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Charles R. Anderson
c/o Berkley Press Publicity

New York, NY 10016

Dear Charles Anderson;

I have been enjoying, buying, hoarding, passing around and boasting about your book the "The Grunts" for quite a few years now. I was in Bravo 1/3 in 1968. Thank you for writing the book, it's real, but then, you know that.

If you know where I can get my hands on about a dozen copies or so, I would like to send them to today's Marines of B/1/3. They are in Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. 1/3 just returned from a 6 month "Float" to Okinawa and WestPac.

What months were you there? I was 3drPlt. Cmdr., X.O. (Under Capt. Frank Tuckwiller) and finally C.O. (2 C.O.'s before Capt. Sam) from June through October, 1968.

A short story about some of our time on "Mutter's Ridge" that I wrote, I have enclosed. "Bravo" was a pretty good outfit.

1/3 has a website @ <http://members.aol.com/hatch101>, that you might enjoy visiting.

Hoping that this finds you well and happy, Semper Fidelis.

Best regards,

Dennis Richardson

P.S. If you can add any names to "The Wall" at the 1/3 website, we'd appreciate the info & help.
DR



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October 1995 (1968 and 1996 use the same calendar)

With B Company, 1st Bn., 3rd Marines on Mutter's Ridge, Republic of Vietnam, September 2-12, 1968

Listen up! This is what happened. The way I remember it anyway...

September 2, 1968-Monday -Republic of South Vietnam

Seven to eight clicks (kilometers) to the northwest of the "Rockpile," off Route #9, in north central I Corps (Roman numeral 1 or "I", the northern most of the five sections that South Vietnam was divided into for military operations and political control), Mutter's Ridge was not just one ridge line. It was more a series of long generally east-west oriented finger-like ridges that come down from the north-south running mountains, separating the low coastal plains south of the Demilitarized Zone (D.M.Z) near Con Thien from highland flats around Khe Sanh, in the northwest corner of South Vietnam, near the border with Laos. Mutter's Ridge, was named for Staff Sergeant Alan Mutter, U.S.M.C (killed in action while serving with 3rd Bn. 4th Marines in 1967); but that was our American name for the ridge. It was never named as such on any Vietnamese map, not then, and especially not now that we are gone.

1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division mounted out for a helicopter assault from their base camp at the "Rockpile." Our mission was to once again , search for and destroy North Vietnamese Army (N.V.A.) units known to be in the

Mutter's Ridge area. We had operated from these hills several times before. We had not made significant contact in this area in our previous operations on and around the ridge; they were mostly exercises in hill climbing, sweating and water discipline. To my knowledge, the landing zone (L.Z.) had not been "prepped," with either artillery or air strikes, prior to lift off. We could clearly see the hill tops from our base camp below, as I assume, we could be seen lifting off.

Bravo ("B") Company was the point for the Battalion, 3rd Platoon was the point for the Company and therefore aboard the first CH46 Sikorsky, tandem rotor, transport helicopters to lift off in the assault. Capt. Frank Tuckwiller, B Co. Commanding Officer (C.O.), decided to position himself and his forward command element in the second helicopter off. As 3rd Platoon Commander I, therefore, loaded out on the 1st helicopter. (This was not necessarily tactically sound as, a commander, for most effective command and control, is supposed to be with or near his lead elements, but not with his point. Therefore, I would have normally been behind my point squad and the C.O. would have been between his 1st and 2nd platoons.) With 14 Marines loaded in each helicopter (or less depending on the altitude, heat and humidity's effect on lifting capacity), and with the C.O., Co. Gunny (Company Gunnery Sergeant, senior enlisted Marine in the field), F.A.O. (Forward Artillery Observer), F.A.C. (Forward Air Controller), their radio operators, the C.P. (Command Post) radio operators and corpsman (medic) in the command element; plus myself, my radioman and Platoon Sergeant; there would have been less than fifteen or sixteen infantrymen to secure the LZ from the first two helicopters to land. Because the LZ was a small hill top, only one helicopter at a time could land, and a hot LZ could mean big trouble for the landing force.

The LZ was very hot! We were in big trouble from the beginning.

