From: Jim & Jan Thompson
To: dlp@war-stories.com; larry@larryposs.com
Subject: War-Stories:How-to-submit-stories-and-photos
Date: Saturday, July 5, 2014 1:17:37 PM

I am James M. Thompson, Lt Col, USAF (Retired). From August 1971 to September 1972 I served as a member of AFAT 3 at Bien Hoa Air Base in Viet Nam. I am the author or a series of poems about my tour titled, ***Rhymes of the Co Van***. I've included my first poem in that series for your consideration.

1. Arrival

He stepped through the door of the 707 and sucked in a mouthful of Hell.

The sunlight beat down from a steely blue sky leaving puddles of heat where it fell.

The only relief was a whisper of breeze that was just as much water as air.

His shirt was soaked through and his hatband dripped sweat before he could get down the stair.

It might have been Florida, maybe MacDill, or a midsummer's day at Chanute,

But the sign on the terminal gave it away reading, "Welcome to Tan Son Nhut".

Some Army MP's dressed in jungle fatigues were showing you just where to go.

He followed the crowd toward a building ahead where lines were beginning to grow.

It resembled a huge picnic shelter, like the kind that you find in the park.

In the shade of the roof it took some little time for his eyes to adjust to the dark.

Though three sides were open to let in the breeze and ceiling fans whirred overhead,

The air was as close as a lover's caress and smelled like the breath of the dead.

There were windows with numbers, and everyone seemed to be lining up at window one.

He fell into line as some fat NCO confirmed that was the thing to be done.

"Leave copies of orders at this one, check shot records at number two,

Change money to script at the third one, complete all of that and you're through."

"The bus for Camp Alpha is waiting. You'll find it just outside that gate."

"You'll need a form five to get past the MP's. Don't hurry, the VC will wait."

"Your baggage will be at Camp Alpha. You'll also get uniforms there."

"The jungle fatigues and the tropical boots are limited issue, two pair."

The first of the windows was what he expected, leave orders and check some routines.

Did he have a Geneva Convention card? (Does Ho Chi Minh know what that means?)

Had he made out a will before leaving the States? Was emergency data all right?

The last thing was checking your dog tags, make sure they stay on day and night.

The next window checked if you'd had all your shots and you sure had to have quite a few.

Yellow fever and typhus and bubonic plague plus smallpox and cholera too.

Some bugs here were new to the medics, and they had little comfort to give,

They pumped in some antibiotics and made book on whether you'd live.

The last window changed all your money, you turned in your dollars for script.

When he read the third window's directions he thought that his mind must have flipped.

It gave quite explicit instructions on sorting your money for swap,

The ones and the five’s on the bottom, the ten’s and the twenty’s on top.

The portraits must be facing upward with all the bills turned the same way,

The president's heads must be upright for your stack to get the OK.

He sorted his money and stacked it, just as the third sign said to do.

He got to the third counter window and carefully handed it through.

But the clerk passed it back in an instant, and said, "This is wrong, don't you see?"

He protested he'd followed instructions and asked what the problem could be.

"Your money will not pass inspection, the corners must be sharp and square."

No dog-eared green money accepted, you straighten it out then and there.

He carefully straightened the paper and un-turned each corner just so.

He'd done some dumb things in the service, but this surely hit a new low.

To ask why would be truly useless, he doubted if anyone knew.

The clerk in the window was no help at all - it was just something he had to do.

He noticed the president's pictures and how they did not go along.

The Treasury folks, evidently, were printing the money all wrong.

While Washington, Lincoln and Jackson looked off to their left all three,

Al Hamilton looked squarely off to his right defying the powers that be.