

RIPCORD REPORT

A NEWSLETTER

No. 17, MARCH 1988

For Friends and Survivors of FSB RIPCORD, RVN

Thuốc sát trùng chỉ diệt các giống sâu
phá hoại mùa màng.



CHIEU-HOI PASS

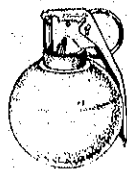
Đồng bào tỉnh Bình Định !

Để diệt sâu bọ phá hoại mùa màng của đồng bào, Lữ Đoàn 173 Dù Hoa Kỳ có rải thuốc sát trùng trên các cánh đồng lúa trong những khu rừng rậm rạp có nhiều ruồi muỗi, v.v. bọ, nhằm mục đích cứu trợ hoa màu của đồng bào và ngừa bệnh truyền nhiễm.
Thuốc sát trùng không làm thiệt hại đến cây cỏ, gia súc của đồng bào. Vậy đồng bào hãy nhiệt tâm hưởng ứng đánh tan mọi luận điệu xuyên tạc của Cộng sản.

8A-702-70

= INSIDE =

- * Art/Photos
- * Contacts
- * Incoming
- * Sit/Rep
- * Ripcord Roster
- * Retrospective
- * Rainbows
- * Movie Recon



= FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTORS =

- * K. Mayberry
- * A. Wiknik
- * B. Seitz
- * J. Kwiecien
- * S. Berry
- * F. Gould



= FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS =
(To Treasurer)

- * Ripcord Assoc.



= CO-EDITORS =

- * Chip Collins



- * Ray Blackman



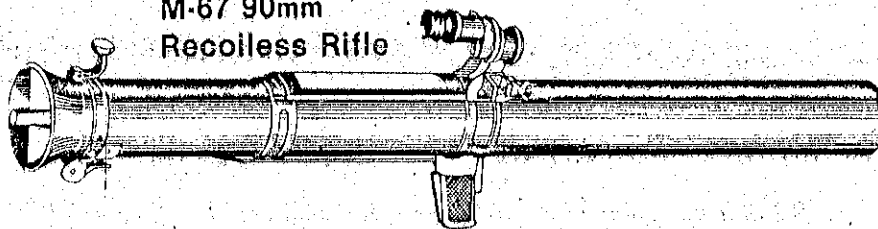
CHIEU-HOI pass provided by Ray Blackman

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.

M-67 90mm
Recoilless Rifle



CONTACTS/NEW FACES

Kent Rowland
(2/508)



Dan Haley
(FO Div. Arty, 2/502)



ADDRESS CHANGES

Harry Crawford Jr.



Col. Ron Bryce



INCOMING

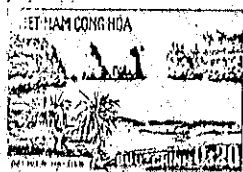
January 8, 1988

Enclosed is a donation to help keep your Newsletter going.

I served with Co. A, 2/506th from April 1969 to March 28, 1970 so as I read about the Ripcord account I feel sad knowing that many of the people I served with could now be dead. The list of names provided do not look familiar but I am sure some of them were friends of mine. I am glad I left Vietnam without becoming involved in Ripcord but shortly after I arrived in early 1969 Company A was involved in the Hamburger Hill battle. We lost one man from Co. A and many wounded and now that the movie has come out I wrote this letter that appeared in the Middletown (CONN) Press on Sept. 16, 1987. You or your readers maybe interested in my comments.

Like many other former Vietnam G.I.'s I am working on a book of my experiences. If you would like a copy of my chapter on Hamburger Hill let me know and I will send it. I'm sure the only items your readers want is about Ripcord but as I said, I was leaving when that started but I would like to know if anyone knows if the following people survived? Koozer, Barbie, Silig (not much to go on), Lt. Kelly. I remember a lot of faces but not many names.

Thanks,
Arthur Wiknik Jr.



February 4, 1988

I survived Ripcord. I was an Infantry platoon leader who opened up Firebase Ripcord that spring of 1970. I was with the 506 Infantry, 'Currahee' Battalion. I am interested in receiving the monthly newsletter and any other information you may be putting out. I may have a few slides of Ripcord and other Firebases.

I anxiously await your reply!

Sincerely,
Kent Rowland
Knoxville, TN



November 22, 1987

Here are some pictures taken on Granite, Ripcord and one with a captured N.V.A.

My memory is so poor I hope by giving these pictures to the Ripcord Association that someone will recognize or remember some of the people I served with.

Sincerely,
Doc Dawkins
Warren, OH



UPDATE

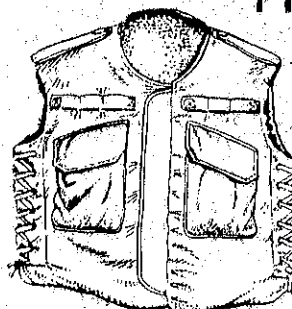
Jim Fairhall writes to note the following corrections on the LZ Saunders Article (Issue #16):

(1) The story was based on an article which appeared in THE VIETNAM VETERAN (a newsletter).

(2) Ken Mayberry provided the article after Bruce Updyke sent it to him (A good example of the sort of cooperation which is resulting in the gradual piecing together of the history of Firebase Ripcord).

(3) An error was inadvertently repeated which was in the original article. Nick was flying with C Company - "Phoenix" - when he was killed. He often flew for Phoenix - the guys whose birds had blue circles painted on their tail booms. (He never flew for Ghost Rider) As Ken Mayberry wrote: "I believe to Nick himself, being known as a Phoenix pilot and being able to wear the blue Phoenix Company patch meant more than any chestful of medals. We were a group of people very proud of who we were and what we were doing."

