

## **Battle of Razorback Valley**

My scout track vehicle for this mission was "A21" comprised of 5 men. This included two gunners, Specialist Casanova, and Specialist Giardi. Track driver. PFC D'Orsey. Sgt Don Delano our "Forward Observer" for the direction of artillery fire and me as track commander.

Our entire force was comprised of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Platoons of "A" Troop 3/5 Cavalry, and elements of B Troop. I seem to recall that some of the elements of B Troop were called out to assist in another area, with Lt Hardestry, as B Troops platoon leader. Perhaps they were going to assist C Troop? I believe it was Captain Pitts that remained with two tracks and a tank?

On or about the 24th March 1969 we entered the vicinity North West of the Rock pile, from QL9, then turned west in between Mutters ridge, and the Razor Back continuing past the Marine base named Bible at grids XD 945-623. This base was located west at the end of Mutters Ridge. Actually this area was known to the Marines as Razor Back Valley. We followed a trail along a tributary of the Song-Cam-Lo River. This area is known as Lang Cat Su, which led into a cull de sac valley that is referenced on the 1501 series, sheet NE48-16 at grid coordinates XD 818624. This series readily indicates the river flowing from the mountain. On the L-7014 1:50000 series it can be found at 947607. This was at the confluence of the Song-Cam-Lo River where it leaves the mountains, and also travels from the ESE to WNW. Then again goes SW. It was here that we encountered the 27th NVA Regiment whom had control of the surrounding mountains, and was delivering flat trajectory Armor piercing projectiles at us.

Many of our men could not remember the name of this encounter. Many didn't even know where we were to begin with. As I listened to them talking they would refer it as to the place where Lt so, and so, or that kid from Philadelphia got hit. Some even called it the Dong Ha Valley, which were some kilometers to our east. What brought a smile to my face is when they referred to it as the place where Frank had done a two-step on hot M60 brass, but that comes later in this story. Luckily for me I was keeping a make shift daily journal in my shirt pocket. In most cases I was very thorough in keeping our grid coordinates and dates of actions. This evolved from my bad experiences when operating with units at Bastogn.

They would not enter our assistance into they're After Action Reports even though we were the key to a successful operation. When one book was completed I simply mailed it back to a trusted friend, and started another. I have to admit at this late date that my Captain knew that I was keeping a journal. At the end of the battle he asked me for it. I told him that I no longer kept the journal. In any event I had the feeling that it would be the last that I ever saw of it.

The trail leading in was one of many old NVA trails that permeated the area, but the terrain as such was that the trail expense permitted track vehicles to navigate its route, and maneuver in the event of being fired upon. This area was easily accessible from Highway QL9.

I mention cull de sac that is not necessarily true. At the confluence of the river the NVA trail continued up on to a high grassy hill, and then continued into the direction of Laos. It could have been negotiated, but in the event of an ambush one would have been prevented the ability to maneuver in case of being fired upon due to cliffs, and drop offs near the edge of the trail. Perhaps with suitable ground elements employed it would have been worthy of an attempt, and certainly would have been a surprise to the NVA as this was their front yard so to speak.

Despite being in this area for a period of 10 days, and sustaining heavy loses of personnel, almost half, and the loss of several Track vehicles we had been denied support of any kind. No artillery, No choppers, and no re-supply or medical evacuation, Although we did manage to get several medical evacuations in within the first couple of days earlier in March, which was a previous reconnaissance sortie prior to the actual commencing of the major battle. But when the actual battle commenced all support ceased. We began to be picked off slowly and surely one by one by the NVA.

We had about run out of ammo being under ground assaults during the evening, and heavy shelling during the day light hours. We had at first been subject to crossfire from the South Mountain at XD8186053, and North Mountains at XD818645. Later we were able to force the NVA to fire their RPG's from the other side of the North mountain, at an acute angle, perhaps 5 to 10 at a time. This was largely due to our Tank fire, which by this time had depleted their basic load of ammo.

The RPG rocket motors were just able to reach an apex over our positions where they dropped in on us likened to mortar rounds, and had a variety of sounds like V2 rockets coming over head with their sputtering motors. After this the gunners again started to make sorties directly in front of our positions. During this time Sergeant Dee our Forward Observer took over as a gunner on tracks whose men had been wounded or killed. He also doubled as a medic when the call came out for many of our men, as there now were few of our medics that were left alive.

There was one other type of flat trajectory fire aimed at us. They were well concealed, perhaps wheeled to the mouth of a firing embrasure from a cave. They gave off a horrendous Crack! And, the projectile appeared to be almost 2 feet in length, and lacked the football nose of the RPG projectiles. The problem with this shell was that if it did not hit head on with its nose, it then would ricochet, and careen off into space, or detonate on a neighbor vehicle. I suspect that it was the old Korean War type 75mm recoilless rifle. It also could have been the newer 90mm recoilless rifle used by our forces, but I discounted the thought in believing that none of these had been captured.

Later I was able to confirm this by finding some of these shell casings on the upper slope. They were long, and had a perforated shell casing. The casing had numerous small holes in which to permit the gas to expand in the chamber, and propel the warhead. That was the reason that they had such a devastating back blast. I recalled this from training years ago with this weapon that this was the type of shell that was used in the recoilless rifle series 57mm.

One of the problems was that on our south side the mountains came down to the river in a gradual slope. There were numerous bunkers on that slope which permitted direct RPG and Recoilless rifle fire directly towards our tracks and tanks, but this also afforded our tanks direct fire into the enemy's position which they systematically wiped out one by one.

We were lucky on the north side as we were abutted to the base of the mountain. Although on the edge of the uppermost summit there were other bunker installations, but these were also in direct line of fire from our tanks. What the NVA tried employing was to go down the far side of the Northern Mountain, and direct their RPG fire upwards at an acute angle which permitted their RPG's to fall directly on our side. Thus we were relegated to

more ground attacks, and grenade assaults upon our position, but I attribute most of our enemy casualties from our tank fire, and then later by artillery.

I noticed that some of our men were starting to act strangely and suddenly realized that many of them were starting to feel the first symptoms of shell shock. The constant explosions, and concussive effects, and listening to the clanging shells ricocheting from track to track never knowing where the detonation would take place. Hunkering down pulling ones head closer to his shoulders, while listening to the sputtering rocket motors.

About the third day of the engagement we received some type of artillery fire that sounded like it had come from across the DMZ, from a northerly direction. Several air burst went off about 100 feet above ground about 150 meters towards our east side which is the direction to the entrance area of the valley. Unlike the US air burst these were a dirty oily looking black, the US air burst were a light brown, and a noticeable horrendous crack of lightning within the burst.

Following this we again received artillery, but this time on the ground. They were four burst, which appeared to work its way down the entrance trail towards our positions, but stopped short at about 100 meters away. They were also very black. Their geysers were at least over 100 feet in the air. I am sure that their forward observer was somewhere in the area. I am almost positive that they were fired from an appreciable distance, and think that after reaching the apex of their upward travel that they descended into our area. All firing ceased after the last round struck. What was uppermost in my mind that this was an 8-inch type shell, and its impact was on the road that led into our perimeter? I figured that this had simply been a registration for their artillery in the event that a relief force was sent in to assist us.

Perhaps they stopped because of the cruisers lying off shore, and continuous firing would have invoked their wrath upon them. I again thought that if we had have been on the mountaintops, or the opposite military slope we would have received much more fire. It was something to keep in mind. This all started around 1600 hours in the evening.

**The dead:** Our dead was now stacked up against a medical track wrapped in ponchos, with no way in which to have them evacuated it was a constant reminder of what may await us.

Often we would receive automatic weapons fire from the upper ridge on the mountain that we were abutted to, these seemed to be experienced troops with good marksmanship, as one could feel the velocity, and crack of their weapon upon ones ears as the projectile flew past. They often fired down upon us in-groups, and the ploy was to try, and get us to seek cover within the tracks, and then RPG'S would be employed to strike the final blow.

It was necessary to maintain fire superiority, and to keep a sharp watch for the RPG gunners that rose up from their concealed positions. I have never encountered that many RPG gunners in one NVA unit before; I would estimate that they had perhaps a platoon of gunners.

The employment of our 50-cal, and M60 machine guns were a definite advantage for us. I tried several times to use our M79 grenade launcher, but we were too close to the mountain slope, and my rounds simply exploded on the rear slope of the ridge. We were just too close. I couldn't use the weapon in mortar fashion, as the incoming rounds due to the closeness would have put us in jeopardy. We found that we could throw hand grenades more effectively into the recess of the ridge, but used these more for the bottom dried out riverbed. Luckily this time I brought two cases of fragmentation with us, and they were to become very useful. The NVA didn't like those grenades of ours as all the members of our crew employed them at the same time; with at least two successful throws per man.

One had to be very careful in throwing the grenades, as you would almost immediately be taken under small arms fire as you cocked your arm back for a throw.

I even tried using the M79 in firing straight up into the air trying to get my rounds to explode on top of the mountain, but was informed by the Captain that as observed from the other side of the perimeter that it was a wasted effort. We again sorely needed our mortar section; it would have been an asset with the 4.2 projectile.

**Tank fire and patrols:** We had been receiving RPG fire from the South slope of the mountain across the river, which was devastating. Once we identified the positions that were well dug in

emplacements we tried taking them out with 50-cal machine gun fire, but they had no effect upon these positions. A squad from B Troop even tried a direct assault up the slope on foot, on the mountain at XD818653, but was taken under extensive small arms fire from the mountain on our North side of the perimeter. At grid coordinate XD818645.

