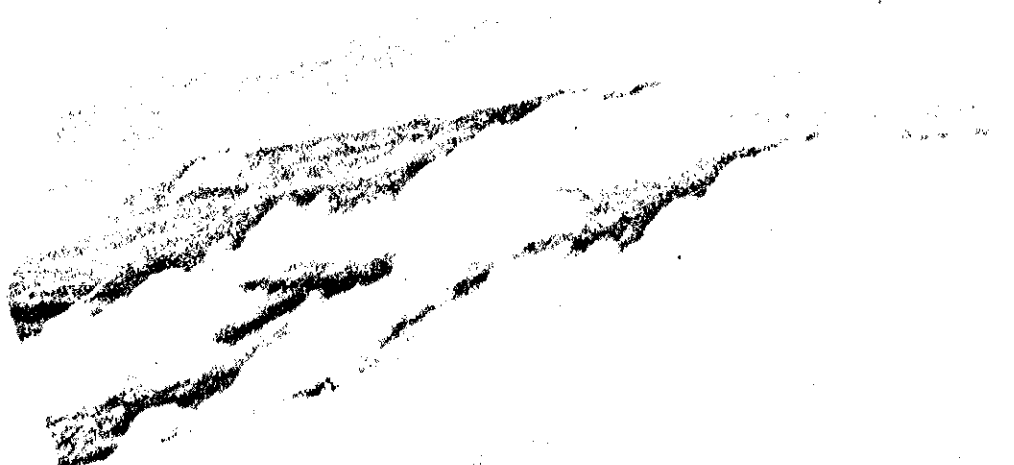


RIPCORD REPORT

A Newsletter

No. 30, September 1991

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN



AH-1G HUEY COBRA

Above the cloud-covered jungle in Vietnam.

From Shelby Stanton's book, Vietnam Order of Battle.

RIPCORD REPORT: FOR FRIENDS AND SURVIVORS

The Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord extended from 12 March to 23 July 1970. During the peak of the battle, from 1 to 23 July, there were 61 KIA, 345 WIA, and one MIA. It was the most costly action by US Forces during 1970. It was the last major battle of the Vietnam War that was fought by purely American units.

At the center of this cauldron of fire on the northeast rim of the A Shau Valley were soldiers of the 2/506th Infantry Battalion, and Bravo Battery, 2/319th Artillery Battalion, 101st Airborne Division. There were others: Infantrymen from sister battalions (2/501 and 1/506); Artillerymen on neighboring fire bases; men who flew F4 Phantoms and Forward Air Controllers in observation aircraft; Army Aviators in gunships and utility helicopters; men who pushed supplies forward; men who kept vigil by radios; men and women who staffed hospitals; and others, who provided support in a thousand different ways.

For 23 days in July 1970, three to four regiments of a North Vietnamese Army division laid siege to Ripcord from the surrounding mountains and rain forested valleys. It was a time of violence and death. Enemy rockets, recoilless rifle fire, and mortar rounds slammed daily into the perimeter. Heavy machine guns, and small arms ripped into the hill and tore helicopters out of the sky. Gristly fire fights broke out on the peaks and in the valleys around Ripcord: Hill 902; Hill 1000; Hill 805; and other nameless places that remain seared into memory.

The men at Ripcord fought aggressively, and well. Their courage was beyond measure. Their steadfast loyalty to a nation divided by the war remains unquestioned. The name "Ripcord" is graven in stone on the granite wall of the 101st Airborne Division Memorial at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, silent testimony to those who were there, who gave the full measure of their devotion to duty.

Membership in the Ripcord Association and subscription to the "Ripcord Report" is free. Anyone may join who was involved at the Battle of Ripcord, who knows someone who was there, or who simply has a genuine interest. The intentions of the newsletter are to share information, clarify events, offer occasional opinion, and promote better understanding of the battle. The association does not mean to offend, or cause renewed suffering due to the content of the report. Many of the members have benefited from the report, hopefully, many more will in the months and years ahead.

The "Ripcord Report" and the Ripcord Association were founded by Chip Collins (B & RCN, 2/506, 70-71) in 1984. From an initial membership of four, the association has grown to over 200 members. Any advertising accepted will be published free of charge. The newsletter makes no guarantees regarding acceptance or publication of an item. Material will be returned if so requested (please include return postage).



BASIC LOAD

Art/Photos	Contacts/New Faces	Staff Journal
Incoming	Murphy's Law of Combat	Tha Enemy
The Tadpole and the Snake		And More...

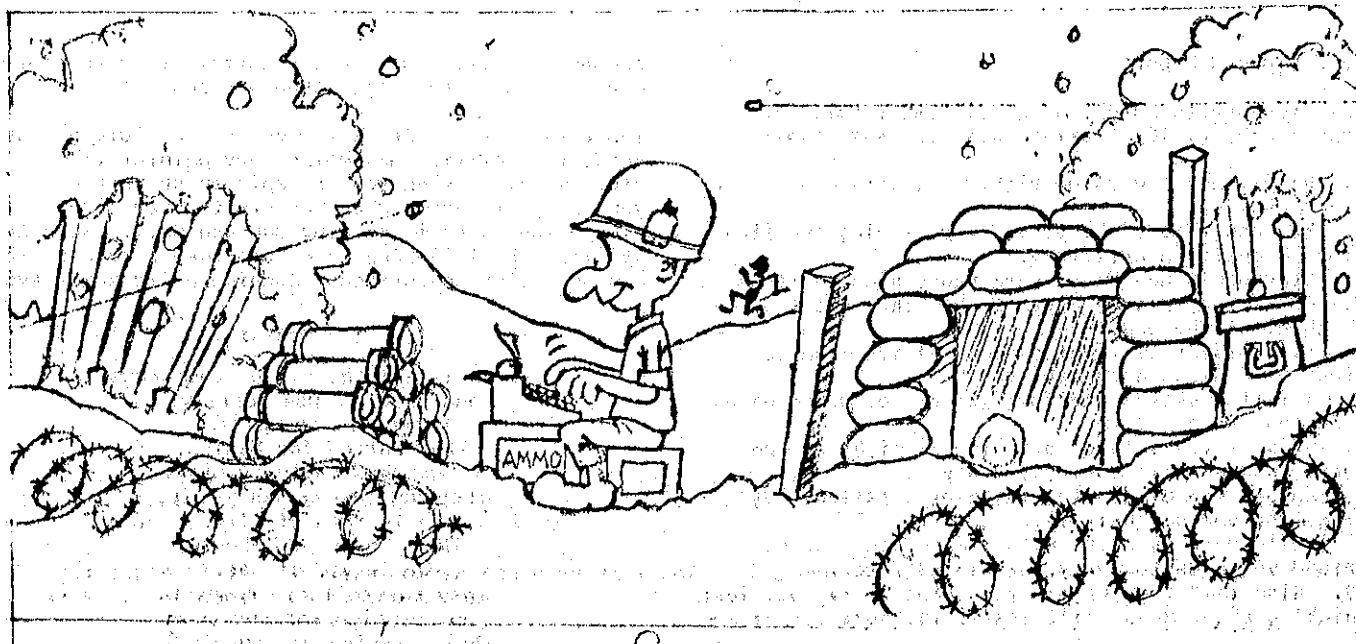
CONTACTS/NEW FACES

SFC Rick Wright, Ft. Campbell, KY // Nicholas Christian, Indianapolis, IN // Al Newman, Ahawam, MA
Charlie Lieb, Green Bay, WI // Richard Scaglione, San Diego, CA

DONATIONS: Gary Jestes, Randy House, Jim Griffin, Dan Esposito, John Bowman

Production assistance for this and the previous edition of the newsletter have been provided by the Historical Evaluation and Research Organization, a division of Data Memory Systems, Inc. of Fairfax, Virginia, a defense and national security studies and analysis firm.

"Oh yesterday our little troop was ridden through and through,
Our awaying, tattered pennons fled, a broken, beaten few,
And all a summer afternoon they hunted us and alew;
But tomorrow, by the living God, we'll try the game again." John Masefield, Tomorrow



STAFF JOURNAL: LZ OAKTON

The monsoon season is upon us, just as it was 21 years ago. Yep. Ripcord happened that long in the past, except for some nights when it seems like yesterday. Welcome to the Ripcord Report.

LZ Oakton has been a bit hectic since the April issue. My commander-in-chief (wife Glenda) and I moved one house up the street (note the new address -- 11614 not 11610). Chip Collins visited in May for an excellent weekend of conversation, food, and drink. Jody Smith (A/2-506, 70-71) and his fire team of wife, Cindy, and children, Rene (15), Jamie (9), and Russ (15) arrived on 1 July (in time to help us unpack) and departed on the 4th to spend a week touring Washington, DC.