Flak Jacket



Front



Back

FACE SHEET NOTE

We have all seen the Chieu-Hoi passes that were printed and dropped by the millions all over Vietnam by the PSY-OPS people. I for one have always wondered what they said but couldn't read Vietnamese.

The translation for the Chieu-Hoi pass on the face sheet of this months issue was provided by a good friend of mine who served with the 1st ARVN Division late in the war. He admits that this is a loose translation because his Vietnamese reading skills have gotten a bit rusty.

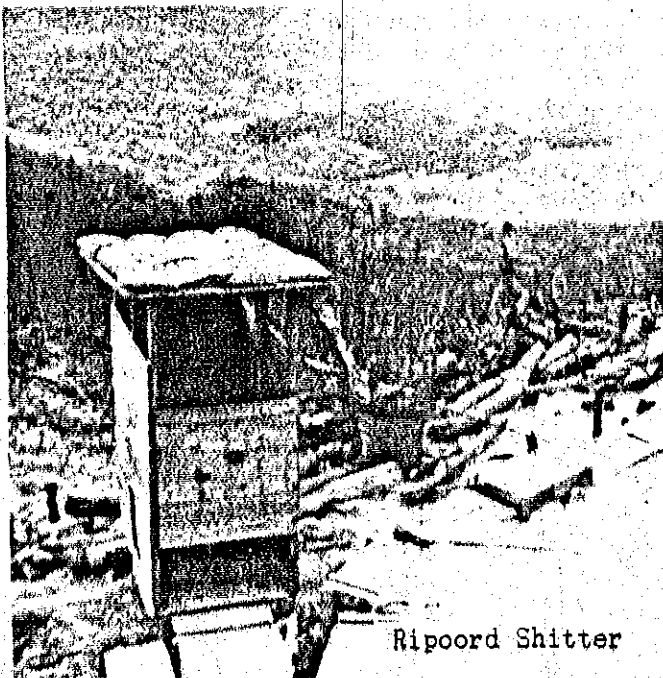
Front:

Chemical used only to control and kill bugs and insects that causes damage and destroy your crops.

Back:

To the citizens of Binh Dinh Province! With purposes to destroy bugs and insects that cause damage to the crops of the people Division 173 U.S. Airborne has sprayed this insect control chemical over rice paddies and jungle mosquitos and bugs. Purpose to help improve your crop and prevent any disease they can cause to the people.

This chemical will not cause any harm to the people or animals. Do not for any reason to believe the Communists who try to influence you against the campaign.



Ripoord Shitter

(Photo compliments of James Kilgore)

SIT/REP

The Ripcord Association, given its diverse geographic membership, is considering the possibility of utilizing regional representatives. The reason being to enhance the associations ability to respond to regional issues in a variety of ways. Regional reps could locally promote recruitment and fuller participation in association activities. Also different regions of the association could plan and develop their own events or special events within the association.

The concept currently proposed by Chuck Hawkins has limitless possibilities and would probably most effectively be distributed by time zones. Enclosed please find an updated membership list by state and relevant materials. Let us know what you think.

C. Collins

As you can tell by the last couple issues of this newsletter we are starting to get a fair response to our request for more input from the group. We do however need more retrospectives.

John Mihalko has done a fantastic job of filling the void with his many adventures but I'm sure that his right index finger is getting pretty sore from constantly banging away at the typewriter keys.



