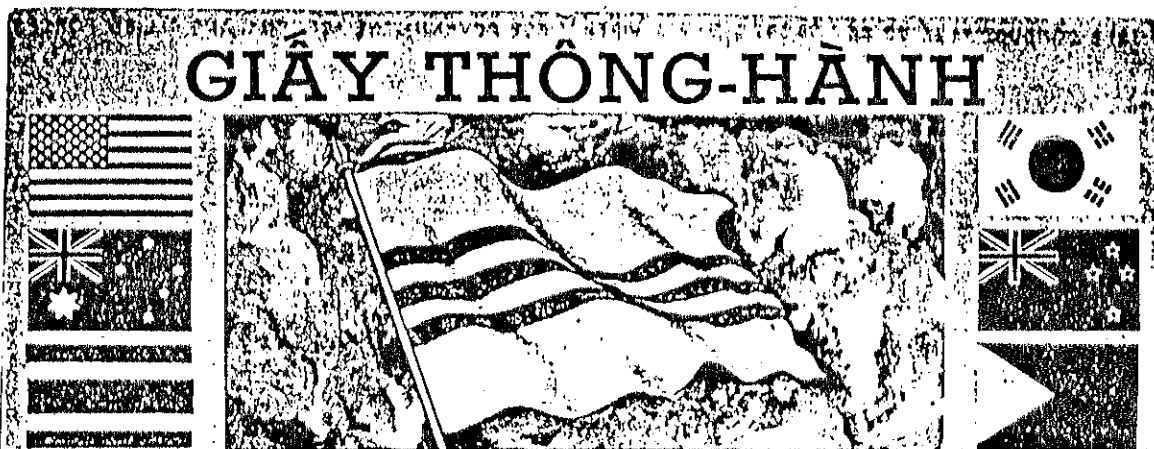


RIPCORD REPORT

A NEWSLETTER

No. 20, July 1988

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN



SAFE-CONDUCT PASS TO BE HONORED BY ALL VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND ALLIED FORCES

이 안전보장패스는 월남정부와 모든 연합군에 의해 인정된 것입니다.

รัฐบาลเวียตนามและหน่วยพันธมิตร ยินดีให้เกียรติแก่ผู้ถือบัตรผ่านปลอดภัยนี้.

SAFE-CONDUCT PASS TO BE HONORED BY ALL VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND ALLIED FORCES



MANG TÂM GIẤY
THÔNG HÀNH
này về cộng tác
với Chánh Phủ
Quốc Gia các bạn
sẽ được :

- Đón tiếp tử tế
- Bảo đảm an ninh
- Đãi ngộ tương xứng



NGUYỄN VĂN THIỆU
Tổng Thống Việt Nam Cộng Hoà

TẤM GIẤY THÔNG HÀNH NÀY CÓ GIÁ TRỊ VỚI TẤT CẢ CƠ-QUAN
QUÂN CHÍNH VIỆT-NAM CỘNG-HÒA VÀ LỰC-LƯỢNG ĐỒNG-MINH.

= INSIDE =

- * Art/Photos
- * Incoming
- * Notes
- * Sit/Rep
- * Retrospectives



= FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTORS =

- * Political Science Class,
Parsippany Hills High School
- * Wm. T. Ripley
- * Wayne Kabat
- * Steve Wallace
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- * Art Wiknik
- * Chuck & Glenda Hawkins
- * Ken Hamilton

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(To Treasurer)

- * Ripcord Assoc.
c/o John Mihalko

= CO-EDITORS =

- * Chip Collins

- * Ray Blackman

NEWSLETTER INTENTIONS

The intention of this Newsletter is to bring those of us together that are interested in FSB Ripcord, RVN. The events, the people, the humor, the memories of that time are being written by those that served there. We want this to be a healthy experience for the Veteran, his or her family or friends. We encourage you to write, call and talk, or send a taped message to us with your feelings about our Newsletter or Ripcord in general. We wish to improve as we grow and your initial input is necessary.

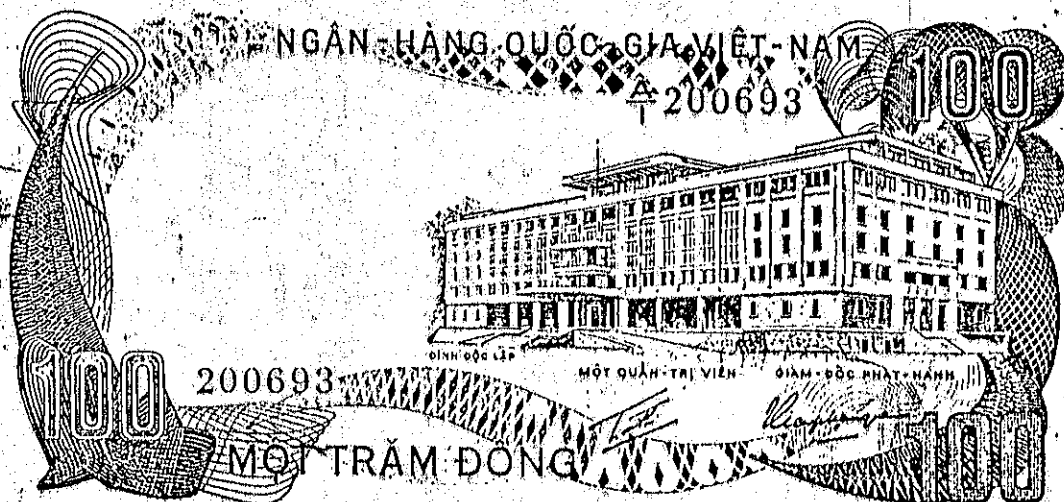
However, there may be those Veterans who are still troubled by their Vietnam experience. We regret this situation, but can not share responsibility for their reactions regarding the Newsletter contents. Ideally, this Newsletter will help all of us through our past and into a rewarding future.

= ADDRESS CHANGES =

Francis Lynch

Tom Chase
(Viet View Graphics)

Chip Collins
(Ripcord Association)



INCOMING

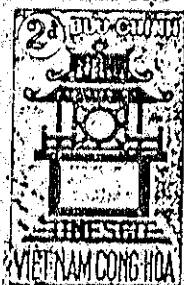
April 21, 1988

Enclosed is a contribution for your fine efforts on the RIPCORDER NEWSLETTER. I was extremely pleased with the cover of the April issue with the "HAMBURGER HILL" stump... a WELL DONE to Blackie's artwork!

While reading Charles Hawkins "The Will To Die" I was struck with a case of dejavu concerning his main character, Sergeant Smith. In October of 1969 Co A 2/506th was on the DMZ assisting in the deployment of the Marines and I was at the chopper pad waiting to go back when I met a cherry PFC that was scared shitless about going to the field. I told him every little common sense trick I knew to help him survive but when the chopper hit the LZ, it crashed and rolled over, killing him and one other G.I.

I also want to thank Julian Montville, from Louisiana, who called me last week (he got my number from your newsletter). We never met but we had a very enjoyable conversation and it would not have been possible without the "RIPCORDER REPORT". Keep up the good work!

