

DANIEL KLEVEN



Daniel Klevan was raised in the Willmar area. He graduated from Willmar High School, and was drafted into the US Army on 21 July 1969. He was sent to Fort Bragg North Carolina for basic training. For Dan, basic training was not as bad as he thought it would be. Being in Bragg in July, his best recollection was that it was hot and there was bad food. Upon completion of basic, he was sent to Fort McClellan Alabama for Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) to train for being an Infantryman. After training he was granted a 30 day leave. During his leave he returned home for a visit before his tour of duty in Vietnam.

On 4 December 1969, Dan reported to Oakland Processing Center to leave for a one year tour of duty in Vietnam. He flew to Vietnam flying to Anchorage Alaska and Tokyo Japan before arriving in Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Bien Hoa South Vietnam. There he was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division.

The Division Headquarters for the 25th was located about 35 miles south of Saigon, near Cu Chi Vietnam. He traveled there by bus. He was assigned to the 3rd Platoon, 2nd Battalion, 12 Infantry Regiment stationed at Fire Support Base Pershing, 30 miles north (18 km) of Cu Chi. He took a helicopter flight to FSB Pershing. This was about half way between the Red China Sea, and the Cambodian boarder.



25th
Infantry
Division
Patch

He became a member of the 3rd Platoon, Delta Company. They operated ambushes and security sweeps out of Fire Support Base Pershing.

His first time out in the field, Dan and his unit became involved in a fire fight. Many of the times that Kleven was out on patrols and ambushes, they came under very heavy fire, but other times, they would go days marching through the mud and mosquitos and not see anything.

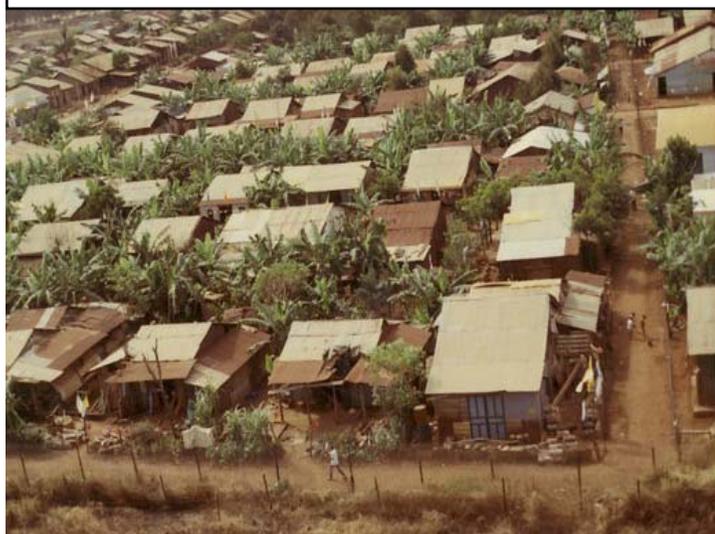
On missions Dan says that it was generally a Company size group going out for 7-10 day missions. They were an Airmobile unit so they would fly out in Huey helicopters, and do a mission and fly back



Dan Kleven, left, while in Vietnam with a couple of buddies.



Above, Huey helicopter coming in, below is a view of Vietnam from the air. Photos from Dan Kleven.



Flying in helicopters was one of the biggest thrills that Dan had while in Vietnam, and he really loved it. On missions they would fly out into areas, and then unload and move out for the operations. He loved to sit in the doorways and look out over the landscape while airborne.

To communicate with family back home, Dan would send audio tapes home to let his family know what was going on with him. In return, they would also record messages to him and send back. As his tour progressed, Dan's messages home became less and eventually stopped. Likewise, the information that he provided also became less. He notes that as his tour went on, he became kind of battle hardened, and just didn't want to talk about what he was going through.



The Audio Letters of Dan and his family were broadcast in part by Minnesota Public Radio on 4 July 2008. Nearly 40 years after he returned home.

On average missions Dan would carry 22 magazines with ammunition (about 450 rounds), grenades, 1 or 2 Claymore mines, demolition C-4 (about 2#) and 60" of fuse, blasting caps, poncho and poncho liner, 2 or 3 quarts of water, foot powder and toiletries, including a toothbrush but no toothpaste. The weapon he carried was an M-16 until he was able to obtain a CAR-15, a shorter lighter version of the same caliber. He also carried a Buck knife.

