

MEMORIES

By Earl McCann

My memories as a LRRP. I joined the LRRPs the second week of August, 1967. I spent three weeks at Camp Radcliff with old Ranger SFC Fred Kelly, training us some and running five miles a day with a sand bag on our backs, waiting for an opening in Recondo School. Myself and two others never went.

We went to LZ Uplift, where I was assigned to Sp 4 Leonard Lyles' team. Sgt Santigan was ATL. One night there we were sitting around the tent, when a couple of team members lit up joints, and started passing them around. It was my first time trying it, and in about 10 minutes I felt like I was in a rocking chair. Rocking in the sky. Boy was I ever stoned.

There were no platoons, just teams, half at LZ Uplift and half at LZ English. My first mission was about the first week of September 1967. We spotted 97 NVA regulars about five miles north of Phu Kat Air Force Base out in the open. Lyles called in artillery, pinning them down. We got the bird out there. We watched through a spotting scope and saw one round hit next to one of the NVA. He went about 20 feet straight up in the air. About five minutes later, four Mohawk with two napalm bombs each came in and lit everything up. We call to get a unit to get a body count. But after going just a short ways, they had to stop. They said the smell was so bad they had to stop.

On the next two missions we were out, Lyles knew I would soon be getting a team so every time we moved he would give me the map and compass and tell me to find out where we were. He taught me everything I know about map reading.

The next mission we had three new members, I won't call no names. We were going to blow the claymores the last morning we were there. So he had me check the claymores before we blew them. Every one the new guys had set out was facing us and I had to turn them around then blow them.

I pulled one mission with Sgt. Santigan as TL. I was ATL. The mission was quiet, no action.

Late in October I got my first mission as a TL. My team consisted of Spec. Gentry Spec Mulligan, PFC Hancock, PFC Easter and PFC Coble. Gentry and Mulligan had more experience than the rest of us. We were watching a trail in the Tiger Mountains on Halloween night when we spotted lights coming up the mountain side. We decided to call in artillery. We were using two batteries at the same time. An 8" with HE and a 105 with WP. I was helping Gentry adjust the WP. We got on the gun target line and did not know what that was then, they had never told us. The round landed about eight to ten feet from us, so close it umbrellaed over us.

I knew that by the sound it was making that we were going to be hit. I threw my poncho liner over me until most of it had stopped falling. I then grabbed my canteen and ran to

make up some mud to put on our burns. Bennie Gentry sure was doing some cussing on the radio, telling them we were hit, to stop firing. The fog set in and medivac would not fly, so the XO came out to pick us up. The only way he could find us was by us burning C-4. It was bright enough to pierce through the fog.

We were treated at LZ English that night and then back to LZ Uplift the next morning. We went out to retrieve our equipment. The WP had burnt through several of my magazines, setting off the rounds.

After that everyone there went to Signal Mountain for a class in calling in artillery, and it sure did help me.

We spent two or three missions watching the same trail. All was quiet. One mission was watching a village in the Tiger Mountains. Watched that for a couple of days. Nothing happening, so just before dark they told us to move. We packed up and moved, got set up, and they told us to move again. So there we went, got set up once more and another call to move again. We turned the radio off and said the heck with it, we're not moving any more tonight. We turned the radio back on about 8:00 am the next morning and they wanted to know where we were at and why they could not contact us. We told them when they decided where they wanted us to go we would move. The rest of the mission was quiet.

For some strange reason several of the teams at LZ Uplift managed to have their spare radio shot up. It happened four or five times, but never was anyone hurt, except the spare radio.

The week before Christmas 1967, we were back in the Tiger Mountains watching the same trail we had watched so many times before and not seen anything but women and children. Christmas Eve, 7:00 pm, one hour after cease fire, 18 NVA came down the trail. We called the company for fire mission, they said no, it is Christmas cease fire. We called the artillery unit and asked if they wanted a fire mission. They said send the co ordinance, glad to get it. But they could not send a bird out to see if we had any KIA.

We had a good Christmas dinner in the field. My wife had sent me a ham, and Hancock had a bottle of wine that was sent to him and we had saved for the occasion.

The rest of the missions were quiet until the last one before going to Camp Evens. Bob Carr and Bill Hand went with me so a couple of my men could rest. All three of us carried a case of grenades each. We were watching a saddle, and spotted six NVA. We called in to engage, permission denied. They preached to never engage the enemy unless spotted.

