

RICHARD LEWIS



Richard "Dick" Wayne Lewis was born on 8 February 1946 in Rush City Minnesota to Emlin & Ruth Lewis. He was raised in the Rush City, Lindstrom Minnesota area and graduated in 1964 from Lindstrom Chi-Hi High School. Following High School Lewis entered college at Winona State University for Liberal Arts. It wasn't long into school that Richard decided that college wasn't for him and after a couple of semesters he quit.

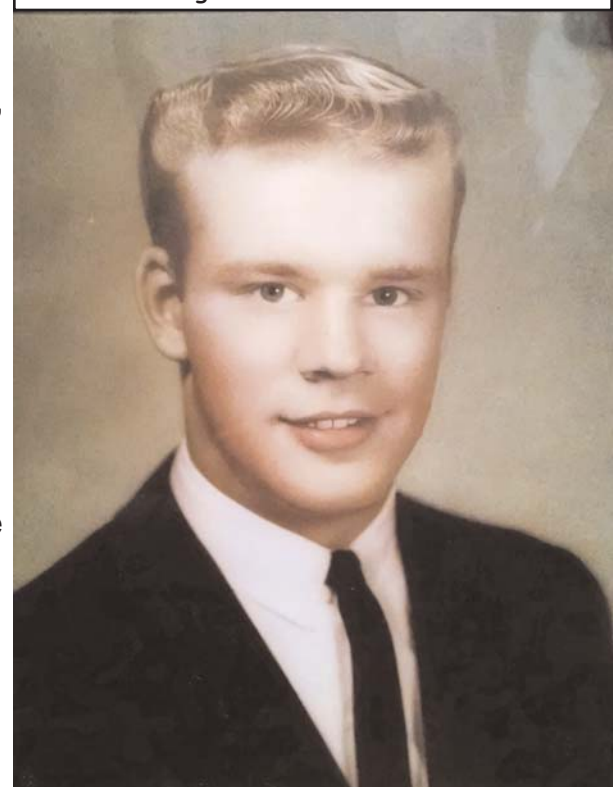
Dick's High School Graduation Photo

Although he knew that leaving college left him eligible for the draft, Lewis left for Texas to work. He found a job working as a Light Truck Driver, operating a 1 1/2 ton truck. He drove delivery routes transporting sample items and delivering them to location throughout Texas.

The possibility of being drafted hung over Dick, knowing that with activities escalating in Vietnam more men would be needed. It was unknown if he would be called or not, but Dick waited and hoped that maybe he'd get a pass.

Eventually, the notice came and he was ordered to report for a pre induction physical. He reported in San Antonio and passed his physical. He was physically fit for military service, and was being drafted to serve in the US Army.

Dick was inducted into the US Army on 27 January and sent to Fort Leonard Wood Missouri.



Upon arrival Dick had an opportunity to enlist, rather than being drafted and put where ever the Army needed him. He decided to to be discharged and reenlist on his own. He was officially discharged as a draftee on 2 February, and reenlisted on 3 February 1966.



He was assigned to Company D, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Basic Combat Training Brigade at Fort Leonard Wood.

Initially Dick didn't like the Army. He had a difficult time accepting the task of taking orders. But in a short time, he realized that there wasn't much choice and taking orders wasn't too bad. After that, basic training became much easier for him.



Army life was a big change for Lewis. Life became full of structure and orders. His days were hectic and busy, leaving no time to really do anything but learn to be a soldier.



Typically they were awakened by 5am, starting his day, training, marching, and drilling all day and evening. Once back in his barracks it was time to clean themselves and their quarters and equipment then get to bed around 10 or 11pm. By 5am the next morning it all started over again. Throughout all of this, they were promptly "encouraged" by the Drill Sergeants to do better. It was a physical and mental test.

Even if there was some free time though, Lewis couldn't leave the company area. While Dick was at Leonard Wood, the base suffered a Spinal Meningitis outbreak and movement outside their area was restricted. He recalled one instance when they were allowed to go up to the PX.

Soon his weeks at Leonard Wood were up and Dick graduated for Basic Training on 8 March 1966. He was allowed a short leave and travel time before he began Advanced Individual training (AIT) at Fort Gordon Georgia.



Dick reported for Signal School at Fort Gordon in April 1966. His time at AIT (Advanced Individual Training) was much different than his experiences in basic training. Activities were geared toward training for the eventual job he would hold in the Army, and didn't spend as much time on physical training.

Typically the day consisted of classroom and training exercises on the field radios with evenings off. This allowed for a much more relaxed life at the barracks. Once the classes were done for the day, the men were able to have some fun and unwind after a day of instruction. Military discipline had already been taught, so things never got out of hand, but they were able to spend some time goofing off, and getting to know one another.

