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### An astounding and stimulating trip (DRAFT)

In my travels around the world I have seen, tasted or experienced many incredibly wonderful things. However, my trip to Vietnam in 1963 was the most stimulating and quite unusual in unexpected ways. You, too, have undoubtedly enjoyed numerous such experiences, but today's tale will delve into the more uncommon side of international travel.

My travel to Vietnam as a young, newly commissioned second lieutenant was certainly exciting. The heat, hustle and hectic activity of Saigon was an astounding experience.

Reality, however, hit home when I was assigned to serve as a liaison officer to several South Vietnamese artillery units. My job was to help evaluate their combat effectiveness and what, if any, training and equipment they would require to be on a par with similar American military units.

The travel to the units was often difficult due to poor, rutted roads. These were all too often simply quagmires of viscous mud or stifling dust. Each trip was anxiety inducing due to the possibility of roadside bombs or sniper fire from the nearby forest.

The color and variety of the Vietnamese countryside was fascinating when not being fired upon. Had these travels been for tourism they would have been edifying and stimulating in a positive way. However, the stimulation was mostly negative with each trip possibly being the last.

Each visit to a Vietnamese artillery unit entailed days of boring preparation and travel to remote locations. While visiting with the Vietnamese military, I was offered culinary delicacies which it would have been insulting to refuse. The most repellant meal consisted of congealed pigs blood and peanuts. This feast cost me a week of heavy-duty antibiotics and numerous visits to the slit trenches. Although the stench of the latrines was nauseating, the swarming, buzzing flies did not seem to mind. The huge cockroaches- who in my opinion were members of a North Vietnamese chemical warfare unit, were particularly annoying given their desire to crawl where they were not welcome. During one visit to an artillery unit near the Cambodian border, an element of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) attacked South Vietnamese Ranger companies conducting interdiction of NVA infiltration routes into South Vietnam. The artillery unit I was

visiting provided three days of fire support to the rangers. The unit itself was attacked on the second night of my visit but managed to withstand the assault although NVA sappers broke through barbed-wire defenses on two occasions.

I remember standing in a hot, drenching rain, tired to the bone, weeping with frustration as my ice cream melted in my mess kit. I was exhausted, suffering from post-combat let down and the utter silliness of the American supply unit from which I had requested a resupply of ammunition expended by the Vietnamese unit. The American logistical company had shipped ice cream and soda rather than artillery shells because "the Vietnamese needed moral support!"

Amazing! My time served in Vietnam was both "stimulating" and "astounding," but I prefer that today's travels involve better cuisine, cleaner bathrooms and far less excitement.