

RECON BY FIRE

Fighting with the 1ST BN (MECH) 5TH Infantry in Vietnam

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RECON BY FIRE

**Fighting with the 1ST BN (MECH)
5TH (MECH) Infantry in Vietnam**

MARK PALOOLIAN

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT *RECON BY FIRE*

“*RECON BY FIRE* is an engaging personal story of the misery and monotony of the civil war in Vietnam between 1965 and 1973. Reading his vignettes are akin to sitting around a campfire listening to one story after another. Worth the read, it is an excellent concise description of the Vietnam war as seen, heard, smelled, and experienced by one of America’s unsung heroes who put his life on the line so the rest of us at home could enjoy the creature comforts and a good nights sleep knowing he was taking one for the team. Mark, thank you for your service to our country.”

—*Stewart Crane, Reno, NV; Colonel, U.S. Army (Ret.)*

“Books about the combat experience in Viet Nam can give some readers reason to pause, or even pass right on by. But, Mark Paloolian’s recounting of his Vietnam experience from 1966 to 1968 is an engaging and riveting read that anyone can enjoy. Mark is a natural story teller with a talent for creating compelling narratives.”

—*Will McCarthy, Reno, NV; Artist,
Graduate from Humboldt State University*

“From Army Boot Camp to Vietnam, Mark Paloolian tells the story of being an APC (Armored Personnel Carrier) driver during combat operations in Vietnam. His first-hand experience helps the reader understand the danger and fear experienced by every soldier when out on patrol. Another great book on the sacrifices made by all the men and women who served in Vietnam.”

—*Gary Lamoureux, Pittsfield, MA; U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Vice President, Pittsfield Community College*

“An interesting and easy read...I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in the Vietnam conflict and war in general.”

—*Bob Willour, Grass Valley, CA; U.S. Forest Service (Ret.)*

“Mark Paloolian takes readers from his college campus to being drafted into the US Army, to Basic Training and finally his duty in Vietnam. While at times very graphic and raw, Mark’s book also has humorous moments. [It’s]...a wonderful example of what thousands of United States service men and women experienced during that time. Anyone interested in United States history and the Vietnam War will enjoy Mark Paloolian's account of serving with the U.S. Army in Vietnam.”

—Don Hartman, Davis, CA; Historian, Retired Instructor

“*RECON BY FIRE* is the engaging account of a young soldier’s tour of duty during the Vietnam War. The memoir recounts his experiences from basic training at Fort Ord in August of 1966, to his civilian return to Vietnam twenty-one years later. Each stage of his tour is described in a separate chapter, much like a series of short stories. The stories are told in a vivid manner and accompanied by photos that reinforce and enhance the narrative. For those who served in Vietnam, *Recon by Fire* should bring back a lot of memories. For those who didn’t, it should give them a keen sense of what they missed. Well done, soldier!”

—Craig S., Toronto, Canada; Former University Instructor
and Special Services Consultant

“Having spent a number of years working in mental health at the VA, I’ve heard many stories about time spent “in-country” – memories, mostly laden with grief and trauma, of our veterans who served in Vietnam during the ’60s and ’70s. But nothing I heard in all those years comes close to the...very personal narrative of Mark Paloolian about the year he spent during the Vietnam war. Mark paints a vivid picture of events – both terrifying and mundane – that took place during his tour of duty, and punctuates many of his stories with personal photographs as well...Mark recalls in crisp detail his experiences from induction into the Army during the summer of 1966, to his flight home to civilian life in late spring 1968. And he then adds a bonus chapter about his return to Viet Nam as a civilian tourist, 31 years later... profoundly insightful...an excellent read for anyone who wants to know what that period of our national history was really like!”

—Wendy McClave, LCSW

This true-life military experience is dedicated to the memory of John L. Lane (1942-2018), a former U.S. Army paratrooper who left us far too early. John was the ultimate patriot and served his country honorably for three years in the 1960s. His knowledge and skill would serve him well in later years as a civil engineer for the State of Nevada. It was an honor to be John's friend for over fifty years. Rest in peace!