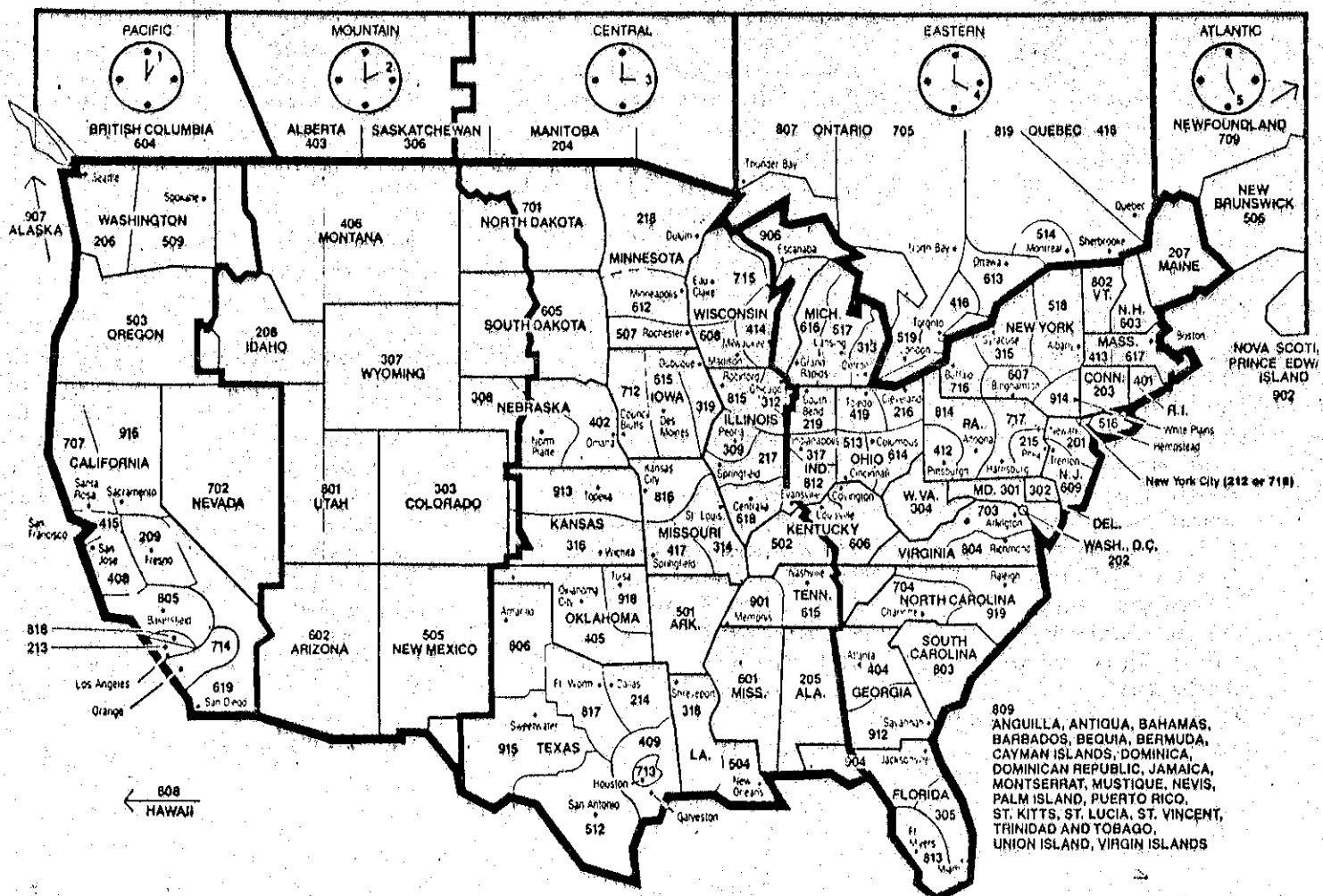
DISTRIBUTION BY TIME ZONE

PACIFIC	MOUNTAIN	CENTRAL	EASTERN
8	8	41	103

TOP ELEVEN STATES

NJ 15	VA 15	OH 14	IN 10
NY 9	IL 7	PA 6	MI 5
SC 5	FL 5	MD 5	

AREA CODES AND TIME ZONES



RIPCORN ASSOCIATION
MEMBERSHIP ROSTER - 1 FEBRUARY 1988

NAME	ADDRESS	CITY	STATE	ZIP
Lloyd Fulmer				
Rodney Watts				
James Kilgore				
Buster Harrison				
Lloyd Harrington				
Frank Gonzales				
Bill Heath				
Al Booty				
Ron Janezic				
Paul Van Schaik				
Dean Sands				
Lee Fox				
Rick Isom				
Jim Kwiecien				
Arthur Wiknik				
Robert Granberry				
John Palm				
John Schuelke				
John Franz				
Fred Hacker				
Charles Garwood				
Wayne Kabat				
Ronald Gaines				
Jim Griffin				
Paul Mueller				
Mike Renner				
John Bowman				
Howard Warrick				
Bob Howe				
Ken Iacullo				
Mike Miller				
Harry Crawford				
Robert Hageman				
Ray Sellers				
Billy Jack Ferrell				
Bill Aeschliman				
Steve Hawk				
Mal Moore				
Alan Riddle				
John Schnarr				
Bruce Updyke				
Martin Glennon				
Cathryn Ball				
Simon Wright				
Fred Spaulding				
Jody Smith				
Buford McCormick				
Ronald Henn				

NAME	ADDRESS	CITY	STATE	ZIP
------	---------	------	-------	-----

Commander				
Mark Heintz				
Julian Montville				
Steven Handland				
Rodney Moore				
Bob Lynch				
Gary Steele				
Rod Soubers				
Fred Edwards				
Gary Jestes				
Larry Horn				
Carl Dykastra				
Doug Quick				
Desmond McClure				
Greg Kiekintveld				
Brian Fitzgerald				
Larry Button				
Michael Leiviska				
Karen Daby				
Alphonso Toney				
Frank Parko				
Walter Smith				
Robert Bridges				
Rande Hall				
Elbert Griffin				
Michael Borland				
Ray Blackman				
Kenneth Mayberry				
Terry Zahn				
Linda Davis				
Larry Smith				
John Milhalko				
William Swayne				
John Sherba				
Tom Shepherd				
Dan Esposito				
John Campbell				
Bud Fitzsimmons				
Bruce Olfyer				
Don Davidson				
Bill Gross				
Mary Nemeo				
Joe Pojedinec				
Ladies Auxilliary				
Commander				
Commander				
S. C. Wintermute				
Jim Aanonsen				
Rick Blythe				
Dick Cable				
Gary McCoy				

NAME	ADDRESS	CITY	STATE	ZIP
------	---------	------	-------	-----

Jim Fairhall				
Anthony Pawlik				
Vincent Kenyon				
Hector Reyes				
Craig Warren				
Jerry Carmichael				
Tom Chase				
Arthur Hickman				
Lenny Long				
Mike Bodnar				
Chris Jensen				
Steve Larkin				
Gene Brown				
Lonnie Knight				
Ken Hamilton				
James Seery				
Robert Ferguson				
Donald Dawkins				
Donald Kennett				
Gregory Mitacek				
Sam Asbury				
James Guilliams				
101st Airborne Divis				
Joe Evans				
Frank Rizzo				
Marty Toohey				
James McKinley				
William Ayres				
Dee Chiofolo				
Billy Roberts				
Clifton Franks				
Steve Wallace				
James Williamson				
Otis Livingston				
Orvil Koger				
Harry Whitfield				
Rick Kellog				
Ben Harrison				
Thomas Stoddert				
G. R. Hatley				
Carmelito Arkangel				
Ronald Reichsmeier				
Benny Hill				
Chip Collins				
Fred Behrens				
Chuck Hawkins				
Sidney Berry				
Joe Hasankulizade				
Ron Will				
Jim Branner				
Ron Bryce				