My bird landed, discharged and left empty under heavy, but so far ineffective semi-automatic and automatic rifles, and a .51 caliber crew served heavy machine gun fire from a hidden enemy on the opposite hill top, about one hundred meters to the northwest. We hastily spread out, forming a defensive line to the incoming shooting and

started to return fire. The second CH46 was attempting to land with both forward and rear door gunners putting out heavy covering fire with their .50 caliber machine guns.

The North Vietnamese guns found their mark and the bird hit very hard, bounced, laid over on it's side, and then flipped completely the other way at least two more times as the huge rotors bit into the ground and beat themselves into pieces. The dead chopper started to burn. The L.Z. was blocked. The rest of the Battalion was forced to return to base. We were alone and taking a lot of enemy fire. As it turned out we were lucky to have the command group with the company's supporting arms controllers on the ground with us.

The injured and shaken Marines were freeing themselves and their gear from the crashed helicopter. With our machine gunner down to a severe back injury, other Marines retrieved his M-60 machine gun and quickly put it into service, pouring effective suppressing fire on the enemy-held hill. Capt. Tuckwiller directed the unhurt Marines into a defensive position along the south end of our hill, completing a very open perimeter.

The south end of the hill had a just barely flat enough area that could be used for a medivac (medical evacuation) point if it were cleared and defended. The C.O. set some of the men to that task as we took a count of the wounded. They would have to be evacuated before we could hope for an extraction or a land withdrawal.

Any thoughts of a march off the hill were soon put away. To the northwest and north, the enemy was entrenched on the other hill. The east and south west was blocked by a steep cliff-like drop off. A large enemy force was discovered in the draws moving toward us from the south and east.

We were advised to ready our wounded for a medivac attempt. I called to one of my Marines to help me search the wrecked helicopter for injured. The last of the crew and our Marines were climbing out as we entered. The pilot was shot in the foot with a .51 caliber round and in bad shape. We managed to free him from the cockpit and pulled him out of the bird. I carried and dragged him toward the newly cleared L.Z. area where

the rest of the crew and our injured were staged. We could hear a CH46 coming up the valley from the southwest.

As the medivac chopper popped up over our hill and flared for hover/wheel-touch only pick up, the whole world seemed to explode at once. The two .50's from the inbound chopper were firing full automatic, a couple of enemy B-40 rockets (a shoulder fired multi-purpose rocket propelled explosive) flew at the helicopter, there were light and heavy machine gun rounds from the enemy positions spraying the air and digging up the ground all around us. Our own machine gun, all our M-16's rifles and our 40mm grenade launcher were all returning fire at once. In the middle of all this fury, the first pick-up was completed and the medivac chopper disappeared over the west edge of our hill.

I returned to the wrecked helicopter to see if there was anything usable that was going to burn up. The two .50 caliber heavy machine guns and their ammo were high on my list. To check the gun for damage, from the forward door, I fired a few rounds at our tormentors across the way. We freed both guns from their mounts, grabbed all the ammo cans we could find, and left the smoking hulk to burn.

I'd had some training on a "fifty," not as a Marine, but, way back in military school. My Plt. Sgt. had none and all the crew of the helicopter were being evaced, so I became a .50 caliber machine gunner. We stuck the barrel in the split fork of a downed tree trunk, as we had no ground mount for the gun. We loaded it just in time for the second medivac attempt to get out the rest of our injured.

This time we had spotted the crew-served machine gun position. When they opened up on the incoming helicopter, we surprised them with some heavy fire of our own. The second pick-up was successful and all of our seriously injured were now gone. We were now free to deal with the rest of the enemy.

Capt. Tuckwiller's group had contacted the air attack and artillery support that was made available to us. He was able to call in constant and heavy shelling on the enemy in the draws and on the slopes approaching us from the south and east. He

turned the F.A.C. over to me to deal with the enemy held hill top. We had a lot of explosives and steel dropping on the enemy positions for us.

