

Preface

For the past 30 years, eloquent speeches have been made, periodicals and books have been published, and the television and the movie industries have tried numerous times to capture the Vietnam years. Politicians have been elected and defeated because of it while teachers have tried to teach it in history classes. However, none of these efforts have rendered a truly accurate portrayal of the horror of the Vietnam War. It is something that cannot be understood without the experience.

We were there. We saw the destruction. We smelled the gunpowder and stench of death. We saw the bodies hanging in the wire, as well as our fellow soldiers dying in the arms of the medics. **We were there** and heard the deafening sound of both incoming and outgoing artillery and shrapnel flying over our heads. **We were there** and could feel the earth shake as the dirt ground into our bodies while we crawled into our bunkers to escape certain death. **We were there** when the peace demonstrators back home were accusing Americans of killing babies and committing other atrocities. **We were there** and heard the comforting words of the chaplain, the moaning of the dying, the prayers of those who thought they were dying, and the butt chewing of the first sergeant. **We were there** and shivered as the drenching rain soaked us to the bone during the monsoon season. **We were there** and felt the heat and dust of the summer. **We were there** when it was time to pick up parts and put them into body bags. **We were there** with the wet cigarettes and the hot beer. **We were there** with long faces when our name was not called at mail call, and **we were there** when the “goody boxes” arrived three months late. **We were there** in the stillness of the night when our eyes hurt as we peered from our bunkers trying to get a glimpse of the men who were trying to kill us.

We were there when the tasks were many and the laborers were few. Our days consisted of the mechanic trying to fix a hydraulic leak, changing worn gun tubes, the barrels burning detail, the cooks trying to prepare a hot meal, the medic tending to the wounded, and the gunners pulling the lanyards, filling sand bags, and stretching concertina wire. **We were there** when officers and sergeants walked the gun line and the perimeter to boost morale and take care that we remained vigilant. **We were there** placing claymore mines, while the loaders rammed the projos home and the drivers escaped death by inches as they ran the roads. **We were there** with the FDC, the ammo haulers, supply and battery clerks, FO’s, and section chiefs. **We were there** when each task was a part of our function to kill, or suffer the consequences of being killed. **We were there** through the long days and the even longer nights as we waited in the darkness for the inevitable probes and the coming of the rats and night sounds. We reread our letters, we laughed, we cried and we prayed as we watched the beautiful dark sky. And always, we counted the days and dreamed of hot showers, hamburgers and milk shakes and of our loved ones back home.

This book is neither about death nor life, nor is it about heroes or cowards. It is simply a few pages about a group of men who were there and served their country when asked. We were men from the large cities like Chicago as well as the small hamlets of the Mississippi delta. We were yanked from our schools, jobs, and homes and placed in harms way, but we prevailed, and we served with honor, pride, and distinction.

Afterward, most of us returned home to rebuild our lives and try to take up where we had left off a year earlier. Yet, we brought back memories that even today cannot be shared, as “others” just cannot comprehend it. Our own children and grandchildren chide us as they are not interested in our “stories” and in a few years, when we move on to the nursing homes, this book will be discarded in the garage or estate sale. But to those of us who served, it contains precious memories because **we were there**.

We were there, and we have memories. Many of them, we wish we could forget, but there are also those memories that we cherish of men from the “Big Guns Of The DMZ”. So the men **who were there** write these memories, not for others, but for us “lest we should forget.”