I also spoke with Colonel Bob Seitz (RCN & C, 2/506) who is on his way to Harvard for a year as a Senior Army Fellow, and with two classmates of mine who were in the battalion: Charlie Lieb (C & RHC, 2/506); and Richard Scaglione (RCN 2/506). A number of you kept our postman busy, including Colonel Randy House (101st Aviation and 2/506), our senior Ripcord Association member in Operation Desert Storm, and others (see Incoming).

Many thanks for all the submissions received. Not all of them could be used for this issue, but they will stay on file for future reports.

The goofy-looking guy in the cartoon above is supposed to be me when I was the Adjutant for the 2/506th in the last three months of my tour. The battalion artist (extra duty for one of our short-timers) made the drawing over 20 years ago. Enjoy, and "Curraheel!"

Chuck Hawkins, LZ Oakton.

INCOMING

Hi Chuck,

I thought the Ripcord readers would be interested in these news articles. As you can tell, the news media got a few details wrong, but they meant well.

I think the Ripcord Report is helping us all to ease the hurt we all feel over Vietnam. I hope the Ripcord Report will continue into the years until we join our brothers on "The Wall" in Washington, DC.

Gary Jestes, Hampstead, MD

Dear Chuck,

On Memorial Day this kid brought tears to my eyes. Perhaps you can squeeze his essay into the newsletter. Thanks.

Art Witnik, Higganum, CT

Dear Chuck,

Enclosed are two articles of interest. One is in reference to an article in the Ripcord Report about athletes who were in 'Nam. I knew about him but never knew his name until I ran across this article.

The second article is one I ran across recently in the Atlantic City Press which I think expresses a lot of Veterans' feelings.

Enclosed is a donation; wish it could be more. Keep up the good work. Best wishes.

Den Esposito, Ventnor, NJ

Dear Ripcord Report

In reference to Murphy's Law of Combat (Ripcord Report #29, p. 16) I offer these ten additions:

1. He may not always be right, but he's always the lieutenant.
2. You can tell if he passed map reading the first time he calls in artillery.
3. Claymore mines don't care whose side you're on.
4. Grunts may not be elegant, but they are the backbone of the army.
5. It's easier to fight a squad of NVA than to sleep with a bunch of leeches.
6. A full rucksack and four gallons of water weigh more than some people.
7. Wrist watches lose more time at night during guard than anytime during the day.
8. Anyone who misses the taste of C-rations must have lost one of their five senses.
9. While walking point with a machette, you get around 50 yards to every canteen of water.
10. High tech weepers are the thing today, but just thinking about RPGs still scares the heck out of me.

Jim Griffin, Rossville, GA

Dear Chuck,

The February Ripcord Report found me still in Saudi Arabia, but I hope by the time you receive this note, the BLACKJACKS will be back at Fort Hood, TX. I am writing mainly just to thank you for making the Ripcord Report possible. Jack Glennon, one of the Phoenix pilots (C/158th), does a similar newsletter to keep all the Phoenix guys together. As I reflect after my second war, the importance of the "experiences" shared by warriors becomes more and more evident.

After we returned from Iraq, I began to go around to all my officers trying to express how important their experiences will be to them in the future. I advised them to write down the names of all those they fought with, take group photos, and ID each member. I encouraged them to reflect on the adventure. My brigade was involved in two tough fights before "Q" Day -- lost five KIAs, 14 MIAs, won six Silver Stars. I am so proud of these guys, I hope someday there will be a BLACKJACK/SWA Newsletter.

Just wanted you to know how much I appreciate your efforts. Curraheel

Randy House, Fort Hood, TX

Dear Chuck,

"From the corn fields of Nebraska."

I think you are doing a fantastic job as editor of Ripcord Report. You put a lot more heart and soul into it than I ever could. Of course, my soul belongs to Delta Raiders [2/501], though the Ripcord Association will always have a special place in my heart.

I liked "The Enemy." Not the enemy we met in person, but "The Enemy" article that you printed. It's interesting to read about the Vietnam War from their point of view. I am a little surprised to find out that the sappers were considered the

second-most elite of the NVA units. Sappers could certainly do more damage than a recon unit.

Thank you Mary E. Graves! You are absolutely right about the indifference being very painful to Vietnam Vets. When you are spit on or yelled at you can yell back. When you are treated like a non-person there is nothing you can do... Nothing at all. The following is a poem that I read at the Nebraska Vietnam Veterans' Reunion a few years ago.

VIETNAM

For us it was the six o'clock news.
For them it was reality.
We called for pizza.
They called for Medics.
We watched children play.
They watched children die.
We learned of life.
They learned of death.
We served dinner.
They served their country.
Our passion was success.
Their passion was survival.
We forgot.
They cannot.

(Author Unknown)

You see, Mary, there are others out there who feel the same way you do and Vietnam Veterans are being healed. Healed from the biggest pain of all -- indifference -- thanks to letters like yours. Sincerely,

Ray "Blackie" Blackman, Valparaiso, NE

Dear Chuck,

I was given your address by someone who thought you might be able to help me in my venture.

I am writing an article about the Infantry Non Commissioned Officers Candidate Course (Ft. Benning, GA) that trained NCOs during the Vietnam War from 1967 until 1975. Could you place a writer's inquiry in the Ripcord Report for information and assistance from former graduates of this program? I am particularly interested in class numbers, dates, copies of graduation programs containing company rosters, etc. This information would be greatly appreciated along with comments about this program from graduates.

Thank you sincerely,

Leonard Russell, Jr.,
ME 04462

PS. I was with the 5th Mech up on the DMZ and all our missions were flown by the 101st. I was with a mech unit and spent all my time flying. I never set foot on a track vehicle.

Dear Leonard,

Consider it done. All readers who graduated from the Infantry Non Commissioned Officers Candidate Course are encouraged to contact Leonard Russell at the above address. Thanks for your inquiry and interest in the Ripcord Report.

Chuck Hawkins

To Sirs,

My name is Rick Wright. I'm a platoon sergeant with the 101st ABN DIV (AASLT). I heard about the Ripcord Report from a guy named Arthur Wiknik from Higganum, CT. He sent a letter to "any soldier" of the 101st. We have written each other a couple of times.

I came in the Army in '75, so I missed Vietnam. I read just about everything I can get my hands on. I would like to receive your publication. If you have a set rate, just let me know. If it is by donation, I'm sure I could scrape up a few dollars here and there. Thanks.

SFC Rick Wright, A Co., 2/502 IN, 101st ABN DIV, Ft. Campbell, KY

Chuck,

Just recalled that I was to provide a review of Bob Parrish's Combat Recon and another non-fiction book called Maverick. Seem to have let you down on that count. However, I will sit down soon and shoot one out for you -- sorry about that -- completely skipped my mind.

In the mean time... Here's a little essay I jotted down for a fellow who's compiling a history of medics. If anyone else was a medic, or has memories of their platoon (or company) combat medics, they may write their recollections and pass them on to: Joe Kralick, "DOC," P.O. Box 1267, Ranchos, NM 87557. (4/31st, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, and C Co., 326th Medical Battalion, 101st Airborne Division, 164th Aviation Group -- '69-'72.)

Joe is particularly interested in memories involving the ± 2000 combat medics who were KIA.

I just finished illustrating an oral history of the similarities between the Afghan and Viet Wars (entitled Parallels) for some professors at Puget Sound University. Should be out this fall, God willing. I will advise you as soon as I know. Take care.

Machinegun (Mike "M-60" Kelley), Sacramento, CA

Chuck Hawkins, Ripcord Report

My Scout Dog was Koko, 3845, and we were with the 42d Scout Dog Platoon out of Camp Eagle. We walked point, in order of times, for: 1) A/1-327, 2) D/2-17 Cav, 3) D/1-327, 4) C/1-327, 5) 2/17 Cav, 6) Hawk Recon/2-127, 7) 3/D/1-327, 8) 1/B/1-327, 9) C/2-327, 10) 3/327, and 11) 1/501.

I had many different experiences with so many different LTs and some CPTs, but the grunts were all the same -- good, solid people. Often, I would take a turn at night watch just to help out, besides walking point in the daytime. Koko was a good luck charm. We came into platoons that had just hit the shit, and nothing while we were there, and then had a good quiet time for a few days, and as soon as we left, that platoon hit the shit. Nobody was killed or injured when Koko and I walked point. There were a few VC or North Vietnamese people that got killed, but no US 101st troops.

