

SERGEANT DONALD SIDNEY SKIDGEL

I wrote this remembrance for Sergeant Donald Sidney Skidgel that was posted on the Vietnam Veteran Memorial Fund website in 1996. In this 2011 remembrance detail and elaboration has been added that was not included then.

20 years and 11 months old Sergeant Skidgel was a senior Cavalry Reconnaissance Squad Leader in the Third Platoon, Troop D, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division the day he was killed in action on Road 311 south of Phuoc Long and Song Be in Phuoc Long-Binh Phuoc Province, Republic of South Vietnam at about 1:00 pm on Sunday, September 14, 1969.

For his heroism and intrepid bravery above and beyond the call of duty on that day Sergeant Skidgel was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

His other posthumous awards included a Bronze Star Medal and Purple Heart.

My name is Andrew J. Hudson. I was the Troop Commander and had served with Sergeant Skidgel, some called him Donnie, several months before his death. This updated reflection and recollection is offered from my memory to remember him, to tell about his unit, his dangerous work, and about some of the things he was involved in the last two days of his life.

Please see the separate posting of a small part of the 1969 map sheet, with footnotes, that was used then to show the battle area on Road 311 where Sergeant Skidgel was on September 14.

Troop D, or Delta Troop as it was sometimes called, was the only ground cavalry troop in the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, an air cavalry squadron. The Troop was organized with three ground cavalry platoons and instead of horses the troopers were mounted in trucks and jeeps. The three cavalry platoons were informally identified by the colors of our nation's flag: 1st platoon was known as "Red", 2d platoon "White", and 3d platoon "Blue". Each platoon had a Scout Section with two Scout Squads, an Infantry Squad, a Mortar Squad, and an Anti-Tank Section.

The senior leadership of each platoon consisted of a Platoon Leader and Platoon Sergeant who were the platoons' command group. Each of these leaders had a jeep with driver/radio-telephone-operator (RTO), and usually a combat medic rode with the platoon sergeants. Lieutenant Marion (Buck) Ross, who hailed from Mississippi, was Sergeant Skidgel's Platoon Leader.

In each platoon was a 12 man Scout Section led by a Staff Sergeant. There were two Cavalry Reconnaissance Squads (also called Scout Squads) in the Scout Section. A Scout Squad had two M151 jeeps and each jeep had a pedestal mounted M60 machine gun and a three-man crew: a Sergeant who was Squad Leader, a Machine Gunner/Observer, and a Driver/RTO. Sergeant Skidgel was the senior Squad Leader in the second Scout Squad of the Third Platoon.

In each platoon was a 10 man Infantry Squad led by a Staff Sergeant. In each Infantry Squad there were two M60 machine-guns, two M79 Grenadiers, and five Riflemen all mounted in a three-quarter ton truck.

In each platoon was a four man Mortar Squad led by a Staff Sergeant. This indirect-fire crew was mounted in a three-quarter ton truck with an 81mm mortar and various types of mortar ammunition including High Explosive, White Phosphorous, and Smoke rounds.

In each platoon was an eight man Anti-Tank Section that consisted of two 106mm recoilless rifles each mounted in a jeep. A Staff Sergeant, who was the Section Leader, manned one gun with a three man crew. A Sergeant, who was the Assistant Section Leader, manned the second gun with a three man crew.

The Delta Troop command group was my driver, Private First Class Ferguson, and me. An artillery forward observer (FO), Captain Tom Mahoney, a Sergeant who was the assistant FO, and their driver, all mounted in one jeep, were attached to Delta Troop.

The authorized, forward operating, front-line combat strength of Troop D was 125, including medics. However, like all combat units in Vietnam, and like all armed forces combat units in all wars the United States has participated in, Delta Troop was never at full strength. Every day the Troop always performed combat operations short-handed.

In 1969 there was no internet, no web-cam, no email, no smart phone, no cell phone, no cell phone camera or video, no texting, no I-pods, no I-pads. There was no technology then that we see our soldiers, who are fighting other wars, using today. In addition to all those devices and tools we also now have internet satellite mapping applications like Google Earth. So, by using Google Earth we are able to identify and help provide a feel of where Sergeant Skidgel and Troop D were on the ground then.

