

A Brief Photo Tour of I Corps, Vietnam

Welcome aboard, the NIS “I” Corps photo tour is about to begin. The Vietnam War, in all its ugliness, has been filmed and preserved in numerous archives. The NIS mission was one of support to our war fighters, no matter where, in country, they were deployed. We did this, and did it well, albeit often under untoward circumstances; an evolution that we are all proud to have been a part of. It would have been impolite otherwise. Our tour today, however, reflects a visit to those physical areas through which our folks traveled to do their jobs; the hardships they encountered and some of the Vietnamese people with whom many of our agents lived among and bonded with, often without consciously trying. That war indeed sucked but not all of the memories were bad.

We to begin our tour at the NISRA Da Nang office. S/A Dave Roberts can be seen standing at the front gate, ensuring that all is in readiness for our weekly Saturday baseball game with our neighborhood kids.



S/A Dave Roberts organizing the Saturday baseball game with the neighborhood kids

When not responding to complaints of crime and/or evil throughout the length and breadth of I Corps, our focus was usually on report writing, lifting weights, reading the bible, having a beer or three and, interacting with the neighbors and their kids, as depicted in the following photos.



Our opposition's infield



Our opposition's cheerleaders



My very bestest friend in the whole neighborhood. I asked her parents if I could take her back with me but, they said no

There was an event in early 1966 that did much to bring us closer to our neighbors. General Nguyen Cao Ky, head of the Vietnamese Air Force and a future premier, led an assault against the Buddhist uprising in Da Nang. Our NISRA was in the center of the street where the central Buddhist temple was also situated. General Ky positioned tanks and troops throughout the city as a show of force. A Vietnamese tank, crewed by a force of misfits was positioned at the end of our street, and would fire on anyone who dared to appear on the street. As one could imagine, we responded to very few calls during the three week ordeal. It soon became apparent that our neighbors were being unfairly punished by all this because their habit was to shop daily

for needed food items. Their discomfort and misery levels were obvious. We had advanced warning of this siege and had laid in many, many cases of “C” Rations. Charlie Baldwin, the SRA established the Da Nang version of the Berlin Air lift, wherein we supplied “C” Rations to our neighbors. We could not carry them to our neighbors so, we threw snack boxes and rolled food cans across the street to them, much to everyone’s amusement and delight.

General Ky, subsequently showed up at the gate to 3MAFHQ with a company of heavily armed Vietnamese marines and announced that we wanted the movements of all U.S. military personnel (U.S. Marines in particular) within Da Nang to be restricted, because he was in charge. When USMC General Lewis W. Walt was given this news, he left his office and walked alone to where Ky waited. The exact translation of what transpired has been lost to history but we were told by a trusted USMC source that General Walt put a gentle finger on Ky’s chest and informed him, literally, that if he and his troops were not out of town by sundown, they would feel the directed wrath of U. S. Marine Corps air and ground forces. Ky and his marines departed, returning to Saigon.

Da Nang, called Touraine, by the French, was once a quaint and attractive center of commerce and culture, modeled after the French City by the same name. Time, neglect and the infusion of too many residents had, however, substantially ruined its earlier beauty and, all of its former charm. Be that as it may, it still yielded some interesting street scenes, as can be seen in the following photos.



A truly giant banyan tree in downtown Da Nang



The downtown Da Nang city flower market



Downtown Da Nang City Fish Market



A Da Nang brassware dealer. These items were once 105mm and 155mm shell casings



Da Nang Rope Merchant and his cat



Downtown Da Nang's central Market place: much better than a garage sale

Several kilometers north of the city's center, we find the heart of our military operations. First, The Da Nang Air Base, once a huge facility, managed primarily by the Air Force. Navy and Marine Corps air units shared smaller portions of the facility. Most all of the shore launched aircraft raids against the forces of North Vietnam and, close air support of our Marines on the ground, originated from Da Nang Air base. The Marines also maintained an air attack and support facility out of Chu Lai, to the south.

As the sights and smells of downtown Da Nang begin to fade into the distance, we begin to see sign of our Marines and their headquarters and logistic facilities.



3RDMARDIV Headquarters reinforced facility, Da Nang. Prime hillside property



Traffic control outside Da Nang, Marine Corps Style



3RDMARDIV HQ Office Park and billeting area

Aside from 3RDMARDIVHQ facilities depicted above and the 3MAF compound situated on the far side of the Da Nang River, most of the more exciting USMC real estate lies to the north, beginning with the Hue/Phu Bai areas. Out next group of photos depict both military and civilian subjects within those areas:



Catholic church in the center of Hue City. This structure may have been destroyed during the 1968 Tet Offensive but, I am not totally sure of this.