John Bowman, Davenport, IA, Feb-Sep '70

Bach Trinh

Honoring Other

Soldiers

SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 1991

THE WASHINGTON POST

Today heroic American soldiers will march in Washington as part of the splendid welcome home they are receiving nationwide. For many of us, however, this is also a day to remember equally heroic American soldiers who fought in another war—Vietnam.

Although they had to encounter a different political situation and a different type of warfare, the Americans who fought in Vietnam were no less valiant than those who fought in the Persian Gulf. Those who opposed the war in this country, however, used many different tactics to win their cause. One of these was the demeaning of the image of the U.S. troops in Vietnam. Another was the creation of a false impression of widespread anti-American sentiment there.

The truth is that after the war, Eastern Europeans and Russians who went to South Vietnam often found that the only way to be treated decently by local residents was to pretend that that were Americans. To South Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans alike, American soldiers were our defenders and heroes.

Victory in the Gulf War has restored America's pride and confidence. This is all the more reason to review the psychological and emotional impact left over from the Vietnam War. Through the defeat and victory of these wars, we learned much about propaganda and the credibility of governments that exercise it.

The once-victorious Communist government of Vietnam is now desperately begging for diplomatic relations and dollars from those it formerly called a treacherous enemy. This diplomatic development seems inevitable and will actually benefit both countries. But it still needs more time and consideration. Americans should be skeptical about the motives and actions of the Vietnamese government. We should use this situation to do all we can for the establishment of democracy and basic human rights in Vietnam. That will be the final honor and a true victory for the Americans who fought and died there.

The writer, an artist who lives in Northern Virginia, emigrated from Vietnam in 1975.



THE ENEMY

Major Malcom A. Danner
Major Billy J. Biberstein

Editor's Note: This article is from the May-June 1969 issue of *Infantry*, "...the professional magazine for infantrymen," and is the second in a series reprinted in the "Ripcord Report."

"The North Vietnamese don't like it under the yoke of the Communist party ... American Infantry Units are weak, their fire power is poor and their equipment is poor ... We know we cannot defeat the Americans, as it is almost impossible to defeat you ... We will win the war politically, not militarily...."

These are some of the random thoughts and views of a young lieutenant in the North Vietnamese Army who was wounded in action and subsequently captured by an American unit in South Vietnam in 1968.

The information, views and opinions in this article are those of the NVA lieutenant and do not reflect the official position of any Department of Defense agency.

This is his story, continued....

When we are in the mountains avoiding contact and on a rest period our most vulnerable elements are the patrols we send out, and some of the companies that we have guarding our outer perimeter. The food we normally have in advance, and the rest area will always be around some source of water.

It is easy to distinguish our officers during the battle as they attack with the headquarters element. The headquarters element consists of the CO, XO, radioman, and runner. The officers don't wear pistols or insignia of rank during the battle and are dressed the same as each soldier.

When moving in large units in South Vietnam our forces do not use the existing trails. These trails do not necessarily speed your movement up because of the security requirements and fear of detection; consequently, the personnel weave on and off the trails. While moving we have a squad linking battalions to each other. When we arrive at a perpendicular trail, we break branches to show the direction. In thick vegetation we cut bamboo stalks and place them about waist high in the foliage with the pointed tip showing the direction. There is no set distance for spacing these stalks.

Prior to an attack we prepare a plan. Normally the recon unit has seen the area and can diagram it in detail. This normally is given to the sapper units who will go in first or maybe with the attacking infantry.

All units must go by this plan and a soldier must execute an order even if many get killed. They must launch the attack at all costs. The plan always shows how to get into the objective area, where key points to be destroyed are located and how best to exfiltrate. Artillery support is fired prior to the attack to confuse and pin down the enemy. During the battle sometimes artillery continues firing and kills our own men, but this is normally done only where there is a lack of communications. If the enemy gets our attacking forces pinned down, artillery is employed in order for them to withdraw. Artillery is also used when we want to break contact or exfiltrate.

There are several reasons why our artillery is inaccurate and not too effective. One is that we don't get to choose the terrain all the time. Another reason is because of the tactics involved and the last reason is the enemy.

After the battle if we have many dead, we rest and bury the dead. It is NVA discipline that you always try to recover a friend's body. We have no religious service for the dead, we just bury them. His personal effects are kept by his friends. If a unit has suffered lots of casualties their morale is low and replacements are needed. That unit is rarely used to attack the same objective.

We used a control technique to help weak soldiers by organizing into three man cells. The selection is not made by friendship, but by picking two skillful men and one weak one.

I never saw a self-criticism session and don't know if they are effective or not. The men in my unit made written statements of self-criticism but I just filed them in their records.

My reconnaissance unit is usually briefed on our mission at least one day prior to moving out. Our regimental commander or the executive officer briefs us on our mission. After we receive our mission we stay together in the unit area. We never use guides when we are conducting our movement because they are not reliable. Guides are used by larger units only for long distance moves or marches. For our movement, we use maps and compasses to navigate. The maps we use are 1:100,000 or 1:50,000 scale

and are French-made with Vietnamese writing. Our division supply element can provide these maps for any area very soon after request. Normally there are not enough compasses for every man, so every third man is issued a compass.

During the day when my unit is on an operation, we start the day at 0430 or 0530. The necessary rations and equipment are obtained and prepared the day before the operation begins. The special equipment we usually carry consists of radios, maps, compasses, binoculars, notebooks and a knife. I inspect every man to include the condition of his weapon, ammunition (90 rounds per man), two grenades and equipment prior to departure. We move out at 0600 hours. During movement to the reconnaissance objective, we usually travel about three kilometers per hour, taking a 10-15 minute break every hour. We rarely travel more than a day and a half without sleeping. During movement we keep our weapons on safety because we have had accidents with triggers catching on bushes, etc. We do not sleep at mid-day during movement.

At 1500 hours we find a place to make camp for the night. When we arrive at the reconnaissance objective, we usually establish an OP approximately one or two hours distance from the objective. Next we dispatch small teams (two or three men) to move in as close to the objective as possible. If we possibly can, we try to penetrate and enter the objective area to determine the exact enemy strength and location. We try to locate and count the number of heavy weapons such as 105mm howitzers and 82mm mortars.¹ If we are successful and are not detected we withdraw using the same route.

We are never assigned a straight combat mission to engage the enemy. We are told only to observe and report what we have seen. Near Chu Do, in the western highlands of Kontum, one of my reconnaissance squads saw a US reconnaissance team on three different occasions. Each time I ordered my men to hold their fire and not engage US troops unless we were discovered. If we were discovered, we would return fire immediately and attempt to disengage and withdraw. US reconnaissance teams always fire into suspected position and this is not effective as the disclose their own location. We know where they are after they fire and all we have to do is bypass them. Often we are able to determine the reconnaissance objective of the US team because of these mistakes.² As reconnaissance personnel we do not fight in battles. During the attack we usually remain at a secure area with the regimental staff until the main body has returned.

In our reconnaissance of cities, we are normally met by local force liaison people at a prearranged location within or close to the city. The liaison people escort us to the exact position or locations to be attacked. If there are several ARVN soldiers, we wear civilian clothes. Normally we use challenge and passwords to recognize the liaison people. Before we reach the city, usually at our secret base, the code words are issued by the local force underground organization (VCI) along with ID cards.

When we complete our reconnaissance mission, we return to our unit as soon as possible. We never rely on civilians or others to relay our information. After an attack, we normally take two or three weeks off and rest and treat the wounded, and conduct "lessons learned" meetings. My reconnaissance unit did not train unless we had more than six weeks between missions and I never experienced a lull longer than three to four weeks.



When you do a good job in the army you are awarded by being promoted and given a certificate of commendation. I was happy when promoted as I knew my leaders recognized my good performance. Recently in South Vietnam, the NVA has started giving the Medal of Victory. I did not get one and none of my men earned one. There are no monetary awards given.

We are taught and given training on send tables about American defensive perimeters in general. We have much training on how to disarm mines. The Claymore is the easiest. We have received lots of training on disarming four or five particular mines. One is the small plastic anti-personnel step mine. The second is the Claymore and the third the ground and trip flares. We also were trained in the one that has either the push or pull firing device in the safety pin hole. I have never seen one of my men blown up while disarming a mine and have only seen two of my men step on mines and neither of those mines exploded.

