Richard Madore
[redacted]

January 14, 1998

Dear Mike,

I've put together a little "SOG" package for you.

I wrote John Plaster and asked him to write up a little summary of "SOG" for me, which I have enclosed. I don't know if you would want to use something like this to open the directory section on over the border operations.

I've also enclosed two stories of two team leaders who earned Congressional Medals of Honor. They were both extracted by "Gladiators".

The histories of the 57th A.H.C. "Gladiators and the 361st " Pink Panthers" are also included, of the 7 years that "SOG" was in business in Kontum the 57th and 361st flew the bulk of the missions flying 3 ½ and 4 years respectively. Other companies that did 6-9 month tours were the VNAF flying CH-34's, the 119thAHC Alligators, the 189thAHC Ghostriders, and the 170th Ahc Bikinis'.

The pictures enclosed are of a mountaintop in Laos called "Leghorn". It was manned by 4-6 Americans and 20 or so Montagnards. It was a super top secret location that had equipment for monitoring truck traffic on the Ho Chi Minh trail. It was also a relay station for teams deep in Laos. I also had to throw in my picture of the ladder job as a reminder of my choice for the cover of the next directory.

Thanks and GOOOO Broncos.

Sincerely,
Rick

SOG'S SECRET WAR

Ever wonder where those unmarked H-34s were headed, west of Khe Sanh? Or hear excited calls, "Prairie Fire!" on Guard? Or encounter pilots in the club who couldn't explain how their Huey had been hit by 57 mm anti-aircraft shrapnel?

While a half-million U.S. forces were fighting the war inside South Vietnam, a few dozen Green Berets and Montagnard hill tribesmen were fighting the covert war outside the country, launching from border camp airstrips to recon and raid the Ho Chi Minh Trail for SOG — the top secret Studies and Observations Group.

This classified combat deep behind enemy lines in Laos, Cambodia and, at times, even North Vietnam, proved a great irritant to the North Vietnamese who devoted more and more forces to counter SOG's raids, ambushes and sabotage missions. Eventually some 40,000 to 60,000 NVA were diverted from combat in South Vietnam to rear security along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a phenomenal 600 enemy tied down per U.S. Special Forces soldier operating in Laos. Despite the considerable cost of achieving this — in both ground and aircrew casualties — in 1969 a MACV classified study found SOG an effective economy of force. Indeed, by the war's end, at a cost of about 300 Green Berets, as many as 10,000 NVA may have met their makers — an amazing ratio but also reflecting an effectively integrated air-ground team that pulled SOG men from what often would have been complete annihilation by forces that vastly outnumbered them.

U.S. Army, USMC and USAF rotary wing units were an integral part of this covert war. Although their unclassified award citations falsely identified the locale as South Vietnam, two USAF aviator Medals of Honor and perhaps a dozen or more Army DSCs actually were earned in cross border operations.

Executing the war's most dangerous missions, SOG operators sustained casualty rates not seen

since the Civil War; in 1968, for instance, SOG's Green Beret casualties exceed their assigned strength. By war's end, a dozen entire SOG teams — along with dozens of aviators — were missing, and although signal intercepts confirmed some had been captured, Hanoi still denies knowledge of almost all of them.

SOG's were the war's most highly decorated units, with, for instance, the Kontum-based, 60-man CCC Recon Company earning five Medals of Honor and twice that many DSCs. In one harrowing incident, a 14-man SOG team was mass-assaulted by a reinforced NVA regiment, odds seven times worse than the Alamo, probably the most lopsided engagement in U.S. history. A SOG Green Beret is the war's most highly decorated soldier; U.S. Army then-Sergeant First Class Robert Howard , was awarded the Medal of Honor, DSC, a host of lessor awards, and eight Purple Hearts.

Dodging the world's heaviest concentration of anti-aircraft artillery — some 10,000 guns along the highways of southern Laos — SOG helicopters employed NOE tactics before the term existed, and set the tradition for today's Special Operations aviation units.

THE END

SOG's once top secret story is now told in a new book, SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam*," published by Simon & Schuster, and available this summer in paperback.*

3/65-16/72

GLADIATORS
WO-1 JOHN COOK
SSG MELVIN DYE
SSG BOB GRIFFITH
DIED 2/19/68 PULLING
FRED'S TEAM OUT.

