

ALMOST CAUGHT

From Mark Keller

It was, I believe, late June or early July of 1971 and I was with TL SGT **Wanish**'s team. ATL was SGT **Tarver**, Me, SGT **Greer** and one other Ranger along with our KC made up the team.

We had been alerted for a mission, but no pre-insertion VR was performed, so we were going in cold with no LZ's or extraction points determined. I remember some small gripes about that. The mission was based on intel (probably 1/9th Aero-Scout reports) of a lot of trail usage in an area along a small river.

That meant we were going to insert on the edge of the river bank and keep our fingers crossed. We all kind of shrugged with the attitude of "OK...here we go".

We inserted on that river's edge, the jungle growth coming almost right down to the water. As usual, the insertion was done in mere seconds and we had crept up from the river only about ten feet when we heard a single rifle shot that seemed almost in front of us another ten feet.

We froze and did some intense listening. We reckoned it was an NVA signaling "it's all safe up to here, buddies". So creeping forward we discovered a trail parallel to the river making a junction coming into it from straight ahead. That was where the NVA had fired his shot.

SGT **Wanish** decided to immediately, and quickly I can tell you, go left on up the trail and set up a hasty ambush. We knew we had little time, but NVA were sure to be coming and we'd nail'em.

We moved maybe forty meters up-trail, emplaced several claymores and hunkered down in record time. The cover and concealment were not the best, just adequate about 4-5 meters back from trail's edge.

After only a very few moments, SGT **Wanish** wanted me and SGT **Greer** too get on the trail ASAP to make damn sure the claymores were properly concealed. I went straight forward and **Greer** went to my left to check the end part of the daisy-chain.

The concealment there at the trail's edge was really scanty and thin, raising up just a tad higher than a squatting man. So, crouching down I was just reaching out to deal with some det cord that could use a little help hiding when I heard feet come pounding down the trail towards us.

It happened so quickly that I did not even have time to lift my CAR-15 up from the ground although my hand was on it. I could only freeze, hunch down lower and peer from under my bush hat, knowing I better be quick on the trigger if spotted.

As four NVA ran by me, I could have touched them as they were even closer than arms-length away from me. But they were running totally focused: eyes straight ahead, AKs at semi-port arms and running for all they were worth (an image I'll never forget). I have no idea what their urgency was about, but they never even glanced at anything except their absolute immediate front. I was amazed (and thankful) because had they looked, there was no way they'd have not have seen me. Had to have been a guardian angel.

After they passed I eased back to the team, SGT **Greer** coming up right behind and his eyes were probably as big as mine were. I whispered to, I think, SGT **Tarver**, the claymores were just fine and then asked SGT **Greer** how it went with him. He said he laid down full length in the available cover and so was not seen. We both shared a pretty big grin over our escape from the situation.

Probably no more than 4-5 minutes at the most passed and again we could hear running feet coming down the trail.

It proved to be four more NVA. They did not pass. SGT **Wanish** blew the claymores.

As SOP, we stripped the bodies, got a Pink Team on station and the LOH guided us to a PZ.

Soon enough we were back at Bearcat.

Talk about a quick mission!