

This is a collection of recollections of my time in Vietnam, from 1968 to 1972. The maps are markups of detailed historical maps downloaded from the [University of Texas collection](#). They are of [Danang](#), downtown [Saigon](#) and the [Phu Nhuan](#) district where our office was located. The line drawings are my own, drawn from memory, with a little help from my friends.

Dan Feltham drew a [picture of the office](#) from memory, which I rendered in Corel. I wanted to get a rough idea of its size, to attempt to locate it in the Phu Nhuan map above. I will be pleased to amend it to show additional features.

Several people over the years have sent group photos from the Hong Kong conferences held in 1969 through 1972. I attempted to add names to the pictures; John Siniscal did a better job, but I cannot find what he sent. Here is what I have for [1969](#), [1970](#), [1971](#) and [1972](#).

I would like to thank my comrades-in-arms Dan Feltham, John Leussler, John Moss, Grant Giske, Curt Maxwell and others surely to come for their input. This document represents only a few days' work. It is certainly rough in spots, and bound to be inaccurate. Please [email me](#) with corrections or additions. If you have a story to add, please dictate it and send me the mp3, or call me at 702-997-2134 in the evening US time (when I will be in bed) and dictate it to my answering machine.

Graham Seibert
Kiev, March 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. My dialogue with Earl Ness when he was inviting me to go to Vietnam.	2
2. A quick descent into Tan Son Nhut airport.	4
3. Views of strafing: across the river from the continental hotel, from the bar of the Danang officers club.	5
4. My year in Danang and the availability of the women.....	6
5. My landlord in Danang and his seven marriageable daughters.....	7
6. My house in Danang.....	8
7. Helping the fishermen with their boats on China Beach.....	9
8. Parties at my house in Danang attended by the Marines and the Navy.....	10
9. Ringing the bell in the officers' club in Okinawa.	10
10. The beauty of the new rice in spring as seen from Monkey Mountain.....	12
11. Blowing up the building around the 1401 in Danang.	12
12. The fruits in the market: plantain, mother's breast, stinky fruit and so many more.....	13
13. Teaching Vietnamese to program and teaching computers to print in Vietnamese	14

14.	How I started learning how to write – the story of piaster exchange.	15
15.	My trip to Cambodia with Bob Curtis and Bill Shugg	16
16.	Going to the beach with the girls.	18
17.	The Tan Son Nhut gate pass system	19
18.	Buying artwork in Vietnam	20
19.	The house I shared with Bill Shugg and Bob Curtis.....	21
20.	Monique and Jean-Jacques	22
21.	Colette and the C 47 set	23
22.	Cockroaches.....	25
23.	A very practical outlook on sex.	25
24.	My Vietnamese marriage.....	27
25.	The soup stands near my house on Pasteur Street	28
26.	How I started the BARFUP club.	30
27.	The state-of-the-art.....	32
28.	The loves we left behind – and didn't.	33
29.	The strength of the comraderie	34
30.	The "I-watch boys"	35
31.	Domestic bliss.....	35
32.	Croquet in Lake Watson	36
33.	The SEAWA Gong in the Saigon office.....	36
34.	The bar girls	37
35.	Water skiing from Club Nautique and Sunday afternoon volleyball games at Thi Nghe with the Frenchies.....	37
36.	The legacy of French colonial administration, and the sports clubs.....	38
37.	Illnesses in Saigon. A case of rabies.....	40
38.	The traffic in Saigon. My parents visit – driving across town with the policeman following me. Bribery.....	41
39.	Parklane brand doobies.....	43

1. My dialogue with Earl Ness when he was inviting me to go to Vietnam.

At IBM they taught me how to program, and it turned out I was pretty good at it. I was in a sales office, which used guys like me, called “Systems Engineers,” to make sure that the computers we sold actually did the jobs our clients needed to get done. Although in theory

the customers had their own programmers, I often wound up making things work for them. I programmed computers to set type for the San Francisco area newspapers and to account for pipe production at Kaiser Steel, among other things.

In the spring of 1968 the National Guard had stepped up its drill schedule to twice a month. We were designated a Select Reserve Force, the first to go if President Johnson called us up for Vietnam. About that time an offer came through IBM for a job supporting our military in Vietnam. I interviewed with Earl Ness, the District Systems Engineering manager. The conversation went something like this:

"Would you like to go to Vietnam on assignment to support our military?"

"Yes."

"If we give you an overseas pay differential of 60 percent?"

"Yes."

"Not so fast. How about if we also pay your way back to the United States for a vacation every year?"

"Yes, indeed."

"I don't want you to make a rash decision. How about if we give you two additional one-week R&R vacations every year? It will be all expense paid, and you can go as far away from Vietnam as Honolulu, in any direction."

"YES."

"Don't rush. Did I mention that all of your living expenses, including restaurant meals, would be paid all the while you are in Vietnam?"

"YES"

"As you make up your mind, let me mention that everything is tax-free."

"YES"

The one question IBM could not answer was whether it would get me out of the National Guard. I spent a long time reading the National Guard regulations and determined that I had a problem. As a signalman I had a critical military occupational specialty (MOS). I talked to Sergeant Gregory, the regular army guy who ran our weekends-only unit on a full-time basis. He was excited that I had the chance to go to Vietnam and sympathetic to my problem with the MOS. He said "The Army ain't gonna step on its own dick. How'd ya like to be a cook?" We got that one taking care of, and I left for Vietnam in November of 1968.

Some of my acquaintances in Berkeley were horrified that I was going over to participate in the war. Antiwar rallies had been a pretty regular thing on Sproul Hall Plaza since the Free Speech Movement had taken place in 1964, while I was on active duty. I listened closely to the arguments against the war. I knew that I didn't have enough experience to evaluate them, but I could be certain that this was just a bunch of kids who didn't want to serve their country in much of any way, and absolutely certainly didn't want to get shot at. Their rebellion was grounded as much in self-absorption as anything else: sex, drugs, rock 'n roll. My housemate Jack Plasky showed his grasp of the situation when he asked with big sincere eyes if I was really going over there to "Make computers that killed people."

This introduces a theme that has been repeated throughout my life, in this autobiographical piece. I grew up with the belief that society had done something for me, primarily keeping me safe, forming an environment in which my parents could prosper, and educating me. I in turn owed something to society. In the context under discussion it was helping the country defend itself and paying taxes. And, as you can see, I didn't have any moral compunction about choosing the most advantageous means of satisfying those demands. I also didn't deeply examine the connection between the defense of our country and fighting in Vietnam 10,000 miles away. We all knew from the newsmagazines that the Soviets had within the past few years pushed to expand their empire in Korea, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, India and Cuba. It was pretty easy to convince me that they were doing it again in Vietnam.

2. A quick descent into Tan Son Nhut airport.

Our Boeing 707 descended out of the clouds into Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon. It was October 1968. I looked with wonder at the country I was entering. It was green, spread forever, and there was a war going on down there. We had been involved in Vietnam for almost as long as I could remember. I was an avid reader of Newsweek in time, and remembering back to when the French were having troubles in Vietnam. We had been seriously at war for more than three years.

I was not an experienced traveler. The prior week in Tokyo had seen my first full day out of the United States. And here I was entering the country in which I didn't know the people, didn't know the culture or the language, and really had no idea what I was getting into.

It seems that the plane descended quite rapidly. It was probably just my paranoia – I could imagine surface-to-air missiles shooting up from any quarter. That fear turned out to be ill-founded. I don't recall that any civilian airliners were lost during the whole course of the war.

On the other hand, air travel in those days was not that safe. After I had been in country for a while I got very comfortable with the fact that we civilians in the cities were not in much danger. Travel was another matter. I lived in Danang, in the North of South Vietnam, for just about the entire year of 1969. I used to travel back and forth to our office in Saigon a couple of times a month. I would sometimes fly on military aircraft – the versatile, ubiquitous C-130 cargo plane, or one of its military cousins: the C-124 "shaky," the C141 jet transport, and sometimes the Lear jets that were used for mail and for executive purposes. What you did was you walk down to the airport, registered for space available rides, and took what you got.

During 1969 I flew to Okinawa a few times with the Marines. It was totally informal. Drive to the airport, walk onto the tarmac to where they were loading, get on the airplane and go to another country. No formalities whatsoever. The Marines took full advantages, bringing duffle bags of marijuana to their somewhat more constrained buddies there in Japan.

However, I sometimes also flew commercial. One time I had a ticket to Saigon on Air Vietnam. Their standard aircraft were four-prop Douglas DC6s. It was quite an experience. You would have live chickens in the overhead bins. These were peasants traveling by the only means possible in that war-wracked country.

I waited at the Danang airport seemingly forever for my DC6. There was no announcement. I finally concluded after three hours sitting and waiting with a whole crowd of Vietnamese that it wasn't going to come. I got in my car and went home. The next morning I read that the aircraft had crashed on landing, killing all on board. That did not give me a warm, fuzzy feeling about Air Vietnam.

Fred Hodder, one of the first of the IBMers in Saigon, reported a similar experience on a flight to Kathmandu. The runway, a mile high in the Himalayas, was rather short. It was serviced by French Caravelle jets. These commercial airliners used drag chutes for their landing because otherwise there was not enough runway for them to brake. The flight after Fred's crashed, once again killing all on board.

So that was the danger of aviation in Saigon. It was not in getting shot at, unless you were actively fighting the war, out there looking for to collect lead. It was at the state of the art of aviation 45 years ago this wasn't that great.

During the time we were there they lengthened the runways at Tan Son Nhut so that the new 747s could fly in and out. With the greater volume of military coming and going, and all of the hangers-on such as ourselves, they needed big airplanes in order to handle us. We would typically fly to Hong Kong, Tokyo, or Honolulu to on the first hop to the States.

That hop in itself was fraught with some peril. The Hong Kong Kai Tak airport was old, extremely close to a bunch of high-rises on the Kowloon side. You could almost imagine the bottom of the plane scraping apartment buildings as you landed and took off.

3. Views of strafing: across the river from the continental hotel, from the bar of the Danang officers club.

Vietnam was the first war brought by television into the living rooms in America. In retrospect, the news media probably did a service. However, we in the war zone thought that it was disloyal of them to tell the story in a way that put the military in a negative light. They hated having to fight on two fronts: the war and the media. We shared the military's resentment when certain stories such as the massacre at My Lai surfaced. However, witnessing the way America has seemed to have gotten involved in so many pointless foreign adventures since, I would have to say that my opinion has changed. I wish the press had been more effective at keeping us out of the Middle East.

It was an armchair war in the sense that the generals mostly didn't have to be near the front and the US public could watch the whole thing on television, having the immediacy of the action while being tens of thousands of miles removed from the danger.

It was also an armchair war for us. There was a roof bar in the Continental Hotel in the heart of downtown Saigon. Saigon was fairly safe, but just across the Saigon River there were some unsecured villages where there would be fighting from time to time.

On occasion we could sit drinking our gin and tonics on the roof of the Continental and watch them firing at the VC across the river. Those airborne gunships as I recall were called C47 Spooky, or "Puff the Magic Dragon", a reliable old DC3, with a 6000 round per minute Gatling gun mounted in the door. The story was that the recoil of the Gatling gun was such that the plane flew as much sidewise as forward when the gun was firing. Whatever the case, it put out a tremendous amount of lead. It certainly looked impressive. You had to have respect for whatever enemy soldiers would tempt being fired on by something so lethal. And for us it was just for show, watching the tracers light up the night sky. My understanding is that only every 10th round or so was a tracer, a phosphorus bullet meant to show the gunmen where his rounds were going, but even at that it looked like a constant stream.

The Vietcong operated behind the mountains in [Danang](#), which came within a mile of the shoreline. The Third Marine Amphibious Force was thus forced by geography to be located not far at all from the mountains. You could sit on the veranda of the officers club and watch the same sort of battles going on. In those cases it was usually close air support planes strafing the villages, and looking for Vietcong who ventured close enough to shoot Katyusha rockets towards the Marines. The airbase suffered rocket attacks with some regularity, so the 1st Marine Air Wing aviators were on fairly constant the call to keep Charlie nervous.

