

DAVID SHOWS' MEMORIES

The First Cav. LRRPS from early October 1967 through early October 1968.

Bill Carpenter issued a challenge for us to write down our individual perspectives of what LRRPS was when we knew the unit. I have attempted to do that.

This is not intended to be a definitive history of the unit, it is how I remember it, 40 years later.

After browsing the web site, eavesdropping on the posts, and corresponding with some of the other old guys, I have certainly discovered that there was a lot about LRRP that I never knew, and a lot that I may have known at one time that is now clouded by the passage of years.

As much as possible I am trying not to include specific incidents, except as they relate to my over all impressions of what the unit was. I may try to write down more of those later, unless some one has the good sense to tell me to shut up.

I was a 19-year-old E-4 mos 11B when I arrived in Viet Nam 8 October '67 after a tour of duty in Korea with the Mechanized Infantry. I was promptly assigned to the 1st Cav. Division.

Upon arriving at Ahn Khe I was assigned to an Infantry company (I don't remember the unit) and was told to store my gear in a hooch, and I would be transported to a training area for in country orientation. The company area was fairly deserted since the unit was in the field. Two young troopers came in to the hooch having just returned from the field for some reason. We introduced ourselves and I recall they were very welcoming and friendly to the new kid, and very up on what a good unit I was getting into. They made a special point of warning me that I might be approached by Long Range Recon Patrol which I had never heard of, and asked to volunteer. They warned me not to even consider it, assuring me that no sane person wanted any part of that.

As I recall the 1st. Cav.'s in country orientation lasted about three days, I still remember a couple of the classes and instructors, especially one very large spec 6 who did classes on medical issues, the guy should have had his own comedy show. I still remember several of his jokes. There was considerable introduction to weapons and equipment, a lot of which was in use nowhere else but Viet Nam at the time. A lot of us had never fired or trained with M-16's.

I got my first taste of rappelling from the tower in the training area.

"Graduation" was a "patrol" of about a company-sized group of us newbies. We were inserted by slicks to a fairly nearby hill outside of the camp, and basically camped out there overnight. There I met up with Bob Whitten, and we pretty much stuck together after that. Bob was also an E-4 and had done a previous tour in Germany.

When we returned to the training area, a LRRP Sgt. (I think it may have been the 1st Sgt. but I'm not sure of that) came around and told us a little about the LRRP missions, and asked for volunteers. He stressed the idea that LRRPS only took volunteers, operated in 4 to six man units usually with Montagnard scouts, on six to ten day missions, operated considerable distances from friendly units, and primarily worked to locate and gain information on enemy units and movements getting in and out without being detected or making contact. He advised LRRPS also acted as forward observers for artillery and air strikes, and occasionally might be sent on ambush missions. He did not minimize potential dangers, but told us that generally the goal was to avoid direct contact.

The idea kind of appealed to both Whitten and I and we volunteered. The Sgt. then spent about 15 minuets individually interviewing each of the handful of guys who had volunteered, and both Bob and I were accepted. I always thought that what got me into the unit was being a squirrel and deer hunter.

He arranged for us to be taken back to our assigned units and pick up our stuff then take us to the LRRP company area. I remember running into one of the two guys I had met before, and he was quite upset that I had gone to LRRPS and told me that he was sure I was going to regret it "if you live long enough".

I arrived in the company area and went to what passed for an orderly room to report in. The 1st Sgt and another Sgt. were there and I remember them making fun of me for standing at attention when speaking to Sgts.

At any rate there was a dozen or so of us arriving to the unit at the same time, I can visualize several but have lost a lot of the names. We were divided into two "teams" for LRRP training in the company area. My team was Jim "Mack" McDonald, Mike Tebbitts, Bob Whitten, Larry Pappert, Chuck Awe, and myself. I wish I could recall some of the other names, the people I remember fairly well but the names are gone.

I don't remember a lot of the specifics about the training but as I recall it wasn't very long, perhaps two weeks at most. A lot of work on compass and map, directing artillery, and air support, we actually got to go

out and call in practice fire missions with live rounds, some medical training, I remember we had to practice establishing IV's by drawing blood from each other. There was more weapons training, and a good deal of close order drills moving in team formation, tactical reaction drills, rally points etc. More equipment familiarization. Radio procedures, coding and decoding. There was some rope training rigging mc guire rigs and swiss seats etc. I remember we even trained on making rope bridges (which we never actually used after training). There was some physical training, long runs, and the final exam was a long run around the perimeter of Ahn Khe with sand bags in our alicie packs, and weapons.