All the US defensive positions are very easy to get through. I can say that I have never encountered a tough one in my experience. We just crawl slowly through the wire, cutting the bottom strands. In case we are detected while inside the camp and must make a hasty withdrawal, we use wood planks or ladders if available and go over the top of the wire. In training we have a man lie on the wire and we run over him but we never do this in combat operations. You had lost of wire around Polet Kleng but it was easy to get through. I just don't think you have a defensive barrier that is effective against us.³

We have one doctor and one medical specialist who work at the regimental dispensary. We also have two medics in the company. Physical examinations are not routine in the NVA and are given only when you're ill. The doctors in the NVA are very good. If a man loses a leg he is sent back to North Vietnam. When they go back the government keeps them in medical centers as they don't want the people to see them.

When we have cuts or infections we take anti-infection pills to cure the infection. We do not take any type of medication prior to going into battle and only the doctor has morphine.

Although we take the malaria pill, most of us have malaria. The pill is used only to prevent malaria, but due to the poor physical conditions of our personnel, we often contract it. I believe all 70 men in my unit had contracted malaria at one time or another and it was in various degrees of seriousness.

We also take B1 vitamins daily. Three men in my unit had paralysis and couldn't feel pain or anything. We didn't know what this was and just sent them to the hospital. I never saw them after they went to the hospital.

The only women in the NVA were the nurses who worked in the hospitals and they didn't go with the combat units into the battles. We didn't

have much sex life in the NVA unit. However, sometimes during infiltration we met girls at the communications and liaison stations in North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The girls in North Vietnam and Laos were usually Vietnamese. The girls seemed to like us and we were nice to them, sometimes giving them North Vietnamese money and gifts.

TO BE CONTINUED....

1. US and ARVN mortars were 81mm, not the 82mm variety used by the NVA.

2. This interesting observation by the NVA lieutenant certainly does not characterize the US recon teams I knew of in the 101st.

3. The lieutenant sounds very sure of himself. I wonder if any of the blood trails leading away from the Ripcord defenses, or the pair of bloody shorts found one time, belonged to any of his former comrades? The record shows that there were about 20 known attempts by the NVA to penetrate the Ripcord perimeter, and none of these were successful. There may have been others, also probably unsuccessful.

Editor

Below. NVA recon soldiers, 1968-69
Photo from Infantry Magazine, 1969



MY RECOLLECTIONS OF STEPHEN SMITH,
COMBAT MEDIC

By Michael Kelley

June 18, 1991

SMITH, Stephen T., "Doc Smitty," Indianapolis, Indiana, Specialist, Fourth Class, HHC, 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, Attached to D Company.

WOUNDED 16 SEP 70
DIED OF WOUNDS 21 SEP 70

Doc Smitty was the last of three medics who were attached to my platoon (3d Platoon, D/1-502d Inf) between November 1969 and September 1970. He joined us in the late spring or early summer of 1970. He was from Indianapolis, and liked to talk about a red, 1965, Pontiac GTO, that was stored in his garage. Naturally, he was an Indy 500 fan as well. He told us that he was the only adopted son of an elderly couple who were already in their seventies when he'd left for Vietnam. I'm not sure whether he was a Conscientious Objector, but I don't recall him every carrying any weapons except, perhaps, a .45 pistol.

Smitty was about six feet tall, slender, and prone to embellishing his stories so much that I had a difficult time believing anything he said. Seems we were all prone to bending the truth a tad, but it wasn't regarded as a major character flaw in our den of thieves. The '65 GTO might have even been a fiction, but it was the kind of dream we were all hanging onto, and we all overlooked his liberties with the truth because the dreams were the only things that could transport us home. He wore glasses, had dark, straight hair, and was sporting a thin mustache at the time of his death; a vague memory of a slight lisp sticks with me too, though I'm not sure of that.

I remember him doing well when we took some casualties in late August 1970. We were working a steep, boulder-strewn creek bed when two of our men were injured. One suffered a head wound (Benie Wright), and another a cracked sternum (Norm McCormick). There were no LZs within reach, so we had to have both extracted by a hovering Medevac Huey which dropped first a basket for Wright, and later a jungle penetrator for McCormick.

It was an exceptionally dangerous and difficult extraction; the Medevac had trouble finding us, and had to hover like a sitting duck at an extraordinary height for what seemed an extraordinary length of time! Smitty took care of the guys and got them out in one piece, although most of the credit has to go to the skill and courage of the Huey crew.

I also remember an incident when we were working an area south of Firebase ARSENAL in June 1970. We were crawling on our hands and knees through some thick bush when the point man crawled into a hornet's nest and got the hell stung out of him. Smitty scooted into the thicket and pulled him out, but in the process managed to piss off more than a few hornets himself! Each victim then claimed an allergy to bee stings, thus forcing us to both blow our cover by calling in a medevac, and to work without a medic for the following week. Neither

casualty suffered much more than a few days rest at the 85th Evac Hospital as a result, which prompted some grumbling speculation that they were both just a couple of malingerers (we were usually jealous of anyone whom we suspected might be getting away with more than we were).

During the last week in August, or the first week in September, 1970, the entire battalion CAed (helicopter combat assault) onto abandoned Firebase BRICK about 25 kilometers south of Hue. Early in the assault, two helicopters had been shot down, and their debris littered the edges of the landing zone as we arrived. From that point on we bumped into Chuck (the enemy) and his boys almost every day; the war had been a picnic for most of my tour, but things changed in a hurry after we re-opened BRICK.

Firebase BRICK was perched atop a huge mountain mass some five miles south of our usual AO (area of operations), and I recall watching F-4s bomb and napalm it for days prior to our being told we would assault it. As we watched, a lot of us expressed our pity for whatever American unit might have been involved. The day before our CA, we were given new maps and the grid co-ordinates of our objective. Imagine our surprise when we plotted the grid and realized that we were to become the unit we'd been pitying! We were rattled, to say the least.

As soon as the company was dropped in, we saddled up and headed down an eastern ridge of the mountain. For days we explored the east and northeastern fingers of that hill mass, and practically every day we bumped into Chuck, or found his recently vacated bunker complexes and supply caches.

While bivouacked as a full company on 15 September, we spotted an enemy soldier scouting our position, and as a result, were sent a three man dog team in order to track him. When it came time for the company to move later that afternoon, the chopper scheduled to pick up the scout dog team was delayed such that the 3d Platoon got left behind to secure the team's eventual extraction that evening. By the time we'd seen the dog team off, it was too late for us to find and join the remainder of the company, so we moved a few hundred meters from the LZ and set up for the night.

Inasmuch as the entire company was to be extracted the next day (16 September) anyway, it struck us that it would make good sense for our platoon to be picked up from the LZ which we'd secured for the dog team's extraction, rather than having us hump all the next morning just to catch up with the company. It made sense to us, but not to Captain Rader. The captain was right; the LZ near us was probably under enemy observation and potentially lethal. Still, we made several attempts to change his mind, but he would not bend. Smitty and I were to pay a heavy price for the captain's good judgment.

On the morning of 16 September, we moved out and finally met the balance of the company along a beautiful, stoney creek that reminded me much of a stream I'd fished as a child near Montreal, Canada. We stopped, bathed in the stream, and filled our canteens; it was a pleasant and refreshing break. We then veered off the trail bordering the creek, and started busting trail up the hill that was to

be our LZ the morning of 17 September. At the hill's base we came upon a bunker complex that had signs of recent heavy contact all about it. It was an eerie place, and should have alerted us to the probability that good soldiers would certainly mine an LZ which sat atop a hill being used as their base camp.

Blind to that warning, we struggled up the mountain and crested it sometime in the late afternoon. It was a hot, difficult climb, and we were soaked with sweat and exhausted by the time we'd reached our objective. After a short break (during which I ate a can of pineapple bits), I had my squad begin setting up for the night; the first order of business was to put out trip flares and claymore mines as our initial line of defense.

I was teaching a new squad-member (a red-headed kid who had only been in-country a few days) how to put out the claymore, and was telling him to inspect the entire defense every night to make sure the job had been done right, when I heard Smitty call my name from somewhere behind me. I turned to greet him, but was puzzled to discover that he wasn't where his voice had been; he was nowhere in sight, and it confused me greatly. Simultaneously, it seemed as though someone had taken a handful of soft dirt and lightly tossed it into my face. "What sort of idiot would pull such a stupid practical joke?" was the first thought through my mind.

Nothing made much sense at that point. I had not heard any explosion (both eardrums had been ruptured by the blast), and it wasn't until I got the first whiff of the explosive that I began to understand the magnitude of the moment. I put my hand to my forehead and felt what I thought were pellets from a claymore mine. "Oh, shit!" I thought, "A claymore cooked off accidentally!" In that instant, I knew I was about to die.

