

# Viet Nam Journal

## A Return after 47 Years



Source: vietnam-travel-guide.net

Mark D. Waterhouse

December 2017

I hope you enjoy looking through this journal as much as I have enjoyed putting it together.

When, on the last day of this trip, I posted on Facebook that I intended to do a journal once I got home, the idea was to elaborate a little on the ten days of Facebook posts I had done during the trip.

However, once I got working on it, it took on a life of its own. I found there was much more I wanted to know about the places we had gone and the things we had seen – and thought maybe others would also be interested. So I looked at many websites and learned even more than the voluminous information we had been given by our extraordinary guide Cong.

I found that while I had shared about 50 pictures in the Facebook posts, there were many more I thought people might want to see (and I still have a couple of hundred that aren't in here).

And so, this is the result, which I am happy to share.

As I note toward the end, the trip started as a once-in-a-lifetime event. Now we hope to do it again soon.



**Brother Marines – Lifetime Friends  
Terry Harris-Inman and Mark Waterhouse  
Camp Faulkner, Viet Nam - 1970**

## Contents

Preliminary Thoughts.....	1
Viet Nam – or Vietnam?.....	2
Getting There and Back.....	2
Some Thoughts about Korean Air.....	3
Our Traveling Companion .....	4
Our Guide and Driver .....	5
Vietnamese Currency.....	6
Where We Stayed – Hotels and Cities .....	6
Almanity Hoi An Resort & Spa .....	6
A Little about Hoi An .....	8
Imperial Hotel – Hue .....	11
About MACV.....	15
MACV During the Hue Tet Offensive .....	16
A Little about Hue .....	17
Saigon Tourist Hotel – Dong Ha .....	18
A Little about Dong Ha.....	19
Silk Path Hotel – Ha Noi .....	21
A Little about Ha Noi.....	21
Meals.....	22
The Tour Itinerary .....	27
Arriving In-country (September 3, 2017).....	27
Day 1 (Monday, September 4, 2017).....	28
Resort and Other Development.....	28
Marble Mountains .....	33
Marble Carving Workshop .....	35
The Legend of Marble Mountain .....	39
Marble Mountains Tour .....	39
Marble Mountain Air Facility and Camp Faulkner .....	48
China Beach.....	49
The Cham Museum .....	51

The Cao Dai Temple .....	54
The Remainder of Day 1.....	56
Day 2 (Tuesday, September 5, 2017).....	57
A New Highway .....	57
Rice Harvesting .....	58
Tam Ky.....	61
Chu Lai Combat Base.....	62
Khong My Towers .....	67
Fire Support Base (FSB) Ross.....	71
Landing Zone (LZ) Baldy .....	74
Day 3 (Wednesday, September 6, 2017) .....	78
Thang Loi Company Silk Business.....	78
Lotus Farm .....	81
An Hoa Combat Base.....	84
Viet Nam Paper Industry.....	87
Liberty Bridge.....	87
Hill 65 .....	89
Hill 55 .....	92
Day 4 (Thursday, September 7, 2017) .....	94
Red Beach .....	94
Hai Van Pass (Ocean Cloud Pass) .....	98
Lang Co.....	101
Phu Bai Combat Base .....	104
Arriving in Hue .....	106
Day 5 (Friday, September 8, 2017) .....	113
The Citadel and Imperial City.....	113
Thien Mu Pagoda – Pagoda of the Heavenly Lady.....	123
Tomb of Tu Duc.....	127
Walk to the Hue Marketplace.....	135
Day 6 (Saturday, September 9, 2017) .....	138
City of Quang Tri .....	138
The 1972 Easter Offensive .....	141

An Unplanned Stop at a Vietnamese Wedding .....	141
Stopping to Honor An's Parents.....	143
Cửa Việt.....	143
The DMZ.....	147
Dai Do.....	152
Day 7 (Sunday, September 10, 2017).....	154
Mines Advisory Group.....	156
Rubber Plantation .....	157
The Rockpile.....	158
Vandegrift Combat Base .....	158
Khe Sanh Combat Base .....	161
The Battle of Khe Sanh.....	166
Laotian Border.....	167
Day 8 (Monday, September 11, 2017).....	167
Da Krong Bridge and Ho Chi Minh Trail .....	168
The Ho Chi Minh Trail.....	170
The A Shau Valley.....	170
Hill Tribe Bru Village.....	172
Some Scenes on the Drive down the Valley .....	175
A Luoi .....	176
Day 9 (Tuesday, September 12, 2017).....	178
Off to Ha Noi .....	178
Military History Museum / National Army Museum .....	181
John McCain Monument.....	184
Silk Path Hotel and Hanoi Breweries .....	185
Day 10 – (Wednesday, September 13, 2017) .....	188
The One-Pillar Pagoda.....	194
Ho Chi Minh Museum .....	195
Viet Nam National Assembly Building .....	195
Hỏa Lò Prison – Maison Centrale – The Hanoi Hilton.....	196
Walking through the Old Quarter .....	200
Day 11 – (Thursday, September 14, 2017).....	201

Some Final Odds and Ends that May be of Interest..... 202

    Written Vietnamese..... 202

    The Importance of Yellow – and Other Colors..... 202

    Horn Honking ..... 202

    Some New Friends ..... 203

    Bia ..... 204

    The Hunt for Dewars..... 205

    Vietnamese Houses..... 206

    Vietnamese Crops ..... 206

    Vietnamese Birthdays ..... 207

    Vietnamese Cemeteries..... 207

Appendix A – Cong’s Impressions of the USA..... 208

# Viet Nam Journal

## A Return after 47 Years

Mark D. Waterhouse

### Preliminary Thoughts



In 1970 I served in Viet Nam in the United States Marine Corps. Despite the obvious downsides of being there, I was struck by both the beauty of the country and friendliness of most of the everyday people.

I am not sure when the idea of returning first struck me – it was many years ago – but I began to get serious about it in 2011 when I thought it might be my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday present to myself. But work requirements and other things got in the way. Finally in 2015 Leslie (Cosgrove) and I were signed up and ready to go on one of the tours arranged by Military Historical Tours (MHT).



Unfortunately, about a month and a half before we were due to depart, the tour guide, Marine Captain Ed Garr, had a stroke while on another trip and subsequently died. MHT was not able to replace him on short notice, so the trip was cancelled. The following year I had neck surgery which prevented traveling in 2016.

MHT runs many tours and I was looking for one that would focus on the part of Viet Nam where I had spent most of my time – I Corps (pronounced Eye Corps). In early 2017, the MHT website showed a tour “50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Marine Corps Combat Engineers in I Corps – 1967.” I wasn’t there in 1967 – but close enough. That was what I was and where I was.

This journal is based on that trip and includes texts and photos from my daily Facebook posts plus many others I took, photos and notes Leslie took, a few photos I took in 1970, and additional information and photos to help me remember things and you enjoy the ride.

#### Viet Nam Corps and the DMZ

For the purposes of military operations, during the Vietnam War South Vietnam was divided into four Corps Tactical Zones, (also called Military Regions), and the Special Capital Zone (the Saigon area – now called Ho Chi Minh City). The four Corps Tactical Zones were numbered using Roman numerals - **I-Corps**, **II-Corps**, **III-Corps** and **IV-Corps**. Each Corps was an administrative and command area for tactical operations. I-Corps was located in the region nearest North Vietnam and adjacent to the DMZ.

The **DMZ** (demilitarized zone) between North and South Vietnam was established in April, 1954 as a result of the Geneva Conference ending the war between the Viet Minh and the French. The DMZ in Vietnam lay roughly at the 17th parallel north, but actually extended five kilometers on either side of the Ben Hai River and west to east from the Lao border to the South China Sea, which Viet Nam now calls the Eastern Sea.

### Viet Nam – or Vietnam?

When I was getting ready to go there, the country name was two words. Over time, it got shortened to one word. Is one more correct than the other?

In the country, it is most common to see the name written as two words, reflecting the derivation of the name. According to Wikipedia: “The name *Việt Nam* (Vietnamese pronunciation: [\[viət na:m\]](#)) is a variation of *Nam Việt* (literally "Southern *Việt*"), a name that can be traced back to the [Triệu Dynasty](#) of the 2nd century BC.<sup>[14]</sup> The word *Việt* originated as a shortened form of [Bách Việt](#), a group of people then living in southern China and Vietnam.<sup>[15]</sup> The form "Vietnam" is first recorded in the 16th-century oracular poem [Sấm Trạng Trình](#).”

As explained to us by our guide Cong, the name generally refers to the Viet people (an ethnic group originating from present-day northern Viet Nam and southern China) living south of China.

### Getting There and Back

The Trip Over	The Trip Back
<p style="text-align: center;">September 2-3, 2017 (Crossing the International Dateline)</p> <p>6:25a to 8:57a 2h 32m Hartford to Atlanta Bradley Intl. (BDL) to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta Intl. (ATL) Korean Air 6830 operated by Delta BOEING (DOUGLAS) MD-88</p> <p>Layover 3h 48m stop Atlanta (ATL)</p> <p>12:45p to 4:45p 15h Overnight · Arrives Sun, Sep 3 Atlanta to Seoul Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta Intl. (ATL) to Incheon Intl. (ICN) Korean Air 5036 BOEING 777-200LR 2 Meals and a snack</p> <p>Layover 1h 55m stop Seoul (ICN)</p> <p>6:40p to 9:20p 4h 40m Seoul to Da Nang Incheon Intl. (ICN) to Da Nang Intl. (DAD) Korean Air 463 BOEING 777-300ER Dinner</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">September 14, 2017</p> <p>10:20a to 4:35p 4h 15m Hanoi to Seoul Noi Bai Intl. (HAN) to Incheon Intl. (ICN) Korean Air 5690 operated by Vietnam Airlines AIRBUS INDUSTRIE A350-90 Lunch</p> <p>Layover 2h stop Seoul (ICN)</p> <p>6:35p to 7:21p 13h 46m Seoul to Atlanta Incheon Intl. (ICN) to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta Intl. (ATL) Korean Air 5035 operated by Delta BOEING 777-200LR 2 Meals and a snack</p> <p>Layover 2h 9m stop Atlanta (ATL)</p> <p>9:30p to 11:53p 2h 23m Atlanta to Hartford Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta Intl. (ATL) to Bradley Intl. (BDL) Korean Air 7177 operated by Delta BOEING (DOUGLAS) MD-88</p>



One other flight was involved – getting from Hue (actually Phu Bai International Airport – which was the airstrip at the old Phu Bai Combat Base) to Hanoi. This was on Vietnam Airlines, which was quite comfortable and professional and was about an hour and 15 minute trip.

The legs between Atlanta and Seoul, Korea were very long – around 14 hours. The westbound trip to Seoul took an unusual route: north through the US and Canada, then west along the northern boundary of Canada and Alaska, over the water north of the Bering Strait, then south through Russian and Chinese Airspace into Korea. Probably would not have been able to do that on an American airline.

On the way back – probably because the North Koreans had fired a missile that morning – we went due east from Seoul across Japan, then over to Seattle, before heading southeast to Atlanta.

#### Route from Atlanta to Seoul shown on seatback video screen



#### Some Thoughts about Korean Air

<https://www.koreanair.com/content/koreanair/global/en.html>



Korean Air is my new favorite airline. This trip was flown on a combination of Korean Air, Delta and Vietnam Airlines – all codeshare partners. I have done a lot of flying – primarily on US airlines. I hadn't fully subscribed to the idea that the United States has a third-world air travel system – until I encountered Korean Air. Even in economy class, when we boarded the plane we found on our seats a blanket, pillow, slippers, eyeshades, headsets and a bottle of water. During the flight, there was free wine and beer with the meals. Indeed, we didn't have to pay for drinks during the flight at all. While both legs between Atlanta and Seoul were on 777s, the difference in quality between the Korean Air and Delta planes was really noticeable.

And for some reason, while boarding the flight from Seoul to Da Nang, we were issued new seat assignments and found ourselves upgraded to business class. Each seat was a separate pod that fully reclined. After a long day of flying, it was a great treat for the last 4+ hours.



## Our Traveling Companion

While the trip was advertised as a tour, it ended up being just three of us - Leslie and me and a guy from Henderson, NV – Marc Hancock. Marc was Marine Infantry in Viet Nam in 1968 and 1969. At first he was with 2nd Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division (2/4 1<sup>st</sup> MarDiv), known as the Magnificent Bastards.

(According to the website

[http://military.wikia.com/wiki/2nd\\_Battalion\\_4th\\_Marines](http://military.wikia.com/wiki/2nd_Battalion_4th_Marines), "The moniker of "The Magnificent Bastards" was first used by the incoming Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Joseph R. (Bull) Fisher the day he assumed his command on 4 June 1964. On 24 September 1966, Battalion Order No. 5600.1B, was signed. It officially added (by legal order) the lower pennant with the nickname the "Magnificent Bastards".) While with 2/4, Marc was part of the Battle of Dai Do, which is discussed latter in this journal.



### CAP Units

According to Wikipedia: The **Combined Action Program** was a [United States Marine Corps](#) operational initiative implemented in the [Vietnam War](#) and proved to be one of the most effective counterinsurgency tools developed during that conflict. Operating from 1965 to 1971, this program was characterized by the placement of a thirteen-member Marine rifle squad, augmented by a U.S. Navy Corpsman and strengthened by a Vietnamese militia platoon of older youth and elderly men, in or adjacent to a rural Vietnamese hamlet. In most cases, the [Popular Forces](#) militia members (Nghia Quan) were residents of the hamlet who were either too young or too old to be drafted into the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) or the [Regional Forces \(Dia Phuong Quan\)](#). The entire unit of American Marines and Popular Forces militia members together was designated as a Combined Action Platoon (CAP).

In 1969 he joined Combined Action Platoon 2-9-1 (CAP Unit) operating out on An Hoa, which is one of the places we visited and is discussed later. He may have been with other units of which I am not aware. This marker indicates we were at Kilometer 1,020 on the 2,300 km long National Highway 1A that runs north-south from the Chinese border to the southernmost part of Viet Nam.

## Our Guide and Driver

MHT provided the guide and driver. Because there were only three of us on the tour, it was like having private service. Our guide was Tran Quoc Cong, known as Cong and pronounced Cung (in Vietnamese, the “o” is pronounced as in “one and done”). We ran into another tour group while in Chu Lai. Their guide told us Cong was the best guide in Viet Nam and said “He was my professor.”

Some years ago, Cong had served as guide to David Halberstam when he returned to the country. Halberstam, a highly published Pulitzer Prize winning author (perhaps best known for his book *The Best and the Brightest* on the Kennedy Administration's Viet Nam foreign policy) had been a *New York Times* foreign correspondent in Viet Nam in 1962. On his return trip, Halberstam and Cong developed a friendship that led to Cong being invited to Halberstam's memorial service after he had been killed in a car accident in 2007. Cong spent three months in the United States and published a collection of very interesting notes about the trip, which are included, with his permission, as Appendix A of this journal. You need to read this – it will make you think and make you laugh. By the way, Cong told us that in Viet Nam, Copyright means the right to copy.

Our driver was An. I can't tell you much about him because his English was limited – but he was a great person and driver. In particular, he kept us well supplied with Huda beer during our daily trips to the countryside. He is a great supporter of the USMC and had a Marine Corps sticker on the visor of his van.



Cong and An



Inside An's Van

## Vietnamese Currency

The Vietnamese currency is the dong (VND – pronounced dung (no jokes allowed)). The typical exchange rate with US dollars is 21,000 – 24,000 dong to the dollar. While we were there, it was consistently about 22,600 when we exchanged dollars to dong at the hotels. So when you exchanged money, here's what you got:

\$	Dong
\$1.00	22,600.00
\$5.00	113,000.00
\$10.00	226,000.00
\$20.00	452,000.00
\$30.00	678,000.00
\$40.00	904,000.00
\$50.00	1,130,000.00



So exchange 50 bucks and you are a millionaire. US bills have to be clean, undamaged and not marked on.

Prices were also very reasonable. I bought three beers at dinner one night and it cost 110,000 dong = not quite \$5.00.



While you can easily exchange dollars to dong, you can't exchange in the other direction, so you make sure you have spent all your dong before leaving the country unless you plan on returning. However, US currency is accepted in most places – at least in the more developed areas – at the exchange rate. US \$2 bills are considered very lucky, so we had gotten a stack of them before we headed over and used them as rewards.

## Where We Stayed – Hotels and Cities

MHT had arranged all the hotels during the trip.

### Almanity Hoi An Resort & Spa

<http://www.almanityhoian.com/eng/>

For the first four nights we stayed at the Almanity Hoi An Resort & Spa in Hoi An, which is about a half hour drive south of the Da Nang using the new coastal route. This three year old property is north of the downtown but within walking distance. It is a outstanding location we enjoyed very much. The staff was wonderful (especially Hau, with whom we are now Facebook friends), the pool area was delightful, and the restaurant was a great way to start each day sitting and eating by the pool.



Pictures from the Almanity Hoi An Resort & Spa



**View from our Room**



**Pool Area**



**Poolside Restaurant**



**Leslie and Hau in the lobby**



**Pomelo Tree  
(Southeast Asian Grapefruit)**

### A Little about Hoi An

<https://www.vietnamonline.com/destination/hoi-an.html>

The Almanity is located in the historic town of Hoi An, which is on the north bank of the Thu Bon River (Song Thu Bon). It is about 28 kilometers (km) or 17 ½ miles south of Da Nang and has a population of about 122,000. Hoi An was an important trading port from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century and was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999 because of its many tube houses (very narrow but long – and now known as rocket houses because they can be many stories tall), Chinese pagodas, ornate family shrines and community halls, and the Japanese covered Bridge built in 1593.



## HOI AN TOURIST MAP

**www.cungphuat.info**

<p><b>21</b> Nhà thờ tộc Trần <i>Trần Family's Chapel</i></p> <p><b>4</b> Nhà cổ Phùng Hưng <i>Old house of Phùng Hưng</i></p> <p><b>77</b> Nhà cổ Quận Thằng <i>Old house of Quận Thằng</i></p> <p><b>129</b> Nhà cổ Đức An <i>Old house of Đức An</i></p> <p><b>101</b> Nhà cổ Tấn Kỳ <i>Old house of Tấn Kỳ</i></p> <p><b>80</b> Bảo tàng Gốm sứ mậu dịch Hội An <i>Museum of Trade Ceramics</i></p> <p><b>7</b> Bảo tàng Lịch sử - Văn hóa Hội An <i>Museum of Hội An History-Culture</i></p> <p><b>149</b> Bảo tàng Văn hóa Sa Huỳnh <i>Museum of Sa Huỳnh Culture</i></p> <p><b>33</b> Bảo tàng Văn hóa dân gian <i>Museum of Folk Culture</i></p> <p><b>39</b> Nhà biểu diễn nghệ thuật cổ truyền Hội An <i>Hội An Traditional Art Performance House</i></p> <p><b>66</b></p>	<p><b>Chùa Cầu (Cầu Nhật Bản)</b> <i>Japanese Covered Bridge</i></p> <p><b>24</b> Miếu Quan Công <i>Quan Công Temple</i></p> <p><b>9</b> Xưởng sản xuất thủ công mỹ nghệ Hội An <i>Hội An Art Craft Manufacturing workshop</i></p> <p><b>23</b> XQ Hội An <i>XQ Hội An</i></p> <p><b>52</b> Đình Cẩm Phô <i>Cẩm Phô Communal House</i></p> <p><b>14</b> Tụy Tiên Đường Minh Hương <i>Minh Hương Communal House</i></p> <p><b>176</b> Hội quán Quảng Triệu <i>Quảng Triệu Assembly hall</i></p> <p><b>46</b> Hội quán Phúc Kiến <i>Phúc Kiến Assembly hall</i></p> <p><b>157</b> Hội quán Triều Châu <i>Triều Châu Assembly hall</i></p> <p>Phố đi bộ <i>Walking and cycling town</i></p>	<p><b>Trung tâm thông tin du lịch</b> <i>Tourist Information Center</i></p> <p><b>Điểm truy cập thông tin du lịch</b> <i>Tourist information kiosks</i></p> <p><b>Trò chơi đập nồi</b> <i>Folk game of breaking pots</i></p> <p><b>Trò chơi Bài Chòi</b> <i>Folk game of bingo-in-huts</i></p> <p><b>Cắt rờ trên sông</b> <i>Square fishing net working</i></p> <p><b>Ẩm thực</b> <i>Hội An dishes</i></p> <p><b>Quầy vé</b> <i>Ticket stalls</i></p> <p><b>Bãi đỗ xe</b> <i>Parking lots</i></p> <p><b>Toilets công cộng</b> <i>Public toilets</i></p> <p><b>Điểm chơi đàn Piano dành cho du khách</b> <i>Piano performance for tourists (FOC)</i></p>
--	--	---

Hoi An is now known as Viet Nam's garment capital with hundreds of places selling and making suits, shirts, dresses, jackets, shoes – about anything you need to wear. Plenty of choice off the rack, but also a town of master tailors who can make anything you want from measurements or a photograph.

Leslie had wanted to find a place to look at silk fabric and garments. Hau told us about a place (Thang Loi Company) that made its own silk and Cong brought us there. I bought two pure silk shirts off the rack (\$35 each) and Leslie had an outfit made for her – measured at about 9:00 a.m. and available for pickup at 6:00 p.m. She is wearing it in the photo to the right. (More about Thang Loi and silk making on page 78.)



Thang Loi Silk Stock



Hoi An Riverside Market

We were fortunate to be in Hoi An the night of a full moon when the Full Moon Festival (also known as the Hoi An Lantern Festival) was occurring. Lanterns are everywhere and merchants are encouraged to turn off their lights and just use lanterns. Some lanterns are candles placed in little paper vessels and floated down the river. No vehicles are allowed in the historic downtown at this time. Residents burn incense and other offerings (lots of copies of dong notes) by the street in honor of ancestors.



**Hoi An Full Moon Lantern Festival from the Balcony of our Restaurant**



**Hoi An Full Moon Lantern Festival from the Street**



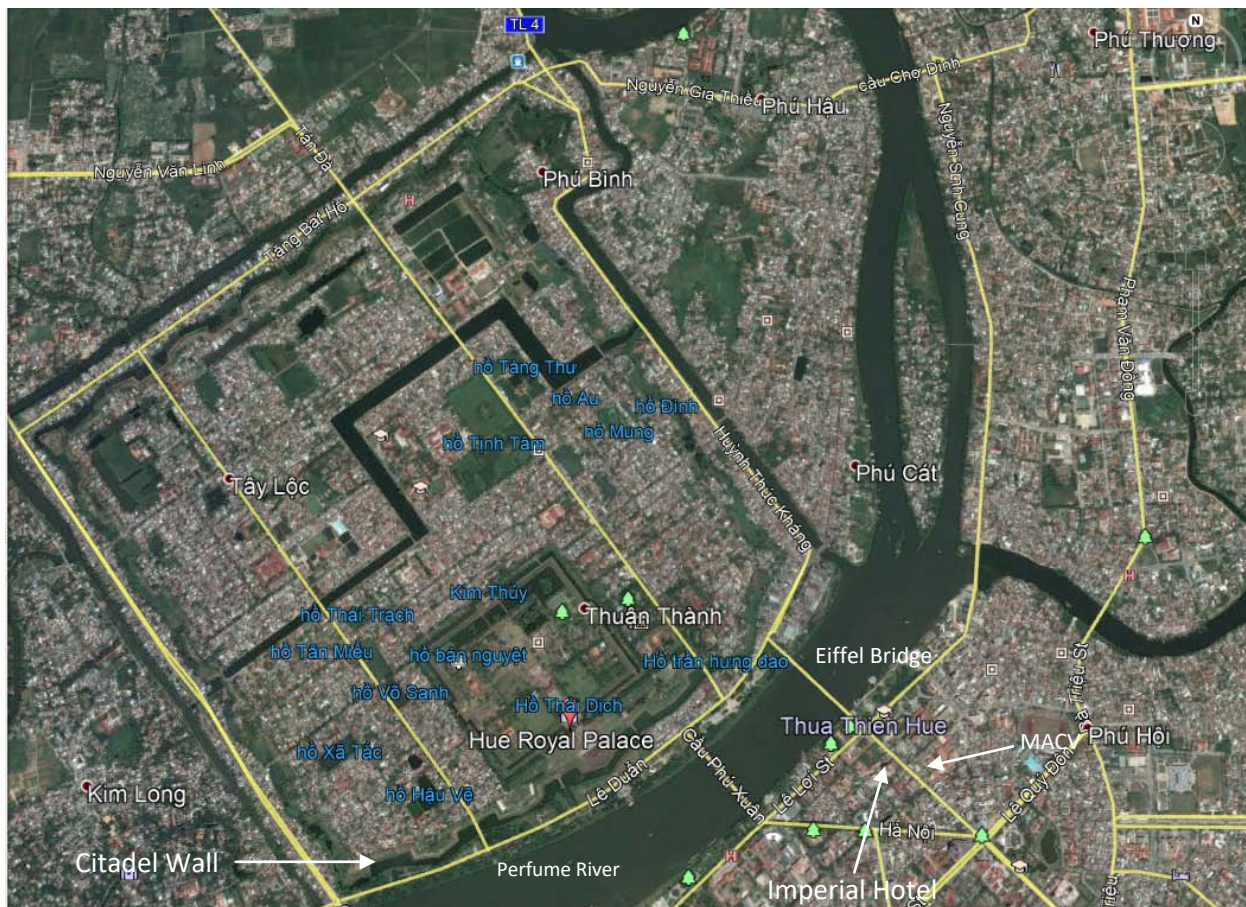
## Imperial Hotel – Hue

<http://www.imperial-hotel.com.vn/>

We stayed here for a total of three nights on both sides of being in Dong Ha.

Another very fine hotel – this one a 16 story, elegant property with a beautiful pagoda on the roof. To the east we looked down on the MACV compound, one of the most famous sites from the 1968 Tet Offensive (more on MACV on pages 14 – 17). To the north we looked at the famous Eiffel Bridge (yes – same Eiffel as the Tower) that was the primary access route from MACV to The Citadel (the large area outlined in yellow)

and Imperial City (the square area shown as the Hue Royal Palace) in the aerial below. Much more about The Citadel and Imperial Palace later during the write-up on Day 5 of the tour.



Hue Location Map



Hue Imperial Hotel Lobby

Some Shots from the Imperial Hotel Rooftop



Eiffel Bridge



The Citadel



Downtown Hue Neighborhood and Cathedral

New Highrise Construction



### Imperial Hotel Rooftop Pagoda



### Some Shots from the Imperial Hotel Rooftop Pagoda



Some Shots from the Imperial Hotel Rooftop Pagoda

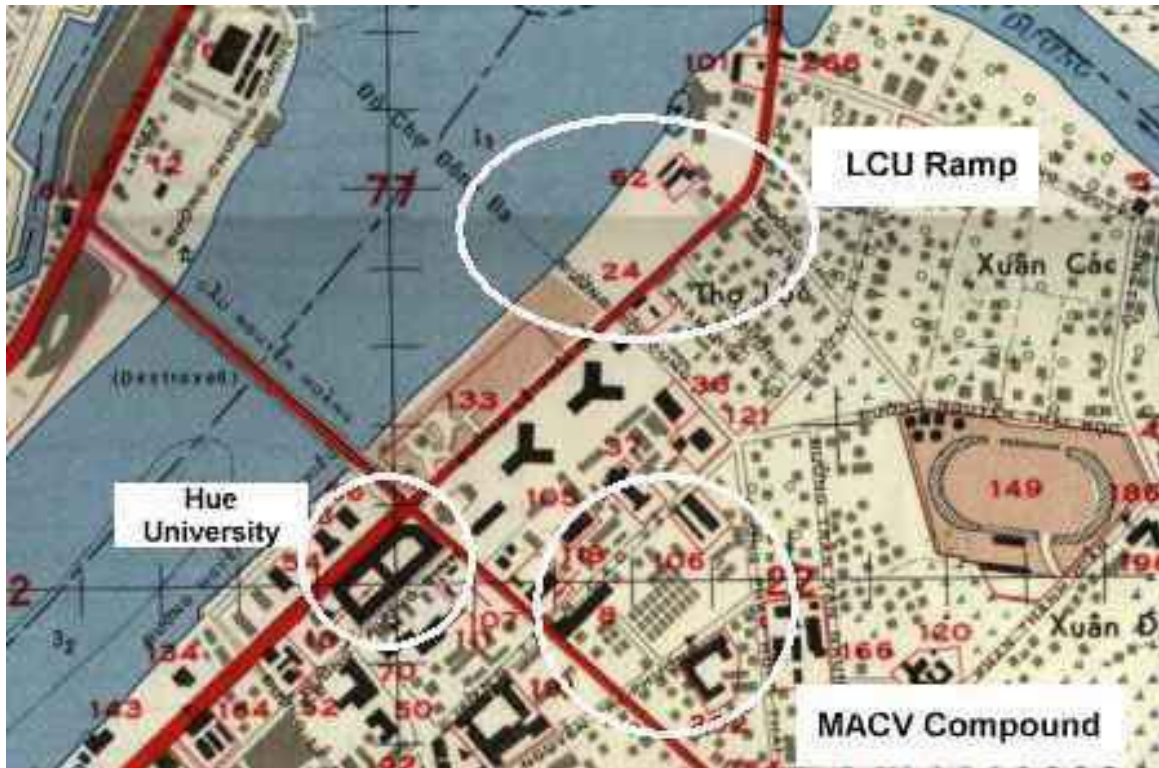


Looking Down on the Hue MACV Compound from our Imperial Hotel Room



**Northern tip of Huế New City showing MACV compound and LCU [Landing Craft, Utility] ramp**  
(National Route 1 runs along the southwest side of the compound.)

Map courtesy of [John Paul Rossie's Maps of Vietnam](http://www.johnpaulrossie.com/maps-of-vietnam/)



### About MACV

Source: <http://militaryvetshop.com/History/MACVietnam.html>

The United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, known as MACV (pronounced "mac-vee"), was a joint service command under the Department of Defense. MACV was created on February 8, 1962 in order to increase assistance to South Vietnam as well as command and control all advisory and assistance efforts in Vietnam. The command was dissolved on March 29, 1973, after the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Vietnam. MACV was the highest level of command "in-country." Therefore, the history of MACV is really the military history of the Vietnam War.

The major special operations command within MACV was the Studies and Observation Group (SOG). Contrary to popular belief, the acronym "SOG" does not officially stand for "Special Operations Group" although "Studies and Observation" was an attempt to hide what the command did, which was unconventional warfare and highly classified operations throughout Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. MACV-SOG was comprised of U.S. Army Special Forces (Green Berets), Navy SEAL teams, Air Force Combat Controllers, Marine Recons, Air Force Special Operations pilots of the 90th Special Operations Wing, and other special operations personnel.