Beginning in late June through October 1969 Troop D from Fire Support Base (FSB) Buttons conducted both dismounted operations in the jungle and rubber plantations, and mounted cavalry reconnaissance, scouting, screening, patrolling, and security missions along the vast and intricate network of trails, roads, highways, and other lines of communication throughout what is now Phuoc Long-Binh Phuoc Province. At night Troop D occupied defensive positions for a sector of the large, expansive perimeter on Buttons. Occasionally, Delta Troop would conduct a night ambush outside of Buttons.

FSB Buttons was located a couple of kilometers west and north of Nui Ba Ra mountain and about 6 kilometers west of Phuoc Long and Song Be. Buttons was the headquarters base of the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry, of Troop D, and of a howitzer battery consisting of six towed 105mm cannons. This artillery battery provided fire support for the 5th Battalion Infantry companies, the Scout Platoons, and for Delta Troop. The 5th Battalion's crest was titled Garry Owen, for the Irish tune George Armstrong Custer chose as the 7th Cavalry Regimental song in 1867. In 1969 the 5th Battalion, 7th Cavalry commander was Lieutenant Colonel Thomas F. Healy.

Nui Ba Ra is a small mountain rising up from relatively flat ground to a height of about 760 meters (about 2,300 feet) at its tallest peak. Obviously a volcano millions of years ago, it stands alongside an east-west secondary road now numbered 741. Road 741 forms an intersection with Road 311 in Phuoc Binh about three kilometers west of the mountain. However, today, Google Earth images, dated 2011, shows Road 311 now to be north-south Road 749. Road 741 runs east of Nui Ba Ra to the cities of Phuoc Long and Song Be, and to the Song Be River. At the north-west base of the mountain is an airstrip that was then capable of landing aircraft as large as the C-123 and the C-130 Hercules, the workhorses of the United States Air Force. Buttons was on the north side of Road 741. On Google today a large community of houses, shops, businesses, and warehouses occupy some of the flat ground where Buttons was in 1969.

When the artillery battery on Buttons needed to provide fire support for 5th Battalion units working to the south the mountain interfered with the angle of fire so several cannons would have to be moved to the south side of Nui Ba Ra. This is where First Lieutenant Michael Herman Thomas, Scout Platoon Leader, Company E, 5th Battalion and Private First Class John Anthony Halladay, Radio-Telephone Operator and Assistant to Lieutenant Thomas, and the Company E Scout Platoon were on Saturday, September 13, 1969. Three of the 105mm howitzers assigned to FSB Buttons had been positioned on the southwest side of the mountain to provide fire support for infantry companies working along the Song Be River, and in the jungles and rubber plantations south and southeast of Buttons. The Scout Platoon had been assigned the mission to provide security for these three guns and their crews at this temporary base which was on flat, open terrain with no protection, except for the foxholes dug by the Platoon.

Also on this Saturday, September 13, 1969, the Troop had proceeded from Buttons with two platoons, White and Blue, on its mission to establish strong points along secondary Road 311 from its junction with the principal Highway QL14 which was about 100 miles northeast of Saigon. The first platoon, Red, was on detached duty providing security for Troop B located at a Fire Support Base near An L c, west of Buttons. Several provincial policemen were with the Troop on this day. The policemen's mission was to intercept movement along Road 311 and to check papers and conduct inspections of bicycles, motorcycles, wagons, cars, trucks, buses, and pedestrians. The police were not there to find enemy soldiers, we were; and, our mission also was to support the police as they searched for bandits, questioned strangers and looked for contraband.

This area in Phuoc Long-Binh Phuoc Province west and south of Phuoc Long and Song Be was a major infiltration route, a virtual highway no less, for North Vietnamese Army forces moving down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and entering South Vietnam from Cambodia through a vast area along the international border known as The Parrot's Beak which was several kilometers west of Buttons. Some estimates placed the number of enemy soldiers pouring into South Vietnam along this route into the 1st Cavalry Division's Area of Operations (AO) at a thousand every few days. Paradoxically, now we know, President Richard Nixon had ordered the withdrawal of thousands of American troops every few days during this time and ordered US forces to avoid major engagements.