I was on the captain's track observing the assault. One of the men on the opposite shore carrying a PRC-25 was looking to his left when suddenly an NVA jumped from a high mound down into some bushes. About ten meters away on his right flank. I cried out to watch out, but he couldn't hear me. The captain called him on the radio and warned him of his immediate danger, but it appeared that he wasn't sure where the NVA had taken cover. I requested permission to use the captain's 50 cal, and he agreed and warned the radio man to take cover. I set my sight and commenced to fire three round bursts, at the same time the captain told the radio man to watch my tracers. I boxed the area with about 12 rounds, and the radio man was now informed to check out the position. When he did he made the cut throat sign indicating that the NVA was dead. It was a hasty shot at 150 meters, and was glad that I had spotted the NVA.

Our three tanks then began to take them under fire. Their position permitted direct fire into the bunkers since the distance was about 100 meters to the slope. This all but eliminated these positions for us. Another patrol from B troop went back up the slope to check the area for any survivors, but there was little left from the extensive tanks main gun. They had us in crossfire from both mountains on the North and South side. Unfortunately the tanks guns were useless against the summit of the North Slope, which we were abutted to. That is unless it was to be a direct line of fire shot. Our Captain had selected the squads from B troop to make these sorties. I believe that it was because of the extensive casualties already suffered by "A" Troop.

After that the only RPG fire from the South was an occasional gun crew that crept along the rivers south bank, but the 50 cal machine guns were very effective in taking these out. Our main concern now was the North Slope and summit of the mountain that we were beneath. The NVA didn't like those main guns from the tanks firing at them. I believe about 8 or 9 RPG positions were eliminated from the south slope. One recoilless rifle position was taken out that was much higher up on the slope and more to the western side of the mountain making it very difficult to spot him. One of the

tanks was able to range in on him after he fired as he gave off a large back blast of smoke and debris.

I recall a guy by the name of Rusty because of the color of his hair. He had made several runs on foot to get ammo for his tank from our pile. Running like hell across the perimeter with a tank round on each shoulder while RPG's were whizzing past him. On his return run he would shake his fist up at the North Mountain. Years later I found this guy to be Rusty Bauer.

As I watched Rusty it was then that I remembered him. He was a scout on the 29 track which had hit two mines in a row. The first one was a small blast, but the second was big Bertha. This was just outside of the Marine Base C2. A VTR Vehicle track retriever had to be called in. When the VTR pulled up to the track it set off another large mine buckling its frame. Then when another man tried to retrieve the cables he also stepped on an anti personnel mine.

The area was permeated with them. As I watched Rusty, I now find out that his name was Bruhn as he was dodging through the RPG fire I figured that he was a survivor, very lucky. Why? Again outside of C2 there was a large bunker that was found full of high explosives. An E7 type Black Fellow by the name of Jack Waddy was left behind to blow up the bunker. Rusty and three other guys took up a position about 100 meters from the bunker, and were just in a circle talking. When the bunker blew there was a loud whooshing sound which took off the arm of one of the guys and wounded the other two. Rusty was unscathed. Jack Waddy I was later told stepped on a mine outside of Camp Evans killing him instantly. Just prior to his demise he was informed that he now had a daughter that he had never seen.

As the battle raged about us, it was decided to assault the Southern mountain on foot. In order to get across that tributary of the Song Cam Lo River that ran east to west it was necessary for the men of B troop to use their air mattresses. Luckily they had the foresight to go some distance far to the east. When they entered the current was so swift that it took them right down in front of our positions from where they were able to climb the riverbank, and store their mattresses for their return journey.

I remember one trooper while on his attempted journey back across the river began to receive extensive sniper fire from the North Mountain.

Suddenly he realized that his mattress was slowly deflating and it looked like that he was doing the Australian crawl before his mattress sank. Soon he found himself treading water with all his gear on. Fortunately he was close to the bank of the river, sputtering, and cursing he was pulled up its steep banks by several of our men. His only concern was that he was now soaking wet.

When we had first entered this area several choppers had come in and deposited several pallets of 90mm tank ammunition. There was a great pile of it in the "A" troop south section of the perimeter. The NVA gunners on the North Mountain were at their wit's end trying to score a hit on this pile of ammo. Luckily for us they never did. It didn't take long for all this ammo to be devoured by our tanks, as they were instrumental in knocking out most of the RPG bunkers on the south mountain and eliminating most of the recoilless rifle fire from the north side.

Later the NVA gunners gave up their permanent bunker positions due to the accuracy of the tank fire, and began to move freely across the mountain slopes seeking terrain that provided them with concealment and cover, never taking the chance of firing a second shot from the same position. They were getting smart!

**Another time and place:** One interesting incident occurred when Sgt Delano went over to the river flowing down from the mountain to the South, A tributary of the Song Cam Lo. This was no more than 20 feet from the Captains track. He was attempting to catch fish during a lull in the battle. Strange! People do strange things in combat in order to break from the immediate concerns. This maintains their mental balance. I can imagine that he momentarily was thinking that he was on the edge of Port Huron on a cool summer's day. As I came over he appeared to be deep in thought, and was assembling a survival-fishing pole, and I inquired as to what in the hell was he trying to do.

I stood there staring into the pool of water with him; momentarily I caught sight of a leg, or hand. I turned around to the track just behind me, and got two fragmentation grenades, and commenced to throw them into the rushing river. This brought Dee out of his reverie, and he jumped up screaming! Are you crazy! And I replied this is the way to catch big fish. The grenades exploded, and two NVA came floating to the top, the concussion had killed both of them, as there were no obvious marks on



them. One was armed with a pistol, fragmentation grenades, and a long knife.

The other was similarly armed but his pistol was missing from its holster, the weapon was not on his person. Their clothing was of the VC type, black silk pajamas with a black silk headband. I observed all this as Dee was wrestling with the two bodies in the very swift current, and let one slip from his grasp as it was swept rapidly down into the wider river and disappeared. Our Captain had ordered him to jump in and make the retrieval. As a result Dee was only able to reach the opposite bank with the one body, and managed to haul it up on the bank. Capt Meaders had come busting out of his track that was about 20 feet away to find out what the explosions were all about.

Why he ordered Dee to jump into the river and not me didn't make any difference as I noted Dee's shivering as the water was very cold having come out of the mountains. With the approaching damp fog I knew it was to be an uncomfortable evening for Dee as we long since lacked a change of uniform. We did drag the other body back across at the ford with a rope since we didn't want to get wet, and inspected the body.

After his particulars had been removed we then commended him back to the deep where he was swiftly taken down river with his comrade. The area smelled bad enough as it was. The current was so swift at this place that I couldn't understand how they had come up it without being noticed; perhaps they were hanging onto large rocks? This was also probably why I spotted ones leg as the current was trying to take him back down the river.

As I looked down where this mountain river joined the larger I could note white caps on the surface indicating that it was very swift. I made a mental note of this that a good swimmer could use it as a fast exit from this area if needed.

The hours on watch seated up in the cupola seem very long. You feel so tired that your brain feels like its going to cramp from the loss of sleep this coupled with the thoughts of the individual and whatever the day's events might have brought.

**Dreaming:** There is a place where a man may go inside his head.

There is that dream state that brings him back to his youthful moments, with old pals and girl friends that he once knew. Some are even mentally occupied with vivid pictures of his wife and children. Moments of bliss and nice thoughts far removed from the present realities. It is a nice comfortable feeling, and often times appear to make the hours rush by. One cannot dwell in those places very long because at that very moment the soldier may miss the fleeting shadow of doom, and even not see the enemy gunners rise up from their position in front of him. With the ensuing bright flash that will forever more leave those in the places thought of.

Many men have come out of that reverie, suddenly realizing their worst nightmare. Then again it could be the sudden appearance of an enemy soldier standing before him and smiling down at him. Those will if he is not lucky or fast enough will be his last thoughts. A soldier cannot permit that luxury of letting his mind drift off. It could very well be his last thoughts.

I think that the above was a sortie against the Captains track as it was directly behind me near the water edge. They wanted to take him out. Had they surfaced at that time, they would have taken out Sgt Dee, and perhaps attacked the Captains track. There was a profusion of reeds sticking out of the water on the opposite side, close to it's banks so it is assumed that they were also using reeds in which to breath through, but this type of reed was absent on our side of the river.

So it appears that they were now prepared to make their assault having swum to Dee's side. My appearance for some reason was perfectly timed.

The Captain and Dee couldn't figure out how I knew that theses enemy soldiers were in the river. I didn't enlighten them to the fact of my spotting a flash of human flesh in the water. Dee had at this time removed his trousers and boots. He was standing knock kneed; hands clasped about his front in his BVD's next to the Captain shivering like a cat in a snow storm.

I paid particular attention to these soldiers as I looked into their faces they didn't appear to be Vietnamese. Their eye structure was much larger more like a Does eye. They were also of a slighter build, and much shorter in height. I thought them to be Hmong from Laos, or perhaps Cambodians? More than likely Cambodians as the Hmong were fighting our secret war in Laos. In fact they were taking more casualties than us in their attempt to

prevent the NVA access to Laos. In either case despite their small size one must realize that it doesn't take any strength to pull a trigger or cut a man's throat.

One of the Marines on our supply choppers while in the Dong Ha Valley had warned me about these guys while telling me that they were operating with the regular NVA units as scouts, and were very good in the Razorback Valley area.