I'll segue into something else. Marines are a very gung ho outfit. They have their own esprit, quite different from the Army and the Navy. Those at the 3MAF were garrison troops. The guys I worked with were programmers. They had joined the Marines for bravado and derring-do, not to be sitting at a desk and programming. The only real action that they saw was to go on perimeter patrol, looking for Vietcong infiltrators. They volunteered for this duty as often as they could. It gave them an opportunity to go out with their M-16s, and their favorite weapon, sawed-off shotguns, to look for trouble. None them ever did find any. Life at the 3MAF was really kind of quiet. There was one guy that I knew only remotely who got killed by a random Katyusha rocket. But in general it was a fairly safe place to be. And it is not in the Marine temperament to remain someplace that safe and civilized.

4. My year in Danang and the availability of the women

I spent my first year as the only representative of the sales division outside of Saigon, in the northern city of Danang. All four armed services had major installations there, some of them with sizable computers. I had a very broad portfolio, everything from serving as sales representative to being a nitty-gritty operating system programmer. Basically I was there to

serve as the face of IBM. The other six American IBMers had real jobs – they kept the machines fixed. They did a good job, and they stood high in the eyes of our customers.

I used my first year overseas to learn a little bit about Vietnamese culture and language. My landlord, Mr. Tho, who ran the French brewery, had seven marriageable daughters. I was invited over frequently. He, however, was the only one who spoke French and the daughters were not that tempting. I did, however, take the rusty edges off my high school French from 10 years prior.

The [city of Danang](#) was off-limits for the military – they were so many troops that they would have simply overwhelmed the town. The Marines were at Red Beach, about 10 miles west of the city, the Air Force logically enough along the airport southwest of the city, and the Navy on the peninsula between the Han River, which flowed north into Danang Bay, and the South China Sea. I lived right in the center of town. Managing my own schedule was delightful. I was able to find time to go to China Beach most afternoons, where I cemented the habit of daily exercise which has lasted me a lifetime. I would jog for a mile or two and then swim. There weren't any other foreigners where I swam, north of the Navy's R&R spot with its officious lifeguards. Sometimes I got drafted by the local fishermen to help them launch or beach their woven bamboo fishing boats.

It is hard to identify any other virtuous habits I developed during that year. I got to know a number of delightful women and made a few generalizations which have stood the test of time. Men and women are naturally drawn to one another. In the time-honored model, the man provides financial wherewithal and the women make themselves companionable and hope to marry and bear children. The English complaint about GIs during World War II, that they were "[overpaid, oversexed, and over here](#)" certainly applied. It was easy to make lady friends, a fact which aroused some resentment among the Vietnamese.

It would be unkind to characterize the women as simply selling their bodies. There was a lot of genuine affection. You could safely say that the knack for developing affection for an American was a useful life skill. To quote one of the Englishwomen from the above hyperlink, "food was scarce, but we supplemented our income by a little impromptu whoring with the GIs – we all did it."

It was interesting that few of the girls took any precautions. I don't understand their logic; their lives were precarious enough without the burden of babies. Sometimes they had a realistic hope that a guy might marry them, but usually not. They generally seemed to take pretty good care of their accidental kids. In any case, it gives me satisfaction to reflect that many of those babies wound up as adoptees in the United States. It is also interesting to note the innocence of those first years of the sexual revolution, before herpes and long before AIDS, when a small dose of antibiotics could remedy any misadventure.

5. My landlord in Danang and his seven marriageable daughters.

I took over the house that my predecessor, Curt Maxwell had rented for his two years in Danang. Mr. Tho, the landlord was the manager of the French brewery, Bier 33, or Ba-Muy-Ba. There were six apartments in a row on Ba Dinh, a quiet back street. He and his wife and seven daughters lived in the last one, on the east end of the block, and I had about the third one from the west end.

My landlord of course didn't speak any English, but he did speak very good French. He had spent some time in France itself as a member of the French Armed Forces. He welcomed the opportunity to spend some time in conversation with a Westerner who knew something of the world.

I arrived in Vietnam at the age of 25, having completed my high school French just over a decade before. I was a little bit rusty, and I didn't have a dictionary. However, working with Ong Tho we were soon able to overcome the difficulties. There were certain words that came back slowly. I remember we went back and forth over the concept of a plage, a beach, several times before I figured out what he was talking about. It got easier and easier throughout the course of the year.

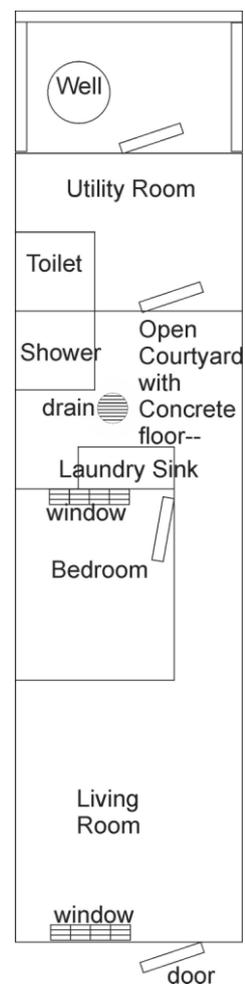
Me being an eligible bachelor, and he having seven marriageable daughters, he was quite happy to see me. But the fact was that none of his daughters could speak French, so the conversation was mostly between the two of us. I think that having the foreigner over gave him a certain amount of prestige, and I enjoyed the company.

I only knew one other tenant. The woman who lived next door to my right was a rather shrewish, though not dumb and not unattractive woman in her 30s. As I recall she became Lieut. Dave Pfeffer's lover during his visits to my house.

6. My house in Danang

This is an attempt to pull together all the descriptions I have written about my house in Danang in a single place. It was number three out of six attached houses in a row. I have marked its approximate location on my map of Danang, although I do not see a building that exactly fits its description. The front entrance opened on the living room. There was a hall leading past the bedroom, which was on the left, out to the open air patio. The shower was in the back left-hand corner of this patio. The surface of the patio was graded so that it drained to a metal grate in the center.

There was a laundry sink on the outside of the bedroom wall, as I recall. They might also have cooked there.



The back room of the house had the toilet in the corner, on the other side of the wall from the shower. It was also used for cooking and for storage.

The house was probably about 16 feet wide and 40 feet deep. The ceilings were probably about 8 feet. Though the windows shut, there was always a good draft through the house. Storms were rare, it rarely got cold, and you wanted air to keep the mosquitoes stirred up.

The house was on low ground. There was a well in the 6 feet or so between the house and the fence out in back of the house, and you could see the water level looking down. It was run by an electric pump probably mounted on the open cistern above the shower, which meant that the water level could not have been more than 15 feet below ground level. There was no hot water.

That fact, combined with the fact that it operated on a septic system, meant that sanitation was more or less marginal. Nonetheless, I survived. I add that in that house in Danang there was an outdoor courtyard in the back, one corner of which was the kitchen and another corner of which was an enclosed toilet with an overhead water tank. The water was pumped up to an open tank on the roof, so there was water pressure for the faucets.

This was certainly the most primitive house that I lived in in Vietnam. My apartments in Saigon were all indoors, and they all had hot water. Even in Danang, however, I didn't feel any privation. A cold shower in the morning was bracing.

7. Helping the fishermen with their boats on China Beach.

Dr. Kenneth Cooper published his book *Aerobics* in 1968. I bought the first edition. It was something that people in California were talking about already. I started to run along the Ala Wai Canal in Honolulu on my way over to Vietnam. Those are the first steps in a lifetime program of exercise. Even now, 48 years later, I simulate 15 km in 30 minutes on an exercise bicycle every day.

Living in Danang, master of my own time, with the Toyota Land Cruiser at my disposal, I went swimming most afternoons at the Vietnamese seaside installation just north of China Beach. I would jog up and down the beach, in those days probably a mile or so round-trip, and then go swimming. The water was almost always warm. It was never clear enough to see my feet.

The bottom was kind of silty. Vietnamese fishermen would go out in woven bamboo basket-boats and feel around for clams with their toes, pick them up and throw them into the baskets. At other times they would fish from the small boats.

Other fishermen had serious fishing boats. They were perhaps 20 to 25 feet long, apparently with wooden frames and woven bamboo sides, sealed with some sort of plastic or resin. I think that they were motor powered. They brought the boats over the beach down to the water

every day. There would be six or so men for the work. The boats were heavy – fiberglass would've been a great boon to them, but they didn't have it. As I was running along the beach they often motioned me over to help them. I was glad to be asked, and impressed at what they could do. These are guys on the average 6 inches shorter than I was and probably weighing half as much. They could, however, probably do more work than I could. I had to respect them.

8. Parties at my house in Danang attended by the Marines and the Navy.

The military had made the city of Danang off-limits to soldiers before I got there in 1969. There were simply too many soldiers and not enough Vietnamese. Allowing the soldiers liberty in town would have destroyed the character the place.

I was, therefore, in a rather privileged position being able to live on the economy. The military were not dumb – they took advantage of it. My Navy client was a certain Lieut. Dave Pfeffer, who ran the 1401 operation on the road to Monkey Mountain. He ran a pretty good shop, and I enjoyed going over there to teach autocoder and mainly just to pass the time.

He in turn enjoyed coming over to my house. He was a child of the 1960s, just as I was, and occasionally enjoyed a little bit of marijuana. It was available to anybody – they sold it on the street corners right outside Navy headquarters – but it would not have been appropriate for him to smoke it there. He could relax with me.

The other services handled it differently. Army Capt. Dave Campbell just came over to socialize, and the Marines from Red Beach came in groups of five or 10 for parties. The Marines mainly like to drink.

However, my guests all seem to have one thing in common. Somewhere in my neighborhood – I never found out where, because I just wasn't that interested – was a cathouse. Although the military guys who came over generally didn't know each other and didn't come at the same time, they must've communicated via some ESP, because they all assured me that it was a pretty nice cathouse and they were glad to spend some time there.

9. Ringing the bell in the officers' club in Okinawa.

Besides the Navy, the other small second-generation computer in Danang was an IBM 1440 installed at the 1st Marine Air Wing. Marines had their own aircraft operations. Whereas the Air Force was mostly devoted to fighter jets and bombing, Marine aviation is primarily for close air support. These guys would say that a Marine pilot wasn't doing his job if he didn't come back with leaves and twigs stuck in his airplane.

My primary Marine client was the Third Marine Amphibious Force. These guys ran one of the biggest computers in the country, an IBM 360/50, handling supplies for all Marine Corps activities. Their parent organization was on Okinawa, with an even bigger IBM 360/65

computer. In the course of setting up the computer operation in Red Beach, they had to fly off and on to Okinawa. I, as the IBM rep, went along.

As I write elsewhere, the Marines have a very distinct esprit de corps. They are drinkers, fighters, and lovers. Actually, I am not so sure that a predilection for drinking and fighting equips one especially well to be a lover, but that's what they thought. When they went on R&R to Honolulu the thing that they talked about more than anything else was going out and finding Army and Navy wives to seduce.

In Danang, however, there wasn't much to be seduced. So they drank. They drank incredible amounts. I didn't spend that much time socializing with them in Danang, as I had my own life and they were confined to base. However, in Okinawa we were more or less on the same footing. I had a rental car and they were in a BOQ, with the run of the island.

We would eat together. And that meant, drinking together. That could be a disaster. One day after work we went out to the officers club to get a bite to eat. Work was over at five, and I was hungry at six. They were drinking. I kept on making noises about food. They kept drinking. It went on to 7:30, 8:00. I was starving.

Finally, in desperation, seeing a dinner bell waiting to be rung, I rang said bell. It was a catastrophe! When you ring the bell in a Marine officers club, it's an announcement that you have something to celebrate and you are buying a round for the house. Oh – I had not intended that. I happily bought the round, just to buy my freedom and get out. That could not happen. I was such a good fellow, having bought the house a round, that they all bought me rounds.

By the time I left, I was not only starved but as thoroughly drunk as I have ever been in my life. I had no alternative except to just take the rental car back to my hotel. Thank God I was an experienced drunk driver, because I needed it that night! Never again.

On the subject of drinking with Marines, I occasionally had lunch in the officers' mess at Red Beach. Two of the officers that I knew, I think it was Joe Taggart and Dan Van Grol, got on opposite sides of the mess hall. One of them shouted to the other

"Where you going?"

"Going to Red Rock to get the mail"

"But what about the lions?"

"Fuck the lions!"

"You'd fuck a lion?"

"I'd fuck a lion's mother!"