About three weeks earlier all six of Troop D's 106mm recoilless rifles and their crews, the entire Troop Anti-Tank Sections, had been airlifted to the top of Nui Ba Ra. Platoon size units from the 5th Battalion infantry companies drew the rotational duty to provide defensive security and protection against enemy attacks and sapper assaults on the major communications complex established on top of the mountain. This complex housed radio towers and antennae to provide extended distances for military radio transmissions for all combat and combat support units working in the 1st Cavalry Division AO, and it housed highly secretive and sophisticated surveillance and detection equipment that monitored the continuous infiltration and movements of North Vietnamese Army forces into South Vietnam from Cambodia. Security for this complex provided protection for the detachment of communications soldiers as well as for the massive amount of electronic equipment. That's why the 106s were there.

In 1969, from its southern junction with QL 14, Road 311, a very good asphalt road able to handle two-way traffic, wound its way northwest over rolling terrain, through open plain, jungle and rubber plantations and connected with Highway LTL1A (which today on Google is Road 748). LTL1A (Road 748) connects with Road 13 and Road 13 runs southward to the outskirts of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and north to Cambodia.

Today, however, using Map Sheet 6432 IV, Titled DONG SRE VIET, Vietnam, Scale 1:50,000, dated 1969, and superimposing images on Google Earth, we see that Road 311 from its junction with QL14 exists but is no longer numbered. Where the path of Road 311 was in 1969 is now under water, apparently from flooding because of dam removal or dam building on the Song Be River and its tributaries. Instead, on Google Earth we see Road 749 from QL14 has been built to the west around the water and connects with an old part of Road 311 (749).

From QL14 US Army engineers, using Rohm plows, had cleared the large jungle growth from both sides of Road 311 and created tree lines. Within some of the clearing lay remnants of downed trees; and the grass and undergrowth had already sprouted.

On this quiet Saturday, with the provincial policemen, Sergeant Skidgel and his Scout Squad as well as other elements of Troop D were in strong point positions stretched along Road 311. The policemen and the Third Platoon Infantry Squad manned a reinforced inspection point on top of the hill just slightly north of the significant curve on Road 311 (see map, the curve is between lines 25 and 26 and just north of BM250 on the map). Each strong point position was located to enable 360 degrees of observation and supporting fire. From my position north of the junction of Road 311 and QL14, with a third platoon scout vehicle, we could see Sergeant Skidgel's position farther to the north. From his position he could see us and the next position to his north, and the next position could see supporting positions in both directions, and so on. Distances between positions varied depending on the terrain, the lay of the land.

It was late afternoon. The day had been uneventful and it was time to wrap it up and head for Buttons. The section of Road 311 where we were was not travelled that day by anyone or any vehicle. Quickly we learned why. It was uncanny. But, then, and now, on reflection, it was quite simple. Usually we would see a farmer, a traveler, someone on a bicycle, a motorcycle, children, water buffalo, a truck, some living, moving soul when we were out on our missions. Of course, when either the Viet Cong, or soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army, were, or had been, in the area we saw no one. There were times when Troop D had established night ambushes and nothing had happened. In the early morning hours, however, even at sun-up, children would appear, safely away, but visible, with baskets of bottled soft drinks. Soldiers always were issued cases of soda in cans through regular military supply channels. But the children, ages from around four through ten or twelve, always had soft drinks in bottles. And usually the bottles were cold even in the early morning.

I gave the order over the radio to the platoon leaders to pack up and mount up and begin moving north along Road 311. The Scout vehicle with me followed as we moved north toward Sergeant Skidgel's position. We saw his jeep moving slowly along the road before disappearing down over a small knoll.

Suddenly, we heard heavy firing erupt from AK47s and machine guns ahead of us. I shouted Go! and Ferguson gunned the jeep. When we topped the knoll where Sergeant Skidgel had been we saw his jeep a few meters down the road stopped on the right edge. We pulled up near his jeep and hastily dismounted. I ran forward. Sergeant Skidgel was kneeling behind the right front wheel of his jeep and was firing his rifle across the front of the vehicle. His machine gunner and jeep driver also had dismounted and were firing into the tree line across the road. The enemy fire was from the west tree line approximately where BM 250 is shown on the map.

It is still in my memory of kneeling beside him and seeing him smile and nod, a look of excitement on his young face. Sergeant Skidgel, who was expecting a birthday in one month, when he would be 21 years old, would be killed in action the next day, a couple of hundred meters north on this road where he was now kneeling. He reported the contact and estimated the enemy force to be about eight to twelve soldiers. No one in his scout squad was hurt.