Both the Captain and Dee yelled to me as I walked away as to how did I know? I turned, and placed my two middle fingers to either side of my temple, in mock attitude of communing with a supernatural entity, and continued walking away. One of the two made a comment, as that is one strange son of a bitch!

I made it back across the perimeter in the direction of my track hoping that I wouldn't be taken under sniper fire.

**A Captains shave:** My thoughts are substantiated in that at one time I watched as Captain Meaders was walking towards our track on the North side. We were conversing as he came closer to our track. Suddenly an RPG team opened fire on him directly, as he was about ten feet from my track. At the sound of the bang! He simply went into a squat position, and clearly the round missed the top of his head by inches. The round ricochet on the ground striking a tank on the side, it then bounced off, and exploded on the cupola of a track. He was very lucky. He had been singled out for this action, and probably identified by an observer as being an officer in command. It is or was very unusual for an enemy gunner to waste a shot on an individual, not when he had the opportunity to knock out either a tank or track. The episode happened so fast taking us unawares as we raked the area with machine gun fire. Upon inspecting the area we did not find any bodies or blood trails they simply disappeared into the heavy brush and deep ravine to the west of the dried out river bed.

**Vision loss:** Dee got even with me. I had not slept since we came into the valley, and was starting to have vision problems. While on watch in the cupola, a few hours before dawn as I was slowly scanning the area of the ridge and dried out river bed I became aware of a very small red light heading in my direction. I had no idea what this was, but I picked up my M16 thinking that I could get a shot at it. At this time I could discern a

ziiipping sound as the red light traversed down the mountain towards me. The next thing that I knew was a horrendous pain in my skull as the light struck me. I had I admit been mesmerized with its descent.

The pain was so great that I dropped my M16 rifle thinking that I had been struck by some kind of tracer with a silencer. I came up rubbing my eyes and now find that I am totally blind. The sky was a white milky scene, and the ground just a black void.

I now grabbed DeLano who slept on the right outside of the cupola beside me. Awakened with a start he now takes my place on the 50 cal. I explain that I am blind, and was afraid of an NVA charge at that very moment. He rubs his hands over my face and claimed that he couldn't detect any bleeding.

All sorts of things were racing through my mind; it happened so suddenly to me that I thought perhaps it was some sort of new weapon employed by the enemy, perhaps a laser. I was confused. Dee and I remained sitting there for well over three hours, and a half just whispering, talking about a variety of things, at least until dawn when I could report my condition. I didn't want to sound an alarm needlessly to alert our perimeter.

At this time my normal sight returned, just as quickly as it had disappeared, much to Dee's relief and mine as he also needed his sleep, and we again switched positions. I was physically and mentally ill at ease about this sudden condition.

The next morning was a bright sunny day with a cool breeze coming down the valley. I figured well this is it I have to get some sleep. I haven't had any sleep other than a catnap doze for some 8 days now and informed my crew as to what I planned. I put Dee on the 50-cal, and let one man go to visit his friend on the other side of the perimeter.

I was un-folding a sleeping bag to lay on after having removed my boots, and socks to air my feet out, and also threw the sleeping bag beneath the track. My intention was to sleep beneath the track.

**Doing a jig:** Suddenly there was a loud bang! An RPG hit our track, and was followed by another RPG team whom fired on the tank on my

left.

This was supported by machine gun fire from up on the first ridge. I commenced to fire on the left RPG team using the M60 on the left side, and Dee opened up on the first RPG team. My gunner on the right Specialist Girardi was using his M60 in spraying the ridge from where the machine gun fire was coming from.

I let out one hell of a yell, and Dee screamed are you hit? I replied hell no! But try standing on red-hot M60 brass with bare feet. I was doing a jig while firing the gun. He never would let me forget that. Believe me when I say that the brass was extremely hot.

The first RPG had hit the bottom front edge of our track, and upon inspection the whole belly was pock marked with fragmentation. My sleeping bag was shredded and about 20 feet from the back ramp. If I had of been sleeping beneath as I intended I would have been turned into chop meat.

**Fourth wound:** The Tank also survived the RPG hit by just spraying its side with fragmentation. Although I told Dee that I was not wounded, I had spoken too soon. The RPG that splashed the tank on its side made me flinch and duck down. I now was firing our left M60 machine gun. I suddenly seen an object bounce off of the tank from the corner of my eye and it settled on a flat section of the tank. It was a Chicom grenade. I was busy firing at the enemy gunners to my left front when the damned thing went off. I felt an excruciating hot burning pain beneath my nose, which rocked my head back, and thought that my brain was vibrating. Later I found that I had a piece of shrapnel embedded below my left nostril into the upper lip. It felt like a dentist was using a one-inch drill on my front teeth. At the same time another two grenades were thrown from the upper ridge, and hit the 50 Cal's front shield, and then bounced back down on the transom of the track. I could hear Dee scream grenades as they also exploded. They were trying to get the grenades into the large open hatch in the rear. I make mention of these superficial wounds as to me it meant a close call.

We then replied in kind by throwing grenades back up onto the other side of the ridge along its entire length, while at the same time both our M60 gunners were now raking the ridge and that is when all firing ceased.

**New enemy weapons:** We found one RPG tube in the dried out riverbed, and another of the old type at the far end on the left where the NVA bodies had collapsed into the ravine. The one that dropped into the riverbed was a new type that none of us had seen before. Its tube was made of anodized dark gray metal, and had an infrared scope mounted on it, which also could be used as a conventional scope during daylight. There was a side pack leather case with batteries carried by the gunner on his left side. I often wondered if it might have been the laser or infrared action intensified by the scope that had caused my momentary blindness. We didn't bother with the NVA bodies. They were chewed up into pieces and barely recognizable as what was once a human being.

I knew one thing for certain now, that somebody that was well concealed above was watching us very closely. Since when I un-folded my sleeping bag. I went off the rear ramp, and threw my bag beneath the track; it was when I stepped back on the ramp for a can of C-Rats is when the RPG's fired, coincidence, who knows? Something always happens in which to give my sleep-deprived body some more adrenalin in which to keep on going... Oh how I would embrace thee, if it were not for the permanence offered by war.

At the end of the battle this new type of RPG weapon was turned into the Officer's that came up from Camp Carroll who wanted to see what a battle field looked like. The RPG supposedly was to be shipped back to the West Point Museum. I don't think that it made it, and was probably given away to some brass. We even test fired it, and found it to be a formidable weapon. It is probably lying in someone's backyard now supporting his tomato vines. The scope was beautiful; I would have given an eyetooth for it.

**Enemy radios:** There was several miniature HF High Frequency Transceivers no bigger than a bantam book. A new technology that we weren't aware of at the time was an instrument of communications whose size which had CW Continuous wave and Single Side Band characteristics. The dials were marked in Chinese characters, and taken from bodies that appeared like Chinese Troops or advisors. Being a ham operator I would have given an eye tooth for one of those little rigs, but they were confiscated as being of intelligence value.

Most of the time at night, the RPG teams would come down, and often hit our trip flares. And sometimes they wouldn't. They used a system of having a man on either side of the gunner. What appeared to me was that after the gunner fired. His teammates would grab his arms, after he turned and led him back to a cover area, the flash of the RPG being fired must then blind the gunner, and his two assistants kept their eyes closed until just after the bang! This was always supplemented with heavy machine gun fire from above for their support.

I took the time one evening when I spotted an RPG team that was kneeling in the brush. They were getting ready to rise up to a firing position, but appeared to be conversing with one another, and one pointed to a track on my extreme right front. I instantly called the track that was directly in front of them, and received a confirmation of the activity. I wanted him to take them under fire, as he was a new man sitting on the gun, and wanted to see him make his first kill.

**Why doesn't he fire?** I waited, and waited seemingly like forever to hear the cough of the 50-cal down the line, but suddenly the RPG team fired. I immediately and instinctively took them under fire, my tracer's inches from the track directly on my right, and could see them lift into the air, and collapse, being thrown into a ditch. They were using the technique as described above. The gunner's assistants closed their eyes just before the command to fire, so as not to be blinded by the flash. I was observing them with my 7X50 zoom lens binoculars benefited by the bright moonlight. I could even see my tracers entering and exiting their bodies.

Despite our booby traps in the dried out riverbed, they always came in through that position. I figured that another entrance to the riverbed must be at the far end where the river came through a narrow ravine. One morning I went into the dried out riverbed and followed its route west of our position and came to the river. There was about a six-foot drop off to the banks of this narrow river. The area was heavy with bushes and undergrowth, but as I stood there looking above me I also noted that the ridge lip also continued down this far. I was more concerned with receiving a dropped grenade from above.

I was suddenly assailed by that heavy deep sweet smell of dead

bodies, and the low buzzing humming sound of the blue flies. I could now see the dead bodies of the NVA all piled up against the wall of the ridge as if resting in place. This momentarily startled me as they looked so natural as if taking a break. Their glazed eyes opened as if staring at me and I almost opened fire on them. Apparently it looked like that medical attention had been provided to some of them as the white bandages were visible. I was shocked to see rats the size of a small dog feeding on the remains. They were swollen, and gluttonous, not even heeding my presence. The stench was getting to me, and I started to heave up bile, not having any worthy contents in my stomach to expel. I had a green cotton sling that I kept pushed down in my shirt to use as a tourniquet if needed. I immediately yanked it out and wrapped it about my face, and nose while breathing through my mouth.

