

OCTOFOIL



9th Infantry Division in Vietnam



**Two Years
in Delta**

The nation's highest award for heroism, the Congressional Medal of Honor, has been presented to three former Old Reliables.

Sergeant Leonard K. Keller, Sergeant Sammy L. Davis and Specialist Four Raymond R. Wright all received their awards from President Lyndon B. Johnson in ceremonies at the White House.

Keller and Wright received an unprecedented double award Sept. 19, for action in the Ap Bac, May 2, 1967. Serving with Company A, 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry, the duo destroyed seven bunkers and accounted for 24 Viet Cong killed in one action.

Their company was pinned down while attempting to relieve a company that had been hit hard earlier in the day. As enemy fire poured over the area, Wright and Keller, armed with an M-60 machine gun and as many grenades as they could carry, began at one end of a bunker complex and systematically knocked out all seven bunkers and killed their



12 occupants. They also killed 12 snipers in a nearby treeline and destroyed three carbines, a semi-automatic rifle, an automatic rifle and a 60mm mortar.

Davis received his award for an action while serving with the 2d Battalion, 4th Artillery, at Fire Base Cudgel, Nov. 18, 1967. The fire base was hit by an intense mortar attack which was followed by a heavy ground attack. After Davis directed small arms fire on an enemy position, allowing his gun crew to set up their howitzers to fire directly on the position, the gun was hit by a recoilless rifle round, damaging it.

As his men left to assist other gun crews, Davis singlehandedly loaded the howitzer and fired it. With the recoil mechanism damaged, the gun jumped back, knocking Davis to the ground. Painfully injured, Davis continued to fire the weapon until it was useless and then assisted in helping three injured infantrymen, cut off from the fire base, get back to the safety of their perimeter.

Congressional Medal of Honor

OCTOFOIL

Vol. 2/Jan Feb March No. 1

9th Infantry Division in Vietnam

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THE COVER

The heat and humidity of South Vietnam have been the home of the 9th Infantry Division for two years. The cover of this OCTOFOIL symbolizes the Division and its dedication to bringing a just peace to South Vietnam. In an interview beginning on page 3, Major General Julian J. Ewell, Commanding General of the Division assesses the Division's performance of the past and what it expects to accomplish in the future. In the feature article beginning on page 6, Captain Frank Reysen, former editor of the OLD RELIABLE and Specialist 5 Tom P. Gable Jr., assistant editor of the OCTOFOIL, combine with a history of the Division's accomplishments since its arrival in Southeast Asia.

OCTOFOIL, serves as a means of expression for the views of the Commanding General and achieves command information objectives of the Department of Army and the 9th Infantry Division. Material of interest to Division members is invited and should be mailed to: Editor, OCTOFOIL, Information Office, 9th Infantry Division, APO 96370. OCTOFOIL is a quarterly publication of the 9th Infantry Division. It is published for the benefit of all members of the Division serving in Vietnam. Views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army.

Letters

to The Editor

EDITORS NOTE:

The "Letters to the Editor" column is intended to reflect the pulse of the Division. We invite and encourage any candid comment you wish to submit. Names and rank will held in confidence as a matter of editorial policy. Letters should be mailed to: EDITOR, OCTO-FOIL, Information Office, APO 96370.



Dear Editor:

I am glad your magazine took the time and space to write about RTOs and medics. They are all great guys and do more work than anybody else in the division. You write about officers too much. But you didn't that time. Thank you.

Dear Editor:

Your use of Super Private with the MP story was outstanding. You should run him in every issue. And why not run an Octofoil comic book full of all the Super Private strips? It adds a little humor to the military situation over here. All my friends and I really enjoy it.

Dear Editor:

The art work by Shumacher to illustrate the medic story was the best I have ever seen in a military publication. It really fit with the title of the article—The Death Cheaters. you could almost picture death. I hope you continue to use such great art in all issues. It complements your fine photographs and adds another medium of expression to a very versatile publication.

Dear Editor:

Outstanding! That story in the last Octofoil about Combat Neurosis was great. I've always wondered what effect the daily grind has on the average rifleman. It only raised my admiration for them and what they have to go through. I also enjoyed the rest of the magazine, but how about a story on the support soldiers. They don't have it all that easy and I think they deserve a little recognition.

Dear Editor:

As usual, the Octofoil was good—and bad. I was happy to see the article on the RTOs and Tiger Scouts, but did you

have to drag the chopper pilots into it again? You know there are some people in this division who do something besides fly.

Dear Editor:

You play up the 3d Squadron, 5th Cavalry in all your publication. How about doing something on 9th Aviation. We do as much, or more work, yet you never mention, us. If you truly are a division publication, you should try to be more equal in your coverage. You haven't been.

Dear Editor:

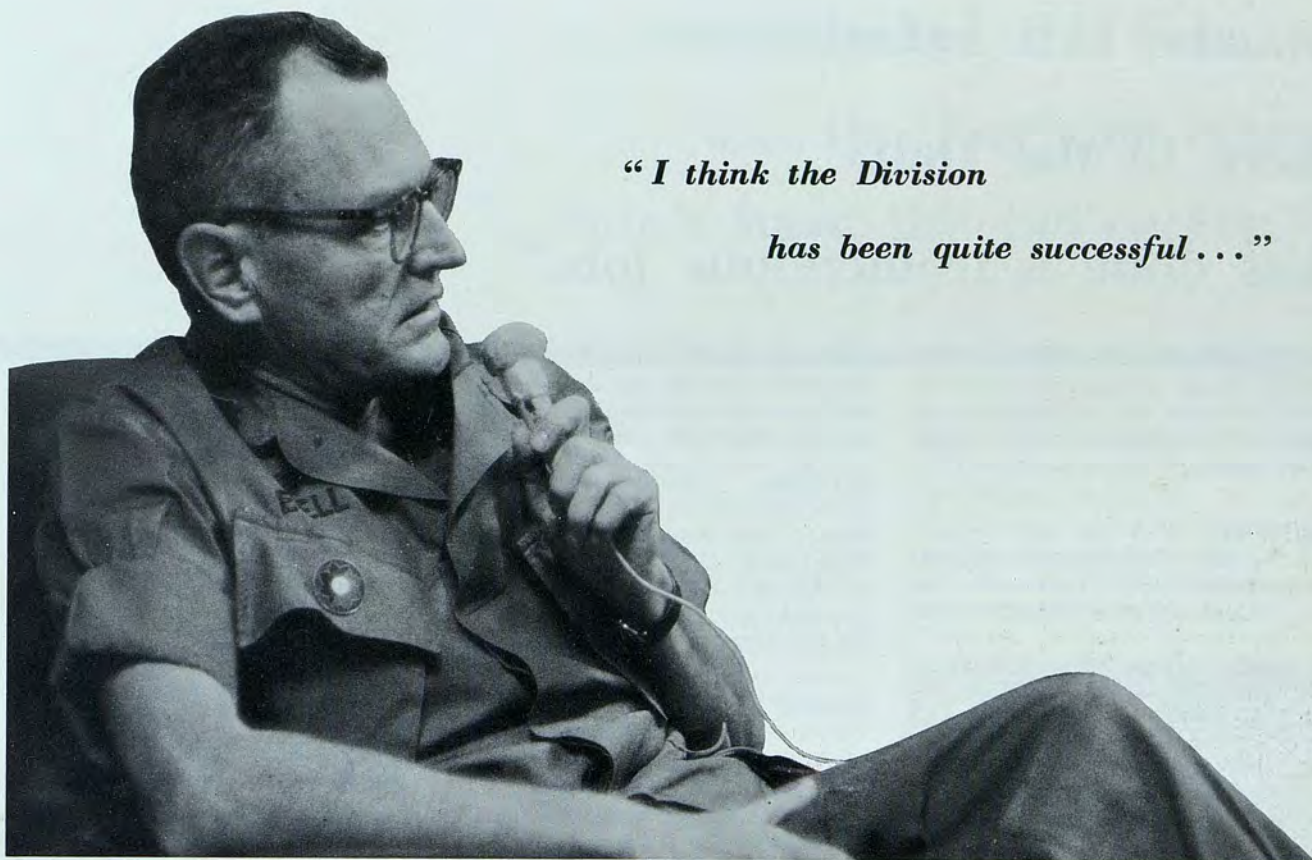
After spending all summer fighting with the 1st Brigade while every other division in Vietnam and the other brigades in this division cooled their heels, I expected to see at least some mention of what we did in the Octofoil. But not only didn't you say a word, but you ran an article on the Second Brigade. I think we got the short end of the deal after spending those months fighting while everyone else just relaxed and I'm a bit disgusted with you.

Dear Editor:

As someone who has been personally saved by the alert eye of a Tiger Scout, I thank you for the article about the scouts. They've kept more than one man from stepping on a mine or tripping a booby trap.

Dear Editor:

I've finally got to write and say this. I really appreciate the fact that you write for the average guy in the division. So much of what we get to read that pertains to the Army is written for the officers and senior NCOs. Or it is so bad it is a waste of time. The Octofoil is something I can not only read, but I'll be proud to take home.



"I think the Division

has been quite successful..."

An interview with Major General Julian J. Ewell

"We've damaged the VC severely..."

After two years in Vietnam, the 9th Infantry Division has established a proud record of accomplishment both in and out of combat. In such places as Bau Bang, Cholon, the Y-Bridge and the Plain of Reeds, the Division has carved its niche in the history of the war in Vietnam. On the occasion of the second anniversary, the OCTOFOIL sent First Lieutenant David H. Furse to interview the Division's third commander in Vietnam, Major General Julian J. Ewell. In his office in Dong Tam, General Ewell discussed the Division in the delta, the accomplishments of the infantryman, air mobility and civic action.

OCTOFOIL: General Ewell, in the two years since the Division arrived in Vietnam, it has killed over 12,000 enemy troops and has had a body count at a ratio of well over 10 to one. How does this compare with other Divisions?

GENERAL EWELL: Unfortunately, I don't really keep book on all the divisions in Vietnam, but I think the record of the 9th Division since its arrival here has been one of which every soldier in the 9th can be proud. We've damaged the VC severely and we've done it at a minimum cost in casualties to our own men. I don't think you can ask for much more than that.

OCTOFOIL: Since the Division has moved to Dong Tam, how successful has the Division been in thwarting the VC here and denying him access to the rice-rich Delta?

GENERAL EWELL: I think the Division has been quite successful. Of course, starting with the offensive right after Tet, the 9th Division and the 7th ARVN Division, which works in this area with us, were

quite fortunate and lucky in being able to wrack the VC in Dinh Tuong Province, and by this summer the VC were on pretty shaky ground in the My Tho area. Since then we have had several good battles with them and the main and local force battalions in this area are almost ineffective.

The big change has been in the next province down, Kien Hoa, which has historically been a center of the Viet Cong movement and before that, the Vietminh movement. No one had ever really been able to make any substantial inroads into Kien Hoa on a continuing basis. When our second brigade went down there with two battalions, and now with three, they really started taking the VC there, who are pretty tough and slippery, apart by the numbers. The climate in Kien Hoa is radically different now than three months ago. However, I think we have a lot of hard work to do in Kien Hoa because the VC have been there since

“...the U.S. infantryman here in the Delta has done a tremendous job.”

1945. It will probably be weeks or months before we can definitely say that we're riding free and clear in that area.

OCTOFOIL: *With all our complex equipment of warfare, it's still the infantryman who closes with the enemy and charges the bunker. How*



would you evaluate the performance of the infantryman of the 9th Division in fighting in the wet, Mekong Delta environment?

GENERAL EWELL: I think anyone would agree that the U.S. infantryman here in the delta has done a tremendous job, fighting under very strange conditions—water, mosquitoes, everything you can think of. He's met the VC, who are no dummies by any matter of means, on their home grounds and beaten them. I don't think anyone can help but admire this tremendous job that they've done.

However, I do think it's worth mentioning that many of our successes and the reason we've been able to kill VC in large numbers with relatively low casualties is the fact that we always strive to get the infantry-artillery-helicopter-Air Force team working in perfect teamwork and using firepower to do

everything possible so that the infantryman is not required to take the VC apart with his bare hands.

OCTOFOIL: *Division MEDCAPS have treated over 500,000 Vietnamese and conducted over 4,600 MEDCAPS. How do you feel this has affected the acceptance of U.S. Forces by the Vietnamese people in the last year?*

GENERAL EWELL: There's no doubt that civic action, particularly in this revolutionary type struggle, is very important. However, I think we have to recognize that civic action is a supporting operation, and it's sort of like icing on the cake. It makes the cake taste much better, but it's no substitute for the real struggle and the initial problem here was to give the people some degree of military and psychological security against the Viet Cong. I think that in recent months we've got the Viet Cong beaten down where the people feel that they have some chance of getting out from under this reign of terror which the VC have been using, in effect, to hold them captive.

