

28 May 1996

Memo: Ron Lesley

- a: Nomads of II Corps
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In the beginning, I was nineteen years old, when I enlisted in the U. S. Army.

At St. Louis I got poked, prodded, and the Oath of Enlistment - then wisked off in a 7 -O-Quick. A sharp hair cut and custom cut fatigues, we looked liked all the other bald headed trainee that were shot by a wrinkle gun,(even the guys that you had been in the same barracks with you did not recognize). This was Ft. Lewis, Washington, July 1969, "Welcome Station".

In a very loud C-130, enroute from Long Bin to Qui Nhon, I talked to this long lean Texan with a thick mustache that covered his upper lip. We did the 20 question bit, and he asked me what my MOS was. I answered MEDIC. Specialist Fourth Class Richard Guthrie was the inquiring mustache, and with a grin, he told me about this strack unit and best of all,

because I was a medic I could stay in the rear and take care of the sick, lame, and lazy. Oh-key, I thought lets at lease check it out. Well upon landing at Qui Nhon The guy in the control tower flipped on the PA system and said something to the effect - Welcome all you FNG's to the Republic of Viet Nam. This did not set well with Sp/4 R.L.Guthrie who shouted things about the guys Mother, and his intelligence, as he was taking off he neat new jungles and proceeded to put on an old salty set of cammies. I don't know what other inquiries where about each other parenting, something about the number living and what part ran down someone's leg, but that was my introduction to Richard L. Guthrie. Next stop was Sharang Valley Jungle School.

As always, more paper work, and classes to attend. The only time that I thought that I was in a *combat zone* was on bunker guard! It was the only time that I *had a weapon!!!* Specialist fourth Class Guthrie knew Specialist Fourth Class Bolton who was the Ranger Liaison for Charlie Company Rangers. They disappeared and reappeared from time to time. Guthrie had talked with Bolton and that's how I was selected to go to the Ranger School at An Khe. Even at the company reunion Bo said it was my 201 file that got me assigned to Charlie Company . . . OK.

The An Khe Ranger School was a weeding out course before being assigned to Charlie Rangers. This is where the rubber meets the road, I met Staff Sergeant Ron Lesley for the first time, he was the NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge) of the school. I was just a little apprehensive on my arrival. This was due mainly to my introduction and ride to the TOC (Tactical Operation Center) with Weird Arnold!

For those of you that never met Weird Arnold - you miss meeting a real piece of work, cause SSG Arnold was defiantly a one of a kind. Anyway I managed to get to the TOC and not have to change my fatigues when I arrived. I signed in and talked with the company clerk to pass time. He said that he had been in the Marines and this *was not* his

first tour in the 'Nam. Being a captive audience, I listen until the line about his spit shined jump boots and Dress Blues. . .in the Marines? That was my *last* tour with him! The Ranger School was tough - no nonsense basic course in staying alive. I was twenty and in damn good shape. But being the quiet wise-ass, I did find myself in deep water some times. We were doing night rappelling from the tower. Well when Sp4 Bolton shined the flash light in your face (your eyes) you where to sing a song. I'm doubling timing in line and zap, flash light!" From the Halls of Montazuma to the shores" . . . Hit the creek Gove!! One Sergeant. . .two Sergeant. . .ten Sergeant . . .and one for the Air-Borne Ranger in the sky. For those of you that never got to hit the creek, it goes something like this; At a double time you move out to the edge of the creek, stop, and fall foreword into the water. Your feet stay dry and as your face clears the surface and you gasp for air you must count each push-up. That was one time that I know I was the Instructor Entertainment for the night . . . and believe me it was a *long* night. For the most part I kept my mouth closed and my ass out of a sling. The classes were quick and to the point, and in between classes we ran or did football grass drills . . . never a dull moment. In looking back in retrospect, we were being honed to a rough edge so we could survive. The big day came - when we ran real mission at the school just outside the perimeter! It was short and during daylight hours. We had all completed the basics. Time to be assigned to a platoon and then assigned to Team!! The good -byes were said to SSG Ron Lesley, Sgt Bruce Sellers, Sgt Lefty Lake, SSG (Weid) Arnold, and Sp4 Worth Bolton. Yesterday I could not spell Air-Borne Ranger, Today I are one!

