

Hembree

Harper (Kia Oct 65)

Boyt

Lopez

Relford

Ferguson

Phone conversation with Jack Hembree, February 2, 2004

Keywords: Harper, McElwee, Boyt, KIA, October 1965, Lopez, Relford, Ferguson, Long

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NH

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Jack Hembree was a Staff Sergeant E6 in 1965 as the Mortar Platoon Sergeant with C 2/5. He functioned as the Platoon Leader in the absence of any officer, though LT Al Conetto was assigned to the platoon for a very short time under he was transferred to the 173rd Airborne Brigade. LT Don O'Keefe was assigned later for a period of two weeks. Under the TOE of the 11th Air Assault, each rifle company (A, B, and C) had only three rifle platoons, but no weapons platoon. Delta Company was the Heavy Weapons Company, consisting of mortars (81s and maybe some 4.2) and 106 recoilless rifles. Just prior to deployment that was changed, and each 81 mortar platoon was assigned to each of the rifle companies. For that reason, Hembree had not worked with the company all that long and did not know either CPT Boyt or First Sergeant Lopez all that well. SGT William Harper was the 1st Squad Leader, and SGT Roger Leggett was the 2nd Squad Leader. Hembree does not remember the name of the 3rd Squad Leader. His company command net RTO was PFC Ernest Relford, and his internal platoon net RTO was Ferguson. (First name unknown, not on July 65 roster.) They carried PRC25 radios, not PRC 10s.

Hembree had known Harper for some time, and thought highly of him. He and his wife Sally remember that Harper's girl friend from Tennessee came to Ft. Benning and they were married just before deployment. (Harper is on the No-Quarter web site as being single)

On October 10th, 1965, the company was moving through a flat area of flooded rice paddies at the base of the Vinh Thanh Valley – also known as Happy Valley. (Note: This contradicts the information from James McElwee, who indicated it was terraced hillside rice paddies, but I could very easily have misinterpreted McElwee.) Though the area was flat and wide open, the company moved in single file. The company avoided walking on the paddy dikes, and slogged through the flooded paddies, making progress very hard. As they came to each dike, they often had to help each other over the top.

As they were moving, Ferguson had gotten atop a dike, and turned to assist SGT Harper up. He did so by extending his M16. The weapon discharged once, striking Harper. Harper believes the bullet struck his hip, the ricocheted up and struck his heart. In any case, he went into shock immediately, and died soon thereafter.

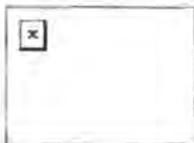
To this day, it bothers Hembree that neither CPT Boyt nor ISG Lopez asked what happened. It was purely accidental from Hembree's viewpoint, but was never investigated.

On other topics, he liked and respected LT Long as the CO, but thought his first name was Roger, not George.

He also like LTC Tully, the battalion CO, but thought he was an old man when they deployed (maybe in his 50s), and had a suspicion that the brigade commander kept the 2/5 Cav out of heavy contact for that reason.

Hembree also chares Ed Boyt's opinion that the 1/7 Cav was a sloppily run outfit. He said that at LZ X-Ray, his CP was near Hal Moore's anthill CP, and he thought Moore was a "little screwy." He went on to say that there was actual combat by C 2/5 Cav at X-Ray, and that SSG Juan Cruz was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" for carrying mortar ammo across an open area under fire. Hembree himself shot an NVA sniper out of a tree during a dawn "mad minute."

Company C
2nd Battalion 5th Cavalry
1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)
April 1969 - July 1969
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-----Original Message-----

From: jack hembree [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2004 9:50 PM
To: webmaster@tallcomanche.org
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Sgt. William Harper

Dear Douglas

I can not believe after 33+ years someone has ask about Bill. I tried from the time of his death

till i got of the Army. however know one would talk to our ask any questions, after all i was his platoon Sergent from start in the 11th air assault division; If you are really interested please

email me. I do have pictures of Bill, however they are with my little girl and she will not give them up. she thought the world of Bill

Douglas am getting very tired no, so please let me know, and will chart.

Thank You

Jack [REDACTED]

sally and jack hembree

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Douglas Young

From: Douglas Young [webmaster@tallcomanche.org]
Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2004 10:07 PM
To: jack hembree
Cc: James McElwee
Subject: RE: Sgt. William Harper

Hello Jack - - - good to hear from you.

Yes - after 33+ years, it is time for all of us to share and talk. That has been wonderful for me. I was only with the company for 4 months in 1969, yet we lost 10 men during that time. Talking has been good for me. I am very interested in knowing all about your time, from the beginning of the 11th Air assault until the time you went home from Viet Nam. I did not know you were SGT Harper's Platoon Sergeant. In fact, I don't even know what platoon you were with. Take some time and write down every detail you can think of - everything. I will then add your information to the story we already have on the site.

Ed Boyt (Captain Boyt to you, retired as a full colonel) told me something about the Army sending the wrong body home. Do you know anything about that?

Please tell your daughter we would love to have the pictures of him. I need them only for a short time so I can electronically convert them to be shown on the web site. I will crop her picture out, and just show him. I will mail them right back. That is how we have added many of the pictures on the site. As I still work (I am not retired), I usually find time over a weekend to work on the history of the company. Once I do that, I mail the photos right back - I do not want to hold on to anyone's personal - and precious - memories. I only want to honor our own.

I received a nice magazine article a few days ago from James Mc Elwee, who was one of SGT Harper's men in the squad. You can see it on the October 1965 page on the web site. James was quite close to his Squad Leader, and says SGT Harper had been his Squad Leader since he had been in the Army.

I am also interested in any other articles you might have - copies of orders for your CIB, or awards you earned - anything like that. We want very much to record as much of the history of C 2/5 Cav as we can find.

If you can, please mail the photos and copies of orders or other memorabilia to:

Douglas Young
[REDACTED]

My phone is [REDACTED]

Thank you for getting in touch with me - I look forward to hearing from you, and look forward to reading every memory you might have about the 11th Air Assault, about Charlie Company, about your own time in Viet Nam - and about your relationship with SGT Harper.

Best - -

Doug

Douglas Young