"You lion mother fucker!"

Somehow it does not seem so funny now, but at the time it was uproarious.

10. The beauty of the new rice in spring as seen from Monkey Mountain.

When I returned to the University of California to complete my bachelor's degree in the spring of 1965, 2 ½ years after dropping out of Reed College, I pledged Theta Chi, the fraternity in whose house I had stayed for a month before entering the Army in July 1964. It was an interesting six months. I was not cut out for fraternity life, but I did make a couple of friendships.

One of my closest friends, Jim Villers just happened to show up in Danang working for the Navy. As I recall, I just ran into him by accident. He in turn told me that another of our fraternity brothers, Dave, was working for the Air Force on top of Monkey Mountain at the north end of China Beach. So we fraternity brothers got together a couple of times for beers. It was useful that I was there as a civilian and had a car.

Monkey Mountain (Núi Sơn Trà), at 850 m – 2800 feet, 5 miles northeast of my house in Danang – offered a commanding view of the countryside. There is nothing more spectacular than the green of new rice in the springtime. This mountain stands by itself, away from the city, away from the war, away from everything. As I recall there was a quiet officers club where we could drink.

It is an irony that Dave wound up in a war in Asia. Even back in 1965 the Chinese and Japanese students were making their presence very much felt on the Berkeley campus. They put a lot of pressure on white American students in the technical fields such as engineering. Dave spoke of them disparagingly as "fish head eaters" and did not approve of people like me dating them. It is interesting to reflect that this trend of Asian students crowding out everybody else on American campuses was visible that many years back.

Another of Dave's prejudices comes to mind. The Armed Forces radio station played popular music that appealed to the troops. A lot of American soldiers come from the heartland in the American South, and they played a lot of country music. Dave disparaged "grit music" as much as he did Asians. He must've done it in a rather appealing way, because I don't remember any bad feelings toward him. I developed an appreciation of country music while in Vietnam.

11. Blowing up the building around the 1401 in Danang.

The Vietcong used Russian arms throughout the war. Since their weapons had to be smuggled down the Ho Chi Minh trail, they were mostly fairly light. Katyusha rockets were a favorite. They were not very accurate, but they did instill a certain degree of terror.

In Danang, they would launch them from behind the mountains west and south of the Third Marine Amphibious Force garrison and from south of Marble Mountain. The military bases were expansive enough that they would usually hit within them, although they were not dense enough that they would cause much damage on the average.

One time they got lucky, however, and blew up the building that housed the IBM 1401 over at the Navy supply center. The 1401 was a tough machine. It took a licking and kept on ticking. Our field engineers had to spend a few days spiffing it up, but it was soon back in business.

This was a great story, great publicity for IBM. If I had had better instincts I would have been over there in a heartbeat, smiling and glad-handing and taking credit for the field engineers' work. However, that is not my nature. I stayed away and let them get the glory.

The military issued us weapons for self-defense while we were there. In Danang I had a 45 caliber pistol and an M-16. I kept them under my bed. Even at the time I seriously wondered what good they would do me. When you live in a country where they speak another language, and your appearance sets you apart as a foreigner, it is probably not the best idea in the world to start a gunfight when you don't know what's going on. When I heard the Katyushas that blew up the Navy computer site, I reached down to check that my guns were still there and then went back to sleep.

One instance in which one of the M-16s did see use took place in Saigon. The manager of the IBM federal systems division came home one evening to find a burglar in his house. The burglar had found his M-16. Panicking, the burglar shot him dead. So far as I know that was the only fatality IBM suffered.

IBM had more than 100 field engineers in country at one time to service all of the equipment. The field engineers had about six offices up and down the country. One of them was in Nha Trang, halfway up the coast from Saigon to Danang.

One of the men there, Harry Hetrick, had a reputation as a hell raiser. As the story goes, he used to ride all over the place on his big, noisy motorcycle, annoying the natives. One time they attempted to talk to him about it and he shot at them. Harry then sold the motorcycle to a field engineer from another company, perhaps Univac. Within a week of buying that motorcycle, the purchaser was shot dead out of the saddle.

I do not remember the story well, and I do not know if it is true. I will appreciate somebody correcting me.

12. The fruits in the market: plantain, mother's breast, stinky fruit and so many more.

Once I was in established in Danang I started to explore the town. My house had a kitchen, and I like to cook. Despite the fact that I could eat every meal out, I did not always want to do that.

There were not any grocery stores per se. There was an outdoor market at the north end of town where you could buy meats, vegetables and staples from vendors at small stalls.

I was particular fascinated by the fruits. They had more kinds of bananas than I had ever seen before. A few of them have since appeared in North American markets, especially with the greater immigration of Asians over the past half-century. There are the small, sweet red bananas. The Vietnamese called them chui chin. There were ordinary yellow bananas in several sizes. There was a lovely purple fruit called Vu Sua, which means breast milk. There was another purple fruit called mangkop. There were breadfruits, mangoes, star fruits – so many others.

As a foreigner, I always had a sense that I would be paying a little bit more than the natives. I sensed that I knew less about bargaining than they did. Actually, these fears appear at least in Ukraine not to be well-founded. I am at least as good a shopper as my wife. But in Vietnam I didn't know that.

There were several different prices for the bananas. The fruits all look the same to me, so I decided to go with the cheap ones and give it a try. When I got home and peeled it, it tasted like chalk. Yuck! I had just discovered the difference between plantains and sweet bananas. Plantains are for cooking, as any Latin American could have told me. But I didn't know any. So, after that I paid the price and got sweet bananas.

13. Teaching Vietnamese to program and teaching computers to print in Vietnamese

IBM moved me down to Saigon and assigned me to some more substantial work at USAID in late 1969. They had a staff of American contract programmers who probably cost \$50,000 apiece with full logistic support. USAID reasoned that it would be cheaper and better for the country if they used local national programmers. They charged me with developing and then leading a training program for systems analysts and programmers.

The largest part of my success was due to good luck in demographics. Working with USAID brought a draft deferment and a pretty good salary, making the job highly attractive. USAID gave a programmer's aptitude test, which is pretty much the same as the mathematical part of the SAT, ACT or GRE, to the huge number of people who answered a newspaper ad, and offered jobs to the best. We got a staff of 30, about half Chinese, half Vietnamese, half male and half female. Kids that smart were an absolute delight to teach, and within a matter of months the American contract programmers were being phased out. My partner in the effort, Bill Shugg, led the difficult conversion from the DOS to the OS operating system and trained two of the recent hires as systems programmers.

My second most interesting assignment in Saigon was developing the Vietnamese language support for IBM computers. My colleague Curt Maxwell had designed the physical part, the type font and print train, and worked out a plan for handling the language: how to keypunch

and store Vietnamese text, how to sort and compare Vietnamese fields, and how to break the text into two separate lines to be printed, one of diacriticals and a second of the letters themselves. I refined his schemes for keypunch data entry of Vietnamese text with diacritical marks, the computer software to translate it for internal representation, the software to print it, and the software to do sorts and comparisons. In the process I learned quite a bit about the mechanics of language.

These two assignments kept me busy most of the time during 1970-72. I continued to develop my skills as a programmer, though they had been pretty good going in, and learned about the structure of a spoken language. The most important skill, however, was writing. I developed quite an assortment of teaching and reference materials. I continued to improve my writing in every subsequent job throughout my career, though only about half of them involved heavy programming.

14. How I started learning how to write – the story of piaster exchange.

IBM employees in Vietnam were on permanent travel status. That meant that we were reimbursed for all of our living expenses: rent, food, and incidentals. We would fill out a weekly "green sheet" to report our expenses to the company, and they would reimburse us. As I recall, it was a cash operation. We were having our paychecks deposited to banks back home, but our expenses were a local matter.

The South Vietnamese government, like governments throughout the Third World, had a perpetual currency crisis. They maintained a currency that was artificially strong against the dollar. The official rate of exchange was 118 piasters to the dollar for most of the time we were there. The black-market rate was never as low as 118, but for the first year or so it was close enough as an approximation. However, by 1970 it had grown to over 300 piasters to the dollar.

This presented two problems. First, IBM wanted to maintain its reputation as a clean cut, straight shooting organization. They strongly encouraged us employees to change our money legally, at the 118 piasters rate. However, there was a strong temptation to go on the black market where you could more than double your money.

The second problem was that IBM reported our expenses to the Internal Revenue Service as income. Since they reported at the rate of 118, it artificially inflated our W-2s. Since only the first \$15,000 of income was exempt from federal taxes, this pushed some of us who would not have otherwise been paying tax into a taxable position. It increased the tax bill for better paid employees such as our managers.

Up until this point in my life I had never written much. I had graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in mathematics for two reasons. Number one: no laboratories. Number two: no writing. However, I was a pretty good typist and in the course of developing

programming courses in Saigon I had wound up writing quite a bit. I took it on myself to see if I could change IBM's policy.

I wrote a paper recommending that IBM itself change the money from dollars into piasters. They could reimburse our piaster expenses in piasters, and report the income to the IRS at the unofficial, black-market rate. Vietnamese pretenses did not influence IRS thinking – they recognized actual value. It was, after all, printed in Newsweek. If IBM handled the exchange, it would lessen our temptation and our tax burdens.

Dan Feltham, the office manager, liked the idea and forwarded it to his manager in Honolulu, who at that time would have been either Bill Doody or Bob Tanner. They in turn forwarded it to the next level of management, Tom Gill in the San Francisco area. It eventually went to Washington DC, the headquarters of IBM federal government sales, run at that time by John Gentzler or Vic McDonald.

The document came back and forth several times for polishing in this way or another, giving me a lot of practice editing and rewriting. However, after a relatively short time, perhaps two or three months, it was approved. It gave me a great sense of satisfaction to get that much visibility up my management chain, and to get something done.

In this experience changed the course of my life. I was called on to write in the course of work in Vietnam. When I got to Germany, I wrote extensively, documenting the Army supply system automation requirements at the lowest organizational level, the Direct Support Unit. I was writing in support of a truly inspired leader, Maj. Ron Glidden, who pushed the thing up through channels and got approved as an Army standard system using IBM 3741 programmable workstations. I wrote the code – making myself the author of an Army standard system. It turned out as my career developed that the writing experience gave me more to trade on than the coding experience.

15. My trip to Cambodia with Bob Curtis and Bill Shugg

It is curious how one's sense of distance expands with experience. My recollections of the neighborhood I lived until I was seven are quite local. The farthest I ever walked was about a mile up to the University of California campus. Unusual for a four-year-old, I did walk daily to Whittier Elementary School, about a half mile away.

When I was in high school I had a bicycle. I also liked to take long, solitary walks at night. I would fairly often walk the 5 miles to the University of California campus. My horizon had expanded to take in three fair sized suburbs, my native El Cerrito, Berkeley and Albany. My recollections of Portland Oregon also embrace much of the city. I had a bicycle and went everywhere.

After dropping out of Reed College in Portland I started to work. When I was living once again in Berkeley and Oakland in 1963 I bought a motorcycle and a car in rapid succession. I

went to work, first in San Francisco and then for the Department of Highways all over the place. The car and motorcycle gave me the freedom to get to know pretty much the entire Bay Area and several other parts of California. I would often drive to Mendocino, or down to Santa Cruz and down the coast. My ambit had expanded to most of California. But that was it – California.

All of a sudden, at age 25 I was in Vietnam. I had burst out of California, the United States, and even North America in one fell swoop. The world was my oyster. I think others of us felt the same way. While I was in Saigon I made a point of seeing as much of the world as I could. As part of their generosity, in addition to paying for a two-week vacation back home in the United States every year, IBM gave us two one-week R&R (Rest and Recreation) trips anywhere we wanted to go, provided the distance did not exceed that of Saigon to Honolulu. That was a pretty good radius – it would reach to Europe.

While I was in Vietnam I visited The Philippines, Australia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Kathmandu, France, Spain, Monaco, and Cambodia, as well as the countries to which I went on business, primarily Japan.

And this is an introduction to the trip that we took to Cambodia in 1970.

Ankor Wat is among the Seven Wonders of the World, at least according to some characterizations. It was hard to get to. Cambodia had no diplomatic relations with the United States. Given a challenge like that, we felt compelled to go. Bob Curtis, Bill Shugg and resolved to do it. We could obtain visas through the Australian Embassy. Cambodia was actually happy enough to have American visitors; it was just that Prince Sihanouk was performing a delicate balancing act between communist China and North Vietnam on one side, and the United States on the other. He did not want to appear too welcoming.

