



“Uncommon Valor
was a
Common Virtue.”

Stories of Everyday People at War

War Stories and Interviews written by
Darrell Alleman

Just One Putnam County Soldier's Story: Vietnam - Jerry Masini

When thinking of someone who would write a story about a serviceman for the Memorial Day issue of the newspaper, we instantly thought of Darrell Alleman

as our unofficial ace reporter. It seems that Darrell has a story for



Jerry Masini (L) "Charlie" my driver (R) 1960 Ford Wagon (black) parked in front of Rex Hotel Saigon, VN 1962-63



Jerry Masini AF125 Studio B, Rex Hotel, Saigon, VN 1962-63



Getting ready to board plane to go home. Jerry Masini, Ton Son Nhut Airport, Saigon, VN September 1963

every occasion and we knew he would come up with a good one for this "special assignment" and he did. This is my first Veteran Story. -Darrell Mark's Gerald ("Jerry") Masini, Vietnam Veteran, was one of the original broadcasters of "The Dawn Buster" radio show put on by the Armed Forces Radio Station in Saigon. Jerry attended Mark grade school and was interested in radio. His teacher and friend, Hugo Borri, peaked his interest and became his mentor on ham radio. Jerry received his ham radio license

when he was only sixteen years old. He graduated from Hopkins High School, IVCC, and Bradley University. Jerry was drafted and trained at Fort Hood, TX as a Military Policeman. For fifteen years, he was the engineer for Tonica's WEEQ TV Channel 35, a satellite to Channel 25 in Peoria. When the Tonica station closed, he worked for Channel 25 for two years before starting the present Radio Shack in Peru Mall.

PFC Masini was sent to Vietnam in September, 1962 as a Military Policeman. Jerry was the first PFC soldier to serve in Vietnam. During his tour of duty, American soldiers were considered advisers, and the patrolling was done by the South Vietnamese. Fighting was limited to guerrilla warfare. He was assigned to Ton-Son Nhut ("Tent City") outside Saigon airport. It rained constantly, was hot, had no mosquito netting, and had outside latrines and cold showers. It was a rough way to live, but it was even rougher for the soldiers out in the fields. Jerry took his radio license and manual with him to Vietnam with the intention of doing a radio show there for the soldiers. He anticipated there might be one there. After a week he heard about an Armed Forces Radio Station in Saigon that was just starting up but was having technical problems. They only had

one Vietnam technician. Jerry talked to the officer in charge of the station and explained that he was qualified as an audio specialist and had a First Class Operation License. Jerry was immediately reassigned to Armed Forces Radio Saigon.

Jerry believes this was an act of God. He moved from Tent City to the Dianam Hotel above the cinema on the third floor. The radio station was in the Rex Hotel on the fifth floor. Officers lived in the hotel. There was a lot of saluting there. They all decided that the radio personnel should wear civilian clothes with their name on the shirt, so they would not have to constantly salute each other. Jerry, Chief Arbuckle and a couple of others at the AFRS collaborated to design shirts that they all wore, and even Robin Williams, the actor, wore this same shirt in the movie, "Good Morning Vietnam." It's amazing, but Jerry can still wear this shirt he designed 42 years ago.

Jerry was assigned a 1960 black Ford station wagon with a Vietnamese driver called "Charlie." In the movie, "Charlie" was depicted as a black man and the vehicle was a Jeep (Hollywood!!).

Chief Arbuckle was the program director for the station. He was in charge for about a month before Jerry got there. There was not a music library at

first so Chief Arbuckle had borrowed LP's from G.I.s to use for the radio show. Using anything but government issued LP's was against regulations, so Chief Arbuckle declared the LP's to be government issued. Chief Arbuckle was doing the show until he realized that Masini's zany antics were perfect for the show. American soldiers would wake up and go to sleep with the Armed Forces Radio Station. The station covered Vietnam for the rice-rich Mekong Delta in the south to the high mountain country in the north. Jerry liked the Vietnamese people and said they are hardworking and excel in everything they do.