Statue of The Man, positioned in front of the church in the previous photo



Religion from a different perspective, a Buddhist Temple in Hue City



Palace entrance to the ancient city of Hue. Much of this structure was destroyed during the 1968 Tet Offensive.



Another shot of the once beautiful imperial palace at Hue



This is allegedly the home that Ho Chi Minh kept when he resided in Hue



Cannons that once protected the Imperial Palace at Hue



Main Street Hue, a rather sleepy city



Market place in Hue City. That's trash in the foreground



Phu Bai from the air



Hue's Perfume River, as seen from the air on approach to Phu Bai

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Administration Building for Hue/Phu Bai International Airport



Hue/Phu Bai International Airport's only hanger and apron



Fourth Marines Headquarters area at Phu Bai



Fourth Marines Residential sub-division at Phu Bai

It's time to get back on the chopper for an exciting flight further north, to our next area of interest; Dong Ha, Cam Lo, and those landing zones on or near the DMZ. Y'all can't go much more north than this without switching sides. Our next photo depicts your landing zone at the Dong Ha International Airport. If you look carefully, you can see the Dong Ha logo on the face of the administration building.



Main, and I might add, only terminal building at Dong Ha International Airport. The white structure is a communications shack, built by the Marines. Note the modern wind speed and direction indicator in the left side of the photo.



The greater Dong Ha area as seen from the air, during the rainy season



Main postal facility at Dong Ha.



S/A George Meglemre shown here during what appears to have been a reflective moment while sitting on a 155mm projectile container outside of a hooch at Dong Ha. I seem to recall he was mumbling something about no one should be allowed to have this much fun.



Street scene, forward combat base, Dong Ha

Just a short flight from downtown Dong Ha, we come upon the rural beauty of Cam Lo, nested in an area just a bit south of the DMZ.



Cam Lo offers unlimited space for camping and related outdoor activities.



Cam Lo; getting there is half the fun



We're almost there. Cam Lo Commuter bridge. EZ Pass accepted in all lanes



Marine Corps housing area. Cam Lo Structure to the right is a Seven Eleven



The Cam Lo area is also rich in agricultural opportunities; rice being the major crop



Cam Lo's Moon River; perhaps the model for the Andy William song.



Backup at Cam Lo

Our final stop on the northern portion of our tour will be that area at and near the DMZ, that geographical “neutral” area between North and South Vietnam.



The DMZ; picking up and dropping off. Not too much to see here.



The Plateau area, just south of the DMZ



As you can see, our Marines made due with old technology. The Huey had not yet landed

For the final leg of our tour, we take you to beautiful Chu Lai by the sea; located south of Da Nang.



The Chu Lai coastline is truly beautiful. I would not be surprised to see it dotted with luxury hotels at some time in the future



Chi Lai Coastline



The most luxurious bunker in Chu Lai. Watching for unfriendly watercraft



Main Street within the Marine area in Chu Lai



Prime real estate in the Marine area of Chu Lai

Operation “Hastings,” carried out by the Marines and RVN forces in 1966 was one of the largest combat operations carried out during the Vietnam War. Casualties were heavy on both sides however, losses on the NVA side were much higher. Substantial quantities of arms and ordnance materials were recovered when the smoke cleared. The following photos depict a small portion of what was recovered.



Operation Hastings, small arms recovered



Operation Hastings, more of the same

This brings to a close, our moving tour of I Corps. The remaining photos are an attempt at being “Artsy” and consist mostly of the children of Vietnam, a photo subject my camera always seemed ready to focus upon. Kids rule!



Kids in front of a church. Da Nang



Local wildlife in Da Nang



Kids and fishing junks at Da Nang



Getting ready to pass out school supplies at a Da Nang area village school



JAG Lt Carnahan and his staff at a Da Nang area fishing village.



China Beach in Da Nang, long before the television show of the same name made it famous



China Beach in full operation. Sea snakes sharks and a determined undertow did make it an iffy place to swim too far from shore

Hope you enjoyed the tour. I am happy to have been your guide. Regret I was unable to provide you with a full in-country tour, but, my primary AOR was limited to "I" Corps; from Chu Lai north, to the DMZ and the Rock Pile.

Semper Fi,

Carl J. Merritt, Cpl., USMC, S/A ONI, NIS, NCIS, EIEIO (Ret)