We got our visas from the Australian Embassy and flew into Phnom Penh on Royal Air Cambodge. That's where we spent the night – and I got the case of diarrhea mentioned elsewhere. We toured Phnom Penh by pedicab. The major attraction seemed to be an American F86, a Korea-vintage plane that had been shot down some time back and was mounted in the middle of town. As we traveled silently to the swish-swish of our pedicab driver's motion, a somewhat more rapid swish-swish appeared beside us. It was other pedicab drivers, bearing gifts in the form of ladies of the night. We politely declined.

The next day we flew to Siem Reap where Ankor Wat is located.

We had not made reservations, and it turned out that the two first class hotels in town were full. They recommended a small Chinese run hotel. We booked our rooms and spent the day going through the ruins. They are quite extensive and very vertical. They are reminiscent of Mayan ruins such as Copan in Honduras. At any rate, after a day of climbing up and down umpteen very steep steps on the temples, we had a quiet dinner and retired.

The next morning we got on Royal Air Cambodge and returned to Phnom Penh, where we would spend another night before flying back to Saigon. After we breakfasted and got ready for our departure, Bob Curtis patted his pockets to find his passport. Not there! A moment of panic. What had happened?

Bob recalled. He had put his passport under his pillow. He did not want some Cambodian thief to sneak in in the middle of the night and take it. That's where it was! Back in Siem Reap, with those shifty Chinese hoteliers.

We had no contacts in Phnom Penh. The best we could do was to talk to the airlines and tell them our problem. I was the designated spokesman, as nobody spoke English and I could get by manageably in French. They told us to wait. They called their office in Siem Reap, which in turn called the Chinese hotel. The Chinese had been quite distressed to find this passport and have no way to return it. The airline sent a courier to the hotel to pick up the passport and put it on the next flight down to Phnom Penh. It was waiting for Bob when we got to the airport after one more night in Phnom Penh, and we returned happily to Saigon.

Diarrhea, Ankor Wat and a lost passport would have been enough excitement – but there is more to report! There was a currency crisis when we were there. Cambodia, like a lot of Third World countries, suffered inflation. They had recently started printing a 500 rial note, the biggest piece of currency in circulation. However, just as quickly as it was introduced, it was counterfeited.

We knew nothing of this, of course, as we arrived from Saigon. We changed enough money to get by. The hotel gladly gave us 500 rial notes. The next morning, as we were leaving for Ankor Wat, we went to pay our bill. We proffered the 500 rial notes that they had given us. Oh, no! We can't accept 500 rial notes. They might be counterfeit! You have to pay us in smaller bills, or in US dollars.

We went back and forth, once again using my somewhat improved high school French, and we remained adamant that if they were not going to take the 500 rial notes that they had given us the day before, they were going to get paid. They finally relented and we were on our way.

16. Going to the beach with the girls.

It is 50 miles as the crow flies from Saigon Southeast to the beach at Vung Tau. We fairly frequently drove there on weekends. Our Vietnamese girlfriends were of course delighted to get out of the city.

It would have seemed to me back in those days almost impossible to take a trip like that without a car. However, from what I observe in Latin America, Ukraine and other poorer countries I'm sure that there was good and frequent bus service. But the girls certainly appreciated the comfort and speed of going by car, and of course the fact that somebody else is paying for it.

The water was nothing special. It was rather turbid. There isn't anything to speak of in the way of surf. The water is, however, fairly warm. It was a comfortable place to swim.

Vung Tau had been a tourist destination even back in the days of the French. It had quite a few restaurants, nothing fancy but certainly enough to satisfy you. You could, of course, get a lot of local fish. You could, of course, wash it down with the local drinks.

In this discussion every theme seems to lead to another one. Here is an aside on beverages. The French had introduced beer to Vietnam, and the Vietnamese rather liked it. Mr. Tho, my landlord in Danang was the manager of the French brewery. It turns out that his company, Bier 33, was an established brand in France, as was Panther Pils. Those brands set up shop in Vietnam and seem to dominate the market. As far as I could tell it was about as good as the French product. That, however, is faint praise. French beer is just not up to par with Belgian or German.

Whatever the case, any place you went in Vietnam you could order a Ba-Muy-Ba, which is Vietnamese for 33. I forget how you ordered Panther Pils in Vietnamese. To an American it was panther piss – we all knew what that meant.

The alternative drink would've been a gin and tonic. Vietnam had its own tonic water production. I forget what the brand was, and it didn't taste exactly like Schweppes, but it did the job. They also had a local gin that was not terribly expensive. Add a bit of the Vietnamese lime, which was really great, and you had a truly drinkable drink.

So, to return to the thought of Vung Tau, I can picture sitting under thatched roofs, which stood atop wooden poles, sheltering simple wooden tables and chairs from the sun. It was a great way to while away an afternoon.

Another attraction to the girls was that they were able to buy the produce of the countryside. One that I remember especially well was the durian, or stinky fruit. The girls could not get enough of this delicacy. It looked rather like a small breadfruit, lumpy, little bit spiky on the outside. It had a smell somewhere between Limburger cheese and a dead skunk. The girls would insist that we stop and buy some. I did my best – I insisted that they wrap it in a plastic bag and put it in the trunk of the car – but it was all to no avail. Within 10 minutes this car would reek to high heaven. The girls went into ecstasies of salivation waiting to get home and sink their teeth into it.

17. The Tan Son Nhut gate pass system

After the Tet Offensive of 1968 the Vietnamese Army tightened security. Whereas we used to be able to drive directly onto Tan Son Nhut airbase, we now needed a vehicle pass. The gate guards would check us as we entered.

The pass had to be displayed in the lower right corner of your windshield. Having the pass was no problem, but they required that you get it updated every month. You did this by making a special trip with your documentation, whereupon they would punch your gate pass sticker with the appropriate symbol, something like ▲, ♠, ♣, ♥, or ♦. It consumed a major amount of time.

I am not a great fan of systems and bureaucracies in the first place. We had a handheld one-hole punch in our office. The kind that made round holes. The name and address of the manufacturer was stamped in the handle. I wrote to them and asked for a catalog of products. Sure enough, they had a whole range of hole punches, including every pattern that was being used for the gate pass system. Feeling rich, I ordered them on my own account. When they came I gave them to Bob Barbeau, the office manager. After that, only one person had to go to Tan Son Nhut every month to find out what shape they were using, after which everybody could validate their stickers in the office. Problem solved.

18. Buying artwork in Vietnam

Marble Mountain represented the southern perimeter of the safe space in Danang. It was also a source of a lot of carved marble that showed up in the Danang markets. They would make beautiful white Buddhas, looking incredibly serene, to sell to tourists. I wound up buying a couple of marble Buddhas and one made out of Rose Quartz which I had until I left for Ukraine.

I later bought a small statuette of Buddha out of carved jade. That one is still with me here in Kyiv. It is just about my only memento from Vietnam.

Another attractive local handicraft was mother-of-pearl inlaid teak panels. The theme was invariably four seasons, displayed in four panels. It struck me as curious, because Vietnam's tropical location does not give it four seasons. There is the hot season, the rainy season, and the cool season. The seasons are somewhat different between Danang and Saigon, but in any case there are not four of them.

Be that as it may, they produced these panels with a four seasons motif. I understand that further north, up in Hanoi, they may in fact have seasons. I bought some panels in Danang. They were very glossy, covered with thick black lacquer with the very white mother-of-pearl shining through. I brought them home for Christmas and my family liked them.

When I moved to Saigon I discovered antique stores. The older versions of this type of work were done in on lacquered teak. It was polished and oiled, but nonetheless natural wood. Some of the older work was absolutely exquisite. I bought two sets of panels, one of them of for independent panels about 3 feet high by 10 inches wide, and later a second screen, four panels connected by hinges, the whole thing about 6 feet high and probably 7 feet wide.

The antique dealer had given me the story on this. It had been commissioned by a Vietnamese prince for his bride in the late 19th century. I got the names of all the parties. It was the best piece of work I had ever seen, so I paid the asking price of \$3,000. It decorated my apartment for a while. There was a question of how I was going to get it home, so when one of the USAID people rotated back to the United States, I gave him some money to include it in his hold baggage. That got around questions of customs and the like, and the fact that IBM was not going to ship much baggage for me, at least so far as I could tell.

I don't recall what happened to the smaller panels, but I kept the \$3,000 set up through the time of my divorce in 2006. The winters in Washington had not been especially kind to it, and a couple of pieces of the mother-of-pearl had fallen out. But it had generally weathered pretty well.

After separating from my wife, I rented a house in Rockville, Maryland. I was looking for male schoolteachers as housemates. That didn't work. I got no answers. What I finally wound up with were two young women, about 30. One of them, Lan, was Vietnamese. Absolutely beautiful and gracious – it certainly recalled what I liked about Vietnam. And, very much in character, she had a fiancé who was just as attractive, a guy named Viet Nguyen. They got married just about the time I move permanently to Ukraine. I was delighted to be able to give them that screen as a wedding present.

19. The house I shared with Bill Shugg and Bob Curtis.

When I moved to [Saigon](#) in 1969 I moved into a [duplex](#) which I shared with Bill Shugg. Bill is a tolerant sort – he never criticized me, although I suspect he occasionally bit his tongue. Bob Curtis lived in the other duplex.

Bill had a live-in relationship with a beautiful young woman named Kim Chi. She seemed to me to be everything you could want in a partner. She was mild-mannered, clean, and pleasant to be around. I, on the other hand, remained unattached.

One would think that Kim Chi would be accustomed to the native flora and fauna of Vietnam. However, her girlish reactions sometimes surprised me. I remember once when she shrieked as a gecko fell off the ceiling and onto her head. We had lots of geckos. They were welcome, as they kept the mosquitoes down. They were entertaining. A gecko's brain is not altogether too big. Occasionally you would watch them on the ceiling and one would catch a cockroach instead of a mosquito. A cockroach is very big, quite a mouthful for a gecko. A gecko's teeth are pointed backwards, just like a snake. Once a gecko was committed to a cockroach, he had to eat the thing. You could watch them struggle for an hour or more when they had tackled something a little bit too big.

Geckos spend most of their lives on walls and ceilings. They seem to have been absolutely cut out for human civilization. I don't have any idea where they lived before they started to share houses with people. However, sharing houses with people, the people are privy to their

most intimate acts. You have to learn not to be put off by gecko poop. It is not that offensive, and not hard to clean up. Gecko lovemaking is another story. Geckos make love the same way most reptiles do. They managed to do it on the ceilings, holding on through the most intimate acts. It is fascinating to watch. Is even more interesting when they go overboard and lose their grip and fall. I only saw that happen about twice.

Geckos get into everything. One time Bob Curtis opened the refrigerator to find a totally torpid gecko hanging by one arm from a rack. He picked it up and put it on the table. After five minutes he bumped the table to see if the gecko would respond. No reaction whatsoever. He feared it was dead. However, 10 minutes later when he tried again, the gecko popped to life, looked around, and ran off. They are hardy creatures.

However, there are some things that they cannot overcome. When Bob— or perhaps it was his landlord – painted the apartment he found a gecko that was tragically stuck in the paint. That guy was a goner.

20. Monique and Jean-Jacques

In 1970 I had been in Vietnam for two years and knew the country pretty well, spoke Vietnamese somewhat and had brought my French up to snuff. The people in the IBM office knew as much.

Back in those days we carried huge Motorola walkie-talkies. The customer engineers needed them to respond quickly to service calls. Those of us in the sales division of IBM simply took advantage of the convenience. I got a call from Ron Martin, one of the customer engineers, who was downtown at the Continental Hotel. The Continental was the major hotel in town, where most of the newsman and foreign visitors hung out.

I could identify immediately with Ron's problem. He had met a Vietnamese beauty with whom he could not speak, but who had an obvious interest in him. He needed a translator fast.

The beauty was Monique. She had just left Cambodia as the war began there. She had been fathered by a Japanese soldier and a Vietnamese mother during the Japanese occupation of Cambodia. She was mistress to a French rubber plantation owner, had been fairly well treated and, given that her intelligence was evident to all, educated along the way. However, the Frenchman had scrambled back home to France and she had been left to make it to Saigon on her own. She had no resources beyond her looks and her wits. She was playing those to full advantage.

