

Dale Markovich

When I reported for duty at An Khe, Capt. Tucker was there CO and 1st Sgt Kelly was the top NCO. That was June '67. There was training and PT for a week or so. Training was small squad tactics, compass, artillery, calling sitreps, commo procedures, lots of running around An Khe, radio watch, quick reaction, and team E & E. Reaction depended on situation, attack from the front, rear, or flanks. One-by-one break contact and fall to the rear, take up position and the next member peels and so far down the line until contact is broken. Most of the time the contact was a superior force and you had to wing it.

I then reported to Phan Thiet, on the ocean coast south of Saigon. I ran several missions as Radio and ATL. I believe Lt. Utter was the platoon leader and SSGT Campbell platoon sergeant.

The missions were mostly OP and roving patrol, reporting anything out of the ordinary. We did have several chances to make contact and our team had several kills. The enemy in the area seemed to be at that time VC militia, VC regulars and some NVA regulars but not many. The weapons we brought back were an SKS carbines vintage 1944, one M-1 Garand, one M-1 carbine, several AK-47s, and several modern SKS's. The web gear and grenades were ChiCom, and a mixture of other stuff.

After several weeks I went to Recondo School for training. I really enjoyed the course and the Green Berets who taught it were something else. I compared it to a nine week Ranger course condensed into three weeks. It was the only army course where you had to pull an actual combat mission to complete.

I graduated and returned to Phan Thiet. We were moved to LZ English in Bong Son area. LZ English, LZ Albany, LZ X-ray. The terrain was different some jungle a lot of mountains. Phan Thiet was flatter with brushy mountains, plains, and very little jungle.

I was made TL at Bong Son. We ran different missions here. G-2 wanted us to seek out and find the enemy, follow trails, find camps, supply and rest areas, set up ambushes, and if the opportunity arose, take prisoners. The locals were told to stay out of certain areas and not travel at night. It could be dangerous for them.

In Phan Thiet and Bong Son we always had fly overs to check our AOs and look for LZ sites. The chopper that took us in was the same chopper that took us out. We had choppers assigned to us. We also had a Red, White, Blue teams from the 1st of the 9th to help us if we needed them. They were on 24 hour call.

Capt. Tucker was replaced by Capt. Gooding. Tucker later died when a chopper he was riding in was shot down. 1st Sgt. McDermott was killed when a jeep he was in hit a mine. He was sent home. An LRRP named Dickenson was killed in the explosion. I really missed those people. They were good LRRPs and soldiers.

The division CO changed, Abrams was replaced by Tolson. The rules of the game changed also. We had three or four teams in each area the Cav was in. And the Cav was everywhere, I Corps, II Corps, III Corps, where ever the Cav was, there were LRRPs. G-2 wanted us to take a more hands on position with our missions. There were Ops but now they wanted us to seek out and destroy the enemy with every means available.

The enemy was mainly VC regulars and some NVA, armed better with the latest weapons plus RPGs and light machine guns.

Now we started to run into trouble, several LRRPs were KIA and WIA. We always had two teams in the field, a third team resting, and the fourth team ready to go. Each team was in the rear for up to 48 hours then out again for 3-5 days, depending on the mission.

The gear each team carried depended on the AO we were going into. Some teams had four Americans and two ARVN scouts, or five Americans and one ARVN scout. Each American carried:

- A weapon, M-16 or CAR-15
- 10-12 magazines of 19 rounds each
- 1 magazine of 19 tracers

We used the tracers on infiltrations, just in case the LZ was hot. Six men firing tracers on auto sometimes got us out of a bad situation. Quite impressive at night especially when the rounds are coming at you.

- 8-10 grenades
- 1 white phosphorous grenade
- several boxes of ammo for reloading magazines
- hand popper
- flares
- rope for extraction
- 1 claymore
- clicker for claymore
- popper flares for trip wires
- at least two smoke grenades
- 1 CS "tear gas" grenade
- 1 battery each for the PRC -25 radio

The TL and ATL carried high frequency radios.

Medic carried the squad medic bag

Radio man carried the radio

Knives, machetes, hand ax, shovel, pistol were optional

Food and water depending on AO, type of mission and how many days out

2-3 LRRP rations a day per choice

a one lb. block of C-4 to heat our water for coffee or LRRP rations, or to blow things up

Everyone on my team carried a thermite grenade, just in case we'd have to drop packs and run. The thermite grenade would burn everything, even melt metal. That way we let nothing fall into enemy hands.

We carried enough gear to supply a VC platoon.