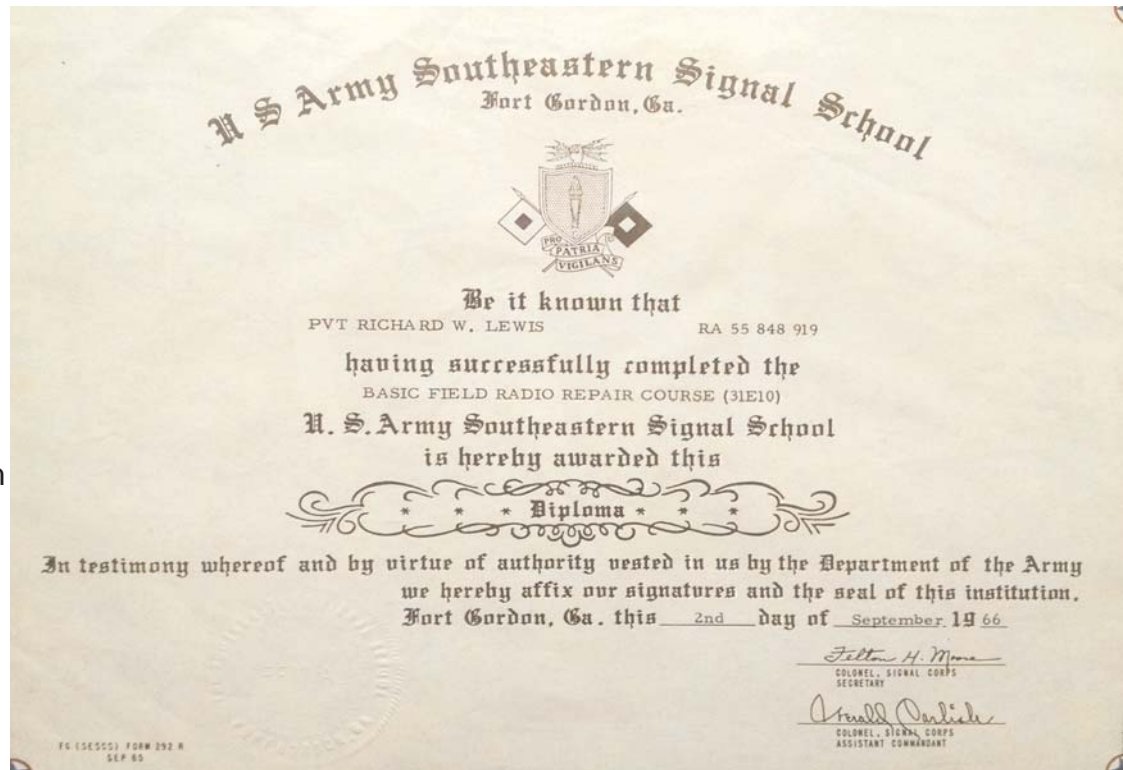




The tight knit barracks living created friendships that would never be forgotten by Dick. All of the men were going through the same experiences day in and day out, and shared in the same struggles.

Lewis' first 8 weeks at Fort Gordon would consist of basic field radio repair school. By June 23rd, the classes at Gordon, had advanced from Basic Repair to Advanced work knowing how to completely rebuild and repair all the field radios in use in the US Army.

The classes consisted of much technical data on for the various radios in service and total component replacement & repair. All said, there was nothing on an Army radio that Dick wasn't able to take care of.



On 2 September 1966 Dick graduated from the US Army Southeastern Signal School. Soon he had orders in hand for Vietnam. He was granted a 30 day leave prior to shipping out to Vietnam. Lewis took this time to return to Minnesota to visit family and friends.

In Minnesota Dick tried to catch-up with old friends and take the time to say goodbye. When preparing to ship overseas, 30 days didn't seem like much time. Between meeting up with friends, and spending as much time with his family as possible, his time flew by. He loved his time home with his family. Knowing where he was going, he felt like he couldn't get enough time at home. He was anxious and worried about what was in store for him during his time overseas. Before he knew it, his 30 days were up and he had to say goodbye to his life in Minnesota for a new life in Vietnam. He'd travel to San Francisco from Minneapolis before heading out on the long flight across the ocean.

Ticket stub from his flight to San Francisco



On the morning of 1 October 1966, Lewis said goodbye to his family and boarded a plane for California. He had no idea what to expect for his future, and hated to leave. He noted in his journal, "When a man has to leave such a wonderful family it's sure hard to go."

Later that evening, Dick had arrived in San Francisco. He met up with an Air Force Sergeant who rented a car and the two of them toured the city. He had the opportunity to see the Golden Gate Bridge, Chinatown, and Alcatraz. Dick noted that he really liked San Francisco, and had met a number of guys on the same path as he.

On October 2 he donated blood before heading to Travis Air Force Base by 2:00pm to wait for his plane overseas. He waited all evening and night for his plane with no sleep. Finally around 6:45am on 3 October he boarded his flight and flew to Hawaii. Again he noted in his journal, "The flight to Hawaii was real nice - especially when we came near it. I never realized it was so big. It was very warm at 9am."

