

**Short story for the Class of 1967 Veterans Project “booklet” and/or the website.**

### **Ironic Twists of Military Life**

I graduated from Dickinson College on June 4, 1967. I had been “invited” to report to my Draft Board on June 6th for my pre-induction physical. However, previously in April, I had been accepted for the United States Marine Corps flight program. I had always wanted to fly and thought this could be better than carrying a rifle through the rice paddies of Vietnam, which I’d seen Walter Cronkite talk about on the evening news in the fraternity house for the previous two years.

Surprisingly, over the next 3 years all went well. I graduated from OCS at Quantico, married my Dickinson sweetheart Priscilla McKinlay ('68) in Pensacola, and even survived carrier qualifications in different jets aboard different ships in different oceans.

In June 1970, I received my orders for Vietnam.

The Navy / Marine Corps DO know how to train people, and my lot was the Grumman A-6A Intruder. At that time it was a cutting edge, twin engine, all-weather, single-piloted, attack jet, with a non-flying Bombardier/Navigator in the right seat. The final transition before being deployed to Vietnam was aboard the Marine Corp Air Station at Cherry Point, NC, where we mastered the missions we could expect in country.

Our USMC A-6A squadrons were based in Chu Lai & DaNang , and were dual-missioned. Primarily, we were there to provide close air support for our deployed Marine infantry and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) fighting in the northern areas of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), better known then as “I-Corps.” Secondly, our squadrons flew night missions interdicting and bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the main supply route for the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the Viet Cong (VC) that was mostly in Laos and Cambodia.

My orders assigned me to an A-6A squadron in DaNang. However, by the time I arrived in WestPac, the squadron was in the process of being withdrawn from the RVN and was repositioning aboard the Marine Corps

Air Station in Iwakuni, Japan. After all that training, anticipation and angst, the powers-that-be said essentially, never mind, we have a better idea.

As it turned out, it was a window in time in which I was fortunate enough to have found myself. Those first 3 months of my 13-month tour involved ferrying airplanes, weapons, and electronics to the last USMC A-6A squadron still in Vietnam. Not that I didn't get shot at, but I flew no combat missions for which I was trained. It was an eventful summer of re-supply of our sister squadron still in country, but also somewhat anticlimactic.

I don't know: Is that ironic? Or just a lucky window that happened to align with the shift in my world view over the prior 3 years?

In summary I spent 6 years of active duty in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam "conflict" and 8 years in the Reserves (flying the A-4E). I regret none of those 14 years of service except for the year of separation from my family. My experience led to being hired by American Airlines where I thoroughly enjoyed my 31-year career as a commercial pilot.

Respectfully submitted, 7 November 2025,

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Major, USMC (Retired)



