

## Title:

The Road from Saigon. Memories of Vietnam

## Word Count:

751

## Summary:

An account of the author's experiences whilst living in Vietnam. This story deals with his first trip by road in a Vietnam at war.

## Keywords:

vietnam,saigon,asia,war,travel,viet  
cong,adventure,photos,photography,flying,combat

## Article Body:

I forget why I was in Saigon. I imagine it was to see some girl I'd met before I was posted to Baria. I must have stayed overnight and had to get back that evening to be ready for duty the next day. It was too late to get a flight so I did the obvious thing and took a taxi. There were cars with chauffeurs one could hire. Big powerful American cars. There were French cars with seats for eight or ten people where one could buy a place. But I had only been in the country a month or two and I didn't know this. So I took a Saigon taxi, a venerable old Renault 4cv. The driver had vaguely heard of Vungtau and as I offered a lot of money he agreed to take me.

All went well down the Bien Hoa highway. It had theoretically three lanes in either direction. Or at least I think it did because in practise the concept of lanes was alien to the Vietnamese mind. Let's just say that there were two flows of traffic going in opposite directions. Flows made up of every conceivable type of transport imaginable overtaking on your left or right, no matter. From big US duce and a halfs all the way down to overladen motor scooters. The inevitable three-wheeled-scooter-powered-taxi-cum-all-purpose-goods-transport. The only thing I never saw were tanks. They did appear from time to time but then everything else vanished. I've never been down that twenty (?) mile stretch of highway without seeing a major, often fatal accident.

After the highway we passed by rubber plantations of sinister reputation. In the heat of the day rubber plantations are delightfully cool. But they feel really spooky. Too many things have happened in them to ever enjoy being there. This area would later be the responsibility of Thai soldiers. Mostly known for having very effectively shelled there own base.

Evening was drawing to a close and the car's radiator started giving cause for trouble. The driver kept on getting out to go and find water in what were

probably the beginnings of the mangrove swamps. Night falls suddenly in the east and suddenly it was dark. The Renault either had no lights or the driver chose not to advertise our presence by using them; the darkness was total.

## Part 2

I am able to retain that great British calm in periods of stress. Outwardly it appears admirable. Inwardly it is what I call one of the shades of fear. I was to get to know all the shades of fear over the coming years. Discipline helps one blanket out reality. One functions normally, one is completely without emotion. When one returns to the real world it leaves no trace. One's mind has been completely protected. It is also rather suicidal unless you are born with the luck of the Irish.

The road that led to Baria had been the scene of a particularly bloody ambush shortly before. The hills that lay back a short distance from the road were infested with Viet Cong.

In the camp we had become a little concerned. The Viet Cong were often setting up road blocks and any foreigner who accidentally strayed too far on the wrong day disappeared. Later an Australian division would move in to try to clear the area. Admirable soldiers they were not there at that time.

There was a worrying crunching sound and the car came to a halt. Silence. We got out. The car was tangled up in a mess of barbed wire. We waited, but there was no movement, the area appeared to be deserted. Had the Viet Cong laid the barbed wire? Was it left over from a previous road block earlier in the evening? Were they preparing something for the next morning? All traffic was forbidden on that road at night from dusk to dawn. Only a certifiable nutter would use it. We had four flat tyres. Somewhere deep inside me I felt really scared but managed to suppress it somehow. We got in and limped along for what seemed ages. The tyres were in shreds. I doubt if the wheels were any better. We finally arrived in Baria. I gave the driver some more money and took one of the three wheeled taxis from Baria to Vungtau. That stretch of the road was relatively secure in the day. Dodgy at night, forbidden also to traffic, it was complete heaven to what I had just been through.