The Way It Was

NAME: Allen “K.C.” Allcock
UNIT: D Troop, ¾ Air Cavalry
TIME PERIOD: June/July 1969
SOURCE: 25th Aviation Association website
DATE RECEIVED: 4 November 2004

Only a short time after I had been in country with Delta Troop, 3/4 Air Cavalry, I was asked to become a team member of a reactionary/recovery squad. Although I don't know for certain if "reactionary/recovery" is the proper name that was used, but it does describe somewhat the mission. It had become the SOP of our unit to perform many of the "rescues" of our troop's aircraft, especially those that were downed from mechanical failures that could be quickly repaired and flown out to safe areas for better, permanent repairs. Enemy engagements also brought about flight failure. Sometimes in enemy infested areas, maintenance crews were flown to the sites to make repairs so that the helicopters could be flown out.

One good thing about the helicopter is that it has the ability to autorotate down to somewhat of a safe landing without the power of an engine driving its rotating wing. Altitude and the quick action of well trained, experienced pilots and crew could make a landing area out of practically nothing. If altitude wasn’t present, in most cases the landing would be rather abrupt. Damage and injury would be certain, and recovery of injured crewmembers would be a priority. Our smaller aero-scout, "loach" aircraft, we could sling load under our UH-1, "slicks", and do our own recoveries, but when our larger aircraft, such as the UH-1H, or the Cobra gunship came down, about all we could do would be the performance of minor, quick maintenance, getting it airborne again under its own power, or else call in a recovery helicopter unit that had the large, "Chinooks".

It was in June/July of '69 when I was used for the first time to work on an aircraft that was down in the, "boonies". I can't remember if Captain "twinkle-toes" Dixon was the maintenance officer still yet, or if he had rotated home already (twinkle-toes was a nickname that many of the Officers and EM used to refer to the little rock upon his toes he used with each step). But, for sure, Captain Mack was the officer who I recall as getting us to and from the "downed" aircraft. A cobra that was flown by Mr. Bobo. They were down not to far from the base of the famous, "black virgin mountain", in somewhat an open area. There had been a failure of the 42 degree gearbox located at the base of the vertical fin, and with the right tools, a couple of aircraft mechanics, spare part and a few long, "eternal" moments, we could have the cobra flying "before sundown". Sp/4 Richard Waite, and I were, "volunteered", and away we went. The flight up from Cu Chi was great, and as we flew onto location, we noted some perimeter defenses had been set up for our protection and the downed aircraft protection. By perimeter defenses is best described as a couple of squads of infantrymen encircling the downed aircraft, and keeping "charlie" from moving in to close to "snipe" at the aircraft or those working on it. Then, some of the infantrymen were making a sweep of the area just to reinforce those who were protecting us. All of this could be clearly seen from the air as we approached but when we landed, that was the last we saw of our, "defenses". For when we were on the ground, the sweep patrol seemed to be swept out of sight. Feverishly, Rick and I went to work removing access panels and taking bolts

loose and hoping we would not drop and loose anything. At every moment I could feel the searching eye of an enemy sniper upon my being. Finally, after about an hour, we were ready for a test run-up and very ready to get out of there. We got the attention of a circling scout ship, and communicated to them that we were ready for the Cobra flight crew to return and fly the downed aircraft out of harms way. That burned more time off of the already dimming evening hours, but it wasn't before long that they returned, firing up the cobra, giving us the "thumbs up" and flying off. In those moments, other "slick" choppers started arriving and our security also started pulling out. None of these helicopters came close to the place where Rick and I were waiting with our tools and we began to get somewhat concerned. We were armed with M-16's and plenty of ammo, but I believe it would have been a short battle. We just hunkered down and waited. After what seemed to be an eternity, (probably about five or ten minutes), we finally heard the buzzing sound of a scout ship and saw Captain Mack quickly land and motion us aboard. Phew! were we relieved. A red sunset was blazing in the west as we flew and it wasn't until we were safely heading toward Cu Chi that my heart rate began to slow down. However, the flight home was not without incident. As we were flying back to Cu Chi, I started noticing tracers arcing up from the left side of the aircraft and toward the front of us. And, it seemed like we were flying closer and into their path. Captain Mack, seated on the right side of the aircraft, didn't seem to notice. Finally, as the tracers kept coming closer, I remarked to Captain Mack, "I believe we are being fired at!" He took notice, pulled in a little pitch, made adjustment in direction, and silently flew us on home. (He was cool under fire).

Several times over the next few months, I got to practice the "art of recovery" a few more times. Delta Troop had an outstanding record as far as good mechanical operations on the choppers, and it was a rare thing for the choppers to fail mechanically. However, the enemy would hit a vulnerable spot now and again and bring one down, especially one of our scouts. Since the majority of the aero-scouts work was much of the time flying at very low levels, buzzing back and forth along suspected enemy trails and bunkers, Charlie would occasional "bag" one. Somehow, regardless of how hard one might try so as to not become real close and personnel with flight crews, more times than not, you considered the pilots, crew chiefs and gunners of Delta troop as your brother, friend and ally and any loss was personnel. Many times we were successful in snatching a downed crew and aircraft out of the grasping reach of the enemy. And just as often, those doing the recovery were elated with joy and relief.

But the strangest incident occurred about February of "70. I say about, because I can't narrow it down, but by mentioning the names of one of the scout ship's crew, someone might be able to tell me an exact date. Normally I flew on all test flights that came out of our hanger. A Warrant officer by the name of Tom Shirley usually shared that duty with me. This was his third tour of Vietnam, his second as a pilot. On this particular morning, we had a "slick" readied for test flight following a hundred hour P.E. Mr. Shirley, had gone to an early appointment to a dentist, so they gave me a new pilot to fly the test flight with me. He was a "new guy", in our unit, and did not know me, nor did I know him. To me, he just looked like any other soldier in OD green, and I guess I looked like any other to him. Especially, when you put on a flight helmet, and slide the tinted visor down covering the eyes. It was while we were on that test flight when we got the call to return ASAP. Being only a few miles out with the helicopter, we returned to the base and I was quickly briefed on the emergency. One of our scout ships had crashed and needed to be

recovered. I told the new pilot about my duties regarding the expected recovery and ran into the maintenance hanger, grabbed the tools and recovery slings and loaded the items aboard the awaiting helicopter that we had just returned to base in. I was flying in the A/C seat and the new guy was at the controls on the right side, and we headed for a spot near the Cambodian/Vietnam border. It was there that the "loach" had lost a tail rudder blade to a tree, and the aircraft had spun to the ground. During the "hard, spin-in landing", Chester Stanley, one of the crewmembers aboard the downed aircraft, had been thrown from the aircraft and was injured. Chester at one time had been one of my men before becoming one of the elite scouts for our unit. A team member cobra gunship was still flying large circles above the downed scout ship to give it protection when we arrived, but had to leave station soon after because of running low on fuel. What we needed to do was simple. We land, I grab the sling, a couple of tools, run over to the crumpled scout ship, pull the rotor blades, pin on the slinging device, position myself high enough for the "Slick" to hover directly above me, and once I slip the eye of the sling over the cargo hook of the slick, the pilot hovers it a little sideways.

As we came in for a landing, we could see the downed helicopter in edge of the bush and the crew members of the aircraft huddled around a prone body at the edge of a nearby clearing. The downed pilot flagged us safely in for a landing among the trees. I vacated the pilot's seat I had occupied on the trip out, grabbed the recovery sling and the essential tools, and headed for the downed aircraft. Since it was back in the bush a ways, it did not take long for the foliage to swallow me up. While I was headed to do what I needed to do, the downed crewmembers loaded the injured crewman aboard, and the other pilot from the downed aircraft climbed into the left side pilot seat, which I had just vacated. I heard the Huey pulling in pitch, so I climbed deeper into the underbrush and all vision was lost of me. Then, to my sickening surprise, as they pulled pitch, they turned away from me and flew off. I thought surely that someone would notice there should be five aboard, but I guess that there was such relief in the thoughts of the rescued crew and concern for the injured crewmember, that no one noticed I was not aboard. After all, put a helmet on, the familiar OD green on, we all looked about the same, especially to a new guy not familiar with any of us.

Since the cobra had flown off of station, and the "loach" had not been shot down, recovery of the downed aircraft took second precedent over the injured crewmember. Nevertheless, I was terrified. In fact, terrified is to small of a word to really describe how I felt, because the only thing I had removed off of that aircraft before it had left, was the recovery sling, and a couple of tools. My M-16 and all ammo was aboard. I did have a knife, but somehow I didn't feel confident in my abilities to survive very long with only that, although in reality, I would probably last about as long with a knife as I would with a rifle. The clock seemed to stop, yet it was my heart that beat faster. I begin to look around for some place to hide, and hope that soon someone would add things up, and come back. I just knew that by a short time, I would either be dead, or a prisoner.

Off in the distance I heard the rattle of a short firefight, and knew that the enemy was coming to have a peek at this downed aircraft. It wasn't going to be flyable, but they might want to rob it of some of its gear. When the downed crew had been picked up, they had loaded their machine guns aboard along with the injured crewmember, so there was no danger of "Charlie" getting any

arms, but things such as radios they would steal. Probably thirty minutes later I heard the rumble of a tracked vehicle squeaking towards me. Since there was a quite a bit of foliage in the area, and the approach of this vehicle was from Cambodian boarder side, I could not determine if it was friend or foe. Certainly I wasn't feeling very positive about my situation, so I figured that it was foe. Moments later, in a distance, I heard the tracked vehicle(s) pull up, and then as the moments ticked by, I heard the approach of humans by foot tromping toward my hiding area and the downed aircraft.

All life simply drained from me. I knew I would never see my beautiful bride back home ever again. How would my mother take my disappearance. In fact, I just wondered if the enemy would keep me alive, or just kill me and my body would never be identified. I felt totally whipped. Then, all at once, I thought I heard English being spoken. Then, again from another point. GREAT! I headed out of my hiding place, jumping for joy, elated about having someone with the same nationality being so close to me. About that same time, instantly all of my elation vanished, because all the bullets in the world begin to zing in and impact all around me. I realized what a stupid move I had made. The English speaking soldiers were firing at me, not knowing what the noise they heard coming from within the bush meant. They didn't know if I was friend or foe. I hugged the ground, and finally when somewhat of a calm had taken back over, I yelled out. "Hey! I'm An American!" After a short silence, I heard a voice yell back to me! ""All right, come on out, and boy, you'd better be American." I did, and the next statement I heard was, "What, and Who (blank-a-dee, blank-a-dee, blank) are you...doing here!! To this day, I can't remember what "tank" unit these boys were from, but there commander was a red headed 1st lt. If he is a 3/4 Cav.. guy, I sure would like to shake his hand and buy him a steak dinner somewhere.

To end this nightmare, around noon we hear a chopper beating the air coming toward us. When it made its flare, I could see a familiar face, Tom Shirley at the controls, and all by himself. It seemed that he asked a few questions, put two and two together, took all the little things that was slipping through the cracks, and started making corrections. We got the "tankers" to slip the eye of the recovery sling into the eye of our cargo hook, and flew back to Cu Chi base camp. What a beautiful sight. Delta Troop got their downed aircraft back, I got back, and no one ever knew the difference..... All blunders were covered, which was something that seldom happened, and everything was intact except for the hair on my neck, which stood for years. After I was separated from the army, I looked up Tom Shirley and stay in some type of contact to this day. We are forever friends. One thing for sure, I learned a lesson! Today, whatever I do, I like to size up the situation, and let all know who are involved, what I am going to do. I don't like the idea of being left alone.

This is a true story, no names have been changed, and I am sorry for the lack of memory on some of the others in this incident. Regardless, I am very proud of the unit I served with, and its people.

The Way It Was

NAME: Ron Bissell
UNIT: 1/8th Field Artillery
TIME PERIOD: 1966-1967
SOURCE: Emails from Mr. Bissell
DATE RECEIVED: July 2004

I joined the 1/8 FA on 13 July 1966. I was a Captain and was assigned as Communications Officer. This lasted for about a week. The CO (LTC James Cannon) then fired the S-4 and I was placed in that job. I was there for about four months and was then assigned as LNO to the 2/27 Infantry. I was in this position until rotating on 13 July 1967.

This picture is of round Number 100,000 fired by the 1/8 FA. The gentleman holding it is Captain Mullen, Assistant S-3. I can't recall his first name. Naturally, we knew him as "Moon."

The Way It Was

This is of a crew from B Battery setting up the howitzer to fire round 100,000. Unfortunately, I had to go to the boonies, so I missed the actual ceremony. Don't know the exact date of this event, but I'm guessing it would have been in September of 1966.

My "baptism of fire" occurred on or about 17 July 1966, only a few days after I had arrived. Charlie dumped something like 250 rounds of mortar and recoilless rifle fire into Cu Chi. My understanding is that this was the first large scale attack on the camp. Anyway, as the new guy I was accused of being the Magnet Ass that drew the fire. I always retorted that Charlie knew he was in trouble after I showed up. I don't think the attack did much damage, but a Division mail clerk was killed and several people were injured. Each of the GP medium tents used for quarters had a small sandbag bunker at each end. I was told that each of these was covered with timber and sandbags, but that a few weeks before, a Division trooper had been killed when one of the roofs collapsed. So a Division directive came down ordering the removal of all such roofs. The day after the attack, I saw everyone from Colonels on down out working, putting the overhead covers back on. An OCS classmate of mine was in another battalion during the attack. I saw him a few days later and he told me he had been in the TOC when the attack started. A recoilless rifle round hit the hardpan outside the TOC, bounced, turned sideways, went through a ventilator shaft, hit the beam above my buddy's head, fell to the table he was working on and rolled off onto the floor. He said, "I was out the door before that thing hit the floor, but I was no sooner outside than a mortar round landed nearby, so I went back in, but when I saw that round on the floor I went back out again. Ya know, I spent the whole rest of the attack running in and out of that TOC!"

This picture is of a 105mm howitzer from Battery B, 1st Battalion, 8th Field Artillery firing from within the Chu Chi base camp. The positions were carefully prepared to allow crew protection when firing in response to a Viet Cong attack. The position was constructed to allow the howitzer to fire in any direction, even though this required some rather strenuous man-handling by the crew. The picture was taken sometime in the latter part of 1966.

The Way It Was

This is a picture of a memorial service at the 1st Battalion, 8th Field Artillery in Cu Chi. It occurred during the fall of 1966.

During this time period there were 10 men in the liaison team supporting each of the infantry battalions. The 1/8th FA provided direct support to the 2nd Brigade, which was composed of the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 27th Infantry and the 1st Battalion, 5th Mechanized Infantry. Each liaison team consisted of a Liaison Officer (Captain), a Recon Sergeant and two Specialists at battalion and a Forward Observer (Lieutenant) and a Recon Sergeant at each of the three rifle companies. The 1/27th had been detached from the brigade and was working with the 1st Infantry Division north of the Saigon River in an area known as the Iron Triangle. The 1/27th became heavily engaged and the 2/27th was called on to reinforce. Unfortunately, the headquarters element of the 2/27 was inserted onto the wrong LZ and was effectively eliminated. The three rifle companies had already been inserted and were without effective command and control. The result was the near elimination of C Company, 2/27th. Six of the 10 artillerymen with the 2/27th were killed and two others seriously wounded. The memorial service was in honor of these men.

I replaced the Liaison Officer at the 2/27th Infantry. In fact, I paused to take this picture just as I was leaving to join them. For several weeks the 2/27th Infantry occupied a static blocking position on the Saigon River in the Michelin Plantation northeast of the Cu Chi base camp. During this time Headquarters and C Company were reconstituted.

During the remainder of my stay with the 25th I attempted to learn something about the battle. I managed to visit most of the involved battalion-sized units to read their S-3 journals, but it was of little help. Mostly, they sounded as if they were describing different wars, not just different portions of the same battle. I got about the same result in talking with the few people who were still around who were actually there. Such is the "fog of war."

S.L.A. Marshall in one of his books has a description of the battle, which he terms "The Battle of the Ghost Town Trail." His description doesn't make a lot of sense to me, and I never heard that name from anyone who was there.

The Way It Was

NAME: Greg Bucy
UNIT: B Co. 25th Avn Bn, the Diamondheads
TIME PERIOD: 1968
SOURCE: From the 25th Aviation Association website
DATE RECEIVED: 10 November 2004

"Where did the fire come from", asked the Lieutenant Colonel commanding the armor column as we straggled out of the four-foot tall elephant grass and approached a tank. I opened my mouth to tell him from the base of the mountain but couldn't say a word - I realized I had cottonmouth so bad I couldn't speak. "Where did the fire come from", he asked again. Once again I tried to mouth the words, but no sound would come. At that moment any further conversation was drowned out by the approach of the Cobra less than ten feet over our heads. Although expended, my wingman, Dave Watson, was making another low level pass over us just as he had when we began running from our burning helicopter. In an effort to answer the colonel's question, I turned and looked back toward the "Black Virgin", Nui Ba Den, pointed at her, and whispered, "from the base". As I turned, I saw my crew huddled together, Ed Schenk, my pilot clearly exhausted but still running on adrenaline, with our wounded crew chief Del Herne on his back, and our gunner Floyd Jackson who had carried Herne most of the way, now supporting our wounded passenger, a grunt, his arm still in the sling it was in when we had picked him up. Their faces wore the mask of those who meet death face to face, the frenzied long and knowing look of wide eyes in emotionless pain. The colonel seemed satisfied with the answer and motioned for us to follow him.

Behind the column of tanks and APC's I could see a Little Bear landing, a resupply ship no doubt, since these troops had been in heavy contact all day. As we approached the ship I could see the crew hurriedly tossing things to those on the ground, but as soon as we got there they stopped, helped the five of us aboard and took off for Tay Ninh. As we climbed aboard, they still had ice bags on the deck, and as the effects of our adrenaline wore off I could tell Herne who had been shot in the hip was in obvious pain from his as yet untreated wound. So he sat on the ice as we flew to the field hospital in Tay Ninh.

The day had begun like so many others in Cu Chi; first, the crews assembled, discussed any planned missions, then while one pilot did the pre-flight the other read the log and discussed the ship's condition with the crew chief. The pilots would then man the ‘scramble shack’ on the flight line while the crew performed any last minute maintenance. When finished the crew would join the pilots (it was common for the crew to spend an extraordinary amount of time on their ships). As members of B Co. 25th Avn Bn, the Diamondheads, it was our primary job (although we had many missions) to provide attack support for elements of the 25th Infantry Division when they were “in contact” with the enemy. Toward this end we maintained two Light Fire Teams (two armed helicopters which fought as a unit) on alert status 24/7. These teams would be dispatched on a moments notice to provide rocket, minigun, and M60 machine gun fire, in support of the ground troops engaged with the enemy. Simply put, our job was to provide immediate overwhelming fire power at the precise location on the battle field which would inflict maximum damage on the enemy and force the withdrawal of any who might survive our onslaught. Our teams consisted of various helicopters, usually either two Cobras, or two `Charlie' Model gun ships, each armed with rockets and/or miniguns or some combination of the two. The Cobras were faster, more maneuverable, and more heavily armed, but the ‘Charlies’ had four extra eyes and two M60 machine guns, which in the hands of experienced crew compensated for the ‘apparent’ weapon load advantage of the Cobra. So we occasionally flew as a ‘Charlie’ and Cobra team, with the lead being the ‘Charlie’. Such was the case this day the 8th of January 1970. Heavy fighting often required both fire teams, this call was usually made by the ground commander. If in his judgment the situation on the ground required constant intervening fire -i.e. the enemy would not disengage - he would call for both. So while one team was rearming another would be supporting the troops. Again, this was the case this day. The primary team lead by George Conger (a Cobra team) was scrambled, followed shortly by my team (the Diamondhead 50 team). When the phone rang in the ‘scramble shack’ the crew ran to the ships - with the exception of Ed, pilot of the lead ship, who got the phone and took the mission particulars. When he came running out with our destination and radio contact we took off on our second mission of the day.

We were to return where we had been earlier that day, the northern slopes of Nui Ba Den and Nui Cau, mountains with a saddle between them, which rose very steeply from the surrounding flat land. All of us were familiar with this area; I had been in Vietnam nearly eighteen months, and had seen battle after battle fought in this area. It's proximity to the Cambodian border allowed the enemy to get large numbers of troops into this area. We controlled the bottom and top, and the enemy had the area between, an area honeycombed with caves and fortified fighting positions. The mountain top positions had to be resupplied by air, because no one could make it

up the slopes, and the enemy on the slopes could not take the top though there were times when they tried in great numbers and with great ferocity. As we arrived on station I was briefed by George and then by the ground commander.

A ground unit of the 3/22 Inf., was conducting a ground sweep of the earlier area of contact and had made it to an area about 200 meters from the base of the slope, where they had become pinned down by heavy fire. As they had attempted to withdraw, the enemy positioned some of their forces to their rear (between the grunts and the armor column about 1000 meters behind them that was supporting them); other infantry elements moving in to support them had in fact become engaged. When we arrived they were in effect surrounded, at very close range, and taking heavy fire from the slopes. The armor could no longer support them with fire to their rear since it would have involved shooting toward those trapped. We began placing suppressive fire between the element trapped and the armor column, to allow them a way out. On our first pass, we took very heavy machine gun fire from the slope (we were flying parallel to it) as we broke. As we lined up for our next pass, we could see the muzzle flashes of machine guns on the slope as they fired (at us I suppose). Since we were firing very close to friendly troops I was flying at about 500 feet. The machine guns appeared to be up slope at about 200 feet elevation. After several passes on the machine guns, they were silenced, and I believe disabled because I was shooting at muzzle flashes I could see through my cross hairs, and by that time I'd gotten to be a pretty good shot. The ground fire had gotten less intense and we turned to other targets.

The ground element called numerous times for critical Dust Off. Dust Off made several attempts to get in to them, but was turned away by ground fire. Dust Off would get to within 100 meters of them at an altitude of 50 feet or less and then have to turn back. The friendlies were so close and virtually invisible in the elephant grass that there was little we could do to suppress for Dust Off. When Dust Off left, we expended our heavy ordinance in the area to the rear (North) of the friendlies and on the slope.

As I advised the ground commander we were expended except for door gun in the Charlie (Dave's Cobra was totally expended) and nearly out of fuel, the ground element once again requested critical Dust Off. I advised the ground element that we would make an attempt to pick up his wounded, to have them and smoke ready, and that I would approach from his Northeast (Dust Off had approached from the Northwest). I then briefed the crew and started the approach. As we approached I told ground to pop smoke, both gunners were firing at the slope some 300 to 400 meters to our front, as we neared touch down both gunners stopped firing and I turned our tail toward the mountain and landed. As I looked over my left shoulder the wounded got up out of the grass, one walking with his arm in a sling and one stretcher borne, carried by four others, no more than 30 feet away. Both gunners resumed firing to our rear, and within seconds the walking wounded climbed aboard; then, almost simultaneously, Del Herne, crouched over his M60, jumped up and started to slap at his hip, the guys with the stretcher now less than 10 feet away dropped back into the grass. As Jackson (behind me on the right side of the ship) continued firing at the slope behind us, Herne made his way up to the console between Ed and myself, still slapping his hip where he had obviously been hit.