From the north two other scout jeeps arrived and for the next few seconds we all poured heavy rifle and M60 machine gun fire into the suspected enemy positions. We stopped firing and cautiously moved forward to search for the enemy soldiers. We found foxholes, weapons positions, equipment, equipment harnesses, backpacks, communications wire, and evidence of wounded or killed enemy soldiers but no bodies. It was determined that they had spent some time in the location because of the marked improvements that had been made and the firing positions that were established.

Now the sun was setting. By the time our search for enemy soldiers and of the enemy positions was completed a pair of fighter-bombers arrived, called for by Captain Mahoney, the FO. He directed the fighter-bombers to attack west and south of the tree line where they dropped their bombs. On this day these United States Air Force fighter-bombers carried no napalm.

Our day ended and we resumed the march toward Buttons. The policemen with us were exhilarated by the brief combat show and also were happy for their mission to be ended. We said goodbye as we dropped them off at their headquarters near Song Be.

Upon arrival at Buttons a complete battle report was submitted. Later during a command briefing and meeting with Colonel Healy and his operations staff a reconnaissance and scouting mission was decided and planned. It was decided the Company E Scout Platoon would slip into the area to determine what size force was there and fix the enemy's locations. Once that was done an infantry company would be air lifted by Huey helicopters to the site to engage and destroy the enemy.

It would be Delta Troop's mission to pick up Lieutenant Thomas and Private First Class Halladay and the Scout Platoon the next morning, Sunday, September 14, at the mini-camp of the three artillery guns, on the south side of Nui Ba Ra, and transport them to the site where the fight had been that day. The plan was that Scout Platoon members would ride on Troop D's scout jeeps and surreptitiously slip off as we moved south along the road. From the slow moving jeeps they would step into the sprouting jungle grass alongside the road and quickly fade from view. Then they would consolidate under concealment of the jungle and begin infiltrating into the area to conduct a thorough reconnaissance to pick up the trail. Troop D would reestablish strong points along 311 to be available to respond quickly and provide support or relief if the Scout Platoon got into trouble before being able to enter and fade into the jungle.

Troop D arrived at the temporary howitzer position on the south side of Nui Ba Ra about 10:00am on Sunday morning, September 14. The artillery gun crews had not completed packing but Lieutenant Thomas, with Private First Class Halladay standing next to him, reported the Scout Platoon was ready to move. Colonel Healy and his operations staff had decided the towed cannons would not need a security escort on their return to Buttons. Sergeant Skidgel and his Scout Squad, along with the other elements of Troop D, took up perimeter defensive positions around the temporary camp while the command groups gathered around my jeep.

With my map sheet spread out on the hood of the jeep we discussed our mission and our plans. At the same time I took stock of the size of our combat force that was present for duty: there were 22 troopers in the Second Platoon (of an authorized combat strength of 40), 24 troopers in the Third Platoon (of an authorized combat strength of 40), and 15 members in the Scout Platoon (which probably had an authorized combat strength of 40). So, counting the FO, Captain Mahoney, and his two-man team and Ferguson and me our combined combat strength on this day totaled just 66.

In every war the fighting strength of American combat units always has been reduced. Troop D's combat power was reduced because of the loss of the First Platoon that was providing security for Troop B near An Lôc; the loss of all six 106mm recoilless rifles and crews that were on top of Nui Ba Ra; because of work details and perimeter security responsibilities on Buttons; and, illnesses, injuries, emergency leaves, and scheduled Rest and Relaxation (R & R) absences. These shortages were bad enough but Monday, September 15, was to be payday and Delta Troop's Second Platoon Leader had been dispatched to the 1st Cavalry Division base camp at Phuoc Vinh, as Troop pay officer, to pick up the Troop payroll. Then payday was every two weeks and the designation as Troop Pay Officer on a rotational basis gave the Platoon Leaders a deserved 24 hour break.

Because of a normal rotational practice it was the Second Platoon's time to lead the mission. Because the Second Platoon Leader had departed that morning on a helicopter to the 1st Cavalry Division base camp at Phuoc Vinh to pick up Delta Troop's pay, the Second Platoon was being led by the Platoon Sergeant who was a seasoned combat veteran. We decided Lieutenant Thomas and his RTO and assistant, Private First Class Halladay, would ride in the Second Platoon Sergeant's jeep to facilitate radio communications and command and control.