I now knew that our grenade sorties had been highly successful. As I now turned my gaze back to the drop off I receive a shock as there is an NVA soldier boosting himself up the lip with another holding his weapon in one hand while pushing him from behind up the lip. I was standing in the dark, and really don't know why he didn't see me.

I step forward and he looks up and gives forth an agonizing cry of alarm, at the same time I unleash two three round burst of M16 fire into him and the man behind him. Both fall back into the fast flowing river, but I can note their bodies lodged on the rocks below.

I now can hear more NVA calling from further up in the ravine, and I beat a hasty retreat back to our position. Casanova greets me as he is on the edge of the dried out riverbed with his M60. I inform him that we may be receiving some uninvited guests in a couple of minutes.

Casanova my left M60 gunner remains at this position while I get some grenades ready. The tank on my left is also notified and he turns his 50-cal down into the general area as he sits much higher, and should be able to spot any NVA moving into the riverbed. We wait about a half an hour but nothing develops and we resume our normal watch back on the track.

I am now thinking about the sight that I had seen with all the dead NVA as if resting in place with their backs against the wall. Some even appeared to be staring at me. It is now lunch time, and despite coughing up the bile I have no desire for food. This was not to be my last encounter with



the Vietnamese rats.

**Night Attacks:** Several times after dark when our teams were putting out trip flares they attacked by coming out of the dried out riverbed. Setting up an ambush in that bed was out of the question since they could easily just roll grenades down upon us. We had some new men with us, One that I recall was SP/4 Castile, and they performed admirably, by taking cover despite the glare of the trip flares, and the firing of AK-47's with the fifty's, and M60's firing over their heads. I have at other times watched men in another platoon go completely insane when in this predicament, screaming their heads off for a cease fire, but that was impossible.

Many times down South I watched as men performed this task unarmed, assuming that the enemy was nowhere in the vicinity. It was a practice that we halted in the I Corp area. These men also assisted in the engagement by using their M16 rifles. SP/4 Castile had an older brother, a sergeant first class, but his first name evades me, both were in the 2nd Platoon with the older one on a tank.

That ditch was getting filled up, but I suspect that they somehow may have retrieved some of the bodies. This always remained a mystery to me, as well as other vets. It was quite unnerving the first time the NVA tried to charge us from the dried out riverbed.

They must have had to use a buddy in which to boost them over the edge, but over they came as if propelled, and not screaming the usual Urah! They were screeching in a falsetto voice sounding like demented women. They would no sooner get a leg over the edge than we would greet them with automatic fire blowing them back into the riverbed. Usually it was necessary during these events to have one or both M60 gunners to watch for an RPG team that would rise up from another position to give us a good slam to permit their chargers to board the tracks. Their falsetto screams instead of voicing the Urah! During their assault made me realize that they were newly conscripted troops.

We did receive several more grenade attacks during the night, perhaps 5, or 6 at a time but they just landed around the track, not being very effective. Although I must admit that the concussive effect from these grenades are devastating. One that I vividly recall was sometime just before

dawn. Suddenly something comes out of the dark night and heavy fog, and strikes me directly on my chest. Thwack! It really hurts and I somehow manage to catch the object as it drops between my legs. I notice that it is much heavier than the Chcom grenades that I experienced down in the delta. The handle is much longer as is the upper portion containing the charge.

I later find that the safety pin on these devices are similar to the American type, and are located midway up on the handle. As I grab it I can feel its heavy vibration. This is not a homemade grenade. It is a Chicom grenade vibrating like nurse Hooligans dildo, and I manage to throw it from me towards the dried out river bed where it explodes.

Alerted we would again throw our grenades back into the upper ridge. There was no warning with these grenade attacks. From a concealed position behind the lip of the ridge they would throw the grenades up and out over the ridge hoping that we would be subject to the fragmentation or get a lucky throw into the rear open hatch of the track. As a consequence one had to be extremely alert to these attacks, more so when they started to bounce all over the place.

**Baptism of Fire:** Our driver D'Orsey when not firing his grease gun was busy hauling ammo for our guns, preparing grenades for use, and making sure that parachute flares were available. He was indispensable to our needs and quite cool under fire, being that this was his baptism of fire.

**Strange lights:** At night we also experienced unusual phenomena. Pale yellow lights could be seen sailing down the mountainside, and meander back and forth through the valley on our eastern side. We thought that it might be NVA planting mines on our previous route in. One particular light that was to the right front of my position was a red light, almost like a tracer, but very slowly. It would be seen coming down the mountain, and would also exhibit a noise like a ziiiip, and would disappear some 20 or so meters from our position. I at first thought that perhaps I was suffering from combat fatigue. I even thought that I may be going mad as I staggered around as if in a trance from lack of sleep. It wasn't until the others seen the lights that I now realized that it wasn't my imagination.

When I first seen this infrared red light coming down I tried to shoot it

with my M16, but I missed, pretty hard for a moving target at night. The second time that I seen this light was about 3am. This time it was coming straight towards me. I again grab my M16 to get another shot at it, but suddenly I felt a blinding flash of pain in my skull. I wondered if I had seen a tracer fired by a silencer. DeLano was sleeping on the right side of my cupola and I grabbed him whispering that I am blind. I couldn't see a damned thing other than a milky sky and a black void on the ground. I figured that the NVA was now going to charge my position. Dee took my place on the 50 caliber machinegun; he ran his hands over my face and claimed that there was no blood. I explained what happened to him. I was at a loss of words in describing what I felt.

We now sat there whispering back and forth, and thinking of alerting the Captain, but thought better of that in not wanting to unnecessarily alert, and worry our men on the perimeter.

We sat there talking until Dee claimed that dawn was peeking over the mountains. I looked around and now could discern some foliage, my eyesight was returning. At dawn I could again see clearly.

I reported the event to Captain Meaders soon after. I explained all that happened and he just wanted to know how I felt, at the time I felt Ok and told him so. He had seen the red light also and just told us to sit tight and play it by ear.

Capt Meaders perhaps was beginning to think that he had a track full of nut cases, one man fishing, and one with the loss of vision, and the lights, but at least everyone was able to view the pale yellow lights towards the east. He even stayed at our position one night to view this oddity of ours, with the red light, and was greeted by exactly what we also saw. I thought it some type of laser technology, or a ploy in which to divert our attention from our left flank, or even to make us expend more ammo.

I searched the side of that mountain several times, looking for some evidence; perhaps a wire in which some type of device was made to slide down, but never could find anything that would support that kind of evidence.

**Sgt Boi** our Vietnamese interpreter some many days later upon hearing of our experiences informed me that the lights were the departed lost souls of the dead NVA and French Legionaries as there were many battles

fought in this area back in the fifties. Makes one think?

I was thinking about planting some neon bulb lights with a resistor, and capacitor that would flash intermittently out in front of Sgt Bois position, but never could find the required Burgess 6 volt batteries needed for my prank. Besides I don't think that the Troop Commander would have appreciated my sense of humor.

**The newsman:** On or about the 3rd or 4th April an artillery liaison aircraft, kind of like the old L16 series of my time came in. He flew low over us, several times. I was amazed that he was not taken under fire, He was truly ducks meat for a simple AK-47 blast, and apparently some kind of communications existed with him and our Capt. As a consequence he landed on the dirt road adjacent to the river. We sent several tracks to form a perimeter around the craft. The pilot and another man emerged from the cockpit, and I was in position to be the first to greet them. I cannot recall the pilot's name other than he was tall, and had blond hair.

The other gent was a newspaper reporter. He was about 66 inches tall, broad of chest, and had black graying curly hair. He wore a fisherman's vest with all the zippered pockets being a gray color, and perhaps a Levi's blue jeans. There was a noticeable eastern accent to his vernacular, perhaps New York. He immediately came up to me, and started asking questions. I told him that he was very lucky, as usually at this time we are receiving artillery fire. He took my name, and hometown origin, and took a close up picture of my face.

I had received a grenade fragment in the upper lip; on the left side now some day's prior, my fourth wound in Nam. My face was rather swollen, as our last aid man could not extract the fragment as it was lodged in my upper tooth. I could hardly drink water now or eat. I had 500Mg tablets of tetracycline that I had been taking that I received from the Hospital ship Sanctuary when I was their patient, and am sure that it had helped as far as infection was concerned.

He started over to the Captains track, but the Capt was now running up to us, and yelled to me that he didn't want him taking pictures by the medic track. This was of our stacked dead comrades.

The newsman tried pushing past me, and I grabbed him by the arm. He had seen the stack, and wanted a picture of it badly. I told him to stay in place, and face me. He was furious, and started to inform me about all the Generals that he knew, and that my ass was grass. I now realized that this guy had a nasty disposition, and nothing was sacrosanct to him other than getting a news story for his rag. I told him if he didn't shut his mouth that we would bind him, and dump him into an NVA trench on top of the mountain to be found. This worked.

On the whole by some reporters, this war was reported by a self serving Media who penned stories filled with inaccuracies, deliberate omissions, and biased presentations and blatant distorted interpretations because they were more interested in a story than the truth! Not always the case, but in some. I should note at this time with our most recent excursions into Iraq that the media has taken a complete turn around in their reporting. They even now report the correct unit's designation. Amazing!

By this time Captain Meaders was by our side, and informed him that no pictures were to be taken under any circumstances and an argument ensued, but I had walked away by this time, and don't have any idea what transpired.