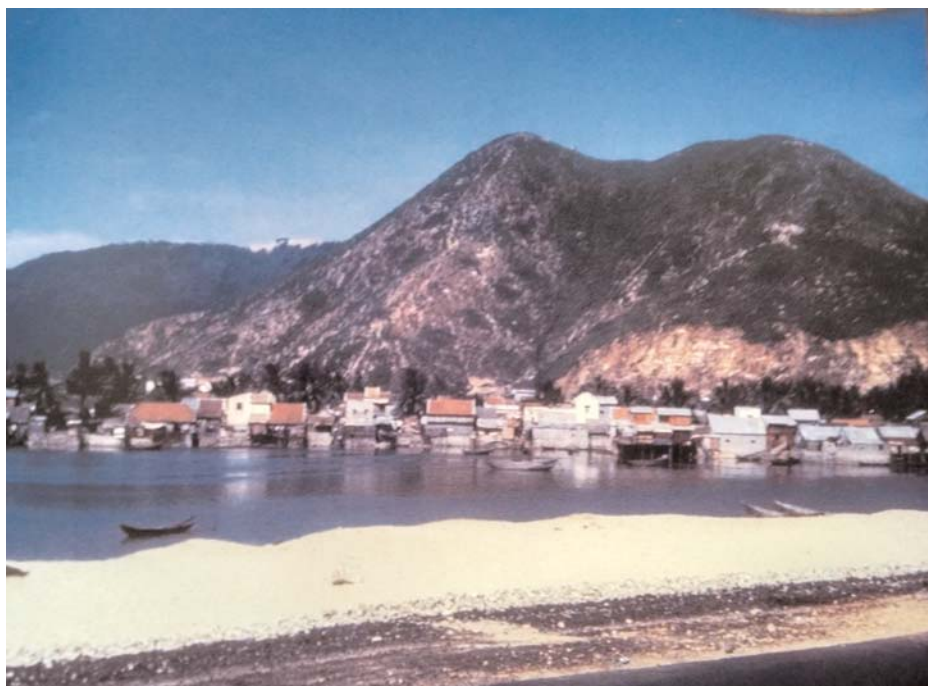
Dick's time in Hawaii was short lived. His layover was only about an hour before he boarded a TWA jet with around 180 other servicemen to fly to Okinawa, 8 1/2 hours away. It was a long, uncomfortable flight. All of the men on the plane was carrying a large Army duffel bag, and they all held theirs between their legs for the flight. No bags were checked.

While airborne, Lewis took some time to begin a letter to his parents and siblings back in Minnesota. He described how little there was to see flying over the ocean. "There isn't much in the way of scenery out here that's for sure... clouds and water."

When Dick arrived in Okinawa, he had an hour layover before heading out for Saigon. In Okinawa he saw a few military jets loaded with bombs preparing to leave for Vietnam. Once boarded for the final leg of his flight he picked up writing his family telling them of the beauty of the water near the reefs at Okinawa. He mentions the vivid greens and blues of the water, and how he could tell how deep it was by the colors.

Around 8pm, 6 October 1966, Private Richard Lewis arrived in Saigon Vietnam. In the dark there wasn't much for Dick to see, but he could smell. Dick vividly recalls the foul odor that welcomed him in the country. It wasn't an easy thing to describe but to him it smelled like feces or as he wrote to his family, "The whole country smells like one big outhouse."

Even in the dark though, Dick could see some of the damages of the war. He saw the damage created from an attack on the airport. He noted the sight in a letter home. Arriving later in the evening, Dick stayed in Saigon and met up with a friend from Camp Gordon.



Dick went to the Enlisted Men's Club in Saigon, and saw a Vietnamese band playing American songs. He noted how funny it was that they could sing American songs, but couldn't speak English. He was also able to get a pass and spent some time seeing the sights in Saigon with his friend from Camp Gordon. He stayed at Saigon until he received orders for his duty station, about 27 miles away at Long Binh.

When Dick arrived at Long Binh, he didn't have a specific duty yet. One of his first experiences there he recalled about 5,000 men heading to the chow line. Dick ended up near the back of the line and by the time he got up to the front, there wasn't any food left. Later he found out that those who worked sand bagging detail would get to be in line first, so he volunteered for that duty.

This wasn't Dick's permanent duty station, he was still waiting for orders to his permanent station. He stayed on sand bagging detail at Long Binh until his orders came to report to the Qui Nhon area of operations in Vietnam. He had been waiting for almost a month for permanent orders.

Although Lewis was trained as a Field Radio operator and repairman, after his time at Fort Gordon he never really used a radio again. When he arrived at Qui Nhon, he was assigned to the 5th Maintenance Battalion.

At first after his arrival, Dick had no duties. He eventually was assigned to help work in the maintenance shop, redoing brakes, carburetors and other things on the numerous vehicles that they maintained. This unit helped maintain many of the vehicles that were used for the convoys across the countryside.