## MACV During the Hue Tet Offensive

The Tet Offensive took place during my senior year in college. Given the Selective Services position at the time that graduate school deferments would only be given if you were studying to be a doctor or minister, I already knew that if I passed the draft physical, I would be headed into the military, and given the fact that I had grown up under my father's WWII USMC blanket, I would likely go into the Marine Corps.

The only U.S. military presence in Hue on January 31, 1968 was the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) compound located about a block and a half south of the Nguyen Hoang Bridge [heavily damaged by an NVA sapper attack on February 2, 1968 and subsequently replaced by the Eiffel Bridge] on the eastern edge of the modern sector [that is, the newer sector of the City as opposed to the historic Citadel and Royal Palace area north of the Perfume River]. The compound housed about 200 U.S. Army, Marine Corps and Australian officers and men who served as advisers to the 1st ARVN [Army of the Republic of Viet Nam] Division. The nearest U.S. combat forces were at the Phu Bai Marine base eight miles south down Route 1, home of Task Force X-Ray, a forward headquarters of the 1st Marine Division that was made up of two Marine regimental headquarters and three Marine battalions.

### What is a Sapper?

Sapper is another term, derived from the French *saper* (to undermine, to dig under a wall or building to cause its collapse) for combat engineer (which is what I was) who performs duties such as breaching, demolitions, bridge-building, laying or clearing minefields, building or repairing field defenses, roads, airfields, or other construction projects, as well as serving as infantry when needed.

Source: Wikipedia

Communist forces in the Hue region numbered 8,000, a total of 10 battalions, including two PAVN [People's Army of Viet Nam] regiments of three battalions and one battalion each. These were highly trained North Vietnamese regular units. Six Viet Cong main force battalions, including the 12th and Hue City Sapper Battalions, joined the PAVN units.

The PAVN 804th Battalion twice assaulted the MACV compound, but was repelled each time by rapidly assembled defenders armed with individual weapons [primarily rifles and grenade launchers]. The North Vietnamese troops then stormed the compound gates, where a group of Marines manning a bunker held them off for a brief period before being taken out with several B-40 rockets. This action slowed the PAVN attack and gave the Americans and Australians time to organize their defenses. After failing to take the compound in an intense firefight, the Communists tried to reduce it with mortars and automatic weapons from overlooking buildings. The defenders went to ground and called for reinforcements.

While the battle raged around the MACV compound, two Viet Cong battalions took over the Thua Thien Province headquarters [in Viet Nam, provinces are the equivalent of states], the police station and other government buildings south of the river. At the same time, the PAVN 810th Battalion took up blocking positions on the city's southern edge to prevent reinforcement from that direction. By dawn, all of the city south of the Perfume River, with the exception of the MACV compound, was controlled by the North Vietnamese 4th Regiment. Thus in very short order, the Communists had seized control of virtually all of Hue.

As Truong [Brig. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong, 1st ARVN Division commander whose headquarters were in the northeast corner of The Citadel] consolidated his forces, another call for reinforcements went out from the surrounded Americans and Australians in the MACV compound. Responding to III Marine Amphibious Force orders, but not fully aware of the enemy situation in Hue, Brig. Gen. Foster C. "Frosty" LaHue, commander of Task Force X-Ray, dispatched Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines (1/1), to move up Route 1 from Phu Bai to relieve the 200 surrounded MACV advisers.

After entering the city, the Marines were pinned down just short of the adviser compound. More Marines from Phu Bai, Golf Company, 2/5, joined up with the original force and together they fought their way to the compound, sustaining 10 killed in the fight.

The battle seesawed back and forth until February 17, when the 1/5 Marines [1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment] had secured its objective [The Citadel], after losing 47 killed and 240 wounded.

Fighting continued for days, but finally, at dawn on February 24, ARVN soldiers pulled down the Viet Cong banner that had flown from the Citadel flag tower for 25 days and hoisted the South Vietnamese flag. On March 2, the longest sustained infantry battle the war had seen to that point was officially declared over. The relief of Hue cost the ARVN 384 killed, 1,800 wounded and 30 missing in action. The U.S. Marines suffered 147 dead and 857 wounded, and the Army lost 74 dead and 507 wounded. Allied claims of Communists killed in the city topped 5,000, and an estimated 3,000 more were killed in the surrounding area in battles with elements of the 1st Cavalry and the 101st Airborne divisions.

Source [with additions by me] – selected excerpts: <http://www.historynet.com/tet-what-really-happened-at-hue.htm>

### A Little about Hue

Hue (pronounced hway), located about 13 km (8 miles) inland from the Eastern Sea and 80 km (50 miles) northwest of Da Nang (97 km or 60 miles by road), is one of the most historic cities in Viet Nam. The city is bisected by the Perfume River (*Sông Hương* – Sông means river and Hương is more accurately translated as fragrance rather than perfume) into the older and more historic northern part and newer southern part. The river's name comes from the sweet smell of the water in autumn caused by flowers from upriver orchards that fall into the water.

The website

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/vietnam-population/cities/> shows the 2017 population as just over 287,000 making Hue the fifth largest city in Viet Nam. However, Wikipedia, citing the website



<http://www.huecity.gov.vn/TrangChu/NewCatId/37> shows the 2015 population as over 354,000.

Hue was once Viet Nam's "Imperial City" and was the home of 13 Nguyen Dynasty emperors between 1802 and 1945. (In case you're wondering how to pronounce Nguyen, for the English tongue, Nuin or Nwen pronounced as a single syllable gets you pretty close.)

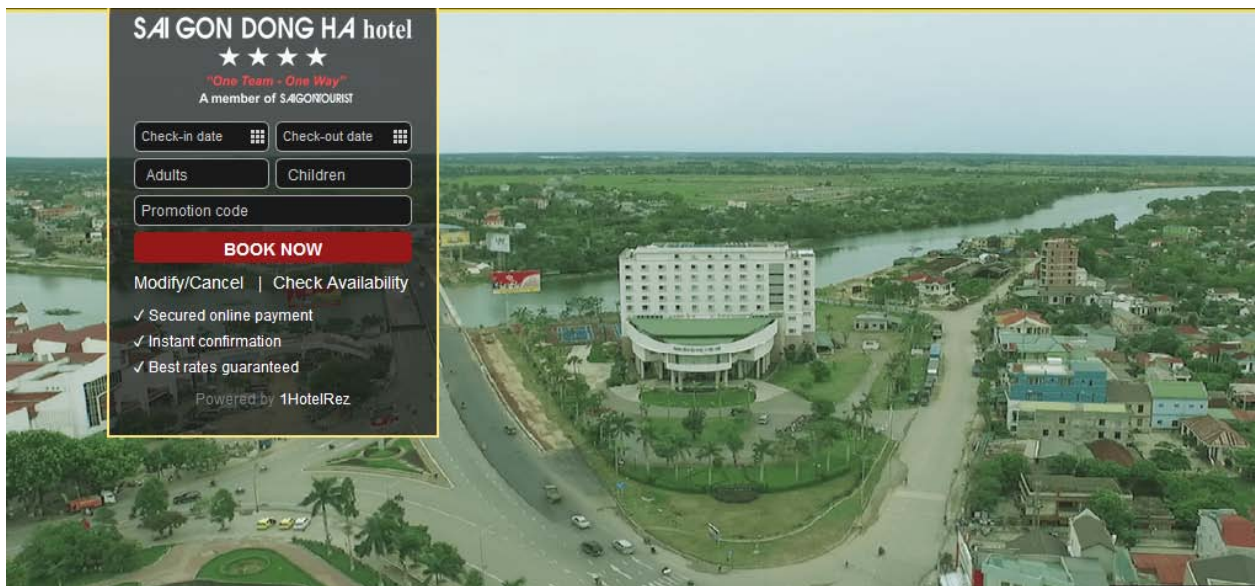
Despite significant damage in the French and American wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Hue is still a very beautiful city and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There is a great deal of restoration occurring that could be seen in many locations, as well as substantial new construction such as the new highrise shown on page 12.

The city draws many tourists because of its collection of historic and cultural sites including pagodas, palaces, mausoleums – and especially the Citadel and Forbidden City, which are discussed at length in the Day 5 portion of our tour. We only had time to scratch the surface – which is one of the reasons we are already talking about going back.

**Saigon Tourist Hotel – Dong Ha**  
<http://www.saigondonghahotel.com/>



We stayed two nights in Dong Ha. It was an adequate hotel but not nearly the quality of the first two or the last one in Ha Noi.



**Website shot of the Saigon Tourist Hotel**  
 (Major Dong Ha Market is under and to the left of the "Book Now" Block)





View from our Saigon Tourist Hotel Room of the Pool Area and Song Hiếu

### A Little about Dong Ha

The City of Dong Ha is now the capital of Quang Tri Province due to the near total destruction of the City of Quang Tri during the 1972 Easter Offensive by the NVA (see Day 6 of the tour for more information on the Easter Offensive). While Cong thought the population is now about 100,000, the most recent official population from 2011 was just over 84,000. Because I can't provide documentation that the population is over 100,000, the Red Cross considers this to be a "rural area" with a potential for malaria, and I can't give blood until I have been back here for a year with no symptoms. Careful but dumb.

According to Wikipedia, "During the [Vietnam War](#), Đông Hà was the northernmost town in South Vietnam and was the location of a strategically important [United States Marine Corps Đông Hà Combat Base](#), to support Marine positions along the [Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone \(DMZ\)](#).<sup>[1]</sup> The 3rd Marine Division [3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv] had overall command and control of this operational area.<sup>[2]</sup> Large numbers of NVA operated in the DMZ area. 3rd Marine Division intelligence estimated the combat strength of NVA and VC forces in the DMZ area in January 1968 was 40,943 troops.<sup>[3]</sup> Đông Hà was overrun on March 31, 1972, during the initial assaults of the North Vietnamese [Easter Offensive](#).





**An aerial of Dong Ha found online showing the major portions of the Combat Base overlaid on a current view of the City**

See: <http://www.astrotx.com/Dong%20Ha%20Combat%20Base%20Maps.htm>

The Wikipedia entry neglects to mention that the 3<sup>rd</sup> MarDiv was withdrawn from Viet Nam to Okinawa in September – November 1969. I joined them there in December 1969. After that withdrawal, Dong Ha Combat Base was operated by The Army. An Army friend who spent a fair amount of time there is astounded that what was merely a combat base surrounded by almost nothing other than a few villes where the occupants tried to sell the soldiers smokes, cokes, popsicles, sisters, etc., is now the provincial capital with a population somewhere around 100,000 full-time residents and a regular tourist trade.

For a good video of the Dong Ha Combat Base (with an emphasis on air operations) see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Mp9mnWKhkw>.

## Silk Path Hotel – Ha Noi

[http://hangbong.silkpathhotel.com/?\\_ga=2.144554486.293256294.1511891956-1613606803.1511891956](http://hangbong.silkpathhotel.com/?_ga=2.144554486.293256294.1511891956-1613606803.1511891956)



A beautiful, modern design, boutique hotel in the Old Quarter of Ha Noi located on Hàng Bông Street, which becomes Hàng Gai Street a few blocks to the east. We thought this was Silk Street from the hotel name, but it is not. Many streets in the Old Quarter (also called 36 Streets) are named for the primary products sold on that street – more on that later.

Décor was delightful and the food was excellent.

The staff – mostly young men and women – was outstanding. One of the Military Historical Tours staff told us this was one of his favorite hotels and we understand why.



### A Little about Ha Noi

OK – it is almost impossible to do just a little about this ancient city on the Red River located about 75 miles inland from Hai Phong and the Gulf of Tonkin. Ha Noi celebrated its 1,000-year anniversary in 2010 and the Old Quarter is 600 years old.

Ha Noi was conquered by the French in 1873 and served as the administrative center and capital of French Indochina until 1954 when the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu.

The website <http://population.city/vietnam/ha-noi/> estimates Ha Noi's 2017 population at somewhat more than 7.5 million, second only to Ho Chi Minh City (Sai Gon). The city is big and dense – according to the *Fodor's Travel – Vietnam* book, the Red River delta is the most densely settled part of Viet Nam with more than 1,000 people per square mile. The City of Ha Noi is 334,467 hectares or 1,291 square miles.

The Fodor's book devotes 52 pages to the city with another short section on side trips you can take. Fodor's says "Full of things to see, from the architecture of the Old Quarter and the French Quarter to Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum and the Temple of Literature, the Vietnamese capital lends itself to leisurely exploration."

We had a little less than two days. So much for leisurely exploration. This is definitely on our "Spend More Time" list. Here's the link to the Wikipedia entry for Ha Noi:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanoi> .



Map of Viet Nam showing Ha Noi, Hue and Da Nang



St. Joseph's Cathedral  
Old Quarter of Hanoi

## Meals

Unfortunately, I didn't do a very good job of writing down the names of some of the restaurants where we had our lunches and dinners. Breakfasts were included at the hotels where we stayed – always buffet style so you had plenty and a wide selection. Except for two nights, all lunches and dinners were included in the tour price.

One of our "complaints" was that there was too much food. Most meals were six or seven courses – soup, salad, three kinds of meat (usually beef, chicken and fish – sometimes pork), vegetables, and dessert. They were usually served family style, and there were always leftovers. We asked in one restaurant in Hoi An what happened to the leftovers and were told they went to feed pigs.

Here are some pictures from some of the places where we ate:



**Dao Tien Riverfront Restaurant in Downtown Hoi An**



**Entrance to Nam Long Riverside Restaurant – Hoi An**



Lunch at Cung Dinh Restaurant in Hue



Lunch at Cung Dinh Restaurant in Hue



Lunch at Cung Dinh Restaurant in Hue - Place Setting for the Emperor and his Wife



Leslie, Marc and Cong at entrance to Les Jardins De La Carambole Restaurant inside The Citadel in Hue



**Breakfast Area and Buffet at Hue Imperial Hotel**



**Silk Path Hotel Restaurant – Ha Noi**



## The Tour Itinerary

### Arriving In-country (September 3, 2017)

"In-country" was the term used to mean being in Viet Nam. The term isn't limited to that country; according to the Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary, it means "being or taking place in a country that is the focus of activity (such as military operations or scientific research) by the government or citizens of another country." I have added military-related tourism to that definition.

After spending about 22 hours on three flights, plus about 6 hours in layovers (Atlanta and Seoul), we arrived in Da Nang, checked in at Visa Control (\$25 per person), got our luggage, and were met by Cong and An. An drove us down to Hoi An where we checked into the Almanity hotel. An had both water and beer ready in his van. I knew from the start he was a good man.

It was strange to arrive at Da Nang International Airport – which had been the Da Nang Air Base (also known as Tourane Air Base because it had been a French air facility) and was later a Republic of Viet Nam Air Force facility. The US had major Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps units stationed there.



**The Da Nang Air Base I Flew In and Out of in 1970**



**Da Nang International Airport Today**

### Day 1 (Monday, September 4, 2017)

The first day of our stay focused on the Marble Mountain and Da Nang area.

#### Resort and Other Development

The amount of development in the City of Da Nang and along the coast between Da Nang and Hoi An is astounding: resorts, hotels, condominiums, golf courses and housing developments of all kinds, many by foreign (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) developers. There is a new coastal highway running north-south between Da Nang and Cua Dai with much of the new development along this route, shown as the yellow line cutting diagonally from top left to bottom right in this Google Earth aerial.



Here's what some of the development looks like (some a little blurry because they were taken from An's van while in motion) and I am not sure what most of them are:





### Da Nang Area Resort Pictures from the Web



**Hyatt Regency Resort and Spa**



**InterContinental Da Nang Sun Peninsula Resort**

(At the Base of Monkey Mountain – now called Mythical Monkey Mountain or the Son Tra Peninsula)



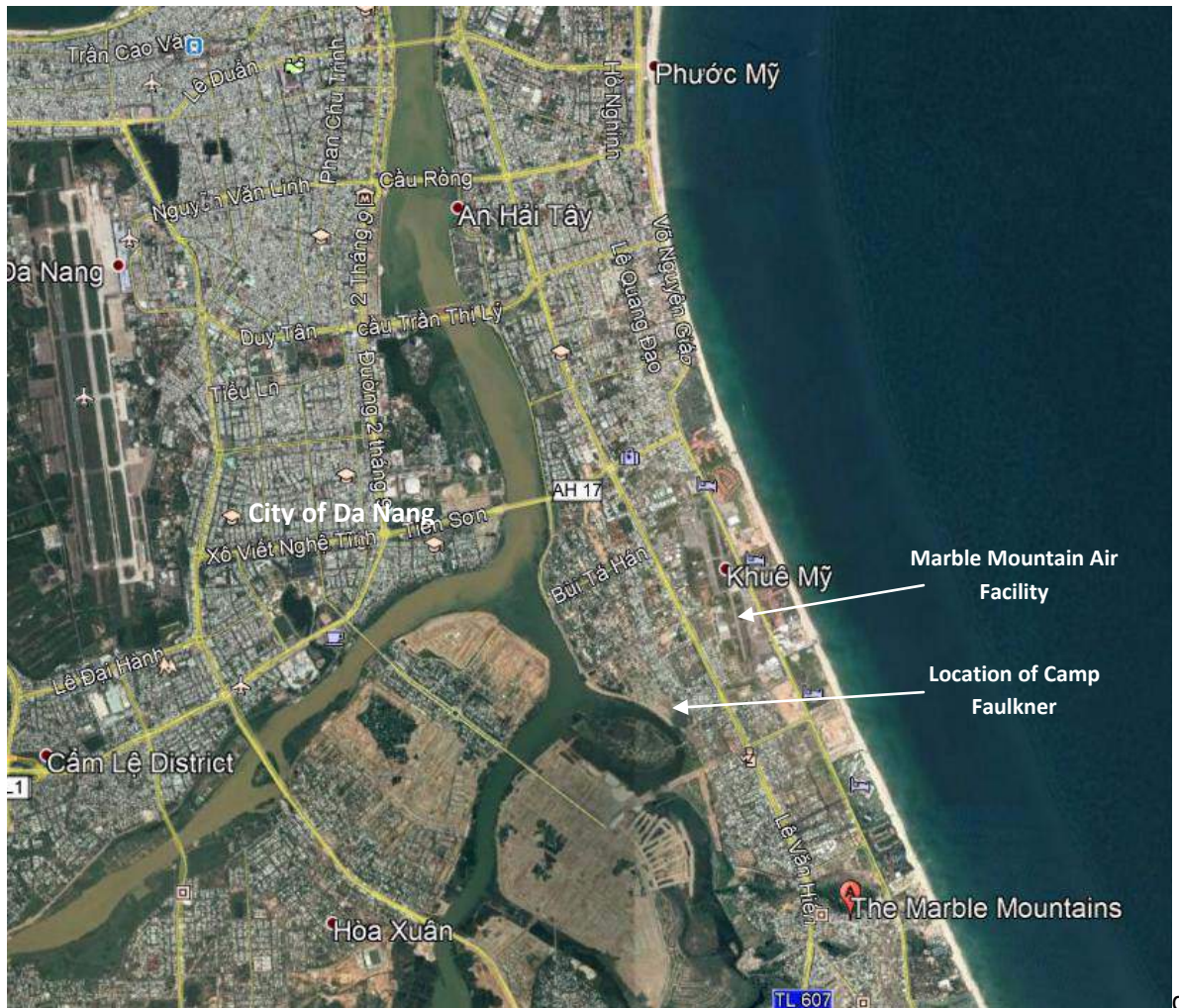
**Novotel Da Nang Premier**



**Furama Resort Da Nang**

## Marble Mountains

My base camp – Camp Faulkner – was about 1.5 km north of what we called Marble Mountain but is actually Marble Mountains because there are five of them clustered together. Some are marble and some are limestone. The five mountains are named after the five elements: Kim (metal), Thuy (water), Moc (wood), Hoa (fire) and Tho (earth). These mountains have many caves and tunnels and several Buddhist sanctuaries. This Google Earth image shows the location of the Marble Mountains in relation to the City of Da Nang and the Da Nang International Airport as well as Camp Faulkner and the Marble Mountain Air Facility.



**Marble Mountains Region Aerial**

From Wikipedia: The Marble Mountains are home to several Buddhist and Hindu [grottoes](#). A stairway of 156 steps leads to the summit of Thuy Son, the only Marble Mountain accessible to visitors. It allows a wide panoramic view of the surrounding area and the other marble mountains. There are a number of grottoes, including Huyen Khong and Tang Chon, and many Hindu and Buddhist sanctuaries, the pagoda Tam Thai, built in 1825, Tu Tam and Linh Ung, and the tower of Pho Dong. The sanctuaries feature statuary and relief depictions of religious scenes carved out of the marble.



**Marble Mountains Aerial:** <http://www.vspa.com/v-dn-aerial-photos-1.htm>



**Looking at the Marble Mountains from Camp Faulkner – May 1970 (my picture)**

Discussion later on says Camp Faulkner was built on a sand dune. Can you tell?



While in Viet Nam in 1970s, I bought a marble desk nameplate (see below) for myself and one for my father (a USMC Combat Engineer in WWII). These were made from stone quarried from Marble Mountain. As we discovered after the war, part of the stone removal was related to the construction of a Viet Cong Infirmary inside the mountain.



### Marble Carving Workshop

Our first stop was a marble carving workshop at the base of the Marble Mountains. I'm not sure but think it was Marble Mountain Sculpture (<http://marblemountainsculpture.com/index.php>). If you see anything you like, they will ship it.

Direct rock extraction from the mountains was recently banned so stone is now being transported from quarries in Quang Nam, Ninh Binh and perhaps other provinces. As you look at the pictures that follow, I am not sure which actually came from Marble Mountains stone and which came from other quarries. Nonetheless they are magnificent pieces of all different sizes, colors and themes – and all handcrafted.









How they are finished



Leslie learning marble polishing using something like a fine-grain emery paper

### The Legend of Marble Mountain

From the website <http://www.vietnam-guide.com/da-nang/marble-mountain.htm#> and other sources:

According to ancient folklore [a Cham dynasty legend], an old hermit who lived on the coast of Da Nang was fishing in the waters of the China Sea when a dragon emerged from the water on Non Nuoc Beach and laid an egg. After the dragon disappeared, a golden turtle came, who claimed to be the god Kim Quy. The turtle instructed the old man to protect the dragon egg from danger, but the old man, unable to cope with the dangers, decided to bury the dragon egg in the land. A thousand days and nights followed before the egg hatched, and out stepped a beautiful girl. The fragments of the shell were left on the beach and eventually grew into the five elements that are the mystical Marble Mountains.

### Marble Mountains Tour

From the marble workshop, we went around the corner to Thuy Son, the only Marble Mountain accessible to visitors.



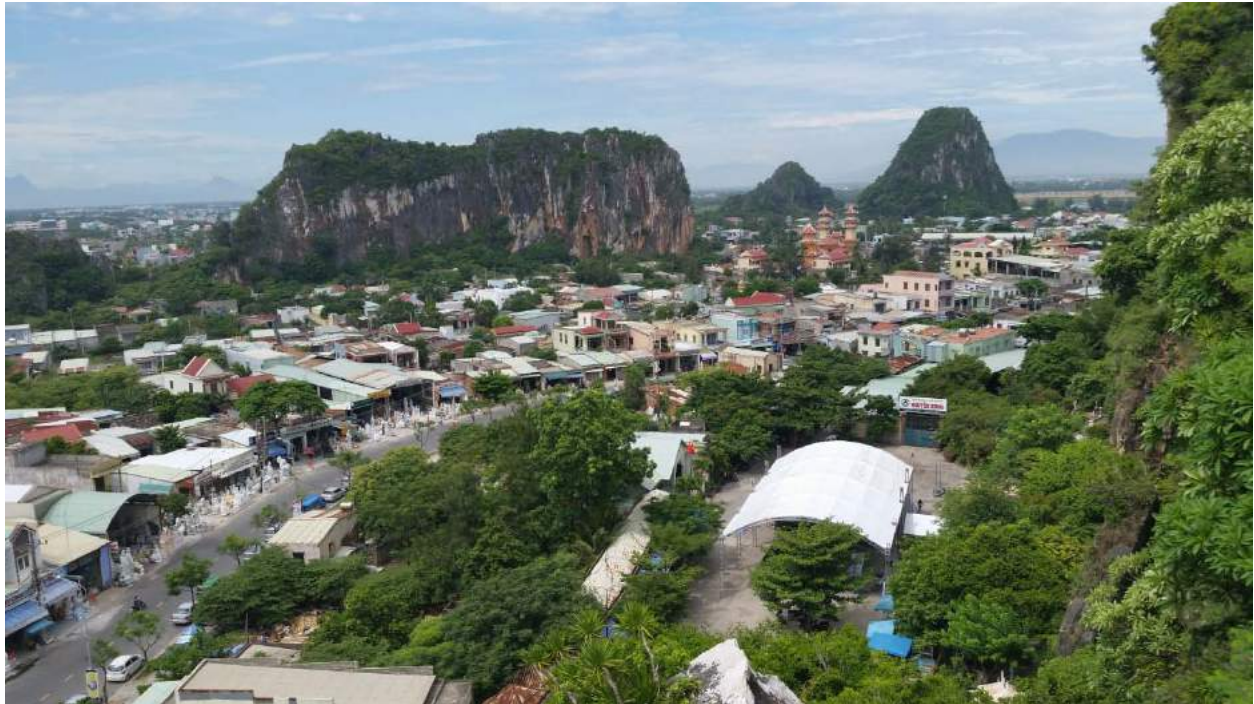
The Mountain of Water, which is home to pagodas dating back to the 17th century and a number of caves, is one the most frequented climbs with a steep hike up 156 stone steps to Tam Quan Gate and its superb vistas to Mount Kim Son (the Metal Mountain) and the coastline from the Riverview Tower located next to the gate. The Riverview Tower dates back to the 18th century and the reign of the Emperor Minh Mang.

For over 400 years it was customary to remove the marble inside the mountains to make furniture, sculptures and jewelry or use it as building material. As could be seen from the pictures from the



marble workshop, the stone is of great beauty and was used in the decorating of the Ho Chi Minh Museum (more on that later). As noted above, stone removal is no longer allowed.

The following are various views from the top of Thuy Son, the Water Mountain.





Here are some other shots from our tour of The Marble Mountains:

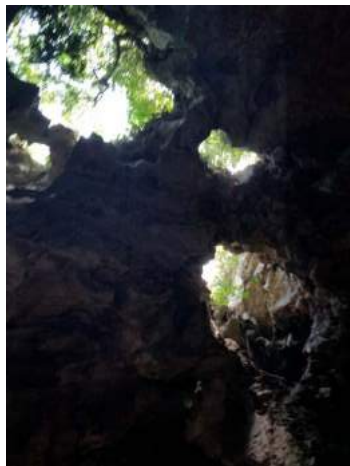


**Huyen Khong Buddhist grotto inside Thuy Son – the Water Mountain**





Natural holes where the light comes in



Cong said this is called the Mysterious Void



**Tam Tai Tu Pagoda**

Monks still live here



**Carvings at Thuy Son – the Water Mountain**



**Thuy Son – the Water Mountain Buddha**



**Carved Inside Thuy Son – the Water Mountain**

### Marble Mountain Air Facility and Camp Faulkner

From the Marble Mountains, we drove north toward Da Nang. This took us past the Old Marble Mountain Air Facility (MMAF), which was the home of Marine Aircraft Group 16 (MAG 16) when I was there. MAG 16 was a helicopter base built in 1965. Because it provided aircraft for many operations, the Viet Cong didn't like it much and periodically tried to hit it with rockets from the western countryside. Camp Faulkner was generally west of the south end of MMAF and east of where the bad guys were launching rockets. My fourth night in country, 10 rockets fired from the west (our perimeter guards saw the launch flares) we believe were aimed at MMAF fell short and ringed Camp Faulkner. Fortunately, no injuries or damage. However, inside our Officers' Club we had a shuffleboard table that had imbedded shrapnel from a rocket strike that occurred before I got there. It made for some interesting bounces and zig-zags down the table.

Not much left of MMAF but this is great land for future development.



**Old Hangars at Marble Mountain Air Facility**

After driving past the old MMAF site, we tried to find Camp Faulkner (location shown on the Marble Mountains Regional Aerial on page 33). Camp Faulkner was originally built in 1965 on a sand dune southeast of Da Nang as a Seabee Base. It was named in memory of U.S. Navy Seabee Equipment Operator (hauling) Third Class Arnold Joe Faulkner, who was killed on 22 March 1966 as result of injuries received in an industrial accident while working on a runway site at Kham Duc.

No luck in getting to whatever is left of Camp Faulkner. An enlargement of the Aerial on page 33 shows some open land, but we were not able to find a way to get to it due to new development between the access highway (now Provincial Road TL 607 – it had been 539 but all the road numbers were changed after the war) and the Camp.

## China Beach

Some of you may remember the television series China Beach, which was on from 1988 to 1991. The location is a real one and was the primary recreational area for us because it was only a couple of miles away. I had always remembered it as a really beautiful beach – if you disregarded the concertina wire used to secure it.



**China Beach – July 1970 (my photo)**

China Beach was the nickname given to this portion of Da Nang Beach (actually My Khe Beach) which is about 18 miles long. It is still gorgeous.

A couple of shots.







## The Cham Museum

For more information on this Museum, see: <http://chammuseum.vn/en> and

<https://www.danang.co/places/museum-of-cham-sculpture/>



Because this was our first full day after a long trip, China Beach was the last planned stop. Cong asked if there were any other places we wanted to visit in Da Nang. High on my list was the Cham Museum (and Cao Dai Temple – more later) which I had visited several times in 1970. Cong was visibly surprised we had asked to go there. Marc had never been there but afterwards he said he was very happy to have made that stop.

Technically called the Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture, this was started by the French in 1919 to house artifacts from the Kingdom of Champa, which ruled the area for more than 1,000 years. The museum has more than 300 pieces of sculpture. Cong was extremely knowledgeable about the place because when it has tours that require a docent with particularly good English, he is asked to play that role.

Here are some of the artifacts in the Museum:

### About the Cham Dynasty

From :

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Champa-ancient-kingdom-Indochina>

Formed in 192 AD during the breakup of the [Han dynasty](#) of China, when the Han official in charge of the region established his own kingdom around the area of the present city of Hue.

The Cham were a people of Malayo-Polynesian stock and Indianized [culture](#).

The dynasty lasted until the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

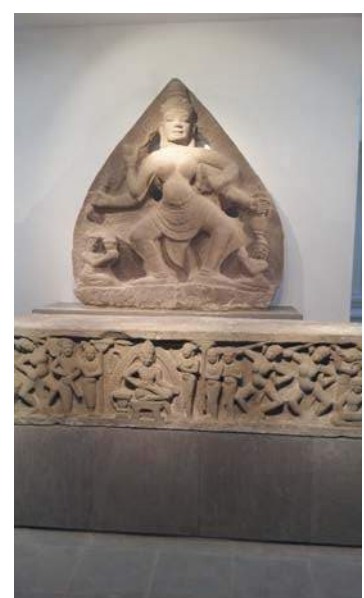
For more information, see:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Champa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Champa)



**My Favorite Piece**

I have this same picture that I took in 1970



From the website: <http://chammuseum.vn/en/exhibitions/my-son/>



For more photos see: [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g298085-d454979-Reviews-Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture-Da Nang Quang Nam Province.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g298085-d454979-Reviews-Da_Nang_Museum_of_Cham_Sculpture-Da_Nang_Quang_Nam_Province.html) - click All Photos

## The Cao Dai Temple

Another place I had visited several times in 1970 and wanted to see again was the Cao Dai (pronounced cow die) Temple.



