

# LET'S MAKE A MOVIE SCREEN?

BY

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**PREFACE:** While living in the beautiful tent city at Cam Rahn Bay Air Base, we were always looking for ways to improve our situation since eight-man tents with plywood sides were not the most luxurious habitat, even for seasoned war veterans like us. It's a good thing we were pretty young or we probably wouldn't have tolerated it well. This is a story about the time I helped make a movie screen. As a side note, I will confess that our living conditions were much better than some of the ground pounders who had to put up with deplorable living conditions, plus, they wandered through the jungle and got shot at.

**IN THE BEGINNING:** I have mentioned the art of trading in previous war stories and I became pretty proficient before it was over. We used to trade with the Army guys that would come wandering through our tent city. One hot commodity was aerosol cans of bug spray. I traded several cans of that stuff for jungle fatigues and jungle boots and other valued items. As I related in the Hooch Girl story, some of us even traded for HAND GRENADES! Sigh.

**REGULAR TRADERS:** There was an army helicopter outfit up on the main highway to Nha Trang not far from where the access road to Cam Rahn Bay turned off. I don't know if these guys were related to the Apocalypse Now troops or not, however, they definitely liked to party and I don't remember any of them refusing a beer. Bug spray, fatigues, boots, boxes of rations, ammo and souvenirs were routinely traded.

**ROK MARINES:** There was a ROK Marine camp just a few clicks from the Army Aerial Squadron up on Highway-1 and on occasion they'd make a sojourn to Cam Rahn and shop at our very limited BX and wonder around the base or go to the beach, etc. I remember standing in the BX line waiting to buy whatever when these little rock solid ROK Marine guys would just cut in to the line where ever they liked. You could tell that nobody wanted to question them about it. They would have feigned no understanding and that would have been the end of it. As you

passed their camp up on Highway-1, you could see obstacle course items not far from the road with wooden walls, hanging ropes – some with hand rings, and all kinds of tree logs and things to “play” on. Yeah, we had heard the stories of how the VC particularly disliked the ROK Marines because of taking ears and what-have-you. Maybe it was just bravo-sierra war stories, but I wasn’t gonna’ get into any confrontation with one of these troops.

**HERE THEY COME:** We use to see the Army guys at Baker beach pretty often and sometime we’d get a game of beach football going and played in the shallow water along the beautiful white sandy beach. There weren’t many rules. You just try to get the ball across the imaginary line and hope you didn’t drown. One day, we were involved in a game when this six-by full of ROK Marines showed up. The whole back end of the six-by was filled with these little no-neck guys. An officer or NCO of some sort jumped out of the cab, blew a whistle and made them get into formation. When he dismissed them, they all shouted something and jumped about six feet into the air and then headed to the water. Guess what they wanted to do. They wanted to play football! I only have this to say about that. When the football was handed to me, shortly thereafter it was like I had been hit by a 300-pound defensive lineman from the Chicago Bears. Remember Refrigerator Perry? After I managed to come to the surface and coughed out all of the seawater I had ingested, I limped off the playing field. That was the end of that.

**BACK TO THE MOVIE SCREEN:** The Army guys came by the tent one day and asked if we had any spare plywood and 2x4’s because they wanted to make a movie screen up at their detachment. We had been converting our tents into wooden hooches and later roofed with the asphalt corrugated roofing that we hauled from Nha Trang in a weekly convoy that I drove in. Since we constantly needed material for the effort, I had permission to get material from the Red Horse. We were able to get nails and all the stuff necessary to make our house into a home. So, I grabbed the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeants 4-door truck and the Army guys jumped into the back and we headed to Red Horse where we gathered ample materials to construct the movie screen.

**SPEAKING OF THAT TRUCK:** I recently had the fortune to find Bill Ferguson, a hooch mate during the first eight months of my stay in the plywood palace we had built. Bill was the guy who had traded bug spray or what-have-you for the hand grenades. Turns out that Bill is living in California and I called him and we relived a few moments. Turns out Bill had intimate knowledge of the truck since he had stolen it and left it for use with the First Shirt. Just goes to show you that you can’t remember it all.

**ACROSS THE PONTOON BRIDGE:** No problem, I just signed the order form and we headed out across the pontoon bridge and up the road to the Army area. When we got there, we unloaded the several sheets of plywood, 2 x 4’s and nails. Somebody says, “Hey John, you want a beer?” Well, “Is a pig’s ass pork?”, “Does a bear shit in the woods?”, “Is the Pope catholic?” Of course I wanted a beer. One beer led to another...and another...and we were having a good ole’ time when I looked at my watch and .... OMG, I gotta’ get back across the bridge before dark or I’m toast.

**IT’S DARK ALRIGHT:** I stepped out of the tent and it was pitch dark out and there I was, off the peninsula, across the bridge with a blue Air Force truck. What the hell am I gonna’ do now? I suppose I could have spent the night there with the Army guys, but I didn’t have any way to call home and let them know. So, in my several beers logical way, I headed back to the base. The lights on that Dodge truck were like the 6-volt headlights on an old 1959 Ford Popular I had in England. The light came out and about 10 feet in front of the truck it dropped to the ground.

**THE BRIDGE:** I managed to keep the truck on the road and came to the pontoon bridge where they had an Army guard on the outside and an Air Force guard on the inside. As I pulled up to the bridge in my blue truck, the MP stepped out of his little house and held up his hand. I stopped and he looked in and wondered where I'd been and where I was heading in my blue pickup truck. And by the way, have you been drinking? Well, I told him exactly what happened, with the plywood and the beer and he told me that the blue pickup truck was not authorized on this side of the bridge after dark. Gee, tell me something I didn't know. He told me to go on and the Air Force guard at the other end would take care of me.

**I CAN SEE IT NOW:** As I slowly drove across the pontoon bridge, I envisioned the three stripes flying off my sleeve. Man! I'm in trouble this time. When I neared the other side of the bridge, I slowed down, prepared to stop but the Air Force guard just stepped out of his little house and **WAVED ME THROUGH!**

**I'LL BE A GOOD BOY FROM NOW ON:** I'm guessing they had a couple tin cans and a string to talk to each other and the Air Force guy showed mercy. What a relief. I drove the truck on in and parked it by the orderly room tent and walked to my hooch and nobody said a word about it. I'm pretty sure that was the last really stupid stunt I pulled. Well, maybe not. There wouldn't be any more "War Stories" if that was the case.