I turned to the front and initiated takeoff in an extremely nose low attitude. The ‘Charlie’ had plenty of power since it was empty. As I started to pull the nose up to a more normal attitude, I heard my wingman say, “You're on fire, 50, you're on fire.” At that point, and believe it or not, as my life flashed before my eyes, my “Army Training” as an aviator took over, because without thinking I lowered the collective, and flared the ship. The ship hit the ground, I have no idea how hard, and slid along until it nosed over into a bomb crater. I remember almost standing on the tail rotor pedals and pulling back on the cyclic. Apparently we had sufficient rotor speed to back out of the crater, because the ship came to rest almost level.

Stunned, I tried to move and couldn't, and after briefly thinking myself paralyzed, I realized my shoulder harness had locked. So I undid my seatbelt and harness then reached up with my left hand and turned off the switches (haven't a clue why, Army Training I guess); I looked around the ship and was amazed that no one was on board. It was then I noticed the battery compartment to my front was burning. I threw my ‘Chicken Board’ (body armor) which was setting on my lap, secured by the shoulder harness, to the side, and tried to slide the armor plate beside my right arm back to get out - it wouldn't budge. I climbed over the radio console, headed for Ed's door, which I noticed, was open. Just as I was about to dive out, I saw Ed lying on the ground, and about at the same time, realized we were still taking fire. I could hear bullets hitting the ship, hitting in the grass, and in general ‘popping’ as they went by.

Ed, who was facing me, raised his head, and said, “I came back to tell you not to get out on this side there are briars everywhere.” To this day I can't help but chuckle when I think about that. Bullets or briars, for me it was an easy decision; I'll take briars every time. So I dove out, briars an all. Ed and I crawled a few meters (he was right about the briars, we both got cut up) from the ship, which seemed to be taking the worst of it although it was nearly consumed in fire. I asked, “Where's the crew?” After saying he didn't know we both began to call out. Seconds later, our gunner Jackson jumped up and shouted, “We're over here.” (On the other side of the bomb crater) Immediately they started to draw fire, and I could tell Jackson had them moving, and in the right direction, north, because I could see the grass moving although I couldn't see them. I called out for them to join us at the north end of the crater, the way they were headed. When we joined up with the crew and our passenger, we took stock of our situation.

We were still taking fire, although it was sporadic unless someone stood up, we had one gun, Ed's .38 with 5 rounds, either Jackson or our passenger may have had an M16 but no ammo, and we had two wounded, one who could walk and one who couldn't. Although Herne tried valiantly, he was shot in the hip and it was just not possible for him to get far. We weren't sure how far we'd flown, but it couldn't have been very far (100 to 200 meters at best). We knew there were enemy troops in the area, probably small groups, but we had not taken any fire from beneath us as we made our approach, and if we egressed via the same route maybe we'd get lucky. Just after we set off, Dave flew over us, not ten feet above our heads, moving at a high rate of speed and justifiably so, because he was being shot at from what appeared several directions, but mainly from our rear. While he was in the area it became apparent we needn't worry about them shooting at us, they were going to shoot at him.

As we left, I knew the armor column was in front of us, deployed in line, so I didn't have to navigate precisely. At times we could see a few feet at best, but the mountain behind us loomed large and the occasional tree made for good bearings, with luck we could make it out. Hopefully, Dave would let them know we were coming out. The grass was tall enough that at times you could almost stand erect, and even though we continued to take fire for sometime, Dave got the brunt of it. Jackson and Ed took turns carrying Herne piggyback, though Jackson, a big guy, carried most of the load. We moved very quickly. Amazingly Jackson kept up carrying Herne. When he could hardly stand, Ed took Herne. Though it was only around 800 meters to the armor column, which as walks go is not that far, at times that day the column seemed a lifetime away.

The Way It Was

NAME: Mike Dufour
UNIT:
TIME PERIOD: January 1967
SOURCE: from 25th Avn. Association website
DATE RECEIVED: 10 November 2004

Pleiku,RVN January 1967

One of my greatest fears during my service in Vietnam was being asleep and having a VC sapper slip in silently and cut my throat. It had happened on many occasions to others and the thought of it happening to me resulted in many a sleepless night. In January 1967 the company was sent to the coast to support elements of the Fourth Division. After two weeks in the field, my aircraft needed repairs that could only be performed by battalion maintenance, so I returned to Camp Holloway at Pleiku with my crew.

The work was going well, but it would still require remaining at Holloway for two nights before we could return to our assignment on the coast. The evening of the first night, I was not too happy about being virtually alone in the company area. It is one thing to face your fears in the company of many brave men. It is something else altogether to have to face them alone; or worse, alone and at night. Trying not to think about it, I ate C rations for dinner and busied myself writing letters home. Finally, with nothing else to do and fatigue from long days and sleepless nights demanding attention, I laid down on my cot fully clothed.

I lay only inches from the large screen windows that bordered two sides of my cot. Trying to lie perfectly still in the blackness, I listened to the sounds of the night, waiting for sleep to find me. Somewhere nearby, a wind chime would sporadically send its lonely call, as if to say, “I'm still here.” Alone in the hooch, I knew that any sounds I heard had to come from the outside. Staring into the dark, I strained to hear the faintest noise, wishing desperately that I could silence the noise of my own heart beating.

I'm not sure exactly when I became aware of the breathing sounds on the other side of the screen. Maybe it was that subtle sound that had pulled back the gauze of sleep and caused me to slowly and carefully open my eyes. Without knowing it, I had synchronized by own breathing to match the almost inaudible sound seeping through the window. Terrified, I tried to think of something that would tell me what to do. I remembered the training we had been given in basic; to see in the dark, don't look directly at the object, look to the side of it. Scanning slowly left and right, I could faintly make out the shape of a man's head and shoulders that was imperceptibly darker than the surrounding night. Or was it my imagination? If I could just stop the sound of my heart pounding in my ears, maybe I could clearly hear the breathing outside! Panic was slowly forming in my gut and reaching out to envelop me. Was someone really there? Could I really see the outline of the enemy in the blackness? Maybe it was just a trick of light and the only thing close to me was the fear that wrapped around my heart. I lay absolutely immobile, too frightened to reach for the gun under my pillow and not knowing what else to do. It was then that the humid breeze shifted slightly and drifted in through the window. It was that same breeze that had first caused me to place my cot here, seeking relief from the fetid heat. Now, it carried to me the unmistakable odor of the fermented fish oil sauce called nuoc maum eaten by almost all

Vietnamese. It wasn't my imagination; there was someone waiting silently just inches from me on the other side of the screen.

If I moved suddenly, would the silent intruder abandon the knife he surely carried and open fire? As close as my own shadow, he couldn't miss no matter how fast I tried to move. Maybe I could slowly slide my hand under my pillow and find the comfort of the cold steel of my Colt .45. Maybe I could shoot him first, before he could fire. Even if I rolled to the floor, I couldn't escape his line of fire. Without warning, a flash of light and the sound of a loud explosion suddenly washed over the hooch. The soldier hidden in the darkness was as startled as I and I could clearly see his outline as he involuntarily ducked.

In one seamless movement, I grabbed the gun from under my pillow and rolled to the floor. Without stopping, I crawled as rapidly as I could to the far end of the hooch where I stopped in an enclosed alcove, waiting to see if the enemy followed. Seconds later, I heard a series of explosions coming from somewhere on the other side of camp and I could now hear people shouting and running through the company area outside my hooch. I ran to the doorway in the front of the hooch and as I stepped outside, there was a faint glow coming from the east end of the camp. In its flickering light I could see people running. I quickly realized that everyone in sight except me was wearing “black pajamas.”

I didn't know where to go or what to do, but I didn't want to stay in my hooch alone surrounded by enemy soldiers. I remembered that the shower building had been built by the French and was the only concrete structure at Camp Holloway. I grabbed my M-16 and a bunch of extra clips and ran the short distance to the shower. I must have had an angel with me because as I ran in the door, the muzzle of an M-60 machine gun was jammed in my chest. I screamed “American” and was waved inside. Fortunately, the guy guarding the door wasn't applying “shoot first, ask questions later” or it would have been a short night for me. Standing there in the darkness, we could hear the explosions of mortar rounds falling and satchel charges detonating in the logistical command dump. There must have been at least 40 people in the shower, shuffling around in the dark and talking in excited, muted whispers. Suddenly, it occurred to me that to the enemy, the name for the only concrete building on post must be “target.” The roof was tin, and if a mortar round hit it, the round would penetrate it and explode inside. The concrete walls would then serve to concentrate the blast and cause the shrapnel to ricochet around the room.

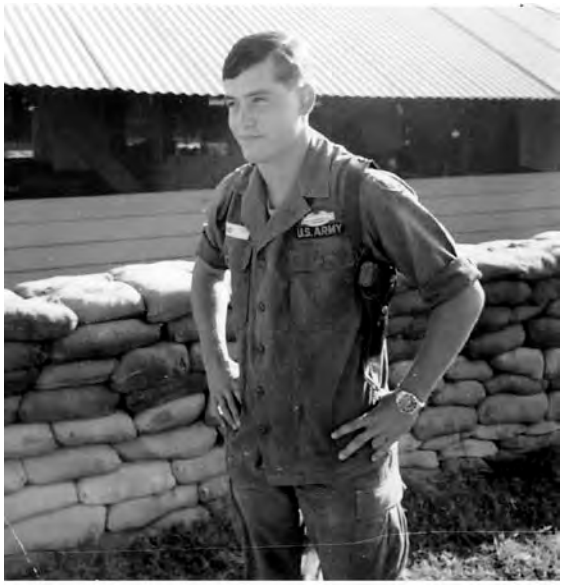
I decided that I needed to be somewhere else, immediately if not sooner. I made my way to the door, checked for enemy outside and started running in a low crouch towards the command bunker near the runway. As I approached the bunker, it was easy to see that I had not been the only one with the idea of going to the bunker, as its entranced was jammed with people trying to get inside. Realizing that I would have to find somewhere else to go I frantically tried to think of options. Then it hit me. What was I trying to do? I wanted to be where the enemy wasn't. The enemy were all coming on to the post, so I would go in the opposite direction! Without missing a step, I swerved around the command bunker and ran across the runway on an angle, heading for the bunkers at the far end of the strip next to the perimeter. A few yards short of the perimeter bunkers, I saw a foxhole with a SP4 laying in it. I jumped in and with a big smile said,

“Mind if I join you?” Just as happy as I now was not to be in the middle of the attack, he laughingly replied, “Yes sir, I could use the company!”

For several minutes, we lay there watching the explosions and the brilliant red tracers crazily crisscrossing the sky. From somewhere near the tower, a figure suddenly appeared, wearing only his BVD's and an Australian bush hat. He was carrying an M-60 machine gun and trailing link ammo far out behind him as he ran to the center of the runway. Just as he reached the center, he was totally surrounded by black pajama clad soldiers. We couldn't see him through the enemy troops, but we knew he was going to go down fighting because we could hear the constant rat-tat-tat of his M-60. As we watched in stunned admiration, the VC all started falling down, as if swiped by an unseen giant hand. Soon the only person standing was the Aussie spinning in circles, firing his M-60 until he had expended all his ammunition. He then tossed the machine gun down, ran over to our foxhole and jumped in. Turning to us with a large lopsided grin, he asked, “Got a gun mate?” Too amazed to utter a word, I handed him my M-16. He said, “Thanks mate,” jumped out of the foxhole and went running down the centerline of the runway. I never saw him again, but I have never forgotten the respect I gained for the Australians that dark night.

The Way It Was

NAME: Eric Lincoln Fagnano
UNIT: 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry
TIME PERIOD: June 1966- June 1967
SOURCE: Letters from Mr. Fagnano
DATE RECEIVED: 2004



I, Eric Lincoln Fagnano, RA12741009, served in South Vietnam, June 1966- June 1967, with the 25th Infantry based at Cu Chi. My unit was the 2nd Battalion 14th Infantry (Golden Dragons) I was in "Cannibal Charlie" "C" Company.

My job was "pointman." I carried two M-16 Rifles. I carried a lot of ammo clips in claymore bags. My captain was CPT Grant (West Point), my platoon sergeant was SGT Woody. He had fought the Japanese in World War II and the North Koreans in the Korean War while in the 25th Infantry Division.

I was in the Iron Triangle, the GoBo Woods, Tay Ninh Province, Dau Tieng, Rach Kien, Mekong Delta, etc. See "Life" Magazine January 1967, "The Delta" pictures of Rach Kien. On Page 25 that's a picture of "C" Company, 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry carrying out our dead. It was SP4 Garry Ruhluff. He was on night patrol and was shot dead crossing a bridge at Rach Kien. On page 26 is a photo of PFC Rickasis who was later shot on each side of the spine in a firefight. On page 27 PVT Luger, Detroit, Michigan, also walked "point" with me, saved my life one day. My M-16 jammed and he shot two V.C. in front of me. The Photographs were taken by Larry Burrows "Time Life." He was killed in a Vietnam helicopter crash.

I served 365 days in Co. C in-country. I was wounded twice in action, gunshot and booby trap-trip wire on two occasions. I was patched up and returned to the field by my request. I was concerned about my unit without my skills as a "pointman."

To this day, April 11, 2004, Easter Sunday, I can say I was in a top notch combat unit, Co. "C" 2nd battalion, 14th Infantry, 25th Infantry, US Army.

The Way It Was

NAME: Bill Fitch
UNIT: 4/9th Inf.
TIME PERIOD: 1967-68
SOURCE: 25th Aviation Association Website
DATE RECEIVED: 4 November 2004

Battle Of Bo Tuc (FSB Beauregard)

BO TUC (LAKE OF FIRE)
Since the establishment of the large forward base at Katum with an airstrip, the NVA had to take wide detours around it coming in from their bases in Cambodia. The old French stronghold of Bo Tuc stood in the middle of a major detour route that would avoid the large Katum base camp. Bo Tuc is where the 4/9 Manchus were to set up yet another road block for NVA troops crossing over from Cambodia.

On December 18, 1967 I was on one of the last lifts for Alpha Company from Katum to set a fire base at Bo Tuc. The rest of Alpha Co. was already beginning to dig in when I got off the chopper. Bravo, Charlie, Delta Company, and a battery of 105 artillery were also arriving. It was a "small perimeter' for a battalion of Infantry and 105's to occupy. There was a lot cursing and frustration of where to find room to set up defensive positions. This planning was going on in between sniper fire and sporadic incoming 82 mm mortar fire.

Because we thought a ground attack would come at any time, we had to dig in hurriedly and were not able to make as strong a bunker as we would have liked. Since they ran out of room on the outer perimeter, they moved about 6 or 8 of us (Alpha Co.) to dig 2 man fighting positions behind one part of the perimeter as sort of a mini second line if that part of the perimeter was

breached. My buddy and I were digging our foxhole when the position next to us yelled, "Hey, Man look what I dug up!" He was holding up an old French helmet with a bullet hole right through the front of it. We did not consider this a good sign and I began to get a very bad feeling about this place. There were many abandoned wells all over the place and you had to watch every place you put your foot down because you could have easily fallen in one. When Charlie Company came in they had to set up around the artillery because the outer perimeter was completed and there with no room left for any more positions. I remember thinking I was glad I was not in Charlie Company because being next to 105's during a fire mission can be a "deafening experience!"

At about 3:00 AM on December 19 all hell broke loose and the mortar rounds came pouring in and we all hunkered down in our hastily dug positions to wait it out and hope one didn't drop into our hole. We only had time to put two layers of sandbags supported by some flimsy sticks we had found; so a direct hit would have caved our position in or worse. There was a brief lull in the incoming mortar fire and then the outer perimeter positions began to fire. I could not see past the front positions but from the heavy fire, I knew this was a major ground attack.

I thought we were holding on pretty good until I saw the ammo dump explode in a huge fireball and watched in horror as the business end of a 105mm shell came spinning down and landed 20 feet from my foxhole. The 105 round was glowing with orange and red colors; it was smoking and would pop and crackle every few seconds. My buddy and I started to abandon our bunker to get away from the 105 shell that we thought would explode any second. But then the ammo dump had a second explosion and it was then that I saw NVA running toward us from where Alpha Co. positions were supposed to be.....we were being over run! After a quick 2 second discussion, my buddy and I decided not to make a run for it because our own guys would mistake us for NVA and kill us in the dark. We decided to take our chances with the hot 105 shell and pray it didn't explode. We thought if the 105 shell didn't get us the NVA would but we were going to fight it out from our foxhole. There was a small dirt road type path directly in front of our position and the NVA would come running down it and the suddenly veer off about 40 to 50 yards from us and head toward the artillery positions. I was not disappointed that they did not continue charging down that path until they were on top of our position! My buddy squeezed in beside me and we were both now facing the inside of the perimeter since there seemed to be more NVA inside than outside the perimeter. All night long my buddy and I would relay information back and forth about what was each of us was seeing outside and inside the perimeter. My heart was pounding so hard I could hear it in my ears! We took some single shots every time the ammo dump flared up and we could see NVA moving. We didn't want to fire on full automatic because it would increase the chances of hitting our own people. The NVA appeared and disappeared so quickly, it was like shooting at a flickering shadow; there was not even time for a 3 round burst. The NVA would always duck down every time the ammo dump flared up and it was hard to get a clean shot. We never could tell if we hit one or he just dove for cover. There were explosions all night long and in every location; Bo Tuc was literally ablaze every where you looked! It was like being in the middle of Hell's Lake Of Fire. The ammo dump was exploding every 15 minutes, hand grenades exploded and rifle fire were all inside the perimeter, 155 mm and 8 inch heavy artillery from other fire bases lit up the surrounding woods of Bo Tuc, our own 105 artillery was firing round after round of bee hive shells point blank into

the NVA, jets screamed in from Phan Rang and dropped bombs just outside the perimeter that sounded like rolling thunder, gun ships roared in with mini guns blazing away with rounds hitting only yards from the outer perimeter, and a small spotter plane (Bird Dog) flown by Lt. Col. Bo Harrison circled at 200 feet dropping hand grenades out the planes window into the fire storm below. In the middle of all this, by the Grace of God, the hot 105 shell finally cooled off, didn't explode, but kept us praying because it kept smoking until the sun finally came up. One F-100 was making strafing runs at what appeared to the tree top level. This particular F-100, flown by Capt. Arthur Chase, would come in repeatedly with green tracers streaking up to meet him on each run. There was a tremendous explosion during one of these runs (from a bomb or the ammo dump) and I didn't even have time to duck down before a piece of shrapnel the size of my hand came buzzing through the air and impacted into the sand bag that was 6 inches above my head; it then melted a large hole in the green poncho that I had draped over the sand bags for some camouflage. The F-100 pilot was the bravest pilot I saw during my tour in Viet Nam. He came in low, at night, and his jet was outlined in the sky by the blazing ammo dump making him an exposed target for the NVA. Yet again and again he would come in, strafe, and roll over and come around again and again. I am certain Capt. Chase's strafing helped keep the NVA at bay outside the perimeter and prevented them from reinforcing the NVA that had already made it inside Bo Tuc. His courage and low passes helped us hold out until daylight. (See citation below)

The next morning there were between 30 to 50 NVA dead inside Bo Tuc and there were dead NVA outside the perimeter also but I don't remember that count; there would be 4 dead in front of one position, 8 dead scattered in another area and so on. We did a sweep outside the perimeter and saw blood trails too numerous to count going off in all directions. This had to be a Regiment size NVA outfit and we apparently had inflicted heavy losses on them. Our losses were 10 killed, 35 wounded. This appeared to be a top notch NVA unit that had no fear of going up against us hard head on.

It was a well planned attack; they breached the perimeter and got to the artillery which had to start firing "bee hive" rounds to defend themselves. The fact that Charlie Company had set up around the artillery seemed to blunt the attack because the NVA thought once they were inside the perimeter, they would be able to outflank all of our positions. But as luck would have it, they made a big mistake going straight for the artillery and ran head on into a second line of bunkers inside the perimeter with Charlie Company dug in around the 105 gun positions. This is where the attack was finally stopped. After the Battle of Bo Tuc, the Manchus were sent to Suoi Cut to relieve the 2/22 Infantry that had been chewed up badly in an early January 1, 1968 attack on their base. We did not know it at the time but the Manchus were one of the first American combat units to be engaged in what would be known in a few weeks as the infamous 1968 TET OFFENSIVE.

The Way It Was

NAME: Jim Gross
UNIT: 3rd Squad, 4th Cavalry, Sgt.
TIME PERIOD: January 31, 1968
SOURCE: Letter sent to the museum concerning a 51 Caliber Chi-Com Machine Gun in the collection
DATE RECEIVED: March 1996

On the morning of January 31, 1968, Bravo Troop 3 Squadron, 4th Cavalry was pulling perimeter duty north of a town called Trang Bang. Our job was to check for mines and ambushes. A call from Tropic Lightning came over the radio that Ton Son Nhut Air Force Base was under heavy attack. Our sister troop Charlie had already arrived on the scene and taken many casualties. We were ordered to proceed immediately and reinforce. Fortunately, the enemy didn't blow the bridges, ambush us or mine the roads. When we did arrive at approximately 0800 hours, fierce fighting was taking place. I noticed American bodies lined up and down the rice paddy dikes, with numerous enemy soldiers lying about. The battle lasted all that day, but we eventually beat them back by nightfall.

The next morning, American Intelligence reported that the 271st V.C. Regiment was held up at a place called Hoc Mon and was using the area for staging attacks. With Ton Son Nhut now secured, we proceeded there. Upon arrival, we quickly took sniper fire, but soon eliminated it. We then advanced to the first wood line, not knowing the enemy was very well entrenched beyond it. It would take us, the 27th Infantry and 15 Air Strikes to get them out of there.

A squad of the 27th was assigned to my two Personnel Carriers. On the third day their Sergeant was killed. Since I was the ranking NCO, I was put in charge of his men. On the fifth and final day of the battle, a plan was devised. A diversionary force would proceed as usual from the south, but this time the main unit would circle and attack from the north. This worked well, and caught them totally by surprise. They left their main line of defense and sought refuge in their bunkers and tunnels. As we got closer, my Personnel Carrier came upon an abandoned bunker with a large 51 caliber machine gun sitting on a tripod. It was in very good condition and could very well be used again, so we couldn't just leave it. I ordered two of my men and two Wolfhounds (27th) to retrieve it, which they did.

As we moved closer, hand to hand fighting pursued. I almost lost my own life when an enemy soldier put a 9 millimeter pistol on me. A gunner on a tank got him before he could pull the trigger. At this point, two Americans were dead in my Personnel Carrier and another on top with a sunken chest wound. I had to get to an open rice paddy so he could be taken to the 24rh evacuation hospital at Cu Chi. A Medi-Vac chopper was waiting for me. The pilot informed me

that he couldn't take the dead for lack of room, but would come back for them later. When I got back to the battle, it was getting dark, so we moved out and set up a perimeter. An officer and three soldiers approached my carrier, and confiscated the captured machine gun. I didn't like this since so much went into getting it. The next morning, we went back to the scene of the battle. No trace of the enemy could be found. They had pulled out during the night, thus ending the battle of Hoc Mon.

