



BIG RED ONE



TOUR OF DUTY
1967 - 1968
VIETNAM



*Portrait of Ronald M. Beasley
in his Dress Army Uniform.*

“Graduation!”
“Now What Are You Going To Do?”

I graduated from Dominguez High School, in Compton California. The year was 1963. After graduation I then went on to Compton Junior College.

The Vietnam war wasn’t happening at that time. I think it didn’t start until 1965 or 1966. At the time of my graduation I believe we only had advisers there. After the war escalated, I had the feeling that they (one of branches of the armed services) would draft me pretty soon, so I figured that I would let them draft me rather than volunteer.

“Drafted!”

I was drafted January 3rd of 1967 into the U.S. Army. I was sent to Fort Ord for basic training and then on to Fort Polk, Louisiana for Advance Infantry Training. After that, I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, to train to drive an Armored Personnel Carrier (APC). The APC is like a small tank, it's made out of inch thick aluminum. It's not really bullet proof, but it kind of keeps the guys inside somewhat safe and it holds about 8 infantrymen.

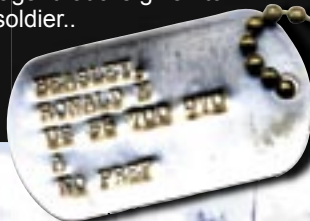
“Hello Vietnam!”

When I received my order to go to Vietnam, I went as an individual, since I wasn't assigned to any battalion or company. Probably the reason for this was because I had been separated from all the people I went through basic with at Fort Knox. Most of the other guys had been sent over attached to a battalion or company.

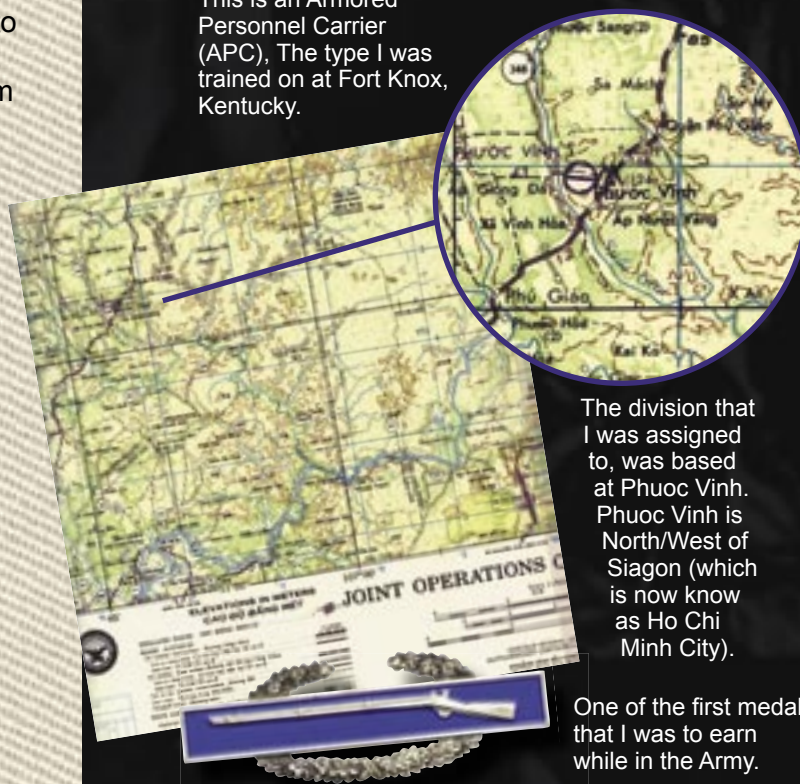
When I got to Vietnam, I was sent to a camp that was designated just to send enlisted men to where they were needed. When the Army was short of personnel, they would call down to the camp and say they needed “X” amount of men for this or that and they would tell us who was going where.

I was eventually assigned to the First Infantry Division and that portion of the First that I was assigned to, was based at Phuoc Vinh. Phuoc Vinh is North/West of Siagon (which is now know as Ho Chi Minh City). The Battalion was the Second Battalion, Company D. They assigned me as an infantryman. This was not

The standardized issued “Dog Tags” that are given to every soldier..



This is an Armored Personnel Carrier (APC), The type I was trained on at Fort Knox, Kentucky.



The division that I was assigned to, was based at Phuoc Vinh. Phuoc Vinh is North/West of Siagon (which is now know as Ho Chi Minh City).

