

Lieutenant Colonel Battreall arrived in Vietnam in May 1967 and was assigned as Senior Advisor, 4th ARVN Cavalry with its Headquarters just outside Da Nang. The squadron was the ONLY armor in all of I Corps and was parceled out by troop from Tam Ky in the south to Dong Ha in the north. Its commander, LTC Nguyen Van Toan, was the senior LTC in the Armor branch and somewhat forlorn at holding the same job he had had years before as a Major. Nevertheless, whenever he got wind of a troop operation sufficiently in advance, he'd saddle up his Squadron command group (3 M113s) and attach himself as an extra platoon. He never usurped control from the Troop commander but simply participated in and observed the operation (always attached to an Infantry Regiment) so he could offer advice to the Infantry Regiment commander. I would parallel that advice to the Regiment's Senior Advisor. Toan remained loyal to the Thieu/Ky government during the Buddhist mutiny in 1st Infantry Div and was rewarded with command of the 2d Infantry Div where I found him when I returned in 1970.

I made it a point to go on operations with each of our troops. Since our (M8) Armored Car Troop in Hue was charged with security of Hwy 1 from Dong Ha to the northern approach to the Hai Van Pass, I customarily drove to Hue and points north, thereby becoming (as a MAJ) the senior US officer to do so. Our 3d troop (M113) was stationed at PK17 (Kilometer Post 17) north of Hue, and I frequently accompanied them on operations from the coast on the so-called "Street Without Joy" to the piedmont hills inland. The squadron's tank company (M24s: a miserable excuse for a tank mounting a short 75mm gun originally designed for the B25 bomber and cursed with two engines and two transmissions which were never properly synchronized so that one did all the work while the other loafed) was stationed at Cam Lo on the Qua Viet River west of Dong Ha. By the time of my second tour these had been replaced by the much more capable M41 mounting a high-velocity 76mm gun which proved more than a match for the Russian T54/85.

Promoted to LTC in mid-tour, I moved to Saigon as Senior Advisor to Armor Command. (This was an unfortunate misnomer, for it implied command influence over deployed armor units which was never the case. A more appropriate translation would have been "Office of the Chief of Armor".) Its function was to monitor the employment of armor units countrywide; suggest improvements to Infantry Division commanders; recognize the need for more armor units and justify them to the Joint General Staff and MACV; organize, equip, and train new units and deploy them to the division or corps which needed them.

Returning to VN in 1970 as a newly promoted COL, I had a small problem with my boss at Training Directorate, MACV. The position at Armor Command had been upgraded to full colonel, but the general didn't think he was getting his money's worth from my predecessor. I asked him to give me a month, and if he still wasn't satisfied he could reassign me. He agreed and I went immediately to Armor Command Headquarters in the village of Go Vap just east of Tan Son Nhut airport. There I found that everyone was pushing pencils and twiddling thumbs and none of the present crew had visited a unit in the field. THAT changed instantly!

As a colonel, I had entree to all the staff sections at MACV, and I would routinely stop there enroute from my billets to my office. I also ate dinner and spent the evenings at the MACV Command Mess where I found coordination over a drink and a game of lairs' dice more effective than most office visits. Over time, I was able to increase ARVN Armor from 6 rather

poorly equipped squadrons to 17 squadrons, 3 medium tank battalions (M48A3, 90mm guns), and four Armor Brigades (one per Corps). The brigades were modeled on our WWII Combat Commands: tactical headquarters with no organic units. The Corps Commanders would assign units to the brigades according to the mission at hand. I Brigade was the first unit in and the last out from the ill-fated "Lam Son 719" incursion into Laos. III Brigade ran roughshod in Cambodia and was racing to the "rescue" of Saigon when President Big Minh ordered surrender.

Just before the so-called Easter Offensive of '72, I was in the area south of Quang Tri observing the final training test of the new 20th Armor (M48A3 tank) with my counterpart, now-LTG Toan, Chief of Armor, when it hit the fan. The newly activated 3d Infantry Div had been forced from the old US 5th Mechanized combat base north of Quang Tri into the city of Quang Tri by incessant 130mm artillery fire. Not yet supplied with a Signal Battalion, the new division found itself without communications in the city. I Armor Brigade, which had been the control Headquarter for 20th Armor's test, was made to order for such an emergency. It's commander, COL Nguyen Truong Luat, and I went to the Div CG and easily convinced him that our mobile headquarters with trained staff officers and radios galore was just what the doctor ordered. In minutes we were rolling north with orders to "take command of all friendly units north of Quang Tri." We did so in time to reinforce a VN Marine battalion covering the Dong Ha bridge over the Cua Viet river. 20th Armor was in the area and came under the brigade. Enroute to the Dong Ha bridge, they sighted enemy tanks coming south on Hwy 1 from the N/S Vietnamese border. In their first action since our rigorous, US -conducted, training they took the column under fire and destroyed the lead tank at a range of 3,800 meters (matching the best Israeli performance against the Egyptians). Overheard on the radio, the North Vietnamese commander could not comprehend where the fire was coming from and ordered his column to withdraw.

COL Luat and I checked out the Dong Ha bridge which had been prepared for demolition. The enemy having retired, we decided to put a tank company across to establish a bridgehead. Walking back to implement this plan, we were blown to the ground when the bridge went up behind us.

Next morning Luat and his Brigade Headquarters traveled west along Hwy 9 looking for friendly units to be brought under control. Roughly 2-3 Km west of Dong Ha, an NVA rifle company appeared on the scene and I took a bullet through the right knee before I could slide down the hatch from the top of our M113. Evacuated by helicopter under incoming 130mm artillery fire, I can confirm that our medical evacuation system is every bit as good as it's cracked up to be. I was shot at 8:30 AM, and by noon I'd been flown all the way back to Da Nang (Actually, the field hospital at China Beach) and was coming out of anesthesia after definitive surgery.

Five months later, I was ready to go back to work and returned to Saigon as Chief of Staff, Army Advisory Group, which was intended to be the Army component of a joint MAAG which would stay on after MACV closed down. Unfortunately, apparently no one told Henry Kissinger about this, and I ended up attending the MACV deactivation ceremony and flying off to Clark Field, Philippines: literally the last American other than the Defense Attache's office to leave VN.

LTG Toan went on to command first II Corps where he was credited with stopping the Easter Offensive at Kontum, and the III Corps where he was the last commander at the end. He

told me that Pre Big Minh told him if he could force the enemy to mass three divisions at Xuan Loc, the B52's would return to destroy them. He forced FIVE division to mass, but no B52's came! Note: Pre Nixon had been forced to resign by this time, and Congressional liberals led by Ted Kennedy shouted "No more money for bloodshed!" thereby rendering all previous bloodshed futile.