As result, in recent months our civic action has shown more tangible signs of making progress. The people are beginning to talk, to tell you where the VC are hiding out down the road and are much more forthcoming, mainly because they appreciate what you're doing and they also know that they aren't going to get their throat cut if they talk to U.S. troops. This is just conjecture on my part, but I think the best sign of all would be when the people of Vietnam again feel that they'd just as soon the Americans would leave. That's the sign that you're really home free. When the situation has improved to where they know they can take care of themselves, they know that they've got the VC on the run and they want to run their own country exactly the way they want without a bunch of American soldiers in the way, then

I think they'll tell us to get going and that means that we've really won the war.

OCTOFOIL: *The Division has been very involved in supporting and upgrading the Vietnamese military. How successful do you think we've been in our IMPACT program and our cooperative operations?*

GENERAL EWELL: I'm a great believer in the idea that the Vietnamese military, particularly in our area with the 7th ARVN Division and the 25th in Long An Province, really don't need much help. They know their job; they proved during Tet that they could stand up and slug it out with the Viet Cong, and since then have really been going after them in good fashion. However, I do think we've made a real contribution in several areas, for instance, when they formed some new regional force companies down here



in Dinh Tuong Province, we were able to put a platoon, squad or even a few NCO's with these companies and help them with things that were new to them.

You mentioned the IMPACT program, which is probably the most helpful of all assistance programs in that the Vietnamese supply system is

“...what licked the French was the fact that they didn't have the helicopter.”

not quite as highly developed as ours, and their scale of support is not as elaborate, so that in any unit they're always short of some things which are important. As you know, in cases of real need, we are authorized to issue supplies, ammunition, barbed wire, pickets, sandbags, things of that sort, to the Vietnamese to help them get the show on the



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road. And I'm sure that this has been tremendously helpful to them. It's not only the actual, physical assistance that gives them confidence in organizing their defenses, getting their operations going, but it's the psychological boost they get from knowing that if they really get into a tight situation, the U.S. will do everything it can to help them out.

OCTOFOIL: *What makes this war in Vietnam perhaps more different than any other conflict that we've been in is the air mobility we have, in particular, the use of the helicopter. How has the use of this mobility we have affected the great success of the Division and what problems have we run into using the helicopter in the Mekong Delta environment?*

GENERAL EWELL: Well, I think we all tend to take the helicopter for

granted, but you just have to read about the French experience in Vietnam to realize that any comparisons aside to the effectiveness of the units, what licked the French was the fact that they didn't have the helicopter. If they had, it might have been an entirely different story. So the helicopter is, no doubt, the secret weapon of the Vietnam war and has been the one single thing that's been most instrumental since 1965 in allowing the U.S. and ARVN forces to have almost an unbroken chain of success against the Viet Cong, which is something we've never experienced in any previous war.

To return to the 9th Division in the Delta, I think we are quite fortunate down here in that the terrain in the Delta is probably ideal for helicopter operations. You have an unlimited number of landing zones, it's flat, the weather is reasonably clear and good. The cover in which the enemy can hide is somewhat limited so my guess is, if you studied all of Vietnam the helicopter shows its best light right here in the Delta, with the exception of Kien Hoa Province, which is not quite as ideal for these operations. I don't think we've uncovered any magic formulas in using helicopters although the so-called jitterbugging or pile-on technique, which Colonel Emerson in the 1st Brigade perfected during the last year, is, no doubt, the most sophisticated use of air cavalry assault helicopters that's been developed to date. We made a few studies and found the First Brigade, which was highly skilled in jitterbugging, was getting kills at a rate of four times as great as any other brigade in Vietnam, and at a much lower casualty cost. That was sheer skill.

OCTOFOIL: *Speaking of piling-on, in any new conflict we are involved with a new set of problems and must develop new tactics to meet these problems. The pile-on or encirclement, has been developed for this particular set of problems and cli-*

mate in which we are working. Do you believe that this is one of the major tactical breakthroughs which has been made in the Vietnam War, especially in the Delta?

GENERAL EWELL: It's a hard question to answer. I think it's been a very important contribution, but as I inferred earlier, I think it's essentially a little too tricky for the average unit, and I think we're now developing the sort of simplified form that, although it's not as good, gets the job done.

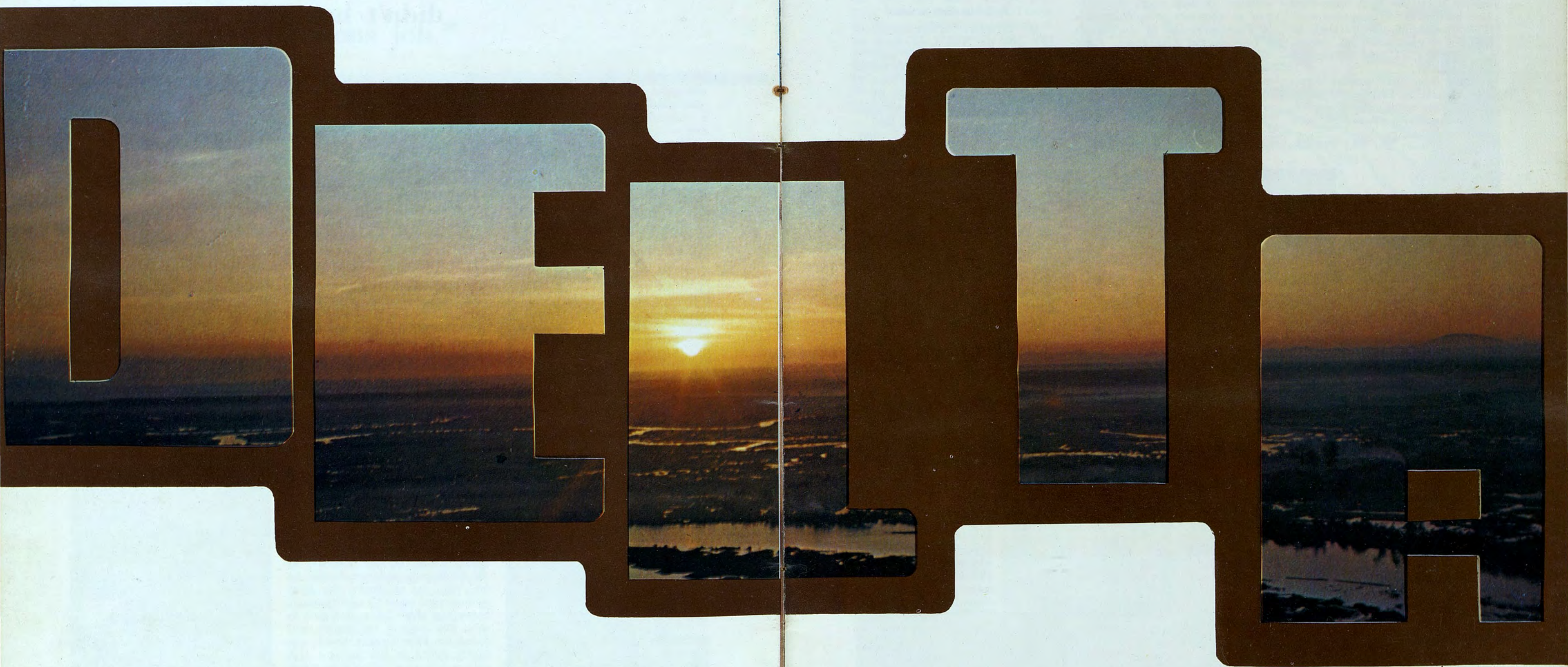
To answer your question in a more general sense, I think every war is different and has its own problems; in fact, one thing which is difficult about the Vietnamese War is that it changes every three months. It's quite apparent in recent weeks that the VC has gotten so scalded by jitterbugging and the pile-on, that he's broken down to platoon and even squad level and dispersed



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throughout the country side. So this makes the pile-on unproductive and we've had to change our tactics to more night patrolling, more day patrolling and what I call a flushing techniques, where you make your insertions and just run the VC out and the air cavalry picks them off as they scatter. ☛

Mekong



... after 2 years

By CPT Frank Reysen, Jr. and SP5 Tom Gable, Jr.

In December, 1968, the 9th Infantry Division marked the end of two years in Vietnam and, more important, in the Mekong Delta.

When the Old Reliables arrived from Ft. Riley, Kansas, in 1966, there were no precedents for protracted operations in a water-filled land barely five feet above sea level. They moved into the trackless, inundated wastes south of Saigon, pursuing the VC and learning as they fought.

Since those first tentative forays and contacts, the Division has gained a reputation among friend and foe alike as a cohesive, determined, hard-fighting outfit.

In two years, the Old Reliables

have killed more than 12,500 enemy and captured almost 4,500 small arms and 650 crew-served weapons.

On the civic action front, the Division has conducted almost 5,000 MEDCAPS, treating more than 550,000 Vietnamese patients. In addition, Division troops helped repair or construct some 60 schools, 50 dispensaries and 65 playgrounds.

Psychological Operations (PSY-OPS) planes have dropped over 200 million leaflets and logged over 3,000 hours disseminating information by loudspeaker to both friends and enemies.

The most significant achievements include decisive victories over many Main Force Viet Cong and North

Vietnamese Army units, formation of a Mobile Riverine Force, discovery of the largest enemy weapons cache of the Vietnam War, suppression of the VC terror campaign during Tet, 1968, and of a followup attempt to invade Saigon in May.

Reliables first action

The Division's first significant contact with the Viet Cong came on Jan. 20, 1967, when 1st and 3d Brigade units, combined with the 3d Squadron, 5th Cavalry, cut down 14 enemy during Operation COLBY.

A concerted effort at conquering the Delta came one month later as the 3d Battalion, 34th Artillery, mounted 105mm howitzers on float-

Robey



The boats of the Mobile Riverine Force have become a familiar, dreaded sight to the Viet Cong who fight in the river-laced delta (right).



Fighting was heavy in both Tet and May Offensives as Old Reliables reacted quickly to halt the enemy advance and throw them on the defensive (left).

Ashlon

ing barges and began fire support from river anchorages.

In March, the 1st Brigade and 3d/5th joined JUNCTION CITY, the largest operation of the war. During this multi-division operation, the Old Reliables encountered their first important battle. In the pre-dawn hours of March 20, A Troop, 3d/5th was attacked by elements of the 273d VC Regiment near Bau Bang, about 34 miles north of Saigon. A furious six-hour battle left 230 enemy dead, while friendly losses were four killed and 67 wounded.

Deeper in the Mekong Delta, elements of the 2d Brigade collided with a force from the 514th VC Battalion on May 2. Quick-reacting troops of the 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry, and 3d Battalion, 47th Infantry, encircled the enemy in the Ap Bac, then called in gunships and air strikes. A sweep of the battlefield near Dong Tam produced 195 enemy dead.

Two weeks later the 3d and 4th Battalions, 47th Infantry, combined with elements of the 7th ARVN Division to kill 113 VC in the Cam Son Secret Zone, 20 miles west of Dong Tam.

Water-borne force

Emphasized during this Delta fighting was the need for a mobile strike force capable of navigating the Mekong Delta waterways. In June, the solution came with the formation of the Mobile Riverine Force, composed of two 2d Brigade battalions and Naval Task Force 117. Operating from a fleet of 100 vessels, including two large self-propelled barracks ships, the MRF initiated ex-



Moving into Saigon, the 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry blunted the Viet Cong attempts to enter the city. Much of the fighting centered around the Y-bridge over the Kinh Doi Canal as the VC tried to cross into the city.

tensive combat operations throughout the sprawling Delta.

In its first major contact, June 19-22, the first MRF since Civil War times netted 256 kills at the Rach Nui Canal west of Rach Kien.

In early August, a joint American and Vietnamese strike force returned to the Cam Son Secret Zone during Operation CORONADO II. After eight days, Allies from the 2d Brigade, Naval Task Force 117 and ARVN Rangers, Marines and infantrymen counted 285 VC dead.

Elements of the 1st Brigade and support units turned up the largest cache of the Vietnam War during October while clearing jungle 13 miles southwest of Bearcat during Operation AKRON III. In two weeks of clearing a massive tunnel complex, Old Reliables found 1,140 weapons, almost 95,000 rounds of small arms ammo, 3,634 grenades, 2,273 recoilless rifle shells and 452 mortar rounds. The cache included

four 85mm howitzers—the first such artillery pieces seized from the VC by U.S. forces.

