

Linwood Elwood Duckery interviewed July 12, 2007
E4, US Army, 316th Artillery, June 1966 – June 1968

Linwood registered for the draft when he turned 18, but the army wouldn't take him then. He was anxious to be drafted, but was classified 1Y. As the war in Vietnam escalated his classification was changed to 1A. Linwood was married in June of 1966, received his draft letter the same month and within one week was off to basic training. The first memorable event was his first plane ride, in a thunder storm, from Washington, DC down to Fort Jackson, SC for basic training.

After two months of basic training, Linwood was assigned to a communications unit and sent to Fort Bragg, NC for more training. While there, he learned about the telephones and switchboards. When training was done there, they were given leave at home. Linwood then flew to Oakland, CA. Due to the earlier experience, he left his seat belt on the entire flight. Landing in Oakland was another interesting experience as the plane appeared that it was going to land on the water as it came in low over the bay while approaching the runway. From Oakland, he boarded a huge ship for the 30 day trip to Vietnam. Along the way, the ship stopped at Subic Bay in the Philippines to drop off some Marines and sailors. About two hours after leaving Subic Bay, the ship had to turn around and head back due to a typhoon.



After a two day delay for the storm, the ship continued to Vietnam and docked at Cam Ranh Bay. The first day was spent waiting on the beach for transportation. They just had to sit and wait, no swimming allowed. Their first stop was Chu Lai airport where they spent five days filling sandbags. By now, Linwood was assigned to the Air Mobile Artillery. Their 155 Howitzers were carried into place by Chinook helicopters. Marines and Army infantry would check the area first and once it was cleared of the enemy, the artillery would be brought in and a perimeter set up. The guns would be set up in a "lazy W" formation so they wouldn't all be crowded together to make an easy target.

These bases were often set up on a hill and after about a month, the unit would move to another hill top and set up a new base. Setting up a new base meant filling lots of sand bags, but this time, they were able to use them (unlike earlier, at the airport). Part of Linwood's duty in setting up a new base was laying the phone wire inside the base so that different areas of the base could communicate with each other. Linwood also had to repair the lines when they were cut. This was un-nerving because one could never be sure who had cut the line and where they were. One time, they heard a rustle in the bushes, sent up a flare, got into a firefight with them and actually rounded them up. They had caught the guys who had cut the lines and had tampered with the mines to actually hit the repair crews. Once the base was set up, Linwood would sometimes stand on guard duty.

Linwood E. Duckery

Unusual Weather

Along came sand storms where the wind would blow about 80 mph and the sand would cut your skin. You had to wear goggles for protection. After the sand storms came monsoon season with constant rain. During this time, the men were wet from head to foot all the time. Adding to the problems, the Viet Cong (VC) would infiltrate the base under the cover of rain, turn around the claymore mines, set off bombs and fire at the men from inside the base.

Another hazard was malaria and spider bites. While none of the men in Linwood's unit were wounded, some of them did become ill or were bitten by spiders, but not Linwood. He said he was too scared and was constantly on the lookout.

Out in the field, they were supplied every few days and the mail was also brought in. Linwood received plenty of mail from his wife and sisters.

Most action took place at night. The VC would work on the base in the day doing laundry, chores, etc... and then sneak back in at night to attack. It was impossible to tell the VC from the South Vietnamese. Very little sleeping was done at night and Linwood always had his M-16 nearby. During the day, many VC could be observed in the rice paddies who would quickly disappear into tunnels. At night, the base would set off a flare (the 10 o'clock quiet signal) and the flare would reveal many people in the rice paddies.

The Tet Offensive

In January of 1968 came the Tet offensive. An American officer came around in advance and told them to be ready. There would be thousands of the enemy coming by land, air and water. During the day, not much happened, but then at night: BOOM!!! Everything happened. The howitzers fired until the barrels turned red in support of troops in the field. When the guns were too hot to fire, they would pause and another artillery unit at a different base would take over providing support. While Linwood's unit wasn't attacked directly during this time, there was the possibility that they would have to be sent to Saigon to help out there. German and Korean troops were used instead and Linwood didn't have to go.



Linwood's next assignment was at Bearcat, a large American base east of Saigon. The duty was not very pleasant. They were assigned to clean out armored vehicles that sometimes contained parts of human remains.

Linwood was given the chance for three days of R&R at Long Tau which he gladly accepted. The first leg of the journey was to Saigon. They couldn't land at first because the airstrip kept being blown up. He spent about two days in the hangar before they were able to take off and get to Long Tau. Long Tau was like Las Vegas and was filled with MP's. Linwood ended up spending most of the time at the hotel relaxing. Another time, Linwood saw a USO show starring Bob Hope although he was sitting a long way from the stage at the time.

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Back at Bearcat, one of the men in his unit ran over a water buffalo. Because water buffalo are so valuable in Vietnam, each man in the unit put in about \$10 to give to the owner. They men did get to eat the buffalo. Rations at Bearcat normally contained meat and cigarettes. Since Linwood didn't smoke, he would trade his cigarettes for meat.

The end of Linwood's enlistment was coming up and he was asked repeatedly to re-up. Linwood and his buddies said they would re-enlist if they would be given written assurance that they would not be sent back into combat. The Army was not willing to do this so Linwood declined to sign up again. Linwood flew home in a 747, arrived around midnight and was immediately processed and given his discharge.

Linwood said he was treated well upon his return from Vietnam, unlike some soldiers. He is proud to be an American citizen and to have served and says the "military helped me, exposed me to other people." While his time in Vietnam was frightening, especially during Tet, Linwood is proud of having survived the experience.