

Chapter 5; An Son



The company clerk transported me by jeep from Qui Nhon where I arrived by C130. The road side from Qui Nhon is pictured above. It is miles of garbage, some of it burning. No one was able to explain how it got that way. The vehicle on the right is a "Lambro". This picture is unique in that usually the roof was loaded with stuff.

An Son is a small village east of Qui Nhon. The army base there is Lane Army Heliport. The 129th Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) consists of two UH1 flight platoons with about 12 UH1s in each a Gunship Platoon with 6 AH1 Cobras, and a maintenance platoon. There is one gate and we share the compound with another company of UH1's and Cobras (60th AHC), and a company of CH47 Chinooks, 180th AHC. There is a hill in the center of the compound with the hootches and headquarters buildings arranged around it. Our company is the 129th Assault Helicopter Company of the 1st Aviation Brigade attached to the 7th squadron of the 17th cavalry.



The 129th
call sign is
Bulldog.

I processed
in and was
assigned to
a hootch
with Ken

Godwin from NC. The
accommodations were fairly nice.



They were about 12 by 30 frame construction buildings with metal siding and roofs. The hootches were spaced about 3 feet apart, and had rows of sand bags

all around to protect from shrapnel. There were just two of us assigned to the hootch, but there were 4 of us living there. It seems that Ken's full time girlfriend and her friend lived there also. Girlfriends were not authorized, but there were a lot of them there none the less. They would pull a hidden panel off the wall and disappear between the buildings when folks like officers showed up at the door. We brought them stuff from the px (post exchange / convenience store) and mess hall. They were freer to wander around at night. We had a refrigerator that kept drinks and food cold. Ken went home after I was there for about 2 weeks, and I kicked the girlfriends out.

Since this was a helicopter base, the sound of Hueys and distant gunfire could be heard most any time of the day or night. It worked into your subconscious till you tuned it out. Late one evening I thought I heard a Huey, but then the sound suddenly quit. I gave it no more thought until the next morning when I saw a Huey lying crumpled on the flight line. It seems after consuming large quantities of intoxicating substances; a Warrant officer and a Lieutenant decided that their crew chief (sp5 Blase) needed to learn to fly.

Sp5 Blase jumped into Bulldog 753, strapped one of the company dogs, Dudley, into the left seat, cranked it up and radioed the tower that he was heading for San Francisco.

Everything was going fine until he tried to take off. It was at this point that it became obvious that either the instructions were inadequate or the students inebriated condition did not allow for the subtleties of helicopter flight. In any case the Huey rose a few feet in the air and returned to terra firma with a loud crunch. Blasé got cut from Plexiglas shards in the stomach and lungs. He was medevaced out. Word has it he may be paralyzed. Major Allan Jones had been our commander for three



whole days and it became his responsibility to investigate. The Warrant Officer derosed (date expected return from overseas) the next day, and he got away clean before his part was discovered. The Lieutenants hootch was searched and found to contain drugs and other contraband. Maj Jones tried to court martial him, but his father who happened to be a general evidently intervened and he was eventually just sent home.

After the boredom of Chu Lai, I requested to be assigned to a flight platoon. Sergeant Smith thought I was nuts, and told me “nope your mine, but what I will do is assign you to unscheduled maintenance.”



When I got to unscheduled, Jim Johnson was crew chief of 66-16740, the UH1H assigned to the maintenance platoon.

The guys on unscheduled wear this patch. Snow Snake was the name of our helicopter. I don't know the origins of the name, but I do know that heroin was sometimes called snow. The unscheduled team was housed in a hootch located right on the flight line so when a call came in, it would take just minutes to get ready to fly.

When one of the company's aircraft had problems due to maintenance or combat, Unscheduled would fly out to repair and fly the subject aircraft back, or rig it for sling load and call one of the Chinooks from the 180th sling it back for us. When there were no recovery missions going on, the guys would help out as needed in general maintenance. The maintenance crew chiefs duties were to act as crew chief for the helicopter to keep it ready for a mission at a moments notice day or night. A huge benefit was that as long as the Huey was ready to go, the crew chief did not have to stand in the morning formations.

