

# A Confession

By Ken Kalish

It was a long time ago that I learned of a violation of sections of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and it's time for me to fess up.

When I was a member of the Navy's River Patrol Section 523 stationed in Vinh Long, much of the equipment with which we worked was hand-me-down stuff from the Korean War, which in its turn was hand-me-down from World War II. One of those ancient hand-me-downs was a small Studebaker-built truck, a half-ton vehicle painted haze grey that we sailors used to transport crews to and from the docks. It was our unit's general use vehicle for other important stuff like moving food supplies, spare parts, and beer.

Many utility vehicles used during World War Two had wide-mouth gasoline ports designed to permit one to empty a five-gallon jerry can into the gas tank within seconds. The same was true of vehicles used in the Korean War, and of some in Viet Nam. One day a local bad guy came up with an idea. He had noticed the gasoline port on our little truck was big enough to swallow a hand grenade, so he wrapped a grenade with electrician's tape, pulled the pin, and then slipped the grenade into our parked truck's gas port.

Shortly after the grenade reached gasoline, the electrician's tape adhesive began to dissolve. Eventually the spoon sprang free. When it did, the grenade went off. Our truck was instantly transformed into a bonfire. We were suddenly without our most important ground vehicle.

No worries. Our support unit had a Boatswain's Mate who was a magician. He could make things appear and disappear at will. Sometimes he used barter, sometimes larceny. He replaced the truck in a matter of hours. He got permission from the officer

in charge of the support unit to remove the damaged truck by chaining it to a big Army front loader and carting it off to the scrap heap at the Army airfield.

He also knew there was an identical vehicle perpetually parked in front of officers' quarters at the airfield, so on his way back to our base he paused only long enough to chain the unused truck to the loader's bucket and carry it back to a small garage near our base.

It took him most of the next day to paint that OD truck haze grey and to stencil on appropriate Navy unit data.

The Boatswain's Mate was sure our officers didn't need to know how the little truck had been resurrected, so they were technically being accurate when, a few days later, they told an Army Major that they had not seen the Army's OD truck.