

MY SHOT TO CALL

SPC Terry Park

In December 1971 and thanks to John **Floyd's** notes I was on a team with Richard **Zilka** "Zeek" TL, Thomas **Smith** "Smitty" ATL, Richard **Oliver** "Ollie" RTO, and John **Floyd** RS.

The mission was in an old logging area and S-2 assured us there were no civilian logging but to check for VC activity. After our insertion, when our ears became accustomed to the surroundings, we heard the faint far away sound of chain saws so Zeek headed the team toward the sound. My job was to protect John Floyd the rear scout who from time to time had to stop and cover the team tracks. This at times left us isolated from the team but it was a necessary job.

After a couple of hours, we intersected a dirt road with fresh tire prints and we cross the road. John, who carved down his boot treads, effectively covered our tracks.

We continued toward the chain saw sounds but now paralleling the road. The underbrush is thin so we are almost spotted a couple of times by civilian wood cutters. Zeek sets us up about sixty feet from the road, set out claymores, and over the next couple of days count the log trucks as they roll by but no sign of VC but around 80 civilian loggers. On our fourth day, which is December the 8th, we experience a little bit of excitement.

Zeek is closest to the road at 12 O'clock and I am at 6 O'clock. The underbrush is sparse and I can see for about 70 feet which means I cannot completely rely on the sound of brush breaking to announce someone approaching. Late in the morning I happen to glance to my right which is the direction of the chain saws and see only the top of a man's head silently approaching our position. If he continues in a straight line, he will be about fifteen feet behind me.

I alert the team and Zeek says since I am in the best position the team will wait for my command to fire. As he gets closer his shoulders, chest and then waist come into view. He is cradling something in his right hand and it extends to his right shoulder.

I am nearsighted and I silently curse myself for my vanity with not wearing the military issued glasses. If I wait to positively identify the object then it may be too late. So, I ask myself what action would cause me to command "Fire"? I decide if he moves the object down and to the front toward his left hand I would do so. This too may be also too late but I only had a second or two to figure this out.

About three seconds later he looks to his left, sees us, stops, he throws his back with a look of terror on his face, and a loud sound of anguish issues from within. He begins to raise the object off his shoulder, it continues higher and higher and now I clearly see it is a machete attached to a wood handle, used for logging.

He is about twenty feet from us. John and Smitty search him finding nothing. John recalls the man was so grateful to be alive he even helped him roll up his claymore wire and he shakes all our hands before we departed to the extraction point.

To this day I do not know if I could reconcile with myself if I had ordered the killing of a civilian. I do remember vividly how short a period I had to make my decision and still become chagrined today when I hear anyone so casually offer their opinion when a law enforcement person is involved in a fatal shooting.