I turned back to the redheaded kid, only to find him standing as if frozen, staring at me with his mouth wide open in shock. Then I looked down at my own torso and found myself transfixed by the oddly copper-colored streams of blood that were cascading out of my chest and stomach. I didn't feel even a twinge of pain, yet I was certain that I was about to die. I went to my knees, then over on my back, and simply waited for the lights to go out. A great calm came over me, as though I'd reached the end of a long journey; I felt much sadness when I thought of how the news would impact my family, but not a stitch of pain or fear.

Many faces came and went from the narrowing tunnel of light above me. I recall one belonging to a medic from our sister platoon, and it was ashen with fright and shock. He tried to start an IV, but couldn't. He seemed a lot more frightened than I was, and I remember feeling sorry for him. At that point, I'm told, they replaced him with a medic from another platoon.

Unbeknownst to me, Smitty's unfortunate step had found a rather large enemy mine. I was later told that he'd been blown at least 30 feet into the air and slammed backwards into a large tree. At that point, his body slid down the tree's trunk, finally coming to rest among its roots, sitting up and facing out from its base. He was so covered with dirt and debris that he could not be identified until some time later. A friend of mine, Ron

Johnson, recalls that when they lifted him to a stretcher, his legs were like mush; as though the bones had been liquified.

Smitty's good friend, Howard (Chico) Mikkali, told me another part of the story. Mikkali was the platoon leader's radio man (RTO) and Doc was the platoon medic, so it was customary for both to sleep at the Command Post (CP) with the platoon leader. Because of that status, both were usually exempted from the drudgeries of setting up our night defensive positions, and that day was no exception.

While the rest of us set our mines out that evening, Chico and Doc decided to play some cards, but discovered that neither of them had a deck. They were so exhausted from the hump up the hill that they flipped a coin to decide which of them would wander through the platoon area to locate a deck -- Smitty lost. Oh, how Smitty lost! And Chico lost too, because I doubt he will ever recover from the effects of that coin toss, and the "what ifs" of that timeless moment.

After fashioning a litter from sticks and ponchos, my friends carried me to the LZ. I simply assumed that I was the only serious injury. We passed a group of soldiers, and I gave a moment's thought to waving, then decided it wasn't a good idea because they might be spooked by the memory of a dying man waving his last goodbye to them! Soon after reaching the clearing, we were met by the heavenly sounds of the Medevac frantically thumping its way toward our position. With that sound came the first glimmer of hope that I might survive the day.

The Medevac landed. I was literally thrown on its floor and then, to my surprise, left alone with my thoughts. The helicopter just sat there, and it was my perception that no one was paying even the slightest attention to me. "What the hell is going on?" I thought, "Let's get this damn thing moving!"

Suddenly, there was a flurry of activity, during which someone was loaded in the litter above me. I had no idea who it was. I'm not even sure I cared at that point; I just wanted to get moving. At last we lifted off, and perhaps ten minutes later flared into the landing pad at the 85th Evacuation Hospital at Phu Bai, just south of Huế. I'd once delivered some mail to the emergency room that I then found myself being barreled into, and I recall reflecting on that irony as they wheeled me in.

During the flight, the two medics were giving someone above me all their attention, and that baffled me a little. I was finding it harder and harder to breathe (fragments had perforated both lungs), and finally yanked one of the pant legs in front of my face. A medic bent down and asked me what was wrong, and when I told him, he found and handed me a small oxygen bottle and mask. "Hold this to your face," he told me, "this guy is in bad shape, and we need to work on him." When I heard those words, it finally dawned on me that I really wasn't going to die; the other guy was in bad shape, so I must be in better shape!

In the emergency room, the medevac scenario was repeated. The "other guy" was in a litter off to my left, and he had at least six people hovering over him, while I was left with a lone Spec/4 who kept asking me what seemed to be a series of

incredibly dumb questions (What's your name? Do you want us to notify your folks? "Are you out of your f__king mind?" I was thinking.)

I woke up in the intensive care ward some time later. I have no idea how much later, or whether it was day or night. At the end of my bed were a corpsman and a nurse discussing the fact that Jimmy Hendrix had just died. Jimmy Hendrix was dead? I simply couldn't believe my ears; the scene was so surreal that for a few moments I actually thought I was dead, and had been delivered to the gates of Hell!

It was a long time, I mean hours and hours after I woke up, before they wheeled Smitty into IC, and I finally realized who the "other guy" was. They put his bed next to mine, and to my right.

Doc Smitty was a mess. Below the waist he was little more than human wreckage; pure hamburger. Above the waist (excepting his hands), not a single wound was visible. Both legs had been removed above the knees, and his genitals were gone, as was a good part of both hands. He had huge baby diaper-like pads wrapped around each stump, and they seemed to fill with blood every few minutes. The nurses kept pumping unit after unit of blood into the poor bastard, but it just seemed to be going in one end and out the other at the same speed. I don't remember any time during the next few days that someone wasn't working on him.

Through it all, Smitty kept giving encouragement to me -- "Don't worry, Kelley, we'll be OK." -- but I

could only nod and mumble in return. Tubes protruded from every orifice of my body, so mumbling and nodding was the best I could do. Although I probably looked like hell, I recall very little pain at all. In fact, I felt fine, and it was Smitty who looked like death warmed over to me; yet there he was trying to bolster my spirits! It was very exasperating, and I avoided looking his way as much to avoid his attention as to avoid the horror of his condition.

On the morning of 21 September they told me Doc's kidneys had failed and that they were going to fly him down to the 3d Field Hospital in Saigon, to what I remember them saying was the only dialysis unit in Vietnam. (It still strikes me as odd that after six years of combat, there was only one dialysis unit available in all of Vietnam. Can anyone confirm that?) They bundled him up and took him to the plane on the nearby runway. My memory is very vague as to whether he was conscious at the time, but I have no memory of our saying goodbye to one another, and would guess that he was not.

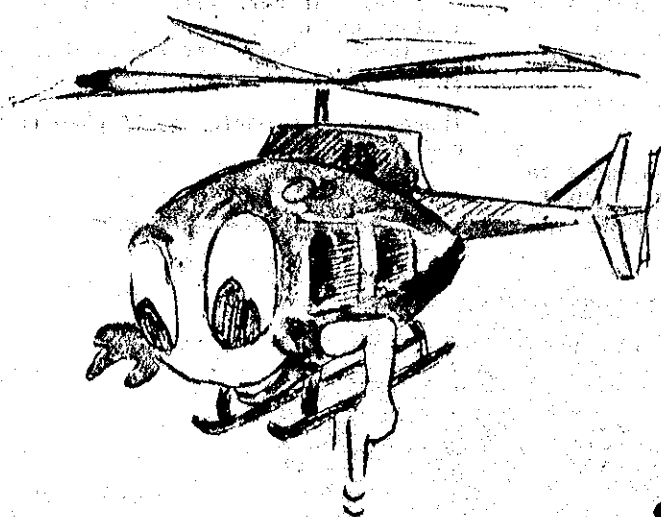
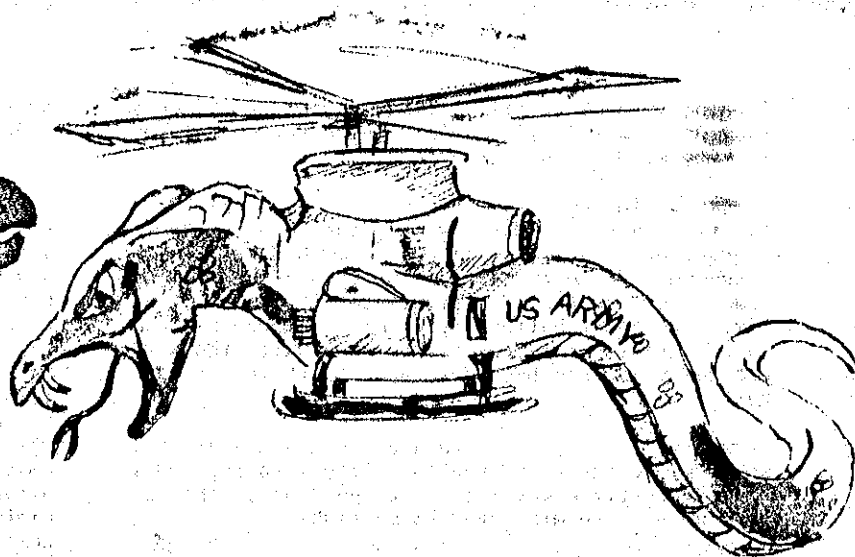
Some hours later a nurse came up to me and quietly told me that he had died during the flight. There were tears in her eyes. I told her that I was glad that he had died, and that his suffering had ended. She thought about what I'd said for a moment, and then said that she understood what I meant.