Next we moved to the Central Highlands, LZ Stud I believe was the name of the LZ we were at. Now things got real hairy for LRRPs. Lots of mountains and jungle, bad jungle, triple canopy jungle. Sometimes so thick very little light would get through. Brush so thick you could walk into an enemy's camp before you noticed. It happened to some teams, walked right into enemy positions.

G-2 had the same orders for us, seek and destroy. Open LZs for infiltration and extraction were few and far between. Some LZs had enemy watchers on them. They would report any landings. Some LZs were booby trapped, sharpened stakes, punji pits, even mines. We had to set up radio relay stations on friendly LZs or set up our own on mountain tops because some of our missions were far from friendlies. We didn't trust ARVN LZs. There was a trust factor in those days, because some of the ARVN officers on down were VC. The ARVNs were always talking about LRRP and Green Beret missions. Charlie would know also.

The VC in the area were hard core VC and NVA regulars, and were armed with the best and latest. One of our LRRP teams captured the latest ChiCom sniper rifle. The army had never seen one before. One of our teams captured a Chinese advisor. We had heard some rumors of Chinese and Caucasians being seen raveling with the enemy, dressed in camos and carrying weapons. Plus reports of women VC carrying weapons, they knew how to use them, also. Most of them carried M-16, I wonder where they got them.

The VC and NVA had gotten wise to recon units, Marines, army, Green Berets. Now we had VC and NVA teams that were hunting down our recon teams. They got special training to do it. Some even had 'Yard scouts training them. We had 'Yard scouts, they were very tough and hard core. We took several KIAs and WIAs in the Central Highlands. We even had an LRRP team overrun right after they set up for the night. Two KIAs and three WIAs on one team. These enemy hunter teams were getting good at their job.

Some teams reported hearing dogs in the jungle. Were they tracking us? Not sure but we started carrying black pepper and red hot pepper we could spread on the trail behind us, just in case. We also set up a lot of booby traps on trails we came upon. We never used trails, so we were pretty sure no friendlies did either.

We also ran missions for people dressed in civilian clothes, we called them "spooks". We'd set up electronic devices in valleys and trails, far away from any friendly areas.

We next moved to Camp Evans, for the Khe Shan operation and Tet. For the Khe Shan operation I was sent to a Marine Force Recon unit on an LZ called Witch's Tit. A mountain 400-500 ft. high with the LZ built on top of the highest ridge. We sleep under the LZ pad. There was only enough room for a Chinook to land. I think the LZ was 50' by 50'. I was there to run a radio relay station plus share intelligence with Marine Ops and LRRP Ops. On several occasions I called our choppers in to pull out their teams when they got into trouble. I was there until the relief of Khe Shan was over.

The Cav moved to Camp Evans while I was gone. I reported to Evans and was made a Platoon Sergeant. I also trained new LRRPs and took out future team leaders to judge them whether they were good enough or not. The terrain was mainly brush and rolling hills, to the west were the mountains. The LRRPs could only move at night because of the terrain and vegetation. Hole up during the day light. The Battle of Hue took place during the Tet Offensive.

I took teams out and had some good missions. We even had a chance to make some kills. Most of the time we called in artillery, jets, or B-52s. We also called in line troopers. A lot of troopers didn't want us to go out on missions, because we always found something for them to do. G-2 had us search, find them, get into trouble, and bring in troopers to pull us out. The LRRPs did stir up a couple of hornet's nests that turned into large battles that wiped out a lot of Hardcore VC and NVA regulars.

The last operation I was on was A Shau Valley. Bad AO, bad intelligence, bad operations, bad orders. G-2 wanted the LRRPs to repel onto a mountain top, set up an LZ, and put radio relay and artillery pieces in. Not a good mission for LRRPs. They LRRPs went in, and got shot up in the choppers they were on. G-2 never told us there were NVA on the mountain. After setting up a perimeter and retrieving the wounded, the LZ got probing attacks, after several days, more troops came in, plus more LRRPs, and expanded the LZ. With resupply and the wounded taken out, the LRRPs settled down to business running missions and gathering intelligence. Then it happened, the LZ was attacked again and three LRRPs killed. Snipers got all three.

I had less than 30 days left in country. SSgt. Barnes came and asked me to go and help SSgt. "Mac" McDonald run the LZ. The platoon leader had been wounded in the attack and Mac was in charge. I gathered my gear and left on the next chopper. The NVA knew they couldn't overrun the LZ so they set up snipers to keep us busy. Most of their manpower were getting their butts kicked down in the valleys by the Cav.