One of the first medal that I was to earn while in the Army.

Patrols, Search & Destroy, Missions.



Shoot and run. This is a shot that I took just as our patrol started to take enemy fire.

was not my choice first. I thought about it, and I really wanted to be an APC driver. After all that's what I had been trained for. I went to some sort of Army consular, who explained to me about the short life expectancy of an APC driver compared to that of an infantryman. I thought to myself, being an APC driver wasn't such a good idea after all. So I said, "OK, thank you and good-bye."

As an infantryman, I was first assigned an M-16. After a period of time I was re-assigned to carry a M79 grenade launcher. With that, I also carried a 45 pistol. About the M79, it's so easy to use that it doesn't take more than 10 minutes to train some one. We didn't train with dummy ammunition it was all live ammo. Remember this was Vietnam, not the states.

My first 8 months with the First Army Division, was patrols, search and destroy missions and ambushes. Just about anything you could think of, we did it. Many times we would take helicopter rides out to where they needed us. The "Helios" would put us down in open fields and we would go out from there. Sometimes we were given only a few seconds to jump out of the helicopters, as they hovered a few feet above the ground. My concern with this fast rapid exiting at that height was, that we might be jumping onto hidden sharpened bamboo sticks called "Pungee" stakes, placed there by the VC.

Generally we went out as a company, but on ambushes we would go out as a squad. A squad was comprised of 12 men and we got to know each other pretty well. We were totally dependent on one another. "Hey! You watch

me - I watch you" - was pretty much understood.

We were at Phuoc Vinh for about 6 months, then they moved us out to an area near the Michelin Rubber Plantation. The First Airborne came in and replaced us at Phuoc Vinh.

This is interesting, I am pretty sure we crossed over into Cambodia a few times, but nobody ever confirmed it.

"45 Lost"

One day we were out in the open and came under fire. Everybody was running around like chickens with their heads cut off. The 45 that they issued me, was one with a holster that didn't have a flap that locked shut. During this approximately 30-minute skirmish, my 45 came out of the holster. After the engagement was over, I went back to look for it, but was not able to find it. It's ironic. The Army asked me to pay for it and I replied, "Naw, I don't think so, the holster was the reason it fell out. That wasn't my problem but yours". They issued me another one, with a holster with a locking flap. End of the lost 45.

"Big Red One Patch In Hand."

On another occasion, we were on patrol and stumbled upon 3 Viet Cong fighters. We engaged in a short firefight, killing those three. After the engagement, we were ordered to bury the bodies by our C.O. We really didn't want to dig the holes and bury them, but eventually



Captured V.C. Weapons and Ammunition.



One of the guys finds a opening to a hidden V.C. tunnel.

Captured weapons, grenades and RPG rounds.



Above is a Chinese made Claymore mine. The V.C. would put them next to trails and explode them as our guys would be walking by.



To the left is an AK-50. What makes it different from an AK-47, is the bayonet is attached permanently. To the right is our M-16.

He Wanted To Let The V.C. Know Who Had Killed Him.



we followed the CO's orders. One of the men I was with wanted to let the V.C. know it was our division, that had killed them. He wanted to bury one with his arm out of the grave with a Big Red One patch in his hand. The rest of us went along. We buried the one guy leaving him with his arm sticking up (out of the ground) and put a "Big Red One" patch in it. They (the VC) must have seen him, because we caught hell for it the next day. That day we had a really big firefight and I had a feeling that had something to do with it. The company got hit and took casualties, how many exactly, I can't remember, but our squad did not any take casualties.

"The Army Does Funny Things."

During my tour of duty in Vietnam, I received a couple of awards.

I received the Army's Commendation Medal with the "V" for valor and I also got the Bronze Star with "V" for valor.

Actually, the Army does funny things. My company commander recommended me for a Silver Star and it was down graded to Bronze Star. Another time they recommended a Bronze Star and it was down graded to an Army Commendation Medal.

The Army Commendation Medal was for the results of one particular firefight. We were in an open area, it had a big berm that separated a rice paddy and a tree line in the distances. Two of our guys got hit while on the rice paddy berm. Both were killed. Shot by V.C. hiding in the distant tree line. Later on our company com-

mander wanted to recover their bodies, so the Vietnamese wouldn't take them and we could return them to their families. The company commander asked for volunteers to recover the bodies. So, another guy and myself volunteered. We crawled over to where they were and dragged their bodies back to our position, while some others covered our actions.

The other incident was for the Bronze Star.