Tet aggression

After a month of scattered contact, action exploded again on Dec. 4 during Operation CORONADO IX. Two battalions of the Mobile Riverine Force, working with Vietnamese Marines, killed 250 VC in day-long fighting along the Rach Ruong Canal, on the western edge of Dinh Tuong Province, about 65 miles southwest of Saigon.

Combat activity slackened during the first month of 1968. The only major engagement came Jan. 10 when the 2d Brigade killed 47 during bitter fighting in Dinh Tuong Province.

Then, on Jan. 31, during the Tet truce, massive guerrilla attacks erupted from the DMZ to the Delta. The 9th Division, now familiar with Delta fighting, swiftly grabbed the initiative and turned the tables on

the brazen insurgents. Once the VC and NVA units exposed themselves, they immediately were shoved on the defensive by the Old Reliables' inexorable counterthrust.

Units of the 1st Brigade were summoned from their jungle environment into the Mekong Delta. Armored vehicles from the 3d/5th helped crush an enemy uprising at Bien Hoa airport, first and last stop for many servicemen in Vietnam. Troops of the 2d and 3d Brigades tracked down marauding bands of invaders at Ben Tre and My Tho.

Attempt on Jaeger

To overcome the biggest communist push of the war, Division units gained momentum early and never failed to carry the battle to the VC. Old Reliables achieved decisive victories at Long Binh, Bien Hoa, Saigon-Cholon, Ben Tre, Xuan Loc, My Tho, Vinh Long, Ap Bac, Can Tho and Tan An.

By Feb. 22, more than 1,625 VC



and NVA bodies were credited to Division troops. A stunning blow had been dealt the terrorists in the Mekong Delta.

Nevertheless, on Feb. 25, the daring enemy attempted an early-morning assault on Fire Support Base, Jaeger, 10 miles west of Dong Tam. More than 500 VC were repelled by members of the 5th/60th, reinforced by artillery batteries. After four hours of fierce fighting, more than 100 enemy bodies were counted, and over 45 weapons captured.

On March 11, the 3d Brigade closed its 13 month-long Operation ENTERPRISE in the Mekong Delta. The many-faceted operation to drive the enemy from Long An Province netted more than 2,000 enemy dead, more than 1,000 suspects detained and 8,500 VC bunkers destroyed.

Next big action for the Old Reliables came in May, when they left the Mekong Delta to fight on the southern edge of Saigon.

Battle at the Y-Bridge

For weeks after the Tet offensive, Allied forces had ringed the capital city, sealing it off to would-be infiltrators. At the beginning of May, the upcoming Paris peace talks reinforced expectations of another enemy show of strength.

When the long-awaited second wave of communist thrusts finally began May 7, it proved a pale replica of its predecessor. Only at the southern edge of Saigon, where the Y-bridge crosses the Kinh Doi Canal, did the enemy follow up his mortarings with a ground assault.

The Old Reliables, seasoned by

their February conquests in urban operations, dashed to the scene and repeatedly smothered enemy jabs at the entrance of Cholon, Chinese community of Saigon.

Five battalions of Division infantrymen, closely supported by armored personnel carriers, helicopter gunships, artillery and Air Force fighter-bombers, killed almost 1,000 VC and NVA in eight days of sharp fighting.

Later, U.S. and ARVN commanders credited the Division with achieving "one of the biggest victories of the war."

Yet the Old Reliables did not let up in their pursuit of enemy forces throughout the Mekong Delta.

From June 1-4, elements of the 1st Brigade relentlessly tracked two VC battalions through the treacherous Plain of Reeds and joined with artillery and air strikes to kill over 225 enemy.

Enemy arms factory

Moving even deeper into the Delta, the Mobile Riverine Force, bolstered by the 5th Vietnamese Marine Battalion, killed over 130 VC and captured over 75 weapons from sampans and an arms factory near Vi Thanh, about 20 miles southwest of Can Tho. Early in August, the water-borne infantrymen plunged into the previously secure enemy lair of the U Minh Forest, killing more than 140 during five days of intermittent contact.

Fighting through waist-deep mud and thick nipapalm, men of the 1st Brigade killed 104 VC in action Aug. 12-13, 10 miles southeast of Tan An. Five days later, the same units

killed 66 enemy 17 miles east of Tan An.

In early September, it was the 1st Brigade again keeping up the pressure as they killed 90 VC, using the familiar tactic of chase, surround and pound.

On Oct. 4-5, elements of the 3d Brigade trapped an enemy battalion 12 miles west of My Phuoc Tay, pursuing them until they could run no more and running up a body count of 138. More than 60 of the count was attributed to Cobra and LOH "Warwagon" gunships of Troop D, 3d/5th, which supported the action.

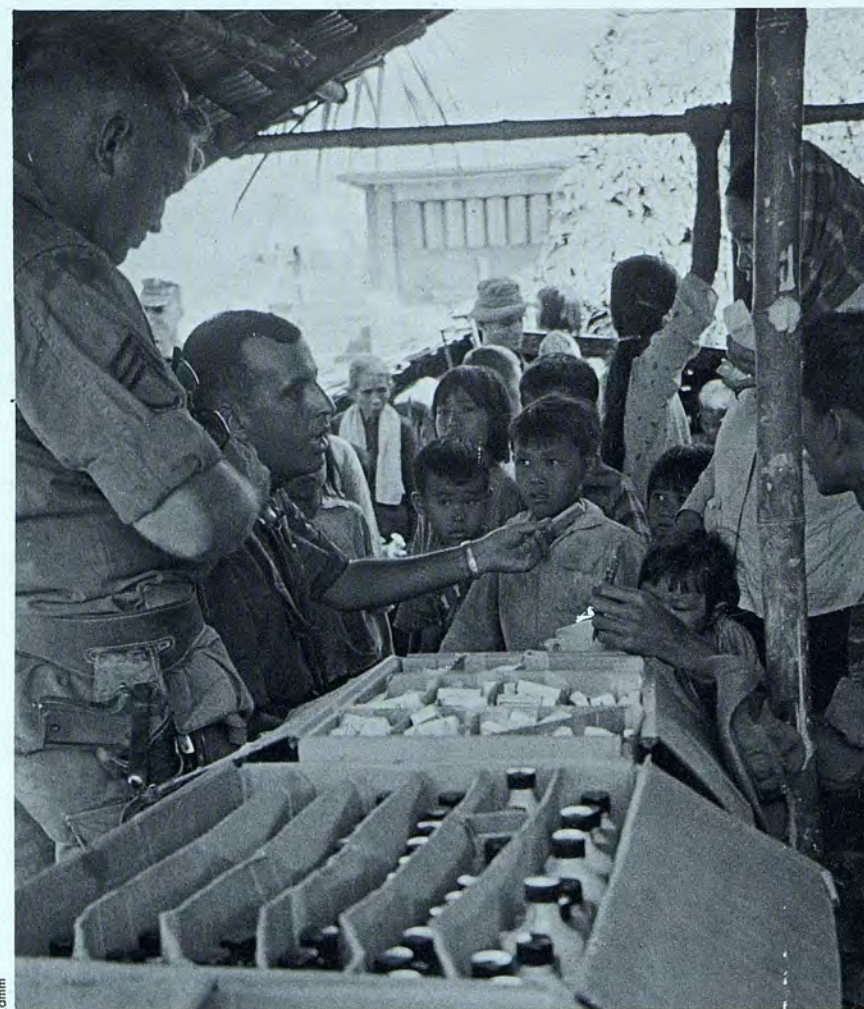
Inundated fields and deep, often swift rivers, make movement through the Delta difficult. Division soldiers need all their strength and ingenuity to move easily.

Fighting wanes

During the remainder of October, all three brigades made sporadic contact against an enemy that seemed less willing to fight as the Old Reliables continued to dominate all battlefields. Fighting raged near Cai Lay, Ben Tre and Rach Kien, during October, with many enemy units being almost wiped out. More VC began rallying to the government under the Chieu Hoi program.

November and December followed the same pattern as October with fewer major contacts. Elements of the MRF killed 51 during contact in mid-November, with no friendly losses.

The 9th Division had established itself as a ubiquitous fighting force and the first Allied unit in history to conquer the Mekong Delta.



Crying babies, tired old mamasans, even livestock become patients for the MEDCAPS the Division holds throughout its tactical area. In almost 5,000 MEDCAPS, more than 550,000 Vietnamese have received free treatment and medication.



Quick movement of artillery has been aided by floating platforms that allow the 3d Battalion, 34th Artillery to displace easily in the river-laced Delta. In a matter of minutes, the platforms can move out to a new position.



Find 'em, Surround 'em, Pound 'em **GANG-TACKLING THE VC**

By 1LT John F. Lamm

Editors Note: The OCTOFOIL would like to thank Major John Sewell and Major Edwin Deagle for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

The Huey UH-1D almost clipped the treetops as it snaked along a wooded streamline. Inside the speeding craft, a sergeant sat intently watching the needle on his People Sniffer. It had bobbed hypnotically in the low range for over an hour when it suddenly leaped to maximum reading.

"Maximum," he told the pilot over the intercom. "Let's check it out."

The pilot whipped his craft up and around, doubling back over the same spot. Again the needle made a paroxysmal jump.

"Positive reading," reported the sergeant. The target was confirmed.

The pilot quickly got on his radio to initiate the second stage of the operation.

Bee-like LOH helicopters buzzed low behind the sniffer ship, hugging quizzically over the suspect area, spreading the nipapalm with their prop-wash and straining to detect movement.

Out of the corner of his eye, a crew chief saw an arm quickly emerge from the swaying vegetation and disappear. The chopper slid over the spot and dipped lower. A burst of AK-47 fire flashed past the chopper.

Reacting instantly, the LOH returned fire and hopped nimbly out of the way, calling in the big brothers of the helicopter fire team, two Huey Cobras poised high above, waiting to strike. At the first call, the sharklike attack helicopters screamed from the skies, raking the area with minigun and rocket fire.

Simultaneously, five kilometers to the east, an infantry company was in an "Eagle Flight." Five slickloads were on the ground sweeping an intelligence target with no luck. Another five full slickloads circled nearby as a ready reaction force.

When the call came that the Cobras were in contact, the reaction force left its hovering position and headed for the new target area. The sweeping clement moved to a predetermined rendezvous point to wait for extraction and movement to the contact. A few minutes later they hit a new landing zone near the target area and moved in as a blocking force.

This chain of People Sniffer, LOHs, Cobras and infantry is part of the first stages of a new and successful combination of classic tactics—reconnaissance and encirclement.

The new methods, known in the 9th Division as "Jitterbug" and "Seal" operations, have virtually shattered the grip of the VC main force units on the people of the northern Delta.

Such a combination was needed to overcome major problems never encountered daily by American forces. Not only did they face an elusive guerrilla insurgent, but one of the world's toughest lands—the Mekong Delta.

Mud in the Delta is a slimy, sucking, unforgiving trap for the infantryman. It holds him fast when he has to move. It fouls his equipment and quickly saps his strength.

The water that brings the mud is equally damaging. Besides being uncomfortable to work in constantly, it breeds a skin disease called Dermatophytosis. Combined with immersion foot, this fungal disease can incapacitate a man with alarming speed. The fast-paced airmobile tactics eliminate such constant exposure to water.

Fire control problem

The Delta also poses a fire control problem because of the high population density and commanders must be skilled and alert to avoid injuring civilians. Yet they must remember that the VC can easily blend with the civilian population.

For all the problems it causes, the clear, flat Delta region has one major asset as far as seal operations are concerned. It can be described as one huge landing zone, making it possible for commanders to quickly hop troops from one area to another, and in each landing to place the soldiers exactly where needed.

The ultimate result is localizing the Viet Cong in streamlines and patches of nipapalm. It confines them to a definite area which can be pinpointed and surrounded.

Colonel Henry E. Emerson, 42, Milford, Pa., former 1st Brigade commander and innovator of Jitterbug and Seal tactics used in the Delta, explained the advantage of his methods.

"It gives us the capability of trapping the VC and then pounding him," said the well-known "Gun-fighter." "It takes a lot of practice and coordination, but it ultimately enables us to find and annihilate an entire battalion."

When initial contact is made by the ground troops, the first step of the seal process begins. Trying to draw the VC into a fight, the ground troops have to help the battalion commander determine the exact size of the VC force.

As the seal develops, every helicopter available is used to ferry troops (above) into the contact area. Often the first enemy the troops encounter is the sticky Delta mud (right).

The presence of automatic weapons is an excellent benchmark. These weapons are usually found in units of at least squad size and if there is a squad in contact, the chances are good there is a larger unit in the treeline, or nearby.

Block escape lanes

Next, the second set of slicks moves into position on what appears to be the best lane of escape for the enemy. In nearby battalion base-camps, stand-by and even standing down soldiers are filling magazines, canteens and checking radios.

