

WHAT ARE SNCOS MADE OF?

PART I

From Jim Regan

No, no, not snakes and snails and puppy dogs tails! Although there are some troops out there would not agree. For the most part, the Senior Non-commissioned Officers (SNCOS) are a different breed of cat. They have already paid their dues; had their time as a Private, walked guard posts, pulled KP, (Kitchen Police), spent their time in Motor Pool, had their separations from their loved ones. I haven't even touched the heart of what they are responsible for. They have attended all the good schools associated with their Military Occupational Skill (MOS.) Non-Commissioned Officers', (NCO) Academy, Airborne/Jump Schools, and Jump Master's School. Some Ranger School Grads, the Chemical, Biological, & Radiological (CBR,) Aerial Delivery, Air Transportability, and the list goes on and on.

Upon graduation from all their schools, they were given more responsibility and were the "Go To" guys when things were happening or got screwed up. Their view of the younger troops was all encompassing. We looked for any weakness, or strength. We watched for the Born Leaders and gave them additional tasks to further build their confidence and experience levels. Let me take you through a "Day in the Life of a SNCO in a Combat Zone." This is in the Republic of Vietnam, Dec '68-Dec'69!

After a restless sleep, up before the troops. Check the area, as any good Platoon Sergeant (Plt. SGT), and determine if there are any problem areas. Eyeball the Troops and insure that they have their heads screwed on straight. Mosey over to the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) and check the logs, (What went on during the night w/ the deployed, Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRPs/ Ranger Teams.) Specifically for my Teams in the bush.

Check w/ the Ol' Man and make sure I'm up to date on the plan for the day. Find the First Sergeant and pull his chain (not too hard!) By now the troops are outside and ready for the First Formation. Yes, we did that. So the; First Sergeant, Commander (CO), any Lieutenants (LTs), and the Headquarters (HQ) folks, (Operations NCO, Supply Folks, Training & Intel guys, and Commo) were visible to the troops. Instead of talking over a radio to these guys, they had a face to go with the voice. The Leaders had an opportunity to see and talk w/ their Troops. All the Leadership were "Role Models" for the troops. With no exceptions, they had been there and done that.

After formation, the Platoon Sergeants had a shot at their guys. Then the Team Leaders (TLs.) It was important that the Teams, usually five and sometimes six men, did as many activities together as possible. Even BS'ing and goofing off! A Team is as strong as its weakest member. Without realizing it, they were learning to work together so that everyone knew the capabilities of the other guys and could anticipate what the Team Leader (TL), Assistant Team Leader (ATL), or other Team member would do in any particular situation. Whether it was back in the rear with their gear, or on a Mission.

Things are humming and Teams that had been alerted attend their Mission Brief. The Platoon Sergeant (Plt Sgt) did not attend. The TL was in charge. Then the prep for deployment. Giving the Team a Fragmentary (Frag)/Warning Order for their Mission, and getting all they needed for the Mission. This included, but not limited to, Ammo, Chow, and Water. Replace any field gear that was faulty, radios FM & URCs Radios for Commo with the TOC and also Aircraft (A/C,) supporting them(Gunships, F-105s , and even Spooky a AC/47 Fixed Wing Gunship, that could stay over the "Contact" area for hours!

Test fire all weapons, except ; Smoke, White Phosphorous, (WP,) and Fragmentation grenades! Time for the Immediate Action Drill, (IA.) The team finds a spot where they can form up in the configuration that they will use in the bush, usually a file. The TL insured that each LRRP knew his area of responsibility, from the Point Man to the Rear Scout. Usually a Five Man Team! The Plt Sgt would observe and make limited comments. Again the TL was in charge. The Plt Sgt would not be by his side in the Bush or if he was in "CONTACT" w/ the enemy!

While all this is going on, the SNCOS cruise the area, checking, checking, and checking. What do we check for? Anything and everything that could adversely affect the Soldiers. Misplaced gear, faulty construction, sand bags that have "aged out." Sounds tedious and unnecessary but the smallest failure in any area can lead to a failed Mission!