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“In peace the sons bury their fathers,
but in war the fathers bury their sons.”

—*Croesus, King of Lydia from 560 BC
until his defeat by the Persians in 547 BC*



Recon by Fire is a memoir of Mark Paloolian’s personal experience as a soldier in the U.S. Army from 1966 to 1968 during the Vietnam War. He started writing it five decades after serving. While the stories and photographs are his, the experience of being in a war is universally unique and yet sadly, uniquely universal on Planet Earth.

“I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought,
but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.”

—*Albert Einstein*



Map from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook: Cu Chi is northwest of Ho Chi Minh City and the DMZ is just northwest of Hue, separating South Vietnam from North Vietnam during the war.

INTRODUCTION

.....

THE MAJOR IMPETUS for putting my Vietnam experience in writing is personal. The initial idea to do it coincided with the fifty-year anniversary of my 1967 tour in Vietnam as a soldier in the U.S. Army. I had hopes that writing my story down would provide me with some understanding and closure.

It is easy for me to recall this experience, both good and bad, because I was fortunate to suffer no major injuries. My children ask why I seem mentally balanced after such an experience, and I can only conclude that it was possible because I turned twenty-two in the Army, making me older than most other draftees and recruits. Additionally, I had already been away from my hometown of Reseda, California, attending the University of Nevada, Reno. I believe these two factors aided me in this relatively easy war recovery because the strict military regimen, difficult training, and war atrocities would be harder on eighteen-year-olds straight from the comfort and shelter of their homes and families.

For me, the draft was the only way I was going to serve in the military because it only had a two-year obligation and I

wanted to serve the shortest time possible. Friends tried to talk me into attending officer candidate school or helicopter pilot training, but those required longer commitments. Besides, with four years of college under my belt, I assumed I would get a decent military occupation. That did not turn out to be the case.

People often speculate as to why we got involved in the Vietnam War, and I can only provide my opinion. I came up with three concepts, but this is just speculation on my part:

- In many cases, war can stimulate an economy.
- War tends to rally a nation and citizens behind a common and worthy cause.
- As coaches say, “You can’t practice and practice without playing a game.” In other words, the military complex needs a venue to try out new weapon systems, new military technology and new training concepts.

The Vietnam War lasted from 1955 to 1975, nearly two decades. The Soviet Union and China had the best position during that time because they could supply North Vietnam with arms and planes, thus testing their weapon technology without suffering casualties. The United States, on the other hand, did not have this luxury when committing troops to Asia.

Historians will debate the causes behind The Vietnam War and we can only hope history doesn’t repeat itself. It is undeniable that this war was one of the longest, most unpopular and tragic wars in our history. In the end, we failed at preventing the domino theory we were so afraid of in the 1950s and the United States instead became involved in Vietnam’s civil war.

Tragically, as in other wars, it came down to young boys and men dying for the miscalculations and poor judgment of older men in politics. There were also U.S. female casualties, as approximately 11,000 women, most working as nurses, were

stationed in Vietnam during the war. Looking back, only concept number three became a reality; we played the game. I hope you can appreciate my story and my experience.

I would like to take a moment and give credit to my editor, Linda Hiller. Without her talent and expertise, my book would have been a marginal story at best. Thank you, Linda, and I appreciate your help and efforts with this project.



Me in front of an armored personnel carrier (APC) that was hit by a Russian rocket, or RPG; Vietnam, 1967.

CHAPTER ONE


.....

The Beginning

IT WAS 1965 and life was good. I had just transferred back to the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) to complete my degree in secondary education, so Reno was to be my home until graduation. But the war in Vietnam soon changed my direction and altered my plans.