Art Wiknik
Higganum, CN



June 20, 1988

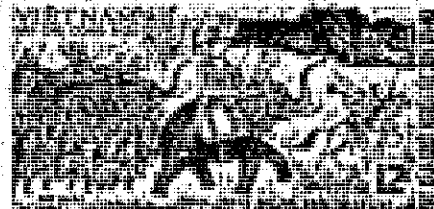
I knew I had some slides of what was left of Ripcord after the Arc Lite. I got about half way through them and my old Nam era projector broke. I did run across some you might be interested in. I'm not sure if they'll reprint very well. I threw in a couple I thought you might enjoy. They are of the Ho Chi Minh trail deep in Laos. Of course we were NEVER there because we weren't allowed to cross the border. Which leads to a great war story about how we forced down a dink spotter plane and stole his camera from which these pictures were produced. Of course it would take too long to tell so I'll let it go at that. Notice the bomb craters from B 52's. I don't know how they did it, but they kept the trail open.

One of my pictures is Ripcord, probably taken when we CA'd back in to pick up a body that was left behind. It looked as though they tried to defoliate the area with 500 lb. bombs. I remember thinking at the time, this must be what the moon surface must look like. I originally thought the other picture was Ripcord also but the more I look at it I don't believe it is. Maybe you will recognize it. I wish now I would have labeled them.

I'll be at N. Platte for the Nebraska Vietnam Veterans Reunion but I don't know about Omaha. The 4th of July my wife and I are going to Ft. Worth for a Nam Helicopter Pilot Reunion. That should be fun.

Hope you enjoy the pictures. When I get another projector I'll go through my other slides and send more.

As ever,
Ken Mayberry
Bradshaw, NE



June, 1988

Thank you very much for all the new information that you sent me. I especially liked the one about the Valentines Day Massacre. I also want to thank you for letting me be a member of your organization, even though I didn't serve. As I write to more and more veterans, both from World War II and Vietnam, I'm finding that they let me join their organizations, not to mention I get a lot of encouragement on my museum and I make a lot of friends this way.

I have a couple questions for you right now that you may want to print (actually one is Dads). The first; how did you deal with the constant or almost constant exhaustion?, and the second; how did you keep from falling out of the helicopters while they were in flight?

That's about it for now. I'd just like to say again that I really appreciate all the help you and all the others have given me and for letting me join your organization.

Sincerely,
Wm. T. Ripley
Decatur, IN



NOTES

Wm. T. Ripley has written to ask the group a couple very good questions. The first; how did you deal with the constant or almost constant exhaustion?, and the second; how did you keep from falling out of the helicopters while they were in flight? Since we all dealt with different situations in different ways please feel free to help us answer Wm. T's questions.

These two questions are tied together in an odd sort of way. The weight of your ruck would help keep you from falling out of the helicopters while in flight, then wear you out once on the ground.

For the most part it was fairly safe riding in the choppers, that is unless you were under fire and the pilot had to make a steep bank before you were settled in. If you started to slide out the door you tried grabbing anything that was bolted down, like the pilots or door gunners chair. If it was too late for that (as it was for me when we extracted from Hill 805) you prayed that someone would grab you.. "Thanks again Bull!"

I dealt with exhaustion by getting mad. Someone would move a pin about a half inch on a map and expect us to be there by noon. I'd love to have shown them a side view of that map. For some reason I guess they thought we could walk across air. A map pinned to a wall is flat.. the mountains aren't. You see, I still get mad about it. Anyway, I'd get mad and was determined to make it for several reasons. If a Medivac had to come in to take you out for heat exhaustion your position would be known. Nobody wanted to be the first one to fall.. "If the CO can make it so can I!" From time to time, during real ass kicking humps, I'd even wish for contact.. nothing big, just a trail watcher.. anything so we could stop. So I guess you could say I dealt with exhaustion through anger and determination, or anything else that would keep my mind off how tired I was.

Blackie

This years Ripcord reunion will be held in Whippany, N.J. from October 7th through the 10th. A seperate mailing with details about the reunion will be sent out to everyone.

Anyone interested in attending should contact John Mihalko at 10 Legion Place, Whippany, N.J. 07981.



Lt. Doyle



"Doc Speed" with captured RPD

BACK TO THE MOUNTAINS
By: John Mihalko

Our next trip back to the mountains was on either April 7 or 8. Needless to say none of us were too enthused. Ripcord was yet to be secured and we expected a lot of contact. Most of us decided to pack more food, water and ammunition.

We also had a new platoon leader in Lt. Doyle, our third in three months. None of us knew what to expect from him but he looked very young to me. I guess I was still used to the old war movies where grizzled sergeants and platoon leaders were much older than the troops they led. Ours was a different war indeed.

The mission was only supposed to last a week, but we had yet to see things work out as planned. We were going to be operating about a mile from Ripcord which didn't help my nervous system any. There was one thing that did cheer me up though. Doc Speed was coming out with our team.

Speed was the former medic of our Alpha team. I say former because his team no longer existed. With the casualties and re-enlistments that April 1st. had wrought, the few remaining members of Alpha team were dispersed among the rest of the platoon.

Whether we chose Speed or he chose us is subject to debate, I don't think anybody ever knew just who he belonged to. Echo company thought he belonged to Headquarters company and vice versa. We didn't care which company held his "draft-rights," We were glad to get him. His unique brand of humor and perspective would fit in with Bravo team very well.

I was nervous as usual on the flight out and prayed for a cold l.z. We were inserted without incident, but if memory serves correctly, it was already well into the afternoon. I believe all of our teams would be working in a close proximity for mutual support.

I never liked afternoon insertions. It cut down on the time we had to get a feel for the terrain and what we would be up against. It didn't take us long to find out that the a.o. was hot. We had been on the move for maybe an hour when the silence was broken with AK fire to our rear.

It didn't last very long. Only a few quick bursts, but it made us all very uneasy. There was no return fire. That was a bad sign. It also sounded very close. We wanted to put some distance between us and the enemy to our rear. Only a few hours of daylight were left and none of us wanted to be on the move after dark.

I wondered what the NVA were up to and who or what were they shooting at. Maybe they had observed our insertion and were driving us to a main force unit. We had no answers and proceeded with the utmost caution. I kept reminding myself to take my time as my eyes searched for anything out of the ordinary.

We approached a stream and decided to stop. I didn't like being that close to a body of water, but we had little choice. It was getting late. We had heard no more AK fire during our trek and detected no movement to our rear. At least that was a good sign. We backed off some distance from the stream, found an area with good fields of fire and set up for the night.

The night passed without incident and morning arrived. We chowed down and got ready to move out. Two members of the team went down to the stream to clean up a bit. As I was checking my gear, some shots rang out. We grabbed our 16's, all eyes fixed in the direction of the stream. The gunfire was ours and there was no return fire.

Our guys came back shortly excited and out of breath. They reported that they had fired on a lone NVA in the water downstream. They had seen each other in the same instant, but our guys were quicker on the draw; too quick, they didn't think they got him and he vanished into the jungle.

Some of us went back to the stream while the rest pulled security. I flipped off my safety as I got nearer the water. We spread out and waited and watched for any sign of movement. There was none. All was quiet except the melody of the stream itself. Our friend was indeed gone to who knows where. I cursed our luck. If the NVA didn't know where we were yesterday, they sure know today.

