THE FIRST TEAM

Fall 1969

Commander's Message

In all my experience as a soldier, I have never worked with more dedicated, devoted, or determined men than those I talk with every day in my travels throughout the division's area of operations. You are America's finest, and I'm proud to serve with you.

As in past issues of The FIRST TEAM magazine, the theme of teamwork and support is woven into the pages. The essential life-saving support supplied by our combat medics and Medevac personnel is featured in one story, while the aviation support given the infantryman on the ground is depicted in an article covering the work of the Cav's Chinook. In yet another the efforts of the unsung and unheralded clerk is featured.

The role of the man on the ground is presented in stories on that key communicator, the RTO, and in a one about the all important leader of men—the fighter personified—the rifle company commander.

The final article highlights a page from our division's magnificent history, where the battle for the Ia Drang Valley won the Presidential Unit Citation for the division.

Every soldier in The FIRST TEAM today can be justifiably proud of the lst Air Cav's heritage and of the significant contribution our division is making to the cause of freedom.

The remarkable achievements of the lst Air Cav are possible only with the 100 percent effort of all. For this effort, I express my deepest appreciation to every gallant Skytrooper.

E.B. Roberts

E.B. ROBERTS
Major General, USA
Commanding

Volume 2, Number 3 Fall 1969

THE FIRST TEAM

In This Issue

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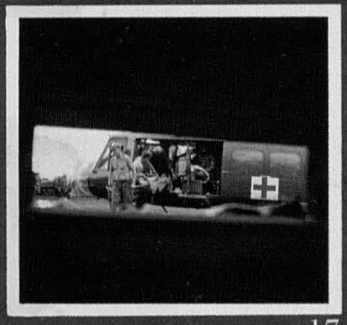

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The Cover

Front Cover: Combat Artist Ron Doss catches the brotherhood of Medevac as one man helps another in time of need.

Back Cover: Soldiers move enmasse to board a Chinook helicopter, the 1st Cav's primary mover, as captured by photographer Paul Sgroi.

COMMAND GROUP: MG E. B. Roberts, Commanding General; BG George W. Casey, Assistant Division Commander (Operations); BG Frank Meszar, Assistant Division Commander (Logistics); MAJ J. D. Coleman, Information Officer.

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(Special graphic effects and litho by J. Mac Speed Service Systems, Tokyo)

Combat and Cargo

By SP5 Joe Kamalick

"It's constant flying, no auto pilot or anything...real flying, there's no question about it."

To the men on isolated 1st Cav firebases scattered throughout the jungles of III Corps, one of the most familiar and heartening of daily sights is the arrival of big, noisy and godawful windy Chinook helicopters bearing tons of life-supporting food, water and ammunition.

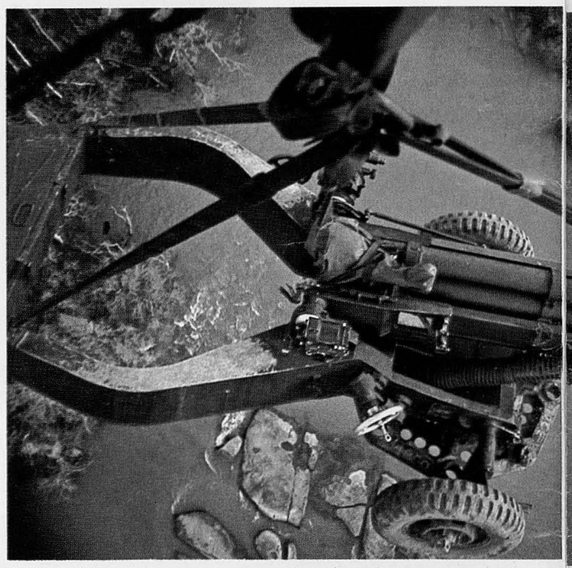
Without the Chinooks tracing a hundred paths through the air, the Cav's firebases would become poor insurance risks; small, lonely circles of real estate that would be quickly reclaimed by the rush of enemy and then by the slower but more inevitable growth of jungle.

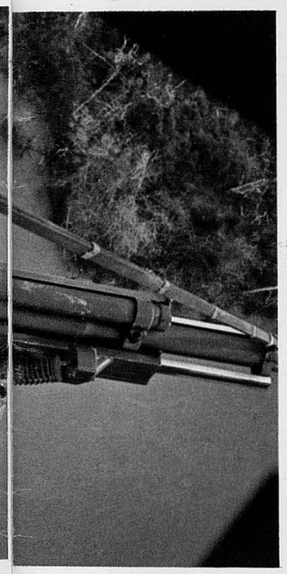
But the enemy and the jungle are kept at bay because the Chinooks are there; because they deliver the goods.

It begins day after day in the dark early hours. Carrying headset helmets, machine guns and flak jackets, flight crews for the CH-47

COLEMAN

KOEHNLEIN





KAMALICK

Chinook helicopters of the 228th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion walk down the flight lines at three different airfields. There they begin pre-dawn maintenance inspections of their respective birds.

Along the flight lines the big, hulky Chinooks squat between revetments, olive-drab dew beaded on their oily and thin metal sides. The ships look much like science fiction buses, but not at all as if they could fly.

After an hour of crawling over the Chinook, checking rotor heads, oil levels, transmissions and tube drives, the crew chief greets two pilots who arrive just as the sky starts to streak with dawn. They ask how it's going. "It'll fly okay," he reports.

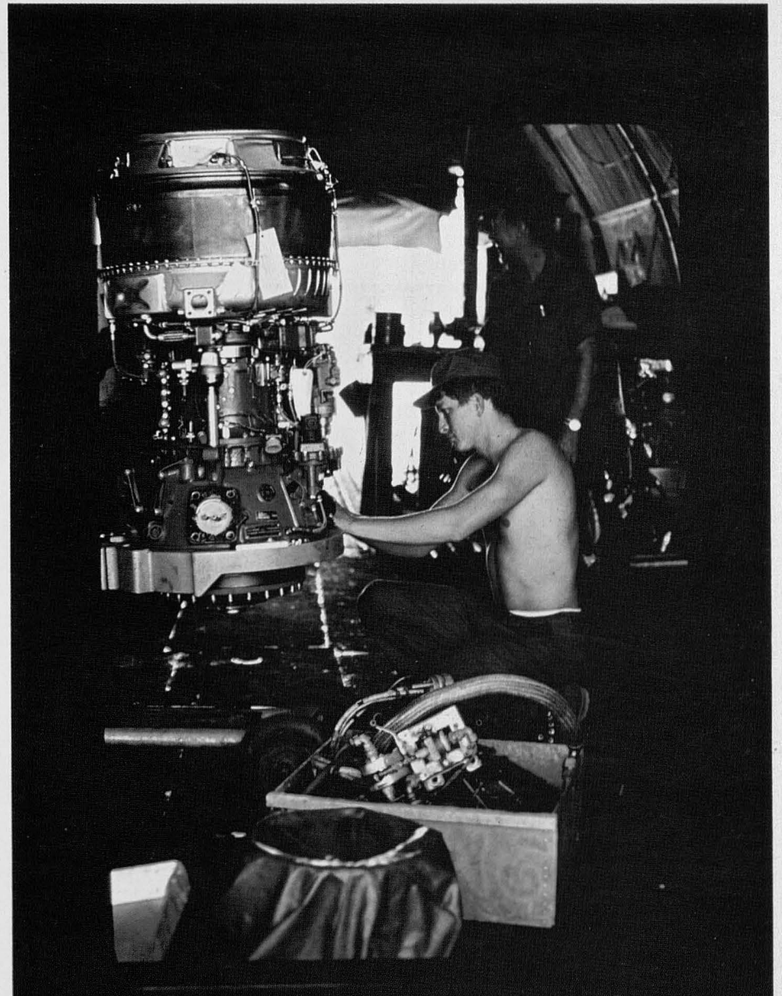
The pilots climb into their half-plastic cockpit and give the engines a run-up, another check for subtle, dangerous flaws. At 7 a.m. they lift-off, starting a flying day that usually averages out to about ten in-flight hours. Between take-off and final landing that night some 12 hours will pass. They will pickup troops and cargo at Song Be, Tay Ninh, Phuoc Vinh, Lai Khe and Quan Loi, ferrying them forward to some 30 landing zones.

Lunch will be short. It will be C-rations or a "hot" at a mess hall wherever they may happen to be at noon. After eating, the crew again removes engine, transmission and drive shaft cowlings for more checking and double checking. They are dedicated—as dedicated to their work as they are to living. It's a long way down from 3,000 feet. Helicopters are not glider aircraft.

"It's a good airplane," said one of the 228th pilots. After ten hours behind the stick, that statement was high praise.

A Chinook pilot, a veteran from the

KAMALICK



MOON

flight decks of World War II's B-25 and B-29 bombers, called piloting this craft "real flying—there's no question about it. It's constant flying, no auto pilot or anything. I've never flown so much before in my life."

Behind the pilots up forward sit the door gunners. Leaning against their machine guns at open ports, they watch for the flash of hostile enemy fire or for the far reaching, threatening line of hot tracers. Their job looks easy. They sit and watch the ground below. But as one pilot said of his gunner, who had silenced an enemy .51 caliber machine gun position, "As far as I'm concerned, he earned his whole year's pay in those two minutes." When the heat is on, this soldier is perhaps the most vital man aboard.

"The Chinook is a big green school bus," said one door gunner. "It's got no class."

Class? Perhaps not. But power, yes. Within the 1st Cav the 228th Chinooks and the men who fly and crew them are primary movers—the chief source of food, water, equipment and ammo for all the landing zones stretching across a 4,000 square mile area of jungle and checkerboard rice fields.

And every other week or so a new firebase is cut from the jungle. The 228th Chinooks assigned the task will make as many as 30 to 40 sorties in hauling men, artillery pieces and tons of equipment and ammunition to make the new site as complete as possible on the first day.

When the flying day is over at perhaps 7 or 8 p.m., the crews spend another two hours pulling still more maintenance. The man most responsible for the ship's mechanical condition is the flight engineer, who by day "rides the hole" and supervises the pickup and drop of sling loads. It is the flight engineer who must determine whether a ship needs repairs beyond the skills of his crew.

By now the Chinook is such a familiar sight that its work is taken for granted, saving countless man hours and muscle power by putting the load right where it's needed and most convenient – on a dime or a 5-ton.

For every hour of flight, according to a 228th maintenance officer, the Chinook needs approximately ten man-hours of mechanical work. "The key to our operations," he said, "is maintenance—more so than with any other type of aircraft."

There are more than a few times when repair crews work through the night under the glare of lamps to replace an engine so the sorely needed aircraft will be ready to fly again at dawn.

"Let's face it," said another 228th officer, "the pilots and flight crews have the glory jobs because they are exposed to all the danger of flight itself, and then combat, too...and they work damn long hours."

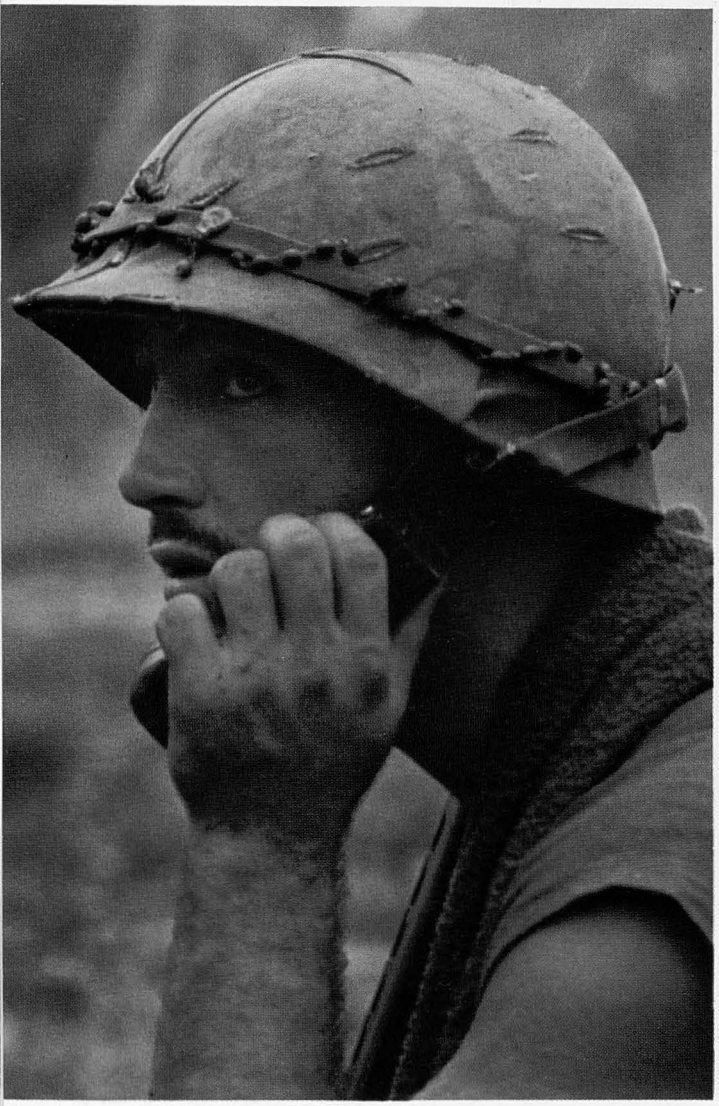
"There is a sheer but inconspicuous type of heroism, one of endurance, shown every day by the mechanics on the flight lines and in the hangars."

COMMANDER IN A CLUTCH

By CPT Peter Zastrow

"He is a sharp boy. He must be sharp; every RTO must be."

AHRBECK



AHRBECK

The Cav RTO and fellow grunts live and work in rough places. They are young, determined and prepared. Life can be hard, but the RTO is their contact with "the world beyond the bamboo and wait-a-minute vines."

The platoon wound its slow, cautious way through a bunker complex hidden beneath the sun-flecked floor of a ridgeline forest southeast of LZ Jamie. When the RTO stopped to unsnare his pack, the radio crackled with the company commander's order to stop, but by then the point man and platoon leader were too far ahead to be told.

AK-47s clacked loudly from one of the bunkers up front, pinning the point man and the lieutenant to the ground. The lieutenant was in real trouble—under heavy fire without means of requesting reinforcements.

Moments later the RTO moved up, half running, half crawling, while AK rounds nipped into the wet leaves and exploded against trees around him. He plopped heavily down beside his lieutenant.

"I told the 3rd platoon leader to move his men up here," he said with a question in his eyes. "I hope that was all right? "

It was. "In fact," said the platoon leader later, "it was exactly what I would have done." For a second or two the RTO had assumed command of his unit and another platoon. Once more an RTO had shown his true value in a tight situation.

Captain Rodger Bultman, former commander of Company D, 1st Battalion of the 12th Cavalry, once said of his radio operator: "There have been times when my RTO has been in command—in every sense of the word—of my company." The captain thought a moment. "He is a sharp boy. He must be sharp; every RTO must be."

He is a valuable man. He is the man who links the men of his company with the world beyond the bamboo and wait-a-minute vines. He is their link with artillery and air support.

The enemy also realizes the value of an RTO. With his long whip antenna towering above him in his forward column position he is a favorite target for the first volley of an ambush or for the equally deadly sniper's bullet.

