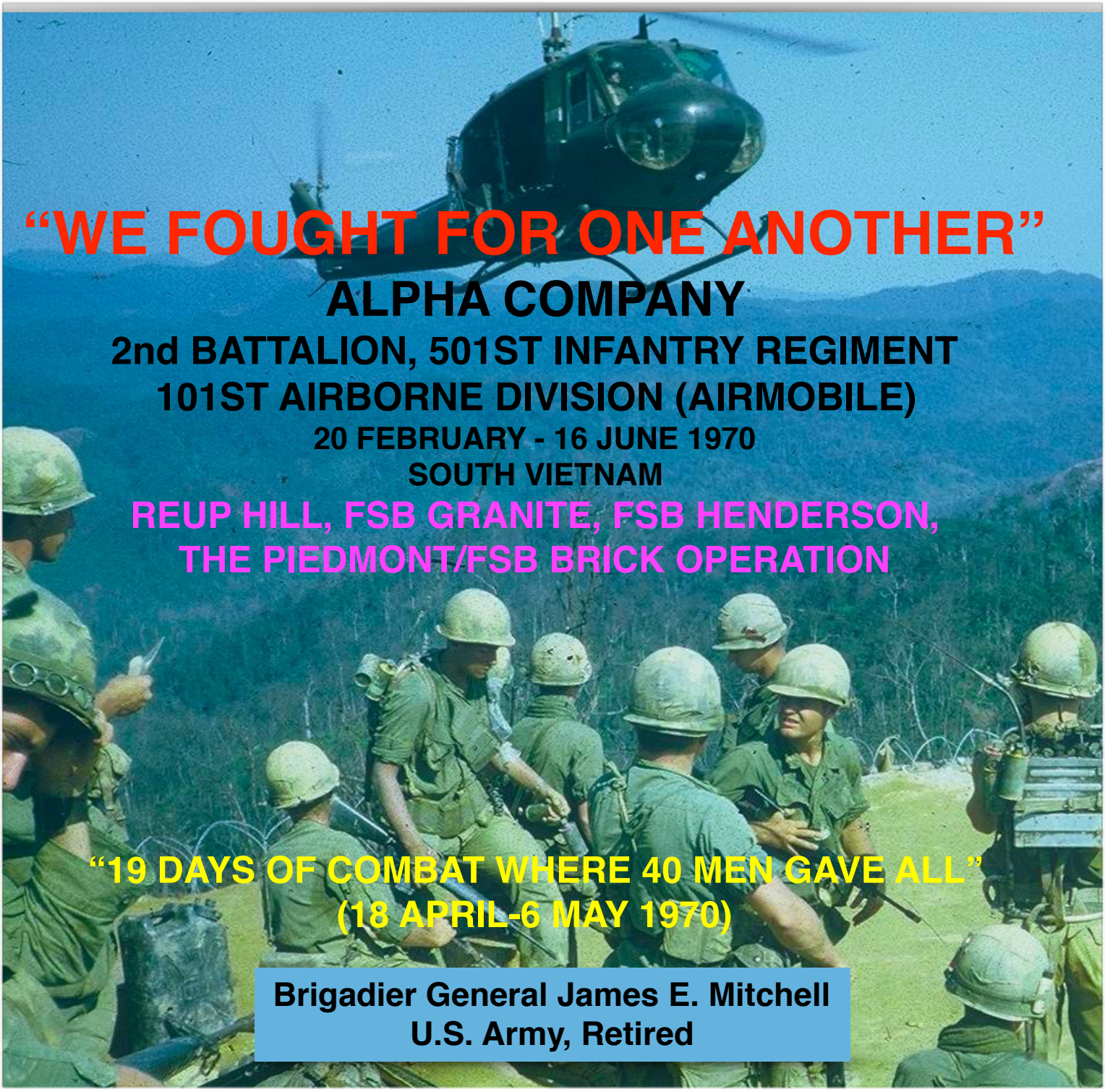

"WE FOUGHT FOR ONE ANOTHER"

ALPHA COMPANY

2nd BATTALION, 501ST INFANTRY REGIMENT
101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)

