not mad at your son.
I'm mad at God.
Both our boys went to war;
Why would God
Give you back your son
And take mine away?"

—"Nancy Rowling" (Margo Mortendale) in movie "Heaven is for Real" and book with the same title by Todd Burpo. "Pastor" gives an excellent response to the question.

"I Was There"

"I was one of a handful of Americans who'd been there 2 years already, and stayed in Saigon while the U.S. was putting people on helicopters at the Embassy...A C54A aircraft that was packed with children, but unbalanced, crashed in mid-April 1975, killing 138 people.

The Americans dropped carpet bombs and cluster bombs, and planted hundreds of thousands of land mines over the course of the war, at a frenzied pace in the last months. They continued to test new technology until the very end. The U.S. tested Agent Orange and white phosphorous on the Vietnamese population. South Vietnam dropped an American CBU-55 bomb on civilian Vietnamese, killing anything in range that breathed oxygen.

Saigon's population had been mostly shielded from the war until the end, while those who lived outside the city suffered for years. As the war came to a climax in Saigon there was

understandably fear and panic. But when the Liberation Front Forces arrived in buses and tanks, we saw people throw flowers and cigarettes to the arriving soldiers. South Vietnamese soldiers in Saigon discarded their uniforms, turned in their weapons at collection centers and joined the crowds. North Vietnamese soldiers camped in city parks, washed laundry and strung clotheslines between trees. They all spoke the same language. It seemed to me more like a family reunion than a coup. In fact, many families were reunited.

July 1975 found us helping Vietnamese friends after the capture of Saigon and change of regime. In the face of extensive propaganda that the conquering North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front soldiers would maim, murder, mutilate and destroy, we stayed. But they didn't do that.

Surprisingly, once installed in Saigon, the North Veitnamese government sought to improve general health care, housing and education, increase access to water and electricity, and, yes, "re-educate" high-level South Vietnamese officials who were still there. But there were no firing squads; we observed no murder, no torture, no clubbings in the streets. The Vietcong seemed committed to reconciliation as the only way to unite the country and make progress. Contrary to propaganda news reports from the West, the Vietcong tried to avoid retribution, and apparently no political enemies were executed. They even extended an olive branch to America, despite the long, deadly war that had ruined their country and put their civilians in danger.

The new government was money-poor and refugee-rich. Many people left the country over the following years. Refugees streamed in from Cambodia where the Khmer Rouge had taken over. There was antagonism with China and Russia as well as clan difficulties. The U.S. embargo caused tremendous suffering. Vietnamese rice fields were destroyed or littered with unspent landmines, so their main export was non-existent for several years. The rich people in Saigon lost most of their money, but much of it was made through wartime contacts with Americans. The new government did redistribute wealth, much of it having been made on the Black Market to the disadvantage of the poor.

Of course there was danger. It was a war. There were bombs, rockets, artillery and random rifle fire soon after America pulled out. But the transition was more peaceful than we expected.

Now America is enriched with many new Vietnamese-American citizens. Vietnam is enriched with a peaceful relationship with America.

And, we have moved on to other wars."

—Condensed from "Eyewitness To the Capture of Saigon: It Was Not a Bloodbath" by Claudia Krich, from "The Veteran: Vietnam Veterans Against the War", Vol 45, Number 2, Fall 2015, pp.1, 10.

Bicycle peddler, 2016, by Chuck Keller.

Voices Rap

Voices are calling me HOME.
Where? Motherland is Cambodia...
And spaces between states of America.

Voices upon my soul
Searching
Telling me to:
Meditate
Change policy
Change perspective
Change purpose
Move to change, not to perfection.

Thatched hut in Cambodia, 2016.

Chains in theory
Redeem controversy
Make substantial progress
Quick-change.

Change of chairs
Freedom gain
Will there be
An organic change?

Two farmers at the edge of a village, 2017.

Voices for human equality
Voices for reality.
Voices for truth
Voices for lies
Voices creating more chains.

Voices silent for years
My native land: Kingdom of Kampuchea
Voices that cannot speak
Voices that were eliminated
Murdered '75 to'79

Voices that were bombed
Voices counting
600 millions of pounds of bombs
To scream or cry was not allowed

Education or not,

Chuck Keller's Cambodian photos taken between 2004 and 2017 (pp. 179-183) show a restored Cambodia, not the war-torn land Narate Judie Keys escaped from nearly 40 years ago. Chuck and his wife, Sally, are Wycliffe missionaries who left Cambodia in March 1975, entering Thailand at a rural border crossing a month before The Khmer Rouge entered the capital city Phnom Penh and took power. The Kellers continue to translate the Bible into Krun and live in Cambodia for 6 months, and northern Minnesota for 6 months, each year.