What I remember most about the training was how informal it was. There was absolutely none of the "military harassment" typical of most peacetime army training. I recall that one of the guys who came in with us announced that he couldn't do it. LRRP missions appeared too dangerous to him. There was no harassment or belittling of him, he was treated with respect and transferred out promptly. I remember clearly one of the instructors telling him and the rest of us that there was no shame in it, this work just wasn't for everybody, and he invited any one else who wanted out to just say so ASAP. No one did. The only psychological stress of that training was simply from being constantly reminded that we had to learn these skills very quickly and that if we "made it" our teams lives would depend on it, that and frequent reminders that if couldn't do any part of it we would be quickly reassigned.

We went out on a sort of short shakedown mission with Mac as TL, Tibbetts as ATL, and an Sr LRRP NCO acting as observer and adviser. I remember him quite well, but again do not remember his name. I remember meeting him again at Quang Tri months later. He was then with some other unit I think SF and came by to visit with some of the Montagnards. I remember that on that mission we were shown several actual booby traps and that a Montagnard who went with us was wounded on a punji stake and had to be medivacked while we continued.

After that mission we went through a regular debriefing, followed by an in depth individual critique from the NCO. We were then informed that we had made it and could call ourselves "LRRPS". From that moment forward we considered ourselves and went by "1st Cav LRRPS".

At that time the unit designation was actually 191 MI HHC LRRP but that was only our APO mailing address, as far as we knew we were simply "First Cav. LRRP". I don't recall that any training time had been spent on the history or founding of the unit, and I didn't know until quite recently that the unit had only existed for less than a year at the time I arrived.

I don't recall that there was ever any discussion of "RANGERS", there were of course RANGER qualified men in the unit, but I believe they were very much in the minority, we were "just" LRRPS, and very proud of it. Since we were all volunteers, I remember that guys had a pretty wide variety of MOSSs, including ones that were not normally thought of as combat MOSSs.

We were then sent to LZ English, where we spent several months pulling missions. John "Barney" Barnes was the senior team leader while I was there. Our groups stayed largely together. There was some shifting of personnel among teams since most missions were four G.I.s and two Montagnards. At times we didn't have enough Montagnards to go around and we had 6 man G.I. teams and four or five man teams with one Yard. I remember talk of at least one four man mission, but I don't remember anything about it, and didn't participate in it.

When we weren't pulling missions we spent most of the time reading, playing cards, and goofing off, with frequent "tourist trips" into Bong Son. Our AO on English was pretty much isolated from the rest of the base, surrounded by concertina. The scout dog platoon was our nearest neighbor and as I remember it we were both pretty much left to ourselves, we always though it was because the officers and NCO's of other units considered us more than a little "non military" and they were afraid we might corrupt regular troops. Generally we kind of reveled in that reputation, and the attitude of regular infantry types that we must be seriously deranged to operate in such small units. I remember a high ranking old timer NCO berating several us at a mess hall because of the way we were dressed (tigers, mixed with jungle fatigues, and woodland camo, go to hell hats, no helmets or flak jackets, non issue weapons etc), and John Barnes telling him that these were our uniforms and should be afforded the same respect as any other U.S. uniform.

Frequently we just told people that questioned us that we weren't soldiers, we were lrrps.

I was always cognizant that we had teams operating out of other LZs, but we didn't have a lot of contact. Primarily "our" world and our unit consisted of the teams that operated out of LZ English. We knew that we had a company and a company commander but we didn't see them very often. For us the boss was the Lt. in charge of our area on the LZ. While I was there our officers did not go to the field with us, teams

were generally led by an E-5 or E-6, and at times by an E-4. I remember that ranks were very unimportant to us and frequently the team leader would be "outranked" by newer guys on the team.

The team leader was boss regardless of rank. I was only ever personally involved in one mission that included a Lt.

At English we lived in about three large army tents on cots. The tents were ringed by sandbag walls. I don't believe that we had any bunkers there. We went to a nearby unit's mess hall.

I don't recall when my group began splitting up, but I suspect it was around the time that Mac and Mike were sent off to Recondo School.

I also cannot recall how long I was at LZ English, but I do remember celebrating Christmas there. So we were there at least into 1968.