The station's transmitter broke down and the commanding officer, Jerry, and the Vietnam engineer had to take Jerry's driver and car ten miles outside Saigon to pick up a spare transmitter part. The commanding officer said there had been a sweep out there and there no Viet Cong in the area. So they should not carry any weapons. They drove through rice paddies, around water buffalo and picked up the spare modulation transformer and headed back. When they came around a curve in the road, there lay a tree across the road. Jerry knew they were in trouble. He put his hands on the back of the seat in front of him to show he had

no weapons. Immediately Viet Cong soldiers poked guns through all four windows. One jammed his sub-machine gun, called a grease gun, into Jerry's temple. The Vietnam engineer talked to the soldiers for what seemed like an eternity and then let them go. As they drove off, Jerry expected them to shoot. When they were out of harm's way, Jerry asked the Vietnam engineer why they were released. He said that they had no weapons with them. Jerry speculated that the soldiers knew him and his family. He told Jerry he could not tell about this incident, because they all had families. Jerry never told this story until now. Jerry said that this was the second time God intervened in his life. A lasting impression on Jerry was when a Buddhist monk staged a grisly scene for the media on a side street in Saigon to protest the war. The monk sat calmly in a yoga position and torched himself. I am sure we all remember seeing this picture in the news. Jerry lifted the morale of the home-sick soldiers at 6 AM with the marching music to wake up these weary soldiers. He played 1950's and 1960's rock and roll music, country music and upbeat music. He gave the news from back home using a lot of humor. He was willing to do crazy things. Jerry made the "Dawn Buster" show the success it was and when

his tour ended, after one year, three days, four hours, fifteen minutes and twenty five seconds in Vietnam, Jerry came home!

After Cronouer's one year tour, he wrote the movie "Good Morning Vietnam," and in 1987 the comic actor Robin Williams played the role of disc jockey. Jerry said that, unlike the movie, he could play any music he wanted except one--Chubby Checker's "The Twist"--because the sister-in-law of the South Vietnamese President hated that song. The local government controlled the U.S. station.

Jerry recently gave a program about this at



Gerald Masini's Uncle Frank Masini US Army WWI was a charter member to the Granville American Legion Post.

a Mason's Scottish Rite dinner meeting in Lacon. Harold Faletti was the program chairman.

It is very important to Jerry that the readers know that there are many veterans, local and nationwide as well as other Vietnam veterans, who are truly heroes and were wounded physically and mentally in the war. Other soldiers have much more heroic stories than his to tell. Jerry said that there are a lot of unsung heroes who did really

important jobs out in the fields of Vietnam. This is just his own story of one year, three days, four hours, fifteen minutes and twenty

five seconds of his tour of duty in Vietnam.

"On this Memorial Day, I want all Veterans to know that their sacrifices are not

forgotten and we all are grateful and appreciate their sacrifices to protect and preserve our country's freedom.

Vietnam Army Veteran Jerry Masini, Part 2

After Jerry was honorably discharged from service one year in Vietnam he arrived home in September of 1963. After several years from 1963 until 1995 he received a letter in the mail that said you are not a Vietnam Veteran, Jerry said he could not believe it. He called the VA, they told him that's right, you served before August 8th 1964 and that all who served before then were not



Vietnam Army Veteran, Jerry Masini,
Mark Illinois

considered Veterans, and name of them that served before that date, were not eligible for any Vietnam Veteran benefits. Jerry started looking into why the VA would not consider him and other Veterans for benefits. He discovered

that republican Senator Alfonse D'Amato of New York had already written a bill to make these early Vietnam Veterans eligible for VA benefits, but the bill had been pigeon holed. In fact Jerry found out that the National American Legion had other ideas and this bill was not high up on their priority list. Jerry then called Senator O'Amato's office in Washington and asked about the bill. He was told it looked like the bill was dead, and not going anywhere. Jerry decided to call the WQAD TV Channel 8 in the Quad Cities and tell it to the TV Broadcaster Jim King. He had already called every television station in the area including Peoria plus every Senator and every Representative in the area. They all gave life service and some said there is no change of anything being done. Jerry also called President Clinton's office and Vice President Al Gore's office too. Their offices said they would look into it but he never heard back from them.

Jim Kind was interested in this story, and brought his Channel 8 crew to Jerry's home in (Monkey

Nest) Illinois to interview him. The well known broadcaster told Jerry that they planned to put their interview of Jerry on that night at 8 o'clock and 10 o'clock, and they were going to turn over the story to 20-20 on ABC and Barbara Walters. Everyone had said the bill was dead because it was in the middle of August and it was dead for that session. The Senate and Congress were going home in two weeks. Soon people in Congress got wind of what was going on, that there were Vietnam Veterans that were not qualified for Vietnam benefits. This was election year, and when they heard it was going to be on 20-20 that weekend the bill was stuck in another bill as pork and it was passed. Jerry received a call from Senator O'Amato who told him the bill was passed.