By now, the brigade commander is also circling overhead, and usually determines whether or not to muster the rest of the brigade for a "pile-on."

If he says go, all helicopters available are pressed into service and troops are poured into the area.

As they come in, the brigade commander first cuts off the avenues of escape and then fills the gaps in-between. If soldiers are not readily available, artillery and gunships are used to keep VC off these lanes.

If the encirclement begins in the latter part of the day, this can, and has, meant soldiers advancing on treelines far into the night.

Each slickload lands far enough from the contact area to keep them from being brought into contact before they can spread out along the perimeter and fill their gap.



Tomlin



Korroler



Korroler



Streams at low tide (below) make moving in the encirclement difficult. In addition to slowing the soldiers down, the mud coats and fouls equipment (left).

While the seal is taking shape, artillery and air strikes begin. Guided by a forward air controller, the jets pinpoint their bombs on the entrapped enemy.

Artillery takes over

When all companies are in and the seal begins to tighten, bombardment with tactical air becomes more difficult. Often, the circle is just too tight to call in airstrikes without endangering the troops, and artillery alone does the pounding. When it gets that tight, the supporting batteries have to register tube by tube. In many cases, the commander of the supporting artillery battalion personally calls the shots.

C-47 flareships are called in when it gets dark both to make it easier to adjust artillery and to prevent the VC from slipping out any holes that might result if the seal is not complete by nightfall. Illumination continues throughout the night.

As the encirclement progresses and the ring tightens, the brigade commander periodically pauses in the bombardment and offers the trapped enemy the chance to surrender. Using both hand-held bullhorns and helicopter-mounted, 1000 watt loudspeakers, Vietnamese interpreters and Tiger Scouts explain to the VC that they are completely cut off and to continue means sure death.

Throughout the night, as parachute flares lazily drift down from the flareship, the infantrymen lean

against the slimy rice paddy dikes, watching for any possible escape attempt. Across streamlines, concertina wire is suspended from a rope and secured on both sides by engineering stakes.

Infantry sweeps area

At sunup, the companies begin an organized sweep of the area. In many cases, it is only to count bodies. Other times, they may meet scattered resistance from a bunker that has somehow escaped the hundreds of rounds of artillery that have been dumped into the donut hole. Sometimes VC, the fight drained out of them, will stumble out to surrender.

This may end it. The troops may load on Huey slicks or CH-47 "Chinooks" and head back to their basecamp. If the action took place near a village and buildings were damaged, the brigade psychological operations officer may be there, making on-the-spot payments for damaged homes, dead livestock or missing rice, regardless of how the damage occurred.

In some cases, only part of an enemy unit has been caught and the escape trails of the larger unit can be found and followed. If so, the brigade will probably begin chasing the enemy. In some cases, such as the battles of the Plain of Reeds and northeast of Tan An, the chase can go on for four or five days before enemy units are finally trapped and virtually eliminated.

Experience and luck

Like any precision operation, the encirclement requires a lot of experience—and some luck. One of the classic examples of the seal operation is the Battle in the Plain of Reeds.

Only an occasional canal or small treeline break up the vast, flat area known as the Plain of Reeds. Nothing but miles of stagnant water and rotting vegetation, for years it was a haven for the VC.

The first brigade's 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry hit a hot LZ, June 1, and started an encirclement and chase that set a pattern for future operations.

For four days, the brigade pursued three major VC units, finally trapping them in a treeline on the southern edge of the plain.

The 2d/39th, along with the 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry, 4th Battalion, 47th Infantry and Vietnamese Civilian Irregular Defense Group soldiers surrounded the VC and killed 192 enemy, bringing their three day total to 233. ☺

shooting the donut

By CPT Jeffrey P. Tassani

To an artilleryman, accuracy is the name of the game. If he is accurate, he brings havoc on the enemy with little danger to his own ground troops. If not, he can kill his own men.

The 2d Battalion, 4th Artillery performs in what many artillerymen might consider an accuracy nightmare. It is called "shooting the donut," and involves dropping hundreds of artillery rounds in the middle of a ring of U.S. infantrymen. It is close, continuous supporting fire that leaves no room for error. The artillery must be quick to be effective and the slightest error can cost friendly lives.

Before being committed to combat, all artillery battalions and batteries go through training tests. One of the toughest parts of the battery test is putting a given number of rounds in a circle, which is similar to shooting the donut. The circle is two to three times larger, and the best of the units rarely put all the rounds in the circle.

As a comparison, a professional basketball player can put eight of ten foul shots through the hoop, while the 2d/4th must put 2,000 of 2,000 rounds in the donut. If the player misses, the game is lost. If the artillery misses, lives are lost.

To be that accurate, there must be tremendous teamwork.

The artillery team is composed of three parts: the forward observer, the Fire Direction Center and the firing battery.

The forward observer adjusts fire on the ground with the infantry or from overhead in an aircraft. He is normally a lieutenant with less than two years of experience in the army and a tremendous responsibility. His job is to call for the artillery support and adjust it to obtain the desired result.

First Lieutenant Burton Williams, is a forward observer and an experienced man in shooting the donut.

Williams claims, "...that the most difficult part of being an FO is getting the initial round on target; we start by firing a spotting round and then adjust from there. Once the artillery is on target, our work is confined to moving it around."

Asked about how time consuming the task is, considering the accuracy that is required, he said, "The key to success is quickness; this is the case for the artilleryman. Get the enemy before he has a chance to escape. I have taken part in several encirclements, and in each case there was detailed coordination on everyone's part. If it is done right, there is less chance of any friendlies getting injured.

"Believe me, the situation can get tight for the

FO. He has to make quick judgements in directing the fire and his judgements have to be right."

The Fire Direction Center is the brains of the artillery. This is the network that receives the call for fire from the forward observer, plots and computes the data and in turn relays the firing data to the guns.

First Lieutenant Edwin F. Maxwell is Fire Direction Officer in an artillery battery. His responsibility includes supervising the chart operators and the computers. He considers firing in support of an encirclement a real challenge to him and his people. Maxwell said, "The most difficult part of the encirclement is making sure of the correct range. If just one number is off, it could mean the lives of many friendly soldiers. The idea of accurate fire cannot be stressed more than in a tight encirclement; there is just no room for error."

"Perhaps the key to a successful encirclement," he continued, "is to get that first round on the target. That will surprise and confuse the enemy and they will probably start trying to escape and run into the infantrymen. Once the FO has directed the initial firing, the battery then concentrates on moving rounds around the encirclement, making sure that the ranges are checked, double checked and triple

checked."

The 2/4th, the oldest artillery battalion in the 9th Division, in direct support of the men of the 1st Brigade, has participated in numerous encirclement support missions. Their battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Dirmeyer, referring to shooting the donut, said, "It's the type of close in fire support that, to my knowledge, no unit has been required to deliver, certainly not on a routine basis."

"It is even more amazing," continued Dirmeyer, "when you consider the level of experience of the officers and NCO's of the direct support and attached artillery, compared with that of units in Vietnam in 1965 and 1966. Over 50 percent of one howitzer section had less than one year in their MOS and less than two years total service."

Lieutenant Colonel James Lindsay, former Battalion Commander of the 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry, was supported by artillery in a number of encirclements. He said, "It's a tough business, but the artillerymen were first class. At times we called in the artillery very close and experienced a few casualties, but the overall effectiveness of the artillery fires was indispensable."

Dirmeyer summed it up, "FO's love it. It's artillery at its finest."



SNIPER!

It happens almost every day in the Mekong Delta—a soldier peers cautiously over a paddy dike and sees a Viet Cong in the distance walking along another dike.

"I can't hit him," is the frustrating thought that races through his mind. "Too far away."

Too far away for the M-16 rifle, yet easily visible because of the flatness of the Delta—it is a recurring problem but one that is now being solved at the 9th Division sniper school at Bearcat. The only such school in Vietnam, it

teaches beating the enemy at his own game—sniping—plus a little one-up-manship.

Major General Julian J. Ewell, Division commander, first envisioned the need for trained snipers in the Delta. Prior to assuming command of the Division, he requested that a team of the Army's best riflemen be assigned to the Old Reliables from the

Story and Photos

By SP5 Mike West

Marksmanship Training Unit at Ft. Benning, Ga.

Arriving in Vietnam in June, 1968, the team of nine non-commissioned officers and its commander, Major Willis L. Powell, Columbus, Ga., set to work

building a school from scratch and gaining practical experience in actual combat situations.

During the first month,

two members of the team bagged 10 VC in a night ambush near Dong Tam, engaging the surprised enemy from over 500

meters. Thus proving the feasibility of sniping in the Delta, the team went to work on classrooms and range facilities.



Moore



One of the toughest problems was building a range, where students would spend most of their time. The great distances involved—up to 700 meters for target firing—called for a new system of raising and lowering pop-up targets and detecting hits.

Working with materials on hand and the cooperation of Division engineers, the team devised a method of using students, accompanied by an NCO, to remain in a sunken pit at the end of the range and raise and lower the targets with ropes. When firing is completed, the "pitmen" mark the targets. The scores are tabulated by instructors on the firing line sighting through small tripod-mounted telescopes.

To reduce the possibility of the snipers being sniped at while on the far end of the long range, an element of student marksmen provide security nearby. Communication with men in the pits and on security is accomplished by field telephones.

Now completed, the school teaches the art of sniping to volunteer riflemen from each battalion in the Division. It constantly seeks soldiers possessing special qualities—a good eye, ability to think quickly and remain cool in combat and, a prime requisite, the desire to learn.

Once a man is accepted into the school, he is issued a precision Match Grade M-14 rifle with camouflaged stock and a scope, the heart of the sniper's equipment.

At the beginning of the 18-day course, students fire the specially prepared M-14 for familiarization. Then the weapon is "zeroed" at 300 meters using the scope.

Treated like professionals

"The unique quality of the scope is its ability to tell the rifleman the distance to the target while making adjustments for that distance," said Staff Sergeant Richard D. Rebidue, Columbus, Ga., an instructor.

Designed by an Army lieutenant at Ft. Benning, the complex scope is so unerringly accurate that it is now being commercially adapted to sportsmen's rifles.

Despite the precision equipment, the prospective riflemen, like new

Carefully squeezing off each round, the potential snipers fire down the 700 meter range at the sniper school. Because of the length of the range, the men working on the target end of the range risk being sniped at themselves.

students anywhere, sometimes experience doubts when they first arrive for classes. Any qualms quickly vanish, however, when they become aware of the professional competence of their instructors. As one student remarked, "I couldn't believe how great the NCO's were. They really know their business and treated us like professionals."

The reason soon becomes obvious. Powell and his instructors have a total of over 170 years in the service among them. Each trained, and later taught, at the Army's elite Marksmanship Training Unit at Ft. Benning. Most are members of an exclusive group of the top armed forces marksmen known as the "President's Hundred."

Their experience is used to screen students during their first week at the school, to spot immediately those who might not make completely effective snipers. So high are their standards, for example, that only half of the first class graduated.

Work in two-man teams

"After graduation, when the men return to their units, they will be put in two-man teams," explained Master Sergeant Alfred B. Falcon, Columbus, Ga., NCOIC of the sniper school. "Working on regular operations and patrols, they will be used to engage targets beyond the range of normal infantry weapons."

With an increasing number of graduates moving into the field, the VC can no longer find safety in distance. Shortly after members of the first class began operating with



their parent units, reports filtered in describing the high number of enemy casualties attributed to the long-range riflemen.

As more and more of these well-trained and equipped snipers begin applying their talents in the Mekong Delta, the VC are going to find no escape and no place to hide. ☹

Attentive students (above) listen closely as instructor critiques their work. At firing end of range, an instructor (below, right) observes firing results. Students (below left) prepare to engage targets 700 meters away.



HEALTH IS AN OLIVE DRAB AMBULANCE

By 1LT John F. Lamm

They were already waiting in line as the olive drab ambulance with the big red cross rumbled down the rutted road and through the gate of their village.

Weary, children-laden mama-sans, sun-leathered women and a few old men stared patiently as the vehicle ground to a dusty halt in front of the school. Its escort, a gun jeep, parked under a nearby tree.

Children sprang up from nowhere, eagerly watching as three medics clambered out of the truck and hurried to open the rear doors. They moved forward and the medics obligingly let them help carry in their supplies. Two young boys reached in, dragging out a box bigger than both of them, and carried it off to the schoolroom set aside for the MEDCAP.

While one medic set up in the back of the truck to handle minor skin cases, the other two, now swarmed by children, laughingly walked into the school.

An old woman quietly shuffled into the room, sat down, pointed to her chest and coughed. The usual. The medic listened with his stethoscope, nodded and gave her a bottle of the green medicine. An interpreter told her to take the prescribed dosage twice a day and come back next week if it didn't clear it. She will.