For more information see the Cao Dai website <http://caodai.org/web/content.aspx?pageID=1>. This website summarizes Caudaism as: **CaoDai is a universal faith with the principle that all religions have one same divine origin, which is God, or Allah, or the Tao, or the Nothingness, one same ethic based on LOVE and JUSTICE, and are just different manifestations of one same TRUTH.** CaoDai does not seek to create a gray world, where all religions are exactly the same, only to create a more tolerant world, where all can see each other as sisters and brothers from a common divine source reaching out to a common divine destiny realizing peace within and without.

That appealed to me in 1970 and still does.

Cao daism was established in 1926 in Tay Ninh province. According to the website <https://www.vietnamonline.com/culture/cao-daiism-in-vietnam.html> the full name is "Cao Dai Tien Ong Dai Bo Tat Ma Ha Tat," meaning Cao Dai [the] Ancient Sage [and] Great Bodhisattva Mahasattva. The religion is both monotheistic and polytheistic in that it worships one God but is the integration of many major religions, mainly Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. These three religions are represented in the three colors of the banner in the picture above – yellow stands for Buddhism, blue for Taoism, and red for Confucianism.

You may be perplexed by what appears to be a swastika on top of the Temple. The swastika is actually an ancient symbol of good luck in the Indian subcontinent, East Asia and Southeast Asia where in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism it is a sacred symbol of spiritual principles. Even in the west it was historically a symbol of auspiciousness and good luck until the Nazis appropriated it as an emblem of the Aryan race.

From Wikipedia: "The symbol of the faith is the Left Eye of God, representing the [yang](#) (masculine, ordaining, positive and expansive) activity of the male creator, which is balanced by the yin (âm) activity of Mother Goddess, the Queen Mother of the West (Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu, Tây Vương Mẫu), the feminine, nurturing and restorative mother of humanity.<sup>[3]</sup>

Under the Divine Eye is the religious emblem which represents the essence of the three religions: the bowl of charity for Buddhist compassion and asceticism; the feather duster for Taoist purification; and the spring and autumn annals for Confucianist virtue and love. [I have a similar shot of the Divine Eye I took in July 1970.]





Mark, Leslie and Marc at the Cau Dai Temple

### The Remainder of Day 1

A wonderful lunch followed by a search for two Da Nang breweries, one of which was permanently closed and the other whose brewery and tasting room is still under construction but they told us where to find their beers and that they have a brewery in Ha Noi. Cong took us to a resort in Da Nang that served two of their beers - an excellent wheat beer and a very unusual and good IPA with chilies, pepper and salt.



Finally a stop at a silk store in Hoi An, and then back to the Almanity for some pool time before dinner. At 4 p.m. every day some of the hotel staff comes out to the pool for a Tai Chi session which they encourage guests to participate in. After yesterday's travel, that seemed like entirely too much work.

The day ended with a splendid 9-course Vietnamese meal at a riverfront restaurant. Food was part of our tour price but we had to pay for drinks. Three beers cost 110,000 dong = about \$5.

## Day 2 (Tuesday, September 5, 2017)

Today was primarily a military sites day. The tour schedule called for visits to the Chu Lai area, Firebase or Fire Support Base (FSB) Ross, Landing Zone (LZ Baldy) and possibly some others. While I don't remember spending any appreciable time in or around Chu Lai, I was in and out of Ross and Baldy periodically.

### A New Highway

Viet Nam has been investing heavily in new infrastructure, with financial assistance from Russia, China and, to a limited degree, Cuba. There is a new, four-lane highway from Hoi An down to where it joins the National Highway (QL) 1 north of Tam Ky. It is still under construction in places and new enough that it doesn't show up on Google Earth. This website provides a good discussion of the trip: <http://hoiannow.com/the-road-to-tam-ky/>

We took that route on the way to Chu Lai.



**New Cua Dai Bridge at Cam Thanh on New Highway South from Hoi An**



**View from New Bridge**



**Looking from the Bridge at Fish Farm Nets**

### **Rice Harvesting**

Leslie had wanted to see rice paddies and she was in luck – September is rice harvesting season in this part of Viet Nam because the monsoons hit in October. It is also typhoon season.





**Rice Harvesting Along the New Highway to Tam Ky**



**Rice Harvesting – Very Hard Work**

Viet Nam ranks in the top 5 rice exporters in the world. Here's a list from 2016 from the website <http://www.worldstopexports.com/rice-exports-country/>:

1. India: US\$5.3 billion (26.7% of total rice exports)
2. Thailand: \$4.4 billion (21.9%)
3. United States: \$1.9 billion (9.6%)
4. Pakistan: \$1.7 billion (8.5%)
5. Vietnam: \$1.6 billion (8%)

Once harvested, the rice is dried for 3 days before putting in sacks. Pretty much any flat surface that is in the sun is used including major portions of roads so that the travel portion is reduced to one lane. After the fields are harvested, they are burned off to start the process for another growing season.



**Rice Drying and Rice Paper Wrappers Curing**



**Rice Drying – Some can be very artistic**

## Tam Ky

As previously mentioned, to get to Chu Lai, you pass through Tam Ky. I didn't spot anything special here other than it looks like a fairly typical Vietnamese ville (what we called a village). However, the [www.hoiannow.com](http://www.hoiannow.com) website says "Tam Ky was a village until a bunch of planners and architects moved in a few years ago to transform it into the province's capital. So un-Vietnamese and out of character with its surrounding villages, housing styles and terrain, this moderately sized, very Russian-influenced town with matching architecture is the outcome." Need to check that out in the future.



QL1 Highway in Tam Ky

## Chu Lai Combat Base

For more information, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chu\\_Lai\\_Base\\_Area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chu_Lai_Base_Area)

The Chu Lai Base Area (also known as Chu Lai Combat Base, Kỳ Hà Air Facility, or simply Chu Lai or Kỳ Hà) is a former U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Army and ARVN base built in 1965 during the early years of the increasing American presence in Viet Nam. The base included a jet-capable airfield with a 10,000 foot concrete runway which is still there and in use as the Chu Lai International Airport served by Viet Nam Airlines. It was a very large and active base.



**Former Chu Lai Combat Base and Chu Lai International Airport**



### Chu Lai Combat Base

<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/62148929>

Viewed from a nearby hillside to the west, it appears there is nothing left of the Chu Lai Combat Base except the airstrip. However, one of the gates off QL1 is still manned, suggesting that the People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) may be using part of the old base. This picture of the gate was taken on the move because Cong didn't want to stop in front of it.



Off the road that provides entrance to the Airport, Marc was able to take about a 10-minute walk around some old ammunition bunkers without creating an international incident. The aerial of the base on page 62 shows where he walked.



**Chu Lai bunker Area Where Marc Walked**



**Airport Terminal and Old hangar (to the far right)**



**Old Chu Lai Hangars**



**Chu Lai International Airport Terminal**

The previously mentioned western hillside provides somewhat of a view of the old base and current airport. It also has a major Socialist Republic of Viet Nam monument overlooking the base and celebrating their victory. This is where we ran into the other tour group whose guide told us Cong is the best in Viet Nam.



View of Chu Lai from the Hillside to the West



Socialist Republic of Viet Nam Monument Overlooking Chu Lai



### Khong My Towers

After lunch in Tam Ky, we went to a 10th century Cham temple – the Khong My Towers – The Temple of the Naughty Monkey.



A post on TripAdvisor says: Khuong My towers is a group of three towers in line from the north to the South. Their specific architecture reflects a traditional Champa style with three levels, the upper level representing the stereotype of the lower one with a sandstone top. Khuong My Towers show the first style of Champa architecture influenced by the Khome design (curled and deep carved leaves and lozenges representing diagonal and stylish flowers). This is the specific design of Khome art dated from the 9th and 10th centuries.

Cong said this was an unusual design in that most towers like this have the tallest in the middle, but this one increases in height from north to south. He also said that the bricks were not mortared together – rather they used an adhesive made from leaves, cowhide and sugar syrup. And here they still stand more than 1,100 years later.

The website <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/vietnam-in-photos/154689/khuong-my---temple-of-the-naughty-monkey.html> provides this information and includes many more, very beautiful photos:

The group includes 3 triple-roofed sandstone towers with pointed tops. The northern tower is the smallest and is partly ruined. The middle one is bigger and better preserved. The southern tower is the

biggest and best-preserved. Culturologists think that Khuong My is dedicated to Vishnu [one of the principal deities of Hinduism – for more, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu>].

If one stays for a while at the towers to contemplate a thousand years of now peaceful, now turbulent weather and history covering the seemingly forgotten temples, one can enjoy the mysterious sandstone sculptures of the ancient Champa.

Among the multitude of reliefs on the walls of the Cham temples, many depict lively, mischievous and cute monkeys. A peculiarity is that all the monkeys' sexual organs are vividly expressed.

Here, three monkeys carry baggage on their shoulders and heads. There, another tired three: one with its back bent down, hugging a gourd, a middle one picking up something, and a left one sitting on a rock, its chin resting on its hand. In another scene, three monkeys beat drums and cymbals and dance jubilantly, perhaps celebrating a victory.



### **The Naughty Monkey**

The most remarkable scene, perhaps, is the funny one depicting a little monkey, its penis being bitten by a tortoise, while another monkey stands by their side, scratching its head with one hand, the other pointing at the tortoise.

In 2007, at the Khuong My site, archeologists excavated 17 unique sandstone sculptures, among which some depict monkeys. These sandstones are now on display at the Champa Sculpture Museum of Da Nang.

Culturologists think that the monkey is the Cham totem. Among Cham architectural remains in Quang Nam Province, Khuong My temples have the most images of monkeys; in many postures, expressing the most nuanced of feelings, all highly stylized.



Waving from the entrance of one of the Khong My Temple structures



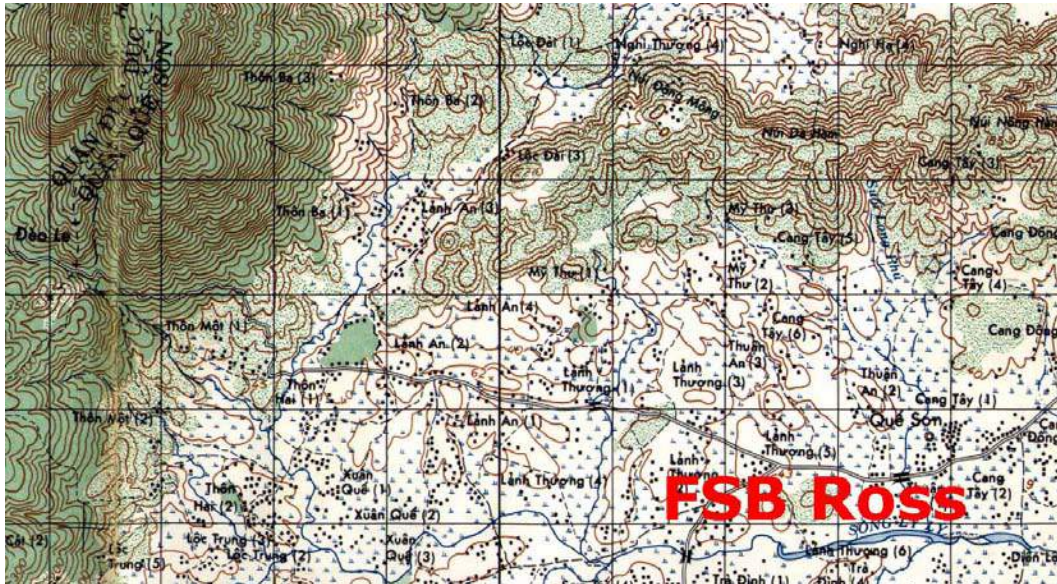
**Khong My Towers Brickwork**

If you are interested in more photos of the many Cham temples in Viet Nam, see:

[https://images.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search;\\_ylt=A0LEViX1qCZaYHUALzYPxQt.;\\_ylu=X3oDMTByMjB0aG5zBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzYw--?p=cham+temples+in+vietnam+list&fr=yhs-adk-adk\\_sbnt&hspart=adk&hsimp=yhs-adk\\_sbnt](https://images.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search;_ylt=A0LEViX1qCZaYHUALzYPxQt.;_ylu=X3oDMTByMjB0aG5zBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzYw--?p=cham+temples+in+vietnam+list&fr=yhs-adk-adk_sbnt&hspart=adk&hsimp=yhs-adk_sbnt)

### Fire Support Base (FSB) Ross

From Khung My, we headed to the old Fire Support Base Ross. It now looks to be a park but still has the wonderful 360 view which is why we used it for artillery. Fire Support Base (or Firebase - also known as Hill 51 - hill numbers indicate their elevation in meters) Ross was built in 1968 and was a U.S. Marine Corps, Army and ARVN base located about 17 miles southwest of Hoi An. Here's the general location:



FSB Ross



**FSB Ross Aerial during the War**

### *What is a Fire Support Base?*

From Wikipedia: A fire support base was originally a temporary firing base for artillery, although many evolved into more permanent bases. Their main components varied by size and terrain: a typical FSB usually had a battery of six 105 millimeter or 155 mm [howitzers](#), a [platoon](#) of [engineers](#) permanently on station for construction and maintenance projects, at least two landing pads for helicopters (a smaller VIP pad and at least one resupply pad), a [Tactical Operations Center](#) (TOC), an [aid station](#) staffed with [medics](#), a communications [bunker](#), and a [company](#) of [infantry](#) serving as the defense garrison. Large FSBs might also have 2 artillery batteries, and an infantry [battalion](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Under the original concept of the artillery fire support base, a 6-gun battery set up with one howitzer in the center to fire illumination rounds during night attacks and serve as the base's main registration gun. The other 5 howitzers were arranged around it in a "star" pattern.<sup>[2]</sup> Smaller FSBs tended to vary greatly from this layout, with two to four howitzers of various calibers (usually 105 mm and 155 mm at battalion level) located in dispersed and fortified firing positions.<sup>[3]</sup> These smaller bases arranged their guns in square or triangle patterns when possible.<sup>[4]</sup>



**View from FSB Ross September 2017**



**Vietnamese War Monument at the Crest of FSB Ross**



**The Monument in the Park on the Crest of FSB Ross**

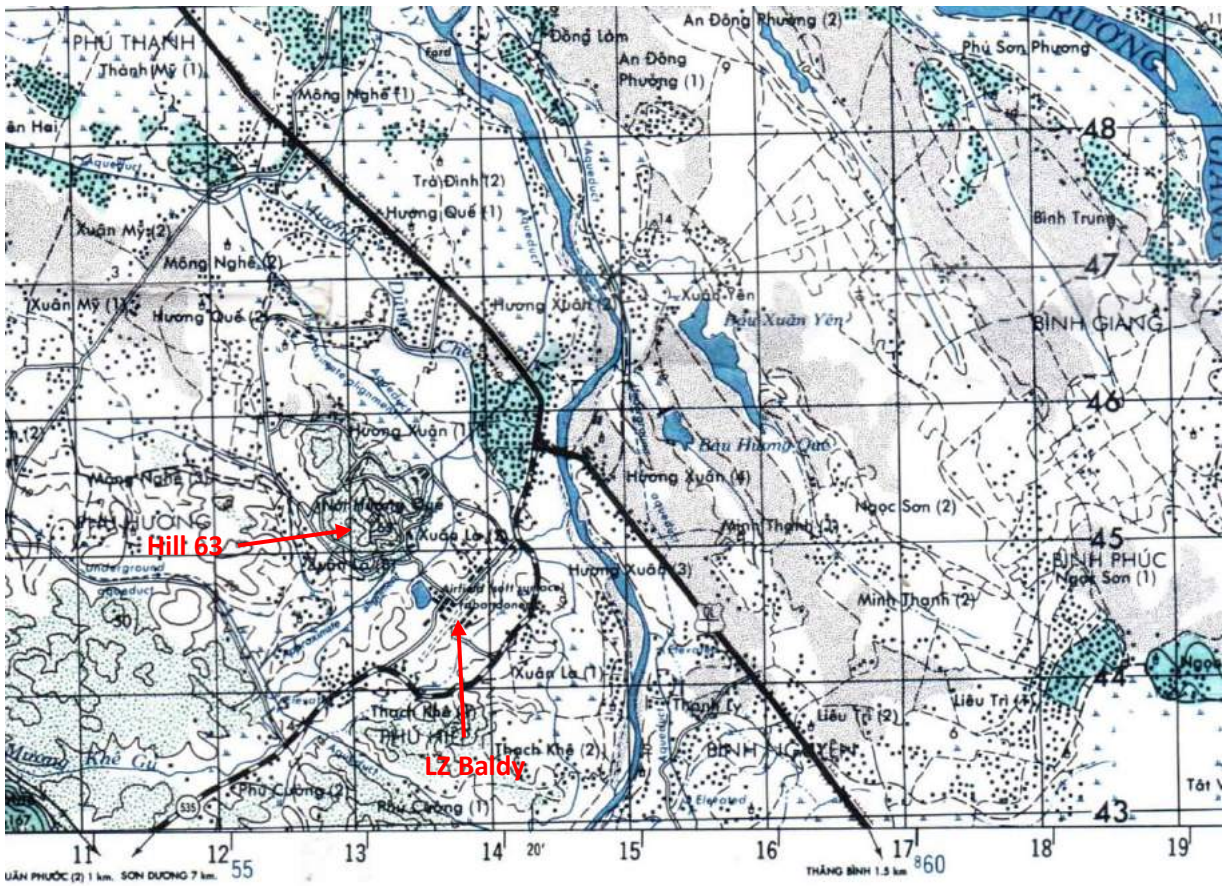
### **Landing Zone (LZ) Baldy**

From FSB Ross we drove a short distance to what had been LZ Baldy (also known as FSB Baldy or Hill 63). Baldy was built in 1967 at the intersection of Highway 1 and what was then route 535 about 17 miles northwest of Chu Lai. It was used as a U.S. Marine Corps, Army and ARVN base primarily for aircraft use, but also served other functions including as a Fire Support Base.

Before leaving on this trip, I had bought some Quadrangle maps of the Da Nang and Hoi An area (see East View Cartographic's website <http://www.eastview.com/products/maps>). These are much like what we had to use in 1970. My son took my laminated map to Show and Tell in grammar school and it never made it back home, so I bought four maps for the trip - \$41.75.

Here's Baldy's location:

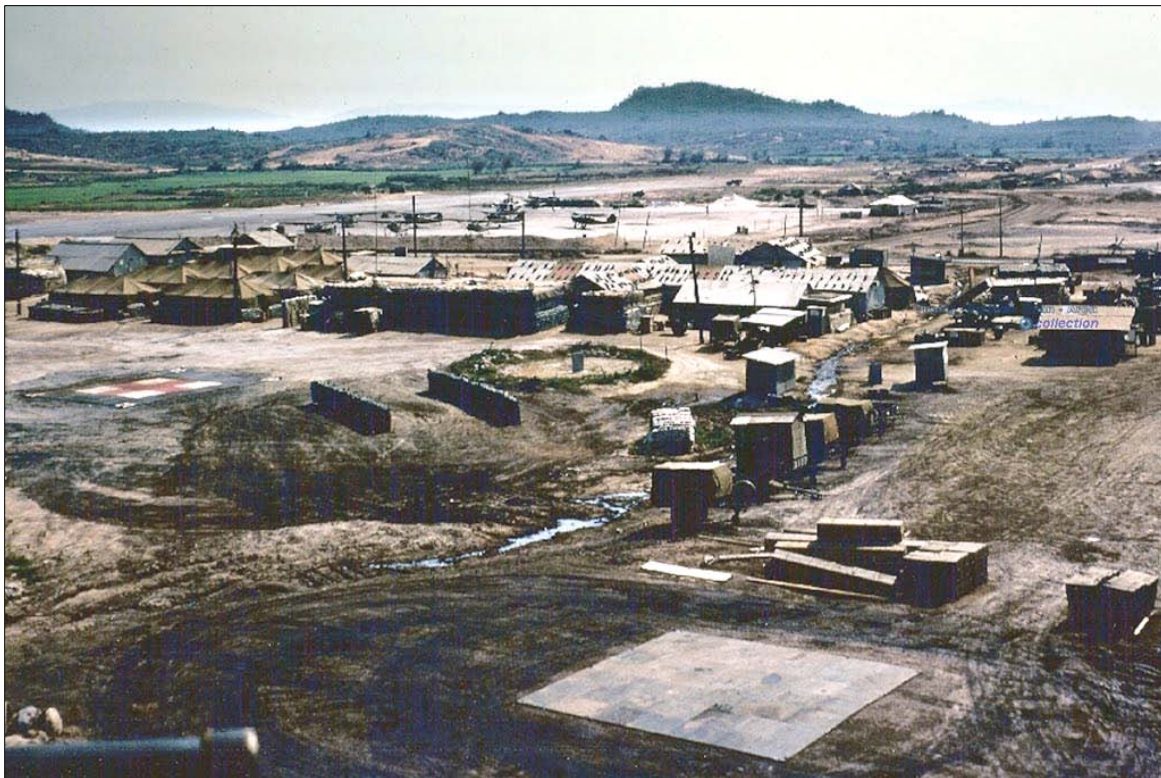




LZ Baldy – August 1970 (my photo)

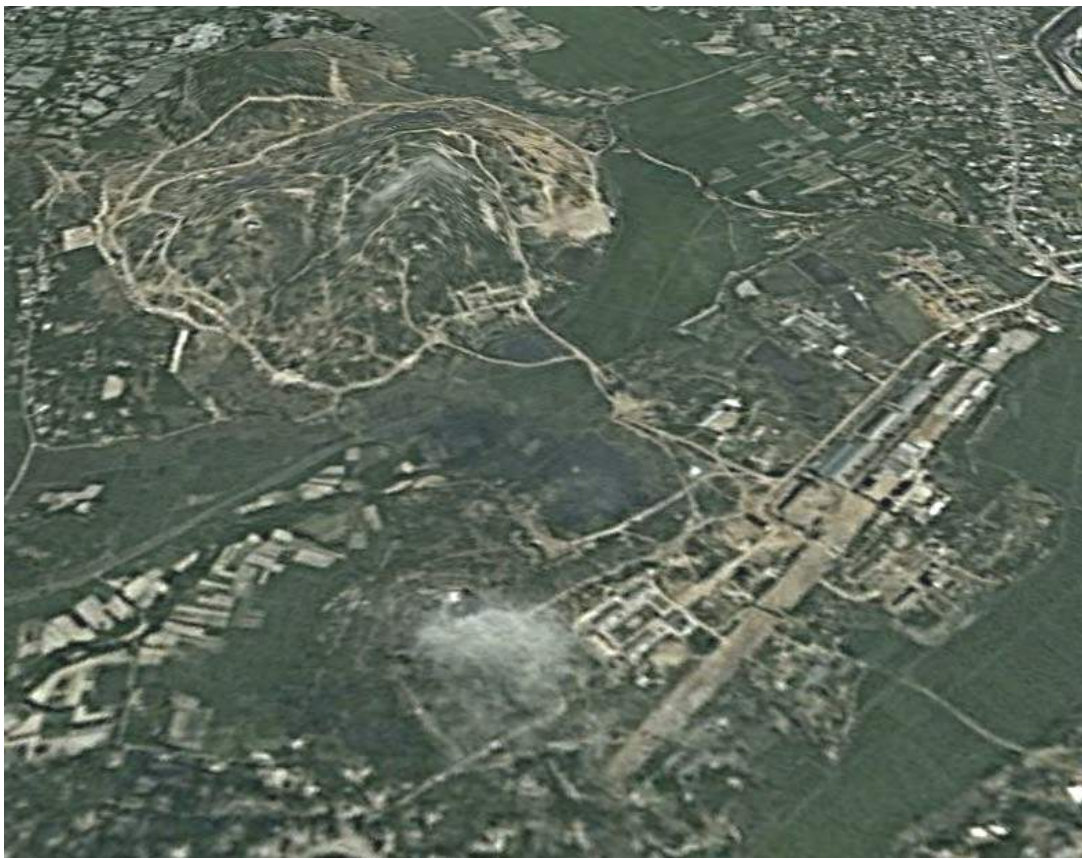


LZ Baldy Photo from website by CPT Seale Tuttle



LZ Baldy

Today Baldy is still a military base - just on the other side. So we were not able to explore the old base, but here's the entrance gate:



**A View of LZ Baldy Today**

Source: <http://www.thecharlietigers.com/lz-baldy-now.html>

From there we returned to the hotel to relax until dinner. I had decided I had not packed enough tee shirts, so after a typical 15 minute Vietnamese downpour, we walked partway into Hoi An until we found a store with a good selection (made in Hoi An) and I bought these. [WARNING – the ink is not color fast and bled all over the place when first washed – but it also washed out pretty easily.]



The day ended with dinner at a very nice riverside restaurant in downtown Hoi An that unfortunately was across the river and about a half mile from a casino hotel that was hosting a wedding party. The guests were having a very good but loud time singing karaoke. Spotting karaoke places as we traveled – there are many – became a recurring theme during the rest of the trip.

### Day 3 (Wednesday, September 6, 2017)

This was another primarily military sites day with the schedule calling for “...touring along the Tu Bon – Vu Gia River basin, including the western edge of the ‘Rocket Belt’ and the including An Hoa Combat Base, Liberty Bridge, the Arizona Territory [so called because it was a lawless place like the old wild west], Go Noi Island and Hills 55, 65 and others.”

### Thang Loi Company Silk Business

But first, we started the day with a stop at the Thang Loi Company, which is the silk business Hau told us about and where I bought 2 shirts and Leslie ordered and was fitted for pants and a blouse (see page 9). They were ready by 6 and we wore them (OK - I only wore 1 shirt) to dinner at a great restaurant near the beach that night.

When we arrived, one of the young saleswomen took one look at Marc, who had lost a great deal of weight in preparation for the trip but still had a little belly, and said “Ooh – you a little Buddha.” A short time later when I tried on my shirts and they fit right off the rack, she said “Ooh – you a model.” Little Buddha and the model became another recurring theme during the trip – well, at least by me.

They also make silk here, and we got to see some of the process. Here are some young and older silkworms feeding on mulberry leaves:



**Young Silkworms**



**Older Silkworms**



**Silkworm cocoons on bamboo trellis**

Silkworms are the larvae of the silk moth. The 47 day process of developing and harvesting silk thread is:

1. The young silkworms hatch and eat and sleep for 17 days.
2. Then they spend time eating but not sleeping – another 10 days or so.
3. They are placed on bamboo trellises where they spin their cocoons for about 20 days.
4. When fully developed, the cocoons are placed in 70 degree centigrade water (158 degrees Fahrenheit), which kills the worm before it becomes a moth and makes a hole in the cocoon to escape, leaving the thread for harvesting. Each cocoon produces 100-300 meters (325-1,000 feet) of silk thread like in the picture to the right. It takes 2,000 – 3,000 cocoons or more to yield a pound of silk.



For an article on silkworms and silk production see <https://www.thoughtco.com/silkworms-bombyx-domestication-170667>.

### Lotus Farm

On the way to An Hoa, we stopped at a Lotus farm. The farm is owned by the village with families contacting to work portions of the farm for a certain duration in a communal fashion. Rice is grown in a similar arrangement.



**Lotus Field**



**Lotus Blossom**

The lotus is the national flower of Viet Nam and we happened to be there during lotus harvest season. We were able to watch a family harvesting and processing lotus for market and some pictures follow. For an excellent discussion of the Vietnamese lotus flower, see the website <https://cutemintran.wordpress.com/2013/05/11/lotus-vietnams-national-flower-a-symbol-of-divine-beauty/>.

This website states **“To the Vietnamese, lotus is known as an exquisite flower, symbolizes the purity, serenity, commitment and optimism of the future as it is the flower which grows in muddy water and rises above the surface to bloom with remarkable beauty.** At night, the flower closes and sinks under water. It rises and opens again at dawn. How it blossoms and recedes at certain times of the day makes the flower remain untouched by impurity. Thus, the lotus symbolizes the purity of heart and mind.”

Besides its beauty and fragrance, almost all of the plant is used. Stems from younger plants are used in salads, the stamens are dried and made into an herbal tea, and the lotus seeds are eaten raw, dried or boiled. Leslie looked at lotus plants for our pond and one sells for \$35 - \$40.



**Harvesting Lotus**





**Lotus Seedpod and Seeds**



**Pile of Lotus Pods after Harvest**



**Lotus Seeds**

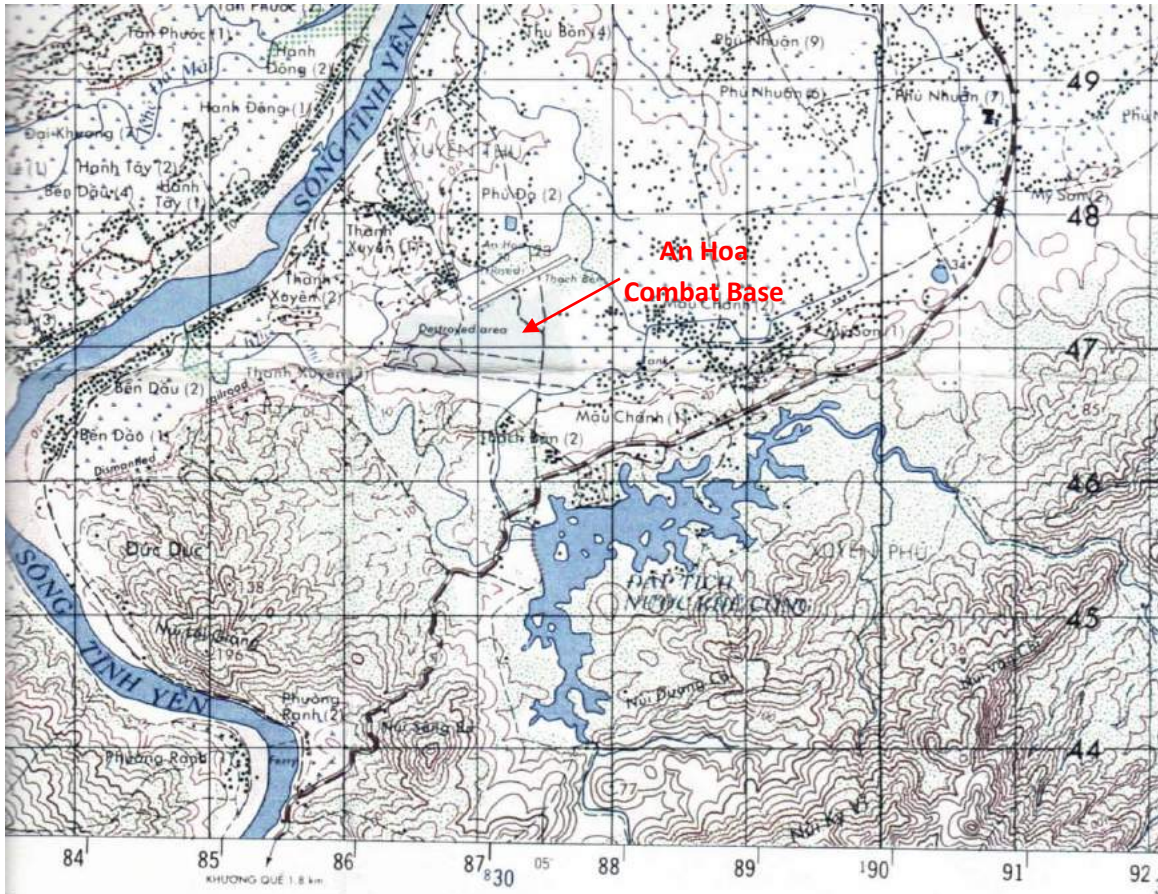
**An Hoa Combat Base**

We continued our drive to the site of the old An Hoa Combat Base where I had been several times and Marc had been stationed in 1968 with a CAP unit (see page 4 for a refresher on CAP units). The base is not there anymore because we demolished it when we pulled out so that it couldn't be used against us or the ARVN. One of the companies in my Battalion did much of the demolition. The remains of the airstrip are still there and we were able to stand on it and look around the area.