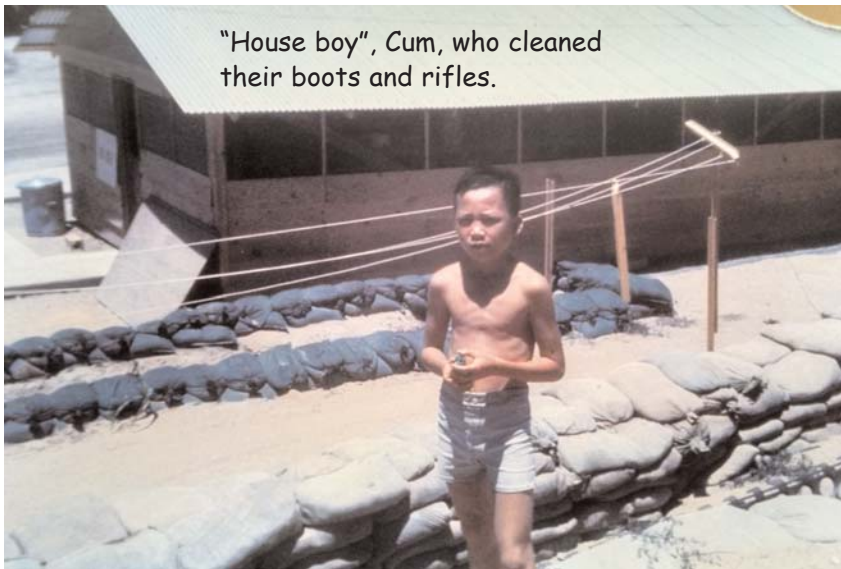


Dick lived in a tent hut while in the compound. They referred to this type of quarters as a "hooch". He would report to the Electrical & Fuel Maintenance shop for work each day repairing parts to vehicles, and relax in his hooch at night.

On Thanksgiving, 1966, Dick worked half the day and had a huge evening dinner to celebrate. The Enlisted Men's club offered free beers after 5pm, and he noted in his journal that some men, "got pretty drunk and there were a few fights. I wasn't in any of them though." Even in a combat zone, Dick and the men were able to have some relaxing times and comforts.

Some nights he would pull guard duty, watching the wire of the compound for Viet Cong infiltration. Most of his nights doing this were pretty uneventful. On the night of New Years, 1967 he heard a lot of shooting so he fired a flare to see what was going on. Turned out it was just celebratory shooting, and they were all safe from attack.

"House boy", Cum, who cleaned their boots and rifles.



In the compound area, native Vietnamese were hired to do various tasks. A local girl, Moui, swept their barracks and made the beds for them. a young boy, Cum, polished their boots and helped clean rifles and other tasks. On Christmas 1967, Dick and the men in his hooch gave bicycles to the boys who worked in the compound.

The natives in the area didn't have much, and many lived in squalor. The small ramshackle shacks they used for homes upalled Dick. He wished that they could have a better living situa-tion.

Dick with Moui, the local girl who helped clean thier hooch.



Above is a small "Truck Wash" and house of ill repute which was positioned right across from the compound. "wash your truck and come inside to unwind". Dick had heard the horror stories of this place, he knew a smart man stayed away. The water used for washing the trucks was the muddy ground water.

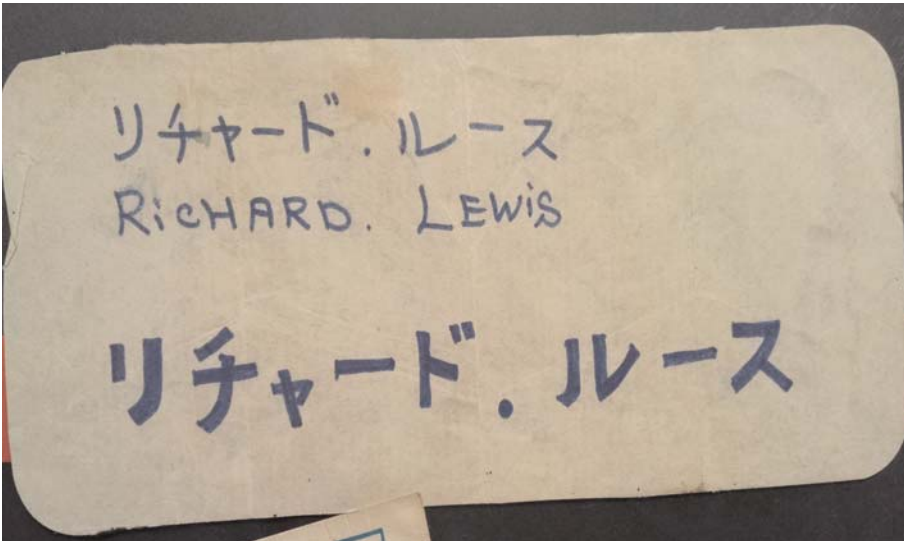




From time to time Lewis was able to travel to see some of the countryside, or the nearby village of Phu Tai. Most of his time, however, was spent in the compound and his sights were of other GI's and military equipment.



In March 1967, Dick was able to go on leave to Hong Kong. He looked forward to the opportunity to take off from Vietnam and see more of the World. He left Vietnam through Cam Rhan Bay. Here he got cleaned up and headed to hit the big sights of Hong Kong.



Dick traveled to Hong Kong with a friend from his company, Norm. Norm was from Iowa. Together they wanted to see all the sights they could. The two men were stunned when on the Airplane they were given warm towels to wipe their faces with and refresh. Lewis remembers how pristine white they were when they got them, but almost red from the dirt they wiped off their faces when they handed them back. Even with cleaning up in Cam Rahn Bay, the dirt in Vietnam stuck with them.

In Hong Kong there was a well known floating restaurant. Lewis and Norm spent one night there trying it out. The place was greatly talked about by those who had been there and they wanted to see what all the fuss was about. Dick recalled it was good food, and was a nice place. The following morning, the Communist Chinese blew the place up, completely destroying it. Dick always wondered why they blew up a restaurant.