The pilot, newsman, and Capt spoke for a while, and then the two departed in their aircraft. The pilot was a real Hotdog as he done two victory rolls over the valley as he was departing. I give credit to both the pilot and newsman as they could have easily been shot down, but apparently it was the magic lull in the battle, which usually does take place. Perhaps the enemy commander was regrouping his forces, and figuring out another avenue or method of attack. Would you believe it we came under attack again very soon after they departed. Actually we should have let him take his pictures; we wouldn't have this mess today with our archives.

I couldn't understand the absence of the NVA, and or artillery. It was as if they were too shy for a camera audition, and didn't want to show themselves probably guessing the newsman's intentions. His neck was circumvented by a variety of cameras.

**Viet rats:** Sergeant Delano and I sometime after the news mans appearance were walking the perimeter checking with the tracks on how

much ammo we had left. I decided to grab a smoke and steered DeLano over to a large rock where we could sit down supporting our backs. I find that we are facing our pile of fallen comrades. I for the most part didn't let my gaze linger very long on this growing pile; it was just a fleeting glance as it was a reminder what just may be in store for all of us. I now suddenly realize that there is movement within the ponchos that they are wrapped in.

I grabbed Dee by the arm exclaiming Dee! There are some live ones in those ponchos, they are moving. Dee then lowers his head and informs me. No Frank that's just the rats moving around inside the ponchos. They are huge and are coming out of the Song Cam Lo River. I look at him as we stand and I exclaim you mean! And he cuts me short by saying yes they are having their full. I tell Dee about the rats on the ridge; that were gorging on the dead NVA. He replies that there is not much that we can do about it. They are coming in droves, as we now are standing besides the pile.

**Combat fatigue:** Suddenly there is a loud blood-curdling scream, and a figure rises up from the other side of the pile. This apparition is wielding an entrenching tool and is now flaying the ponchos with the flat of the blade. He has scared me half to death, so much that I had withdrawn my 45 pistol and was aiming it at him.

He is screaming eat my buddies you lousy bastards as he manages to dislodge one and reduces it to pulp. I note that his face is a deep purple, and he is drooling at the corners of his mouth. I recognize him. He is one of our Tank Commanders a sergeant from one of our three tanks.

He doesn't recognize me any longer. My mind is racing. My God this poor guy has lost it; he shouldn't be out here any longer. He now stops wielding his shovel, and stares at me. Dee nudges me, and says don't pay attention Frank he comes out periodically. Some of the guys have nicknamed him the Guardian of the dead.

I again exclaim what have we been reduced to? This man should be sedated and in a hospital bed. Dee says well there is not much we can do, not until we can get some choppers in here. My emotions are starting to reappear, and am fighting back my tears. The sergeant is looking at my 45 pistol in my hand and mutters that he also has one of those as he turns to walk back to his nearby tank. Unknown to us our Captain had come up

behind us and now proceeds over beside the sergeant. He puts his arm around his shoulder, and is talking to him. He seems to have a way in which to calm the man down as he now stops his shivering. He leads him over to the tank and the sergeant climbs up squeezing past Naquin who is on watch in the cupola, and disappears below.

The Captain is telling Freddie I think! To keep him inside, and don't let him out other than to escort him for his bodily functions, and above all don't let him have a weapon. Freddie says that he will comply, and the Captain adds that if he does not we will have to tie him up and he then may go completely off the deep end or have a stroke. Freddie guarantees the Captain that he will see to it.

Dee and I briefly talk with the Captain and we express our needs in which to have our dead evacuated. The Captain informs us that he is calling every day back to Headquarters for chopper support but that none is available. He informs us that he has other wounded that need immediate evacuation. He has one man a tanker that is now presently on guard up in his cupola that has a large hole in his head in which his brain is visible.

**His other side:** He had asked the pilot if he could fit him in his craft and get him out. The pilot had difficulty getting in and was afraid that he wouldn't be able to clear the mountains with the additional weight. They then ask the newsman if he would volunteer to stay behind and let the wounded man take his place. He flat out refuses, and says that he is not going to be stuck in this trap. He is offered to be able to take all the pictures that he wants to, but he still refuses. The Captain then informs the pilot to take this bag of crap out of his sight, and they depart. We should have tied him up, and kept him in a track in which to get the other man out. The Captain relents about this decision.

**Out of ammo:** On the 4th April 1969 we were forced to divide our ammunition between ourselves.

My basic load of ammo for this operation was 5000 rounds of 50-cal ammunition, despite the required max limit of 3500. I had 5 boxes left, and gave 3 boxes to the remaining tracks. We only had 50 rounds of M60 machine gun ammo left

The main element of our remaining force had taken up a position,

forming a small perimeter at the shore of the Song Cam Lo River on its north side, with the river running, east, and west. That separated them from the Southern Mountains. My position was on the North side 20 meters from a dried out river bed that was abutted to the base of a mountain at XD818644. That had a 15 degree slope, and was assumed that the main force of enemy ground elements would engage us from this position that evening. Where this intelligence emerged from is unknown to me. More than likely it was due to all the enemy movement at this location during the hour of darkness.

My instructions were to deliver as much firepower with my remaining ammo into the NVA, and then if possible fall back to the defense of what was left of our force. I assume that the Captain also has other plans to be merged with this movement?

During the previous days Sgt Dee had been assisting us with precise fire from his M14 Rifle. I watched as he engaged NVA on top of the mountain at a range of perhaps 800 meters watching them as they threw their arms up in the air or their pith helmets being blown off. He also assisted many of our most seriously wounded and remained with them until they passed on. The wounds inflicted upon them were fearful to behold, since they were the result of direct enemy shellfire.

**Compassion:** There was one incident when Dee went to assist a friend of his that he had seen being blown down inside the track. Unfortunately at this time we only had one medic left, and he was doubling as a track commander. Perhaps it was premonition, but the day before, him and his friend were talking together, and his friend related to him that he came from a poor family. And that if he ever received a wound that would render him comatose or bed ridden for the rest of his life that he would rather pass on rather than being a burden to his family.

A situation like that would destroy whatever plans they had for retirement, and waste all the money that they had saved. He then made Dee swear to him that if it happened that Dee would then just put a 45 slug into his head.

The irony of the situation was when Dee reached his fallen comrade in arms in company with Campbell our Capt's driver, he found him lying in the



bottom of the track. The shell that struck was one of those with a high crack, and the concussion had crushed his skull. His forehead was only about 3 inches wide with his brains coming out of his ears, and nose, but he was still alive.

I heard the terrible cry of anguish coming from Dee, and ran over to check on what had happened. Dee was holding him in his arms, and was now pulling his 45-cal pistol out of its holster. He now had the weapon up against his friend's temple, but luckily at that moment the man gave a horrendous shudder, and passed on. Somehow I was relieved that it had happened in this fashion as the Captain was now coming over the side of the track, and I don't know what the consequences would have been for Dee if he had delivered the final blow.

It sounded like an iron foundry works with the ricocheting, and bouncing projectiles from one vehicle to another, and the terrible fear of not knowing where they would detonate.

At this time it was obvious as to some of our wounded, many had head wounds, and were quite noticeable with their heads swathed in white bandages. They were obvious seated behind their guns in the cupola. They made for a good target. As a result we then covered their heads with camouflaged arm slings in pirate fashion to lessen the noticeable target. Some were able to wear their steel helmets without the insert.

Often times when our side of the perimeter was under fire, I would hear the sputtering of an RPG projectile coming in from high above. I would momentarily glance up and watch the trajectory of this round as it exploded on a track. I could see the commander throw his arms wide into the air as he disappeared in a blinding flash and smoke. As the vacuum caused by the explosion sucked him back down into the track. What amazed me was that another person perhaps a medic or a man that was not tethered to a gun who would in bound's leap across the perimeter and in one jump would be in the commander's cupola. I could observe his immediate action on the gun, and his commencing firing at the enemy. Brave men all! Well knowing that the next shot may very well take them out.

I do recall a few of the men that were our Captains drivers, but the time of their involvement during our many sorties is vague. Carl Campbell from Tennessee was with us at Lang Cat. There was also a George Brown,

and Doris Cook aka Cookie whom I know survived as I met him in Korea around 1970. He was busy filling his mouth with two big pieces of Korean chicken.

**Air assault:** Stepping back a few days I remember that on April 1, April Fools Day, Easter. That during the night there was an air assault by a small element. This was an air assault onto the hilltop at XD818615. I was told that they were Rangers from the 5th Mechanized, but later was again told that it was an element of Marines.

They could very well have been the 1/11 of the 5th Mechanized Infantry, but since our battle was merged as indicated by our archives there is no telling who they really were. The Chinook dropped them off on a sharp peaked mountain about 1500 feet in elevation, overlooking our position on the NW side, this was during the hour of darkness, and the fog was fast moving in. No sooner had the chopper departed than extensive automatic firing started, and continued through out the night, only ceasing at dawn. One could easily watch the red tracers coming down the hill slope, and the green tracers going up into the sky. When we couldn't see the green tracers anymore, we knew that the NVA had gained a foothold on the edge of the hill firing directly into the Assault team.

This scenario continued on the next evening also, but after midnight we were informed that they couldn't hold out any longer, and that their casualty rate was extremely high. As a consequence two Chinooks made sorties onto the mountain, one I believe to extract the survivors, and weapons, and the other for their wounded, and KIA. The perimeter of this mountain was very small, being very sharp at its top, and I assume that due to their perimeter size, that there was much hand-to-hand fighting.