**Standing on the northeast end of the An Hoa Airstrip**



An Hoa Combat Base (also known as Duc Duc), built in 1966, was a former U.S. Marine Corps and ARVN base 17 miles west of Hoi An. An Hoa was an established Vietnamese community with an industrial district. In 1966 Marine engineers completed the construction of Liberty Road (which I drove several times) that linked An Hoa with Da Nang.



An Hoa Location Map



Looking west from An Hoa Airstrip



**Aerial of An Hoa Combat Base looking east**

Source: <http://www.marzone.com/7thMarines/Vn5507.htm>

For more information on the An Hoa Combat Base and its AO (Area of Operations) see <http://anhoaproject.co.uk/>.

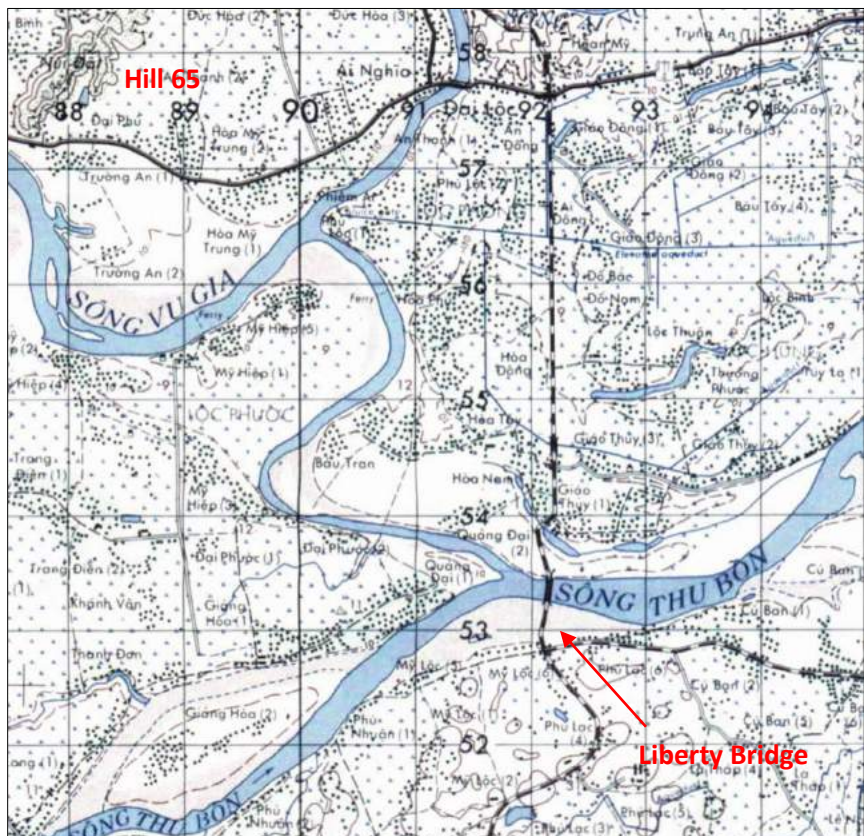
### Viet Nam Paper Industry

Viet Nam has a very successful and growing paper industry and one of the largest companies is the An Hoa Paper Joint Stock Company which makes and exports large volumes of various kinds of pulp for paper making (see [http://www.pct-vn.com/cnt\\_24.html](http://www.pct-vn.com/cnt_24.html)). Cong told us that hard wood pulp for high quality paper was a major industry, with eucalyptus bark sold to Japan and we saw timber harvesting (bark already removed) for this purpose at the old An Hoa Combat Base.

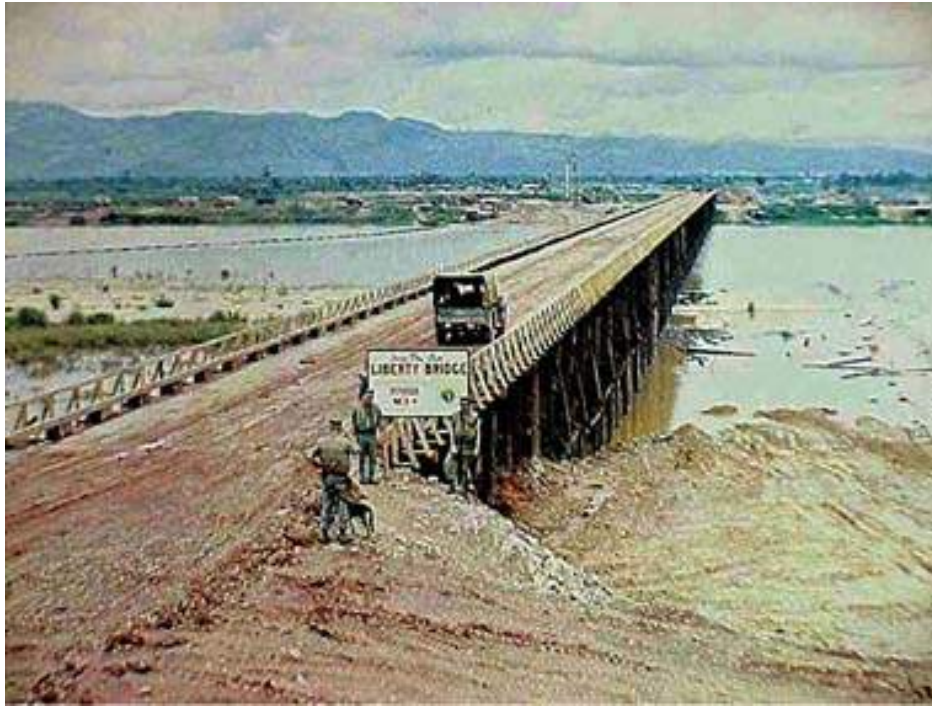


### Liberty Bridge

From An Hoa, we drove up to Liberty Bridge. This was a Seabee project and the longest timber bridge in Viet Nam at 2,040 feet. It was 35 feet above the Song Thu Bon (Thu Bon River) and required 1,080 piles to be driven. The completion of the bridge not only helped US and ARVN troop movements, but also allowed Vietnamese residents on both sides to cross the river, which they had only been able to do by boat before. For many pictures and a brief but good discussion, see <http://www.seabee-rvn.com/Bridges/Liberty-Bridge/i-TxHkQts>.



Here's what the bridge looked like during construction:



**Liberty Bridge looking north**

Source: <http://www.marzone.com/7thMarines/Vn5510.htm>

The old Liberty Bridge was destroyed in a typhoon in 1985. All you can see now are some of the bridge pilings.



As part of the country's infrastructure improvement program, a new bridge was completed in 2016.



**New Liberty Bridge**

### Hill 65

We never did find the entrance to Hill 65 but the map on page 87 shows its location. After about 20 minutes of looking for the entrance road, Marc and I agreed that since neither of us had spent much time there – I think I was in and out quickly on multi-stop helicopter flights – we didn't need to look more and told Cong and An we were OK with moving on. Here's what it looked like and you can see its horseshoe shape in the quad map on page 87 above.



**Landing at Hill 65 – May 1970 (my photo)**



**View from Hill 65 – August 1970 (my photo)**





**Hill 65**

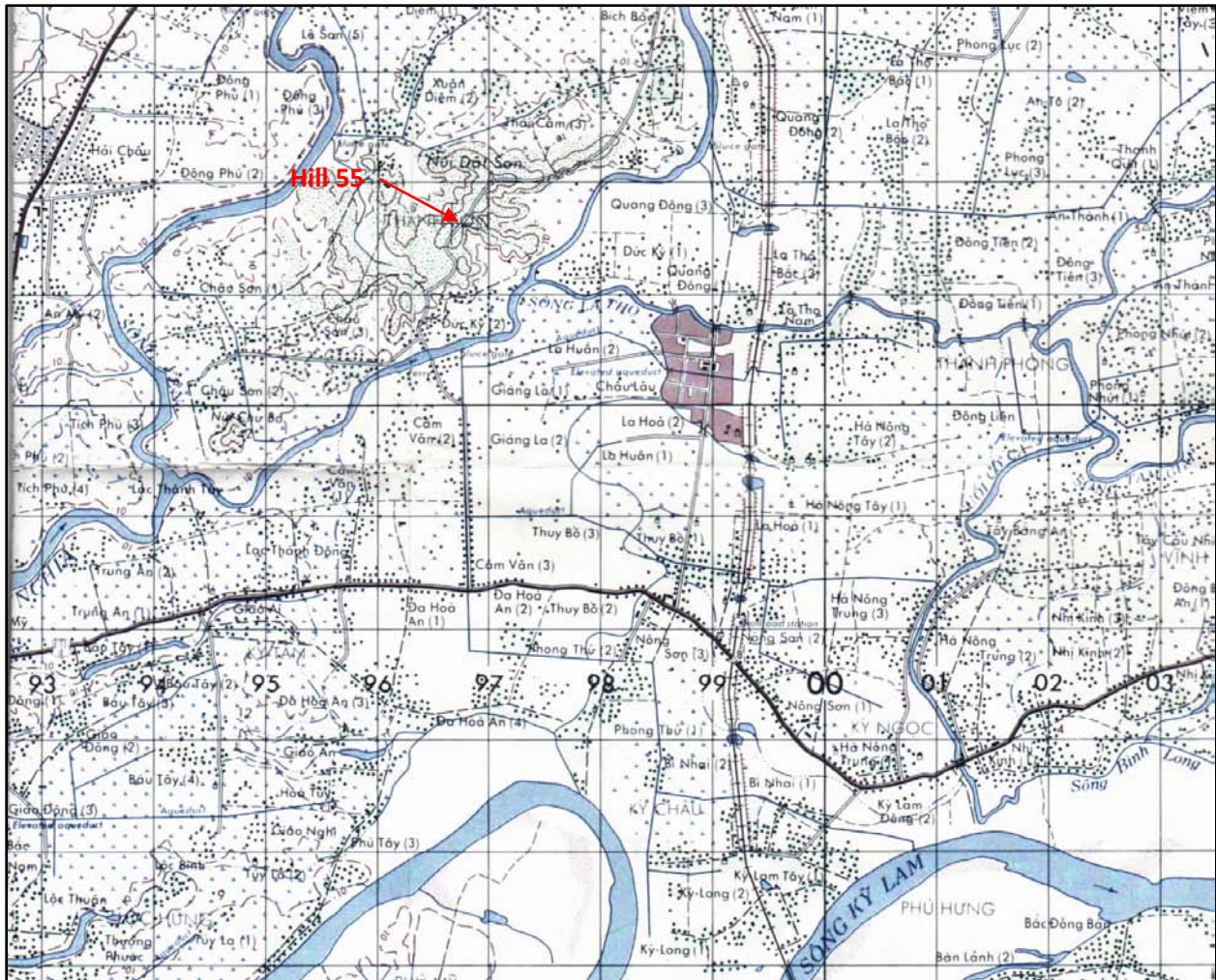
Source: <http://www.marzone.com/7thMarines/Vn5508.htm>

The website <http://grunts-vietnam.blogspot.com/2009/03/hill-65.html> shows another Vietnamese monument on the top of the hill.



## Hill 55

After lunch in Dai Loc, we proceeded northeast to Hill 55 – location shown here.



Hill 55 (also known as Nui Dat Son or Camp Muir) is 10 miles southwest of Da Nang and was built as a Marine base in 1966 on the site of where two battalions of French troops were wiped out in July 1954 in the “First Indochina War” (1945–1954).

Hill 55 was very important to us because it commands a 360° view of the countryside including into Da Nang, which would be just about in range of a 105 mm howitzer with the right set-up (range of 11,500 to 19,000 meters = 7 to 12 miles) so that we could provide supporting fire over a long distance, but equally important, the enemy could too if they held the hill. You can still see the remains of our old 105 artillery firing pits.



Looking at Dan Nang from Hill 55



Hill 55 105 Firing Pit

Hill 55 now has a monument and map celebrating Viet Nam's victory over the French in 1954.



**Hill 55 Monument and Map of the 1954 Victory over the French**

### Day 4 (Thursday, September 7, 2017)

We left Hoi An and our new friend Hau. This was a travel day, heading north from Hoi An through Da Nang and stopping at Red Beach; then over the Hai Van Pass to the picturesque village of Lang Co; then up to Phu Bai and finally arriving in Hue.

### Red Beach

Red Beach is another portion of Da Nang Beach a couple of miles west of China Beach. This was the site of the first Marine Corps landing of combat troops in Viet Nam (two battalions – about 3,500 Marines – from 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment) on 8 March 1965. Red Beach is 8 km (5 miles) northwest of Da Nang heading up the coast. It is called Red Beach because of the colors reflected over the water at dawn and sunset.

Immediately after the landing, development started on the Red Beach Base Area (also known as Camp JK Books, Camp Haskins, Camp Viking, Paddock Compound or Red Beach Camp) to serve as a logistics and support base for the Marine Corps, and later the Navy, Army and ARVN.





**Red Beach Today**



**Fishing Boats at Red Beach**

Many of the boats are round and made from bamboo with a bottom coated with pitch



**Development at Red Beach**



**Da Nang Skyline from Red Beach**

1. Typical early morning hot weather haze, but soon the monsoons will hit and the temperature will go down to the 70s.
2. In 1970, who would have thought Da Nang would ever have a skyline?

### Hai Van Pass (Ocean Cloud Pass)

The name is derived from Hai, which means ocean and Van, which means cloud. Many sources consider this to be the most scenic route in Vietnam.

From Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%E1%BA%A3i\\_V%C3%A2n\\_Pass](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%E1%BA%A3i_V%C3%A2n_Pass):

The **Hải Vân Pass** (Vietnamese: *Đèo Hải Vân*, IPA: [d̥ɛw hǎ:j vən], "ocean cloud pass"), is an approximately 21 km long [mountain pass](#) on [National Route 1A](#) in Vietnam. It traverses a spur of the larger [Annamite Range](#) that juts into the [East Sea of Viet Nam](#), on the border of [Đà Nẵng](#) and [Thừa Thiên–Huế Province](#), near [Bạch Mã National Park](#). Its name refers to the mists that rise from the sea, reducing visibility. Historically, the pass was a physical division between the kingdoms of [Champa](#) and [Đại Việt](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

The pass ... also forms a boundary between the climates of northern and southern Vietnam, sheltering the city of Da Nang from the "Chinese winds" that blow in from the northwest. During the winter months (November–March), for instance, weather on the north side of the pass might be wet and cold, while the south side might be warm and dry.<sup>[1]</sup>

The twisting road on the pass has long been a challenge for drivers traveling between the cities of [Huế](#) and [Đà Nẵng](#). Since the completion of [Hải Vân Tunnel](#), traffic flow and safety have improved.<sup>[1]</sup>

The pass is crossed by two main transport routes: Vietnam's main north–south highway, [National Route 1A](#), and the [North–South Railway](#). The road crosses over the mountain more or less directly, climbing to an elevation of 496 m (1,627 ft) and passing south of the 1,172 m (3,845 ft) high Ai Van Son peak, while the railway hugs the coastline more closely, passing through a series of tunnels along the way. Since its opening in 2005, the [Hải Vân Tunnel](#)—the longest tunnel in Southeast Asia [6.28 km (3.90 mi)]—offers an alternative road across the pass, reducing travel times by at least an hour.<sup>[1]</sup>

Construction of the tunnel [opened on June 5, 2005] was split into two segments, a southern and a northern section. The southern section (4 km (2.49 mi)) was constructed by a Vietnam–Japan joint venture between the Japanese [Hazama Corporation](#) and their Vietnamese partners, [Cienco 6](#). The 2 km (1.24 mi) northern section was constructed by a joint venture between Korea's Dong Ah construction company and Vietnam's Song Da Construction Corporation.<sup>[2]</sup> The main tunnel is 11.9 m (39.0 ft) wide. A second tunnel running alongside the main tunnel is currently used for maintenance and emergencies but it is planned to expand this at a later date as traffic increases. It is connected to the main tunnel by 15 cross-tunnels. The tunnels have lighting, fire alarms, communication, water supply and treatment, ventilation fans, and radio broadcast systems.

For additional information on Hai Van Pass, see <http://vietnam-beauty.com/top-destinations/destination-in-the-central-region/12-destination-in-the-middle/272-hai-van-pass.html> and <http://en.vietnam.com/central-vietnam/other-places-of-interest/hai-van-pass.html>

From a military perspective, the Pass and particularly its peak have always been a very strategic location because traffic is funneled into a narrow pathway and can therefore be easily controlled or disrupted. This strategic importance of the peak can be seen from the remains of military fortifications still there.



Some of the fortifications built by the French date back to 1826. Seabees widened the road to facilitate getting supplies from Da Nang to Hue.



**South End of Hai Van Pass**

There is a leper colony in the vicinity of the beach



**Hai Van Pass Road**



Hai Van Pass French Fortifications



Sign at the Peak of Hai Van Pass



**Hai Van Pass French Pillbox**



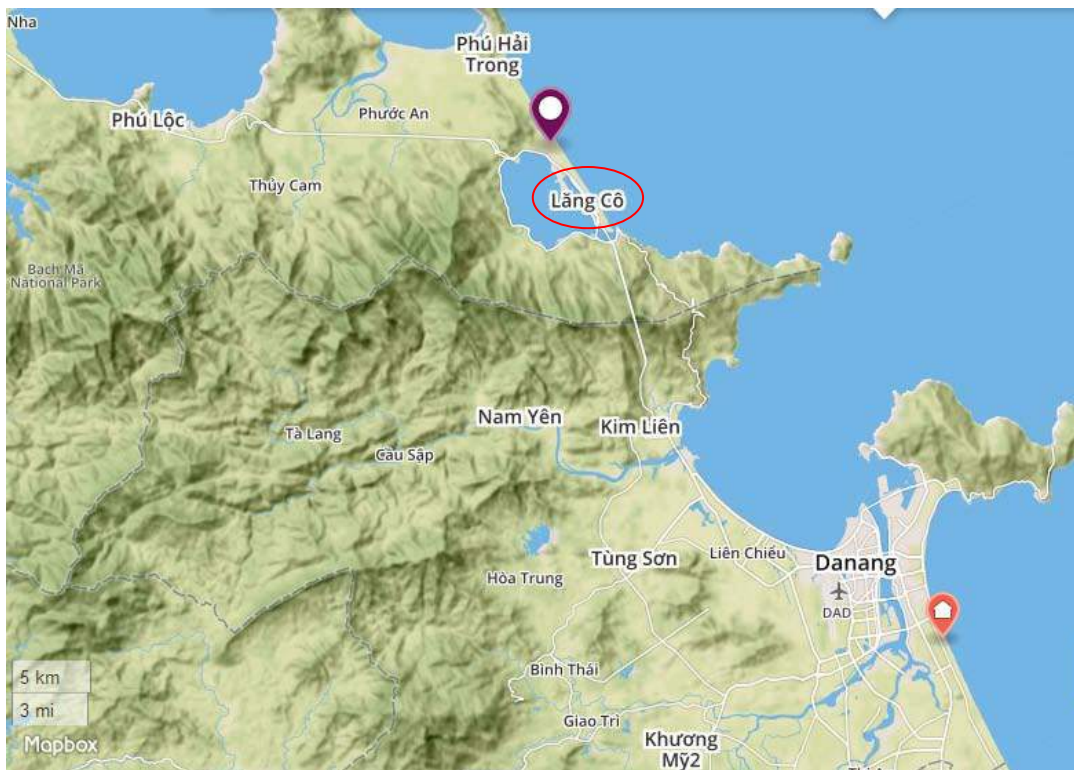
**View of Da Nang from Hai Van Pass Peak**

### **Lang Co**

From the peak of Hai Van Pass, you descend the winding road into a series of valleys and lagoons. The first you come to is the village of Lang Co which sits at the tip of a long peninsula separating a shallow lagoon from the sea. The village consists of many small structures - one and two story houses, commercial structures and an old church.



**Bridge at the north end of Hai Van Pass into Lang Co**



**Location of Lang Co**

Source: [https://www.audleytravel.com/us/vietnam/places-to-go/lang-co?audcmp=286018307&audadg=1255642284035196&audkey=lang%20co%20vietnam&auddev=c&utm\\_source=bing&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=27-505%20Vietnam&utm\\_term=lang%20co%20vietnam&utm\\_content=Vietnam%20-%20Place%20-%20Lang%20Co%20-%20Exact](https://www.audleytravel.com/us/vietnam/places-to-go/lang-co?audcmp=286018307&audadg=1255642284035196&audkey=lang%20co%20vietnam&auddev=c&utm_source=bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=27-505%20Vietnam&utm_term=lang%20co%20vietnam&utm_content=Vietnam%20-%20Place%20-%20Lang%20Co%20-%20Exact)



**Fishing Boats in Lang Co Lagoon**



**Fishing Net in Lang Co Lagoon**

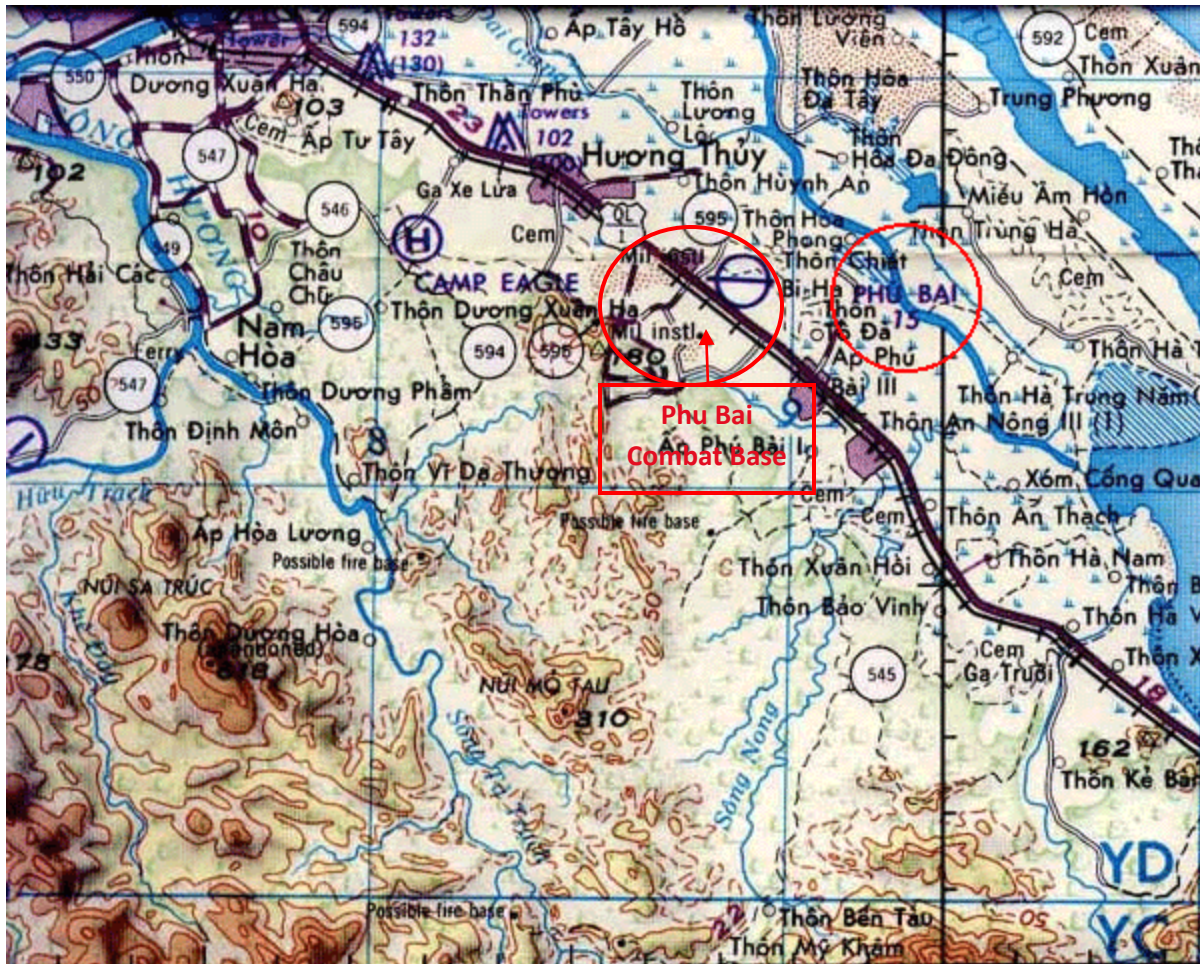


**Lang Co Lagoon**

### **Phu Bai Combat Base**

From Lang Co we continued north to Hue with a brief stop at the old Phu Bai Combat Base located 15 km (9 miles) from Hue; it is now an industrial park. We will fly out of the airport – part of the old Combat Base – when we head to Ha Noi. In the industrial park is the Huda Beer Brewery (owned by Carlsberg as most breweries in Viet Nam are), so I had to stop there but they wouldn't let me in to have a beer. So I had one from our cooler. The Vietnamese word for beer is bia.





Phu Bai Area Map

The Phu Bai Combat Base (also known as Phu Bai Airfield and Camp Hochmuth) is a former U.S. Army and Marine base a short distance south of Hue. During the 1968 Tet Offensive in Hue, most of the Marines who reinforced the MACV compound and subsequently liberated The Citadel came from the Phu Bai Combat Base. It was originally built in 1963 for the Army Security Agency operating under cover of the 3rd Radio Research Unit (3rd RRU), as a radio facility. After the departure of US troops, the base was operated by the ARVN as a forward logistics base. At that time, the Phu Bai airfield was the only airport serving Hue; it is now the Phu Bai International Airport and still serves Hue. It was overrun by the PAVN in late March 1975.



### Phu Bai Combat Base

Source:

[https://images.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search;\\_ylt=A0LEViCxQyhayGYA5IQPxQt.;\\_ylu=X3oDMTByMjB0aG5zBGNvbG88DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzYw--?p=Phu+Bai+Combat+Base&fr=yhs-adk-adk\\_sbnt&hspart=adk&hsimp=yhs-adk\\_sbnt](https://images.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search;_ylt=A0LEViCxQyhayGYA5IQPxQt.;_ylu=X3oDMTByMjB0aG5zBGNvbG88DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzYw--?p=Phu+Bai+Combat+Base&fr=yhs-adk-adk_sbnt&hspart=adk&hsimp=yhs-adk_sbnt)

As previously noted, much of the base is now the Phu Bai Industrial Zone, which has an area of 800 hectares or nearly 20 square miles.

### Arriving in Hue

Our final stop of the day was arrival in Hue, once the home of the Annamese emperors.

Before going to the hotel, we took a quick trip around the main street area (Le Loi street), which runs along the south bank of the Perfume River. Le Loi, considered one of the most beautiful streets in Hue, is a very long road that begins at the Hue rail station at the west end and runs to the Dap Da Bridge.





Turning off Hung Vuong Street onto Le Loi, the prominence of the Huda Brewery in the area is immediately noticeable with this entrance arch over Le Loi. The name “Huda” is a combination of “Hu” from Hue and “da” from the Vietnamese word for Denmark because it is owned by Carlsberg, the Danish brewing company.



They also have a large “I Love Hue” sign (in Vietnamese) in Park February 3 farther to the east on Le Loi as shown on the following page. February 3<sup>rd</sup> is the anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of the Republic of Viet Nam.



### Hue Train Station

Source: <http://www.exploresondoong.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Hue-train-station-1.jpg>

On the next page is a monument on Le Loi to Vietnamese troops who fought with the French during World War I.



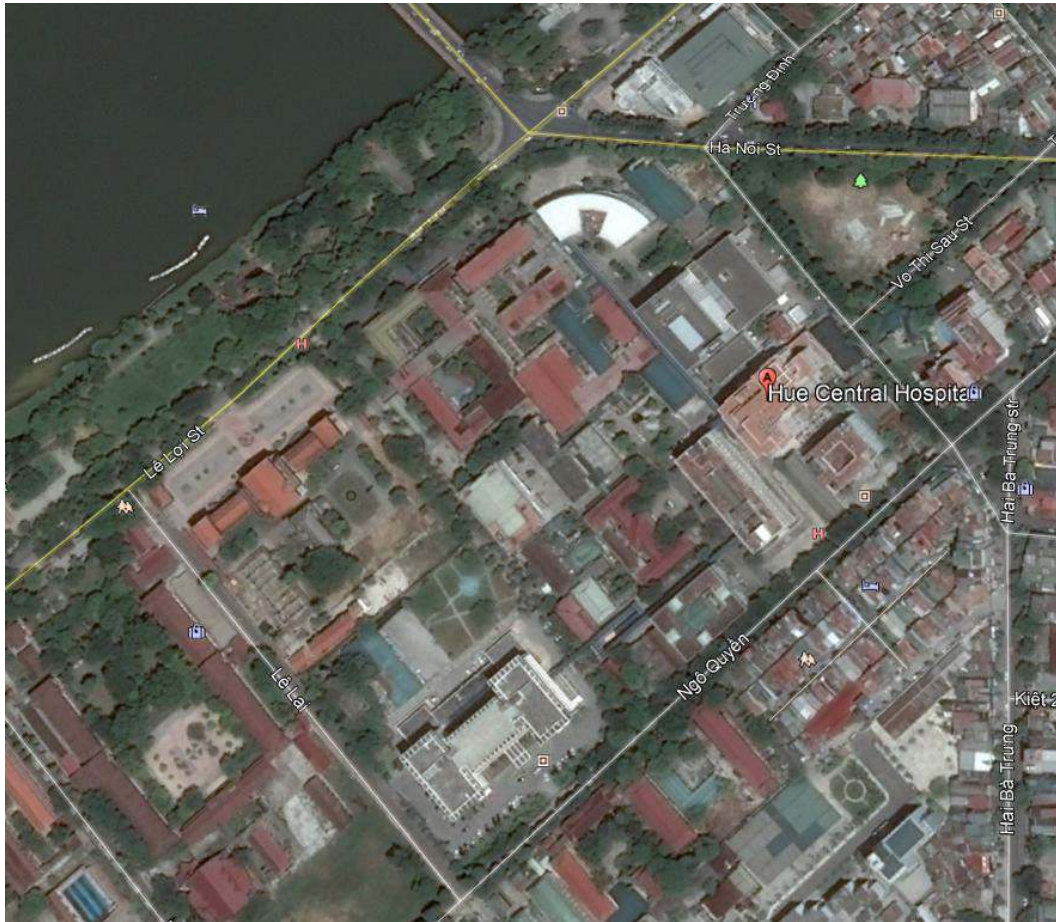
Also on Le Loi is the famous Quoc Hoc National High School, now called the Hue National High School, which is the oldest high school in the country. Established by the French in 1896, it was the school for children from royal and noble families. For many years it was all male; its graduates include President Ho Chi Minh, General Vo Nguyen Giap, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and President Ngo Dinh Diem, as well as many poets, musicians and scientists. The boys' school has now been combined with the girls' school next door.



