

# The Last GIs to Go

By Lynn C. Newland  
Associated Press

## Camp Alpha, Vietnam

Nearly 2000 American servicemen left Vietnam yesterday without shouts, back slapping or cries of joy.

The soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who filed through Camp Alpha at Tan Son Nhut air base seemed blasé to the point of boredom about leaving.

GIs waiting for their "freedom birds" whiled away the hours playing cards, reading or drinking beer in the Alpha Club. Country singer Johnny Cash was a favorite on the jukebox while Vietnamese waitresses served steak or fried chicken.

"Sorry, no sandwiches. We close tomorrow," said one girl.

"C'mere, honey. I love you till your nose bleeds," a GI said to a passing waitress.

She pretended not to hear.

"Hey, honey. How about three more beers," a fat Army sergeant called out. "We gonna di di (leave)."

## Processing

As the departing GIs gathered in E. B. Robinson Hall for final processing, they left little behind them except graffiti. Scrawled on a bathroom wall in the Alpha Club, their verse told a partial story of GI impressions of the Vietnam war.

"If the power of love would overcome the love of power, there would be no wars," someone had penned on the wall.

Someone else wrote, "Always high, always stoned, spent my time going home."

Another scrawl also reflected the GI involvement with drugs in Vietnam, a major problem for the United States command.

"Man made beer, God made grass," it said.

The hall, a dull cement block building where final processing takes place, was a jungle of suitcases, guitars and duffel bags.

On the final stop of processing out, the GIs encountered staff sergeant Francis Sidley, 31, of Keyser, W. Va. Sidley, career Army, was outgoing but firm, even with offi-

cers. "I love my job," he said. "I don't particularly want to leave. Hell, the money's too good."

"Ration card, MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) card and unit installation card," Sidley called out. "Ration card, MACV card and unit installation card."

## Cards

Sidley had called for these cards since 7 a.m. It was late afternoon.

"We've got to get these guys out of here," he said. "No big deal."

A large green "amnesty box" stood to the side of the customs station. GIs could drop narcotics, weapons or contraband in it and the military police would not question them.

"If you don't have your MACV card you'll miss your flight," Sidley told one nervous soldier groping for his papers.

"Ain't no way," the GI mumbled.

To another perspiring serviceman, Sidley said: "If you don't have your cards, you're extended for the duration of Vietnam, and that will be a long time."

The GI didn't laugh.

## Frisked

After turning in their cards, the GIs passed through one of three curtain-covered booths to be frisked. They then moved to one of three waiting rooms, called Alpha, Bravo and Charlie. A sign above the inspection booths warned: "Once inside waiting area you will not be permitted to leave."

No one wanted to leave.

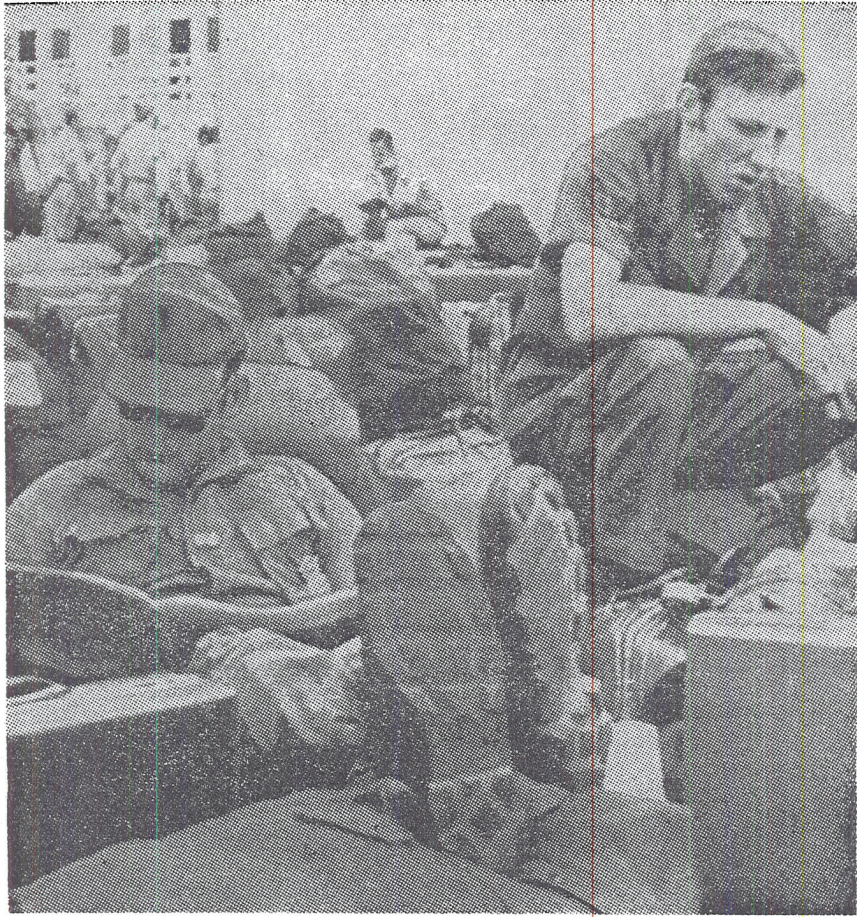
Most GIs just sat and stared in the drab green waiting rooms. Some read. Others paced the floor. No one bubbled. No big deal.

Sergeant Michael Marvin, 22, of Bryan, Ohio, who works with Sidley, said he's tired of processing GIs.

"My feet hurt," he said. And after all the GIs have left?

"You know what's going to happen here?" Sidley answered. "I'll tell you. Just like the movie, you remember? There's a war and nobody's going to attend."

Associated Press



UPI Telephoto

Americans still in Vietnam waited for planes out