



Photo: Terry Morris standing on Tower OP-1 ladder

When I Think of Vietnam...

FEELINGS OF GUILT!

**35th Security Police Squadron,
Phan Rang Air Base
1966-1967**

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I never fired a shot in combat nor saw a body bag. Never endured a rocket or mortar attack. But I was there!

It was early in 1966, I was stationed at a small ADC Base in Wisconsin. I had just made Airman First last fall, married and moved off base for the first time. I was due for discharge in February of 1967 and Vietnam was the last thing on my mind. I had less than a year to go so there were no thoughts of getting orders for Nam.

Memories are vivid of going to work on a midnight shift when someone hollered at me, "Hey Morris, you got orders for Vietnam"! How could this be I wondered, Vietnam was a 12 month tour? But it was true, I was listed on orders for Phan Rang Air Base, RVN. A million thoughts started going through my mind. We had heard all the rumors about Nam, about AP's being shot while they were getting off the plane. We heard about this base was bad and that place was safer and so on. It was in the early years of the war yet and there were few true accounts of what it was like there yet.

It was the spring of 1966 when I arrived at Tân Sơn Nhứt. After a brief day or so of in-country processing I was off to Phan Rang. It was just the start of the buildup of the AP Squadron and the 12 man tents were to become our new homes. After a couple days of OJT combat training we were assigned to flights. Although I didn't appreciate it at the time, I was assigned to Panther Flight. The Panthers worked from 1800 to 0600 on 3 man observation posts, OP's, and perimeter tower guards. In reality, Panther Flight was the best duty, what better time to be awake and armed than at night when Charlie was most active.

I remember going through a sort of three phases in Nam. As an FNG I was scared of everything, remembering all the rumors and stories I'd heard in the states. The emotions you have out in the boonies, not knowing where you are, not knowing what to expect, is quite the opposite of humping around an F-102 in Wisconsin. The feeling of not knowing if you'll live to see another sunrise is something that is impossible to describe. After 2 or 3 months of sitting in the rain for 12 hours and some days choking on the dust I entered a different mind set, phase two I guess. Why am I here? As long as I have to be here let's get it on with the VC. I recall returning from a supply convoy from Nha Trang that we were pulled over at Cam Ranh Bay AB because Charlie had ambushed the highway ahead. Lt. Soda and I were in the lead jeep and we were both angry that we hadn't gotten there a little earlier to get into the action. There was "No Fear" as the young kids of today would say. Like most vets I guess, I was counting the days, minutes until I could get out of that place and go back to the "Real World". Enter phase three, the fear starts again. Sitting up in the hills watching as the Spookies spew their tracer red light beams, the 101st pounding the hills with artillery, and the Huey Gunships firing on Charlie at night reinstalled the fear I had months before. I'm too short, I just want to get home in one piece. And I did.

Was I a John Wayne in Vietnam? No, I wasn't. Did I do my part in Vietnam? I know I did. But why the feelings of guilt so many years later? I came home to a normal life without a scratch, Vietnam was quickly forgotten. Do I even have the right to call myself a Vietnam Veteran? To this day, I don't know.

In 1994 I made my first of three visits to "The Wall". They say that the Wall has healing powers, but for me it was more of an awakening than a healing. So many names, so many heroes that paid the ultimate price to preserve freedom. To the best of my knowledge, there is not one name on the Wall of a person that was a part of my life. Not a relative, not a classmate or boyhood friend, and not any AP that I sat in a bunker with had their name etched on that black wall.

Since that time, I've come to know a great number of brothers and sisters that served in Vietnam. In my mind they are the truest Americans in the country today. They're the very backbone of this country and I'm proud to call them my friends. Would I go back to some foreign land with them to preserve the freedoms that we enjoy? In a heartbeat!

And next time... *no guilt feelings.*

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