His back broken in a helicopter cras winner Fred Zabitosky risked his life

By Dr. Kent DeLong

Born on October 27, 1942, Fred "Zab" Zabitosky grew up with little discipline. Vandalism and petty theft had earned him some time in the reformatory in Trenton, New Jersey, while an unhappy home life had him running away frequently. Trouble was something with which he was intimately familiar.

When he joined the Army at the age of 17, Zabitosky found the home he had never had. "I loved the discipline and I loved the pride," remembers Zabitosky. "This was the first time I ever experienced either."

Basic training was also the first time he had ever been out of the New Jersey area. He trained in Fort Benning, Ga., and did well. By the time he returned to Vietnam for his third tour in September 1967, he was a combat-ready Green Beret who knew his job.

So classified was the mission in Laos during which Special Forces Staff Sergeant Fred W. Zabitosky earned his Medal of Honor that President Richard M. Nixon did not know the details.

Zabitosky was assigned to Military Assistance Command Vietnam's Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG), Operations Project 35, also known as "Shining Brass" and code-named "Prairie Fire." Its mission was to conduct secret operations into Laos and Cambodia. The operation, conducted from Kontum at Forward Operational Base No. 2, had been going on for two years; Zabitosky's mission was to infiltrate across the Laotian and Cambodian borders to monitor the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Zabitosky was made the leader of Spike Team Maine, which consisted of three Americans and nine indigenous troops, usually Chinese Nungs. Because his team was operating in unconventional warfare mode, the men wore no uniforms. In fact, they wore either North Vietnamese clothes or generic military fatigues without any identification. Their rifles were either Russian AK-47s or Swedish K-submachine guns. They carried North Vietnamese combat gear and ate only Vietnamese food. Before a mission, they didn't wash for several days, since they didn't want to smell like Americans.

For Staff Sgt. Doug Glover, the MACV-SOG missions were his first combat assignments. By the time Glover was ready for his third mission on February 18, 1968, he was made a team leader and he and Zabitosky were friends. The Tet Offensive had begun, and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops were using Laos and Cambodia as their staging areas. A decision was made to infiltrate five MACV-SOG teams into Cambodia and Laos to determine enemy troop concentrations and to decide if a second enemy offensive was probable.

The night before the mission, Glover told Zabitosky: "I had a dream that I'm going to get killed. I know I'm going to die tomorrow." On hearing that, Zabitosky realized

next day, and he responded, "Doug, I'll go in with you as your assistant team leader."

The next day, two helicopters carrying the team landed east of Attopeu, Laos. As the Green Berets moved through 10-foot-tall elephant grass and bamboo thickets near the landing zone (LZ), Zabitosky could see that Glover was uncomfortable.

The team members started into the jungle and suddenly realized they were in the middle of an NVA complex. There were bunkers and K-wire everywhere. But the real tipoff was the enemy soldiers sitting at their campsites, eating. Just as the Green Berets realized where they were, the NVA realized it, too. All of a sudden, guns started blazing from both sides. The team dropped back.

Zabitosky asked Glover what he wanted to do. "You take over the team," Glover responded. "You got to take over the team." Zabitosky said, "All right, move the men back to the LZ, and I'll stay here and cover." The team withdrew. "I wanted them out of there. I had my hands full and I work better alone," remembers Zabitosky. "The team had a better chance of survival at the LZ."

Zabitosky started to withdraw, firing his M-16 as he moved back and setting Claymore mines connected to white phosphorus "Willy-Peter" grenades. He radioed Glover to call in airstrikes on the white smoke as soon as the grenades started going off. A Douglas Skyraider A1-E strike force was on the way.

When the phosphorus grenades started to blow, the bombers dropped in. Zabitosky had no way to communicate directly with the aircraft himself, and now 750-pound bombs and napalm were dropping all around him. Dozens of NVA were still

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His back broken in a helicopter crash, Medal of Honor winner Fred Zabitosky risked his life to rescue the crew.

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□PERSONALITY□

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making their way toward him. "I finally made it back to the LZ with the rest of the squad, but there were no helicopters to get us out of there yet," he recalls. Realizing they would have to buy time, he positioned each man around a tight perimeter defense just outside the LZ.