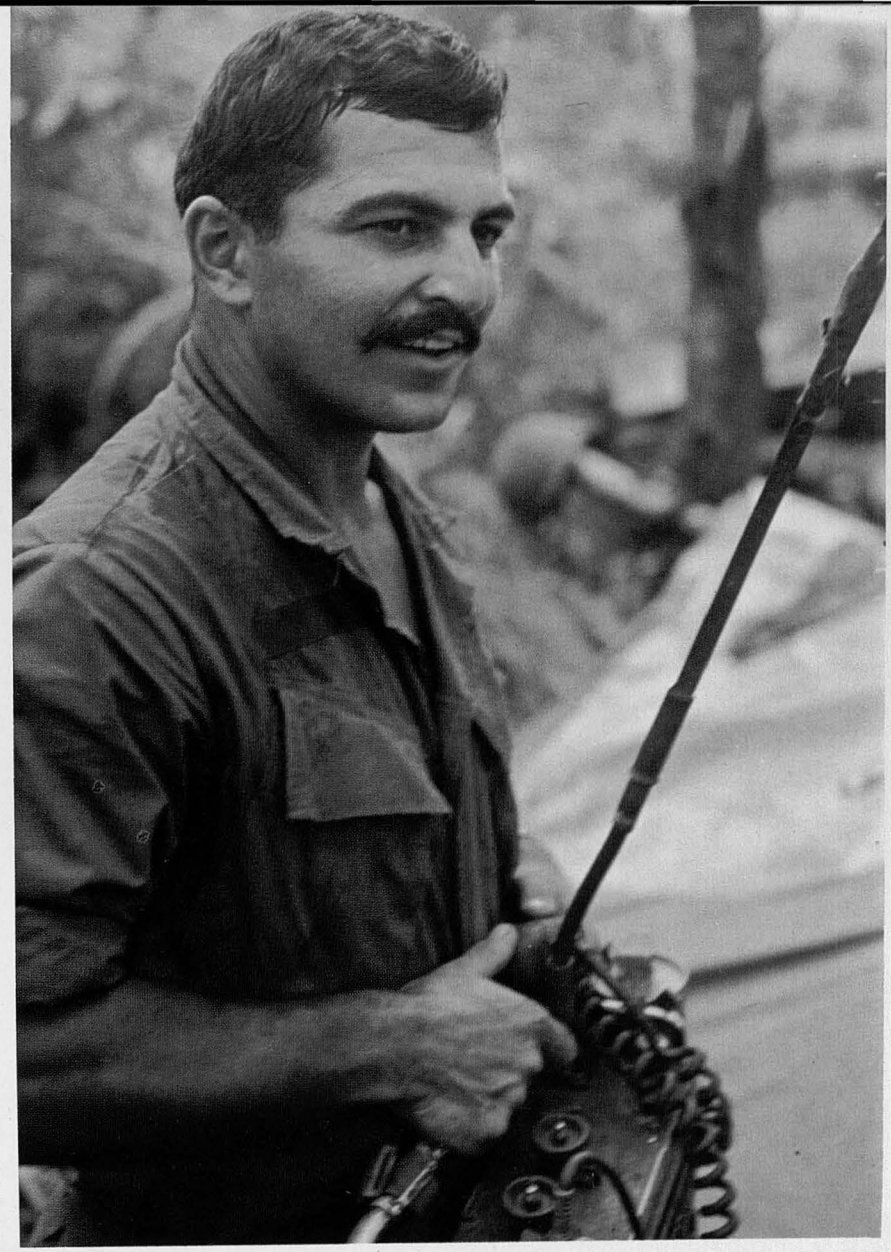
Despite his importance in a unit, the prospective RTO is not a trained specialist when he arrives in Vietnam. He enters his

company as an 11 Bravo rifleman with only minimal background in radio training from basic or AIT schooling, hardly enough to permit him to take over the job immediately. He will learn the best way, the hard way—on the job.

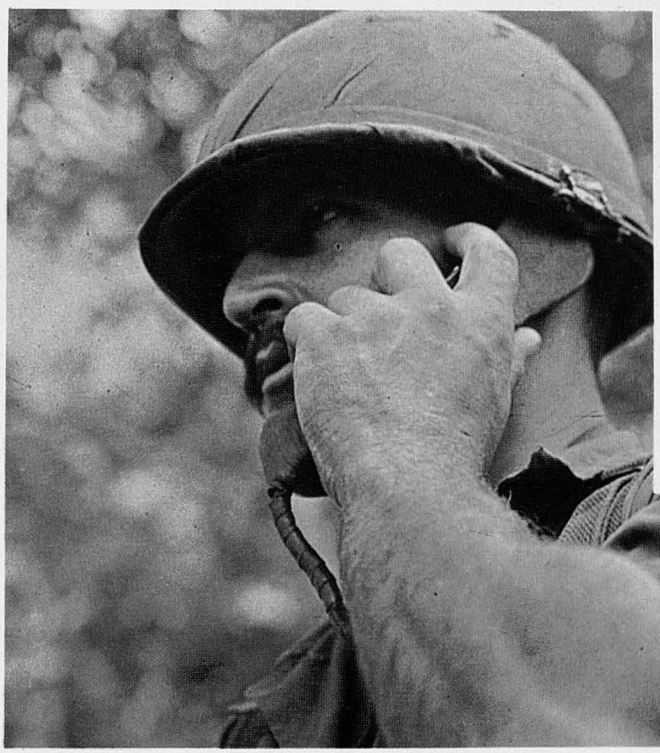
Though the procedure differs from unit to unit, the RTO position is usually decided on a volunteer basis. Perhaps beginning with a squad radio or serving as RTO on local patrols, the prospective radio operator learns his job through experience.

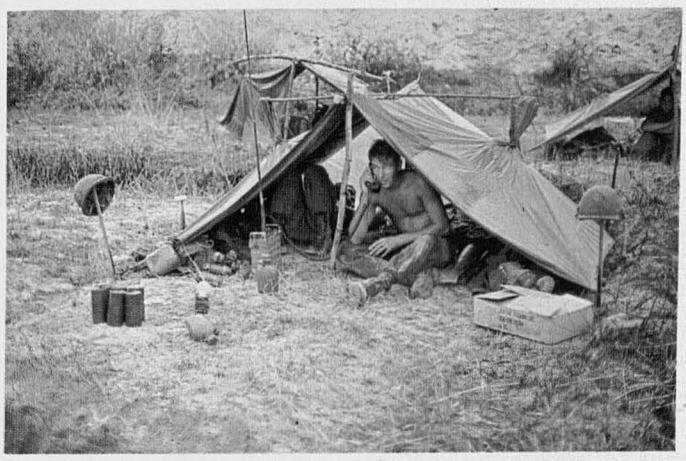
Some essentials of the job can be learned only through that real experience. They cannot be taught in a classroom. Teamwork between the RTO and his commander, for example, is one of the non-textbook necessities to any successful operation. Radio traffic may be almost constant, and it becomes a rapid, staccato exchange in a firefight. The RTO must be quick to separate the important from that which can wait, to answer for himself those questions which his commander need not be or is too busy to be concerned about. The messages, commands and requests for information rush through the static air, and all in a language like no other in the world.

The RTO vocabulary is completely strange to the newcomer, but, again, he will learn. He will learn to think as well as talk in terms like FOB and NDP, sixes and two-sixes, Alpha Sierras, Poppa Zulus, Delta Tangos, freaks and pushes. The more standardized radio call procedures like "over," "out," "roger" and



MERRILL





"wilco" make for economical transmissions and save vital time in a fight. After a year of talking in the strange tongue, most RTOs will continue to speak it for months after leaving Vietnam.

When infantrymen of the 1st Cav hear the term "RTO," they will think of one of their own. He is a soldier toting his M-16, a full pack like theirs and an added 25 pounds of radio slung on his back, plodding through jungle mire.

But there is more bearing down on an RTO than just the weight of pack and radio–he has a burden of responsibility, often second only to that of his commander. And at times, as Captain Bultman said, the RTO must even assume that burden as well.

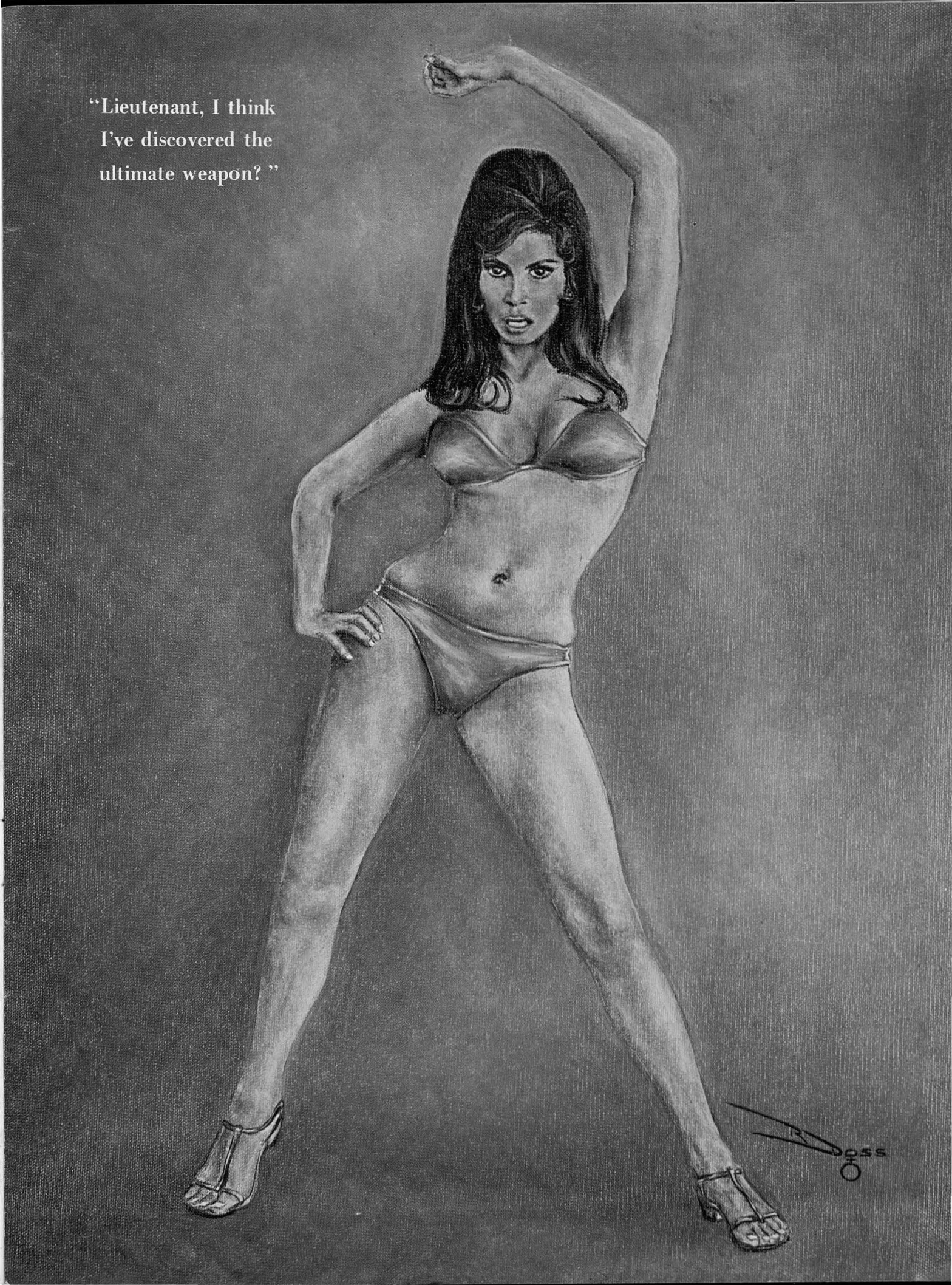
The RTO must be prepared at all times, when walking or resting (he sleeps with his radio), to take command when the situation warrants. It will most often come when his unit is in contact, when he is separated from his commander or when the commander is hit. Then the lives of the men of a platoon or company may depend on a PFC's or Spec Four's ability to make the right decision, the decision that may mean living, the decision that can mean the return for many to Saturday nights and beach parties "back in the world."

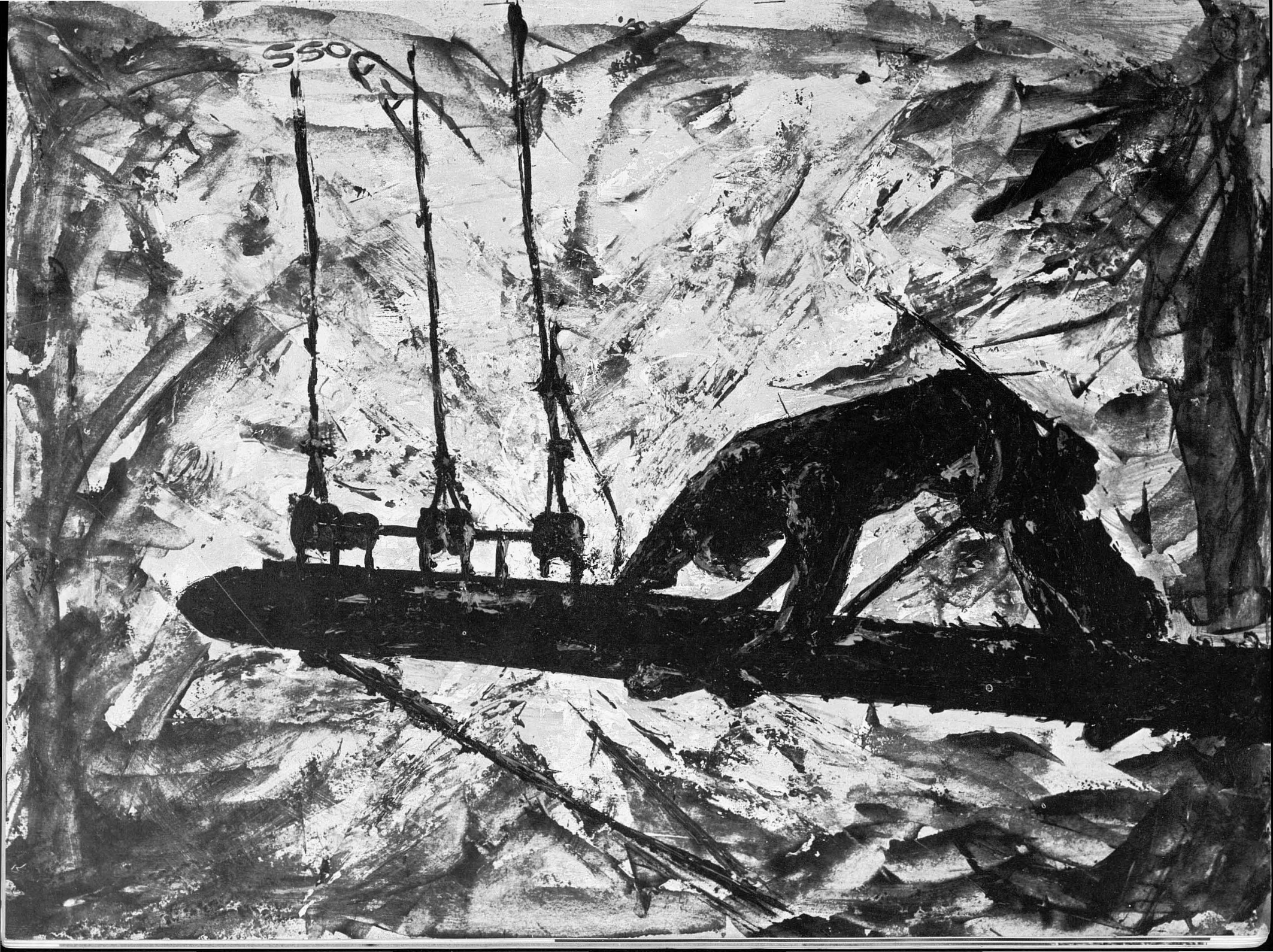
With the exception of the platoon or company commander, there is generally no one in a unit who knows more about the situation than does the RTO, which is partially why he is capable of assuming temporary command. The other part is that "he is sharp, very sharp."

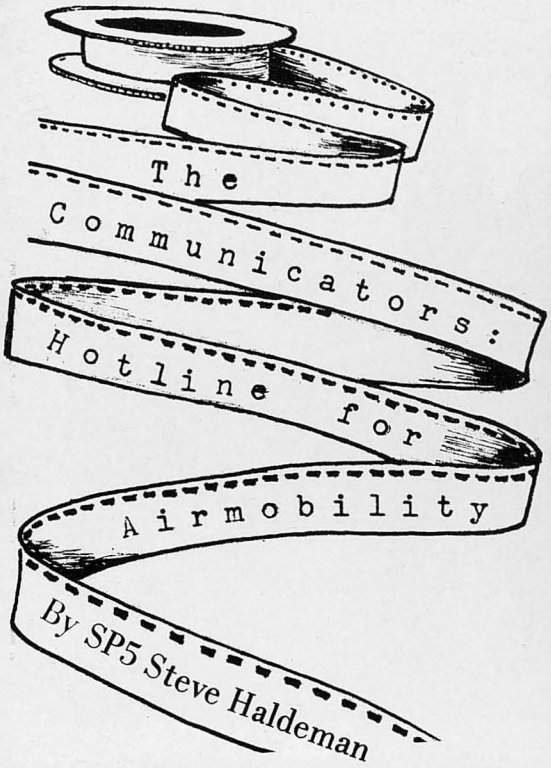
When one company commander was asked if he could recall when his RTO had gotten him out of a tight place, he replied with what serves as a tribute to all RTOs:

"I can't really remember a particular incident–it happens every day."

