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**42nd Artillery**  
**U.S. Army**

**Central Highlands, Vietnam**



I enlisted in '68, right out of college. Since I was living in Canada when I signed up for the draft, I was put into the Foreign Draft Board, and they never draft anybody out of the Foreign Draft Board. You're completely insulated from the draft board when you're there. But once I moved back here, they started sniffing around. I was getting letters—"Do you live in the U.S. now?"

I enlisted in the Army and at that time you couldn't enlist in anything other than the Combat Force, so I enlisted in the Artillery because I thought it sounded the safest of Artillery, Armor, or Infantry. I enlisted into an Officer Candidate School because I thought that sounded like a good thing to do. Went to Ft. Leonard Wood Missouri for Basic Training and the Officer Candidate School was right next to the Basic Training school. I saw that the training the officer guys were doing was twice as hard as the guys in Basic Training. I didn't want to do that, so I had the option to get out.

I was in Ft. Leonard Wood for Basic Training, Artillery and all the artillery schools were in Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. So after Basic Training I went to AIT, Advanced Individual Training, where you learn your specialty. I got there and they had an NCO school you could go into for a Non-commissioned Officer, come out as a sergeant. It took 7 months additional. Nixon had just become president or was just about to become president, and he said he had the war figured out and he was gonna end it. And I thought if I can drag this out another seven months, Nixon's gonna end that war before I have to go. But it didn't work out that way.

In April of '69, I went to Vietnam and was assigned to the closest thing to a front-line artillery battery as there was, First Charlie Battery in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Artillery. I flew out from Seattle. We were all jammed into, I think it was a DC-8—big plane. There were 220 of us in a plane that normally had 160 in it. In Vietnam we landed down south in the jungle near Saigon, at the air base near Saigon. Then I got on the helicopter, and they flew me to Pleiku.

Pleiku, in the central highlands of Vietnam, was where we were centered. Our artillery battalion had three batteries. Two of the batteries never moved the entire time I was there. The battery I was in moved 24 times in 11 months! I was only in there for 11 months instead of a whole year because they were starting to cut back on the number of troops over there.

We were the Air Mobile Artillery. Helicopters would come and pick everything up and move us from one hilltop to another to support whatever action was going on. I was there right after what they called the Tet Offensive. My opinion was that everyone was exhausted after all the Tet was done, so there was kinda more or less a lull.

Most of the Viet Cong equipment came down what they called the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which was actually in Cambodia or Laos, not in Vietnam. The scariest thing we ever did was going into an area called the Parrot's Beak, where Laos jutted into Vietnam. There was a centralized area right across the border. We set up right next to that and shot into

Laos or Cambodia. We were doing a tremendous amount of damage. They finally sent a battalion down to wipe us out, so that half of our battery was completely overrun. The guys just had to run off one side of the hilltop as the Vietnamese were coming up the other side.

I don't think I was ever shot at with a rifle the whole time I was there, but we got mortared. They'd sneak into the jungle around our fire base and shoot mortars in. We built shelters in so we were mostly under cover and it didn't really do much damage.

We were totally isolated the entire time I was there. We had no supplies, and we ate C-Rations almost the whole 11 months. Thanksgiving and Christmas they'd bring out prepared turkey dinner, something from the Base Camp.

One time we were right next to a little Montagnard area but I was never in any of the towns or with any of the people. You could see them when you'd fly over in the helicopters. The central highlands weren't like the swamps that were down in the southern part. We were up high, a couple of thousand feet, and it wasn't really like jungle, more like deciduous forest. We often had what they called "Cidgies" for our perimeter defense, around our fire bases. That stood for Civilian Irregular Defense Group. They were mostly people called Montagnards, which were native minorities of Vietnam. Most people regarded them better than the Vietnam Army. You were better off having Cidgies for defense. The Cidgies would man the post around the perimeter. Most of the battles were in the more populated areas. We were there to support whatever infantry action going on in the trees around us, but after Tet there just wasn't a whole lot going on.



**Civilian  
Irregular  
Defenses  
Group**

**"Cidgies"**

My job was Fire Direction Section Chief. We manned the radios from the forward observers that were out in the woods. They'd radio in where they wanted us to shoot, and we would calculate what had to be put on the Howitzers in order to hit that spot. The two-man groups went out and crept around through the forest looking for things to shoot at. They had "lurps"—Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, LRRP. Sometimes they'd call in [whispers] and you could hardly hear one of them. Once a guy called in [whispers] "We have a small group of North Vietnamese here. They're about 25 meters to the north of us." We'd radio back to them, "We can't fire. We have to be at least 50 meters away or we can't shoot." Called back, "Oh, we made a mistake—it's more than 50 meters!"

When we moved we'd land on these hilltops, and they'd fly out a bulldozer. It would dig a trench, and that's where we lived. It was like camping out for 11 months. We'd lay beams across the top of the trench, put steel panels on that, then pile sandbags and all the dirt they plowed up on it. We had to do that 24 times..

Charlie Battery went everywhere. At the Parrot's Beak battle, the battery that got overrun was the other half of our group. They were getting ready to overrun us too. We got picked up the next day, so they were never involved with that. The Cidgies got really scared and fired off into the woods—they were all afraid too—and they fired up all their ammo. I was on the radio, calling in, "We need ammo, bring it out! We're stuck out here!" So they sent a whole pallet of ammunition out under a helicopter, dropped it, and it was the wrong ammo! It was mini gun ammo, for the machine guns on the helicopters using special ammo. It wouldn't fit anything.

Towards the end of my tour, the Battery clerk told me that I'd been put up for a Bronze Star. I left Vietnam and left the military and it never showed up. I got out alive. That was the reward for me

We manually figured how to direct the Howitzers with charts and maps and azimuths, figured by using a slide rule. We did have a computer, but it was a vacuum tube operated computer, about 6 feet x 3 feet. Heavy as it could be—it took two guys to carry it. When it worked, it actually did what we needed, but it seldom worked. When a base was being overrun, the Lieutenant that was in charge when they left had to destroy stuff before they ran off. He took a white phosphorus grenade and set it on top of the FAADEC—we called it Freddy—Field

Artillery Automatic Digital Computer. He said, "I just watched that white phosphorus grenade melt through the top of that thing. That was the most satisfying moment of my tour." They did the same with the Howitzers. The 155 is about 5 inch. And there was a 175 millimeter which had a huge, long barrel on it for long distance. Ours would go about 12 miles, the maximum we could shoot. The 175 could shoot some 27 miles. But ours was still air mobile, as the 105s were. They caused a lot more damage.

I came home in April of '70. I was 22. We did get a week of R&R while we were over there. I went to Hong Kong for a week.

We ate C-Rations almost the entire time I

was over there. The C-Rations got very, very old. My mother would send me packages every once in a while. One of our family traditions was that we'd have popcorn every Sunday night so she'd send these little Jiffy-Pop popcorn pans. We'd get C-4s from the engineers. If you'd cut just a little chunk off a bar of C-4 and put a match to it, it made a nice little hot fire and you made popcorn over burning C-4!

I kind of put up with the military and tried to pay as little attention as possible. It made me appreciate freedom. Being in the Army and having people telling me everything to do and everywhere to go, makes you appreciate freedom.



**The Parrot's Beak**



**Firing the 105 Howitzer**



**The Parrot's Beak Area**