Glover was the radioman now. The FAC (forward air control) plane, flying above the surrounded troops, asked if there were any more Americans outside the defended area. When the pilot was told no, he called the A1-Es even closer, creating a scorching ring of fire. Napalm, 750-pound bombs and cluster bomb units (CBUs) were dropped on the surrounded Green Berets' perimeter. The NVA kept attacking with wave after wave of frontal assaults. Over the next 1½ hours, the overhead FAC aircraft counted 22 separate attacks made by four NVA companies. Zabitosky's team was running out of ammo.

Finally, some Bell UH-1 "slicks" arrived. These unarmed, stripped bare utility helicopters were designed to carry as many troops as possible. Two of the choppers came over the team, while a third circled above them. Medic Luke Nance was in the third helicopter.

The slicks informed the team that they couldn't bring their ships down on their LZ—it was too "hot." The team was ordered to a new LZ about 500 meters away. The NVA continued attacking. "We had been in battles this intense before, but none so prolonged," explains Zabitosky. "I was still in charge, and I was standing and trying to direct our fire and movement to the new LZ. When you are in charge, your men look to you for guidance, and you don't want them to know you are as scared as they are." He knew their time was running out along with their ammunition and luck.

The team started moving toward the second LZ. The American air attackers increased their barrage on the surrounding enemy, which allowed Zabitosky and his men to reach the clearing just as the first slick landed. Zabitosky ordered two Nungs and one American onto the helicopter.

The NVA realized what the Americans were doing just as the first helicopter took off and the second landed. The enemy troops regrouped and started moving toward the new position. Zabitosky's team kept firing. It looked as if they were going to make it out, even though it would be close.

Glover looked at Zabitosky, smiled, and said, "You brought us through again, Zab." Zabitosky replied, "You see, you had nothing to worry about with that dream."

The six remaining team members ran to the open door of the second helicopter. Zabitosky ran to the left side, firing at the

onrushing NVA while the other men got in on the right. The NVA were getting closer, and Zabitosky hung out the door, spraying automatic fire as the helicopter took off. The helicopter's machine-gunners were firing, too, but suddenly the ship's tail boom was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade.

"There was a violent jolt, followed by screaming," Zabitosky remembers. "I saw the tail boom come around and I heard an explosion. Then I remember falling. It was like a dream." The helicopter crashed and Zabitosky landed about 20 feet from the burning wreckage. He was on fire, and he remembers thinking that he was near a very hot sun. When he started coming to, he realized the "hot sun" was the blazing helicopter, and he was in the fight of his life. His clothes were in flames, and he could hear screams coming from the downed chopper. He knew he was hurt, and his first thought was, "Don't let them catch you or they'll kill you." He wanted to crawl into the bush and maybe be rescued. But he heard the screams from the helicopter again.

The ship's fuel cells and ordnance were going off, and Zabitosky knew five of his team members were still in the bird, along with two pilots and two machine-gunners. He was the only one who had been thrown clear of the helicopter, which had broken at midsection and twisted on its right side. "I was out of ammunition, and the barrel of my rifle was bent from the fall," he remembers. "Now, all of a sudden, I was faced with the possibility of losing my whole team. I was hurting bad."

Zabitosky had broken his back and several ribs in the crash. Despite his injuries, he managed to fight his way to the cockpit and started dragging out a dazed pilot.

He remembers, "I dragged the pilot out and saw he was awake. I asked him to help me get the co-pilot, who was still screaming. The pilot refused, saying it was too late and there was no chance the co-pilot could live. He left me, dragging my bent gun with him."

Green Beret medic Luke Nance, who was in one of the rescue helicopters, remembers: "We were receiving fire and I saw Zab's helicopter go down. It was exploding, but I thought I saw something move just outside." The pilots in the helicopter overhead were convinced that no one survived the crash, and they started to leave the area. Nance went to the cockpit and calmly said: "No, we're not leaving. We're going down there." Looking into his face, the pilots realized the Green Beret meant what he said. They were on their way down to the crash site.

Nance's helicopter came down about 60 meters from the crashed helicopter, and the injured pilot Zabitosky had rescued earlier started crawling toward them.

"We went down but didn't quite land," Nance remembers. "I jumped out of the

chopper and shot an NVA point-blank out of a tree. There was a lot of fire, and there were NVA troops coming at us. I could see men still alive, and I wanted to get to them."

Despite the continued NVA attack, Zabitosky started into the burning helicopter again. The co-pilot kept yelling: "Help me! Please, help me!"