At one point, we had a flight of two Air Force F-4's "Phantom" attack jets who didn't want to drop their 500 and 1,000 pound bombs on the forward slopes of the N.V.A. hill, because they were afraid of hitting us. Our Marine A-4's "Sky Hawk" attack jets had been doing a great job of close air support, but had run out of bombs. We repeatedly asked the Air Force F-4's drivers to do the same. If the enemy positions looking down on us weren't silenced, we would stand little chance of a successful air evacuation. We did not want to be stuck on our hill for the night. The Air Force drivers would still not drop their loads where we wanted them to, so, I released them and told them to get out of the way. As there was not any more Marine Air available, I called for artillery fire, which had been told to stand by, while the air support was on station.

I was assigned a couple of Marine 8" guns, some of our biggest and most accurate artillery pieces, for my fire mission. I was told that due our proximity to the target and the gun angle, the 8" guns would be shooting with an inbound trajectory such that the shells would be less than one hundred feet over our heads on the last one hundred meters to the target. With a bursting radius that could include our forward positions, it was a real close call. No room for error, but we didn't have any other choice if we wanted out.

We were to be called a "splash" five seconds before impact, to give us time to get our heads and everything else down. We passed the word and pulled as much of ourselves as we could under our helmets and into our flak jackets.

Those 8" shells sounded like freight trains flying overhead, but the enemy bunker site disappeared in the first two impacts. I called a "fire for effect" and walked the shells up, down and across the enemy held hill for a while.

During the fire mission, I got a radio call from 1Lt. Sandy Hunt, our XO (Company Executive Officer, second in Command, whom I'd known since being enlisted recruits together in San Diego boot camp). He was listening to our battle on the radios from the

Bn. 3 shop (Battalion Staff section 3, Operations) back at the "Rockpile". He said "they" wanted him to remind me not to chew up any future L.Z.'s too much, if I knew what he meant. I told him that I didn't really have the time to discuss my thoughts about "their" choice of L.Z.'s right at the moment, and that "they" probably didn't want to know anyway, if he knew what I meant. The other hill looked like a barren, cratered moonscape when we lifted fire, but it was very quiet.

The C.O. was having similar success with his targets, but he had a lot more to shoot at, and suggested to Battalion that they might well want to extract us a.s.a.p. They were sending two CH46's right away.

I remember shooting down the slope with my rifle and having a lot of things being shot back up at us, as I was the last man to dive into the last chopper. I landed at Capt. Tuckwiller's feet. He had this really strange look on his face as he looked down at me, as if he thought I was acting undignified. I was, and I was still scared to death, plus, I never have liked helicopters; but he never did say anything.

We landed a very short time later back at the "Rockpile" with the rest of the Battalion waiting and cheering from their places along the perimeter. The Operations Officer (S-3), a major, was there at the end of the ramp. He slapped me on the back and said, " Rich, it's great to see you, we had written you guys off!" I was so stunned and shocked, I just glared at him. Capt. Tuckwiller and the Company Gunny firmly took my arms and pulled me away without another word.

Bravo and the air crew had taken no KIA's (Killed in Action) that day. The other guys didn't do so well.

As we took our positions in the line, we could see the hills that we had just come from. Air and artillery were working them over pretty hard. We were going back all right.

September 3, 1968-Tuesday

We knew the night before, that we were going to go back to Mutter's Ridge at first light. We just didn't know the order and the how. The order came as we moved out of the base camp lines to the L.Z.; we were to go last, to be in reserve. The how came as the first birds with the assault force returned from the ridge for another pick-up, the zone was "sweet," no enemy fire. The N.V. A. had decided not to play today. We would not have to fight our way back on to Mutter's Ridge again.

Alpha ("A") Company had landed and was establishing a perimeter on the northern hill top, from which, we had taken so much fire, the day before. They were to send a Marine over to our hill later with a souvenir for me, several linked .51 caliber rounds from the destroyed N.V.A. machine gun bunker.

Bravo landed on the same little hill top to the south east of Alpha that we had crashed on and fought from. The fire from the crash, plus all the air strikes and cannon fire had not left much of the downed CH46. All that remained was part of the tail section, several feet to the rear of the aft cabin door. We settled into own perimeter and waited for the word to start patrolling.

The plan was for the two companies to send out combat patrols supported from their hill top positions, to locate the direction of the enemy withdrawal. All the indications were that the enemy had gone north.