I believe but am not sure that we were still at LZ English when we were re designated as Co E 52nd Inf. LRP. I'm told now that that happened in January of 1968. If I ever knew that we were a part of the 75th regiment, I had completely forgotten it, I don't think I ever knew it. For us that was just an APO address change, the teams and the missions really remained the same. We still called ourselves "1st Cav LRRPS" I don't recall that we ever had any authorized insignia, although guys sometimes had "LRRP" embroidered onto the slash of the Cav Patch, and some of us had "Long Range Recon Patrol" patches made up as a banner to sew on over the Cav patch. I still have one of them. These were never authorized. I don't believe that I ever saw the emblems and banners that I now see on the web site.

At some point we moved from LZ English en mass north to Quang Tri. I remember there was a bit of anxiety in that we were told that we wouldn't be dealing with VC up north, it would be mainly NVA regulars.

We packed up the entire area onto deuce and a half trucks, and joined a convoy of other Cav units headed north, the trucks were loaded to the hilt and we primarily rode on top of the loads. We drove to the ocean and were loaded onto a Navy LST.

The LST had US Navy markings but the crew was Japanese merchant marines. While we were on board the ship put out to sea to ride out a storm, and I recall that is the sickest I have ever been in my life. To this day I have zero interest in a cruise, or even fishing out of sight of land. We landed on a beach in a marine controlled area and proceeded to Quang Tri. From reading on the web site I gather that this was LZ Betty, I don't recall that, I thought we always just referred to the place as "Quang Tri". We were quartered in a ruined shell of a building that I think was a remnant of a colonial plantation near one corner of the LZ. The Lt's quarters and orderly room was a tent surrounded by sand bags between this building and the corner of the base. The long side of our building faced the perimeter wire. We divided up the area in the building into numerous "apartments" with walls constructed of rocket boxes filled with dirt. Bob and I stole three 4x8 sheets of plywood from the mess hall area at the other end of the base, near the tall tower and open cistern, and used them to make a roof for our apartment, which was in one corner of the building. Army tents were then stretched over the steel roof frame of the building.

That LZ was frequently targeted by rockets while I was there, but they were very ineffective, they had to be fired from a considerable distance and the enemy did not have the benefit of advanced launchers. You could see the rocket coming from a long way off then it would flame out and we couldn't see it until it hit. A trench was added between our building and the command tent for use as a bunker, but I don't think we ever used it. Generally when rockets were fired we would sit around and watch the infantry types diving for holes and try to predict whether or not the rocket was going to hit the base, most did not. We always did our best to convince the regular troops that we were completely nuts.

We stayed there for some time pulling missions, again I don't remember how long, but long enough that the LZ began to be home to us.

Some time around April of 1968 part of our group including Bob Whitten, were sent up to Khe Sahn (sp?). After awhile I was sent to join them at Khe Sahn it seems to me that I was only there for a day or so when the company commander came to me and informed me that he was promoting me to Sgt and sending me back to Quang Tri to be a team leader. Soon after returning to Quang Tri I ran afoul of a highly propelled foreign object and was medivaced out. I remember that when I came out of initial surgery I think the same day, Bob Whitten, and a couple of other guys came to the hospital to see me. I think but I'm not sure that the other guys may have been Bob Ankony, and Chuck Awe. I never had the slightest idea where the hospital was in relation to our LZ, by this time Bob had also been sent back to operate out of Quang Tri. I ended up medivaced out of country.

By the time I returned to duty with LRRP (Co E 52nd Inf. LRP), I was sent to Camp Evans. There was a much larger contingent of the unit there, including a training unit for new members, Bill Hand was doing

the training of new guys then. The unit's actions in the Ausha Valley, and Signal Hill, had already taken place by the time I returned to duty, Bob Whitten had been killed, Mike Tebbits was wounded and medivaced out not long after I rejoined the unit. Chuck Awe was still with the unit but had been pulled from field duty and would soon be sent home because they had discovered that he was allergic to malaria pills. I remember Chuck worked a lot as the company RTO during that time. Mack Mc Donald was still there but was very short and derosed out ahead of me. Larry Pappert had been wounded before me and sent back to the states.

I became a team leader and continued to pull missions from Evans for the rest of my tour. I remember that there was considerable consternation that some of our teams were being used at Lp and Op positions just outside of the perimeter, which we did not feel was an appropriate use of LRRPS. I was never involved in any of those missions but continued to do more typical scouting missions. When I arrived at Evans we were living in Army tents but soon after plywood cabins were built for us with tents stretched over them for roofs. The outer walls were protected with sand bags.

