

MY RTO – ROBERT ANKONY

By Doug Parkinson

My RTO was always ready with the handset.

No matter how difficult the climb up a steep hill, the vines, the razor sharp elephant grass or the sharp thorns of the scrub brush, as the team leader I only had to reach my arm behind me and the handset would be there....it had to be...even in the rapidly developing situations of combat

My RTO was with me at some of the largest operations the First Cavalry Division performed during the Vietnam War, The 1968 Tet offensive, relief of the siege at Khe Sahn, the massive deployment into the A Shau valley.

My RTO was where he wanted to be, a dependable member of a long range patrol team, at the tip of the spear, watching combat unfold as the storied 1st Cavalry Division deliver wrath.

My RTO became the nearest thing next to God...a team leader; the first person off the helicopter on a mission and the last person on at the end of the mission.

As the TL he could look into the eyes of the other team members on the flight out and know they depended on him to get them in and out of combat safely, parents, future spouses, unborn children and grandchildren depended on the TL my RTO.

The TL would experience the quiet tension as the helicopter descended into the landing zone not knowing if the tree line would light up with muzzle flashes and tracers.

The TL knows the relief at the end of the mission when you feel the cold metal floor of the helicopter and the bird lifts safely out of the landing zone.

The relief of his team members shows in their eyes as he looks at them, a silent thanks. We performed our duties against a determined foe that really didn't want us to be there.

Teenagers with automatic weapons.

Bob is still my RTO...he still communicates with me.

The calm comforting voice of Sgt Parkinson