My first Team Leader was Sgt Al Peni (Uncle Al), the team leader of team 4-5. I know that Sp4 Gary Thompson was the rear security. I don't remember where Sp4 Badmilk walked, or who else was on the team. I do know that I was the FNG and they *always* carried the radio. The other new guy on the team was out of the motor pool, a guy name Gaddett. Gary Frye was leaving and I think he was on 4-5, but I don't remember it we ever ran a mission together. The Mission. The first mission I ran was a recon mission. I knew what we were doing and how things were suppose to go in my minds eye. I was in Viet Nam for all the right reasons. Mom's apple pie and the lady that lived on top of the hill that wrote me so many letters: Thank-you, Donna Sue Hoehner. This first mission was as my Father used to say, was a "Milk Run". Dad was a tail gunner in World War II, and always saw where he had been and not where he was going. God bless you MSG (ret) Joe Gove. My second mission was a Hot LZ. The first man was off the skid, the rest of us followed the leader. Man I was scared shitless and hoped that Sir Charles was shooting as *bad* as I was! The good news was I had passed baptism by fire and did not wet my pants, ha! The bad news was everyone in Viet Nam knew where we were. We blended in to the jungle and kept a close eye out for a tracker and *charlie miked*. With that mission under my belt. *All* and I mean *All* the patriotic bull shit was out of my system!!! I was eating, sleeping, and counting the days! Their is nothing like being in a fire fight to get a whole new perspective and realign a new set of priorities. Those tracers did not have my name on them, but they did have; "To whom This May Concern". The other thing that happen was all of us moved, the entire team, as thought we were one. All the things the SSG Ron Lesley and the others had taught us at the Ranger School **REALLY WORKED!!** Afew missions later I exited on the low side of a helicopter on a steep hill and rolled my ankle. The door gunner saw that I did not get up and head for cover, and told the pilot. After all

the insertions where completed they came back and picked up the entire team. I was impressed, in pain, but never the less impressed. The pilot that flew us to the Evac Hospital and played lets skip the skid off the waves in the South China Sea. No, I was not impressed, and still in pain. I was a single pac drop off, and the rest of Ranger Team 4-5 returned home.

The Doctor said, the good news is, your ankle is not broken. That bad news is: one, it will never heal properly. two, its only a sever sprain. Now lets do a realty check!! I got hurt - helicopter picks me up and drops me off - gleeful medics, like myself cut off my boot and my leg, ankle and foot grow rapidly - x-ray , doctors discuss, wrap ankle - release back into the wild. . . This is great!!, except I done know where "this" is! Here I sit on a bench wanting a cigarette. Large green bottles to the left of me. Large green bottles to the right of me. Each contain a single white tag with red letters-"Oxygen Danger". Well it was almost lunch according the noise rumbling in my midsection. Reaching into the inner pocket of my left leg cargo pocket, pay dirt. Chicken and Rice. Reaching into my left breast pocket was a spoon! As I was finishing up a corn flake bar for dessert this guy comes around the corner." Are you the guy that got hurt on infil this morning?" " Yea." " C'mon we're getting read to leave". God takes care of drunks, fools, and Rangers. The helicopter crew had run another mission and brought in another guy. They had lunch and checked the "Lost and Found" bench near the ER entrance. There I sat looking like t'weedle t'weedle dumb dumb my son John. One boot on, one boot gone. Green and Loam face with matching cammies. An M-16 and crossed white crutches. I know that I must have looked like a NVA Poster Boy. I was now home ward bound. The bird flared on final and the jeep was waiting. When I arrive at the TOC, Maj Hudson our CO, was trying to figure out what he was going to do with broken Ranger! Unfortunately he did not have to wait or look long.

