

RANGER TEAM 41 IN CONTACT

August 2-5, 1969
From Craing Leerberg

Early August '69 my Team was to conduct the usual Recon & Survey of our A.O. for 3 1/2 days. It appeared to be just another "Dry A.O."

As usual I always walked front scout and suddenly I came to a heavily used trail with tons of Ho Chi prints, all moving in the same direction. I turned to my ATL and signaled (using my fingers) you want to move on the trail (which was not allowed)? The entire team shook their heads "NO" so I circled the team about 12 meters off the trail in a slightly sunken spot with my concern that this many gooks could mean a possible large enemy strong-hold could lie ahead.

I didn't want to set up next to it if it was close by, so I signaled I was going to follow the trail a short distance so we wouldn't get a big surprise from front or rear.

The short distance went on to be more than 500 meters when I smelled Gooks! I froze just off the trail and began smelling a stronger and closer smell. I assumed it was a large element or a very close element. I walked backwards towards the team and felt I was being followed so I scrambled back and told the team "put out claymores, FAST".

I turned towards the trail to retrieve my rucksack and there on the trail were 5 NVA staring at me (in total camo, painted). I glanced at the team and they were getting their claymores out to set up! As I turned back they began to raise their A.K.'s so I fired-full auto and they all went down and so did I. The team opened fire and the gooks not dead or wounded returned fire.

As I didn't know how many there were behind them I bounced "Max" (Cobras) and called in Redleg (artillery) to hopefully suppress incoming fire. When the gunships arrived on line I directed their fire as well as artillery.

During the exchange of fire we took an RPG and most of us were hit. Two of my team were on their first missions but they did their jobs returning consistent fire so it would sound like there were more of us than we were. One of the new team, Mike Bakkie was hit in the head and was bleeding a lot. We tried to stop the bleeding as best we could while still taking fire-but to no avail.

I called for Med Evac to extract him. Finally when the Med Evac came on line he asked where they could get close enough to drop a jungle penetrator. I told them to find an opening and give us distance and direction so John LeBrun and I could take Mike to the opening and strap him into the penetrator. They did and we did so up and out he went.

Now, having spent most of our Ammo, frags, and C4 I requested for the third time a lift bird to get the remaining four of us out. The two previous birds had taken fire and could not do so.

Suddenly I got a call from "Long Knife 6", the Commander of the 1st of the 9th Cav and he said, "Get to the same clearing the Med Evac used and I will try to descend close enough to extract you."

He came in cutting Bamboo and trees with his rotors hovering just long enough for us to be extracted.

During most of the contact General Casey, 1st Cav Commanding General had been observing the contact from above and was impressed how we all had survived. Later, he came to our Unit to congratulate Colonel Booth and my team for a job well done.

Regards
Craig Leerberg