AHRBECK


"Lieutenant, I think
I've discovered the
ultimate weapon?"
R. Doss





By SP5 Steve Haldeman

SGROI

Telephone switchboard operators, with hands a picture in motion, are part of a communications team which provides the necessary link between combat and support troops spread over an area approximately the size of Connecticut.

Gideon, an ancient leader of men, is said to have equally divided 300 soldiers into three companies, placing a trumpet in every man's hand.

In the middle of the night, while the enemy slept, Gideon silently gathered his men around the hostile camp. He instructed his men to blow their horns and light lamps on a signal from him.

Immediately afterward, Gideon began blowing his trumpet. On his cue the soldiers did the same and uncovered their already lighted lamps. When the enemy was roused from sleep in this manner, they were terribly frightened and immediately fled their camp, never again to gather as an armed band.

Signal communications may have come of age at that moment. Gideon assured himself of good command and control through communications.

Today the warrior is a Skytrooper and the Cav's 13th Signal Battalion does the same job Gideon started so many years ago, as they provide communication, in this case to a division the size of a midwestern town of over 20,000 people.

This job is no small task, especially when the division happens to be airmobile. There are no wires strung to the suburbs and direct long distance dialing is impossible. But the amazing fact is that the 13th Signal Battalion provides telephone, radio, teletype and cryptographic services to a combat division spread over an area of operations approximately the size of Connecticut.

They do all of this with the smallest signal battalion in the Army, and with the least and lightest equipment. The equipment has been cut down, transistorized and compacted to fit into a one-quarter-ton trailer or to be slung under a Chinook.

By necessity the number of men in the battalion has been drastically reduced. They must be ready to move into a different area at a moment's notice; to wherever the FIRST TEAM happens to be fighting.

"Voice of Command" is the slogan of the battalion. These professional communicators live this sobriquet by providing the important link from the division's headquarters up to II Field Force Command, and also by direct lines to the three brigades and to the Support Command in Bien Hoa.

The nerve center of the operation is located at Phuoc Vinh, home of the division's headquarters and also the Rear Operations Platoon. This unit has charge of all the signal facilities at rear locations. This includes a communications center, telephone switchboard and a radio network.

In the communications center tape punchers feed their hungry machines with perforated messages 24 hours a day, while at the same time, cryptographers code and decode top secret information. The jobs of these men are little known, but they handle the most important and secretive articles of information coming in or going out of the 1st Cav.

In a small sandbagged bunker work four telephone operators seated behind two switchboards. Their hands are a study in motion as they plug and unplug wire jacks. Their conversations are generally limited to, "Skyking, sir," or "Ringing DTOC, sir."

The Skyking switch is the circuit to the tactical units and the division staff. It is freed from providing non-tactical phone service, because the Phuoc Vinh switch, a Corps Area Communications System, handles this mission.

These two switchboards are separated only by a plywood wall, and they work hand-in-hand to operate a phone network capable of handling any communication problems or needs.

A microcosm of the Rear Operations Platoon is the Command Signal Center Platoon. It maintains a switchboard, wire team, communications center and a radio relay.

Its function is to establish and operate a signal center in support of the division's main command post (CP). Should the main CP be displaced, a jump signal center is committed directly to a new site. If another element of the division is designated as the alternate division CP, this platoon augments the existing signal operation.

A third platoon, the Support Command Operations Platoon, is designed to provide commo to the division's Support Command. If heavy action necessitates immediate resupply, for example, the call is relayed by this platoon.

The Radio Platoon is the workhorse of the tactical operation. Across its wavelengths passes tactical information from division to the brigades and to division artillery. Say, for instance, a maneuver battalion is moved. The order is relayed to the brigade commander via strategically placed ground relay positions, which are results of numerous Radio Platoons being deployed.

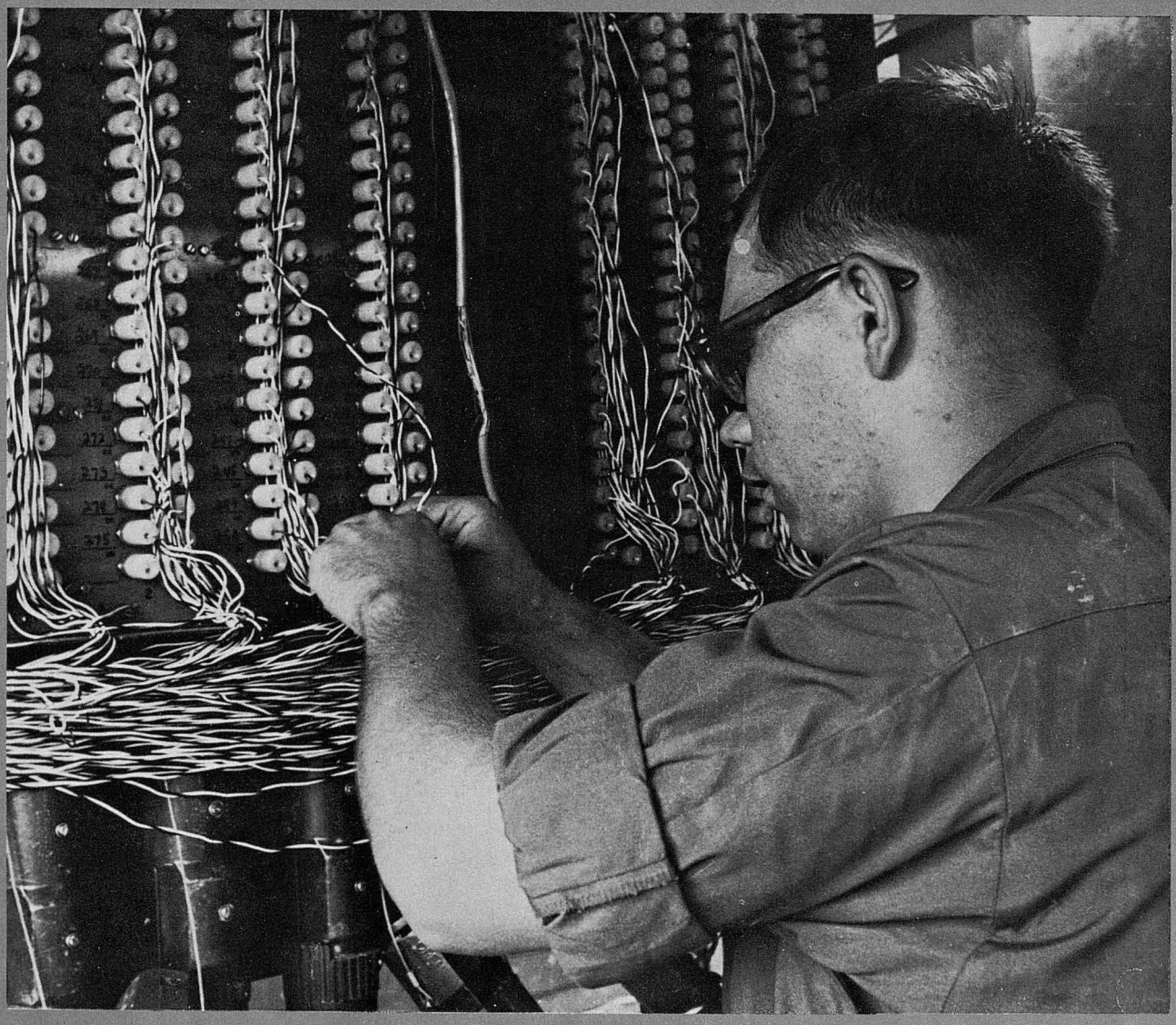
Just as in a flood, the men manning these ground relay stations seek the higher ground. They sit atop fog-shrouded mountains and other terrain bulges, collecting and redirecting a myriad of signals.

There are instances, however, when terrain and distances hamper effective radio relay. This is when an Air Force Caribou fixed-wing aircraft is scrambled and airborne. Sporting switchboards inside and antennas protruding from the aft, the plane orbits the contact area, beaming messages to the isolated CP.

So no matter where the Cav is working, or where its units are assaulted, the 13th Signal Battalion is able to establish and maintain a communications network for the division's fighting town.

SGROI

As a hot Vietnam sun beats down upon a powerful 13th Signal Battalion communications tower, the work of establishing and maintaining equipment for "a fighting town" continues.



SGROI

Greater Love Hath No Man

By SP4 Floyd Arnold

(Editor's Note: The following tribute, written by SP4 Floyd Arnold, is an account of one of many brotherhoods formed in war. It is also an account of the unheralded and most human kind of heroism performed daily in the Vietnam jungles. It is the rare kind of selflessness that one man has toward his buddy, his brother – the most basic and perhaps highest and better part of patriotism.)

I met Sergeant Rodney J. Evans when I arrived in Vietnam. Both of us were from the southern United States and we became instant friends.

Rodney was here for his second tour, having served with the 101st Airborne Division in 1966-67. Even though we

were both already members of the 1st Cav, he told me that it was highly unlikely we would be assigned to the same battalion. I believed him, but we still hoped.

When we were both sent to the 1st Battalion of the 12th Cavalry, this made us happy. We asked if it would be possible for us to serve with the same company. Our request was granted and we ended up in Company D's 3rd Platoon. Everything was great. We were working side by side.

During the first couple of months, I found out many things concerning my new friend. Actually it seemed like we'd known one another all our lives. He wrote casual letters to my wife and I wrote to his girl. The four of us even made plans to meet back in the States somewhere. Rod wanted my wife and I to be attendants at his wedding.

I was later transferred to the 1st Platoon. On April 26th, while we were conducting a search and clear mission, all three of Delta's line platoons suddenly made contact with the enemy. We had called for Medevac and had reported a number of casualties.

When we finally made it back to our night defensive position, Rodney was waiting. He grabbed me and said, "Thank God you are all right." Once again we were very happy – almost like brothers.

Later that night we sat and talked about the day's activity... and wished we were back home. It was the second time in three days I'd been in a firefight and I was quite nervous. Rodney was very helpful at times like this. He raised my morale.

I remember the day he received a particular package from his parents. Enclosed was an item of special importance, an item of which Rodney was to become extremely proud to own. It was a Bible

Our interest in religion and our faith was common. We began reading and studying the Bible as often as we had time. We were of different denominations, but this didn't seem to matter at all.

On July 17th our company was walking to a pickup zone when a mine detonated on our point element. The next morning Rodney had time to stop by and chat with me for a short time before his platoon left on patrol. He was in good spirits, as he'd just completed five months in-country.

We talked about home again as we sat drinking some hot chocolate. Just before he left, I told him to keep his head down and his eyes open. He replied with a laugh, "Okay, but they can't get me today, because I just turned 21 yesterday." I told him to be careful anyway. We knew the enemy was in the area someplace.

About 30 minutes after they left we heard a blast. I contacted the squad nearest the noise and found that they had walked into another mine. Then Rodney called me and said his squad was going to assist those in trouble.

Soon afterward we heard yet another blast. Rodney's RTO called and said that they, too, had walked into a mine...one man was "hurt bad."

I couldn't ask for the name over the radio, so I asked if they would need blood, oxygen and a doctor on the Medevac bird. "Yes! " came the reply, then an addition, "I think he is dying."

A few minutes later the RTO called me and said the wounded man was "3-1." This was Rodney's call sign.

I asked permission to help bring him back to the night defensive position. My wish was granted. I'd just started toward the contact location when I met the men carrying him on a stretcher.

"He's dead," said the medic.

The men in his squad later told me about the action. His RTO explained, "Evans saw a claymore...and he just jumped on it, otherwise we'd all have been hit."

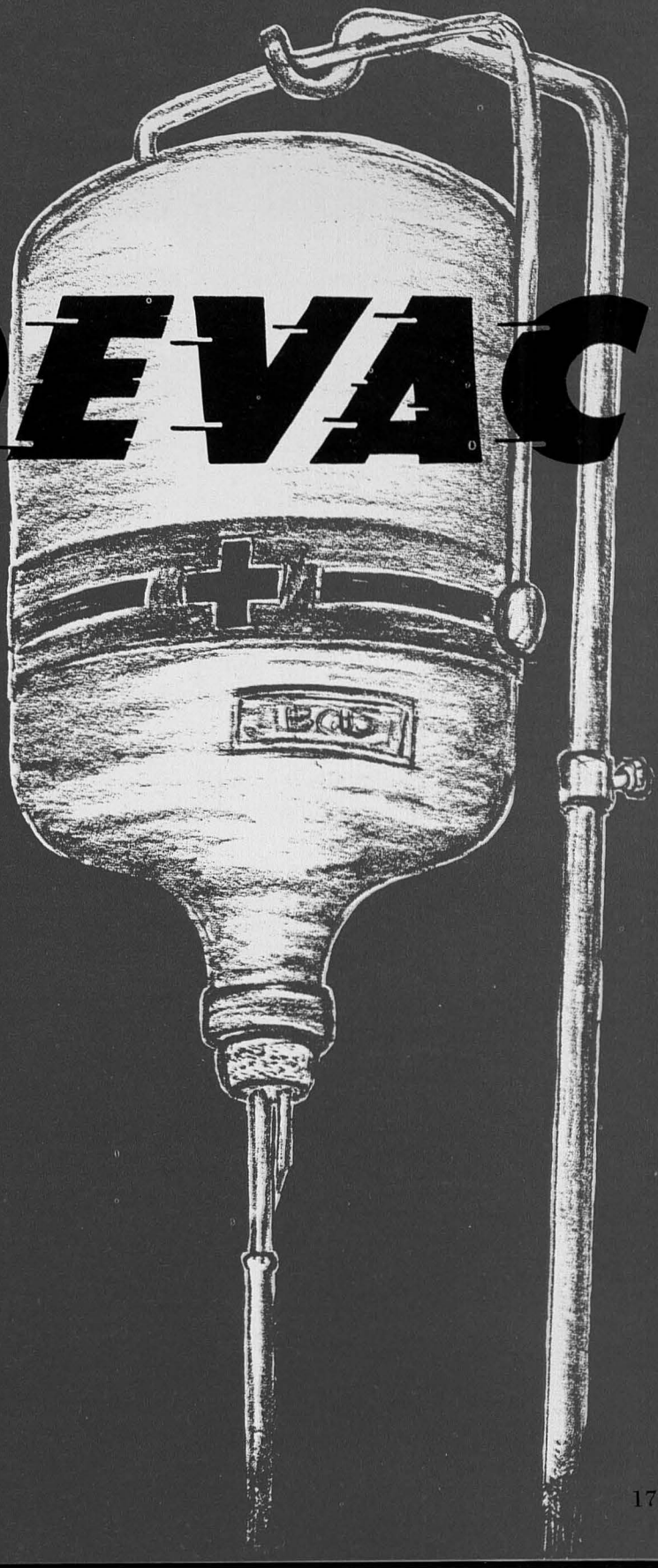
His machine gunner spoke softly, "Rodney yelled, 'Mine! ' and jumped to the ground. I never did see the mine."

The assistant squad leader said confusedly, "He wouldn't let me walk back-up like I usually do. I don't know why. He just wouldn't."

Yet another member of the squad added, "We know he died for us . . . he saved our lives."

To the men that knew him, Sergeant Rodney J. Evans of Florala, Alabama, is a real hero...one they liked, respected and will never forget.

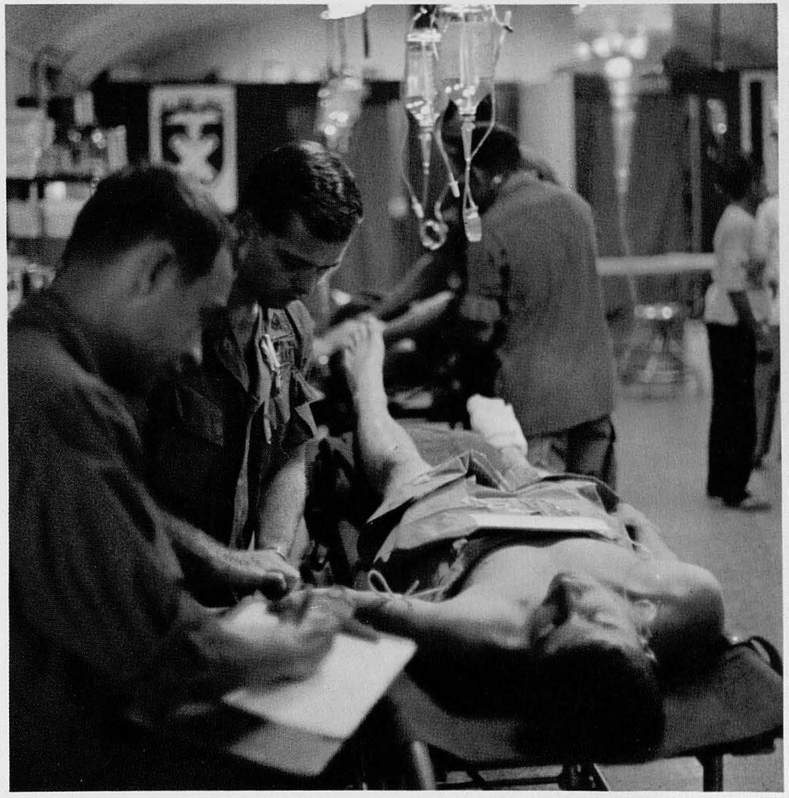
MEDEVAC



"There's something about saving a life
—and the way Medevac does it,
defying the odds—
that makes it appealing."