It was night. We were pulling perimeter guard for some of our artillery emplacements. We put out barb wire all around us and had a clear field of fire. And sure enough that night we got hit pretty hard by the VC. They were trying to blow up all our artillery. We had stationed ourselves in a foxhole, we would take turns standing guard, all around the perimeter. There was six of us, including myself, assigned to this one foxhole. We had three rounds of watch, two men at a time.

Another soldier, who also was armed with a M79 grenade launcher and myself happened to be in the foxhole together, with a couple of M-16's, since the M79 had limited capability in an all out firefight. After awhile into our watch we started taking fire. We woke up the guys outside the foxhole and got them down in the hole. We are all sitting there in the foxhole and the guys that came down into the foxhole started smoking. The smoke really started to bother the two of us. We said to each other, "Let's get out of here." We crawled out of the foxhole and hid behind it for protection. As we sat up there we could see what was going on. There were Viet Cong outside our perimeter firing RPG grenades from our right front and they

Bronze Star



Army Commendation



Vietnam Campaign



Good Conduct



Vietnam Service



National Defense



Infantryman's Medal

The Next Day.



This picture I took, is same to the one that appeared in Times Magazine

were going behind us into our artillery positions.

We said, "Wow! That guy is right over there. If we see him again, let's throw a couple of M79 grenades over there and get rid of him." We were ready and waiting and pretty soon he fired another round, so we laid a couple of M79 grenades on him and he didn't fire anymore. We assumed that we either killed him or he ran away deciding to go somewhere else. The next morning, my squad leader told the company commander about us being outside shooting M79 rounds at the guy with the RPG launcher. The CO recommended both of us for the Silver Stars.

The next day we went outside the wire and found about 26 Viet Cong bodies. This was unusual, as the enemy liked to take their dead with them, if they possibly could, they didn't want us to have a body count as to how many we killed and know that we hurt them.

We recovered the 26 or so bodies and brought them in along with their ammunition and weapon. I happened to take a picture, it was identical to the same as the one that appeared in Times Magazine. Somebody sent a copy to me.

"The Toothache That Maybe Saved My Butt"

I was very fortunate. I was in the field for 8 months and it seemed like our company didn't have as many problems as most. We were pretty fortunate not to have as much combat as other companies.

Another time we had a problem when half, (I think about half) of my squad wound up dead or wounded.

I just happened to have a toothache that morning and went to the dentist and I didn't go out with them. I was scheduled to be the radioman. I told them I had a really bad toothache and I really needed to take care of it. They said, "OK, you stay back." So I stayed back and went to the dentist and had that taken care of. I was assigned to carry the radio that day. The guy who replaced me got killed. So I was real lucky about that.

So in that one day, in the short firefight we had, I think 3 were killed and 3 wounded.

"The Graveyard"

Only once was I really scared. I talked my platoon leader in to changing the plans. We had just flown into an area and set up a base camp there. We knew that the VC were there in the area. We were in a graveyard to start with, which wasn't very encouraging and the platoon leader wanted us to go out on a night ambush. Having been told that they (the VC) were there, it seemed foolish to go out in the area that he wanted us to go in. So, he talked us into going, but not going where he had originally planned, because it was a little too far for support.

Nothing happened that night. The next night however, another squad was assigned ambush duty. Sure enough they were there, we hit them "hard". They movement and opened up on them - it didn't take very long -you don't know what

Our Bunker and Protecting the Artillery Positions.



This is a picture of our "bunker" that was the type that would be set up around our artillery positions.



Some ariel shots of our artillery fortifications.

Getting There.



Many time we were ferried out to combat areas via helicopter. One of the concerns I had was having to jump out of the chopper as it hovered above waist high grass. The concern was that we might be jumping into a field of deadly "Pungee Sticks" that had been planted by the V.C..

the hell is going on, all of a sudden it's going and then it's over – it's quick. It doesn't last very long. You see people moving and you decide that when they get to "here" – you open up and everybody does. The next day the area was searched, but we didn't find any dead. They, (the VC) would take take their dead and wounded with them.

"I Never Was Much Of A Reader."

I played a little bit of cards. I was never much of a reader, until Vietnam. In Vietnam I read a little more, because I had time. We write letters home... read the letters that we got.