Voices were demonized.
Destroyed. DESTROYED by

600 million TONS of bombs
Dropped EXPLOSIONS
Still exploding

Novice escape during the night
Daylight shunned the shadow
Of the no-voiced

Shadow puppet played in darkness
Sneering, *"Koun knov aw na?"*
Leering, "Where are you, daughter?"

Children outside their home, 2004.

One by one by one
600 hundred hundred ton
EXPLOSIONS still exploding

Tosh in the field of bones and skulls
Beaten and burned, burned
Then buried, buried then died

I, found, referred,
Transferred from Toul Seng
Once a school
Turned prison.

Children gather by a stream, 2005.

Once a place of knowledge shared
Turned a place of torture bare
Voices of spirits roaming

Wishing to be burned, turned to ashes
Waiting to be reincarnated
Searching for Providence.

My native tongue, Khmer, suppressed for 25 years
Thailand Flashback: '81 to '91
Refugee Camp Site 2

One Voice sang our Khmer Anthem
Then voices of children
Unsure, unbeatable

Born in Thailand
Deported to Cambodia
Voices heard, unheard, undeterred

Voices suppressed, compressed
Muted then silent
My native language: Music, decompressed
during my return
to being (August 2015)


Two houses built on stilts, 2017.

Voices of a Cambodian Journey
Captured on film (August 2016)
Filling tears with joy
destined to return
to the music of voices

My quiet Voices roar inside
My heart, BEATEN
And I don't know why
but I know
it's telling you to listen!

Voices in winds
voices in rain
voices in snow
one Voice among us
voices, voices that are US.


Rolling hill farm scene, Cambodia, 2017.

—Narate Judie Keys, CMT, Author & Poet from Cambodia to America http:// www.NarateKeys.com

"Ar kun:" "Thank you for listening" in Khmer.

Why Cambodia?

The Cambodian incursion set off a chain of events. The U.S. sent troops in to stop the North Vietnamese who already had sent 2 divisions in to occupy Cambodia. There really was no win: we were both on foreign soil, neither side had any moral high ground. Had we avoided the conflict altogether, there would have been a blood bath. If we had pulled out earlier, there would have been a blood bath. Had we stayed longer, blood bath. The Khmer Rouge contributed the Killing Fields. Pol Pot grew his utopia fertilized by one

million educated civilian bodies.

I was on the U of M campus the day after the incursion. Hurrying from one class on the West Bank across the Washington Avenue Bridge for my next class on the East Bank, it was eerie that all traffic was at a dead stop. Even more disconcerting that a demonstration against the war was clogging arteries through the Quad, a plaque of protesters blocking the bridge. Suddenly dissenters were fleeing opposite Coffman Union, police in riot gear chasing them brandishing nightsticks.

I plugged to electrical lab class at IT with no small difficulty. Inside we smelled what seemed like a burning circuit. Suddenly a guy with the longest hair in the room shouted, "Tear gas! Shut the windows!" He warned us not to touch our eyes or get any water near them, which would make the effects worse.[1] He seemed to know what he was talking about. We stayed circuit-board snug in the classroom for quite some time.

I recall feeling the strange exhilaration of combat. The fog of war. Prickles of electricity going through my body—I didn't know if someone would get killed, or how extensive the riot. When the crowd thinned maybe 2 hours later, I took my chance to get away from the mess. I tried to board a bus, but the driver wouldn't open the door. I stayed on the fringes as much as possible, but nearing the Dinkytown Army Recruiting Center, it really got ugly. Helicopters were circling with pepper foggers. It was a war zone. I was relieved to actually make it to my car at the Elm/Kasota lot.

As much as we appreciated what was happening half a world away, for good or bad, afterwards we realized university students didn't start it. The U is an eclectic place; we were there for class and needed to get our money's worth, but lots of other people came to campus for the feel of it, the anonymity. Such a display made for good TV, adding to the premise there was a conspiracy going on, inferring "those radicals on campuses needed to be subdued."

It reminded me when fire was set to the U of M ROTC building, winter 1970, about the time of Kent State. Protesters used axes on the fire hoses, the same as in Ohio. People who were killed at the Kent State demonstration weren't protesters. The National Guardsmen who were ordered to shoot protesters shot over their heads—they didn't want to kill anyone. Unfortunately, the bullets struck students up on a ridge who weren't even involved.

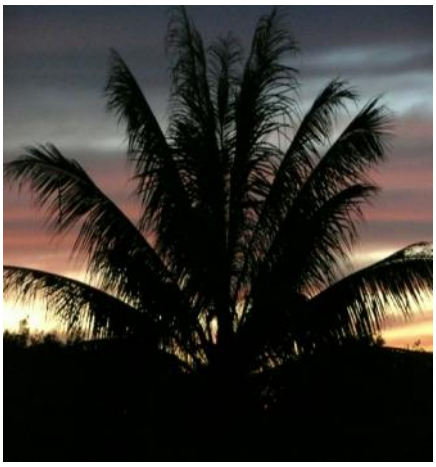
—G.

