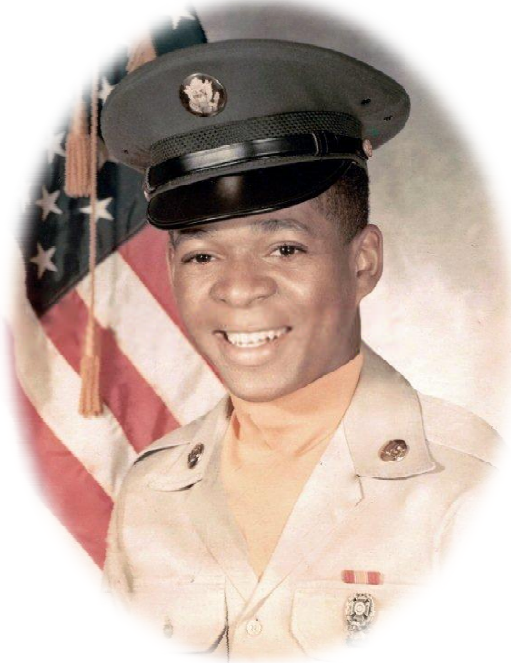

MICHAEL ALLEN, 1970-1971, Sergeant E5, Track Commander
Scout Squad Track 34 (M113 Armored Personnel Carrier), 3rd Platoon, C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 5th Cavalry

*Mike learned to look to the north to find
the brighter side of what laid in store for him*

I was born in Columbus OH where I have remained a lifelong resident. I am a proud member of my family's tradition of military service. My father served in the Army Air Corps during WWII, and two of my three sons continued the tradition after my own Army service. My oldest son served in the Army for 11 years, most notably with the 101st Airborne Division. My youngest son served in the Navy and was aboard the carrier U.S.S. Enterprise for Operation Eldorado Canyon, the U.S. retaliatory response ordered by President Reagan in March 1986 against Libya for its link to the terrorist bombing that killed an American serviceman in Berlin.

I graduated from the Columbus East High School in 1968, after which I went to work as a shipping clerk for Ross Laboratories until I was inducted into the Army. Founded in 1925, Ross Labs has been an increasingly important company in Columbus as America's pioneer developer and leading producer of infant formulas and nutritional supplements. The company produces such globally popular brands as *Similac* and *Ensure*. Ross Labs has also been a particularly important part of my life. I was fortunate in being able to return to the company after my Army discharge, and remain with Ross Labs to my retirement in 2000.



My induction into the Army was a matter of my having "won the lottery" so-to-speak. The first National Draft Lottery for the Vietnam War was held on December 1, 1969. In advance of the first drawing I was issued the draft number of 57. My number was pulled at random along with 194 others at the televised first lottery drawing that consisted of 850,000 men in the national draft at the time. How lucky can a guy get? Through a series of drawings, 162,746 men were called up for ultimate induction in the military during 1970. I was inducted on February 2, 1970 at Fort Hayes in Columbus and sent to Fort Bragg NC for Basic Training. My Advanced Individual Training took place at Fort Knox KY where I qualified for the specialty of Armor Reconnaissance Specialist (MOS 11D10). My next assignment was to Vietnam.

As a PFC, I was flown out of the McChord Air Force Base in Tacoma WA on July 4, 1970 and arrived in RVN at the Cam Ranh Bay Air Base. At the Army's Personnel Processing Center I was told I would be sent to Quang Tri Province. I looked for Quang Tri on a wall map of South Vietnam in the center, and couldn't find it. A friendly fellow offered to help me find what I was looking for. He asked where I was going, and when I told him Quang Tri, he told me that I was looking too far south on the map. As I had looked for Quang Tri down around Saigon, he pointed north towards the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). Oh, my! When I arrived at Camp Red Devil in Quang Tri, I was told of my assignment to the 3/5 Cavalry and that I would be transported to Dong Ha. Again, there was a map of South Vietnam on the wall that caught my attention. Naturally, I looked for Dong Ha to the south of Quang Tri. With the help of yet another friendly fellow I was told once more to look to the north. I replied: "Any farther north and I'll be in North Vietnam!" Thus began my adventures with the 3/5 Cavalry.

When I reported to the 3/5 Cav my final assignment was to the 3rd Platoon of C Troop, which was in the field at the time. While I waited for the return of the platoon to the Dong Ha Combat Base, I pulled base perimeter guard duty. I quickly came to realize the guard duty was a far better job than the detail to burn human waste. All Black Knights know what I mean about the peculiar smell given off by the burning of diesel fuel and human waste in the 55-gallon "potty" drums that was forever ingrained in our memories.

