

This past month I returned to Vietnam for the first time 53 years along with other soldiers who serve in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions, 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry (Airborne/Airmobile) from 1965 -1971, for a two-weeks, with "Vietnam Battlefield Tours". The tour concentrated on I and II Corps areas visiting various cities, fire bases, SF Camps, major US Military Camps and locations where our units had major combat engagements. At some of the battle engagement areas and camps, the government would not allow us access because they still have not been cleared for unexploded ordinances. For example, at the A Shau Special Force Camp we were only allowed access to the old runway area. The camp area itself had not been cleared by the government, which we were told is an ongoing process throughout Vietnam. We did see several EOD trucks throughout our travels. During this two-week trip we visited Ho Chi Minh City, Pleiku (Camp Enari), Kontum, Dak To, An Khe, Phu Cat, Qui Nhon, Bong Son Area, Da Nang, Dong Ha, Khe Sanh, Loa Bao, Da Krong, Hue City and A Shau Valley, DMZ and the Laotian Border. All US military bases and camps, fire bases were totally destroyed after the war by the government except for some of the runways which are now either city airports, a road down in the middle of a town/city or were being used to dried harvested rice and other crops.

Vietnam is no longer like I remembered it. The mud wall- thatched roof homes are replaced by cinder-block with metal tin roofs. Even the Mountainyards have wooden homes with tin roofs built on wooden pilings. The old two lane and old dirt roads are now 2 to 4 lane major highways. Black pajamas are basically obsolete, replaced by brighter color pajamas. Firebases are over grown with jungle. All of the Vietnamese people were very warm and welcomed us with open arms everywhere we traveled. Old NVA soldiers approached us, shook our hands or hugged us. One told us, "your country sent you here to fight us and our country sent us here to fight you, but that was a long time ago." "Welcome back to Vietnam". Even the active duty military were friendly and courteous to us. One of group had the 8 digits coordinates where his platoon was engaged about 50 yards off a road. He lost several people in that engagement. The exact coordinates are now in the middle of a goldfish pond, in the middle of an upscale bar. So we all sat down, ordered a drink, remembered those who were lost at this exact location over 50 years ago. The bicycles have been replaced with trillions of 125 cc motorcycles. Everyone 18 years old and older seem to own a motor scooter or motorcycle and they are everywhere! Only school children and old people still ride bicycles. I enjoy this trip immensely and would like to go back again sometime in the future. I will tell you however, the 16 hours airplane ride is a "Butt-Kicker"!

Chuck Rose