Our future didn't look very bright. We now knew that we had NVA to our rear and more somewhere ahead. We decided to probe in another direction on the compass. Somewhere along the line we linked up with the rest of our teams. I believe they had all made contact since insertion, so it was decided to operate as a platoon for mutual support.

We covered a lot of real estate in the next few days with sporadic contact most of the way. It almost felt like we were the ball in a pinball machine. We'd make contact, break contact, head off in a different direction, and make contact again. Fortunately, we took no casualties, but it kept us on edge. We broke brush and we walked on trails. It didn't seem to matter. There were NVA all over the place.

The days were also getting much hotter. Our team was on point as we made our way through a valley floor. There was no overhead shade or cover. The sun was doing us more damage than the NVA had done in a week. Progress was slow. Some of the guys were becoming sick from the intense heat. We were all pretty near heat exhaustion as we made our way to another ridgeline and some welcome shade.

As we made our ascent you could see the heat rising up from the valley floor. Word came up to stop and rest. We were all physically drained and exhausted. Our medics, as worn out as they were, did one hell of a job in tending to us all. Our one hour rest turned into two and then three. Every time we'd get ready to move out, word would come up that someone was still too weak to travel.

I don't think we ever did go any further that day. We needed more than a few hours rest to replace our lost body fluids. I remember feeling as weak as a kitten. The mountain we were climbing was very steep and very high.

The next day we continued our journey onward and upward. Progress was slow. During one of our breaks, someone noticed something off on our right flank. We decided to investigate. My eyes widened with amazement. We were staring at a split-rail fence like right out of a western movie.

On closer inspection we saw that there was a field on the other side. We followed the fence up the ridgeline until we could see the field in its entirety. It wasn't a fence at all, it was a corral. It enclosed the whole field and it was

built ingeniously into the treeline that surrounded the field. You would never notice it from the air. You had to be practically on top of it to notice it at all.

The field was pretty much overgrown and the corral showed signs of being there for awhile, but it was cause for alarm. Why was it there, and what was its purpose? The sheer size of it was amazing. It seemed to be larger than a football field!

Our discovery was radioed in and we proceeded with great caution. It didn't take us long to pick up a trail, a fresh trail. Ralph Motta and me were walking point and slack, Ralph on point and me on slack. Why we were chosen, I don't remember. Both of us were point men, but for different teams.

We followed the winding trail, stopping every few yards, two sets of eyes taking in everything all at once. If Ralph was looking ahead, I was taking in the flanks and vice versa. We were as one and our eyes missed nothing. The high ground was to the left of the trail and it was littered with natural rock formations.

Ralph was scanning the rocks and I was looking down the trail when Ralph shouted "Cook." I followed his lead, as we both dove behind the safety of a log and started firing. I never did see the target of his attention. Our adversary had ducked down in one of the rock formations and didn't return our fire.

As I was re-loading, I detected movement down the trail. I spied two more NVA, but they seemed to want no part of the action. They were running away! I fired some shots in their direction, but they were gone. What the hell had we stumbled into? I turned my attention back to the high ground, eyes and ears straining for any sign of movement, but everything was still.

It was over in seconds, but it seemed like a lifetime. Lt. Doyle made his way to our position, but before he could utter a word, I blurted out: "Get the thump-guns up here." We had two over and unders with us and we put them to good use. Ralph and me directed their fire on the suspected positions as the rest of the teams came forward.

Everyone opened up and we sprayed the hell out of the area. Through it all, we took no return fire. We must have sounded like an entire line company minus the 60's. Finally, we got on line and swept through the area, textbook style. The enemy was gone, but he had left much in his flight.

We had evidently walked into a guarded cache while they were enjoying their evening meal. I checked out the area where I had seen the two NVA, and sure enough there were plates with a half eaten meal. A rice cache was uncovered, many RPG rounds were found, a lot of AK ammunition was turned up also. Our main prize however, was an RPD complete with drum attached.

We all took turns examining it. Maybe this was the same weapon that fired on us a few days ago. It didn't matter. It belonged to us now. All of the rice was destroyed and the RPG rounds and AK ammunition was gathered up, placed in one of the rock formations, and blown in place with a claymore mine. What an explosion that was. It echoed and reverberated throughout the countryside.

We destroyed everything but the RPD. More than anything else, it represented our victory. We were quite proud of ourselves and rightly so. Our heady feeling

was short lived however. It was now almost dusk and a counter attack was feared. The RPD may come in handy after all. We never had the welcome firepower of a 60, but an RPD would do in its stead. I was glad that I didn't have to carry it, let alone fire it.

Off we went, away from the scene of a most successful engagement, hoping we wouldn't get hit along the way. Our heady feeling had been replaced with a keen sense of urgency to put as much distance as we could between us and the cache. We knew that the enemy had to be pissed as well as hungry. We had been playing tag with them for almost a week, and the box score had us ahead on points. I almost pitied the poor bastards who had to report that their cache no longer existed. Heads would definitely roll, hopefully not ours.

We were off the trail, breaking brush, which shot the hell out of noise discipline. It would have been a difficult task in the daylight. Darkness made it practically impossible. There was no moon or stars to pierce the darkness. The ridge-line was very steep and treacherous. Many a mumbled curse could be heard as we stumbled over and into obstacles that mother nature had sadistically placed in our line of movement.

Finally, we had to stop before someone got lost or hurt. We set up in place on the side of the mountain. I didn't even bother to drop my ruck. Instead, I used it for ballast with my feet wedged snugly behind a large rock. It was cold and damp, but mercifully it didn't rain. Thank God for small miracles. I still couldn't get over how quickly the weather could change. Less than two days ago, the sun and the heat had made our lives miserable; now the cold damp night was getting in a few licks.

The expected attack never materialized. The first rays of sunlight were a welcome sight as they penetrated the shroud of darkness that surrounded us. I was tired and sore. Every muscle and joint in my body ached. Guy was indeed correct when he said that a few months in the mountains would exact a price on the body. Everyone was moving around now trying to restore the circulation to aching muscles.

I lit up a Lucky to get my lungs functioning once again. From my position I took a quick look around. Not too far off our right flank was a very steep drop. It was a miracle that we had come as far as we had without anyone getting hurt or going over the edge. This was definitely the biggest and steepest mountain I had ever had the misfortune of climbing.

We continued our journey onward and upward. The weather took a turn for the worse and we were soaked in for two days. Starvation time once again. Junior, Doc-Speed and me shared my last package of Lipton soup from one of my mother's Care packages. I was saving it for a rainy night, and this was it.

The weather finally broke. We were hoping to be extracted, but it was not to be. We were to be re-supplied in the field and DRIVE ON! I never liked a field re-supply. A kick out from a hovering helicopter was like a double edged sword. The food was welcome, but the helicopter marked our position to every revenge minded NVA in the area.

What our new mission was to be, I can't recall. The rain started once again soaking us in and slowing down all activity. At some point in time during that second week, we were on the move once again. We were to take over a line platoon's AO. Something was up. We humped for hours in the rain, which sucks, to say the least.

