

**Ronald Devlin telephone interview by Richard Killblane, 9 August 2010
201-248-8701**

Ronald Devlin was drafted in the Army on 2 May 1967 and attended Basic Training at Ft Dix, NJ, then AIT at Ft Eustis, VA for MOS 57H20 (cargo handler). He went through jungle warfare training at Ft Story, where the soldiers were taught map reading. If they got captured they were sent to a [VC] village where they were interrogated. Devlin was captured. He was 5' 8" tall and weighed only 125 pounds; but when sent to get water, he jumped his guard and held his head under water. Others ran up and told him he was not allowed to touch the guards. The prisoners were water boarded and also put in a square pit filled with water, little snakes and frogs. The guards put the boards over top and poured in water. The prisoners had to hold onto the boards to breathe.

Devlin arrived in Vietnam 9 November 1967 and was assigned to the 71st Transportation Company (Terminal Service) at Qui Nhon. As soon as he arrived had an operation on his left arm and could not lift anything heavy, so he pulled security on the shore where the access road (causeway) through the village connected to the DeLong Pier.

The 71st Tran Company's barracks was next to the barracks of the 387th Trans Company. Both were along the beach. During Tet Offensive, 31 January 1968, all the soldiers from the two companies were called out in formation with all their combat gear and stood in ranks because the leaders were not sure what to do. There was no attack that night, so they were told to go back to the barracks, but they remained ready for an attack.

Couple days after 31 Jan, Devlin was pulling guard duty on the other side of the road right next to the pier. The long road went through the village and ended into the pier where they stacked the cargo to truck it out. The village was near a stream. Around 2300-2400 hours that night, few bursts of AK47 fire came from the village. A ship was sitting at the pier but was not being unloaded yet. Rounds hit one of the bulkheads; and some ricocheted and hit the back of the ship. Then it became kind of quiet again. No one returned fire. Devlin liked to sit and rest at the bulkhead to rest. He thought to himself that he was glad he was not taking a break at the bulkhead that time.

For a week and a half after Tet, they did not drive through the village. Since their barracks were next to the beach, they loaded on LCMs and sailed to the pier where they unloaded. The pier, however, never shut down.

Utah Beach (Wunder Beach)

On February 1968, the soldiers of the 71st and 397th Tran Companies were hanging around in the barracks and then called into formations where about 30 names from each company were called off. Devlin's name was called off. They were told to go get their gear and report back in formation. With their gear, they then marched to the water, which was next to the beach, and

loaded on BARCs and LARCs. The amphibians took them to a navy ship where they had to climb up a cargo net. The Navy ship stern opened up. (LSD) Around 1400 hours, they boarded the ship.

A first sergeant, sergeant first class and sergeant were in charge of the group. Everyone else was below the rank of sergeant. No one told them anything about where they were going or what they would do. Most soldiers moved to the front of the ship where the NCOs told them to sleep on the deck. The ship was still loading BARCs and LARCs. Two hours after boarded the vessel, it set sail for three to four days and nights.

One night the ship stopped, and they could clearly see the beach. A Navy ship was firing on the beach and the soldiers could see things blowing up in the distance. They could also see helicopters firing at enemy on the ground and saw red and green tracers indicating there was a fire fight with the enemy. He had never experienced anything like it in his life. He knew the fight was real and he was going there. Someone had a radio, and heard Hanoi Hanna welcome the members of the 57th Trans Battalion. Devlin's TDY orders attached him to the 57th Trans Battalion.

The next morning they had a formation to go to the hull of the ship. The Navy guys shook their hands, gave them hugs and then wished them good luck. The soldiers walked down a ladder to the BARCs. There was not enough room for Devlin and 10 others in the BARCs, so they boarded Navy landing craft [LCM6]. While waiting guys started looking up, Devlin also looked up and saw the sailors in their whites, lined up along the railing, saluting. All the soldiers stood up and saluted them back. The sailors then dropped their salute. That was the greatest feeling in Devlin's life.

