

“MY PURPLE HEART 3”
(a True account)
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Source: War Stories Collections, Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas The following document has been reformatted from its original version and partially edited.

A friend from the 58th Engineer Company in Fulda I met in 1965 was installing fluorescent lights in our mess hall without turning the power off. I was impressed, but would never do that. Also our company was installing six-inch pipe at An Khe and the captain was proud of himself for trading the issued heavy pipe for Victaulic. As a pipeline engineer in Korea I had traded miles of the light pipe to construction units. The pipe probably lasted long enough for the installers to rotate. When he rotated home Angel stayed in Pleiku one night where I waited to testify in a court-martial.

After one beer Angel left for the enlisted men's club for a last drink with some of the soldiers he had worked with. When he failed to return I went back to the barracks and got good and asleep when a brusque MP lieutenant got me out of bed. They had arrested Angel with a joint of marijuana and I had to sign him out of jail. I really felt bad since Angel had also married a German and was a very fine soldier and good friend. When I was wounded two months later he still had not been allowed to rotate as he was waiting for a court martial. A few days after Angel's arrest I called the JAG and learned my soldier had been sent to Fort Leavenworth on an unrelated charge and I could rejoin my company.

Travel in Vietnam was uncomplicated. I could catch a truck and convoy to An Khe or catch a hop. I caught a milk run hop. We landed at one place just for supper and about thirty American men civilians walked in to eat. They were helicopter technicians and seemed relatively happy to be there and happy in their work. I knew they were well paid, but I was not interested in that kind of money.

Captain Moran, our company commander, had been a sergeant with me training advanced individual engineers at Fort Leonard Wood before going to OCS and making captain. He was an intelligent, balanced leader until marijuana came up. Then he went crazy. When I joined him at An Khe he was conducting shake down inspections daily. He would fall the troops out and go through their belongings thoroughly. He would dump their foot lockers and stick his eye in the corners while sniffing for marijuana. While he did this we would conduct a police call of the company area. A Porta Ricon specialist yelled gleefully that he had found a carton of American juicy fruit. He passed a pack around to all of us. The first one to open his pack cried: "This ain't chewing gum!" How right he was. Captain Moran sent it through channels to learn it was

one hundred percent pure Columbian golden marijuana. Another soldier found a similar carton of Double Mint also pure Columbian gold.

We had several projects on the camp and broke the soldiers into work gangs and they worked all day. My special project was cleaning out bunkers filled with artillery, mortar, and rocket rounds and hand grenades. The hand grenades were the scariest because they were just thrown together in boxes and their pins thoroughly intertwined. In the evening we had mortar attacks and manned our perimeter. There was a very large hill next to the compound where firefights went on sporadically most of the time. We spent a lot of hours clearing brush off the base of the mountain and the Air Force sprayed heavily with what we found out later was Agent Orange.