The rain finally stopped and the sun broke through, as we neared our new po-

sition, Radio contact was established with the line unit and we continued our journey. The link up was made in their ndp and I took a quick look around. I liked what I saw. We commanded the high ground with an excellent view of the surrounding countryside below. There was also a gigantic boulder which afforded even a better view.

We made some small talk with the grunts before they moved out. They had been working the area for awhile, and had made no contact. That was good news for a change. The sunshine felt good as Doc Speed and me picked out our position overlooking the entrance.

I guess we were buoyed by a false sense of security. Speed and me were feeling pretty good, as was the rest of our unit. We were in a beautiful location, the AO was cold, and the sun was shining, warming our cold, wet bodies. The RPD was placed on top of the boulder for added protection. What could go wrong?

Speed and me put some finishing touches on our position, knocked off a lrp, and were catching some rays from the warmth of the sun. We were talking about Jersey and our home towns, when I decided to clean my 16. I didn't notice that Speed was doing the exact same thing.

We were actually the first line of defense, overlooking the entrance which was below us and off to the right. Our small talk continued, when Speed grabbed my arm and said: "Gook,! Shoot him!" Frantically, I looked to where Speed was pointing, and sure enough, there was a lone NVA just standing there staring straight ahead.

I guess he had observed the line platoon move out and was going to rummage around the ndp. Only his upper body was visible. I couldn't tell if he was carrying a weapon. Here was a hunter's dream. A perfect target, not more than twenty feet away, and yet I was powerless. I held up the stock of my 16 and said: "I can't, you shoot him!"

Speed held up his weapon which was in the same condition as mine. We looked at each other, and by mental telepathy we both said: "UH-OH!" Our intruder had yet to see us. His eyes were fixed straight ahead. It was a race against time to get our weapons back together. Our intruder finally caught sight of us. The three of us were a mirror image of fright.

Luckily for us, he saw that he was outnumbered, did an immediate about face, and ran like hell. Speed reacted instantly by grabbing a frag and throwing it in his general direction. While I broke all records in re-assembling a 16, Speed kept lobbing frags. By this time, our position was alive with activity.

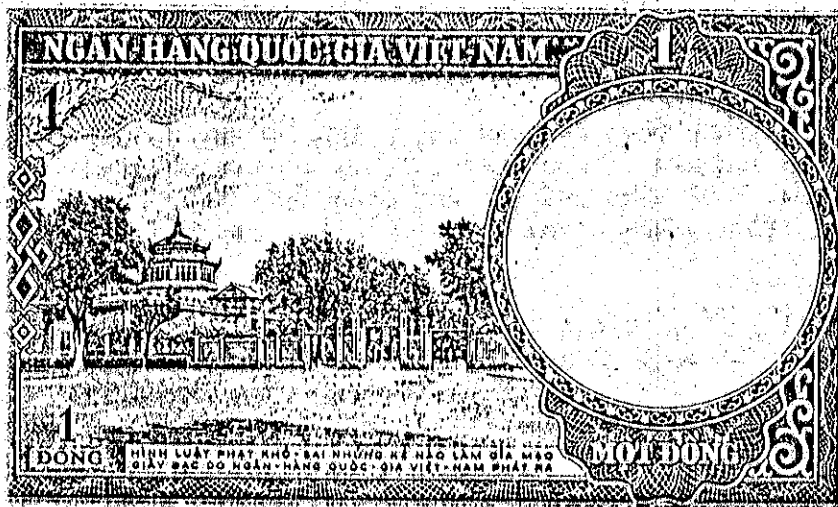
I asked Speed: "Did you get him?" "I don't know, but if I didn't, he won't stop running till he hits the Ashau." Speed and me went out to see if we could pick up his trail, but he was indeed long gone, probably the new NVA record holder for long distance running.

The rest of the mission was uneventful. We made no more contact, and had no more visitors. It had been a long two weeks, and we were finally heading back to Evans. We were all feeling good once again. We had made a lot of contact. Our body count was zero, but we took no casualties either. We found many trails, destroyed a lot of rice, RPG rounds, ammunition, and were coming into Evans with the captured

machine gun. The weather was getting much hotter, but being soaked in was still a way of life. While we were out in the field, Ripcord was being secured. That was a good sign. Or was it? Till next time.



John "CUSTER" Mihalko
(with captured RPD)



John 'CUSTER' Mihalko



John "CUSTER" Mihalko



THE INTRODUCTION

Ray "BLACKIE" Blackman
D, 2/501

"Okay men, listen up! We're going on a real patrol today...outside the wire...to look for enemy activity in the area. This will be the real thing so stay alert. If you find anything out of the ordinary do not...I say again...DO NOT touch it. If you see something that looks out of place report it to me. I will be walking point. Keep your eyes on me at all times, walk where I walk, and don't bunch up. I won't have a bunch of fuckin' cherries get me killed."

Oh shit! This is it. It's my last day at SERTS and so far the only new thing I've learned is how spooky it is on the bunker line at night.

Bunker guard duty at Evans sucks! Everything is black and quiet. There's a dim flash far away...just bright enough to make you look. The faint shape of a mountain appears on the horizon... green and red streaks bounce around in the sky behind the mountain-mass... flares pop... then you hear a muffled whoomph, kra-kra-kra-kraack, thdddd-thdddd, poo-poo-poo-poo poo-poo... the guy wrapped up in his faded poncho liner behind me stirs, "Those poor bastards are hittin some kinda shit out there tonight aren't they? Keep your eyes open man." ...then it got black and quiet again, like nothing had ever happened.

"Listen up men. If I call your name get in that jeep over there. You're going to the 2-501 at Phu Bai. The rest of you will be assigned to a unit here at Evans. You can walk."

During the ride to Phu Bai my mind drifted back... back to Iowa.

I didn't really have an opinion about the war in Vietnam. Things were going so fast that I hadn't had time to form one. After dropping out of school I started my first job at a window & door factory, then got married. Most of my older friends were being drafted and going off to Nam. Some came home early... One with both legs missing. They had all changed. I was classified 1-A and wanted to know what to expect. None of my Nam Vet friends would volunteer any information and I was too scared to ask... scared of my own friends... they had changed.

Gary and I hadn't been friends before being drafted together. We lived in the same town but were worlds apart. He was single and wild, while I was married and quiet. We became buddies during basic and AIT at Fort Polk. Gary introduced me to my first professional date in a crazy town named Ville Platte on one of our week-end passes. Upon graduation he went to Vietnam and I went to NCDCS at Fort Benning.

After finishing NCO school at Benning, then OJT at Ord, I found myself home again. My wife told me that she had seen Gary a few days earlier but I didn't believe her. The next day we went to fill the car up with gas and there he was, bigger than shit, sitting in his blue Malibu on the other side of the pumps. "Hey, Gary, what the hell are you doin here? Your supposed to be in Nam!" Gary got out of his car and limped over to me, "They fuckin got me man. They blew my foot off. I stepped on a booby-trap during my first mission.. You on your way over?" "Yea, I leave tomorrow. How'd they get you fixed up so fast?" "Oh man, they aren't done fuckin' with me yet," knocking on a wooden leg with his fist, "This ones only temporary so I could come home for a visit. I'll get the real thing after my stub gets hard." "How bad is it over there?" "It's bad man," giving me a bear hug, "What ever you do keep your fuckin' head down and watch where you put your feet... I gotta go now."

