

EARLY DAYS IN VIETNAM

By J.D. GOSNELL

(Editor's note: Retired Master Sgt. J.D. Gosnell is a Korean War veteran who first arrived in Vietnam in 1963, returned home briefly, and came back to serve with the C Battery, 2/32, from 1964-66. This is his story.)

My name is J.D. Gosnell. I served with the 2/32nd Battalion from June, 1964-Feb. 8, 1966. I went over with the advance party in Oct, 1965. Our group set up with the 1st Division at the University of Saigon, which is located about 10 kilometers east of Saigon.

When I departed Tan Son Nhut Airport for a trip back to the states in 1964 I left a package with the Sgt. who replaced me. When I returned and saw him, he had not mailed my package, which contained boots and other equipment. I wanted my stuff back. Instead, he gave me \$250. I knew I could not do anything about this so I took the money.

The next day I went into Saigon and bought a small gasoline Clinton water pump. I went back to Tan Son Nhut and got one of the Air Force personnel to make up a manifold for the shower unit we were going to install in "C" Battery's camp.

First Sgt. Geldernick had a platform made up to set the shower unit on. And somehow we managed to secure a 250-gallon wing tank for water. I was also the unit mess Sgt. And my section had a 250-gallon water trailer to keep the wing tank filled and also supply water for the mess operation.

"C" Battery was one of the best organizations I ever served in. It had the best First Sgt. and officers. But then again the 2/32 Battalion had the best officers I ever served with during my 21 years in the army.

While based at Trung Lap in January of 1966, Staff Sgt. Johnson, the battery commo section leader, and I came back from the water point and several Vietnamese women came out to the road, saying "V.C., V.C." They pointed to a Vietnamese man who was behind an overturned two-wheeled cart wiring up two claymore mines. S/Sgt. Johnson got out of the ¾-ton truck and the man ran. I had a M-60 machine gun and usually covered the area when Sgt. Johnson checked out a suspicious situation. We had several incidents such as this while based at Trung Lap.

One day, I believe it was right after 13 Jan, 1966, me and Sgt. Johnson went to the water point again. We had two lower grades with us, a PFC and a SPEC 4. Anyway, some VC started sniping at the water point. One of the engineers came over and asked us if we could help get the Spec 4 out of the plumbing on the purification trailer. Meanwhile, the

PFC told me and S/Sgt. Johnson he was going to get himself one of the buffalo in the herd.

About that time we started to get automatic fire from the direction of the buffalo herd. S/Sgt. Johnson said later that it looked as if some of the buffalo had feet on the opposite side. The PFC had a good time shooting at six-legged buffalo. We both crawled into a buffalo track. Meanwhile, the engineers got our SPEC4 out of the trailer again.

I will say about the ambush Bill Van Eck describes in his story that I concur with all he said. There was a write-up in the Lawton newspaper that said I had a round go through my first aid pouch. That didn't happen but one round cut the male end of my pistol belt buckle. I kept trying to buckle it and when I looked it was no longer there. The round that hit my canteen remained there. And the magazine pouch had a large hole in it.

I always felt if I were on my M-60 or behind that big, beautiful 50-cal I was safe. I know everyone has a story about their time in Vietnam. This was mine.

(P.S.: Bill Van Eck says he never saw anyone turn down J.D.'s cooking at Saigon University. Gosnell was a man had friends all over the city and in every unit they hooked up with. :We had a lot of equipment other battalions could only dream about," he said, "because of J.D.'s connections.")