SNCOs have, burned into their brain, "Accomplish the Mission and take care of the Troops!" Some Soldiers don't appreciate this, but they will figure it out someday.

Time for the Visual Reconnaissance (VR.) The Plt Sgt and TL and maybe the ATL head to the pad and link up with our Bird/ Slick/ Helicopter. He, the Pilot, has been briefed and the Plt Sgt can talk with the crew. Approaching the Area of Operation (AO) we do lazy turns and the TL picks out the Landing Zones and Pickup Zones (LZs and PZs.) Plt Sgt is checking, checking the map and insuring that it is indeed the AO of interest. Looking for telltale signs of activity. Talking w/ the TL, insuring that the Pilot is paying attention. He, the Pilot, will be the one flying the Team to insertion. Don't want to spend too much time over the AO, so we do some more flying over several areas. Back to the Rear and begin final Prep. Team is together and the TL is issuing the order. All aspects of the Mission are covered. The Plt Sgt sits in and observes. After the TL's Operation Order presentation there is a time for questions from the Team. Then the Plt Sgt conducts a "Brief Back." He insures that all members are keenly aware of their mission and what support they have. Their support is usually; Helicopter Gunships, Tactical Air Support, Tube Artillery, Medivac, and last but not least, the Extraction Bird. Commo checks are made w/the TOC and any of the mountain top relay stations that may support .The Team is ready to go. The CO generally comes out and talks w/ the Team. Encouragement to do well and get back with the info we need on the enemy. Watch out for each other. Pictures of the Team are made and they load up on a Mule (M274, Light Weapons Carrier) our "Chariot", w/ Plt Sgt, and head for the A/C. Plt Sgt makes final coordination w/ Pilot and we load up.

The flight always seemed to go quickly. Their faces were stern and you could feel the excitement and adrenaline flowing in all those aboard the A/C. Nothing was taken for granted. Short final and the Bird makes some false insertions around the AO. Then the Bird, about a kilometer from the LZ, goes lower and into the LZ. While this is taking place, a "Pink Team" (LOH & COBRA) are nearby and ready to assist/support. The Cobra is the "High" bird that vectors the Slick into the LZ. Can't see much at tree top level! We touch down, most times within a few feet or so, and the Team is out as if they were "Puff Wheat" shot from a canon! Bird pulls out and makes some other false insertions. The Team had come to a Security halt by now and commo is established between the Team and the Plt Sgt and the TOC. We were sneaking into enemy territory!

Flying back to the Company. Now the SNCO has a responsibility to keep track of the team, hope for the best and prepare for the worst. Wandering around the Company area, touching base w/ the Ops NCO, Commo NCO, Supply Sgt. Checking equipment that may be needed to extract the Team, such as McGuire Rigs (used for extracting Teams from densely covered areas, where a helicopter could not set down to get them out!). Other Teams may be back from their Mission and cleaning/checking all their weapons and gear. A chance to chill after their time in the bush. Checking in w/ the First Shirt to see if all Admin pertaining to the Soldiers has been accomplished. Things like; R&R, Awards, Promotions and lots of other stuff. Never had to check on the progress of Article 15s, (Company Level Disciplinary Action.) That did not happen! Usually Plt Sgts took care of stuff like that in their own special ways.

WHAT ARE SNCOs MADE OF?

Part II

From Jim Regan

Lots of thinking went in to this next part. Do I confess to all the things that I did in order to "Take Care of the Troops?" Why not, what can they do? Bend my dog tags and send me to the 'Nam?! So here we go.

There were several calls, shouts, which I hated to hear in the Company area. Not in any particular order; "WE GOT A TEAM IN CONTACT!" "WE HAVE A DOWNED BIRD!" "INCOMING!!!"

