

By Ralph (Skip) Resch Jr.

I want to make this as painless as possible, both for you and me, because I am no writer and thinking too hard, hurts! I'll begin with a little background, so you know where I am coming from.

It began early in 1967, at Mainz, Germany (Lee Barracks to be exact). I was assigned to B. Co. 2nd Bn. 509th Inf. (Abn)(Mech), which I believe, was the only Airborne Mechanized unit in the Army, back then.

I was a Buck Sergeant (E-5), and had recently completed the 8th Inf. Div. NCO Academy, around Feb. of '67. About June my C.O. (Commanding Officer) asked me if I would attend the 7th Army NCO Academy starting in August. The company had a quota to fill and no one else was prepared to go. I had some problems receiving back Jump Pay and I told him, that if he could help me get my pay straight that I would go. Well, off to finance I went. The next month I arrived at Bad Tolz to attend the best NCO Academy the Army had then.

I was doing real well at the Academy, I won 2nd place in the Commandant's Inspection. I believe they decided to reward me on my 20th birthday (Aug. 19th), so I received orders to report to the Republic of Vietnam in October.

When I returned to my present unit at Lee Barracks, my C.O. informed me that I was up for promotion to E-6, however, he was going to keep the stripe in the unit even though I deserved it. I would probably get promoted soon in Vietnam. What a double Whammy!

Well, after a whirlwind of out-processing, and a 30 day leave to visit family, I arrived in Vietnam in October of 1967. As I was getting on the bus to travel to replacement (repo), I noticed that all the bus windows were covered with wire. Now from experience, having been in combat in the Dominican Republic for 15 months, I knew that the wire wasn't to keep the passengers' hands and arms in. It was to keep the thrown hand grenades out! And me with no weapons yet! That ride seemed to take forever, but I finally arrived in Ben Hoa at repo to begin my in-processing.

While waiting at repo, I knew that I didn't want to be assigned to a regular infantry platoon (too much confusion in the jungle with such a large group). If you don't believe me, watch some of the movies or news reels of that period of platoon size units, "TOTAL MASS CONFUSION." Also, I didn't want to waste a couple of weeks going through "P" training.

After a couple of days in repo I heard that a new LRP unit was starting up and that they were looking for volunteers. Well, not having ever learned not to volunteer in the Army, I went for an interview. That's when I first met Lt. Green (1st Plt. Ldr.) well, what was supposed to be an interview was more like an interrogation and I felt afterwards that there was no chance for me in this unit. Lt. Green called me back in and welcomed me to E. Company 20th Infantry Airborne Long Range Patrol. I was in!

Shorty, after being accepted, the volunteers were shipped to Camp Enari, Pleiku, the home of the 4th Inf Div. (Bunch of legs.) Who became our arch enemies, with our newly assigned Airborne LRP Company. I was assigned as Patrol Leader of the 4th patrol, in the 2nd Platoon (infamously known as Patrol 24). We (the members of the 2nd Plt.) spend the remainder of Oct. and part of Nov. getting acquainted with our patrol and platoon members, being issued our equipment and weapons. The rest of the time, we just lounged around, building latrines and repelling towers. Of course our favorite pass time was filling sandbags to go around each of the billets (2,000 per billet and 5 billets in the company area).

While we were doing all this area beautification, 1st Plt. was just finishing MACV Recondo School. Finally in November we were off to Na Trang for our turn at Recondo School. One tough but excellent school (but, that's another story).

I don't want tell my whole Vietnam tour, I just want to tell you about a little known operation, that I participated in with E Co. In the spring of 1968, I was selected to lead a mobile training team (four of us) to Buon Me Thuot to train a Company of the 23rd ARVN (Vietnamese) Rangers, Long Range Patrol tactics.

I arrived in Buon Me Thuot, just after the VC had attacked the airfield where Special Forces had a compound, they had lost a lot of equipment and rations, resulting from a mortar attack. I reported in at the MAVC compound in town and my point of contact a LTC. He took me to a Vietnamese Army training post between the MACV compound and the Airfield. This is where I met the Vietnamese we were to teach.

The Vietnamese Rangers consisted of a Captain, 2 Lieutenants, 3 military interpreters, and about 100 enlisted soldiers. We were given 2 M38 Jeeps for our use. Then, I was given a tour of the facilities, training areas, and billets. I had the option, for us to stay on the MACV compound or at the Vietnamese Army Post. I decided that we would stay at the Post while we were training the soldiers (a decision I never regretted, again that's another story.)

My other three specialist arrived (Lord forgive me I don't remember their names, but I do have pictures of them and maybe at one of the reunions I'll be able to put names with faces). We began planning, how we would conduct this Recondo School. After a couple of weeks of training and practical exercise on the post, we began running actual patrols in and around the providence.

Things were going well for a couple of weeks, then one day the MACV LTC contacted me and asked if we had any patrols in a particular area. I informed that we did. He explained to me that they received reports from one of the villages that a group of soldiers similarly dressed and equipped like ours went into a local village. They held the villager's hostage, raped the village chief's daughter, and damaged the village. I got a hold of the Vietnamese Captain and we extracted the patrol and debriefed them (when the stories didn't jive, we then interrogated them).

The results were that these Vietnamese Army Rangers were also Viet Cong. In fact, while in training, one of these guys had gotten drunk and walked into my C.P. with a grenade with the pin pulled, and no pin available. I was finally, able to talk him out of the grenade. While holding his hand and inserting a safety pin, out of a first aid kit. Well, I'm still here to talk about it. This was one of the little guys I had become friends with, because while in training he tried the hardest. Then I understood why he had walked into my C.P. with the grenade.

I could go on, with more about our Recondo School at Buon Me Thuot, but I just wanted to let you know, as much as we were separated in the company. Our company did a lot of different missions that other company personnel didn't know, was going on.

To end this story, the V.C. went to jail, the Vietnamese Rangers graduated and went to Na Trang for evaluation. My team and I went back to our platoons and continued patrolling missions. Oh! By the way I did get promoted to E-6 two months after I arrived in Vietnam, 2nd Platoon had graduated from Recondo School. We went on that ridiculous platoon size mission, and that's when I received a call over the radio that I had been promoted that day, Dec 24 (Christmas Eve, 1967).

There are two major lessons I learned from my tour in Vietnam.

(1) When you fail to follow the lessons and procedures that you were taught in training, that's when you got into trouble, and someone was bound to get injured or killed.

(2) After serving several more years in the Army. I began to look back on the missions, the men I served with, situations that arose and I wondered how did we ever survive. I've learned the answer to that "we weren't alone!" God, had to have been with us. I was fortunate that none of my men were ever wounded or injured. With all the close and fatal situations we were faced with, along with making a few mistakes that could have had serious results.