Ron was a pretty good find. Although they did not have to be college graduates, customer engineers were generally pretty smart guys. Ron was handsome and kind as well. The negotiation was fairly straightforward. She needed a place to stay, and Ron would certainly

enjoy the company of such an exquisite creature. They needed my language skills to establish the quid pro quo, but biology would take care of the rest.

There was a kicker in the deal. Monique had a younger half-sister in tow. Nga, a full-blooded Vietnamese, not as quick or outgoing, but beautiful in her own right. Where would she stay? I could hardly say no.

Nga shared my bed for two or three weeks, and then left under circumstances that I do not recall. We certainly did not fight; we could barely really talk. I think that Monique used her charms to improve her situation and invited Nga back to live with her. In any case I never saw Nga again. But Monique did reappear in my life.

I belonged to two French clubs in Vietnam, the Cercle Sportif and the Cercle Nautique. A downtown club for sports and one on the river for swimming and water skiing. The French tolerated Americans because they wanted the dues, but they clearly condescended. One of the nicer Frenchman was a fellow named Jean-Jacques Serville, who worked for a French import export firms in Cholon, the Chinese section of Saigon. He was an odd looking fellow, walleyed like Marty Feldman, but intelligent and pleasant. One day he invited me to his wedding to... Monique!

I was a yokel. I had been to a couple of weddings, but I didn't get it. I invited a couple of my friends, Sandy and Cary to come along. Jean-Jacques was much more civilized. A look of mild surprise crossed his face as I showed up with two unannounced guests, but he accommodated us at the reception at a large Chinese restaurant in Cholon. There was course after course of Chinese food. Two extra guests did not strain their hospitality. And there were these wickedly cute and innocent Chinese girls walking around with ewers full of brandy, filling your cup if it fell an iota below maximum. We drank an extraordinary number of toasts.

I speak French fairly well, and Cary does not too badly. We also offered our toasts. However, on the third or fourth time around, Cary rose to give a toast, folded, and slid under the table, just like in a cartoon.

We said our goodbyes, after which Sandy and I took Cary to a taxi. We get him home to his girlfriend Thu, who was waiting anxiously. We put him to bed. I was not terribly sober and I went home to bed myself. For the next two weeks I could beat Cary at chess, something that had never happened before or since.

And that is the story of Monique and Nga. A story of lust and love and war and drinking.

21. Colette and the C 47 set

John Smith had a wry, mordant humor. He needed it. He seemed jinxed to be attracted to women who did not treat him very well. He had come from Washington DC, where the

woman in question was named Stephanie. I never met her, but, the stories he told offered a very fully portrayal of the early feminist movement.

In Saigon he met a woman named Colette. Colette was also quite a piece of work, about 3/8 Vietnamese, 5/8 French. She had a high opinion of herself and of the French, and a correspondingly low opinion of most Americans. The two of them lived in a house across Pasteur Street from me. Sometime around 1971 John transferred from the Saigon office to Bangkok. Colette divided her time between the two cities.

John's sense of humor often got him in trouble. The one anecdote that is told over and over is that when Colette boasted of raising John above his peasant roots, introducing him to the "Saigon jet set," John quietly remarked, "Well, C 47 set at any rate," The C 47 being the Army version of the ancient Douglas DC three. Colette got irate.

On another occasion I brought a French woman to Vietnam. I had met Liliane Pagnet on the beach in Nice, where we started a fling. Round eyed women were a rarity in Vietnam, as were women with whom I could talk. Liliane was not terribly well-educated, but she was decent enough looking.

Naturally, I introduced her to my neighbor Colette. I gather – memory is fuzzy, and I am sure I did not know at the time – that Colette told her that she could do much better than me. In any case, I was soon alone with no lady friend, holding a return ticket from Saigon to Nice, as Liliane was off cavorting with soldiers. Our fling was over. I cashed in the ticket and got on with my life.

I have no idea what happened next, but when I was living in Germany with my new Vietnamese wife Josée my parents forwarded a letter from Liliane addressed to me in the United States, asking if we might get together again. That was history, of course.

In any case, you might gather that I was thereafter somewhat guarded in my interactions with Colette.

I had another run-in with Colette when I was planning to go to Bangkok. She asked me to bring a package to John. My relationship with her was already rather strained. She had made some less than kind remarks about the ladies who visited my apartment across Pasteur Street from her. Why she would even have known or cared I don't know, but she was a busybody. At any rate, I asked her what was in the package. I did not want to be bringing a sealed package into Thailand, especially from somebody whom I know had had a little bit of experience with the opium trade. Colette absolutely blew up. I think in the end I did not bring it.

John brought Colette back to the United States, California I think. I never saw her again, but she is the kind of women whose path through life leaves a trail of sparks like a dragging

tailpipe. I kept hearing similar stories about her for a couple of decades until John finally left her. I think.

22. Cockroaches

When I first came to Saigon in late 1968 I was living in a villa that they kept for temporary visitors on the south side of Cach Mang just west of the train tracks. As I recall it was about three rooms. At any rate, there were cockroaches all over the place. I had just come from California, which has relatively few cockroaches. Those that there are small and tame. These Vietnamese editions were enormous and aggressive.

I'm a take charge sort of guy. I resolved to do something about the cockroaches. The next time I was at the PX I bought a big spray can of bug killer. I had watched where the cockroaches went. This house, like most in Vietnam, had an outdoor kitchen with a concrete floor. The concrete floor was poured on an incline so that the water drained into an outlet in the center. Just like the diagram above of my house in Danang. The outlet was covered by a cast-iron grate, probably 4 inches in diameter. That was where the cockroaches were coming from. Gotcha!

I walked fearlessly up to the drain, pressed remorselessly on the spray can button and filled that entire drain with toxic mist from a good 30 second blast of pesticide. That ought to do them!

It certainly got the cockroaches' attention. They came pouring out. And pouring. And pouring. I could not believe how many there were. The air was thick with them. I beat a quick retreat behind the door to the kitchen. They came under and around the door. Soon they were all through the first room. I ran out into the second room and closed that door. It was tolerable, but I didn't want to test them anymore with the bug spray. I went out the front door and stayed gone for a good long while. When I returned I made my peace with the cockroaches. It lasted for the duration of my four year stay in Vietnam. Live and let live.

Another impression I got during that first month was the locals' attitude toward domestic animals. There was an Army veterinarian somewhere in the area who had noticed a serious problem. There was a male dog with such a severe case of venereal disease that he was in danger of dying. The vet had operated on the dog, depriving him of his doggieness in order to save his life. The Vietnamese wondered why he would do such a thing. And I thought to myself, if I were a dog, I would probably just as soon die.

23. A very practical outlook on sex.

The Vietnam War came right at the peak of the sexual revolution. The onset had been amazingly fast. When I graduated from high school in 1960, I and most of my friends were virgins, and so were the girls as far as we knew. We whispered when we thought it was not

the case, but even then, if it involved "good girls," it only involved their long-standing boyfriends.

By 1965 it was, as the song had it, "if you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with." As a student at Berkeley I had been approached one day as I sat on my front porch by a not unattractive girl simply offering herself to me. The drug revolution seemed to have a lot to do with it.

The soldiers who came to Vietnam were for the most part younger than me. The culture, and especially the popular music, were telling them that if they weren't getting sex, they were not getting their due out of life. They wanted it, and they wanted it now!

There were 500,000 American soldiers in Vietnam during the peak years of the war. That's one for every hundred Vietnamese. If you discount the Vietnamese who were out in the countryside, or old or young, you find that there were an incredible number of young American men for the number of young Vietnamese women. Moreover, most of the Vietnamese men were in the Army. There were a great many relationships formed.

Vietnamese culture, Oriental culture, treated sex differently than the Americans. Oriental cultures in general respect older people. Older elders had traditionally had some say in who the young people married. Marriage was seen not so much as a fulfillment of true love as founding a family with the intention of having children.

The Vietnamese women seem to have taken a very practical view of sex. It's enjoyable – and they are not adverse to enjoyment. It is also what is expected of them in order to have children. Having children is what women are supposed to do. More than that, sex is something that men expect, and men are there to take care of women. What's the question? Sex is a natural thing.

They did not worry about pregnancy nearly as much as girls in the United States did. If they got pregnant, so what? Vietnam was a country of extended families. If a girl had a child out of wedlock, her mother and aunts would raise it for her. They would often not do so without complaining, but somebody would take care the child. Although birth

Joke about VD in Vietnam

An American catches some disease. Goes to see an American doctor.

"I have some bad news for you. It seems we'll have to amputate."

The guy doesn't like that verdict at all. He goes to another American doctor, who tells him the same thing.

In a panic, he reasons that it is a Vietnamese disease; it might be better to see a Vietnamese doctor.

"Doctor, doctor, I'm really scared. The American doctors say they need to amputate. What do you think?"

"Ho ho ho. No need amputate. Three day – fall off by itself."

control pills had been available in the United States since about 1961, and condom use was fairly widespread, neither seem to be very common in Vietnam. The girls took their chances, and if they got pregnant, they seem to accept the baby. I don't recall much discussion about abortion.

Sexually transmitted diseases were also much different back in those simple days. AIDS would not become a threat for another 20 years, and even herpes wasn't yet in discussion. It was quite simple. There was almost nothing you could catch that couldn't be cured by penicillin. The worst fear was of a mythical bacteria called the "black syph," which though often talked about never afflicted anybody I knew.

The upshot was that the Americans could afford to be sexually reckless, and the Vietnamese girls had a fair incentive to go along. There were not any Vietnamese guys, and a Vietnamese girl who was fortunate enough to marry an American got a ticket out of her war-torn country. If she got pregnant, the guy might feel guilty and marry her. He might, in any case, give her some support.

Quite a few of us eventually did wind up marrying Vietnamese. Several couples remain happily married.

24. My Vietnamese marriage.

All good things come to an end. By 1972 Nixon was making good on his promise to end the American involvement in Vietnam. Henry Kissinger had signed a treaty committing us to pull out, leaving the South Vietnamese on their own. The war would continue for another three years, but without American presence, after which Saigon fell and the Communists took over.

As the US military pulled out, so did IBM. I had a question of where to go next. I really loved working overseas. I determined that IBM had exactly two other overseas offices similar to our Saigon office. One was in Japan – I already knew the people there – and the other was in Germany. I set my sights on Germany.

I had done pretty good work in Saigon, so my management could recommend me to the office in Germany. I think that they wrote letters on my behalf. I went to the Vietnamese PTT office downtown next to the Cathedral and booked a telephone call to the office in Germany. I had a conversation with the manager, a guy named Al Bissell, letting him know that I was interested. They accepted me in the spring of 1972.

At that time I was newly involved with a girl named Nguyen Thi My Hue, a cute young thing of 22, the daughter of a retired Chief Justice of Vietnam. She had been through the French school in Saigon and use the French name Josée. She was pretty, she was presentable, and she was reasonably smart. I didn't exactly love her, but it seemed close enough to take a chance. I suggested that we get married and go to Germany together.

She also had her reservations. Like most high-class Vietnamese, she thought of Americans is rather gauche. Her best friend My Linh, engaged to a French banker she had met at the Cercle Sportif, referred to me as "pistache." That's French for pistachio. I drove a pistachio colored Ford Maverick which they considered to be a pretty crude vehicle. But, I represented a ticket out of the country, and she came.

The Vietnamese bureaucracy was frighteningly complicated. In order to get married we had to jump through a great many hoops. Many people were in the business of jumping through these hoops, and there was an active business for go-betweens. Josée and I were well-enough connected to find a good one, a Vietnamese army major who did everything for us.

We had to find a friendly district, where he knew the officials. We rented me an apartment in a convenient part of town. We bribed the official, posted the banns of marriage, did all of the legal stuff, and got married in record time.

About this time I had to go to Iwakuni, Japan for a week, to teach 1401 autocoder to some Marines up there. When I got back, I think it was the end of June, we started planning the wedding. Larry Saslow graciously offered his house on Cach Mang for the reception. It was a wonderful party. Larry recently sent me a couple of photographs – I having long ago, three marriages and three continents back, lost the originals.