"It's like a brotherhood."

AHRBECK



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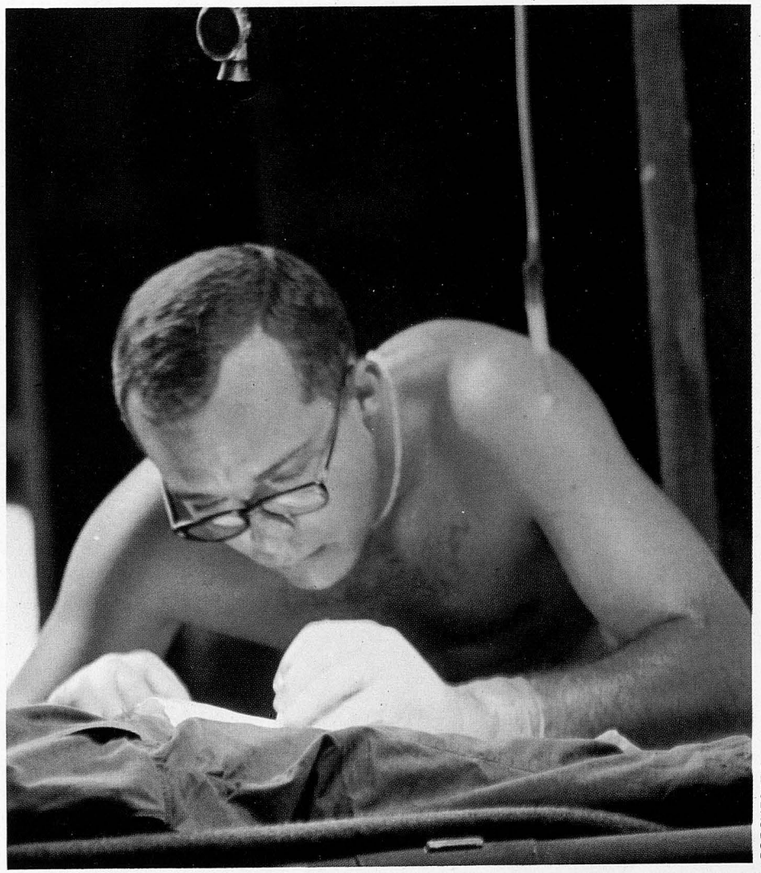
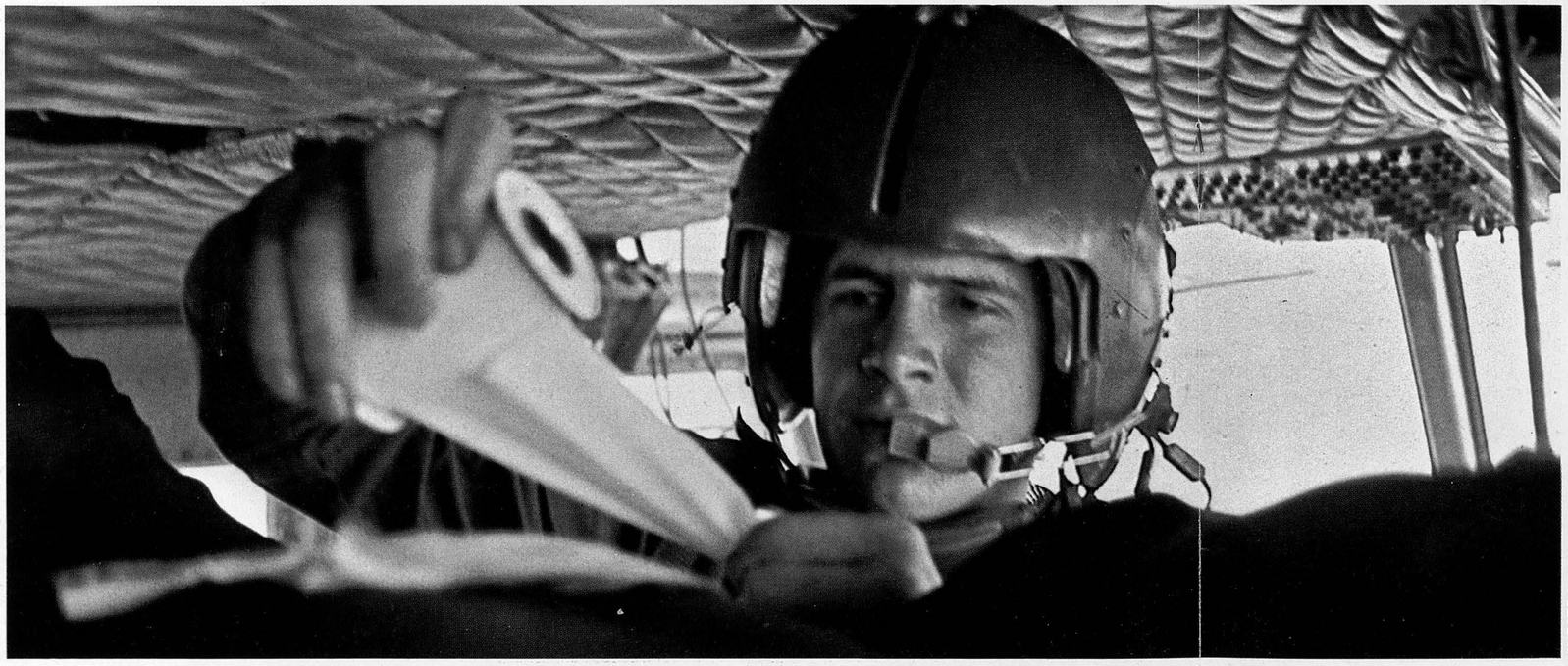


BORCHESTER

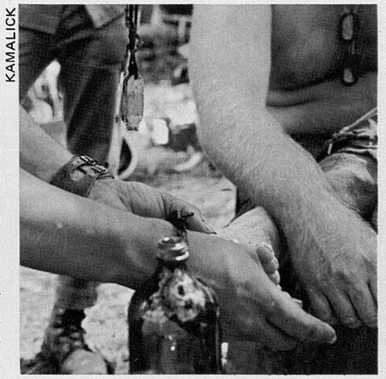
"...Nor shall I deny any man's call, whether for hazard of health or inconvenience or danger, but go to him."

–Hippocrates
425 B.C.



AHRBECK

A Medic's Greatest Fear



KAMALICK

(Editor's Note: PFC Gary Holland has served as a field medic with the 15th Medical Battalion. This is his account of a medic's anticipation of battle and his reaction to the inevitable call for help. The nightmare, of course, did not come true.)

Since graduating from the U.S. Army Medic School, I have suffered the terror of a recurring dream. Or should I call it a nightmare? I know that someday it is bound to come true.

I dream I am shuffling along a narrow sandy roadway winding snakelike through dense, moist jungle. Triple canopy foliage drapes the tops of trees two-hundred feet above, shutting out the sun. A small unit of infantrymen stalk slowly ahead and behind. We walk wearily, but with increased caution. No one speaks, yet we sense from the forest that something is wrong. Maybe it is the unusual absence of birds, the silence broken only by snapping twigs under heavy pack loads, clicking machine gun shells dangling in bandoliers sagging from well-worn shoulders, heavy panting of sweat-soaked men.

We continue, waiting for something to happen. We are looking for it, expecting it, seeking it – yet hoping it is never found. We know it is useless to hope. This is war.

My head turns up at the faint crack of a twig somewhere ahead. I am caught for an instant by an intense twinkling of sunlight slipping between emerald jungle leaves. I linger for a moment, hypnotized by the blade of light, aware of what is about to happen.

There is no reason to think. I react without deciding. My legs collapse, crumbling slowly to one side, my body falling yet hanging in mid-air.

A cloud of red dust puffs into the still air as my body drops heavily to the ground. I bounce and roll, tearing at my pack straps. I am still in the open – still rolling.

I feel the jab and tear of jagged rocks and sticks as I roll to a stop in a shallow gravelike depression. My arms are free. My pack lays with the aid bag in a clump of weeds a few feet away. I feel no wounds.

The whole length of my body is pressed flat-hard against the earth, my face compressed into the soil. I try to be thin but feel grossly conspicuous. Certain my rear is high up in full view, I grind my pelvis tighter into the ground. It will go no lower.

I am stiff and trembling as bullets crack and whizz randomly about. The air is full of speeding metal. I expect the shattering, hot impact at each second. I sweat in sheets, my lungs heaving, my heart pumping a rapid pulse to the brain. Any time now...Any moment... "Medic! "

A voice cries out before me, echoing back again and again. My mind tries not to hear but the sound in my ears grows increasingly louder with each reverberation. "Medic! "

Bullets whine, exploding into fragments, shattering branches which drop to the ground, whole limbs ripped and torn. "Medic! "

Louder he screams out to me in panic. Slowly, through the evolution of seconds, my mind can see him sprawling face-up in the chalky dust, writhing in a puddle of spreading blood coagulating in the intense noon heat. "Medic....Please.... "

He claws the air beckoning to me, opening and closing each hand desperately, pleading. One hand moves back clutching his eyes, a brush of tangled blond hair caught between sticky fingers wet with blood. "Please...help me? "

The jungle is roaring a rain of bullets, the air pungent with grey smoke and dust. I begin to rise. Suddenly I imagine an explosion splattering my face, turning it to jelly...I cannot move. I know he is dying. I must get up! "Please! "

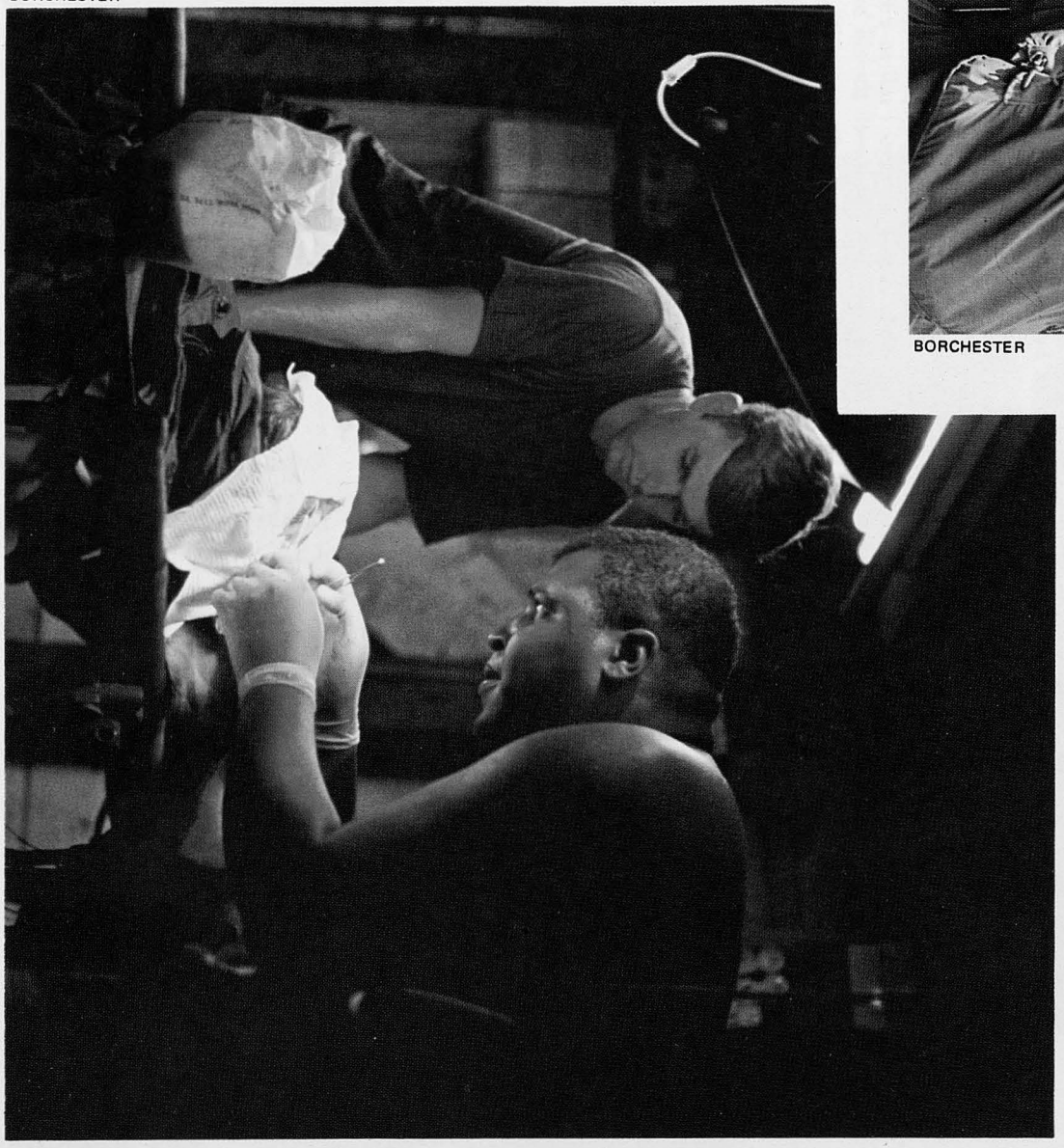
I try to move. I am paralyzed, lying helplessly. "Please! "

Tears stream glistening down my face, plunk softly into the earth. I am sobbing and falling apart. I begin to vomit.

It always ends there. I awake and am relieved to remember that it is only a dream. But today I am less certain.

The airline stewardess speaks into the microphone solemnly. "Good morning, gentlemen. Hope you enjoyed your flight. Please fasten your seatbelts and observe the 'No Smoking' sign. The weather in Bien Hoa is hazy, but dry. The temperature is now 110 degrees. Hope you will all enjoy your stay in the Republic of Vietnam."