After a scheduled supply drop late in the day (our combat load was for extra ammo and only one day's rations for the initial air assault) with our extra food and water, we expected to stay in our perimeters that night and head out north the next morning. The supply drop never came. Mother Nature had something else in store for us.

A tropical storm developing in the South China Sea, east of us, gained unexpected strength to a full blown typhoon and then turned due west, right at I Corps and us. For whatever reasons, all I'm sure very reasonable and fully justified, our two Marine Rifle Companies on those too small hill tops on Mutter's Ridge, did not get resupplied.

For the next five nights and four days, we would not see the sun, the surrounding hills or the valleys below, let alone anything flying. We would only know Alpha Company was still there, less than a hundred meters away, because they would tell us they were still there, just as wet and hungry and miserable as we were. We would have all the water we wanted to drink, a first for Mutter's Ridge.

The rain came just as we finished our fighting holes for the night. We were experts at erecting low profile covers over our fighting holes with sticks and our ponchos. No big deal, we'd been in the weeds for months on end ... it's raining, so what. Then the clouds came right down on us and opened up. And the wind blew and the rain came at us sideways. We couldn't see more than a few meters. Making it to the next fighting hole was a major undertaking. The ground was a slick, wind driven muck, all but impossible to stand on. Out of sight of your own fighting hole, blinded and not sure of the direction, there was constant danger of sliding over the side of the hill.

All we could do was to hunker down and survive. The priorities were to keep the radios protected, get as warm as we could, and protect as much of our gear as we could. Wet was not an issue. There became degrees of wet. The fighting holes filled with water and stayed full. Huddled shivering against a buddy in a soaked poncho liner under a leaking poncho shelter was better than out in the cold driving rain. You couldn't put on dry socks, but you could change them for warmer wet socks, that you had put inside, under your shirt and flak jacket, pressed against your skin .

Sgt. Hare, my Platoon Sgt. and I made the rounds of the platoon's fighting holes several times a day, checking on the condition of our Marines. We both admonished them to take off their wet clothing or at least open it up and bare the skin to the open air, a couple of times a day. Especially their feet. A testament to their field craft was, that when the storm passed, only two Marines had severe enough cases of immersion foot to be medivaced. Surprisingly, they were part of group that had holed up inside the helicopter wreckage. They had just never taken their boots off. I would have liked to have them brought up on charges. I settled for severe public chewing out, in front of their

buddies, whom they had let down and a message to the First Sergeant in the rear, not to let them enjoy themselves.

The Company C.P. was established in an old N.V.A. dugout. It was a deep trench like fighting hole with a back room. Enemy soldiers, always wary of our aircraft overhead, had dug in several feet from both ends into the backside of a trench, leaving an overhang. The two holes were connected by a widened tunnel, creating a comfortable, but somewhat claustrophobic for big Americans, cooking and sleeping room. It lasted until the second or third day, when the rain soaked earth caved in.

The enemy wasn't much of a concern after the second day. We maintained our outposts and watches. Our lines connected with Alpha Company to the north and north west. We had the protection of steep drop-offs on the east and south west. The only reasonable approach was up the steep sloped finger to the south, which was covered by one of the other platoons and a river of flowing water and muck from our hill. Besides, any N.V.A. to the south had to be just trying to survive and were as miserable as we were. Any N.V.A. we might have seen, we would have expected to be surrendering. We almost would have welcomed an attack as a diversion from our torment. An attacking enemy wouldn't have stood a chance, as, most of the time we were pretty surly. It was not a fighting time, and the living wasn't fun.

No one could really sleep, it was more of who was really on watch. The rest of the time you were in a kind of zoned out, miserable, and numb daze. I huddled in a four man hollow trying to share warmth with my Platoon Sgt., radioman and a corpsman.

There wasn't any food for the last 2 or 3 days of the storm. What C-rations (Korea era, single meal, canned food-Combat rations) we had each carried in our packs was gone if not that first morning, by the end of the second day. We all searched every pocket of our equipment and dug around in old trash pits, for anything previously thought to be inedible. The four of us on one day, scrounged a single can of cheese and crackers. We each had one, stale round cracker with crusty bland cheese spread on it, to chew on. It seemed like a banquet.

