

Extraordinary Things

From David Shows

When I first got back to the unit a couple of years ago, I found myself jabbering to guys about things that I had thought had been forgotten decades ago. They had not been forgotten of course they had just been pushed far from the surface.

One of the thoughts that I expressed was that now I am amazed that I was ever able to participate in some of the "extraordinary" things we did when we were kids in 1967 – 1968. Since that time I've heard almost this exact same sentiment from a number of other guys.

What happened I guess is that for many years there was no one to talk to about some of these things. Not that I didn't have an active support circle, its just that those folks did not have a frame of reference that would allow them to understand, or enable me to explain things that had become a part of me. It would be like speaking English to some one who only knew Chinese.

Thinking about those times now I've come to understand that what astounds me and I think others most is not the "extraordinary" things we did, rather it is the everyday "ordinary" things that we were able to accept as routine and natural parts of our lives.

Many if not most of us at that time didn't have any substantial specialized "training", most of us were not RANGERS, we were fairly average young soldiers (teenagers with automatic weapons and explosives), but much of what LRRPS became we brought with us to the unit, we learned from each other and on the job, and LRRPS was truly greater than the sum of its parts.

The "ordinary" things that we were able to simply accept as normal parts of our life, that is what is truly "extraordinary". These are the things that you cannot explain to others, perhaps not even to yourself all these years later.

Going out long distances in a hostile land where any one who saw you would be totally committed to killing you, a thousand and one natural hazards awaited you, and where you pretty well knew your ability to communicate with any support unit would at best be somewhat unpredictable. Knowing that the "support" units whose radio frequencies and call signs you had memorized were probably more theoretical than real. If things really went south, you knew that "help" would be too far distant to do you any good. Your only real help was yourself, three other American boys, and two young Montagnard. That was the big "ordinary" thing, and for us it seemed very natural and right at the time.

That is not to say of course that support units did not save our bacon any number of times, or that they did not do extraordinary things themselves in order to do so, just that the odds of their being able to do what they did repeatedly for us, were realistically very slim.

We were not braver than other soldiers, nor were we dumber, this was just the way it was and we accepted it as "ordinary".

I think of the tremendous loads of ammunition we carried, for what? In any sort of battle it's extremely unlikely that we would have lived long enough to run out of ammo

Jumping from unreasonable heights with impossible loads onto unknown grounds. Leaving the landing area into dense cover where there would be no place for the theoretical help located miles away to even land within hundreds of meters of you.

Laboriously and silently picking your way through what you would consider impenetrable bush if you were rabbit or quail hunting, sometimes taking hours to move a few meters.

Just living outside in the heat, humidity, and rain day and night for a week or more with only your shirt and flop hat for shelter.

Simply lying down on the wet ground to sleep, with all the bugs, mosquitoes, and leaches not to mention the occasional truly dangerous wild animal, knowing that if you were discovered it would almost certainly be by an overwhelmingly superior force, and actually sleeping.

Regularly living on one dehydrated meal a day, going out for a week or more with enough water for three days.

Gratefully drinking water with little green things swimming in it, mixing instant coffee, and chocolate in it so that you didn't have to see the little green things.

Six guys huddled closely together in the pouring rain sharing one non filtered cigarette.

Those and a thousand other ordinary things.