Mac and I spent most of our time crawling from foxhole to foxhole directing fire, picking out targets, calling in artillery, getting shot at, and once in a while mortar rounds. Due to the high range and steep incline the rounds weren't accurate, just annoying. There were only two usable trails into our LZ, no more mass attacks occurred.

One night I got a radio call. I was told I was three days AWOL. I was supposed to report to base camp to go home. I told them to come and get me. They did and within 24 hours I was on my way home. I never knew what happened after that until the first LRRP reunion I attended. After that, my nightmares went away.

Our living conditions varied according to the areas we were in and how often the LZs would get hit. At Phan Thiet we lived in bunkers, Bong Son tents with walls made of sand bags all around them, Central Highlands, we lived underground or pits with sand bags around each pit. It was the same at Camp Evans, graves, 6' X 4' X 3' deep with sand bag walls. Some LRRPs were almost buried alive when a round landed close to our area.

The whole time I was with the LRRPs, I never at in a mess hall. We never had our own and we wouldn't supply KPs, so we couldn't eat in some other units. Other units didn't like us around them. We'd wear our tiger stripes, carry ChiCom weapons, no insignia or rank on our uniforms. We use to go to the EM and NCO clubs, but we'd usually get drunk and fight our way out. Some trooper would say something and was all it would take. We us to fly back to base camp and buy stuff at the PX and get our beer, wine, booze at the supply NCO clubs. We'd either buy the booze or trade weapons, NVA uniforms, web gear and patches, helmets, etc for it.

One time we bought so much stuff we couldn't put it on our chopper to fly back to the one LZ. We had to "borrow" a ¾ ton truck and a jeep and catch a convoy back to our area. We put new numbers on the jeep and truck and used it until we moved to another area. We left the "borrowed" vehicles at the airstrip. Our LT and Sgt didn't want to know where the vehicles came from. Our LT and Sgt. did use the jeep a lot, and the truck came in real handy when we had to get to the airstrip with all our gear, or pick up a team coming back.

We had to steal, or trade for, everything we wanted. We got OCO landing strips to build the roofs on our bunkers. We got sand bags and lumber, furniture, refrigerators, coolers, BBQ grills, steaks, hamburgers, potatoes (real ones), eggs, real ice cream, and milk. We built a bar, lounge area, the engineers plowed a huge hole for us and built us a 20' by 50' underground bunker, we had three layers of sand bags for a roof, PCP walls, and ceilings. We used it for a lounge, bar, radio room, and CP. When our unit moved, our old area was highly sought out by troops replacing us.

We had some great parties and Bar B Qs. Ask the Red Cross and USO girls, everyone attended, even off duty MPs. MPs didn't bother us after we CS'd their area one night. .Many night Doc Gilcrest and I would pass out under the stars on top of one of the bunkers. Doc was my medic and ATL on many missions. We were very close, he became unit medic.

The attitude of the LRRPs towards the war was different form the regular troopers. Most of us were airborne rangers, some asked to go to Nam. We were all volunteers for the LRRPs, so we knew what we were getting into. Many troopers said we were insane for what we did, four or five Americans going out on a mission. Doing some of the things we did, I know I felt safer with those LRRPs than at any other time. Everyone knew what to do and what was expected from them, we looked out for each other. I never ordered my men to do something I wouldn't do first.

We were brothers then, and the rest of our lives. Even though I didn't see them or hear from them, I think of them often. We were all glad and proud of what we did, what we were, and who we were.

Many men should have gotten more medals and recommendations than they did. Everyone should have gotten a medal for bravery every time they went out on a mission, or returned from one. The brass said, why give them a medal when they are just doing their jobs, what was expected of us. Medals didn't mean that much to us, our friends and co-LRRPs meant everything to us. Duty, Honor, Comrades.

This issue with the teams carrying M-79s: it depended on the AO we were working in. In open area we carried two, the TL and ATL, and everyone carried six rounds. The M-79 round would have to travel 15-20 feet before it armed itself to explode. If in a dense jungle area, they were useless, Ops ok. I shot a VC one time, the round didn't go off. I hit him in the head, it killed him anyway. There were other rounds for the M-79, CS, flares, shot shells, etc, etc. If the mission called for its use, we carried it. When we were in the Central Highlands and around the DMZ, the jungle was too dense. During the Battle of Hue and Tet, the M-79s were used quite often, open areas, towns, cemeteries, etc.

Some of us chose to carry AKs. Some missions called for carrying AKs. We'd set up on ambush and when we fired our weapons the enemy would signal us to stop. They thought we were VC or NVA because we were using AKs and they saw our ARVN scouts. They were really surprised when we didn't stop firing and mowed them down. The M-16 sometimes jammed, the problem was finally corrected, lot of good men died anyway.

