

BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Personal Memoirs

I SEE THE MUZZLE FLASH FROM THE AK-47 AND I WAIT FOR THE COPPER JACKETED LEAD ROUNDS TO FIND THEIR MARK. MY BODY TENSES AS I PREPARES FOR WHAT IS COMING, "THIS IS IT CARLISLE YOU'RE A DEAD MAN, GOD, PLEASE MAKE IT FAST AND PAINLESS."

In August 1964, 3 days after his 17th birthday, the author entered the U.S. Army. At that time Vietnam was just a small blurb on the six o'clock news. After a tour in Europe, where he became the youngest E5 in the 2nd Battalion, 5th Artillery. He is looking forward to entering a new phase in his Army career. Life was good; then everything changed with orders to Vietnam, which in 1967 is front page news, and the lead story Walter Cronkite.

Al Carlisle spent his childhood playing war games with his twin brother, and neighborhood friends, in the fields and vacant lots of Lakewood, Colorado, a suburb of Denver. Al always knew that one day he would be a soldier, a veteran like his Dad. He also developed a keen interest in photography. When he won a contest during Vacation Bible School he chose a little Kodak Brownie over a football. His desire to serve his country, and his love of photography came together in 1967, the same year he met his wife Pat. Vietnam proved to be a turning point in his life. He no longer saw the Army as a life career choice. Al has lived his life with gusto, knowing how very close he came to being an additional name on that black marble wall in Washington D.C. To which he has paid homage to many times. He currently resides in Orlando, FL, and is the Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Taft. The purpose for his being spared is manifested in his ministry.



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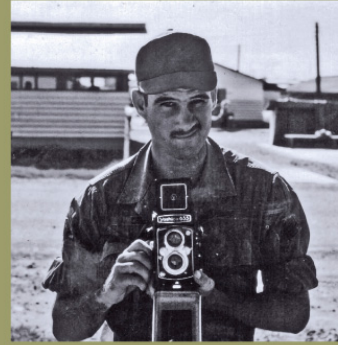
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DEPTH OF FIELD

AN ARMY PHOTOGRAPHERS
YEAR IN VIETNAM



AL CARLISLE

DEPTH OF FIELD

AL CARLISLE

I spend a restless night; occasionally waking to what I perceive is sporadic gunfire, and the bright arc light of the occasional flare. Or, am I just dreaming Seems like only minutes pass when we are awakened and told to prepare for the morning formation and breakfast. After hastily getting dressed, and shave with cold water, we make our way out, and try to form up with the others. We respond, "Here," when our names are called. Then it is off to breakfast consisting of powdered eggs, spam, something black and steaming, they call coffee.

After breakfast we make our way back to our barracks to gather our belongings and wait for the truck that will take us to the 589th.

The heat and humidity, which I have endured since arriving in

Vietnam, has drained my stamina. Or, I am feeling the effects of the combination of the salt, and malaria pills I took for the first time at breakfast. What I know, is this, it is not quite 10 AM and I am already sweating profusely. I reason to myself, that I will eventually get used to it.

The three-quarter ton truck finally arrives, and we put our duffel bags in the bed and take our place on the wooden benches that line the side under the canvas tarp that covers it. A Buck Sgt. occupies the shotgun seat up front. We are soon on our way.

Not much talking takes places we all take in the sights, and sounds, of this new and strange country. We make our way out of the bustling city of Qui Nhon, and on to the two lane asphalt road that is QL-19. The contrast between the inner city of Qui Nhon, and the agricultural landscape of lush green fields, and banana trees, is striking. "What a beautiful country," as my eyes look upon the bright colored hues of greens and blues which dress the canvas of this landscape. In the rice patties I see laborers about their duties all bent over with their pointed conical hats pointing into infinity, and water buffalo as a farmer strains to keep the plow straight in the thick black mud.

The mountains of the central high-lands come into view; their tops shrouded in low gray clouds. This pastoral scene is interrupted by the site a large garbage dump just off the road; with groups of Vietnamese of all ages sift through the garbage looking for anything of value or usefulness.

One of my fellow, new guys, and traveler, breaks the silence. "Hey fellas, we'd sure be up the creek if we got ambushed about now. Since the only guys with weapons are the two up front." Collectively we all agree; again we are reminded that we need to be alert, and be aware of our surroundings. I felt vulnerable, and completely helpless. We pass many tiny little

shanty towns that line both sides QL -19.

Children play next to the busy highway, some are naked, and some wear knee length T-shirts and flip-flops. Some of these structures are fabricated from flattened C- ration boxes, and pieces of wood and corrugated tin, and I am not sure what holds it all together. Some have sandbags stacked around the outside. A Vietnamese woman uses her conical straw hat to fan away the flies as she nurses her baby. I shake my head in diffidence, "What a way to live," I think to myself.

We pass through the opened barbed wire fence at the entrance to the 589th base camp. We pass by the camp barbershop, with its red and white pole, and the A- framed Chapel and a large open area with benches and a stage; covered by a shed type roof. The truck stops in a cloud of red dust, and the Sgt. comes to the rear of the truck and says, "Welcome to the 589th."