Unless you have "been there, done that, got shot at and missed or hit" you can never realize/feel the emotions! The amount of reaction/action, adrenaline, and excitement will not be achieved by folks outside the military in combat! I have said before in some of my TALES, "I did not realize how many emotions could be experienced in a moment or two." Relief, tears, short breaths, laughing, prayers, putting on a stern face and hugging the guys that you extracted from CONTACT w/ the enemy! Never showing any kind of weakness! Teams pulled out of "HOT" LZs wanted to see a confident, shiny, recognizable face! Sometimes it was hard to do and I believe that the SNCOs showed ALL the Rangers that we were there, day in and day out, for them! Whether it was in the Rear or in the "Bush!", or in the Birds that put them in and extracted them!

There are other TALES/STORIES. Refer to the attached story about "THE LATRINE" Then there is the Tale about the "SCARY NITE!" These will show you some of the things that we did as SNCOs. Yet another TALE...

A Team from the other Platoon, "IN CONTACT!" Had to be extracted by McGuire Rig. Me and the 2nd Plt Sgt get our birds rigged and off we go. He goes in first and takes two Rangers out. I'm in next and pull three Rangers out, guys shooting at us, (Hot Extraction!) The Pilot gets goosey and starts to drive/fly OUT without lifting UP enough! My "K" Bar (Survival Knife) is out, and I smack him on his helmet! "UP, UP," I holler. The Rangers are dragged through the trees. One Ranger is tore up, lost all his gear, and he is hanging UPSIDE DOWN, in his Loop, the Recovery strap. The other Rangers can not get to the guy and they are all oscillating beneath the bird. The Pink Team, (Cobra Gunship & a LOH, Observation Helicopter,) are watching this debacle. We find a clear area. Set down the Rangers down, gently, and recover them to the Bird. Scared to death was the only way I could describe my feelings. All on board and again the multiple emotional feelings. You never lived 'til you almost died!

No, no, all these events did not happen in one day. Some days were wonderful! All Teams in from the Bush. A BBQ set up, a break for all! As a SNCO, I recognized that the Support Troops from the Company need a break also. Sometimes we forgot who was making the wheels go 'round. The CO and SNCOs did not overlook the support guys; HQ, Commo, Supply, Training, R&U (mail/Laundry/drinks et al), and last but not least, the Ops and Intel NCOs. I tried to "Mid nite Requisition" lots of stuff as the other SNCOs did!

One memorable occasion was a trip to the Bien Hoa Air Base, The rear area for the 1st Cavalry Div. Our wonderful Supply Sgt and the Training NCO had made arrangements to pick up a complete Audio/Visual System for projecting "Training" films! The Engineer Company, our great friends and support, had a pallet of 5'X 8', $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood to be picked up but could get no support. We arranged for Charlie Troop, 1/9 Cav, our other neighbors, to send a "Slick" to Bien Hoa to get the stuff. Me and Otto took off in the Deuce and a half, driving down that road like a bat out of Hades. Got to the base and located the plywood. Signed for it and insured that it was properly rigged for an External/ Sling Load. All was fine and we sat there listening to our FM Radio. By now there is a crowd of rear "Echelon Personnel", gawking at the Rangers in the truck. We get the call from Cavalier when they are on short final and I tell them "SMOKE IS OUT!" Otto Pops Smoke. They ID the smoke and head right for us. I get on top of the load and grab the clevis that hooks to the underside of the bird. Hooked up, I scramble and Otto tells them its ready to go and the engineers will meet them at the airstrip at Phuoc Vinh.

Otto and I travel over to the area, loading dock, where we would sign for and pick up all the goodies. Projector, screen, sound system and all the wire and stuff that goes with it. By now its lunch time and the troops are mostly some place else. We sign for the stuff and Otto loads it into the back of the Truck. Tail gate was down so he could easily slide the boxes into the bed of the truck. I'm standing around doing my

usual surveillance and smoking a Pall Mall. There are several boxes, some large and some larger on the dock. They looked as if they had been there a while. I check the area and not a soul in sight. OTTO! Help me with this stuff. No questions from him and before you know it the boxes are loaded, tailgate up and secured, and we roar out of the Supply Depot. Don't stop Otto, I said. What's in the boxes Sarge, he asks. I have no idea whatsoever, I tell him. We zoom back down the road and head to Phuoc Vinh and the Company area. No MPs or A/C looking for us! He backs the truck in near the Supply tent. A group of Rangers hurry over to see what we got.

