

The following story was extracted from the C/1/9 webpage. It was written from the bird's eye view. I know that some of you will remember the event.

WET AND WILD
A STORY OF LRRPS ON THE LAM
By
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Slashing Talon 6 and his First Sergeant had grabbed their gear and were running toward the TOC at Phouc Vinh when the call came for WO Bard Davenport and I to "saddle up" and make our way to get briefed. I sent Bard ahead to get the ship running, along with our Crew Chief John Waller and Door Gunner Allan Harper while I ran to the TOC.

I entered the TOC, step for step with WO Hebert Valencia (Cavalier 26) leader of the two bird Cobra Fire Team. There we joined the LRP Commander already engaged in a hasting brief with our Operations Officer. The mission was simple: Slash Talon 32, a six man LRP Team, had encountered an enemy point man and in the effort to capture the guy the NVA had taken a round or two. The LRP's were moving south toward the river and were in a running gun battle with the pursuing enemy. Our task was to find an LZ, evacuate the wounded NVA, and extract the LRP patrol.

We were quickly airborne to the west and began a climbing left turn southbound headed for a river terrain feature known as the "testicles" for the river's eerie resemblance to a well developed male scrotum. The Cobras had raced ahead to support the LRP Team and to sort out the tactical situation. Less than 20 minutes later we were on station and square in the middle of a monumental FUBAR.

The LRP "snatch" ambush had gone badly wrong. The guy they bagged was walking point for a much larger NVA force strung out along the trail. The LRP Team had carried their wounded prisoner as fast as they could down the trail while fighting a rear guard action to keep the gathering NVA at bay.

The LRP Team found themselves pinned against the rapidly flowing river at their backs with no LZ and the bad guys deploying in an attempt to flank them. They quickly realized that there was no way they could get the prisoner down the river bank, into the current, and on to the helicopter while laying down covering fire. Slashing Talon 6 made a snap call and asked us to go down and get as close to the river bank as we could.

Not exactly sure of what was going to happen next, Bard brought us to a low hover over the river keeping enough distance from the bank that we didn't get our main rotor tangled in the overhanging vegetation. Both Cobras were laying down some rockets less than 100 meters north of the LRP perimeter.

The LRP CO had un-strapped and, along with his 1st shirt and Waller, had jumped into the current to reinforce and assist with the extraction. Waller hadn't exactly asked me for my permission, he just left. They took a short swim and joined the LRP Team's perimeter and quickly got on the radio to coordinate the extraction.

The plan was to come back in when the LRP CO, 1st shirt, and crew chief, along with one of the LRP's had moved the wounded NVA into the water suspended on a poncho. They would then swim out to the helicopter, put him on board and climb up themselves. The remaining LRP's would fold in their perimeter and we'd "get the hell out of Dodge" while the Cobras suppressed. Great plan?

We came back in and took up a low hover as the swimmers struggled in the river's swift current with the wounded NVA. When the got to the helicopter, they quickly realized that they couldn't lift the wounded guy in the poncho since the water was over their heads. Bard held us as steady as a rock while Waller went out on the right skid, hanging from the M-60 pylon knee deep in river water, as Bard carefully lowered the pitch while we took "Mr. 'H' model" for a swim. Waller was up on the intercom calling out tail rotor clearance above the river until the water level was inside the cargo compartment.

The swimmers, with some help from Waller, were able to float the NVA inside still on the poncho and we could pick up the hove a bit as we waited for the rest of the LRP Team to board. The remaining five team members came on board while Bard eased us out of the river. The Cobra Fire Team rained high explosives and nails along our right side as Bard struggled to get us flying.

Cavalier 26 cheerfully called to let us know 'we were sporting a rooster tail' of dripping water that lasted for at least five minutes after we cleared the riverbed headed for Long Binh and the pad at Charlie Med.

Our wounded NVA looked terrible as we flew toward Long Binh and medical care. I called ahead to ensure that they were ready for our arrival and knew the condition of our patient. The medics off loaded our NVA and the LRP's decided to disembark as well and decompress a bit while we went to refuel for our short flight back to Phouc Vinh.

On returning to the pad, we were saddened to learn and concerned that the NVA had yet to be treated. Our entire LRP crew was gathered in one corner of the landing area quietly talking to one another and our wounded guy was still in the casualty holding area. Bard stepped out to figure out how long we'd be and to go see if he could rouse some attention for the critically wounded NVA.

What none of us realized was that a medical assessment team had earlier triaged the badly wounded NVA and determined he wasn't going to make it. While we stood watching, our NVA gasped once and died provoking an emotional and tense response from Bard and Harper directed toward the medical folks who just couldn't grasp or begin to understand the depth of our emotional connection to the dead enemy soldier.

We got ourselves loaded up and made the short flight back to Phouc Vinh in silence secure that we had done our best and gratified that we'd pulled it off and were still all in one piece. Slashing Talon 32 was coming home.

EPILOGUE

On 27 March 1969 (after this author had DEROSED) aircraft UH-1H 66-16714 was lost to hostile fire at XT 636587 in Binh Long Province. Killed that day were WO 1 Bard Davenport, SP4 Allan Harper, SP 5 John Waller and another Warrant Officer.