Ironically, at that time I was glued to the nightly news, watching the war escalate almost monthly with draft quotas steadily increasing. Because I was secure in the college setting, I felt reasonably safe from the draft. I also thought that since I was in my senior year at UNR, if I should be called up, I could apply for a student deferment or at least get a safe job in the service. Knowing the draft commitment was two years also gave me a slight sense of satisfaction. Two years in non combat service would surely go quickly, so I thought.

In the spring of 1966, I received a letter from the Selective Service System in Reno requesting that I appear before their local Board in anticipation of a possible draft selection. I was asked if I was about to graduate in the spring and was informed that they would provide me with a one semester

SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM		Approval Not Required.								
 ORDER TO REPORT FOR INDUCTION										
The President of the United States, To Mr. Mark Palocian PO Box 408 University of Nevada, Reno Reno, Nev 89503		LOCAL BOARD NO. 54- Alameda County 24800 Mission Blvd. Hayward, California <small>(LOCAL BOARD SEAL)</small>								
		July 19, 1966 <small>(Date of mailing)</small>								
<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="4">SELECTIVE SERVICE NO.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="width: 20px;">7</td> <td style="width: 20px;">33</td> <td style="width: 20px;">45</td> <td style="width: 20px;">1241</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			SELECTIVE SERVICE NO.				7	33	45	1241
SELECTIVE SERVICE NO.										
7	33	45	1241							
GREETING: You are hereby ordered for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States, and to report										
at	Local Board No. 43 <u>24800 California Ave., Reno, Nev 89502</u> <small>(Place of reporting)</small>									
on	<u>August 30, 1966</u> <small>(Date)</small>	at <u>6:45 A.M.</u> <small>(Hour)</small>								
for forwarding to an Armed Forces Induction Station . To report collect to the Induction Station in <u>Oakland, Calif: 582-5455</u>										
IMPORTANT NOTICE <small>(Read Each Paragraph Carefully)</small>										
IF YOU HAVE HAD PREVIOUS MILITARY SERVICE, OR ARE NOW A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OR A RESERVE COMPONENT OF THE ARMED FORCES, BRING EVIDENCE WITH YOU. IF YOU WEAR GLASSES, BRING THEM. IF MARRIED, BRING PROOF OF YOUR MARRIAGE. IF YOU HAVE ANY PHYSICAL OR MENTAL CONDITION WHICH, IN YOUR OPINION, MAY DISQUALIFY YOU FOR SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES, BRING A PHYSICIAN'S CERTIFICATE DESCRIBING THAT CONDITION, IF NOT ALREADY FURNISHED TO YOUR LOCAL BOARD.										
Valid documents are required to substantiate dependency claims in order to receive basic allowance for quarters. Be sure to take the following with you when reporting to the induction station. The documents will be returned to you. (a) FOR LAWFUL WIFE OR LEGITIMATE CHILD UNDER 21 YEARS OF AGE—original, certified copy or photostat of a certified copy of marriage certificate, child's birth certificate, or a public or church record of marriage issued over the signature and seal of the custodian of the church or public records; (b) FOR LEGALLY ADOPTED CHILD—certified court order of adoption; (c) FOR CHILD OF DIVORCED SERVICE MEMBER (Child in custody of person other than claimant)—(1) Certified or photostatic copies of receipts from custodian of child evidencing serviceman's contributions for support, and (2) Divorce decree, court support order or separation order; (d) FOR DEPENDENT PARENT—affidavits establishing that dependency.										
Bring your Social Security Account Number Card. If you do not have one, apply at nearest Social Security Administration Office. If you have life insurance, bring a record of the insurance company's address and your policy number. Bring enough clean clothes for 3 days. Bring enough money to last 1 month for personal purchases.										
This Local Board will furnish transportation, and meals and lodging when necessary, from the place of reporting to the induction station where you will be examined. If found qualified, you will be inducted into the Armed Forces. If found not qualified, return transportation and meals and lodging when necessary, will be furnished to the place of reporting.										
You may be found not qualified for induction. Keep this in mind in arranging your affairs, to prevent any undue hardship if you are not inducted. If employed, inform your employer of this possibility. Your employer can then be prepared to continue your employment if you are not inducted. To protect your right to return to your job if you are not inducted, you must report for work as soon as possible after the completion of your induction examination. You may jeopardize your reemployment rights if you do not report for work at the beginning of your next regularly scheduled working period after you have returned to your place of employment.										
Willful failure to report at the place and hour of the day named in this Order subjects the violator to fine and imprisonment. Bring this Order with you when you report.										
If you are so far from your own local board that reporting in compliance with this Order will be a serious hardship, go immediately to any local board and make written request for transfer of your delivery for induction, taking this Order with you.										
<small>589 Form 352 (Revised 4-25-65) (Previous printings may be used until exhausted.) U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1965 O-351-121</small>										