[1]**The best way is to flush eyes with milk. A volatile chemical reaction occurs when water is used.**

The Chase

i wait in forest filled with misty rain
set opposite the rice field
underneath blue sky
the sun begins a slow set, flashing, descending,
a distant palm now colorless black.
i search for grain, an indescript rodent,
as Khmer Rouge tries to trap me.

—Narate Judie Keys



Sunset glows behind a palm tree, 2009.

Run Away

A sand storm conquers.
Villagers are fleeing
Take cover! A cave!
No plan for survival.

Villagers are fleeing
Walking, running toward Neverland
No plan for survival
The night caves in.

Walking, running toward the river
Barefoot but hopeful
A broken ship
To sail into the dissipating sand storm

A sand storm dispersed
To discover a safe haven
A new island uncovered, covered in sand
A new life to discover.

Does anyone know what kind of Cambodian flower this is?

—Narate Judie Keys, CMT, Author and poet from Cambodia to America.
www.NarateKeys.com

Note: Narate Keys came to the United States in 1987, after escaping from Cambodia and living in a relocation camp outside of Cambodia for 15 long years, waiting for paperwork to be processed, as happens to many refugees.

The Many Doors to Minnesota

Door wide open
To the broken stone
Taken by jungle weed

Suppressed by Pol Pot
Door slam shut
Without warning
Stone hearts control
Refugee camps

Door wide shut
Escape at daylight
Miles and miles walked
Bearing unborn child

Gate wide open
Two stone pagodas greet
Our ancestors celebrate
A New Year begun.

Door wide open
Without a key
Agate stone[1] at once shine
Without polishing...

—Narate Judie Keys

[1]**Agate stone refers to the kind Minnesota welcome she received.**

Note: the [Concerning War] author's parents were part of the Methodist Church movement in 1980 to help relocate Cambodian, Thai and Vietnamese asylees (seeking entry due to political danger), refugees (coming due to displacement because of war), and emigres (due to interest in relocation). Even small churches partnered with others to sponsor individuals or families. Thus, MN has one of the largest East Asian populations in the U.S. today. Their tiny church in Finlayson, with the church in Afton, brought the Phong family of 8 to live in its town of 213 people. Bob plowed and cultivated garden space, provided seed, and helped fix up a vacant house in town for the family to live in. Elaine, a retired teacher, received her ESL certification to teach the entire new family English and tutor the children in school. She taught 2 generations of the family (and even the grandmother for a short time), and all became gainfully employed, several children moving on to university. One son became a welder in Philadelphia, and probably put all the rest through college!

We Are All Casualties of War

"Revisiting Vietnam obliges us to enter into an indescribable hell,
To understand a little more of
The agonizing palpable naked terror which so many lived.

Searing power, blistering emotion, raging misery,
A performance no Oscar can ever reward
From the bestial inhumanity of war; any, every, all war.

Cruel, sickening, loathsome:
The heartbreaking base desperation in which
A soul seethes to the boiling point.
We are all casualties of war."

—Post from Keith F. Hatcher, La Rioja, now living in Spain, 10/31/2001, praising the wrenchingly plausible performance of Thuy Thu Le and Michael J. Fox, concerning the movie "Casualties of War", Brian De Palma, Director.

Alpha Bullet Charlie

"I was a border guard at Checkpoint Charlie.[1]
It was my job to process people through or keep them on their side.

One day a whole group sort of stormed the gatehouse.
Language and body language, too, were both terrific barriers.
I told them to halt. Multiple times. Began to think they were
Creating a diversion to allow others across.
I was losing control of the situation fast. They had no papers.
The short of it was I shot them all.

Turns out they were a family
Who'd been caught on the wrong side of the fence
When the North/South directive came down.
Just at wit's end, trying to get home like everyone else.
I have to live with that judgment call.
Every day.

—A man who's had many sleepless nights.

[1]**Zone between North and South Vietnam.**

Bully for You!

"Fritz" was a nervous kid, shy, used to being teased,
Afraid to talk to girls. Always looked
Over his shoulder, no one to watch his back.
5 years later, he possessed peace, calm, confidence.
He easily spoke. What happened? I had to know.
"I went into the Marines."
Compared to being bullied,
Basic was a piece of cake.
It worked for him.

"Shoulder to Shoulder, Even the Fallen Stand Tall". This bronze Veteran's Memorial statue in Virginia, MN, was designed by local sculptor Gareth Andrews and dedicated in 2012 to service members from World War I to the Persian Gulf War.

Enlargement shows details of the 8 service members from all branches of the military sheltered in the wings of an American bald eagle.