If we were out in the field rather than our base camp, we'd go out on patrols. Some times we'd walk ten miles. Sometimes we would have a base camp set and then have to move to another base camp. After we search one area and there wasn't anything there, we'd go to another place and that could be ten miles away. So, we could spend a day walking and then when we got there we would have to dig foxholes. If that took us to midnight to do it, we'd have to stay up and do it. We were always under the threat that we could be attacked.

"Conscious Objector"

We had one guy in our company, who was a conscious objector. I remember one day we walked ten miles, we all were really tired and we dug our foxholes. The next day our company had gone out on a little patrol. I was still in the back, another squad had gone out, and

conscious objector was ferrying ammunition up to those guys in the other squad that was out on patrol, he was running back and forth...and he got shot. He went away for probably about three months – three months he was in the hospital recovering – and he came back! I was shocked ... that he came back ... he was wounded pretty badly. I assumed that he wanted to come back ... I would guess that if you are wounded that badly that you want to come back or they would have let you go back to the United States. He was as dependable as anybody.

“The Anti-war Movement at Home”

There was quite a bit of information about the anti-war protests being filtered out to us. We didn't hear much about that (the protests). But from the time I got there ... shortly after I got there...I came to the conclusion that we didn't belong there. Mainly because if we were going to go over there, we should go over there to win the war. If not, what in the hell are we doing over there? And we were holding back.

My attitude to this was, “I was going to return home no matter what it took.”

“Wound!”

A broken toe. It's something you don't get a Purple Heart for. It didn't happen in action.

I was driving down a dirt road in a jeep. It was a real rainy night, raining like hell and a rabbit ran in front of me. I kind of swerved and then I swerved back to run over it and the jeep flipped,

Base Camp at Phouc Vinh.



To the left is a shot of just one area of our base camp.



Below and to the left is a shot showing how we would use empty artillery shell casings to make walkways.

In the photo below is the area that we would bath in, as well as wash our trucks.



Above, lining up for haircuts by a local barber and to the right is our Mess Hall, with some local female help in the foreground.

Scenes Beyond Combat.



Above is downtown Phouc Vinh.



Left is a local village hut.

To the right is a Buddhist church.



Above is a long distant shot of a Memorial to the Vietnam soldiers and on the right is a close up.



landed on my toe and broke my toe. Destroyed the jeep.

I had a radio in the jeep, so I called for help and they came out to get me.

“The Ending of 8 Months In the Field and Combat”

I was in Vietnam from August or July of '67 to October of '68.

After the first 8 months out in the field, I was transferred to Long Ben, where there is an ammunition depot. One of my duties was to guard the ammunition depot during the day. Occasionally I had some night duty. It was pretty easy.

The normal tour was a year, but I volunteered to stay an extra 3 months in Vietnam.

I wrote my mother that I had volunteered to extend my stay an extra three months. After that 3 extra months I wrote my mom another letter saying I was going to stay again and she wrote me back and asked me not to, so I decided not to extend my tour. I would still have received an early discharge, because I had only less than 3 months left when I returned to the U.S..

The Army shipped me out to San Francisco, where I was honorably discharged from the United States Army. Except I was still in the reserves, but it was inactive service status. If they needed me they could call me back in.

While in the Army a year and 9 months, I was promoted four ranks, from Private to Sergeant E5. In a war promotions are more rapid. People died and you've got to take their place, it's part of it.



"The End and Coming Home"

After returning home, I tried to keep in contact with some of the men I served with, but it was hard. I kind of lost interest and lost their names and addresses.

On coming back, I was absolutely happy to be back.

It was upsetting to see all what was going on (the anti-war protests), but I was never directly affected by it. I never had a confrontation with anyone. I never got called a baby killer or any of that crap. Everybody was really friendly to me. I never made a big deal about being in the Army. I didn't tell everybody that I was and I didn't bring it up. So I really didn't have any problems.



Above are a couple ariel shots of the Vietnam countryside.

A copy of my discharge papers.

“The Dawning of the New Beginning”

Just out of the Army, I didn't have a job.

One of my friends got me into the Art Department at Douglas Aircraft Company in Long Beach, California. I wound up getting laid off there with just about everybody else, during major cutbacks that Douglas was going through.

Another one of my friends told me he was applying for a position as a firefighter in the Compton Fire Department. I had nothing else to do, so I thought I'd go and apply. I did get hired.

3 years later I was hired on as a firefighter in the Long Beach Fire Department. I was there for 27 years and retired from the department in the year 2000.

While working for the fire department I met the love of my life, Lora. We became husband and wife. Together we had two great kids, my daughter, Brooke and my son, Mitchel.



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