

Marion C. Crawford

January 1999

Hi Donna!

Wishing You A Happy New Year And Every Good Thing

TO THE BEST SOLDIERS IN THE WORLD - THE USARV WAC DETACHMENT.

This is your former First Sergeant, Sgt C. (October 1966 through June 1968). We started it all, didn't we? It was the first time a WAC Detachment was activated in a combat zone....and I don't know about you, but no other assignment could top this one! Was life boring when you went on to stateside assignments? I went on to Fort Sheridan but retired a year later. You unfortunate women had to endure ho-hum PCSs, right? HA! I've heard from some of you who retired as First Sergeants and Sergeants Major. I am so proud of you! Others went back to school to earn degrees and some hold very impressive positions and titles. Still others took on the important job of marriage, children, and family. I am proud of you all!

I will never forget how excited the original cadre were the day our first troops arrived. We had been preparing for them for three months and when I saw those first women come down the steps from the aircraft - WOW! They were so sharp, even after that twenty-plus hour trip. No fatigues in those early days - the uniform of the day was summer greens, nylons, and heels. They were young and beautiful - and so embarrassed because Associated Press and Army photographers were there to record history....and the women felt too tired and thought their uniforms too wrinkled to have their pictures taken. But, they were ready a few days later when the official welcome took place at the Tan Son Nhut WAC Detachment compound with the USARV Band performing. The commanding general and other dignitaries were there and a big cake was presented. We were also given a huge bouquet of flowers with a message that read "Welcome to USARV, women, you are a welcome sight to these starved eyes". It was from the command and men. The mess hall was moved to our area for the evening meal as everyone was gathered there - and four of our women got up and sang and danced, impromptu, for our guests. They were great! AP got a photo of me at that time standing among the men with such a look of pride on my face. This photo was distributed to all the major newspapers back stateside.

It was quite a tour of duty, wasn't it? Heavy gun fire, vibrations from the bombing, alerts that sent us running to the bunkers, and seeing our men who lived right across the street go off on missions and not return. On a more light note, seeing the men across the street walking or driving along trying to see into our compound and being so interested they ran into telephone poles, jeeps, and each other. As I used to say, our road was the shortcut to everywhere once the guys found out where the detachment was....we had a lot of laughs. Remember the move from Tan Son Nhut to Long Binh when we took everything from our quarters with us, including beds, footlockers, and wall lockers. No one wanted to make that move

and leave our hootches, named after Las Vegas casinos, but we went like good little troops and eventually settled down in our vented buildings that let rain in during the monsoons and dust and dirt during the dry season. Such fun! Lots of celebrities gave shows for us, i.e., nervous Hank Snow, Nancy Sinatra, Vic Damone, and, of course, Bob Hope. Wasn't that a great version of "Hello Dolly" with Martha Raye? We were also privileged to see and hear Cardinal Spellman and Billy Graham. Many of our congressmen, our WAC Director, Colonel Hoisington, and former WAC Director, Colonel Rasmuson, visited the unit. Then there was the above ground swimming pool sent to us from a WAC Veteran's organization back home. What a time we all had in that twelve feet wide, three feet deep wonder. Nobody dared walk past 'cause if you did - IN YOU WENT, CLOTHES AND ALL. We all especially loved to throw my dear Field First into the thing - remember how Betty would howl. We threw in our commander, Cpt Murphy, too. She was a good sport!

And speaking of commanders - we could not have had two better officers than Cpt Peggy Ready and Cpt Joanne Murphy. Cpt Ready, a personable and intelligent young officer (who looked like Doris Day and danced like Ginger Rogers) impressed her women as well as the officers and men, first at Tan Son Nhut and later at Long Binh. When her tour of duty was up we dreaded seeing her go - the rest of the cadre had already extended and were staying. But, here comes her replacement, Cpt Murphy (a Julia Roberts type) and another wise choice by the Pentagon. She was one of the most gentle, efficient, and caring women that I had ever known. The troops liked and respected both of these commanders. Their prime responsibility was the welfare of their women and they took this job seriously. SFC Betty Benson, my Field First, was my right arm and she made all of our lives a lot easier. She went on to become First Sergeant at Fort Monroe. Later, she became the first Distinguished Military Graduate of the Sergeants Major Academy. She retired as a Command Sergeant Major having served more years than any other EW, something like 32 years. Our Supply Sergeant, SSG Edith "Effie" Efferson, was a real character and gave us a lot of laughs. She went on to be First Sergeant at Fort Meade. Dear Effie did not live many years after returning to the states but did live long enough to give two adopted young girls a strict and loving home. It's a good thing they were young or she would've taught them other things like drinking CC and beer, right gang? Then there was Ren and Pat our two clerks who were young and wonderful troops. Our perky Cpt Ready returned to civilian life later after returning stateside, but remained in the reserves and retired as a Colonel. She now wears the black robes of a judge in St. Augustine. Cpt Murphy also returned to civilian life and is now a very successful professional fine arts photographer in San Antonio, Texas. I am happy to report that Cpt Murphy will be at the reunion and I will be working on Cpt Ready and Betty Benson to get them there.

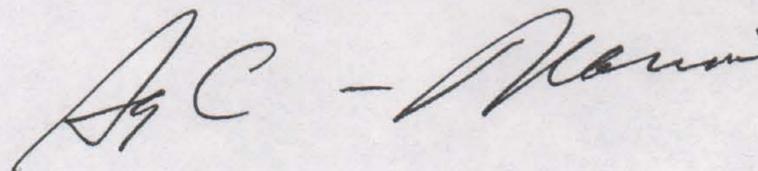
Remember the meals I cooked for you, and having to borrow huge pots from the mess hall? Remember the ammo dump being hit by enemy mortar fire and all of us being knocked around including our mascot, KoKo. The explosion was horrendous. We all thought we'd been "had" that night.

Remember the fright! We spent the entire night in bunkers seeing what looked like atom bombs exploding throughout the night as different pads at the dump were hit. The noise was deafening. In the morning, our troops put on fresh uniforms and Cpt Murphy, Betty, Effie, and I watched them go off to work as though nothing exceptional had happened, while we collapsed onto our desks, shaking like leaves. It's true, young soldiers can take stress a lot easier. Then comes the Tet Offensive....Charley knew how to ruin your day! Our embassy was taken over that time and the Tan Son Nhut airport damaged so badly that Betty and I, returning from R&R in Australia, had to be diverted to Cam Ranh Bay and then to Bangkok. Talk about two very ballistic NCOs. Our worries about our detachment were calmed by a thoughtful phone call put through by Cpt Murphy from Vietnam to our hotel in Bangkok to reassure us that they were all right. Thank God!

All in all, our service over there was an experience of a lifetime. And now we have an opportunity to enjoy a regrouping by attending the big Vietnam reunion in Olympia, Washington next November. I am thrilled and excited at the thought of seeing so many of you again after these thirty plus years. Do try to make it, as this special occasion will end up being the second most exciting time of your lives....want to bet? If you should hear from others in our unit who have not heard from me, please furnish me their names and addresses. My list is not complete and may not be accurate.

I am flying from my winter home in central Florida to see you - so hopefully I will not be disappointed. Meantime, I would love to hear from you. Tell me what you have been doing since I saw you last and I will do likewise when I reply.

Always with love and pride,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "A/C - Marion".

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