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B-36 Special Task Force (Vietnam)

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From: BossHoggB-36 (Original Message)

Sent: 7/31/2007 6:29 AM

From:

To:

Subject: RE: Richard Deo's VA ltr confirming B-36 service

Date: Sat, 28 Jul 2007 23:25:11 -0700

WILL YOU PLEASE FORWARD THIS TO ALL OUR FORCEMEN. I still don't know how to work in cyberspace! Appreciate you. Deo wrote me a letter requesting my help. His records don't reflect any SF assignment. I think we should all stand ready to support Deo's VA case as needed. He's certainly is and will always remain one of us!

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a statement confirming Richard Deo's continuous combat service with U.S. Special Forces Special Operation Task Force B-36 during the Vietnam War.

My name is James "Bo" Gritz. During the Vietnam War (1965-1968), I was assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and commanded a Special Operations Unit, B-36, known as the Special Task Force, Task Force Rapid Fire, and Third Mobile Strike Command. During that time five Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol personnel from each U.S. Infantry Division were assigned to perform unconventional warfare missions as part of B-36. Richard Deo was a LRRP from the 1st U.S. ID who served valiantly and honorably with us as a special operations Forceman. The missions of B-36 were classified and our Area of Operations extended beyond the borders of Vietnam. We operated in conjunction with SOG Detachment B-56 (Project Sigma). B-36 was distinguished by the Commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam, General William C. Westmoreland, who, as U.S. Army Chief of Staff, featured the men, missions, and myself in his memoirs as "The" American Soldier (A SOLDIER REPORTS). The Forcemen were further recognized twice with the Presidential Unit Citation (awarded to a group of soldiers exhibiting collective heroism at the level of the Distinguished Service Cross). Richard Deo was a valued part of this exceptional fighting force. To more fully appreciate the service of Richard Deo and all soldiers assigned to the Special Task Force, I'm including a brief sketch of the concept and deployment of B-36.

GEN William C. Westmoreland (COMUSMACV) and COL Francis Kelly (CO US 5th

SFGA) thought to test a new concept in 1966, pitting USSF-commanded indigenous (Cambodian) mercenaries using guerrilla warfare against the North Vietnam Regular (NVA) Communist Army units coming south along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The enemy staged out of special War Zones (C & D) controlled by the Viet Cong (South Vietnamese Communists). These safe-areas had never been penetrated by U.S. or ARVN troops.

COL Kelly called me to his office in Nha Trang (SF HQs), pointed to a map of C-Zone and asked: "What would you say if I told you to go there with a company-sized force and conduct guerrilla warfare for a month or more?" My answer was immediate: "It's Suicide." There are thousands of the enemy operating in an area well known to them. The first time we cannot disengage, they will fix and finish us. There is no way to reinforce, nor withdraw. Guerrillas must be like fish in a sea. Everything in the War Zones belongs to the enemy." Kelly snorted, turned his back, heading back to his desk. Departing, I commented: "If you ever get serious about doing such a thing, I should be the one to do it, having been run out of all those areas with Delta-Recon." One-week later, I was again summoned to Blackjack's office. He looked up and said: "Do you have any questions?" All I managed was a "Sir?" Kelly shouted "About 'that'! pointing at the map, go out there, come back and tell me what it was like! I knew Kelly well enough that to question further was ill-advised. I was on my own to select a team of SF volunteers, recruit a small army of Cambodes, equip, train, and lead them as Kelly had directed. It was the only time I wrote a "Soldier's Last Letter" to my Grand-parents.

We weren't authorized anything. I secured a caged-area within Project Sigma's SOG-camp (between Bien Hoa and Saigon). My XO took off to find 350 bare-footed Cambodians fit to fight. Our Medic, Sergeant Jim Donahue (a Marine in last-life), dressed as a medical officer from the 1st Infantry Division, signed for a mobile field hospital (tents). The two Engineers commandeered generators, and hardware -- including jeeps and trucks; and so it went. It was U.S. policy at the time for Americans only to have new combat equipment. The indigenous forces were issued World War II-era gear. I ordered automatic-firing M-2 Carbines, Browning Automatic Rifles, 60mm-mortars and 1919 light machineguns. What I got was 300, M-3 .45 caliber "grease" guns with no magazines! I went to see Blackjack and left Nha Trang with an aircraft full of new U.S. battle-gear.

Our training was interrupted by a mission that came down from the White House. A "Dragon Lady" spy plane had gone down in a denied area intact -- meaning the self-destruction explosives didn't destroy the plane and most importantly the above Top Secret box in the tail! Westmoreland went to Kelly, and he came to us (Story told by GEN Westmoreland in his book). The box had to be recovered at "all cost." The USAF figured the plane impacted and was swallowed in the triple-canopy jungle somewhere within a 200-kilometer squared area swarming with hostiles. God was with us. We were just getting started.

