



**SGT Stepaniak in a MK-108
Radio Jeep at Hue in late
1967**

SGT Walter Stepaniak was the longest serving Red Marker radio operator in the unit's history. He served two 18-month tours, from January 1967 – June 1968 and from September 1968 – April 1970. Walter had been in the Army from 1963 – 1966. Recalled to duty during the American build up in Vietnam, he opted to join the Air Force rather than reenlist in the Army.

Originally, the Air Force assigned him to a Tactical Air Support Squadron serving I Corps. However, his brother was serving with the U.S. Army's 1st Division in III Corps. Walter requested a transfer to a unit based in III Corps. Since he was jump qualified, the Air Force agreed to a transfer to the Red Markers supporting the Vietnamese Airborne. He quickly began jumping with the Airborne and wore the wings of both nations.

During his first tour, Walter deployed to numerous forward locations supporting Airborne operations. In January 1968, he was at Hue when the Viet Cong launched the TET Offensive. The detachment's aircraft were immediately destroyed on the ground. A few days later, a mortar round destroyed the MRC-108 radio jeep. Before its destruction, the radio jeep served as a critical communication link between the beleaguered forces and the outside world. Once the jeep was destroyed, Walter worked with the U.S. Marines. Using a deuce-and-a-half armed with twin fifty caliber machine guns, Walter joined other volunteers in driving across the Perfume River Bridge, distributing ammo to the fighting Marines and picking up wounded.

Several days later, the Marines decided they wanted their armed truck located further south. Stepaniak volunteered to drive it since all the other Red Markers had already been

relocated to DaNang. He drove the truck and delivered film entrusted to him by Walter Cronkite and others to their offices in Saigon.

Stepaniak's second tour primarily supported Airborne actions in III Corps and the Fishhook of Cambodia. His skill and experience proved especially valuable to new radio operators joining the Red Markers as the detachment grew to its maximum strength in 1969.