

HISTORICAL OCCURRENCES

This story was sent by Mike Brennan to John Lebrun for his "Legacy" project. John is compiling a list of all officers and senior NCOs who served in the 1st Cav LRRP/Rangers in Viet Nam.

A RANGER OFFICER'S JOB

From **Mike Brennan**

I came to H Company as a new and inexperienced platoon leader on 8/15/69. Although when I came into country the week previously I had been on orders for the 7th Cav, the previous H Co. platoon leader, whose name was **LT Bell**, had been killed in action shortly before my arrival in country. Since H Co. had a priority on Airborne/Ranger-qualified officer replacements, and since I was the first Airborne/Ranger-qualified LT that was not a pathfinder to show up at division HQ after **LT Bell's** death, I was sent to H. Co. against my will.

Of course, it turned out to be a wonderful assignment with absolutely superb young American soldiers. As I write this I'm looking at a big plastic Cav patch insignia, atop which is a big Co H, 75th Inf scroll that a friend in N company had made for me. These insignia are attached to the filing cabinet to the right of my computer screen. Hardly a day goes by that I do not see that insignia and think of those days and of those very brave young LRRP-Rangers, that we served with.

George Pacerelli was the CO. when I arrived. **Clark Surber** was the XO, and **Bob "Mac" McKenzie** was the other platoon leader. When George interviewed me and discovered that I was a West Pointer, he accused me of infiltrating the company so that West Pointers could take it over, implying that the regular Army officers who had previously scorned the company were now wanting to take it over after he had built it up into a great unit. As a proud and somewhat testy young 1LT, I stood up, picked up my 201 file, saluted, and said that since the captain obviously did not want me in his unit, I would gladly go back to division HQ and go onto the assignment in the 7th Cav that I'd been given originally. As I turned to leave, George told me, "Lieutenant, halt and sit back down. I'm going to tell you about this company, the finest unit and the bravest soldiers in the United States Army." For about the next hour he spoke passionately and very comprehensively about the unit, about its young, brave soldiers, about their hazardous missions, and about the fact that these dedicated young, brave, and smart soldiers needed and deserved to have equally young, smart, brave and dedicated young officers to lead them and take care of them.

He then took me on a tour of the TOC and of the company area. Of course, I was blown away. I agreed to stay, with the proviso that since I would be promoted to captain in 10 months, I would spend 5 months serving loyally and faithfully with the company, but then in January of 1970 I could transfer to the 7th Cav for 5 months as a grunt platoon leader if I still desired to do so. George agreed. From my point of view at the time, I had won the right to serve as a line platoon leader, if not now then later. From George's point of view, he would DEROS long before January so it would not be his headache and after 5 months with the company I might decide to spend my entire tour of duty with the unit. Or, I might get myself killed between then and January. Who knew?

When George DEROSed, **Clark Surber** took command of the company for a brief period of time, until he was replaced by **Dick Griffiths**. When **Mac McKenzie** DEROSed, **Al Rice** came in to replace him as a platoon leader. When **Mac** left I assumed the duties of XO, but still continued to perform the duties of platoon leader until **Jim Hinz** joined the company and took my platoon leader duties.

I was acting as both the XO and as a platoon leader through most if not all of November. In early November **Dick Griffiths** took R&R in Hawaii with his wife, so I was also acting CO. I have the picture of an award ceremony on November 3rd when I hosted the division CG, **MG Elvy B. Roberts** as he pinned on decorations for **SGT Milford**, Harvey's team, **David Torres**, **Julius Zaporozec**, and others. On November 10th I was the sixth man on a team led by **SGT Richard Saylor**. We were inserted in the afternoon, were probably spotted by the NVA and followed through the night, got into a firefight later on the 11th, and were hauled out by McGuire rigs. At that height above the ground, Viet Nam looked beautiful.

At about that time the Division had received intel that the NVA planned to hit one of the brigade firebases that were protecting the local provincial capitals. I had put **Stan Edwards** team into position near Song Be within a few days of that time and was in our TOC a day or two later, when an NVA regiment with more than 800 men moved past **Stan Edwards**' team on their way to Song Be. As the center of the NVA regiment passed **Stan's** team's position, the NVA halted for lunch on the opposite side of the trail. They used **Stan's** team side of the road as their latrine. Fortunately, the NVA did not discover the team's presence. Unfortunately, several of the LRRPs were peed upon by the NVA.

When the NVA finally passed Stan's position, the team radioed in their sitrep and we were all astounded. I hopped in our jeep and took that information up to the division HQ and briefed the G2. The G2 immediately brought me into a meeting that the C G was having with his brigade commanders in the division TOC. I gave the CG my report of Stan's intel in front of the brigade commanders. When Colonel **Edward C. "Shy" Meyer**, the new 2nd Brigade CO at Song Be, who had had some bad experiences with Cav LRRPs in a prior tour, pointedly asked the CG if he trusted the LRRPs' information, General **Roberts** told COL **Meyer** in no uncertain terms that, "I would trust the information from the LRRPs with my life. You, colonel, should do the same." General **Roberts** sent the brigade commanders back to their respective firebases to be prepared for the NVA assaults.