extension or a deferment. Since I needed additional credits and would not graduate with that extension, I declined the extra deferment. That decision made me eligible for the immediate draft and my “Greetings from the United States Government” letter came that summer.

I was employed as a summer grounds keeper in Thousand Oaks, California for the Conejo Valley Unified School District. I was working outside in the heat and elements, thinking this would help get me physically ready for basic training. I also worked out in the evening with local high school football players and regularly used a heavy boxing bag I had hung in my garage. Not knowing what to expect in the Army, I wanted to be as fit as possible for this new adventure.

My reporting date was August 9, 1966. That particular month had 66,000 men drafted, which was the highest number of soldiers drafted to date. I had requested from the Selective Service System Board in Reno that I enter the service from Los Angeles, where I was born and raised, so I could potentially connect with males I might know. I was granted that request, but I never met up with anyone I knew from childhood even though nearly 100 percent of the draftees were from California.

On that August 9 reporting day, I boarded a Greyhound bus in Thousand Oaks, Calif. for a ninety minute ride to Los Angeles. There, I boarded one of two chartered buses that headed back north, driving past Thousand Oaks again on the way to Fort Ord near Monterey. The bus drivers got lost, so we didn’t arrive until 9:30 p.m. Immediately, uniformed troops boarded the bus and told us to “get our asses off this bus.” We thought they were officers, but they were a holdover cadre awaiting openings in specialty schools and/or Officer’s Candidate School. They lined us up in front of coffee cans placed behind each recruit. In the dark, we were instructed to dump any knives, nail clippers, etc. into those cans. I remember hearing a lot of “clinks” as items were deposited into the cans.

We then marched to a classroom and did 30 minutes worth of paper work that took about three hours. After that, we were issued our uniforms and duffle bags and headed off to our barracks and our first night in the U.S. Army. We finally got to bed (bunks) around 2:30 a.m. only to be awakened at 4:45 a.m. for our first full daylight training. With such little sleep and stress, I started to catch my first cold and sore throat. This was starting out to be quite an experience.

Although I was apprehensive about what to expect in the Army, I was not that upset about getting drafted because I had been going to school nonstop since the first grade. For that reason, I welcomed the new change, but after a few days in basic training at Fort Ord, I wasn't as excited about that change. After having so much freedom as an independent college student, the regimen and discipline of military life was a shock. The physical training was good and I was in decent physical shape to endure most of those rigors, but adapting to the mental aspect was tough.

I think we had about 183 recruits in basic training. Some were regular enlistees, commonly referred to as "RAs," while approximately 75 percent were recent draftees. The largest percentage of draftees were African Americans from the Los Angeles area. Since the 1965 Watts riots in L.A., sometimes called the Watts Rebellion, had taken place just a year earlier, I was apprehensive about how we would all get along. As it turned out, everyone got along fine because we were basically all in the same boat.

Our drill instructors were two African American sergeants and another instructor was from Guam. Overall, they treated us with respect as they put us through our paces. The training was meaningful six days a week, with Sunday being a semi-training day. Recruits were allowed to attend church services if desired, but few took advantage of that. On days where the



Some of my fellow recruits at Fort Ord Boot Camp in California. I'm in the back row, left.

training was not intense, we used our free time to shine our shoes, straighten up our foot lockers for unannounced inspections, and also to write the all-important letters to family and friends.

