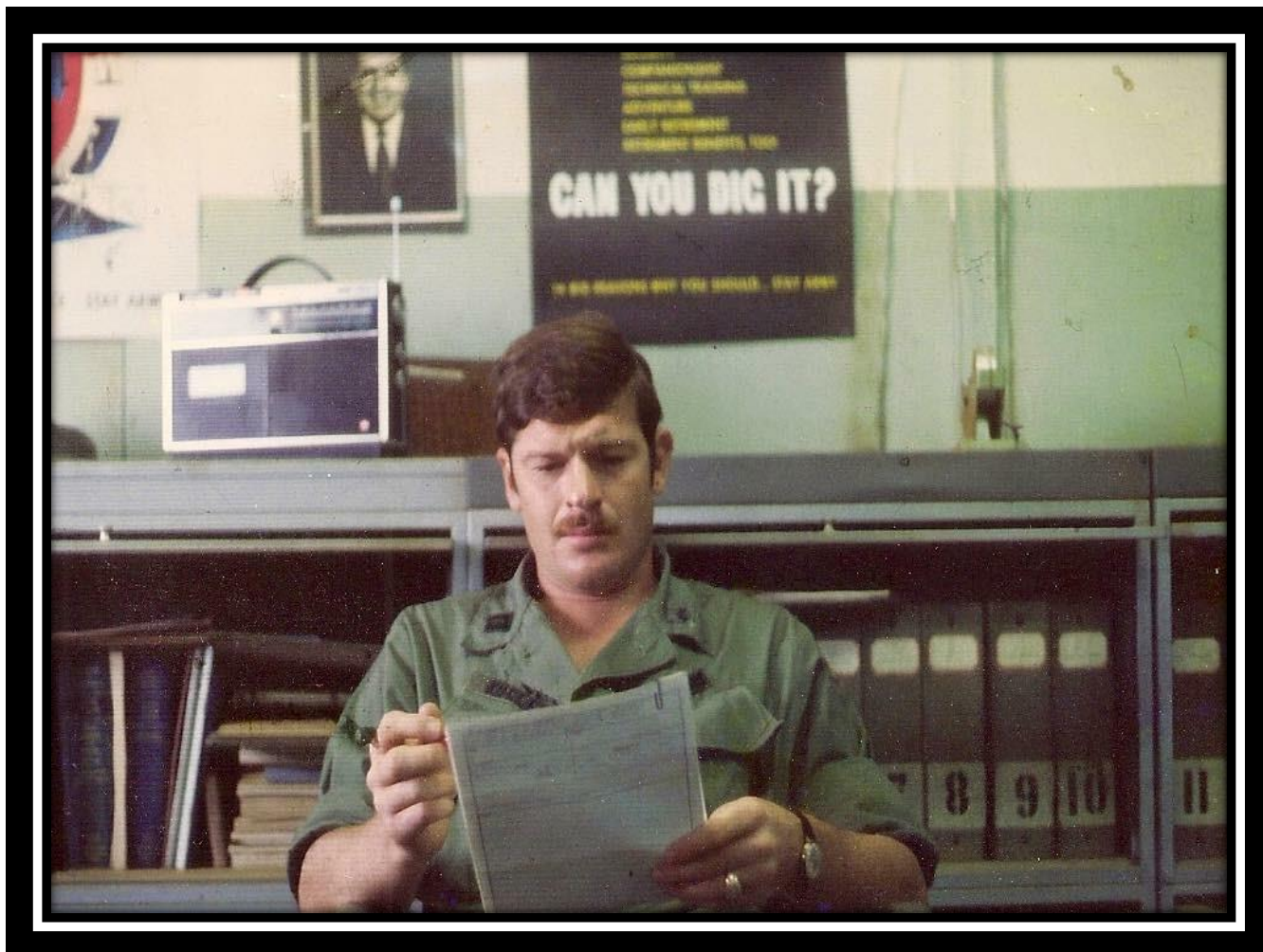


**Clarence  
Kugler**



I was assigned as a Captain to a supply and transportation battalion (several hundred men) in the northern section of South Vietnam in July 1971 as the battalion adjutant. (The Americal Division) I had no experience in personnel matters so I was mentally challenged when informed I was in charge of all the personnel actions of my unit to include individual records, promotions, awards and R&R leaves (Rest and Recuperation) from the combat zone. In addition, any soldier needing marriage counseling was sent to my office. It did not matter to the Army that I had no experience in marriage at the time. It was good, in the Army, to be a fast learner.

My first day on the job, I sorted through all the battalion's enlisted personnel files and I found the 2 enlisted men with the highest Army testing IQ scores and I immediately transferred them to my office. I knew nothing about the requirements of my new job but I assumed some bright guys would help me navigate the uncharted waters ahead. I was right because they did all the behind the scenes work and I promoted them.

In separate jobs, I was the company commander of about 100 truck drivers responsible for leading a weekly truck convoy somewhere in the Chu Lai/Da Nang area of operations. The officers did the convoys on a rotating basis along with spending nights inspecting the 50 foot guard towers around the

circumference of the unit. (This required making sure the men were awake and that they had ammunition; not always the case)

One night, I was watching female Korean singers performing at the Officers Club when I spied, Rusty Hay, a fellow Denison University lacrosse player watching the entertainment from the other side of the stage. Rusty, an Air Force officer and a dentist, told me that he had very little to do because of a lack of patients. I told Rusty that if he would send an Air Force bus over the next morning, I would give him all the patients he could hope for. The next morning, I had a formation of my truck drivers and I told them to smile and if I tapped them on the shoulder to get on the AF bus waiting in the parking lot. The bus returned later in the afternoon and one would have thought the men just returned from hand to hand combat as Rusty did tooth extractions on the twenty some men with bloody results. Rusty's buses kept coming back and soon all my truck drivers had bright white smiles. As is said, no good deed goes unpunished. One of my dental patients came back from his 2 week R&R to Hawaii and requested marriage counseling in my office. He told me he wanted a divorce and I asked what could have gone wrong in Hawaii. He replied, "Sir, I could not get my wife to practice good dental hygiene."