20 FEBRUARY - 16 JUNE 1970
SOUTH VIETNAM

REUP HILL, FSB GRANITE, FSB HENDERSON,
THE PIEDMONT/FSB BRICK OPERATION

"19 DAYS OF COMBAT WHERE 40 MEN GAVE ALL"
(18 APRIL-6 MAY 1970)

Brigadier General James E. Mitchell
U.S. Army, Retired


North Vietnam
Hanoi
Haiphong
LAOS
Gulf of Tonkin
Hainan (CHINA)
Vinh
Mekong
Demilitarized
101st ABN DIV (AMBL) OPERATIONAL AREA
Quang Tri
Hue
Da Nang
THAILAND
Kontum
Pleiku
Qui Nhon
CAMBODIA
Cam Ranh
South Vietnam
Phnom Penh
Saigon
Gulf of Thailand
South China Sea

“WE FOUGHT FOR ONE ANOTHER”

In memory of those I lost in battle and their families, loved ones, and friends….

For those of us who survived because "the lost" gave us the gift of another day….

For my loving wife of more than fifty years….Donna and my precious daughters….Beth, Kimberly, and Wendi, and my twelve wonderful grandchildren….Jon Michael, Jaime, Andrew, Lauren, Scotty, Mitchell, Bryant, Zachary, Halley, JT, Kailah, and Rebekah.

For my Dad...a WWII wounded infantryman and Korean War veteran. The only tears I ever saw on his face were plane-side in Tupelo, MS as he saw me off for Vietnam. Somehow he saw into my future.

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PREFACE

THE SETTING

The monsoon season began its rather predictable breakup of almost constant fog, mist, rain, and cloud cover over the northern reaches of Vietnam's jungle-covered Annamese mountain region in the early spring of 1970 providing the North Vietnamese forces and U.S/South Vietnamese forces in the I Corps region ample warning for the conflict to come. However, neither force could have anticipated that the last great U.S. offensive of a long and protracted war in Southeast Asia was about to take place. Monsoons, tropical storms, and typhoons (generally October through the February-March timeframe) had routinely cast a dent in major offensive operations in the mountains but with improving weather both friend and foe alike were ramping up for increased offensive operational activity. These traditional spring-to-early-fall large scale campaigns occurred as predictably as the seasonal weather changes in Vietnam but the spring and summer 1970 confrontation would be markedly different for the U.S. XXIVth Corps and the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) in the I Corps region from both a tactical, operational, and strategic perspective.

Almost a year earlier the U.S. casualty count (72 U.S. killed; 372 wounded-in-action) in the aftermath of the much publicized Battle of Hamburger Hill (Dong Ap Bia, Hill 937; 11 to 20 May 1969) had served as "fuel-to-the-fire" for the nation's now raging anti-war sentiment. Under enormous political pressure, President Richard Nixon (during a July 69 stop-over press conference in Guam) announced a significant strategic shift of direction for U.S. military forces in Southeast Asia (and around the world). No longer would the U.S. mission in Vietnam be to "seek out and destroy" the enemy. Henceforth, the U.S. national military strategy would radically change to providing U.S. military and economic assistance to nations around the world struggling against Communism **BUT no more Vietnam-style ground wars involving American troops.** The U.S. national security strategy hence forth would be focused on encouraging local military self-sufficiency, backed by U.S. air power and technical assistance, to assure security. During that same month of July 1969, while

visiting Vietnam, President Nixon met with and changed General Creighton Abrams' (Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command-Vietnam) orders so that they would be more consistent with the policies and objectives embedded in a new and substantially altered national military strategy. President Nixon told General Abrams: **"we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense. The primary mission of our troops is to enable the South Vietnamese forces to assume the full responsibility for the security of South Vietnam"**. Not only did President Nixon make radical changes to the U.S. military strategy for the war in Vietnam in July of 1969 but he would deliver a speech to the nation on November 3, 1969 outlining this strategic change and further told the nation that he had **changed General Abrams' mission** to match the nation's new strategic direction. Abrams would make clear to his staff that **the MACV mission was no longer "to seek out and destroy the enemy"**…**the mission had changed to "providing protection for the people of Vietnam"**. General Abrams would clarify to his subordinates that **"it is important that the command move away from the over-emphasized and often irrelevant 'body count' preoccupation. In order to provide security for the population our operations must succeed in neutralizing the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) and separating the enemy from the population. The enemy Main Forces and NVA are blind without the VCI. They cannot obtain intelligence, cannot obtain food, cannot prepare the battlefield, and cannot move unseen"**.