I remember that LRRP at Evans was different than what I had experienced at English, and at Quang Tri. We even had a couple of actual military type formations in the company area. I don't recall ever having a formation before that, other than a single team lined up for equipment inspections before a mission. We even had a regular supply room (tent) and our own supply Sgt. Kirkendal. We never did have our own mess hall, but at Evans we did have our own command radio bunker in the company area. At Evans we frequently got cold beer, which we did not have at English or Quang Tri.

General make up of a "standard" six man team during my tour was the Front Scout, followed by the Team Leader, followed by the RTO, followed by the Medic, followed by the Assistant Team Leader, followed by the Rear Scout. Five man teams were not uncommon.

Equipment wise:

We were all issued standard M-16's and a few CAR 15's without slings and the swivels taped up, as primary weapons, but a lot of guys carried other weapons instead of the 16 which was pretty much universally distrusted, due to its unbelievable tendency to jam. Every one kept a single section of cleaning rod handy in a pinch you could kind of throw this section down the barrel with the bolt locked open to force out a stuck ctg case. I remember that one of the last things we did before going out on a mission was to test fire the 16's into 55 gallon drums buried into the side of a hill to make sure they would work. Even when they did we always wondered if they would work the next time. A lot of guys used makeshift slings since we didn't carry issue ones usually a section of rope tied to the stock behind the pistol grip, and to the front sight assembly allowing you to carry the rifle in a horizontal attitude at the ready and instantly shoulder it. I had acquired an M-14 with an early version of a synthetic stock and a 4-power side mounted scope, and usually carried that. A few guys carried AK-47s, I remember one guy who carried an automatic shotgun he had sent from home, and a claymore bag full of loose 00 buck rounds. One guy (Bob Ankony) was very much enamored of WW II grease guns and frequently carried one. Quite a few of us also carried pistols, mostly "illegal" privately owned ones, and a few issue 1911s.

I think we were supposed to carry 11 magazines for whatever weapon we were carrying, but frequently carried more. Each guy carried at least 4 frag grenades, two trip flares, and one smoke grenade. At some point I recall our LT insisted each man carry one WP grenade. (I was scared to death to have that thing on my person, and didn't carry one whenever I could get away with it). Everyone carried one 6 rnd bandoleer for the M-79 except for the man actually carrying the 79 who generally carried more.

The M-79s we had all had had the stocks cut off, and the rear sights removed, and were generally carried strapped to the back pack or in it with the handle sticking out. I do recall one guy who had rigged up a kind of belt holster for it and carried it that way. (Ala Josh Randal Wanted Dead or Alive). I don't recall who in the team carried the 79, I think it varied.

The Team Leader and ATL usually each carried a set of binoculars, and sometimes we also carried a 40 X spotting scope. Frequently but not always we had a first generation starlight scope. Very heavy, bulky, and primitive by today's standards.

Each guy carried a map and compass, (can you imagine what we would have given for a GPS? probably would not have been lost nearly as often) and small notebook. Everyone was required to take running notes of movements and everything that happened on a mission. (I'd give a lot if I had been smart enough to keep those notebooks). The team leader also carried the SOI book on a lanyard around his neck.

We all carried one LRRP ration per each day of the mission (and as many extra as we could find room for) and one quart of water for each day of the mission, again extra if we could make room. Our Lrrp rations

made us the envy of other troops who had to rely on C rations. I think everyone really liked the Irrp rations, I still eat them from time to time, although the manufacturer (Mountain House) has dropped all but a couple of the original menus. Water was carried in at least two one-quart canteens per man, plus two-quart soft-sided canteens (we liked these because they could be compressed when empty and didn't take up so much space, but they were sort of fragile and frequently developed pin holes) and 5-quart plastic bladders. We were always low on water and looked for every opportunity to refill with ground water. Everyone had a canteen cup with the handle broken off to cut down noise. There was usually one or two "stoves" made from a c-ration can per team and shared as we heated water one team member at a time. We usually carried a pound or two of C4 explosive, which we used for heating the water. Most importantly we each carried a plastic spoon salvaged from a C ration in our breast pocket since Irrp rations did not include spoons. Each team member carried a claymore mine, except for the RTO and the ATL. The guy assigned to carry the aid bag was the "medic". At least on the teams I served on we did not have specially trained medics.

On a couple of missions we carried one or two LAWs, but not very often. I was on one mission where we carried an M60 machine gun, but that happened only once on a special "heavy team".