The new medic at the rear was found dead in his bunk. I flew to An Khe and was greeted at the tarmac by none other than Weired Arnold and his steed of steel. With a cloud of dust and spinning wheels we eluded Sir Charles and we arrived safely(?) at HQ. I was in the process of inventorying the Aid Station when SSG Ron Lesley and Sgt Bruce Sellers walked in. These guys have been in competition with each other forever. They had been playing football and Ron had kinda ripped open his elbow. Well I had been counting pills and morphine syretts all morning and really did not know where anything was. We did a search and destroy and came up with some betadine and tape. Butter Fly Time! I scrubbed, cleaned out rocks (large and small), and taped-Mission Completed. Two days later he shows up and trys real hard to convince me that the tape had - "just come off, Doc". No I didn't buy it then, nor at the reunion twenty-six years later. But I rescrubbed, recleaned, and retaped that old / fresh wound so he could finish playing football!

I really don't have total recall, in fact my gray matter has many flat spots! The one thing that I know was I did alot of bartering for medical supplies. At the An Khe Ranger School I was to teach the first aid portion at the school. I had never taught anything to anyone by U S Army standards in my oh so short career. I had two lesson plans, one from MACV Recondo School, a list of pills the how and why and when to take them. The other lesson plan was from Chuckling Charlie Rangers, on first aid, Dust-off, and alike. Last but not lease syringes were passed out. I don't remember what was traded - probably LRP Rations. Everybody drew blood from his Ranger Buddy. My thought behind that was

simple - If you can't hit the vain now, you'll never find it on a two way rifle range when you *need* to hit it.

Thats one idea that Mr. Ron Lesley blessed me with a At-a-boy, I humbly Thank-you for sir. For anyone that was never at Camp Radcliff, RVN, let me fill in the gray area.

Standing in the our little AO, face away Hong Kong Mountain. Thats were the bad guys lived and they had alot of 122mm rockets. Now do an about face and you see an EM Club and then an entire helo pad filled to the brim with *every* type of helicopter that could fly.

Ya get the picture. We where located in the center of the short round fan pattern! Sir Charles would sent us our 2300/ 2400 good night rocket(s). If the Kp's at the mess hall where a no-show, it was a rocket wake-up from Mr. Charles. One early morning I was rudely blown out of my bunk ! I grabbed my aid bag in one hand and my crutches in the other and hopped down the hill to fine a *large* smoking hole. Where before a two hole crapper *had* stood!!! The location was across the road with from the school where all the instructors stayed. "Holy Shit, look at this" came from inside the building. "Check this out Doc", Ron said pointing to a hole about the size of a silver dollar. This particular hole was head high when he sat on his bunk . Looking through the hole one could see where the latrine used to be! If he would have woke up and sat up. We would not have talked about it at the reunion, years later thats for sure. Another morning and another rocket rudely rocked me awake. This time we had a class of students from the Korean White Horse Division. In front of the wooden school building was two GP medium tents. That was home sweet home while a student. A short round landed in the creek about one hundred and fifty meters from the tents. One Korean Private was sleeping in the end of the tent, on his side, and had his ankles crossed. Well this piece of hot shrapnel shredded the cuffs of both pants legs, yet *never* even scratched him *anywhere!* Needless to say he was really shook the rest of the day. Another thing that happen that made me real grateful I was in the U S Army. One of the privates did something - to this day I have no idea. The Korean Captain punched the lieutenant, who, punched the Sergeant, who, punched the private did something wrong. Well lets set the record straight. The private was knocked to the ground four or five times and each time he would get up and return to the position of attention. Everytime they got a break that day, the private was running around the AO with his weapon above his head. On the lighter side. Remember the EM Club that was in the way of the air field . . . well.

I think a 122 did hit it once, but I'm not to be quoted for the record. One night all the Instructors were drinking beer and discussing, sex, politics, or religion - damn sure wasn't tactics. Anyway, an M-79 appeared from someones tactical casha, with a bandoleer or two of CS rounds. Checking the wind sock at the runway ... just a little Kentucky windage ... yea. Thumper belched out about four CS canisters. They landed about 100 meters from the club and quietly grew, drifted and blanketed the entire building. To say a grand night was had by all was true for Charlie Rangers that night. We watched as the club emptied it contence of patrons into the street. Another cloud grew, but this was obscenities that went to the four winds. Now our neighbors that shared our little piece of real-estate was Kelo Rangers. We has an on going feud with these guys. There where afew nights with eyes burning and nose running I donned my protective mask or tryed to use my poncho liner as a hasty protective mask. When anyone entered the K Company area, they entered between two telephone poles with a huey blade attached to the top of the poles. The blade had the