When he slept, he laid out the poncho, then slept on that with his poncho liner. He rolled up his "hump rag" for a kind of pillow a lot of the time. If it was wet and rainy, he would sleep in his helmet, since the suspension system in it would hold his head up and out of the water and mud.

In country, Dan notes that their appearance was pretty relaxed. Not a lot of care was taken for how they looked or being "out of uniform". The heat was at times nearly unbearable, and a lot of the time, they didn't wear their shirts.



Dan Kleven, "In the Field", during his tour in Vietnam.



Their unit had a mortar platoon that offered them support in combat if needed. They were also able to get artillery support from the bigger guns if the need arose from the FSB.

By the time that Dan arrived in Vietnam in late 1969 and 1970 he states that there was a noticeable "drug culture" in the military. He also notes that some aspects of what is seen in Hollywood movies is accurate, but for the most part they are gross exaggerations of what his experiences ever were.

During one of the "audio letters" that Dan sent home, he spent some time introducing some of his friends in the unit to his family back home. In the interview, they joke and try to have fun considering their circumstance. By the time Dan sends this letter home, he has gotten his nickname, "Rabbit".

His nickname came about because of his size and his ability to do one of the more dangerous jobs, tunnel rat. Crawling through enemy tunnels with nothing but a .45 cal pistol and a flashlight. Dan recalls this as being one of the "freakiest" experiences in Vietnam. He says that it was pitch black, with the possibilities of running into spiders, snakes and other animals. Tight quarters and you never knew what was around the next turn. It was an experience that he will never forget.



Another tough task that Dan was assigned at times was “walk point”. With this task, Dan was put out front, watching and clearing the way for the following troops. Through the thick dark jungles, with little to no visibility in front of you. You lead the way, hoping to see signs of something that could be an ambush, before it happens. But being out front, puts you in the position to be the first one hit if an engagement with the enemy happens.

During the tapes to his family in Minnesota, Kleven tries to explain combat to his family saying, “After you get shot at alot, you just get...I don’t know, you just get nervous.”

Dan Kleven, US Army Vietnam



At one point during his tour of duty in Vietnam, he was allowed a trip to Hawaii for a bit of R & R, rest and relaxation.



The lax dress code in Vietnam didn't mean that Dan and the men of his unit didn't do what they could to wear uniforms to help them do their jobs safely. Although issued the standard “jungle fatigue” uniforms, they did acquire and wear the “new” camouflage uniforms. The camo uniforms helped them blend in better when out in the jungles on patrols and missions.



Chow time in the field

In April 1970, President Nixon and his administration decided that it was in the War's best interest to invade Cambodia, and try to upset Vietnamese supply lines. It wasn't an experience that Dan was very pleased with, but Dan and his unit were sent into Cambodia for this task. In his last Audio letter home, Dan explained to his family some of the things that they captured from the enemy supply lines. 1000's and 1000's of pieces of equipment and munitions, much of it brand new.

Beyond describing the weapons cache, Dan also described something else that they captured, medical supplies. This discovery angered Kleven and the other men immensely. It wasn't the fact that the medical supplies were there so much as the fact of where they came from, American and other foreign "ally" countries. They were shipped to the Vietnamese from organizations sympathetic to the North Vietnamese cause. In his voice on the tapes, you can hear the frustration of Kleven trying to talk about being in harms way at war, while in the mean time, other Americans are supplying those they are fighting against.

At the end of the tape, before Dan signed off from Vietnam for the last time, he described a bit of what happened the day he was wounded. He explained that his wound was slight, and only took about three stitches, but "it was worth getting hit for two days out of the field."

On 7 June 1970 Dan was involved in fire fight against the North Vietnamese and VietCong. During this operation, Dan was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart for his actions. The West Central Tribune did a write up about him while he was overseas.

After being wounded in the leg by shrapnel in the battle having served about 11 months in combat, he was sent to the 5th field hospital for 4-5 days for medical treatment.

The Cambodia incursion ended 30 June 1970, after Washington fell to public pressure. Americans protested the incursion and this event was a spark that helped ignite the events of Kent State University where 4 students were killed protesting the war.

Willmar Man in Vietnam Awarded Five Medals

WILLMAR — Specialist Four Daniel A. Kleven, son of Wallace Kleven of Willmar, has been awarded five medals for "gallantry in action" while serving in Vietnam.