I carried an AK-50 when I was in the rear areas. That's an AK with a folding metal stock. We would wear our tigers everywhere also. One time we went to an Air Force base at Dong Ha to buy beer and supplies. We had to wait till the supply store opened. We went to the nearest EM bar to get drunk, they weren't going to let us in because they thought we were mercenaries or CIA spooks. Naturally we didn't tell them anything different. We were finally let in and had a couple of drinks and left. It made us feel good and added a spring to our step when we went anywhere and people stared at us.

I remember going with Capt. Gooding to a couple of meetings. I carried my AK-50 and NVA web gear, tailor made tigers and floppy hat or Black Beret. I would stand at parade rest or attention right next to him, or right behind him. The other officers would give us a look, or not look at us at all. Gooding and I thought it was very humorous, good PR for the LRRPs.

When we went to recruit new members, we looked the best we could, whether it was in tigers or tailored camo jungles. The Black Beret was everything, we even wore it on missions. Finally, orders came down from command that we weren't allowed to wear tigers or carry ChiCom weapons in rear areas. The Black Beret was banned from use in the rear. We only wore it on forward LZs, we still carried AKs, just not at base camps.

I guess command didn't want anyone to be different from everyone else. We were finally ordered to wear steel pots everywhere, except on missions. The rules and regulations got so Mickey Mouse in the rear areas, that we tried to avoid going anywhere when we weren't on a mission. The forward LZs were OK, but not base camps.

I think that's about it. I hope I didn't bore you. I hope you were able to read my writing. Machines and I are not user friendly. I tend to get mad and break them. It does get kind of expensive. If you need anything, let me know.

Dale Markovich
 "Mark"
 67-68 LRRPs

POSTSCRIPT

I may not be accurate with some of the names, but the men on my teams I'll never forget, some of the others I might forget. If we spent more than a couple days together, it was not very often. We would stay with the people we were most at ease with. Dean Brown, John Hardesty, Steve Fox, Rufus Bacon, "Lucky" Wells, Roy Olson, Dave Reber, "Bugger Red" Rubin, Al Volkel, Greenfield, Tucker, Noto, Turbitt, Lambert, Hand, Curtis, Parkinson, Mac, Barnes, Campbell, Hall, James, Gentry, Glover, Brown, Teagle, Modolo, Perez, Juan Elias, Cline.

We were lucky we spent a day or two with the other LRRPs. Most of the time we were in the field, where we wanted to be or on forward LZs. My closest and best friend was Doc Gilchrest. We shared a lot, drank a lot, got into mischief together a lot. I still care a lot about him.

There was a time in '67 and '68 when what LRRP teams saw, or reported, was questioned by rear-echelon intelligence officers who had never been in the field. G-2 and S-2 in certain areas said some teams had falsified sitreps or contact in order to be pulled from the field early. I had never seen or heard about any team making false reports in any of the areas I was in. There were rumors that the unit was to be split up and sent to the line companies. It got so bad, G-2 wouldn't believe us unless we brought back proof of kills or made contact. When an LRRP team made contact or pulled an ambush, the first order of business was getting the kill out of there. Not walking through the area looking for weapons, gear, or bodies. One of my missions was questioned by G-2 because we had killed two VC. G-2 said the area was clean and void of Charlies. A line company had just been through the area within the last 24 hours and reported it squeaky clean. We got picked up and taken back to the LZ. When, much to my surprise there were several officers in nice clean, starched jungles waiting for us. We unloaded the chopper, walked up to our onlookers, and dropped weapons and gear from the dead Charlies right at their feet. We turned around and walked back to our area for a hot meal and shower. No one spoke about what had happened. It turned out there was a list of names taken from the gear that were VC militia or supporters, or name of interest from the villages in our area. Never heard anything else about the mission. Did our debriefing

and went to get some cold beer. We prove our point, and disgust, for G-2 and S-2's attitude.

Like I said there were bad missions, bad areas, and bad prior intelligence. Some times we were told there was to be no team extraction and either sit tight or go to another area. Sometimes we had primary and secondary objectives, if one failed, do the other. We were given little choice in our missions. If we didn't like them we did them anyway. If we didn't do it someone else would have to.

Truth be known, there were no braver men anywhere, no finer, no more committed, better trained, or dedicated to doing their jobs than the members of the 1st Cav LRRPs. I am proud I was one of them, and had the honor to serve with them.

Once a LRRP always a LRRP

LRRPs never die, they just move on to another AO