Shit.

"Blackman... Sergeant Blackman!" The jeep stopped near a building where chest high cement-covered sand bags formed a half circle in front of the entrance. "I hope you know that you're one lucky son-of-a-bitch man.. You'll be with Delta Company.. a good outfit. The rest of you guys stay put.. You're going to Alpha.. Hard Luck Alpha." He went on to explain that Alpha had hit the shit on a firebase. They had gotten over-run and lost a lot of men. The cherries in Alpha would out-number the old-timers.. Not ee-yen a good situation to be in. "These guys in Delta.. you listen to them.. they know what they're talkin about.. You'll be all right."

As the jeep drove off, leaving me standing there in the road like a dumb-ass, a large figure of a man came out the door of the building. He walked around the strange looking sand bag barrier and headed toward me. With a huge smile on his face he reached out to shake my hand, "Sergeant Blackman? I've been expecting you. My name is John Schuelke. I'm the First Sergeant of Delta Company, 2nd of the 501st. Welcome. Come on in and I'll get you squared away."

As we walked around the cement-bags I noticed a sign to the right of the door. BE PROUD YOU'RE A GRUNT. DELTA COMPANY HAS EIGHTY PERCENT FEWER CASUALTIES.

After going inside "TOP" explained to me that the company was in the field and I'd be joining them on their next Log Day. In the mean time there were a few guys in the rear, for various reasons, that he would introduce me to later. In fact a couple of them are in the 3rd platoon... the one I'd be assigned to. He went on to say that Captain Straub was the CO of Delta Company. Top assured me that Straub was a fine leader who takes good care of his people. Top also told me that I was lucky to be with Delta, instead of Alpha.

Top took me to supply, then escorted me to a hooch.

"Hey... look at that!" "Looks like we got us a new man." "Come on over here and drop your shit on this cot." "Where ya from man?" "How's things in the World?" "What platoon ya goin to?" "He's gotta be goin to third man." "Yea, we been short handed since Re-Up Hill!" "Ya goin to third man?" "Hey Top, ya gotta give him to us!" "Want a beer?" "What's your name man?"

Upon entering the company hooch I was bombarded with questions as a small group of scruffy looking characters headed my way. They all looked genuinely happy to see me. Three Vietnamese men, who looked very young, sat side by side on a cot in the far corner with puzzled looks on their faces... one had a stupid looking grin on his face, almost like it was painted there. They looked very much out of place. Now I'm confused.

"Hey man, don't worry bout those guys... they're on our side now." ..huh?.. "Yea, they're captured NVA. They were given a choice.. go to jail or let us pay you fifty bucks a month to be a scout." "They call em Kit Carson Scouts." "They're supposed to walk point and find the booby traps for us... what a crock of shit!" "Ain't no gook gonna walk point for me man." "There it is!" "Fuck it, they never stay around long anyway." "So, how's the World?"

They didn't really want me to say anything. I think they were just happy to see a new face. A potential replacement. I was fresh from the World and they had almost forgotten what civilization had been like. I could talk later.

Top walked out of the hooch saying something about leaving me in good hands.

Jerry Bull introduced himself first. "You'll probably be going to 3rd platoon. Ask for the third squad... that's my squad... it's the best." "Let me show you how to pack your ruck." "You'll need a frame for this thing. It rides top low without one." "Of course we're out of em right now but I'll snatch up the the first one I can for ya."

As the huge pile of shit on my cot started to dwindle and my rucksack looked like it would split at the seams, I asked a stupid question, "Do I really need all this stuff?" "Oh, this ain't all of it... you'll need at least two more canteens of water, a Claymore, maybe six frags, a quarter pound of C-4, an ammo can for your personal stuff, and a hunting knife... Can you think of anything else guys?" ..no, please.. "Yea, man, you gonna need some dry socks and foot powder... maybe a towel." "Better get him some bug spray!" "They'll probably give ya some 60 ammo to carry when ya get out there top." ..fuck..

Bull, a big red-headed southerner, had decided to take me under his wing. He was in the rear for two reasons. He'd be leaving for R&R in a couple days but first had to get the doctors O.K. at Camp Eagle. He explained that Delta Company was operating in a nasty AO. Third platoon had been sent to re-enforce another company catching some shit on a hill...

a place they had named Re-Up Hill..for obvious reasons. Guys from the other company were re-enlisting for an MOS change, just so they'd be taken off that hill, and back to the rear to sign the papers. I was told that it had brought on a change in the rules. From now on you can't re-up unless you're in the rear on stand-down.

During a firefight, that was described to me as "Damn Near't Hand To Hand", in the middle of the night, while on Re-Up Hill, a satchel charge had gone off right next to Bull's fighting position... he had gotten a concussion from the near miss. When Third platoon left the hill, they were ambushed. One of the other platoons from Delta was sent to help. Captain Straub immediately decided that Delta would operate in company strength as long as we were in that AO.

Suddenly I don't feel so "Lucky To Be With Delta." I'll be replacing a guy that was wounded in an ambush not too damn long ago. This is really starting to get scary!

Later that evening, after washing down the Phu Bai dust with a few beers, it was decided that we should gather some intelligence information from the enemy.. "Lets ask the scouts how the NVA mark their booby traps so their own men don't get blown away." This would prove to be easier said than done.

As we walked toward the cot where the three scouts were still sitting they became restless and started talking to each other quietly. We sat on the cot next to theirs and Bull asked, "How do NVA soldiers mark booby traps so other NVA soldiers don't get killed?" They looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders, "No bick booby." Shit, they don't speak English. Oh well, lets try a different approach.. the English lesson began.. "Booby trap same-same BOOM!" "Ah, boom-boom number one!" "No you dumb fuck, not that kind of boom", Bull put his fingers on the cot and started walking them, "Click", he threw his hand into the air as he jumped from the cot yelling, "BOOOOM!!" The scouts jumped with fear but I think they understood.. "Booby trap go BOOM." "Yea, you got it man. Now, NVA put booby trap on trail... Why no other NVA go BOOM.. only American G.I.?" One of the scouts replied, "NVA no step on booby trap, NVA go other trail." Now we're getting somewhere. "How do they know which trail to use?" "No bick." The conversation went on well into the night but we didn't really learn anything.

On the next morning there was a company formation... for all four of us. We were a sorry looking bunch of guys trying to stand at attention. Top informed us that all was well in the field. Delta would move to an LZ in two days for supplies. That's when I'd go out. Bull was sent to Eagle and the other guys were assigned various details within the confines of the Phu Bai wire. After all the shuffling around that I'd been through in the past two weeks it looked like the Army had found a place for me. I was to write home... send my new address... tell 'em your okay. Take it easy today. You'll be pulling guard duty in our sector of the Phu Bai Bunker Line tonight,

Snoopy stood guard on the control tower at the Evans log pad as our jeep pulled up to the Delta pile. There were other piles there... they all looked the same. How they knew which one belonged to Delta has always been a mystery to me. There was a steady stream of helicopter traffic in and out. They all seemed to be going to, or coming from the same general direction... the mountains. A Crane would take off as a Chinook landed. Two Cobras sat waiting for a Loach to warm up. Slicks landed to pick up their cargo. It was an amazing sight... Organized chaos... Business as usual.