The very idea of such a radical change in the nation's war-fighting strategy (appropriately named "VIETNAMIZATION" by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird) fit many of General Abrams' subordinate commanders "like a hairy shirt" and the same was true for a significant portion of the U.S. war-fighters throughout the Department of Defense. Ironically, most of the Vietnamese military leadership (who we had trained and fought along side for almost a decade) rejected "Vietnamization" as well. More simply put, the Army's war-fighting culture and ethos were at stake...our strategic purpose traditionally had always been to seek out and destroy our enemies….to "fight and win" the nation's wars. A clear majority of the nation's most senior uniformed leadership were adamantly opposed to a "protect and pacify" role and mission for U.S. forces in Vietnam (or anywhere else in the world). (Today, a half century later, U.S. war-fighters continue to vigorously debate such "roles and missions").

This was the convoluted strategic setting for the spring and summer of 1970….one of competing grande strategies for how the nation should use its military forces, i.e., do we ”fight and win or protect and pacify”? In reality we were at war internally on multiple fronts…we now were faced with a conflicted and confused mission in Vietnam and a second and perhaps more serious conflict between (and within) our civilian leadership and the military establishment over rolls, missions, and purposes for use of military forces. The most immediate response to the nation’s newly imposed national military strategy was that General Abrams’ subordinates, for the most part, either ignored or purposefully planned operations that dismissed (or neglected) the primary components of “Vietnamization”. Many if not most of General Abrams’ immediate subordinates continued their operational planning as business-as-usual and, not surprisingly, fought exactly as they had been trained.

In April, 1970 (eight months after a Presidential "change of mission") the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), by order of MACV, would forego most of the tenants of the “Vietnamization Intent” in order to conduct the last large-scale offensive operation of the war in Vietnam and the only large-scale offensive operation approved by MACV in 1970.

Concurrent with President Nixon’s pronouncement of a new strategy of “Vietnamization” in July 1969 were immediate National Command Authority decisions for extensive reductions in U.S. troop strength (and combat units) currently operating in Vietnam. With these massive troop withdrawal decisions came commensurate cuts in logistical resupply and the stream of personnel replacements programmed into the theater. Troop withdrawal decisions in 1969 came swiftly and each incremental reduction of forces would dramatically change the U.S. combat footprint in Vietnam. For example, in July 1969 U.S. troop strength was approximately 537,000…by July 1970 U.S. troop strength had plunged to about 404,000! In those twelve months about 133,000 troops (and scores of unit flags) had (or were) returning home…an average of more than 11,000 personnel per month. (Withdrawals would accelerate at an even faster pace from July 70 to July 71 with personnel drawdowns of almost 15,000 personnel per month). As scores of units “cased their colors” for their return home other combatants designated to remain in theater were suddenly faced with a host of cascading new and challenging mission requirements. Commanders in Vietnam were confronted with: (1) the introduction, integration, and execution of a radically new national military strategy; (2)

an in-theater and a national debate over “revised” rolls and missions of U.S. Military Forces, and (3) the immediate assumption of substantially more risks to be assumed in the combat theater as a result of drastic reductions in combat capability throughout the region of conflict.