Three meals a day were provided to us, but to access the mess hall, you had to make a hand-over-hand run across the full length of an overhead horizontal ladder. If you fell off, you had to go back and start over. Some recruits had to repeat this exercise two to three times before they could finally eat. The meals were plentiful, though, and you had to consume everything on the tray.

While we were in the U.S., we were given regular milk as well as other healthy drinks. In Vietnam, the milk had an

unusual flavor. They called it “reconstituted milk,” whatever that meant. We heard rumors that the milk contained saltpeter to keep our sexual arousal at a minimum, which was unnecessary because we were isolated from females, both in the U.S. and in Vietnam. I never did find out the real reason for the unusual milk taste.

In the mess hall, you always had to be alert to unusual situations. One time, the mess sergeant told us to come up for seconds, at which point he piled the extra food on to the trays of the recruits who came forward. He then said that the last five recruits out the door would have to stay and clean up and have KP, which stood for kitchen patrol (police), the next day. You always had to be cautious about volunteering or getting caught up in situations like that.

On occasion, rumors around the barracks would surface concerning the food and the recruit servers. One day, we were “informed” that we should skip the split pea soup. The reason (rumor) given was that a disgruntled KP server had urinated into the large pot. Because of this rumor, there was a considerable amount of soup left over at the end of the day.

Another somewhat humorous rumor, spread on a different day, was that another Army server, upset with officers, used his genitals to make the “gravy dip or scoop” on the mashed potatoes served to officers in their private, isolated part of the mess hall. Not sure what his issue was, but he must have been very upset. What’s ironic is that most of these disgruntled soldiers were enlisted men rather than draftees. Needless to say, it kept most of us on our toes as Basic Training continued.

I recalled the advice my dad and uncle, both World War II veterans, gave me before going into the U.S. Army: “Don’t gamble, never volunteer, and remember, an erect penis has no conscience!” I appreciated their advice, but I already didn’t want to get into trouble, because confinement in the brig, which is the

military prison, did not replace normal Army time. Six months in the brig meant staying in the service an extra six months. For me, the two-year obligation was going to be enough.

In the 1960s, smoking was allowed but only when permitted by the sergeants, and only in designated areas. At night, we all had to take an hour out of our sleep to be a fire guard, getting fully dressed and walking up and down the barracks for safety patrol. While walking, the silence would be broken by snoring recruits and those talking in their sleep. It was tough to be awakened out of a dead sleep, get dressed, work the shift, then get undressed and try to go back to sleep.

Another area requiring adjustment was showering and using the toilets. I was lucky to be one of eight who would shower at night, allowing more time to get ready in the early morning hours, while up to eighty recruits fought over the showers in the morning. Using the toilets was another adjustment. We had about fifteen toilets lined up along a wall, but we were only allowed to use four of them. With no privacy, it was strange to use the facilities with three or four recruits standing in front of you waiting to use the same toilet.

We marched everywhere. For some recruits with short stride lengths, it was tough to keep up. One time, the sergeant asked for a recruit with percussion or drum experience to come forward. I thought the drummer did a decent job aiding us in maintaining our cadence, but evidently the sergeant had a different opinion and the drummer was sent back to his platoon. The sergeants would often sing out the typical Army cadence and that helped maintain our rhythm while marching. One cadence I remember was, "Your left, your left, your left, right, left," over and over. The cadence did help with the marching.

During basic training, we began our immunizations for diseases we might encounter in Vietnam including smallpox, typhoid, cholera, tetanus, yellow fever, typhus and more.