The Scout Platoon members would be mounted on several of the Troop's Second Platoon lead vehicles. At the agreed upon point, which was at the significant curve near where we had been in the brief fight the day before (between the numbers 25 and 26 on the map), and upon the agreed signal the 15 Scout Platoon members would individually slip off the slow moving vehicles and fade into the sprouting jungle grass alongside the road. The Troop's vehicles would slow, but would not stop, and continue for a short distance pretending nothing was out of the ordinary. Then the Troop would take up strong point positions similar to the day before and be prepared as a reactionary force for the Scout Platoon.

At about 11:30am we mounted up and departed the temporary artillery position with Troop D's Second Platoon leading. I had asked the leaders huddled around my jeep if they wanted their platoon to eat our cold C-Ration lunch there, in the mini-artillery position, or get on with the mission and eat later once we all were in position. It had been collectively decided to eat lunch later when we all were in position.

Lieutenant Thomas sat on top of the right rear radio that was mounted on top of the right rear fender directly behind the Second Platoon Sergeant. Private First Class Halladay sat on top of the radio that was mounted on top of the left rear fender of the jeep, behind the jeep driver. One of the Scout Platoon's radios was strapped on his back. Another Scout Platoon member with a radio also was in this jeep.

We crossed the east-west creek near the hamlet of Ap Binh Lan, which is now under water (see the map). A Regional Forces (RF)/Provincial Forces (PF) camp was located on the west side of Road 311 (marked as Military Area along the creek on the map). The RF/PF soldiers (their nickname was Ruff/Puffs) and many of the families who lived at the camp were along the side of the road as we moved past. The RF/PF soldiers were somewhat similar to a state guard unit and were used mainly as a security listening post, as an outpost, for the Provincial government. In fact the RF/PF was not really a combat force, although they did fight when defending their camp. The main mission for this RF/PF force was manning a listening-post on a major east-west trail that crossed Road 311 (see map) and reporting any movement. United States Army Advisors lived, trained, and conducted operations with the RF/PF. We all waved. None of the several Advisors assigned at this RF/PF camp were visible.

As his two lead scout jeeps climbed to the high ground south of the creek (marked as a ford with the image of a bridge on the map), south of Ap Binh Lan and the RF/PF Camp (Military Area), the Second Platoon Sergeant requested permission to conduct a reconnaissance by fire with his lead scouts' pedestal mounted M60 machine gun. The Second Platoon infantry squad followed him and my jeep was behind the infantry squad truck. The FO followed my jeep, and behind Captain Mahoney was the second platoon 81mm-mortar squad in their three-quarter ton truck, followed by the two jeeps of the other scout squad of the second platoon. The Third Platoon was in tactical formation following the Second Platoon. In the cavalry column the standard operating combat distance was maintained between each vehicle.

In just a matter of seconds permission was received from the 5th Battalion Tactical Operations Center (TOC) at Buttons to conduct the reconnaissance by fire. I relayed this approval to the Second Platoon Sergeant. The lead scout jeep was by then over the crest of the hill and descending toward the shallow valley. Before the lead scout jeep began its ascent out of the valley the machine gunner began firing his machine gun into the right side of the road (including up and forward toward where the enemy soldiers had been located the day before), and then across the road to the left in a sweeping 180 degree arc. The second scout jeep machine gun also was firing into the clearing near the road and into the tree lines, first to the left, on the north side of the road, and then on the south side of the road into the grass and along the tree line.

The lead scout jeep topped the second hill and was just about to enter the significant curve which was slightly north of where the brief fight had occurred the day before. As planned the Cavalry column began to slow in anticipation of the Scout Platoon members to begin slipping off the Troop's vehicles.

The area exploded in a fusillade of AK47, heavy machine gun and rifle fire, and a barrage of B40 Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) from both sides of the road. The entire Troop column was engulfed in this withering assault.

The reconnaissance by fire by the lead scouts' machine guns provided the early trigger to a classic horseshoe shaped ambush that had been established by a large enemy force, later estimated to be about 600 soldiers. The premature execution of the ambush permitted the rear of the Troop to extend beyond the northern most enemy positions along both sides of the road. This blocked the North Vietnamese Army forces from surrounding us.

