



STAFF JOURNAL: LZ OAKTON



Be Of Good Cheer

CAMP EVANS. Republic of Vietnam, Christmas Eve, 1970-- The monsoon season had settled in for the winter, much abated from its October fury. Charcoal clouds swept low across the sky, fog filled mountain valleys, and sometimes leaked into the lowlands.

The 2d Battalion, 506th Infantry, was deployed on Fire Base Rakkasan, a few clicks into the mountains from Rocket Ridge, and in the surrounding jungle. It was about the same position the Best of the Currahees had occupied the year prior.

I, on the other hand, now held the exalted position of battalion adjutant (also the personnel officer), one of the supreme REMF* jobs available to officers.

Capt. R. G. Rollison (now the battalion supply officer) and I shared half of a hooch just behind the personnel building, Capt. Lee Fox remained as chaplain, and he and headquarters commandant 1st Lt. Jim "Crazy Jim" McCall shared the other half of our plywood and sand-bagged living quarters.

In the evenings, Rollison was fond of throwing his Randall knife inside against the door. Most of the time he managed to stick it through the plywood. Sometimes it ricocheted into my half of the hooch. Once it struck my guitar a glancing blow. We 'bout had a disagreement over that, but his Randall was bigger than mine. Besides, the man had once saved my life.

By Christmas, there had been other changes in officer personnel. Lt. Col. John Bard had completed a short stay (four months) as battalion commander, and in his place was a fiery whip of a man named Joe Bellochi. Among his accomplishments, Lt. Col. Bellochi counted receiving an Article 15, as a young lieutenant in Korea, from Gen. Douglas MacArthur, among the most significant. Not many officers survived a blemish on their service record to become battalion commanders.

Irrepressable Maj. Sid Davis had rotated stateside for a tour at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., and the battalion executive officer's slot was filled by a quiet West Virginian, Maj. McClintock. For all the shennagains we occasionally got into in the rear, McClintock rarely batted an eye. Even when Crazy Jim and I swipped one of the two captured 37mm NVA antiaircraft cannon that were parked outside 3d Brigade headquarters, McClintock quietly shook his head. "The brigade commander (now Col. Grange)," he told me, "has initiated an Article 31 investigation (the Army's equivalent of a grand jury). I hope it doesn't snare anyone in the battalion," he finished.

It didn't. McCall and I got away scott free. Confession, they say, is good for the soul. Confession after the statute of limitations has run out is even better. What were they going to do, anyway? Send us to Vietnam?

As Christmas 1970 approached my spirits became more ebullient,

for I was now a "two-digit midget," and going home to wife and family was never far from my mind. For a Christmas present, or maybe just to get me out of his hair for a day, McClintock granted me a day off to spend with some Army aviator friends in Phu Bai. Then, while I was partying far away with "those crazy aviators," mayhem broke loose at the battalion headquarters at Camp Evans.

A soldier assigned to Headquarters Company, depressed at some sad fact of his life, locked himself in a hooch and opened up at random with M-16 rifle fire. No one was hit in the opening fusillade, and Rollison, Fox, McClintock and a dozen other men quickly surrounded the deranged soldier's makeshift fortress, and tried to talk him out.

Instead, the hooch door opened a squeek, and out rolled a M-26 football-shaped fragmentation grenade. The grenade failed to explode (A Christmas miracle?), and Rollison rushed the door, kicking it in. Now terrified, the soldier could think of only one thing to do. He pointed his weapon at his foot and pulled the trigger.

It was a messy wound. The round and accompanying hydrostatic shock destroyed bone and muscle. But it accomplished the immediate purpose of getting him hustled off to a hospital rather than the stockade.

The Christmas that might have turned deadly, did not. And men who otherwise might not have appreciated as much God's gift of life, were reminded again, so far from home, that our tour on this earth is only temporary.

From LZ Oakton, I wish you all good cheer. Merry Christmas, gentlemen and gentlewomen, and Currahee.

Chuck Hawkins

* This acronym is rated PG-13.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 1995

A List of What's In and What's Out

IN

Ripcord Reunion '95
Republicans
Al Gore
Striped Business Shirts
Higher Interest Rates
Newsletters
Multi-Media CD-ROM
Internet
Petting Zoos
Women in Combat
Geo. Bush Economic Policy
Election Year 1996

OUT

Phony Vietnam Vets
Democrats
Hillary Clinton
Batik Print Shirts
Affordable Housing
Major Print Media
Floppy Disks
Information Highway
Sexual Harassment
Gays in the Military
The Economy, Stupid
Election Year 1996