

## Chapter 4; 335<sup>th</sup>

On July 30<sup>th</sup> I checked in at the 335<sup>th</sup> Transportation Co attached to the 16<sup>th</sup> Combat aviation group, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry (Americal Division). It's good to have a permanent home for awhile.



The 335<sup>th</sup> was housed on an old Seabee compound on the west side of the north/south runway.

A company clerk retrieved me from the combat center with a  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton truck. Seabee's were the Navy engineers that built the base at Chu Lai. It was beautiful by Army standards. The two story barracks buildings were solidly built with 4 man rooms. The walls were slatted with screen on the inside so air could move through. The rooms extended

across the building with a door on each side leading to a concrete side walk.

Life was pretty laid back. After breakfast, a deuce and a half truck would transport everyone to the hangar located on the east side of the runway. Our company did not have any flight operations; we just repaired helicopters and performed preventative maintenance inspections. I was assigned to the parts department, where I processed paperwork for parts orders. Later on I was in charge of the tool room where I dispensed special tools.

The tool van was located in an aircraft shelter that had a half round top with concrete on top of that. The ends were open so it was relatively cool there. It was however booring! We had a bunch of extra #3 phillips screw drivers, so I sharpened the ends and used them for "throwing knife" practice.



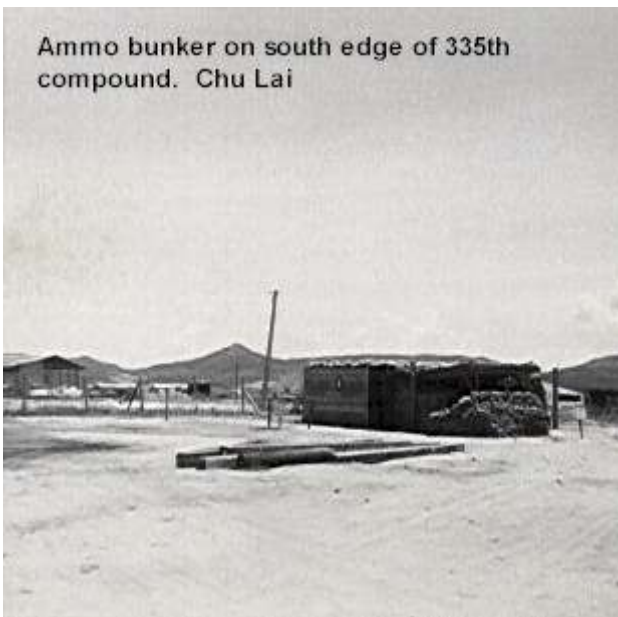
We had an Inspector General (IG) inspection, and if you have more or less than the allotted number of a particular tool, you are in trouble, so I had to bury a

bunch of "extra" torque wrenches that we were not authorized to have. When the price of torque wrenches goes up, I'll go back and retrieve them. Or not.

We had hootch maid service. It was nice to have your area and clothes cleaned for \$8 a month. I did learn that leaving money lay around was not a good idea. For some idiotic reason I left a \$20 (military payment certificate, MPC) laying by my bed. I stepped out side of the door, and back just a minute later. When I came back in, a hootch maid was just going out the back door, and my money was gone. I immediately called it to the authorities' attention, but by then she had passed it off to someone else.

One thing about boredom is it gives you plenty of time to think. I missed my family and home. Even milking cows didn't seem so bad about now.

Our company saw no combat while at Chu Lai. We periodically had to stand



Ammo bunker on south edge of 335th compound. Chu Lai

guard along the perimeter, but there was no action. The only combat related excitement we had was an unidentified explosion near the ammo dump. We headed for the bunkers, but there was no further activity. We never found out if it was a GI who thought that would be a good time to function test a hand grenade or if Charlie lobbed a mortar over the fence.

We generally did not have to work on Sundays and could generally catch a ride to the beach. There was a USO on the beach. They had some actual round-eyed donut dollies, but they didn't look anything

like the gals on the China Beach tv program. A round eye was the term we used for an American or Caucasian girl. They were in very short supply in Vietnam.

China Beach was actually located north of Chu Lai at Da Nang. I hopped a ride up there on a courier plane once, but just dropped off some papers and turned around and flew back.

The South China Sea was clear and warm. The beaches had fine white sand and crystal clear water. What a great place to vacation if there wasn't a war going on. The USO had some small sail boats to check out, so I sailed around the bay.

Life at Chu Lai was deadly boring except for the occasional USO band. They were generally Philippine or Vietnamese who knew little English. What they lacked in quality, they made up in volume to cover up the fractured lyrics. Most of the attention was directed towards the partially clad gals anyhow. Their antics were met with the hoots and howls of the female deprived GI's who encouraged them to remove the rest of their attire (which didn't happen).

I have only a few pictures of my time at Chu Lai. It seems I lost my trusty Instamatic due to a losing bet.

We went to work at the normal time on October 23, 71. The wind was blowing and it was raining. Not a particularly unusual situation, but they took us back to our compound about 9 am. We were told a storm was coming.

We didn't mind a day off so we fooled around the barracks. The wind continued to rise and was soon howling. The wind was blowing rain through the slatted sidewalls of the barracks clear through the other side. We stood on the lee side of our barracks attempting to keep dry. The wind seemed to increase in intensity till it was just shrieking. Suddenly the roof on D barracks right beside us just disintegrated. It didn't just tip over; it just shattered and disappeared like a bomb went off.

We moved to the concrete shower and bathroom area in the center of the building. One of the maids tried running from one building to the next and got a severe cut from flying tin roofing material. There were 4 x 4's flying through the air like arrows. The sound of the wind is what I remember the most. It was just a shrieking howl. In Mid afternoon the eye of the storm passed over us.

The wind dropped almost to nothing. It was an eerie calm compared to the shrieking earlier. The wind then turned the other direction, but did not seem to be quite as bad. Our compound lost several roofs and a lot of other damage. Our hangar had the whole back wall blown out. The wind rolled up about a quarter mile of pierced steel planking off of the ground. PSP is made of about 2 foot by 8 foot pieces of heavy steel that is linked together to provide landing or parking areas. Newspaper reports indicated 85 Vietnamese



were killed and over 200,000 rendered homeless. We had experienced the awesome force of typhoon Hester.

Excerpt from TIME magazine:

*The wind-driven rain slanted in from the northeast and kept building until the eye of typhoon Hester passed over Chu Lai, home of the Americal Division. At one point, the officers' handball-court roof was seen flying end over end through the air: the roof of the officers' club went piecemeal. The house of Major General Frederick J. Kroesen, the division commander, simply blew apart. In the confusion of crumbling buildings and hangars, one man died, eleven were injured and 33 helicopters were damaged beyond repair. In all, Hester wreaked more havoc on the base in 24 hours than the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese army could have done in six months.*

President Nixon had already started the Vietnamization, the draw down of American combat troops and turning over bases and material to the Vietnamese.

Typhoon Hester accelerated those plans. As we prepared our company to move out, we lived on c rations for about a month. Yuk! Our time was spent packing up stuff and pulling guard.

I got a raise! I am now making the grand total of \$380 a month. I am paying off some of the loans I made from Mom & Dad, and Laverne, and a leftover bill from Longview Piper.

In November 71 just a few of us were left, and I got orders to go to An Son, East of Qui Nhon, 129<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company.