

# LOOK MOM, I'M AN AUXILIARY MOTOR POOL DRIVER!

By John P. Slusser



**PREFACE:** Received the December 2008 Log Entry and having read more of very prolific **Jim Knoch's** writings about his experience at Cam Rahn and other places, plus **Ev Sherwood's** Black Coffee story and **Frank Pilson's** Red Skies, I decided to attempt a story again. I lost the original draft in a hard drive failure. I'm thinking, it's been forty-two years and how am I gonna' remember the names? By the way, this is not THAT story; I'm saving it for later. What's amazing is that Frank may have lived in a tent just a few feet across the sand from my 391<sup>st</sup> WCS group of eight.

**HOW TO BEGIN?** Jim Knoch hit the nail on the head when he said "Who wants a day off in Cam Rahn Bay?" As long as working didn't interfere with some drinking time and sleeping, I was fine with trudging through sand to and from the Weapons Control Shop. When we first arrived, the only brew available was Carlings Red Cap Ale since us enlisted swine didn't get the opportunity to make booze runs to Okinawa, etc. Then there was Baker Beach, but other than sitting around in our skivvies drinking beer, telling war stories and writing home, it became pretty boring. So, I volunteered to be an Auxiliary Motor Pool Driver. I had a standard "Kick the tires and light the fire!" briefing on the infamous six-by, had my military drivers license stamped and was soon ready to make the Saturday morning run to Nah Trang, returning on Sunday afternoon. Usually, we returned with a load of corrugated asphalt roofing used to make tents into hooches. Frank may have been a front or back escort on one of these convoys with the AP's Jeep with a mounted 50-caliber machine gun. Only he would know.

**GETTING PREPARED:** After a few trips in the convoy, I began to really look forward to Saturdays. I was working mid-shift and would cut out at "oh-dark-thirty" to make it over to the motor pool where the trucks were parked side-by-side and nose-to-nose with telephone poles separating them. During the pre-flight, we would check the oil, tires, water, etc., and then start the diesel engines and let them idle. You didn't need a key, just turn the switch and pull the knob. As usual, I would be accompanied by whomever I had picked for shotgun (a very coveted position - another story), and with his help, we had quickly completed the procedure.

**NOW THE EXCITING PART:** About that time, a young two-striper, a motor pool troop - name unknown - came up to preflight the six-by next to us and he was pretty darned cocky about it all. He was fussing, upset that he had been ordered to drive a vehicle due to the shortage of volunteer drivers. He

went through the motions to check everything, yammering on about it all, and then what did he do? Being six foot something, he just reached in the open door and turned on the switch and pulled the knob, with him still standing on the ground! He was a bit surprised (us too) when the motor caught and the truck was in “granny gear” as opposed to neutral. Hmmm. The brake must not have been set as per the checklist.

**OOPS! :** In my mind the replay is in slow motion. The six-by started slowly forward and began to climb the telephone pole and as it did, the open door hit the vehicle next to it and nearly pinned the motor pool guy between the door and the running board! So, he had to abandon ship and let it go. I can still see him with mouth open and hands on top of his head as the thing climbed over the barrier and hit a blue flight line step-van, pushed it back where it hit a blue pickup, pushing them both back with ease. It seemed like an eternity before the open door had cleared our vehicle and the vehicle parked beside the now rumped van on the other side of the telephone pole. Finally, someone from the motor pool dispatch office jumped in and turned off the switch! The distraught Airman made some comment like, “No, no! There goes another stripe!” Well, as Paul Harvey would say, that tells “The rest of the story.” I’ll be darned if I know how a cold diesel motor could develop that much torque to climb that pole and push those trucks about so easily, but it sure did.