HOT DOG! We have two cases of assorted size Tiger Fatigues. (Special Forces Brand.) We get them into the tent and we already know that the pants wear out too fast. Supply Sgt says he'll trade the SF stuff for the "Flower Cammies" that we use. Great, he has some trading material! Next crate is a little mysterious. We offload and decide to open it. What do you think it is? A whole case, about 12 each, M-79, 40 mm, shoulder fired, Grenade Launchers, brand spanking new! Into the tent they go. Sarge says he can pick them up on the property book as "Found on Post!"

I get the word out to the TLs to bring their unserviceable "Chunkers"/ grenade launchers, to the Supply tent. They turn in the used and abused M-79s and begin the process of modifying the new Chunkers. First to go is the fiberglass stock, replaced by the cutoff wooden stock. Next is the front & rear sights. All Teams now have serviceable, brand new Chunkers.

Word got around quickly and soon the First Shirt and the CO were hanging around, just looking. Later the CO calls me up to the Head Shed. How 'bout those Chunkers, huh, he says. Sir, don't ask questions that you can't stand the answers to, says I. He lights a cigar, gives me a "mile wide" grin and walks off toward the latrine w/ his Stars & Strips Newspaper. Never another word about that particular supply mission.

The Engineers were happy and the TLs were happy. Don't take much to give a little joy to troops in a Combat Zone!

WHAT ARE SNCOs MADE OF?

Part III

From Jim Regan

Sometimes, when I think of it, I wonder if I really knew what I was doing! There were so many opportunities when I could have done better. Perhaps; moved, carried, pushed, hollered, or even listened to someone! That is in the past and I can't change it. As I grew into my role as a SNCO, I continued to learn from my experiences and listen to my mentors. The SNCOs, who would carry, cajole, harass, and sometimes, mentally and physically challenge me! These were the "TRUE SNCOs" and Petty Officers of, not only the Army but the Navy, Marines, Air Force and yes, the Coast Guard.

I have lots of recollections of when I could have, should have, would have! One such is a quiet afternoon, '69, sitting on my cot. Figuring out who was who in the Zoo. Teams in, Teams out. What Troop did I want to look at more closely? Then it happened!

I felt, not heard an explosion! It was not "Incoming!" I rolled out of my room at the end of the First Platoon, saw and heard absolute chaos at the end of our Hootch. I raced towards the Second Platoon Hootch and was met with lots of Rangers scrambling out of the Hootch. I saw and heard explosions, what kind I didn't know. I grabbed the fire extinguisher from our hootch and went to the 2nd Plt. I hollered for more fire extinguishers. Without looking around I entered the hootch and saw the fiery scene. Flames, bodies, explosives still detonating. Rangers behind me immediately set up a "Triage" and began to move folks away from the area and treat their wounds. I kept hollering for more fire extinguishers. As I moved deeper into the area of detonation, I had extinguishers handed to me. Hollering to the Rangers, I told them to move any one out that they could see. Instantly, beside me, was another hulk of a man. Rick Wallace, the 2nd Plt Sgt, with fire extinguisher in hand. We attacked the fire, rounds still "Cooking off!" More extinguishers were shoved to us as we attacked the blaze and tried to "Cool Down" the rounds of 40MM, WP, Smoke, Claymores, Frags and all the other good stuff that our Teams carried into the Bush on a Mission.

It seemed like an eternity! We were hollering for more extinguishers, making sure that all the Rangers were out of the hootch. Outside, the other NCOs had done their Magic and had Ambulances, from the Aid Station on the scene. Fire Equipment from the Airfield arrived.