It was amazing that the Chinooks were not shot down. One could easily observe green tracers entering the aircrafts body. As the last chopper was about to leave one could despite the noise of the aircraft hear men that were screaming, die you bastards! The survivors were now spraying the top of the hill with automatic fire. It was next to impossible for us to assist them, mostly due to the incline of the slope. If we had of sent men on foot, we would have put our tracks in extreme jeopardy due to our already depleted ranks. Also they would have been taken under fire from the butte on their East Side where the NVA had extensive entrenchments putting them in a

deadly crossfire. One must realize that the Choppers could not land on the bluff, only the tail section butted against the bluff was able to touch earth while the pilot attempted this difficult approach.

## Chapter Twenty One

### Desperate measures

At about 0200 hours on the 4th of April 69 the enemy proceeded in trying to come down the 15 degree slope to obtain the protective cover of the dried out river bed. Which was 10 feet deep by about 15 feet wide running along the northern side of our perimeter? With its far edge abutted to the mountain. Captain Meaders was talking with me from the left side of the track. I was telling him that we have heavy movement to our front and the ridge above. We were suddenly interrupted by a loud sound, which perhaps must have been a dropped RPG tube that fell into the dried out riverbed Clang! Clang! The NVA also had their new recruits, and incompetents.

It became obvious now as they became quite noisy in their haste, dropping equipment, and some actually just falling over the edge in the dark trying to dig their heels, and hands into the sharp slope to decrease their rate of descent. Capt Meaders departed to alert the perimeter to our rear.

We opened up on them with sporadic M60, and 50-cal machine gun fire, they were coming down the slope like Lemmings oblivious to the murderous fire that we were pouring into them, and simply falling into the riverbed. When an opportunity would present its self we would also flip grenades in to the riverbed. They were also coming through the narrow defile of the ravine on our left flank that intersected with the riverbed.

I had a Tank on my left flank, which only had one round left for its main gun. There was an RPG team that I had pinned down behind a rock cleft on my right front, and instructed the Tank of which Freddie Naquin was a crewmember or Track Commander I forget? I seem to recall that he was up in the turret most of the time flipping grenades into the second ridge. The name sergeant Far, Hart and or Johnson, rings a bell though. I tell them to fire on my tracers into the rock defile which they accomplished destroying the RPG team. At the same time I note several RPG rounds just whizzing up in the air on an erratic spiraling course, like balloons with the air suddenly let out.

I was thinking that this move perhaps gave the enemy commander some second thoughts about his frontal assault. In that he might be unsure of the disposition of our ammo for the main gun on the tanks. It did appear that

they had curtailed the assault for some more minutes buying us valuable time.

**An escape:** On the morning of this same day Captain Meaders talked to me about the probability of being over run. If there was just a few of us left, it was thought to take a couple of tracks back out through the valley. I looked at my map, and knew the entrance, and thought it a bad idea. We would be limited to the single dirt trail now resembling a road due to all the tracks traveling on it.

This road was abutted to the mountains, which would be on our left side north, and the river some 100 meters to our right South. We also had to cross the river further down, and would be again be abutted to the mountains on our right, where it would be easy to fire down upon us. It would be too easy to be ambushed taking this route out, not to mention the possibility of mines. A wild dash for the entrance would assuredly leave disabled track with its wounded men on the trail with perhaps no alternative but to leave them behind. I didn't want to see this happen. I gave him my thoughts. If only a couple of men are left, there must be someone able to escape, at least to let them know what happened here. I didn't like having to make a dash between Mutters Ridge and the Razor Back Ridge.

The river that flowed from the mountain waterfall and intersected with the tributary of the Song-Cam-Lo flowing south into the mountains would be ideal as it was only several feet from our position. Both sides of the river were of high dense brush, with no trails on either side, and would make it rather difficult for the NVA to traverse on either side. My concern was with the wounded, if there were any left. I had hoped that they could hang on to their rubber mattress, and our stronger swimmers could assist them. This remained to be seen The River eventually flowed into a gorge that would lead us to a well worn trail used by Marine Recon units in the area of Khe Lo Bong, where we could set up on a mountain and call for assistance, or follow the trail into more friendly terrain.

As a matter of interest this area now has a major dirt road that is capable of Land Rovers, and motorbikes, going through, and over the mountains just west of where we had the engagement. Cubans completed these around the late 1970's.

The Captain checked, and all of our remaining men were swimmers. So it was decided that in the event that we only had a couple of men left, that these should take their M16's, and whatever ammo that they had, and get into the fast flowing river. We would then follow it down where at some point we could cross the mountains and make our way near the Quang-Tri area, or perhaps call in a chopper to one of the many mountaintops for an extraction.

An air mattress was prepared with a PRC-25 radio strapped to it, which was tightly wrapped in a poncho to seal it from the water. The Microphone was also inserted in to a plastic bag from our batteries and sealed with tape. Hopefully we can negotiate the river, and use the radio call in a lift off from one of the mountains.

At this time the Tank on my left flank was ordered back to our small perimeter, which was now bunched up at the banks of the river. The tank was to be used as a buffer for RPG fire that would be against the manned tracks. The Tank only had 50 rounds of 50-cal ammo left.

With my diminishing ammo left I realized that we could not hold the final assault. I asked Sgt Dee to get on his radio, His Radioman Ronney Saxton having been badly wounded, having lost an arm, and try in any fashion to obtain artillery support. I told my 3 other crew members that I was going to try and get artillery delivered despite our proximity to the enemy. And that it may be the final cause of our demise, it would perhaps be better than being taken prisoner, wounded or over run, and perhaps executed, they all agreed to the final option. We were approximately 60 feet from the trench.

**Calling for help:** Sgt Dee was on the radio pleading for artillery support that was being denied from various other units being actively engaged or in support of other activities. He had a long list of radio frequencies, which he was rapidly dialing through and trying to call the assigned unit. He finally was able to contact a unit that was familiar with him. Just a lucky shot, as communications was not that good with the signal fading in, and out. This was B battery I think? But definitely the 1/40th Artillery, his parent unit, and they took his coordinates. For some reason now the signals were quite strong, and readable

The problem was that the Song Cam Lo and the mountains were in a very small area, which had us, boxed in. Whereas at Lang-Cat, or as the Marines referred to it as the Razorback Valley, we just barely had enough room to permit A Troop, and elements of B Troop to form a perimeter, which turned out to be an oblong instead of a circle. Encompassing an area of approximately 25 meters at it's widest.

At the moment I was concerned with my right flank from a possible RPG or ground attack. My right flank was towards the entrance of the valley, which was usually covered by a tank at about 150 meters from us. A very lonely exposed position, but he was pulled back to the small perimeter. I believe that this was the tank on which Rusty Bauer was on since most out on the eastern flank were B Troop personnel. This area now completely exposed for some 150 meters to a line of scrub trees, and brush that would provide excellent concealment for the enemy.

**Danger:** We now almost lost all hope as we heard the artillery unit scrub our fire mission, since we were too close to the target.

**Situation develops:** We were beginning to feel like the French at the battle of Agincourt. We were bunched up together in a tight group with no recourse in being able to spread out due to the size of the area in which we found ourselves. Our perimeter now was less than 100 feet.

Although not being able to charge like the French, we were methodically being picked off by the Viet long bow; the rocket propelled grenade, and recoilless rifle.

Unfortunately the Vietnamese had underestimated the lethality of the 50 cal and the M60 machine guns, plus the tenacity of the track crews to remain at their positions under this devastating rocketry fire.

The range of the machine guns coupled with its accuracy deemed it prudent for their archers to retreat out of effective range of their weapon due to the extremity of their casualties. They were now relegated to firing their missiles just outside of its effective range from a high angle position where they no longer were able to view their targets. All we needed now was a catapult, mortars or artillery fire in which to deliver death upon them from above. Their archers or missile men now likened to the English with their

long bows at Agincourt tried the same tactics. They lay down their long bows, and try to engage us in close combat with the use of their lesser weapons, and again were effectively driven off.

It was time for the King of battle to make an appearance in which to decide the final outcome of the fray. We were desperate, having now run out of ammunition with no support forthcoming.

Can we upset the tables of balance, and turn the tide of war as opposed to what happened at Agincourt? If we can get the artillery then we will find out what the fortunes of war deem.

**Danger Close:** We decided then to pencil whip our grid position by 100 meters on the map coordinates by adding the extra 100 meters, we were desperate, and fire was granted almost immediately upon the basis of Danger Close. Their concern was with the accuracy of the shell due to high angle fire, ballistics and the wind. They insisted upon a marker round, which gave me concern, as it would warn the NVA about the forthcoming artillery, but as it worked out it didn't make any difference. We were relying on Sgt Delano's expertise as an artilleryist. A marker round was delivered which was directly over the target. At this moment we could hear NVA calling to each other, and even the rapid scrape of shovels as they were making a last ditch desperate attempt to dig in. It was too late as then there followed 5 rounds of artillery dropped directly into the riverbed. It was a perfect bull's eye for every shot

The artillery rounds were 105mm with a bursting range of 35 meters. I believe that the artillery unit was at or near the Rock Pile. A distance of approximately 4500 meters at approximately 137 degrees, from our location as the crow flies. The range of the 105mm being 11.5 Km made it ideal other than being high angle fire. Sgt Dee kept calling in fire, and worked up and down the river bed, and the upper slope of the first ridge above the river bed, delivering intensive artillery fire, of which lasted perhaps for about 2 hours or more.