The RTO of course carried the radio (PRC25 what an improvement over the PRC 10's and PRC 6's used by the Army in other theaters) and the ATL generally carried a back up radio, and each of the rest of us carried a spare radio battery. I remember how we had to break up the radio batteries when we changed them, and bury and conceal the pieces to keep the VC from using them. (Now my sons and I use little pocket radios with several miles range that are about the size of a pack of cigarettes and run on a couple of pen light batteries, wouldn't that have been great back then.)

Of course none of us ever went anywhere without our survival knives, which we used for darn near everything. We would spend every free moment sharpening those things, then dig a hole with them, and start all over again.

Each guy carried a couple of small squeeze bottles of mosquito (and leech) repellent. I remember how just a tiny drop of that stuff would cause a leech to curl up and drop off you. On base areas we sometimes would douse one of those huge centipedes with the stuff and light them the stuff was quite flammable. We each carried either a half a poncho or more commonly half a poncho liner. We always cut these in half because we were afraid of getting tangled up in them if we used a whole liner to sleep under, a half one would more or less barely cover you when you slept.

There was always one or two signaling mirrors on the team, one or two strobe light signal devices, such as are commonly carried on small boats. We usually carried a few of the hand operated aerial parachute flares. Unbelievably we found room for almost everyone to carry extra "personal" stuff, cigarettes, extra grenades, camouflage paint sticks, cleaning gear for the weapons etc.

Those ended up being damn heavy packs, but at 18 or 19 years old they were manageable.

The team leader was normally advised of a mission a day in advance, and notified the assigned members to start getting their gear together for the number of days required. The team leader usually, but not always went on a fly over of the assigned area and planned insertion LZ with the Lt.

We would then have a briefing detailing specifically where we were going and what we would be looking for. Each member would be told who was carrying what equipment, what units we were to use for artillery, ARA, medivac, and their frequencies, code words, E&E azimuth etc. Then would then have a second briefing where each member was quizzed as to all of these details and had to know the coordinates of our intended insertion, who was carrying what equipment, and the radio frequencies of units who were supposed to support us.

We primarily were inserted by three Huey slicks accompanied by two gun ships. (Most of the gun ships were just Hueys with rocket pods and mini guns added, late in my tour we started to see the "new" Apache gun ships). The team would be on the first slick traveling at low level followed by the other two running one after the other. I believe our Lt. generally rode in the last slick. The lead slick would pull close to the ground at a pre-selected LZ usually a small open saddle on a ridgeline, and the team would jump off. The ship seldom actually landed, and a few times we jumped from ridiculous heights that would scare me to death now. (I do have a story about one of those jumps on a team with Glover, but that's for another time) The other two ships would pass overhead and continue on and the team's ship would fall into place as the third one in the line leaving us behind. The theory was that from a distance folks on the ground would see three ships moving at treetop level over an area and never realize that an insertion had been made, unless of course an observer was close enough to actually see us off loading. These insertions were usually made just

before dark. For the most part I think this worked reasonably well. We would move into the heaviest cover available and wait for full dark then move to an overnight area to listen and make sure we were alone. I also participated in at least one "walk" off mission where we inserted by foot after dark by walking out of a small unit LZ, and traveling by foot to our assigned area. I was on one leave behind mission where we went out with a company sized infantry unit patrolling through an area and when we got near our assigned patrol area and the unit would stop for a short break we would hide in the woods and let the infantry unit walk off and leave us behind.

Our assigned area was a four thousand meter square surrounded by another thousand-meter buffer zone. Generally there were several areas in that four thousand square meter area that we were assigned to physically inspect for trail activity and other evidence of enemy activity, including actual sightings of enemy troops. This area was designated as a no fly and no fire zone for other units. Ships were not supposed to over fly this area unless they were in contact with us, and when ships occasionally did stray into our area we hid from them and tried our best to get them called off because we knew we would look a whole lot like the enemy from the air. An arbitrary point outside of the assigned area was designated and rather than giving locations in map coordinates we would give them in terms of distance from the pre designated point.

I had several months to go on my enlistment after I rotated back to the states, which I spent at Ft. Hood, I know that at some point I learned that the LRRPs had become RANGERS some time after I left. While I was at Ft. Hood I met up with Chuck Awe, and boy was I glad to see him. We were only together for a short time and until recently he was the last LRRP I had any contact with, although I did stay in contact with the Whitten family for several years. Now 40 years later Chuck Awe and I are exchanging e-mails and I have managed to make contact with several others that I remember from the unit.