"I made my way inside the cockpit and was able to get to his side," Zabitosky recalls. "I felt my face and shirt burning." The last fuel cell blew as he started dragging the co-pilot out. "We were thrown clear, but both of us were on fire. I started dragging him toward the chase copter. He only had a leather pistol belt left on. Everything else was burned off."

Zabitosky remembers the co-pilot saying to him: "Thanks for not leaving me. Are we going to make it?" Zabitosky replied, "I really don't think so, but we'll try."

The only weapons he had left were a pistol and one hand grenade. The NVA had been held outside the LZ perimeter by the intense air support, but now some enemy soldiers were starting to get through. "I pulled the pin on my hand grenade and was ready to just let it blow," recalls Zabitosky, "but at the last second I threw it toward some attacking soldiers."

Zabitosky hoisted the co-pilot on his shoulder and painfully made his way toward the chase helicopter. On the way, he saw the pilot, who was still on his hands and knees. "I considered leaving him, but I didn't; I started dragging him, too," he recalls. "We got within 10 feet of the rescue ship and I remember Luke Nance's skinny little hands coming to our rescue. He saved my life." Evacuated to Pleiku, Zabitosky would be hospitalized for six weeks.

Several hundred enemy soldiers were killed that day, including 109 at the first LZ. The crashed helicopter's two machine-gunners, Spc. 4 Melvin C. Dye and Spc. 4 Robert S. Griffith, and three Nungs died in the crash. The co-pilot died two days later. Glover also died in the crash; sadly, his dream came true.

"There is no such thing as patriotism in a combat situation," says Zabitosky, looking back at the mission. "You don't think about medals, promotions or even the flag. You don't think about why you are there or even your family. You think strictly about the people you are with, and what you can do for each other."

President Richard M. Nixon presented the Medal of Honor to Fred Zabitosky in March 1969 for his heroic efforts during the classified 1967 mission. "I wear the medal, but it was earned by Doug Glover, my indigenous team members and all the Special Forces enlisted men who served on special projects," says Zabitosky. "All the guys who wore that beret in combat have done just as much as I have, even though they may not have received the Medal of Honor." □

GLADIATORS!
VAUGHN ROSS AND
CARTER HIGGINBOTHAM
PULLED FRANKLINS
TEAM OUT.

In a battle compared to Custer's Last … Staff Sgt. Franklin D. Miller won t…

By Al Hemingway

On January 5, 1970, the familiar swish of helicopter blades punctuated the air as several UH-1D Hueys, or "Slicks," swooped down from an overcast sky and prepared to land. As the choppers briefly hovered, Recon Team (RT) Vermont—comprised of three Americans: Miller, the team leader; Green, the combat medic; and Hobart, the radio operator—leaped into the waist-high vegetation and proceeded to reconnoiter the area. In addition to the Americans, four Montagnards accompanied the long-range patrol. Prep was their leader, Hyuk was the pointman, Gai served as interpreter, and Yube provided rear security.

The team leader for RT Vermont, Staff Sgt. Franklin D. Miller, had already been in-country for nearly four years. Miller's Vietnam odyssey began in March 1966, when he was assigned to the Reconnaissance Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Cavalry Division, as a green replacement fresh from Jump School at Fort Benning, Ga. His mentor was Staff Sgt. "Bummer" Bumstaten, a middle-aged noncommissioned officer. Bummer would remain with Miller throughout his service in Vietnam and, in the end, would save his life.

Seeking "life in the fast lane," Staff Sgt. Franklin D. Miller volunteered to serve in the shadowy world of the Studies and Observations Group and was awarded the Medal of Honor for fighting to save his team.

In the fall of 1967, Miller's squad was ambushed—ironically, as they were setting up an ambush of their own. Miller's pointman went down with a leg wound, and the soldier right behind him was shot in the abdomen. As Miller was returning fire, a grenade fell next to him. Without hesitation, he picked up the Chicom (Chinese Communist) grenade and tossed it back toward the enemy. He then charged into the enemy's position. In his book *Reflections of a Warrior*, which he co-authored with Elwood J.C. Kureth, Miller wrote: "As I ran toward the blast area I suddenly discovered that I was inside the enemy ambush! Out of the corners of my eyes I could see enemy soldiers on both sides of me lying in the bush, firing at my patrol. Obviously they weren't aware that I was there. Apparently the grenade blast acted as a perfect cover."

