

**Robert H. Ralyea**

**US 51\*\*\*\*\***

**MOS 56E20 - Cargo Handler**

**US Army**

**November 17, 1965 - November 17, 1967**

**Honorable Discharge**

I would like to preface my comments about my induction into the US Army by saying that I, like many others in 1965, was concerned about Vietnam and the draft. I graduated from high school in June of 1964. My grades were not that great, and by that I mean a B average was not good enough to get into most colleges since their requirements were raised due to high enrollment to beat the draft. If you carried 15 credit hours per semester and enrolled into an accredited college, you most likely would be exempt from the draft. The high enrollment during this period caused the colleges to raise their enrollment policies. I tried to enroll in a community college but all I could manage to do was carry 12 credit hours at night. Consequently, I received my draft notice in October of 1965 with a report date of November 17, 1965. I should also mention that if you were a member of any military reserve program, you would also be exempt from the draft. Army reserve programs were filled to the maximum by 1965 and would not accept any new enrollees.

I hope that our government never repeats a draft policy as they did during the Vietnam War.

I had mixed feeling about going to Vietnam as I was young, never been away from home, family and friends. Initially I do not feel that I was under a great deal of stress, just uncertainty. I was resigned to the fact that I had to serve my country honorably. Both father and mother served in the Army Air Force in WWII. Many veterans went willingly, regular Army, some went when drafted like me and some went kicking and screaming.

My MOS was a cargo handler (56E20). Why I was assigned that MOS I am not sure. I do think that the Army went by your civilian job, which was a stock clerk during high school and one year of college.

I arrived in Vietnam June 4, 1966 and assigned to the 155th Transportation Company in Cam Rahn Bay. I was a private and assigned to a Stevedore squad. Cam Rahn Bay was one big sandy area, a village at one end of the bay area was inhabited by locals. Initially the village was quite but months later it became a place for the GI to get a cold beer and socialize with the locals, to put it nicely.

I don't believe I met my 1SG or Company Commander initially. I was greeted by my Platoon SGT and shown where I would sleep, the quartermaster for field gear, uniforms and weapons. I am not sure if I was told about my duties until the next day when we trucked to a pier in Cam Rahn Bay and boarded a merchant ship. Usually one squad would take one of the four ship cargo

areas. We had two winch operators and two signalmen, (fore and aft on each cargo hatch). The remaining squad members would work in the hole moving cargo and slinging the cargo. I do remember that I was sent into the hole and instructed by others of my rank how to sling crates box's, pallets of 105's (105 mm artillery shells), 155's (155 mm artillery shells) and 500 pound bombs. We worked 12-hour shifts 6 days a week for several months. It may take several days working 24hrs a day to complete the off load. Several times we off loaded mortars from a merchant ship to a Navy ship that had deck mortars. You would stay with that ship until it was fully loaded. The interesting thing we found was that it took 14 to 15 hours to load the Navy ship with mortars and one day we watched that ship cross the bay and fire all its mortars towards the mainland in about 15 minutes.

Sometime in late September 1966, we were advised that we would prepare to move out to an unknown location. We prepared our field gear, cleaned weapons (M1 4). We arrived at a beach near Cam Rahn Bay and boarded an LST with our gear, trucks, and jeeps. We spent the night on this ship and arrived at a location the next morning. We were told it was Vung Ro Bay. Our operation was called "Operation Robin". I can't verify that. We were never told what units we were to support. I believe that the bombs were for Tuy Hoa Air Base and the 155mm arty were for the ROK'S. The cement was probably for the Tuy Hoa Air Base since it was originally built on PSP. Tanks and APC's were either the ROK's or 4th infantry division. I can't verify that though. The beach area was very small maybe 100yds by 100yds. Immediate beach area was very sandy but farther back it was red clay and muddy with a mountain, very steep. A steep road to the beach gave us access to Hwy #1 several miles inland. No local inhabitants in the area. We off loaded our equipment. Some of us were transported to our cantonment area near Tuy Hoa on CH - 47's and others moved the trucks and gear via Hwy #1 to our cantonment area. This area was known only as "AREA B". It was several hundred yards from the South China Sea. I think our cantonment area was near Tuy Hoa Air force Base because we observed constant aircraft landings and take offs in the distance west of us. After settling in our first night we were in our tents and we heard a popping sound, like corks pulled out of a bottle. Our platoon sergeant said it was small arms fire and to hit the deck. We were never given a report on this incident. Our daily trips to Vung RO Bay we either trucked in (1 1/2HRS) or were air lifted (1 5 MIN FLY TIME) by CH-47'S. This was a whole different ball game than in Cam Rahn Bay. We were met daily by several LARC's and transported to ships off shore. We had to jump from the LARC to a Jacobs's ladder with full gear and an M1 4 rifle rolling seas to board the ship. We had a few people fall into the water between the ship and LARC ( no one killed or injured) so we were advised to leave our weapons and gear ashore. We off loaded 500 pound bombs, cement, PSP (Perforate Steel Platform), 105mm, 155mm and unbeknown to us at that time (FRIENDLY FIRE) Agent Orange to BARC's where the cargo was transported to the beach area marshaling yard. Other transportation units would then move the cargo to its destinations. Frequently we would off load Tanks and Armored Personnel Carriers onto BARCS and we would escort (ride along) to a drop off destination at different locations on the coast. This was one of the worst assignments we could get because we had no idea how to start one of these units but eventually would figure it out. The BARC would reach its destination and come ashore. This was highly dangerous because on several occasions we would come ashore in high surf and tides. On two occasions the ships engine hatches were open and the engine area was flooded causing the pilot to lose control of the ship. (The pilots and crew were Japanese, very poor communications). The ship would come in sideways under no power with heavy equipment on deck and not secured. On one of these