I got along pretty well with my Vietnamese in-laws. By that time I spoke just enough of the language to talk to Josée's mother, Nguyen Thi A. Her father, who had been born in 1900 and had spent much of his early life in France, could speak to me quite easily in French but didn't seem to be terribly interested in the whole affair. She is was the seventh child out of 12. The others whom I got to know were mostly the younger siblings, who were extraordinarily curious, quiet and respectful.

The rest of the story is that I had separated from Josée and was living in Germany by myself when Saigon fell. I nonetheless sponsored her family to come to the United States after they escaped as boat people. Josée and I reconciled for a year after I returned to the United States, and we bought a house for her family in Baltimore. As part of the finalization of our divorce after the reconciliation fell through, her family kept the house. They're nice people and I am not terribly broken up over this fact.

The divorce was another story. Josée had caught on to feminism extraordinarily quickly. When we divorced she hired a junkyard little dog lawyer, a woman named Nan Hunter whose specialty seems to have been defending black men accused of murder. She may have been evil, but she was not very effective. I won the divorce and didn't see much of Josée thereafter. In our last contact, which must've been in the late 1980s, she needed a copy of our divorce certificate so she could marry a Syrian guy. I have no idea what happened.

25. The soup stands near my house on Pasteur Street

Fast food, or street food, is a part of Southeast Asian culture. You find it in Thailand, Cambodia, and throughout Vietnam. The street vendors may have little wheeled carts, or they may just have bamboo baskets suspended at the ends of bamboo poles slung over their shoulders.

There are a variety of foods. Most typically, it would be a mixture of rice and meat and herbs wrapped in a banana leaf. I think that the name of it is ban my. When I lived in Danang I learned to enjoy them – they're rather spicy – and to trust them. After the first couple of months, my stomach was accustomed to Vietnam and I got along fine.

As an aside, it would've been impossible to figure out what was to blame if I did have stomach problems. My house in Danang was on low ground. There was a well out in back of the house, and you could see the water level looking down. It was run by a pump mounted on top of the well, which meant that it could not have been more than 25 feet down.

That fact, combined with the fact that it operated on a septic system, meant that sanitation was more or less marginal. Nonetheless, I survived. I add that in that house in Danang there was an outdoor courtyard in the back, one corner of which was the kitchen and another corner of which was an enclosed toilet with an overhead water tank. The water was pumped up to an open tank on the roof, so there was water pressure for the faucets.

Back to the street food. If it made me ill while I was living in Vietnam, I don't remember it. However, when Bob Curtis, Bill Shugg and I went to Cambodia to visit Ankor Wat, I made the erroneous assumption that the street food would be safe in Phnom Penh as well. Wrong! I had the worst case of diarrhea of my life during our three days there.

The really classy street food was phở. By now every country in the world is familiar with phở. However, it was totally new to us when we got to Vietnam. Although it was sold throughout the city, there were two streets which were famous for it. I lived for a year right next to one of them. My address was on Pasteur. The cross street, if memory and an old map serve me well, was Hien Vuong. There were soup restaurants just about every other storefront up and down the street. They served three kinds of soup as I recall. Phở ga, chicken soup and phở bo, beef soup. The beef could be raw or already cooked.

In any case, what they would do would be to fill the bowl with noodles, rice noodles as I recall, and then lay chopped scallions, lemongrass and other veggies on top. Then they would put the meat on. They would ladle boiling broth over the top. The broth cooked the meat, and they served it to you like that.

There were stools on the street by the restaurant where you were expected to eat. You took your chopsticks from a common can, took one of the flimsy little napkins and wipe them off so that you got clean chopsticks, and dug in. Depending on your taste, you might add hot peppers and nuoc mam before you ate.

There was another street in the Chinese part of town, Cho Lon, lined with similar phở stands.

The food was nutritious and not too filling. The Vietnamese are naturally slender people, and their diet went well with their body plan. It was not too much, it was delicious, and if you had things to do you didn't have to spend a long time with your meal.

26. How I started the BARFUP club.

Like every large company, IBM had a system for reimbursing employee travel expenses. If you went somewhere on company business they would pay for your transportation, hotel and meals. A delightful aspect of our assignment in Vietnam was that we were on travel status all the while we were there. The company paid for our meals!

I lived in Danang for my first year. My house was not far from the Polish Cannon officers club, but the menu in the officers' club was really kind of boring after a week or two. For variety, I would eat in the civilian restaurants in town. The choice was limited. There was a floating restaurant that served wild birds – sparrows were there specialty – and several kinds of fish. There was a Korean restaurant that catered to the Korean nationals who were working in support of the American war effort. It was authentic, but rather down-market, in keeping with the finances of its customers. There was one Chinese restaurant that I went to one time. Thereby hangs another tale:

The other IBM personnel in Danang were field engineers – computer repairmen. They lived together in a villa, where they had a Motorola walkie-talkie set up that they could use to communicate with one another and to take trouble calls from customers. They decided that they needed a secretary to operate the radio, so they hired a young Chinese woman. To be charitable, they did not hire her for her looks. She, on the other hand, would've scored a major coup if she were able to get an American boyfriend. It was this young thing, whose name I forget, who took me to the Chinese restaurant. Probably in an effort to get my hormones up to an operating level, she took charge and ordered for me. Pork ball soup. Made with real balls from real porkers. I'm glad she didn't tell me until the meal was over.

While I'm on the subject of the field engineers, I stayed in their villa for the first couple of weeks I was in town, until I found an apartment of my own. Every evening a vendor would walk down the street with a long bamboo pole over his shoulder, a basket hanging from either end, calling out in a singsong voice "Ho veet looong." The guys thought that I needed to have a treat. They bought me one. I opened it. "Ho" turns out to mean egg, "vit" means duck, and "long" means "which would've hatched tomorrow if we hadn't boiled the son of a gun." It's a little duck infant with all the feathers, the beak and everything. This experience came after about one month in country. Yes, I was not in Kansas anymore.

I don't know the rationale for IBM's having posted me in Danang. We did have a couple of large accounts up there, but the customers were awfully self-sufficient. I had to look for things to keep myself busy. I developed my own inventory system of where all of our

equipment was. It was a good programming exercise for me, but it wasn't anything anybody ever used. My customers had IBM 1401 and 1440 computers, which were already six years obsolete by then. It was hard to find people to teach the autocoder programming language. I taught myself autocoder and then turned around and taught Navy and Marines how to do it. The Army supply operation was even more backwards, using Univac 1005 ledger card systems supported by IBM electronic accounting machines. This technology was 15 years old the least. In the same way, I learned how to wire boards so I could show people how to do it. However, it made no sense to keep me up there, so they brought me back to the Saigon office in the end of 1969.

Upon moving to Saigon I found that everybody there was still eating in the bachelor officers' quarters. Good, healthy steak and potatoes, but not terribly interesting. We had a ritual lunchtime dialog:

Jeet yet?

No Jew?

Sgweet!

And we would pile into our cars to drive to a BOQ or International House, downtown on Nguyen Hue. There simply was not too much close to the office. We would occasionally go to the VNAF (Vietnamese Air Force officers club) on Tan Son Nhut airbase because it was closer. And fairly often we would go to the "Howard Johnson's", street vendors around the office.

I started agitating for going out to some of the better restaurants in town. The French had had a fairly significant cultural influence. There were good French restaurants, owned by honest-to-goodness Frenchmen.

It took a little bit of American cultural imperative to form a group. We called it the benevolent Association of Restaurant Fanciers United for Protection, or something similar. I doubt that anybody remembers the exact formulation, but the acronym was BARF-UP. We made a point of finding new restaurants as often as we could, and going to good restaurants every Tuesday night, I believe it was. The names of the French restaurants escape me. There was one called La Cave. There was a French Algerian restaurant on the top of an apartment building where they served wonderful couscous. There was a place down a dark alley called Le Gaulois, decorated with cartoons of Asterisk and Obelisk. We quite often went down to the Cho Lon section for Chinese food. Grant Giske reminds me of the My Cahn restaurant by the river.

There was a wild food restaurant where you could order delicacies like porcupine, deer and wild boar. There was a Vietnamese restaurant called Beef Seven Ways – Bo Bay Mot – not far from our office. We did not consider Vietnamese food to be anything very classy, but it tasted good enough and added to the variety.

27. The state-of-the-art.

Computers have changed remarkably since our days in Vietnam. The IBM 1401s I supported in Danang were 16K machines with printer, card reader/punch and tape drives. No disk. The smaller IBM 360 computers, such as we had at USAID and PA&E, had 64 and 128K. The big one in Red Beach had 512K. By comparison, the four-year-old PC I'm using to compose this text has 6GB – 12,000 times as much.

Communications, like computers, has shown the dramatic improvement in the intervening years. The state-of-the-art for sending data back and forth to the United States was the Autodin computer. It was a dedicated IBM 360/20 computer, with a card reader/punch and optional tape drives, which communicated at 2400 to 9600 baud (bits per second). It took up the floor space of a big double bed. My fiber optic connection here in Ukraine operates at 100,000 bits per second... and could be much faster if I needed more speed.

The first Trans-Pacific telephone cable had only been installed in 1964. Circuits were rare and expensive. We would sometimes queue for up to an hour for a short conversation over military lines. It was mostly business, though we did occasionally manage personal calls. Vietnam's French-installed PTT phone system could manage overseas calls, but they were very expensive.

Cars, by comparison, seem not to have changed much in the 50 years since. They are more efficient, but the principles are the same. The running board, carburetor, inner tube and manual choke were already history by the 1960s. The aspects that were changing were electronic. We had 8-track tapes, lots of high quality music in the cars.

The fact that cars in Vietnam were rolling antiques was due to economics, not technology. As in Cuba, Argentina and Uruguay, Vietnam's high import tariffs ensured that it was worth keeping the relics rolling. Most of the taxis were Renault 4CVs and Dauphines dating from the 1950s. A truly high-class ride was a two decade old Citroën 11CV "traccion," one of the world's first front-wheel-drive production cars.

We Americans were truly privileged to be able to bring in modern Japanese cars. I owned a 1967 Volkswagen beetle in California, which I sold to our manager Dan Feltham upon being assigned to Danang in my first year in Vietnam. The company provided me with a 1968 Toyota land cruiser and I didn't need my own car. When I moved to Saigon I bought a used Mazda and then bought a 1971 Ford Maverick through the PX. That was a mistake. The Vietnamese snickered. They knew that the Americans didn't know how to make cars and that I should've bought a Japanese brand. The pistachio color certainly stood out, but there was nothing whatsoever exciting about the car in any other way.

It is hard to think of other machines, appliances and the like that have improved vastly since those days. We did not need washing machines. Everybody in Vietnam employed maids to do their laundry. It is hard even to remember what the laundry facilities were like. It was

certainly all done by hand, and hung on the line to dry. The maids who did the laundry were sometimes not terribly sophisticated. My first month in Vietnam I was surprised one day upon returning home to see my brand-new sky blue tie (we wore bright colors in the 60s) hanging on the clothesline. Since we did not do our own cooking, we did not need mixmasters, toasters and things of that ilk. There has not, however, been all that much progress. The one modern machine which would not have been available in that era is the dishwasher. My experience with dishwashers, in three houses and the United States and now one in Ukraine, is that the things never work anyhow. We do a better job washing them by hand.

28. The loves we left behind – and didn't.

You readers may think I have some sort of an obsession, given the frequency with which I mention the women of Vietnam in this article. Bear in mind that we were single men in our 20s and it was the height of the sexual revolution. The Vietnamese women are attractive and their men were off fighting in the war. We were, as I quote elsewhere, "overpaid, oversexed, and over there."

We were not the first to discover the attractions of the place. The French homesteaders called the affliction "le fièvre jaune," or yellow fever. When one of our managers, a guy named John Parks, brought his wife over to Saigon the guys kidded him. Why would he bring a sandwich to a banquet?

With the hindsight of 50 years, I can offer a reason. Pepita Parks was a delightful woman and a wonderful companion. John had divorced her because IBM would not send single men to Vietnam. As soon as he got established he sent for her. The ruse worked. Everybody liked John, and they did not hold it against him that he had gamed the system.

It is reassuring to note that the human animal is for the most part a homebody at heart. A great many of the guys found a woman they liked and invited her to move in. Some shopped around for a good while before doing so, others got established right at the get go. John Moss and Stu Schmidt are still married to Jackie and Therese. Curt Maxwell remained married to Ngoc for a few decades. My marriage to Josée lasted seven years by clock time, though only one and a half by a lapsed time. We broke up, were apart for five years, and tried a reconciliation which worked only a few months.