Taking a cab from Hong Kong, they checked out much of the downtown area. They stopped to see the "Playboy Club" and Dick vividly recalled the ladies there singing "Rescue Me". Like in Vietnam, they sang American songs, but couldn't speak English very well. They also stopped at other clubs and sights in Hong Kong.

One day the two of them traveled to see the Great Wall of China. For Dick it was a magnificent sight. He couldn't believe the amount of work that had gone into building it. All too soon, their leave was over and the two headed back to Vietnam, and their jobs in a War Zone.



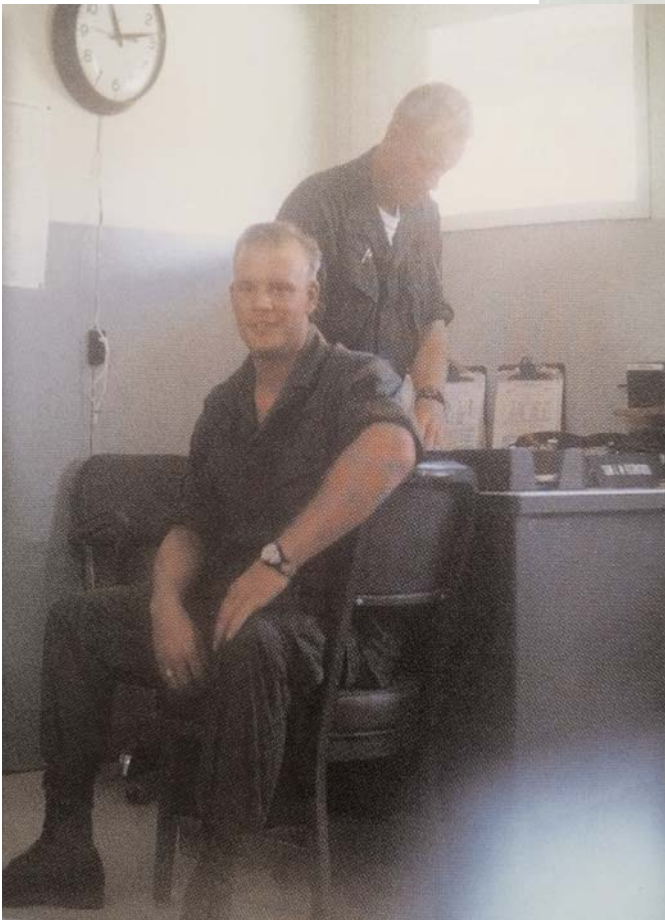
After working in the Maintenance shop for about 6 months, Dick's Sergeant came up and told him to go interview with the new Battalion Commander. It turned out there was an opening for the Colonel's driver and if Lewis was picked it would look good on both Dick's record and the Sergeant's.

He went up to the Commander's officer and was the first one to be interviewed, and the last one. Lewis was hired on to be the driver for Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel William G Gallivan.

Dick had been promoted to Specialist by this time, and was put in charge of the Colonel's jeep and transporting him wherever he needed to go.

Lewis was meticulous about the care and upkeep of that jeep. He was continually keeping it cleaned and wiped down, and kept it fully maintained. Dick's jeep was always the cleanest one around.

Colonel Gallivan, as Dick recalled, was not a very tall man. When he sat in the jeep his legs would dangle and swing, not touching the floor of the jeep. No matter the man's size, however, Dick respected him and enjoyed his job driving for him.



When they would leave the area, the Colonel sat with one arm holding onto the seat of the Jeep, the other hand resting on his sidearm in case they ran into any trouble. One time the Colonel asked Dick about his weapon (which he had there). Most times though, the Colonel sat in the jeep, looked over at Dick's rifle and magazines of ammo, and knew they were set to depart. He never had to ask.

The Colonel had four companies in his battalion in the Meekong Delta area of operations. Dick would drive the Colonel around the Vietnamese countryside to the locations as needed. Occasionally, traveling by jeep was not an option.

The first time Dick brought the Colonel to an airfield, Gallivan boarded a helicopter and Lewis stayed behind. For hours Dick waited for him to get back. Eventually, when he did return, Dick asked if he could go with on the flight the next time the Colonel flew out. Dick thought that it at least gave the Colonel another gun protecting him. Colonel Gallivan said of course and apologized that he hadn't asked him.



Vietnam from the Air, photos taken by Dick while he flew with Colonel William G Gallivan.

Dick loved flying in the choppers. It gave him a unique opportunity to see Vietnam. He didn't like being a gunner on one, however. On occasion they took enemy fire. For Lewis, that was an extremely scary experience. He watched the tracer rounds coming at them, and trying to fire back at the areas they came from. Luckily being shot at by tracers, this gave them an opportunity to see where their targets were.

Colonel Gallivan didn't like to fly at night, so they usually were heading back before it got dark. On one occasion their return was closer to dusk than normal. They began taking some enemy fire, and again the enemy was using tracer rounds. With the bright streaks of light flying toward them, Dick was sincerely afraid. He fired back as needed, and was happy once they were out of harms way. It made him so much happier that the Colonel didn't like night flying, as when it was light out it felt like there was less activity.

In late August 1967, Dick was promoted to Specialist 5 (E-5). After having gone 11 months without a promotion because he was in-transit he had jumped two grades in 5 months. Dick was also becoming a "short-timer" in Vietnam. His year long tour of duty was nearing the end.