We could not get a chopper, so I went big time with artillery, zone fire, six quadrants, 1/2 charlie batteries, eight inchers with air burst, and 105 ground burst. We told the artillery to keep the co ordinance. This was the beginning of Tet '68. A little while later we heard bugles and hollering from a different location. So I called artillery in, requesting

the first round be WP. They told me I was on gun target line, so I ask for high angle. The team was scattering every which way, but that put a stop to the bugles.

About two hours after I called the first artillery in, we saw three or four flashlights moving around. The artillery still has the co-ordinance from the first mission so it was zone fire again. The next morning when the chopper came to check things out, all they could find was a well ventilated village, we could not see it from our location.

The last day of the mission, Carr, Hand and I were seeing who could hold a grenade the longest before we threw it. We went through several, then I got an airburst out of one of mine. That put an end to playing chicken.

One more good one at LZ Uplift, another LRRP and I were in the village, we run out of cigarettes. So we bought a pack of joints to smoke. We smoked two apiece there, then caught a ride back to Uplift in the laundry truck, a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton with the bed enclosed, so we smoked two more before getting back.

After getting back, the XO sent for my team. I had to get briefed on the next day mission. My eyes are all red and glassy, speech was slurred, don't know how I made it through the briefing, but he never said anything to me about it. Me and the XO never did get along good. He wanted a debriefing as soon as we got in, and we wanted a shower and a hot meal first, so he had to wait.

I know a lot of those there remember Capt. Crunch. A big time pot smoker who always brought his bird in hopping, he never could set it down easy.

When we left for Camp Evans, they took some teams up to set up the tents and get everything ready. The rest of us had to catch our own rides up anyway we could. We caught a ride with a convoy, and all the vehicles got a ride along with a gas tanker. I was more scared there in that truck than I was in the field.

When we got to Camp Evans, we were in for a surprise, they had stoves up in the tents, got plumb chilly. Some built bunkers inside the tents. I dug a hoe four feet deep and covered it with sand bags. There was a two feet opening to get in and out of. The rockets were a daily thing, laying there listening to them whistle overhead, wondering if one had your name on it.

I pulled several missions at Evans and my nerves were getting the best of me, not scared, just not wanting to have the responsibility of maybe getting someone on the team killed. So I gave up my team.

Felix Leon had been on my team since he had been in the country, he begged me to not give it up. I think the second mission he was on with another team he got killed. The company went from not making contact to letting his team leader send him and one more LRRP down to ambush two NVA. They turned out to be point for an NVA battalion. I

felt if I had kept my team, he might have made it. But after thinking about it, HQ was the ones who gave the OK that got him killed.

Hand and my teams were sent to LZ Stud in March of '68 for about a month. We were running out of cigarettes, and the unit we were with would not give us anything out of the sundries packages. So we found out where they were stored at, and went and got a box for each team.

After I gave up my team, I went out on a couple missions as Hand's ATL. They sent us out for a seven day mission close to LZ Stud. The elephant grass was about 20 feet high. So we had to jump out of the chopper. We soon found a big, wide trail with elephant tracks everywhere. They said find the closest LZ for a pickup. The mission lasted about 1 ½ hours.

I pulled two missions with Elias as TL. We landed on a mountain where a company was dug in. It took 45 minutes to get down the mountain. We got spotted, made it back up in 15 minutes, counting two rest breaks to catch our breath.

I took my team back and pulled several more missions. We were set up in a small group of bushes about 11:00 p m when three NVA came within 30 yards of us. I ask permission to engage. Permission denied.

They sent us way north of Evans on one mission. We were suppose to have been moving at night and watching during the day. I went to the CO and showed him on the map where we would be at for the night. We were about five feet from the crest of the hill. All was quiet, then all hell broke loose. We were laying on the ground watching bushes being cut down with .50 cal. machine guns about eight inches over our heads. The artillery rounds were just barely clearing the hill. I got on the radio and done some cussing then. I think I called them everything but a white man.

The next day we spotted a Chinese LRRP team. They were camouflaged a lot better than we were. They had grass around their legs, waist, arms and head. They would walk a little ways and squat down, almost disappear. We called in the chopper, and one of the team members got a little piece of shrapnel in his eye. They wanted to land and pick him up, and leave us out there. No way, after being compromised.

We had a lot of trouble from the choppers, they would spot us, and circle with the M-60 ready. We had to shoot them the bird to let them know we were GIs.