Some people are born losers. Even with the best imaginable array of advantages – our money, our physical size, our United States citizenship, our sophistication, and the highly insecure life situations of the Vietnamese girls, some guys screwed it up. There was one field engineer named Jim who had a shapely but hard-bitten girlfriend who really got her hooks into him. Despite the fact that he was making twice as much as he would have back home, and all his living expenses were paid, he was perpetually broke. This woman managed to leech thousands of dollars per month from the man. I didn't know him well enough to talk about it,

and didn't want to get close enough to see how she'd managed the trick, but I had to have a grudging admiration for the thorough extent to which she had overcome hardship.

Another part of the human condition that has not changed is that some guys are simply indifferent to women, and some like the company of their own sex. These guys got along well with everybody else in the office, but I don't think that they formed the same kind of long-lasting friendships among the group as those of us who were more actively pursuing the opposite sex.

As a point of historical interest, I don't remember any particular prejudice against homosexuals. Male nurses hung out at the Air Force club near the Danang airstrip and would try to make time with any single guys such as myself who happened to wander in. I wasn't interested in wandered out just as quickly. What sticks in my mind is that they did not hesitate to come on to me, and I didn't find it either unusual or uncomfortable. During the 1970s, just I understand the situation is today, there were girly boys hanging out at the Continental Hotel. We knew they were there and we just ignored them. Just as an aside, one of my allies in a 1993 effort to oust a corrupt gay priest from our Episcopal church in Washington, D.C. was a guy who was gay himself – who had served in Vietnam and had retired from the Air Force as a full colonel. The contemporary propaganda about the historical repression of gays seems to me to be overblown.

29. The strength of the camaraderie

Men form their closest bonds under shared adversity. One of my closest friendships, lasting now late in life, is with a fellow soldier from the California Army National Guard. We spent a lot of time talking about the absurdities of Army life and scheming on ways to avoid being screwed by the system.

I'll have to say that the situation of IBM employees in Vietnam was the furthest thing in the world from adversity. Outsiders might have thought that we suffered, but in fact we had interesting jobs and we were not terribly burdened. We were, however, thrown into each other's constant company, and developed a genuine camaraderie. The couple of dozen men who will be most interested in what I am writing here represent that camaraderie. The men of IBM's Pacific operations have annual reunions in Las Vegas. Dan Feltham wrote [a book](#) about IBM's operations in Vietnam to which a number of us contributed.

By comparison, the alumni of the IBM office in Frankfurt, Germany do not to my knowledge have reunions or stay in touch a great deal. The hundreds of people who formerly served in the Army logistics center at Zweibrücken Germany still have annual reunions. One of their number, Mary Green, [wrote a book](#) about their experience. The IBM federal employees in the Washington area, who must number in the thousands, get together monthly for luncheon meetings as the Rusty Blues. Surveying all these organizations, I have to observe that the closeness of the Vietnam group is matched by none.

30. The "I-watch boys"

Vietnam was a poor country, and we Americans were much envied for our money and our possessions. The Vietnamese worked hard to separate us from our money.

Among the most down and out citizens were the street children of Saigon. They were quite numerous. They would beg for money. In one of the most ubiquitous ploys was to watch foreigners' cars for them. If you did not hire somebody to watch your car when you parked on the streets of Saigon, something bad might happen to it. If you get my drift.

A minor misfortune might be that somebody would urinate on your tires, so the car would stink when you come back. Your hubcaps might be missing. Your radio antenna might be broken, or somebody might have broken into the car and stolen the radio.

Whatever the I-watch boys demanded, and in my recollection it was probably a matter of pennies, was certainly worth the price.

31. Domestic bliss

The guys who had live-in girlfriends could enjoy a stable life. Everybody had a maid to do the wash. Hiring a cook was not a big deal. Cary and John, who shared a house at 102 Hong Thap Tu, were the very example of a delightful ménage. They not only enjoyed each other's company day in and day out, but they frequently entertained guests. Visiting dignitaries from Honolulu, San Francisco and Washington often enjoyed their hospitality. Bill Doody, the manager from Honolulu, avers that he did not believe for a minute that Thu and Jackie were "temporary maids." Nah! They were beautiful, poised, and totally at home.

Vietnamese home cooking is a delight in every way. The specialty is cha gio - spring rolls. In North Vietnam they are fairly large, in South Vietnam they are so small that one of them makes a mouthful. In either case they consist of a little bit of shredded pork, shredded carrots, other shredded vegetables and aromatic herbs wrapped in rice paper and then deep-fried. For a Vietnamese feast, the women get together and spend hours putting them together, talking and enjoying each other's company as they do so.

The men, for their part, are expected to express loud appreciation for what the women do and stay the hell out of the way. That involves drinking and talking among themselves. Hardly a difficult task.

When it came to entertainment at the Moss/Campbell household, the cooking would have already been done by Jackie and Thu, the mistresses of the house, and the cooks. The guest would experience only the cha gio, ban my, and other exquisitely wrought Vietnamese delicacies.

Those of us who generally lived without live-in lovers were on the outside looking in. It was a very attractive way to live. On the other hand, we had our freedom to do what we wanted at night. The problem was that there was not that much to do. Nightlife in Saigon pretty much revolved around the girly bars, and none of us were into that scene.

I do not have a very good recollection of how I passed the time, but it involved a lot of reading and conversation with the other guys who were not tied up in relationships. At this stage in my life I would have to say the time is best spent with somebody that you are serious about and want to form a family with.

32. Croquet in Lake Watson

Most young men are inclined toward sports. And I have to say, now in my senescence, that most young men are better at it than I was. Somebody else should write this account.

At the end of the working day we did not have a whole lot to do, and we often played croquet on the back lawn of the office villa. Croquet does not take a whole lot of room, and in that backyard, level, fenced in and bordered with Bougainvillea, we had certainly enough space.

The only fly in the ointment was water. Drainage was poor, and it would often puddle up. We named the resultant reservoir "Lake Watson" after IBM's founder, Thomas Watson.

The games of croquet were vicious. If somebody got a chance to send your ball into oblivion, you discovered that oblivion was a long ways away. The players were serious. The level of talent was daunting. That is, everybody's talent but my own. I had never been much good at sports, and this losing streak followed me here to Saigon. I would play, to be a good sport, but I suffered seeing my ball attacked, whacked, blown away to the extent that I had no prayer of ever winning.

Good sportsmanship requires that one does not complain. I did not. But I will leave it to others who were more successful at the game to chronicle the enjoyment derived therefrom. For myself, I was just as happy to see the event come to an end and get off to some things I enjoyed more, primarily dinner and conversation.

33. The SEAWA Gong in the Saigon office

Kipling wrote:

And the end of the fight is a tombstone white with the name of the late deceased,
And the epitaph drear: "A Fool lies here who tried to hustle the East."

We had our own problems with the Vietnamese way of doing things. Notwithstanding the fact that we were ostensibly there to help the Vietnamese – at least we believed it, even if they did not – they threw a good number of bureaucratic blockades up in our path.

There was a place of honor in our office for the SEAWA gong. A large, three-foot-diameter Chinese gong nicely engraved with dragons and other fearsome beasts that somebody had bought in Hong Kong, suspended on its own stand with a two-foot striker hanging down.

SEAWA stood for "Southeast Asia Wins Again." At our weekly office meetings, after having confronted a particularly difficult, or just plain silly impediment, a member of the office would strike the gong and explain the situation as humorously as possible.

34. The bar girls

Girly bars and brothels were fixtures in Saigon. Even if you never visited them, you knew about them. Actually, if you ever went out drinking, you became familiar with bar girls.

The bar girls supposedly spoke English – the customers certainly did not speak Vietnamese – but they had their own lingo. The first words out of their mouth were usually "You buy me drink," or "You buy me Saigon tea." A Saigon tea cost 500 piasters, a little over two dollars at the black-market rate. That's how the girls made their living – they split the money with the bar owner.

If you resisted the suggestion that you buy them a drink, they would challenge you. "You Cheap Charlie – you no buy me tea." Sometimes they elaborate it on this theme. One girl told me once "You Cheap Charlie – you must be from Texas." I have no idea what Texas had to do with it.

If you're really insistent, the insults got worse. "You #10 dinky dow" meant that you were the very opposite of a number one guy and you were kind of crazy.

We had our defenses. When the girls sidled up to one of us, asking, "What your name, G.I.?" we might say "Larry Revolver." She would repeat "Wary Wewolwer." We would say, that's right, Larry Revolver and smirk at her inability to pronounce it.

We would also at times claim that we were out of money. "Sorry, no have money. No payday." But the girls were not that dumb. They would answer in turn, "Bull shit. You civilian. No have payday. Have money all the time." And of course, they were right. We were just Cheap Charlies.

35. Water skiing from Club Nautique and Sunday afternoon volleyball games at Thi Nghe with the Frenchies.

Some of the more athletic members of our company have recommended that I write about Sunday afternoons playing volleyball and waterskiing at the French Club Nautique. I must confess that at the age of 25 I was quite a klutz, and another half-century hasn't seen me outgrow it. John Siniscal and Grant Giske loved waterskiing at the Thi Nghe Annex on the

Saigon River. There was a large oxbow in the placid waters just 2 m above sea level, with a canal cut through to save on navigation time. That formed an island, which they loved to waterski around.

Try as I might, I could never get upright on water skis. I would skew to the left or the right and fall down. I never even had the thrill of a partial success, skiing for 30 seconds or so as one actually should. Needless to say, the outings to Thi Nghe were more interesting to others than me. I must confess that the same is also true volleyball. Some are cut out for sport, others are not. I did what I could: running, bicycling and swimming. Those three sports take determination and demand nothing in the way of coordination. Determination was the single asset that I possessed, and still do. But I did not enjoy the afternoons in Thi Nghe as much as those who were, one might say, born to it. I recommend Dan Feltham's book "When Big Blue Went to War" for an account by somebody who understood the scene much better than I did.

36. The legacy of French colonial administration, and the sports clubs

The historical verdict on the French is that they were not the best of the European colonial powers. One cannot name a former French colony in the modern world that enjoys good government.

On the other hand, they were immensely effective at spreading French culture. The Vietnamese said that heaven would be characterized by French houses, cuisine and culture.

They were not, however, altogether ineffective. I learned a great deal about the Vietnamese language implementing the Vietnamese print train for USAID. Until the 1890s the Vietnamese used Chinese characters. A Frenchman named Alexandre de Rhodes developed a phoneticized alphabet that was able to represent the tonal quality of the language. Being solidly in charge, the French were able to universalize this language. It made reading and writing much simpler, as a result of which Vietnam had a very high literacy rate.

The French also introduced the notion of town planning. The streets in French Saigon were laid out in a very logical grid pattern, wide boulevards where they were needed, parks scattered around here and there. This is in contrast to the way in which oriental cities normally grow, just as in medieval Europe, by paving the cow paths. A glance at the map shows what happened when French influence diminished. Our office in Phu Nhuan was built on cow paths.

The French enjoy living well. They supported a great many first-class restaurants in the city of Saigon, which we got to know through the BARFUP club noted elsewhere. They set up a rail transportation network. By the time we arrived in the 1960s it was in disrepair – the French had lost control of the countryside in the 1950s. They had set up a Postal and telephone service, the PTT. It was not as effective as the PTT in France, which in turn was not as effective as the Bell system in the United States or the Bundespost in Germany. Still

and all, it got the job done. Some of us had old black telephones in our houses that actually worked.

The French set up police forces as well. The spiffy white uniforms of the traffic police in Saigon earned them the name "white mice." They were not a menacing force, simply genially corrupt. They might stop you for some supposedly infraction of the traffic laws, but a couple of hundred piasters was always enough to make the problem go away.

The French enjoy their leisure. Think of René Lacoste and his signature brand of sportswear, designed to show off the trim, sporty physique of an upper-class Frenchmen. As long as things were going well with their colonial empire, as they seem to have done up until World War II, the French had a fair amount of leisure. With time on their hands, money to spare and gorgeous weather, they turned to sport. They established a yachting club at the mouth of the Thi Nghe River (or creek, to be honest) in downtown Saigon. They established the Cercle Sportif for tennis and swimming adjoining the palace where the administrators lived. And they established a golf club out in the part of town where the airport would later be built.