Poison Ivy patch and a K Company Air-borne Ranger scroll. Have you ever thought about different things? Like At Ft Bragg we used green detcord, and in Viet Nam we had white detcord! Yea, you know where I'm going with this. Your Mission Should You Accept . . . Some time between the 2300 hrs and the 0500 hrs rocket review, the poles of K Company came tumbling down. That was one stern ass chewing that was given with a glimmer in the eye of the giver. We on the other hand had to keep our military bearing at least till the bottom of the hill. I guess one of the time I was really scared by friendly, besides at Pleiku by an ARVN Air-Borne Ranger-and that's another story. We had a new FNG clerk that was being shone an AK-47 that was captured. No, it was not cleared and yep he emptied the entire 30 round magazine! Down the company street, through K-Company, and between the school and the repelling tower. I ended in the creek, very wet, cast and all, but happy I did not have lead poisoning! I also acquired a dog, well a puppy one day from someone. Just a little fuzz ball of fur with a curly tail. We're sitting on the floor sharing a LRP and 1SG Cathie walks by and has a fit about this venomous animal in his clean aid station! I really have to laugh today about a venomous(?) dog in the clean(?) aid station in Viet Nam. That was next to a helicopter air field ? I had my buddy two or three days and had to DX him, Hell I hadn't even named him yet. He was still "Dog". Well I E&Eed to the bottom of the hill to the school with my curly tailed refugee. Dog and Ron hit it off immediately. He and Bruce Sellers Named him on the spot, Shuford! I don't know, it we someone or something they both knew back in the world.

By this time the real cast I had was in sad shape. I had also had a few Au-Shits hanging over my head. Something to do about Malaria pills and the 1SG. Disgression is the better part of valor. I cut my cast off and headed towards South. The Company had just moved. They were at Phu Hep at an old abandoned air field. I was helping setting up tents when a typhoon or bad squall came through for a few days. That was *real* interesting. But it did unbalance the ecological system ? The blood sucking sand flees ate me and everyone else alive. They were everywhere. I also ran into an old buddy of mind from Special Forces Training, Thomas Weaver. I met Tom at Bragg just before he was awarded the Silver Star from the Marine liaison assigned to Bragg. Thomas also walked to the beat of a different drummer. We yelled at one another and took a slug of the 5th of Old Grandad Tom had. We caught up on old times and killed sand flees. I'll tell on him later. 1st Platoon was up at Plaku, and Guthrie knew that I was looking for a home. Sgt Bruce Sellars had got on that 7-0-quick and headed across the pond to the land of the big PX's. I believe That SSG Ron Lesley left the school and ran a few missions and DERO's back to the world. I headed north and became a member of Satan's Playboys, 1st Platoon LRRP, We Kill For Fun! Bolton, Guthrie, and I had a reunion. We taught ARVN Air-Borne Rangers six man team tactics in recon and hunter-killer missions. Bolton one frosty morning was toying with an M-26 frag. There was about six of us talking about this and that when spoon on the frag goes "ping" and an "O Shit" proceeded the thud of the frag hitting the ground! All that could be seen was a blur of assholes and elbows!!, as Bolton stood their laughing at us. It seems that he had unscrewed the blasting cap and tossed it in a bunker and popped the primer. That piece of information only Bolton knew. We all called him a bag full of bad names, and then laughed after the fact.

Guthrie and I had been trying to get on the same team from day one, and it just never happen. First Platoon linked up with the company at An Khe. A new Platoon Leader was