Colonel Gallivan called Dick into his office one day and asked him if he would be willing to extend his tour, to stay on as his driver. Gallivan liked the way Dick did things, and hoped he would stay. Being a kid in his early 20s, however, Dick decided that he wanted to go home when his tour was up. On 26 September 1967, Specialist Richard Lewis left Vietnam for Fort Lewis Washington after serving 11 months and 24 days in country.

Lewis returned to the US through Fort Lewis Washington. He was assigned to Company D, 78th Signal Battalion. Even by this time, public opinion of the war was somewhat negative. In some areas of the country protesters were causing disturbances in the larger cities. New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles were all locations the Dick remembered hearing about these demonstrations. Dick was trained to help with Riot Control in case of issues on the West Coast.

He was also selected to serve as Honor Guard for military funerals for KIA's (Killed In Action) from the war in the northwest area of the United States. They traveled by bus to a number of them in Oregon and Washington, and Dick remembered being flown to some in Idaho and Montana. In all he served as Honor Guard for around a dozen military funerals in about 2 months.

Lewis decided to reenlist in the Army in November 1968. After his return from Vietnam, Dick didn't like the Army life in the US. He felt that the attitudes in the US were too trivial on little things. He hated spending time dealing with inspections and formations when he knew that while in country, where things mattered, they didn't mess around with inspections and things like that.

He volunteered to go to Vietnam again, but was at first denied. He eventually received orders to report for duty in Germany. Lewis was excited at the prospect of again traveling overseas, and looked forward to the opportunity. Those orders, however, were short lived. He soon received word that he would again go to Vietnam.

Dick's qualifications, rank, and job (MOS) put him high on the list of people they wanted to go over and relieve units preparing to return from the combat zone. Dick was sent to Fort Eustis Virginia to prepare for his future tour of duty, arriving in November 1968. He stayed at Fort Eustis until he left for Vietnam in July 1969.

Lewis flew out from Fort Eustis to San Francisco, then to Hawaii. After a short layover in Hawaii Dick flew to Guam, then Wake Island, then the Philippines before again arriving in Saigon. Once there, Dick was again welcomed with that same smell that hit him when he arrived in 1966. The last time it took him about 2 months to get used to it, and figured it would take the same amount of time to again get used to it.

Lewis was assigned to the 604th CS Maintenance Company. Their job was to go into areas where units were preparing to leave, and take inventory of their supplies and repair or dispose of unservicable items. They looked at all items in the unit, weapons, radios, munitions, and anything else that was "on the books" for the unit. If an item was still good, they cleaned it up and had it ready to go for the next unit. If broken but repairable, they packaged it up for shipment to the US to be repaired. If the items were too far gone, they were prepared for disposal. It was a duty that Dick really liked. He hoped that it would continue for his entire tour. Unfortunately, after a couple months it ended and Dick was chosen to do something else.



Dick and a friend, Gary, were chosen for mail delivery duty. They would load mail onto 2 1/2 ton trucks (Deuce and a Half) and transport the incoming mail to duty stations and encampments around Vietnam.

As many places in Vietnam were not fully secured, Dick and Gary would return to base and inspect the number of bullet holes in the vehicle. Sometimes it was amazing that they didn't get hit with the sheer number of holes shot through the sides of the truck.

Some of these trips had them travel as far as 100 miles from their base. On one occasion, Dick witnessed the way enemy prisoners were interrogated by US Army Rangers. It left him with a sour taste. He didn't like the enemy, but thought it might have been a bit harsh. In the end though, Dick wasn't phased from doing his duty.

Soon the Mail Route ended, and Dick was assigned to operate a 12 ton forklift near Long Binh Vietnam, helping load and unload incoming supplies. Dick remembers that the tires on this vehicle were nearly 6 foot high. It was a huge machine, but he enjoyed the task.

Everything changed for Lewis on the afternoon of 12 October 1969. Dick's forklift had all wheel turning, allowing for it to make sharper turns. This could be changed from two wheel, to all wheel turning as needed. A mechanical failure caused the two wheel operation to become faulty. Dick was forced to bring it in for repair, with all wheel turning engaged.

He was driving the forklift down a freshly paved road in a pouring rain. Coming up on a curve, Dick tried to turn slightly without over turning the wheel. With all four wheels turning, it would be difficult to control on the wet slippery pavement. The forklift began to slide and Lewis quickly lost control, and slid toward the ditch. Dick knew if the vehicle flipped on him, he'd be crushed so he had to jump from the sliding vehicle into the ditch before it overturned. He was able to get off the truck, but landed hard in the ditch before the vehicle completely turned over into the ditch. The fall smashed Lewis' right foot, causing fractures of the foot and dislocating his left shoulder.

Dick was picked up by ambulance, and brought to the 24th Evacuation Hospital near Long Binh. Dick remembers arriving and being looked over by medical staff. Shortly after arriving, a chopper came in carrying wounded. They told Dick his injuries were going to have to wait while they worked on the two injured men. Lewis laid there on a stretcher, looking over at them working on those two guys who were severely wounded. He said he had never seen so much blood.