About a week later, we went into Cu Chi (base camp) for rest. I decided to visit a museum to see the assortment of captured enemy weapons on display. To my surprise, there sat the enemy machine gun. A great feeling of pride came over me since I was the one who gave the order to retrieve it. Upon leaving the museum that day, I felt we had at least accomplished something at Hoc Mon. Twenty-eight years later, a newly arrived soldier form Hawaii, told me a museum called Tropic Lighting was at Schofield Barracks with enemy weapons from the Vietnam War on display. It only stood to reason, since my machine gun was on display at Cu Chi, the 25th would take it with them to Hawaii after the war. After reviewing everything, TLM 639 is the 51 caliber machine gun that me, my men and the 27th Infantry captured that day, so long ago in a place called Hoc Mon bridge in Vietnam.

The Way It Was

NAME: Dave Henard, 1LT
UNIT: 25th Aviation Battalion
TIME PERIOD: 1968
SOURCE: From the 25th Aviation Association web site
DATE RECEIVED: 10 November 2004

We were all aware that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers did not like helicopter gunship pilots. In fact, several horror stories were told about the things done to captured gunship pilots and crew - the treatment given definitely did not fit within the terms of the Geneva Convention. We were all convinced at the time that we did not want to be captured. Therefore, we were going to use those 45's for close combat even if none of us could hit anything with them. The joke was that they were more accurate if you threw them at the enemy at very close range.

I just learned during a television documentary about the helicopter war that the NVA had a bounty of $25,000 in gold on the heads of all helicopter gunship pilots. This makes the following story a little more believable.

It was mortar season and Cu Chi was getting hit on a regular basis. I took pictures of our blown up mess hall three times in early 1968. You'd think that they had something against eating, or something. This particular period was sometime during the month of January 1968.

Short hair was a blessing in Vietnam, so beyond military discipline, we got our hair trimmed regularly. The barbers were Vietnamese unless you were lucky enough to have a soldier friend who trimmed hair. I still remember feeling uneasy about the lack of rapport that I had with this particular Vietnamese barber. You might say that we didn't “hit it off.” It wasn't what I said either, since I don't speak much Vietnamese. He must have been in a particularly bad mood that day because he cut me badly when he trimmed around my ear with a razor that day. It was a bad enough cut that I had blood running down my neck. Now a bad haircut is one thing, but this was going too far. I decided to change barbers after this.

Several days later, we had a particularly bad mortar attack. It was long enough in fact, that the light gunship fire team that was on counter-mortar duty that night was able to get out there in time to see some flashes and to put some 2.75 inch folding fin aerial rocket ordinance into the area of flashes. A patrol (it is likely that it was a LRRP unit, but I'm not sure) was sent out before dawn to investigate the reported area within the Boi Loi woods near Cu Chi.

Dawn did not burst onto the scene that morning. In fact, we were socked in with fog. The patrol had come into contact with a Viet Cong unit of unknown size and gunship support was needed. The Diamondhead 10 fire team was on primary that morning, but we were grounded due to the fog. I volunteered to go up to see how thick the fog layer was and believed that I had flown traffic patterns enough that I could fly the pattern by memory while avoiding hangers and other tall buildings. It turned out that the fog was only a couple of hundred feet thick and would burn

off quickly. My blind descent put me very near the airstrip and I briefed Division headquarters on the radio and said that we would go see if we could help.

The Diamondhead wing ship followed me on the second takeoff. When we got on the battle scene, there was little to see but fog. However, I found a hole in it and spiraled down through it. I have to diverge here to give some credit to the bush pilot who gave me some of my fixed wing training at Vichy field near Rolla, Missouri. He taught me to spiral through fog in these emergency conditions. The same trick saved me one night when the entire area south of the central highlands became socked in while we were on a mission. We were into our fuel reserve and needed to get down. The ground controlled radar was broken at Tay Ninh and Saigon's Tan Son Nhut was too busy landing fixed wing planes to take us. A Little Bear slick had been in the air for fifteen minutes longer than us that night and was really nervous. When I got on the ground at the airfield at Bien Hoa, I pointed our landing light up through the hole to help the slick see the hole and get down through it. The aircraft commander of the slick gave out hugs that night.

Back to the battle scene: Once we got down there, we found that we had seventy feet or so of headroom below the fog. Thus, we were able to put some rockets and machine gun fire into the area surrounding the patrol once they popped smoke. The fog was burning off quickly at this point, so some slicks were able to fly out to pick up the patrol.

Guess who they found among the dead enemy soldiers. Yup, it was my favorite barber who was bad with a dull razor. He had maps of our Cu Chi base on his person and had marked our mess hall as well as the position of our gunships along the runway. It is apparent that this wasn't the only copy of the map that was ever made, since they hit our mess hall a couple of times later. However, there wouldn't be any more bad haircuts from this guy.

The Way It Was

NAME : Emil Heugatter, Sergeant-Major
UNIT: 25th Infantry Division Sniper Program
TIME PERIOD: 1969-1970, Vietnam
SOURCE: Letter to Museum
DATE RECEIVED: 18 May 2001

Statement of Service with 25th Infantry Division, Cu Chi, RVN
In July, 1969, as a member of the 9th Infantry Division Sniper School stationed at the division base camp at Dong Tam, RVN, we were told our division commander, MG Harrison Hollis, was going to assume command of the 25th Infantry Division at Cu Chi. The 9th Division was the first combat unit to leave Vietnam when the American pull out started in 1969. As the sniper school instructors had only 2 months with the division, we did not have enough time in-country to rotate. We came as a group from the Army Advanced Marksmanship Unit, Ft. Benning, Georgia. MG Hollis took selected men and the 9th Division Sniper School with him to Cu Chi. The sniper program in the 9th Division had been an unqualified success and the General thought it would also prove the same with the 25th Division. I was happy to go to a division with the history of the 25th Division. As a career soldier with over 15 years service, I had a number of friends who had served with the division in WWII and Korea. We arrived in Cu Chi in late July or early August. We had to build a sniper range upon arrival. We were given all the support possible from the division Engineer Battalion. We put the firing line on the bunker defensive line. Our gunsmith, SFC Loris Smith, came up with the idea of cutting armor plate from destroyed armored personnel carriers into silhouette targets. This proved to be an excellent plan. The targets were at staggered ranges out to 900 meters. The students had to qualify out to 900 meters with daylight firing and 300 meters night firing. The school started as soon as the range was completed. We, the instructors, would go to the field for 5 days with the new graduates. The program proved to be a huge success. After a month at Cu Chi, I was promoted to master sergeant and became the NCOIC (non-commissioned officer in charge) of the school. I remained on the sniper duty roster and continued going on sniper missions. I got some funny looks from the NCOs out in the field as an E8 going on 3 man night ambushes. In hind sight, I look at my service as a member of the Tropic Lightning Division as one of the most gratifying assignments of my 26 year career.

The Way It Was

NAME: Jim Horrell
UNIT: 25th Aviation Battalion
TIME PERIOD: 1969-1970
SOURCE: email he sent to Ron Leonard, 25th AVN. webmaster
DATE RECEIVED: December 5, 2005

We all have memories of certain events that have remained with us over the years; little snippets of time of major moments in our life. Most of the in-between stuff is long forgotten but you still remember the big events. These events sometimes involved good or poor flying techniques, either performed by other pilots or ourselves. We remember because it may have scared the hell out of us or because it was just awesome. I'm not sure why I relate this, other than the fact that I am still so proud of the pilots and crew members I flew with.

John Driscoll

Patrol Base Kotrc (see After Action Report 60) had been a source for enemy contact for sometime. According to The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund web site, Patrol Base Kotrc was named in honor of Major James Carl Kotrc, who died on 29 July 1969. It was "A tiny fort near the Cambodian border built in August 1969, with two purposes, to draw enemy attacks as a means of fixing and destroying enemy forces, and disrupt the enemy communications route passing through the area."

On September 5, 1969 there was a lot of action going on. The base had been under attack and in need of supplies. Late in the afternoon John Driscoll, from the Little Bears, got the call for an ammo run. "Hey, who wants to run low on ammo after it turns dark." John knew this and said so. So he had the ammo depot boys load his Huey to the gills with small arms ammo, mortars-the works. I mean you couldn't see the crew chief or gunner. And it was heavy. This might be their last ammo supply until the next day. Well, every time he tried to sneak into Kotrc to off-load, and the skids were about to touch down, the bad guys would mortar the place. It would take a few minutes to unload and you can't sit there, waiting to get hit. So he'd lumber out, dragging the skids in the mud, and the mortaring would stop. He was the target and the bad guys wanted his aircraft. Over your right shoulder you could see trees explode from incoming, look over your left shoulder and see our guys running around, mud flying up from the impacts of incoming and wonder how come they had not been hit. Get in, get out, and stay alive. Come back in and the same thing would happen. I know he made at least three attempts, maybe more before the crew was able to off-load the boxes of munitions. I know all this because I had the second best seat in the house; I was sitting next to him watching this incredible show. This guy was so cool I don't think anything jacked up John's heart rate. Had we been hit, September the 5th would have looked like the 4th of July. But John knew the troops needed this load badly, and did well. He also knew what the down side could be. Months earlier he had been shot through the legs and was evacuated to Japan to recover. Then, lucky for us, they shipped him back-to our unit.

Between the night of September the 4th, through my afternoon flight with John on the 5th, I flew 17 hours in a 27 hour period, 10 of those hours being night (I think Jim Collins was the aircraft commander for that portion). I still have my DA form 759-1 (individual flight record) to prove it. In the Bears we flew days one week, nights the next.

Not all pilots are created equal. Earlier I mention poor flying techniques along with the good. Part of a copilot's job is to absorb, retain and apply the good qualities we saw in an aircraft commander, while remembering and discarding poor techniques that we were exposed to and can get you into trouble. One dark night I had an aircraft commander doing a high overhead roach to a remote landing zone. We were so far over on our side, it was the only time I didn't know which way was up or down.

For those who do not fly, the high overhead approach is used to keep you in close to your landing zone. You fly over your spot, bank the aircraft on its side and circle down, flaring at the bottom. It is not a good idea to have the aircraft on its side on a dark night when you are more likely to be killed by the accident, than by the enemy. You will be heard but not seem. Still, you may get shot at. Fortunately there were enough good pilots to lead the way. That brings up:

John Mistretta

Over the long haul I probably learned more good qualities flying with John Mistretta than any other. Maybe it was because I flew with him as much as I did. His fine techniques served me well in my flying career. John had a smooth thought process and the control touch to go with it, in addition to being a good guy. Whether it was making an approach to a landing zone in the woods on a pitch-black night in stormy weather with really strong winds, and the only light source marking the landing spot was a strobe light inside a helmet or maybe even a flashlight - or low leveling in heavy rain, or spending hours on end doing re-supply, my time flying with John was some of the best.

An honorable mention should go to Diamond Head pilot **Mike Finnegan**. On August 12, 1969, I ended up with some ground troops, and from a groundhogs point of view, I watched Mike earn a Silver Star by repeatedly flying a Huey smoke ship between us and bad guys, laying down columns of dense smoke so that an assault helicopter company could land troops behind it and not get hosed down. He must have been flying over those guys. He was good, and lucky that day, but I think he took some hits. We were close enough that I thought I was going to get scalped that day. Shrapnel from 500-pound bombs, and napalm that was dropped from our F-100's and A-4's was screaming overhead and splashing in the water around us. I was sure I was going to get it in the forehead. I remember thinking; wow, I can feel the heat of the napalm the instant I can see the orange flames. A Lt. Colonel took a round from small arms standing about 10 feet from me. Those were the good old days.

The Way It Was

NAME: Tony Lazzarini
UNIT: "A" Co. 25th Avn.
TIME PERIOD: 1966-68
SOURCE: excerpt from his book: Highest Traditions: Memories of War
DATE RECEIVED: 13 July 2005 Mr. Lazzarini visited and donated this book

In 1965 I was stationed in Hawaii with the 25th Infantry Division. I was trained as a helicopter mechanic, and A Company, 25th Aviation Battalion had a small fleet of Ch-21 "Shawnees." They were usually referred to as "flying bananas" because of their shape. They had rotor blades fore and aft and were normally used for transporting supplies or troops. They were old, noisy, rattled, and powered by an eighteen-cylinder twin bank radial engine. We kept busy after every flight repairing stress cracks in the airframe. They were later replaced by the twin turbine CH-47 Chinooks. The army named all their helicopters after Indian tribes; I never did figure out why.

One day, I had passed by a corporal in my company wearing a patch on both shoulders. I knew one was our division patch because I also wore one but the other, on his right shoulder, known as a combat patch, I did not recognize. Over his left pocket he sported a set of flight wings. I had to ask him what that was all about.

"That's a MACV patch (Military Assistance Command-Vietnam) and the wings are gunner's wings," he said. "I went through door gunner training here in Hawaii, and later was sent to Vietnam for 90 days TDY (temporary duty)."

The division had a program known as "Shotgun," after the shotgun riders on the stagecoaches of the early west. They trained volunteers to act out this modern day version to protect helicopters in a place called Vietnam. Being 19 years old, it sounded cool to me. I never had to volunteer for the program because the entire 25th Infantry Division went over a few months later. I went through a gunner program because A Company wanted everyone trained who might be flying later.

It was my first ride in a UH-1 Iroquois. Yep, another Indian name but they would become better known as the Huey. A turbine driven, nice riding, high powered piece of flying hardware. It was a 1300 horsepower roller coaster on wings. (Actually rotor blades, but you get my drift.) None of us knew at the time a whole new way of fighting would be developed around these aircraft.

Our Huey Slicks had two post-mounted M-60 machine guns, one on each side, that could pivot in all directions with built-in front and rear stops so an anxious gunner could not accidentally shoot down his own ship. A metal tray at the base of the mount held 300 rounds of ammo and fed the gun through a flexible metal chute. In Vietnam, we eliminated the chute because of problems with ammo binding in it under extreme twisting conditions. If the ammo stopped moving, the machine gun quit firing. We also tossed the 300 round countainers. Our machine guns fired 400 rounds a minute. Who the hell ever figures out that combo? In country, we found

that by reinforcing a smoke grenade box and securing it to the bottom of the machine gun mount we could link up about 1500 rounds. Much better.

A Huey crew consisted of the AC (aircraft commander),co-pilot, crew chief and gunner. The AC was usually the ranking, more experienced officer and flew the ship. The co-pilot monitored the vast array of gauges and kept the AC informed of changes. He also took over the flight controls if the AC became disabled. The crew chief performed all the daily maintenance on the ship and acted as the door gunner on the other side of the helicopter. We could load up to seven grunts and all their gear. The chief kept us flying and I kept the guns working. He and I were the only ones assigned to a specific aircraft. It was *ours*!

Specialist E-5 Jerry Spurlin, the crew chief, and I flew "Little Bear 626." All ships were known by the last three digits of their tail number and would be spoken individually. Six two six would fly countless missions and log hundreds of hours of combat time before it became a mass of broken aircraft scattered on the Tan Son Nhut runway.

Jerry was a soft-spoken kid of slender build with a dry sense of humor and a ready grin. With his GI glasses, he looked like he would be more at home in a library hovering over books than sighting down the barrel of an M-60 machine gun. He and I were 19 years old, a couple of years younger than the pilots.

It was surprising how much alike we were. No one was older that 22. The states were well represented: Alabama, Kentucky, Illinois, California, New York, Texas, New Mexico, Rhode Island. Conversation was a clash of accents. Door gunners were volunteers. That told you something right there. In training, I was told the average life span of a helicopter door gunner in a hot LZ was 20 seconds. Flying in and out of trouble was a huge adrenaline rush. War to us was a go and get in it kind of thing. Nothing got us more jacked up than knowing we would be flying combat assault the next day. "Full suppression" was a term that meant we would be going in and firing our machine guns at anything that held the enemy, looked like it could hold the enemy or looked like something that looked like it could hold the enemy. We all became adrenaline junkies. I felt a little sorry for the pilots. We were in the back having all the fun and they were dust driving the bus. We would fly into hot LZs with helicopter gunship escorts discharging rocket after rocket, pounding the earth with black and orange fireballs that saturated the air with the stink of burnt foliage and black powder. It was the combination of flight, noise, and danger but never the possibility of death.

Everyone knows that at twenty you are invincible. Soldiers bleeding, downed Hueys, smoldering ashes whipping around a helicopter caught in the violent turbulence of its rotor blades. Shoot anything that moves. We had the sixth sense that protected only the chosen few. The unlucky could only be remembered for a short while. New people, new ships, new missions, the next mission, that's all there was. Get ready, stay prepared, stay loose, and smoke 'em when you got 'em. You are known for what you do. There is no hiding, lying or cheating. Bullshit carries no weight. Your word, your action, your machine gun is who you are. Period.

The Way It Was

NAME: Ron Leonard
UNIT: B Company, 25th Aviation
TIME PERIOD: 1968
SOURCE: 25th Aviation Association web site
DATE RECEIVED: 4 November 2004

"Mole City"

Since Thanksgiving 1968 our whole AO of III Corps had started seeing enemy activity on a slowly escalating scale. The doldrums of TET were over. Charlie seems to have his wounds licked and healed from the ass-kicking he endured during the TET offensive. From his Cambodian sanctuaries another round of attacks are about to begin.

For weeks the tenseness in the air had been building and could be cut with a knife. Charlie had refused to commit large numbers of troops to the fight, just an ambush here and there, mostly of platoon-sized action. This was aggravating the higher ups at Division and in Washington D.C. The body counts were slipping and something had to be done. With this in mind they developed a new strategy "The Patrol Base".

The principal of the "Patrol Base" was to establish a very small Fire Support Base right under the VC and the NVA's noses. To this end, "Patrol Base Mole City" would be the first in a series of these bait and trap operations. "Mole City" was located in an area that had been untouched by allied ground forces in over a year. The area straddled one of the busiest infiltration routes from Cambodia in all of III Corp. This route serviced the NVA with men, equipment, and supplies that would operate on the III Corp, Saigon, and War Zone C battlefields.

It was tiny, barely 100 yards across in any direction. Circular in nature and positioned but a couple of clicks from the Cambodian border it would prove to be the ultimate lure. It would have a defending force of 500 men made up of three companies of the 4/9th Manchus of the 25th Infantry Division.

On the morning of 18 December 1968 the men of Manchu began the task of preparing this tiny oasis 91/2 miles south of Tay Ninh City into a fortified position nicknamed "Mole City." In a single day Company A of the 25th Infantry Division's 65th Engineers transformed 186,000 pounds of building material hauled in by 27 sorties of CH-47 helicopters into a well fortified position. The engineers, with the use of bulldozers, constructed the perimeter berm, and the men of Manchu would dig the bunkers spaced 20 yards apart, linked together like a giant spider web with deep connecting trenches to act as fighting positions. The bunkers consisted of deep holes covered with PCP steel and a layer or two of sandbags on top to shield any direct hits from mortar, rocket, and RPG rounds. A prefabricated guard tower was flown in to cap off the construction effort. Needless to say there was a sense of urgency.

By nightfall of 22 December 1968 the concertina wire had been strung, the claymore mines set, personnel sensors were positioned in the tree lines, fields of fire established, listening posts had been dispatched to the northeast and southwest, and the artillery had set their coordinates on the

tree lines. They were ready. These brave men had no idea what would soon be in store for them. The Manchus themselves had endured a hard month. A few days before Thanksgiving they had lost two-thirds of their experienced troopers in one all-night firefight south of Trang Bang. The units were now made up of new replacements with no prior combat experience, virgins to combat, and a few seasoned veterans. It would prove to be for many their last night on this earth.

This sets the stage for the unraveling of events that will be forever etched on my brain. This battle would prove costly for the NVA/VC (North Vietnamese Army/Viet Cong). It was also very costly for the heroic men of Manchu and many more. They would still be paying for this battle 34 years later.

In the “Diamondhead” scramble shack you could sense something big was up. No one was saying anything, but with the rumblings in the company area, the franticness of the maintenance crews in the hanger trying to get another fireteam flyable. When our flare ship and our sister company Little Bear's counter mortar ship were put on three-minute standby at 6 P.M. you knew. We had all seen it before.

At 11P.M. in the “Little Bear” ready room the “Counter Mortar Crew”, which was made up of the aircraft crewchief and gunner, the artillery “Forward Observer”(FO), the “Aircraft Commander (AC) CWO Mitch Wilhelm and the co-pilot (PP) WO Ed Rodgers had just settled down to go to sleep, when a messenger burst through the door stating in an urgent voice, “let's go you guys, you have a mission.” The gunner and crewchief were already on their way to the aircraft to make it ready for takeoff along with AC CWO Mitch Wilhelm and the (FO). The (PP) WO Ed Rodgers was hurriedly writing down the mission coordinates, artillery information, and radio call signs of the ground commander.

As WO Ed Rodgers approached the aircraft the engine was already at 6600 RPM, the guns were mounted and the crew was on board and ready to go. In moments they were headed southwest towards a rendezvous with “Hell”.

We in the Diamondhead “Scramble Shack” were doing our usual thing, some were watching the 11:30 TV program “Gun Smoke” and still trying to figure out if Matt Dillon flinches when he draws his gun in the opening scene of the program. Some of the crewmembers were playing cards, and the gunners were asleep, all of us waiting for the phone to ring- the signal the mission had started. It was a long restless night. At 0020 the phone rang. We all sprang into action and raced to the ships. The last pilot CWO Greg Bucy answered the telephone and got the radio frequencies of the ground commander and coordinates of the mission.

As I got to the ship I untied its blade, gave the clear signal and the pilot hit the starter. You could hear the whining of the turbine as it started spinning. You could hear the Tic! Tic! Tic! of the igniters searching for fuel and the Whoosh of its ignition. As the RPM's increased you could hear the methodical singing of the blades as they gained momentum searching for 6600 RPM. The gunners and crewchiefs are mounting the guns, and getting into their protective chicken plates. CWO Bucy finally arrived with the mission information and gets in and buckles up in his seat. It is time to Rock and Roll.

“Cu Chi Tower, Cu Chi Tower this is Diamondhead Light Fire Team on “The Beach” (Our designated portion of the flight line). “Scramble,” the Fire Team leader CWO Hayne Moore broadcasts. “We are enroute Hoc Mon.” “Be advised Diamondhead of heavy arty in the area” breaks in the tower. “You are clear to the south. Contact Hoc Mon Arty for approach to the area.” Moments later we hovered out of the protective revetment and head south down the runway, the heavily loaded gun ships, frantically clawing at the air for translational lift. Soon we were on the way into the cool night. The lights of Cu Chi slowly fading away as we steadily gain altitude up to 1500 feet and level off. It should be but a short flight of 15 minutes to Mole City.

As the gunships cut through the darkness, the rhythmic popping of the blades gave the night a feeling of tranquility. This tranquility would be shattered moments later. As we approached the Oriental River just south of Go Dau Ha, still three to five clicks south of our objective an NVA .51 caliber anti aircraft gun opened up on the lead gunship. We had positioned ourselves slightly behind and to the north of the lead ship, so we had a front row seat. As the tracers ascended towards the lead ship they appeared to curve towards them, like chains of orange Christmas tree lights. Over the radio came a transmission “Taking fire, taking fire”. CWO Larry King (AC) instinctively had WO Roy Thomas (PP) reach up and pull the navigation light circuit breaker and go blacked out. We immediately rolled in and attacked the NVA .51 cal below with several sets of rockets and the doorguns as the lead ship broke hard to the right to avoid the anti-aircraft fire from below. They also killed the navigation lights and went blacked out. This one pass seemed to silence the .51 so both ships still blacked out head back to the river.