Seeing Miller's position, the other patrol members shifted their firing accordingly. Miller killed three North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldiers, and the rest scurried into the jungle, breaking up the ambush. For his actions, Miller received the Bronze Star with "V" device for valor.

Several months later, the 1st Cav's Recon Platoon was patrolling in the Central Highlands section of South Vietnam. Intelligence had indicated that the enemy was using a certain area for staging, and Miller's unit was assigned to discover the bottom of a mountain. Climbing over the top of the spur, the soldiers saw evidence that the NVA were still close by—thousands of punji stakes protruded from the ground and were hidden by the grass. If the enemy had sprung an ambush, the unsuspecting infantrymen would have leaped from the trail and flung themselves on the ground—right on top of the punji stakes.

Patrolling a little farther, the soldiers came upon a stream. Bummer, who was leading the patrol, ordered everyone off the trail for a break. A half-dozen men were sent ahead to look around. A short time later shots rang out as well as a short burst from an M-16. Within seconds, four soldiers came back and reported to Bummer. They had been walking toward the river when an enemy soldier had emerged from his hiding place and shot the first two men. The third man, seeing what was happening, killed the NVA soldier. A couple more NVA quickly turned and ran before the four could return fire.

The remainder of the platoon pushed forward and came upon a company-size camp. The thick jungle had concealed the enemy unit from aerial observation. However, the camp was strangely silent.

Just as the platoon began crossing a stream, the dense brush erupted with a fusillade of automatic weapons fire. Within seconds, six soldiers were dead. When the platoon returned fire, the NVA started lobbing 82mm mortar rounds, wounding several more men in the process.

Miller saw a squad of NVA attempting to outflank the platoon on the left. He pointed them out to the M-60 machine-gunner, who cut loose on the party, dropping four of them before he himself was killed. Grab-

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In a battle compared to Custer's Last Stand, MACV–SOG's Staff Sgt. Franklin D. Miller won the Medal of Honor.

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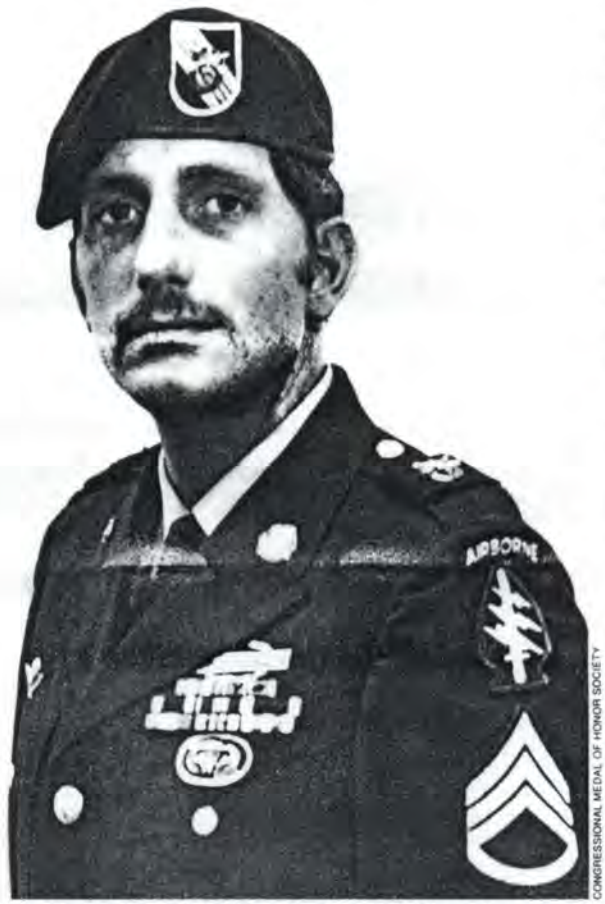

COMPRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR SOCIETY

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□PERSONALITY□

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bing the weapon, Miller kept up the suppressive fire. The assistant gunner frantically fed the ammunition belt into the machine gun, and what was left of the platoon made a hasty withdrawal. Miller was in the process of reloading when an NVA soldier appeared out of nowhere, bayoneting the assistant gunner to death. Swinging the M-60 around, Miller killed the enemy soldier.