Operation Blackjack 31 (the first mobile guerrilla operation of the war) succeeded beyond everyone's imagination. We had more than 50 engagements with the enemy, raiding 17 battalion and regimental-sized base areas, with only one Forceman KIA. We used every dirty-trick possible for more than a month deep within War Zone D. Once every eight-days or so, fighter planes dropped 750-pound napalm containers filled with food, equipment, and munitions on a bomb-hole to us, while striking targets with bombs and napalm around us. Our food consisted of a clear plastic bag filled with white rice

and dried minnows (complete with head and eyes). We added water and tied the bag to our load-bearing pack. In about an hour it had swelled to a filling size. Interested in Deo and his other LRRPs, General John Hay, Commander of the Big Red One, asked me how we could stay in the field for more than a month when one of his brigades required 50,000-pounds of rations per day? When shown our See-Bye (Cambodian food), he remarked: "Americans could never eat this stuff!" – forgetting that Special Forces are Amer-I-Cans too. Westmoreland, et al, was so impressed with our recovery of the spy plane and success on BJ-31 that he asked up to stay together to form and train additional Spec Ops units and be prepared to deploy as required.

BJ-32 was routine for us ("Miracles on Demand"). Then Westmoreland wanted us to go even further! The two Mobile Guerrilla Task Forces (957 & 966), augmented with five LRRPs from each U.S. Division. As a "provisional" one-time-made-more special operations unit, we had no base. The Cambodes had families, etc. Prior to BJ-31/32 we left Project Sigma's (B-56) compound and moved to Tay Ninh (West near Cambodian border) and camped in a bombed out area near a Special Forces (CIDG -- Civilian Irregular Defense Force) Training Base.

The South China Sea offered a great beach-front location -- except the VC controlled the area. I used a CIA utility boat out of Vung Tao to get within swim distance of four abandoned villas along the beach. My recon proved the VC had tagged all the homes with graffiti, but there weren't any large tactical units directly in that area. The next day I visited the Province Chief in Vung Tao to get permission to occupy the Long Hai beach area villas. He laughed when I told him my plan to construct a SOG base there. "Cannot do! VC there!" When I suggested we would take the area, build the base, pacify the area and open up the road between Vung Tao and Long Hai, he nodded "OK." Back at the border, we loaded up a long convoy of brightly dressed women, children, and tiger-suited Forcemen. From the Command & Control helicopter it was quite a sight. The VC were completely taken by surprise, and once we arrived, we weren't moving! Just one-thing. When the Province Chief saw that he had seized Long Hai, he wanted me to pay rent for use of the villas. A team of engineers came in and leveled us two defensive camps; one for the "Taskforce" and a second for the Mike Force (an SF A-Team and battalion of Chinese Nungs) who would watch the farm while we were making the impossible appear routine. The price was high -- 46 USSF KIA!

SF is "The" elite "Spec Ops" in our military. The Special Task Force (B-36/IIIrd MSC/TF Rapid Fire (we had several code names) were the cream of the cream. To be assigned to the Unit meant who were going to fight the war the SF-way -- we won our war! It meant that you were part of a body that functioned one-for-all and all-for-one. Our essence is described in four phrases: "We fight because we believe; We left disillusioned, We returned lost, and We die because we are committed." We all wore tiger-striped camouflage with no rank insignia. Everyone went -- including staff officers. Officers were assigned to Hatchet/Road Runner/Recon/ etc and et al mission teams as "guns" until they proved themselves worthy and capable of command. One captain was assigned as the Intelligence Officer. Nobody was better than Master Sergeant Beatty. I instructed the officer to dress-out for the next mission. He was grazed by a round along the nape of his neck. Upon his return to base, he was doctored and sent out again. For a short while our Operations Sergeant was Master Sergeant Wolf, a WWII, Korean War vet. I suggested that Wolf might be better-off on the staff at a provincial capital. He would have none of it! When Wolf was wounded, we

launched four helio-teams until one finally rescued him. Wounded Forcemen, who wouldn't stay in the hospital, grabbed their weapons and dressed in light-blue Pjs flew off to bring our brother back.

Richard Deo was a-part-of our body. He was combat wounded, decorated for valor. He was a true hero! For real soldiers, like Deo, there was nothing better than being a Forceman! We love each other, We did then, do now, and forever will be the FEW (Fellowship of Eternal Warriors)!

Deo's records reflect assignment to the 1st ID, but his tour of duty, was with the 5th SFGA, Spec Ops Det B-36 under my command as an SF RA Major. Only once did Deo actually serve the Big Red One. General Westmoreland asked us to act as bait for the U.S. 1stID, I thought as a Forceman and not a Regular Army Officer. It was a fatal mistake. Major General Hay instructed me to have the TF enter an area he was unable to penetrate. We were to find an NVA Division there and draw them toward a fixed battle adjacent to a large dry lake where the Big Red One could land 15 and more Huey Helios at once so they could crush the hated enemy.

