

SGT, JOHN BARNES AND THE EXTRACTION OF RECON TEAM 32

from Chuck Windham

I was a young E-6, fresh out of NCOC School when I was recruited at the 1st Cav's induction center to be a LRRP by the acting first sergeant of Echo Company, 52nd Infantry. He assured me that I did not want to go to a Grunt Company as a squad leader, besides he said we could have a cold beer on stand down from missions. It sounded intriguing, and the 30 day rotations of the grunt units wasn't very appealing, So Sgt. **Ramos** and I signed on. Ramos and I had attended NCOC School together!

It was off to Camp Evans for our three week orientation as LRRP's and a couple of missions on other teams, then off on missions as a Team Leader. The unit was desperate for NCO's for Team Leaders during this time, and was receiving a lot of Shake-N-Bakes from the NCOC School at Fort Benning, which were turning out E-5's and E-6's with Infantry MOS. I was given command of Team 32 and assigned missions in early August 1968.

For those that were assigned to Camp Evans, many will recall that missions west toward or in the A Shau valley region would all most always provide enemy activity with the NVA moving men and equipment into South Vietnam from Laos. This was one of the major entry points from the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In early October, 1968, Team 32 was assigned a mission just east of the Valley along one of the trails. Our mission was to determine how many troops and what type of equipment was being moved on the trail.

When one of our teams was inserted or extracted, an operations person either an NCO or a Platoon Leader would oversee the operation to insure that all went as well as could be expected. Sgt. John **Barnes** was our Operations NCO, and would ride a lot insertions or extractions from Evans. John Barnes was one of those individuals who you wanted on your side in a bar fight. To say he was one tough hombre is an understatement! On this particular mission, Team 32 got into contact while conducting trail observation, and Sgt. Barnes called for extraction.

I moved the team to the extraction LZ, Sgt. Barnes was on the Slick that was to perform the extraction. The NVA was trying to flank the team on the ground, and a team of ARA shot up their position, so the Bird could pull the team. I learned later that this was a rookie pilot flying his first hot LZ. The bird came in hard and fast and landed on the far side of the LZ, and I ordered the team to rush the bird and board. I, as the team leader always ensured that all was aboard before I got on the bird. I looked around and saw my assistant team leader, Sgt Ramos was having trouble coming to the bird, so I placed my 16 in well and ran back to Ramos to assist him in boarding the helicopter. I grabbed Ramos and threw him in the well of the bird as it was lifting off. I was left standing on the LZ with no rifle and my old .45. in hand, watching the skids of the Slick getting smaller and smaller as it rose up and disappeared over the trees!

Looking for cover, I noticed one of the Blue Max Cobras fly in low over the trees and flared up as to land. The Cobra immediately pulled up, and backed off as the Slick returned and dropped down to retrieve one relieved Team Leader! On board, I saw Sgt. Barnes grinning with his thumb raised up, giving me the OK sign!

After the mission debriefing, I was asked a couple of questions: (1). Why was the Blue Max Cobra was attempting to land? Then found out he was going to put me on his skids to ride out. That is how they would rescue their comrades if they were shot down! (2). Why did the slick return after clearing the LZ? I received word that Sgt. Barnes with his service .38 against the head of the pilot, and assured him that if he didn't return for me, then his co-pilot would get the chance! For that exact reason, I was glad Sgt. Barnes was on my side. Sgt. Barnes retired as a Command Sergeant Major.

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TL Slashing Talon 32 (Oct, 1968)