After completing work on the two wounded men, they came back to working on Dick. They assessed the severe injuries to his foot, and reduced the dislocation of the shoulder. After a couple of days, Dick really began to realize how bad his foot was. At first, the shoulder is what hurt him the worst. His foot was completely numb, and he didn't realize how bad off it was. Eventually that numbness wore off and he was in desperate pain. After about a week at the Evac hospital, Lewis was transferred to the 106th General Hospital in Japan.

He was flown to a main airport in Japan, and then transferred to the 106th via helicopter. He remembers vividly that the helicopter was the type where he was strapped to the rails on the outside of the chopper, like in M*A*S*H, with a plastic bubble over him for protection. When the chopper banked and turned, he would look down over the landscape. He said it was "Really cool, the best ride he's ever been on. Better than any ride at an amusement park."

He remained in Japan at the hospital for another month, where they worked on trying to repair the damage to his smashed foot. They attempted to fix the fractures with pins in his foot, and continued rehabilitation to his shoulder. He waited, hoping to receive word that he would return to the US for continued treatment. He was in severe pain, and wanted to get back home.

Back in Vietnam, Dick's personal effects were packed up and sent back to the US for his return. Normally when out processing, packages are thoroughly inspected so that contraband items are not returned to the US. Because of Dick's situation, the packages weren't inspected and when he arrived all items were there.



One of the items that wouldn't have normally made it to the US was his Montagnard cross bow. Dick acquired this through a trade. Someone wanted one of the Army poncho liners, and would trade for the cross bow. Lewis thought the crossbow was pretty neat, and traded his poncho liner for it.

When Dick was evacuated out of country, he thought the cross bow was gone. Surprisingly it arrived to him in one of the packages of personal effects from Vietnam.

Following his Hospital stay in Japan, Dick was sent to Madigan General Hospital in Washington. While there they continued to work on treatment of his foot. Slowly it started to get somewhat better, but was going to have permanent damage.

On 31 March 1970, Dick was released to duty in the Army. Because of his injuries, he was on restricted duty.

He became a clerk and typist for the Army Hospital. After some training he became a Personnel Records Specialist, taking care of the orders and medical records for the patients at Madigan General Hospital. He continued to have severe pain with the foot, and kept his foot in a brace all the time.

Eventually Dick was medically evaluated. He was unable to walk for over a half mile even with the brace. At least on third of his day was spent in pain. He couldn't run, walk on uneven ground, and had significant trouble climbing stairs. The medical evaluation board concluded that his injuries were a Line of Duty (LOD) injury and he would be permanently disabled. Parts of his foot and ankle had not healed, and he had limited motion in the joint and foot.

Although his injuries happened while in the Line of Duty, they were not caused by armed conflict with the enemy. Because of this, Lewis was not awarded the Purple Heart. Later on in life, people found out he was disabled vet, they assumed he had the Purple Heart. He was adamant to ensure they understood that his injuries weren't sustained in a manner to receive that medal. He wasn't combat wounded, it was a simple accident.

By August 1971, Dick's injuries were determined to place him as unfit for Active Duty. On 8 September 1971 Specialist Richard W Lewis was medically retired from the US Army with a disability. He had served five years, seven months and seven days in the US Army.



Piece of Shrapnel Dick brought home from Vietnam. He picked this up after a mortar attack.



For his service in the Army, Dick was awarded the Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal and Republic of Vietnam Campaign medal. He was also awarded the expert marksmanship Badge for qualifying with the M-14 rifle.

He also had kept a number of mementos from his service including many of his letters and postcards and his journal he kept telling of his service while in the Army. Prior to leaving for the military, an old veteran friend had encouraged Dick to make sure to keep track of things, and hold onto as much as he could. In later years, he'd wished he had. Lewis took this advice and held on to copies of his orders and anything else in remembrance of his service.

Dick Returned to Lindstrom Minnesota following his medical retirement. As a disabled veteran, Dick needed to look for work and a way to continue on with his life after the Army. He applied for a job with the City, and with his disabled veteran status was hired.

Dick became a life member of the DAV (Disabled American Veterans) and the VFW. Although he was not an active member of the posts, he did take pride in being a part of those two organizations.

As the years progressed, continued problems from the complications of his injuries plagued him. He received medical treatment with through VA Health Care.



In 2007, Dick met a man from Kandiyohi at the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis. As the two began talking, Dick learned of The United States Military Historical Collection. He wanted to pass some of his military items along for the displays. In e-mail correspondence, Lewis met up with USMHC to discuss donating items to the collection for the displays.

Dick traveled to Kandiyohi in May 2007. He passed along his Crossbow to the collection, and talked about digging out more items to see added to the collection. At the 2007 Veteran's Day display, the Crossbow was placed in a protective box and at the display. Dick had wanted to attend the display that year, but weather prevented him from attending.

In 2008 Dick came back to Kandiyohi and saw the crossbow mounted in the display case made, and wanted to bring it back to show some friends in Lindstrom. He expected to get it back for the 2008 display.

Unfortunately, timing and weather didn't work out for Dick to make it back in time for the 2008 display. Via e-mails and phone calls, it was planned to figure out a way to meet up as soon as we could. Dick was still trying to put together other items to include in the display with the crossbow.