SMALLPOX			TYPHOID		
DATE VACCINATED	TYPE OF REACTION* AND DATE DETERMINED	SIGNATURE, GRADE, AND SERVICE OF MEDICAL OFFICER	DATE OF EACH DOSE	AMOUNT	SIGNATURE, GRADE, AND SERVICE OF MEDICAL OFFICER
25 AUG 1966	ACCELERATED	J.R. STEVENSON MAJ, MC	15 AUG 66	0.5cc	M.S. FABRICANT MC
AUG 6 1967	90 AUG 1966	<i>Nothing of use</i>	15 SEPT 66	.5cc	M.S. FABRICANT
*Immediate reaction, unaccelerated reaction, typical primary vaccine.					
CHOLERA			TETANUS		
DATE OF EACH DOSE	AMOUNT	SIGNATURE, GRADE, AND SERVICE OF MEDICAL OFFICER	DATE OF EACH DOSE	AMOUNT	SIGNATURE, GRADE, AND SERVICE OF MEDICAL OFFICER
26 FEB 1967	1 cc	ALVIN JAFFEE CAPT MC	15 AUG 66	0.5cc	M.S. FABRICANT MC
AUG 6 1967	1.5cc	<i>Nothing of use</i>	15 SEPT 66	.5cc	M.S. FABRICANT
*Immediate reaction, unaccelerated reaction, typical primary vaccine.					
YELLOW FEVER			TETANUS		
DATE	ORIGIN (Name of manufacturer)	BATCH NO.	PLACE OF ADMINISTRATION (Station)	SIGNATURE, GRADE, AND SERVICE OF MEDICAL OFFICER	
30 AUG 1966	NAT DRUG	80 84	FORT ORD, CALIF	J.R. STEVENSON	

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1963 O-779-962

TYPHUS					UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE	
DATE OF EACH DOSE	AMOUNT	SIGNATURE, GRADE, AND SERVICE OF MEDICAL OFFICER			CERTIFICAT DE VACCINATION	IMMUNIZATION CERTIFICATE
30 AUG 66	0.5cc	M.S. FABRICANT II			DELIVRE CONFORMEMENT A L'ARTICLE 99 DU REGLEMENT SANITAIRE INTERNATIONAL	ISSUED IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 99 INTERNATIONAL SANITARY REGULATIONS
26 JAN 1967		<i>Nothing of use</i>			DD FORM 737, 1 MAR 64 REPLACES EDITION OF 1 SEP 54 WHICH WILL BE USED	LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME PALODIAN, MARK L
OTHER IMMUNIZATIONS						
DATE	TYPE	LOT NO.	AMT.	MEDICAL OFFICER	DATE OF BIRTH: 15 SEP 44	SEX: MALE
10 AUG 1966	ORAL POLIO	1001-1-10-1-1	1.0 ml	J.R. STEVENSON MAJ, MC	SIGNATURE OF ANOTHER PERSON: <i>Mark L. Palodian</i>	REMARKS (Drug, Foreign Protein or Serum Sensitivity, etc.) 562 TYPE AB
15 AUG 66	1 cc			M.S. FABRICANT C	SIGNATURE OF PERSON: <i>Mark L. Palodian</i>	REMARKS (Drug, Foreign Protein or Serum Sensitivity, etc.) RICAN CAPT, MC
25 AUG 66	1 cc			ALVIN JAFFEE CAPT MC	EXPIRES: FEB 1967	
10 OCT 66	ORAL POLIO TYPE 1, 2, 3					
11 JAN 1967	(VACCINE)			ALVIN JAFFEE CAPT MC		
AUG 6 1967	1 cc			<i>Nothing of use</i>		
AUG 6 1967	1 cc			<i>Nothing of use</i>		
SENSITIVITY TESTS (Tuberculin, Schick, etc.)						
DATE	TYPE	DOSE	ROUTE	RESULT	MED. OFF.	
6 AUG 66	TINE			NEG	M.S.	

Official record of the various vaccinations I received during my time in Boot Camp at Fort Ord.