**Hue National High School Gate**

For more information on Hue National High School, see <https://www.vietnamonline.com/attraction/quoc-hoc-hue---century-old-high-school.html>.

Another noteworthy place in the same portion of Le Loi is the Hue Central Hospital. The Wikipedia entry on the hospital shows that it was established in 1894 as the first western hospital in Viet Nam. It has 2,078 beds and occupies 120,000 square meters (nearly 1,292,000 square feet). It employs 2,016 people, including 431 doctors and pharmacists and 18 professors. There are also 152 staff and 2,500 students at the Huế Medical College.



### Hue Central Hospital Complex

Source: Google Earth

And finally, at the corner of the Le Loi and Hung Vuong streets is the Hotel Saigon Morin. In 1968, this was Hue University and was only half as many stories. It was a building that was heavily involved in the Tet offensive. Our guide Cong attended Hue University.

There are two particularly famous photographs involving this building during Tet. One is of a Marine machine gunner in a hole in the street at the Le Loi and Hung Vuong streets intersection. They have a copy of the picture in a hallway near the hotel lobby and I took a picture of the picture (see page 112).

The other is of a Marine casualty being lowered from the second floor rooftop (the north side of the building was only two floors at that time) to his buddies in the courtyard. That picture is shown on page 112 and the star in the top picture on the next page shows where the picture was taken.

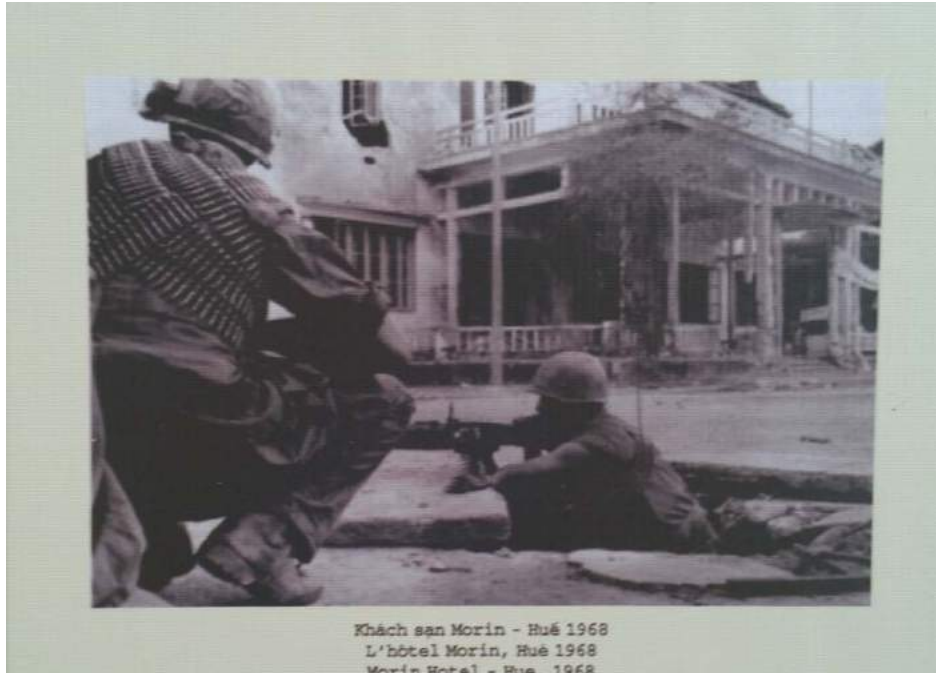
**Pictures of the Hotel Saigon Morin, formerly Hue University**



The yellow star shows where the second picture on the next page was taken in 1968. The building was only two stories at the time.



**Hotel Saigon Morin September 2017**



**Looking from Hue University (now the Hotel Saigon Morin)  
at Marine position at the Le Loi and Hung Vuong streets intersection – Tet 1968**



**Hue University (now the Hotel Saigon Morin) Rooftop Medivac – Tet 1968**  
Source: <http://www.popasmoke.com/visions/displayimage.php?album=107&pid=6076>  
See the location of where this occurred in the top picture on page 111

### Day 5 (Friday, September 8, 2017)

This was a day of only three stops (plus lunch) but an overwhelming amount of history and scenery in and around the historic city of Hue, the ancient capital of Viet Nam. I can't possibly tell you all the things Cong told us, nor can I positively identify all the things I took pictures of – but I hope you enjoy them nonetheless.

#### The Citadel and Imperial City

The majority of the morning was spent at The Citadel and the Imperial City (or Forbidden Purple City, which was the Royal Family's residence) inside. Planned in 1802, construction of The Citadel started in 1804 and took 30 years. It was made a World Heritage site in 1993.



**The Citadel and Imperial City**

Source: Google Imagery

Once the home of the Annamese emperors who had ruled the central portion of present-day Viet Nam for nearly 150 years until World War II, the Imperial Citadel of Hue served as the capital of Viet Nam's Nguyen dynasty. The three-square-mile Citadel is surrounded by walls rising as high as 30 feet which are up to 40 feet thick, forming a square about a mile and a half long on each side. The walls not bordering the Perfume River are encircled by a zigzag moat connecting to the River that is 90 feet wide at many points and up to 12 feet deep.

Inside the Citadel is a dense development of row houses, apartment buildings, villas, shops, parks and an all-weather airstrip. At the south-central edge of the Citadel is the Imperial Palace, another fortified enclave with its own moat. This is where the emperors held court until the French took control of Viet Nam in 1883. The palace is essentially a square with 20-foot-high, 2,300-foot-long walls. The very center of the area was the Purple Forbidden City, an area reserved exclusively for the royal family.

The Citadel was a strategic location during the Vietnam War, and especially during the Tet Offensive, because it is close to the demilitarized zone that separated North and South Vietnam.

Here are some pictures.



**The Citadel from our Hotel Rooftop Garden**





**The focal point of the Citadel**



**Citadel Walls**



A Citadel Entrance



Citadel Gate to the Imperial Palace



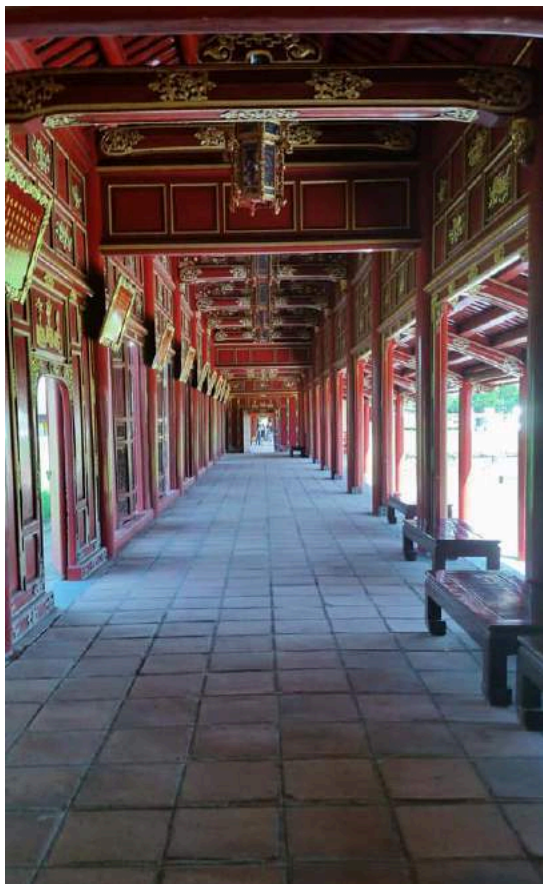
**Walkway to the Imperial Palace**



**The Imperial Palace**



Imperial Palace Wall from the Inside



Walkway to Emperor's Mother's Home



**Imperial Palace Ornamentation**



**Ornamentation made from Broken Glass and Wine Bottles**



Wall Decoration



Emperor's Rickshaw



**Imperial Palace Lamp**



**Evil Spirit Prevention Wall**



**Compound in The Citadel where 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division held out during Tet – now a military hospital**



**Field inside the Citadel Used for Medvac Flights during Tet**  
The highrise building is the one you see from our hotel on page 12



**Citadel Wall with Tet Bullet Holes**



## Thien Mu Pagoda – Pagoda of the Heavenly Lady

After leaving The Citadel, Cong took us to the Pagoda of the Heavenly Lady, also known as the Pagoda of the Celestial Lady. If it has Pagoda in the name, you know it is a Buddhist site, and this is the most famous and important one in Viet Nam. Construction started in 1601 during the rule of the Nguyễn Lords and includes the seven story pagoda. Cong says if people see a picture of this Pagoda, they immediately know you have been to Hue.

With seven stories, the Thien Mu Pagoda is the tallest pagoda in Viet Nam at 27 meters (nearly 89 feet). The octagonal pagoda overlooks the Perfume River and is regarded as the unofficial symbol of the former imperial capital. The initial temple was very simply constructed, but over time it was redeveloped and expanded with more intricate features.

For more information on the Thien Mu Pagoda, see

[https://sacredsites.com/asia/vietnam/thien\\_mu\\_pagoda\\_hue.html](https://sacredsites.com/asia/vietnam/thien_mu_pagoda_hue.html)

or

<https://en.vietnam.com/central-vietnam/cities/hue/attractions/thien-mu-pagoda.html>

Here are some pictures:



**Entrance to the Thien Mu Pagoda**



**The Thien Mu Pagoda**



Thien Mu Pagoda Temple



Novice Monk at Thien Mu Pagoda Temple



**Thien Mu Pagoda Bell**

In 1710 ruling Lord Nguyễn funded the casting of a huge bell for the Thien Mu Pagoda. Reputedly the largest in Viet Nam, the bell weighs 3,285 kg (7,242 pounds) and can be heard 10 kilometers away.

Housed at the Thien Mu Pagoda is the car (an Austin) of the monk whose self-immolation in 1963 made worldwide news. The monk, Thích Quảng Đức was protesting the persecution of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government of President [Ngô Đình Diệm](#).



### Tomb of Tu Duc

After lunch, we finished touring with a stop at the Tomb of Tu Duc, according to Cong, the most elegant in Viet Nam. Tu Duc was the longest reigning monarch in the Nguyen Dynasty (1848-1883). Begun in 1864, the construction took 3,000 soldiers 3 years to build it and it was a 50 building complex with a manmade half-moon shaped lake. Despite having 103 wives and concubines, Tu Duc was unable to father a child. It is believed he was sterile due to having smallpox or mumps as a child.



While this complex was built as his tomb, it was completed well before his death. The cost of constructing the complex resulted in the need for extra taxation leading to an attempted but unsuccessful coup in 1866. Thereafter, Tu Duc used the tomb's palace buildings as his primary residence. Cong told us that in part this was because Tu Duc became increasingly disenchanted with the presence of the French in Viet Nam and residing at his retreat reduced the need to interact with them. According

to Wikipedia "Interestingly, despite the grandeur of the site and the amount of time Tu Duc spent here, he was actually buried in a different, secret location somewhere in Hue. To keep the secret safe the 200 laborers who buried the king were all beheaded after they returned from the secret route. To this day, the real tomb of Tu Duc remains hidden for future generations to discover."

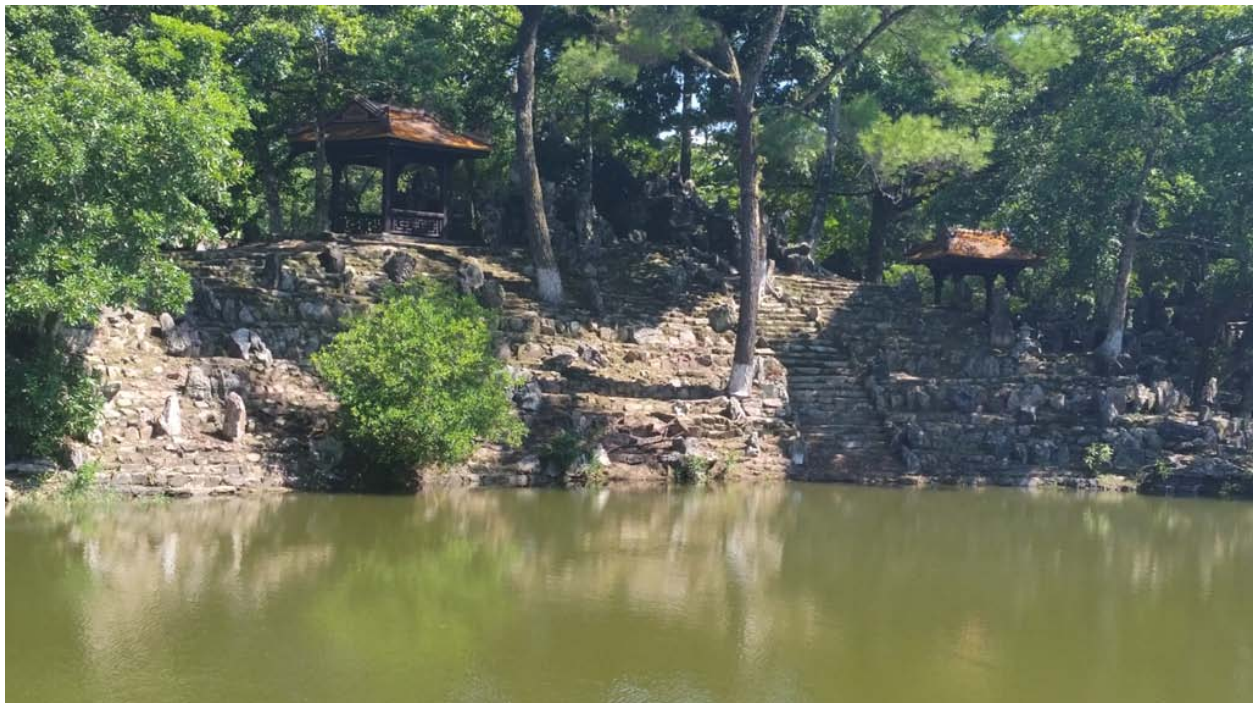
Here are some pictures:



**Tu Duc Tomb Entrance**



**Tu Duc Tomb manmade lake and island for the Emperor's hunting and fishing**



**Tu Duc Tomb Island**



**Tu Duc Tomb Restoration**

Some additional photos from the Tu Duc Tomb grounds:













**Tu Duc Tomb Guards**

For more information on Tu Duc's Tomb, see:

<https://vietnamese.style/destinations/tu-duc-tomb.html>

<http://en.vietnamitasenmadrid.com/2011/12/tu-duc-imperial-tomb-hue.html>

<https://www.vietnamonline.com/attraction/tu-duc-tomb.html>

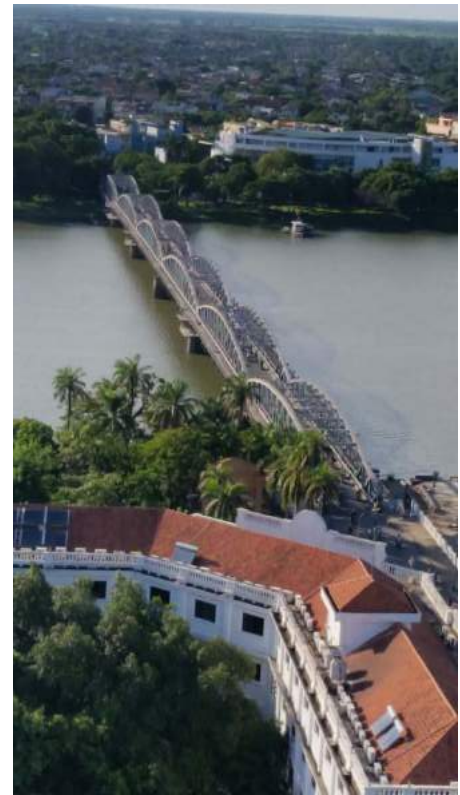
On the drive back to the hotel, we stopped at a small roadside shop where they were making incense and the conical hats we associate with Viet Nam. Leslie bought a hat in Ha Noi later in the trip.



### Walk to the Hue Marketplace

Once we got back to the hotel, we decided to take a short walk over the Eiffel Bridge to the Dong Ba Market. We never made it there because the entire street on the way was a market itself. Here are a couple of shots from our walk:

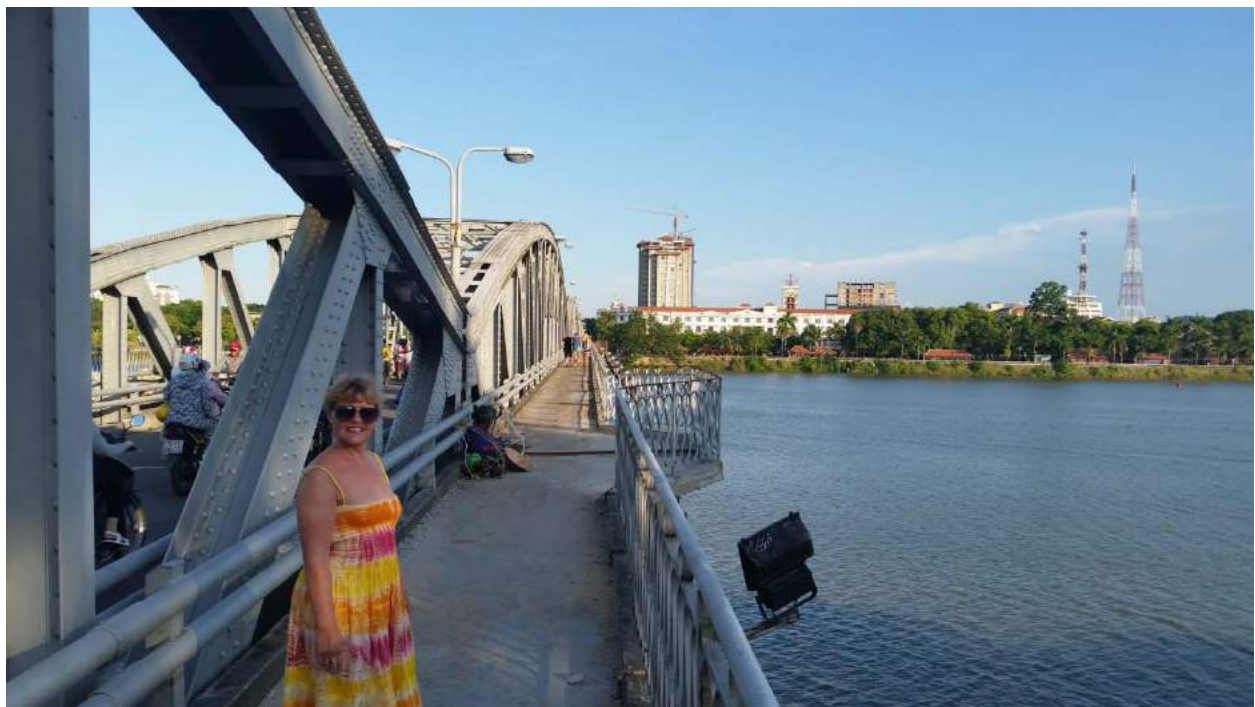
Eiffel Bridge and corner of Hotel Saigon Morin. The market area is to the right at the far end of the bridge.



Marketplace Parking and Traffic



**Hue Market Flower Shop**



**On the Eiffel Bridge looking at the Hotel Saigon Morin and highrise construction**



Floating, lotus shaped restaurant by the Eiffel Bridge and Park February 3



Sunset in Hue

### Day 6 (Saturday, September 9, 2017)

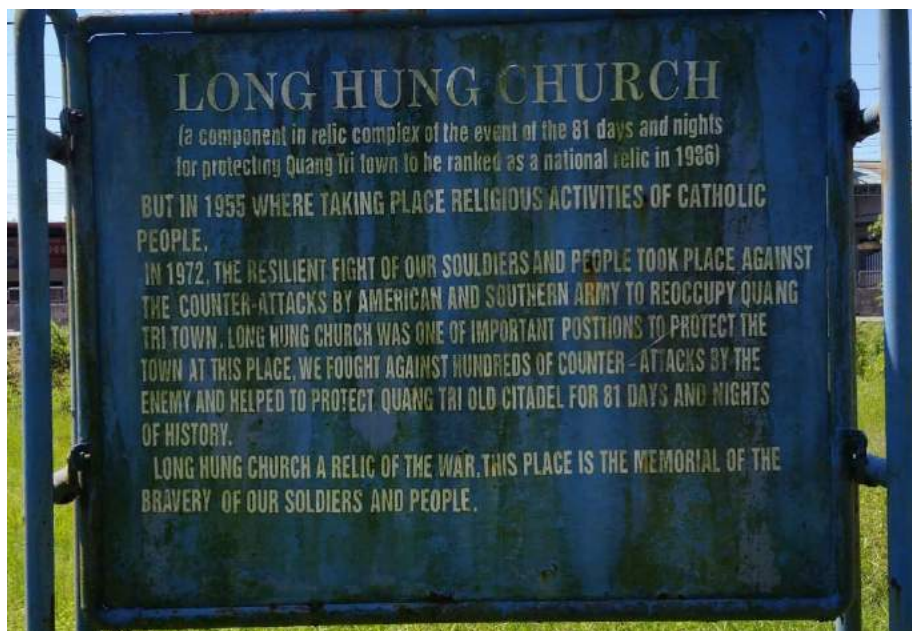
Today we traveled north from Hue into Quang Tri Province. Our traveling companion Marc Hancock spent a lot of time here with 2/4. Quang Tri Province is the poorest in Viet Nam. It also has a great deal of unexploded ordnance (from both sides) and despite being taught in school not to pick up anything strange, children are still being injured.



**Quang Tri Buddhist Monument to Those who died in the 1972 Easter Offensive**

### City of Quang Tri

The City of Quang Tri used to be the provincial capital but was completely destroyed during the 1972 Easter Offensive. Cong showed us the remains of two buildings left as a sort of memorial – the first was a Catholic Church.



**Remains of Quang Tri Catholic Church not destroyed in the 1972 Easter Offensive by the NVA**





**Remains of Long Hung Catholic Church**



**Inside the remains of Long Hung Catholic Church**

"INRI" is an abbreviation for the Latin "*Jesus Nazareus, Rex Iudaeorum*" ("Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews"), posted on the cross by order of the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate.

Source: <https://www.catholic.com/ga/what-do-the-abbreviations-inri-and-spqr-stand-for>

The second remaining building Cong showed us in Quang Tri was a high school. On the second floor is a blackboard with a note from the Class of 1972 who returned for their 22nd reunion in 1994.

**Remains of Quang Tri High School and Blackboard written on by Class of 1972 at a Reunion**



### The 1972 Easter Offensive

For more information, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter\\_Offensive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Offensive)

This was a military campaign conducted between March 30 and October 22, 1972 by the North Vietnamese regular army (the PAVN) against the ARVN, the South Vietnamese regular army, and supporting U.S. forces. This was the first major incursion by the North into the South since the 1968 Tet Offensive. The large-scale invasion (Wikipedia says it was the largest offensive operation since 300,000 Chinese troops crossed the Yalu River into North Korea during the Korean War) was a radical departure from previous North Vietnamese offensives. It was not intended to win the war but rather to gain as much territory and destroy as many units of the ARVN as possible, so as to improve the North's negotiating position as the Paris Peace Accords (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris\\_Peace\\_Accords](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Peace_Accords)) drew towards a conclusion – and in this it was successful.

In I Corps, PAVN forces overran ARVN defensive positions in a month-long battle resulting in the capture of Quang Tri City before moving south in an attempt to also capture Hue. In June and July the ARVN forces counter-attacked, culminating in the recapture of Quảng Trị City in September. The result of the two battles centered on Quang Tri was its nearly total destruction.

### An Unplanned Stop at a Vietnamese Wedding

The highlight of the day was on the way from Quang Tri to Cua Viet where we happened to find a wedding reception, stopped to take pictures, and ended up getting invited in. We gave them US \$2 bills which are considered very good luck in Viet Nam and other Asian countries. It was a little unusual to see the bride in white as red is the more traditional color.





Mark enjoying a toast at the wedding

### Stopping to Honor An's Parents

We also were fortunate to be able to accompany our driver An to the old home of his parents where he lit incense in their honor.



### Cửa Việt

From the wedding we continued on Provincial Route TL 64 to our next planned stop, Cửa Việt. We went to the mouth of the Song Thanh Han (sometimes called the Cửa Việt River) where the U.S. had constructed an in-country R&R facility as part of the Cửa Việt Base. For troops in northern I Corps, it was faster and easier to bring them here than to traverse Hai Van Pass to get to the Da Nang area. Cửa Việt is another area with delightful beaches and is now being developed as a tourist area, although it has not become popular yet. There are now at least six hotels along the Eastern Sea just north of the Song Thanh Han. We had lunch in this area.





From Wikipedia: Cửa Việt Base (also known as Cửa Việt Combat Base, Cửa Việt Naval Support Activity, Camp Kistler or simply Cửa Việt) is a former U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, U.S. Army and [Army of the Republic of Vietnam](#) (ARVN) base north of [Quảng Trị](#) in central [Vietnam](#). The base was located at the mouth of the Cửa Việt/[Thạch Hãn River](#) approximately 16 km north of Quảng Trị and only approximately 10 km south of the [Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone](#) (DMZ).<sup>[1]</sup>

The base was first established by the [3rd Marine Division](#) in 1966 as a logistics and support base for Marine units along the DMZ and particularly the [Đông Hà Combat Base](#) once the Cửa Việt/Thạch Hãn River had been dredged to allow passage for [LCUs](#) [Landing Craft, Utility].<sup>[2]</sup> An in-country rest and recreation center was established at the base and it was used for rehabilitation of Marine units coming in from operations along the DMZ.<sup>[3]</sup>

After the withdrawal of most US troops, the Cửa Việt Base was the scene of major battles during the Easter Offensive of 1972 and the Battle of Cửa Việt in January 1973. For more information on this battle, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_C%E1%BB%ADa\\_Vi%E1%BB%87t](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_C%E1%BB%ADa_Vi%E1%BB%87t).