“Diamondhead 20, this is Diamondhead 10,” CWO Hayne Moore broadcasts, “go Diamondhead 10” CWO Larry Little replies. “We are at 1500 feet and are going to go steady dim on the nav lights. Suggest you stay blacked out and below us.” “Roger that Diamondhead 10.”

In the distance you could already see the eerie glow of the parachute flares fired by Artillery howitzers somewhere in the Vietnamese night, and the occasional ricochet of a .51 cal tracer high into the night sky. I thought to myself, “not them 51's again. I hate those things.” If you got hit in the chicken plate it wouldn't even slow it down. It would make a thumb size hole going in and take out the whole back of your chicken plate exiting. If you got hit in the hand it could just rip off your whole arm.

As we got closer CWO Hayne Moore was back on the radio contacting the ground commander. “Recast Uniform one four, this is Diamondhead 10 Light Fire Team, please advise situation,” our ETA is five minutes. “Roger Diamondhead 10. We are getting the shit kicked out of us. We are surrounded and I don't know how many there are but they are everywhere, and we are in danger of being overrun. We have enemy in the wire and on the north/east sides they are in the open. We are taking recoilless rifle fire along with RPG and automatic weapons. Be advised we have two LP's (Listening Posts) out, one to the southeast about 200 yards in the tree line, and one to the northeast about the same.” “Roger Recast Uniform one four.” As we neared station, we could make out the automatic weapons fire. It was ferocious, red tracers going out, white and green tracers going in towards the perimeter, and the occasional streak of an RPG seeking out a bunker and its occupants.

The night was hazy with all the smoke and dust in the air from impacting ordinance of the friendly artillery and rockets and mortars from the NVA. The glow from the flares made it a surrealistic vision.

As we orbited the battlefield, the Fire Team leader, CWO Hayne Moore, tried to quickly access the situation on the ground, and to formulate an impromptu plan of attack. The entire perimeter was under siege, and it was paramount to assist the hardest hit portions as soon as possible. It was decided to split the fire team. Diamondhead 10 would work the north side of the perimeter, and Diamondhead 20 would work over to the west and south sides. As we started our first run, and we started down and punched off one set of rockets, here came the .51's. They looked like orange basketballs and they just whizzed by inches from their mark. I thought," that was way too close." My gunner and I hosed the position the best we could with the M-60 machine guns leaning out the doors and made a mental note of the location. As we broke right we were over the open area to the north and there were so many NVA soldiers it looked like a bunch of ants attacking a picnic. I didn't care where I shot the M-60, I couldn't miss. There were too many of them. As we circled around and made another pass we expended all of our rockets, mini-gun ammo and 2000 rounds of M-60 door gun ammo from each gun in the open area. The M-60's were so hot they glowed cherry red and had a translucency to them. You could see the bullets going down the barrel.

"Recast Uniform one four, this is Diamondhead 20. We are fully expended and headed to re-arm, we will be back ASAP." "Roger Diamondhead 20, just make it fast." With that transmission made, we nursed all the speed we could get out of the old Huey. The blades flailing at the air to get all the speed it could muster from the old girl, the deafening whine of the engine, and the whop, whop, whop of the blades shattered the night as we hurriedly flew toward the re-arm point at Tay Ninh since it was closer than Cu Chi. Fuel could wait for later. "Tay Ninh Tower, Tay Ninh Tower this is Diamondhead 20." After a short pause Tay Ninh Tower replies, "Roger Diamondhead 20, go." "We need clearance to the Tay Ninh re-arm point direct, ETA five minutes." "Roger Diamondhead 20 you are clear direct." In the distance I could make out the lights of Tay Ninh City. Just to the north would be the base camp. The air was cool and soothing as it rushed by the open doors, my nerves were rattled and for the first time I noticed I was drenched in sweat. The combination of the heat of battle, fear, and adrenaline had caused it. I, for a few moments as the adrenaline subsided, could recollect what had just happened. This was the most intense battle of MY war. To say I wasn't scared would be futile, and a lie. The tracers had come up so fast and so often at times I had been afraid to breathe for fear of inhaling one. I thought to myself, I don't know if we will get out of this one, this is bad. Then I thought about the grunts on the ground. I wouldn't trade with them for a million dollars. Whatever I had seen from above was ten fold worse down there in the trenches. Somehow the thought of their plight made my situation acceptable. It was our job to get the grunts out of this, to see them through. They were our grunts. They were our sole purpose of living. We could never let them down.
As we were inbound to the re-arm point I noticed the Little Bear Counter Mortar ship had just finished refueling, lifted off and hovered over to the headquarters pad near the Division como bunker. The engine had remained at flight idle, the crew had stayed on board except for CWO Wilhelm the AC who had went inside.

As we landed and shed our helmets and protective equipment there was a sense of urgency to complete the re-arming as quickly as possible. The Manchus needed us desperately and we knew it. The pilots and crewchiefs humped rockets and loaded them into their launchers while the gunners re-armed the mini-guns and door guns. Moments later our wing ship appeared out of the south and landed next to us in the re-arm point. They, too, would go through the same ritual of re-arming as we did. Little did we know, that this ballet would be played out over and over for the next seven hours non-stop. The Little Bear Counter Mortar ship also joined us, hovering over from the Division como bunker.

CWO Hayne Moore and CWO Larry King, the Diamondhead 10 and Diamondhead 20 AC's, along with CWO Mitch Wilhelm, the Little Bear AC, assembled near the lister bag of drinking water that was at the re-arm point to map out the best way to support the Manchus, and develop a plan to protect the Little Bear ship on this upcoming mission.

The briefing in the como bunker was for an emergency re-supply of ammunition, which was being loaded by the re-arm point personnel. If we didn't get it to the Manchus quickly they would be out of ammo and overrun, which would mean hundreds of deaths. There was no possibility of putting additional troops in before daylight, so CWO Wilhelm talked to his crew, and understanding the dilemma and danger involved they all volunteered to make the ammo re-supply.

After kicking several scenarios around they decided to stack the ammo in a pyramid in both doors. The re-supply would be a challenge, since “Mole City” was laden with obstacles. There was a tall radio antenna and an observation tower near the center of the compound where the drop zone was to be concerned with, not to mention they would be going into the center of a blazing firefight which would make it prohibitive to land, so they would just come to a hover and kick the ammo out the door. This plan also created a problem; they were two men short to off load the ammo. The gunner and crewchief needed to man the guns for self defense.

Two young troopers from the re-arm point were busily loading the last of the ammo, when CWO Wilhelm walked up to talk to them. He asked them if they would mind going along to kick out the boxes when we got where we were going. Neither one had been in a helicopter before nor did they know anything about them, or the mission. They jumped at the chance and replied, “sure man, this ought to be a trip.” Little did they know, this would be a trip to last a lifetime. They boarded the “Little Bear” helicopter and took positions crouched down behind the ammo boxes.

CWO Wilhelm shouted to them over the whine of the turbine engine, “Stay hunkered down behind those ammo boxes until I tell you to, then just kick out the boxes and we will be out of there.” There were no headsets or helmets to give the two troopers where the pilot could talk to them directly in flight, so he would have to relay the instructions via the gunner and crewchief. The pilots were gathered around discussing tactics as us crewmembers just stood back and listened to the plan. They were discussing the best way to pull off this re-supply. It was going to be dangerous on the re-supply ship. Almost like a suicide mission. I'm glad I wasn't on that slick tonight, and I felt really sorry for those kids from the re-arm point. They didn't have a clue what was going on out there in Indian Country.

“Look Mitch, Larry and I have been out there all night,” Hayne Moore stated. “The anti- aircraft fire has been very heavy, we have taken care of most of the .51's and now it is mostly small arms fire that seems to be slowing some. If we come in from the north and hang a hard right and head west I will turn on my landing lights to draw the fire away from you as best I can, and Larry will cover you. It ain't a great plan but it is all we have. The Arty is pounding the east and south so we can't go there. The west is really Indian Country so we don't want to start from there.” Everyone thought about it for a minute, and couldn't come up with a better idea, so the consensus was “Let's do it.”

We all headed for our ships and began the ritual of getting the chicken boards, helmets and other gear squared away, checked the door guns one final time and climbed aboard. I glanced again at my watch and it was just after 2:20 A.M. The Little Bear ship left first as we had a few little things to attend to, but moments later we slowly lifted off into the night sky heading back to the inferno of “Mole City”.

In the distance we could see a single light of the battle, a glow in the southern sky. The closer we got the glow began to separate itself into many little lights. The flares dropped by the Spooky gunship overhead, the artillery flashes, the red almost laser-like stream of tracers coming down from the mini-guns of the Spooky gunship, and the tracers going up at the aircraft. Through our headsets on the radio we could hear the din of battle raging in the distance. This just heightened the adrenaline flow coursing through our veins.

Over the radio we could hear the Little Bear ship coordinating the re-supply with the ground commander, and arranging for a temporary halt to the artillery fire missions. Moments later we were there at 1500 feet above the raging battle and joined the Little Bear ship in a clockwise orbit above the battle.

“Little Bear, this is Diamondhead 20.” “Go Diamondhead 20” replied the Little Bear pilot. “Pull out of this orbit and make a big swing to the northeast, we will join up there. Presently we are at 1500 feet enroute to that location. When we get linked up kill your navigation lights and get down on the deck and make your approach north to south. When you get parallel to the center of the Drop Zone make a hard right and we will escort you in. I will turn on my landing lights to draw fire away from you, then we will be blacked out on the way in.” “Roger that Diamondhead 20”.

The three ships started their southerly approach towards Mole City. The Little Bear ship just barely skimming the tree tops flanked on one side by Diamondhead 10. Diamondhead 20 was at 1000 feet and turned on his landing light. That drew an immediate response and the torrent of anti-aircraft fire was horrendous. He quickly turned off the landing light and blacked out his navigation lights as he descended to occupy the left flank of the Little Bear ship. The three ships in tandem made the right turn inbound to Mole City.

The gunships barely seventy-five feet on either side of the Little Bear ship blazing away with their rockets and door guns, the Little Bear ship withholding fire for fear of hitting one of their escorts. In the distance a flare was fired to mark the Drop Zone, with a little adjustment the re-

supply ship was lined up on the Drop Zone. As they neared the outer perimeter, the gunships peeled of to the right and left leaving the re-supply ship unprotected and on her own. The intense small arms fire hammered the lone ship on her final hundred-yard journey. You could hear the ting-ting-splat of the enemy rounds piercing the thin skin of the aircraft.

On short final to the Drop Zone CWO Wilhelm was in command of the ship, but WO Don Rodgers had his hands and feet on the controls also in case CWO Wilhelm should become shot or killed. His job was to also monitor the gauges in case some vital component of the aircraft was hit with hostile fire. Within seconds the Little Bear ship was over the Drop Zone and had come to a hover just a few feet above the ground. Through the intercom CWO Wilhelm screamed to the crewchief and gunner to tell the two guys in the back to kick out the ammunition boxes, which they did frantically. It took but a few seconds, but with the murderous hail of enemy fire it seemed like a week.

As quickly as they had arrived, they were gone. As they crossed the perimeter wire through a hail of enemy small arms fire WO Rodgers broke in on the intercom “The engine oil pressure is dropping and the engine temperature is rising!”

It was decision time, either put it down immediately in Indian Country in the black of night and 10 miles from any friendly troops, or hope they can make it back to Tay Ninh, since it was the closest friendly installation. After discussing the dilemma quickly they voted to try and make Tay Ninh and put as much distance as possible on this little piece of “Hell.”

As the blades frantically beat the air into submission, and the whining of the engine reached a deafening roar the gauges continued to worsen. Soon the lights of Tay Ninh were in sight. Praying as they went, they soon crossed the perimeter wire and put it on the nearest landing pad that they found, which was the re-arm point. After shutting the engine down and thoroughly checking out the problem of the gauges, a round had severed the main oil engine line. They had been flying with no oil for a while. They all were relieved, and very lucky to have made it back in one piece. The ship was shot full of holes, but just that one lucky shot had hit anything vital. Through their heroic deeds the Manchus had the needed ammunition to withstand the NVA onslaught.

Back at Mole City CWO Moore and CWO King had decided to keep the fire team split into two separate ships and fight individually as there were too many targets, and the Manchus needed suppression on the entire perimeter. We would assume our previous position on the west and south with CWO Larry King’s Diamondhead 20 gunship. CWO Hayne Moore and the Diamondhead 10 gunship would again work the area to the north.

The Little Bear ship had been gone but seconds as we continued to expend our ordinance on the enemy below. After two passes we were totally expended and we were in route to Tay Ninh to re-arm and refuel. CWO Moore contacted the ground commander and let him know our intentions. “Recast Uniform one four, this is Diamondhead 20. We are fully expended and headed to re-arm, we will be back ASAP.” “Roger Diamondhead 20, just hurry.”

Several minutes later looking over the pilot's shoulder through the windshield, the soft red glow of the gauges breaking up the darkness of the cockpit, I could make out our lead ship, its red and green navigation lights evident, along with the incessant blinking of the red rotating beacon. In the distance the discernable glow of Tay Ninh City was quickly approaching.

“Tay Ninh Tower Diamondhead 10.” “Go Diamondhead 10.” “Request straight in to POL, need a little gas in this old beater.” “You're clear at your discretion, Diamondhead.”

Descending into the POL area we turned on our landing lights to locate the pumps. Having found them with a little effort, both old Huey's flared and settled slowly to the ground. The engines running at flight idle, the crewchiefs jumped out, removed the gas caps and started the refueling process. It would take but a few minutes. The heavy gunships could only take on 1000 pounds. If we put more fuel, and a full load of rockets and ammo, they would never get off the ground with their underpowered engines.

When we had our 1000 pounds of JP-4 on board, we obtained clearance from the tower to hover the few yards over to the re-arm point to begin our re-arming ballet once again.
This time we had some help. The local re-arm point guys that had been loading the ammo in the Little Bear ship gave us a hand building the rockets, and helped us tote them, and place them in their launchers. We were exhausted, hot, and sweaty.

The lister bag was once again the center of attraction. We couldn't get enough water tonight to kill the thirst. We talked about the re-supply run as the re-arm point guys finished loading the rockets, and what a crazy bunch they were. To pull that off in one of the biggest firefights of the war.

Soon we were climbing back aboard and headed back to the war. There was silence in our souls as we had a chance to gather our innermost thoughts, and dwell on them for just a few moments; to have discussions with god and make silly promises, to see images of our family in our mind, and contemplate our fate to come.

In the distance we could see the familiar flares casting their eerie light on the landscape below. We could make out the navigation lights of an Air Force Forward Air Controller in his OV-10 Mohawk, and a Command and Control UH-1H slick that had one of the division upper level officers aboard to supervise the battle. They had arrived on station during our absence, and were orbiting counter clockwise high above the action below.

As we neared the battle the intensity of the ricocheting tracers became more distinct caroming high into the air. You could make out explosions around the perimeter of the tiny enclave. It was going to pick up right where we left off. I just gritted my teeth, checked the M-60 to make sure it was ready, and thought to myself, “You want me, come and get me.”

“Recast Uniform one four, this is Diamondhead 20, please advise situation, ETA two minutes.” “Roger Diamondhead 20.” “Charlie has broken through and taken over three bunkers on the north side and they are in the wire. I will mark our position with a strobe light. It will be the

bunkers to the west of the light. Just start there and go anywhere you want. Get them suckers off our back."

"Diamondhead 20 this is Issue 15," "Roger Issue 15 go." "I have a flight of two F-4's inbound now ETA 10 minutes. I suggest you stand off to the north when they drop these hot potatoes. They will be making their pass from west to east". CWO Larry King replied, "Roger that Issue 15, just call again when they're inbound."

We settled in on the west side and from 1500 feet began our run from the north punching off rockets in sets of two as we watched the tracers going in all directions below. The pungent odor of cordite was heavy in the Huey as we watched them impact in the wire, our M-60's finding their marks on the enemy caught in the open with nowhere to hide.

The roaring sound of the mini-guns cut through the night as their laser-like trajectory belched fire on the unsuspecting enemy below. It was like a replay of the previous trip; the enemy tracers headed skyward searching for their tormentors, our door guns again glowing cherry red and raining bullets on the NVA below. The NVA were everywhere but we had slowed the onslaught. At the end of the run we searched for altitude and again circled around to make another run. Once again the rockets found their marks in the groups of NVA. You could see them fall in groups some blown into body parts yet others were nailed to the ground and posts in the wire from the fleshettes.

We were under constant small arms fire, and The Manchu were in a battle for their lives. The artillerymen with the Manchu had lowered their 105's to chest high and were shooting beehive rounds point blank into the faces of the enemy.

"Diamondhead 20 this is Issue 15, flight of two F-4's are on location and beginning their runs west to east." "Roger that Issue 15" CWO King replied. We immediately held off to the north. As the F-4's came by all you could hear was a hiss of the fuselage cutting through the air, then the roar of their engines as they screamed by and dropped the napalm canisters which made a ball of fire that went 200 feet or more into the air and engulfed the landscape for several hundred yards into a fiery inferno. The NVA that were caught in the open would be fried to a crisp. This was the scenario until 4:15 in the morning. Re-arm, refuel, return to the perimeter of Mole City. At 4:15 we spotted 50 to 60 NVA southwest of the friendlies trying to escape back toward Cambodia. We rolled in with the rockets and door guns and cut them to ribbons, halting their impromptu retreat. After expending our rockets we orbited the area and let the door gunner shoot up what ammunition he had left into the fleeing throng of NVA. When the door gunner was expended on ammo, the C and C ship's door gunners took over while we returned once again to Tay Ninh to re-arm and refuel. At daybreak contact was lost and we flew around the pattern and inventoried the damage. It was a sobering sight. The fleshettes had nailed NVA to the posts in the wire, to trees and anything else including the ground. Bodies were strewn everywhere. It seemed like hundreds of them scattered about with a multitude of weapons, both personal and crew served. The napalm had fried many alive.

We remained on station until the wounded had been removed, and provided cover for the dustoffs. When it was all done, we had been in continuous action for 7 hours, and had played a decided role in the outcome of the battle for Patrol Base Mole City. It will be hard to ever forget. The battle claimed 106 NVA lives that were counted and many more had been drug off the battlefield from the 272nd NVA regiment, and the 9th NVA Division. Bodies of dead NVA soldiers would continue to show up for days buried in shallow graves throughout the area. The Manchu had been hit with the full force of a 1500 man NVA regiment. Outmanned three to one, they had fought with great courage and had won a monumental battle.

The Way It Was

NAME: Robert Mandap
UNIT: 25th Aviaition Battalion
TIME PERIOD: 1962-1966
SOURCE: email sent to museum
DATE RECEIVED: December 2007

I joined the 25th ID after graduating from flight school in the summer of 1962. I was assigned to the 25th Aviation Bn. Besides flying normal training missions we were responsible for training helicopter door gunners for the "Shotgun" program. The aircraft that I flew most of the time was the Ch-21 cargo helicopter built by Plasecki-Vertol. It was the first tandem rotor helicopter in the US army inventory at the time. It also saw extensive service during our initial advisory capacity in Vietnam… prior to the introduction of the UH-1 and CH-47 helicopters.

In January 1966, I was deployed to the central highlands of Vietnam with the 2/9th FA Bn., 3rd Bde. during Operation Blue Light. At that time I was a Captain and the only infantry officer assigned to a field artillery battalion. When we arrived in Pleiku I was allowed to live in with the 3d Bde Aviation Section, "Aloha Airlines," on the 52nd Aviation Bn. Airfield, for security reasons. The CO of the 2/9 FA Bn was LTC Saul A "Curly" Jackson, the XO MAJ Paul Lenhart, and the S3, MAJ William Schneider. During my tour I flew missions involving scouting for new artillery battery positions and flying forward observers for artillery and airstrikes. Other missions included damage assessment of B-52 bombing strikes, medical evacuation and daily liaison missions for the CO and S3 of 2/9 FA Bn. The aircraft involved was the H-23 "Raven" built by the Hiller Aircraft Corporation. The weaponry was skid-mounted 30 Caliber machineguns… which didn't work most of the time. Armor plating consisted of a 1'' thick 12" x 12" steel plate under the pilot's seat. Navigation equipment was an artificial horizon and a plumb bob suspended on a string from inside the cabin bubble—used for night and inclement weather flying conditions. Commo equipment was a UHF radio. Personal protection gear was a steel-plated chest protector.

Even though the H23 might be considered austere by today's standards it got the job done. It was tough, powerful and easy to maintain. Although it had no hydraulic or automatic flight controls it was very responsive in all maneuvers that we put it through… including taking off backwards!!

A few personnel that served with the 3d Bde during my tour who later became General Officers were: Eric Shinseki, Bill Schneider, Bob Kingston, Philip Fehr, Ed Shanahan and Dave Bramlett. There could have been others but these are the ones I remember. Hope all this adds to your archives.

The Way It Was

NAME : Jim Moore, Colonel
UNIT: 1/35th Infantry
TIME PERIOD: April through September 1967
SOURCE: Letter from Col. Moore to "Harry"
DATE RECEIVED: 1978

Harry,

The large scale Xerox copy of map shows the area around Duc Pho where the 3rd Brigade TF, 25th Division, operated from April 1967 through about September 1967. We came from the south around Bong Son to take over from the Marines.

The 1/35th landed at LZ (landing zone) Montezuma and we went out on foot to seize LZ OD. I named the LZ in honor of then Major Bob Drudick, the Battalion XO (executive officer.) He was 100% gung ho/ ranger/ airborne. He carried about 100 pounds of assorted armaments on his harness—we called him OD Drudick.

LZ OD was situated so that we could support LZ Montezuma with 4.2 mortars. There was a steep hill on the east side of Montezuma and we wanted to be sure we could support by fire in event of an attack from that direction.

At LZ Montezuma was the Brigade CP (Command Post,) the Brigade/Battalion trains, our rear CP (S1 & HHC(-)) plus two or three artillery batteries. Also located there were a couple of aviation companies. The strip was soon upgraded to all weather C-130.

At LZ OD we had the Battalion CP, 4.2 platoon and our DS 105 Battery. We kept a rifle company (-) there for protection at night—allowing day/night patrols to keep our area clear around the fire base.

Initially our 1/35 AO (area of operation) went to the top of the map. The 2/35th was not with us until early May 1967. The 1/14th was about 20 kilometers north along Highway 1. Our job was to find the NVA/VC (North Vietnamese Army/Vietcong,) move them out and control the rice harvest. The first major actions took place where the red stars are shown in what later became the 2/35th AO.

Some time around mid-May, the 1st Brigade, 101st moved into LZ Carentan. Their units operated in the mountains to the west in company-sized 3-5 day patrols. From time to time, I'd get a company from the 101st to help me cover my area. As you can see, it was rather large and included all types of terrain—coast line, highway /RR, numerous villages, coastal plain and then the mountains.

When things settled down in late May 1967, we operated rather loosely—by companies and even platoon elements—to be able to cover a lot of ground. We always stayed within 105/155 howitzer range except when we conducted some "mortar raids" into the mountains to the west. Those were one day affairs to check out an area with a rifle company with 4.2 platoon to support.

In the south, we were at the extreme limits of the 155mm howitzer and relied on the 1st Cavalry across our boundary very frequently. Once, I used a destroyer in DS of an assault into LZ Lloyd. It worked out well—I picked up the NGFLO at sea.