BORCHESTER



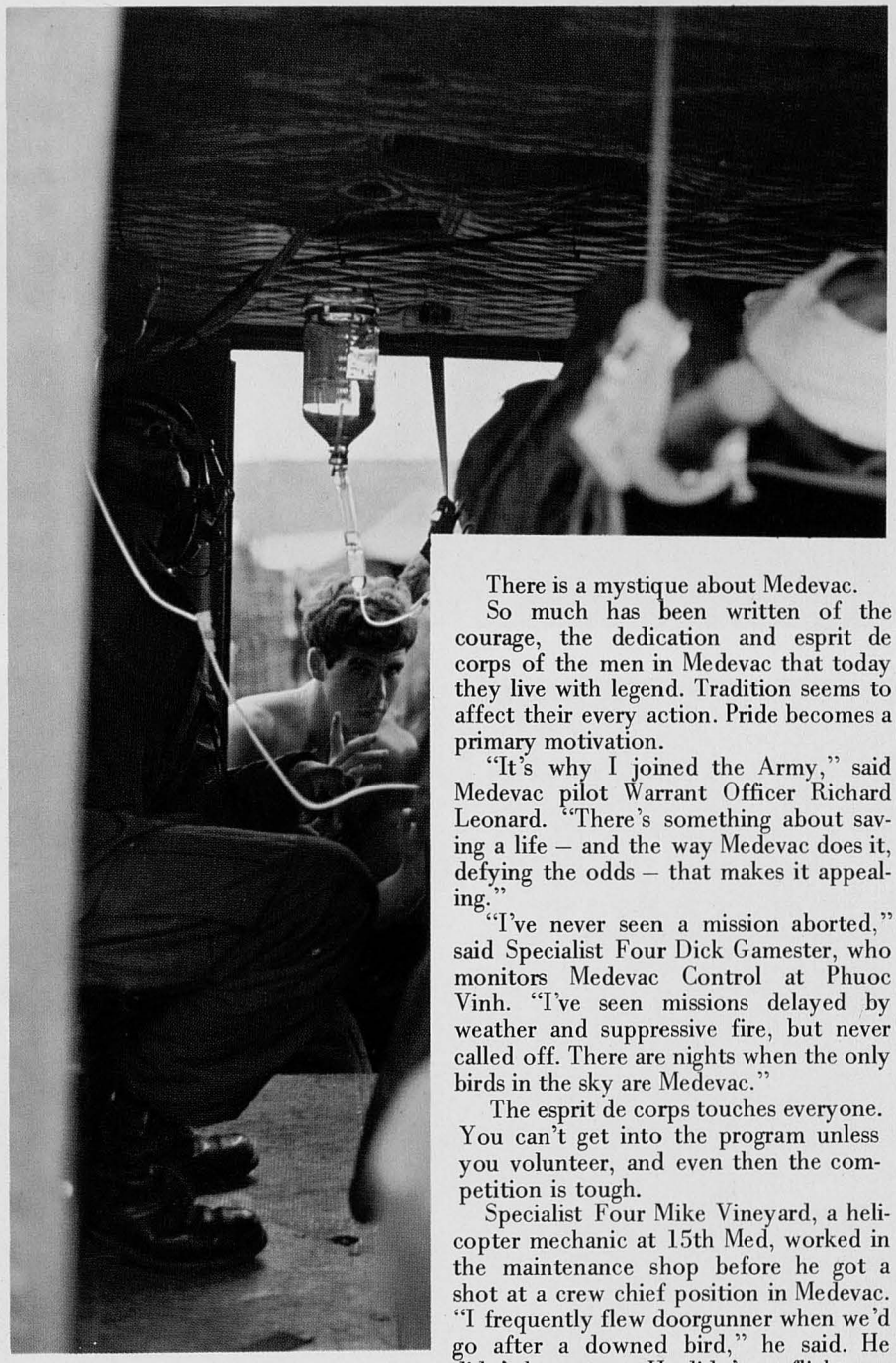
BORCHESTER

BORCHESTER

They will be remembered as long as men fly and the hurt cry out for help.

medevac

By SP4 Tom Benic



AHRBECK

There is a mystique about Medevac.

So much has been written of the courage, the dedication and esprit de corps of the men in Medevac that today they live with legend. Tradition seems to affect their every action. Pride becomes a primary motivation.

"It's why I joined the Army," said Medevac pilot Warrant Officer Richard Leonard. "There's something about saving a life – and the way Medevac does it, defying the odds – that makes it appealing."

"I've never seen a mission aborted," said Specialist Four Dick Gamester, who monitors Medevac Control at Phuoc Vinh. "I've seen missions delayed by weather and suppressive fire, but never called off. There are nights when the only birds in the sky are Medevac."

The esprit de corps touches everyone. You can't get into the program unless you volunteer, and even then the competition is tough.

Specialist Four Mike Vineyard, a helicopter mechanic at 15th Med, worked in the maintenance shop before he got a shot at a crew chief position in Medevac. "I frequently flew doorgunner when we'd go after a downed bird," he said. He didn't have to go. He didn't get flight pay for it.

"You just do it," he said. "When a bird goes down, everyone heads for the pad. It's like a brotherhood."

That startling routine response to a call that seems beyond that of duty is part of the mystique of Medevac. Yet there is another side.

"It gets to be a little hairy at times," said Medevac pilot Captain Ernest Bayford. "But I wouldn't say there's excessive strain on anyone."

He's right, of course. Medevac teams lead a very comfortable life when the going is slow. Half their time is free. Even at the brigade field hospitals, where the teams are on call 24 hours a day, they have no duties until suddenly, though routinely, they are called to scramble.

"Downed aircraft, let's go! " Captain Bayford shouted from the doorway of the crew quarters. It was 2:21 p.m. and the scramble was on. The crew reached the chopper at full stride; in minutes it was airborne, hitting 100 knots at treetop level. The bird climbed to 2,000 feet; then nine minutes after the call and ten miles northeast of Quan Loi, the descent began.

They circled once at 300 feet as a Cobra gunship pulled in behind. The downed aircraft was somewhere in the thick green foliage below. A Light Observation Helicopter (LOH), flying as low as it could, finally spotted the wreckage and marked it with purple smoke.

Aircraft commander Bayford banked the ship to the left and hovered over the now visible downed helicopter, its slender tail protruding through the bamboo.

It was 2:33 when Specialist Five William Meeks attached the yellow, torpedo-like jungle penetrator to the cable hoist and lowered it to the bamboo below.

On the ground a man grasped it and, shielding his face from the entangling bush, rode the cable skyward. He looked straight up at the chopper with a strained smile, drawing closer, closer until he could touch the skid, grab the medic's hand and pull himself aboard.

"We've got to get the pilot out! We've got to, got to! " he said again and again, breathing hard as he lay against the cabin wall.

The whine of the hoist started up again, bringing the rescued door gunner to the side of the ship and inside. He clutched at the medic-crew chief. It was 2:35.

"He's trapped. I couldn't budge him. He waved me away," the man blurted out. "We've got to get him out, we've got to," said the door gunner.

"They will. They will," answered the medic.

The ship gained altitude slowly, banked to the left and circled again at 300 feet. It was up to the Blues now – the crack infantry element of the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, already airlifted to the area and maneuvering toward the downed aircraft and its pinned pilot.

The Medevac chopper circled above. Specialist Meeks turned at once to his patients, wrapping and taping the crushed toes of the door gunner.

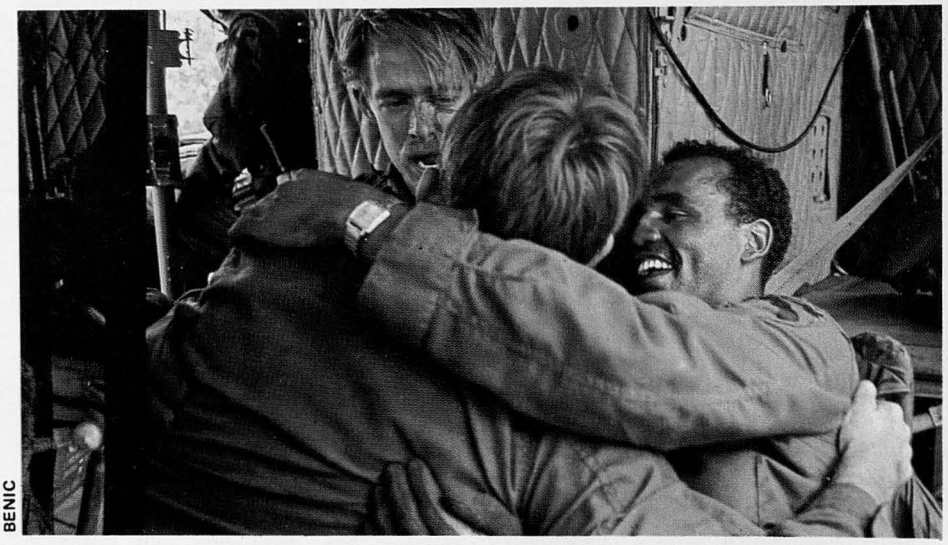
As the chopper passed over the crash site for the fourth time, a thick cloud of white smoke erupted from the bamboo below, and there was a bright red flash from the ground.

"Hey, man, our ship just blew up! " the wounded door gunner shouted. He turned to the medic with his eyes wide and fearful. The medic talked into his radio mouthpiece, listened, and then looked up at his patient.

"He's all right. The Blues got him out. He's okay."

The helicopter circled down to land in a yellow meadow close to the crashed and burning chopper. The rescued door gunner looked past the medic. A big smile shot across his face and he flashed the "V" sign at the freed pilot, now sprinting toward the ship.

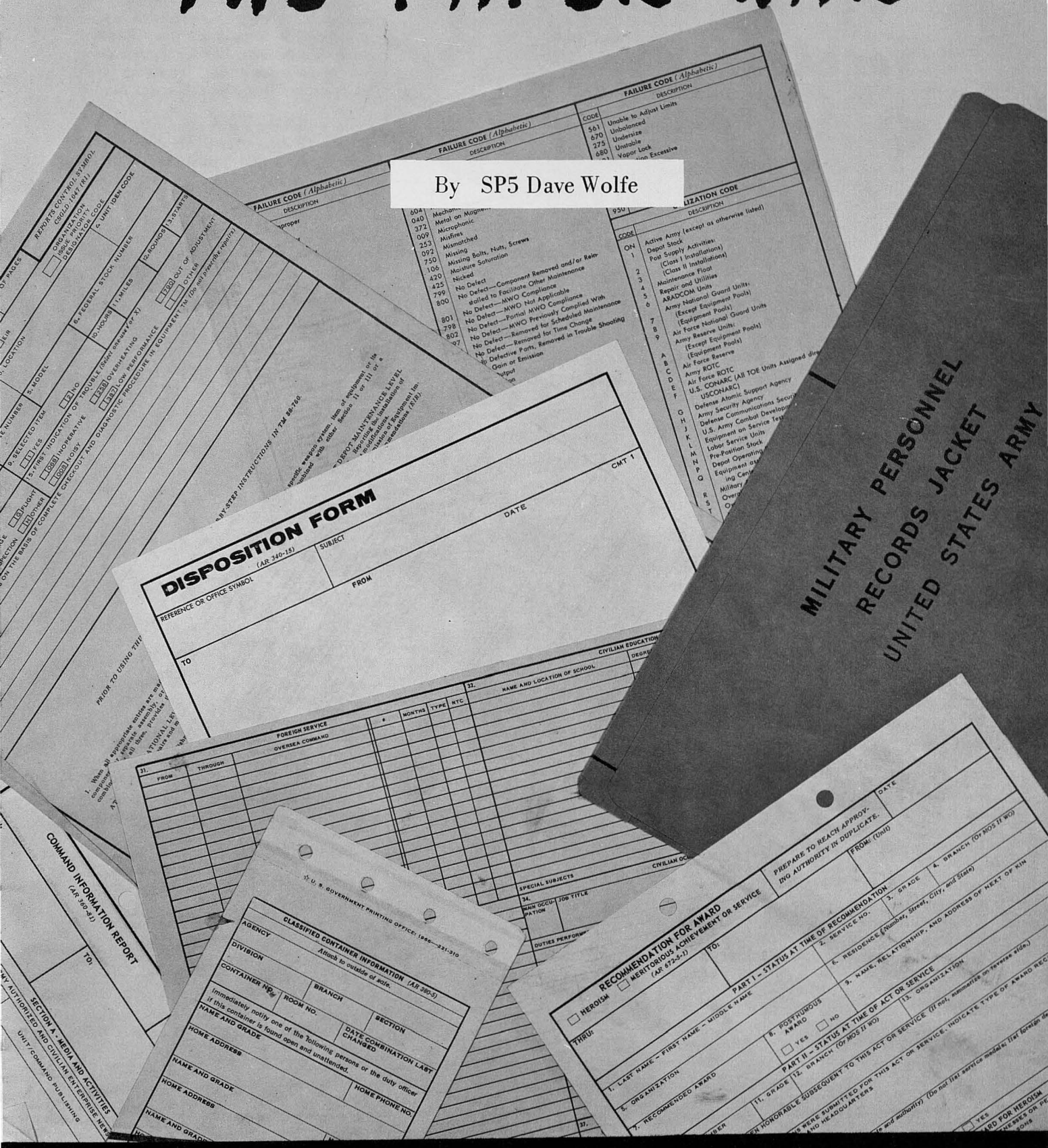
"You're the greatest. You're the greatest," the rescued pilot cried to the Medevac crew as he climbed aboard. Then he turned and lunged at his own two crew members who caught him in a wild embrace.



BENIC

THE PAPER WAR

By SP5 Dave Wolfe



... and the battle of boredom

The day included a four click hump. A night defensive position is just around the corner. And a resupply kick-out is scheduled. Mail is on the way.

One of the men out here is Tommy Reynolds. The 23-year-old southern Californian has it pretty tough right now when compared to his way of life back in "the world." There's a six-month-old son at home who's growing like a weed. He's never seen his child.

When the mail is thrown from the log bird two hours from now, Tommy will receive a letter from his wife – the first in several days. He will not have to go out on night ambush this day and he's got a new mosquito net to use tonight. Life is good – sometimes.

The letter says she's fine and that the baby is cutting a tooth. Everyone says Tommy Jr. looks just like his daddy. She sends her love and tells him not to worry about things.

But he must worry because the responsibility is his. He thinks to himself how good it is to know her allotment check is now made out for more money, just in case something comes up. He'd taken care of that a month ago at the VIP center.

He withdraws and dreams a little. R&R is only 12 days ahead. 'Hawaii, here we come!' And that promotion will help make the wife's life a little more comfy. Only 65 days to go 'til DEROS.

Tommy Reynolds is fairly representative of the some 21,000 soldiers in the 1st Cav. They share many

of the same problems, including promotions, financial records data, personnel problems, efficiency reports and other assorted clerical work that creates a mountain of paperwork. When multiplied by the number of soldiers in the division, the task is seemingly insurmountable.

Tending papers, filing disposition forms, maintaining records and cutting stencils are part of this business. It is, indeed, a large chore, but the job can be done and done well.

What about the man who does this job? What makes him go?

He is an American citizen, most often a very good one. Ranging in age anywhere from 19 to 24 years, he may have been drafted out of college or perhaps he entered the Army following high school. Some people like to call him a "citizen soldier." Right now he happens to be a clerk.

A citizen gone military may perform one of more than 200 jobs. Some are infantrymen, others work with artillery. There are engineers and cooks, signalmen, medics and mechanics; specialists of one kind or another doing every type of job imaginable. And there are clerks...lots of them.

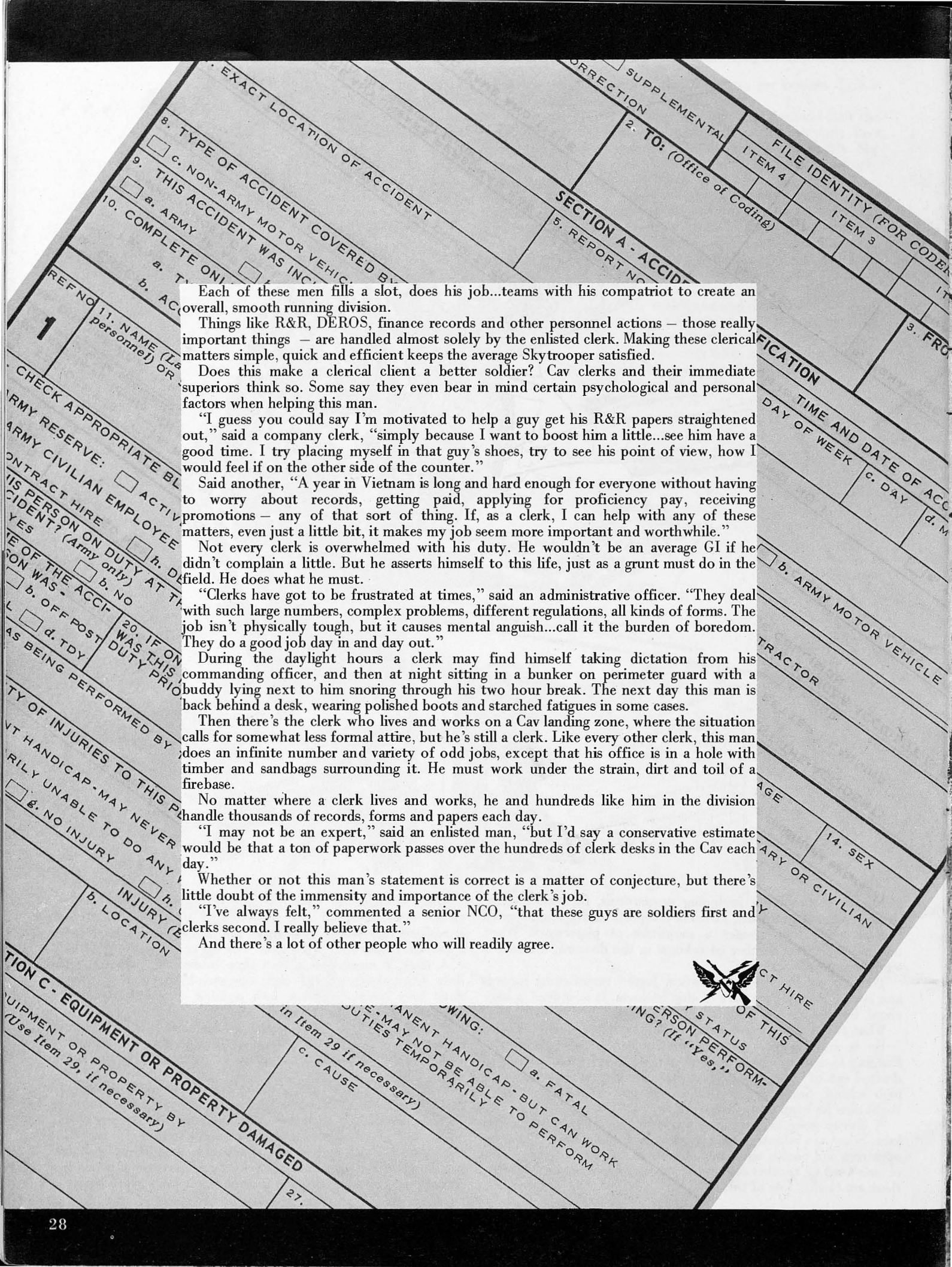
Many soldiers are leery in their outward attitude toward a clerk. They tend to shy away from this man when using complimentary words. They may call him a rear echelon warrior, a man that "gets over," one that "has the good life."

