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**USS Bon Homme Richard CVA-31**

I went into the Navy in February of 1966. My best friend in high school, who was about three months older than I, got his draft notice and didn't want to get drafted. So he said, "I'm going into the Navy." I thought, well, my name is probably coming up, so we joined the Navy together. I was twenty years old when I enlisted. With Vietnam going on, I knew I was going to be going into the service someplace, but I just hadn't thought about it at the time. Before I went in I was up at Fort Dodge Community College for not quite a year, till this friend of mine got drafted. You were hearing about it when you were in high school, so what plans can you make?

We both signed up at Fort Dodge and had Boot Camp in San Diego. After Boot Camp I was assigned to the Naval Auxiliary Station at Fallon, Nevada. It was considered an auxiliary air base because prior to going to Vietnam, pilots would come out to Fallon and do bombing runs out in the desert because they had several military bombing ranges out there in that area. I was supposed to be there for a year, but I ended up staying there two. Then I was transferred to an Attack Aircraft Squadron, VA-93 stationed out of Lemoore, California. It was deployed on the Bon Homme Richard, CV-31 attack aircraft carrier off the coast of Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. I landed in Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. I flew out onto the ship. I actually flew *onto* the ship. It was an eye opener. It was a two-engine prop plane that went from the Philippines to wherever with mail. All the seats pointed to the back of the airplane. When you landed and they caught the arresting gear, it really just put you back in your seat, it stopped so damn quick. It had a hook on it like the jets did. The cargo plane could come in at a slower air speed than the jets, but it was still kind of an abrupt stop. That was in June of '68. Then in October, the ship came back to the states in Lemoore.

I worked in the personnel office and kept the personnel service records. The daily routine included receiving new people coming in for duty, people for discharge, and so on. Probably not very interesting. It was a pretty safe duty. I spent most of my service in California.

My friend that went in with me was stationed at Alameda in San Francisco. It was about a five- or six-hour drive, so I would catch a bus and go see him. He was deployed a lot more than I was because he was in an aircraft squadron. He was over in the Vietnam area a lot more than I was.

Cam Ranh Bay was one of the prettiest places I've ever seen—white sandy beaches, palm trees all along the shoreline, really gorgeous. The thing that struck me more than anything else was that you could hear artillery and gunfire off in the distance. But it was beautiful. I couldn't get over it. When I landed in Cam Ranh Bay, we were only there for about forty-five minutes or so, then we'd get back to the ship. I don't think I got any pictures of Cam Ranh Bay, but I know I took pictures around the ship.

When I was on the ship, I was only over there for about four or five months up in the Gulf of Tonkin. About every thirty days we'd go into port, which mostly consisted of going to the Philippines. Just before we came back, we went to Japan. I bought some china and some silverware that I brought back with me.

I was in the service, probably four years, and three of those years I spent right here in the states between Fallon and Lemoore. I know when I was overseas or on the ship they would send mail just to

let the family know they were okay. They might not write letters, but they would put anything in the envelope to let people know they were okay.

I guess I was different than other people because I worked in the personnel office. When I was in the shop, I worked twelve-hour days, twelve on and twelve off. A lot of times it wasn't that terribly busy at times so you'd have time to write letters and stuff. I kept a correspondence with some people from Cam Ranh Bay.

When I first went out to Fallon, I was only supposed to be there for a year. Our chief petty officer wanted to keep me so he put in a request for me to stay in Fallon. But when I transferred out, I did volunteer to go to Vietnam. They assigned me to an aircraft squadron, which wasn't in Vietnam, but was off the coast. Some of my experiences aren't very exciting compared to some of these other people who were In Country. But sometimes I feel lucky. It sounds so exciting, going to fight for your country and all that, but I had some friends that did get drafted to Vietnam, and a couple of them didn't come home. And some of them got wounded. Looking back now, I'm just as glad that I didn't go!

When I was out in Lemoore, with that VA squadron, they were getting ready to deploy and go back over to Vietnam on a different aircraft carrier,



**Cam Ranh Bay**

the USS Ranger. Prior to going overseas, they had what they call carrier qualifications. They would go out on the ship to practice taking off and landing. We were out on the Ranger for about two weeks. When we came back in, we were going to deploy within a couple of weeks after that. At the time, if you were going to get out three months after deployment, they would let you out early. Actually I got out about four months early. Otherwise I'd have gone out with the ship and they would have had to float me back. Getting out was kind of quick because I didn't know it was going to happen because as soon as we got back, we were going to be packing everything up and getting ready to go. Then they said, "Oh, we'll just send you home."

I had a lot of good times, especially since I was in the states most of the time. When I was out in Fallon, Nevada, we were considered a remote base, so a person could get a ninety-six-hour liberty. We used to go in the desert and camp out, just to have a good time. The Base gave us supplies with rations—if there were four guys, they would give us supplies for that number, for ninety-six hours. They had guns we could check out if we wanted to go hunting. Probably the biggest memory is landing on that aircraft carrier!



**The Personnel Office  
On the Bon Homme Richard**