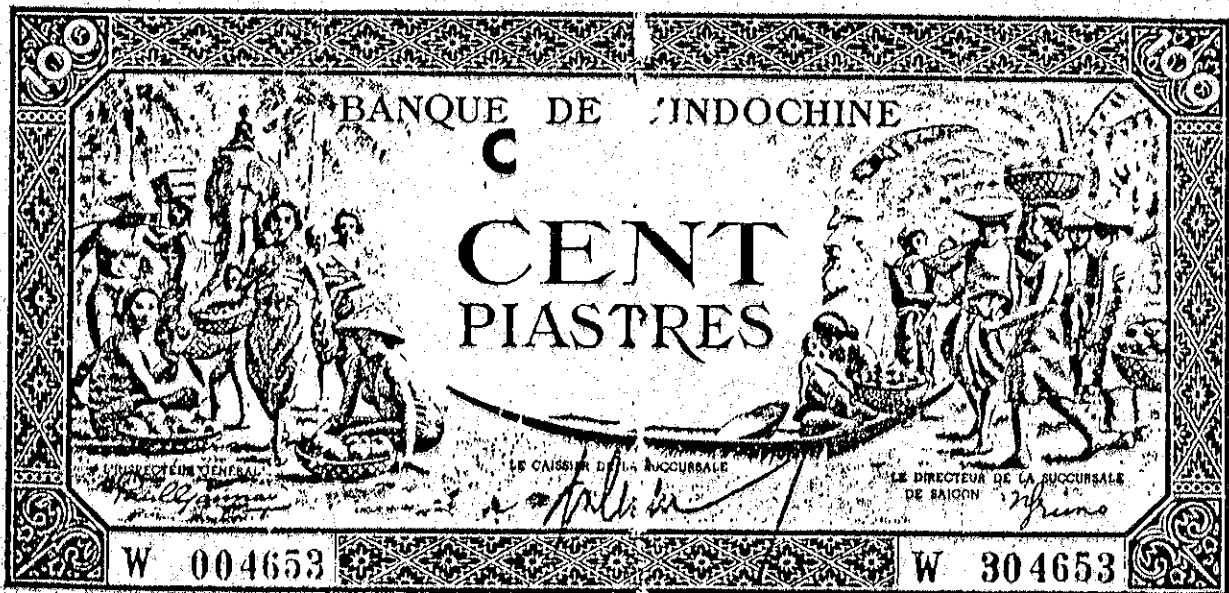
NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE ZIP

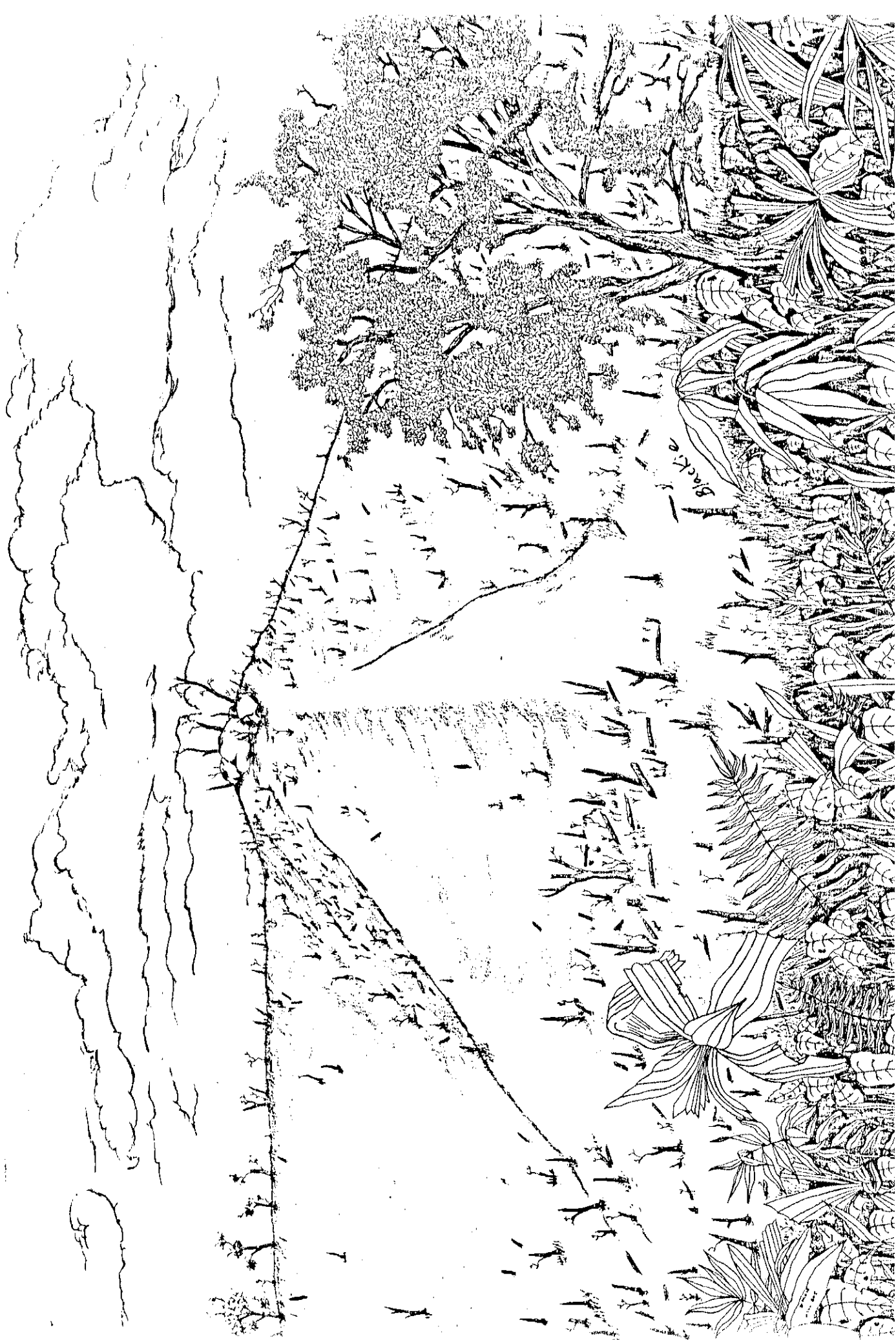
Jerry Rodgers
Ronald Hudson
T. D. Roberts
Robert Seitz
Glenn Maxwell
James Hawkins
Francis Lynch
John Swanson
Ed Kemen
Lin Bashford



