

# Cam Ranh Bay AB

## Main Gate, Vietnam in 1972 ...

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1972-1973

**USAF 483rd Security Police Squadron** - I arrived in Vietnam on 4 January 1972. I was a know-little about the world nineteen year old. There were about 120,000 US troops still in country at that time. Landing at midnight at Cam Ranh Bay AB Air Base, I immediately noted the heat and humidity and after a wide eyed ride (the driver pointing out the posts I'd be working, all the wire, bunkers, towers, slap-flares drifting down constantly and noting the "smell" of the place) in an open M-151 Jeep courtesy of my outfit, the 483rd Security Police Squadron.

I was dropped off at the transient Hooches. I lay down to try and catch a few winks. Too hot, I tossed and turned until early in the morning when I heard some GI saying "Mamasan sweep floor, Mamasan clean here, no do that Mamasan." Groggy from the long trip and lack of sleep because of the heat I got up. Another GI sleeping in the bottom bunk said he had been there for three days and proudly described his sexual successes with the hooches girls.

I started processing-in and the GI at supply issued me my Jungles and Cammies and Jungle boots. He asked for my DEROS and I said January 1973. He stated matter of factly that 1972 was the "year of the DEROS Man... Nobody got a '73 DEROS". I said, well you just met ONE that does!

I had to wait twelve days before I got my first taste of incoming 122's. I was in the mess hall eating breakfast prior to going to Guardmount at 0400 hours when the rounds started coming in. Glass was flying everywhere and the local VN female kitchen help was running and screaming wildly. I didn't know what to do, but the sirens were blaring and a guy on the PA announced "mission essential personnel report immediately to your duty station" so I went to Central Security Control (CSC).

CSC put me on a reserve force and we waited for a Track (M-113) to pick us up. Nothing else happened. No casualties. A few problems here and there, another rocket attack, some casualties, I was starting to get into the groove. I was feeling like I could handle this crap, no sweat GI. *If the VC try to come on the yard I'll waste'em.* I even got stupid enough to ask SSgt Bill Gravey, from my home state of Alabama (Gravey was ex-Army and had a CIB from a previous Nam tour), to let me join him on the SPS ambush team. The team said 'Naw, not yet, get some more experience first.

I worked the Main Gate and the Allied Checkpoint and I became familiar with some Army guys who were moving their equipment from Cam Ranh to Nha Trang. They would stop at the gate and shoot the breeze and harass me about how much better things were in Nha Trang. They would give me all the details about all the wonderful things and living conditions they had found in their new home. It was a daily ritual. I even got to know their CO Commander real well. They really were some great guys.

On 30 March 1972 the NVA launched the Spring or Eastertide Offensive. Intel reports at Guardmount indicated lots of enemy activity. In the North (Military Region I) formerly known as I Corps, things were looking bad. Before it was over the NVA took Quang Tri and almost took An Loc in MR III. The NVA sent 125,000 troops South during this offensive.

Our little war started on 8 April. On that Saturday night the sappers hit the Army side hard. I recall coming outside on my way to CSC and I saw the sky lit up and glowing orange. I ran to the armory and picked up my M16 and when I came back across the road I could see our hospital ambulances flying around everywhere. Someone said they thought the VC were in the water down by the bridge and trying to get away. We headed that way and let loose a barrage of 40mm from our M-79's and 148's into the water. We also raked the shore line with M16 fire. Someone finally told us to report back to CSC and I was posted on the Main Gate about 0500 Sunday morning.

After daylight a Jeep drove up to the gate and stopped. The Army CO Commander, the First Sergeant and a Chaplain were in the Jeep. The Captain had tears in his eyes as he got out of the Jeep and walked over to

me. He threw his arms around me and told me it was his unit that had taken the casualties. I stood there stunned, in silence. I was in a state of shock. It was all I could do to keep working that post. It hit me hard. The SP working the gate with me told me to sit down and he would handle the gate by himself. The day before we had been joking and cutting up. Now they were gone.

After that day whenever I worked the back gate (Aerial Port) I could not stand to check the Graves Registration duce and a half trucks. I finally got the nerve to search for the names of those guys killed in action, midnight of 9 April. They are: James Michael Barry, Daniel K. Kushner, Jerry D. Laws, and Joseph C. Szekely. I don't know what happened to the eighteen others that were wounded that night, but I haven't forgotten them either. What's hard for me to take is knowing that at the same time this happened, students at Michigan State University were protesting in the streets, blocking the roadways, and having meetings discussing war and peace and freedom and they didn't have nothing to do but party down and live! They might just as well spit in my face! That little piece of war changed my life. Those students didn't realize just who was making a real difference for freedom. I do. Now and forever.

*We Take Care of Our Own*

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