

Interview with Allan Furtado 154<sup>th</sup> TC. 71" Trans BN. June 67 June 68

**When were you assigned to the 71" Trans Bn.?**

I was assigned to 71<sup>st</sup> Trans Bn. on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1967.

**What was your rank and duty position?**

At the end of my tour, I was a Sgt E-5 and was second in charge of the 71 " Bn consolidated MHE night shift maintenance operation at Newport Terminal.

**Did you deploy to Vietnam with your unit? (The 71" Bn. Arrived in Vietnam 2 August 1966)**

No, I did not deploy with my unit (71<sup>st</sup> Trans Bn.).

**Where did you deploy from and how did you train up for the mission?**

I deployed from Fort Eustis. I was with the 714<sup>th</sup> Trans Bn. (TBROSDE) Co. B., trained to repair steam & diesel - electric locomotives (not what I did in Vietnam).

**Describe the deployment. Where did you land? Did anything interesting happen upon your arrival? (VC sapper attack)**

I was deployed unassigned and had no idea where I would end up. I landed at Bien Hoa Air Base and went to the 90<sup>th</sup> Replacement Bn. in Long Binh. Nothing unusual happened.

**When did you leave Vietnam?**

I left Vietnam June 26<sup>th</sup> 1968.

**What companies were assigned to your battalion?**

To the best of My recollection at the time of my arrival, there were the 154<sup>th</sup> , 368<sup>th</sup>, 372<sup>nd</sup>, 551<sup>st</sup>, and 567<sup>th</sup>.

**Who were your commanders?**

During the time I was there, we had at least three or four battalion commanders. LTC Frederick H. Hagreen III, LTC John P. Sancry, and LTC Harold G. Lloyd were 71<sup>st</sup> Trans Bn. commanders.

Colonel C. E. McCandless was commander of the Newport Terminal during the 1968 TET Offensive, for which he received the Bronze Star Medal with "V" device for leading the defense of the Facility.

### **What was the mission of your unit?**

During the time I was there, my unit, 154<sup>th</sup> Trans CO's mission was the discharging of cargo at the Newport facility, although I actually worked with the 71st consolidated MHE maintenance operation at Newport.

### **Describe the port life at Newport.**

The first five or six weeks I worked the 12-hour day shift; at that time, there was no maintenance night shift. When the new consolidated maintenance building was finished, we started up a night shift. We worked only on forklifts. Keeping the forklifts going 24 hours a day was a big problem under the conditions they were used. The maintenance night shift was very unique. There were only 8 to 10 of us in the entire building and we were the only men working there at night. It was quite a different scene in the daytime. The daytime forklift crew, the truck maintenance, the crane and RT forklift maintenance and every officer from the 71st, it seemed, hung out at the maintenance building. I think the 11th Trans Bn did their maintenance there too. We actually used a truck from the 11th Bn to convoy back and forth from Camp Camelot to Newport every day. Life at the port was pretty routine for the first 5 or 6 months, but that changed quite a bit after TET 68, which I will get into later.

### **Describe what problems you had and how you corrected them.**

We had two main problems. First, trying to find guys that had experience in repairing the equipment, forklifts in our case, and second, getting the parts to repair them. I had been working on cars and trucks since I was fourteen so it came easy to me. After a few months, when a unit came in for repairs, or would not run, I could almost tell what was wrong with it just by looking at its number. Everyone was always asking me for help. I couldn't understand why they gave us guys who had no experience in mechanics at all. To correct this problem, I tried to train most of the others to diagnose and repair the forklifts. The second problem wasn't so easy. There seemed to be no way to get parts any faster. I had to improvise as much as possible.

### **What accomplishments did your unit make? (Or what are some of the things you are most proud of during your tour?)**

Looking back on it now, I guess I could say I'm most proud of the way I got the job done. Keeping the equipment running so the ships could unload as fast as possible and getting the supplies and equipment out to the units.

**How many times were you attacked? Could you describe them?**

We had one major ground attack and quite a few rocket and mortar harassments. For a few weeks before the 1968 Tet Offense, we kept hearing that something big was going to happen. Two days before the actual Tet holiday, we were told to bring all of our combat gear to Newport with us. Prior to that, the only armed men there were the MP security force assigned to the port. I believe they were from the 720nd MP Battalion. Later we heard that they didn't want us bringing our weapons so the VC would think we might be less adept to defend the port. We knew there was probably VC in the port reporting back to the leaders about our strength and ability to defend the port.

On the eve of February 1st, 1968, we were told to take a position outside the maintenance building, where I worked, looking up at the Newport Bridge. We were actually the closest men to the bridge on the whole port. I decided to climb up on top of the cab of a track crane to get a better look at the bridge. Just after midnight, we heard small arms fire toward the north side of the bridge. There was an ARVIN guard bunker located there and we were sure they were getting hit. The fighting seemed to subside for a while. A short while later, I saw some movement on the bridge and more small arms fire started coming in on us. I returned fire. I heard a round whiz past my head, it must have been only inches away. I was off the cab of that crane in about two seconds and on the ground next to my friend, Bill Siller. Bill said "I told you not to go up there". In a little while, the LT came over and told us to take a position right up to the chain link fence, that more men were coming down from the docks to help reinforce our position. He also said the VC could be coming across the river, which was only about 25 feet on the other side of the fence. Remember, there were only about eight to ten of us in this area, the rest of the men were way down at the docks and ramps. Now it started getting really hot. The VC had set up mortars on the bridge. The Newport Bridge was four lanes wide. All they had to