Sometime during the night of the 5th day, the storm finally spent itself. Sunday dawned clear, hot and steamy; but dry. We were re-supplied by chopper by noon. Water (OK, fine!) and cases of C-rations and radio batteries. We each bragged about how many C-ration meals we were going to eat. Most of us couldn't finish one, our stomachs had shrunk so much.

We were told that the typhoon that we had just endured on that hilltop in the open was one of the worst storms ever to hit Vietnam. It got our vote.

With the Sun and drying out, came other changes. The re-supply choppers had brought in some replacements, new guys, including a new Second Lieutenant. Sandy Hunt, the X.O. was relieved and sent to the rear as a staff officer in the S-3 section. I was promoted to X.O. and turned Third Platoon over to the new Second Lieutenant.

I had been a platoon commander, in the field, since arriving in country the previous October, over ten months. My first eight months were with 3rd Anti-Tanks, as an Ontos (a small tracked vehicle armed with six 106mm recoil-less rifles (canons)) Platoon commander; at fire bases and on convoys from Khe Sanh to ConThien and all the garden spots along the way and back. I'd had the 3rd platoon of B/1/3 since June. We had been on almost continuous operations in the field, from Di Do near the coast, west to Camp Carroll and the "Rockpile". We were always near the DMZ, with more time on Mutter's Ridge than anyone else.

Units that I was attached to and served with, had been awarded a Presidential Unit Citation, two Navy Unit Citations and three Meritorious Unit Citations for combat actions under fire. I had been injured 3 times, one counted for the Purple Heart. I was ill enough once, to be sent to the DaNang hospital, for 4 days. I had medivaced quite a few of my Marines for illness and wounds, but, until now, no one in my charge, had died. We were good, but we were always very lucky too. Our luck was about to change.

September 8, 1968-Sunday

Mutter's Ridge connects several high spots, one of which was Hill 461 (a surveyed, bench marked knob, map marked as four hundred sixty one meters above sea level) about a kilometer northwest of our hill top L.Z.'s. Hill 461 is just three clicks below the D.M.Z., and North Vietnam.

A descending sloped finger led off Alpha Company's hill pointing toward Hill 461. Dried out, fed and resupplied, Alpha Company packed up and moved out down the finger, looking to re-establish contact with the N.V.A. Bravo Company followed.

Off the hill tops, the ridges and fingers were still quite green with moderately heavy forest and vegetation, in spite of obvious efforts to defoliate, bomb and shell most of the hiding places of this northern "free fire zone" (Rules of Engagement: areas of the country, evacuated of all civilians and declared "unpacified", therefore anyone found in the area unidentified as friendly was presumed to be the enemy, and did not require pre-authorization to take under fire). The steepness of the terrain, required our movement be restricted to the high ground and therefore march by column, not exactly the most secure of battle maneuvers, in terms of reaction and support.

The point elements of Alpha Company were ambushed and pinned down on the ridge line trail, in the early afternoon, short of Hill 461.

One of the worst command jobs, especially in the field, can be that of Executive Officer, if the unit has a strong, well organized, leader in the Commanding Officer. Other than being the C.O.'s shield holder (a seldom required activity in a modern army) troop cheerleader, record keeper, supply officer, march prodder, straggler gatherer and "one in wait for the command", there's not a lot of requirements on the position when the company's on the march. I found myself a new XO, with little understanding of what more might have been required of me, no unattended-to specific instructions, but there, available for the C.O. but out of the way, in a long column of march, moving toward the shooting up ahead, and not in the fight.

For reasons not made clear to me, Bravo was ordered to pass through Alpha's column and take up the attack, still in column, through the ambush site and toward

Hill461. Passing Alpha took most of the rest of the day. Alpha had taken 5 K.I.A.s. By dusk we were being held up under heavy enemy small arms and machine gun fire, just short of a narrow draw at the base of Hill461. We had taken three K.I.A.'s in the approach fighting. The Company was in combat two or three Marines against two or three N.V.A. at a time. Make contact, push over and through them, and move forward a little, to their next strong point. Not exactly classic company movement to contact, fire and maneuver tactics. The N.V.A. had, once again picked the fighting ground.