A woman carrying one child, with two more in



tow, bustled jabbering into the room and went through long pains to describe her children's afflictions to the medic. He examined each and gave her a bottle of white medicine and a box of yellow pills for each. She smiled and jabbered her way right back out of the door.

Then the problems began. Another mother with a child came, complaining of the same afflictions. But the medic only gave her the white medicine. She couldn't understand why the other woman should get both medications when she only got one. It wasn't worth the argument so the medic gave her a box of the same pills. She smiled graciously, thanked the medics and left. They smiled, shook their heads and went on with their work.

But the rate of hypochondria in Vietnam is probably no greater than in the United States. Correspondingly, the whole MEDCAP becomes worthwhile when a young girl is discovered to have hepatitis and the interpreter arranges for her to be taken to the district hospital and the eventual cure.

Other illnesses, potentially serious, were eliminated in the preliminary stages by inoculations.

Simultaneously, at the ambulance, the third medic treated skin problems caused simply because there was no soap. He cleaned the ulcers, applied a medication and passed out soap, neatly wrapped in leaflets explaining that it came from the South Vietnamese Government and its allies.

The MEDCAP ended the same way it began, with the children carrying the huge boxes back to the ambulance. The skin specialist medic was presented a coconut for his efforts and the other two received the profuse thanks of a wrinkled old gentleman.

Once loaded, the ambulance carefully picked its way through the gaggle of children, edged behind the MP jeep and rumbled back through the gate and down the rutted road. 🍌

Ektachrome
TRANSPARENCY



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Kodak

The Celluloid Soldiers

The Combat Photographer In Vietnam

By SP5 Tom P. Gable, Jr.

Their magazines are packed with celluloid and most of their shooting is done with 35mm cameras. They also carry the more common bullet-filled magazines and a rifle. They hump it like the grunts. They shoot for history and posterity, not body count.

What they accomplish during combat may not have an aura of immediacy, or glory. It isn't supposed to. It may even seem a little foolhardy. More than one unit commander has marveled at the soldier who shot film with one hand and his M-16 with the other.

But foolish, daring or artistic, the work of combat photographers from 9th Signal Battalion is prized by Army historians and newspapers alike.

Their pictures show the men, the equipment, the terrain, the uniqueness of waging war in the watery,

trackless Mekong Delta. They show the faces of life, and death, the anguish of man at war.

To capture such graphic descriptions, 9th Signal Battalion photographers follow the maneuver battalions into tumid fields and paddies. They sometimes fight, and one man has died, while searching for the pictures to tell their story. Each man knows what he is looking for.

Some photos 'drop in'

"I try to get action, combat, men fighting," said Specialist Five John Gardenhire, 20, of Modesto, Calif., a veteran of five months in the field. "There also is the unusual, the shots that dramatically illustrate what men face in the Mekong Delta. Sometimes you watch and wait for days and don't get a thing. Then sometimes, it just drops in your lap."

One series of photos "dropped in" on Gardenhire during an operation with the 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry. Colonel John Geraci, 1st Brigade commander, was shot down near Gardenhire and the sweeping infantrymen. Rushing over, the 9th Signal photographer captured Geraci and his men on film as they exchanged fire with VC snipers, crawled through slimy paddies and raced for evacuation. His picture of the mud-covered Recondo commander, known as "Mal Hombre," cradling an M-16 and shouting orders was reproduced throughout the world.

Such photos don't always come as easily. Humping with the infantry is tiring, not always rewarding and oftentimes hazardous, especially for a man burdened with myriad camera equipment.

"I was with the 2d/60th as they swept toward some trees," Gardenhire recalled. "We were about 50 yards away from the treeline when it erupted with rifle fire. The VC had been waiting and really opened up on us. Guys on both sides of me got hit. I helped pull them back and then tried to get some pictures. I also shot my rifle a lot. Sometimes you don't know which to do."

Shoots continuous action

Specialist Four Peter Kiss, 20, of Warehouse Point, Conn., also humps it in the field but some claim he has it artistically tougher than most Signal photographers. He shoots motion pictures, which means he must get continuous action. Sometimes the choice is difficult among ducking, shooting continuous action with a camera or helping out with

an M-16. Often there isn't a choice.

"One night we were moving toward a rendezvous point when snipers hit us from the rear," Kiss said. "We moved ahead toward a treeline but got hit from there. Two Hoi Chans told us there were 100 VC in bunkers. We were a small unit and then they came after us."

"There was no cover and fire

came from all sides. I really thought we were done for. But we fought back and about 15 minutes later got some helicopter support. Then we pulled out. I have never been so happy. We found out we had walked by six large booby traps and missed them. Another unit followed through later and got hit badly."

Getting action, or continuous act-



His Canons covered with mud, Specialist Five John Gardenhire catches his breath in a chopper after a contact. The mud and water are camera-killers and a photographer rarely manages to keep the same camera in working condition for a whole year.

ion, isn't the only problem faced by the combat photographer. Their area of operations with the 9th Division is the distended Mekong Delta. Just as with the infantryman, it becomes a minute to minute battle to keep equipment dry. And a camera is far less sturdy than a rifle.

"We were crossing a fairly swift river during one operation and some

men couldn't swim," recalled Kiss. "Some went under and a few of us went out to pull them to shore. Then I slipped and went under myself. All the film was soaked. I lost everything."

"It is almost impossible to keep cameras clean in the Delta," said Specialist Five Larry Lee, 20, of Livonia, Mich. "When something

sudden happens, you sometimes forget you have a camera until you hit the ground, or mud. We have to be very careful. All equipment takes a beating in the Delta, especially cameras."

Although the first thought at the sound of rifle fire is to look for cover, Lee maintains that is the best time to take pictures.

"That is when most of the action takes place," he said, "Everyone is on the move, hustling into position and firing. Once they are in position, action slows. The men may be firing continuously but there is not as much drama as when they are sprinting and firing at the same time. But when the first enemy fire erupts, the action is there, and plenty of it."

Specialist Four Mike Laley, 20, of Grosse Ile, Mich., agreed with Lee in that action was more dramatic, but added that shots of the men struggling with the Delta mud and water help illustrate what kind of war it is—muddy and tough.

Many types of photos

"The soldier against the environment makes for excellent mood or feature photos," Laley said. "Also, anything that shows enemy equipment or defenses has news value and interest. This war is different than any other fought by Americans. The enemy is different. We have to show it."

Other photographers making the rounds of combat units include Specialist Four Chris Brow, 21, of Poughkeepsie, N.Y.; Specialist Four Stuart Kovacs, 21, of Huntington, N.Y., and Private First Class Stephen Shepard, 21, of San Diego, Calif. Brow and Kovacs are constant contributors to the Division newspaper and magazine and many of their pictures have been published in Stars and Stripes and other publications in Vietnam and the United States.

"The men do a great job," commented Major John A. Hedrick, 27, of Austin, Texas, former battalion operations officer. "That includes not only the men in the field who shoot the film, but the men who develop and print it in the lab. They provide photo coverage for the entire division. It is a big job, but they do it like professionals."

With an M-16 in one hand and a Leica M-2 camera in the other, focusing, framing, waiting for the right shot while trying not to get killed—they do it like professionals.



Gardner

Specialist Four Mike Laley, his Leica already grimy from the rice paddies, rests for a few minutes before going into another LZ. Even on days when there is no fighting, the photographer looks for good mood and feature pictures.

Their work...



SP4 Michael Laley



PFC Steve Shepard



SP5 John Gardenhire

SP4 Christopher Brow



SP5 Lawrence Lee





THE LIFE SERPENT

By 1LT David H. Furse

Boots caked with thick delta mud are just another burden for the infantryman to carry. The mud is standard equipment for military operations in the delta. Everyone carries his basic load of the oozy slime, like it or not. Men and machines alike bog down in the mire.

It's all part of the daily routine to keep the sprawling rice-rich Mekong Delta out of the hands of the Communists who are struggling to regain control of this area in which they once roamed free, recruiting the young men and heavily taxing the abundant rice harvest.

Through the heart of this contested land twists a giant coiling serpent called the Mekong River. The river and its many branches are arteries pumping life to the land. The river is the source of the agricultural richness that is South Vietnam. The rice bowl would be empty without it.

Because of the high temperature and heavy monsoon rain, the Mekong has carried unusually heavy loads of sediment contributing to the rapid formation of this fertile alluvial delta. Five branches of the

*The Mekong River
fills the Delta
rice bowl*

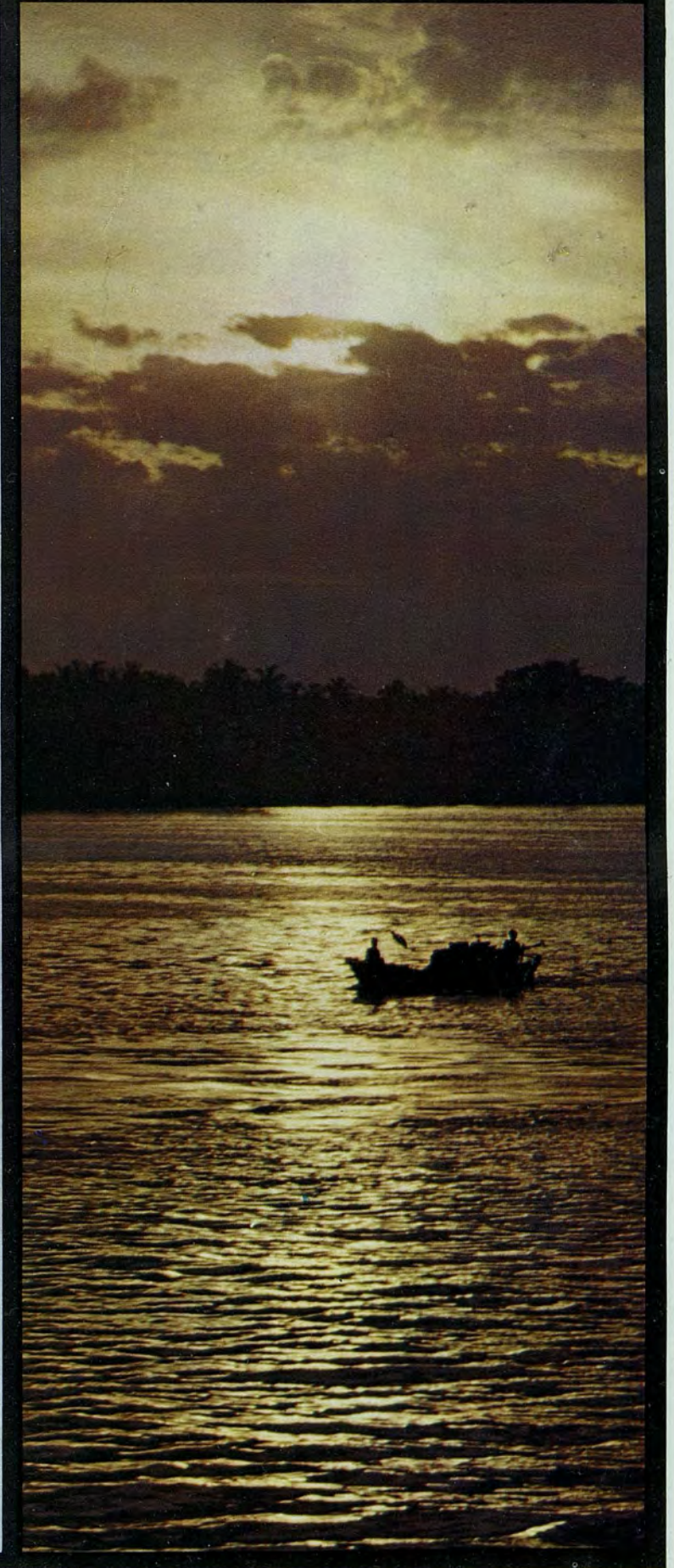
Mekong River have deposited the 26,000 square miles of the delta in Vietnam, most of it since historic times.

Beginning in Tsinghai Province in the Tibetan highlands and traveling 2,500 miles to the South China Sea, the Mekong is among the longest rivers in the world. It is paralleled for its first 750 miles by two other great Asian rivers, the Salween and the Yangtze, also born from the same source. Divided by mountain ranges exceeding 1,500 feet, these three deep river valleys are often as close as 20 miles apart.

The river forms the international boundaries between Burma and Laos and between Laos and Thailand. Settlement is sparse along the river until it reaches the twin capitals of Laos where it forms two isolated alluvial plains sufficiently fertile to support a large population.