Kleven was awarded the Purple Heart, Silver Star, Army Commendation Medal, First Oak Leaf Cluster and the Air Medal



SP4 DANIEL KLEVEN

for "meritorious achievement in military operations against hostile forces in Vietnam" during the first part of this year.

He received the Silver Star for "heroic actions on June 7, while serving with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry in Vietnam." The citation continues, "While on a reconnaissance operation, elements of Company D came in contact with a large enemy force. The hostiles were well entrenched in a bunker complex. Upon initial contact, Specialist Kleven exposed himself to a barrage of hostile fire as he unhesitatingly assaulted an enemy bunker and silenced it. When the company withdrew to regroup, Specialist Kleven assisted in the treatment and evacuation of the friendly casualties. As the company made a second assault, he

was again at the forefront of the element. Disregarding his own safety, Kleven moved forward through the hail of enemy fire and succeeded in destroying two or more enemy positions with hand grenades. His valorous actions contributed immeasurably to the success of the mission."

Specialist Four Kleven was also awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received during this encounter with hostile forces on June 7.

West Central Tribune article about Dan, including information on the 7 June engagement in which he was wounded.



After Dan recovered from his wound, his unit was located near Xuan Loc, about 46 km east of Bien Hoa. Their base, FB Huskey, was on the north east corner of the town. The Battalion had a liason Captain for MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) part of the intelligence section. This Captain would go back and forth between Dan's Battalion and MACV. Dan was assigned to be this Captain's driver.

Because of being drafted, and serving a tour in Vietnam for 12 months, Kleven was set to return to the United States with more than 150 days left in his two year commitment. If he had more than 150 days, he would be reassigned in the United States to do some sort of training or some other task dealing with helping "green" troops get ready for combat. Having been in Vietnam and doing what he had to do, Dan didn't want to have to go back and train. He had a job that he liked doing as this Captain's driver and could keep doing it if he extended his time in country. Dan extended 47 days in Vietnam so when he returned to the US he would have less than the number of days needed to be reassigned.

On 16 December 1970, while in Vietnam, he was promoted to the rank of Sergeant E-5. That year, he spent his second Christmas in Vietnam.

During his early audio letters to his family at home, Dan explained to them about "Kit Carsons". A Kit Carson was a Vietnamese person that many times was an enemy, but was captured, or wounded and came into American hands.

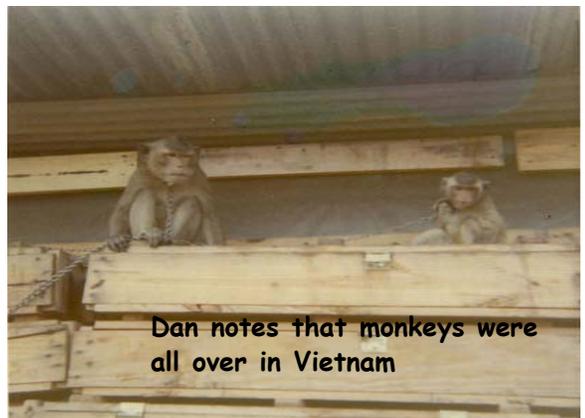


A Vietnamese "Kit Carson"

These people were used by the Americans for training or as scouts in exchange for food and or medical help. As scouts, the Kit Carson's were great for finding and clearing "booby traps" and the like as they had been the ones putting them in to begin with. Many men were saved from a trap because of these scouts.



Dan's unit also helped in river patrols. They would be on boats, like the one pictured at left, and sweep up and down the river scouting for enemy.