A devastating shower of rockets, machine gun and automatic weapons fire had hit the two leading scout jeeps and the Second Platoon Sergeant's jeep. He and his driver were gravely wounded. Six other second platoon troopers and several Scout Platoon members also were wounded.

Lieutenant Thomas and Private First Class Halladay were instantly killed.

A rocket exploded next to my jeep. Ferguson and I hastily dismounted and took cover on the right side of the jeep. The enemy automatic weapons fire was intense. I hurriedly pulled a portable radio out of the back of the jeep and we moved away from the vehicle expecting it, and us, to be hit at any moment. We were somewhat concealed in the grass at the edge of the road, but the thin blades of grass could not stop rockets or bullets.

I switched channels on the portable radio and called the Battalion TOC at Buttons to report our contact and to request helicopter gun ship support. I advised that I had only one radio and that I would be switching back to the troop radio frequency to manage the fight. Eventually the Troop had to use the 5th Battalion command radio frequency to communicate because of a shortage of portable radios in the Troop. This was a serious shortcoming for ground cavalry units that had to conduct combat operations with only vehicle mounted radios. As a mounted cavalry troop we were not authorized to have and were not issued portable radios. The portable radios, antennas, handsets, harnesses, and batteries we had were scrounged or bartered for.

Ahead of us I could see the second platoon infantry squad truck. I could see the Second Platoon Sergeant's jeep which was on fire. I also could see the second scout jeep which was ablaze. I could not see the lead scout jeep, or any of the troops. I could hear some of their machine guns and rifles firing mixed in with the long bursts of many enemy AK-47s and exploding rocket propelled grenades.

Behind us, down into the shallow valley, I could see some of the third platoon's vehicles. The FO's jeep, which always followed my jeep, was on fire. I could see troopers moving near the edge of the road. They were firing into the tree line on both sides of the road, red tracers slamming into the target locations. Behind the FO's burning jeep was the leading Scout Squad of the Third Platoon.

Sergeant Skidgel's jeep was the second scout jeep leading the third platoon and that platoon's order of movement was similar to the second platoon. Everyone in the third platoon had dismounted under fire, seeking cover and concealment.

Ferguson and I were pinned down, as were the Second Platoon and the Scout Platoon troopers at the head of the column. When we tried to move we all drew a hail of automatic weapons fire. Ferguson provided cover as I talked on the radio with Lieutenant Ross, Sergeant Skidgel's platoon leader. I could not establish contact with the Second Platoon Sergeant or with anyone in the Second Platoon or Scout Platoon. I did not know the Second Platoon Sergeant and his jeep driver were gravely wounded. I did not know Lieutenant Thomas and Private First Class Halladay had been killed.

Soon I was able to talk to Colonel Healy who had hurriedly arrived on station in his command helicopter when he heard my report of heavy enemy contact. Soon, too, I was talking with Cavalier Red, the First Platoon Leader of Troop C. Captain Gayle Jennings, Cavalier Red, was piloting a Cobra gun-ship and was maneuvering to provide close air support with his rockets and cannons. A Blue Max aerial rocket artillery gun ship also joined in providing supporting fire into suspected enemy positions along the tree lines on both sides of the road. And Colonel Healy's helicopter door gunners even got into the fierce fighting by pouring their machine gun fire down into enemy positions. It was pile-on time.

As the battle progressed I asked Lieutenant Ross to try to shift a covering fire in our direction, which would perhaps permit Ferguson and me to move out of the kill zone to better concealment. Apparently responding to Blue's instructions to try to shift fire toward our position Sergeant Skidgel and his jeep driver scrambled from their concealed position to a jeep. As the jeep moved out of the grass onto Road 311 I watched Sergeant Skidgel mount the M60 machine gun on the pedestal. As the driver straightened out on the road headed in our direction Sergeant Skidgel, standing upright behind his gun, fearlessly ignoring the hail of enemy machine gun and rocket fire, began firing into the enemy positions. Enemy fire into our position abruptly decreased. Two rockets impacted behind Sergeant Skidgel's jeep.