On a happier note, one of my truck drivers from Pittsburgh came into my office and requested I write a letter for him to the President of Iron City beer. The driver enclosed a Wells Fargo (the only bank allowed in Vietnam) check for \$50 to cover his request for beer. Several weeks later, the same soldier came to me with a letter from the beer president saying every effort was made to send the beer but it was illegal to send alcohol to individual soldiers. The check was returned the letter said the soldier he could use the letter as a letter of recommendation should he desire to pursue a job with the company when he returned. Several months passed by before I received a long manila envelope. I pulled out a long picture of my former soldier proudly standing at the front door of his Iron City beer truck in his Iron City uniform. Years later, on a family trip to Pittsburgh, we took a cable elevator up to the top of Mt. Washington and I was able to get my first taste of an Iron City beer and it was worth the wait.



## **Christmas in Vietnam**

Prior to heading to Vietnam in 1971, I was moved from the Chief Scientist's Office to an intelligence office in the Pentagon. I never knew what the office mission was because, being born in Australia, I was not able to get a top security clearance during the two months of my assignment. I would report to the office in the morning and then head to the basement gym for much of the day. Around noon, I would run over the bridge to the monuments and back for lunch in the center of the Pentagon. For artwork, my office had the silhouettes of ships and airplanes. I never sought any information on the artwork not wanting to draw any attention to my seeking unauthorized information.

On weekends, I was playing rugby for the Washington Rugby Club. One Sunday, we were playing Clemson in the first game of the Cherry Blossom Festival out in front of the Smithsonian. I was up on the front row and just about to catch the opening kickoff when a Clemson player kicked my right index finger cutting it to the bone. With blood spurting forth, I was given a towel and escorted off the field to my black VW bug. I then drove across the Potomac to Fort Myer Army Base ("Home of Generals" where they train soldiers for the Unknown Soldier guard duties) and I had the finger stitched up. The finger to this day does not fully bend. At the Walter Reed Hospital I was informed that my finger would not deter me from assignment to Vietnam and off I went in early summer 1971.

Just prior to Christmas 1971, I was assigned to the DaNang Support Information Office as the Assistant Information Officer. I always felt this title was strange because there was no Information Officer being that he was back in the states after being wounded on an assignment.

I put out a monthly magazine that required me to go to Saigon for final editing. In addition, I was in charge of Bob Hope tickets and seating for the show's 1971 Christmas tour and I greeted Bob Hope along with Jim Neighbors, Lola Falana, Vida Blue, not to forget Les Brown and his Band of Renown when they arrived by helicopter for the tour's short stay in DaNang.

After the Bob Hope visit, I decided to have a wisdom tooth removed before Xmas during a monsoon with strong winds and heavy rain. I was directed to a dental hut in the storm. A young Captain like me had his University of Wisconsin diploma on the wall of the metal hut. What made the operation exciting was a bamboo viper (bright luminescent green snake) in the hut during my operation and the fact that the roots on my wisdom tooth were curved. The dentist's assistant held a

broom in one hand keeping the snake in the corner and with the other hand he held a metal desk lamp giving the dentist illumination into my mouth. Suffice it to say, the wisdom tooth removal turned out to be a colossal fubar. As I remember, Christmas dinner was served by enlisted hands, no plastic gloves employed by serving personnel. The dining ware was a cold metal tray and I was forced to chew carefully on one side of my mouth.

In 1972, I was at Ft. Lewis in Washington State getting out of the Army. At the end of my physical, the doctor asked, "Did anything happen to you in the Army that inhibits your motor movements?" I opened my medical file and showed him the Walter Reed paperwork and he declared on paper that I was 10 percent injured as a result of my injury. My first monthly check was for \$6. Now, in 2020, I receive a check for \$135 a month. As these checks will arrive until I die, I have a very warm spot in my heart for the Walter Reed Hospital; not so much for Clemson.

I should add, a month after I left Vietnam, I was using the GI Bill to attend the University of Denver graduate school and I was playing rugby for the university team. At the start of my first game, I tackled a runner and thought nothing of it but when I went into a scrum one of my teammates said, "Hey Buddy, you might have broken your jaw." My car rear view mirror indicated that I gave the appearance of having a cantaloupe in my cheek. X-rays at the hospital revealed no broken jaw but revealed the dentist from Wisconsin left two of my wisdom tooth roots in my jaw which had become infected. I was taken to the Cody Dental Clinic (no relation to Buffalo Bill) where the roots were finally gouged out of my head. After a year of squabbling over the price of the root removal, the Army finally reimbursed the Clinic for their efforts on my behalf. I played rugby until the age of 41. On the day of my retirement, I was playing for the Boca Raton Rugby Club on a polo field. Just before half time I tackled a young fellow and we slid on the grass. We stood up and I noticed I had a rather fresh horse road apple on my shoulder. I immediately walked off the field while getting a replacement player and notified the team that I was retiring from rugby. I thought I could play for a few more years and I would never come up with a better retirement story. I do inform Australian relatives that I am a retired professional rugby player as I receive a monthly check as remuneration for my salad days rugby playing.