Vietnamese money and postage stamps provided by:

CYCLO DAP ARCHIVES

1462 West University Drive
Mesa, Arizona 85201



METAMORPHOSIS
By John Mihalko

We all go through very distinct changes and stages during our tours in Viet Nam. I guess you could say that these changes mirror our lives. We start out new to the world as infants, progress through our childhood, move on to our teenage years and adulthood,

Each step is a learning and maturing process complete with the inevitable highs and lows. Our Viet Nam experience follows much of the same route with the main difference being the time element. In "growing up" there were many years between the stages to learn and mature. In Viet Nam we went the cycle in one short year, though it seemed like a lifetime.

I didn't realize it at the time, but by April Fool's Day, I had changed much already. A metronome was marking the time in my brain, but as yet it was still silent. I had a long way to go before I would consider myself "short." I thought about the past, had no choice in the present, and pondered the future. Two out of three didn't look good.

My "education" was part on the job training, part common sense, and a lot of support from the rest of the team. I had settled in to my occupation as point man. Actually, walking point wasn't really new to me. I had done it thousands of times in my youth while playing Army with Poje in our back yards or in the woods at the end of Legion Place.

Now I was walking point for real. No more Mattel guns, no more pretend Japs and Germans. The enemy was indeed very real and I took my job very seriously. Actually, I felt safer leading the way instead of bringing up the rear. The chemistry was perfect.

I considered the lives of my teammates in my hands, and the St Valentines-Day Massacre was ever present in my mind. We were not going to end up face down in a stream, riddled with bullets, with unfriendly hands stripping our bodies and taking our weapons and possessions if I could help it.

I had learned much in a few short months and knew there was much more to learn. Every time out was a new semester and test of knowledge gained through experience. My determination and survival instincts were very strong. The mountain jungles had toughened me physically and mentally.

My biggest fears besides death were of leading us into an ambush and of being socked in near the end of a mission with little to eat. I felt I could control the ambush part unless we hit a hot l.z. right from the start, but nobody could control the weather. We all knew what it was like to be socked in for days, sharing the last of the B-2 units and eating the dried out peanut butter and jelly we called "choke."

My family and friends were 10,000 miles away but my new family was Bravo team Recon and we were just as close knit. I had gone from infancy to adulthood in less than three months with my new family. Our personalities were as different as our backgrounds, but our goal was the same. The name of the game was survival and we would do whatever it took to make that goal a reality.

The mountains were changing also in more ways than one. They were alive with activity, friendly and unfriendly, but no amount of war could alter the day to day life cycle of the jungle. Mother nature still ruled supreme. I used to marvel at how the sun warmed our sore and stiff bodies in the morning as it also burned the fog off the mountains starting in the valleys, lifting like a curtain, exposing the lush green countryside in its rays.

The events of April Fool's Day and its aftermath also left a deep scar. We knew that we had taken part in something big, the biggest thing to hit the I Corps in a long time. We also knew that it was probably only the tip of the iceberg. I had seen for the first time the awesome might of a lot of coordinated firepower, ours and the North Vietnamese.

Isolated small unit firefights were one thing. April Fool's Day was a rude awakening, and no little firefight. No one in Recon had ever experienced anything like it. We all wondered if this was the beginning of a big North Vietnamese offensive.

Our casualties had a sobering effect. Up until April 1st., we were used to inflicting them, not taking them. The events of the past week had cut us down to three operational teams. We knew we would be going back to the Ripcord a.o., it was only a matter of time.

The war was also changing politically. Troops were being withdrawn and the President was telling the people we were in a defensive posture. The South Vietnamese would be assuming more of the burden. I didn't see anything defensive about Ripcord and I sure as hell didn't see any South Vietnamese soldiers on April 1st. Who was kidding who?

The Paris Peace Talks had been going for over a year and had accomplished nothing. I couldn't understand how diplomats could smile and shake hands for the cameras and yet do nothing while their countrymen continued the fighting and the dying.

Someone once said that it is easy to pick up "the sword," and hard to put down. Hell, these guys were armed with pens and champagne glasses and were getting nowhere fast. I thought they should do away with the rhetoric and the booze and pick up "the sword." Better yet, let them exchange places with us. A peace treaty would be signed in record time.