Other troopers in the third platoon also shifted their fire in our direction providing a withering covering fire for Sergeant Skidgel and his driver as their jeep moved up the road. Sergeant Skidgel's leadership had rallied members of his platoon. His direct and immediate action had broken the enemy's hold and relieved the pressure on the head of the column. His conspicuous bravery, above and beyond the call of duty, had saved the lives of several of his fellow troopers who were in the heart of the enemy kill zone.

Suddenly Sergeant Skidgel was hit. His right arm projected out and behind him, searching for the right rear fender of the jeep, his left hand continuing to hold onto the machine gun. He pulled himself up to stand behind the machine gun again and managed to fire a short burst into the tree line and the grass.

Then, he was hit again as enemy gunfire zeroed in on his threatening advance. Sergeant Skidgel slumped behind his machine gun, but he managed to sit on the right rear fender for a moment before a final burst of fire knocked him off the jeep. The jeep slowed to a crawl, obviously the driver was concerned about Sergeant Skidgel as he tumbled off the right rear fender and fell backwards onto Road 311. The jeep veered off the road and rolled to a stop. The driver quickly dismounted and disappeared.

Sergeant Skidgel did not move as he lay in the middle of Road 311 about two hundred meters from where he had fought the enemy soldiers the day before.

Later a medic reported that Sergeant Skidgel's wounds had been instantly fatal.

Colonel Healy decided to insert an infantry company immediately into the battle area and directed that my troop move to the north to the high ground, south of the creek crossing and the RF/PF camp, and secure an area for the Huey helicopters to land on Road 311 so the infantry company could safely dismount. This infantry company's mission would be to pick up the trail and close with and destroy the enemy.

Several of Sergeant Skidgel's friends came to his poncho wrapped body to say their good-byes. They all wanted to help, and carefully lifted him into the first helicopter that landed with infantry company soldiers so he could be taken out of the battle area. We were moved at the loss of Sergeant Skidgel, Mr. Halladay, and Lieutenant Thomas.

The next day I wrote the citation for the Medal of Honor for Sergeant Skidgel. It was signed by Lieutenant Colonel James "Pete" Booth, our Squadron Commander, and was forwarded from the 1st Cavalry Division through channels to the Secretary of the Army.

It was so hurtfully sad then, and it seems even sadder now, that Sergeant Donald Sidney Skidgel was killed in action north of the significant curve on Road 311 south of Phuoc Long and Song Be in Phuoc Long-Binh Phuoc Province, Republic of South Vietnam on Sunday, September 14, 1969. In 30 days, on October 13, 1969, he would have celebrated his twenty-first birthday. He was so very young.

Later a memorial service was organized on Buttons for Sergeant Skidgel that, security permitting, as many soldiers as possible attended. In the early 70s a Weapons Training Facility at Fort Knox, Kentucky was named after Sergeant Skidgel. I spoke at the dedication ceremony, and was able to meet and speak privately with his loving parents.

Even though he was far from home he was not alone. He was among a close brotherhood of combat soldiers who cared about him and who now, and will always, remember him and honor his service to our country. Sergeant Donald Sidney Skidgel answered the call of our nation to stand in harm's way and served in the United States Army with great honor and bravery. We truly mourn his ultimate sacrifice. For 42 years not a day has gone by that I haven't thought about him.

