

MEMORIES

By Keith Phillips

Shoot low Rangers, they're ridden Shetlands!

It seems that our country has experienced one tragedy after another since 9/11/01. After 9/11 we had the Space Shuttle, then Hurricanes repeatedly hit Florida and most recently Hurricane Katrina and then Hurricane Rita. In my capacity as a Special Agent I have had the opportunity to provide assistance in all except the Florida hurricanes. Katrina, though, takes the cake. I was providing protection for EPA's sampling teams and involved with search and rescue. I spent nine days experiencing a stench that would make the burning of diesel fuel and human waste, in a cut off 55 gallon drum, by a mountain Yard with black teeth, seem like a bouquet of fresh cut flowers.

At one moment a Huey came over the top of us while the smell of decaying bodies invaded all my senses. As I looked up my ears were filled with the sound of the popping blades and all I could see was the large red cross on the nose of the Huey. Just for a split second I was thousands of miles away. Later that day as we were making our way through the Ninth Ward, a round hit my government ride. I was with a former Marine (Gulf War vintage). We never heard the report of the shot nor did the coward take a second shot so we could get a fix on his location. If we could have identified a target that "nit wit" would of realized it is not wise to shoot at a Ranger and a Marine each trying to out do the other. It should be noted that once the busses started taking survivors out of New Orleans we stopped getting shot at. I'll let you ponder that one.

During my time in New Orleans with all the helicopter traffic I began thinking about a mission I pulled just before I went on R&R in early February 72. The Team consisted of Smitty (Thomas E. Smith, KIA 02/20/72) Team Leader, I was Assistant Team leader, Elvis Osborne (KIA 6/9/72) was walking Rear Scout. I believe "Stubby" and "Jackson" (David W. Jackson) were with us. The sixth person I can't remember.

We had been paralleling a hard packed trail, which ended up going through a defoliated area. The underbrush had regrown and the trees were sticking up out of it like toothpicks. Due to the thickness of the underbrush we were forced to start walking the trail. We had just crossed a high-banked stream (creek by Texas standards) when we heard movement in the direction we were traveling. Elvis and Smitty went on a point recon, which resulted in contact with a small contingent of VC. As soon as the firefight started I was on the horn bouncing the "birds". By fire and movement, Smitty and Elvis were making their way back to the Team. Once we had visual on their location we began providing covering fire. At that point Elvis stood up and threw a grenade yelling of course, "GRENADE"!!!!!! As fate would have it, the grenade hit the only, toothpick of a tree, in that direction. As we all watched the grenade was coming back at Elvis like a Smart Bomb by today's standards. Elvis seemed frozen as if he had got to close to a curb on a bicycle and could not pull away. At the last moment Elvis disappeared into the underbrush and fortunately the grenade fell short of his position. In hindsight that was just the prelude of what was to come.

By the time we got Smitty and Elvis back with the Team the Gun Ships were on location. We popped smoke and the gun ships identified. As we watched the Cobra Climb and then lay over to start his gun run we realized he was rolling in on our smoke. Without hesitation we all went into the high-banked stream. As I was going underwater I observed Elvis diving into the approximate four-foot deep stream with at least a foot of mud in the bottom, HEAD FIRST.

The gun Ship's rockets were sure enough dead on our smoke. As the rockets exploded and we came up out of the water all I could see was Elvis' feet sticking about six inches out of the water. We grabbed him and pulled him out. He didn't need "camie" after that. He had mud in every orifice of his face. We all made it out with only *torn flesh* from underbrush. Ain't life Grand.

Keep Your Powder Dry