The guys showed me the ropes. When a bird needed sling load, the rotor blades needed to be tied down securely. A nylon sling would be secured around the rotor hub to connect to the hook on the bottom of a CH47 Chinook. If any of these items came loose, the huey would start swinging and the CH47 would have to cut it loose, destroying it.



The company's mission was to support the Korean Capitol (Tiger) Infantry Division and the 22nd ARVN Division. The flight platoons would take them to an area on a combat assault. The gun platoon supported with Cobra gun ships. When the troops were on the ground, we would haul rice, water, ammo etc. We would generally have a Korean radio telephone operator (RTO) to guide us to the proper location and to coordinate with the ground troops. The RTO's were generally a good bunch, but the smell of Kimche on their breath was more deadly than enemy small arms fire.

When we were called on a recovery, there were normally not bullets flying, but we never really knew what to expect. Our operations would receive word of a mission. The crew chief would quickly preflight our bird and mount the guns. The rest of the crew would get the slings and tools, and any parts we thought we might need. If the downed bird needed sling load we would get a ch47 Chinook on the way, but sometimes it would take an hour or so to get one on site. When we hooked up to the Chinook, one of us would stand on the rotor head with the sling loop while the massive CH47 maneuvered overhead to get into position to hook up. After the hook up was made, the guy would jump off and get out of the way. The ch47 would then take it to our company maintenance area. Sometimes we work till 2:30 AM to get the bird ready to fly the next day.

On one occasion we had some time to kill at a Korean compound. They just happened to have a firing range close to us, so we thought we would get a bit of shooting practice. We fired our m16 rifles, and shot up a bunch of m60 ammo. Jim Johnson was firing the m60 when a dog walked across the range. "Get him



"we all yelled. He had about a hundred rounds left, and shot until the ammo was used up. When the dust cleared we saw the dog just trot off the range like this happens every day. Poor Jim got razzed incessantly about his shooting skills.

He was a short timer with only a few weeks to go. There was little to do in the evenings, but booze was plentiful and we were partying with the folks up on the hill playing a game called bullshit. It goes

something like this. A group of guys with beverages in hand are basically telling stories where shit is the main subject. When a guys name is used as in Jim shit, then Jims' response is expected to be bullshit! If he is inattentive and misses his queue, he is expected to drink a large portion of his beverage. Well Jim seems

to have consumed a large quantity of beverage owing to the fact that he did not fair well in the game and also his girl friend wrote to inform him she did not care if he came home since she was now with someone else. We stumbled down the hill to our flight line hootch when Jim runs into a small banana tree. He swears at it and commences to pound at it with his fists. When it doesn't fight back, he just becomes more infuriated. We pull him off the hapless tree and guide him to our hootch.

We have hootch maids at An Son just like at Chu Lai. They are paid \$8 per month per person to wash our clothes, clean our rooms and shine our shoes. Our hootch maid is Linh Le Thieu. She is a 19 year old Vietnamese girl, quiet, but friendly and attractive. I have taken a liking to her. Her English is limited, but we can converse. She has a good sense of humor and frequently calls me "dienke dau" (dinky dow, crazy) when I'm teasing her.



One morning not long after the banana tree event, the hootch maids arrive and Jim is just getting up. He decides that since he has a piss hard on, Linh should be happy to help him with his condition. She declines and he becomes insistent, angry, demanding. He got to the point where he grabbed her and was dragging her back to his room when I had enough. I informed him that this was wrong and that if he wanted her he had to go through me first. He was aghast to think that I would defend her since she was just a "dink". The others just stood around only slightly embarrassed. After a few tense moments, he laughed it off like nothing had happened. "It don't mean nothing" he said.



A unique feature of Lane Army Heliport was the chapel. It was a beautiful stone structure and held non-denominational services on Sundays.