Air support was plentiful. Initially, we were to be supported by the Navy but the Air Force didn't want to see that happen. The Air Force did a fine job. We did get backup from the Navy on several occasions to include our flight on 22-23 May. I preferred the Air Force.

Our ALO/FAC, Major Smith, was a classmate of mine at C and GS at Maxwell in 1965-1966. He was tremendous—unfortunately he was killed in the fall of 1967.

Our stay at LZ OD was the first time we had stayed at one place with the Battalion CP for more than a week or so. I became concerned about ground or mortar attack by the NVA or VC. We had never been hit before. As a result, we added a 'mad minute" to our routine of patrolling/ambush/HI fires. We cut loose at least once a week with all we had in the firebase to include our .50 caliber machine gun and mortars—usually at dusk. What a sight—the troops were even impressed. Never were hit as a result. Major Tippen had us surrounded by wire and mines to boot. Looking back though, our bunkers were poor on overhead cover due primarily to lack of materials such as lumber.

After mid-May 1967, I put some units on a night schedule to break up our routine. Those on a a day schedule moved after dark before bedding down. We only got caught once—lost a couple of men from a grenade attack in B Company.

In July, we started rotating a platoon at a time into LZ Montezuma for 3-4 days of rest, refit and training. The troops had been in the field continuously since 2 January!

We tried to compensate by feeding hot meals at least once a day. Delivery by air usually at about 6 p.m. We'd also fly in the rucksacks, beer, soda and mail. Then, at dusk, we'd pick it up (chow, cans, etc.) and the unit would move to a night position.

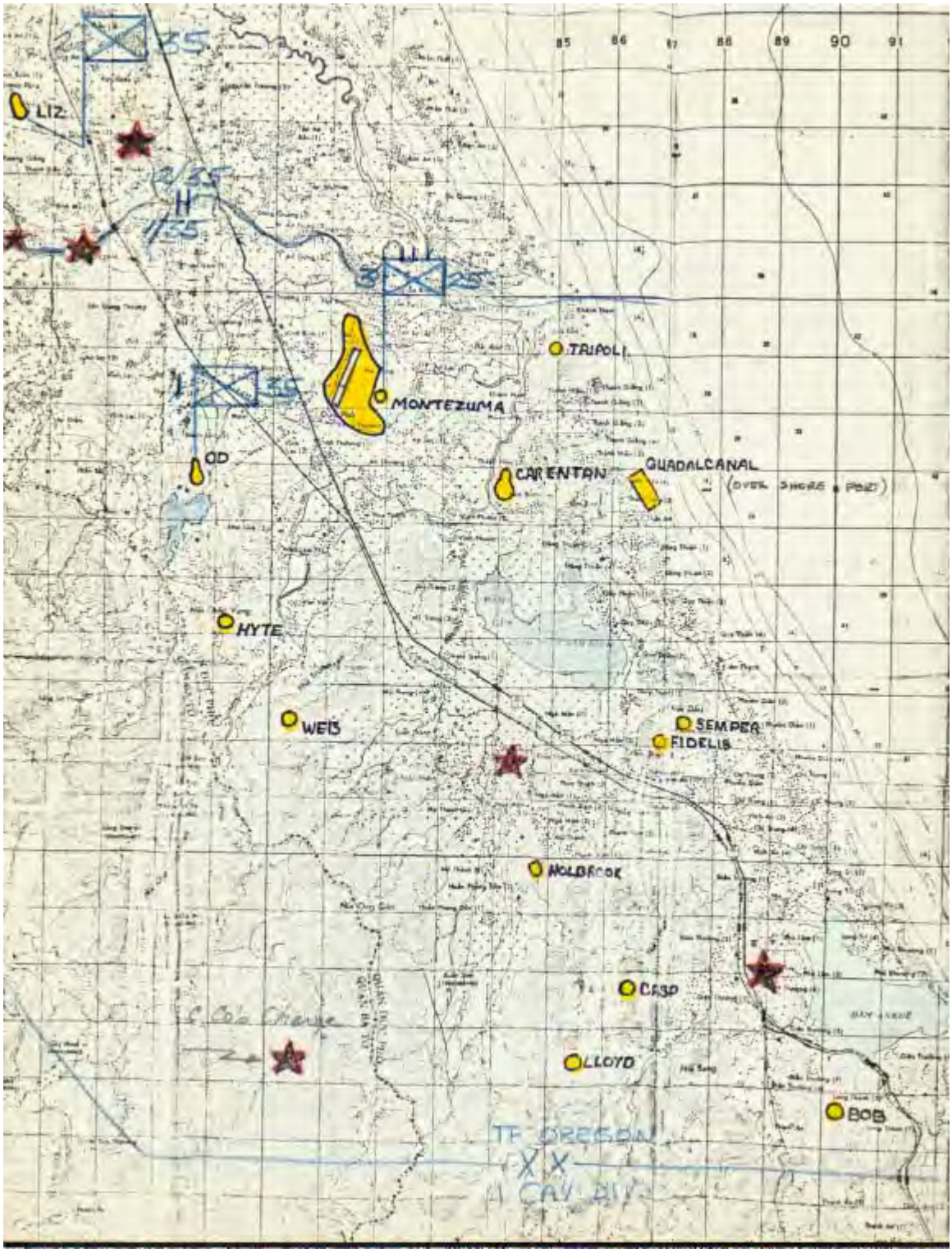
The rifleman did a superb job. His morale was good. That was the time before anti-war sentiment had set in.

We won our share of awards although fewer than in most units. Our administration chain stretched all the way back to Pleiku and that really didn't help us out in the "Bastard Brigade." Impact awards were our best bet to see that justice was done.

Our biggest tactical problem was cracking through a fortified village. We always seemed to get entangled at dusk and have to wait it out to finish the job. The 2/35th had APCs (armored personnel carriers) and tanks and that's what we needed to give us some punch. All in all, the men did their job and it was a proud outfit. Should you want to know anything else, please drop me a line.

Col. Jim Moore

The Way It Was



The Way It Was

NAME: Dan Nate
UNIT: 3/4th Cavalary
TIME PERIOD: 1968
SOURCE: From the 25th Aviation Association website. Written by Mr. Nate in 2001.
DATE RECEIVED: 10 November 2004

The sky partly cloudy; the sun showing no mercy, we walk to the waiting chopper. It will again take me to a place I have never been. As we walk, I notice the gun-ships to my left and right, fully armed, ready to go on our distress call, one we all hope we don't have to make, but probably will.

Our MISSION, after insertion, is to find a place to stay, to hide, undetected, for 4 nights and 5 days; to monitor and report any and all enemy movement; to effect a "live capture", if possible, and to inflict surprise and pain upon Sir Charles prior to extraction by the Centaurs, in any way possible.

Departing Cu Chi, all you can hear are the chopper's blades, as the familiar "whump-whump" carries us out over places pock-marked by artillery and bomb shells. Craters in the earth leading to the woods and jungle areas so frequented by the enemy. At a pre-set moment, the choppers begin a low-level hedge-hop motion to confuse the ever-present field watchers as we approach our designated landing zone. Every eye is searching, scanning the horizon and the land immediately below us. It seems to go on forever, yet we can see and feel the speed with which the choppers descend, constantly moving forward. There it is, the corner of the hedge-row, our appointed drop-off and infil point. Cigarettes, the last we'll enjoy for the mission's duration, are quickly extinguished upon the floor. "LOCK AND LOAD"."PREPARE TO JUMP". "Go,Go,Go," yells the Team Leader, only barely audible above the din of the revolving blades. The point man is out and running, making for the tree-line. The rest of the team rapidly following, as the chopper continues to "skim" across the ground, lifting and turning in it's hasty departure.

We make it, holdin-up in a rough circle, facing out. The choppers are gone. The silence is deafening. We are alone. Five men, no friendlies, and whatever fate has in store. The tension mounts as does the temperature. No more discussion, no more conversations. Five days of ear-ringing silence, tension, and heat. After a short radio report, while the TL checked the map and compass reading, the point man moves out, followed in silent procession by the rest of the team; each member scanning left, right, left, forward, and behind, always behind. After what seems like forever, the team reaches the chosen set-up point; bushes and trees alongside what appeared, from above, to be a road of sorts, but up close becomes a well-used trail leading from the river west of us, toward some destination known only to those indigenous to this area. As we silently approach this point, we are constantly searching and listening. If WE thought it looked like a good hide-out, then so might have the enemy. We prepare for the possible ambush, but reach the trees without mishap. A quick eye search leads to the TL setting-up up the team in proper position, to best see, hear and encounter enemy movement. "Claymores out" commands the TL, and each man low-crawls forward, one-at-a-time, while his mates keep him covered. Once the

OD path-sweepers are in position and wired back to the TL's command board, the waiting begins.

The sun continues to climb into the sky, baking the earth and all exposed. Sweat covers each man from head to toe. Finally the sun begins its descent and darkness rapidly approaches, bringing with it the multitude of nightly airborne pasts. Mosquitoes cover all exposed flesh and bite through our tiger-striped fatigues whenever possible. String-lines are attached to the legs of the flankers, leading back to the TL and ATL positions, so that a constant check can be maintained throughout the night. The lines will be checked every so often, on a pre-set timetable, to ensure integrity and awareness by slightly jerking them. This keeps all alert, ready for the night movements of the enemy. One that can only move safely at night, in his own back yard, due to our air-borne supremacy during the day. With the daylight almost gone, all are especially alert, listening and watching, noiselessly awaiting the inevitable.

Soon, by plan, two men at a time will be allowed to "doze-off", attended by each one's closest team partner, while the TL, radio operator and flanks keep tight watch. This plan will alternate throughout the night, giving all a chance to ease the tension somewhat by grabbing some z's. As I lay awake on guard, not really able to see through the thick, darkness of night, I listen with the un-impaired sense of youth, hearing only the constant drone of mosquitoes and distant calls of the lizards and night birds. The night passes without incident, but the tension and fear of being heard or seen has begun to take its toll. Accompanied with the day's sunlight and ever-present heat, we feel the effects despite the relief provided by occasionally sipping at our hot, wet collapsible water bottles.

The TL sends out two men with instructions and directions. Search for obvious signs of recent use, both on the trail and along its bush-lined edges. They return and report their findings and this is relayed back to TOC, as is all else. Night two and day three pass in much the same fashion. We are tense and bored at the same time, and de-hydration has started despite our attempts to quell our water loss during the heat of day.

Night three, suddenly we hear voices and the un-mistakable sound of movement. The sing-song chatter assures us that these are NOT friendlies. The TL passes the word. "WAIT, WAIT" he signals with his hand gestures. The lines attached to the flanks are jerked just enough to ensure that they are advised and aware of the sounds. AND THERE THEY ARE. Black outlines against the stark whiteness of the trail, moving in our direction, west-to-east. The trail/path will bring them right to us. But we struggle to see how many, and how prepared the enemy seems as they approach. That will be the "tell", how the enemy moves, and what they carry with them. Three, motions the TL, using his fingers, and the radio man reports to TOC. Still we wait. Now all can see them, two with weapons shouldered, and one with a full rucksack. Good enough. Ready signals are passed. We wait until the enemy is within our ambush perimeters, and BOOM, the TL triggers the first volley of claymores, lighting-up the night. Dirt, debris and noises abound, and the rest of us begin a sweeping motion across the path directly to our fronts, criss-crossing slightly left and right, over-lapping patterns of M-16 fire drawing lines through the darkness. "CEASE FIRE" commands the TL, and all drop magazines, exchanging for full ones, eyes sweeping the trail to the left and right half-expecting to see enemy reinforcements moving

toward us. After many long, dry-mouthed moments, the ATL and point man approach the bodies on the trail. All three are down and dead. They pull them from the trail into the dark protection of our tree line position. Then the bodies are disarmed and searched for all items, and their uniforms are checked to detect unit designations. All pertinent items are bagged for retrieval, and the longest wait in the world begins.

Prior to initiating the ambush, the TOC was informed, and requests for extraction ships have been made. The birds are in the air, enroute. But the silence following the immensely loud ambush is UNBELIEVABLE. Covered in sweat, dirt and camo paint, ears ringing like church bells, we can do nothing but wait, and smell the cordite, gun-powder and iron-like fresh blood odors of the ambush. Monitoring the radio, the TL prepares us for extraction. We cover each other as the un-used claymores are dis-connected and collected and placed in our rucks.

Suddenly the beautiful "WHUMP-WHUMP" is heard as the choppers approach. Still too dark for smoke markers, the ATL flashes the strobe-light through the empty tube of the M-79 man's weapon, focusing the light straight up, shielding it from ground-level sight, until the pilot declares "WE HAVE YOUR POSITION". Like a practiced ballet, the team is led out into the more level extraction point, and one-by-one, the two choppers turn and glide down into our midst. A quick, short, backwards run and we are all climbing aboard, moving over for the next man, the TL helping each man make the short jump into the chopper, then climbing aboard, and we're in the air, arms and legs akimbo, some still on the skids, the chopper never really having landed, but bumping, and gliding in a stutter-step motion, across the ground as we jump or are tossed in.

Within moments we are away, and cigarettes and lighters are passed from the door-gunners to the eager men of the ambush team. The night coolness a distinct pleasure compared to the past days and nights of stifling heat. Sighs of relief can be heard, but little is said. No one can really hear yet, and the rushing air from the open chopper doorways carry away any real attempts to vocally communicate, but hand signals point out the lights below as we approach Cu Chi and the landing pads at 3/4 Cav. Slightly tilting backwards, and a thump, bump and the choppers have us down. We are home. Another mission completed and a verifiable body count with intel add to the success. Our jeeps and trailers are waiting to take us back to our company area, where hot meals, cold beers, wet showers and medical attention await. The mission was a good one. All are safe and the enemy has suffered another set-back, because these men worked as a TEAM. They are professionals. "They are LRRP's".

The Way It Was

NAME: Todd Frye
UNIT: 25th AVN
TIME PERIOD: Vietnam
SOURCE: Email from Mr. Frye to Ron Leonard, 25th AVN Association web master about David Nobriga
DATE RECEIVED: February 2006

Mr. Nobriga, the Flyin' Hawaiian, was extraordinary to the point of becoming a legend. He was always calm, cool and collected. Soft spoken and deliberate in all he did. A true gentleman. He liked to wear leather flight gloves when he flew and wore clean, well-tailored uniforms. The most extraordinary occasion I can recall while flying with Mr. Nobriga was capturing a fleeing Viet Cong. When the VC broke across the rice paddy, Mr. Nobriga gave us strict orders not to fire a shot. We came in low and hot, banking so severely I thought our rotor blades where going into the ground. The nearly vertical rotor plane cut right in front of Charlie who was now backpedaling as fast as he could in the mud of the rice paddy. After getting solid footing, he took off in another direction, and Mr. Nobriga gave it full cyclic forward, swooping down for another pass. The ground was so close I found myself pushing back, as if that would give us more room between the tip of the rotor plane and the rice paddy. We may have made another 4 or 5 passes in the same manner…all of us hanging on for dear life as Mr. Nobriga deftly guided 440 through more swooping turns and banks, as a maestro would play a Stradivarius in Carnegie Hall. The now panting figure in black pajamas finally stopped, threw up both arms and remained still. Tropic Lightening ground troops who had lined up on the dikes of the rice paddy to watch this amazing performance, rose to their feet to give us (Mr. Nobriga) a standing ovation.

After my year in Viet Nam, I was assigned to an Air Cav outfit in Ansbach, Germany. On one of our flights close to the Czech boarder, I bumped into Mr. Nobriga again at some obscure airfield. We were both surprised to see one another, but before I could say "how ya been", Mr. Nobriga grabbed me by the arm and took me into the pilots lounge and presented me to the group. "O.K. Frye, tell them about how we rounded up that VC". Evidently this "story" had preceded Mr. Nobriga, and all of the pilots in the room were skeptical that such an event ever happened. I recanted my recollection as Mr. Nobriga took it all in…arms folded and eyes flashing as we all re-lived that incredible event.

DAVID S NOBRIGA 27 Nov 1930 15 Jun 2001 (V) XX732 (U.S. Consulate: GERMANY (FRANKFURT))
Diamondhead Pilot 67-68 that made his home in Hawaii and died in frankfort Germany.

The Way It Was

NAME: Bill Osthagen
UNIT: Co. B, 25th Aviation Battalion
TIME PERIOD:
SOURCE: 25th Aviation Association Website
DATE RECEIVED: 4 November 2004

The AC was CW2 Riley, I'm pretty sure his first name was John and being a large fellow some of the pilots called him 'Big John'. I believe you might have known him 'cause he had been with Diamondhead for a year before I got there. I think he extended to get more total flight hours.

We were doing GS stuff this particular day, can't remember the other crew members names (Jeez). I remember some talk between the pilots about the bird being under powered, lots of hours on the engine and not running so good. You can probably give me a quick class on what that means. At the time I was the grunt in the back enjoying the hell out of the ride, so I didn't know what they were talking about and didn't care.

We get to the LZ where we are going to off load a bunch of C-rats, water, etc. to the grunts. The LZ is one of those that had been cut out of the canopy, so you had to pull to a hover and ease your way down in. Plus it was a tad tight, not much extra room for the blades. So Mr. Riley pulls to a hover planning to go in slow and he's telling us to watch the blades and all that. But about the time he stops over the LZ we lose power and just kind of fall in, doing about a half turn on the way down. We ended up on top of some logs and we're rockin' back and forth a little. We are all sorta having that Whew! feeling. The grunts are grabbing their stuff and then on the radio one of them is saying: "Man, that was great, you got in here in about two seconds, hell, everyone else that's been in here took about five minutes to get down.

Then, the next voice is Mr. Riley saying: "I didn't fly into your damn LZ, I fell into it. And I will not be back here today with this aircraft." No answer on the other end, as a grunt myself I knew they didn't know what he was talking about. Then on our intercom Riley was muttering about: "damn idiots can't tell the difference between a landing and almost crashing".

I was cracking up in the back, but not on the intercom 'cause it occurred to me that Mr. Riley was still a bit upset.

The Way It Was

NAME: Bob Seger
UNIT: 25th Aviation
TIME PERIOD: 1968
SOURCE: Taken from 25th Aviation Association's web-site
DATE RECEIVED: 10 November 2004

One of the chief reasons for the 25th Infantry Division's success on the battlefield in Vietnam is teamwork.

In no other place is teamwork more essential than in the helicopter. The chopper, whether used for troop movement, resupply or tactical support, must be incomplete coordination with the ground activities. Any infantryman knows how good it feels to see gunships pounding the enemy at his front and flanks.

The helicopter, because of its mobility, has been the key to many victories. To get the most out of this mobility, Tropic Lightning forces must work together. Within the helicopter too, teamwork is imperative. A vital member of that team, who supplies the chopper with protection from within, is the helicopter doorgunner.

He is a man with a mission. The two machine guns, one on each side of the chopper, must function perfectly all the time. These guns are often the only friendly thing between the ship and the enemy. Some gunners prefer to mount two machine guns on their side for more firepower.

Each chopper carries a crew of four. Besides the aircraft commander and pilot, there is the crewchief and doorgunner. The crewchief sits behind the gun on the left of the chopper, so he can see the instrument panel better. Working with the crewchief, the doorgunner doubles as a maintenance man of sorts.

He plays a large part in rearming, cleaning and painting the ship. The doorgunner sticks with the ship during the day and between flights. There is plenty of maintenance to pull.

When flying, taking off or landing, the gunner's open position at the rear gives a clear view of any dangerous obstacle or other aircraft, which could damage the ship. His eyes are always open.

In formation flying, gunners on different aircraft work together in harmony with their pilots and each other. Someone is always in a good position to see the enemy. Once suppressive fire is ordered, teamwork and precision displayed gives the appearance of an invisible hand coordinating all.

EMERGENCY RESUPPLY

An emergency resupply of ammo was a mission I will never forget. I was just lounging around the company area when an urgent request for ammunition came down from headquarters. The Wolfhounds were heavily engaged against Charlie and they desperately needed ammo. They asked for volunteers to fly a load of ammo into the field for the Wolfhounds. I had nothing to do, so I volunteered as the aircraft commander. They said it was an emergency, so the other pilot and I sprinted to the Beach. The crew chief and door gunner were already waiting for us. Those guys must sleep on the chopper, as the other pilot and I had hustled to get down to the flight line and they were ready and had untied the rotor blades.

We quickly started up the helicopter and hopped over to the ammo dump. As the crew was loading up the helicopter with cases of ammunition, I was on the radio getting us an artillery clearance. Before every flight, it was necessary to determine where the artillery was firing to avoid it. Occasionally, we had to make a long detour to avoid flying directly flying into the trajectory of our own artillery shells. Artillery shells and helicopters were like oil and water, they just did not mix well. The flight characteristics of a helicopter struck by an artillery shell would be similar to a streamlined manhole cover, straight down.

As I received an artillery clearance, I learned I would have to take a long way around to get to the Wolfhound's location. However there was an alternative to speed the ammo into the field. I knew if I took off downwind I could avoid the artillery fire and proceed much more quickly to my destination. Since the Wolfhounds were in a firefight and running short of ammunition, it seemed imperative to fly the ammo to them immediately. After loading up at the ammo dump, I decided to take off downwind even though I recall my flight school instructor telling me never to take off downwind.

On many occasions, I was told to never, and I mean never, take off downwind. The wind assists a helicopter in getting up the air, while taking off downwind does just the opposite. Since I had been instructed to get the ammo out as quickly as possible, I decided to disregard my old instructor's advice. I decided to take off downwind as that would take me to the infantry's location quicker

That was a big mistake. I knew there was a problem when the aircraft was over so overloaded that I was barely able to pick it up to a hover. That should have been my first clue to a major problem. As I took off downwind, I could feel the strong tailwind picking up the tail and wanting to flip the helicopter over on its nose. Normally this is not problem as I simply pull back on the cyclic stick and the nose then comes up and the tail drops. However, as I pulled back on the cyclic stick, nothing happened. I continued to pull back on the cyclic stick until I could not pull it further.

What happened, was I ran out of cyclic, which means I had the cyclic stick pulled all the way to the rear and the nose still was still dropping. I had lost control over the helicopter. I had the cyclic stick pulled all the way to the rear and the nose was still continuing to drop. With the tailwind, we were zipping along the ground like crazy. My life seemed to flash by also. To

someone watching our takeoff, with our nose low and our tail high, they probably thought we were in a very unusual takeoff position. Actually, we were in a good crashing position and that scared the hell out of me.

Luckily, the helicopter reached translational lift just inches before impacting the ground and we became airborne. It is a good thing as the wind and our momentum most likely would have tipped us over on impact. Then when the rotor blades hit the ground the helicopter would have been ripped apart. We were loaded with high octane jet fuel and a ton of ammunition on board. It was an explosive combination.

It was only a few minutes' flight to the scene of the firefight, but on the way there I was concerned about our landing. There was no doubt in my mind, with the heavily loaded helicopter, it was absolute necessary to land into the wind. I certainly did not need a repeat of my takeoff. After contacting the ground commander, I learned the disposition of the friendly forces and the direction of the enemy fire. When smoke was popped, I was greatly relieved when the smoke revealed I would be able to make a landing into the wind and at the same time, avoid over flying the enemy's position. This made our potential landing safe but then what to do on takeoff, as takeoffs and landings were always made into the wind. I did not like the idea of taking off right over the enemy position.

