

OPERATION RAPID FIRE V

From December 8, 1967 through January 24, 1968 the 188th AHC supported Detachment B-36 at Forward Operating Base Tay Ninh East. B-36 was the Command and Control element of Special Forces "A" teams 361 and 362. The operation was for the purpose of gathering intelligence for the II Field Force on VC/NVA movements across the Cambodian border in War Zone "C." I volunteered for this very dangerous "Top Secret" operation along the Vietnam/Cambodian border northwest of Nui Ba Den. Those who volunteered from the 188th were ordered to remove their dog tags and all identification and to remove all US markings on our ships. We would be working with the teams behind enemy lines. The 188th committed 5 slicks, one Command and Control, and three Spider gunships on a daily basis for this operation. Utilizing low-level insertions at first light, the small "A" Teams were inserted into multiple Landing Zones to preclude the Viet Cong pinpointing their exact location and strength. By the close of Rapid Fire V the 188th had flown 45 separate airmobile operations ranging from single ship insertions and extractions to multiple ship operations. We flew a total of 1,185 sorties and 621 flying hours in support of Rapid Fire V.

During the operation the 80th Training Regiment base camp was located and hit with a B-52 strike. Some of the documents found were classified "TOP SECRET". The 271st VC Regiment and Headquarters for the 7th NVA Battalion were both located in our Area of Operation. The 188th killed 36 VC, wounded 3, captured 3 POW's, destroyed two VC vehicles, and three bridges. I remember getting two confirmed kills while on an armed aerial recon to engage targets of opportunity. I caught two VC out in the open, running with weapons and opened up on them with my M-60 machinegun, killing them both. I never thought I would live through this operation supporting the green berets. During the operation my company had 17 helicopters hit by ground fire and 3 totally destroyed. It was the most dangerous operation of my tour in-country.

188th crewmembers, CPT Gerald Doht, Sp/4 Tim Wingerd, Sp/4 John Newcomer and CWO Wesley Gager were wounded in action. During Rapid Fire V the teams had two KIA's, Sp/4 Ruiz and PFC Frank Taboda and 47 wounded in action. I made friends with several of the team members and Cambodians while at Tay Ninh East. That made it really stressful for me when the teams were compromised on the ground and on the run. All we could do is circle over them and hit the advancing VC units trying to kill them and us, until we could get them out. The Cambodian mercenaries lost ten KIA and fifty-six wounded in action. The teams killed 139, wounded 41 and captured 11 POW's. The documents recovered were of such importance that they were immediately couriered directly to Washington D.C. and the President. I often have flashbacks about shooting those two VC.