



Spike Protective

BY MARC LEEPSON

While rummaging through Vietnam War scrapbooks filled with orders, pictures, and military ephemera, I came across a small tag that came with my jungle boots. That's my 22-year-old scribbling on the "Boot Combat Tropical Mildew Resistant" tag from the second week of December 1967. Each jotting is a unit name or place in country. I quickly wrote them as I sat through at least ten shipping formations during the four days I spent at the giant 90th Replacement Battalion on Long Binh Post right after arriving in country. Those formations took place three times each day on a giant parade ground.

Hundreds and hundreds of us had to strain to listen for our names to be called indistinctly over a muddy loudspeaker by a guy on a high wooden platform. He began with words I can still hear: "The following individuals are assigned to..." and he'd call out a place or unit: the First Aviation Brigade, 199th Light Infantry Brigade, 18th MPs, 36th Signal Battalion, Cam Ranh Bay, Pleiku, and so on. Then he'd name the individuals.

We lined up single file by flight. As guys got their assignments, the lines shrunk. On the fourth day, the line of my flight was down to me and a handful of other men, and I was running out of room on the small boot tag. Then I heard my name over the loud-speaker. I would be going to a place I'd never heard of, Qui Nhon. I wrote it down twice, circled it, and inked over it several times.

Then I walked up to the platform to get my orders. A half dozen of us would ship out the next morning. As I dimly recall, at zero dark thirty we did a hurry-up-and-wait before being trucked back to Binh Hoa. More waiting, then we climbed aboard a C-130 for the flight north. An hour or so later, we deplaned and boarded a shiny new Army bus, which took us to the 527th Personnel Service Company outside the city to get more orders. I stayed at the 527th, where I put in a tour of duty wearing my spike protective, tropical, mildew-resistant jungle boots, although I never saw the jungle.■

As a redeployment clerk with the 527th PSC, Marc Leepson spent his year in Vietnam sending people home from the war.