Even though the future didn't look very bright, I was always buoyed by letters from home. My family is large and my incoming mail reflected its size. The war had brought us even closer together and I could see the changes in them also. We lived for those letters. They were an instant morale boost for me and they kept me in touch with them and "the world." My letters to them meant that I was healthy, well and most importantly, alive.

My youngest sister Marci, had just turned 15. She was at that "awakening" stage where boys were starting to look good to her. It didn't seem that long ago when her main interests were cartoons and Barbie dolls. Her letters had that youthful flavor, bright and cheery, but they also revealed a growing maturity.

Some of the news was bittersweet. The draft board was intensifying their efforts in making my brother Steve a member of our Armed Forces. That didn't

sit too well with me. I never thought the draft was fair and I thought it equally unjust that they could take every male member of a family. Fortunately, a close family friend testified in my brother's behalf at his draft board hearing that he was indeed the sole support of our mother. I was elated when his deferment finally came through.

My younger brother Steve has always been an enigma to me. You couldn't find two brothers, born 16 months apart, so different. We shared none of the same interests from our taste in food, to the music we enjoyed, but we were close nevertheless. What his letters lacked in grammar and punctuation, were more than made up for in content and sincerity.

My older sister Mary Ann is the most sensitive of our clan. She could cry watching a Disney cartoon. She kept me informed on the family gossip, local news, weather, etc. Her letters were the longest and read like a diary which they were. She would type about a page a day and mail it at the end of the week. She worried about all of us and always inquired about the rest of the team.

My oldest sister Marge and me shared a special relationship. We were the most alike in the family. We shared a lot of the same interests and even thought alike. I could relate to her better than anyone else. She kept me informed on the political situation and wanted to know everything that was going on with us. I never pulled any punches with her and she did likewise. Marge had also acquired a taste for the Beatles, my favorite group. I would find out much later that she played the song "Let It Be," everyday I was away.

I guess my mother's letters meant the most to me. It has been said that the fair sex is the stronger of the two, and you'll get no argument from me. My mother is like a rock and she was now writing to her second warrior; the first being my father in WW II. Wars may come and go, leaders and politicians may change with the times, but mothers remain the same. Through my mother's letters, I was seeing her through my father's eyes.

I had to be very careful what I wrote to my mother. Combat or death was never mentioned in our letters, but like all mothers, she is possessed with that sixth sense. She knew I was infantry and not sitting on a bar stool in Saigon. She watched the newscasts every day and prayed for my safety.

Once I made the mistake of telling her about the difficulties of being socked in. The Care packages started coming in at a furious pace. These were no ordinary Care packages. She was determined to feed me since the Army was failing. She found foodstuffs in cans that I never knew existed.

A typical package consisted of: stuffed cabbage, ravioli, chicken, turkey, shrimp, potatoes, Dinty Moore beef stew in the large can, which also made a fine cooking stove when empty, Lipton chicken noodle soup, which tasted great under a hooch in the rain. Desserts weren't left out either. She sent fruit-cocktail, and pudding, vanilla and chocolate.

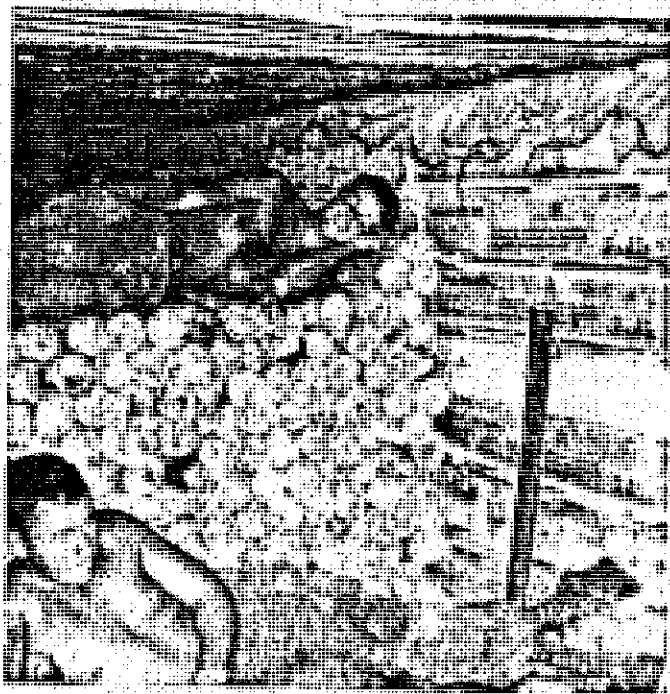
I also received plenty of juices to drink. Orange, tomato, grape, and grapefruit. You name it, my mother found it. She put any supply sergeant to shame. Her intentions were noble, but she failed to realize that I had to hump her plentiful bounty.

It was an impossible task. I would have needed an extra hundred pounds on my slender frame and a ruck twice as large. Bravo team ate very well for the rest of my tour and the Care packages never slackened. Film for my trusty instamatic was impossible to find back at Evans. She solved that problem also. Every Care package had a few rolls of film inside.

I thought about my father a lot that first week in April. He had died very suddenly one day before my 11th. birthday and left behind a legacy that is still being felt by my family and the town of Whippany to this very day. He told me once when I was very young: "Son, life is not always easy, it's what you make it." "In everything you do, give it 100%." "Always remember, a quitter never wins, and a winner never quits."

As I had mentioned previously, a lot of guys were re-upping to get out of the field. I couldn't blame anybody in that decision. It was something that you had to decide for yourself. I was considering it when I remembered my father's words from so long ago.