As we started getting close to landing, one brave soldier stood up with no cover or concealment and was waving his arms and instructing us to land at his location. As we got close to the landing zone, I could see the muzzle flashes of Charlie straight ahead shooting at us and they were not that far off. The landing went fine but I remember how impatient I was sitting on the ground in the middle of a firefight. I did not want to stay on the ground for very long. We were making a very big and inviting target. Charlie was very close to us. I looked back and saw the door gunners in the back handing the boxes of ammo to a soldier who placed them on the ground. I told them just to kick the damn boxes of ammo out on the ground, to hell with neatly handing them to some soldier. I said, “Didn't you see us taking fire when we landed?” They complied with my instructions and just threw cases of ammo out both sides of the aircraft as fast as they could.

After unloading the ammo, I knew there was no way could I takeoff, into the wind, as I would then be directly over the enemy position flying only 30 feet off the ground and about 30 knots. They could hit us with a rock. Since we were considerably lighter now, I took off into a cross wind with no difficulty. I learned my lesson and always took off into the wind after that. I was more careful on all takeoffs after that.

NAME: John Senka
UNIT: 4/9th Infantry
TIME PERIOD: November, 1968
SOURCE: 25th Aviation Association Website
DATE RECEIVED: 4 November 2004

Mole City

Shortly before Thanksgiving 1968, Charlie Company 4/9th 25th Infantry Division, better known as "Manchus," lost 2/3 of their unit when Captain Winters and his men walked into an NVA base camp. Our platoon had spent the prior night on an ambush patrol. As we walked into the fire support base, I joked with radio operator, Dave Briggs, of North Collins, N.Y. Little did I realize this would be the last time I would see Dave or my other buddies alive.

After this, our unit spent many days in limbo; only a handful of grunts. Most of us hoped we would be sent to the rear. No such luck-- our ranks were filled with brand new replacements. We nervously waited for some word of our next destination. Finally we were told to send our radios and personal belongings to the rear area. We were also issued flak jackets. We would rendezvous with Alpha and Bravo companies about 2 "clicks" from the Cambodian border.

The following days were spent on patrols and digging large, deep bunkers. Henry Maul, a quiet redhead from Wyoming was always close by, however, Don Culshaw, a muscular, seasoned rifleman from Minnesota was my partner in the construction of our bunker. Don and I spent several days in the hot sun, digging and filling sandbags. We placed steel over the bunker, and laid the sandbags over the steel. We later dug out the rice paddy dikes and placed the earth over the sandbags. This not only camouflaged our position, but provided an unobstructed view on our side of the perimeter. We were proud of what we had built. We both agreed we could do this for the rest of our tour if it meant not having to confront the enemy. Ironically, neither of us would get to use the bunker.

It was December 22, 1968--Christmas Truce. A prisoner exchange was taking place nearby. We spent our morning walking through a nearby village. We held our empty M16's in one hand and our loaded magazines in the other; our arms were held high over our heads. Several of our group passed out T-Shirts as a gesture of peace and goodwill. We hadn't received mail or other supplies in several days. We were eating green eggs for breakfast; supposedly from Gook chickens. Finally, at about 9:00 that night, we received fresh supplies, mail, Christmas cards, cookies and miniature Christmas trees from home. I remember Don placing a 2 foot artificial tree on top of our bunker. I also was pleased and surprised to get a Christmas card from Bruce Pealer. Sgt. Pealer, a combat Vet from Johnson City, Tennessee had served with me at Ft. Jackson, How happy we were!

At about 10:00, we were given our orders for the evening. Don was going to go out on a night patrol; evidently Intelligence suspected enemy activity along the Cambodian border. Phil Glenn, a lanky, popular 19 year old from St. Paul, Arkansas; and Jose Olea, a seasoned, pistol packing

sergeant from Buffalo, NY would also join the patrol, which eventually totaled nine. My instructions were to occupy and defend one of the others bunkers. Our perimeter consisted of deep bunkers, connected by deep trenches. We were 500 strong. I was glad to see Hank Maul in my bunker. Justin Anderson, a tall blonde Swede from Chicago was also there. I engaged Malcolm True, one of the newest replacements, in conversation. True, who was from Tampa, Florida, had just arrived, along with Jimmy Walker from Red Oak, Oklahoma. The newest "grunt" told me he was married and his wife just had a baby. He was obviously very much in love and a tape recording from his wife was his constant companion.

At about midnight, Lt. Mosher told us to get ready-there was going to be a "Turkey Shoot"! We were told that there were 100 Gooks between the patrol and us, and that the patrol couldn't get back in.

We had no idea that 1500 hard core NVA soldiers were storming in from Cambodia. Little did we know we were outnumbered 3 to 1. I was shocked to find out many years later, that this had been a suicide mission; each enemy soldier had his grave marker strapped to his back. The sky suddenly lit up. It looked like daylight as illumination rounds floated from the sky, dangling from their parachutes. The sky was further brightened as ammo dumps exploded.

The four of us began firing our M16's through the narrow slots in our bunker. We blew all our claymore mines, still not fully understanding the hellish nightmare we were about to face. Malcolm True and I climbed out of the bunker and vigorously heaved hand grenades. As we rejoined Hank and Anderson, a grenade suddenly exploded, filling our dark hole with deadly shrapnel. Almost in unison, we screamed, "I'm hit". We were lucky, none of us were hurt badly. We quickly got into position, and laid down a devastating hail of gunfire. Seconds later, a tremendous explosion filled the air. Anderson let out a blood curdling scream! He was within inches of me. Looking his way, I could see he was dead. My eyeglasses were blown off my face, as was my "steel pot". Not realizing my right leg was shattered, I started crawling behind True, out of the smoke filled hellhole, and into a muddy trench. We found another bunker filled with GI's, many already wounded. A young medic was doing his best to help those most in need. Having barely squeezed through the rear entrance, suddenly a thud hit in the mud next to me. My brain told me that a hand grenade was going to blow, the Gooks were inside the wire! Impulsively, I threw myself towards the center of the blackened dungeon.

Following the explosion there was a deadly silence. Trying desperately to regain my senses, I discovered three of my comrades still able to fight. One of them was a new replacement who had just arrived in country. I recall he was from New York City, was slightly over 5 feet tall, and fired a blooper (M-79 grenade launcher). Roger Cantrell, also a newcomer, was in good shape, as was Lynn Welker, a respected squad leader from Jonesboro, Arkansas. Unable to move my lower body, I urged the others to keep firing.

Unbelievably, concussion grenades were tossed in; I still remember being hit in the face and hesitating to open my eyes for fear that I was blind. I'll never forget the sudden silence as my eardrums exploded and blood streamed down my face. My lungs and nostrils smelled like and

felt like the inside of a gun barrel, as yet a third grenade exploded, filling my belly with hot steel. As I lay there, I prayed that this would soon end.

As I gazed into the area outside of our bunker, the bright light was again visible. The shadow of someone walking in a zombie-like manner appeared. Remarkably, Henry Maul had somehow found me. He crawled into our hole and collapsed by my side. He was somewhat delirious, and I urged him to stay quiet. From the corner of my eye, I could see Sgt. Welker climb out of the bunker and into the trenches. The silhouette of him firing his M-16 has been etched in my mind for 21 years-I remember seeing him hit by small arms fire and rolling past me into the bottom of the bunker. My many attempts to get a response from him were futile. He appeared to be dead.

Hope filled my head and mind as the gunships approached. Their guns rattled away, the enemy became silent. When the choppers departed to resupply, the enemy once again could be seen and heard scurrying among us like deadly rats. At one point, an enemy soldier jumped into my shelter this was probably the only time I thought I might die. What crazy thoughts were in my mind? Math! As a high school student, I was lousy at it, absolutely hated it. All I could think of was, "If I knew this was going to happen, I wouldn't have worried so much about math.

Slowly, reaching for my weapon, and aiming at the Gooks heart, I suddenly was painfully aware that the gun barrel was filled with mud. Gently, the weapon was placed beside me, my legs were curled up to protect my vital parts, and groping in the dark I found a fruitcake tin, which I plopped over my head in a desperate attempt to protect my head. Miraculously, no bullets hit me as the "Dink" sprayed the interior of our bunker. How much time had passed? I don't know. Unconsciousness engulfed me.

When my eyes were again opened, there was daylight outside, but complete silence. A different kind of fear came over me. Who won the battle of Mole City? Were the NVA in control? Would I be taken prisoner? How bad are my wounds? The only other person moving was Cantrell. He mechanically told me his leg was no good, and he wanted a drink of water. Feeling a canteen under my torso, I dug with my fingers until I freed it and tossed it to my buddy.

The most beautiful sight I've ever seen was when a black Mortar Sergeant poked his head into our blackened grave and rejoiced, "There are some Americans alive in here." I urged him to get Hank out first as he was hurt worse than I. He said, "You get out first, because you're blocking the entrance. Besides, your friend is dead.

I was flooded with emotion when became apparent that I was saved. The reality of what had happened these past seven hours struck me like lightning. The realization that most of my buddies were dead caused me to sob uncontrollably, as tears filled my eyes and fell onto my bloodied uniform. I was filled with anger and hate for having had to go through this. As the second shot of morphine entered my body, I sucked the life out of a Winston. Everyone could hear me screaming, "I hate this place." What a horrible experience! "Send me to L.B.J. (Long Binh Jail), because I refuse to come back."

The medics, who were picking steel out of my gut and leg, assured me wouldn't have to return because, "You're going home." And I did.

POST SCRIPT

When the medivac chopper landed at the 12th Evac hospital, I was shocked and thankful to see Lynn Welker, whom I thought was dead. We spoke briefly from our stretchers. I made contact with him again in 1990, via telephone. He is an accountant today. Hank Maul, Malcolm True, and Justin Anderson all died. Phil Glenn and Donny Culshaw both died heroes, as part of the patrol; Jose Olea survived that patrol and is a fireman in California. I've corresponded with the Glenn Family and have met personally with Don Culshaw's family. Jimmy Walker survived this battle unscathed, completed his tour and owns his own construction business in Oklahoma. Jimmy filled in many of the gaps of the Mole City Battle for me, as did Dan Gregory, another platoon member, now living in Montana. After 21 years, X-"Manchu" John Yelton from Newton, Utah is spearheading an effort to get all Charlie Company 4/9 25th Division members who served during 1/68 to 1/69 together for a reunion, especially those of us in the 2nd platoon.

The Way It Was

NAME: Morgan “Butch” Sincock
UNIT: 4/23rd Infantry
TIME PERIOD: 1968
SOURCE: Email sent out by Mr. Sincock on 4 July 2004.
DATE RECEIVED: 4 July 2004

Thirty-six years ago today the 4th Battalion (Mechanized) 23rd Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, was loggered on the west side of Highway #1, opposite Gate 51 of Tan Son Nhut Airbase on the northern edges of Saigon. I can no longer recall what we did for most of that day, but we were likely out on patrol to the northwest trying to disrupt what had been called the "Rocket Belt" from which the communist launched rockets on metropolitan Saigon most nights through June and into July. That evening we left one of the officers in charge of the company and the rest of us crossed the road and were given a ride from Gate #51 to the Tan Son Nhut Officer's Club. There we had a steak (water buffalo) dinner and a few drinks. Toward the end of the evening the Korean band stuck up "American the Beautiful," followed in short order by "Anchors Aweigh", "Off We Go Into the Wild Blue Yonder," the Marine Corps hymn, "The Caissons go Rolling Along," and finally, "The Star Spangled Banner." Besides a salute to Independence Day, it was the cue that they were closing for the night.

We walked out and four of us promptly requisitioned a jeep (Officers, as is well known, don't steal things) and drove it to Gate #51 where the APs assured us with a wink that they were thankful that we had found the lost vehicle and would see that it was returned to its rightful owner. This was only a few months post-Tet '68 and the USAF at Tan Son Nhut recalled vividly the 25th Division rescue of their Air Base (by our 3/4 Cav) such that it was very difficult for a 25th Division Soldier to do any harm or get into trouble. It took a few more months for that welcome to wear out, but on July 4, 1968, it was a still fresh in the memory of the Air Police at Gate #51.

We walked across the road to our Night Defensive Positions (NDP) and I recall heading for the latrine. One of the other guys was met by his platoon sergeant who had apparently been doing some celebrating of his own. He announced that they had something they had to do and he took his Lieutenant by the arm and headed to one of their tracks. As I exited the latrine I saw the two of them a few yards away. The sergeant promptly struck the bottom of a Star Cluster sending several green streams of light into the sky. The Lt. followed with a red Star Cluster and before long several others joined in lighting the sky with our military fireworks. Suddenly the horizon lit up with similar displays of green, white and red light. Every American position within miles began to fire off Star Clusters. Those red, white and green domes of fireworks dotted the horizon north and west of Saigon for miles. Soon someone from Battalion came running out shouting to stop firing off the Star Clusters. By then we had expended our supply of Star Clusters (something that we rarely had occasion to use in the course of normal operations anyway.)

I have seen many impressive displays of fireworks over the years and will likely see another tonight. But I will never experience as moving a display of the spirit of July 4th as I did that

evening thirty-six years ago when the Soldiers of the American Army showed their spirit and pride in an American tradition.

I wish you all a wonderful Independence Day.
Butch Sincock

NAME: MAJ Michael H. Slominski, USA-Ret
UNIT: 3rd Support Battalion
TIME PERIOD: 1966
SOURCE: Account sent by MAJ Slominski after visiting the museum in 2004
DATE RECEIVED: 14 March 2005

25th Infantry Division, 3rd Brigade Deployment to the Republic of Vietnam

In 1965 I was a 1st Lieutenant commanding Company D, 725th Maintenance Battalion. The Division had sent some troops from the 65th Engineer Battalion to RVN in early summer 1965.

On Sunday, 12 December 1965, I was working on my car when I received a call about 0900 hours from the Battalion Adjutant, CPT Joe Jendrysik, to report to the Battalion Commander's office ASAP. Upon reporting to the CO's office I found the rest of the staff there. It was then that we were informed that the 3rd Brigade was deploying to Vietnam. Since I was a 1st Lieutenant and at that time the requirement was for a Captain to be in a Company Commander's slot I was offered the choice of either being moved to the staff of the 725th Maintenance Battalion or take over as the new S-1/S-4/PBO of the 3rd Support Battalion (Provisional). I chose the new battalion. At that time the 3rd Support Battalion consisted of the Battalion Commander and myself.

Work started immediately to transfer D Company to a new CO and I started my duties as the 3rd Support Battalion S-1/S-4/PBO. At this time I was one of the few officers trained by the U.S. Marine Corps in October 1963 in outloading operations as a result of preparations for an amphibious exercise in 1964 (Operation Westwind). In addition to my battalion duties, I assisted the U.S. Air Force personnel in preparing aircraft outloading plans for the deployment. The 3rd Support Battalion had no assigned personnel or equipment so we began the organization of the unit. The battalion consisted of a maintenance company, a company from the 25th S&T Battalion, a company from the 25th Medical Battalion, and a portion of the 25th Admin.

At that time the Quadrangles had a large grassy area in the middle of the Quads which for the most part were off limits except for ceremonial functions. As the 3rd Support Battalion began to accumulate equipment is was boxed, packed, and stacked on the grassy areas that had been off limits. Because of the short time frame when it was my time to sign the Property Books, I had the respective Company Commanders sign for their property before I signed the property books. I did that in the hope that they had a vested interest in making sure all the property was there. I had two NCO's who were assigned to the S-4 Section who handled all the property receipts.

The 3rd Brigade began the deployment by outloading aircraft out of Hickam Air Force Base just outside Honolulu. We used C-141 Starlifters and C-135's (The C-141's had greater lift capability but the bay doors on the C-135's were bigger to accommodate the larger vehicles). The 3rd Brigade put the first elements of the Brigade in Pleiku, RVN on 24 December 1965, Christmas Eve. Eventually I was the last man of the Brigade to close in RVN after working many 20 hour days. I landed in Pleiku on 20 January 1966. I remember that we had to go to Congress to get

additional C-141 sorties because of all the cargo we had. I assume that the Air Force handled that because I was on the last C-141 to go.

On the way to Vietnam, we had to go on oxygen because somewhere between Hawaii and either Wake Island or Guam, there was an extremely strong smell of gasoline. The pilot told us (there was another 1st Lieutenant on board who had just returned from Dom Rep along with me) to go on oxygen and not smoke or do anything that would cause a spark. As I recall we were at about 41,000 feet when we got that word. Upon landing, it was discovered that someone failed to purge the gas from some equipment. About five gallons of gas was drained from the equipment after we landed on Wake/Guam.

I can't recall whether we made another stop at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines or went directly into Pleiku Air Base and landed just before dawn. I expected to see a crude landing area. Instead as the bay doors of the aircraft opened, I thought I was in Times Square. I had never seen so many lights. I got loaded onto a truck and was taken to our base camp on a hill which overlooked the air base. Of course by the time I arrived, the base camp was all set up. Our headquarters was in GP large tent and my bunk was in a small CP tent which I shared with the Battalion S-3. All my tent had was the canvas walls and an ammo box on end to use as a closet for my gear. The floor was dirt until enough artillery rounds had been fired so we could build a floor.

When we were leaving Hawaii, the Brigade must have cleaned out every Property Disposal Yard on Oahu and got all the plywood that was available. That still didn't make for very comfortable living but it worked. We had slit trenches and used them for quite a while until more permanent latrines could be built. We eventually set up a small tent as a battalion PX for which I was also responsible. It was in Pleiku that I was promoted to Captain in April 1965. I stayed with the 3rd Support Battalion until May 1966 when I was recalled to the 25th Infantry Division base camp at Cu Chi where I was assigned as the Division Armament Maintenance Officer. I remained in that role until I DEROS'ed out in January 1967.

The Way It Was

NAME: Donald W. Slowik
UNIT: 25th MP Company
TIME PERIOD: 1966
SOURCE: letter from Mr. Slowik
DATE RECEIVED: January 2006

My Friend Joe

I first met Joe Mammolitti on an early January morning in 1966 aboard the U.S. Navy troop carrier USNS General John Pope as we were leaving San Francisco bound for the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. During that surreal moment at daybreak we were all anxiously standing shoulder-to-shoulder on deck with hundreds of other troops enjoying our last views of San Francisco. It was then I casually turned to this unknown person next to me and said to him, "I just wonder how many of us will be coming back." At that moment he turned to me and briefly smiled, and then we introduced ourselves.

During the years that followed, I many times pondered that watershed event on that cold morning in San Francisco, cherishing the bitter sweetness of our first encounter, let alone its believability. I have since embraced the belief that the warmth of our Creator was present during those hallowed moments as we each leaned on the ship rail gazing at the breadth of the Pacific Ocean, beginning a journey in life that only one of us would complete.

Upon approaching the Hawaiian waters and first seeing Diamond Head on the distant horizon, we again enjoyed the views from the same ship rail but on a warm and sunny day instead. Upon our arrival in Honolulu, we reported to our separate assignments, Joe to the 25th Division Headquarters Company, and I to the 25th Military Police Company. We were billeted in separate buildings called quads, each facing the same beautiful parade field in Schofield Barracks. My fond recollection of the warm tropical mornings after a refreshing rain or the panoramic sunsets and the beauty of the surrounding mountains are forever seared into my memory of our new, but brief home in Hawaii.

Because we were both reared in major urban cities, Joe from New York, and I from Chicago, we gravitated doing things which had common interests that most city kids could only appreciate. Our friendship soon became bonded with a deep sense of shared values which were reflected in the activities we enjoyed doing together while in Oahu. I especially remember him sharing with me his many fond thoughts and love for his family.

One day in March 1966, all the troops stood in battalion formation in full battle dress for final inspection on the same parade grounds in front of our billets. I will forever remember this somber event on that warm beautiful day in Hawaii at Schofield Barracks. This final assembly of bodies and souls in such a tropical paradise on this earth will always resonate in my memory with a deep sense of pride and being uniquely sacrosanct in some mysterious way. Following a brief address and prayer by our battalion commander, we were then transported by truck convoy

to the same familiar troop carrier, the USNS Pope, docked in Honolulu Harbor to begin our long voyage to Vietnam.

Following our arrival at the 25th Division base camp in Chu Chi, Vietnam, Joe and I had less opportunity to spend with each other because of our duties. I would spend long times away for the base camp due to convoy duties and transporting POW's. We would occasionally meet for meals and share news from the letters we received form home. On a couple occasions, we even enjoyed several USO shows performed at the base. During one evening performance, a brief firefight with some VC erupted in the distant outer perimeter of the base camp, but the show continued anyway with the help of some helicopter gun ships that suppressed the enemy fire.

Don Slowik and Joe Mammoletti at Cu Chi Base Camp
June 1966

Several other events punctuated our friendship while assigned to Chu Chi base camp. One episode was a violent monsoon rainstorm that occurred during the night. It rained so hard and was so windy that it literally blew away most of our tents forcing us to use only our ponchos to keep us somewhat dry during that long sleepless night. Another lasting memory was a VC rocket attack on our base camp during the early evening hours after dinner. I clearly remember one rocket passing overhead and hitting a nearby refueling tank for helicopters causing a spectacular explosion. After spending all night in a sandbag bunker, I couldn't help remembering for a brief moment that old adage, "there are no atheists in foxholes," undoubtedly authored by another frightened soul from some previous war.

In March 1966, I was transferred to another military police unit in Can Tho, Vietnam. I was given only about a week's notice and told this to Joe, much to our mutual regret. We had dinner the night before I was scheduled to leave by convoy for Saigon the next morning. At the close of our meal, he promised to see me off before the convoy left at dawn the next morning. The weather that last morning not only dismal, but had a low blanket of fog covering the ground.

It also had that distinctive jungle dampness and smell of vegetation that only a previous visitor could identify with.

As I anxiously waited in an idling 2 1/2 ton truck for Joe, the diesel engine was spewing fumes across the damp landscape. At the last moment before the convoy left, Joe came running to say goodbye. He warmly shook my hand while smiling and promised to stay in touch with me at my new unit. I will always remember his unique New Yorker accent when he said, "take care, I'll see you again." That was the last time I ever saw or spoke to Joe. Even to this day, I momentarily relive the finality of that last morning in Chu Chi when I'm driving my car on an early rainy day and stop for a traffic light next to a diesel truck spewing those same pungent fumes.

Joe Mammolitti was killed five days later on August 28, 1966. He died as a result of an accidental gunshot wound inflicted by a fellow soldier. His name is inscribed on Panel 10, Line 51 at the Vietnam Wall Memorial in Washington, DC.

I wish to related one last event that beautifully epitomizes the precious friendship I had with my friend Joe. This final episode further exemplifies the mysterious aura of the omnipresence of our Creator during Joe's lasting legacy.

On a chilly Saturday morning, October 29, 1994, I was in the Washington, DC area following several days of business meetings that week. I checked out of my hotel that morning, and realized I had several hours of free time before my return flight back to Chicago later that afternoon. I thought it would be nice to visit the Memorial Wall one last time before going home. Whatever possessed me to choose this particular day and time to visit the Wall is entirely beyond any rational or earthly explanation. The bizarre events that followed can only be attributed to Divine intervention, so I will always believe.

The weather that day in Washington was just idyllic. It perfectly set the stage for the event that followed which had the extraordinary synchronization of precise timing. The brilliant fall colors, the crispness of the air and fallen leaves and the warmth of the surroundings were woven into the fabric of memories that once again can only border on the unbelievable.

