



SEMPER FI

In 1967, at the age of 18, I was assigned to the USMC 1st Light Anti-Aircraft Missile Battalion in Da Nang, Vietnam to protect the south against attacks by North Vietnamese aircraft.

My unit had set up headquarters in an old abandoned French Fort that hadn't been occupied since 1954 when the French were defeated by the Vietnamese Communists.

According to legend, this abandoned French Fort was overrun in the middle of the night as the soldiers slept. The communists were merciless in their silent and deadly raid. Every other man's throat was slashed during the night to send a message to the French.

Who knows if that's what really happened. But when you're trying to stay warm in a dark and damp sand bunker on guard duty where the French were overrun your mind starts to wander.

Our living quarters were hooches with aluminum roofs and canvass siding and located a short distance from a runway and landing area for helicopters.

It took a while for me to get used to the constant air traffic operations at night and get a good night's rest. When I returned to the world, I had a hard time time sleeping. It was too quiet.

I remember Da Nang as being a very picturesque place situated on the coast of the South China Sea.

I didn't really get to know the people living in the Da Nang region. I wish I had.

Most of the villagers I saw were farmers who spent most of their waking hours in rice paddy fields. I would often wave to farmers as we moved in convoys across their land.

They may have been Viet Cong for all I know.

It's just that it made me feel good to reach out in some way to these farmers as they watched us coming and going across their homeland day after day and month after month.