

HISTORICAL OCCURRENCES

DROPPIN' SMOKE

From Jerry Ballantyne

Note: Jerry was on some LRRP missions in August and September 1967 before going to the 1/9. He said that from their flight time, this event occurred some 30-35 klicks from PhanThiet.

I was assigned to A Troop, 1-9 Cav. On 22 Oct 1967, I was a scout/door gunner in an OH-13 scout helicopter. During a routine scouting mission on the coast north of Phan Theit, we received an urgent rescue request from an LRRP team who was trapped on a hill top by a large NVA element. The team had been on an O.P. and was discovered by an NVA unit. The NVA surrounded the hill and were approaching the team with a tremendous amount of fire power.

We flew to their location. We were talking to the team and observing what was going on. I started firing my M-60 machine gun and M-79 grenade launcher. My pilot began circling the hill as I was busy knocking off the NVA. It was pretty easy shooting and hitting because, at the bottom of the hill there wasn't much cover for the bad guys, or for us. We were getting pounded real hard. Our "bubble" helicopter was an easy target as we circled the hill.

However, as we were climbing the hill, we started to get into double canopy jungle. About that time, the LRRP team was yelling in the radio that the "gooks" were right on them. That LRRP had some real heroes in it. My pilot told me that there was not much hope for them. However, we decided that, if we could get right on top of them and spin the 13, I would be able to take out most of the "gooks" that were right on the team. Because of the jungle growth, I could barely see the team and I was shooting too close to them.

I radioed to the team to take out their marker panel and have them all get on it. That way, I could see exactly where they were. I had about five hundred M-60 (7.62) rounds left. I was firing all around the panel. Then my M-60 was hit. I kept on firing. Then I noticed blood all around me. There was no pain, so I thought the pilot was hit. However, when I looked at him, he was fine.

It was me. I had taken a hit in my right forearm. Just then we received a call on the radio from Apache 6, our troop commander. His helicopter was observing the fight from far above us. He told us to drop a smoke grenade on the LRRP team and then he would send in the Huey Gunships to take over.

As I was firing, I reached for a smoke grenade. All at once, I got hit with a sledge hammer on my right side. Actually, it was an SKS round. I was able to pull the pin and drop the grenade. I think it hit the panel or a Lurp. I told the pilot "good night". When I woke up, I was in recovery at the 53rd Evacuation Hospital.

It's been 46 years, and hardly a day goes by that I don't think about that brave fighting team of LRRPs. Did they survive?

Jerry R. Ballantyne

WA 98548

ED: who was on that team? Jerry would like to hear from you. We did not have any KIAs in October '67, so I know that all of you got out alive.