There were not a great many French left after they gave up their colonial administration and allowed Vietnam to set up its own government. On the other hand, an increasing number of Americans showed up to prop up said government in the face of a growing movement favoring communism (some say) or at least independence from Western powers. The treasurers of these clubs must've decided that American money was certainly good enough and they allowed Americans to filter through their membership vetting process.

I am not the one who should be writing this story. I am a klutz. No good at tennis, golf, volleyball, waterskiing and other competitive sports. I do manage to get one arm ahead of the other in a swimming pool, so I did enjoy going to the Cercle Sportif. The club had other attractions as well. The bikinis around the pool were easy on the eyes – it is where I met my Vietnamese wife. It was not far from USAID, and we would go there for lunch from time to time. It also had a pretty good barbershop.

I never attempted to play golf. We occasionally went to the restaurant at the golf club, but I do not recall the food being especially tempting and it was quite a ways away.

There was a pretty good restaurant at the main installation of the Club Nautique. In the colonial style of the tropics, it was open on the sides, with a 12 to 14 foot ceiling beset with ceiling fans to keep the breeze going. Its setting right beside the river contributed to its most remarkable feature. There were mosquitoes everywhere, and this ceiling was a serpentine labyrinth, a living arabesque, of geckos maneuvering to eat them. I became quite a connoisseur of geckos, and I have never seen as dense a collection as in this club. It was a fascinating floor show.

The Club Nautique had established an annex a few miles up the Saigon River to support waterskiing and volleyball. It was my first and last attempt at waterskiing, which was an utter

flop. Some of the guys enjoyed playing volleyball. As I recall, Jim Strandine, one of our administrators, was really good. I had that kind of Charlie Brown feeling, or perhaps that of Hobbes' friend Calvin, being the last one chosen. I usually found it more enjoyable to swim, or simply drink and enjoy the conversation.

Lest I portray myself as totally unathletic, I was embarked on a lifelong program of physical fitness by this time. I would run every day. Danang was ideally situated for running. As I noted elsewhere, I would drive to the beach most days and run. In my first house in Saigon in the Phu Nhuan district I would simply run along the streets. Jogging had become kind of a thing to do, and there were quite a few other Americans out doing it. When I moved closer to the center of the city there was a quarter of a kilometer track located next to a school. As with swimming, I had the dexterity required to get one leg in front of the other in a fairly rhythmic manner. I never got very fast – seven minute miles – but it provided the aerobic conditioning that has been going for a lifetime.

37. Illnesses in Saigon. A case of rabies.

The list of immunizations we had to get before going to Vietnam was daunting. My shot records shows yellow fever, cholera, typhoid, hepatitis, polio, tetanus, diphtheria, smallpox and some other stuff. You could not vaccinate against malaria, so we had a jar of chloroquine tablets in the office and we took them with regularity.

My observation was that the Vietnamese were not terribly afflicted by any of these diseases. I don't know if they had built-in immunity or if the disease was not as scary as was indicated. There were, however, other things that we hadn't been warned about.

During my year in Danang I came down with an undiagnosed fever that put me in the hospital for about a week. It was high – 103 and more. They couldn't do anything except take me under observation. It was a Navy hospital, treating the serviceman from all over I Corps, the northernmost part of South Vietnam. The patients I remember best were the malaria victims. They would get so feverish they would scream in pain, and the medics dragged them into cold showers to cool them off.

There were a handful of hangers-on in the American community in Phu Nhuan, soldiers of fortune who scrounged around looking for work with the American contractors and others. There was one guy who lived around the corner from our office. One day he came by, looking ashen and shaking. He needed some medical help badly. It turned out that he had gotten bitten by a neighborhood dog and hadn't done anything about it. Wrong move. Within a few days he was dead of rabies.

Intestinal parasites were a threat as well. My housemate Bill Shugg spent several weeks getting rid of the case of amoebic dysentery. People got tapeworms. The treatment involved, as I recall, starving yourself and then taking some strong medicine that would flush a tapeworm out of your system. At any rate, I remember one time going to the toilet in USAID

and looking down at the bowl, only to see a rather long tapeworm looking back up at me. I flushed it down and then went about my business.

Venereal disease was fairly prevalent, but not yet lethal. Neither herpes nor AIDS had yet appeared on the scene. The medical corpsmen dispensed a lot of penicillin, and that seemed to cure whatever ailed anybody.

38. The traffic in Saigon. My parents visit – driving across town with the policeman following me. Bribery.

My parents were very moral, intelligent, industrious people. They would have been better situated in life except for my younger sister's extraordinary illness. A case of measles in 1951 turned into spinal encephalitis which almost killed her. By the time she recovered they had \$50,000 in medical bills, and a daughter who required ongoing attention from a number of therapists to rebuild a normal life. Even with both of them working, it was two decades before they could see their way out from under.

My being in Vietnam was an opportunity that they could not pass up. They had a lifelong interest in travel. My mother worked preparing manuscripts for the anthropology department at the University of California, Berkeley. I invited them for their first overseas travel, and they came.

I showed them all of the sites of Saigon, driving around in my pistachio colored Ford Maverick. I introduced them to my friends in the office, took them to the good restaurants, and showed them whatever might have interested them.

One day I drove them downtown, from our office, to meet some friends for lunch. The Saigon traffic was as it always was, a vast jumble of tiny to huge vehicles, man powered to relatively fast. Pedestrians walked along the side of the street. They often carried bamboo poles with baskets suspended from the ends with goods to sell. There were bicycles. Not just ordinary bicycles, but bicycles with racks on the back stacked high with goods to sell. Sometimes children – two or three in addition to the cyclist himself. There were pedicabs. These involved the backend of a heavy-duty bicycle but a front end with two wheels instead of one, with a seat barely wide enough for two people just above the front axle. These so-called cyclos had been a standard form of transportation for decades. As we discovered on our trip to Phnom Penh, they had remained the standard in Cambodia up to that era.

Next came motorized transportation. Honda 50s were ubiquitous. We kept count of the number of people we would see riding a single Honda 50 motorcycle. I think the record is seven. Daddy driving, mother right behind him, and three little children in front, straddling the gas tank and on daddy's lap, and two kids in back. Sailing along as serenely as the smiling Dr. Seuss characters in *The Cat in the Hat*. There were larger motorcycles as well, many with sidecars, and some motor driven cyclos of the same design as the bicycle cyclos.

The dominant form of automobile was the 1950s vintage Renault 4CV taxi, usually painted blue and gold. We Americans rarely took buses, but we were fairly steady passengers of the taxis. We knew how to bargain with them – you don't get in until you establish where you're going and what the price will be. There was room for one person in front, and three in the back if you squeezed and nobody was too fat. There were also a few taxis of other makes, notably the Citroen "traccion." It may have been a more prestigious car than the Renault, but it was hardly bigger. The drivers, being small men, kept the front seat slid all the way forward, so your knees banged on the dashboard.

There were, of course, private cars on the street. It took a man of some importance to be able to afford a car, and they demonstrated their self-importance as they honked and pressed to get through the mess.

The next step up in size were the delivery vans, which might have been of ancient French provenance but were increasingly imported from Japan. Some of them had only three wheels. Most of them were rather skinny, an advantage for weaving through Saigon traffic. However, there were also larger trucks in the mix.

Finally came the military vehicles. We rarely saw tanks or other actual military hardware on the streets, but the military did have a generous collection of Jeeps, 3/4 ton pickups, 2 ½ ton and 5 ton trucks. Some of the streets were such that a 5 ton truck took up most of the roadway.

This is an incomplete list, but it gives you the flavor of driving in Saigon. Traffic did not move terribly fast. 25 miles an hour would be a pretty good speed except on the main roads. The most impressive thing was how little distance the drivers seem to feel they needed between one another. If you were riding down the street with the windows open, you could easily reach out and touch the other traffic. And they could touch you! Cary Campbell was riding along with his window down, arm resting on it, when two cowboys on a Honda 50 snatched the Rolex he had recently bought in Hong Kong right off his wrist. There was nothing he could do – their motorbike slithered through traffic and was gone in a heartbeat.

Of course, the streets were noisy and smelly as well. The motor scooters (oops, forgot to mention them) had two cycle engines that burned oil. The older cars burned oil just as a matter of course – many needed rings and valves. The 5 ton diesel trucks belched black clouds of smoke when they shifted gears.

This was what my parents saw as we weaved our way through town. I was of course showing off that I knew how to navigate all of this chaos. As we went, a white mouse on a Honda 50 started to follow us, with lights flashing.

I knew that I hadn't done anything egregiously wrong. I told my parents not to worry, he probably just wanted a bribe. But he continued to follow us, block after block. My mother got nervous. Finally, after a long long time, I told her that I would give in and give him the bribe.

I got out of the car and talk to him. He informed me that one of my brake lights had burned out and I had better fix it. He didn't want any money. I was terribly embarrassed to explain all of that to my mother. My father just laughed.

39. Parklane brand doobies.

America as a nation could never figure out what to do with marijuana. There was a schizophrenic divide, between the horrors of the movie "Reefer Madness" and the casual acceptance first by musicians and then by college campuses, and finally by young people at every station in society throughout the 60s.

We Americans in Vietnam were likewise divided. Where I worked closely with the military, in Danang, the officers studiously looked the other way. Everybody had bunkers in which to take refuge in case of Vietcong rocket attacks. There were separate bunkers for the officers and enlisted people. The enlisted bunkers at Red Beach were adorned with psychedelic Day-Glo posters. The Marines would go down there and spend a lot of time, and a lot of acrid smoke would emerge, and nobody would ask any questions. As I have mentioned, the Red Beach Marines brought duffel bags of marijuana up to Okinawa. I cannot imagine that the officers were unaware of what was going on, but I can certainly understand why they did not want to officially notice it.

I had been introduced to marijuana in 1961, when it was still kind of a rarity on college campuses. When I returned to the University in 1965, now on the Berkeley campus, it was quite widespread. My National Guard unit consisted to an increasing degree of college-educated draft dodgers. Whereas in the early 60s the Guard had been kind of a blue-collar unit, they were now able to get the cream of the crop. When I joined in 1964 it was still fairly easy to get in. By 1966 they had changed the process. My unit, Company A of the 49th Signal Battalion, received its headcount allotment for the fiscal year sometime around April. They would interview potential guardsmen at the first meeting in July, the beginning of the new fiscal year. In 1966 the sun came up on a long line of people who were interested, very interested in shelter from the draft. This included two of my friends, Jim Stewart and a gay friend of my girlfriend Chris, whose name I forget. The upshot is that the guard was taking people who were highly competent and had a lot of experience with the dope scene on campus. By 1967 everybody was smoking it. That was my background when I came to Danang. I wasn't a heavy smoker, but I certainly knew what it was.

It turned out that there were sidewalk vendors right outside the navel headquarters in Danang, the so-called "White Elephant," selling cartons that were labeled as Parklane cigarettes. Parklane was a cheap Vietnamese brand. However, the cigarettes had been modified. Industrious little fingers – children – carefully opened the carton of 10 packs, then carefully opened the cellophane of the individual packs, took out the individual cigarettes, rolled them between their fingers so that the tobacco fell out of the tube onto the ground, and then carefully replaced it with marijuana. It was an ideal system. The marijuana was much easier

to smoke than the hand rolled stuff we had had in Berkeley. It seemed to be just as powerful. The filters kept it from getting in your mouth.

Now, seeing as the vendors were sitting on the sidewalk right outside the Navy headquarters, one would think that the Navy would've asked them to him move a discrete block or so away, so as not to make the absurdities of the situation too obvious. They did not.

Observing all this, I assumed that the powers that be did not really intend to do anything about it, and I bought those loaded Parklane cigarettes and kept them in my house. Some of my more trusted military buddies, especially Lieut. Dave Pfeffer, enjoyed sharing them with me. I do not remember that other people from IBM smoked. My housemate, Bill Shugg, had graduated from Berkeley the same year I did. I'm sure he was familiar with it, but he did not seem to have any interest in it. These guys knew that I smoked it, and left me alone. I usually smoked it by myself on the roof or a balcony. I have no idea if my management knew anything about it or not.