Assigned to the Scout Track 34, my tour with the 3rd Platoon was quite memorable. The racial diversity of our track alone was a remarkable experience in life. Upon my assignment to the track, the makeup of our scout squad included a Caucasian track commander (Dan Bigbey), a Cuban-American driver (Henry Faget), a Mexican-American M60 gunner (Juan Cantu), and me, an African-American, as the second M60 gunner. We were truly a melting pot of Americans. We were all brothers who looked out for each other, and during our time together, we were a true family. Of course over time, other squad members came along as crew replacements, and they were just as much brothers as the squad members I found

upon my assignment to Track 34. To this day, I consider them all as *brothers* in every sense of the word. I hadn't seen our "original" squad members for 37 years, but when we met for the first time since Vietnam at the C Troop reunion in Big Sky MT in 2007 it was like time had stood still, except for our obvious weight gains and hair losses.

Less than a month after I had arrived in RVN, I was in a battle for my life near the Village of Mai Loc. The date was August 3, 1970, the day I earned my "cavalry spurs" - or as it was - the Combat Infantry Badge. In our night defensive position, and hours before the battle started about 2300 hours, our platoon had sensed something unusual was going on beyond our perimeter. We were already on full alert when the encroaching NVA (North Vietnamese Army) soldiers were first spotted. Through the use of the infrared searchlight mounted on our platoon's M551 Sheridan tanks, one of our tank gunners picked up on the NVA's presence and kept close watch on their advance. The NVA were allowed to creep to our concertina wire when the command was given for the platoon to open fire with tank main gun canister (flechette) rounds, machine guns and rifles. At the cessation of the fire fight, two AH-1 Cobra helicopters arrived on the scene and were directed to blanket the NVA's assembly area with 20-mm cannon fire. The daybreak assessment of this major engagement showed how the 3rd Platoon had won a lopsided victory. We had incurred no losses yet virtually annihilated the attacking NVA unit. Except for only one NVA soldier known to have escaped, the NVA unit suffered 22 KIA (killed in action). The engagement at Mai Loc was designated as the Battle of Falcon Flats based on the 3rd Platoon's radio call sign of "Falcon" and the flatness of the terrain at the site.

During my time with the Falcons of the 3rd Platoon, we operated in and around the cities of Dong Ha and Quang Tri, the villages of Cam Lo and Mai Loc, the Vandergrift Combat Base, the fire support bases Alpha 4 and Charlie 2, and the areas of the A Chau Valley, Khe Sanh and The Rockpile. My last major operation with the 3rd Platoon was Dewey Canyon II from January 30 to April 6, 1971. As the final U.S. offensive in RVN, Dewey Canyon II was a massive operation with the dual mission to reopen and secure Route/QL 9 all the way west from Dong Ha to the Laotian border, and to reactivate the former U.S. Marine Corps combat base at Khe Sanh. The operation was necessary to support the major ARVN (South Vietnamese Army) offensive into Laos designated as Operation Lam Son 719 ("719" was the code for the year 1971 and Route 9).

I completed my tour with the 3/5 Cav as a SGT (MOS 11D40) and commander of Track 34, and departed RVN on June 21, 1971. Re-assigned to the 3rd Squadron (Thunder Squadron) of the 3rd Armored Cavalry at Fort Lewis WA, I served with L Troop until my discharge from the Army on October 7, 1971.

Upon my discharge, I returned to my home in Columbus and resumed employment with Ross Laboratories. While at Ross Labs I managed to juggle a schedule of night and day classes to earn the degree of Associate in Business Administration in

1980 from Franklin University in Columbus. At Ross Labs, I attained the position of supervisor of container manufacturing, and was able to retire in 2000 after a satisfying 31-year career.

My wife Ann is a great woman. We were married in 1974 and have five children, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Our only "real" travel before my retirement was to the Caribbean, but since my retirement Ann and I have traveled extensively throughout much of the United States, plus trips to Mexico and Canada. We yet want to spend some quality time in visiting the southwestern states. I have a passion for barbecuing. Over the years I have perfected my techniques to where I can cook eight slabs of ribs, a pork shoulder, a beef brisket and a turkey in my smoker at one time.



I am an active member of a variety of military organizations. My interest in them seems to be "in my blood." The groups include the American Legion, the Combat Infantrymen's Association (life member and Commander of the Columbus Company), the Disabled American Veterans (life member), the Veterans of Foreign Wars (life member), and the 3/5 Cavalry (Black Knights) Vietnam Association. I have been a member of the Black Knights' association since I discovered its website in 2003. Ann and I have attended every reunion since then to always appreciate our sense of belonging. Our Lady Black Knights deserve a lot of credit for accompanying their husbands, being supportive of our association and reunions, and letting the guys be together for all the possible good reasons to perpetuate our brotherhood.

Autobiography Edited & Posted: August 14, 2010