By the spring of 1970 the 101st Airborne Division’s operational area (and area of interest) had expanded perhaps three times its original size. The 3rd Marine Division on its northern flank along the DMZ had redeployed in 1969 leaving only one brigade of the 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) in the north. The 1st Marine Division which had been operating on the 101st’s southern flank had begun redeployment and would conduct its last battalion-size operation in the summer of 1970. The battle-space from Da Nang north to the DMZ and west to the Laotian border that had once held at least four or more U.S./ARVN division equivalents was now held by the last remaining fully manned U.S. division in Vietnam, the U.S. 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) and the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN). Essentially the I Corps (and XXIVth Corps) area of operations (and area of interest) had lost at least half or more of its ground combat power from 1969 to 1970 and such circumstances did not go unnoticed by the North Vietnamese. In fact, while U.S. strategic intelligence analysts were touting a reduced flow of North Vietnamese forces into South Vietnam in the 1969-1970 timeframe nothing could have been farther from the truth in the northern reaches of South Vietnam. Both the Khmer Rouge insurgents (in Cambodia) and the North Vietnamese were quick to interpret the new U.S. military strategy and announced U.S. troop withdrawals as a sign of weakness and/or lack of resolve (national will) to continue the fight and each adversary began to make preparations for more aggressive offensive operations. The grande strategists in our enemy’s camps not only welcomed “Vietnamization” they took immediate and decisive military action to advance their military and political objectives long before the U.S. XXIVth Corps spring offensive of 1970 was planned. Between 1969 and 1970 the North Vietnamese began posturing forces to invade the south in earnest with significant troop infiltrations and logistical buildup in the canopied Annamite regional sanctuaries. The North Vietnamese committed at least three or more regular Infantry divisions in their effort (the 324B Infantry Division, 304B Infantry Division, the 308th Infantry Division, and possibly the 325th Infantry Division) to block U.S./ARVN incursions into the Annamite mountain range (the Day Truong Son) well before execution of MACV OPERATION TEXAS STAR. Our adversaries were prepared

militarily to do whatever was necessary to enhance the buildup of base logistical areas and protect routes of movement linked to their strategic initiatives for the eventual invasion of South Vietnam. XXIVth Corps (the 101st Airborne Division's higher headquarters, located in Da Nang) Operational Report-Lessons Learned for the period ending 1 April 1970 reported: the 246th Infantry Regiment (NVA) and 27th Infantry Regiment (NVA) deployed south of the DMZ to north and west of FSB Fuller-Camp Carroll-Mai Loc area. The 66th Infantry Regiment (NVA) infiltrated from Laos into the upper Da Krong Valley. The 803rd Infantry Regiment (NVA), the 812th Infantry Regiment (NVA), and the 29th Infantry Regiment (NVA) advanced steadily eastward developing the western Annamese range into a fortress from which to launch multi-regional operations into the lowlands. By the end of March 1970, the 29th Infantry Regiment (NVA) established itself west of FSB Bastogne and the 803rd Infantry Regiment (NVA) was just northwest of the 29th Infantry Regiment (NVA).

Such was the setting for the last great U.S. Brigade/Divisional offensive operation in the war in South Vietnam. At the **strategic level** the U.S. had conceded defeat by the North Vietnamese under President Nixon's July 1969 "Vietnamization" announcement. At the **operational level** in the theater there could be no victory either due to troop/logistical reductions, the national debate over U.S. "rolls and missions", and the in-theater conflict of "do we protect and pacify" or "search and destroy". However, at the **tactical level** there were countless battles and skirmishes by small units to be fought and won and time after time the "grunts" on the ground won them. In the purest sense the real war-fighters who remained in the theater and occupied "the tip of the spear" were left with only one real purpose….to FIGHT FOR ONE ANOTHER….and that is exactly what we did!).

That said, the "final solution" for the decade-long conflict in Southeast Asia had been declared by President Nixon in the summer of 1969….we had deferred to our adversary...South Vietnam would soon to be ripe for the taking by the Communist North...it was just a matter of time.

GLOSSARY

ACL- Allowable Cargo Load; a term used to determine weight (number of soldiers an aircraft can carry) based on "air-density altitude".
ADC-O-Assistant Division Commander for Operations
ADC-S-Assistant Division Commander for Support
AK-47-7.62mm automatic rifle; some with folding metal stocks called the AK- 50; the common weapon of the North Vietnamese soldier.
AO-Area of Operations
ARA-Aerial Rocket Artillery; most often fired from the AH-1 Cobra Helicopter.
ARVN-Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BMNT-Begin Morning Nautical Twilight
CA-Combat Assault; most often used as a description of an air-assault movement utilizing helicopters.
C&C- a Command and Control Aircraft
C-Ration-the standard field ration for most soldiers tactically deployed in RVN
CCP-Casualty Collection Point
C-141-U.S. Air Force heavy transport jet aircraft primarily used for transcontinental flight.
C4-a form of plastic explosive most often distributed in one pound blocks
CG-Commanding General
Chalk-a numerical designation of a lift of one helicopter in a series of helicopters
Chinook-the name of the U.S. CH-47 medium lift transport helicopter
CIDG-Civilian Irregular Defense Group
Claymore-an individually employed directional antipersonnel mine employed in the defense or used during ambush operations
CO-Commanding Officer
Cobra-the AH series heavily armed helicopter most often employing 2.75 inch rockets and a 40mm grenade launcher

