

Vietnam From The Back Seat: My Year as a worker bee at the Marble Mountain Air Facility

Mr Stephen T Madden

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We were minor cogs in the vast military machine supporting the Marine Corps air war in Vietnam. Unseen and unrecognized, hordes of enlisted men kept the wheels greased, the engines spinning and the windshields polished so that the pilots could accomplish their daily flying assignments. Every day the crew chief arrived early to inspect and prepare his machine for flight. Later he hopped in the back and participated in every combat mission. When the flying was finished, the enlisted men stayed behind to refuel and repair the bird so that it would be ready for the next day's adventure. This is the personal story of one enlisted man's journey from the drudgery of staging battalion in California to the almost lawless Wild West that was Marble Mountain Air Facility in 1970. For the most part no names are used because to the vast majority of the officers, we were just faceless drones in service to the hive. In Vietnam, it was understood that enlisted men were always assigned a higher level of expendability. Normalcy was to most of us an unreachable goal during our time at Marble Mountain. We prepared for the most extreme situations but found that reality sometimes even exceeded the imaginations of those who had trained us. The mind numbing boredom of transporting cargo would be unexpectedly replaced by the shock of having a bleeding and rapidly dying Marine slid across the deck and into your care. At the end of the day the brown mud and pools of darkening blood could be washed away but the visions of life and death that you were a part of would be with you forever.



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