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**Long Binh Stockade**  
**Tan Son Nhat Air Base**



I was drafted when I was nineteen in 1965. I went into the Army and went to Fort Leonard Wood. We always called it Lost in the Woods. After Ft. Leonard Wood I was told I was going to be a Military Policeman at Ft. Gordon, Georgia, just outside of Augusta. Training at Gordon was eight weeks. Then I got stationed about one block up the street at U.S. Military Police School in Fort Gordon. I stayed in Georgia till August when I got notified I was going overseas to Vietnam. This was in 1966.

Military Police was police work to begin with while I was stationed with the Military Police school. They would fly in officers to show them how we handled riot control. We'd take them out in the field for five days at a time and they'd do recon and stuff like that. There'd be Green Berets and Marines and Army officers. We'd have the most fun when the Marines and the Green Berets stayed with us because they didn't care. They would drive off base, get beer, and bring it back. It was quite a time when those guys came for their weekend class. They'd pass the class. Then like I said, for riot control we'd arm up with guns and bayonets and stock and gas masks. We had some guys that would be the rioters.

When I went to Vietnam, I flew over and landed at Tan Son Nhat Air Base outside of Saigon. I think my brother Mike went by ship. We didn't fly over or home with our unit, but singly. I think our first stop was Hawaii, then the Philippines. On the way back it was Hong Kong, then Hawaii, then San Francisco.

When I first got to Vietnam, I was stationed with the 148<sup>th</sup> MP Battalion that guarded the air base there. We also escorted the new arrivals to a camp

next door where they stayed overnight. Then they would go off on buses and we'd escort them in Jeeps, one in front and one in back.. We'd have flak jackets and helmets and machine gun armor on the back of the Jeep. We'd drive the thirty miles to Long Binh and drop them off for someone else to take them to wherever they were supposed to go.

I was there from September until November of '66, so it wasn't that long. Then I went to the Long Binh stockade for American prisoners, with the 557<sup>th</sup> MP Company, the ones that guard the stockade. They called it the Long Binh Jail. The original prison was built for 140 prisoners and we had 400 by the time the new one was built. That's where I spent the rest of my time till I went home in August of '67. It was just barbed wire and towers and a big building for their mess hall like you'd see in World War II prison camps. The guards worked 12-hour shifts, either in the towers or in taking prisoners out. You'd take out five at a time to fill sandbags—everybody filled sandbags. Or they cleaned latrines or moved stuff out of the way. Sometimes you'd get guard duty up in those towers and you'd sit up there all night.

They were in for rape, murder, drugs, everything was going on there. Most of them were sent back to the U.S., and they'd be cleared and they wouldn't have to serve their sentences. They usually just got a dishonorable discharge. I don't know about the guys with murder.

You could sit up in one of those towers and smell the marijuana. One of the guards that slept right across from me got caught selling it to the prisoners. One day his bunk was all cleared out and there he was in the prison. He was a good kid, too. They

said 90 percent of the prisoners were Black and Hispanic and it was all kind of segregated in the spaces. At first the general population were all in tents. The other side was where the solitary confinement building was, with just single cells. One place was where they had these metal container boxes where they'd put these guys that were really out of control for a day. It would get like 110 degrees inside of them. It was cruel, but they did it. Nothing was ever said about it.

We had a riot on Easter in '66 or '67. Everything broke loose. They took over the whole compound and we had to use our riot control. It took most of the day to get them all calmed down. In '68, it took them a week and the prisoners killed a commander and a couple of guards, plus four or five prisoners. It was a pretty bad deal. That was on Easter, too.

I had one incident. A guy was supposed to fall out for head count, and I looked into his tent and there he was, shining his shoes. He said he wasn't going out. I said, "Come on, you gotta go." We went back and forth like that as I kept talking to him and got closer to him. I got right up to him and said, "Come on, we gotta go." Next thing he came up swinging with the shoe brush and we got in a little tussle there. I got him down and then the other guard finally heard all the yelling and came in. So then he got a tour in solitary for a couple of days. Later he always seemed to like to go out when I was a guard. The guards always carried a twelve-gauge sawed-off shotgun. It had double-ought buckshot in it. If they started acting up, you just cocked it and everybody calmed down and straightened up. That got their attention,

The only injury I had was a chipped tooth, from playing football. No, I didn't get a Purple Heart. The medals I did get were just the three you always see.

One afternoon I got to meet up with my brother Mike. He was in transportation, driving a truck. I saw him two months before I shipped out from Vietnam. As brothers we couldn't be in the same location. It was just one afternoon.

When I went home, we didn't bring souvenirs home. They took everything before we left. They said if Uncle Sam gave you two pair of boots, you had to have two pair of boots there. Five pair of underwear, shirts, a poncho— When we got to Treasure Island in San Francisco, they led us straight to the mess hall and had steaks and beer and anything else we wanted to eat. Hot showers, oh gee, I hadn't had one in a long time, a year probably. Our showers in the jail, if you were lucky, you'd get a hot shower. They had old fuel tanks up on a rack, and they'd fill those with water. It took a certain part of the day for those tanks to get hot, otherwise it was pretty cool. But of course, when the monsoon was there, you were soaked anyway.

In Slater, it was just like I hadn't been gone. There were two people that shook my hand—Dale Cluck and Harold Blize—and said Thanks. Everybody else, just like I hadn't been gone.

I know I had it pretty easy. I didn't have flashbacks, but just some dreams. It did take a long time to get readjusted but I never had anyone give me trouble when I came home.



**Mike and Dan Nelson  
Reunite in Vietnam**

**Long Binh  
Prisoners  
Filling Sandbags**



**Long  
Binh  
Watch  
Tower**