

Box Bridge By Bryan K. Grigsby

Most Daspo photo assignments were not about covering direct combat activities. Often we were tasked to document the utilization of different kinds of equipment in the field. On 3 August 1969 I was sent out to record the utilization of a new type of barbed wire than had replaced the old fashioned concertina wire that had been in use by American ranchers for over one hundred years. This new stuff was called Barbed Tape, and it was supposed to be much more user "unfriendly" than the old stuff. It is in widespread use today, but in 1969 it was just being introduced in South Vietnam as a defensive measure.

We drove north on Plantation Road and did some shooting around the perimeter of Tan Son Nhut Airbase. These shots were pretty static and we decided to go further north and find some infantry positions along the highway to Cu Chi. First we tried a position manned by members of the 82 Abn. Division called the Hoc Mon Bridge. These pictures weren't working so we headed north again until we found a better place to shoot called the Hthe Box Bridge, which was also manned by members of the 82nd Abn. Division.

It is interesting to note that only one brigade of the 82nd was ever deployed to the war zone in South Vietnam, and that was as an emergency response to the enemy Tet Offensive of February 1968. The rest of the Division stayed at Fort Bragg North Carolina. While in search of these uses for barbed tape we were driving (alone) up a highway that, a year and a half earlier, had been too dangerous to drive except as part of a convoy.

At the Box Bridge I shot a number of pictures that seemed to fulfill our mission. We got some guys to pretend they were laying out the wire. I shot photos of the wire as it was being used as a defensive perimeter around the bridge. All in all pretty dull stuff. However, on this particular day I had decided to carry my personal Pentax 35mm camera with me. It was loaded with black and white film, something I had not used before. We had some time on our hands so I decided to shoot some stuff on my own of the guys who were stationed there. Many of the soldiers were sleeping, having pulled all night guard duty. Others were just hanging out, bathing in the small river that ran under the bridge, or getting their hair cut. Years later, as I look at these pictures, I consider them more meaningful than pictures of barbed tape.

Over the months I was in South Vietnam I had driven over that bridge many times and never noticed the men who were guarding it. Looking at these pictures now I can see that this was the world of those men and I suspect where they may have spent most of their tour of duty in Vietnam. Part of what made serving in Daspo so interesting was that we dropped in on so many different aspects of the war zone. As military photographers we got to come and go pretty much as we pleased. Each assignment was about something different and in a different place. If we were lucky, like on August 3rd, when we were done with our assignment, we could get back to Saigon and relative comforts of the Daspo Villa.