introduced and a miracle happen - Guthrie and I we're on the same team!!!! We got a FRAG order, I did a VR and came back to set up routes and found Richard L. under two wool blankets with his teeth chattering. This was at the hight of the dry season. I took him to the aid station to pack him in ice and start IV's - his fever was 105+. He's talking as if nothing is wrong and has no fever. The Dustoff was cranked up and Guthrie enroute to Qui Nhon. I was now the Team Leader of Team 1-3. Guthrie and I never did run on the same team, but we did run into each other on the ground one mission. This happen due to Camp Ratcliff status being changed to a Fire Base when the 4th ID departed RVN and the Ranger School was no more. Rich had been compromised, a FNG that did not tell him about the bad guys that had come to see him. The FNG's first mission and last with Charlie Company. The screening process was gone. After a fire fight, I was close enough to set up an anvil and hammer. His team was working they're way towards mind. Access to a bird became available and they were extracted before the link-up of the two teams. During the extraction, I was in the roots of a large teak tree when I heard a swarm of bees, or I thought was bee's. I turned around to the bubble of a Loh-6 and the door gunner hanging out on a strap with his M-60 pointed at *me!* I have no idea how large my eyes got . . . "Oh fuck, I'm dead", ran through my mind, as I gave them a fingerless gloved peace sign! The door gunner smiled as he flashed the sign back and the loch returned from whence it came. My total focus was now on the brush breaking noise to my front. No time to think of what might have been. They were looking for bad guys and thought they had found one. Guthrie rotated back to Texas afew missions after that. I was going to tell you about Thomas Weaver, except I'm not. I will say this much. It had something to do with set of bino, a HB-50 cal on a T&E mechanism and one hell of a single shot kill for Hong Kong Mountain. Yes, he did. One of the last missions that I ran was a strictly recon mission. Intelligence(?) stated that their was no activity in that AO. Thats what I was told anyway. I had a five man team and two of the guys (FNG's) had never run a mission. I did a visual recon that afternoon and a pre inspection, no last minute changes for the TOC. The next morning we ate and saddled up. finial inspection and a tail number. We waited on the tarmac for the Hueys to arrive. The birds swoop in and we load up. The turbines whine and the blades whop as we give a thumbs up and tent city gets smaller. We're next. The LZ is spotted as we head in and out of false infils . . . LZ comming up . . . on the skid . . . the bird flares . . . and we are on the ground. Head count, security and a commo check, we are five by. Check the map and head out. Five days and nothing, except a single NVA boot print. Sgt Cooke is point and I'm rear gunner. The new guys are tucked safe in the center. We head for the blue line to get water. Down the embankment and I go to fill my canteen. For some reason I look up and no one is watching me, or any type of rear security at all. Capping my canteen I head up the bank, stopping short of the crest. I see benches and black boards, what have I walked into now? In the past walked into a base camps and one time eye ball to eye ball with a bad guy, Sir Charles! Cooke and I do a recon around this school/ staging area! Their are three separate thatched roof class room with benches and black boards and, sniff, food cooking. All the trees branches were inter woven so not to be seen from the air, I sure didn't see them. Cooke looked at me and I looked at him, and we both rolled our eyes. We knew we were in some deep shit, with only a half of a team. We linked up and backed down into the creek and walked around the mote that was dug around this island school. On the other side we low crawled into

