

## ORIGINALS OF THE 212<sup>th</sup> MILITARY POLICE COMPANY

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Detachment A 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon  
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On or about the first week of August 1965, we Vet Techs met in San Francisco, where we stayed in a hotel overnight. The next day, we reported to Fort Baker, which was near the Golden Gate Bridge. We were picked up by some handlers in a small bus and taken to Site 09, which was in the hills outside San Francisco, where the unit we were assigned to was waiting on us. That unit was the 88<sup>th</sup> M.P. Co., later changed to the 212<sup>th</sup> M.P. Co. We stayed at this site for 3 to 5 days, at which time pistol belts, 45 holsters and a bayonet were issued to us.

On August 6, 1965, we convoyed to Travis Air Force Base. M1911 45s were issued to us, and M-14s were loaded onto C-130 planes. I was in the first of three flights. On board were approximately 60 men and 46 dogs; 3/4-ton trucks, dog food and miscellaneous supplies.

Our first stop was Hawaii. We were halfway there when an engine went out. We changed planes in Hawaii, but now we were the last to leave. We were now headed for Wake Island. A fuel fillup and a crew change arrived after dark. There was no new crew waiting to replace the crew that flew us in, so we had to wait until the new crew was flown in. Some of the handlers went swimming, after they were told not to because

they could get cut on the coral, which did happen. They came to me to get fixed up, since I had a medic kit for the dogs.

We left the next day for Okinawa. On landing, we learned that the radio went out, so we had to stay overnight until a new one could be flown in. The dogs had a chance to get off the plane and stretch their legs, at which time the crates were cleaned. We were refueled and a new crew came on board.

We stayed in the Marine barracks, as they had just left for Vietnam. Sad to say the barracks were a pig pen, and trash and about 2 inches of water were on the floor because of broken water pipes.

The radio was installed the next morning, and we were ready to get on the plane. We waited while the engines were started. One engine would not start, so the others were shut down. Maintenance came out—the starter motor was broken and there were no spares. They took the start motor out and fired up the other three engines. Pilots took the plane down the runway, and windmill started the fourth engine. We loaded up the plane and were off to Vietnam.

We landed in Vietnam at night. The dogs and equipment were offloaded and taken to an area where other dogs were kept at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. We were taken to Tent City "B" to the process-in area. NOTE" Tent City "A" was the process-out area.

Approximately two weeks later, a formation was called, and commanding officer 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Campbell (who was senior to 1<sup>st</sup> Lts. Burns and Hubing) asked for volunteers to go to Pleiku, as it was a hot spot. I volunteered as it was in the Central Highlands—I thought it would be cooler. I was right. I recall that most of the other guys also volunteered. We flew out of Tan Son Nhut Air Base on a C-130, loaded with 10 dogs and handlers, a sergeant, a corporal and myself, plus a jeep and dog supplies. There were additional supplies onboard for others at Pleiku. We were Detachment A 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, first in the field. NOTE: Later in 1966, "Detachment" was changed to "Section."

The runway at Pleiku (Camp Halloway) was on a slight incline and the surface was punctured steel plate. Planes landed going uphill and took off going downhill. The runway ran east to west, with the downhill going east.

After offloading, we were met by an officer and sergeant from the 52<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Battalion. The 52<sup>nd</sup> ran the place, and we worked for them but not under them. They showed us our temporary living quarters, which were sea containers sandbagged in. Then we were on to the kennels, which were almost complete. They were built by the Vietnamese and construction was overseen by our engineers. The dogs moved in soon after our arrival. The facility had running water and a small office / vet tech area. Later we brought in electricity from the main generation plant 50 yards or so away.

Approximately three weeks later, we moved in with a security force. A tent was erected on a new concrete slab. Later we got our own tent—it had wooden walls and the tent itself went over wooden rafters. Later, the tent was replaced with a tin roof.

Handlers worked the Tropo Site (world-wide video communications) near the area where the Air Force was building a new runway *to* bring in the 25<sup>th</sup> Division from Hawaii, the base about 10 miles east of Camp Holloway. During construction of the runway, handlers worked the area until the Air Force dogs arrived. ARVN (Vietnamese troops) received dogs and took over the Tropo Site.

In October, Camp was now expanding with the Army fixed wing coming in, meaning more choppers. Marines had a radar-communication site and a bomb disposal team arrived. There were bigger fuel, ammo and food dumps built. The perimeter was moved out; guard towers were built at four corners, each with searchlights, radios, infrared night vision; and new and better bunkers were built. Handlers and dogs could now work inside the wire.

Shortly after the perimeter expansion was completed, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara visited. He did not like the V.C. head on a pole that Montagnard troops had put up outside the main gate, where they worked with the gate MPs. He also did not like the scattered tin cans on the outside of the perimeter and wanted them cleaned up. They were put there so someone attempting to get through the perimeter would make a noise prior to troops in the perimeter bunkers setting off claymore mines.

At this time, we were short of fire power, knowing more handlers were coming. We got M-1 carbines, grease guns and Thompsons from Special Forces to augment a couple of M-14s we brought with us. In later months, we got a few M-16s with no instructions and only 1 magazine for each rifle. We did have grenades and shoulder-held rocket launches.

More handlers and dogs arrived in the later part of 1965. They came from training in Okinawa. Living conditions in our facility—the “Hooch” as it was called—became more difficult. We were now double bunked, and it was a tight fit.

Handlers now had some time off as they rotated. During their off time, some acted as a backup force to other on-duty handlers, along with Camp Security forces, if they were needed. We had good radio communication between handlers in the field and backup personnel. I am not sure where we got the radios. The regular camp MPs worked the main gate and town patrol.