The Khone falls, between Laos and Cambodia, represent considerable hydroelectric potential, falling 72 feet of elevation in six miles. From here the Mekong widens and thickens with the rich sediment which covers the delta from central Cambodia across Vietnam to the sea.

Protecting the Mekong Delta from seasonal floods is a great central lake



in Cambodia. During the flood season, this lake expands to three times its normal size. Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia located at the spillway of the lake, is a major inland port, fishery and trade center.

Just above sea level

Over 300 miles of the Mekong River and its branches twist through the Vietnam portion of the delta. The low, level plain, nowhere more than 10 feet above sea level, is very fertile with cultivated land extending to the South China Sea.

The difference between low and high tides varies from three feet in some sections of the delta to a change of six feet in the northern branches. The drainage profoundly affects methods of rice production.

More than 9,000 square miles of delta land are under rice cultivation. The Mekong, with its branches and canals, is used extensively for irrigation. Rice production for the delta in 1959 was reported in excess of 5,000,000 tons. Though Viet Cong terrorist activity has cut deeply into the once abundant rice export, improved methods of cultivation and a more stable military situation are helping production to increase to its former levels.

Mud bank deposits prevent navigation of deep-draft ships in the Delta except for the Saigon River, which can accommodate large ships 50 miles inland. River and canal travel is the most dependable mode of transportation. Over 2,000 miles of primary and secondary canals crisscross the area. All the canals carry a heavy burden of traffic between Saigon and the other large trading centers in the delta.

Mekong River branches and canals also supply a considerable amount of both salt- and fresh-water fish. With substantial United States aid for the formation of credit facilities and cooperatives, the catch has increased several hundred percent in recent years. Although some of the fish is exported, most of the 1,000,000 tons caught yearly are sold fresh in local markets.

Potential power

A series of dams on the Mekong River system is envisaged by the United Nations Asian Economic Commission to provide electrical power for industry, to enable irrigation of large areas of land, to aid in flood control, and to promote navigation on the river. The project would be more vast than the Ten-

nessee Valley Authority in the United States and would provide important benefits to Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Although planning was initiated in 1951, it was only after the Geneva Convention of 1954 that on-the-ground surveys could begin. After preliminary exploration was completed, a report was submitted in 1958 to the United Nations stressing the great potential of the Mekong.

Five locations

Five locations were cited for construction of the dams on the Mekong River. The estimated capacity of these dams would be almost 14 billion kilowatt-hours and would permit the irrigation of 2,500,000 additional acres.

The Mekong River in many ways shapes the economic destiny of the people of South Vietnam. For centuries fishermen with their crude nets, farmers with their wooden plows and traders with their sampans piled with goods for market have looked to the river for a livelihood. Budding industrialists, merchants, farmers cooperatives and fisheries today depend on the same Mekong River as the potential for the future.



Research and Development



LIGHT MY FIRE DUSTER

The Viet Cong move primarily at night in the Mekong Delta, but soon they may have that privilege taken away now that the 9th Infantry Division's 5th Battalion, 2d Artillery is using a new technique designed to expose the VC's movement. The new weapon consists of M42 "Duster" with a Xenon searchlight mounted on the gun turret. The searchlight can use either infrared light or white light to search out the VC. Once VC are spotted, the Duster cannons are used to engage the enemy.



ARTILLERY BOAT

A floating 105? Sounds unlikely, but don't tell the Mobile Riverine Force, because that's exactly what they have. Mounted on a "Mike" boat, the big tube is joined by 2-20mm cannons, 3-30 cal. machine guns and 2-40mm high velocity grenade launchers. Imagine starting down the barrel of that thing while it is loaded with a "beehive" round. No thanks.



BIVOUAC BOOTIE

Want something a little stylish to wear on cold, wet ambush patrols? Well, if you find your combat boots won't allow your feet to dry at night, the Army may have the answer for you in the form of a canvas 'bivouac bootie.' Looking like an OD tennis shoe, the bootie is to be worn when a unit has stopped long enough to try and dry its boots. The bootie will keep mosquitoes out, keep feet warm, allow the boots to dry and provide protection in case the soldiers have to move quickly during the night. And in the morning when your boots are dry, you just fold the booties in two and put them in your pocket.



ZIPPERED CLODHOPPERS

To make it easier to get out of those slimy boots and into your bivouac booties, the Army is also developing a new boot. After going over the problems caused by the old boots, a new one was designed that has a zipper which will cut the time required to remove the boot from five minutes, to seconds. The zipper, which is held in by the more normal laces, will not open by itself. The boot also has more fabric to help it dry faster and fewer stitches to prevent rubbing and causing blisters. A new coarse sole will improve traction in the mud.



GET A LIFT FROM YOUR TRUCK

The 9th Division's 9th Supply and Transportation Battalion is utilizing a new heavy-duty forklift, the first of its kind in Vietnam. Called a Materials Handling Augmentor (MHA), or forklift, it is unique in that it is mounted on a five-ton M-52 tractor. The tractor is capable of pulling its load, detaching itself and unloading the trailer's contents. Built for areas where no off-loading equipment is available, the lift can be raised to 14 feet and lift 4,000 pounds of equipment.



TALKING THEM OUT

There's no VC like a captured VC and that's the aim of hand-held bullhorns now being carried by many Division units. Using, in many cases, prepared messages, Tiger Scouts and interpreters use the small loudspeakers to try and talk the VC out of their hiding places. The appeals are aimed at several different circumstances and enemy units. The interpreter will tell the VC what direction to walk in to meet U.S. troops and what to do once he gets there.

THE FIRST STOP

By 1LT John F. Lamm

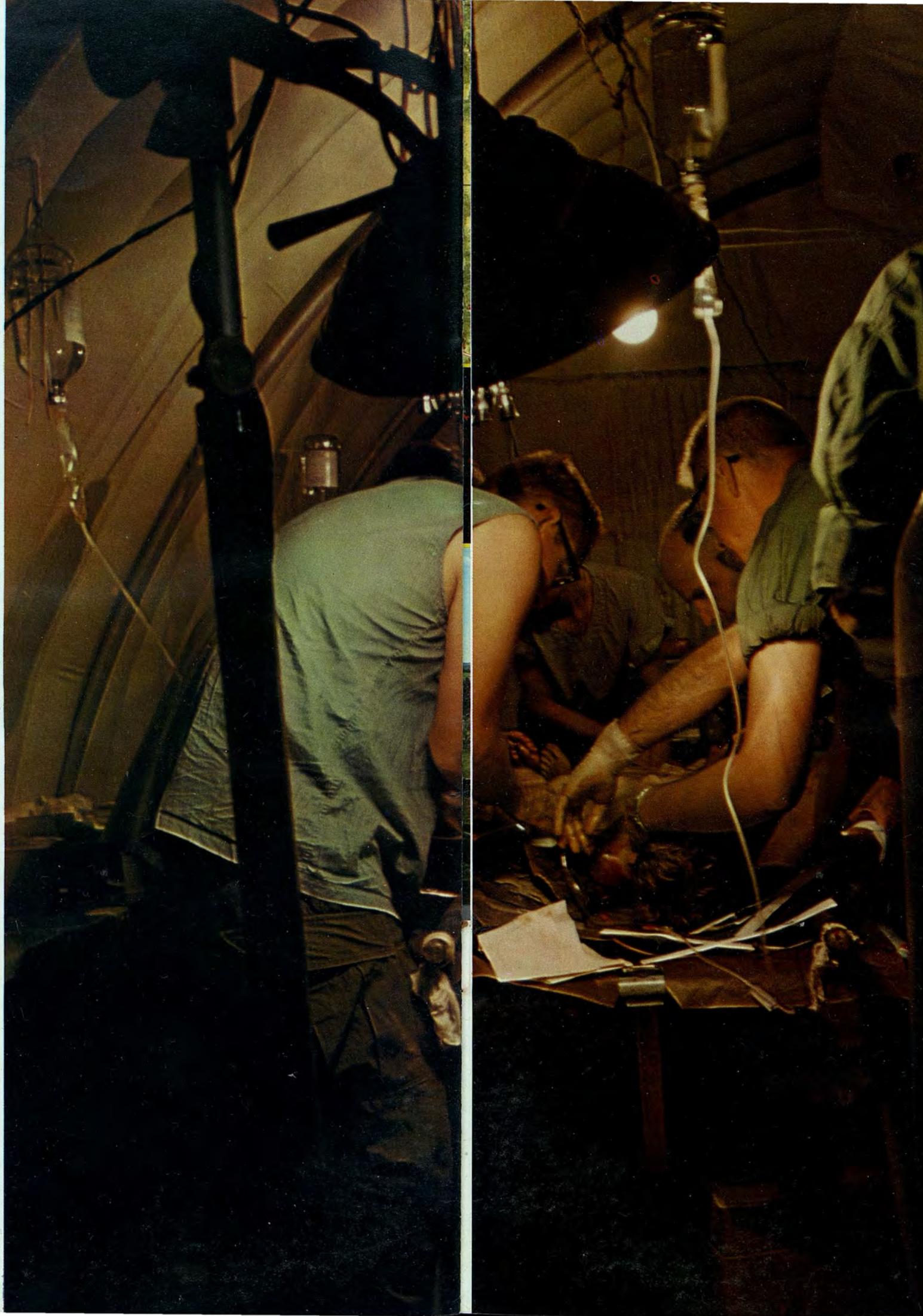
Dust billowed up from the helicopter's downdraft as two men with a stretcher hustled across the blacktop toward a row of large wooden structures. They carried a wounded Old Reliable.

He had been hit just minutes before while moving in the sweaty, muddy atmosphere of a Delta rice paddy. Now he was being taken into a clean, air-conditioned, pre-operating room where an internist, a specialist in internal medicine, would examine his wounds.

He would soon be on the road to recovery thanks to Dong Tam's Third Surgical Hospital, the first stop for many wounded men of the 9th Division. They are taken from the helicopter to the pre-operating room, then examined by a specialist in the type of wound they have received. In some cases, the problem can be remedied on the spot and the patient taken directly to a recuperating room.

If a head wound is involved, the wounded man may not even get off the chopper before a doctor meets the "dustoff" on the pad. If the wound is serious enough, the chopper will take the patient directly to the 24th Evacuation Hospital at Long Binh, which specializes in head wounds.

After the patient has been examined and if he needs further emergency work, he may be taken to the X-ray room or,



An Inflated Hospital

Means Life To Wounded Soldiers

if X-rays are not needed, directly to the operating room.

There he could be operated on by any of four general surgeons, an internist, an orthopedic surgeon, who works on feet, or a thoracic surgeon, who specializes in chest wounds.

If the patient needs close, specialized post-operative care, he is taken to the intensive care ward.

"Because we are a surgical hospital, we do a great deal of intensive care work," said First Lieutenant Beverly Nelson, 22, Detroit Lakes, Minn. "In some cases, such as when a patient is in a respirator to make him breathe properly, he depends entirely on the nurses in the ward for everything and needs a lot of time and attention."

If the surgery is not critical and the wound can be completely closed, the patient is usually taken to one of the recuperation wards.

Most patients spend an average of only four to five days in the 3d Surg ward, before being taken to one of the five major field hospitals for recuperation. These hospitals are the 93d and 24th Evacuation Hospitals at Long Binh, the 36th Evacuation Hospital at Vung Tau, the 3d Field Hospital at Saigon and the 29th Evacuation Hospital at Binh Thuy.

Since each of the hospitals has the same capabilities, the hospital they are sent to depends on the number of patients in each, as the 68th Medical Group, which has



Hospital personnel gently lift wounded Old Reliable off a "dust-off" (above) and carefully rush him to an operating room (below). Speed, combined with professional skill make the hospital a life-saving first stop for wounded men.



control over all the hospitals, tries to keep the same number of patients in each hospital. All head wounds and wounded Viet Cong are taken to the 24th Evacuation Hospital.

Once the patient reaches a field hospital, he may remain there if recuperation time is short. If he will be incapacitated for a long period of time, he may be sent to Japan. Should the patient need further specialized work, such as plastic surgery, he will probably be sent to the U.S.

Two sides

The hospital has both a professional side, which includes the doctors, nurses and personnel who assist in the wards, and an administration side. Headed by Major Carroll A. Ockert, 33, Ayer, Mass., executive officer of the hospital, the administration section maintains records on 250 patients that go through 3d Surg in an average month, plus handling such things as supply and mess facilities.

"The staff functions 110 per cent as a team," said Lieutenant Colonel Frank Kriz Jr., 34, Winter Park, Fla., former commanding officer of the hospital. "The nurses play as important a part in post op and surgery as does the fully trained staff. The Medical Service Corps officers round out the team from the administration side."

Third Surgical Hospital itself consists of two recuperative wards, one

Koraker

Koraker



Karraker

intensive care ward, three operating rooms, a preoperating room and an X-ray lab.

