

## 2 - PLEIKU

### Camp Enari the site of the 4th Division Training Center



I arrived in the afternoon of March 19th. The flying conditions were very crude. We sat in canvas seats with our backs to the fuselage. After a short flight, we began to descend, so I looked out the window. The base camp and airfield (Hensel Army Airfield) were on a dry and level plain. It didn't impress me, although the short runway and the panic stop the plane made did! As we deplaned I noticed the temperature was noticeably colder than Cam Ranh Bay. From the airfield, we were

immediately taken to the processing center and assigned a bunk in a wooden barracks. The base was covered with fine dirty dust. During the wet season, I assumed, this would be a mud hole. The center was located in Camp Enarai, which was named after the first 4th Division soldier killed in Vietnam

We were given 4th Division booklets that were crudely made and sloppily reproduced on a mimeograph machine. The booklet explained about avoiding the evils of Vietnam, which included alcohol, drugs, women, and gambling.

My bunkmate in the barracks was a sergeant from a town in Texas near the Mexican border. This was on his third tour, by choice! He was trying to get assigned to Phu Bai up near the DMZ where his Vietnamese girlfriend lived. That was why he had chosen a third tour and a lifer's career.

The next day, a "processing" sergeant interviewed each one of us. He had reviewed my file and couldn't figure out how a man of my talents, and good-looking too, could end up in the infantry. I had finally found someone in the army that made sense. Right on! He assured me that he could get me transferred to a better position and safer too. I inquired about the army engineers. He thought that too risky for a man of my skills, and suggested being a cook! I declined and decided to roll the dice rather than serve a four-year tour.

As part of our training, we went on a patrol went up to Dragon Mountain, which was just a large hill with lush vegetation. At the base of the mountain, we sat down and took a lunch break near a group of Montagnards that were roaming the area. During the break, Montagnard women and children came over to various trinkets, and we traded for pineapples and bananas. I traded my

C-Rations for a bracelet and a Pineapple and promptly cut my lips by eating it right off the stem! We returned to the base camp in mid-afternoon and turned in our gear. We were told that now

that we had been fully acclimated to a combat situation, we would be shipped to An Khe to join our permanent units.

On March 27, 1970, after receiving our orders for our permanent assignments, we marched out to a deuce and a half and boarded it. Prior to leaving, we lined the floor of the truck with two layers of sandbags to protect us in case we ran over a land mine. Before leaving, we were required to don helmets and flak jackets. There were wooden bench seats on the sides of the bed of the truck, but no canvas overhead covering to protect us against the sun. The weather was clear, hot, and humid.



On the way east we entered the infamous Mang Yang Pass. To get down to the plain where An Khe was located we had to traverse this mountain pass. On June 24, 1954, a month after the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu and a few days before the cease-fire of the First Indochina War, a French armored unit, the Viet Minh's 803rd Regiment ambushed Groupement Mobile 100 in the pass. G.M. 100 was falling back from its defensive in An Khe to Pleiku. The French unit suffered heavy

losses, abandoning its' heavy guns to the Viet Minh. The French dead were buried in a cemetery at the top of the pass.

After about an uneventful three-hour ride we approached An Khe. Besides cooking in our flak jackets and frying under our steel pots, we were none the worse for wear. We arrived at Camp Radcliff, which was the new home of the 4th Division and the former home of the 1st Cavalry Division. Like Camp Enari, Radcliff was named after a 1st Cavalry soldier who died in Vietnam. Each one of us was dropped off at our new units. My unit was the 2/35th, known by the nickname "Cacti Blue".