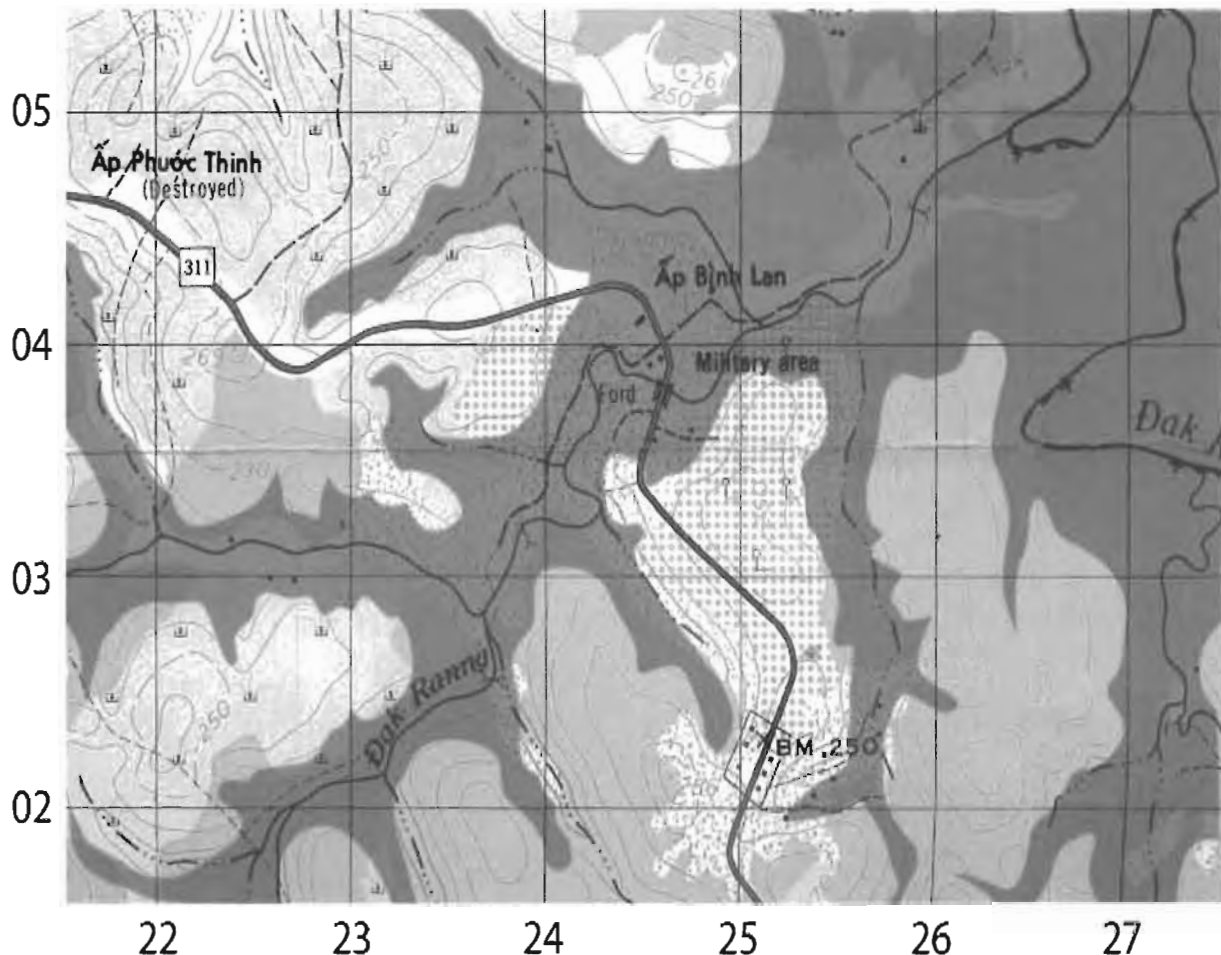
This year, in October 2011, Sergeant Skidgel would have been 63.

To his family, to us, and to me, he always will be very special.

We will always honor, we will forever be indebted to, and we will always remember, Sergeant Donald Sidney Skidgel, United States Army.

Andrew J. Hudson
Lieutenant Colonel, Cavalry-Armor
United States Army (Retired)
September 14, 2011

**1969 MAP SHEET 6432 IV, TITLED DONG SRE VIET, VIETNAM,
 SCALE 1:50,000 & 2011 GOOGLE EARTH SATELLITE IMAGE
 NO WATER OVER 311 IN 1969 BETWEEN LINES 24 & 25
 SOUTH OF WATER 311 STILL EXISTS BUT IS NOT NUMBERED
 REROUTED 311 IS 749 & CONTINUES NORTHWEST & INTERSECTS
 WITH 741 WHERE BUTTONS WAS & NUI BA RA IS LOCATED**



**MAJOR EAST-WEST TRAIL & CREEK SHOWN BELOW AP BINH LAN.
 TWO DOTS LEFT OF "MILITARY AREA" MARK RF/PF CAMP.
 JUST NORTH OF BM 250 SIGNIFICANT CURVE & BATTLE AREA,
 BETWEEN GRID LINES 25 & 26, STILL EXISTS ON GOOGLE EARTH
 AT LONGITUDE 11°46'46.00" N & LATITUDE 107°03'48.50" E.**