The bizarre event that followed slowly unfolded when I strolled past the long row of names leading to Panel 10 to view Joe's name on the Memorial Wall. As I arrived, I saw a man standing on a footstool at the base of Panel 10, under the watchful eye of a lady companion next to him. He was stretching upward while rubbing a piece of carbon in a continuous motion to create a shaded impression of a deceased person's name on a paper form. This has become a symbolic tradition, enabling visitors to directly transfer the inscribed name of a fallen love one thereby customizing a keepsake memento.

As this man was completing his personalized memorial piece, I clearly saw the letters of "Joseph Mammoletti's" name slowly emerging on the paper as he finished the memento. In that brief moment of time to create the etching, perhaps lasting only a dozen seconds, I was presented a unique, but brief window of time and opportunity to meet a person who had a personal interest

or perhaps friendship with Joe. I found this emotionally charged moment incredibly overwhelming.

I quickly address the gentleman as he was stepping down form the footstool and asked him if he knew Joe Mammoletti. He carefully paused for several seconds while staring at me and reluctantly said yes. I vividly remember his lady companion's eyes becoming fixated on me with a mix of surprise and suspicion…indeed a justifiable response under the circumstances. We actually just stared at each other for a few brief moments in slow motion, trying to process the bizarre tone of the moment.

I then began to impulsively ramble on about my good friend Joe while in Vietnam. It was then I recall saying that I was the last person who had seen Joe alive, who was also a friend of his family.

At that very moment, there was a long pause and a gaze of disbelief on their behalf. I introduced myself and just rattled on about Joe and his family. I further mentioned I visited the Mamoletti family in New York when I was on military leave from Vietnam shortly after his death.

We chatted for a long time and they gracefully queried me about certain subtleties of personal information about Joe and his family. We literally stood at the base of Panel 10 directly below Joe's inscribed name for over and hour before they came to the conclusion I was not only authentic, but had no false or ulterior motive for engaging them at the Wall.

Gradually, a certain sense of warmth emerged for these justifiably suspicious friends of Joe who also chose to visit the Wall at that exact moment in time. We actually embraced for a moment in silent prayer and continued to feel a deep sense of astonishment. The couple, Betty and Peter Laseau, was visiting residents from Arizona. They were close friends of the Mammoletti family when they previously lived in New York City for many years.

This confluence of unrelated persons, events, and unique circumstances all converging at such a precise time to pay homage to a mutual friend is by no means a coincidence in my opinion. I believe it is most appropriate to conclude by quoting an author unknown to me, that "For those who believe, no explanation is necessary, and for those disbelieve, no explanation is possible."

In closing, I will fondly remember the warmth of first meeting Joe on that cold January morning in San Francisco so long ago. I will forever believe that the beauty of our Creator was also present during those most profound experiences of my life.

The Way It Was

NAME: Greg Stanmar
UNIT: PIO, 2/14th Infantry
TIME PERIOD: 1969-1970
SOURCE: Heard through Jeff Hinman that we were collecting these accounts. Sent on disk.
DATE RECEIVED: 19 November 2004

I welcome the opportunity to put some recollections on paper before they get lost to time.

I don't think a lot of people realize what the specific job of the serviceman in the Public information Office (PIO) was all about. We all tell our wives that we went AOL from the Army without them realizing it. Former PIO Ray Byrne of Pacific Grove, Calif., likes to tell the story of running into a former captain years later who told Ray the Army could never figure out where Ray and the rest of us existed, except in our bylines for military publications.

Some of us existed in a converted Cu Chi hutch covered by a squad tent to keep out the light. Photo equipment was supplied by an intelligence unit from the Air Force in Saigon, which we got by giving them cases of C-rations. They actually liked the stuff as snacks. A big fan, homemade bunks and a table finished off the living quarters.

One morning a top sergeant from another unit began screaming when he found us in bed at 8 a.m. We told him we were PIOs who had been working all night to make our Thursday deadline and did not appreciate the invasion of brass. He apologized, saying he thought we were in the Army. Fortunately, none of these PIO's demanded the sergeant bring us breakfast in bed as repayment.

I don't remember whether we had really been working all that night, though we did try to operate the darkroom when it was dark to escape the light leaks through the tent. More likely we had been up late discussing a wide range of topics, with plenty of beer and marijuana present. You have to remember that a PIO was someone who only the year before was a college student who stayed up all night discussing the world, with plenty of beer and pot around.

Those who were not in the darkroom that morning were probably out in the field with the infantry, where, of course, marijuana and beer were not part of the field gear. That darkroom was in the headquarters area of the 2/14th battalion instead of at the second brigade's headquarters area, who we really worked for. Our dropping out of the Army, at least in our own eyes, began when the brigade's well-liked PIO commanding officer, Lt. J.T. Richards, was transferred to another base camp and eventually rotated home. His replacement actually took the military seriously.

We were not about to rub shoulders with military types who were serious about the Army in order to do our job and so we built our own darkroom and newsroom, quickly dropping our stuff off at brigade on Thursdays and then leaving the area.

The Way It Was

For most of us our week began on Friday or Saturday with a visit to division or brigade Tactical Operation Command to find where we were likely to find firefights but not a lot of mine fields. From that we picked the company we would hump with for the next couple days. It was usually a company with the battalion we were supposed to be covering.

After we invaded Cambodia there was little choice about what we would cover nor did we want to be anywhere else but in that country. In fact, I was so anxious to get there that a few days before we officially went in I hitched a ride with a convoy of ARVNs that were heading there. I was having a dandy time with my new found friends when, a mile into Cambodia a helicopter showed up to take me back to Vietnam. At that point we were denying Americans were in Cambodia and the brass did not want some kid reporter screwing that up. I have no idea how they found out where I was heading or why I did not receive so much as a reprimand for my trick.

When we did things the way they were supposed to be done, we=d hitch a ride on a truck or helicopter to the unit and re-introduce ourselves. Most often, especially during the Cambodian operation, the unit wasn't operating out of a firebase or hardspot and our sleeping quarters were a poncho liner and the hard ground. The troops and brass were usually happy to see us but puzzled why we would be there if we didn't have to be. Their delight in getting some press attention was why we did it, but would never tell them that.

My becoming a PIO was pretty much like everyone else's story, with minor variations. Armed with a recent degree in journalism from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, once I arrived in country I tried to convince the Army that I was a much better reporter than infantryman. When I arrived at Cu Chi I visited the division PIO office and told them the same thing. They told me to come back after my first purple heart. A month later, I came back with my facial stitches still in place and again asked about the job. I was named PIO to the 2/14th, where I had been a rifleman.

A PIO assignment did not keep us out of the field altogether, since that was how we picked up our stories and pictures. But it did allow weekly visits to the base camp to process pictures and write stories.

I must have made the brass happy because about 20 years after discharge I contacted my congressman and asked for my medals. As with most infantrymen, I had no idea what I had coming. They sent me my Purple Heart and Bronze Star, along with the other usual stuff you get for being there. The Bronze Star citation became handy because it allowed me to get an Illinois license plate with a number I can remember.
My job also must have impressed newspaper brass back home because I quickly was able to get a job as a reporter in Rockford, Ill., and now am an independent contractor for a Bloomington, Ill., newspaper and several radio groups.

Many years after we got home some of us still take part in reunions that are just an excuse for some very good friends from all over the country, who enjoy each other's company, to get together. As time passes our wives are beginning to understand the kind of closeness that can come from sharing the dangers and comradeship of a bunch of guys who did not want to be in the Army until they were drafted and eventually found a way to survive.

The Way It Was

NAME: Emmett Street
UNIT: 1st Platoon, B Company, 1st Bn 14th Infantry/ Tunnel Rat/LRRP Team member in Duc Pho, An Yang, Chu Lai, Bon San.
TIME PERIOD: Vietnam War
SOURCE: Walk in visit by Mr. Street. Interview by Adam Elia
DATE RECEIVED:

How were you fitted out? .45 and a flashlight sometimes took your shirt off. No communication. No way to communicate with topside except by messenger.

Do you go in alone? If the hole was fresh, there would be two of you. If hole was old, you would go in alone.

Describe Tunnel: Mostly decaying odors (swamp odor), smelled odor, very hot and sweaty. Very smelly. Mouth would be dry; hands and body sweating. You first got used to darkness then used flashlight.

Did you see animals? Didn't see any snakes, but I did see rats and spiders. Didn't see DDT grenades.

What did you see? We would find living area, ammunition caches using 5 gallon cans as ammo cans. Living area had nothing special.

You described a firefight in a tunnel hospital, please describe it? We hit the entrance by accident. The nurses did most of the fighting; they

The Way It Was

NAME: Michael F. Tarman, Colonel, U. S. Army (Retired)
UNIT: 25th Military Police Company
TIME PERIOD: February 7, 1969 to February 6, 1970
SOURCE: Forwarded by Maj. Glaser, Edited by Linda Hee
DATE RECEIVED: 6 April 2001

CPT Mike Tarman - Cu Chi RVN 1969

I arrived in Vietnam shortly after noon on February 7, 1969.

I came to Vietnam directly from Okinawa where I had spent 19 months with the 96th Military Police Battalion. I signed out before sunrise and a friend, Lieutenant Chuck Russo, drove me to Kadena Air Force Base to catch a Military Airlift Command to Vietnam. After a brief refueling stop at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, we arrived at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon. We were transported to Camp Alpha only to learn I had "just missed" the bus to Long Binh and the 90th Replacement Battalion. The next bus was noon the following day.

My first night in Vietnam was spent in a hootch in Camp Alpha. Most of the officers in the hootch were either coming from or going on R&R (rest and recuperation leave). I did not meet anyone who had less than six months in country. The personnel who ran Camp Alpha did not seem concerned about advertising who was sleeping where, the sign over the hootch said "Officers' Country."

The following morning and a short bus ride later, I was at the 90th Replacement Battalion. I was pleasantly surprised to receive my orientation briefing from 1LT Dennis Johnston. Dennis and I had graduated together from 83rd Company. Infantry Officer Candidate School, on March 31, 1967. That night, Dennis contacted a couple of other 83rd graduations who were stationed at

Long Binh. We had a couple of beers in the Officers Club and recalled our times at Benning's School for Boys. Of the group, everyone other than me had less than a month until their Vietnam tour was up.

Although my limited commission service time was all with the military police, my orders to Vietnam earmarked me for an assignment in the infantry. I spent three days in the 90th Replacement Battalion waiting for follow on orders. Finally, my name appeared on the "up country" roster. I was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division, the Tropic Lightning Division. There were six officers aboard the caribou flight to Cu Chi, home of the 25th Infantry Division Headquarters. After landing at the airfield, we were taken to the Tropic Lightning Replacement Center under the command of Lt. Andy Malloy. Lt. Malloy had an annoying way of saying, "Welcome aboard" over and over as he took us to Division Headquarters for processing. Three officers went to file their travel claim while three of us went to the Adjutant General's office. A captain busily going through a stack of papers, glanced up, saw my branch insignia, and said, "You will be going to the MP Company, Lieutenant."

By the time I finished processing travel, Captain William A. Tinsley, Commander, 25th Military Police Company, was there to take me to the company area.
The Division Provost Marshal was LTC Malcolm R. "The Gray Ghost" Smith, the Deputy Provost was John Palmer, the Operations Officer was Captain Michael Gersten, and the Provost Sergeant was 1SG Adolph Sanders. This was prior to the Criminal Investigation becoming a separate command and CW2 Billy R. Martin was the Officer in Charge of the Division's Criminal Investigation Detachment.

The troops fondly called LTC Smith the "Gray Ghost" because he seemed to always turn up when he was least expected, but most needed, anywhere in the Division's Area of Operation (AO).

The TOE for a Division Military Police Company authorized a total of 189 personnel. However, I quickly learned the 25th MP Company was not a typical division MP company. There were over 300 personnel assigned to the company.

In addition to the Provost Marshal Section, the Criminal Investigation Detachment, the Company Headquarters, and four platoons, the company had a mess section and a tactical escort platoon. The mess section operated a 24-hour mess which supported the military police in Cu Chi as well as providing midnight chow to Division Headquarters personnel. The tactical escort platoon originally was comprised of infantry personnel to augment the military police escorting resupply convoys in the Division AO. By the time I arrived in country, with the exception of the platoon leader, all the infantry personnel had been replaced by military police.

The 25th MP Company missions included escorting convoys, patrolling the base camps and major resupply routes, operating indigenous labor check points, conducting resource control check points, processing enemy prisoners of war, securing the Division Tactical Operation Center, and performing other missions as assigned. Some of these other missions were providing

the color guard for division ceremonies, performing crowd control at USO shows such as the Bob Hope Show, and providing security for the Donut Dollies hootch. (Donut Dollies were American Red Cross Recreational Workers.) And, on one occasion, I am aware that the MPs responded to a demonstration outside Tay Ninh Base Camp.

The company's headquarters platoon consisted of the normal supply and motor pool sections and, as mentioned previously a mess section. The extra personnel also allowed the company to have an R&U section, and a full time barber.

1st Platoon supported the 1st Brigade in Tay Ninh. 3rd Platoon supported the 3rd Brigade in Dau Tieng.

The 2nd and 4th Platoons operated out of Cu Chi. (Cu Chi was fondly called Chuckle Chuckle by the troops.)

Captain Tinsley advised me that I was going to Tay Ninh to take over the 1st Platoon. The current platoon leader, Lieutenant Morrie Sills, was being reassigned to the 720th Military Police Battalion because he was due to be promoted to Captain. I asked Captain Tinsley when Lieutenant Sills was scheduled to be promoted and he told me sometime in April. I was scheduled for promotion to Captain on March 31.

I spent almost a month in Cu Chi. After attending Tropic Lightning Reinforcement Training Center, I spent three weeks performing convoy escort duty.

My first realization that I was in combat zone was when a thunderous roar woke me in the middle of my first night in Cu Chi. No one else in the "Officers' Hootch" even woke up and after a few anxious moments I decided it must be okay, rolled over, and went back to sleep. The next morning I learned I had been awakened by a B-52 strike miles from Cu Chi.

After three days of reinforcement training, I spent approximately three weeks on convoy escort duty. The 25th Infantry Division's convoy operations were unparalleled. At approximately 0430 each morning, a representative from the Provost Marshal Office flew from Cu Chi to Long Binh to provide a briefing to all the drivers who would be in the convoy. Normally this representative was either the Provost Marshal, Deputy PM, the PM Operations Officer, or the MP Company Commander. The drivers were given a comprehensive briefing on convoy procedures. Topics included route of march, rate of march, march unit assignment, spacing between march units, actions to take in case of breakdown, and ambush procedures.

Convoy speeds varied depending upon the terrain, but general guidelines were 25 mph on the open road and 15 mph through the village. March units were generally no more than 15 vehicles with 300 to 500 meters between march units. All drivers were informed, if they experienced any mechanical problems or their vehicle hit a mine, they were to do everything within their power to not block the road. They were to get out of the road and wait for the trail unit. In case of an ambush, drivers were to get out of the kill zone. They were not to abandon their vehicles in the

kill zone. If the ambush was on a march unit in front of them, they were not to drive into the kill zone.

The convoy was organized into three legs, those vehicles destined for Tay Ninh, those going to Dau Tieng and those going to Cu Chi. Military Police from the 720th Military Police Battalion in Long Binh escorted the convoy from Long Binh to the Phu Cong Bridge. The 720th Military Police personnel dropped out on the south side of the bridge and the 25th Military Police took over.

Military police convoy support consisted of a scout vehicle with each of the Tay Ninh and Dau Tieng legs, a MP gun jeep with each march unit, tactical escort vehicles dispersed throughout the convoy, and a MP vehicle with the trail unit. Additionally, the Provost Marshal's Office had a dedicated low observation helicopter (LOH) which flew near continuous command and control (C&C) over the convoy. The Division also had mechanized infantry unit providing flank security at key sites along the convoy route.

The road from Long Binh to Trang Bang (north of Cu Chi) was paved. From Trang Bang on, the roads were dirt. Each morning, prior to any convoy operations, engineer units swept these roads for mines. Despite these precautions, it was not unusual for an occasional vehicle to take a hit. The two convoys split north of Trang Bang.

The Tay Ninh and Dau Tieng convoys were each lead by a Military Police gun jeep with a MP lieutenant, a MP driver, and a MP manning a 60 caliber machine gun. Each convoy was preceded by a scout vehicle. The scout jeep personnel consisted of a MP sergeant, a MP driver, and a QC (Vietnamese MP). A MP gun jeep lead each march unit with the a MP driver, MP Observer and a MP M-60 gunner. A MP vehicle also escorted the trail unit which contained a wrecker and a couple of bob-tail for disabled vehicles. Upon my initial assignment, the tactical escort platoon also used gun jeeps. Later in my tour, the tactical escort platoon vehicles were replaced with the V-100 Armored Vehicle.

The military police were responsible for escorting the convoy. They, with the help of the help of a Provost Marshal representative in the dedicated C&C LOH, ensured the march units maintained the proper speed and the proper intervals. The MP lieutenant had the additional responsibility of radioing in check points. In cases of emergency, the MPs were also responsible for ensuring the march units got out of the kill zone or did not enter the kill zone. The tactical escort platoon's mission was quite simple. They were the initial response force to any ambush of the convoy until the mechanized infantry units could respond.

While I was performing convoy escort, the Provost Marshal representative in the C&C LOH was most often the Provost Marshal himself. Later, after LTC Smith left, the Division assigned a combat arm company grade officer to the PM for this role.

It normally took approximately 4 hours from the time the convoy crossed the Phu Cong Bridge until they closed on Tay Ninh and Dau Tieng, respectfully. Turn around time at each location

normally took about an hour and a half. During that period, the MPs would eat their c-rations, rest, and, if time permitted, hit the PX to see if there were any good deals. At the appointed time, the convoys would depart for the return trip to Long Binh.

During my brief time on convoy escort, some vehicles in the units I was escorting were hit by mines. However, I was fortunate and never directly involved in any ambushes.

I developed a great respect for the MPs and the truck drivers involved with the convoy. The days were long, hot, and arduous. It was physically and mentally demanding. Even on days when there was no enemy activity, everyone had to be mentally alert at all times. During the dry season, MPs and drivers soon found themselves coated in a thin, white dust. The personnel in the trail unit had the worse. They often were white as ghosts by the time they closed on base camp. In the raining season, it was not unusual to be wet and dry four or five times in a single day. The trail unit was the least heralded of all the convoy positions. Not only did they eat the most dust, they with the constant challenge of ensuring all the vehicles made it to a secure area. It was not unusual for the trail to return after dark or, even on rare occasions, to spend the night in a secure fire support base.

Near the end of February, I experienced my first rocket attack. Someone ran through our hootch late one night hollering we were on alert. I grabbed my steel pot, M-16, and ran out into the company street. I joined a group of the unit officers at the MP desk and learned that a group of NVA soldiers had penetrated the perimeter and destroyed 12 Chinook helicopters. It was unknown if the enemy was still on base camp. We had been on alert for about an hour when the sound of an incoming rocket caused everyone to hit the ground.

The rocket exploded in the military police company area, severely damaging one of the hootches. Much to everyone's relief, the hootch was unoccupied and no one was hurt. Although, several people's new stereo equipment was damaged.

The day after my first rocket attack, I was detailed along with some other company grade officers and NCOs to inventory the Division Club System. (Some tasks must occur regardless of what is going on around with you.) We were split into teams. Since we were on a secure base camp, no one was armed. Just prior to lunch, as our team was counting supplies in a storeroom of one of the clubs, a staff sergeant came in with a squad of infantry. They were wearing their steel pots and their load bearing equipment. They were all carrying their M-16s with an inserted magazine. I assumed they had a round in the chamber.

The sergeant advised me a group of NVA had been found in the Division Finance Office's bunker. They were part of the enemy force that had assaulted the base camp during the night and presumably, they were waiting for darkness to resume hostilities. The entire base camp was being searched to ensure there were not other groups. Needless to say, I instructed all the members of my inventory team to bring a weapon with them when they returned from lunch.

The Way It Was

I went to Tay Ninh the first part of March 1969 to become the 1st Platoon Leader. SSG Joe P. Thomas was the platoon sergeant. The 1st Platoon was co-located with the 1st Platoon of the 545th Military Police Company, the 1st Cavalry Division's MP Company. The 545th platoon leader was Zbigniew "Zeek" Majchek (spelling of last name is highly suspect) and the platoon sergeant was SFC Joe Barnes.

The MP Station, POW Collection Point, and platoon area were located on the southeast part of the base camp near the Headquarters,1st Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division. The MP Station was a wood frame building with a corrugated tin roof. There was a small, raised desk manned by a desk sergeant and a desk clerk. There was a detention cell off to the side of the desk. Behind the MP Station, a connex container, with holes cut in the door and encased in sand bags, served as another detention cell.

The POW collecting point was fenced and had eight hootches for segregating prisoners. During my five months in Tay Ninh, the POW collection point was only used once when one of the units brought in 28 North Vietnamese prisoners. The rest of the time the numbers were so small that we used the detention cells. We had rice on hand for feeding the EPW, but our experience was that they most always preferred c-rations or food from the dining facility.

The 1st Platoon primary missions in support of the 1st Brigade was to operate an indigenous labor check point, patrol the base camp, and conduct resource control check point operations.

Approximately 1,800 indigenous laborers came on Tay Ninh each day. They worked as house boys/girls, laborers for Pacific Architect and Engineering (the Post Engineers), the Post Exchange, and elsewhere on Base Camp. All these laborers and their packages/lunch boxes were searched coming onto base camp each morning and when they departed each evening. The morning searches concentrated on preventing explosives or booby traps being brought onto base camp. The evening searches focused on preventing theft of soldiers' property.

The platoon area and the MP station were on the south side of the base camp. We were near the Headquarters of the1st Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division and approximately 200 meters from the bunker line. The Philippine Cavalry had a complex on the east side of the base camp. Approximately 2 kilometers southeast of Tay Ninh Base Camp was a village named Cao Sai. The residents of Cao Sai were anti-communists Catholics who had fled North Vietnam under the leadership of a Priest. I believe his name was Father Sui. This village provided a significant proportion of the indigenous work force on Tay Ninh Base. Additionally, as attested to by the occasional fire fight at Cao Sai, it provided some strategic protection to Tay Ninh Base Camp.

Tay Ninh Base Camp received rocket and mortar attacks most every night. Since the airfield and the ammunition storage area were on the other side of base camp, most of the time these rounds missed the MP area by a significant margin. At the nightly pinochle games SFC Barnes, SSG Thomas, Zeek and I would play, the first order of business was to establish which direction we were going to fall in case of a rocket attack.. Many a night, I would listen and count mortar

rounds leave the mortar tubes. Then, listen and count as the rounds hit on Tay Ninh Base Camp, paying close attention to the direction of travel.

Early in June 1969, I remember a night that Tay Ninh Base Camp took over took over 200 rounds of 107 rockets and 82 mm mortars. The POL went up in flames, as did a dispensary, and I believe some aircraft were also damaged. There was also a direct hit in the MP area, but again there were no injuries.

Chieu Hoi was the "open arms" program, promising clemency and financial aid to Viet Cong and NVA soldiers and cadre who stopped fighting and returned to South Vietnam. On one occasion, we had a Chieu Hoi person the military intelligence asked us to keep a couple of days rather than evacuating to the Division area. He was providing them information regarding an upcoming operation.