A slick landed near our pile and I helped the supply Sergeant load the C's. A chill ran up my spine when I noticed the door gunner fiddling with his M-60 and ammo. Well Blackman, you really got yourself in a fine mess this time... these guys are serious... there's gonna be real shooting out there. The words of our Drill Instructor popped into my mind, "...and all you 11-Bravo's will be going to the land of the two way firing range."

I had ridden in a helicopter before.. at Benning, but it just wasn't the same. There were soft seats and doors on that one. It had landed like a feather in an open field at our bivouac site during my last week of NCO school. There were no machine guns hanging out the doors. Oh yes, this was different all right.

As our chopper started passing over the mountains I momentarily forgot about the war that I was being flown into. The vastness and beauty of the jungle covered mountains helped me overlook the bomb craters and LZs that were scattered all over the place. The view was breath-taking... it made me feel like a very small cog. It was hard to believe that there was a war going on at all. It was love at first sight. I instantly wanted to come back some day under different circumstances. I'd build a cabin right down there.. on that small hill facing the waterfall.

The slapping rotor blades pulled me out of the trance. There was colored smoke rising from a ridgeline with a bald spot in the center. We started to circle and go down. The trees and mountains were getting bigger real fast. The door gunner started searching the area with his M-60 as his pointing stick. My heart pounded it's way up into my throat. We're gonna die.. they're gonna shoot us right out of the fuckin' sky.

Hey, wait a minute!! I don't see anyone down there. I'm supposed to meet a whole company here. You guys fucked up bad. We're landing on the wrong LZ. These ass holes are gonna leave me here all alone.

We touched down.. by the time I opened my eyes there were two guys running up to the chopper. They had appeared from nowhere. Two more were on the other side. Half the C-rations were unloaded before the door gunner had a chance to tell me to get out. I rolled over on my hands and knees and slid out backwards... Damn this rucksack anyway!

As I stood there in the middle of the LZ, wondering what to do, I strained my eyes in the hopes of seeing the rest of Delta Company. There was a guy between two stumps with a radio... one kneeling down next to him... one carrying a case of C's off the LZ. As the slick lifted off someone appeared before me. He was wearing a steel pot, had one bandolier of magazines around his shoulder and carried an M-16. He yelled in my ear, "My names Dotson.. I'm the 3rd Platoon Sergeant.. You'll be with us. We gotta get off the LZ now.. follow me."

I don't recall meeting Captain Straub at that time but probably did. I was so overwhelmed by everything that I just don't remember it. Anyway, I was led to the third platoon sector and Dotson introduced me to a few of the guys. I was never referred to as a "cherry", in fact everyone seemed very glad to get the extra help.

I was given a LAW and a couple smoke grenades to add to my already heavy rucksack. I weighed about 115 pounds with nothing on. To get a conservative idea of how heavy a ruck is you might try strapping a 60 pound bag of redi-mix concrete over your shoulders and walking up and down the steps to the Washington Monument for 8 to 10 hours in August.. then imagine carrying a rifle and fighting your way through thick jungles and swift mountain streams.

We moved out to set up an NDP away from the LZ. I still hadn't seen all of Delta Company.. only part of the 3rd platoon. It would be at our first stand-down in Phu Bai, about three weeks later, that I would see them all at once and in one place.

Humping in the middle of the column is boring. I had no idea what I was supposed to do except struggle to put one foot in front of the other... "your left right... your left right."

My brother and I used to play Army.. not too damn long ago. We'd gather up all the able bodied kids in our neighborhood and choose sides. Ambushes and major battle plans were drawn up.. but this is no game.. there would be no "Bang bang, your dead" here. I was always brave then.. would I be brave now?

One time my brother went on a recon mission and hid in the rafters of an old garage being used as an enemy Headquarters. He fell and broke his arm. I ran for help. My dad was furious, "Why the hell didn't you stop him?" I'd never been able to stop him before.. he was my big brother and should know better.

Now I'm an E-5 and in a real war. Why am I thinking about my brother now? He isn't here with me... or is he?

My brother had tried desperately to spare me from going to Nam. He was a Communications Technician in the Navy and put his first transfer in for Vietnam when I dropped out of High School. He would put three more in before I got my draft notice. The Navy refused his request.. he was needed

elsewhere. It was ironic that my new 1st Sergeant, Top Schuelke, had taught ROTC to my brother when he was in High School. Maybe a little bit of my big brother is here with me after all.

In the morning, after I learned what leeches were, we moved out, down the mountain toward the valley below. After only a few minutes the ruck had kicked my ass. At least we were heading down... the only thing that saved me. My squad was on point and I was last man. They would slowly work me toward the front as time went by... within three months I could expect to walk point.

After reaching the bottom we found a river. This wasn't a good place to cross so we turned up-stream trying stay as near the huge rocks along the bank as possible. A Loach that was following the river flew above us.

CRACK.. CRACK.. CRACK!!!

When I was 14 years old the neighbor man and my dad took my brother and I on a hunting trip.. for Pheasants. Two flew up right in front of us. My knees went weak. There were three shots fired.. no birds fell. "I only heard three shots! Who didn't shoot?" I had instinctively aimed but was unable to pull the trigger. "I'll never take you hunting again!"

The neighbor was true to his words and never took me hunting again. My dad had told me not to worry about it. "Lots of guys freeze up the first time."

I was worried now. Would I freeze up over here?

The guys in front and behind me disappeared behind the rocks along the river as the Loach exploded into a ball of fire and went down. I dropped in place and became wedged between some small rocks and my ruck. I was urged by someone to "take cover man!" "Hey, get over here... don't lay out there in plain sight!" After collecting my wits I struggled to free myself and crawled behind a boulder where two others from my squad had taken refuge.

There was a squad of NVA sitting on the rocks across the river from us eating dinner.. They were just sitting there big as you please taking pot shots at the bird. They hadn't seen or heard us and we didn't know they were there till it was too late. In fact our whole platoon had already passed them. Most of my platoon and all of the men in the platoon behind us opened up. It was over in hour/seconds... I didn't shoot.

A sweep of the area revealed three NVA killed by small arms fire and one killed by ARA.

A squad from one of the other platoons broke off and went around us. They were sent to check for survivors from the Loach... we all knew there wouldn't be any.

When the patrol came back I got my first good look at the enemy. One of the men was carrying an NVA soldier on his shoulders. He had been wounded and was crying out in pain. The man carrying him was pissed and not keeping it a secret. I later learned that they had found him hiding behind a rock.. he was wounded in the leg. He had a small wooden medal pinned to his shirt. A medal given to him for shooting down a helicopter.

A couple hours later one of our platoons received a "Hoi Chanh" without a weapon.

I had been in the Ripcord area for less than 24 hours, had seen a helicopter shot down and earned my CIB without firing a round.. but was damn lucky to be with Delta.

