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Ronald P. Eberhart, 1967-1968 VSPA LM-47
Tuy Hoa AB, 31st SPS; Pleiku AB, 633rd SPS

Photo: Ron Eberhart, Golf-8 Bunker

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V I E T N A M LAST DAYS IN VIETNAM

by **Eberhart, Ronald P.**
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Last Days in Vietnam

I was interested in the question, 'Do you remember getting discharged from the Air Force?' For me, I think an even more memorable time were the last few days I spent in Vietnam, where bureaucracy was alive and well and trying to keep me in the Nam.

I remember receiving my orders to go back to 'the world' — to hold those documents in my hands was very special and exciting to think that my days at Pleiku were so short. I remember getting relieved of duty so I could get my things together and saying goodbye to the guys — especially Pat 'Hawk' Dunne and Ed Wasilius (From Pa.). They wished me good luck and we talked about getting back together when we all got home. Of, course when we got home we all had lives to live so it didn't happen until I found VSPA's web site and saw the name *Pat Dunne* on the Bulletin Board. I knew this Pat Dunne had to be my buddy from Pleiku, and sure enough we met again after over 30 years.

I boarded a plane and flew to Cam Ranh Bay AB to wait for my freedom bird flight home. As I wandered around Cam Ranh I saw a guy who looked familiar. It was a A1C named Tom Young who was in my high school class. I was surprised and happy to find a guy from home, even though we didn't hang out together at home, we suddenly became best friends. We were sitting in his hooch that night drinking beer and reminiscing about high school when a friend of his came in and joined us, who was also leaving for home the next day. We had fun taunting Young about our being *Sooooo* Short.

The other fellow started listing all the things he had completed to be ready for his coming flight. He was on about the 4th item when he said, "Got my MACV Boarding Pass."

I asked, "MAC boarding pass? — what's that?" He looked at me and said, "You don't have a MAC boarding pass? You've *got to have that* or you won't get on the plane!" I said, "No problem — I'll just go over to transportation first thing in the morning and get one. Afterall, the plane doesn't leave until late in the afternoon, so I've got plenty of time.

The next day bright and early I'm in the Transportation office, orders in hand. After the usual wait my name was called by some A1C office clerk who looked like he hated the world and everything in it. We sat down at his desk. I gave him my orders and told him I needed a MAC Boarding Pass. He looked at me as though I was something foul — loaded up his typewriter with the proper form and started typing.

I should point out that not only was I leaving but the date was 21 December 1968 — I was to

be home for Christmas — as gloomy as Christmas 1967 was — Christmas 1968 was going to be the best ever. Here is where the happiest day of my young life turned dark: the angry clerk stopped typing, looked up from his typewriter and asked, 'Where did you come from?'

I replied, "Pleiku." At this he dramatically *ripped the form from the typewriter* and announced proudly: "Well you're just going to have to go back to Pleiku and get this form typed." I was simultaneously stunned, shocked and sick. I think I said weakly, "*You're kidding right?*"

The clerk then went on a rant about how many dumb-ass troops come in from other bases without their MAC Boarding Pass and *they just made a rule* their office wasn't typing any for guys from other bases. He seemed quite proud of himself that he had the power to crush a person's dreams of home with his ability to refuse to type a form.

I sat in silence for a moment and then stood up and said, "I want to see your commanding officer." The clerk got red in the face, leaped to his feet and said loudly, "You can see him but it won't do any good". The clerk went to a side office door, entered and after a few minutes came out and, still snarling, said through clenched teeth, "You can see the Captain".

I entered the room and prayed I was about to talk with a reasonable man who had some compassion for the possibility that people make mistakes. I saluted and began to make my case. He swiveled around in his chair and listened intently but without any expression that might give me some hope my words were getting through. He was a young Captain and I felt from the look on his face I would get a fair hearing. I apologized for my stupid oversight (no one ever told me about a form!) and told him, "Sir, if I had time to go back to Pleiku and get one, I would, but my plane leaves at 5 o'clock and I'll never get back in time."

There was silence in the room so I played my last card — "Sir, please- *it's Christmas.*" The Captain still hadn't said anything — then he called out to the A1C who then walked in with a smirk. The Captain then said, "Cut this Airman his MAC Boarding Pass."

The A1C turned briskly and walked out, stormed to his desk and loaded a *new form*, all the while spouting about "dumb-ass SOB airmen who fly in without their paper work and causing him more work — dumb-stupid-ass 1st term knuckleheads... Blah, Blah, Blah." I sat there impassively listening to the keys strike the paper — no expression — thinking "*just keep typing asshole.*" Finally, the clerk ripped the form from the typewriter and threw it at me across the desk. I politely said "Thank-You," got up and walked out thinking, "*Free at last, Free at last — Thank-God Almighty, I'm Free at last.*"

In conclusion, my last day in the 'Nam almost didn't happen. I don't know who the Captain was who trumped the card of the clerk A1C, but God Bless him for being a human being with feelings and not another stony unbending bureaucrat.

The plane, that was supposed to leave that after noon at 5: 00pm was delayed and didn't depart until 2: 00 a.m. the next morning. After we took our seats a good looking young stewardess served us a nice breakfast of half-warm hot dogs — *They were the best tasting hot dogs I ever ate.*

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