Welcome to Cửa Việt Beach



Cửa Việt Beach



**Cửa Việt Fishing Boat**

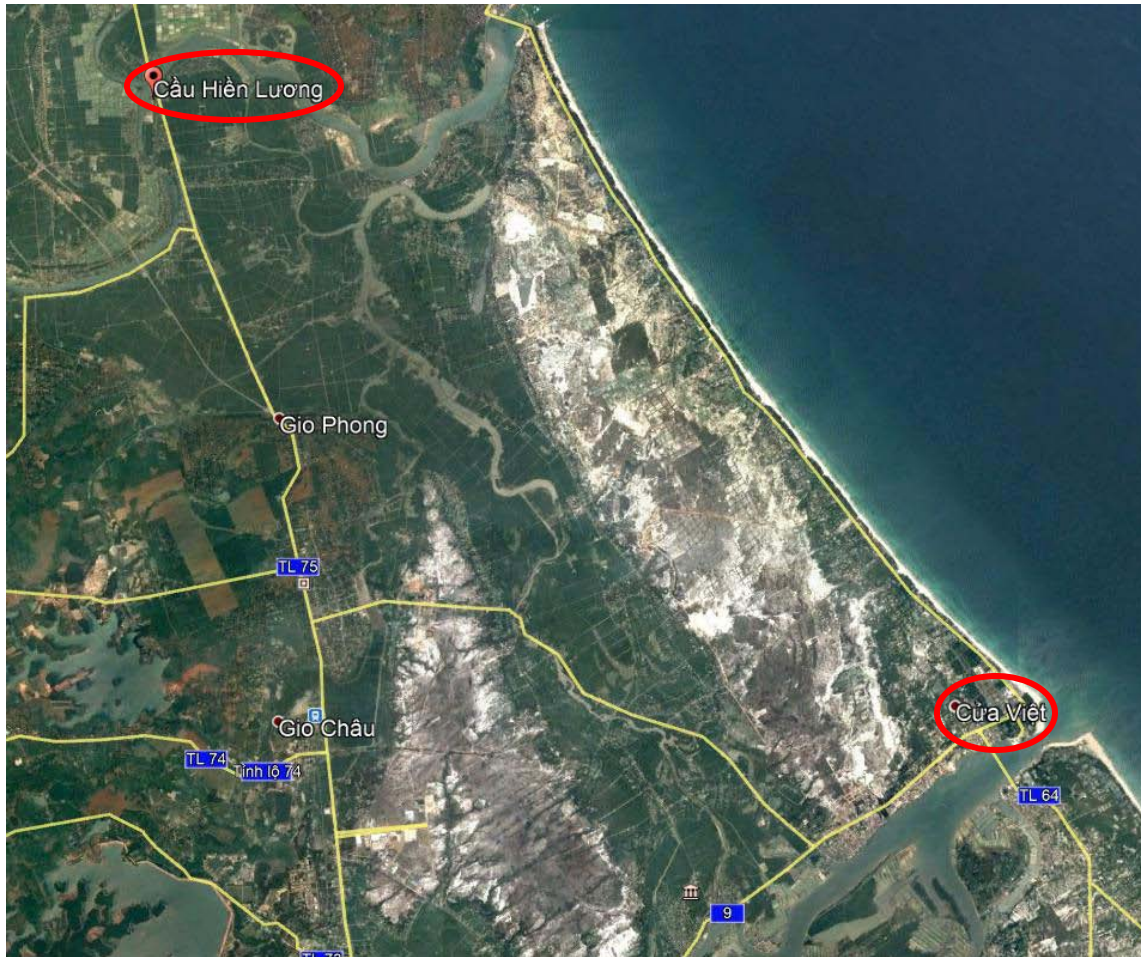


**Cửa Việt Fishing Pier and Beach Erosion Control**



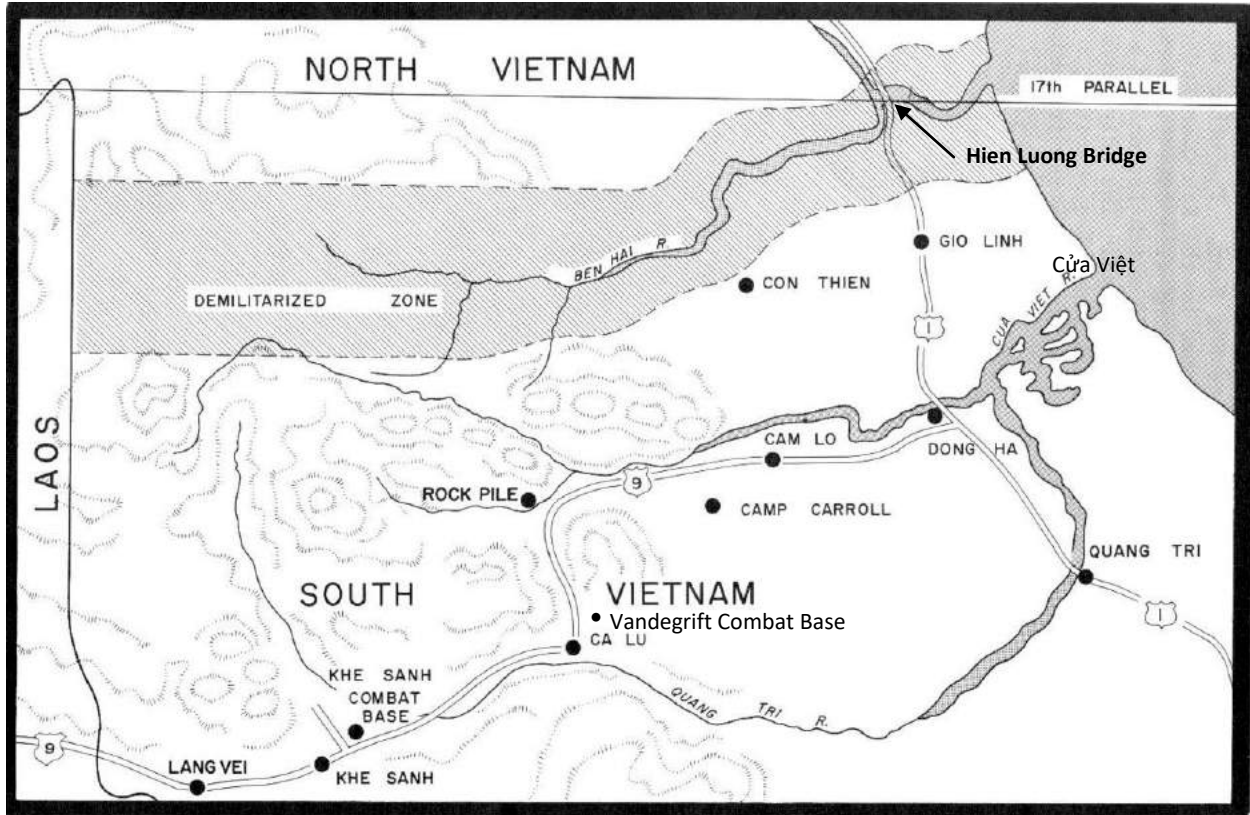
## The DMZ

From Cửa Việt, we drove a short distance to the Hien Long Bridge (Cau Hien Luong) marking the Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) over the Ben Hai River. For more information of the bridge, see <http://www.vietnamdrive.com/hien-luong-bridge-at-dmz-vietnam/>.



Running east-west and about 100 km (62 miles) north of Hue from the Gulf of Tonkin portion of the South China Sea (or Eastern Sea) to the Laotian border (about 100 km or 62 miles in length), the DMZ is frequently referred to as being at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel; however this was only a convenient reference because most of the DMZ is actually south of the parallel. The DMZ actually followed the Ben Hai River from its headwaters some 55 km (about 34 miles) to the sea; west of the river headwaters, the DMZ ran straight west to the Laotian Border. The DMZ included a 5 km (3.1 miles) band on either side of the DMZ demarcation.

The DMZ route can be seen on the map on the following page.



**DMZ Route**

Source: Wikipedia Camp Carroll Entry with additions by Mark Waterhouse



**Cau Hien Luong looking south**



During the war, the south kept trying to show a partitioning of the country by painting their half of the bridge railing a different color than the north side but the north kept painting its side the same as the south's to show unification. Today the north side is blue and the south side is yellow to show where the dividing line of the DMZ was.



**Straddling the DMZ**



**DMZ Museum**



**Russian Speaker at DMZ Museum**

Used to broadcast propaganda across the river to ARVN and US troops



**North end of the bridge Monument to PAVN Troops at the DMZ**



**Monument at south end of Cau Hien Luong (Hien Luong Bridge)**

From the DMZ we headed to Dong Ha, which would be our base of operations for the next two days. The drive took us through black pepper farms and rubber plantations.



**Black Pepper**

Black pepper is the fruit of a vine that grows up posts or trees

The French introduced rubber plantations to Viet Nam in 1910. Rubber trees grow 10 to 15 years before they are put into production.



**Rubber Trees**

### **Dai Do**

Before we arrived in Dong Ha, we tried to find the site of a four-day battle in Dai Do that Marc was involved in but Dai Do has disappeared and is now in the 6th ward of the City of Dong Ha, which is now the Quang Tri Provincial capital. In the war, Dong Ha was merely a combat base. (See more about Dong Ha on pages 19 – 20.) Cong asked some residents about Dai Do and was told the only thing left that reflected the Dai Do name was this building.



### *The Battle of Dai Do*

Source: <http://combatwife.net/golf24marines.htm>

In May of 1968, the North Vietnamese launched what has been called their "Tet II" or "Mini Tet" offensive, striking 119 locations including provincial and district capitals, military installations, and major cities including Saigon. Unlike Tet I, which was primarily a Viet Cong uprising, Tet II was almost entirely an NVA affair.

Most of the attacks were limited to mortar and rocket fire, but a major battle developed along the DMZ as the NVA attempted to do what they failed to do at Khe Sanh-- open an invasion corridor into the South. The first step was to crack the US 3rd Marine Division defenses by overrunning the Marine combat base at Dong Ha.

The battle began on April 30, with the ambush of a US Navy utility boat by elements of the 320th NVA Division at the junction of the Bo Dieu and Cửa Việt rivers. These rivers were vital logistics links for US Marine forces deployed along the DMZ. From the Gulf of Tonkin, supplies flowed up the Cửa Việt to its junction with the Bo Dieu to the Marine outposts at Khe Sanh, Camp Carroll, the Rockpile, and to numerous fire support bases, including Con Thien.

Since Battalion Landing Team 2/4 was in the area, it was ordered to eliminate the threat to the crucial waterway. Nicknamed the "Magnificent Bastards," the battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William Weise. At the abandoned villages of Dong Huan and Dai Do on the bank of the Bo Dieu, the Marines ran into heavy enemy fire. Reinforced by B Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, and supported by the boats of a Navy Assault Group, Weise launched an attack to clear the area.

Faced by the 48th and 52nd Regiments of the 320th NVA Division, Weise was heavily outnumbered and forced to fall back to defensive positions north of the river. But he had stopped the enemy attack, and the NVA reinforcements were turned back by the "Gimlets" [a nickname] of the Army's 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry, who occupied blocking positions at Nhi Ha to the northeast. On May 3, the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment joined the battle, only to find out the NVA had fled.

The NVA attempt to open an invasion corridor into South Vietnam had failed. The "Magnificent Bastards" and the "Gimlets" had saved the day, for if they had failed, the NVA would have been free to overrun the major supply bases at Dong Ha and Quang Tri, and the entire DMZ defenses would have been undermined. However, the cost had been high. The Marines suffered 81 casualties and another 297 seriously wounded, while Army forces at Nhi Ha sustained 29 deaths and 130 wounded. But the enemy suffered even greater losses-- not only did the NVA fail to achieve their objective, they also left 1,568 bodies on the battlefield.

The invasion of South Vietnam called for in Phase III of the General Offensive/General Uprising had been forestalled. It was four years before the NVA tried again with its Eastertide Offensive in 1972, and seven years before it succeeded with its 1975 Spring Offensive.

*(Submitted by Jim Pierce, from the "Historical Atlas of The Vietnam War")*

## Day 7 (Sunday, September 10, 2017)



### Good Morning Viet Nam

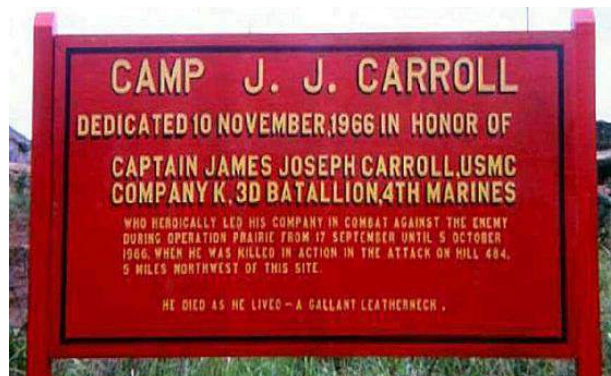
Sunrise in Dong Ha

Today was devoted primarily to visiting combat outposts west of Dong Ha along Route 9, most of which I had never been to or had never left the chopper as we dropped someone or something off.

### Camp Carroll

First stop was Camp Carroll (location shown on the map on page 148). Nothing left there although we did find a concrete pad that had been used by the artillery. The entire camp is either overgrown or being used as a rubber tree farm.

Camp Carroll was a Marine artillery base located 8 km (5 miles) southwest of the Cam Lộ Combat Base (Hill 37). Because Camp Carroll visually controlled a large arc of the strategic Highway 9 south of the DMZ, it was a key facility. It was one of nine artillery bases constructed along the DMZ and had 80 artillery pieces including 175mm self-propelled guns from the Army which could fire a 150-pound projectile 32,690 meters (about 20 miles). Camp Carroll diminished in significance after the 1968 Tet Offensive when the Marines started using more mobile operations rather than remaining in their fixed positions as sitting targets.



Source:

<http://hq4thmarinescomm.com/images/CampCarroll-2.jpg>





**Camp Carroll during the War**

Source: <http://hq4thmarinescomm.com/images/CampCarroll-2.jpg>



**Camp Carroll View September 2017**



**Wildflowers at Camp Carroll**

### **Mines Advisory Group**

On the walk up the road to Camp Carroll, we found a Mines Advisory Group (MAG) sign indicating that there may still be unexploded ordinance in the area.



MAG is a humanitarian, non-governmental organization established in the United Kingdom in 1989 for the purpose of clearing explosive ordnance or its remnants in active and former conflict zones. With US support, MAG started working in Quang Tri Province – one of the Provinces in Viet Nam with the most unexploded ordnance (UXO) – in 1999. For more information on MAG see: [www.maginternational.org](http://www.maginternational.org).

### Rubber Plantation

As previously noted, much of Camp Carroll is now a rubber plantation. On the entrance road to the camp, we came upon a group of people collecting the rubber sap, weighing it, and testing it for quality. The sap is cooked over a little stove like an omelet to see if it thickens and sets up properly.



Collecting Rubber Sap



Testing Rubber Sap

## The Rockpile

We drove past The Rockpile (location shown on the map on page 148), which was an important Marine Corps and Army observation post overlooking the area up to the DMZ and around Camp Carroll and Vandegrift Combat Base, which we went to next.



**The Rockpile**

From Wikipedia: **The Rockpile** (also known as **Elliot Combat Base**) and known in Vietnamese as Thon Khe Tri, is a solitary [karst](#) rock outcropping one mile north of [Route 9](#) and south of the former [Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone](#) (DMZ). Its relatively inaccessible location, reached only by helicopter, made it an important [United States Army](#) and [Marine Corps](#) observation post and artillery base from 1966 to 1969. The Rockpile is located approximately 10 miles (16 km) from the southernmost boundary of the DMZ and 16 miles (26 km) west of [Dong Ha](#).

The mountain rises almost 790 feet (240 meters) from the Cam Lo River bottom and sits astride several major infiltration routes from both North Viet Nam and Laos. The visually dominating figure was a familiar landmark for soldiers fighting in this area.

## Vandegrift Combat Base

Next stop was Vandegrift Combat Base, which was also known as Fire Support Base (FSB) Vandegrift and Landing Zone (LZ) Stud because it served multiple purposes (location shown on the map on page 148). The old runway is about the only thing that is recognizable. Some of the land is now occupied and used by hill tribe families for agriculture. LZ Stud was originally established by the Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division in 1968 to support Khe Sanh during the siege. It was later occupied by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division's 9<sup>th</sup> Marine regiment who renamed it Vandegrift Combat Base after Marine General Alexander Vandegrift, famed for commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division at the Battle of Guadalcanal in WWII.



### Vandegrift / Ca Lu Combat Base during the War

Source: [https://www.google.com/search?q=Ca+Lu+Combat+Base&client=firefox-b-1&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=U5zGI-cGe1sIVM%253A%252C7QYbuwcCluOTM%252C\\_%20XVKL2e-0Cm3HA7WXNnUorK\\_8Brl%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjAgP2milfYAhWF4iYKHxvgACUQ9QEIMjAB#imgrc=U5zGI-cGe1sIVM:](https://www.google.com/search?q=Ca+Lu+Combat+Base&client=firefox-b-1&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=U5zGI-cGe1sIVM%253A%252C7QYbuwcCluOTM%252C_%20XVKL2e-0Cm3HA7WXNnUorK_8Brl%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjAgP2milfYAhWF4iYKHxvgACUQ9QEIMjAB#imgrc=U5zGI-cGe1sIVM:)



View from Vandegrift Combat Base September 2017



Remains of Vandegrift Airstrip



New Resident at Vandegrift



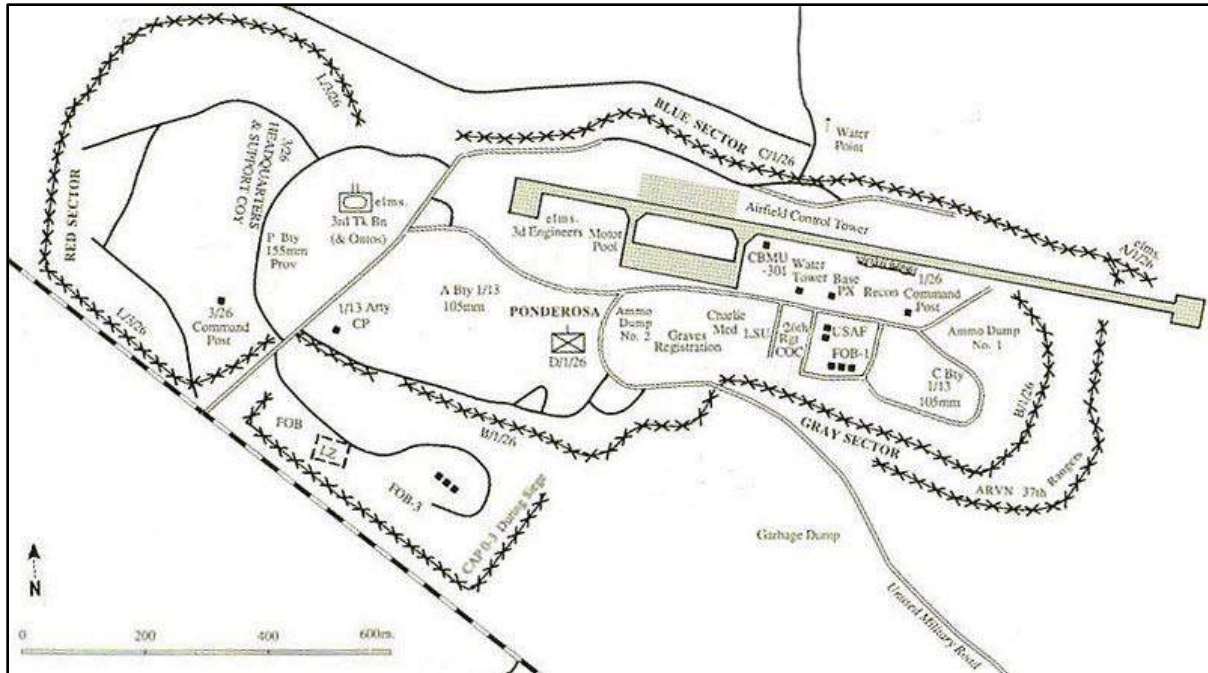
**Flowers at Vandegrift**  
(Don't know what kind)

### **Khe Sanh Combat Base**

Next stop was Khe Sanh (location shown on the map on page 148 and drawing of the compound on the next page), a name that dominated the news the last half of my senior year in college because of the extended siege by the NVA. Ron Clark, one of the guys I went through OCC (Officer Candidate Class, aka Boot Camp) with, had been at Khe Sanh before being accepted into the Enlisted Commissioning Program.

Now here's one of the stranger parts of the trip. For lunch we had a picnic at Khe Sanh because there are no restaurants in the area. Unfortunately, I did not think to take a picture. Most of the base is inaccessible, but there is a museum area with some of the most revisionist history – to the point of being comical – I have ever seen.





**Khe Sanh Layout**

Source: [https://www.google.com/search?q=khe+sanh+map&client=firefox-b-1&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=g6KgQf-Z6YA0-M%253A%252COs\\_ZmuPN6UPo2M%252C\\_&usq=\\_2kwhsZbNd2OqpfKy0yL2rle8fEY%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiPjLr\\_klFYAhWH2SYKHbUqA6IQ9QEIKzAA#imgrc=g6KgQf-Z6YA0-M:](https://www.google.com/search?q=khe+sanh+map&client=firefox-b-1&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=g6KgQf-Z6YA0-M%253A%252COs_ZmuPN6UPo2M%252C_&usq=_2kwhsZbNd2OqpfKy0yL2rle8fEY%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiPjLr_klFYAhWH2SYKHbUqA6IQ9QEIKzAA#imgrc=g6KgQf-Z6YA0-M:)



**Entrance Walk to Khe Sanh Museum**





**Khe Sanh Museum Entrance**



**Khe Sanh Museum Grounds**



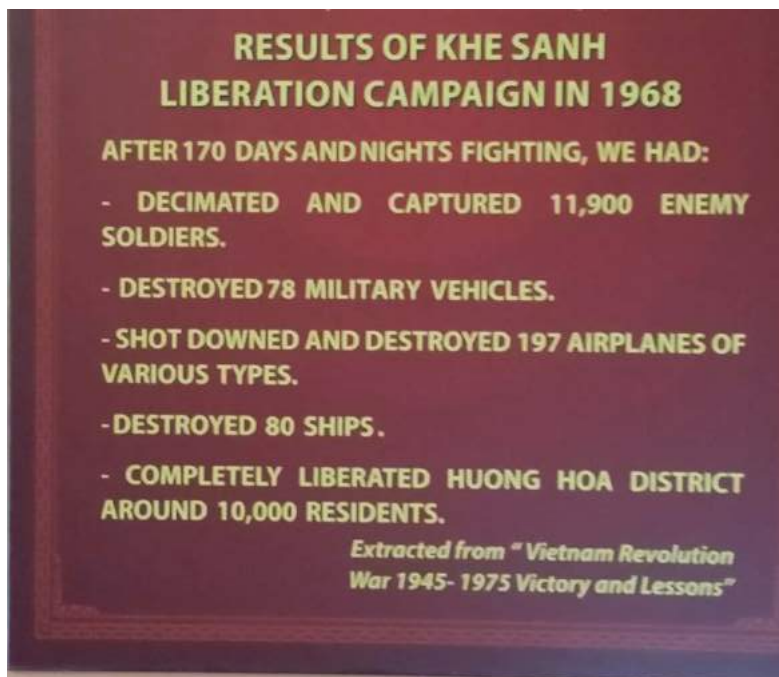
**Remains of Khe Sanh Bunker**



**Khe Sanh Restored USMC Bunker**



Inside the Bunker



### Some Revisionist History

Numbers reflect the fact that the NVA perspective of the Khe Sanh battle included an area from their command post in Laos along both sides of Highway 9 to the Viet Nam coast. Nonetheless, these numbers are far higher than any US estimates.

We did buy some Vietnamese coffee at the Gift Shop outside the museum. It is very mild.

### The Battle of Khe Sanh

For more information on Khe Sanh see

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Khe\\_Sanh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Khe_Sanh) and  
<http://www.historynet.com/battle-of-khe-sanh-recounting-the-battlescasualties.htm>

The Battle of Khe Sanh (21 January to 9 July 1968) was conducted in the [Khe Sanh](#) area of northwestern [Quảng Trị Province, Republic of Vietnam](#) (South Viet Nam), during the [Vietnam War](#). The main US forces defending [Khe Sanh Combat Base](#) (KSCB) were two regiments of [US Marines](#) supported by elements from the [United States Army](#) and the [United States Air Force](#). There were also a small number of [South Vietnamese Army](#) (ARVN) troops. These were pitted against two to three [divisional-size](#) elements of the [North Vietnamese Army](#).



The US command in [Saigon](#) initially believed that combat operations around KSCB during 1967 were part of a series of minor North Vietnamese offensives in the border regions. That appraisal was later altered when it was discovered that the NVA was moving major forces into the area. In response, US forces were built up before the NVA isolated the Marine base. Once the base came under siege a series of actions were fought over a period of five months. During this time, KSCB and the hilltop outposts around it were subjected to constant North Vietnamese [artillery](#), mortar, and rocket attacks, and several infantry assaults. To support the Marine base, a massive aerial bombardment campaign ([Operation Niagara](#)) was launched by the United States Air Force. Over 100,000 tons of bombs were dropped by US aircraft and over 158,000 artillery rounds were fired in defense of the base. Throughout the campaign, US forces used the latest technology to locate NVA forces for targeting. Additionally, the logistical effort required to support the base once it was isolated demanded the implementation of other tactical innovations to keep the Marines supplied.

In March 1968, an overland relief expedition (Operation Pegasus) was launched by a combined Marine/Army/South Vietnamese task force that eventually broke through to the Marines at Khe Sanh. American commanders considered the defense of Khe Sanh a success, but shortly after the siege was lifted the decision was made to dismantle the base rather than risk similar battles in the future. On 19 June 1968, the evacuation and destruction of KSCB began. Amidst heavy shelling, the Marines attempted to salvage what they could before destroying what remained as they were evacuated. Minor attacks continued before the base was officially closed on 5 July. Marines remained around Hill 689, though, and fighting in the vicinity continued until 11 July until they were finally withdrawn, bringing the battle to a close.

In the aftermath, the North Vietnamese proclaimed a victory at Khe Sanh, while US forces claimed that they had withdrawn as the base was no longer required. Historians have observed that the Battle of Khe Sanh may have distracted American and South Vietnamese attention from the buildup of [Viet Cong](#) forces in the south before the early 1968 [Tet Offensive](#). Nevertheless, the US commander during the

battle, General [William Westmoreland](#), maintained that the true intention of Tet was to distract forces from Khe Sanh.

Contrary to the official US casualty count of 205 KIA, other sources estimated the Khe Sanh campaign resulted in a death toll of American military personnel that approached 1,000.

### Laotian Border

From Khe Sanh we drove to the Laotian Border and the major border gift shop before returning to Dong Ha for a swim in the pool and dinner.

#### Gift Shop on QL 9 at the Laotian Border



### Day 8 (Monday, September 11, 2017)

This was the longest drive of the trip. We departed Dong Ha and retraced part of yesterday's drive along National Road QL 9 to the Da Krong Bridge. We then headed south on National Road QL 14B – the Ho Chi Minh Highway – into the northern part of the A Shau Valley, stopping at a Bru Village and seeing the increasing development along what used to be a footpath – the Ho Chi Minh Trail – through the valley. Over the years, the route has progressed from footpath, to one lane dirt road, to now a two lane, paved, National Road.

QL 14B took us south to the community of A Luoi, which is now a secondary provincial headquarters for the western part of Thua Thien/Hue Province. After lunch we headed east on National Road 49 back to Hue. The route can be seen on the aerial map on the following page.



**Day 8 Route**

The route: Dong Ha to Da Krong Bridge to A Luoi to Hue

**Da Krong Bridge and Ho Chi Minh Trail**

Da Krong Bridge is where the Ho Chi Minh trail crossed Route 9 48 km (30 miles) west of Dong Ha and 13 km (8 miles) east of Khe Sanh. During the war, a simple bridge structure was bombed and rebuilt repeatedly. In 1975 after reunification, the Cubans built a more substantial suspension bridge. Cong told us this deteriorated to the point – he actually said it collapsed – that it was replaced more recently with a new bridge with Russian support.



**Da Krong Bridge on QL 14 – the Ho Chi Minh Trail**

At the bridge we met a hill tribe family traveling to their annual gathering for a deceased relative. Two of the men – shown to the left in this picture – were veterans who had fought with the NLF (Viet Cong).



**Mark, Leslie and Marc with two NLF Veterans**



**Wife of one of the NLF Veterans – Typical Hill Tribe Look**

## The Ho Chi Minh Trail

Source: Wikipedia

Construction of what was to become the famous [Ho Chi Minh Trail](#) extended over decades, with elements put in place during the anti-French struggle of the Viet Minh. Known to the North Vietnamese as the Truong Son Strategic Supply Route, the Central Committee of the [Lao Dong Party](#) ordered construction of routes for infiltration as early as 1959, under the [559 Transport Group](#).<sup>[9]</sup> The Trail was a complex web of roads, tracks, bypasses, waterways, depots, and marshaling areas, some 12,000 miles (19,000 km) in total. It snaked through parts of North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. US policymakers made ground attack against Trail networks in these countries off limits, (until limited operations were permitted late in the War) and communist forces took full advantage of this to move massive quantities of men and material into South Vietnam to attack US and ARVN troops. As the war progressed, communist forces expanded and improved the Trail, moving material by truck, installing missile batteries for air defense and laying fuel pipelines. Air interdiction of the Trail hurt communist efforts but failed to stop the logistical buildup on a sustained basis.<sup>[10]</sup>

The Trail had over 20 major way-stations operated by dedicated logistics units or *Binh Trams*, responsible for air and land defense, and delivery of supplies and replacements to fighting points in the South. Commo-Liaison units also operated along other trail segments and were tasked with providing food, shelter, medical support and guides to infiltrating troops between Trail segments. The *Binh Trams* were responsible for numerous functions in the sector of the Trail it controlled - including subordinate camps and way-stations, the care and feeding of troops, road repair, anti-aircraft defenses, vehicle repair and maintenance, and medical care. Each *binh tram* had its own force of porters, guides, engineers, specialists, transportation units and infantry.<sup>[10]</sup> Some *binh trams* had extensive anti-aircraft defenses. The Mu Gia *binh tram* area for example, was estimated to have no fewer than 302 anti-aircraft positions as early as 1966, a deadly flak trap for US aircraft. By 1973, gun batteries had been supplemented with Soviet-supplied SAMs [surface to air missiles] on various parts of the Trail.<sup>[11]</sup>

## The A Shau Valley

The portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail that became National Road QL 14B where we drove, headed south into the A Shau Valley – some of the most miserable fighting ground imaginable. I was not there but know it was a mixture of very steep terrain that funneled you into dangerously narrow columns, triple canopy jungle, thick stands of bamboo, and elephant grass that was like razors on a stalk.

From Wikipedia: The **A Shau Valley** (Vietnamese: *thung lũng A Sầu*) is a valley in [Vietnam's Thừa Thiên–Huế Province](#), west of the coastal city of [Huế](#), along the border of [Laos](#). The valley runs north and south for twenty-five miles and is a mile-wide flat bottomland covered with tall elephant grass, flanked by two strings of densely forested mountains that vary from three to six thousand feet. A Shau Valley was one of the key entry points into [South Vietnam](#) for men and materiel brought along the [Ho Chi Minh Trail](#) by the Communist North Vietnamese Army and was the scene of heavy fighting, especially against American soldiers, during the [Vietnam War](#).<sup>[1][2]</sup> The A Shau Valley is bisected lengthwise by Route 548.<sup>[3]</sup> The [Ho Chi Minh Highway](#) now runs along the valley floor.



From the website <http://www.vietnamwar.net/AShauValley.htm>:

The A Shau Valley is located in Thua Thien Province of I Corps near the Laotian border. Essentially several valleys and mountains, the A Shau Valley was one of the major entry points to South Vietnam of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It was an area that was critical to the North Vietnamese since it was the conduit for supplies, additional troops, and communications for units of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Vietcong (VC) operating in I Corps. Because of its significance to the NVA and VC, it was the target of continual major operations by allied forces, especially the U.S. 101st Airborne Division. Also, it was defended vehemently by the NVA and VC. As a result, the A Shau Valley was the scene of much fighting throughout the war, and it acquired a fearsome reputation for soldiers on both sides. Being a veteran of A Shau Valley operations became a mark of distinction among combat veterans. Although each American effort to staunch the shipment of men and materiel through the A Shau Valley was successful for a brief period of time, the net effect was a series of transitory decreases in the flow followed by increases until the next American operation. Since the U.S. strategy for fighting the enemy did not include occupying remote and sparsely populated areas, the enemy often lost military battles but afterward was able to reinfiltate an area when the Americans left the battlefield. The most famous battle of the A Shau Valley was Operation Apache Snow, also known as Hamburger Hill.



**A Shau Valley Terrain**



**More A Shau Valley Terrain**

### **Hill Tribe Bru Village**

For more information see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bru\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bru_people)

The Bru are an ethnic group living in Viet Nam, Laos and Thailand. The 2009 Census for Viet Nam found about 75,000 Bru Tribe members of which 55,000 lived in Quang Tri Province. The name Bru means “people living in the woods.” The French called them Montagnards (meaning Highlanders or mountain people and pronounced mon-tan-yards). US troops frequently just called them Yards. Some fought on our side and some fought for the National Liberation Front (NLF) as did the two guys in the picture on page 169.

We stopped at a Bru village. Traditional homes were built on stilts to allow keeping cattle underneath and keep out snakes and tigers.



**Traditional Bru Home**

You can see signs of modernization.



**Bru Home with Satellite Dish**

Leslie made a friend here who offered her bananas but they were green.



**Leslie and Bru Woman**

Notice the cooking pit in the middle of the room



**Even the Goats have a raised house to keep them safe from snakes and tigers**



**Bru Women and Children and Bru Girl Dressed for School**

The girl is wearing the standard school uniform and was preparing to walk with her mother 2 hours to reach her school.

### Some Scenes on the Drive down the Valley



**Hydroelectric Dam – part of the modernization of infrastructure in Viet Nam**



**Water Buffalo Taking a Mud Bath**

Marc said “Why do women think mud baths are so great – didn’t do anything for them.”