As a group from the time of arrival, we worked as a team, including the sergeant and corporal. We were always improving the kennel area and our living quarters. For the dogs, we built training and food prep areas, feed and water bowls, and a sanitation cleaning area. We had a sea container to store the dog food and other items.

The kennel design was a lot like state side—a concrete floor, wood side walls approximately four feet high with wire mesh above the walls, and a tin roof. In front of the kennels was a concrete ditch—when handlers washed out the kennel, everything flowed into the ditch and then down a pipe to a septic system, including water from the dog bowls and water used to wash food.

In July 1965, the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division arrived at Cam Ranh Bay. Parts of the Division worked at keeping Highway 19 open, which was the main route to supply the Central Highlands. Also, some of the 1<sup>st</sup> Inf. worked manning the perimeter bunkers. Their main base of operation was Lai Khe in the South. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division arrived September 11, 1965 from Qui Nhon to An Khe, 60 miles east of us. They took over securing Highway 19 and other roads.

The Korean Tiger Division passed through our area. We had some baseball games, and they were good.

On November 10, 1965, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry fought its first major battle in La Drang Valley. From our location, approximately 20 miles southwest, the night sky lit up. Handlers could not work the fuel and ammo dumps. Choppers were coming in all night. Also, Camp was used as the morgue, and those killed in action were flown to Saigon. The movie about this event, "We Were Young Once," pretty much tells it all.

In December 1965, the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry flew in from Hawaii to the new Air Force runway. Part of the 25<sup>th</sup> stayed in the area and worked with the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary. The others went to their home base in Cu Chi in the South.

In September 1966, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division arrived and set up its operations near Pleiku at Dragon Mountain, which was known as Camp Enari. NOTE: The 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary's camp name came from the first one killed in Vietnam from the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary Division, namely Col. Racliff in August 1965, which was prior to the Division's arrival. Col. Racliff was on the pre-arrival setup team.

Around January 1966, there was an intrusion into the perimeter wire on Paul Fowler's watch. Two of the enemy were shot and a third was captured.

Some time prior to the above incident, an attempt was made to breach the front gate at night, but it was stopped by a mobile 155 MM Howitzer parked near the gate—the barrel was lowered to point blank range at the entrance to the gate, about 100 yards off Highway 19, with bunkers on either side firing away—the 155MM Howitzer let loose. Retreat took place and puff the C-47 aircraft with 3 Gatlin guns cleared the area on the other side of the highway. (This information was obtained from Paul Fowler.)

Late November / early December 1966, Paul Fowler was involved in a fire fight at the perimeter, as a backup to the handlers. He was a corporal of the detachment, as earlier

in the year he extended his time to become a corporal. He did not see an end to the situation as he was told to pack his gear—he was going home in the morning.

Paul Fowler became a police officer in Hickory, NC, where he retired. Leroy LaVigne was a police officer in Orlando, FL and retired as a detective. Julian Gabica was a police officer in Napa, ID and retired as a captain.

I can say for sure we were the first deployed to the field. I vividly remember 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Campbell, Company Commander, asking for volunteers, stating "You will be the first in the field where action is taking place." Also, we were Detachment A 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. The military does not start at the end or the middle of the alphabet and go backward or forward. Why the breaks in lettering was anyone's guess. (See the attached map and list of Detachments.) We had kennels ready in August 1965. Next came Quien. They had kennels ready about September 1965. I visited them at the request of Lt. Campbell. Then on to Ban Me Thuot and An Khe in September or October 1965. Other Detachments followed during the remainder of 1965. Eight of us Vet Techs were deployed in 1965. Some of the units near Saigon were looked after by the veterinarian and a vet tech located at clinic.

Some have said that MACV was not ready for us. If so, why did we get kennels built and ready weeks later. Qui Nhon was, for the most part, also ready.



I'm not sure how much was ready in the southern part of Vietnam. I was able to see sites in II and I CORP areas because of layovers in trying to get to and from Saigon when taking blood and fecal samples to the clinic. I did not always have direct flights.

The Detachment to An Khe had tents like the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary. The Calvary was in the valley below. When it rained, it was like a swamp. The Detachment was better off on a hill overlooking the mess below. Slowly it got better for them. When the monsoon season was over, the building of the kennels started.

The following is a list of personnel who were the first to arrive in Pleiku:

Sgt. Billy McKinley

Cpl. Carl Raeger

Vet. Tech. Gary J. Heimbigner

Paul D. Fowler – DUKE 410E

Julian J. Gabica – DUKE 504X

Aaron F. Helmick – FRITZ A441

Carl W. Koester – DOUG 504X

Randy McDowell – SARG 331X

Earl T. Mullins – HAHNS 437X

Charles J. Stephens – WOLF A413

Donald J. Therolf – PRINCE 335E

Willis E. Waas – FRITZ 146X

Approximately two to three weeks after our arrival in Vietnam, Leroy J. LaVigne – FRITZ 343X arrived, together with 4 other handlers and dogs. They did not get to Site 09 in CA on time, so they left out later than the rest of us for Vietnam. Leroy was assigned to us in Pleiku. This now made up 10 dogs, which the kennel was built to handle.

Shortly after this time, Sgt. McKinley left (was reassigned?) and Sgt. Robert Strait arrived from Korea and Cpl. Carl Raeger from Germany (I believe this was his name and prior location). Later in 1965, Cpl. Raeger left (was reassigned?) and was replaced by Carl D. Eriksen, who was later replaced by Paul Fowler. Eriksen lost his hand in a battle in Saigon in 1967(?). I believe he earned a Purple Heart. When Sgt. Strait was reassigned to Korea at the end of his tour, he was replaced by a Sgt. Madura.

All of this information (recalled so many years later) can be verified as remembered by the following: Paul Fowler, Aaron Helmick, Julian Gabica, Willis Waas, Leroy LaVigne and Gary Heimbigner.