After the wounded NVA prisoner and the Hoi Chanh were evacuated we moved away from the river. There was little talk among the guys about the firefight. I couldn't understand it. A Loach crew had died, we had killed four NVA soldiers, taken one prisoner and had one surrender to us... yet very little was said about it. It was as if it had been "all in a days work." Would I become this callous as time went by?

At first light on the very next morning a quick burst from an M-60 interrupted my breakfast. There had been a single NVA with an AK-47 hopping down the trail near our NDP site... one of our machine gunners nailed him cold.

A little later, before moving out, one of the machine gunners test fired his M-60 after repairing it. It had failed to function during the firefight yesterday. Immediately after the test fire there was a loud Whoosh...BOOM! as the first of about 40 60mm mortars started dropping on us. I had seen and heard mortars fired during training but had never been right under them when they impacted. I scrambled to a tree no bigger around than my leg in a effort to avoid being killed.

The only time I can remember feeling this helpless was when I learned how to swim. The method that my brother had used was common. He drug a screaming little brat out from the safety of the shallow water in the swimming area at Lake Mannawa.. and left me. There was nothing to hold onto, so I would either sink or swim.

There was little protection when the mortars came, so I would either live or die.

I survived the mortar barrage but was one scared puppy when it was all over. Two Delta men were wounded during the attack. Artillery and ARA were called in on the suspected NVA position... It's gonna be one long 10 months and 20 days. (Yes, I was already counting my time left in country)

We moved out but it was later decided that we should circle back and set up an ambush around the NVA that we had killed

during breakfast. We would NDP around his body. I can't remember if it was a company or platoon size ambush but do remember very well where I was to sleep... head to head with the dead gook, I avoided looking at him for awhile but later decided that I'd better make damn sure he was really dead. I had this funny feeling that he wasn't dead and didn't want him to get up and slit my throat in the middle of the night while I was asleep.

First I took two quick glances at his body... the third glance turned into a long stare. While looking at him I wondered if he had a wife and family. I know we had been trained to think of the NVA as the enemy and not human beings but I couldn't help it. I had seen dead people before... at family funerals... but this was different... He was laying there all full of holes and his family didn't even know he was dead yet. In a strange sort of way I felt sorry for him. I got little or no sleep that night.

The next morning we moved out and started humping up a very big hill. The jungle was thick and dark. It was hotter than hell, and I wasn't used to my ruck yet. The straps were digging in deep and every time I tried shifting the weight it felt like my skin was on fire where the straps had been. Everyone was drenched in sweat.

We were about half way up when the whispering between the 3rd platoon guys started. They seemed nervous and much more alert. "This is it man. This is the trail to Re-Up." "Are you sure?" "Fuckin right I'm sure.. The ambush was right over there man. They're gonna make us go back up there. This is one bad fuckin place." "Keep your eyes open man, we're goin back up to Re-Up Hill." "They better not make us NDP up there." "There's dinks here.. I can feel em!" "I don't need this shit.. I'm gettin too fuckin short!" The weight of my ruck and my tender shoulders were forgotten.

After reaching the top we circled the filled in foxholes. Only an occasional whisper could be heard. "There's the place Bull got hit." "The RPG's came from there." "This hole took a direct hit." It was an eerie place.. you could tell that men had died here. We NDP'd on Re-Up Hill that night. Nobody in 3rd platoon slept.

The next morning we left Re-Up Hill and went to an LZ. We were to be CA'd to an abandoned firebase called Gladiator. Our job was to secure it so Artillery and Mortars could be installed. It would be my first Combat Assault and I was extremely apprehensive. None of the old-timers knew much about the new AO we were going to but we all hoped it would be quieter than this one. After the last few days I just wanted to catch my breath.

Because of this move, and the fact that some of the guys had mentioned being in the Firebases Birmingham and Bastogne areas before going near Ripcord, I asked someone where our permanent AO was. I was informed that the 2nd of the 501st had become the Swing Battalion and we could

expect to be popped into any AO where extra help was needed, or where NVA presence was suspected. "Oh great!"

Being on a company size Combat Assault, with it's long line of Slicks and Cobra escorts, is impossible to describe.. one has to experience it to know how it felt. It would start with a feeling that something bad was going to happen at the LZ... especially if you had to cut an LZ. Once in the air there would be a feeling of relief that we had made it out without incident. You could kick back and enjoy the ride.. but in the back of your mind you knew we had to land sooner or later. When the long line of Slicks approached the new LZ you felt a strange mixture of different emotions as the Artillery prep stopped and the Cobras dove to finish the job... then you felt the bottom drop out of your bird as it took you into the cold LZ that everyone had been praying for.

As our bird touched down red smoke came billowing through the open doors making it difficult to see. I thought they were supposed to pop red smoke only on hot LZ's, so was confused until hearing the blood curdling cry, "INCOMING!!!"... while, at the same time, the door gunner was repeating, "Get out fast.. It's a HOT LZ.. It's a HOT LZ!"

Now there's a job that I know I couldn't handle.. being a doorgunner and going on CA's every day just wasn't my idea of an easy tour. Of course my tour hadn't seemed too fucking easy so far either.

During the mortar attack a couple days earlier there had at least been some trees to hide behind. This was a bald ass hill with dirt filled foxholes around it.

As I slid down the side of the hill where my squad was frantically trying to dig in, several mortar rounds impacted all around the hastily set up perimeter. There would be six more separate mortar attacks that day with four Delta men being wounded by shrapnel.

We stayed on or around Gladiator for the next twelve days while it was being built up and were constantly being mortared. During one of those days someone walked up behind me as I was digging a bunker.. "How's it going soldier?" As I turned to see who it was I replied, "Not worth a fuck.. uh.. Chaplain." "What seems to be the problem son?" "Well, sir, we've been getting mortared every day since getting here and there isn't anything we can do about it." By now a Sergeant Major had walked up beside the Chaplain and said, "Well Sergeant, I have to tell you that the reports I have read so far about our operations in this AO have indicated that we are doing very well indeed. You have to realize that as long as we can kill ten of the enemy for each one of our casualties we feel that we are winning." I couldn't believe my ears. A value, or price, of 10 to 1 had been put on each American life. I turned around without responding to his statement and began digging again. I don't know how long

they stood there behind me, but they must have figured out that our conversation was over because when I looked again later they had gone.

As soon as Gladiator had been built up, we closed it back down and were flown to Phu Bai., then to Eagle Beach for my first stand-down. We were taken to Eagle Beach in Chinooks and I didn't like it one little bit. There were no doors to hang my M-16 out of and we couldn't see what the hell was going on.

Soon after arriving at Eagle Beach I learned just how much steam a line company could blow off in a rear area, and why the REMF's would just as soon we never come back for a visit. We considered ourselves special and wouldn't comply to the code of conduct that the rear area people were subject to.

The rest of my tour wasn't as frantic as the first two back to back missions that I had been involved in and I was damn sure glad about that. It had been a hair raising introduction to the Delta Raiders.



Ray "BLACKIE" Blackman



(photo compliments of Ken Mayberry)



FIREBASE RIPCORN
(photo compliments of Ken Mayberry)

INCOMING FROM FIREBASE WHIPPANY:

On June 1, 1988, I had a long time dream come true. Like my father before me, I've always believed in the youth of America. I've always had the urge to visit our schools and speak to the students. For many years, no one wanted to listen to us, but that is changing now.

