

DASPO Cover 25th Div Finding VC Cache

In the spring of 1967, the 25th Infantry Division had combat operations going constantly. Operation Cedar Falls was one of them that ran from 8 to 26 Jan. It was a blocking and search and destroy operation along the Saigon River around the Filhol Rubber Plantation, Northwest of Saigon.

The still and MOPIC photographer that comprised the basic DASPO combat photo team had crawled around the jungle for several days without the unit making any contact with the enemy. After 3 or 4 days, we both wanted to call it quits and caught an afternoon re-supply chopper back to Cu Chi.

At the division's IO (Information Office), informing them we were leaving their area; they were glad to see us, asking if we had film left. Telling the major we had plenty of film; he told us a different unit had found a major cache, and asked if we'd film the recover of food and arms. Not wanting to return to Saigon empty handed, we accepted the offer.

The IO drove us to an awaiting helo. I don't think the pilot or crew wanted this mission. The helo had no seats and I don't believe had any doors either. Our seat was a huge block of melting ice, in 90 degree temperatures.

The pilot flew NAP OF THE EARTH as low and fast as he could go. The zig-zag path the pilot took turning and banking enough caused the melting ice block to nearly slide out of the chopper with us aboard on several occasions. My butt was freezing, if we'd get to our destination. My feet couldn't get enough traction to stop the moving ice. My thoughts turned to the Slim Picken movie "Dr. Strangelove, with him sitting atop an atomic bomb as it's dropped from a B-52. I felt the same way, the way the ice was slipping and sliding around with us two riding the damn thing without doors to stop the ice or us from sliding right out of the chopper. I had a feeling we might be doing a beer run, and that's why the pilot didn't want this mission.

Arriving at the landing zone we were right, It was each field commander's discretion to allow beer on combat operations. Usually it was one can twice a week, but this was the first time I saw Ice cold beer. Sodas were available for non-drinkers and controls and rationing was tighter than on food, ensuring nobody got more than a single can of beer.

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By our arrival tanks and APCs were everywhere acting as security force. All the track vehicles had 100 pound sacks of rice several layers high on every level area of the vehicle. I remember 2 chinooks, each capable of sling loading 8 tons; if I remember right, carrying off rice. Additionally huey helos carrying several tons made numerous trips. The weapons captured seemed to loose significants, by the vastness of rice confiscated.

I believe the units year book has a misprint. It says they recovered 25,385 tons of rice. A rail road box car carries about 40 tons, requiring 625 railroad box cars. I saw maybe 25 tons or 25,385 pounds.

All the rice was US Rice donated to Vietnam. Each bag I saw had the US Seal and shaking hands below. The rice had been in the jungle so long many of the bags were rotten falling apart when lifted. The rice itself was bug ridden, moldy, mildew would by american standard be unfit for human consumption. I overheard 25th Inf Div people talking that the rice was VC tax collections.

William Foulke

William Foulke
DASPO Member
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