The fires were out and Rick and I stood and surveyed the damage. Bodies, at the point of impact. Lots of Ammo, blown out of rucksacks, was lying all around the area. Now we had a serious condition with loose, agitated ammo. Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) was called and on the way. We insured that all the surviving Rangers were out and then went about the task of finding out who did not survive. "Head count!"

You see, that day, a Team from the Second Platoon put on a Static demonstration for the folks at Squadron HQ. They went up there, "Loaded for Bear!" Just as if they were ready to exit an Insertion Bird into their AO. Upon return from the Demonstration, the Team went back into their Hootch. A Ranger, unburdening himself from his load, dropped his rucksack and it hit the concrete floor. You may remember that I said the Teams had Detonation Cord, already crimped w/ blasting caps, for "daisy chaining" the Claymores in the ambush position. The Det cord ignited/ exploded, and sympathetically, the ammo in the rucksack exploded. Det Cord, Claymore, Frag Grenades, Small Arms, Smoke, WP. The ensuing fires set off and energized the other Rucksacks with their load of ammo.

I'll not forget the way that the Rangers "acted" when this happened. Fire Control, Evacuation of the injured, establishing a Triage to treat and aid the injured, directing outside support to the "Blast" area. Zero panic! Get it done! In every area, someone took charge!

Now the worst part. Rick and I were still in the Hootch. Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) has "cleared" the area. Here come the guys from "Graves Registration" with "Body Bags!" We had a pretty good idea about who was unaccounted for. Rangers keep track of who's who and where they were. We knew, pretty much, who we would find and the site was not pretty. As the folks gathered the body parts and tried their best to be objective and sensitive, one of them made a tactical mistake. He said, "If we find any more body parts, we'll have to have another body bag." Me and Rick lunged at the guy and fortunately for him some Rangers were there to hold us back. Rick and I knew how many Rangers were "lost" that day!

It was a long afternoon. The Co did his "Magic!" We, Rick and I, gathered the troops around and already had a plan. All the Rangers from the 2nd Plt would move, bag and baggage, into the 1st Plt Hootch. My guys in the Platoon made this as easy as they could. Some cots etc were gone, gone. Gear gone! No

sweat. 1st Plt took over and brought their Brothers into their "Home!" It was not the Hilton, but the guys were exactly where they needed to be, with their Brothers!

I don't know how many times I can say this, and people reading this may not believe me! Times, such as I just described, were not expected. The action of the Rangers, however, is expected! Is it their training, discipline, innate nature to do the right thing at the right time when required? You tell me. Is this the sort of thing that my mentors were preparing me for without putting a "Label" on it? I think so. Act, not react. Make your decision and learn to live with it. Even though it will be for the rest of your life!

The results of the tragedy were; a closer bond, not only with the Platoons, but also with all the folks who came to our aid. Specifically, the 8th Engineers. EOD did their magic and "cleared" the area. The Engineers, after we had salvaged all the personal and other gear, came in like "Gang Busters!"

With no; directions, guidance or whatever, here comes the front end loaders, the backhoes, the gangs w/ chainsaws. It looked like a "Destruction Derby" on a hulk of the building. A huge hole was dug near the Motor Pool. The hut/hootch was literally cut in half w/ chain saws and all the debris was bulldozed into the "Hole." The material was burned and then the hole was dozed over and tamped down. The remaining cement pad is now hosed off and the rest of the hootch is doused out and sanitized. Now comes the neat part. They restore the Hootch but, they add, on to the end of the hootch, a small section that is big enough for four Rangers. You guessed it. The First Shirt and both Platoon Sergeants. Oh Happy Days!!! There are several tales that could come from that end of the hootch. Aint going to happen!

I reckon if there was a good side of this, it was the demonstration of Rangers' abilities to act in any and all situations. I always knew they were able to do the right thing in the bush. All were tested, all achieved high marks! My last thought on this is, Thank God for; Officers, SNCOs and NCOs, and all the Rangers and Friends, of Rangers at the Ranger Company! RLTW

WHAT ARE SNCOs MADE OF?

