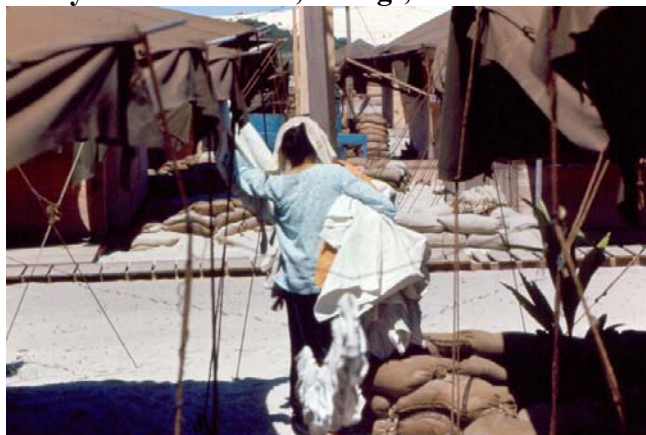


## WE'VE GOT OURSELVES A HOOCH-GIRL!!

By John P Slusser, SMSgt, USAF Retired



**PREFACE:** In early January 1966, the members of the 391<sup>st</sup> TFS arrived at Cam Ranh Bay, RVN after a two-day trek across the Pacific from Holloman AFB, New Mexico. In short order, we were setting up our eight-man tent in our designated area and it wasn't long until we were looking for ways to improve our situation. With an ample supply of two-by-fours and sheets of plywood, our tent soon would become a "Hooch". A couple of us were pretty handy with hammer and nails, but our main carpenter was SSgt Bud Myers and you can see some of our handiwork by going to [www.wd7f.com](http://www.wd7f.com) and clicking on the RVN66 link there. Near the top of the website is the sign listing the inhabitants of our wooden palace.

**GET USE TO IT:** After a few days and nights of residence, we were getting pretty use to our surroundings and had even managed to gather a supply of Carlings Red Cap Ale. It seemed like an eternity before a shipment of real beer came in, but Red Cap had to do. It was warm of course, and we griped about it but drank it anyway. Heck, it wasn't long after that I (well, we) had managed to scrounge one of the old refrigerators sitting on the flight-line with the other equipment that came with the 391<sup>st</sup> and 366<sup>th</sup> TFW. It was necessary to chain it to one of the center tent poles to keep it from walking off and I don't remember if we had a way to lock it. We had cold beer! Well, maybe cool would be a better description because at the rate that we took the ale out of the fridge, it didn't have time to get very cold. But, all good things come to an end. In a few days, the 391<sup>st</sup> Commander came and took it away from us because it was going to be needed in Fan Rang for some trivial use such as film storage. In the interim, we were doing pretty well.

**DANGER, DANGER:** Budd Myers built a table, benches and a washstand and I don't know what all. I think he even helped Bill Ferguson build himself a writing table, with a drawer no less. I digress for a moment to tell you that near the end of the time I was in the hooch with Fergie, I found that he had traded something with some Army guys for four, that's four, live, green HAND GRENADES!! And they were in a hidden area back of the drawer. Geez! I was a just little concerned with the fact that I had been sleeping near that hardware! I guess he must have thought he needed them for protection. Who knows what he was thinking.

**WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO TRADE:** Thinking about it, we traded with the Army all the time, and a hot item for us was jungle fatigues and boots that we couldn't get and never did get from issue. Those items probably ended up on the black market somewhere. Who knows? One of the items that the Army guys wanted was bug-spray. I traded several cases of that and once even traded an extra wall locker for two pairs of jungle boots. Bug spray was a commodity used to hold off the giant crabs that were in

abundance at the Sand Pile. You would take a can to the shower, spray it under your arms and crotch and stand there till it started to burn and then wash it off quickly.

**PROBLEM SOLVED:** I would venture to say that one of the biggest improvements in our living conditions was the addition of a wooden sidewalk and that made it much easier to make our way to and from the shower at the end of the tent row. Speaking of showers, leading to washing clothes, it wasn't long until we were running out of skivvies and socks. About that time, several available Vietnamese women of various ages came around to apply for the job of "Hooch Girl"!

**THE BOSS:** Our Hooch Leader was SSgt Cary Stanley. I suppose it was because he was the oldest or had the most time-in-grade, but for whatever reason, it seemed right. I didn't even know that his name was Cary until a few months ago when I made contact with him up in Aurora, Colorado. I just know him as Stanley. I can still hear him calling me "Slush". Wonder where that nickname came from.

**NO, YOU PICK HER:** Since Stanley was the man, it was his job to handle the hiring of the hooch girl. We had several candidates come forward and some of them were real "doozies", uglier than homemade soap in their black pajamas and straw coolie hats, chewing beetle nut and had lovely red snaggletooth smiles. A couple of them were younger and not so bad and we collectively decided that we would pick Gau. Gau didn't chew beetle nut, was acceptably young and pleasant enough to look at, however, she was very, very pregnant. She assured Stanley that she was capable of doing the job regardless of her condition. Did I mention that Gau was pregnant? I guess so!

**OJT TIME:** Stanley provided the necessary training to include the changing of linen and sweeping the place with the poor excuse for a broom made from a clump of some kind of weed. I think there's a picture of Gau loaded down with bedclothes on linen days heading between the tents. If Gau knew ten words of English, I don't know what they were. She was from Bah Mi Tout, maybe. Anyway, that's how it sounded to me. However, Stanley communicated to her with many gestures and simple English and relied heavily on the little book of English to Vietnamese translation. For the most part, Gau did OK except her hygiene was somewhat to be desired. The rule was to stay at least three feet away.

**SOMEWHAT OVER RIPE:** One day, Stanley observed that Gau needed a little attention to detail so he had a talk with her. It started by Stanley sitting down next to Gau and pulling out a tube of Prell shampoo, you know, the green stuff in a clear plastic toothpaste like container? Anyway, he used all kind of verbal and non-verbal communications with her, showing her by pretending to take some of the shampoo, feigning rubbing it on his scalp and then rinsing it in the shower. Gau nodded with understanding at each stage of instruction and all was well.

**THAT LOOKS GOOD:** Finally, Stanley squeezed out about an inch & a half of the green stuff in Gau's hand and pointed to the shower. What do you think Gau did? She tasted it! Wow! You shoulda' seen her face. Man, I think she was a little leery of Stanley after that.

Seems like Gau had to quit for a while to have her baby and by the time she returned, I had been transferred to the 12<sup>th</sup> AMS.