



Stephen Cutting
MCB 58/53
1967-1969 (advanced & rear party)

After "A" school in Port Hueneme, I went to MCB 58 in Quonset Point RI. A chunk of that battalion was separated to form another new battalion, MCB 53, of which I was one of the chosen ones. Off and over the continent to Davisville. I elected to volunteer for the advanced party, arriving in Country late 1967. After the BEEP (BATTALION EQUIPMENT EVALUATION PROGRAM), the rest of the battalion filtered into camp. I remember our camp setting our sirens off so that we would know what they sounded like but that in turn set the whole DaNang area to turning on sirens. I understand the 'old man' got an earful about that! I do remember a few times mortars walking through our base towards MAG-16, the Marine Heliport next door.

As a mechanic, I started searching for parts in the vast number of catalogs we had available. I also 'invented' a washing machine for dirty greasy rags as supply reported that a shipment was lost somewhere. So, I took a 55-gallon drum and some dry-cleaning solvent, a copper tube crimped at the end and a few coils of tube at the bottom with holes drilled. After hooking it up to an air compressor, I would dump the rags into the can. They sank to the bottom and the bubbles brought them to the top. The bubbling kept the rags circulating. A mop bucket presser and a couple of clotheslines behind the office, along the west perimeter, dried them out so they could be used. The somewhat stiff rags did get recycled until new rags appeared. Laundry refused to wash greasy/oily rags. I had a chance to work in the tire shop and spent most of my time there. I was on my own and enjoyed it. One day I was heading back to my hooch along the west perimeter, along a metal building, and heard a sharp crack just over my head. A bullet going into the sheet metal, and a couple of seconds later the report of a rifle. I never again took that route. I also had a sewing machine and made clothing adjustments and sewed name tags and embroidered the Seabee emblem on pockets of greens. That and cutting hair kept me out of most trouble. I was involved in the rear party that was involved in the BEEP before leaving Country.

The second deployment we were further north, on the bay of DaNang. I was once again on the BEEP advanced party. I served once again in the tire shop, which was enjoyable as I had two regular Vietnamese civilian men who were both refugees from North Vietnam. They each had probably, at the most, an 8th-grade education but knew practical physics. They could maneuver huge tires around with sticks better and faster than I could with a forklift! My two workers were absent a couple of weeks during the TET Offensive. The big memory of the second deployment was when the ammo dump in DaNang caught fire and those bombs started exploding. I remember seeing shock waves coming towards the base every time a big bomb went off and later the sound. It was amazing how the shock waves traveled up and over and down the other side of hills flattening everything in their path. It was also amazing how fast the bases were reconstructed!

One day I took a trip up to the rock crusher on Route 9. The jungle was indescribably beautiful, though the road up and over the mountain was a concern knowing that the trucks

we rode in only had mechanical brakes. That was a pretty long and steep road! I had borrowed a 3/4-ton Weapons Carrier with another Seabee (forgot his name) and we went to a tower site west of DaNang that overlooked Elephant Valley. When we arrived we were advised not to linger because they were getting sniper shots their way. The 4X4 Weapons Carrier could not make it quite to the top, so it was parked in a less steep grade and we walked from there to the top and back.

I took my R&R in Australia and spent time in the outback, having a ball though I did come back a tad on the saddle-sore side. That was an educational experience in itself, well worth the time. I think I was the only enlisted person on R&R at that time because there was trouble with the Aborigines, and it was only supposed to be commissioned officers allowed to go. But - having orders in hand, and a newly commissioned officer not entirely knowing his job at the bottom of the stairs to the back of the aircraft, it worked out. He stated I could not go to Australia. I advised him that he saw orders here, and he had no idea who I was or what my purpose was to go there, and did not have the clearance to know. I looked carefully at his name tag and asked him to pronounce his name please. He said to sit in the back of the aircraft and not cause trouble. At Kings Cross in Sidney, I asked to be as far away from civilization as possible. They had an opening at a sheep ranch to the north/east getting off at a whistle-stop on the railroad. Blokes picked me up in a Land Rover with a snorkel kit on it. Yes, they did not have bridges away from civilization. Two strips of cement in the creeks and rivers in a "V" and across we went.

My enlistment ended as things were winding down in the war, and I was told that even though I had everything needed to make E-5, I was not, and that E-4 and below would have a very hard time re-enlisting. So, I left. In San Diego, I was taken to the bus station out a back entrance, in a private car, dressed in civilian clothes, because of all the protesters at the front gate. I was not at all ready for such a welcome home. I took the milk run (14 hours on Greyhound) back home, signed up for two years of college and got my degree. I spent 23 years in cable television, busted a knee up in a blizzard falling from a pole when a slab from the rotten pole stuck to a spike and down I went. Gravity is fast. I went back to college for retraining and took all the office courses I could lay my hands on for two semesters and ended up as a personal assistant and retired as an office manager.

Now I find myself busier than when I was working. I've taken advantage of the VA clinic/hospital situation, a home loan, and other small benefits. I am a life member of the VFW. The post I was involved with was mostly WWII vets, and the only reason they met was to visit the bottle, and the bar was always stocked. They did not march in parades, support students in school or any of the other things along those lines. I did not like that, so quit going.

I've been married since 1971, and have two daughters, two sons in law, and four grandchildren. We are Baptists and I am involved with the Gideons International. I'm also on the board of directors for the local recreation & parks district, as well as an advisory committee for the city council. I have two hobbies, repairing computers and giving old refurbished ones to kids whose parents cannot afford to purchase one for the kids. I am also into metal detecting, which involves more research than actual detecting (we go for the older stuff where most folks have never been in many years).