

..... PARTING SHOT .....

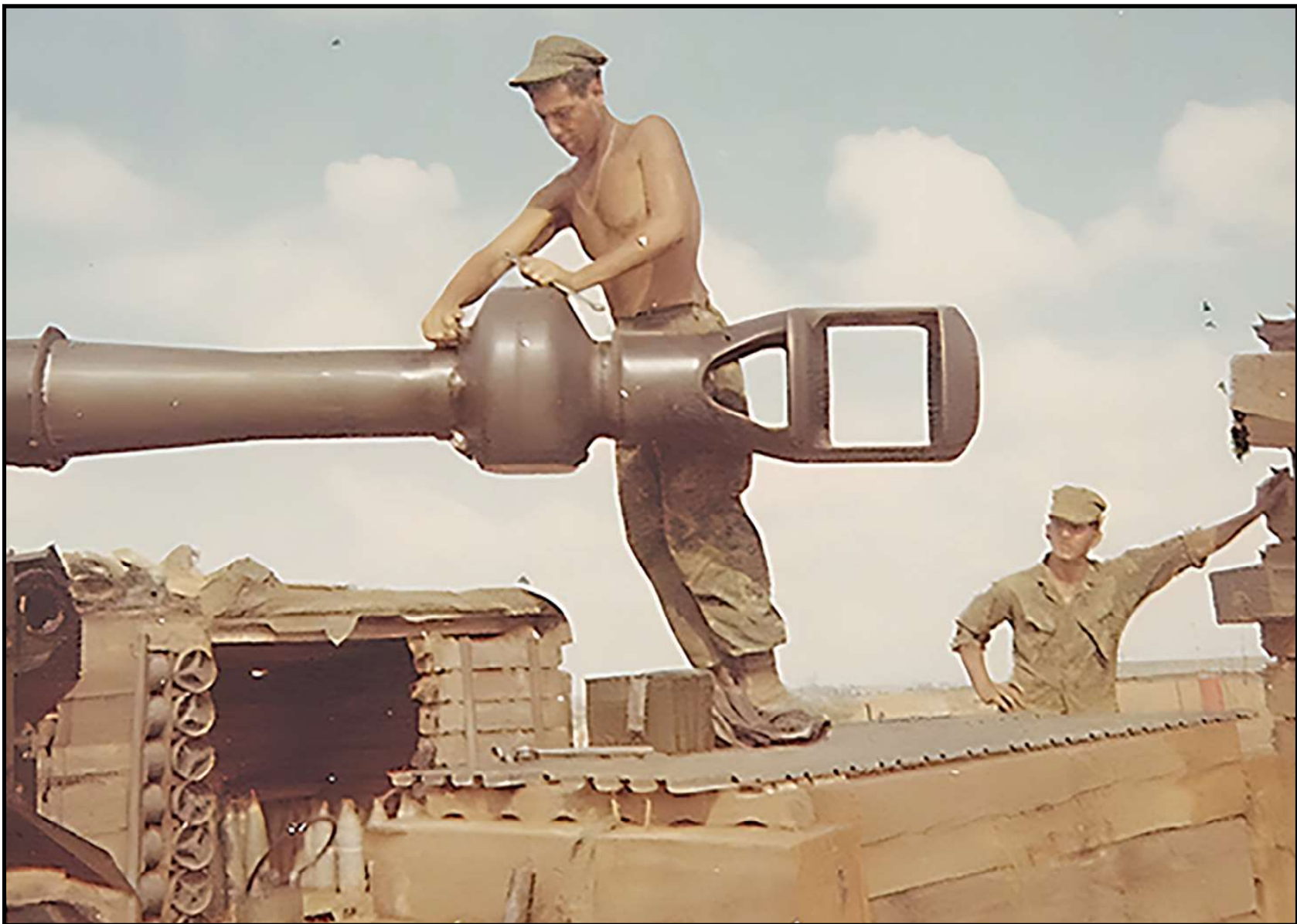


Photo courtesy Lou Pagano

## The Strangest Thing

**L**ou Pagano received his greetings from Uncle Sam from his Huntington, New York, draft board late in the fall of 1968. He was inducted on December 10, but not into the Army. Pagano became one of the 42,600 (out of a total of 2.2 million) men drafted during the Vietnam War who went straight from an Induction Center into the Marine Corps.

It took a while, but the Marine draftee managed to finish Boot Camp the following April. He arrived in-country in July 1969, and joined Mike Battery in the 4th Battalion/12th Marines in the 3rd Marine Division in Đông Hà, the northernmost city in South Vietnam, just south of the DMZ.

That's Lou Pagano doing maintenance on an M109 155 mm self-propelled howitzer. "Every Sunday morning, we would clean the gun and then drive it to the fuel dump for a fill-up of diesel fuel," he said. "I am getting ready to take off that round piece of equipment on the barrel called a bore evacuator. It removes gases and debris so we could take it apart and clean it."

A few weeks after the picture was snapped, while taking part in a night firing mission against the enemy, Lou Pagano became a

casualty of war, although he never received a Purple Heart. What happened is something he will never forget. Here's what transpired, in Pagano's words:

"Even though I was a newbie, I was inside the gun, setting the azimuth and loading the round and the powder bags, and firing the weapon. It was always so hot, even at night, that I never wore my shirt. The first time we had a fire mission that lasted several hours, I experienced the strangest thing.

"Each time a round was fired, the recoil of the howitzer would open the breach and expel the gases and smoke. After one such recoil, there was a flash of light, and I asked, 'What the heck was that?' The two guys inside with me started laughing and said, 'Wait till morning.'

"Morning came, and I saw that that flash burned off all my chest hairs and eyebrows, and everyone I saw that day had a good laugh. This happened to me several more times before I was done.

"The eyebrows came back, but the chest hairs are MIA. My family thinks it's funny." ♦