

Gary Hooper

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Leaving Vietnam November 1969

I received my orders for my departure date from Vietnam on October 1, 1969 telling me that I would leave on the morning of November 30, 1969. It was required to meet with the Province Senior officer and Executive Officer to ask if I wished to extend my officer commission for another three years. I had excellent Officer Efficiency Reports throughout my Army career and I would be promoted to captain on December 15, 1969. But there was a problem. I was a Signal Corps officer whose total combat experience was as an infantry officer, I was a Special forces officer and the Army brass doesn't like or appreciate the concept of the Green Berets and Special Forces is being significantly reduced both in Vietnam and stateside; and I did not have good Army infantry combat experience since I had advised and commanded Vietnamese infantry and not U.S. Army troops. I asked if I could branch transfer from Signal Corps Branch to Infantry Branch and attend Infantry Officers Basic Course. They looked at each other and the major said, "We are withdrawing from Vietnam Lieutenant and even though you have proven to be an excellent officer, you have three strikes against you: you are an OCS graduate, the lowest on the officer pecking order; you are a Green Beret and General Abrams hates the Special Forces; and you have what the Army considers bad infantry command time since you have never commanded an Army infantry platoon." I replied, "I guess that I'm going home."

At that time, I was the Senior Advisor for Psychological Operations which is basically propaganda and agitation operations against the Viet Cong which was truly stupid since the bad guys had been doing it for thirty years and had Masters Degrees in this science and the Americans were still in middle school with a grade average of "D."

My commanding officer at that time was a civilian United States Information Services officer by the name of Ronald Humphry. He was a former television director/producer from Seattle, Washington. He was an old guy in his early to mid-thirties, married with two children. I told him my story about staying in the Army, and how much I loved being in Vietnam. He said, "Gary, with your

History degree, your Vietnamese language knowledge, your combat experience, your intelligence gathering field knowledge, your psychological operations experience, and your obnoxious personality, you would be a perfect fit in any U.S. intelligence agency in Vietnam. So, he and I composed my resume. I sent it to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Intelligence Agency, Army Intelligence, Naval Intelligence, National Defense Institute, and the Central Intelligence Agency, among others.

{More on Ronald Humphry in another paper.}

On November 27, 1969, I left Vinh Long and flew to Saigon in order to turn in my M-16 rifle and my stuff. I noticed that the other guys were turning in their steel helmets and flack jackets. I never was issued a helmet or a flack jacket. I guess the Army determined that I was expendable and/or unworthy. They didn't count anything, just throw all my stuff in a big pile of other guys' stuff. My stuff kept me alive for an entire of my life and I felt somewhat defiled that my stuff was not set aside and honored because I was still alive.

On that date in 1969, when I handed my M-16 to that clerk in Saigon, was the last time I have ever touched another weapon in my lifetime. I was done killing someone's husband, son, brother, and, sometimes, wife, daughter, and grandparents.

Killing people in war is easy, remembering killing people in war is a lifelong hell.

On December 2, 1969, I arrived at Detroit Metro Airport at around 12 noon. And I had no Idea who I should call; my fiancé, my mom, or my dad... I sat in a bar for four hours. I could not decide. I knew that I did not want to be here. I truly wanted to be back with my platoon in Vietnam. God, I loved being in Vietnam.

I finally called my dad and took me home for the coming home party, etc. I hated it. What I wanted was to be 10,562 miles away.

Three nights later, my fiancé returned the ring. She said, "if it was another girl, I can compete but I can't compete with an entire country." She was right. "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" will never be my favorite movie.

On December 7, 1969, I received a telephone call from the Central Intelligence Agency for an interview.