

Gail Birdsall

Specialist 5th Class

1st Signal Corps

U.S. Army



Emblem, 1st Signal Corps
U.S. Army

Qui Nhon, Bong Son, and Ba Gia Vietnam

I enlisted in the Army instead of being drafted. I had a draft number, but I don't recall what it was. It seems it was in the low 100s. They were calling up my draft number, so I decided to enlist to get training for after the service. I didn't enlist with a buddy. I was twenty years old and left behind my parents, Dewey and Dorothy Birdsall, and my brothers and sisters, Pam, Gary, Renee, and Greg.

I was in the Army from June 30, 1969 until April 10, 1975. Active duty was until February 11, 1972, and I was in the Army Reserves until April 10, 1975.

I went for Basic Training to Fort Polk, Louisiana, flying on a commercial airliner from Des Moines to Fort Polk. Next I went to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, also by commercial plane. I asked for and received training for the Army Signal Corps at Fort Monmouth. I was trained in crypto equipment repair. My MOS was 32F. I had a top-secret classification. I was assigned to the 1st Signal Brigade in Qui Nhon, Vietnam, and served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade at LZ English at Bong Son, and MACV for the 22nd RVN Division at Ba Gia.

Besides servicing crypto equipment, I did guard duty, patrols, convoy escorts, and training. In all my duties, I often was under attack by the enemy. We had all the support and supplies we needed to complete our missions, though there were a very few times we got low on ammunition. I never got injured unless you count scrapes, bruises, and burns. Never by bullets or shrapnel.

Occasionally, when I got leave, I went to Taipei, Taiwan.

Then the CO notified me that I was going home. I was taken by a chopper to Da Nang, Vietnam, then got on Tiger Airlines to Fort Lewis, Washington. My rank was E5, Specialist 5.

Most everyone hoped for and looked forward to the day we would go home; including me. There were a lot of mixed emotions about it, though. Around leaving comrades behind, and those that didn't make it home alive. Then there were those we had to deal with when we traveled in the U.S., but it was good to be home and with loved ones. It would have been very difficult to have made the transition from soldier to civilian without my family. I was blessed to have them. I have never spoken much of my experiences in Vietnam until recently. Partly because I didn't want to, and partly because no one asked. My dad was a Korean War vet. He suggested that I just bury things and leave them behind. That seemed to be good advice at the time.

I didn't get any of the hero-type medals such as the Purple Heart, or the Bronze or Silver Star. I received the National Defense, Vietnam campaign, and service medals. Over the years I have spoken with several of the friends I served with, but it's been quite a while since I last heard from any of them.



Qui Nhon Airfield Control Tower