The buildings are actually large inflated rubber structures. Called Medical Unit Self-Contained Transportable (MUST) they are inflated by blower units through large hoses. The building is actually a half circle with the walls broken into one foot sections. Air circulates inside the wall to keep it inflated. Addi-

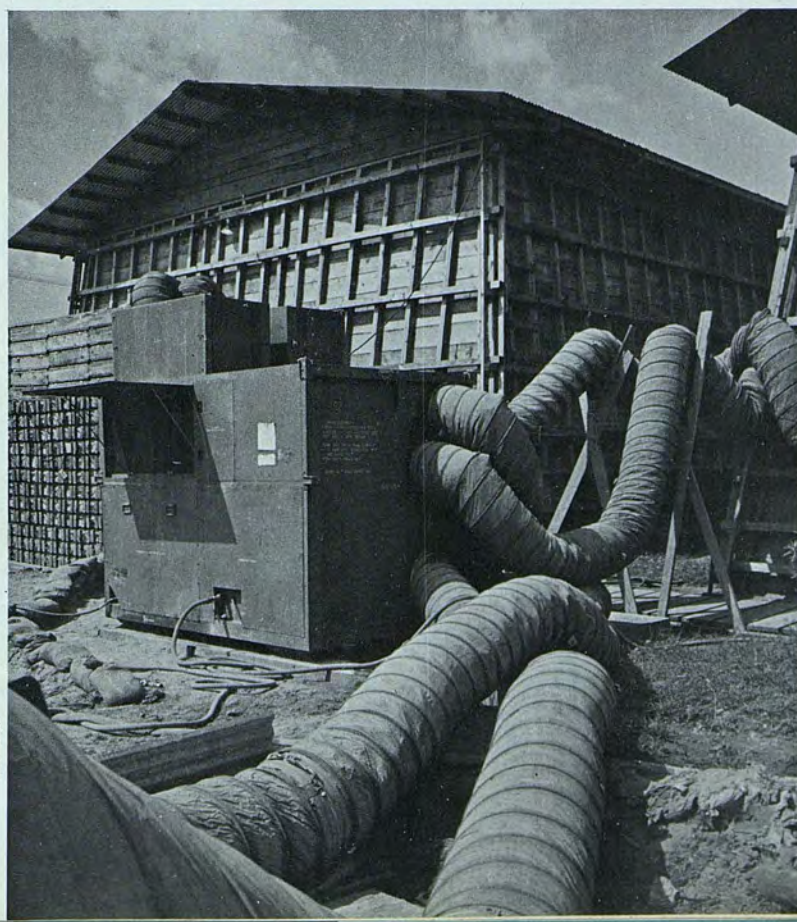
Recreates environment

tional metal braces prevent total collapse in case the rubber walls are badly pierced by shrapnel. The units also have air conditioners that filter the air to keep dust at a minimum.

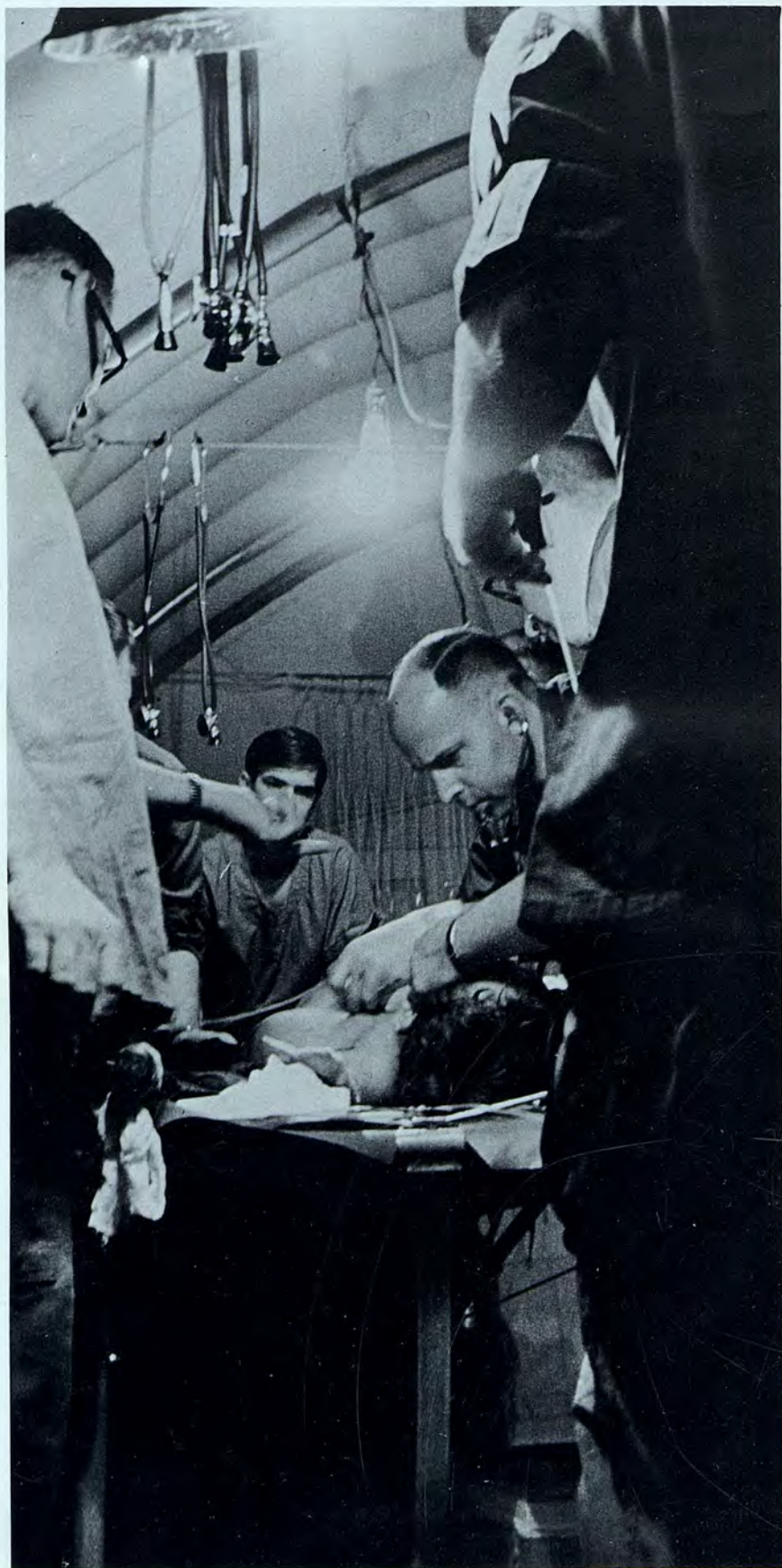
As protection for patients and the MUST units, huge bunkers have been built to enclose the rubber buildings. The bunker frames consist of 12 by 18-inch beams. A double wall with six feet of dirt between them make up the side walls, while the ceiling was first lined with 12 by 18-inch beams, then covered with three to four feet of dirt. A tin detonation roof covers the top of the building.

"The MUST, in its entirety, re-

Working quickly, quietly, efficiently, a hospital staff member (above) aids a wounded soldier in the operating room. The MUST unit (below) provides the staff a clean, cool atmosphere to work and the wounded men good conditions to rest.



Karraker



Lieutenant Colonel Frank Kriz, former commanding officer of the hospital, works on a patient under the bare lights of the operating room. Kriz heads a medical staff of seven surgeons, 15 nurses and various technicians.

creates the hospital environment where the specially trained staff would practice surgery in the states," Kriz said. "The operating rooms and wards are equipped with the latest equipment.

"The unit can be cooled in the tropics or heated in an Arctic environment so the patients aren't subjected to the extremes of the climate they fight in."

Major Fred W. Pauling, 35, a surgeon from Dallas, felt even stronger about the capabilities.

"I believe that for the type of work we do, it's better than the average hospital in the states," he said. "We have to be extremely specialized and because of the wounds we treat, we can do things hospitals in the states can't do."

Crews rotate

Important cogs in 3d Surg's success are the pilots and crews of the MEDEVAC choppers of the 75th Medical Detachment (Airmobile). The "dustoff" crews live in the 3d Surg area and are there on call for three day stretches. After three days, they go back to the 57th Medical Detachment to rest for a few days, before going on to another hospital in the 68th Medical Group for another three day stint.

"I feel better knowing that I'm saving people, not killing them," said Chief Warrant Officer 2, Frank Sutton, 33, Columbus, Ga. "Actually it's more dangerous because MEDEVAC choppers have to spend more time on the ground, but it's rewarding work."

Being completely separate from the Division's organic 9th Medical Battalion, 3d Surg does not perform sickcalls, except for their own personnel. They do have capabilities for dental service.

Oldest MEDCAP

For over a year, a group of volunteers from 3d Surg have assisted in what Kriz calls, "the oldest, most successful MEDCAP in the Delta." Twice a week, the volunteers offer their services outside the Dong Tam gate, treating about 1,500 patients a month.

It is a short jump from the muddy rice paddies of the Division's area of operations to 3d Surg, and that means a wounded Old Reliable can get the help he needs fast.

"To give you an idea of our capabilities," Kriz said, "we once had a soldier brought in with a piece of shrapnel in his heart. Because of the staff and equipment we have, we saved him." ●

Korrek

Octofoil Notes

NEED A LOAN?

Ps-s-s-t, hey buddy, need a loan? Chances are you just might when you ETS and the Veterans Administration is willing to help you out. You can get a direct loan from the VA if you are going to purchase a home or farmhouse. There is a list of other expenditures for which you can get a VA loan guaranty. Under this program, the VA will promise to pay a certain percentage of loans made to veterans should they default in repayment. This means you have the government "vouching for" your credit, possibly resulting in a more favorable interest rate to you with little or no down payment. See your local VA representative for further details.

CHECK IT OUT

A checking account with one of the banking facilities in Vietnam is one of the best ways to keep your personal finances in order—and you get paid for it. All checking accounts pay interest on accounts that maintain a balance of \$100 or more for an entire quarter. There is no service charge made against individual checking accounts and if you wish to begin banking your pay all you need to do is get an application form from your unit personnel officer or from the bank. The addresses of the banks in-country are:

Manager
The Chase Manhattan Bank
Military Banking Facility
Box 20
APO 96243

Manager
Bank of America
Military Banking Facility
Box 30
APO 96243

Manager
American Express
Vung Tau
Military Banking Facility
APO 96291

COURTS-MARTIAL MANUAL

A new Manual of Courts-Martial went into effect January 1, designed to reflect the changes in military law since the manual was first issued in 1951. Most of the changes are of a technical nature involving amendments to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, decisions of the Court of Military Appeals and decisions of the Supreme Court which have general application in the fields of criminal law. Changes in policy have also been made to improve the operation of military justice.

GOING HOME

Once you are in Oakland or Ft. Dix and ready to head home, you can save half your fare IF you just follow these steps:

- Be in uniform and on active duty (or be within seven days of separation or discharge) when purchasing tickets and traveling.
- Be traveling at your own expense (even if you are reimbursed later, or have already received a travel allowance).
- Be traveling on an official military leave or an authorized pass.
- Submit DD Form 1580. This form, available from your unit or personnel officer, is accepted by the airlines as proof that you are, in fact, a serviceman traveling on an authorized pass.

NEED A BREAK?

Want your choice of jobs in a location of your choice? That's what the Defense Department is offering with its Vietnam Veterans Employment Referral Program (VEVERP). Now you can make one job application and receive civilian employment considerations at locations of your choice throughout the U.S. You can register at any Department of Defense Civilian Personnel Office. Your name is then passed on to the Defense Electronics Supply Center in Dayton, Ohio. Bi-weekly, your skills and employment desires will be automatically referred to the Department of Defense and other Federal activities in the area you desire. If a suitable vacancy exists, you will be notified directly.

EDUCATION BENEFITS

If you have your mind set on going back to college when you return stateside, the government is willing to pay you just to go to school. Under the "GI Bills" of 1966 and 1967, if you have been in the Army for 181 days of continuous duty or released from the Army with a service-connected disability since January 31, 1955, you will receive one month of assistance for every month of service up to 36 months. You must attend an approved institution and will be paid on a monthly basis. The benefits can be used anytime within 8 years after your discharge. Payments are:

Type of Program	Number of dependents			
	None	One	Two	Additional
Full time	\$130	\$155	\$175	\$10
3/4 time	95	115	135	7
Half time	60	75	85	5
Less than half time or while on active duty	Tuition and fees, up to the monthly maximum for full time study, paid monthly.			



Donut Dollies

By SP5 Tom P. Gable, Jr.

