

WHO ARE THESE GUYS?

by Glen McCrary

Any inaccuracies are unintentional and purely a result of the passing of thirty-six years. Corrections and comments are welcomed.

The following tale is not so much a war story as one of twists and turns and coincidences that resulted in this Soldier's journey from one unit to another and full circle back again.

It was on or about 1 Aug. 1970, at the time I had been in country since May serving with E Co. (Recon Platoon) 2/5, 1st. Air Cavalry. As the Recon Platoon for the Battalion we spent the majority of our time in the bush with an occasional stand down usually in Quan Loi. The duration of our missions necessitated that the unit periodically be re-supplied by Helicopter (Log Bird). While I don't recall the exact intervals for re-supply, I would guess Log Day occurred approximately once a week. In addition to the necessities required to sustain a force of approximately 20 men there was the occasional small supply of beer and ice and more importantly mail from home... Thank God for mail from home.

It was not unusual for the Log Birds to carry human cargo as well. Replacement troops or troops returning from R&R, sick call or wherever, would hitch a ride back to the unit. That being the case, on this particular Log Day we were not surprised to observe five men exit the Huey as it settled in for off-loading. Curiously, the soldiers emerging from the Slick did not look familiar and it was obvious they were not new replacements. Outfitted in camo fatigues with painted faces and sporting a strange array of weapons prompted the question, "Who are these guys?" It was apparent that the men of Echo Recon were in for a new experience.

Our Platoon Leader assembled the Squad Leaders for a briefing and it was revealed that the mysterious soldiers were a Ranger/LRRP Team from H Company assigned to perform a "stay behind mission". It was a well-known fact that our field units were prime suppliers to the VC and NVA. Our discarded items were valuable commodities to the enemy. In addition to food and other supplies carelessly abandoned, there was always the possibility that documentation identifying the unit or their intentions may also be thoughtlessly left behind.

We were instructed to consolidate all of the debris from the re-supplying activity into a centralized location and then to prepare to move out. The Ranger Team would take up a concealed position and "stay behind" to observe and attempt a prisoner snatch. In closing the Lt. asked for volunteers to stay with the Ranger Team. While I was no stranger to enemy contact I was more accustomed to a friendly force of twenty some odd men, not seven or eight. Nonetheless I nervously stepped forward along with two others and volunteered. While we were made to feel welcomed I have often wondered how the Rangers felt about having strangers attached to their Team.

To provide concealment the Ranger TL carefully selected a position behind a stand of small bamboo allowing for a clear line of fire to the ambush site. With the Team members in position the Recon Platoon packed up and moved out of the LZ. The rear guard of the Recon unit had not been out of sight for more than twenty minutes when two VC rushed to the bait. The trap was sprung with the blast of several Claymores and small arms fire. Miraculously, the first enemy raider danced through the wall of blistering steel never missing a step. The second, not as fortunate, went down...down, but not out! Armed with a M-1 carbine the wounded VC proceeded to lay well-directed fire on the Team's position. As if M-1 rounds splintering the bamboo just above our heads weren't exciting enough, there was more to come. The commotion from the firefight disturbed a colony of fire ants that boiled from the ground and immediately attacked

the Team. Man!!...Rounds sizzling overhead.... Fire ants making a meal of my exposed flesh...I thought, what am I doing here, had I learned nothing about volunteering?

In a matter of minutes, which at the time seemed like an hour, the small battle subsided and the TL directed the Team to move up to assess the results. At that point what moments before was a killing zone became a hospital zone as the Team did everything possible to save the life of their determined opponent. All attempts failed as the courageous VC had sustained a fatal chest wound. Further examination of the ambush site revealed a blood trail leading off into the bush indicating that the first VC was not as fortunate as first thought. An attempt to track the wounded VC failed as a typical afternoon downpour washed away the trail.

At that point Echo Recon returned to secure the LZ for the extraction of the Ranger Team. As we sat and talked one of the Team members was casually poking around in the dirt with his Kabar and happened upon a spent round, a quick glance around revealed that we were sitting in a direct line with our ambush position and the kill zone, the assumption was that the slug was from the M-1. Many times I have wondered what the chances were of finding that slug in the dirt. Is there a chance that the Ranger Team

member was having some fun and messing with my mind? To this day I don't know the answer to that question.

And now..... the rest of the story:

Unbeknownst to me at the time was the fact that before my tour was completed I would become one of "those guys".

In an effort to raise the performance level of the unit our new Platoon Leader felt that additional training was in order. Being a young aggressive First Lt. with stateside Ranger Training his first choice for our additional training was the in-country course at, you guessed it, H Company.

SSG. Al Rapp and myself were chosen to be the first to attend and reported for training on 4 Oct. 1970. Having been in the boonies for most of our five months in country we were unaccustomed to the harassment but fully recognized the value of the training and were determined to successfully complete the course.

After completing the course and the required training missions we had developed a strong appreciation for the small unit tactics and more so for the professionalism and dedication of the men of H Co. and discussed requesting transfers to the unit. In addition to our respect for the unit, rumor had it that the 2/5 was scheduled to stand-down, which would result in the dismantling of Echo Recon. The demise of Echo would undoubtedly result in its members being reassigned, many to line companies. We reflected back on the "stay behind" mission and concluded that if the enemy could easily track the movements of a twenty man Recon unit what chance did a large line company have of operating undetected. Besides, we did not feel that our 11F40 (recon/intelligence) MOS would best be utilized serving with a line unit. The pros far outweighed the cons and we requested the transfers.

As we all know nothing happens quickly in the military and Al and I returned to the Recon Platoon on 7 Dec. 1970 to anxiously awaited word on the transfers. Long story short, my transfer was approved, Al's unfortunately was denied. While disappointed that Al would be staying behind I looked forward to returning to H. Co. and reported on 14 Jan. 1971 to proudly complete my tour as one of "those guys".

Upon returning I was saddened to learn that Omer Carson, my first TL, had been killed in action on 7 Dec. 1970. Omer was one of the many warriors of H. Co. whose dedication, loyalty and soldiering skills played a large part in my decision to volunteer to return to the unit. I think of him often.

Pop Quiz:

Who were the team members on the stay behind mission? No seriously.... who were they, I don't remember.