**New Bru House**

### **A Luoi**

It is a long drive from the Da Krong Bridge to A Luoi (pronounced ah loowee) - about 100 km (62 miles). A Luoi is a secondary government center in western Thua Thien/Hue Province.



**A Luoi Provincial Building**



### A Luoi Market

This market is temporary because the old one burned down.



### Three Little Pigs outside our Lunch Restaurant in A Luoi

Finally we headed back east to Hue to prepare to fly to Hanoi tomorrow.

## Day 9 (Tuesday, September 12, 2017)

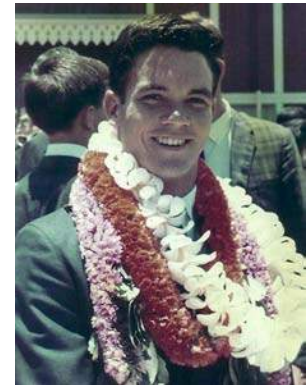
### Off to Ha Noi

Today we left Hue – we would like to spend more time there – and flew from the Phu Bai International Airport (the former airstrip at the Phu Bai Combat Base) to Hanoi.



It was a beautiful day for flying; light puffy clouds with no hint of the annual monsoons that would begin in October or typhoon season – Typhoon Damrey would hit the area where we had just been on November 4<sup>th</sup>.

As we came across the coastline, I wondered if we were anywhere near where my Dartmouth classmate and brother Marine Rob Peacock had flown when he was shot down October 12, 1972. He is still missing. You can probably tell he was from Hawaii. He was the first person in my class I met on campus. We were born three weeks apart.



**Crossing into North Viet Nam from the Gulf of Tonkin**



As previously noted, the Ha Noi / Red River Delta is the most densely developed part of Viet Nam. We could see this as we descended over neighborhoods like this one.

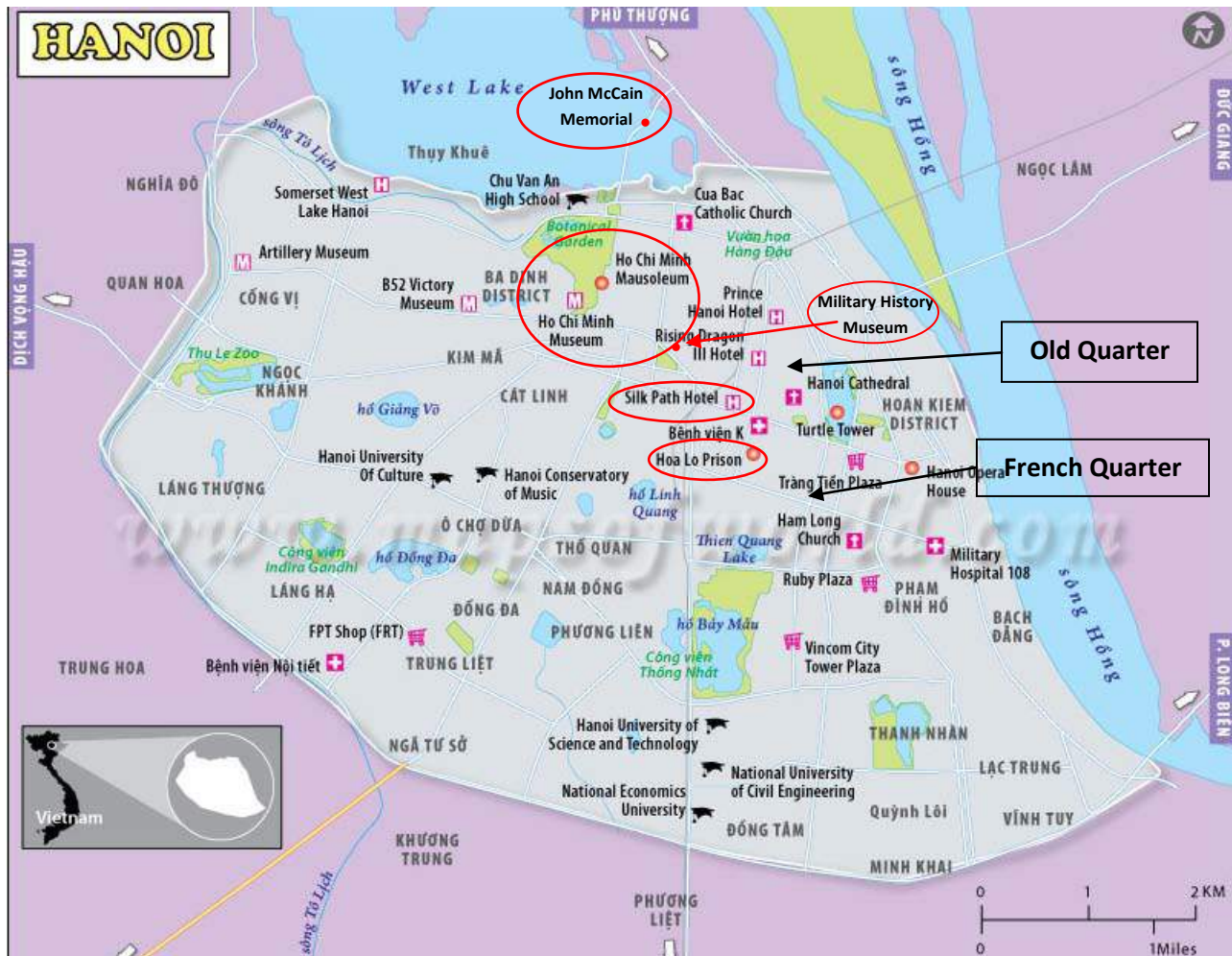


**Descending into Ha Noi International Airport over Ha Noi Neighborhood**



**Ha Noi International Airport**

The term Ha Noi means river interior. The city was established in 1010 A.D, and for many centuries served as the capital of various Vietnamese dynasties. Hanoi consists of eight inner districts and five outer districts and is the political center of the country as well as being a major cultural, economic and technological center. The city shows the obvious influence of the French including their colonial architecture, but also has many other historic and modern aspects that make it a very interesting place to visit. Two days was not enough time and we would like to spend more time there. This map shows the places we visited during the two days we were in Ha Noi as well as the location of our hotel.

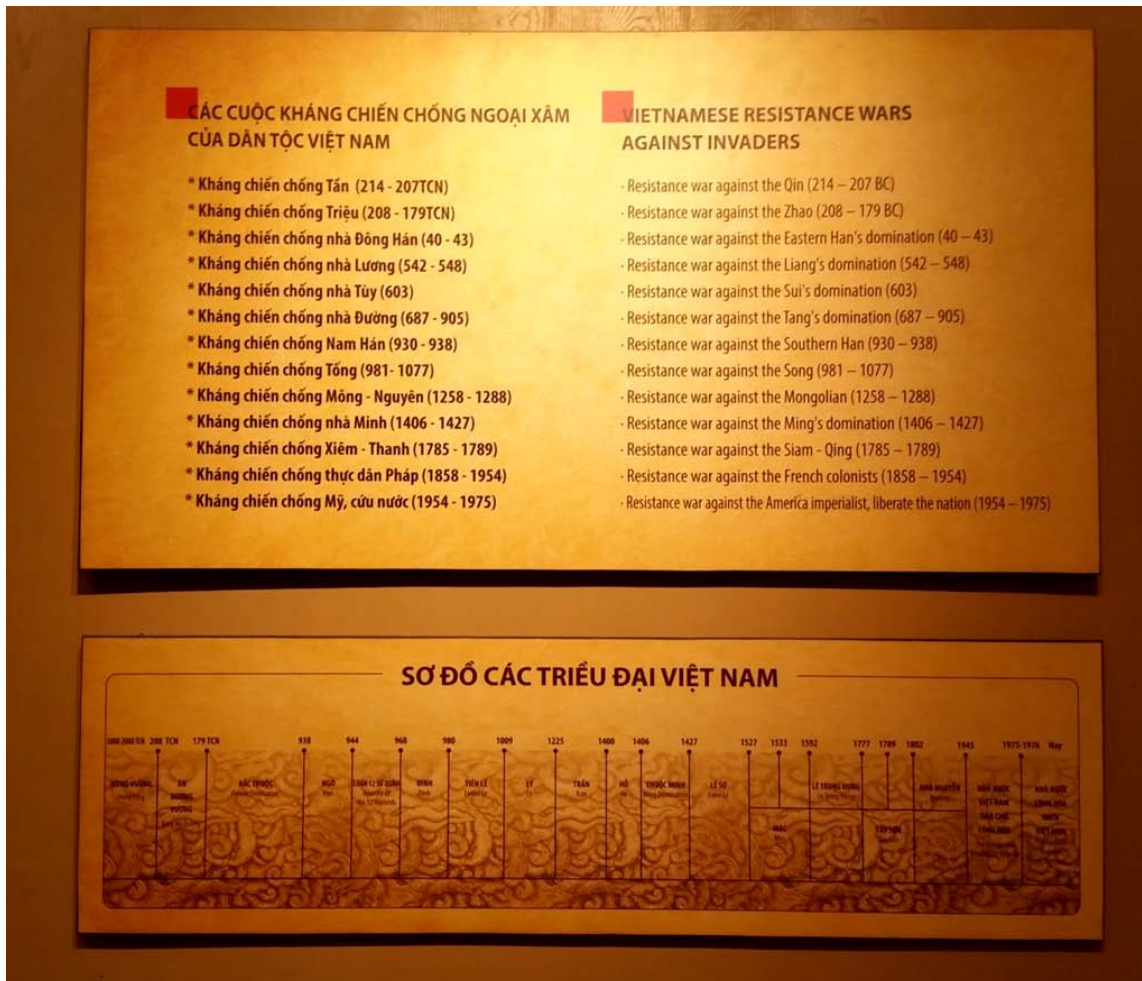


Source: <https://www.mapsofworld.com/vietnam/cities/hanoi.html> with additions by Mark Waterhouse

**Military History Museum / National Army Museum**

For more information, see <https://vietnamtourism.us/army-museum-hanoi/>.

Ha Noi has seven national museums. After arriving and meeting our new guide (whose name escapes us – she was no way near as good as Cong), she took us to the National Army Museum (the name was changed to the Military History Museum in 2002), which focuses on Viet Nam's war for liberation from the French but also covers other aspects of the country's long war history from its founding to the Ho Chi Minh era. There is a very detailed film and electronic display of the famous battle of Dien Bien Phu (or as LBJ called it - Dinbinfoo).



**Viet Nam's Long History of Wars**

The Ministry of Defense authorized the development of the museum which started in 1954 after the defeat of the French. The museum held its opening ceremony on December 22, 1959 on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vietnam People's Army founding. Museum buildings cover 12,800 square meters (about 138,000 square feet). This museum also functions as the headquarters of the Army museum system. It is located in the center of Ha Noi very close to our hotel (The Silk Path) and other touristy venues such as a large statue of Lenin, the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and the Hỏa Lò Prison (more on the Mausoleum and Prison tomorrow).



**National Army Museum Entrance**

One of the well-known monuments on the grounds of the museum is the Ha Noi Flag Tower (shown to the far left in the photo above and just right of center in the photo below). Construction of the Tower started in 1805 and was completed in 1812. It is nearly 31 meters (102 feet) tall and 180 meters (590 feet) in circumference. It can be seen both in the preceding picture and in the following one (the plane is a MIG fighter).



**Ha Noi Flag Tower**

Some additional photos of the Museum follow and another good source is:

<https://havecamerawilltravel.com/places/hanoi-vietnam-military-history-museum/>



**Military History Museum Entrance Wall**



**Museum Planes with New Construction in the Background**

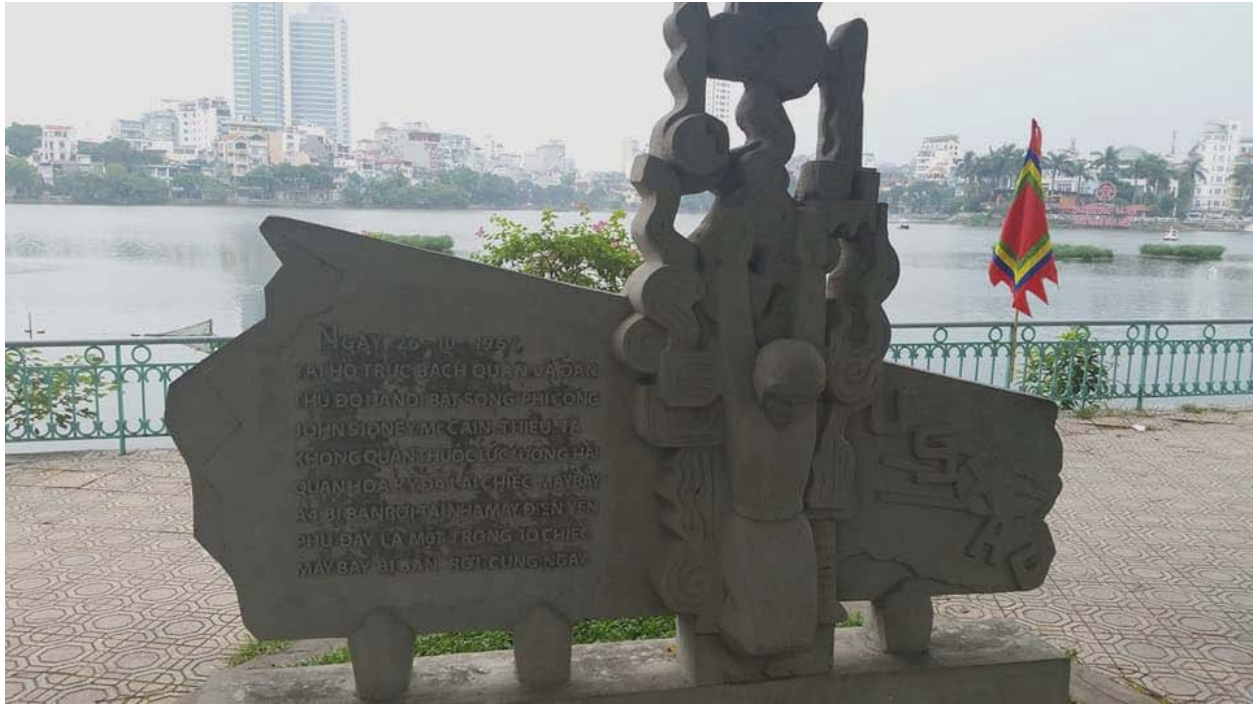


**Statue Made from Remains of Shot Down and Crashed Planes**

### **John McCain Monument**

Our final tourist stop of the day before checking into The Silk Path Hotel was at a monument between West Lake and Truc Bach Lake marking the spot where John McCain was pulled out of a lake when he was shot down on October 26, 1967. *The Fodor's Travel Vietnam with a side trip to Angkor Wat* guide describes this as an "...underwhelming red-sandstone memorial." There is a photo of the monument on the next page.

One small error – it mistakenly says he was in the Air Force, not the Navy.



### **Silk Path Hotel and Hanoi Breweries**

We checked into the very nice Silk Path Hotel in the Old Quarter of Hanoi – see page 21. One interesting thing about this hotel is that its elevator was made by Otis Elevators, which is based here in Connecticut.

My hobby is drinking beer where it was made. At this point I have done that in about 650 different breweries and I am always on the hunt for new ones. I had been in contact with Cong (another one – it is a common name in Viet Nam), the Sales and Logistics Manager of 7 Bridges Brewery in Ha Noi (with another under development in Da Nang). He is Vietnamese, did some of his growing up in Moscow where his family went to start a business, and is a graduate of Western Kentucky University.

Because of the distance and traffic to the brewery, and the fact he had to make a delivery downtown anyway, he brought us bottles of all 7 of their beers (actually 9 bottles in all). The next day we ended up buying a small, hard side suitcase to bring them home with us. The picture on the next page shows Cong and me with the 7 Bridges Brewery beer. It is excellent.



**Cong, Mark and Seven Bridges Beer**

Cong also took us a few blocks into the Old Quarter to the Pasteur Street Brewing Company. We ended up having dinner in their second story, outdoor patio area you can see right above their sign.



**Pasteur Street Brewing Company**





Mark and Leslie at Pasteur Street Brewing Company, Ha Noi Viet Nam

1.5% will be added to the bill		add beer above 10% ABV + 4%	
<b>PASSION FRUIT WHEAT ALE   4%</b>	15 1BU	<b>AXIS 6 ALLIES PALE ALE   7.2%</b>	35 1BU
<b>JASMINE IPA   8.5%</b>	50 1BU	<b>YACHT ROCK TROPICAL WITBIER   5.7%</b>	18 1BU
<b>SPICE ISLAND SAISON   7.2%</b>	23 1BU	<b>POMELO IPA   7%</b>	75 1BU
<b>COFFEE PORTER   8.5%</b>	24 1BU	<b>HONEY RED ALE   5%</b>	20 1BU
<b>PSBC DOUBLE IPA   8.7%</b>	100 1BU	<b>I DRINK YOUR MILKSHAKES IPA   8.8%</b>	48 1BU
<b>CYLO IMPERIAL CHOCOLATE STOUT   13%</b>	55 1BU	<b>THE INEVITABLE BACKLASH NE IPA   5.4%</b>	40 1BU

BEER SANDWICHES SMALL PLATES EXTRAS

**PASTEUR STREET BREWING CO SAIGON**

Pasteur Street Brewing Beer List



**Restaurant Manager Anniek (from the Netherlands) delivering Leslie her IPA sampler**

At the brewery we met a group of five young folks who had met up in Halong Bay. Jakob and Micki (actually Mickinzi) were from Washington State, Matty and Sophie were from the Netherlands, and a young woman from France whose name we didn't get. We had a great time drinking beer and talking with them. Unfortunately, I didn't get a good picture of the group, but what I did get is shown later in the section on New Friends (see page 203).

### **Day 10 – (Wednesday, September 13, 2017)**

Today was our last full day in Viet Nam, and a mix of tourist stops and free time. For all the places we went and things we saw and did, this was a very fast trip.

#### **Ho Chi Minh Complex**

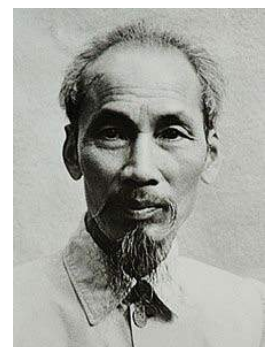
For more information on this complex, see:

<http://hanoifreetourguides.com/2799/>

For more information on Ho Chi Minh, see:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho\\_Chi\\_Minh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh)

In the morning we first went to the Ho Chi Minh complex - his Mausoleum, the Presidential Palace which he refused to live in but used to greet foreign dignitaries, the houses he did live in, and the Single Pillar Pagoda on the grounds.



**Ho Chi Minh – 1946  
The year I was born**

Uncle Ho (Bac Ho in Vietnamese - no construction equipment jokes allowed) wanted to be cremated and his ashes spread in the north, central and south parts of the country because of the personal significance

of each to him and as a sign of reunification, but his wishes were ignored after he died in 1969. Instead he was embalmed and is on display. Unfortunately, and as you might guess from the blue tarp in the next picture, the Mausoleum was closed for maintenance the day we were there. We weren't sure if the maintenance was on the building or Ho himself.

With great assistance from the Soviet Union, construction of the Mausoleum began on September 2, 1973 (Ho died September 2, 1969) and was completed in August 1975. The location is in Ba Dinh Square, generally considered to be the political center of Ha Noi and now all of Viet Nam. The mausoleum is at the exact spot where on September 2, 1945, Ho read the Declaration of Independence for the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.



**Ho Chi minh Mausoleum**

Another part of the complex is the Presidential Palace (see the next page), built between 1900 and 1906, occupied by the Japanese and Chinese during WWII, and the center of the French colonial government from 1946 to 1954.

As mentioned earlier, as President Ho was entitled to live in this building but refused to do so, considering it totally unsuitable for his poor and starving people. He did use it to welcome foreign dignitaries and groups of Vietnamese children who came to visit. It is still used by the President to welcome heads of state and other important foreign visitors. Instead of residing here, Ho chose to live in a small house (House 54) in the garden of the Palace from 1954 to 1958, and thereafter in the House on stilts that was built in 1958. However, even then he used House 54 for lunch, dinner and bathing.



**Viet Nam's Presidential Palace**



**House 54**

Source: [https://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g293924-d311067-i103599925-Ho\\_Chi\\_Minh\\_Presidential\\_Palace\\_Historical\\_Site-Hanoi.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g293924-d311067-i103599925-Ho_Chi_Minh_Presidential_Palace_Historical_Site-Hanoi.html)

Part of House 54 is a garage where Ho's cars were kept and three are still on display – from left to right a 1954 Zis, a 1955 Pobeda and a 1964 Peugeot. These were gifts from the Russian and French governments. When Ho was asked why he didn't get something more modern he said they were still good and were gifts.



Ho Chi Minh's Cars

After the French War was over, the government wanted to build a new house for Ho Chi Minh. He accepted but wanted to have one similar to a house on stilts in the country's northern mountainous areas (and to what we had seen in the Bru Village along the Ho Chi Minh Trail – see page 172) because it would be similar to the place where he had prepared for the Vietnamese Revolution. The house was sited in an area of a botanical garden established under the French occupation. This garden has many interesting trees brought from all over the country. There is also a fish pond reclaimed from what had been a stagnant body of water.



**Ho's House on Stilt's**



**Ho's Fish Pond**



**One of the trees in the Ho Chi Minh Complex Garden**

Not sure what kind

### The One-Pillar Pagoda

This pagoda was originally built in 1049, and as might be expected for a structure that old, has been repaired and rebuilt many times. It has much historical significance based on the story that it was a gift to the Goddess of Mercy by King Ly Thai Tong, who was very old and childless, but whose wife became pregnant with a son late in life after the King had a dream about the Goddess sitting on a lotus flower. The pagoda is shaped like a lotus and sits in a square pond on a single pillar. In 1954 the French destroyed the pagoda as they were fleeing Ha Noi. Ho had it rebuilt beginning the next year with completion in 1956.



The One- Pillar Pagoda



### Ho Chi Minh Museum

Another part of the complex is the Ho Chi Minh Museum. We only had a chance to see it from the outside. According to the website <http://hanoifreetourguides.com/2799/>, it was built in the shape of a white lotus flower and is nearly 20 meters (65 feet) or three stories high. Construction started in 1985 and was completed in 1990 to coincide with Ho's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. There are more than 2,000 documents and artifacts from his life. I didn't get a good picture, so here is one from the website <https://www.vietnamonline.com/attraction/ho-chi-minh-museum.html>.



**Ho Chi Minh Museum**

### Viet Nam National Assembly Building

Across the street from Ho's Mausoleum is the new National Assembly or Parliament building, which was completed in 2014. The National Assembly is a 498 member, unicameral body elected to five-year terms that meets twice a year. For more information on what it does and how it operates, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Assembly\\_\(Vietnam\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Assembly_(Vietnam)).

A picture of the new National Assembly building is on the next page.



**Viet Nam National Assembly Building**

### **Hỏa Lò Prison – Maison Centrale – The Hanoi Hilton**

Our last tourist stop of the trip was the Hỏa Lò Prison - the infamous and sarcastically named Hanoi Hilton. It is very old and only a small portion remains from when it was originally built in stages between 1886 and 1901, and subsequently run by the French to hold political prisoners, in particular, those pressing for independence from France. Much of the complex was demolished in the 1990s but the gatehouse is used as a museum. It contains some very interesting old photos and some of the best creative writing you can imagine about how well the American prisoners were treated. I believe our guide was insulted when we told her that much of what we were reading was not true.

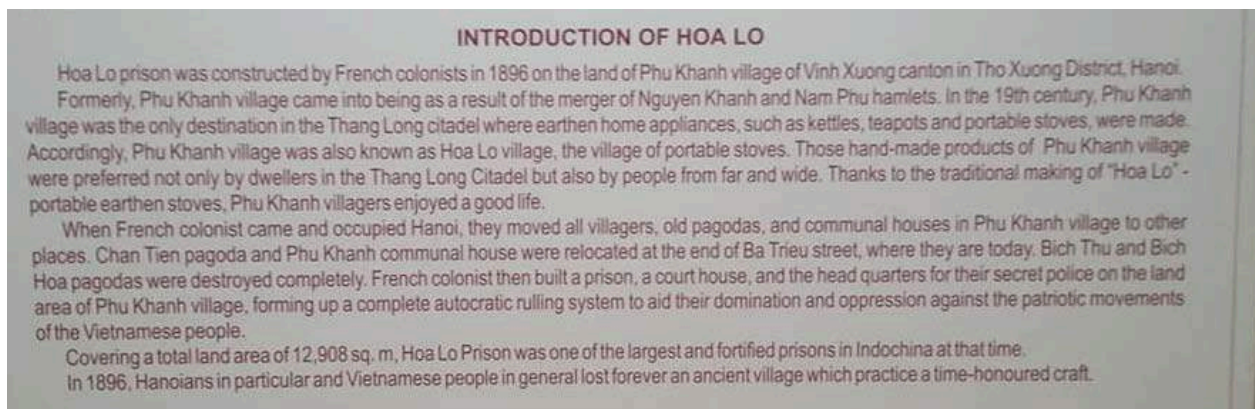
Located on phố Hỏa Lò (Hỏa Lò Street), the street name derives from the number of stores that sold wood and coal stoves many years ago. In Ha Noi, and particularly in the Old Quarter, it is common to have streets that specialize in certain goods, with the street name coming from that product. In the prison name, Hỏa Lò is commonly translated as “fiery furnace”, or “Hell’s hole” reflecting the distaste for the place by the political prisoners held there.

The French called the prison *Maison Centrale* – the Central House – a common euphemism for a prison in France. It was located near both Hanoi's French Quarter and Old Quarter as can be seen on the map on page 180. While its original design was for a capacity of 460, which was increased in a 1913 renovation to 600, by 1954 when the French were thrown out, it reportedly held more than 2,000 inmates.

An outstanding website dedicated to Hỏa Lò Prison which offers criticism of the Vietnamese government's portrayal of their treatment of American POWs is <https://www.tripsavvy.com/hoa-lo-prison-the-hanoi-hilton-1629296>.

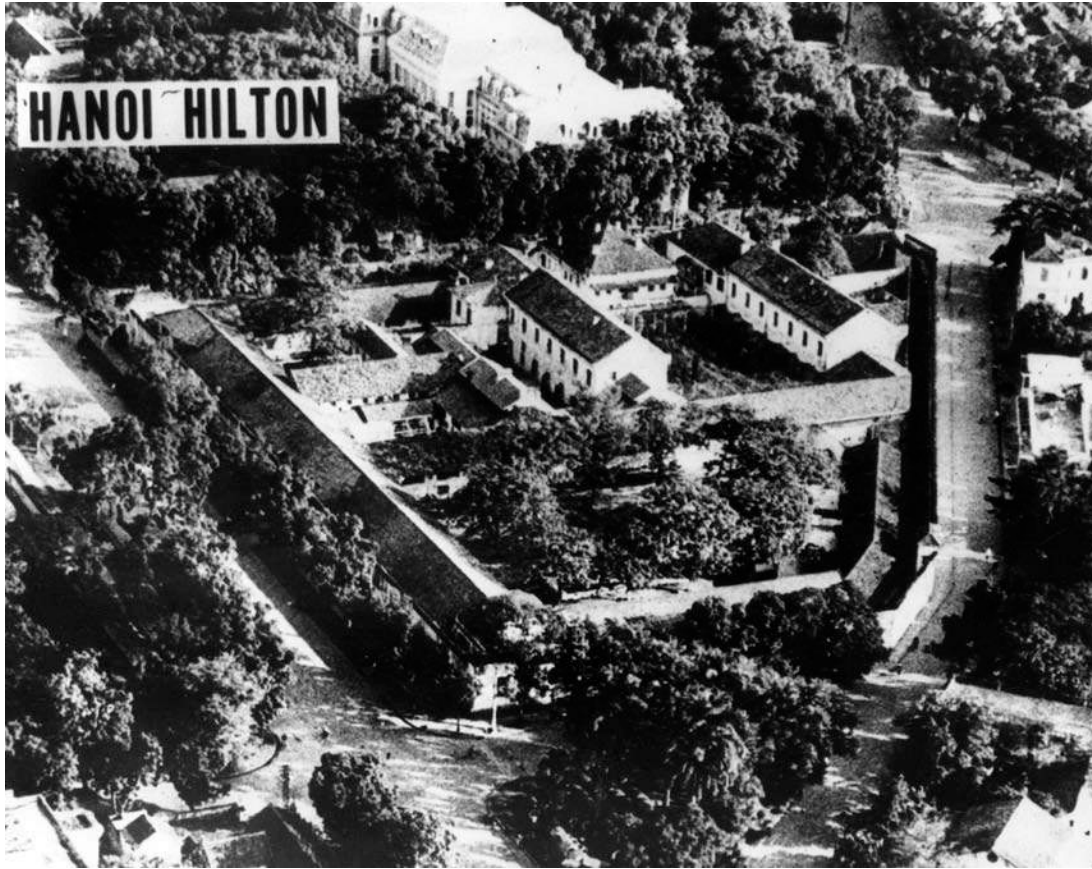


**Hỏa Lò Prison Entrance**



The aerial photo on the next page shows the prison in 1970.

The second photo is one I took of a model of the prison.



1970 Aerial of Hỏa Lò Prison from Wikipedia



Model of Hỏa Lò Prison



**Hỏa Lò Exterior Wall**



**Broken Glass topping Hỏa Lò Wall**



**Hỏa Lò Guillotine**

Fuzzy – but you get the picture



**John McCain's flight suit, parachute,  
and other gear in Hỏa Lò Museum**

### **Walking through the Old Quarter**

After a nice lunch at the Green Tangerine French cafe, it was free time. We bought an extra suitcase for stuff we had bought (and the Seven Bridges beer) and then proceeded to buy more.

After delivering the suitcase to the room, we took a walk through some of the Old Quarter, concentrating on Hang Bong and Hang Gai streets. We thought these were Silk Street because that is where the Silk Path Hotel is located but it turns out Hang Bong is Cotton Street and Hang Gai is Hemp Street. Nonetheless there was still plenty of silk.

For a list of the 36 streets in the Old Quarter and their names in English, see

<http://thingsasian.com/story/meaning-36-streets>.

For a very good discussion of Ha Noi's Old Quarter, see <http://thingsasian.com/story/hanois-old-quarter-36-streets>.



**Old Quarter Street Scene**

### **Day 11 – (Thursday, September 14, 2017)**

And so it was time to return home.

Marc was on his way to the Philippines to spend time with friends so he had an earlier flight than we did.

An easy trip back to Seoul, then back to Atlanta and Hartford. Our route from Seoul to Atlanta was supposed to be the reverse of what we had done on the flights to Viet Nam, which would have taken us north past North Korea, but that morning the North Koreans launched a missile that went over northern Japan. So the route was changed and we flew east from Seoul, just north of Tokyo, across the Pacific to the Seattle area, and then to Atlanta.