Nightfall came with no resolution to our efforts to gain a foothold on the hill in front of us. We were not going back, and the N.V.A., for the time being, had decided to be in the real estate business. We moved our dead and wounded back up the trail to the hill top L.Z. with Alpha Company, to be medivaced. We called our own 81mm and 60mm mortars for covering fire on the enemy positions.

The enemy was still pinning down our forward elements with heavy rifle, rocket and machine gun fire from hidden positions somewhere on forward slopes of the hill. They were not showing much of their intention to depart, wherever they were and in what number, we couldn't determine. Their strong points were just enough to control the approach to the hill. For our part, we could withdraw, or take one position at a time, but not maneuver.

We were going to be trading fire with them for most of the night, not so much for tactical gain; but to harass the other guy and to make sure that he knew we had no intention of breaking off and vice versa. With the dense brush and tree cover over head, direct artillery fire was not that effective, especially as close as we were to each other. It was a long night.

With daybreak, we were able to spot their fighting positions and resume our attack to the base of the hill. There was one particularly tough enemy automatic weapons position near the top on Hill461 that had us pinned down for hours, extracting a heavy price in casualties of every foot we advanced. This particularly courageous N.V.A soldier had excellent, almost unobstructed fields of fire from a dirt and log covered

trench near the bottom of a tree, right below the hill's crest. Only a blazing weapon barrel occasionally stuck out of the fighting hole. Because we were not yet far enough off the ridge and into the draw at the base of the hill to spread out, we had difficulty massing enough fire to knock out the position or suppress his fire. We started calling him "Super Gook." Every attempt to advance or dash from tree to tree in an attempt to get a better angle of fire, was met with incredibly intense and accurate return fire from his hole. In spite of our horrendous machine gun, L.A.W. (Light Anti-tank Weapon, a disposable 40mm shoulder fired rocket), mortar and grenade fire, that at times seemingly obliterated him; "Super Gook" kept up his fire. He was finally silenced, but not before racking up an awful toll in dead and wounded Marines. When we finally took the hill, he and a comrade were found dead, in the partially collapsed trench. It was impossible to tell how many times they had been wounded. It was not hard to quietly and respectfully cover over their hole.

As we were spreading out and just about into position for a final rush up Hill 461, the enemy hit us with a shower of their own 60mm and 82mm mortar rounds, tearing into our assault force and shredding them with hot shrapnel. Our senior Corpsman, "Doc" HM2 Alan James, was later awarded the Navy Cross for his efforts in aiding, comforting and protecting our wounded, at times with his own body; during the three day battle for Hill 461. His efforts during this devastating mortar attack, were noted in particular.

As the mortar fire slackened and we again readied for a dash to the top, we spotted a group of N.V.A. off to the west, breaking out in the open as were we, and heading back to the top. It was a mad dash, foot race to the crest, with the Marines winning and pushing back the enemy soldiers, killing several in close combat. It was an exhausting effort, but we still had to consolidate our new position and prepare for an expected counter attack.

We had suffered seven more K.I.A. Marines that day. Bravo started out for Hill 461 with less than a hundred and twenty Marines instead of the close to two hundred that a fully manned infantry is supposed to put in the field. With a total of fifty five dead

and wounded, there was not much more than a reinforced platoon left of Bravo Company when we reached the summit. We needed medivacs, replacements, water, ammunition and rest. We got rain and it was getting dark.

The few still standing trees on the crest, not much more than a narrow, razor back high spot on the ridge line, had to be cleared for any helicopter approach, even for a wheels and ramp touch only, as there was not enough room to land.

"Doc" James told us that he had a few wounded that were going to go critical. An L.Z. was cleared with axes and c-4 plastic explosive.

Capt. Tuckwiller had arranged for a "Spooky" flight (WWII era DC3- army/airforce C47- twin engine airliner/military transport, converted to flare dropping for lighting up whole battlefields) to help us consolidate our positions and to guide the medivac choppers, who had agreed to make a try at a pick up if they could find us in the dark.