the thickest vegetation we could find. With map in hand we cacked up our location and tried to send a salute report. Primary, alternate, and emergency Frequencies-Nothing! Sgt Cooke dug in his rucksack and handed me the Urk-10. I put it on beeper and held it to my chest, knowing that everyone in a ten mile radius could hear the beeper, not really. This is Spectra, beeper come on voice. I explained that we were deep in Indian Country and our telegraph did not work! We used the flying fortress of death and destruction as a radio relay sight to the TOC. You know the old saying that when things start to sour it don't get no better. Well from the time we found this place things had started to go down hill at a high rate of speed, and it was increasing. Higher was going to be so nice as to send a helicopter right over with a new(?) PRC-77 and two elephant rubbers of water! One , I did not want a helicopter with in a hundred miles of this half green team. Two, I did not want a new radio, I wanted a trombone! That was our brevity code for an extraction. Third, I was *not* really interested in how many or when the Indians where coming home to roost. Cause I knew that some little narrow ass Khaki pants wearing hungry NVA was going to take his bowl of rice and fishheads and try to sit on that one and only boot print I did see or erase! Cooke and I low crawled for ever, when we heard the OH-58 in the distance. With a mirror I flashed him as Cooke layed on the ground and popped a panal. They did a slow low fly by and kicked out the elephant rubbers then handed me the raido!!! Shit!!! They should have just used a black and white with the light bar flashing!!! Ok, I have a new radio, two elephant rubbers that are international orange (remember Bragg and the detcord), and about 400 meters to crawl and leave no sign of a trail. Then to top off everything Cooke leans over and informs that he thinks he saw a bad guy in a tree on the other side of the LZ. We crawl and cover tracks, crawled and covered trail, and crawled some more. When we linked up, the side we came in on, one of the FNG was *asleep*! Now thats a real confidence builder. We were dead center in a thicket that we had crawled into. A commo check was made and we were five by again. As the sun started to sink, voices started to rise from the camp, and they did not sound friendly. I guess after supper they all decided to come out and look for us, and they did. They did not know where we were exactly. So they throw rocks as they walk in groups doing sweeps as them walked almost through us. I passed out Ratlen, and damn if the two new guys didn't go to sleep and one snored! I did a mouth to ear one way whisper communication and the emphasis was at the point of my Gerber under his chin. Then I passed out some Yellow Jackets and strained my ears, because it was real quite. I got on the horn and requested Red Leg about 1145 hrs. They said they could not shoot because of friendlys in the area. I told them that I was the friendlys and I wanted the fire mission. The transmission was interrupted at different times due to walking groups getting too close. We finely got permission at about 0330 hrs even with a danger close warning. First round was about 0400 hrs, and I asked for two repeats. They in return wanted an assessment of the damages and a body count. I tried to reason with Red Leg that we were few and they were many. Also they were real mad at this point due to the Willie Pete and HE Air Mail that was just delivered. Its dark and things are still burning, Sir Charles could still be heard as I stayed in my little thicket. Just at the false dawn things got real quite again, one of those times that you know that your heart will give your position away by beating too loudly. Cooke and I crawled down to the creek and checked the damages out. We linked back up with the team, sent a salute report, and headed South Southeast at a good pace. I half covered the trail as we went.

Hoping that someone would find it and head South after us. We rested a moment and hooked a South Southwest direction for about thirty minutes. Slow and deliberate covering everything. Now a North Northwesterly direction, the same slow deliberate movement and deliberate covering the trail. We passed our old night logger site and the camp. We were told not to cross a ridge line to the north of our area of operation. The reason was the 1st Cavalry Division was working on the other side of the ridge line. Well we were out of our AO by about 600 meter and near the top of a hill. We had line of sight to our old night logger. That was about a klick and a half from our position. We had moved about six klicks in all thought.

The Cav crossed the ridge line and headed to the place we had just left form. I don't know if it was the fire works from the night before or what, but their they went. We could hear the M-113 or M-114s, I'm not sure which. Sir Charles opened up with RPGs and B-40s. These Cav guys ask a snake and tadpole team cause Sir Charles is still mad from last night. He (Sir Charles) probably thinks that those guy are the ones that called in Red Leg on them. The Snakes arrive and start their gun run. We are on the gun target line, but the gun ships are on our frequency? We call them and tell them what the situation is. I flash them with a mirror. They confirm our position and change their gun run. When things got quite again we called relay and asked about our trombone. Early the next morning, after the infills are completed, the pilot identified "Banana Smoke", flared and picked us up. The air was cool and the cigarette tasted good . . . Gun Hill was coming into sight and so were our tents that we call home. Get debriefed . . . repack . . . get a beer . . . a shower . . . and read my mail . . . EOM . . . Doc.

Epilog: On a cool rainy week-end in March at Yatesville, Georgia. C Company (RANGER) 75th Infantry (AIR-BORNE) held a reunion. I had not seen Mr Bruce Sellars or Mr Ron Lesley in twenty-six years. It was good to see old friends and comrades in arms once again. It was as if we were all nineteen again, brash, and cock sure, with that one mission left to run. We talked of Teams, team mates here and now and of the ones that did not return. I received a phone call shortly after the reunion ask Ron asked me to write a chapter for a book he was putting together. SSG Ron Lesley you taught me the skills I needed to be able to return these words to you my friend Thank-you for a job well done.

Doc Gove * C/75th * Tm 1-3

RANGERS LEAD THE WAY

SUA SPONTA