As time went on, efforts were made to coordinate options to meet up again. The trip from Lindstrom was long, and making things work out proved difficult. Dick's continued trouble with his leg made that long of a drive tough, and options to meet in between hadn't worked out.



Dick was very proud of his military service and wanted to make sure that he could pass along as much information and memorabilia as possible. He wanted to share his story, and his experiences in Vietnam. He was also proud of other service members and took part in filling care packages for troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. He remembered how exciting it was to get packages when he was in, and wanted to do the same for the next generation of soldiers.

Following his injury in Vietnam, Dick struggled with pain and complications with his foot. The fracture never healed properly and caused him a considerable amount of problems. The injuries, and his experiences in Vietnam lead to a number of problems with PTSD.

On November 16 2009, Richard Lewis lost his battle with PTSD, taking his own life. He was 63 years old. He was laid to rest at Fort Snelling National Cemetery in the Twin Cities. Although the war had happened so many years before, the toll it took on Dick never let up.



Days prior to his death, Dick e-mailed telling about having been presented with a "Thank You Medallion" or challenge coin from one of the soldiers who he had sent a care package to. He also discussed having tracked down Colonel Gallivan, and looking forward to meeting up with him again.

In May 2010, USMHC visited with Dick's sisters and many of Dick's items were passed along for inclusion in the display.

Specialist Richard Wayne Lewis has taken up a special section in the annual Veteran's Day display since then.

I only knew Dick for a short time. He was a proud soldier, and a good friend. His loss has been a sad reminder of the high cost of war, even decades after the guns have stopped firing.

Rest in Peace My Friend.



Over the brief time I knew Dick, we e-mailed back and forth. One time he e-mailed a forwarded story. Many times, we just ignore these forwards, and delete them without ever really reading them. For some reason, I wanted to read this one:

"The older I get, the more I enjoy Saturday mornings. Perhaps it's the quiet solitude that comes with being the first to rise, or maybe it's the unbounded joy of not having to be at work. Either way, the first few hours of a Saturday morning are most enjoyable.

A few weeks ago, I was shuffling toward the garage with a steaming cup of coffee in one hand and the morning paper in the other. What began as a typical Saturday morning turned into one of those lessons that life seems to hand you from time to time. Let me tell you about it:

I turned the dial up into the phone portion of the band on my ham radio in order to listen to a Saturday morning swap net. Along the way, I came across an older sounding chap, with a tremendous signal and a golden voice. You know the kind; he sounded like he should be in the broadcasting business. He was telling whomever he was talking with something about 'a thousand marbles.' I was intrigued and stopped to listen to what he had to say

'Well, Tom, it sure sounds like you're busy with your job. I'm sure they pay you well but it's a shame you have to be away from home and your family so much. Hard to believe a young fellow should have to work sixty or seventy hours a week to make ends meet. It's too bad you missed your daughter's 'dance recital' he continued. 'Let me tell you something that has helped me keep my own priorities.' And that's when he began to explain his theory of a 'thousand marbles.'

'You see, I sat down one day and did a little arithmetic. The average person lives about seventy-five years. I know, some live more and some live less, but on average, folks live about seventy-five years.

'Now then, I multiplied 75 times 52 and I came up with 3900, which is the number of Saturdays that the average person has in their entire lifetime. Now, stick with me, Tom, I'm getting to the important part.

It took me until I was fifty-five years old to think about all this in any detail', he went on, 'and by that time I had lived through over twenty-eight hundred Saturdays.' 'I got to thinking that if I lived to be seventy-five, I only had about a thousand of them left to enjoy. So I went to a toy store and bought every single marble they had. I ended up having to visit three toy stores to round up 1000 marbles. I took them home and put them inside a large, clear plastic container right here in the shack next to my gear.'

'Every Saturday since then, I have taken one marble out and thrown it away. I found that by watching the marbles diminish, I focused more on the really important things in life.

There is nothing like watching your time here on this earth run out to help get your priorities straight.'

'Now let me tell you one last thing before I sign-off with you and take my lovely wife out for breakfast. This morning, I took the very last marble out of the container. I figure that if I make it until next Saturday then I have been given a little extra time. And the one thing we can all use is a little more time.'

'It was nice to meet you Tom, I hope you spend more time with your family, and I hope to meet you again here on the band. This is a 75 Year old Man, K9NZQ, clear and going QRT, good morning!'

You could have heard a pin drop on the band when this fellow signed off. I guess he gave us all a lot to think about. I had planned to work on the antenna that morning, and then I was going to meet up with a few hams to work on the next club newsletter.

Instead, I went upstairs and woke my wife up with a kiss. 'C'mon honey, I'm taking you and the kids to breakfast.' 'What brought this on?' she asked with a smile. 'Oh, nothing special, it's just been a long time since we spent a Saturday together with the kids. And hey, can we stop at a toy store while we're out? I need to buy some marbles.

A friend sent this to me, so I to you, my friend."

To this day, every time I see a marble, I am reminded of this story and of Dick. We never know how much longer we have, and how long others have here with us. Time is short, and we need to make every "marble" count. Dick was a great friend, and was lost too early. I am proud to have had the opportunity to have gotten to know him and proud that he, and his story, are a part of the United States Military Historical Collection.