That night the NVA hit Song Be hard, but Song Be was ready. Every artillery tube, Puff the Magic Dragon, Blue MAX, every other cobra gunship in the area, and Air Force aircraft were all ready to go when the NVA launched their assault on Song Be. The next morning our soldiers at Song Be counted 237 NVA left in and around the wire, an astounding number of casualties since the NA were always so careful to remove their casualties from the battlefield. U.S. casualties were light. I don't think there were any U.S. KIAs. Stan **Edwards'** team had saved Song Be. **Shy Meyer** became a believer and great fan of the LRRPs that night, although I would not learn that until 21 years later. That's another story.

About 2 weeks later, one of our teams led by Jim **McIntyre** was not so lucky. Again another large force of NVA was moving down a trail that our team was monitoring. And again the NVA column stopped across the trail from our team for a break. When one of the NVA soldiers came across the trail to pee, however, he spotted our team and gave the alert. A firefight ensued. **David Torres** and **Julius Zaporozec** were badly wounded. Jim, **Kregg Jorgensen**, and, I believe, **Richard Cramer** fought off the NVA and escaped and evaded with their two wounded comrades.

I was in our TOC, bounced two Hueys and a pink team from Cavalier Troop, 1st/9th and went out to pick up the team. Although my memory may be faulty, I was in the first Huey which picked up **David Torres** and **Julius Zaporozec**. As we lifted off enroute to the nearest evac hospital, I checked each man out. **David Torres** had no heart beat and was not breathing. It was clear to me that he was already dead. **Julius Zaporozec** was badly shot up, but was still breathing and still had a heart beat. Not being able to do anything else, I held him in my arms and prayed that he would be alive when we reached the hospital. During the next several minutes, however, **Julius's** pulse rate and breathing slowly diminished and then stopped. He died in my arms. When we landed at the landing pad at the hospital, the medics and nurses rushed **Julius** into what was functionally an ER, but it was too late. They could not resuscitate him. He was gone.

The next day back at the company I was very depressed. This was the first time I had seen combat death up close and personal and it was two of the men in my own platoon that I knew and cared about. CPT **Griffiths** understood what I was

going through and told me to go to Cav Rear at Bien Hoa and pick up the end of the month payroll for the company. When I asked him what I was supposed to do for the next three days until the end of the month, he told me to get roaring, stinking drunk, get it out of my system, pick up the payroll, and get back to the company and into the war.

Being the good lieutenant that I was, I followed the CO's orders to the letter. I caught a lift bird back to Bien Hoa with the 1st/9th, bunked with our liaison NCOs at Bien Hoa, who had been told that I needed a few days of drunken abandon, spent several days with them, and got roaring, stinking drunk.

On payday at the end of the month I sobered up, put on a clean uniform, adjusted my black Ranger beret, and with a raging headache, severe nausea, and a feeling of severe bodily distress, went over to the Division Finance Office to pick up our payroll. After waiting for about two hours, the finance officer, a captain, sent word out to me to that they would not have the payroll ready until after lunch, so I might as well go to the Officers Mess and have lunch. I did, but almost everything I saw and smelled caused me to retch and feel even more rotten. So when I went back to the Finance Office at 1:00 PM, I was not feeling especially physically or emotionally well.

As the time approached 3:00 PM I had still not been paid. It was a Friday, which meant little to me, but obviously meant more to the REMFs in Bien Hoa. About 10 minutes before 3:00 PM the finance officer stood up and announced that he was off for the weekend. When he began to walk by me, I stood up blocking his path and asked him where he was going. He told me that it was the weekend and he was going to play volleyball with some nurses. I could come back for the payroll on Monday. The incongruity between what I had experienced just three days before of war and death and the moral disregard for the needs of soldiers by the personnel in the rear area suddenly hit me hard. I snapped.

I grabbed the captain by the collar, pulled out my Colt 1917 New Service 45 caliber revolver, put the revolver to his head, and dragged him back to his desk. I instructed his sergeant to prepare the payroll for me. The sergeant willingly complied. None of the enlisted men seemed upset that I had a gun to the head of their boss, so I guess that they felt the same way about him that I did. When the sergeant finished with the payroll, he and the captain counted out all the bills together. The captain visibly sweating a lot more than the sergeant was. When the captain signed his name on the line, certifying that the dollar count was correct, I signed for the payroll with one hand, while I held the revolver to the captain's head with the other hand. As I left the office I took him to the door with me and said quietly to him, "If I ever hear of you or of what happened today again, I'll come back and finish the job." I returned to the company, paid the troops, and never heard from the finance corps captain again.

Mike

**OK PEOPLE, I AM OUT OF STORIES. I CAN ONLY PRINT WHAT YOU SEND ME
ANY FUTURE "HISTORICAL OCCURRENCES" WILL HAVE TO COME FROM
YOU**

HOW ABOUT SOME MORE OFFICER STUFF

**SO SIT DOWN AND PUT YOUR STORY ON PAPER
THEN SEND IT TO ME.
IF YOU CAN READ THIS,
THEN YOU CAN WRITE A STORY**