The LARCs, BARCs and Navy LCM6 headed fast toward the shore. Devlin was sitting back near the coxswain and stood up to see the shore. He then climbed down the ladder and walked forward where the other soldiers stood looking over the ramp. The SFC asked if anyone wanted to carry ammo for the machinegun. Devlin liked to volunteer and was given two ammo cans. He became the third ammo bearer for the M60. As the boats raced toward shore, no one told them what to expect. His boat ran aground in foot and half of water. When the ramp came down, they ran ten feet forward on the beach and lay down. His group was the furthest to the right. Everyone else landed to their left. The sandy beach sloped upward and they could not see over the incline. A wood line was 50 feet to the right and they did not know what was ahead. His group was the only ones with the M60 machinegun. They stood up and worked their way up the sandy incline.

They set up a perimeter the first night. Devlin only saw two marines. One's pants were ripped up, so Devlin offered him a pair of his pants, since he had plenty but the Marine declined saying Devlin would need them more than he would. Devlin never saw them again after the next day. The soldiers were told to build sandbag bunkers. They covered the roof with PSP and two or three layers of sandbags. The overhead cover had no value except to keep the rain off the gear.

The bunkers were dug anywhere without any plan for defense. Their first sergeant lived in a CONEX bunker while the rest lived in sandbag bunkers. These Army stevedores were definitely out of their element. They had not been trained for this type of operation.

The stevedores at the beach initially unloaded five ships but it was taking too long. Devlin remembered the beach was called Utah Beach and the men were called "Sunders Wunders from Utah Beach." He did not hear it was called Wunder Beach until years after the war. The Chu [or Cua] Viet River was north of Utah Beach. [LTC Sunder commanded the 159th Trans Battalion] but Devlin was told he was TDY with the 57th Trans Battalion. [The 57th Trans Battalion was responsible for the trucks that cleared the beach of cargo.]

No one talked to the men on perimeter. The truck drivers and LARC/BARC drivers kept to themselves and their first sergeant rarely checked on them. They ate C Rations for a month and a half and no one took head counts. He could have left and no one would have known. They still had no idea why they were there and no one had told them what they were doing. Devlin stayed on the perimeter the duration.

The operation was very disorganized. They had a couple platoons on perimeter with no flares, and no "walkie talkie" radios, just M14s, .45 caliber pistols, personal revolvers and one M60. They could smell the enemy, they were that close, but were not attacked. It always bothered Devlin how dangerous the situation was.

On 24 April, they were told enemy was going to attack. The Navy fired shells and hit the bunkers on the perimeter where the guys lived. The Navy aimed for the original perimeter but the men had expanded the perimeter. The rounds sounded like a freight train going over and killed some guys. Devlin was going to go out on a convoy the next day, so he was not on perimeter that night. He slept inside the compound where the trucks and equipment were.

On 30 April, the 1st Cav Division moved in and established their perimeter further out from Devlin's perimeter. COL Michael D. Mahler wrote a book, Ringed in Steel, Armored Cavalry Vietnam 1967-68, which described the operation. Mahler wrote that he received an infantry company to free his men up. Devlin and his men supported the 1st Cav on night ambushes. Devlin and two guys from the 1st Cav to set up ambushes outside the perimeter creating a layered defense. Infantry in the area would come back to Wunder Beach for R&R, pull security at night and set up night ambushes. They received some sporadic AK harassment fire at night and day. While up there, saw jets drop napalm on the village regularly.

In May, Hanoi Hanna said all you boys will be going home for Mother's Day; she paused and then said in a pine box. Devlin rode shotgun on the trucks to Hue Airport and once in middle of May [June] rode up to Dong Ha with ten others to clean up the ammo dump after it was blown up. They picked up the damaged and broken rounds and put them in one area for the EOD to blow up.

Devlin remained at Utah Beach until there was no more activity and bad weather arrived. They left on the back of a 2 ½-ton to the airport at Hue and then flew to Cam Ranh Bay where the men were split up. His friend, Robert "Bob" Serina, remained until they destroyed the bunkers and was moved to the 403rd Trans Company. Devlin never saw the guys he had served with again. After this he was assigned to the 159th Trans Battalion. He volunteered to go to Tuy Hoa and stayed at Tuy Hoa riding shotgun on trucks. When his tour was up, he was sent to Long Binh to process out. Left Vietnam 7 November 1968.