Sometime after it was completely dark, in the eerie light of "Spooky's" flares, a CH46 came out of the wet, pitch black sky in a slowly descending hover to try and touch it's rear ramp against our ridge top for a medivac pick up. The N.V.A. would have none of it. A hail of green tracers from N.V.A. positions all around the hill top, crisscrossed the sky, creating what would seem to be a impenetrable wall of fire all around the helicopter. Our own return fire added a like wall of dancing red streamers, reaching back at the enemy positions. It was like a War God from hell had predetermined a visual scoring system for his hideous enjoyment.

At one point, as the incredibly brave pilot had almost made a touch down, an enemy gunner fired a rocket at the hovering chopper. The yellow fire streaming rocket went right through the cabin, in one forward side gunner's station door right behind the cockpit and out the gunner station door on the other side, without exploding. As incredible as it was to us on the ground, it must have been unimaginably terrifying to the crew, who were forced to withdraw into the safety of the black night. Just the sound of an approaching helicopter, triggered a repeat performance, with the resulting wave off

and no pick up. The crews had tried real hard, but we would have to make it through the night with our wounded, on our own.

Sometime during the rainy night, the N.V.A. tried one more time to push us off Hill 461. With fixed bayonets, enemy soldiers came up out of the dark of the night, and rushed our line at the west peak of the hill top. Bravo's Marines were ready and met them almost instantly with grenades, rifle and machine gun fire, dispatching the last one as he fell forward stabbing his bayonet into the ground in front of our screaming and shooting Marines.

The rest of the night passed as we crouched in our defensive positions, tense and at the ready, rain soaked and staring into the blank emptiness of the dark. We waited for another attack. There were no more attacks. Only the occasional sharp crack of one of our own Marine's M16's as he nervously probed at a sneaking ghost in the dark.

The morning dawned on our scattered, chewed up and exhausted command. It was like finding out that we had defended a rain soaked, muddy trash heap; littered with the rubble left from driving off N.V.A., plus our own field gear, bodies (theirs and ours), ammo cans, spent cartridges, rocket tubes, soiled battle dressings, and ration containers. It was like a visual hangover from a long binge, it was depressing, the nightmare was real after all.

The narrow ridge crest to the north was easily defended with only a few Marines covering a steep drop-off. We pushed our east and west lines out as far as we dared stretch the men, out past collapsed bunkers with dead enemy soldiers buried and not so buried, sticking out. All along the south sloping crest of the hill top, the rest of Bravo spread out gathering itself for the new day. We set about collecting and tagging our dead and wounded for evacuation. We sent a squad size recon patrol out over the north ridge to give us warning of any more enemy presence near us. We called for the helicopters to bring us re-supply and carry off our casualties. We were not in a victorious mood, that morning. We were tired beyond description, we were spent, alive, but spent.

While checking our wounded with "Doc" James, one of them, a radio operator from third platoon, Cpl. Thompson, called to me. He was severely wounded by shrapnel in the groin area. He'd been given a lot of morphine and although very upset, he was considerably dopey. He kept begging "Doc" and I to recheck his wound, could we be sure he was still OK? You know, was he intact, was the equipment hurt? He would not calm down, so "Doc" asked me to "consult." We carefully pulled the battle dressing away. There was a lot of blood from tissue damage all around his thighs, a tear in the scrotum that would require some really painful suturing; but the count of his essential body parts was still correct so, we assured him all appeared to be intact. The young Marine sobbed, relaxed and let the pain killers carry him away, smiling. He was going home, and with all his "equipment".

A single shot rang out to the north. The radio barked. Our recon patrol had taken a sniper hit. More shots. Answering fire from our Marines. Shouts for help over the crest, down the slope. One more K.I.A.

I went over the side of the hill to help with the body, when the squad was coming back up. Single rounds from the hidden enemy sniper occasionally hit near us, they were wild, not well aimed, considering the body. Maybe the sniper had one lucky shot, maybe our return fire had him rattled. Eventually there was no more firing. We were left struggling to bring our dead brother back up to the "safety" of our perimeter. It was one of the physically most difficult things I have ever experienced, no amount of training could ever prepare someone for the final, desperate act of dragging a dead human being, clawing inch by inch, up a almost vertical hill.