occasions were advised by LT to remove field equipment, take your M1 4 rifle and jump ship. The trick was to jump as the surf carried the ship back out and get out of the water before the surf brought the ship back in. Our Platoon leader Corporal Chaney was seriously hurt when he was in one of the APC's and the hatch cover to the driver area was not secured and the hatch came down on him and he caught his neck on the port hole and cut from ear to ear. Some times ROK's were there and other times I think the 4th infantry division would meet us at the drop off. I am not sure of the units we made contact with.

Somewhere along the line while at Vung Ro Bay I was promoted to winch operator. The winch operator and signalmen had to work closely and get along. My signalman was PVT. Perez, no first name. I was relieved to be out of the hole and on deck where the air was clean and relatively cool compared to the hole. Little did I know that the reason I was promoted was because the next four ships to off load were old liberty ships, WWII vintage with steam winches, not electric? The minute I would pull the sticks back on the inboard and out board winches to pull the cargo straight up the hole I found out why I was given the job. The steam pressure was very erratic and the inboard and outboard winches would not pull evenly. I had to concentrate with such a degree until I brought the cargo out of the hole to keep it from hitting the walls of the hole and losing it with men down below. Once the cargo was out of the hole it was another challenge to maintain the inboard winch out bound and the outboard winch steady. This is where my signalman Perez came in. I was totally relying on his signals, as I would drop the cargo over the side. Men, ships and cargo were relying on the signalman to read things right since I was blind to what was over the deck. It wasn't so bad if it was a pallet of cement but when lifting APC's or Tanks over the side I could sink the BARC or worse yet kill someone if the signalman and I didn't work together. I also had to compensate for the difference in ship draft and swells as both ships were constantly moving in opposite directions. These old Liberty ships some times when you had a Tank over the side the brakes on the winches would not hold and I had all I could do to try and slow the decent of the cargo and prayed that the steam pressure would hold until the drop was completed. It was up to me to relay to the signalman that the brakes were not going to hold and he had to advise the deck hands below to get that Tank or APC in position with ropes before it hit the deck. On BARCS there was just enough room to get one Tank into the recessed deck area. We used to wonder why our government would use these old ships and equipment.

Frequently at night while working a second shift we would see heavy machine gun fire from the south end of the bay to the north end of the bay. We would also hear the very distinct sound of AK47 fire. It was never reported to us what was going on. Our position was never directly attached.

On several occasions we would load CH-47's with 155mm and transport to an ROK compound somewhere between Tuy Hoa and Vung Ro Bay. These soldiers were very interesting bunch. They always asked how many VC you killed today and I always replied that I didn't kill any VC today. They would then get very agitated. I always felt they were under the influence of some sort of wine they made.

We worked 12-hour shifts and also were required to perform guard duty 4 hours a day either on board the ships or our cantonment area. All we did was work, eat and sleep. Free time we sleep.

Nothing to do in the Tuy Hoa Vung Ro Bay area. You didn't do any sightseeing in that area. I believe we returned to Cam Rahn Bay sometime in December.

I have no data on tonnage moved in a day. I will tell you that our CO Captain Tim Ryan was more like a CEO than an Army officer. He would have these pep talks and the main word in his vocabulary was "TONNAGE".

Upon returning to Cam Rahn Bay we found that our living area was renovated from tents to the chicken coup style building. That was a major improvement in quality of life.

Life was pretty monotonous after we left Vung RO Bay. We either worked 12-hr day or 12 hr night shifts at the piers on the Bay. Off loading was a piece of cake since we had a pier to off load and the bay was calm, no rolling seas.

Captain Ryan called me to his office one day to advise me that my future father in-law was killed in an auto accident and my grandfather died. This was a total shock being so far from home and not knowing all details. Captain Ryan offered me a trip home. I was surprised that he would allow that. I thought about it for several hours and decided that by the time I got home the services would be over so I would just wait it and out not have to return to Vietnam.

I never took advantage of the one week in country or out of country time off allotted each soldier. It was cancelled once and the next scheduled date my buddies cancelled. I did not want to go alone. When I returned home I decided to extend my time between assignments an extra week. When I was discharged my DD214 reflected that as an "extended leave, unauthorized", not AWOL.

I was very happy to be SHORT and I got the feeling about 60 days before my departure date. Uncle Sam tried to get me to stay, reenlistment or contractor as a winch operator. Offered me \$10k to stay. Looking back I should have stayed and put the \$10K into the market and forgotten about it.

I had a very pleasant experience when I returned home. I landed at Sea-Tac (Seattle-Tacoma, Washington) International airport and was put on standby for a flight to Buffalo New York. When it came time to check on my standby status I was advised that I would not make the next two planes. Some man offered to give me his seat and I accepted. Not sure if I said thank you. Always bothered me that I didn't get his name.

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