May 8, 1968, Carr's team was inserted. Never lasted very long until he was extracted. They were sent back in, and got run out again. Then they sent my team in with C-1/9. We soon got spotted and had to be extracted. We were sent back in again, dropped completely off of the map. They fired smoke rounds and we gave them the directions to the smoke. We were dropped off in a wide open field with grass about knee high and about ½ mile wide. We just made it to the wood line, and got in a bomb crater to take a break. About five minutes later, there comes a company of NVA.

We were close enough to reach out and pull them in the crater with us. We all thought for sure we had had it then. All we could do was break squelch on the radio, one for yes, two for no. It wasn't long before a chopper came for us, had a major as a gunner on the M-60. They extracted us and we went for a debriefing. I told the CO there was a battalion size element in the area. His reply was I didn't know what I was talking about. So out went team five to the same AO. I think everyone was listening to the radio that night when the team got hit, calling the artillery in on their position, till everything got quiet.

What happened in '68 was mainly headquarters fault, for having teams to make contact when it was preached to us not to make contact, and five missions in the same day to the same area.

On my last mission we were sent north to a bridge a platoon was guarding. We left that night and got compromised. We had to return to the bridge. We left out the next day and found a hut. There was a young woman with a small boy. We called it in, they said if they see you, kill them and get out of there. They came within 30 yards of us, but we don't think we were spotted.

Later on we saw a squad of NVA with mortars. We called in the artillery, but could not get a bird out to see if there were any KIA. The mission ended the day Camp Evens ammo dump and POI got hit, On Ho's birthday. That's the day I went to C 1/9. I was put in as third squad leader, but never wanted the responsibility, so I walked point, till 10 days before leaving country. My call sign stayed the same. Most of the time it was One Echo depending on what team name they gave me.

As TL I always carried a case of grenades, two WP, 14 rations, 21 quarts of water, 15 magazines, and one or two claymores.

One other mission I forgot at LZ Uplift, on the last night we had trip flares all around us. We called in artillery and told them how close we were. The artillery was about 50 yards all around our position. It was so close it set off the trip flares. There just happened to have been a machine gun position there big enough for all of us to get in.

I was always glad to find a stream, or have it rain towards the last of the mission to get water. We always ran out of water. One time my team had to drink water with leaches about a foot long in it. The water was real black and stunk, had to hold your nose to get it down. But we never put any tablets in it to purify it, hoping we would get sick just to get out of there.

Most of my missions were with Cobel, Easter, Hancock, and Leon. I do not know if Cobel got a TL position or not, but he was more than qualified for the position.

This is the best of my memories with some being over 40 years old. Part of it may be written down in history to keep the past from being forgotten. A film crew came to LZ Uplift wanting to do a story and photos of the LRRPs. But they said no, due to the bounty on any LRRP that was captured. So we never got the credit there, for our work. While we were at Uplift they showed movies a couple times a week, missed that at Evans. But we were not getting any incoming rounds at Uplift.

There were a lot of LRRPs there the same time I was there, that I never got to know due to the teams being spread out all the time. I would not take anything for the friends I made there and their loyalty to each other. I pulled 33 missions in 9 months.

One of the sergeants in commo at Uplift was cleaning his .45 and shot himself in the foot. On quiet missions we would get commo to go to a different frequency and tape down the head set so we could listen to music for a little while on the spare radio.

I had a picture sent in of the team leader that was on the mission where Dickinson and McDermitt were killed. It is on the third one down on the left side of the pictures I sent in. About three on down is Hand, myself and the short black headed sergeant on the right was TL. One of his team got hit several times with a .51 cal machine gun. Losing part of his team got to him, and he had to leave the LRRPs.

The only Donut Dollies I saw there were at Long Bien. That is where a sergeant from C 1/9 and I took an SKS and traded it for a small refrigerator.

A couple more close calls, we were set up one afternoon, when one of the team members was playing around with the M-79, won't mention any names, but he let it go off. The round landed about five feet from me and a couple more team members. The only thing that saved us was the round never traveled far enough to arm itself.

Another time we were going through some fairly thick brush. The same person was carrying the 79 loaded with buckshot rounds. I was walking point and the one carrying the 79 was behind me. Just as we started up a steep bank, the 79 went off, just missing the back of my head by inches.

I never knew of any team going out with just four members, but I have went out with five. I would have rather went out with four than have two ARVN with me. The Montagnyard "Frenchy" was one of the best LRRPs. He had a sixth sense about knowing when the VC were in the area. Every team leader was glad to have him on their team, and all hated having to give him up to another team. He was one of the best, if not the best. I would like to have had a team, with all of them as good as Frenchy.

I hope you can make some sense out of all this jabbering.