Those are my memories of Stephen T. Smith, combat medic.



Left. M-60 Machine Gunner. Photo from Infantry Magazine, 1969.

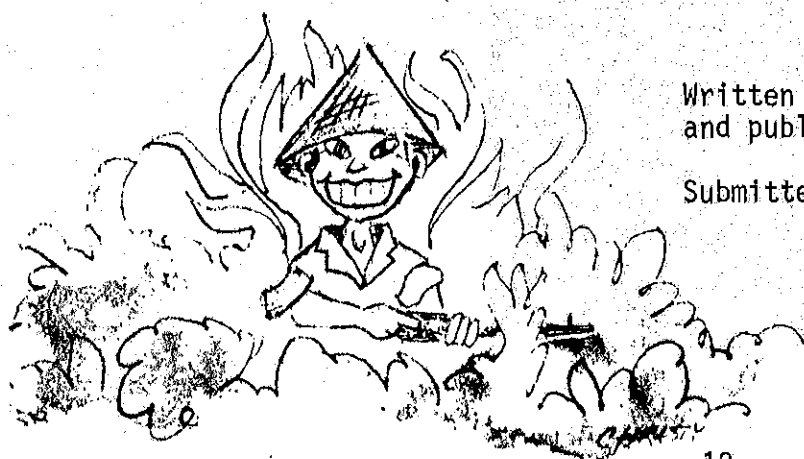
the Tadpole and Snake the



story by
SP4
John DelVecchio

Written by John during his tour in Vietnam
and published by 101st ABN DIV.

Submitted by Ray "Blackie" Blackman

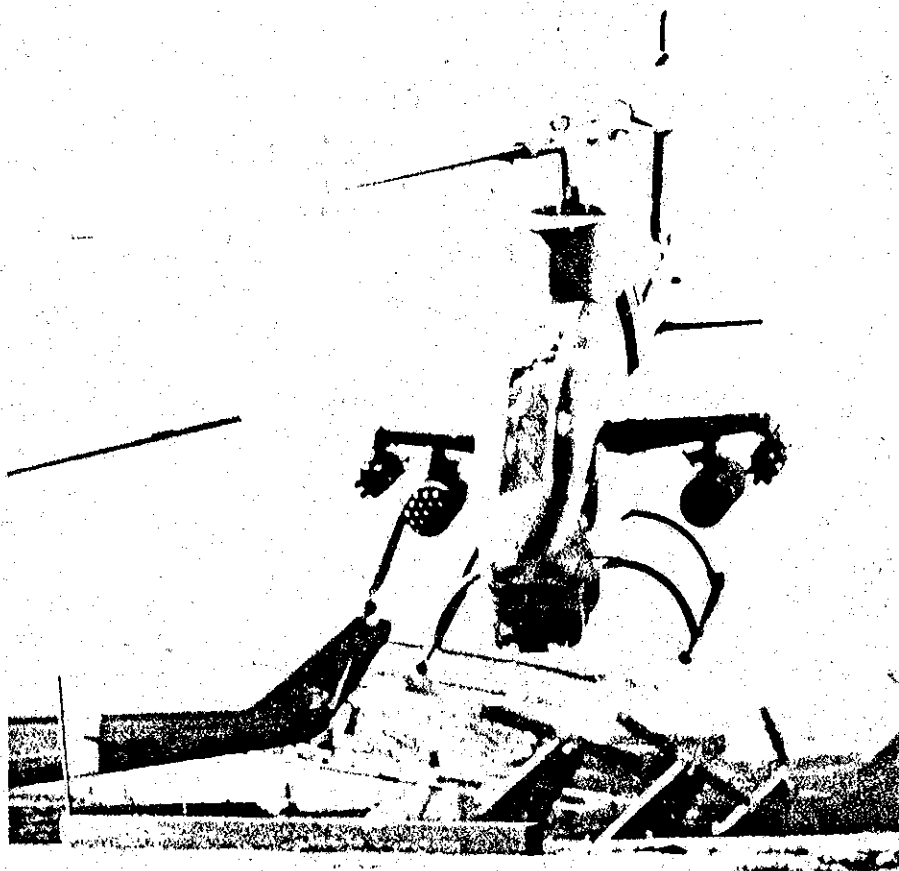


The tadpole and the snake are a team—a team that the enemy dreads and fears, and a team that brings an expression of joy to friendly forces in need of some additional firepower. In military jargon, tadpoles and snakes are “officially” called pink teams, but don’t let the softness of the pastel fool you.

A pink team is made up of several helicopters, each serving a distinctly different, interdependent role. The role each “bird” plays is dependent on the mission. Pink teams are used in aerial reconnaissance and in close-in fire support for the ground troops.

During armed aerial reconnaissance missions, sometimes right down at tree top level, hover light observation helicopters (LOH) which are designated the OH-6. The LOH or white bird is a small helicopter which looks and maneuvers like a tadpole, darting left, quickly up then down, swish right then stationary again. The little bird holds an observer and a pilot. They are always looking, searching the jungle and valleys for signs of the enemy.

Protecting the LOHs are the red birds, the AH-1 Cobras, the hell-bringers. The Cobra is a gunship. It is armed with 2.75 inch rockets, 40mm grenades and miniguns that are capable of lashing out

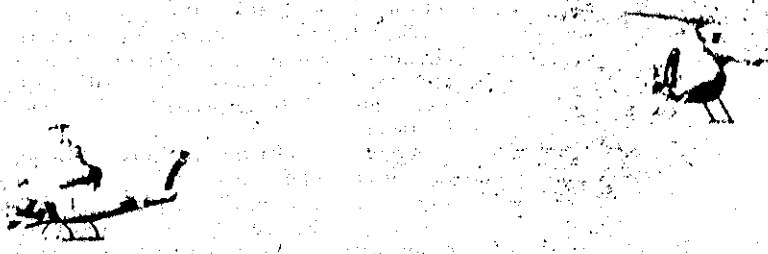


There once was a snake who daily made his way...

with a continuous stream of lead. The “snake” dives in delivering a stinging bite to enemy bunker complexes, caches, bridges and troop concentrations. The sleek Cobras with their fierce firepower capabilities orbit near observation ships. When an LOH pilot or observer spots something he calls in a gunship to engage the target with fire.

Nearby the LOHs and the offensive gun platforms circle slick chase birds, UH-1 Hueys. The “slick” is a trouble shooter. Never do the eyes of the men in a chase bird let the little birds out of sight. If something should happen, a chase bird can swoop down, pick up downed pilots and be airborne again within seconds.

The job of the little birds while on reconnaissance is close-in observation. In the 2nd Squadron (Airmobile), 17th Cavalry, the scouts in the observation helicopters are known as the “Eyes with Teeth.”





Together to the jungle they would go,



The Snake up high and the Tadpole down low.