A clerk is more than a part time soldier. He pulls KP, guard duty, CQ and other details right alongside his peers. He's often on duty long hours, whether he's pushing a pencil, torturing a typewriter or totaling statistics.

Yet the clerk's job remains a thankless one, unheralded, unpublicized, sometimes boring – but necessary. His mission is varied, sometimes complex, seldom dangerous, but again, always important.

Said an infantry officer, "There's no doubt we underestimate the job clerks do. They are important. It's got to be that way. They do what they must and do it well, just like the rest of us."

The list of job opportunities for clerks is long. He may be a clerk typist, stenographer, a legal or court clerk. There are postal, personnel and administrative clerks. Chaplain assistants, medical records specialists, supply and finance clerks work everywhere.



Each of these men fills a slot, does his job...teams with his compatriot to create an overall, smooth running division.

Things like R&R, DEROS, finance records and other personnel actions – those really important things – are handled almost solely by the enlisted clerk. Making these clerical matters simple, quick and efficient keeps the average Skytrooper satisfied.

Does this make a clerical client a better soldier? Cav clerks and their immediate superiors think so. Some say they even bear in mind certain psychological and personal factors when helping this man.

"I guess you could say I'm motivated to help a guy get his R&R papers straightened out," said a company clerk, "simply because I want to boost him a little...see him have a good time. I try placing myself in that guy's shoes, try to see his point of view, how I would feel if on the other side of the counter."

Said another, "A year in Vietnam is long and hard enough for everyone without having to worry about records, getting paid, applying for proficiency pay, receiving promotions – any of that sort of thing. If, as a clerk, I can help with any of these matters, even just a little bit, it makes my job seem more important and worthwhile."

Not every clerk is overwhelmed with his duty. He wouldn't be an average GI if he didn't complain a little. But he asserts himself to this life, just as a grunt must do in the field. He does what he must.

"Clerks have got to be frustrated at times," said an administrative officer. "They deal with such large numbers, complex problems, different regulations, all kinds of forms. The job isn't physically tough, but it causes mental anguish...call it the burden of boredom. They do a good job day in and day out."

During the daylight hours a clerk may find himself taking dictation from his commanding officer, and then at night sitting in a bunker on perimeter guard with a buddy lying next to him snoring through his two hour break. The next day this man is back behind a desk, wearing polished boots and starched fatigues in some cases.

Then there's the clerk who lives and works on a Cav landing zone, where the situation calls for somewhat less formal attire, but he's still a clerk. Like every other clerk, this man does an infinite number and variety of odd jobs, except that his office is in a hole with timber and sandbags surrounding it. He must work under the strain, dirt and toil of a firebase.

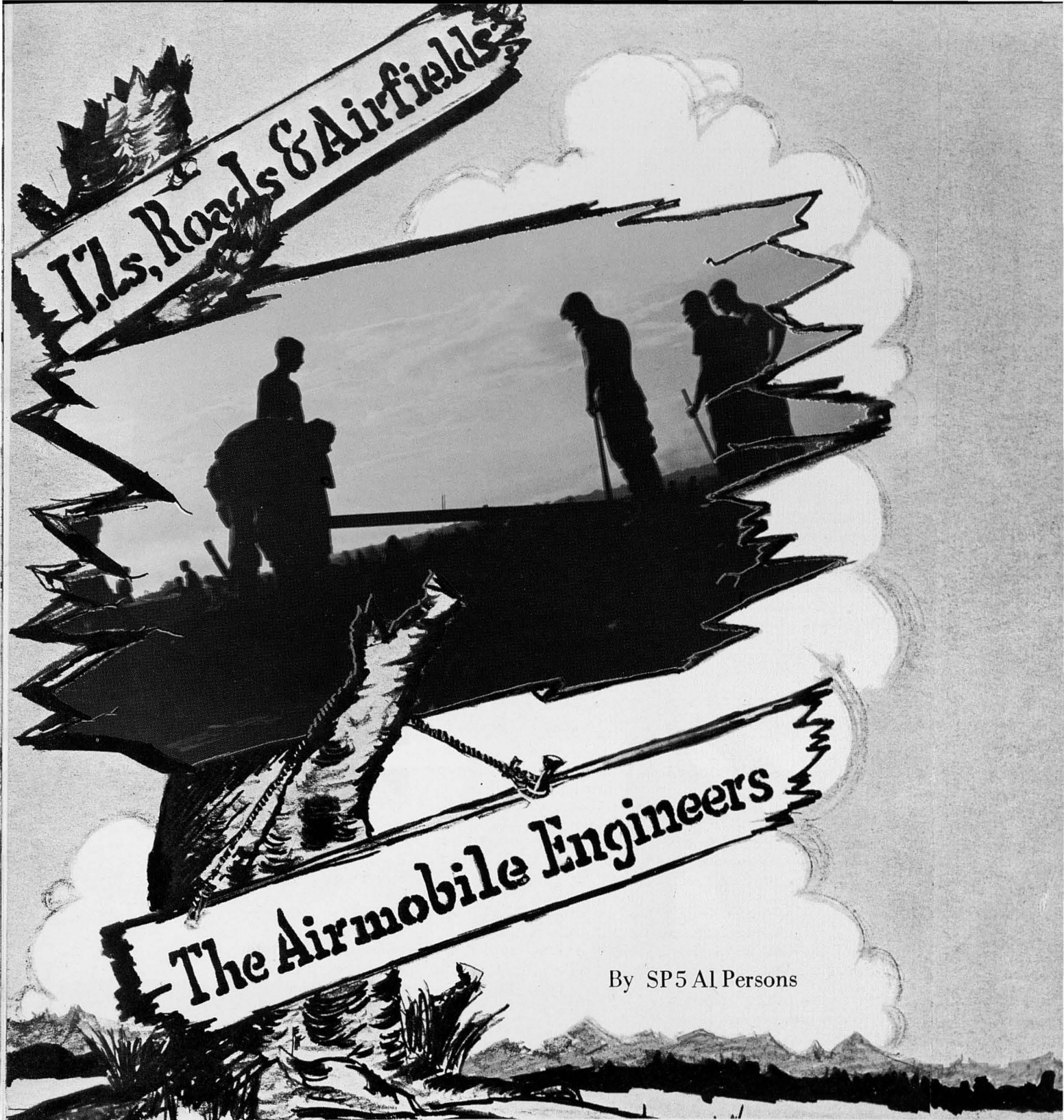
No matter where a clerk lives and works, he and hundreds like him in the division handle thousands of records, forms and papers each day.

"I may not be an expert," said an enlisted man, "but I'd say a conservative estimate would be that a ton of paperwork passes over the hundreds of clerk desks in the Cav each day."

Whether or not this man's statement is correct is a matter of conjecture, but there's little doubt of the immensity and importance of the clerk's job.

"I've always felt," commented a senior NCO, "that these guys are soldiers first and clerks second. I really believe that."

And there's a lot of other people who will readily agree.



Imagine that you are a workman with a large construction firm which contracts the building of airstrips, roads and suburban housing developments, and that schedules require the completion of these projects in the minimal amount of time.

Add to this situation the fact that all your work is done in a tropical country where either a blazing sun bakes the back of your neck or the gush of monsoon rain buries your equipment in two feet of mud.

Having their work complicated by exactly these circumstances, the Skybeavers, the airmobile engineers of the 8th Engineer Battalion, operate when and where things need building or improvement.

The battalion's crude but expedient workmanship gives the division the required, bare necessities for tactical operation. The airstrips they build keep supplies flowing by Air Force fixed wing and their roads move the sustenance for battle. In the case of the Cav's engineers, the civilian housing project becomes a firebase, an airmobile division's landing zone.

But perhaps the most important mission of the Cav's "private construction company" is that of building LZs. The construction generally begins in an isolated patch of land, a co-ordinate anywhere on the map of the division's AO. The only apparent sign of civilization is an old dirt road, which by appearances has long since been forgotten.

Then come the helicopters.

The first sortie contains only a handful of men and equipment. These pioneers begin the initial stages of clearing away the thick brush and sparse tree overgrowth.

BLACKMARR

SGROI

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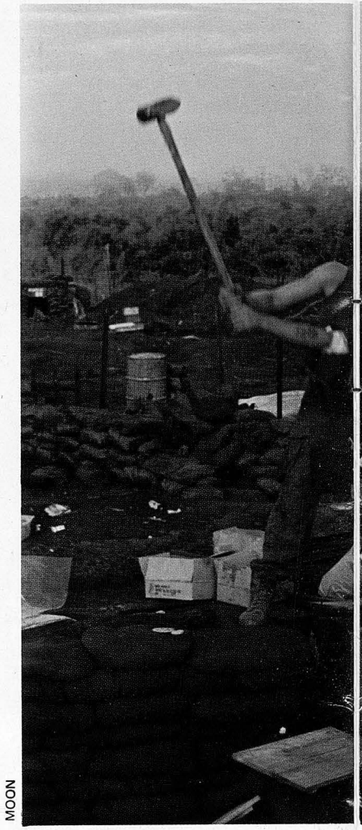
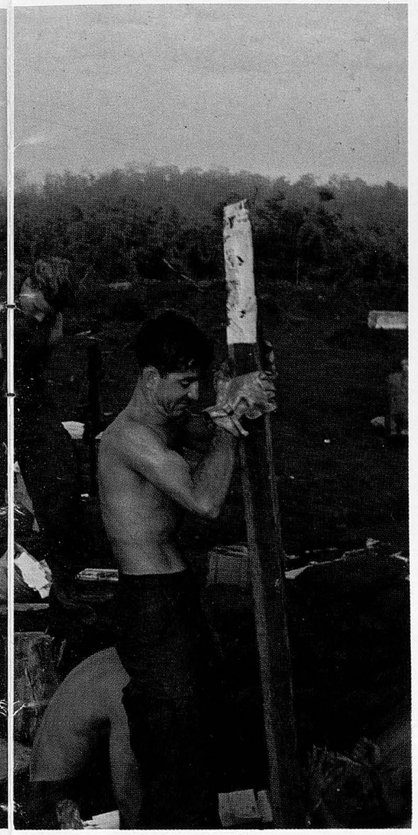
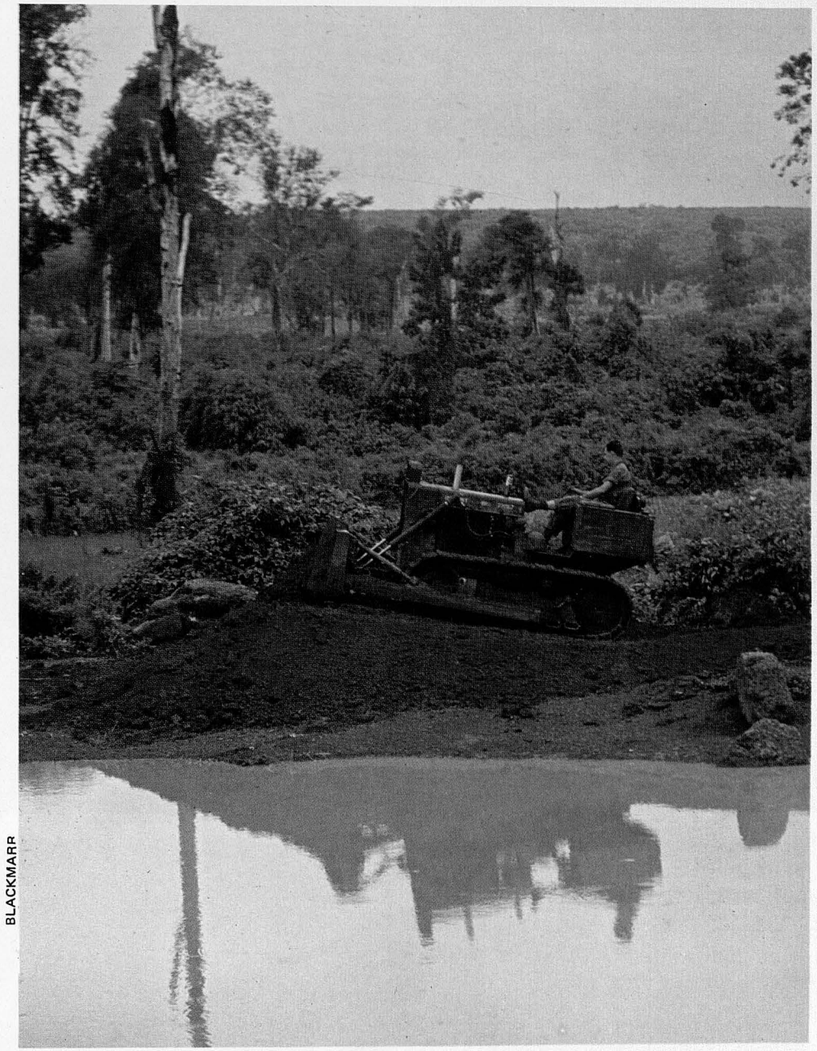
MOON

SGROI



MOON





BLACKMARR

Walking in a circle, the new arrivals to the only moments before unpopulated area begin plotting what will be the perimeter of a new Cav firebase – Landing Zone...well, you name it.

More men and equipment are continually lifted into the new tactical location. Bulldozers and backhoes scrape away the foliage and vegetation. In a matter of hours the once green patch of land becomes reddish-orange, the characteristic color of soil in the area.

As strands of wire are strung about the nearly circular perimeter, and a waist-high protective berm is being raised, the artillery positions begin taking shape. At the same time soldiers work on the artillery fire direction center (FDC) and the infantry tactical operation center (TOC), both of which half protrude above the surface.

Small culvert and poncho hootches begin sprouting everywhere as the LZ's population builds refuge against nature's monsoon season. As though planned and scheduled, the rain comes. A few of the men scurry into their make-shift homes, but the majority stay outside so that the rain can wash away the sweat and red dust which tints their skin.

Despite the rain and ensuing mud, the LZ continues to take shape. In no apparent time at all the perimeter bunkers are completed, a VIP pad is cleared, ammunition supply and water points are established, a medical bunker is built and even a garbage pit has been dug.

In less than two full work days an uninhabited, unmolested and unclaimed section of real estate has been converted into a tactically located, fully operational 1st Cav forward fire support base.

The use of the landing zone in the Vietnam War takes the place of the established forward combat line common to conventional warfare. The movement of firebases from one tactical location to a new site, depending largely upon intelligence reports of enemy activity, gives the division the complete freedom of movement inherent to its official name, airmobile.

These mobile tactical locations are used for varying lengths of time, ranging from only a few hours to several months, again, based upon the tactical situation. This fact of life makes the mission of the Skybeavers a very important one, indeed.

Seemingly impenetrable, Cav firebases serve a necessary function in that they give the infantry battalion the latitude needed for finding the enemy in his own habitat, the triple canopy jungle. While the infantrymen meet the opposition on the battlefield, engineers fight a different war, one against nature and her elements.

DEDICATION

On September 3, 1969, a Huey helicopter carrying four 8th Engineer Battalion officers and a crew of four was shot down over dense jungle near Quan Loi. All aboard were killed.

One of those aboard was Lieutenant Colonel Andre G. Broumas, the 8th Engineer Battalion commander, a 1954 graduate of West Point. Colonel Broumas had previously served as battalion executive officer from July 1966, to July 1967. He returned to Vietnam to command the battalion in May of this year.