Part IV

From Jim Regan

Perhaps this part should have been before, during or after the tour of duty w/ E Co, 52nd INF, LRRPS/H Co, 75th Rangers. Never mind, it will ‘fit’ some way or another. What I haven’t talked about were the mentors that I had while serving as a ISG, Plt Sgt and Ops NCO at the LRRPS/Rangers. If I ran a laundry list it would start w/ a Lieutenant. The XO, Bob McKenzie, met and greeted me as a long lost brother and got me right into the “grove” as far as what went on with the unit, who did what to whom, and how to run the 1st Platoon. Wow! Besides him and the Ol man, there were no other Officers. I was now fully immersed in a unit as the SNCO, ISG, and soon to be Plt Sgt.

The LT gave me a lot of tips, and oriented me well about reading a map from a thousand feet in a helicopter! Just a little different from what I had done in lo those many years in the Infantry. The CO seemed to be a “patient” kind of guy. I realize now that the LT was reporting back to him as far as my levels of proficiency in all aspects of running the Platoon. Life was not easy and the troops resented me. As I told you before, big ol’ Airborne/Ranger, coming in and changing stuff! Like, get the footlockers out of the center aisle so we can get to the bunkers without killing ourselves! Checking weapons and equipment more than just when a Team was being deployed. Walking/cruising the AO and looking for things that just were not correct and taking immediate action to square away things.

Did not realize that the CO was watching me. Never gave it a thought, just went on with what I now call “NCO business!” Can’t remember a time, during our tour, that he ever called me to task about anything. Was I a “Sacred Cow?” No, I think that he developed me by cutting me loose and being far back in the shadow to bail me out if I ever got into something that I could not handle.

Into the “tour” now. I get a call to get up to the HQ and see the CO. Uh Oh! Am I in trouble? Well, here goes. I walk past the First Shirt and rap on the Ol man’s door frame (no door.) Calls me in and tells me to have a seat (on his Merrimac can.) I sit. He is sitting on his cot, smoking one of his “Player” cigarettes and I just sit at a modified position of attention.

He’s got a fistful of papers and I figure that I must be on my way to Leavenworth! Some idle chit chat from him and I get really goosey. Sergeant Regan, he says, I have some papers here that I want you to sign. What in the world is this I think? OK Sir, what’s the deal, I ask. He leans forward and I get really goosey. I want to recommend you for a battlefield commission, he says. I grabbed the cooler with both hands and gasped! Not me Sir, I aint no Officer, says I. Well, he says, I came up through the ranks and I want to put you in for a commission. Can I smoke sir?

I clear my head, light up a Pall Mall and think for a moment. Sir, if I sign the paper two things will happen I said. First, I’ll be a 2nd LT and there aint no way on earth that I’ll ever be a 2nd LT, no way! Secondly, I’ll have to be reassigned out of the unit and probably to some grunt outfit that doesn’t know squat! Hold on he says, because of your age and your time in service, you would be commissioned as a 1st LT! Again, I thought for a second and responded that I’d still have to leave, do you want me to ship out? No, no he says, but this will be for your benefit. Thanks sir, no thanks. I’m fat, dumb and happy right where I am. He told me that he regretted my answer but understood. Til the day he changed command and left the unit, he had the papers and asked me once again, as he was departing, if I would reconsider. The answer was the same, thanks but no thanks. Was that a tough decision to make? Not really, I had no goals for achievement beyond what I was doing right then and there. Later on, in my wonderful career, I realized that it was probably the best decision that I had made in my entire life.

Mentors, how many did we have and not realize what they were doing for us? I think Cpt “P” knew, all along, what my response would be. He was testing me and I believe that I gave him all the proper responses. He trusted me with the care of men in his command. He trusted me, trusted me. What more can you ask from a fellow?