I have long since forgotten my hootch maid's Vietnamese name. Everyone just called her "Sally." When Sally saw the Chieu Hoi, she told me, "GI stay Vietnam, boo coo Chieu Hoi. GI go home, no more Chieu Hoi." (boo coo - bastardized French, from beaucoup, meaning "much" or "many".)

On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. A video tape of the historic walk was flown from Clark Air Force Base to Saigon and broadcast over Armed Forces Television Saigon I had bought a black and white, battery operated television at the PX and watched the event with awe approximately 6 hours after the actual walk. At the time, I was really impressed with the advancements in technology. I saw man's first walk on the moon only six hours after it happened - WOW!

While in Tay Ninh, I spent one afternoon at the Cao Dai Temple. It was a remarkably beautiful temple and provided a tranquillity that I experienced nowhere else in-country.

I left Tay Tinh on August 8, 1969, to go to Cu Chi and take command of the military police company. When I assumed command, the 25th Military police Company had an assigned strength of over 320 personnel. LTC William E. Gregerson was now the Provost Marshal and Major Si Simons was the Deputy Provost Marshal. Company officers included 1LT John "Lurch" Heaton, 1LT Richard E. Hetzel, 1LT Charles Johnston, 1LT Richard Bowers, 1LT Andrew "Welcome Aboard" Malloy, and CWO William Conrad. Lt Malloy had come from the replacement center to be the tactical escort platoon leader. the Some key company personnel were: First Sergeant Raymond Wheeler; SFC Archie B. Smith, Operations NCO, SSG Frank L. Lavia, Supply Sergeant; Sergeant Edward J. Barberi, PSNCO; and SP4 Jerry Gagliardi, Company Clerk.

Although the company had over 300 people, there were no MOS qualified personnel in the motor pool and only four assigned cooks to operate a 24-hour mess. The military police "shade tree mechanics" did a superb job of keeping the vehicles on the road.

During the time I was in Tay Ninh, the 25th Military Police Company had received ten Cadillac Gauge V-100 armored cars. The V-100s had two electrically operated .30 caliber guns and provided the MPs greater protection against small arms fire. All the V-100s were assigned to the Tactical Escort Platoon. Over time most of the 30 caliber guns became non-operational and we mounted M-60s on the V-100s. The supply chain was slow in catching up with the initial issue. The ARVN had the V-100s for a couple of years, it was often necessary to send someone from supply to the ARVN Depot in Saigon for repair parts.

There was no shortage of weapons or ammunition in Vietnam. The U.S. Army issued me a M-16 rifle and a 45 caliber pistol. After a few convoy escort missions, I opted to carry a M-79 40mm grenade launcher as well. When I got to Tay Ninh, I carried a shotgun rather than the M-16 whenever I was going into the city of Tay Ninh. I came across a Thompson submachine gun while in Tay Ninh and gave some consideration to carry that but never was able to make it operational. Upon my return to Cu Chi, I seldom carried a weapon on base camp and reverted back to the M-16 rifle when going off base camp.

The soldiers of the 25th military Police Company found a variety of ways to fill their free time. There was a volley ball court at one in the street and almost every night after the evening meal, there would be a combat volley ball game under way. I would join in regularly and my style of play soon earned me the nickname, "Spider Man." It seems I was always in the net. There were several horseshoe pits scattered throughout the company area that also received regular use. After dark, soldiers could be found relaxing in their hootches, reading, writing home, having a drink in the EM club, playing cards, or taking in a movie.

We were able to obtain movies five days a week through special services. Each night, from 20 to 100 people would take lawn chairs, water cans, ammo boxes, or something else to sit on out to the company street. The movie screen and a small projection booth had been built prior to my arrival. Needless to say, these were not recent releases. I noticed that the size of the crowd was in no way dependent on the quality of the movie. The biggest contributing factor was the number of attractive females and the amount of clothing they wore. (We did not get pornographic movies and in the late 60s there was still no full nudity.) Most often, the movies were on two reels. We received "Gone with the Wind" one night and it took eight reels.

I waited until November of 1969 to take my R&R. I opted to go to Hong Kong. Chuck Russo, my lieutenant friend from Okinawa, took leave and caught a hop out of Okinawa to Hong Kong at the same time. We had a blast touring Hong Kong and the new territories. The Army R&R program was an extremely well organized operation. (I was so taken with Hong Kong that I returned for a week visit 30 years later.)

The cast of the Bob Hope 1969 Christmas show consisted of Neil Armstrong, singer/actress Connie Stevens, dancer Susan Charney, Laugh-In regular Teresa Graves, Miss World 1968 Eva Reuber Staier, and the Gold Diggers. For security reasons, the cast stayed in Thailand at night and flew into the country for each day's show or shows. The day of the show, an infantry company was assigned to my operational control. We were situated to the side of the stage with

the double mission of responding to any attacks on the base camp and being prepared to prevent the crowd from rushing the stage. This infantry company came out of the field that morning and, if anyone was to attempt to rush the stage, I thought they were strong candidates.

After the show, the entire Bob Hope ensemble visited patients in the hospital. Later, the 25th Infantry Division Commanding General hosted a Champagne Cocktail Party for them in a trailer complex behind the Division Headquarters. (The complex was a secure area for the Commanding General and Deputy Commanding General's quarters.) Several MPs were positioned around the complex for security. At one point, I received word that the PM wanted to see me at the complex gate. I went to the gate hoping LTC Gregerson was going to invite me so I might have a chance to see Bob Hope and some of the cast up close and personal. I was greatly disappointed when LTC Gregerson told me that one of the Gold Diggers wanted an MP helmet liner. I was to inform all the MPs that they were to give up their helmet liners if asked and that we would take care of replacing them later. Needless to say, by the time the group loaded in their jeeps for the ride to the air field, most all the MPs had lost their helmet liners. I not only lost my helmet liner, but Teresa Graves left wearing my MP brassard.

During my 12 month tour, two military police were killed in action. SP4 Kenneth E. Wade was hit and killed by a RPG round on February 23, 1969, while defending Dau Tieng Base Camp against a NVA attack. PFC Wilson D. Thomas was killed at Cu Chi Base Camp on June 15, 1969, by an incoming rocket.

Captain Richard Yamamoto, whom I had served with on Okinawa, took command of the 25th Military Police Company upon my departure from Vietnam on February 6, 1970.

People often look at me with a raise eyebrow whenever I tell them that Vietnam was professionally one of my most rewarding assignments. Vietnam provided an opportunity to perform the military police wartime missions rather than train for them. It also taught me a lot about people and how they adapt in almost any situation. Almost 80% of the 25th Military Police Company were draftees. Despite what is written about the "Flower Children" and draft dodgers of the late 60s, the draftees in the 25th Military Police Company were excellent soldiers. They did their job and they did it well. I am proud to have served with them.

The Way It Was

NAME: Thomas Waldera
UNIT: Co. C, 2nd Bn, 14th Infantry
TIME PERIOD: 1964-68
SOURCE: Curator met Mr. Waldera on Shafer-Butte Pass, Idaho in June 2004
DATE RECEIVED: 7 April 2005

I enlisted in the Army in Des Moines, IA in 1960 after serving three years in the Marine Corps and approximately 40 days as a civilian. I was sent to Panama as a rifleman with the 2d Battle Group, 10th Infantry Regiment at Fort William D. Davis, Canal Zone. It was around this time that the Army needed advisors in Vietnam but I wasn't able to go because of my low rank (PFC). It wasn't until December of 1964, when I received orders to the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii, that my chance came again to volunteer for Vietnam.

While I was assigned to C Company, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry- the Golden Dragons- the 25th Division was being tasked to provide door gunners on helicopters being used in Vietnam. The program was based on the use of an armed man riding shotgun on the stagecoach next to the driver in the old west. I applied for the program because I felt that was where the action was. In May, 1965, I received TDY orders to Vietnam as part of Shotgun X and was assigned to the 117th Aviation Company at Qui Nhon, RVN, as a door gunner on an armed UH-1B helicopter. I was there for approximately three months, from June to September. We were shot down once near Dak To Special Forces Camp. During my tour as a door gunner, I received a minor shrapnel wound to the face. However, it was not serious enough to warrant a Purple Heart.

When I returned to Hawaii and C Company, I found out there was a big push for qualified soldiers to apply for OCS. A list of those eligible to apply was published and I was a little more than upset when my name wasn't on it. I knew I was qualified because of my test scores upon entering the Army and the fact that I had been urged to apply in my previous assignments. I had always been happy as an NCO, but when my name was left off the list I insisted they check on my qualifications. When they found out I was right, I felt committed to apply. In December of 1965 I received orders to Infantry OCS at Fort Benning, GA and left the 25th Infantry Division and Hawaii after being there one year.

OCS at Fort Benning was an interesting six months and on 1 July 1966 I graduated second in my class and commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Infantry. Newly commissioned officers out of OCS were not being sent to Vietnam because of their inexperience, so I remained at Fort Benning as a tactical officer for an OCS Company. After six months I received orders for Vietnam. After arriving in-country in March 1967, I was further assigned to the 25th Infantry Division and then further assigned to the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry, the same battalion I had left a little over one year earlier.

However, this time I was assigned to A Company as an Infantry Platoon Leader. In July I was promoted to First Lieutenant. In August, while on a sweep of a canal south of Phu Cuong, A Company ran into an ambush and was engaged in heavy firefight for six hours. During this engagement I was wounded by a white phosphorus grenade and was partially blinded with burns

and shrapnel wounds. This got me my first Purple Heart and Silver Star. After getting out of the 12th Evac. Hospital at Cu Chi, I returned to A Company and assumed the duties of Company XO.

Toward the end of 1967 I started to bug the battalion commander about taking over the command of A Company. I offered to extend my tour in Vietnam if he agreed. Even though it was rare for a first lieutenant to command an Infantry Company, eventually he said "yes" and in January 1968 I extended and took command of A Company. A few days later, on 25 January 1968 while on a search and destroy mission in Tay Ninh Province near Katum, we ran into a large force of NVA that had crossed the Cambodian border in preparation for the Tet Offensive. During the battle I was seriously wounded by an RPG and was evacuated from dense jungle by a light observation helicopter that picked me up from a bomb crater and carried me to the hospital in Tay Ninh and eventually back to the 12th Evac. Hospital in Cu Chi. My wounds did not heal in country, and so, over my protests, I was finally sent to Saigon, then Japan, and finally to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, TX. For the action on 25 January 1968 I received another Purple Heart and a Bronze Star with "V" Device.

It took about four months to recover from my wounds. After I was released from the hospital, I was assigned to the Adjutant General School at Fort Benjamin Harrison, IN, where, after 30 days leave, I took up my duties teaching infantry tactics to AG and Finance Corps officers. Shortly after arriving I was promoted to Captain on July 1, 1968.

After a few months at the AG School, I again became restless and started thinking about returning to Vietnam. After talking with the Infantry Branch Assignments at the Pentagon, I knew my chances of returning to Vietnam were poor because of my physical profile But in late December, 1968, or early January, 1969, I was able to convince a doctor at Fort Benjamin Harrison that I was completely healed and my profile was lifted. I was given a clean bill of health and by January 23, 1969, I was once again on orders to Vietnam.

In April, 1969, I was back in Vietnam. When I arrived, I reported to the Replacement Detachment for assignment and requested the 25th Division. The request was approved and the same day I caught a helicopter ride to Cu Chi.

I got to the 25th Division Replacement Detachment around noon and asked for an assignment to the 2d Bn, 14th Infantry and was told that would be no problem as the battalion was short of Company commanders. When I reported to the Battalion Headquarters I was told that the Battalion Commander was in the field and to get myself a cup of coffee at the mess hall. While I was waiting in the mess hall, different people stopped by to welcome me to the Battalion and to tell me that the Company I was going to command had a poor reputation. I was led to believe the Company avoided the enemy whenever possible and was not aggressive. While I was having coffee, in walks LTC Constantine Blastos, the Battalion Commander, who comes over to me, introduces himself and says "CPT Waldera I have been waiting for you." I said I didn't even know I was coming until a few hours ago and he said it didn't matter, he was waiting anyway.

He said, "I've got a Company that needs a commander." He proceeded to tell me about Delta Company and all the things that were wrong with it. Basically, he could not find anything good

to say about it. In firefights they pulled back without their dead and wounded. They were taking lots of casualties from booby traps, and as a result did not want to go into the hedgerows. All of this time, I was wondering what I had got myself into.

LTC Blastos asked me if I could be ready to go out in the field the next day and I said that would be no problem. I spent the rest of the day getting ready. I drew field gear, jungle fatigues, boots, and weapon and was ready to go. One day in-country and I had command of an Infantry Company.

Early the next morning I took a helicopter to the field and met up with the Company where they had spent the night. I relieved the executive officer in charge of the Company at the time and sent him back to Cu Chi Base Camp. He was a first lieutenant and happy to go.

The first thing I did was gather most of the Company officers, NCOs and men and introduce myself. I told them I had heard a lot of negative things about the Company, but it didn't matter because from this day on, what mattered was that when I told them to do something I expected them to do it. I came down hard on them, and I heard somebody mutter something about the FNG so I said, "Well, this F… New Guy has more time in country than any of you." Hell, I was 31 years old and had 12 years military experience. Most of the men in Delta Company were 18-21 years old.

The following day I took the Company out on a sweep operation to get the feel of the platoon leaders and their platoons and the Company in general. On the sweep I could tell they wanted to avoid the bamboo hedgerows and stay in open areas where they were more exposed. This was due to the booby traps that were placed in thickets. With just a little guidance I was able to convince them it was safer in the bush than in the open. After the first day I could see there wasn't anything wrong with this Company. They were good troops that had had some bad experiences. The platoon leaders were also good. With some guidance on how to teach their men to recognize booby traps and a few other things I picked up on my previous tour, they were able to reduce drastically injuries due to booby traps.

I had the Company for approximately six months under LTC Blastos and later LTC Crutchley, both of whom I highly respected. Delta Company had a bad reputation when I first took command, but it was a reputation that was unwarranted. It was a Company that had gone through a period of bad luck, but before long it was the best in the battalion, if not in the entire division. This was proven by how often the Company was tasked to be the Ready Reaction Force. It was a morale factor to be chosen as the unit to respond to help another unit out of trouble or sent to engage a target of opportunity. In August 1969, Delta Company engaged a large enemy force, and for that action, including entering a tunnel after a VC, I received my second Silver Star.

In September, 1959, I was assigned to Battalion Headquarters as S-3 Air, coordinating helicopter assaults for the 2d Bn, 4th Infantry. In December, 1959, I extended my tour in Vietnam for another six months and after a 30-day leave in Thailand, I was assigned to 25th Division Headquarters as part of the Commanding General's staff.

Sometime around September or October, 1970, I began to lose the use of my right arm, and I didn't respond to treatment . It was thought it was delayed reaction to a blow I received to my head when I dove headfirst into a bunker one night months before in the jungle at a hard spot where we were taking rockets. I was finally evacuated to Brooke Army Medical Center and underwent a cervical fusion to correct the problem.

I did not return to the 25th Division. The war was winding down, and I had another medical profile- this time I really couldn't do anything.

The Way It Was

NAME: MG Ellis W. Williamson
UNIT: 25th ID, Commander
TIME PERIOD: 1968
SOURCE: from his memoirs
DATE RECEIVED: June 22, 2005

In the fall of 1968 we fought the largest battle of my second tour in country. For several days we sensed that something was up but could not pin down just what was going on. We later discovered that the enemy had infiltrated two whole divisions across the Cambodian border in preparation for major attacks in the Tay Ninh area.

One can rightfully ask, how can an enemy force be slipped into our area without our knowing precisely what is happening? One of my operations soldiers figured out a way to describe our area. He said that if I, in an effort to evenly cover ALL of my area, were to spread all of the soldiers in my command equal distance from all the others and then ordered every individual to fire his weapon at about the same time, no one man would hear any weapons other than his own and those three or four closest to him. We had hundreds of square miles to cover. If we had tried to be strong everywhere we would have been strong nowhere.

The enemy threw everything he could gather together in an effort to reestablish bases in our area and to take and hold the city of Tay Ninh. Tay Ninh was in the northwest portion of my area therefore the enemy was initially fighting against only about one third of my command. He did get some troops inside the city of Tay Ninh which gave us a real problem. As a matter of policy we were not allowed to use our heavy weapons or air power in civilian populated areas. The South Vietnamese were not so inhibited. They called in their own air power and pounded away with absolutely no regard for the civilians. Their only inhibition was the religious area occupied by the Ba Dai. To my surprise, the enemy also respected the Ba Dai and stayed out of their compound.

I moved as much of my division north as I could spare. As can be appreciated, we still had the mission of guarding the approaches to Saigon. We had many pitched battles over a period of four days. Every time we found the enemy in the open or in wooded areas where there were few civilians we tore his units all to pieces. We were fighting in an area of several hundred square miles. Of my dozen or more maneuver battalions none were tied in on their flanks with friendly units. In WWII we had lined up Armies, Corps, Divisions, Regiments and battalions shoulder to shoulder for attack or defense. Here the distances were just too great and available friendly troops were too few. In this situation my artillery, helicopter gunships and Air Force and Navy strike airplanes were massing for one unit for a short while and then shifting over to support an entirely different battle. The major requirement, on my part, was to apply pressure where it would do our cause the most good and do the enemy the most damage.

At the end of the forth day the entire enemy force completely collapsed, and he started running for the Cambodian border. I called on the radio and reported to Saigon that in my judgment we had completely broken his back. The higher headquarters thought at first that I was a little

premature, however we never had another fight in that campaign. As an indication of how badly we destroyed the enemy forces, neither of those two divisions was identified in combat again for over six months.

The Way It Was

NAME: Stan Wysocki
UNIT: 3/4th Cavalry
TIME PERIOD: January-December 1966
SOURCE: email from Mr. Wysocki
DATE RECEIVED: 16 October 2006

When I attended the 25th ID assn. reunion last month I promised to send my story regarding Charlie 42, the track that occupied a prominent place in front of the 25th ID museum for so many years. First let me introduce myself. I'm Stan Wysocki, currently of Katy Tx. I retired from the army in 1978 with the rank of SFC E-7. My life with C-42 started in 1965 when I was promoted to E-5 spec. C-42 was, at that time, carrying HQ TRP numbers. In Dec that year it all changed. I was assigned to C TRP.
The designation of my track was changed to C/42. I was to go to RVN as team leader of a 5 man medical team.

We set sail from Pearl on the 3rd of Jan 1966 on the USNS Sultan. On this ship were C Troop and A Troop. We had the whole ship to ourselves. Our vehicles were down in the hold. After a few days at sea during which a number of "Near Deaths" (to hear them tell it) from sea sickness, we arrived on Naha, Okinawa. (note "ON") At that time there was a small circular reef about 100ft across with a light beacon on it. There was about a mile of channel on both sides of this reef. The Sultan, being early, wasn't to tie up until 0800 was circling. I was down in the sick bay checking on my patients when a loud screech and sudden stop threw me against a bulkhead. THE USNS SULTAN RAN FULL UP ON THAT REEF. We were taken off the ship by LSTs. It took another day to get the Sultan off that reef and get it in so our equipment could be unloaded. That wasn't the only screw up for that trip.

We were supposed to pick up our new M48A3 tanks when we arrived. ?????????. Where were they???????. It seemed some clerk in San Francisco, in a fit of genius, put our tanks on the wrong ship and they ended up in Seattle. We finally got them two weeks late. After two more weeks for the crews to familiarize with the new hardware we loaded on LSTs. C Troop loaded up on The USS Vernon County and set off for RVN. The crew said they had never seen the South China Sea so calm; not even a ground swell. We only had a couple of chummers on this run. I think their seasickness was in their heads.

We arrived at Qui Nhon and unloaded our tracks and trucks. A young Lieutenant harbormaster told Cpt. Duffer that the road to Pleiku was closed. Cpt. Duffer looked at him like something that crawled out of under a rock and said "Don't worry, we'll open it." Charlie didn't even poke his nose out. We picked up a convoy bound for Pleiku and spent the night as guests of the 11th Cav. Early the next morning we departed for Pleiku. After an uneventful trip we arrived at our new home. We had to build our base camp. After we built our place we went on the road. Our base camp was only a memory. We did return to it occasionally to pull maintenance.

On one of those infrequent trips a funny thing happened. Cpt. Duffer was attacked. During the night a swarm of bees hung up over the only door on his hooch. He couldn't open his door. He was imprisoned. I rounded up a 90mm ammo box cut several holes for entrances and put on

about 6 layers of clothing and 2 mosquito nets. I also prayed that those bees will cooperate. We set up a stepladder under the swarm. I set the hive box on the top and I had read about setting a resonance so I had a spoon and a pie plate. T started tapping the pie plate gently in a rhythm. About two minutes later, the first bees started to fall in the box . As they peeled off I watched until I saw the queen. I gently picked her up and placed in the box. All the rest dropped in and I closed the box. We put the bees on the green line as forward scouts.

Our time at first was slow; occasional in-coming which usually missed anything important. We were on the road a lot doing search and destroy missions. Occasionally a track would fall into a tunnel and then follow it along to its origin. Sorry if anyone was in the tunnel at the time. No problem burying.

A light note. We were cutting a road thru the bush out of Plei Mi to the Cambodia border. Everything went so smooth that Capt Duffer in a helicopter told Lt Olmstead to turn around . We were 1/2 mile into Cambodia already. We later went back to what we called the 3/4 highway and found that the VC was using it as a supply route. We destroyed a lot of ordnance.

In June we were playing palace guard on a battery of Korean towed 155s from the Tiger Division. On the 24th of June, 2nd platoon with the command track under the command of our XO Cpt. Sloan and my track. This was a rare time that we went with a forward element. Our mission was to link up with 2 Infantry squads in a blocking position. It was to be a taxi run. We linked up and were ready to leave when a voice on the horn asked "Any friendly ARVINS in this area?" Answer NO, BANG one of our tanks fired. Then all hell broke loose. They came piling out of the bamboo like ants. We opened up with everything we had. The ROKs in Plei Mi gave us 360 degrees 155 steel within 50 yards of our wagon wheel. Two Korean fixed wing planes strafed across our front and dropped bombs. We were about to be surrounded when a column (I don't remember which of our platoons, 1st or 3rd) came through the Bamboo in a wedge formation flattening out the area. I wouldn't recommend them as landscapers. We backed out leaving one tank which had had an argument with two 106 recoilless rifles. The round wiping out the last 106 passed the round that put the tank out of commission. The TC and driver jumped in my track and the loader and gunner jumped in another track. We found out later that that tank took five hits, three in the turret.

The investigation crew brought it back the next day. After reconnecting the wires that were damaged they drove it back to Ordnance Company. Gen. Walker visited us in the receiving area the next day. He told us that we had stopped the point of a NVA regiment fresh out of China. Their worst mistake was to take us on in the open without a lot of heavy stuff. All they had was manpower. They counted over 400 dead PAVNs in the area. Cpt. Sloan was laced with shrapnel. I had a bullet hole in me. The three bullet holes on the side came from that engagement, the forth hit me. I think I remember five dead and 30 injured. It took about six months to get full use of my right arm. Since I couldn't pick up anything heavy, I was transferred to the 85th Evac in Qui Nhon to finish out my tour as security NCO and tech on malaria ward.