My decision was simple. I couldn't quit. Not only would I be letting myself down, but also my teammates who needed me as much as I needed them. I didn't know what the future held for us, but I was going to see it through. Somehow I felt that things would work out. Till next time.

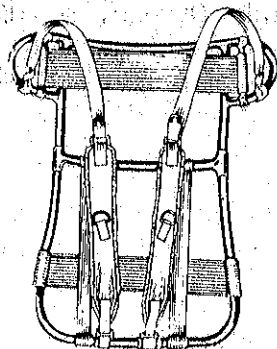


(Photo compliments of James Kilgore)

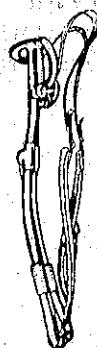


81 MM ASP
ammo supply point
Ripcord
(Whipple on top)

Rucksack Frames



Front



Side

I USED TO BELIEVE IN RAINBOWS, TOO

Mrs. Worrell glanced up as the door opened. The English teacher stopped at the counter with the mail cubicles. Without turning she spoke, "Mrs. Worrell, I have a student coming in to see me. A Mr. Davis. Have him come right back to my office. Oh, and hope you had a good weekend."

"I'll send him back," Mrs. Worrell smiled, "and my weekend was fine. Hope your's was too, Miss Evans."

Sarah Evans pulled her keys from her skirt pocket as she walked down the narrow hallway. After unlocking the door she stepped inside and placed her mail on the desk. The desk and storage cabinet filled most of the room but the floor to ceiling window gave it an airy feeling. Although very cluttered the room was tidy. Colorful pictures and posters covered the walls. Even Sarah's patchwork jacket hanging on the coat tree, added to the cheerfulness. As she turned to switch on the light, Joe Davis knocked on the half-open door.

"Mr. Davis. Please come right in. Please sit down. Make yourself comfortable. I just need to go get your file. I'll be right back. Please sit down."

Joe stepped aside as Sarah Evans left the room. He watched her walk down the hallway. She moved easily and quickly. He decided he liked the curves of her body that were evident as her full, flowered skirt moved against her hips and legs. Her soft blue sweater fit snugly.

As she turned the corner, he sat in the chair directly across from the desk. He sat on the edge of the chair and leaned back. He crossed his legs, resting his right ankle on his left knee. With his arms bent and his elbows resting on the arms of the chair, he folded his hands and rested them on his lap. He casually examined the pictures and posters in the room. His glance took in posters with children, animals and flowers. They all included positive,

cheerful captions. But his eyes kept returning to a framed picture on the desk. Joe straightened in the chair as Miss Evans came through the door.

Sarah Evans placed a manila folder on the desk as she sat down. She automatically tucked her long straight hair behind her ear. She leaned on the desk and leafed through the file.

"Well, Mr. Davis, I see you're a returning student. This is your first quarter at the college and you're taking English 111, Psych 201 and Introduction to Business. Most of the instructors don't keep this type of information on hand but I like to have it so that I can help my students if there's a problem. The two papers that you've^{WAS} submitted so far are also here. Would you like to see how I graded them?"

Joe settled back in his chair as he opened the file. As he glanced over the papers, Sarah watched his eyes.

The file said Joe Davis was 38 but his eyes were much older. She could see that he was physically fit and his blue jeans, t-shirt and fatigue jacket indicated he was a casual, relaxed person. But the stark blackness of his hair and trimmed mustache ^{WAS} were overshadowed by the darkness in his eyes.

He leaned forward and placed the file on the desk. He looked up, smiled and asked, "So what's next?" Sarah relaxed in her chair as Joe leaned back in his.

"Well, Mr. Davis, what's next is what can be done to bring your grade up. As you can see the best grade you can get-at this point-will be a D. You've got one more paper to turn in. If you improve your writing enough, you could bring that grade up to a C or possibly a low B. The question is, Mr. Davis, is that something you want to do?"

Joe nodded and asked, "Yes, Miss Evans, I would like to bring my grade up. What advice do you have for me?"

"Well, mechanically your writing is quite good. You know how to use punctuation and construct a good sentence. Your papers are coherent but there's no...no...no life to them. I want you to write more creatively. Express yourself. Pick a topic that excites you. Write about your job or your family. What kind of hobbies do you have? Why are you back in school? What brought you here to this college at this particular time?"

Sarah Evans' enthusiasm made her lean forward on the desk. Her eyes sparkled. She smiled.

Joe Davis sat looking at his folded hands on his lap. He sat quietly. The smile disappeared from Sarah's face as Joe looked up at her. His eyes startled her. The brilliant blue of his eyes pierced through her. Only the deep darkness behind them softened the impending confrontation. He blinked twice and looked toward the window.

"I'm back at school cuz the plant where I worked shut down. I don't have any marketable skills and I need to work. I was at the same company since 1970, driving forklift. I don't have any hobbies and I'm divorced. I haven't seen my ex-wife or kids for 6 years. Pretty grim, huh?"

Joe turned his gaze back to his English teacher. He looked at her evenly and defensively. Sarah met his eyes, cleared her throat and spoke.

"We'll just have to find another topic. You see, Mr. Davis, if you write about something you're personally involved in you're papers will reflect that interest. I think you are capable of that kind of writing. Let's see...well, were you in the service? Have you travelled overseas?"

Without averting his gaze Joe answered quickly and with a challenge in his voice, "Yes to both questions. Army and Vietnam. But let me ask you a question. That picture in the frame on your desk. Tell me about it."