The youth of our country are genuinely interested in us and the Vietnam war. Thanks to Mr. Jim Duffy, a high school teacher at Parsippany Hills High, who contacted my American Legion post in Whippany looking for a combat Vietnam veteran to speak to his class of seniors.

I felt privileged and honored to represent The American Legion, the V.F.W., but most of all, THE RIFCORD ASSOCIATION. "My class" of seniors touched my heart with a feeling that I just can't describe.

They didn't know what to expect from me, and I sure didn't know what to expect from them, but I read their eyes which said: "My mind is open, I want to know." These young adults are bright, intelligent, warm, sincere and honest. If these students are representative of what our schools are turning out, our country has little to fear. I am very proud of "my class."

I asked Mr. Duffy for some feedback from the class, and he did me one better. He asked his students to write me a letter, which they all did. What follows are their letters to me. I will cherish them always.

John Mihalko

Dear John,

After you left us yesterday, I felt very warm. I felt a connection with the real Vietnam Vet that the movies and documentaries could never relate. Your words were so honest and pure to me, they invited me into your life, past and present.

I don't want to insult the Vietnam Vet by saying that I understand, but after you spoke I had a sense of comprehension of what it was like in the jungles of Vietnam. I can only empathize, which is a goal much higher than sympathizing with the pain that all of the ex-vets must go through daily.

I feel as if I want to get involved in a V.A. hospital. Oh God! If you haven't seen COMING HOME - yes, Jane Fonda is in it, but give her a chance; she's an officer's wife in the movie, it's beautiful.

I thought of your hands, the hands of an old man now, compared to the hands of an innocent young man in the pictures, not knowing the effects of the poison sprayed overhead. I guess you are the vehicle for my connection with the soldiers.

I'm having such a hard time expressing how revealing your talk was. My words are inconsequential. You are in my heart and I thank you for welcoming our class into your world.

Sincerely,
Jenny McNee

Dear John,

Thank you for visiting us yesterday. Your visit was one of the most valuable, if not the most valuable experiences we have had as a class. We do many things that help us to feel connected with our government, and our past, and with people in general, but no movie or book or magazine article can teach us what you taught us. You epitomized what each of us wishes to gain from this class and from life in general - that is some kind of understanding of what makes us as people tick.

I cannot begin to grasp what you experienced, and I don't claim to know anything. Just being around people who are willing to offer a piece of themselves is an invaluable gift. You touched me with your openness and how you were sometimes lost for words because the emotions were too great. And when you said about your daughter, "I love the Hell out of her." And when you described you and your mother's reunion - those are things that will remain in my head for a long, long time.

I am torn; I always thought that I was against war, but I am not against what you did because you believed in it.

Thank you for being so direct and treating us with kindness and not condescending to us. I really appreciated how you took each question seriously.

I wish you and your wife and your daughter and your dog many years of happiness. I am glad your daughter is not affected by Agent Orange. You are an inspiration because you appreciate, as we all should, but tend not to, just being alive.

Thank you,
Patty Klipper

John Mihalko,

I really appreciated you taking your time to speak to our class. I really feel as if I have a better grasp of what Vietnam was really like. It was interesting to hear someone speak who was for the U.S. being in Vietnam. Your sharing of your own personal experiences was very moving and really made Vietnam come alive in my mind.

I can understand why you feel everyone should serve a couple of years. Americans do take their material possessions and life for granted way too much. I just wish that there was an easier way for all of us to learn the important lessons that you learned in Vietnam.

After hearing you speak, I really can say that I hold a lot of respect for you. Thank you for sharing your pictures with us. It was neat to see what Vietnam really looked like.

I hope you continue to speak to more high schools. It was a very worthwhile visit.

Sincerely,
Karen Wolf

Dear John,

When John Mihalko first stepped into the room, I expected a strong fighting man which was totally conservative and for the Vietnam War. Yes, John you were for fighting in the war because you were fighting for our country. It was touching hearing that you were friendly with some Vietnamese when we were at war with them.

You talked in a nice soft spoken way and left us with interesting stories and advice. I think we were privileged to be the first class you spoke to and anyone else who hears your occurrences should consider themselves lucky too. I am so glad your daughter is fine, she is beautiful.

Thank you,
Juliet Linsk

John Mihalko,

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for coming and speaking to us on Wednesday, June 1, 1988. We all appreciated your honesty and respect you. I especially respect what you had to say because I am leaving for Marine Corps basic training on July 11, 1988.

You add some insight to my future and some humbleness to my views on war. You are in my eyes a true hero of the war in the aspect that you have the guts and determination to be able to speak out and share your life with us. Any man who can do that is a real hero.

Finally, you are a credit to your family, your country, and to the 101st Airborne Division. Good luck and may God be with you wherever you go. My gratitude goes with you.

Douglas E. Boehm

John Mihalko,

Your presentation was by far the best I have ever seen. You told us what Vietnam was like unlike other speakers who either glorify it or put down the country for it. I have tremendous respect for you and what you have done. If you have the time, it would be great if you told other high-school groups about your experiences so they can have a first hand source about what it was like.

It is much better for people to hear things from a person who has feelings and has experienced such a thing that you have rather than get a book about it. I thank you for speaking to the class about a very important topic that involves a great many people.

Enjoy Life,
Brady Ries

June 2

Dear Mr. Mihalko,

It is often that I bring home many of the issues discussed here in our political institute course, but it is rare to bring home a man's inner soul, torn heart, horrifying experiences and he's still waving the flag of patriotism. You were honest with us Mr. Mihalko and that is what I wish to thank you for the most.

You captivated your classroom with your realistic account of what actually occurred and shared your hopes and dreams and fears. I imagine it must be more than difficult to open up old wounds to a room of strangers. I saw the emotions overcoming your body and soul as you displayed your bullet shot holder. I imagine you feel those bullets hitting your chest everytime you put it on - again and again and again.

But it's time for Vets to open up because we are ready and need to hear it. It's strange because I expected you to be such a warmonger - but I can understand how you feel so patriotic to the U.S. because of your upbringing. I guess the reason so many of us teenagers are liberal and anti-war is because our parents were teenagers in the 50's and 60's and didn't go to war with you.

I suppose my life would be drastically different and I could understand more. About Agent Orange - in December I did a lot of research with the VVA to find out why disability isn't recognized and why the government doesn't take responsibility.

I presented a bill in a Model Congress in D.C. to give Agent Orange victims proper funding. My bill passed. Unfortunately, it was only a Model Congress. Sir, I honestly believe that if the U.S. has the nerve to take their young men away from their families to defend this incredible nation they should at least have enough respect to help out those who survived and were inadvertently killed by their own country.

I wish you the best of luck. I'm glad your daughter is healthy and that you have adjusted. Keep talking. Don't let anyone ever forget your trauma. Thank you.

With the utmost respect,
Ellen Goldberg

p.s. You are an amazingly beautiful man. You have touched many of our hearts and souls. I feel privileged to have spent what little time we did together. Thanks. Your daughter is beautiful.