In memory of Colonel Broumas and all the Army engineers who have died in the performance of duty, this article is humbly dedicated.

A great deal of planning has gone into the construction of this and every LZ. Ideas from the infantry, artillery and engineers are incorporated into the planning of the firebase's development.

The engineers first try to determine an area where the construction will be the most convenient to things like drainage and available water. If these are handy, and meet the needs of the artillery and infantry, the date for opening the LZ is set. The tactical situation still reigns over all other considerations.

Construction priorities are established next and a site plan is developed, essentially based on knowledge of terrain and weather factors. Aerial reconnaissance and photography also play a part in these determinations.

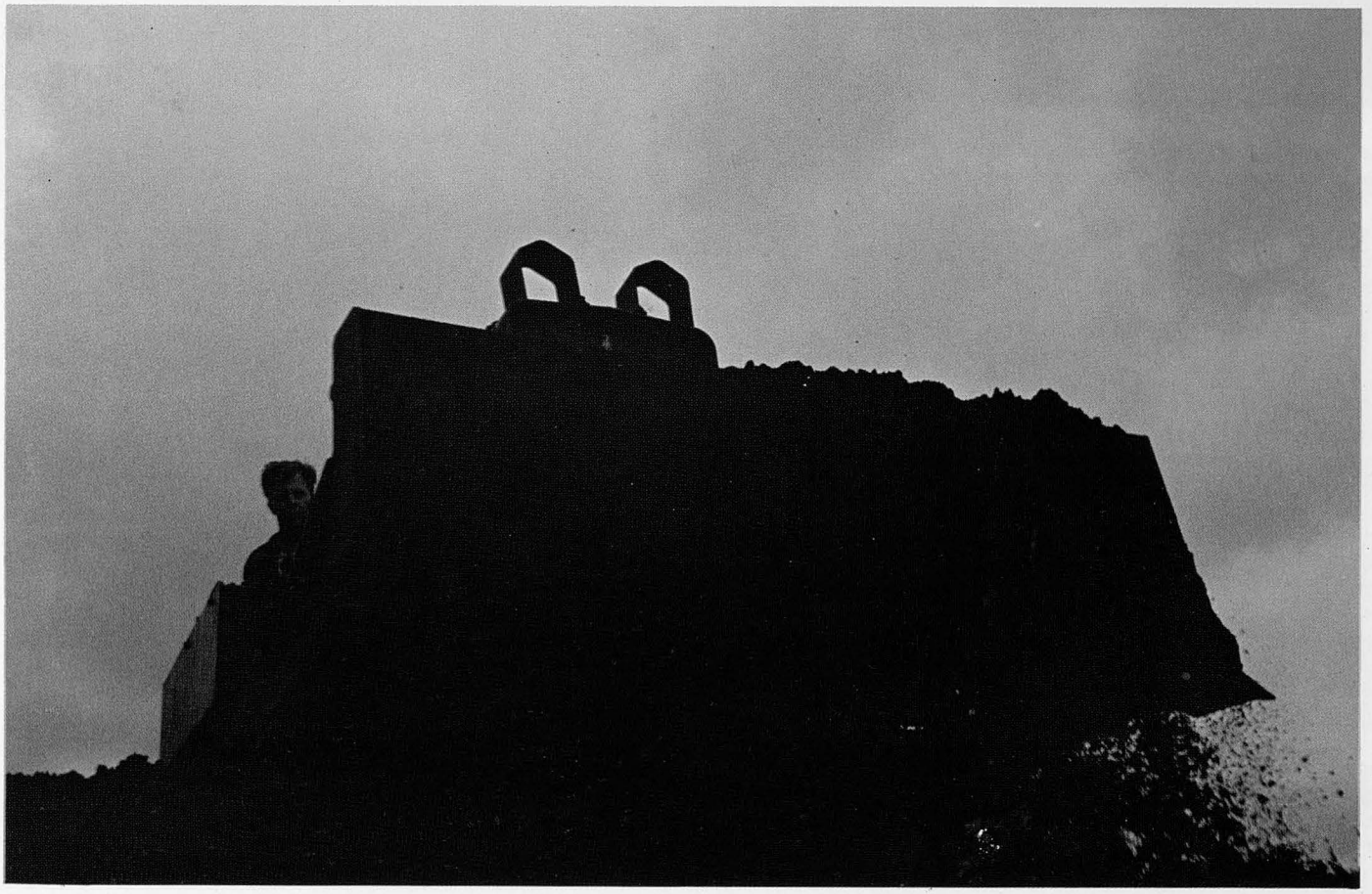
At this point the tactical commander is relieved of further construction-planning responsibilities. The brigade engineer commander determines other requirements and obtains approvals and material releases through the brigade's S-4 channels.

Engineer equipment requests are made directly to the engineer battalion, while tactical troop and logistical lifts are arranged by the tactical commander. Lifts of engineer materials and equipment are co-ordinated by the brigade engineer through normal channels. The construction effort is then scheduled by the engineer unit commander.

All of these planning stages create a smooth continuity for the entire building operation.

Any engineer's parched lips, tired muscles, tanned back and dirty fatigues tell the story of a Skybeaver engineer's way of life. Whether he is a surveyor, drives an earth mover or a backhoe, carries steel, constructs TOCs or wood and tin buildings, or fills one of a thousand sandbags, the engineer is the Cav's I-beam, the backbone of the division's crude comfort and tactical mobility.

He is a FIRST TEAM engineer.



THE REWARD OF COMMAND

By SP5 Joe Kamalick

Every young American who fights in Vietnam will leave with an experience unique to the infantry. He will have come to know one man very well—leader, teacher, dictator and father—his company commander. Those who command and their relations with soldiers are like no others in the ordinary lives of men, because they are born in the crucible of war.

Like other men, commanders vary in personality. But as professionals they have one heavy distinction: their decisions directly involve their own and the lives of others.

Leading men into personal, physical danger demands an uncommon command attitude. It is not that of a basic training or stateside garrison company commander—the spit-shine and starch discipline imposed from without must be replaced by an inner and stronger discipline, the desire to survive.

"The things that keep people alive out here are the small day to day things like setting out trip flares, keeping your weapon clean and checking your ammo," said Captain Richard Haney of Silversprings, Md.

Most men will do those basic "little things," he said. But still "there are people who will not do things that they should, and it's then that you need the authority of command." Then he uses his absolute authority as a dictator. "You cannot allow a man to get killed because he is lazy," said Captain Haney.

His relationship with his men is casual, but the respect is there. "I like to have—and it is necessary to have—an informal relationship with my men. They refer to me by my radio call sign, a nickname, and I use their first names."

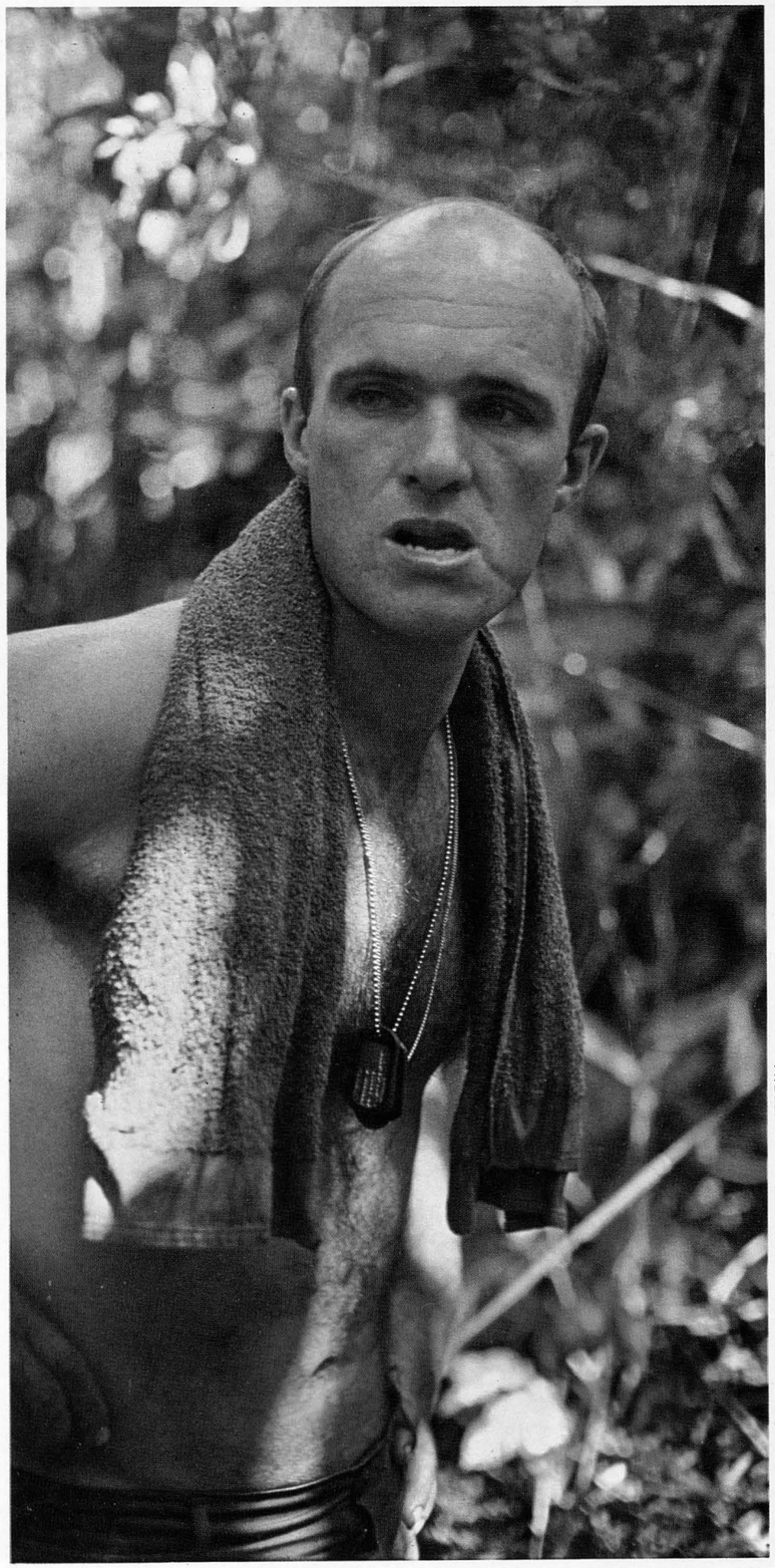
"In working with and commanding the men, I feel that if they know why we're doing something they'll want to do it."

The field commander does not sit in a lofty tower of authority. He is close to his men, sharing their hardships and suffering. He is one with them but for one difference, the command decision.

"My decisions are not infallible," said the 25-year-old Captain Haney. "I can make mistakes unseen by the higher-ups that will be known only to my men. So if I don't listen to them and hear their opinions, then I am alone...then there is no one else out here to help me."

"I listen to their objections, and if I do not agree I'll explain to them why we're going to do it my way anyway."

"You see," he said, "we have an open relationship, it's give and



MERRILL

take. But when the decision is made it is all mine and it is final." In that he is alone, set off from the others as the man in command.

Invariably, the field commander enjoys his work. He does not, of course, enjoy being shot at or enjoy seeing his men endangered, but he takes satisfaction from the act of commanding.

"I like the field much better than having a staff job," said Captain Hoyt L. Dennard of Gordon, Ga. "Out here you get a sense of accomplishment in seeing people perform well as a result of your decisions. In a staff job the results are obscure, you can't actually see what happens."

"But out here," he said, pointing a thumb over his shoulder to the field where his men were waiting for a combat assault, "out here you can see what actually happens. All the different things—the plans and decisions and moves—come to a point and you can see it."

Captain Dennard looked over his men. "I try to talk to and get to know as many of my men as possible." They were sitting in shallow grass, talking and resting while watching for the bobbing line of Hueys that would take them to an assault just a thousand meters away from the Cambodian border. They would go into combat under the direction of Captain Dennard. They would do what he asked, hopefully not out of fear of court martial or because he wears two bars on his collar, but because he commands.

"It's better to have people work for you because they want to, not because they have to—so you ease off on the pressure to get this," he said.

"I became a company commander because I like to work with people, because I'm interested in human nature, in what makes men act and behave as they do. Out here, in the field and in combat, you can see that best."

"I can't help but have some paternal attitude toward my men. They depend on you and you are responsible for them." Captain Dennard is 26-years-old, hardly more in years than many of his men.

The young lieutenant sat outside his poncho hootch on a hilltop overlooking the yellow grass valley below and the next green jungle hilltop beyond. He talked about his command, a platoon. It is not the same as commanding a full company, he said.

"I like having my platoon attached to another unit, because that way the platoon is all mine. The platoon more or less then becomes my own company. They tell you what they want and then you're on your own, you're your own boss."

The lieutenant is First Lieutenant Neil McLean, 22, of Columbus, Ga. He was graduated from "The Point" in 1968. He is eager for his own command, chomping at the bit.

For Lieutenant McLean, a command is his goal, the object of his life. What attracts him to a command "is seeing everything fall into place, seeing it go the way it should without anybody getting hurt, and knowing that it was your judgment, your action."

"I'm looking forward to having my own company because they trained me for responsibility and tactics. Only then will I be able to prove those lessons."

"It's like football," said the lieutenant. "You can practice all week, but if you don't play on Sunday you'll never know how good you are. For the professional soldier, the officer, having a company will let you know whether you can cut the military mustard." There are those who cannot.

On another hill a captain told his men to get ready to move out. A sergeant asked him what the tactical situation was. "The tactical situation is that Charlie is everywhere around here, but we can't find him." But Captain Joe Flesch, 27, of Kirksville, Mo., would look again that day. And his men would follow him in the search.

"The thought of my responsibility for the men is with me always. My job is to take a maximum number of men into effective combat, and then come out of it with the maximum number of men possible."

He has an objective and a responsibility for some 100 lives. Fulfilling both is his task, his command.

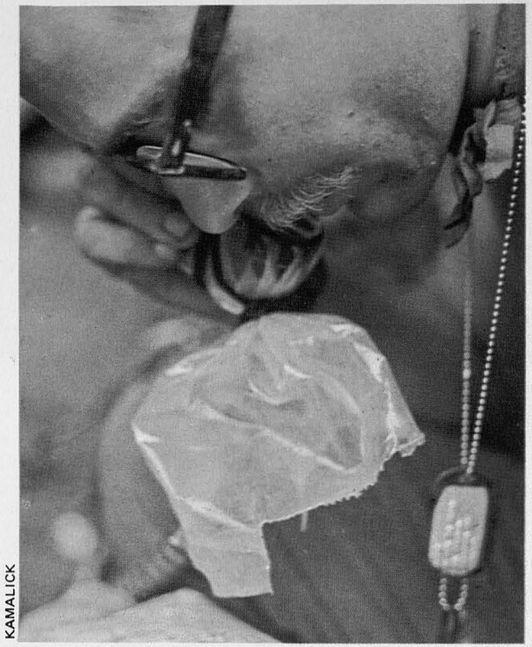
It is not a job that would find wide appeal on the "Professional Positions" page of a newspaper. The life is hard and austere, uncomfortable and wet. And no matter how much you get paid, it falls short of being commensurate with the value of your own life, risked daily in the jungle.

Yet it is sought, sought for the reward that no other job can offer.

Captain Flesch thought for a moment. "I guess the reward of being a company commander is the good feeling you get when the men perform well."

He thought for a while again and offered one more answer. Perhaps he knew, perhaps not, but the answer had been given by another commander centuries ago. But it was Captain Flesch's answer, too.

"The reward of being a commander is command," he said.