I stayed pretty healthy during boot camp, but I did get a bad case of bronchitis and spent three days in the Army hospital on post. During that time, I was fearful I would not catch up with the training and end up getting recycled, which meant starting over with basic training and graduating with another company at a later date. Luckily, that didn't happen and I was able to return and finish up with the soldiers I started with. This was significant because I became very good friends with a kid from San Diego who had the lower bunk next to mine. Of all the basic trainees, he was the only one I remained friends with long after our Army tours were finished. During this time, we were not allowed to socialize with adjacent companies or get weekend passes because the post was closed due to an outbreak of spinal meningitis which is highly contagious. This also occurred at my next training site.

A major part of training at Ford Ord was the firing range which was right on the beach overlooking the bay and the Pacific Ocean. I always thought I would do well at that because I had excellent vision, but my scores were mediocre. I am not sure why I didn't do better. Maybe it was the camouflaged targets or my failure to pick up targets in motion. We only used the M14 rifles at the ranges even though the more advanced M16 rifle was being used in Vietnam. The M14 was also used for our code of arms manual drills.

Another important part of the training was called "PT," short for physical training. You could get a maximum score of 500 if you completed each task with a high score. Running the mile in combat boots was difficult. We had to complete that run in under six minutes to get the maximum score of 100 points. I think my best time was 6:04. I also had trouble throwing the grenade for accuracy. I wanted to throw it like a baseball instead of what they called the "John Wayne method," which was more like tossing a shot put. In retrospect, I'm glad I didn't



Training at Fort Ord, Calif.; I'm in the second row from the top, the fifth from the right.

max the PT with a score of 500, because one morning they asked all of the recruits who scored 500 points to come forward and report to the company barracks next to ours. Later that morning, we walked by that company mess hall and there sat the 500 point scorers and they were pulling KP for that company. You had to always beware of raising your hand in any situation.

My first experience with KP in basic training was a disaster. In trying to impress the mess sergeant, I was earnestly scurrying around to help. That day, pancakes were on the menu, something the guys looked forward to as a treat away from the basic fare. The batter was sitting in a very large open container on a tripod in the middle of the mess kitchen. In

moving too fast, I hit the corner of the open container, knocking it off the tripod. In horror, we all froze and watched the rich batter run down the drain. I felt so bad, knowing the recruits were counting on pancakes for breakfast. The mess sergeant proceeded to get an inch from my face and scream at me. He then gave me the worst possible KP job, which was cleaning out the grease traps. It is a day I will never forget.

The Army has many military occupations, from cooks, clerks and truck drivers to welders. It is not just a fighting force. When I became sick and had to go to the infirmary, I was sitting in the waiting room and could hear muffled screams coming from where a doctor was treating a serviceman. When it was my turn to go in, I asked the doctor what the screams were about. He said a lineman had slipped and slid down a utility pole catching penetrating splinters all the way to the ground. I could visualize the fall and it was disturbing.

The reason I bring this up is that one of the recruits in our company appeared to be very docile and somewhat effeminate, and when his orders came down, he was assigned the job of military lineman. I often wondered how he did with that military occupation specialty, or as we called it, MOS. At grenade practice, he barely got the live grenade over the safety wall, and that was scary. Since we had recruits from all around the country, many were unique characters. One really nice guy from Arkansas had just a few teeth in his mouth when he came in, but by the end of boot camp, he had a full set of teeth, and it really improved his appearance.

The basic training at Fort Ord went well and after about nine weeks, we were ready to graduate. The next step was the assignment of our MOS. With four years of college, I thought I would get a decent job. Out of the 183 RAs (Regular Army) and draftees, thirteen of us were given the infantry MOS of 11B40, which was the walking infantry. I was surprised to be

one of those soldiers. Some recruits who wanted the infantry became cooks, truck drivers, clerks, etc. They all got leave, which was time off before going to their next advanced training or schools, but the infantry MOS recruits were scheduled to leave that night, after the graduation and parade, for our next duty stations. By midnight, I was on a plane to Fort Polk, Louisiana, for Advanced Infantry Training (AIT). This was the gateway to Vietnam, with another big adjustment heading my way.