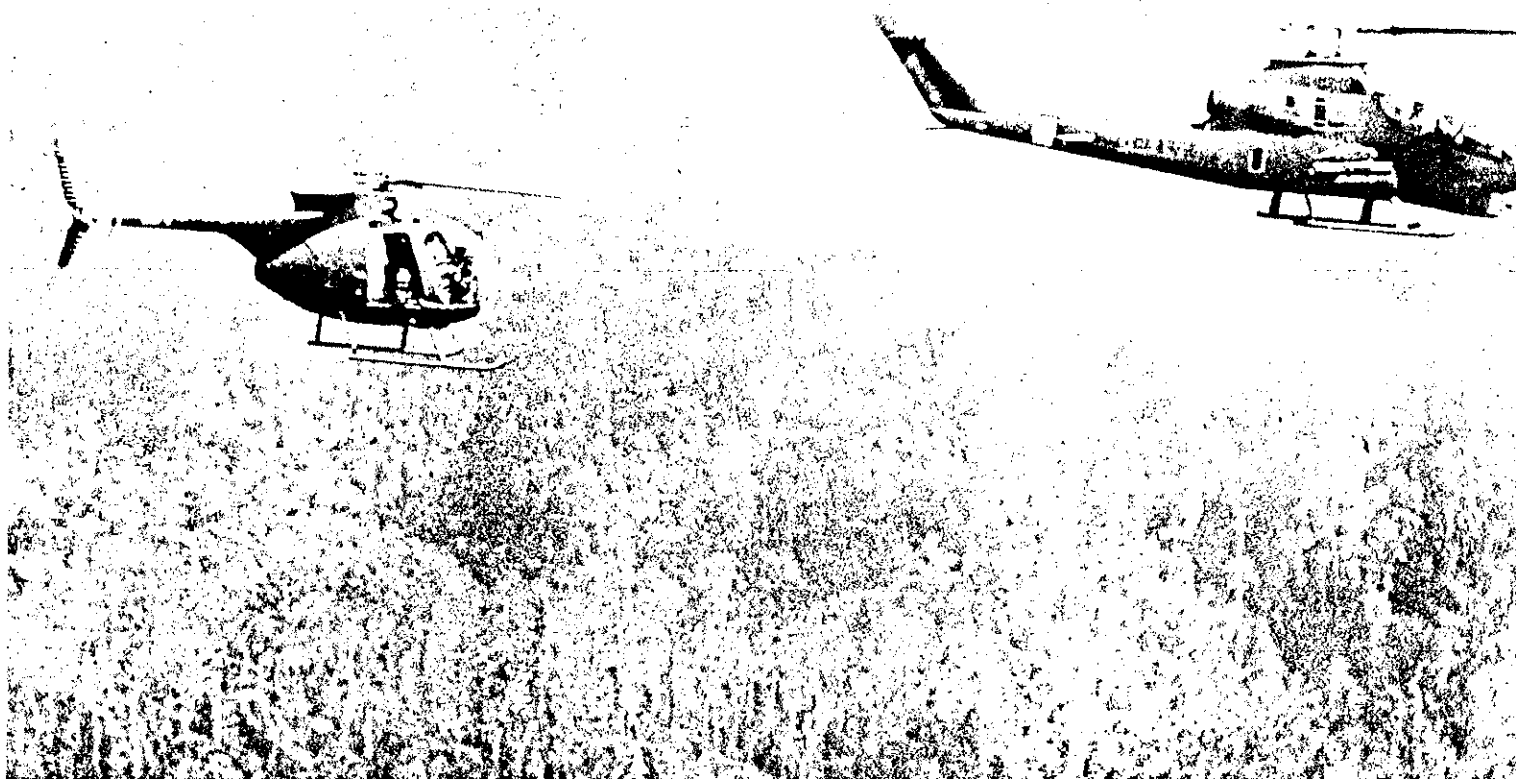
"I've got two more bunkers five by five," reports an aerial scout to a Cobra. "Oh, I've got another 8 by 10 and about 6 deep. Activity within 24 to 48. I've got a hut down there too," the scout adds. The scout drops a marking grenade on the spot and pulls out of the way.

Then the Cobras roll in to destroy the enemy positions with rockets, cannon and miniguns. A large cloud of smoke rises above the once-tranquil enemy location.

Again the LOH takes a look. "You got it. Not much left. Nice job."

Another mission of the pink team is to provide quick aerial fire support for ground troops in contact with the enemy. The mountainous terrain and the vast triple-canopy jungle of the 101st area of operations can cause problems for conventional fire support. Field artillery may find it impossible to hit targets on the reverse slopes of mountains or in valleys between mountains.

Cobra pilots have direct visual contact with the target and the ordnance carried



*And when the Tadpole's eyes the enemy did spy;
Fangs ready, his partner would fly on by,*

is of the direct fire type. Rugged land features do not interfere. The pilot can see both enemy and friendly forces. On dives earthward, a Cobra gunner can fire a series of rockets in pairs to land just above the friendlies—right on the enemy concentration. He can then pelt the enemy locations with 40mm grenades.

The music box (minigun) on an LOH can also spray lead on enemy positions as the bird darts back and forth over the engaged forces. The white bird performs reconnaissance observation for his partners and ground forces.

Pink teams also play a major role in protecting troops being inserted onto landing zones (LZ) or rappelling into jungle thickets. The Cobras and LOHs can provide instant suppressive fire if the troopers on the LZ come under fire.

They look like tadpoles and snakes. And though most troops call them pink teams, to the enemy they are "Red Hot."



Rules of war make it a game for Murphy

By MIKE HARDEN

Scrpps Howard News Service

"There are only two rules in war," explained retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Wayne Phipps of Lockbourne, Ohio. "Rule No. 1: There are no rules. Rule No. 2: See Rule No. 1."

Those two rules notwithstanding, Phipps, a former helicopter door gunner who pulled 2½ tours in Vietnam with the 1st Air Cavalry from 1967 to 1970, has collected a set of rules or laws of combat from his 21 years in the Army.

He is writing a book citing all of his laws and offering a personal experience supporting the truth of each.

Many of the laws, which Phipps has collected from a variety of sources over the years, have a Murphy's law ring to them.

"Since my first day in the Army," he said, "I've known about Murphy. Murphy is comparable to a gremlin in that he is part of your imagination and is always capable of committing any error known to mankind or equipment. He always seems to have everything go wrong. If there is a way to foul up any given item or situation, Murphy can do it and will."

Although there is certainly nothing amusing about combat, anyone who has experienced it knows that one of the most frequently employed defense mechanisms for maintaining

one's sanity is the gallows humor that grows in a war zone.

Phipps was kind enough to provide me with a list of his laws of combat. Here is a sampling:

- The easy way is always mined.
- The enemy diversion you are ignoring is the main attack.
- No operations plan survives first contact intact.
- If it's stupid and it works, it ain't stupid.
- When you've secured an area, don't forget to tell the enemy.
- Tracers work both ways.
- Incoming fire has the right of way.
- Make it too tough for the enemy to get in, and you can't get out.
- Professionals are predictable, but the world is full of dangerous amateurs.
- When you're forward of your position, the artillery will be short.
- The only thing more accurate than incoming enemy fire is incoming friendly fire.
- There is no such thing as a perfect plan.
- If the enemy is within range, so are you.
- Recoilless rifles aren't.
- Suppressive fire won't.
- If you're short of everything except the enemy, you're in the combat zone.
- Never draw fire. It irritates everyone around you.

• No combat-ready unit has ever passed inspection.

• No inspection-ready unit has ever passed combat.

• Fortify your front, and you'll get your rear shot up.

• When in doubt, empty your magazine.

• In war, important things are simple, and all simple things are hard.

• Don't look conspicuous. It draws fire.

• Weather ain't neutral.

• Teamwork is essential. It gives them other people to shoot at.

• Never share a foxhole with anyone braver than you.

• Remember, your weapon was made by the lowest bidder.

• All five-second grenade fuses are three seconds.

• If your attack is going really well, it's an ambush.

• You are not Superman.

• There is always a way.

• It's not the one with "your name on it" you worry about. It is the one addressed: "To whom it may concern."

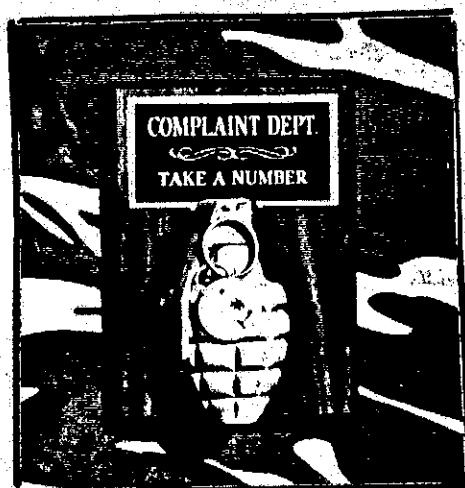
• Smart bombs have bad days, too.

• Mines are equal-opportunity weapons.

• Try to look unimportant. They may be low on ammo.



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Just want to say,
Thanks!
Tratunally, Bil "Doc"

Dogs of war win support for shrine

Sherrard woman wants memorial for K-9 Corps

By Doug Schorpp
QUAD-CITY TIMES

SHERRARD, Ill. — A Sherrard woman hopes to see a new war monument erected, not to the brave men who served our nation, but to man's brave best friend.

Chris Walkowicz is vice president of the National War Dog Memorial Project, Inc., based in Fayetteville, N.C., where the idea was developed by disabled Vietnam veteran Joe White.

"He feels his life was saved by his dog, Ebony, who served 250 missions with Joe over in Vietnam," she said of White, who was a scout dog handler.

The scout dogs "saved many, many lives. They figure an additional 10,000 lives would have been lost without the canine corps ... They say dogs reduce casualties by 65 percent."

The organization wants to raise about \$1 million for the memorial, which would honor the 40,000 dogs who have served America in four wars. They would like to see it built at the entrance of Arlington National

Cemetery, but need congressional approval.