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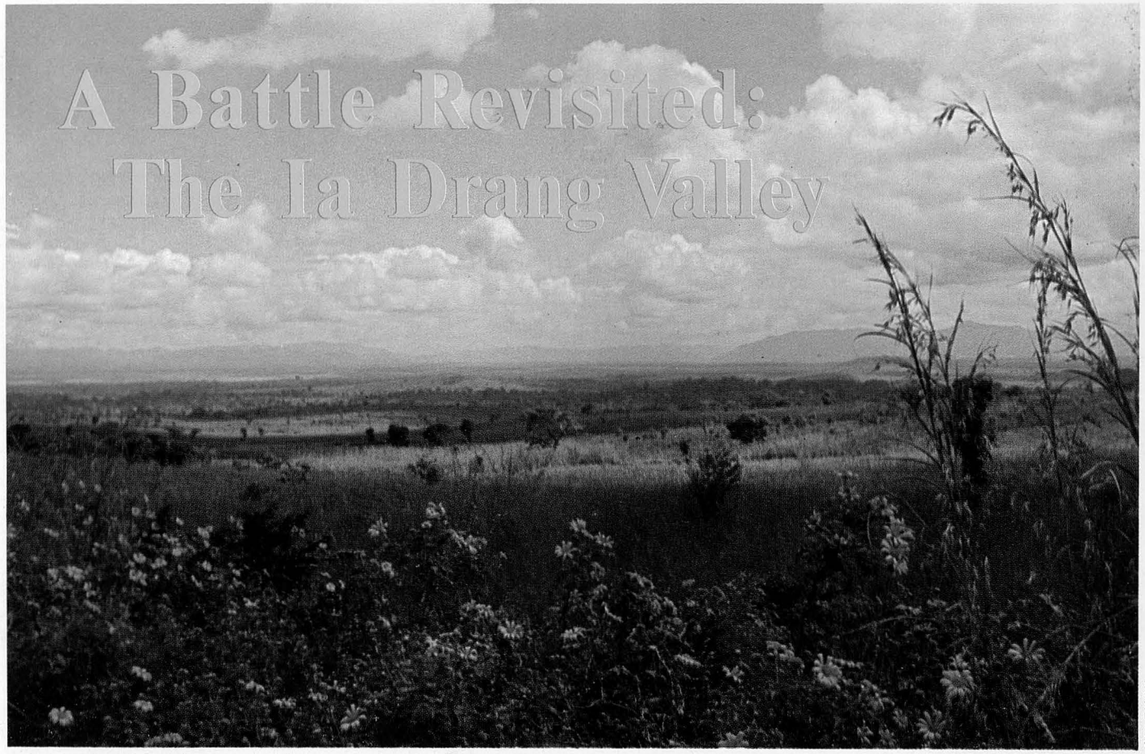

COLEMAN

By MAJ J.D. Coleman

Being first has become a habit with the 1st Cavalry Division through the years, and in Vietnam the FIRST TEAM has compiled an impressive list of "firsts."

But there is none more significant than being the first division in the Vietnam conflict to earn a Presidential Unit Citation (PUC).

The story of the PUC is more than a story of valor, although that is an indispensable element for the award.

There have been many combat actions in Vietnam since then in which units have exhibited a high degree of courage. But the Pleiku Campaign—as the 35 days of airmobile operations that swept across the plateau country west and south of Pleiku was to be called—was precursory.

The Pleiku Campaign was the first real combat test of the FIRST TEAM as a unit, and for the fledgling airmobile concept.

But the campaign was more than just the triumph of a concept.

The campaign marked the first major confrontation between a U.S. Army division and a North Vietnamese division. Again, however, this "first" by itself was not overly significant.

It is when considering the results of the battle in the context of the strategic and political implications of the enemy actions that the Pleiku Campaign looms as a monumental feat of arms.

It all started on October 19th, 1965, when the Special Forces Camp at Plei Me, some 35 miles south of the key provincial capitol of Pleiku, was beseiged by a strong enemy force. The force was later identified as the NVA 33rd Regiment.

This was the lure.

Intelligence quickly picked up the presence of a second NVA regiment, the 32nd, deployed along the road from Pleiku to Plei Me Camp. Any relief column sent to assist the beseiged camp would surely have to run a bloody gauntlet.

This was the ambush.

Since a regimental-sized ambush was fully anticipated by allied commanders, it was decided to commit reaction forces of sufficient strength to smash the ambush and punish the enemy.

This was the Cav's opening scene in the drama that was to ensue. A battalion task force, including airmobile artillery, was flown from the Cav's base at An Khe to Pleiku and given a reinforcement mission.

The battle at Plei Me was not a haphazard engagement generated by local enemy forces. It was the outgrowth of a master plan by the enemy—a campaign to secure and dominate a major portion of the Republic of Vietnam. The plan envisaged the commitment of three NVA divisions in the northern and central portion of the Republic.

One such division was to conduct the Tay Nguyen (Western Plateau) Campaign and to attempt to seize Kontum, Pleiku, Binh Dinh and Phu Bon Provinces.

The lure and the ambush at Plei Me was the opening gun in the struggle for these vital highlands.

On the 23rd of October, when the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) relief column smashed through the ambush and relieved Plei Me, the two NVA regiments broke contact and began moving toward sanctuaries along the Cambodian border.

The Cav's mission was then changed from one of reinforcement and reaction to that of unlimited offense.

The pursuit of the NVA 33rd Regiment by the battalions of the 1st Brigade and the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, introduced to the enemy a new concept in warfare. His retreat from Plei Me to the Chu Pong Massif on the Cambodian border became a nightmare.

North Vietnamese regulars were routed from their hiding places, hounded and pursued, fragmented and destroyed in terrain they had believed would be their protector. Nothing in their background or training had prepared them to cope with the full effects of unleashed airmobile pursuit.

On the 9th of November, a lull came to the battlefield, and the division commander, Major General Harry W. O. Kinnard, decided to bring in the 3rd Brigade, fresh and spoiling for a fight.

At the same time the NVA division was also introducing new

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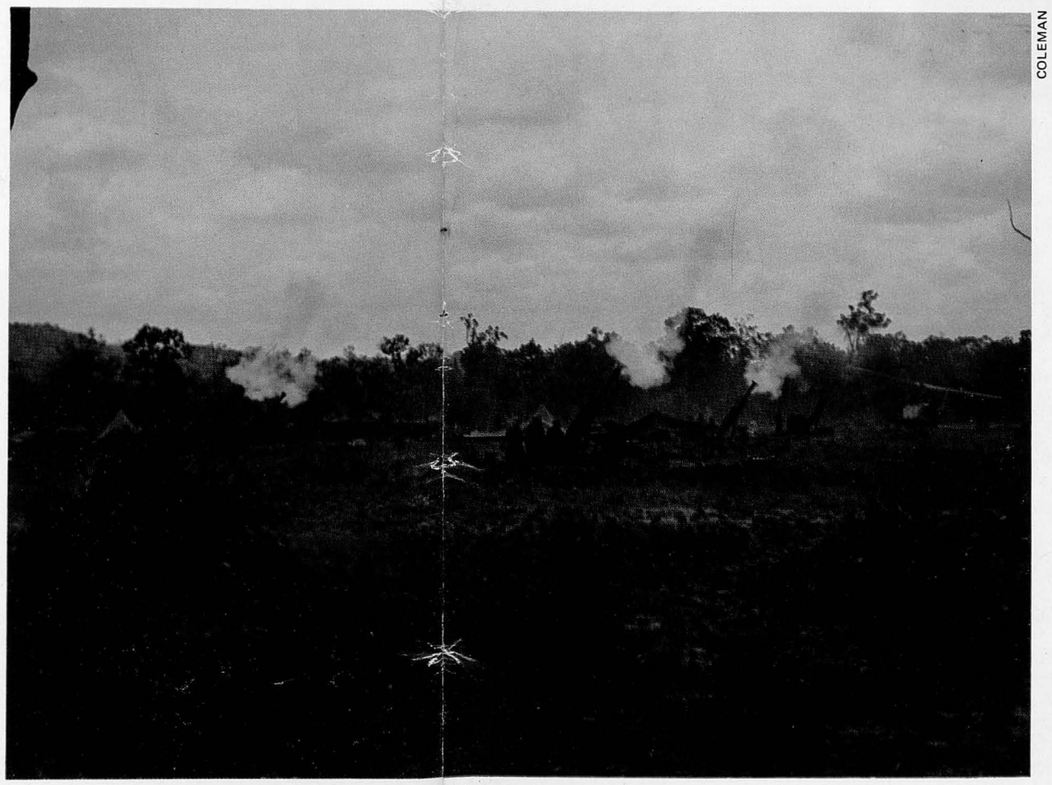
A battery of 105mm howitzers punches off a load of high explosive steel in support of Skytroopers at battle in the Ia Drang Valley. To keep up with the fast moving fight, the division conducted 79 different battery airlifts in a 35-day period.



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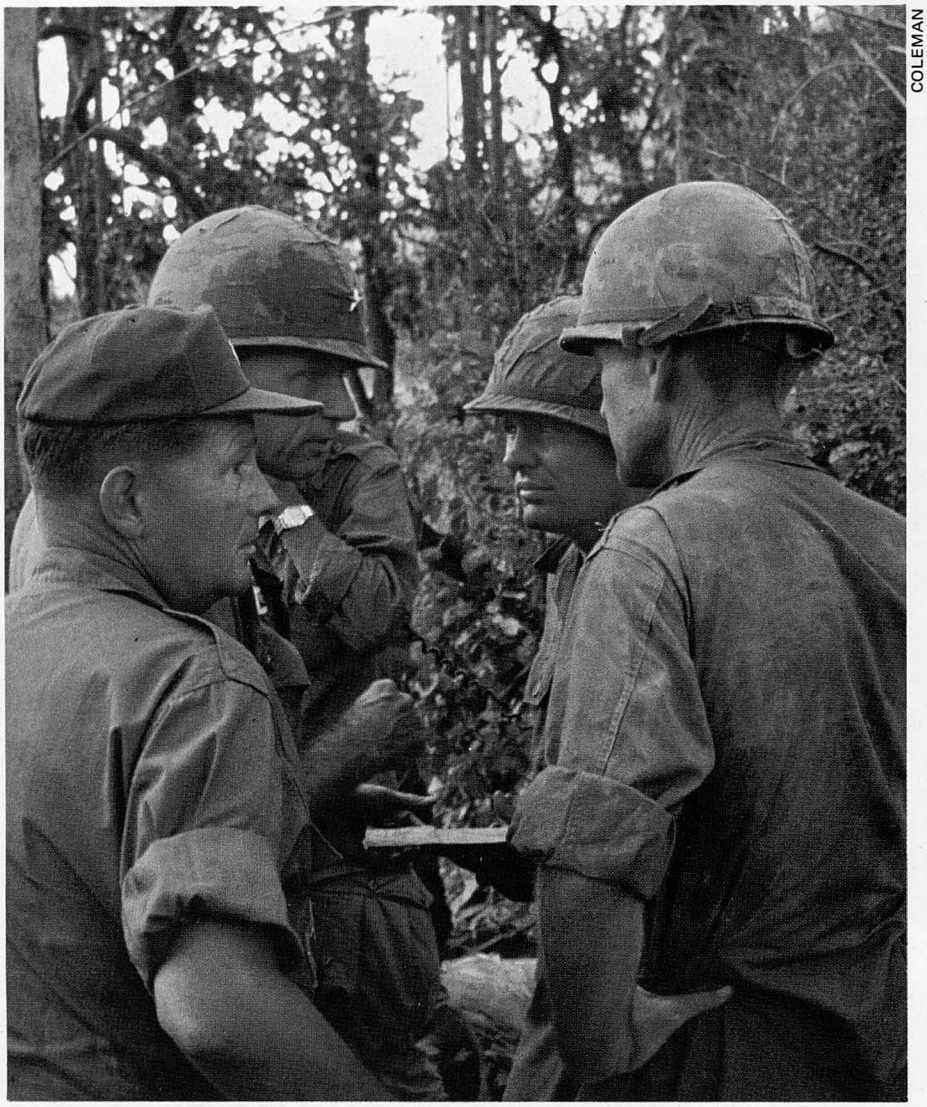


COLEMAN

As the continuing fight rolled on, a momentary lull in action at Landing Zone X-ray gave time for a field commanders' planning session. At right rear is Brigadier General Richard Knowles, the Assistant Division Commander for Operations at that time.

troops to the battle. Fresh from the infiltration trail, the 66th NVA Regiment moved into staging areas in the valley of the Ia Drang and along the edge of the Chu Pong Massif.

On the morning of the 14th of November, the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, air assaulted into a landing zone code-named "X-Ray."

There they met the 66th Regiment head on.

For the next three days, LZ X-Ray became the scene of some of the most violent combat ever experienced by Cavalrymen. The 66th and remnants of the 33rd Regiment tried again and again to overrun the unprotected LZ.

Incredible acts of heroism began occurring as soon as the NVA launched the first massive attack. And one of the greatest was that of an infantry second lieutenant.

Walter J. Marm, now a captain serving again with the 1st Cav, earned the Medal of Honor that day in the Ia Drang, his courage an inspiration to those about him.

The combination of conspicuous gallantry and massive fire power of the FIRST TEAM inflicted hideous casualties on the enemy.

But more was yet to come.

On the 17th of November, the decision was made to maneuver away from the Chu Pong hill mass to permit a close-in B-52 air strike—the first time in history that strategic bombers were used in support of the ground scheme of maneuver.

The 1st of the 7th was airlifted to Pleiku. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, moved overland to an LZ named Columbus, where two artillery batteries were located.

And the third battalion that had fought on LZ X-Ray, the 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry, began moving toward a map location known as Albany. A battalion of the 66th Regiment also was on the move to nearly the same location.

"Unique in its valor and courage, the Air Cavalry Division has established a record which will stand for a long time for other divisions to match."

—Robert S. McNamara
December, 1965

The two battalions collided.

Mere words never can convey the agony that was Albany that afternoon, where two well-armed, determined and aggressive forces fell upon each other in a dense jungle; where friend and foe were intermingled; where it was rifleman against rifleman.

Then came another lull, and again a change in brigades. This time the 2nd Brigade was brought in.

The NVA had had enough, and the 2nd Brigade chased the remnants of the 33rd and 66th Regiments back into their Cambodian sanctuaries. At this point the ARVN Airborne Brigade had been brought into the battle, and it remained for them to drive from the Ia Drang the survivors of the 32nd, the last regiment of the NVA division that had opened the Tay Nguyen Campaign so confidently 35 days earlier.

In those 35 days, the 1st Air Cav killed 3,561 North Vietnamese soldiers and detained 157 others, literally annihilating two of the three regiments of the NVA division. The Cav captured 900 individual weapons and 126 crew served weapons, and enough munitions to completely arm an NVA battalion.

The victory was not without its cost. Three hundred cavalrymen lost their lives, and 524 others were wounded.

Above all else, history will record that there were two things achieved in the Pleiku Campaign. North Vietnamese regulars sustained their first major defeat ever, forever disrupting a well-conceived plan of conquest; and the 1st Air Cav engineered the triumph of a concept.

When Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara reviewed the results of the campaign, he called it an "unparalleled achievement." He declared: "Unique in its valor and courage, the Air Cavalry Division has established a record which will stand for a long time for other divisions to match."

General Kinnard noted that remark when he wrote: "The only higher accolade possible is the award of the Presidential Unit Citation."

In the Rose Garden of the White House in October, 1966, a grateful government concurred.

Salute from Sgt. Mike

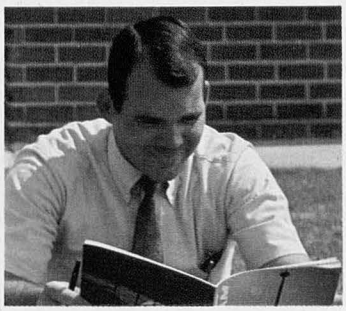
Strange as it may seem, Skytroopers in Vietnam count as one of their best buddies a 23-year-old bachelor who lives in a mobile home in Whittier, Calif., and who is an ex-Marine at that.

But it isn't odd when Mike Hodgson is introduced as the witty and talented cartoonist who created the characters Sledge and Sarge, bewhiskered stars of the syndicated "With Sgt. Mike" series appearing daily in newspapers across the United States, plus in the **Army, Navy** and **Air Force Times,** and the **Saigon Press.**

We would like to think that Mike simply made a wrong turn when the native Californian entered the recruiter's office in 1964, before his 18th birthday, because he's all "airmobile" at heart.

Soon, and without benefit of formal art lessons, he was penning sidesplitting impressions of military life in Vietnam in order to brighten up the letters to his parents in Sacramento. His "studio" was a foxhole or a pup tent and his "canvas" was a paper bag.

Having lived it, is Mike a hawk or a dove on Vietnam? "I'm for American servicemen as long as they're over there," he says sincerely.



Even though he's been out of the service now for more than a year, Mike has little problem developing military situations for his cynical, slack-jawed cartoon offspring.

Says Hodgson: "Just walk through a chowline with pad and pencil and you'll get a zillion punchlines."

Thanks for the laughs, Mike, from the airmobile division.

(Editor's note: The FIRST TEAM magazine staff extends it's appreciation to Joe Leonard of Pico Rivera, Calif., a free lance writer and friend of the 1st Cav, for his help in presenting Michael Hodgson's "Salute....")

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