Sarah took the picture in her hands. It was a portrait of a young woman standing in a crowd on a damp afternoon. It appeared she was listening intently to someone speaking. She carried a single flower and a large "stop the war" button was pinned to her poncho. Sarah held the metal frame as if holding the past in her hands.

"That's me. My boyfriend took it. Well, he's not my boyfriend now, but he was then. Um...it was taken during the peace marches in Washington in November 1969. I wrote "war is hell" on it. Seemed appropriate since that's what we were protesting. Those were good times. That suncatcher-the rainbow-is also from that march. That would be a good subject-where were you in November 1969?"

Again Sarah leaned expectantly on her desk. Joe took his eyes from her face and glanced at the ceiling. Sarah noticed his body grow tense.

"I was sitting in a hooch in the middle of hell in South Vietnam. I used to love rainbows too. But they mean something different to me now. They mean memories. Me and my buddy used to think rainbows were good luck. He was shot down right after it stopped raining. There was a rainbow. Never saw him again and never have liked rainbows since."

Although still in the same room, the distance between them grew. Sarah sank back into her chair. She placed the picture face down on her desk.

Joe leaned his head back against the wall. He struggled to control the tears that collected in his eyes. As one rolled down his cheek, his stomach knotted.

Cautiously, Sarah broke the silence, "Well...um..it would seem, Mr. Davis, that you do have something to write about."

Joe stared at her through the tears. He half-smiled and shook his head. He leaned forward. His eyes locked onto hers.

"You bet Miss Evans. You want me to write about the mud...the mosquitoes...the smell...or better yet...do you want me to describe for you-with the expression and creativity you want-how I, yep me Joe Davis, shot a wounded Vietcong. I shot him dead square in the head. I took steady aim. Blew him away. Is that what you..."

Sarah lifted her hand to stop him. She interrupted, "Um...Mr. Davis. That's not quite what I had in mind."

"Listen lady, there's nothing else to write about. Vietnam was blood. Even the mud was red. You see, if I didn't shoot that VC, the chopper that was there to pick him up-they wanted to take him back for interrogations-would have given our position away. It was him or us. Is that what you want me to write about? Oh, I got alot more stories-but I don't think you could stomach them. Oh, don't get me wrong. I admire you standing up for what you believe in. After all, that's what I was fighting for. Your right to believe."

Joe stood up. He hesitated as he turned toward the door. He shook his head and laughed. As he walked out the door he muttered, "Ain't no big gig. They'll never understand."

Sarah Evans sat motionless. She stared at the empty doorway. She made no effort to call Joe Davis back. Carefully she removed the photo from the frame. For a brief second she hesitated and then tore the picture in half. She pushed back her chair and stood up. She lifted the rainbow suncatcher off the suction cup holding it. As she placed it against her face, a tear worked its way down her cheek.

Joe Davis walked quickly down the hall and out of the building. He fumbled with the lock on the truck door. As he slipped behind the steering wheel, he threw his books on the floor. He leaned his hands on the steering wheel and his head fell against the back of the seat. He took a few deep breaths and decided not to battle the tears. His hands dropped to his lap and he whispered, "That's exactly what I am. I'm a Vietnam veteran."

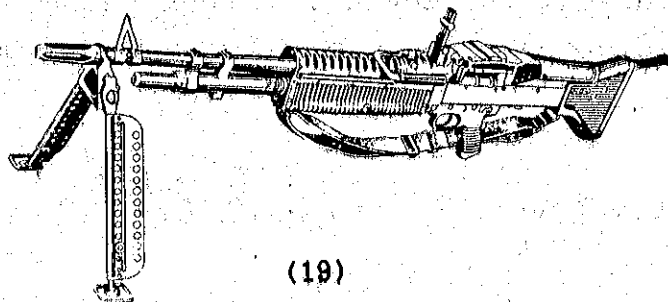


(Photo compliments of James Kilgore)



(Photo compliments of James Kilgore)

On Ripcord
Top: Courtney
Center: James Calvin Smith
(TENNESSE)



Hamburger Hill

Editor, Middletown Press:

If you're looking for a realistic Vietnam movie, "Platoon" was good but "Hamburger Hill", is better. Based on the actual battle that began on May 10, 1969 and continued until May 20th, the movie focuses on the many burden's of an unpopular war that the infantryman of the 101st Airborne was forced to endure. Things like the decision of top military brass to assault the hill everyday, the loss of friends by gruesome deaths, fighting alongside rotting corpses, the unforgiving natural elements, and the growing disenchantment and rejection at home. Still, the men continued fighting with the hope that a victory will somehow bring the war ever closer to an end. At times I even found myself becoming emotionally overcome as the movie showed the troopers continuing to fight day after day.

The irony of the actual battle was that Hill 937 was not regarded as a piece of real estate worth keeping and within days would be completely deserted. Our lopsided 'victory,' 84 Americans killed, compared to an estimated 500 communists, was considered very significant by military standards. However, the rapid abandonment of such hard-won territory continued to fuel the growing lack of support for the war and soon caused President Nixon to announce a plan for systematic American troop withdrawals.

By the way, near the end of the movie a cardboard sign read, "Welcome to Hamburger Hill." At the real battle site, the sign read, "Hamburger Hill," with a small note added to the bottom that asked, "Was it worth it?" Well, as the saying goes: "You've never lived until you've almost died, For those who have fought for it, life has a flavor the protected will never know."

I am proud to say that I was one of the approximate 700 grunts that helped defeat the North Vietnamese Army on May 20, 1969 and stood victorious over a nightmare that came to life.

Arthur Wiknik, Jr.