Two-dozen suntanned, dirt-stained infantrymen shuffle forward, shyly pondering their sweaty appearances. Some slowly sit down, smiling self-consciously for no great reason except that their rugged base has just been interrupted by perfume and lipstick, smiles, red crosses and blue cotton dresses—two American girls.

They are two of the six Red Cross girls working with the 9th Infantry Division. Affectionately called Donut Dollies, most haven't seen a donut since leaving the world. Donut Dollies, as a matter of fact, only serve donuts in Korea. Nobody knows why. The men don't care.

"Hi, I'm Mary Ann." Smile from a brown-eyed brunette, a big "hi" from the crowd. "I'm from Cleveland, Ohio (Yayy) and have been in Vietnam for eight months (Awwwww.)" The response brings a blush, even through her tan. But she overcomes the small surge of shyness and continues with the routine. "Anybody want a short-timer calendar?"

"Got any for 300 days?"

"Bummer, give him three."

"Give him nine, he just reupped for three years." Laughter, groans of disbelief, boo, hiss. Mary Ann steps back, laughing. Another girl moves closer to the men, who are now smiling openly and seem to have forgotten they are in Vietnam, in the Mekong Delta, and not in Santa Monica.

"I'm Betsy (Yayyyy!). I am from Knoxville, Tennessee (Booo!) and have been in Vietnam just two months (Arrrrggghhhh!). We have a game. It's a musical game. Would you like to play?"

"Do we have to sing?" blurts

Gable



Misty (left) and Sandy present a word game to the men of the 709th Maintenance Battalion. The intent soldier at the right is trying to find the word 'black' in the sentence on the card Misty is holding.

one young blond southerner.

"Just sometimes." A quick, light reply almost in chorus, then two pairs of American girl's hands reach into a faded, oblong, olive-drab bag big enough to hold a card table. They pull out a large piece of poster-board. It is covered with plastic and has five rows of cards on it. They read "pop-tops," "singalong," "C & W-jazz," "oldies but goodies," "pot-luck," "show tunes." The cards are repeated many times on each of the five rows. The music game is similar to Concentration, of TV fame—answer a question from one of the six categories, pull a corresponding card, reveal part of the first five lines of a song. Guess the song, win a gold (cardboard and glitter) record. Three out of five games wins the contest, or maybe four out of seven, if you can call it winning because the girls leave when the contest ends, a major loss to both teams.

What's an octave?

"The programs (games) aren't sophisticated," said Pat Owen, 23, of Milwaukie, Ore. "We try to make them as fun as possible, and basically simple."

Simple? From a football game—how wide is a football field? Fifty-three and a third yards, to be exact.

What school did Johnny Unitas attend? Louisville.

And from the music game—what are eight notes on a musical scale called? Octave.

Where do the Trapp Family Singers live? Stowe, Vt.

"Where did you get those questions?" complained one frustrated participant. Banter erupts between the girls and guys. It always does, especially when a tough question is posed.

"The men are great and really try to get into the game," continued Pat, a social sciences graduate from



Betsy (left) and Mary Ann break up during a trip to Tan Tru and the 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry. The game may be about music, sports, personalities, it doesn't matter.

Marylhurst College, near Portland, Ore. "It gets them out of the war for a while and, in a way, back to the states. Maybe it is a little easier on them."

Maybe the game is a way of forgetting.

"Who sang 'Respect'?" asks Mary Ann, whose last name is Hughes, a 24-year old drama graduate from Ursuline College in Ohio.

A game, a song, a memory

"Aretha!" shouts a young grenadier, just edging out a soul brother who captained the team and was THE expert on music. A quick bout of kidding followed. The team, the platoon, is a very tight fraternity.

But Aretha, or the song and its memory, makes images dance through the mind—the Strip, the Ore House, the Rendezvous; maybe a party where the lights were dim and the records only slightly warped; dancing, a driving beat or the soft caress of a ballad; human beings back in the world. Five, six, ten months in country but getting short. Soon, back to the world and Laura, or Chris, or Janet. Respect. Good song. Remember the party where...

"What was the origin of modern jazz?" Interrupted in thought. Huh? The answer.

"Dixieland!" Back to the game.

"Right. Which card?"

"Blue one in the third row." A card is pulled, part of the lyrics appear. The game goes on, more questions, more memories.

It goes on every day in the Mekong Delta, maybe five or six times. It can last 45 minutes or an hour and a half. It is all relative. It depends on the men, what they want, where they are, where they are going, where they have been.

Perfume in the boondocks

"I was at this grubby fire base waiting to go out again and the next thing I know there were two girls standing there talking to me," recalled one 3d Brigade squad leader from California. "You can imagine how good perfume smells in the boonies. I mean, you know, an American girl, it kind of makes the place a little more sane, if that makes any sense."

A girl, a college graduate, at a fire support base in Vietnam, abandoning the world for a year—it makes you wonder. Six girls in a division of men. Why? Not for the \$5,000 a year salary they earn.

"I wanted to do something worthwhile," said Sandy Lockhart, 22, of Camp Lejune, N.C., a political science graduate of the University of Oklahoma. "I met a girl who had been here and she told me what it was like. I felt if I came over I would be doing something important. And every day is a great experience. There is no routine or monotony, I enjoy everything about the job."

Sandy holds the title of "Donut Six," which means she is the administrative leader of the 9th Division



Pat smiles and a soldier from the 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry becomes a bit self-conscious. At times, both sides feel conscious of the conditions—the time the place,—but a smile, maybe a joke, breaks the ice.

sion Donut Dollies. She makes sure that paper work is in order, sick forms are filled out, supplies are on hand and correspondence is maintained with other chapters.



No Kidding! Diane, a former Dollie with the 9th Division, stops to talk with a patient in a 9th Medical Battalion ward at Dong Tam. In the ward, the girls passed out shorttimers calanders, reading material and, most important, a little time.



It helps girls too
"All the girls are peers, though," she explained. "There is no real 'big boss.' It is just for administrative matters."

But administration is secondary. The girls are dedicated to getting into the field and meeting the men. The games go on in many places—small clubs, bleachers, a motor pool.

"Every place has a different type person," said Betsy Tanner, 21, a physics and math graduate of Emory University, Atlanta, Ga. "I haven't been here too long but I love it. Everything is interesting. Sometimes I get a little self-conscious about being among so many men. But I just take a deep breath and it passes quickly. Everyone is so great, from general on down. It is really a fantastic experience."

"Being here has helped my shyness," admitted Mary Ann, who formerly was with the 1st Logistical Command at Qui Nhon. "It has made me more outgoing and given me a chance to meet people from all types of background. Over here, everyone is the same, all in the same boat, especially with an infantry unit."

"We get to know the men better, spend more time with them and don't have to adhere to a strict schedule. With a support unit we had a very strict schedule. I like the infantry better. They have to adapt to much worse conditions and appreciate the little things more."

"It was something I felt I had to do," said Mitsy Lettieri, 22, of Pelham Manor, N.Y., an English graduate of Skidmore. "All my friends were over here. I felt if I didn't go, ten years later I would be kicking myself.

Laughing is a big part of the program, the game. Young people together, boys and girls, men and women, can have a lot of fun, even playing a guessing game, or talking about getting short or recalling common experiences from the same home town.

The programs and the calendars tie it all together. It starts the ball rolling, where to they never know because it all depends on the men and their reactions.

"This game is too deep for me," cracked a gunner from the 2d Battalion, 4th Artillery.

"How long does this go on?" queried an infantryman from Company C, 2d Battalion, 60th Infantry, when his team was hit with three tough questions in a row. "You are just trying to make up look bad."

"We would like to thank you for this great emotional experience," said a tongue-in-cheek mortarman at Tan Tru, maybe getting a little closer to



Lamm

the program's appeal than he meant to.

Be it an emotional experience or not, all men enjoy the programs and look forward to a break from combat or work when two young girls walk in and ask: "Do you want to play a game?" (Yayyyyyyy!) ☺

In the hot, dusty parking lot of a Dong Tam battalion base camp (above) or on the porch of a club in a fire support base (below), the girls get the men involved in a simple game, a few minutes away from the war, a diversion.




Gable

Night On The Berm

A Pleasure, Not A Duty

By SP5 Tom P. Gable, Jr.



It was 4:30 pm. I had donned my web gear and steel pot, filled my canteens, cleaned my M-16 rifle and drawn ammunition from the arms room. Bolstered with insect repellent to ward off mosquitos and a can of peanuts to battle hunger, I was ready for the big night—my first time standing guard on one of the bunkers around the Dong Tam perimeter.

I was a little nervous and probably stood out from among the dozen or so “veteran” guards who stood casually talking about anything but the berm. I had heard many strange tales about guard duty and read some very frightening ones in stateside newspapers. I tried to forget about those less pleasant things and concentrate on something more positive.

“Standing guard is a pleasure, not a duty,” various drill instructors had blared as I suffered through basic training and AIT. Taking their words to heart, I climbed confidently aboard the deuce-and-a-half, ready for a night on the berm.

The truck bumped and jiggled down the dusty road, stopping at each bunker to disgorge portions of the night security force. We finally stopped at my bastion for the night and I hopped off.

Climbing onto my bunker, I could see it was going to be an interesting night. The overhead cover wasn’t worth a can of nuoc mam. Luckily it was the dry season so we didn’t have to worry about rain. My partner, who hadn’t spoken yet, and I stared at each other for a few minutes before taking off our flak jackets and relaxing.

After a few noncommittal grunts, my bunker-mate finally mumbled something like “uwanta gophers.” I hadn’t seen any in Vietnam so I demurred, until I finally realized he meant did I want to be first on guard. I agreed and he was snoring two minutes later.

The first couple of hours weren’t too bad at all. A magnificent Delta sunset burned the sky for about 20 minutes before darkness set in. It was cool and pleasant, a welcome change from the heat of the day. But an hour after the sun went down, the sky turned blacker than a Lambretta driver’s heart. I could barely see the edge of the bunker, much less to the treeline which I remembered was somewhere to my front. I tried opening my eyes as wide as I could. That didn’t help. Then I tried squinting. No luck. Finally I decided I would listen hard.

I kept up until my shift was over and then cautiously tried to awaken my sleeping companion. I whispered and nudged, tried it again, and then finally shouted at him while almost throwing him off the cot. He groggily looked at me like some sadistic E-7 and mumbled something I was probably better off not hearing. He finally mustered enough strength to climb off the cot and stumble into position. I took



his place on the cot, smeared myself with insect repellent and settled down to sleep.

Five minutes later a truck whizzed by, with bright lights on, silhouetting us beautifully for any VC in the area. I panicked. I rolled off the cot and pulled my flak jacket over my head. I remained in that position until I heard a definite sniggering from the front of the bunker. I looked up and my buddy was casually lighting a cigarette, watching me with amusement, if he could see me in the dark.

Sheepishly, I climbed back on the cot and tossed and turned for about 30 minutes before getting to sleep. Not more than five minutes later, I heard grunts and felt someone shaking me by the feet.

"Can't stay awake," he said with utmost clarity. There wasn't anything else to do but take over for him or call him a liar. So I told him to go to sleep.

He sacked out and I went to work prying my sleepy eyes open. I tried to pace myself, getting the adrenalin working as it neared time for the commo check we had to make every 30 minutes. As the second hand touched the 12, I would crank up the radio and press the button. A crackly voice answered.

"Ah, bunker 38, commo check," I blurted.

"Read you Lima Charlie, out." A great conversationalist I thought, almost as good as my bunker mate. Then I began another battle with drowsiness, drooping eyelids, the number one enemy of a guard.

"BOOOOOMMMMMM!!!!!!!" I leaped about ten feet in the air. An eight-inch howitzer had ended my fight to stay awake. It seemed about five feet away and continued to fire into the night. Unreal, it sounded like the sky was falling. But between rounds, I could hear my partner snoring away, a hardened veteran of guard duty.

After about three hours of listening to the artillery and feeling bugs fly into my face, I woke up my buddy and again tried to sleep. But true to form, he woke me up in less than an hour, complaining that he couldn't stay awake. Resigned to my fate as a bunker patsy, I muttered something vile and climbed off the cot. By this time I was used to the artillery. My eyelids drooped, the thundering support fire causing nary a flinch. But I rallied, trying to fantasize as I watched distant illumination rounds and the lights of hovering helicopters. Thoughts turned to home, family, California, then back to office work, or details, or police call, following no particular pattern but just drifting.

The sun finally came up, my buddy snored on, and I turned to watch the sky become as colorful as it had when the day ended. Guard duty was almost over. I was a veteran. ☺



Like a burning timekeeper, the delta sun marks another day, blind to its own brightness and the suffering of men below. Moving west, heading home—don't look down.