When he started on the upper ridge we could hear Lieutenant Pitts of B Troop screaming for a check fire, with his radio. This we found extremely disconcerting as Dee had difficulty in convincing the artillery commander of our dilemma. He was concerned to begin with as when we informed the



artillery as to our position being 100 meters south of the target which theoretically put us near his position gave him some concern. He just didn't know what we were up to at the moment perhaps missing some portion of our radio transmission. We couldn't understand what was wrong, as he was at least another 150 meters from the impact zone and our location. It turned out that they only had some large type of fragmentation land near their location, which later turned out to be large pieces of NVA equipment. They were informed to remain with their rear hatch down for the period of the barrage. There was no way that we were going to terminate the mission.

Not with the decision already been made and my men resigning themselves to their fate. As the flash of the shells lit up the area I could see rag like doll bodies of the NVA being thrown into the sky along with their equipment. "The Die was cast". It was going for broke rather than lose the opportunity. The concussion was tremendous at our location, and the occasional loud Pok! As shrapnel hit against the gun shields and track I lost count of the artillery that was delivered for us, as it seemed that it came in bursts of 5 rapidly.

I knew without a doubt that those first 5 rounds had decimated what was in the riverbank. It was a perfect shot laterally along the parallel line and into the riverbed. My concern was the ridge above as it went down into a deep back slope surrounded by large trees, and rocks. There were the remains of an old trench heavily over grown with brush that ran through the bottom, as I had observed on a prior reconnaissance. The remains of some long lost forgotten fight. This would provide good cover for the NVA. Dee packed enough artillery into that position to do the job properly.

We knew that the larger of the enemy force was already in that position getting ready to jump down and provide a reserve for the assault.

It was all music to me. A crescendo that I knew was driving our enemy mad with fear. I envisioned them laying there pressing their bodies deeper and deeper into the sandy rocky bottom, their hands clenching and unclenching the sand while they cursed their commander for having moved them into this trap.

They probably figured that we were not to be given artillery support. Thinking the ditch and ridgeline as a target would be difficult to hit, but in actuality never realized that at this time that we would receive artillery

support. But never the less we had the expertise of the best artilleryman in the world.

I could hear the swift whoosh of the rounds coming in as I peered over the edge of the 50-cal gun shield, and then I would duck. This was followed by the shells loud explosion, and then immediately would watch again to make sure that the NVA would not try and make a last ditch desperate charge into our position; in order to try and escape the madness of the barrage. Of which I had no doubt; was taking a terrible toll of their men. That was one of their main tactics was to get in close thinking that we wouldn't call our artillery in that close to our own positions.

This apparently caught the NVA completely and totally by surprise since we had been denied artillery, and/or Helicopter support during this engagement. And they were well aware of our ammunition depletion, because our three tanks had ceased firing their main guns, so they had moved in closer for the kill, and thought that they had us.

**Alive! We made it:** After the barrage ceased, we all looked at each other not believing that we had survived. We were like cats shitting razor blades, and with trembling hands remounted our guns, and inspected the 50-cal for any possible damage. We were actually shouting at each other as our auditory systems had shut down with all the concussion. We felt that if they still had the capability of affecting a ground assault, then so be it! At least we got the chance to get even.

During the intervening hours until dawn we finally could hear properly, and sat there whispering to each other while listening to the moans and cries of wounded NVA within the riverbed becoming more audible to us, and that of those on the upper slope ridge. One in particular on the upper ridge was screaming his head off which was getting to me. We had no sympathy for our wounded enemy at this time, and decided to cease their cries with thrown grenades into the riverbed rather than approaching it on foot to use small arms fire. This would have put us in a position to be under direct fire from the above ridge, plus the fact that we had little ammo to spare, but we didn't receive any more ground assaults that evening.

**“All was Quiet on the Western Front“.** Being that

we were closer to the Western border of Laos. Even our little friends the crickets and frogs were striking up their symphony again, ever ready to warn, if anyone approached on foot by their sudden silence at night. The moaning, and groaning, cries and screaming of the NVA now completely ceased. "Artillery does lend some dignity to what otherwise could have turned into an ugly nasty brawl". Who said that?

We relied mostly on the actions of crickets at night and the large ravens that made their home on the spruce lined mountains. During the daylight they permeated this area much in the same manner as vultures.

They were an excellent warning as to the approach or presence of ground troops. If you have ever gone hunting and have had crows in your neighborhood you know what I mean. Even at this late date if we find a cricket in the house it has all the amenities of a guest until such time as it decides to depart.

The only thing that bothers me at this late date is that we had no knowledge of an artillery unit being that close to us, and why we were not notified of its presence to be used accordingly. If we had of known this, the battle could have been cut as short as a week. Perhaps saving many more lives. In turn the artillery unit also had no idea that we were to be operating in that area. A cardinal sin, had they been delegated to perform harassment and interdiction fire into our operational area would have been disastrous.

One US Marine Recon squad was operating in the vicinity of the Rock Pile. Having seen our tracers going into the sky in our attempt to shoot at the NVA on the summit led them to believe that we were despite our red tracer's NVA antiaircraft. Luckily for us no further action was taken on their report. For some reason in this area we occasionally spotted a UH-1 type of helicopter flying from the west and then to the north. They were marked on the side as Air America belonging to the CIA of that time. They sported a big shield beneath the belly which I later find out is a heat shield to prevent heat seeking missiles in searching it out. The whole aircraft was a brilliant silver color. Why they were headed north over the DMZ is something that I never did find out?

We were not going to take any other more chances that evening to check out the area. We would wait for dawn's early light. We survived the Might of Thor's wrath, and his crackling lightning that came swift, and

furious upon the earth. Dee got on the PRC-25, and informed the artillery of our present situation, and on behalf of all of us bestowed our blessings on their rusty little souls. A silent prayer to Saint Barbara their Patron Saint, that we may live to see another dawn that was all that we asked.

**Good news:** At dawn Radio Intercept at FSB Fuller intercepted a message from one of the NVA commanders that the artillery fire had broken their backs. Exact words, as it came from our Vietnamese interpreter sergeant Boi whom had been airlifted to FSB Fuller some days earlier, since his English, Vietnamese linguistics was much better than the American personnel on the site were. We were informed that what was left of the enemy was attempting an escape back over the mountain headed towards the DMZ. From what I was given to understand that all radio transmissions of the NVA were being monitored from the vicinity of FSB Fuller.

There was an Army Intercept unit and the Marine radio 1st battalion located on the site. Permission to pull back was denied the NVA from their Base Commander. But pull back they did in a mass rush for the DMZ.

At the crack of dawn we finally received Helicopters with ammo re-supply, which also evacuated our dead, and wounded. Our KIA was stacked almost to the height of the Medic track, and as wide. The rats were feasting on them. It was obvious, the ponchos were filled with them, as one of our men went mad trying to kill the rats with an entrenching tool, and they were as formidable as the NVA. In fact I watched as this sergeant was led over to a chopper for medical evacuation. He now had his hands securely bound behind him, and was placed in a jump seat and belted in.

When we did finally get them evacuated the helicopter crewmen were horrified as the rats came boiling out, as the ponchos with its contents were hastily thrown on board. The crew chief didn't want any of these uninvited guest's, as they had a penchant to chew on any electrical cables. Most of our wounded had to seat themselves on top of the dead in which to get them all out.

The stench despite the poncho liners was now devastating. The stench was added dramatically with the hundreds of dead NVA that were lying around which made for a bacterial laden atmosphere. As a result the crew chief dismounted, and using an entrenching tool beat on the ponchos while he opened one end in which to let the rats out. He was screaming at us why

we hadn't gotten them evacuated earlier as he intermittently would turn and regurgitate on the ground. We informed him of our situation, and he was apologetic.

**The NVA retreat:** We are now ordered by Capt Meaders, to make a run around the mountain, and come up on an opposite adjoining butte. This was at grids XD818635. There was a well worn trail leading up to the summit. It appeared like tracks at some time in the past had preceded us. We were now joined with a track vehicle comprised of Army Engineers; apparently the entrance to the valley was now open. They had a track with no cupola, but did have a 50-cal mounted on it, and all of them performed admirably while with us on the bluff. I never did learn the purpose of their mission. They were to be decorated for their part in the battle, and I hope it was forthcoming. They deserved it.

We were lucky in finding an unfinished road that led to the DMZ road that had been constructed by the Navy Seabees. This road ran past the small FSB Bible that were or was occupied by the Marines? I never did find out any information about that FSB if it was active or deserted? We then were able to perform an end around end run. What a turn of events. This was where we caught the remaining force trying to climb up an exposed side of the mountain from the ravine. They had previously been down around the base of the mountain in anticipation of a final ground assault against us. We now engaged them with M60 and 50-caliber machine gun fire literally destroying what was left of the element. This was at the slope of XD818645. The men were in a killing frenzy, and I doubt that any order to cease-fire would have been obeyed. It was time for them to get even.

The slope was exposed due to the NVA at one time digging massive trench emplacements on the top edge of the mountain, and dumping the dirt down the west slope of it. Upon breaching the butte we were immediately taken under RPG fire from an adjoining leaf of the butte on the SW side. This appeared to be a massive well-protected bunker. The bunker was very well camouflaged until they fired, which dislodged all the camouflage over its front.