do was stay  
in the middle and there was no way we could hit them from our lower position on the ground.  
The mortar rounds  
were landing in front of us, then to the left and right, and then to the rear. At about that time, the  
men from the  
docks had moved in about 50 to 75 feet behind us, which I was unaware of They started shooting  
over our  
heads. At first I didn't know who they were, VC that got past the MP guards at the front gate or  
our own guys.  
Thank God they were our guys. At this point, it seemed to be total confusion, the noise was  
deafening, and I  
was sure I was going to die. After a while, the firefight calmed down and we could hear the VC  
yelling down  
to us, "Kill GI, send home in body bag", in good enough English so you could well understand it.  
I think the  
hair on the back of my neck stood at attention. I looked over at Bill and I knew we were thinking  
the same thing.  
We were now into this battle for about three hours and things weren't getting any better. I was  
thinking now that  
the NV guards were doing a good job keeping the VC from completely crossing the bridge. The  
problem for  
the VC was once they started going down to the end of the bridge, they were open targets. If they  
ever got in  
behind us, that would have been a big problem. They would have been able to mix in with our  
guys who were  
scattered around. We probably would be shooting at each other. I was thinking, in about three  
hours or so it  
would start getting light out. It would be good to see clearly what was happening. Just then I  
heard a tank-, it  
was going slowly up the south side of the bridge firing its machine guns and stopping to fire its  
cannon. It sure  
looked pretty. At about the same time, two or three helicopter gun ships came in firing their mini  
guns and  
shooting rockets at the VC on the bridge. Now the bridge that was protecting them became their  
demise.  
They had no where to go. In about forty-five minutes, it was all over. It was one hell of a night.  
We kidded  
around later and were calling ourselves combat mechanics for one night. Later I learned it was  
the 3d Battalion  
of the 273rd VC Regiment, led by Colonel Chin May who was responsible for the attack on  
Newport Terminal.

When the day shift finally arrived, they came over to us and asked us "What the hell happened  
here last night.

There are dead VC all over the bridge." We just said "yeah. It was a long night". To my  
knowledge, that was the only night the Newport Terminal completely closed down normal

operations. When we crossed over the bridge to go back to Long Binh, there were still many dead VC scattered over the bridge. Got my first lesson in human anatomy. All I could think was, I'm glad it's them I'm looking at and not our guys or I would have been sick.

During the rest of my tour, we didn't have any more major ground attacks. In the month of May 1968, there was a lot of VC activity in our area. I also remember in that month an artillery unit moved in just across from the entrance to Newport. Every night the 105s were aimed almost straight up and firing all night. The VC were always close by. We were hit with mortar attacks a few times that month. By that time, they had built bunkers for us, it just a matter of getting there in time. They also blew a large section out of the bridge during that period. (Have photos of that on my website.) After the Tet Offense, we always took our weapons with us just in case.

**How did you feel about serving in Vietnam? (I am interested in the stress level of working in a guerrilla environment.)**

Arriving in Vietnam just after turning 20 the month before, I really didn't have any idea what was going on.

It didn't take long to realize that we were involved on a much larger scale than I could have ever imagined

and it didn't look like we were leaving for a while. I don't remember the word stress being used at that time.

I guess that is what we call it now. What I do remember is just doing one day at a time. Trying not to think too

far ahead and always being aware of what was happening around you--almost being able to look in two

places at the same time. You learned to live with the stress and, consciously, it didn't seem to bother me

after a while. The hard part was after coming home from Vietnam and immediately going back to civilian life.

That was when I felt the stress. I found it very difficult not to be on my guard all the time. Even to this day, my

wife says me, "I saw you looking out of the corner of your eye". Some things never go away.

**Describe any interesting things that happened to you in your tour in Vietnam.**

I don't have many interesting stories to tell, at least ones that I could put on paper. One funny story was

about two of the guys that were in the 154<sup>th</sup> with me who worked nights unloading ships and had the same

rotation date as I did. They wanted to try to sign out of the company and head to Cam Ranh Bay three days

sooner than our return date. I told them I didn't think that was a good idea. The NCOIC, SSGT

Fortenberry,  
who was directly over us at Newport, was away on emergency leave, and that made me NCOIC during his

leave. Anyway, we went to the company orderly room to start the process to sign out of the company and

head for Cam Ranh Bay. For whatever reason, there didn't seem to be any problems leaving early. So here

we go off to Bien Hoa Air Base to find a flight to Cam Ranh Bay. The airport terminal at Cam Ranh was much larger than Bien Hoa, we could have easily gotten lost for a couple of days in the area and then reported to

the replacement BN, but we went directly to the replacement BN and checked in. The next formation we were assigned to a work detail. So much for taking it easy for a couple of days.

Every E-6 and above was told to

take off and just report back for the next formation. All the E-5s and below were, as needed, for work details.

I was assigned to a work detail. I was in charge of filling sandbags and burning waste. My two friends were in those details. I kept telling them, you should have listened to me and stayed at Newport a couple of more days.

So I just watched them work with a big smile on my face. Well, it was funny at the time.

I flew to Vietnam on the same plane with a friend, Greg, who was also in the 714th Trans Bn. at Fort Eustis

with me. We lived in the same state about 100 miles apart. We used to hitchhike home together from Fort Eustis, VA to MA. Those were the days when you could wear your uniform and people would give you a ride and

not try to run you over. Arriving in Vietnam, we went to the 90th Replacement BN together. We were separated

there and never saw each other again. Would you believe I saw him in Cam Ranh and we flew back on the same plane?!

Well I guess I'm starting to get off the track here and should conclude this interview, although I could go on for a while. Hope it has been of some interest to you. Maybe the next time I'm in Williamsburg, we could do an in person follow up.