Private Wayne E. Christopher was not any more or less special than any of the other Marines of Bravo Company. He wasn't my favorite Marine, although a most likable and agreeable young man, always eager to take up whatever task he was assigned. He rather reminded me of that famous comedian, Lou Costello, in his face and his stature, I sometimes called him "Lou", I was never sure if he knew who Lou Costello was. The sniper had ended Wayne Christopher's young life. He was from third platoon, the first and only

Marine who was mine to die while I was in Vietnam, the "lucky" part of my tour. He was only one of fifty eight thousand U.S. Servicemen to die in whatever the dying in Viet Nam was called. Private Wayne E. Christopher, U.S.M.C., whose name is among thousands of others on The Wall, panel 44 west, was the eleventh Bravo Company Marine to die in that fight on Mutter's Ridge, and the last.

What had we done? Our jobs, just what we were told to do, that simple. We were to search for and destroy North Vietnamese Army (N.V.A.) units known to be in the Mutter's Ridge area. We found them, engaged them, killed a lot more of them, forty nine confirmed, than they did of us. We drove them back north, once again and for now, out of South Vietnam.

The intelligence people from the "rear" came out. They poked around the battle fields, looked at the N.V.A. bodies, talked to our survivors, took notes and made some reports. They concluded that we had destroyed an N.V.A. regimental headquarters site and had fought and defeated more than a battalion of enemy troops, in well fortified positions. All that would begin to mean something later, after we had been withdrawn from Hill 461. Right then, it didn't seem to mean much. We were too tired and drained, beat up and hurting to feel much good about anything but breathing.

There were some medals awarded, never really enough, for Bravo's actions during those ten days; at least two Navy Cross's, Silver Stars, Bronze Stars and Sixty Purple Hearts. But the medals never really tell the story of combat, especially with Marines. It's always a story about a few, really good men, in harms way.

Bravo Company's Marines were the finest and the toughest men I could ever imagine knowing. In their everyday existence, they displayed unimaginable courage, physical and moral. I am and will be forever proud to have served with the magnificent young Marines that I shared that time and war with. I honor their lives; their service; their deeds; their courage; and for some, by their death, their memory.

Semper Fidelis Marines

Hill 461 K.I.A.'s

Rank	Name	SRVN	Cas date	Unit
PFC	Clarkson, Gerald J.	2397456	680908	A 1/3
LCpl	DeWater, Patrick L.	2436069	680908	A 1/3
LCpl	Glegg, James E.	2415422	680908	A 1/3
PFC	Rambert, Franklin	2325173	680908	A 1/3
PFC	Rea, Billy M.	2404514	680909	A 1/3
Cpl	Campbell, Donald	A 2128722	680909	B 1/3
LCpl	Christopher, Wayne E	2350592	680911	B 1/3
Cpl	Cisneros, Roy	2341534	680911	B 1/3
PFC	Drivere, Richard J.	2445541	680910	B1/3
PFC	Graveline, Richard P.	2368916	680909	B 1/3
PFC	Nunn, Samuel J.	2346578	680910	B 1/3
PFC	Porras, Juan	2377756	680920	B 1/3
LCpl	Robertson, Merle E.	2388054	680910	B 1/3
PFC	Ruchti, Heinz	2425013	680911	B 1/3
PFC	Tines, Franz	2416583	680911	B 1/3
LCpl	Tyson, Dennis L.	2380740	680909	B 1/3

Dennis Richardson enlisted in 1965 (MCRD, San Diego, Plt. 2004) and was commissioned via OCS in 1967. He went to Viet Nam after The Basic School (5/67) as a Platoon Commander with A Company, 3rd Anti-tanks (Ontos), and with B/1/3, serving as an Infantry Platoon Commander, Executive Officer and Company Commander.

Back at Camp Pendleton with the infantry, he served as Executive Officer and Company Commander with I/3/27 and L/3/28 (later L/3/3) until his release from active duty in 1970. He joined the active reserve at Long Beach with 3rd ANGLICO until 1974, excepting a discharge in 1977.

He earned a BA in Business Administration from Cal-State University, Fullerton 1977. He and his wife of 27 years, Susan, a nurse, live in Orange Ca., where he is a speciality lumber broker. They 3 sons, the oldest also a former enlisted Marine Second Lieutenant (Infantry).

Dennis is a Life Member of the Third Marine Division Association.