Another mentor while I at the unit was outside the company. The Squadron Sergeant Major. Only had a couple of occasions to meet and greet him. Once at an NCO Call, get to gether at Squadron HQ and again after an incident at his SNCO Lounge/Club. (See the SHOT AT AND MISSED TALE.) Fine person that he was, he took me under his wing and put me up at his quarters at Bien Hoa Base (he was the Bien Hoa SGM,) when I checked in for DEROs(Date Expected to Return from Overseas), end of my tour.

The Co, Cpt “G”, a Cobra pilot, drove me from Phuoc Vinh to Bien Hoa in the front seat of a cobra gunship! Talk about far out!!! The Sergeant Major’s driver met us at the pad and carried me to the SGM’s

quarters. Did not know about any of the arrangements. Soon after, I learned that I didn't have to do any of the stuff that rotating soldiers had to do to get "out of the 'Nam." All the Out -processing was done for me by his driver. The SGM had assigned himself as my guardian & protector. He took care of me in the greatest fashion. That evening, we sat in his air conditioned hootch, fridge full of Bud, and we "talked!" He expressed his deepest appreciation to have been associated with the Ranger Company and was sorry that he did not get to our area to visit. Thanks a lot "SMAG," but we really didn't need you poking your head in, I told him. He laughed and said how confident he felt about the leadership at the Ranger Company whether it was a PFC or the Co. I also thanked him for his confidence and not getting into our knickers on several occasions. I already knew that this wise man knew about most of our escapades of midnight requisitions etc. As I sat and talked with him I realized that this was the sort of fellow I wanted to be when I grew up!

Blessed is all I can say about my entire time in service for our wonderful country. As I said at the final day/Retirement Ceremony, "None of my commanders ever wanted my job, nor did I want theirs!" The SNCOs who "brung me along" were the finest that this Nation had. They passed the baton to me and my fellow SNCOs to carry on the age old traditions of the NCO Corps. (Founded at Valley Forge w/ Gen Von Steubon training the first NCOs of our great Army!)

As I said before, the NCO Corps that ; trained , cajoled, hassled, abused, used, beat up, pressured, praised, groomed, me, and the list goes on, were the finest that the Nation had seen in generations. I was truly fortunate to have them as my teachers, mentors, counselors, and yes, my lifelong friends! We could go on and on about this and I could tell stories about how the troops on the ground did this and thus and saved my bacon. We all know that those things happen, but we also have to take time and acknowledge that all of our success did not come from the Senior guys. The Troopers, no matter what they were doing, were the real reason for any and all successes we enjoyed, Good times and bad, as long as we never lost faith in our Soldiers, we made things happen, and did not stand idly by and "Let" things happen. God bless our troops!

Jim RLTW

WHAT ARE SENIOR NCOs MADE OF?

Part V

From Jim Regan

There have been several questions/issues that have surfaced in the past several years. What I will offer, is what I knew about those things. In no way are these in any particular priority. As I said, as I knew it, here it is.

The 1st Squadron 9th Cavalry, our direct support unit, was working hard to build/establish a Mess Hall at Phuoc Vinh in '69. It took some time. In the in-between time, our guys ate "C" Rations/LRRP Rats or goodies from home. There weren't many places to get chow, maybe some "Pogey Bait" from the PX. Well... the mess hall is completed and we all looked forward to it. I believe I had breakfast there about twice. My schedule did not match the mess hall hours.

We tried to insure that the guys had a chance to use the facility. Now you have to understand, there were a couple of different kinds of "chow cards." Soldiers without separate rations, or rations non-available, (single soldiers, showed their chow card and ate!) Separate Rations paid for their chow at the Headcount. We had no "Rations not available" since the mess hall was here.

All seemed to be in order. Me and the 1st Shirt went over and had a .25cent breakfast. It wasn't till a little while later that I heard grumblings. Seems as if our guys could not get to the mess hall at the appointed hours. They were run off because they still had Camy stuff on their face and carried their weapons.

