

# Henry Rumbaugh

**Sergeant  
Ammo Supply Transport  
87th Artillery  
U.S. Army**

**Saigon  
Vietnam**



**Ammo Transport Truck**

I was drafted into the US Army in 1965. My draft number was 484-480934. I remember my military rifle number, too. US-55799597 is my rifle number. I went down to Camp Dodge in Des Moines and was drafted out of there to Fort Leonard Wood for Basic. I went in October.

From Fort Leonard Wood I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for AIT. That was eight weeks of training on 155 and 105 Howitzers, plus truck driving. In our sixth week they came out and told us our orders would be down in a week and where we were going to go from there. They said, "We need 21 volunteers out of this unit for Vietnam." I was no idiot, so I didn't volunteer. We had 27 guys volunteer out of the unit. But the day the orders came down, guess where the 27 guys went? Someplace else. They picked 27 guys that didn't even volunteer. We only had three days once we got our orders to be ready to ship out. The other guys went to Korea, Alaska, everywhere but Nam. They didn't tell you where you were going to go, but it didn't take us long to figure this out.

To go over to Saigon, we were supposed to be on a ship in California. I stood in line for seven hours. I got within 100 yards of the ship, and a jeep pulled up and said, "I'm calling out nine names. If you're one of them, step out." Well, I was the first one of the names to come out. He said, "You're not going on the ship, you're flying." Once we got there, they said, "Your outfits won't be here for 30-some days by ship." So they put us with the 101st Airborne, and I was in the artillery with them. The second week we had a bad experience. I was a gunner on the 155, which shoots 15-20 miles out. We had a bad experience one night, it just made me sick, and

I don't talk about it today. I said, "No more."

Then my unit got there, and I told my captain what happened. I said, "You're not putting me on a gun. If I shoot at somebody, I'm going to be where I can see it hit." So they made me a truck driver, and I hauled ammo from Saigon, I hauled ammo to the four-gun battery. I hauled 155 Howitzer shells, and 105's. It got a little scary at times, too. Somebody's shooting at you, and it's hard to know where it's coming from. We were based all over. I have my cigarette lighter with every place marked. We went to Phan Rang, Cam Ranh Bay, and Nha Trang. The batteries would be there for 2-3 weeks, 4 weeks, and then we'd move someplace else. When they moved, I moved.

I picked up ammo mostly from Saigon. A lot of the time there weren't camps set up. The units would move, set themselves up, and cut trees down. They'd be there for three or four weeks. We knew where they were because we went with them. Once we got set up and unloaded, then we'd drive back to Saigon. We'd load the ammo down at the docks there, and often we'd drive back till it got dark and pull off to the side and sleep in the truck. We weren't allowed to run at night. It would take two or three days to get back to them. We'd go to just this side of Laos, not all the way in. It was several hundred miles. You didn't have good roads. Most of them were one-way. Just trails.

The 155 Howitzers have a range of 15-20 miles, and the 105's have a range of 8-10. They didn't have to be right on top. They had what they called a forward observer, and he would call in and say we need ammo. They'd call about the battery

fire, telling them, "No, you've got to go to your right, got to go left," and set them up. When the direction was set, he'd say, "Okay, let 'em fly." Five guns would go just as fast as they could, five rounds each. Then he'd come back and say, "Well, you did a good job," or "You missed." That's what happened the first time, and I said I won't do it anymore because we didn't miss.

Plenty of times our trucks were under fire. We put gunners on the truck, and once we got out of range, we took the gunners off so we could put the hammer down and move.

We were stationed out of Saigon when we first got there, then we shipped out to Phan Rang. Every time they moved, we'd move with them. We stayed with the three-gun battery wherever they went. They'd call, "How soon are you guys going to be here? We've got seven rounds left." They'd about be sitting ducks.

We had a Lieutenant come in one time, right out of training, and he thought he had all the answers. Our captain was on leave. We got ready to go out on guard that night at about four o'clock. He made us come out to formation and said, "Those boots will be shined, that belt buckle will be shined, and you will not load a gun out there until you call me, and I'll come out there to inspect it." Well, we went out there and we didn't shine our boots, we didn't clean our belt buckles. You didn't want anything to shine out there. We got out there and set everything up and loaded up all our guns. But when we did that, everybody did it at the same time, so when the bolt went back, he heard it go click, click, click. He came out there, grabbed a rifle and unloaded it, and said, "Now you heard me. You call me and I'll come out and inspect it. But don't you load up anything." Well, he didn't get halfway back, and we reloaded again. We said, "No, you want to come out here and sit like that, then fine. But I'm not going in. If somebody starts shooting at me, I'm going to be ready. I'm not going to call you and ask what to do." He didn't last long. Captain came back, and the Lieutenant got shipped out.

This kid wrote home one day to his mom, and she sent him some Jiffy Pop popcorn. We could take a can and fill it with sand and put fuel in it, light it, and we'd sit there, and pop popcorn no matter where we were at. Then we ran out of popcorn. So, he wrote to Jiffy Pop in Wisconsin, told them where we're at, and asked would you mind sending us

some popcorn? We got 22 boxes every month. When I left, we had popcorn sitting everywhere. We'd give it away to all the other units.

I have to tell you a little story. When I got over there, before we left Oklahoma, everybody had to go down to the PX, and we were issued all these clothes. Winter clothes, boots, winter coats, winter underwear, everything. We had a duffel bag packed full. That, plus our regular stuff. After we got over there the guys said, "What's all this?" We said, "It's our winter clothes." "What do you have that for?" We said, "You tell me, we had to go get it about three days before we left." He said, "You don't need it here." This building would not hold all the stuff. All the duffel bags they took and threw in a pile. This was all brand-new stuff, and they just threw it on a big pile and burnt it. Boots, and coats, and everything else. The stuff that got wasted is unbelievable.

I wasn't injured, but we were around Agent Orange quite a bit. Well, I've been through two different types of cancer since I've been home. Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, and now I'm fighting bladder cancer. But for getting injured, thank God, no.

**Ammunition  
Dump**



You're supposed to spend a year and go home and I had my year in. Somebody's got to be able to replace you before you leave, and I didn't have a replacement. One day I was coming back to deliver the ammo and I got stopped coming through the port. This guy came out and said, "You aren't going near the 87th artillery, are you?" And I said, "That's where I'm from." He said, "You go by the first camp?" And I said, "Right down the road." He said, "We've got five guys here. Three guys are going to the first camp, two of them are going to the 87th. Can we have a ride back with you?" I said, "Yeah, they've got to get up on top." Because I was loaded with ammo, they had to ride up there with the

gunner. I said, "Woah, woah, woah, before you get up there, do any of you guys have a semi license?" The one kid said, "Yeah, I do." I said, "You're sitting up here with me. When you get back, you aren't getting out of my sight." I took him right in and said, "You're my replacement." A week and a half later. I was able to go to Saigon and fly home. But I wouldn't let him out of my sight for a week.

That was in 1966. When I got back to the states, we went to McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey. Protesters were there. We had a heck of a big fight with them. We had to come back in full uniform. They told us on the plane there would be a

bunch of people there protesting. We had a colonel who got the first guy. He walked right up to him and decked him. Then the fight was on. They were on one side of the fence, and we were on the other side. Then the cops came out. We went to a big room on the Air Force base. We never left there until we went to the airport. When we got ready to leave, they had a car out there waiting for us.

I don't regret my service. If I had to do it, I'd do it over again.



**Above: A Supply Convoy.**

**Left: On One of the Better Roads. Trucks were not allowed to drive after dark.**