Miller remained in his defensive position, covering the retreat of the platoon, as bullets tore all around him. Running out of ammunition, and with the NVA almost on top of him, he sprang up and ran. Cradling the M-60 under one arm, Miller tossed grenades over his shoulder at the NVA who were just feet behind him. They quickly slowed down, allowing him to gain some distance. He found his platoon in the rocks on the high ground. Ten men had survived the firefight, but only six were in any shape to repulse the NVA attack that was almost sure to come.

Not sure of the Recon Platoon's whereabouts, the enemy sent mortar rounds crashing near the rocks. The soldiers stayed motionless and did not return fire for fear of giving away their position. As darkness descended, everything grew quiet. Bummer called in grid coordinates for an artillery screen in front of the platoon. Because the guns had to be moved, however, the beleaguered platoon would have to wait. Miller and the rest held their breath as they braced themselves for the inevitable assault. Suddenly an artillery shell screeched overhead and burst in front of them. Once the grid coordinates were readjusted, the projectiles started crashing into the jungle and into the enemy base camp the platoon had discovered that afternoon. Miller received the Silver Star for his part in covering the withdrawal of his platoon.

With two years in Vietnam under his belt, Miller had been transferred to MACV–SOG (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam–Studies and Observations Group), an intelligence-gathering organization. He was ordered to Nha Trang and was eventually sent to Command and Control Central (CCC), which had headquarters at Kontum. CCC's area of operation was in Laos, where they ran most of their missions. Before long, Miller was the "One-Zero," or team leader, of RT Vermont, and he developed a strong bond with the Montagnards who served on his team.

For nearly two years, Sergeant Miller ran top-secret missions into Laos. When the assignment came out for the January 5, 1970, mission, his team's orders were twofold: to locate an enemy base camp in the tri-border area (where Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia meet) and report back their findings, and

to find a surveillance airplane downed the previous day.

Miller's team gingerly inched their way through the jungle. Approaching a large clearing, Miller motioned for Hobart and Prep to join him to look things over before proceeding. The open area was approximately 50 meters wide and several hundred meters in length. Its center was covered by chest-high grass. Miller saw that the treetops nearby had been clipped off and he deduced that the aircraft was close by. Creeping closer, Miller spotted the plane. Its mangled fuselage had left a deep, long furrow of upturned earth behind it. The pilot had obviously tried to land in the clearing and had been killed on impact.

As the team neared the plane, Miller saw that a platoon-size force of NVA was guarding the downed aircraft. Backtracking to where the rest of the team was waiting, Miller quickly called in a situation report to his superiors. Miller decided to get out of the area as quickly as possible and move on to their primary objective, the NVA base camp.

RT Vermont skirted the enemy troops watching the plane. By late morning, the group was moving into a small valley. Without warning, a distant shot rang out. Miller jotted down its location and kept walking with Hyuk, unaware that his pointman, Yube, had seen something and had given the signal to halt. Because of this, Miller and Hyuk were a considerable distance ahead of the group when there was an earsplitting explosion. As the haze and debris from the blast began to dissipate, Miller could make out someone coming toward him. It was Prep. He was missing part of his jaw.

Miraculously, Miller and Hyuk had been spared. As Hyuk tended to Prep, Miller ran to help the others just as a squad of NVA opened fire and a platoon of enemy infantry charged from the left. Caught in the open, Miller and Hyuk sent a volley into their ranks. Both groups retreated.

Investigating further, Miller was sickened at the sight that unfolded before his eyes. Prep was barely alive. Yube, the pointman, had amazingly survived the explosion and was not as bad as the others. Hobart, Gai and Green were severely wounded. Lifting Gai and dragging Hobart, Miller managed to make it across a stream they had crossed earlier. Hyuk carried Yube and Green and went back to retrieve Prep.

Meanwhile, Miller radioed headquarters and advised them of the seriousness of the situation. He told them his team would try to "escape and evade to the best of [their] abilities." When he finished, Miller looked around and knew his men could not move under their own power.

About noon, Prep died. Miller instructed Hyuk to move everyone to a small rise to their rear. As they were about to go, they heard sounds behind them. Two enemy

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groups were hemming them in. As they lay perfectly still in the thick vegetation, Miller saw two machine guns in position. Two NVA started heading in the team's direction. As they neared, one of them spotted his team and started shooting. Quickly, Miller got off one round, hitting an enemy soldier in the shoulder and sending him sprawling. Turning his attention to the machine gun, Miller saw one of the gunners standing up, looking perplexed, and Miller cut him down with a short burst from his M-16. Suddenly the entire area let loose with an intense salvo of automatic-weapons fire directed at Miller. To cover his withdrawal, he threw a CS (tear gas) grenade. As the fumes began to drift toward the enemy, he pitched a "Willie Peter" (white phosphorus) grenade as well.