Dan notes that monkeys were all over in Vietnam



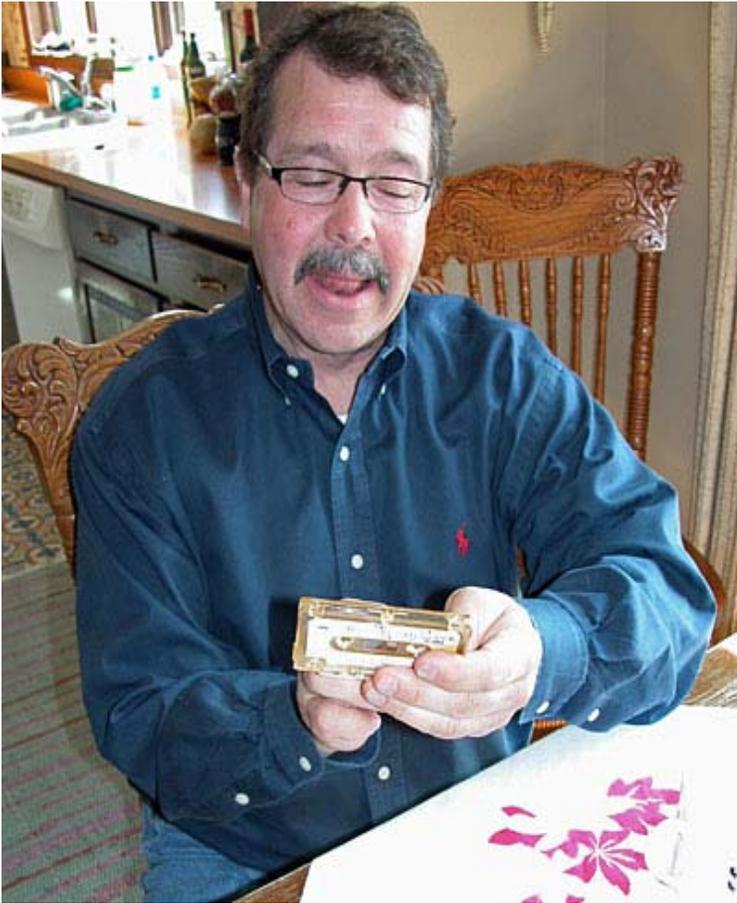
For his service in Vietnam he was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star with 2 Oak leaf cluster (denoting subsequent awards), Purple Heart, Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters, Army Commendation Medal with 1 Oak leaf Cluster and V (Valor) Device, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and Republic of Vietnam Service Medal.

Klevan returned to the United States flying into Travis Air Force Base and went to Oakland California for processing out. He served 13 months 27 days in Vietnam. He returned to the United States in his jungle fatigues, and was given a Class A uniform to return to Minnesota in. He was discharged out of the Army on 24 February, 1971. He flew from San Francisco to Minneapolis, and then traveled home to Willmar in his Class A Uniform, the first and only time he wore it.



Class A dress Uniform (left) and Standard Issue fatigue shirt worn by Dan Klevan, donated 2008





Dan Kleven, looking at one of the remaining audio letters broadcast in part on Minnesota Public Radio. MPR photograph.

In November 2007, Dan's sister Lisa, called into an MPR radio program talking about family audio recordings. She talked with the host about a few tapes that she had from her brother stationed in Vietnam, and tapes sent to him from family and friends.

After hearing this, the host got in touch with Lisa after the program and began the process of preparing to put together a special program for their "Midday" broadcast.

MPR took and listened to the dozen or so remaining tapes, some from Dan in Vietnam, some from Dan's family in rural Willmar, and a couple of recordings from one of Dan's friends at Mankato State University.

Then they came out to Dan's home in Central Minnesota, and Midday host Gary Eichtens interviewed him about the tapes and his experiences in Vietnam. They also looked through and took with them Dan's photo albums from Vietnam.

With all of these items, they prepared a special one hour program that was broadcast on

Minnesota Public Radio on 4 July 2008, at 12 noon. The broadcast offered listeners a rare glimpse into Vietnam through the lens of Dan, his family, and friends.

On the tapes is the background "noise" of life in a combat zone, helicopters, and artillery fire. Voices from the past, like Dan's mother and father. Emotions of Dan's friend in Minnesota, trying to tell Kleven in Vietnam, that he was drafted into the Army.

Talking with Kleven about these tapes after nearly 40 years since he last heard or recorded them, he states that he can remember almost word for word what he said. He also can remember who he was with, where they were, and other vivid memories of the life he lived so many years ago.

The MPR broadcast was also put online in an uncensored version for listeners to hear. The photos Dan took in Vietnam were prepared and placed together in audio slideshows, merging the photos and excerpts of the audio from the letters, features that were available in the online form of the broadcast.

After the war, Kleven returned home to Central Minnesota, where he continued with the family farm for a time, before eventually taking a different job. Dan and his wife, Deb, and raised three sons.

As for Dan's friend from home, that told him via audio tape that he was drafted. He never had to serve in Vietnam. He went for the pre-induction physical, but was rejected for military service. He returned home, safe.