Donations toward the project, which result in dogs being enlisted symbolically in the K9 Corps, range from \$3-\$300 and can be sent to the National War Dog Memorial Project, Inc., P.O. Box 9120, Fayetteville, N.C., 28311-7695. For more information, contact Walkowicz at R.R. 1, P.O. Box CA33, Sherrard, Ill., 61281.

Walkowicz got involved in the project because of her longtime interest in and love of dogs. She is a dog breeder, has written five books about canines and is a magazine columnist.

Since White enlisted her help last year, she has been campaigning actively to raise public awareness about the canine corps' accomplishments.

"They were trained to do various things. They would start out in front of the men, looking for bombs, booby traps, mines and the enemy," she said.

"Some of the dogs from Vietnam were given to the South Vietnamese army after we left. But most of the dogs were slaughtered, along with people, by the North Vietnamese. We want to make sure these dogs are not forgotten."



ATTENTION — While Chris Walkowicz of Sherrard, Ill., checks the morning mail, her German shepherd, Kala, stands guard. Walkowicz is leading an effort for a national monument to honor dogs who have served in the military.

The above article was submitted by John Bowman of Davenport, IA

Speaking of "Dogs of War" -- check out the guy on the right. War is hell; combat is a bitch; and dry feet are a number one necessity.

Editor

Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war.

Shakespeare: Julius Caesar, iii, I, 1599



OUR FLAG

THEY STEPPED ON OUR FLAG
AS IT LAID ON THE FLOOR
THEY BURNED OUR FLAG
WHEN WE WENT TO WAR

WHAT IN THE HELL WERE WE FIGHTING FOR
BUT THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE!

SHE'S THE SYMBOL AROUND THE WORLD
THAT TALKS OF FREEDOM WHEN SHE IS UNFURLED

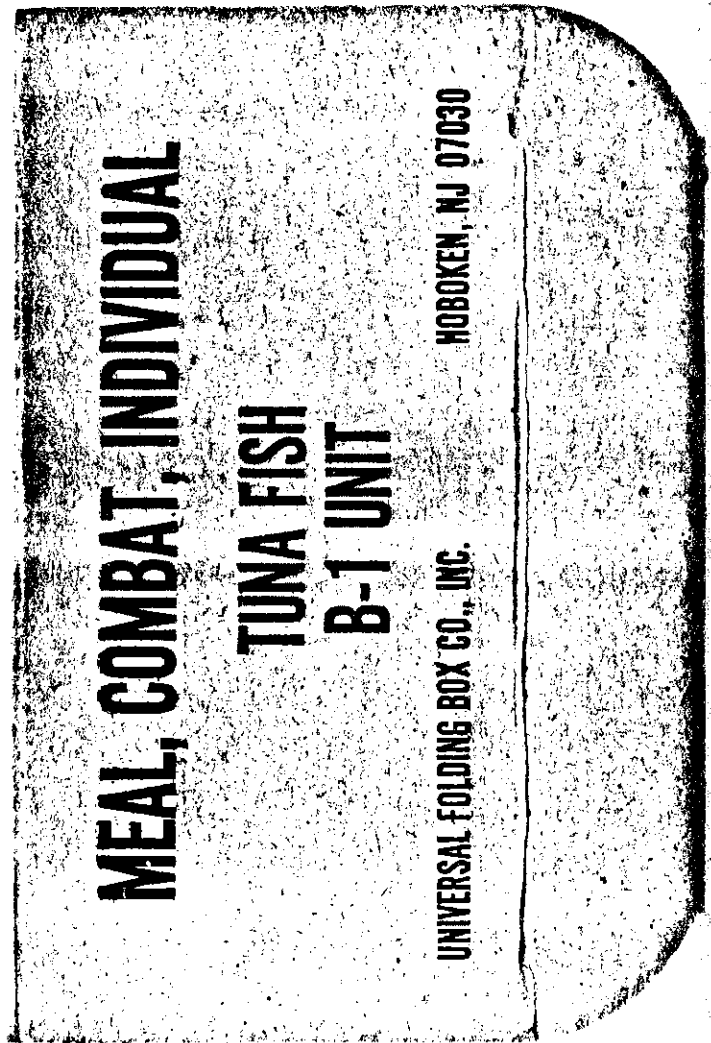
WHY DID YOUNG MEN GIVE UP THEIR LIVES
WHY DID HUSBANDS LEAVE THEIR WIVES?
SO THAT THE FLAG COULD FLY FREE AND PROUD
NOT TO BE TRAMPLED TO THE GROUND!

WHERE IS YOUR HEART, AMERICA?
THAT FLAG IS YOUR SYMBOL
NOT A MAT FOR A FEW

IT'S TIME WE STOOD UP AND SALUTED OLD GLORY
DON'T HASTEN HER DEATH
OR WE WILL BE SORRY

SO PRAY TO GOD
SHE WILL FLY HIGH AND FREE
FOR WITHOUT HER
FREEDOM HAS NO VOICE IN HISTORY

AL WERTH
B-CO. 2/501st.
101st. AIRBORNE DIV.
VIETNAM 1969-70'
RE-UP HILL APRIL 1970
(RIPCORN A.O.)



Above. C-ration
meal container
top. Sgt. Tangard

Left. A Shau
Valley, picture by
Bill "Doc" Payne
in Summer 1970.



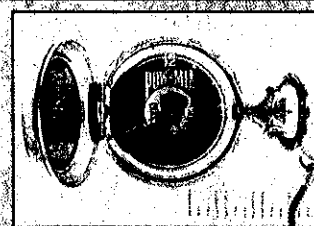
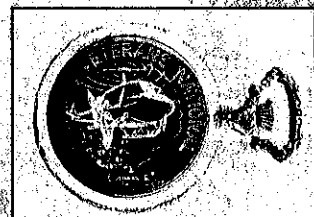
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INFANTRY QUOTATIONS

Infantry is the Queen of Battles.

Attributed to Sir William Napier, 1785-1860

First there is the All-Highest [the Kaiser] then the Cavalry Officer, and then the Cavalry Officer's horse. After that there is nothing, and after nothing the Infantry Officer.

Pre-1914 Imperial German Army apothegm

The Infantry, the Infantry, with dirt behind their ears,
The Infantry, the Infantry, can drink their weight in beers;
The Cavalry, the Artillery, and the God-damned Engineers
Can never beat the Infantry in a hundred thousand years.

American infantry song, early 20th century

The contest is always man to man, to end with; everything in national defense is designed for that purpose and it has got to be that.

William Mitchell: Testimony before House Appropriations Committee, 1921

11 BRAVO



One well-known Brigadier always phrases his requirements of the ideal infantryman as "athlete, stalker, marksman." I always feel a little inclined to put it on a lower plane and to say that the qualities of a successful poacher, cat burglar, and gunman would content me.

Sir Archibald Wavell, "The Training of the Army for War," February 1933

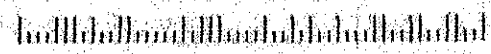
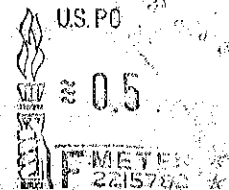
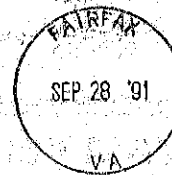
Look at an infantryman's eyes and you can tell how much war he has seen.

William H. Mauldin: Up Front, 1944

RIPCORD REPORT

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

Ripcord Association



Survival Checklist

The Bureaucrat magazine offers the following Murphy's Laws of Combat. Although geared for the military, many of the laws, written anonymously, also can be helpful guides for surviving in civilian offices. For instance:

- If it's stupid but works, it ain't stupid.
- Don't look conspicuous—it draws fire.
- Never draw fire—it irritates everyone around you.
- Never share a foxhole with anyone braver than you are.
- Your weapon was made by the lowest bidder.
- If your attack is going really well, it's an ambush.
- Try to look unimportant. They may be low on ammo.
- The enemy diversion you are ignoring is the main attack.
- The easy way is always mined.
- The important things are very simple.
- The simple things are very hard.
- If you are short of everything except enemy, you are in combat.
- Incoming fire has the right-of-way.
- No combat-ready unit has ever passed inspection.
- No inspection-ready unit has ever passed combat.
- Teamwork is essential. It gives them other people to shoot at.
- Friendly fire isn't.
- Anything you do can get you shot, including doing nothing.
- Make it too tough for the enemy to get in, and you can't get out.
- When you have secured an area, don't forget to tell the enemy.