Cpt "P" asked me to please talk w/ the Squadron SGM. Now for the interesting part. The SGM already "liked" the Rangers. I sat down with; the SGM, Mess Sgt. What's your beef, I asked the Mess hall guy. Well, he says, your guys come into my mess hall all dirty and stinky, carrying weapons, and I ain't going to feed them! The SGM just sits there. I quietly told the Mess Sgt, some of the Rangers just came out of the bush after several days of looking for the enemy and sometimes finding him and killing him! Our schedule for the war can not align with your mess schedule, sorry 'bout that! The SGM looked at me and asked if we could work something out. Sure, I said, I'll have them wash their face and hands, maybe even spray on some right guard! They will still carry their weapons, and by the way you need a "Clearing Barrel" outside the entrance. If possible, when a Team comes in outside the schedule, could they get a baloney sandwich or something? The SGM said that the Mess Sgt would make sure the Rangers were taken care of. Thanks SGM, thanks Sgt says I. Don't recall any grief about the Mess Hall during the rest of my tour. I'm certain that I had made another real friend in the Mess Sgt!

The next area is about the M-79 Grenade Launchers, "Chunkers" that we had. Also the distribution of the weapons among the Teams. When I arrived and finally escaped from the Orderly Room, going to the First Platoon, I checked to see what the weaponry was throughout the Platoon. I found that there was a raggedy Chunker available for me. Immediately scarffed it up. Set up my web gear to mirror the LRRPS/Rangers. Twenty mags, 10 frags, two smoke, a WP, pen gun and flares, 2 trip flares, signaling mirror, water and had a LRRP Ration in my pocket. Always carried a claymore bag full of magazines, and another of HE Chunker rounds. Was bound and determined that I would not get caught "naked" out there!

You now have to read the TALE about me and OTTO on our requisitioning run to Bien Hoa. Policed up twelve brand new Chunkers, two cases of "Tiger" fatigues. All Teams now had completely serviceable Chunkers. Modified the new launchers w/ the cut off wooden stocks, removed the front and rear sights. Put all the sights and stocks on all of the unserviceable weapons. Happy Days! The standard, while I was there, was that the Rear Scout carried the Chunker. Sometimes the TL would rotate the weapon. His choice, always!

This last part may seem controversial. Some of our folks, who started out up North, did things differently, sometimes, than we did in III Corps, and things went through another series of changes as the war went on, Lessons Learned et al. I can only speak about '69, out of Phuoc Vinh.

Some of the discussions were about; who's giving the orders, when are we allowed to initiate contact, how come I have to ask permission? For a lot of people, it may not seem so cut and dried. I'm here to tell you, the Commander and the SNCOs were deeply concerned with Accomplish the Mission, and welfare of the Troops. Not necessarily in that order. John Barnes taught me much as I flew w/ Teams from the First Platoon, and Second Platoon. Things like; keep track of the supporting aircraft, arty, Medivac, extraction birds! Make sure that you don't clutter up the airways with non-essential chatter. I had many opportunities to watch, listen and even participate in "TEAMS in CONTACT!" while "Strap hanging" in the TOC.

I'm sure there are lots of arguments about when to blow your claymores, or beat feet out to the PZs. There were many other things that had to be considered. What support is available, what's the reaction time? This is where the Ops NCO did all his "Magic!" The CO may be standing by, however, the Ops NCO was the guy juggling and balancing the ball in the air. Talk about confidence in your NCOs. That was the epitome! Sometimes the Team reported the contact as if they were ordering a "Happy Meal" at the drive thru window! Other times it got really exciting for all concerned!

There was, as I observed, none of that "Squad Leader in the Sky" syndrome in our unit. The Teams knew their business! Let us know what you need! Keep us posted! We'll let you know all that's on the way for you, Guns, Extraction Bird, Medivac, Arty, and TAC Air!

I reckon that the bottom line is: Nobody was sleeping at the switch, the entire Company was ready and eager to support our Brothers in the bush, (Saw that with a QRF/Bitticks.) The amount of professionalism displayed at every level was to be envied by other Ranger Units. Remember, we all did this "OF OUR OWN ACCORD!" Jim RLTW