Once again, Miller and Hyuk assisted their comrades to safety. Fortunately, Yube and Hobart were able to walk slowly by themselves. RT Vermont had not gone far when the enemy struck again. In the ensuing firefight, Hyuk was cut down with a neck wound and died instantly. Miller heaved a grenade as far as he could and fired several rounds before the NVA broke off their attack. Telling his team to hide, Miller then went out to learn the NVA soldiers' intentions. Concealing himself behind some boulders and trees, he soon spotted an enemy squad. Miller put several well-placed rounds into the leaders.

As bullets flew all around him, a Chicom grenade landed nearby with a thud. Miller escaped unscathed, but then two NVA attempted to outflank him. He killed both soldiers and made a hasty retreat to link up with his team members.

Early that afternoon a Cessna O-2 observation plane informed Miller that it had located a bomb crater just 200 meters from his battered team's position. Once again, Miller left his men and ventured out to examine the area around the crater. Using a mirror to send signals, the team leader made contact with the observation plane to learn whether he had located the right depression. The Cessna pilot reassured him that he had the correct location. Suddenly, an NVA sharpshooter found his mark, and Miller went down with a chest wound. Convinced he was going to die, he was "scared big-time." But then something strange happened. From out of nowhere, Miller heard Bummer's voice talking to him in a relaxed, reassuring manner. Miller would later write in his book, "I'm convinced the voice saved my life, even if I did imagine it."

Regaining his composure, Miller quickly bandaged up his wound. Just as he finished, four NVA sauntered up to his position, thinking that he was dead. Miller killed the first two stunned soldiers and shot the third as he tried to escape, but the fourth managed to get away.

Summoning up every fiber of strength he could muster, Miller rejoined his severely

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wounded team members. He knew they had to get to the bomb crater so they could be extracted from the area before the NVA reorganized and came in for the kill. He also knew that, although he was seriously wounded, he was the only one who could take each individual to the new defensive position. He literally dragged each wounded team member to the depression and waited for the chopper.

It wasn't too long before the enemy surrounded the crater. Everyone who could pick up a weapon started firing. Then a Huey helicopter appeared, and the NVA shifted their firing to their airborne adversary. Unable to remain to pick up the team, the chopper was forced to leave. Despite the fact that the chopper had taken hundreds of hits during the attempt, the pilot was able to keep the bird aloft and limp back to base.

Miller knew that, with the Huey's departure, the NVA would move in for the final assault. Ammunition was running low, and the sun was beginning to set. Only Miller, Hobart and Yube were strong enough to fire their weapons. The situation appeared hopeless. Miller decided on one last-ditch effort. He slithered from the crater, made his way to a large rock and waited. An anti-tank shell slammed into the boulder shielding Miller but caused little damage. Within minutes, NVA soldiers appeared. Miller killed several with a short burst. Again the enemy charged, and Miller lobbed a grenade that stopped their forward movement. Regrouping, they assaulted his position again. Tossing two CS grenades at them, he hobbled back to the crater with the NVA right behind him.

As he fired his weapon at the onrushing Communists, a round struck Miller in his lower left arm, rendering it useless. Down to his last grenade, Miller made a feeble attempt to throw it at the enemy, then waited for the end.

A soldier stepped close to the edge of the crater holding an M-60 machine gun. Miller strained his eyes to get a better look. They were Montagnards! It was a relief force! Soon more of them appeared, forming a defensive perimeter around RT Vermont and engaging the enemy. One officer looked around in amazement and muttered, "it [looks] like Custer's Last Stand." Soon medevac choppers began to bring the wounded to safety. Miller insisted on being the last member of his team to be placed on the Huey.

Of the seven men that made up RT Vermont, only three survived the harrowing events of January 5, 1970. In June 1971, Franklin D. Miller was presented with the Medal of Honor. President Richard M. Nixon told the sergeant: "There's something different about you." There was. Franklin D. Miller was the recipient of our nation's highest award, and he had lived to tell about it. □