It was like a football pass coming to me as it whished inches over my head. This was adjacent to the same hill that the air assault had taken place, and I wondered if they were aware of this large bunker directly across from

their summit. My last spare barrel was now cooked out, and my rounds were just spiraling haphazardly in a great arc towards the embrasure. I pulled back and a tank with Rusty on board, took my position, and destroyed the bunker with two well-placed rounds. I thanked the heavens above for the tanks intervention, as it would have meant a dismount, and using explosives to destroy its inhabitants. It was a lucky thing for us to not be exposed to the enemy's artillery at this time. We remained in the shadow of the mountain that the NVA were climbing up onto in order to reach their trench. This essentially kept us below the horizon from the area of the demilitarized zone where we could not be observed for enemy artillery fire.

I thought that perhaps their communication personnel and radio equipment might have been destroyed during our artillery barrage; otherwise they could have utilized their own artillery very effectively upon us in this location.

The order came over our radios from our Captain. Take aim, fire short bursts, and make every shot count. It was time to unleash the dogs of war, and that we did with a vengeance. The enemy knew what to expect, and none tried to surrender knowing full well what they have done to us over the last ten days.

Many of them tried rolling onto their backs, and fired their weapons on full automatic spraying our tracks with AK-47 rifle fire. Those that did lasted only seconds, as they were immediately taken under accurate fire from us killing them instantly.

The distance from their slope was perhaps 50 meters or less from our location, leaving many with an etched imprint in their minds of what 50 cal machine gun fire can do to a man.

One may ask why they attempted to climb up this exposed side of the mountain that is open to conjecture, other than perhaps that either side of the exposed slope was mined, and booby-trapped. This would have been employed against us had we attempted such a foolish maneuver as to assault that position on foot. This would have limited the advance directly into their lane of prepared fire. We did mark the moment within our thoughts, as our Captain's tactical proficiency has now paid maximum dividends on our behalf

I now was relegated to using my M16 from the cupola. My last 50 cal barrel was now burned out, and I noted the spiraling effect of my tracers. In

the last ten days or so I have burned out 3 barrels, so it was the M16 employed against the fleeing NVA, but my gunners with their M60 were giving a good account of themselves. It was difficult to estimate the enemy killed as some just became lodged on the deep sandy 15-degree slope while others fell back into the ravine. The sand beneath them slowly crumbled, and likened to being washed ashore on a wave they simply slid slowly back, spiraling until they disappeared into the dark recesses of the ravine below.

There were perhaps well over one hundred of them like ants trying to crawl back up to their trench line. We had a grandstand seat with no obstacles in the way from the butte at XD818635. It would have been great to see helicopters in support flying over our heads taking them under fire with rockets. The situation was that the choppers would have been spotted from across the DMZ, and taken under extensive artillery and antiaircraft fire as they sought elevation upon broaching the mountain. Their route would have taken them well over the DMZ line. In fact we were only within the edge of the DMZ line by about 50 meters. Just within the law, or treaty.

During that evening sapper suicide squads tried to penetrate our defense to give their remaining comrades time to escape. It was a very steep climb for them in order to reach the butte's edge, and found themselves slipping, and falling making noise that alerted us to their presence. Sgt Dee worked back and forth between B troop and us whom was on our far right Southern flank, and finally remained with us during the evening; as we again delivered grenade fire down upon the enemy in the ravine. We did it that way rather than give our positions away with small arms fire during the darkness.

We now employed fragmentation grenades using the drill. Pull pin, let the safety handle fly off. Count one thousand, two thousand, and drop the grenade over the edge of the butte, which permitted the grenade to detonate several feet below the edge of the butte, inflicting sever damage on anyone foolish enough to be hanging on its side. In a couple of cases there were horrendous secondary explosions, informing us that our grenades had detonated the explosives carried by the sappers.

**A crawl through hell:** At dawns light there was no longer any enemy presence evident. We then went back down into the Valley. We had to originally leave several tracks down below as we didn't have

sufficient crews to man them, plus some were disabled, but choppers were now arriving with a few people.

I recall Sgt Dee being ordered by a newly arrived Lt to reconnoiter the riverbed, and upper slope, which he had to do by himself. Apparently the LT did not know what had transpired within the last several days. His comment was. God! Who did all this? Dee was ticked off as they made him check that none of the NVA was still alive before the lieutenant and his entourage entered the area. I kind of laughed about this at the time, as I knew that some of the NVA in certain spots had been in there for over a week, and had been getting real ripe.

I could tell that Dee almost lost it in there crawling around all the dead. It was sometime later that we were able to again talk with him. He said that he was concerned about receiving fire from above, or from one that may have only been wounded or was playing possum. Instead of walking through this garden of death he thought it prudent to stay low, and sometimes crawling, or on hands and knees made his way through. He was violently sick several times, and had to remove an enemy soldier's scarf in which to wrap around his face, and nose.

Nobody did go into the dark ravine which had a very narrow entrance but where all the NVA dead had fallen into when we caught most of those climbing the mountain. I don't think that they got a body count for that area.

About the 5th day we all had run out of water and the tablets in which to purify it. We now were relegated in obtaining our water from the stream that gushed out of the ravine from the mountain. It was extremely cold, it actually took ones breath away, and appeared quite clear as at one spot it ran over a white sandy bank.

Dee often would take our canteens down to the stream and fill them as the rest of our remaining force was doing the same. Usually one man would accomplish this task for many. Our thoughts were that a single soldier would not be too obvious to snipers and RPG gunners. Speaking of canteens makes me think that at this time all of us have acquired the NVA canteens. They were neat little jugs that had a leather carrying harness. When on watch we brought ours up into the cupola. We used these in which to relieve ourselves while on watch. This prevented us from standing up on the side of the track in which to perform this function. This prevented us from being a perfect



silhouetted target for any sniper. At first I was the only one that had one, and we had to share it, and laugh about the squeamishness of the others.

I do recall early in the game in firing up some NVA that were trying to escape up into that ravine. I was not sure whether they fell back into the stream or not. I never said anything about that, but it is certain that a soldier in battle needs two primary sources in which to keep him going, and that is ammo, and water.

I was wondering if this water was making us sick, as at times my crew and I complained as we felt flushed and over heated when normally we did not? We hoped that the NVA was not urinating into the stream, what we needed on the tracks and tanks were what were called a Pitoc static device that is used in helicopters. This was a plastic type funnel device connected to a hose, and exited through a port of the ship in which the pilots could relieve themselves.

I really forget if this device was used on the Huey aircraft, but do recall that it was used on the old fixed wing DC47 Dakota aircraft.

**Artillery barrage:** Our reasoning: To have artillery dropped in on our selves, was that if we made an attempt to pull back from our position, this would have given the NVA an opportune moment to evacuate the river bed, and organize a direct frontal assault upon us, and our remaining element. Thus we were able to keep them pinned within the riverbed until the arrival of the artillery barrage. I was also afraid that our wounded if still alive would not be able to negotiate the swift river in an escape. It was a lucky fortune of war that often turns the tide of a battle. I must add at this time that we had received the approval to try and gain artillery support from our Captain. It seemed that his calls for assistance fell upon deaf ears. It seemed like a lost venture in the beginning as nobody would accept our fire mission, and it was just a lucky contact that put us in touch with B Battery 1/40th artillery Sergeant Dee's parent unit.

There was a very short exchange of words between the Colonel of the artillery unit, and Sergeant Dee about our request, and the use of 105mm guns, but hearing all the firing in the background assured him of our situation. They then handled the fire mission for us by warning us of the range. They were concerned over the accuracy of the projectile because of

the high angle, and possible wind deviation. We actually should have been receiving arty fire from the Marines as we were under their operational control, but this was not forthcoming as the radio traffic sounded like the whole DMZ were actively using their fire support in defense of their other positions.

**Fire Mission:** Upon confirmation of the artillery strike I had my two M60 gunners dismount their weapons, which they kept cradled in their arms for possible immediate use within the confines of the M113 Track. I left the 50-cal machine gun mounted in the event that possibly the NVA might make an attempt to evacuate the riverbed, also since the 50 was much more heavily constructed than the M60 machine guns. But we felt that it would be prudent to keep a close watch on the riverbed during the barrage.

Since the artillery delivered was directly on target we suffered little fragmentation damage because of the depth of the riverbed, and the height of the ridge above the riverbed. The only problem was due to the concussion from the proximity of the exploding projectiles, which left us momentarily dazed, senseless, and with limited auditory capability's. Our only casualty was sergeant DeLano with a bloody nose from the concussion. It is interesting to note that not one single solitary prisoner was taken. These were hardcore North Vietnamese troops.

**A middle finger salute:** Both my crew and I were decorated for that evening. Sgt Dee was also put in for a decoration. A Lieutenant (name unknown) had assured me, a recent arrival I think? That Sgt Dee would also be decorated, and Captain Meaders also confirmed this, but at this late date I now know; that he never received it, and was possibly due to the fact that we were under operational control to the 3rd Marines. They were to rotate back to the States soon afterwards, and with our home base being some 500 miles further South in the Delta, perhaps compounded the problem. Sergeant Delano was only on temporary duty with us. And we were not officially attached or assigned to the 5th Mechanized; this would come in September of 69. In fact I believe that the 5th Mechanized might have been under our own operational control?

As a result I and my men were awarded the Army Commendation for

Valor. Our certificates simply read that we refused to leave our positions.

Not a thing about the artillery barrage or our physical conditions from the concussion. I never did learn if my men received their certificates. Soon afterwards I rotated back to the States.

I had spent 27 plus months in Vietnam, Prior I also spent 17 months in the Dominican Republic. The wheel of fortune was slowly closing and it was time to leave this insanity.

Ssgt Frank Kelson  
Dances on hot brass  
2<sup>nd</sup> plt Scout Section Leader.