We did as he asked. We circled our wagons next to a large open field and called for GEN Hay's troopers -- who didn't come. The Deputy CG, GEN Rogers and I are blood-related. He flew over the battlefield and informed us that: "We had no idea it would be like this and no Americans will be put on the ground. You will have all the TAC Air (jet-fighters) and armed helicopters, but no troop insertion. GEN Rogers wanted to know if the TF survivors could break-up in small groups and try to get through the enemy encirclement. This was rejected since none of us would leave our dead and wounded brothers to face the enemy alone. The field was large enough that our light weapons weren't effective against the enemy on the other-side, yet their heavy machine guns, rockets, mortars and recoilless rifles tore away the jungle around us leaving only a giant ant-hill for cover.

Our perimeter was reduced under human wave attack from football field size to a small group back-to-back. It was an estimated 35 to one -- not considering their heavy weapons against our slingshots. Eighty-five percent of our Taskforce were either killed or wounded. We left no one. Just prior to sunset the gunships and jets caused the massed division to withdraw from the fight. We loaded everyone out. I was last to leave, checking to assure nothing from the Taskforce remained. I spotted one of our guerrilla (lightening bolt into a red star) insignia loose on the ground. The birds were waiting to lift-off. I shot the patch away with my Swedish-K submachine-gun and we departed. It is interesting that later that patch was copied by the NVA/VC and used in a color propaganda leaflet.

GEN Hay and COL Kelly met us. John Hay assured me that he had not meant to abandon us. COL Kelly mused that the Special Task Force was now finished. I assured him we were down, but not out! GEN Hay was anxious to give Gen Westmoreland battle results. I couldn't help him, so he turned to his G-3 (Ops Officer) and said: "COMUSMACV there are 400 confirmed killed by ground and another 400 confirmed kills by air, with 800 probable kills by ground and air." We had won a big battle on paper, but lost terribly in reality. One of our brothers, Larry Williams was hit by 12.7 heavy machine gun and died instantly, but was repeatedly shot during the battle. He was covering our flank on the open-side in full view of the enemy. Jim Donahue tried to pull him within our forming perimeter but was forced back by the withering volume of fire. Williams was facing the enemy when hit and doing all he could to protect our column as we circled up. He remained in full view of

both sides until he was recovered and evaced with all of MGTF 957/B-36/MSC/Rapid Fire.

We buried and burned our Cambodian Forcemen. What was left of 957 joined with 966 and we re-entered the Area of Operations -- to fight the TF-way.

After two-weeks of revenge, we returned to the Iron Cross Brigade base of the 1st ID at Phouc Vien. GEN Hay decorated the Task Force leadership with Silver Stars and told me that he had never witnessed such valor.

To me, personally, the war wasn't worth any of the 46 Forcemen who gave their all, nor those who were terribly wounded, like SGT Stark, and dozens more. Generals have told me that collectively the Taskforce was the finest small combat unit in the war. I know each of them individually as the most wonderful men ever created in the image of God. May I please express one more example of the immeasurable love of these men for their teammates? FM Ritchy was our deputy CO (B-36). We were asked by the CG of the 25th ID to search for an enemy Division Hqs that had eluded them. We were in training for our "expanded" operations. I told the CG we would accomplish the task over the coming weekend. I termed it OPN Picnic. We floated down the Oriental River in Armored Personnel Carriers at night and just before dawn landed at the where we were most likely to locate the target. We split into two columns. My column found the base. FM's group absorbed an all out attack as the enemy fled from us into him. After the battle, I was informed that one of my best friends, SGT Ferguson was killed with a single shot through the eye. Crushed, I made my way to FM. His first words were: "I want these three court-martialed!" When I inquired why? FM said: "They are all wounded and I ordered them onto the Medivac chopper. They got on, but got off on the other side!" I looked at Dirty Ernie Snider, who, with a crooked smile replied: "Well Sir, somebody had to be here to take care of the Captain. And we was all that was left!" Upon closer examination of FM, I noticed the back of his tiger shirt was matted in blood. Ritchy had eight holes in his back! When I asked why he hadn't been evaced he said with a crooked smile: "Well, somebody had to keep an eye on these guys!"

Everyone of the Forcemen is a true hero. Richard Deo couldn't have been in better fellowship and brotherhood. He did what others couldn't even imagine. We all shared one thing in common: SF is our mistress. Because of her, we are. I'm beyond words sorry is many wonderful warriors were lost so far from home. All my words are in prayer that their family might know how brave and beautiful they were and are. As Jesus Christ says in John 15:13 -- "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" -- which describes the Task Force perfectly.

Isaiah 6:8 speaks for every Forceman: "I heard the Voice of the Lord saying, Whom should I send and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me!"

It is my duty and honor to confirm that Richard Deo was with us -- in camouflage as a member of the Special Operations Task Force B-36. Deo has a score of witnesses to his combat service since we stay in almost daily contact. The impact of B-36 is in the e-mail addresses:

[REDACTED] etc and et al. I am including a copy of this statement to all of the Forcemen. We stand by our brother Richard Deo!

James Bo Gritz
CO Special Task Force B-36

Sandy Valley, NV

Deo.txt

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