

## China Beach, Beer and Gasoline

By Dennis Foley

I joined MCB 11 in Da Nang after finishing my A School and Military Training at Port Hueneme. I was trained as a Heavy Equipment Operator but when I arrived "in country" at Camp Adenir, there was no need for another operator. "A" Company, First Platoon, however, did need drivers for their 10-wheeler dump trucks. The dispatcher assigned me to a big "multi fueler" and I joined my fellow Seabees hauling materials from our quarry site to all points around the area.

There were several miles between our camp in Da Nang East and the rock quarry which was located at the base of Monkey Mountain, and when the truck was empty my preferred route of travel was along the China Sea shoreline. It was most definitely the scenic route which stretched along the sandy beach known as "China Beach." To historians this place is important because it was the beachhead landing where on March 8, 1965 the first 3,500 American combat troops went ashore. In later days it was South Vietnam's northern location for "In Country R&R" (decades later its name was the presumed location of television series "China Beach".) At the south end of the long stretch of beach were picnic tables, and other park like accommodations which included a hamburger stand. It was a very popular place for any soldier who was lucky enough to be selected to spend a few days there.



**China Beach with Monkey Mountain in the background,  
circa 1967 while in route to R&R in Hawaii**

After a long day of hauling materials I would drive my truck through the village at the north end of China Beach and cruise south on the wet, hard-packed sand where the surf rolled in from the

East and fishing boats were anchored just off shore. Near the end of the wide sandy beach, drivers would slow down to maneuver through the R&R area where swimmers were enjoying their free time on the beach. Here the road jogged to the West in towards Da Nang proper. The road always had some hitchhikers making their way back to their respective camps and on this day I encountered a large group of fellow GI's dressed in beachwear, carrying towels and typical "day at the beach" supplies. They hailed me down and I stopped in the road while the off duty soldiers climbed into the bed of my dump truck. Here the road back to Camp Adenir took us through the area known as Da Nang East until we came to the turnoff where our paths were no longer the same. At their signal, I pulled over and waited while they all piled out and I abruptly gave them a shout and a wave and took off for Camp. As I pulled away and viewed them in my rear view mirror, I remember them all standing in a group, with an unusual waving of the arms and shouts which I presumed were "Thanks for the Ride" salutes.

Back at camp I parked my truck in the equipment yard and went about the task of readying it for the next day's work. When I checked the truck bed for mud or other debris which may have become lodged in the corners I discovered why I had received the unusual farewell when I abruptly pulled away from the hitchhikers. There in the middle of a big empty dump truck bed was a beautiful ice chest. Apparently I had not given the riders time enough to lower it to the ground. Now it was clear to me why my riders had given me such an unusual farewell salute. I felt rather bad about it but the bad feeling didn't last long because when I climbed in the truck bed and opened the lid I found the chest to be half full of beer!

Suddenly I found myself in possession of a cooler of brew that was clearly a violation of battalion rules and regulations. As I recall we were allowed only two cans of beer per day and it was not to be taken outside the Enlisted Men's Club area. Being a rather new recruit to the battalion I sought out the advice of a few trusted "Can Do" Seabee buddies as to how to handle the contraband. I was subsequently assured that I shouldn't worry.....and that was the last I saw of my good fortune!

I later learned that the cache was moved to a safe hiding place under someone's hooch. Sometime later I was told that their Seabee "Can Do" ingenuity was employed. They had buried the brew in the sand, and then soaked the sand with gasoline. The evaporation of the gasoline cooled the beer down to an enjoyable drinking temperature and they graciously ridded me of the contraband.

I finished up my time at Camp Adenir under the restrictive two-can limit and returned to Port Hueneme with the main body of the battalion. More military training, more barracks fire watches, and more haircuts seemed to be the order of each day. But I had no complaints, never missed a fire watch nor a morning muster and all this because at the end of the workday I would hop into my '55 Chevy and fly south on Highway 101 to the home of my soon to be bride.

Both our families homes were in the Los Angeles suburbs and though they were outside the allowed 50 mile travel limit from Port Hueneme I believed I could argue that if measured by "how the crow flies" I was in compliance. A few hours' sleep, a thermos of coffee, and a low profile kept me below the radar. On March 3, 1967, my best friend's little sister and I were married. And not long after that she stood in the parking area of Point Mugu Naval Air Station and watched me disappear over the horizon as the C 130 troop carrier returned us to Vietnam for our next deployment to beautiful downtown Dong Ha.

I completed the Dong Ha tour and returned with the battalion main body in December 1967. Because my combined times "in country" exceeded one year, and because I had less than one year remaining in my enlistment term, I was qualified for the "Early Outs" program. I submitted my application and was subsequently approved. Upon returning we were awarded an automatic two week leave and before this leave expired I returned to the Port Hueneme base and reported to the new MCB 11 administration office in a Quonset hut. There I signed a few papers and in a time span of no more than one hour I drove out of the Port Hueneme gate as a civilian! I returned to the Los Angeles suburbs where my wife and I bought a home and raised two beautiful children. On March 3, 2017 we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary.

### **Career after the Navy**

Upon return to civilian life I worked as a wholesale salesman for nearly ten years but the lure of a construction site and the smell of fresh concrete left me with a yearning I couldn't resist. My Seabee concrete production experience led me back to construction where I established a new career. I soon became a special inspector for concrete, masonry, and welding, then moved on to hospital building inspection for the rest of my working days.

After completing their education our son and daughter moved out of the big city and headed for northern Nevada and it didn't take long for mom and dad to "pull up stakes" and follow their path. Our kids have provided us with four grandchildren who are quickly becoming adults themselves. I retired in 2015 and now my construction projects are limited to what I can fit in the wheelbarrow!

Should I ever make it to one of our Seabee reunions I hope some old salty 'Bee will offer to buy me a cold one in recognition of my lost China Beach treasure!

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