Rather than the nice, new Korean Air 777s with a young crew we had been on (the plane – not the crew) for the trip over, this time we were on an older, beat up Delta 777 (with crew to match) on the way home. Because it was technically a Korean Air flight, at least the liquor was free and we got caught up with some Dewars (see the story about that on page 205).

This has been an extraordinary trip. For me, it started out as a once-in-a-lifetime, bucket list thing and I could now cross it off the list.

However, as soon as we got home – maybe even on the way – Leslie and I were already talking about going back. So many more things to see. Places we would like to spend more time – Da Nang, Hue, Ha Noi – and places we didn't have a chance to visit – Halong Bay, the UNESCO World Heritage site My Son, maybe even Ho Chi Minh City. If we can make it work, we will be back.

## Some Final Odds and Ends that May be of Interest

### Written Vietnamese

You may have noticed in most of the signs in this journal that it looks like English script even when in Vietnamese— and indeed it is. Many years ago, Vietnamese script used a version of Chinese characters. When Catholic missionaries arrived from Portugal in 1615, they created a Latin alphabet and dictionary (based on translating the pronounced word into the Latin alphabet) that has letters we are used to but with many additional accent marks, no F, J, W or Z, but some multiple variations on A, D, E, O and U to reflect the fact that spoken Vietnamese is a highly tonal language with the same base word having several possible meanings and pronunciations depending on the accent marks. All told, there are 29 letters in the Vietnamese language. At one point I had orders to language school where I was supposed to study Vietnamese (Ha Noi dialect), but the class was cancelled. For a good discussion of the Vietnamese alphabet, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese\\_alphabet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_alphabet).

### The Importance of Yellow – and Other Colors

The two buildings in the Ho Chi Minh Complex shown on page 190, and many other photos showing yellow buildings or parts of walls and other decorations in yellow, may make you wonder about why so many structures in Viet Nam – or portions of them – are yellow. Indeed, many of the older buildings in Hoi An are yellow. Yellow is one of the two colors in the flag of Viet Nam.

This appears to be a reflection of the fact that “imperial yellow” was traditionally associated with royalty in Viet Nam, China and Korea. Other sources suggest this is also a reflection of French architecture which blatantly attempted to distinguish itself by ignoring local architectural style, and the French liked yellow.

The website <https://missurasa.wordpress.com/2014/04/10/vietnam-culture-symbols-and-color-meanings/> provides the following:

#### Basic Vietnamese Color Meanings

- Red – happiness, love, luck, celebration [which is why it is commonly the color of a bride's gown]
- Yellow – wealth, prosperity, royalty, happiness, change
- Green – jealousy, lust
- Blue – calmness, hope, growth
- Purple – nostalgia, sadness, fragility, tenderness
- White – purity, death, the end
- Black – evil

For more of a discussion on this see: <https://www.quora.com/Why-are-so-many-of-the-buildings-in-Vietnamese-cities-especially-in-Hoi-An-painted-yellow-gold>

### Horn Honking

When we first started driving with An, it immediately became obvious that he spent a lot of time honking his horn, particularly at the gazillion people riding motorbikes. My initial reaction was that this was a rather rude “get out of my way you little pipsqueak” demand. Then we noticed other drivers were also doing it. When we asked Cong about this, he explained that this is actually a common safety



practice to let other drivers know you are nearby. We concluded that “automobile horn repairer” could be a good vocation.

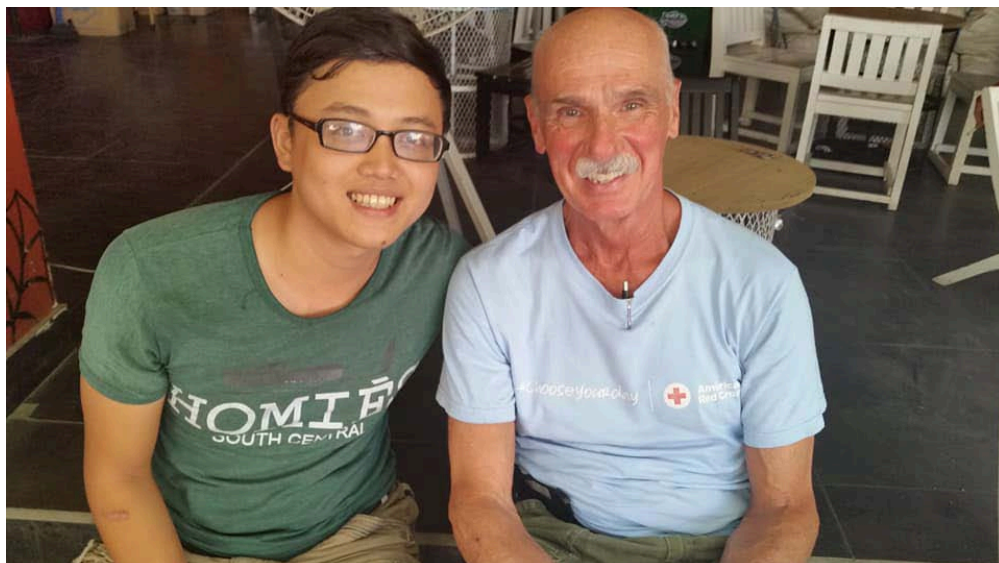
### Some New Friends

I have shown you some of the new friends we made earlier in this journal. Here are a few more.

The first is a group of Hue University students who were studying tourism promotion and were working on a class project that required them to conduct on-the-street interviews. We ran into them just outside The Citadel and they interviewed Leslie and Marc. We have been in contact with Thao Nguyen, who is at the far left.



While in Hue, Leslie and I went to a beer garden and made a new friend Cuong who is teaching himself English and wants to become a tour guide. We have tried to link him up with our guide Cong, who is about as good a guide as you can get. We have been in contact as I have been writing this.



At the Pasteur Street Brewing Company we met a great group of young folks who had just come in from Halong Bay, a place we did not go but would like to. Jakob and Micki from Washington state, Matty and Sophie from the Netherlands, and a young woman from France whose name escapes me.



## Bia

Anyone who knows me knows that one of my passions is good beer (bia in Vietnamese). Most of the large breweries in Viet Nam are owned by the Danish brewery Carlsberg. Carlsberg's breweries include:

- Sabeco Brewery, producer of Saigon Beer and 33 – now 333. 33 beer was the most common (and not very good) Vietnamese Beer in 1970. While the name has changed, the beer has not. The 33 and 333 names are a reflection of Vietnamese superstition. While 3 is not a lucky number in Viet Nam, 6 is and 9 is even more so. The Vietnamese are very superstitious people – for a great discussion of “Superstitions, Astrology and Fortunetelling in Vietnam” see [http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Vietnam/sub5\\_9d/entry-3381.html](http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Vietnam/sub5_9d/entry-3381.html).
- Habeco Brewery, producer of Bia Ha Noi and Truc Bach Beer
- Hue Brewery, producer of Huda and Dai Viet beers

Vietnam Brewery Ltd. Is a joint venture with Heineken and produces Tiger and Larue Beers.

We tried most of them and Huda Beer was by far our favorite. Our driver An kept us well stocked in Huda Beer during the several days we were with him.



### The Hunt for Dewars

Marc, Leslie and I are all Dewars Scotch drinkers. As soon as we got to Hoi An, we started trying to find Dewars in every restaurant and bar we were in, but no luck. Finally, the day we arrived in Dong Ha, Leslie and I took a walk across the street to the major Dong Ha Market, and there in a tiny liquor store, Leslie spotted a fifth of Dewars. We carefully checked the seal because – I know this will surprise you – some people have been known to refill a bottle with something other than what is supposed to be in it. It looked good so we went back to the hotel to tell Marc and see if he was interested. His answer being

"Hell Yes", he and I went back to the market and bought the bottle for 300,000 dong – or about \$13.25. The bottle lasted us about two days.

### Vietnamese Houses

In the urbanized parts of Viet Nam, because of the relatively limited supply of good land and rapidly growing population (while various sources provide differing estimates, the website <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/vietnam-population/> shows Viet Nam's population has increased from 43.4 million in 1970 to 95.5 million in 2017) there is a "standard" house design that is five meters (16.4 feet) wide by 15 meters (say 50 feet) long and several stories – two or three stories were probably the most common we saw. There can then be all kinds of ornamentation, porches, balconies, and other things that don't use up much if any land. Even in more rural areas, this general design seems to be used as a common "module" with two or three of them linked together. Here are some examples:



Typical Vietnamese Houses in Urban Areas

### Vietnamese Crops

Besides the rubber, black pepper, coffee and lumber that have already been mentioned, another crop we saw was the cassava plant, from which tapioca is made from the root. While tapioca is a food staple in many tropical countries, it is low in nutrition and food energy. However, Cassava Coconut Vietnamese Cake or Bánh Khoai Mì Nướng is a very popular dessert in the southern part of the country. For a recipe, see <http://danangfoodie.com/cassava-coconut-vietnamese-cake/>.



**Cassava Plants**

### **Vietnamese Birthdays**

Traditionally the Vietnamese don't celebrate their own birthday. Rather, they celebrate the death of their parents. Cong told us this is beginning to change as the country adds an increasing number of young people who are becoming more westernized.

### **Vietnamese Cemeteries**

No matter where you drive, you see cemeteries, some of them very ornate with small mausoleums that look like mini-pagodas. Cong said cemetery structures have become a form of "keeping up with – or surpassing – the Joneses" with each new burial structure trying to be more ornate than the last one. While I have some pictures of graves I took in 1970, nothing comes close to what we saw on this trip. Unfortunately neither Leslie nor I got a good picture of a modern cemetery. However, you can see some on the website <https://www.dreamstime.com/photos-images/cemetery-vietnam.html>

## Appendix A – Cong's Impressions of the USA

By Cong Tran

Editor's note: Cong Tran, or Tran Quoc Cong in Vietnamese naming convention, paid his first visit to the United States in 2007, an invited guest at the memorial service for author and Pulitzer Prize winning Vietnam War correspondent David Halberstam. Mr. Tran had guided and ultimately befriended the journalist during a return visit to Vietnam by the author some years before his death. Mr. Tran was so moved by his invitation to the memorial from Mr. Halberstam's widow, and so honored to be among the literati in attendance, he saved the printed program (see below). Recently, Mr. Tran shared the messages he sent home from his 2007 visit and gave us permission to share them with our readers, which we are delighted to do. His observations of U.S. culture in contrast to that of Vietnam are insightful and entertaining—at reminder of our national character beyond the context of the Trump regime.

Mr. Tran suspects his first visit to the U.S. was also his last.

---

Dear Friends,

Good morning, America!

SEAT BELT makes me feel clumsy like spaceman in the spaceship. Trying to remember. It takes some time.

Crossing the streets here is a skill, not an art, like in Viet Nam. Press the button. Magical!

I borrowed a digital camera, but my mind still analog.

In Viet Nam, eat to live. Here, live to eat.

I have a dream. My dream comes true.

Thanks for all your help,

Tran Quoc Cong

---

Dear America,

Descartes in America: "I DRIVE therefore I am."

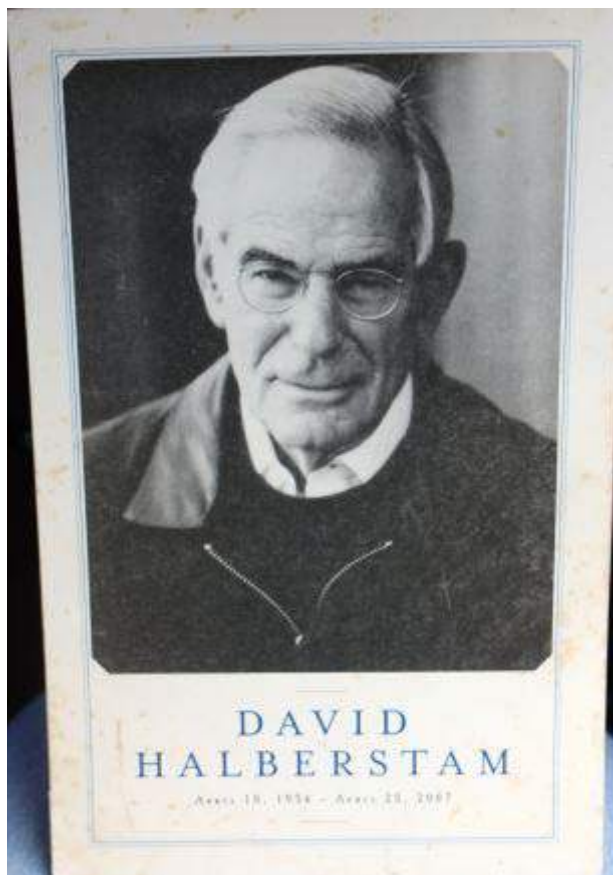
You have driving license, you are somebody. You have wings like angels. I feel disabled because I cannot drive. In Heaven, the angels fly, not walk. My mind, eyes, body in Heaven, but I cannot fly, just borrow the wings.

Mr. Don Giggs offers me a car. Just looking, not driving. How can I change lanes? In Viet Nam, the lanes are built-in and invisible. Very happy to see the sign "Drive Less, Live More."

House/home is really a castle, fortress. Cars are moving castles, fortresses on freeway.

Best,

Tran Quoc Cong



Dear America,

You are the XXXL country, your meal is, too. A cheeseburger is so BIG, it swallows me, not I it. If I keep on eating like this, I do not think I can walk through the door at the customs counter with the slogan "Keep American's Door Open and Our Nation Secure" on the day I leave the paradise.

Things are expensive.

In the announcement for the memorial service for Mr. David Halberstam in NYT: "In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to Teach for America in the Mississippi Delta." Flowers for David, food for me. Teach for America, Teach for my children. Mississippi Delta, Me Kong Delta.

This is an open eyes and mind trip for me.

Thanks for all your help,  
Tran Quoc Cong

---

Dear America,

Memorial Day, Sunday 27 May. Riding bike in Westminster Cemetery, I agree with Thomas Jefferson that "All men are created equal" and buried, cremated equal.

"Flat" means equal in some way, in many ways. In Viet Nam, the graves are not equal at all. In Viet Nam, the hill is for the tombs, death, resting place. Turning your head to the mountain means "pass away." Flat, low land is for villages, life. In U.S., in reverse.

Now, I know why you are "the Quiet American." You do not blow the horns when you drive.

I sleep with the sound of click in my dream. "Click It or Ticket." Seatbelt, please.

See you,  
Tran Quoc Cong



Dear America, Good morning, Sun Valley!

Vietnamese local bus from Little Sai Gon to Phoenix, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Heaven to Hell. Just hot not humid, like home. No sticky. Anyway, 5-star Hell. Just compare, not complain.

The pages of my high school textbook, *Practice Your English*, McGraw Hill, appeared along the road. The first time in life I saw desert, cactus, sand, small bushes, hot and dry. Before, I only see dessert, fruits, ice cream, sweets, caramel, after meals. I felt thorny, like cactus when coming to Arizona. Cowboy films 1965 to 67 replayed.

CARPOOL LANE = Mahayana Buddhism. You live, pray, do whatever to become Buddha, and help the others to become Buddha, too. The other lanes on freeway = Theravada Buddhism. One vehicle, one driver.

In the U.S., I live to be delivered. I cannot drive. Thanks for all help. I come to the U.S. with JFK Inaugural Speech, MLKing's I Have A Dream, the image of Apollo 11, and all my high school textbook in mind. It is my America.

Tran Quoc Cong

---

Dear Phoenix, Arizona,

Wooh! Grand Canyon, Great Wonder of Nature, so grand.

"No one should die before they see Angkor," Somerset Maugham wrote somewhere. To me, "No one should die before they see Grand Canyon." Coming to Angkor, we stretch our necks UP to see how high. To Grand Canyon, we crane our necks DOWN to see how deep. Angkor, the hand of Man. Grand Canyon, the hand of the Creator.

Riding bike in and around Phoenix in June, I know why the Phoenix puts its head in the ash. To hide from the HEAT.

Buying something, I have to pay tax. I feel itchy. You don't, do you? Just the system.

See you,  
CONG

Dear Old Town Scottsdale, the West's Most Western Town,

I rode my Iron Horse—bicycle—to the frontier town 113 years after the first settlers came. I met again my boyhood with the cowboy films in my mind, *Arizona Colt*, *Bonanza*, *The Wild Wild West*.

I clicked my camera as fast as the sheriff shot his Colt to stop the bandit coming to town.

I pumped air into my bike tyre in front of the Cavalliere's Blacksmith Shop, like the cowboys changed horseshoes.

I locked my Iron Horse at the rusty ring once used for horses and mules.

I sent two postcards home from Scottsdale's first Post Office, where every founding father gathered at mail time, twice a day.

And, I had an ice cream in Sugar Bowl Ice Cream Parlor, to cool down the notorious Arizona dry heat. I am the *Man from Nowhere*. A really good day.

Bye bye, from Where the Old West Comes Alive,  
Tran Quoc Cong

---

Dear South California and Arizona,

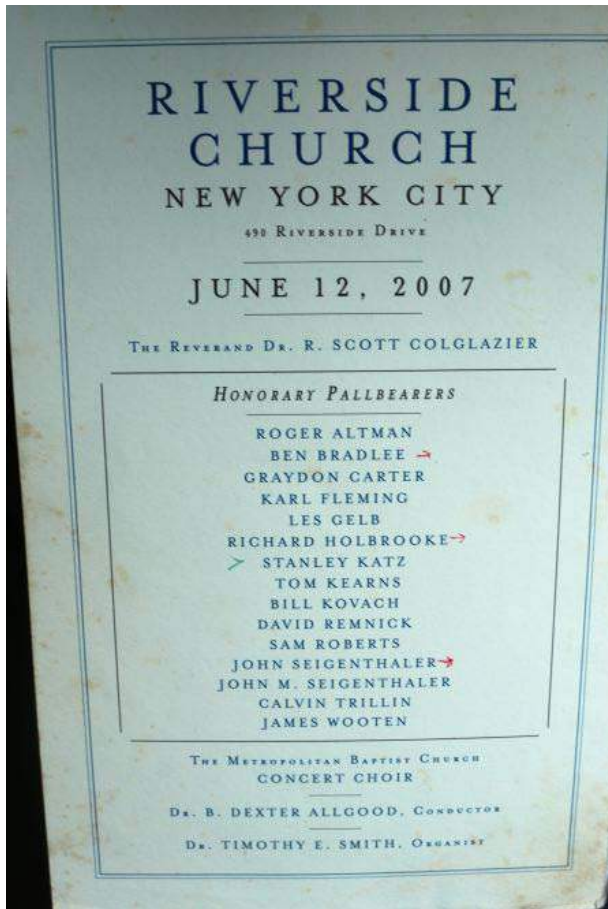
Walking in Mission San Juan Capistrano, I saw Silent Night, so quiet.

Standing in front of Crystal Cathedral, I heard Jingle Bell, so loud.

The bronze sculpture of a woman caught in adultery, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone." They mean tons, tons of glass of the cathedral, neither Magdalene nor adultery.

Thy kingdom comes. Maybe. Looking at all stuff in the U.S. so far, I have felt the Middle Kingdom comes. Everything made in China, except the Cowboys in Rawhide Steakhouse and Saloon.

How come? Hey, folks!  
Tran Quoc Cong



Good morning, New York,

You are Grand Canyon turned downside up.

MANHATTAN, I dropped my HAT 3 times while looking at your skyscrapers, you made my neck painful. I became a MAN without HAT or sunTAN, you are my sunblock buildings.

I saw 3D New York vertically, on Top of the Rock and in subway. First time in my life subway, like guerrilla Củ Chi Tunnels. New York, you made my provincial heart choke.

Early morning walk in Central Park, the lung of NY. At home, when getting angry at somebody, we shout madly, "You are a dog!" Watching people dog-walking here, from now on, I will not shout like that. It is so nice. Will find something else, worse.

Oh, my God! I said. Oh, my Dog! I heard the echo from the bench behind. You made me confused.

CONG

Dear 13 Original States,

Promenade in and around Brooklyn (Broken Land), Greenwich, East Hampton, New Canaan. I wonder how many Gods you have. Only one, right? So, why you have so, so many different churches? It doesn't mean that you are more religious than us. Maybe less. You make God lose his identity. Holding the banknote, I read "In God We Trust." Singular? Walking around here, I see plurality.

Riding bike around East Hampton and Connecticut is like in the Anderson fairy tales. Nice landscape, golden sunshine like honey, green forest, the weather just perfect. I wonder if we need paradise in the next life. God is unfair. Now, I know why you often end your speech, "God bless America." You bribe Him?

Since coming here, I have had the feeling I am spewed out of the Horn of Plenty together with food. How can I control the temptation.

Forgive me,  
CONG

---

Dear New York,

Welcome to Paradise. We know that even Paradise is not perfect. Spewing out of the subway, woo! Times Square, the Crossroads of the World, not easy to cross due to the crowd. Your five senses are raped by the Most Crowded on Earth, the Call of the Wild.

NEW York is new to me, but OLD to the immigrants in the Lower East Side tenements.

GRAND Central Station engulfs you.

GREAT Depression still in some corners I walked through.

BROADway is really broad.

LONG Island is a long drive, just like your common question in Viet Nam: "How long to Ha Long?" So long to Ha Long, so long to Long Island.

Burger KING swallows you like King Kong does.

CENTRAL Park right in the center you never miss.

TOP of the ROCK is top of tops.

SUBways like submarines.

WALL Street is only WALLs and GLASS, which makes the TRINITY church so TINY, so PITY.

TIMES SQUARE is not square, but like the hands of octopus.

HOTline 1-888-NYC-SAFE is extremely HOT at Times Square to fight terrorism.

DEAR New York, you are very DEAR, not cheap to live.

Looking at Lady LIBERTY, I think of Lady Buddha. This with FIRE, that with WATER. Two basic things for life. (Lady Buddha with the flask in her hand pouring water down to extinguish the inferno of our life).

New York, you are XXXL. Forgive me, the frog, for the first time, leaving the pond for the ocean. How can I see you all, let alone understand you?

Take care,  
CONG

---

Good Morning, Washington DC,

The bright sunny day: All the monuments, domes, spires, statues rise up to the sky, soar to the heaven, except Vietnam War Memorial. Black, like the pin, goes deep to the soil. The White House is white. The Black Marble is black.

In the morning, coming to National Cathedral on the hill, I do not see God nor congregation. Emptiness.

In the evening, sitting in the baseball stadium, I see the holy congregation. Their religion is Baseball, singing like church choir. Eating and drinking like sharing the Communion. The 12 Apostles down there bring their spirits up to Heaven with Bats and Balls. When a ball flying to the seats, many people rise up trying to get it like holy blessing. At the back, food and drinks are their "daily bread" they pray for. Some people concentrate on the pamphlet of statistics like Psalms. Baseball caps everywhere like halos. Red and white T-shirts for sale like angel robes. Everyone is happy as they are in Heaven. The first time in my life I watch a baseball game right in the Baseball Cathedral.

I have some books on Baseball Saints by David Halberstam, whose death is the Visa for me to be here. Both Baseball Bible and Baseball Service in Baseball Cathedral are completely dark to me. But I enjoy the Touch of America.

Baseball Bless You, America. Baseball is with you, and you with Baseball.

CONG

---

Dear Philly, good day Atlantic City.

Woo! The Cathedral of Gambling with the double-ten commandments advised by American Gaming Association. Oh, my God. GAMING looks like GAMBLING. This is that. I wonder if caSINO has SIN within itself. Hope not. But I doubt. And I didn't see any SAINT here.

Looking at the stream of people coming, focusing their eyes to the slot machines, I heard the words "free to pursuit of happiness" echoing. Losing, return to win back your losses. A win, return to win more. E-Z Pass. Go faster. Go ahead. No clock. Neither day, nor night in casino. No-Times Square.

You are in Heaven with thousands of colorful neon lights, make everything DOUBLE, TRIPLE, One four Four. Ecstasy. Drinks are free and welcome to lure you to the dream of winner. Gambling is GAME and BLIND. Knowing when to stop?

Responsible Gaming means Irresponsible Gambling, doesn't it?

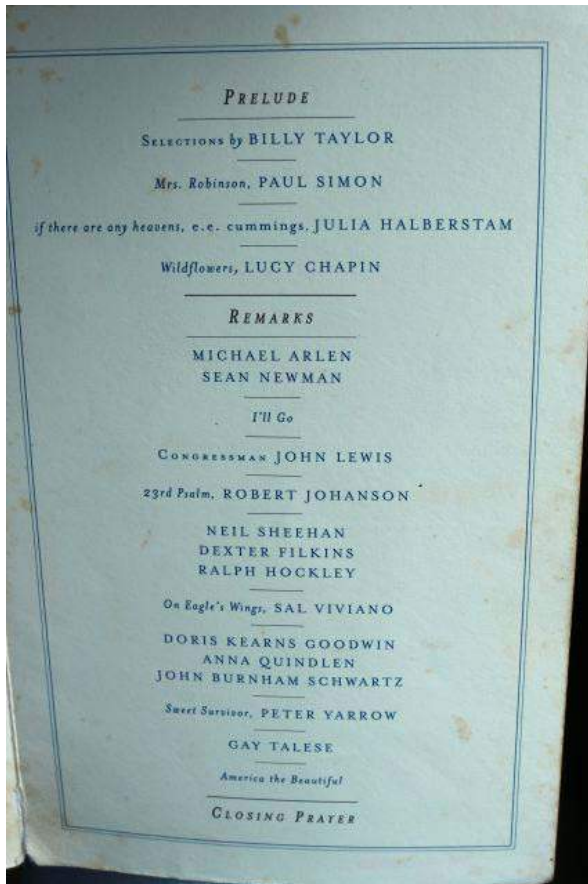
A mime tried to be machine-like. Robot tried to be human-like. Foot Massage and Palm Reading next to each other.

SIN City Mt. Holy Town. The young smile, the old napping. White, Black, Yellow, Brown skin, the Sun makes all shadows the same on the white sand.

Atlantic City always turns on.

On the drive back to Philly, I saw the sign STAY AWAKE! STAY ALIVE! otherwise you die. You intend to gamble your life? BOARDWALK is life. Horn of Plenty. Food, Fun and Friendliness. We the People, Pursuit of Happiness.

CONG



Dear Atlantic Ocean,

The first time in life, I dipped my hand into Atlantic Ocean, just over there is Nantucket, where the ash of David Halberstam will rest. May my soul hitchhike the ferry across. Should I take some ash and drop it into Me Kong Delta, so he can meet his youth again?

One Very Hot Day. I stopped by the house of Home Sweet Home in East Hampton, and the birthplace of the author, America the Beautiful in Falmouth.

I walked step-by-step on Boston's Freedom Trail, not crazy rush like on the Freeway.

In Boston, I slept in the bed of a Marines Captain who was moving from Kuwait to Iraq. I saw all his high school and college pictures, books, souvenirs on the shelves.

In Falmouth, I sent a letter to Spc. Johnson Stephen, who was now somewhere in Iraq, telling him about his beautiful Falmouth village, lighthouse, fishing, swimming and wishing for his safe return, not mentioned the bullshit war at all.

During Viet Nam War, at 15, I found many Xmas cards handmade by primary students in the States, in the Rear, sent to the GIs in the Front. Those were my boyhood toys, which I found in the garbage dump near my school.

Goodbye, Boston. Farewell to the navel of American Revolution. My body is in Jacksonville, Oregon now, digging gold, but my soul still somewhere in New England with golden memories.

Many American-Vietnamese here never touch the navel of U.S. history and Revolution. They just do nails, run barbershops, and mow the lawns, trying to make \$\$\$\$. Gold Rush no longer rushes. Hair, nails, and grass keep growing. We cannot stop them. The longer they grow, the more \$\$\$ my friends make. Their American Dream fulfilled. The streets are paved with gold.

Up near Crater Lake , the first time in my life, I touched snow. Two little girls threw snowballs to me. I sat and lay on it. I walked, doubting my feet like Neil Armstrong's first steps on the Moon.

Goodbye, Boston. 4 July. I left the Cradle of Liberty, Birthplace of American Independence right on her 231st birthday. I ate hot dogs, potatoes salad, baked beans on the East Coast, and watched fireworks in the West, Oregon.

I am in Arcata, CA now.

CONG

---

Dear friends,

Good evening America. I set foot in LAX at 6:25 PM 21 May. Like Neil Armstrong stepped out of the spaceship walking on the Moon, like the Pilgrim Fathers landed at Plymouth Rock, I stood in line at Visitors Counter, Customs, at Tom Bradley Int'l Terminal in high spirit of Apollo and Mayflower. I giggled like the angels had the new wings ready to fly in Paradise.

My wife feels proud and happy back home in Viet Nam. At long last, at least once in life, her husband goes to America. The Promised Land, Paradise, Heaven, Something Number One.

She boastly told all the villagers, "My husband saw a pumpkin as large as a house in America." All the villagers listened, mouths and eyes wide open.

Another lady said, "My husband also saw a cooking pot as big as the Village Commune."

How come! What for?



The answer: "My husband's pot is used to cook your husband's pumpkin."

Best,  
Tran Quoc Cong

---

Dear America,

My soul and mind are untidy like NASA in Florida the day Apollo 11 returned from the Moon.

My visit to the U.S. Paradise is the reincarnation to me. I still have East-West jetlag. Climatically, Paradise. Purgatory, jet lag. It is The 0001 Place (not 1000) to see before you die. 101 Things to Do in life. Not many people have their dreams come true in this lifetime. I am one of the few. Out of more than 3000 photos taken during 90 days in the New World, the Dreamy Land, I had to choose the best, iconic 10. And if only 3 chosen, which ones should I pick out. I told my family, friends, neighbors, colleagues

What I have seen:

- the button to cross the streets
- the subway in NY and Washington DC.
- the snow in July at Crater Lake
- the Atlantic Ocean
- the Central Park in NY, desert in Arizona, Redwood Forest ...

What I have tasted:

- the biggest burger
- the brownie and trail mix
- the blueberry and yoghurt
- the corn and salmon

What in USA scared me:

- I almost burned my finger with the hot water tap in the kitchen.
- the alarm at my classmate's house. He gave me his house key, but his wife set the alarm as usual. I opened the door, and the siren barked fiercely. So scared, I just stood at the door holding my passport, just in case the police came. ... Goose pump. "Ask not what American will do for you, but what together we can do." But, I am alone then.

Yesterday, my daughter asked me if I had any dream, dream to go visit somewhere, somewhere else.

No, I have no dream now. It takes time to have another dream. I feel full for my five senses.

Many thanks, USA,  
C O N G

---

By [Editor](#) | April 13th, 2017 | Categories: [Issue 20: 13 April 2017](#) | Tags: [Essay](#), [Tran Quoc Cong](#), [David Halberstam memorial](#), [David Remnick](#), [Calvin Trillin](#), [Paul Simon](#), [Julia Halberstam](#), [Gay Talese](#), [Doris Kearns Goodwin](#), [Anna Quindlen](#) | [1 Comment](#)