COMUSMACV- Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Viet Nam
CP-Command Post
"Danger Close"-a term to describe indirect fires employed closer than 400 meters to friendly forces; normally required command clearance.
DEROS-date eligible for return from overseas service
Direct Support-a command relationship among units
DMZ-Demilitarized Zone- the boundary between North and South Vietnam
"Dust Off"-to aerially evacuate for medical reasons or the slang term to describe the UH-1 medical evacuation helicopter
EENT-End Evening Nautical Twilight
ENLISTED RANKS

PVT- Private
PFC- Private First Class
SP/4-Specialist Fourth Class
SGT- Sergeant
SSG- Staff Sergeant
SFC- Sergeant First Class
MSG- Master Sergeant
SGM- Sergeant Major
CSM-Command Sergeant Major

FA-Field Artillery
FAC-Forward Air Controller
FDC-Fire Direction Center (Artillery); coordination center for artillery fires
FO-Forward Observer (artillery/mortars/other indirect fires
Fougasse-jellyed fuel and flame munition (IED) often employed by U.S. forces in 55 gallon barrels around fire support base perimeter defenses
FSB-Fire Support Base
FSSE-Forward Supply and Service Element
G1- Personnel Staff Officer, Division level or higher
G2- Intelligence Staff Officer, Division level or higher
G3- Operations and Training Staff Officer, Division level or higher
G4- Logistics Staff Officer, Division level or higher
GPS- Global Positioning System
"GRUNT"-a slang term used to describe an infantryman
GSR-Ground Surveillance Radar
GVN-Government of Vietnam
HE-High Explosive

High-Drag Munitions-Air Force munitions equipped with umbrella-like folding fins that deploy to decelerate the bomb to improve accuracy on the target
H&I-harassing and interdicting indirect fires (usually artillery and mortars)
Huey-the UH-1 helicopter most often used for troop movement and aerial resupply
IED-Improvised Explosive Device
Jungle Penetrator-a three-pronged device, lowered from a helicopter (UH-1), to extract personnel by air when no LZ or basket recovery is possible
KIA-Killed-In-Action
Kit Carson Scout-an enemy soldier who had "flipped" to the ARVN side and worked with U.S. units.
LAW-a shoulder fired U.S. Light Antitank Weapon (often used on fortified positions
LOH-Light Observation Helicopter; most often an OH-6
LP-Listening Post
LRRP Rations-Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol field ration packaged in plastic
LZ-Landing Zone; most often used for helicopter landing/take-off
MACV-Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MASH-Mobile Army Surgical Hospital
MEDEVAC- Medical Evacuation
MGRS- Military Grid Reference System (the grid system superimposed on a map sheet in order to determine an alpha-numeric reference for a specific location.
MI-Military Intelligence
MIA-Missing-In-Action
MTT-Mobile Training Team
M16-the standard U.S. military 5.56mm automatic rifle
M60-the standard U.S. military 7.62mm light machine gun
M79-the standard U.S. military single shot 40mm grenade launcher (later replaced by the M203)
NCO-Noncommissioned Officer
NDP-Night Defensive Position
NVA-North Vietnamese Army
OFFICER RANKS
2LT- Second Lieutenant

1LT- First Lieutenant
CPT- Captain
MAJ- Major
LTC- Lieutenant Colonel
COL- Colonel
BG- Brigadier General (1 Star)
MG- Major General (2 Star)
LTG- Lieutenant General (3 Star)
GEN- General (4 Star)

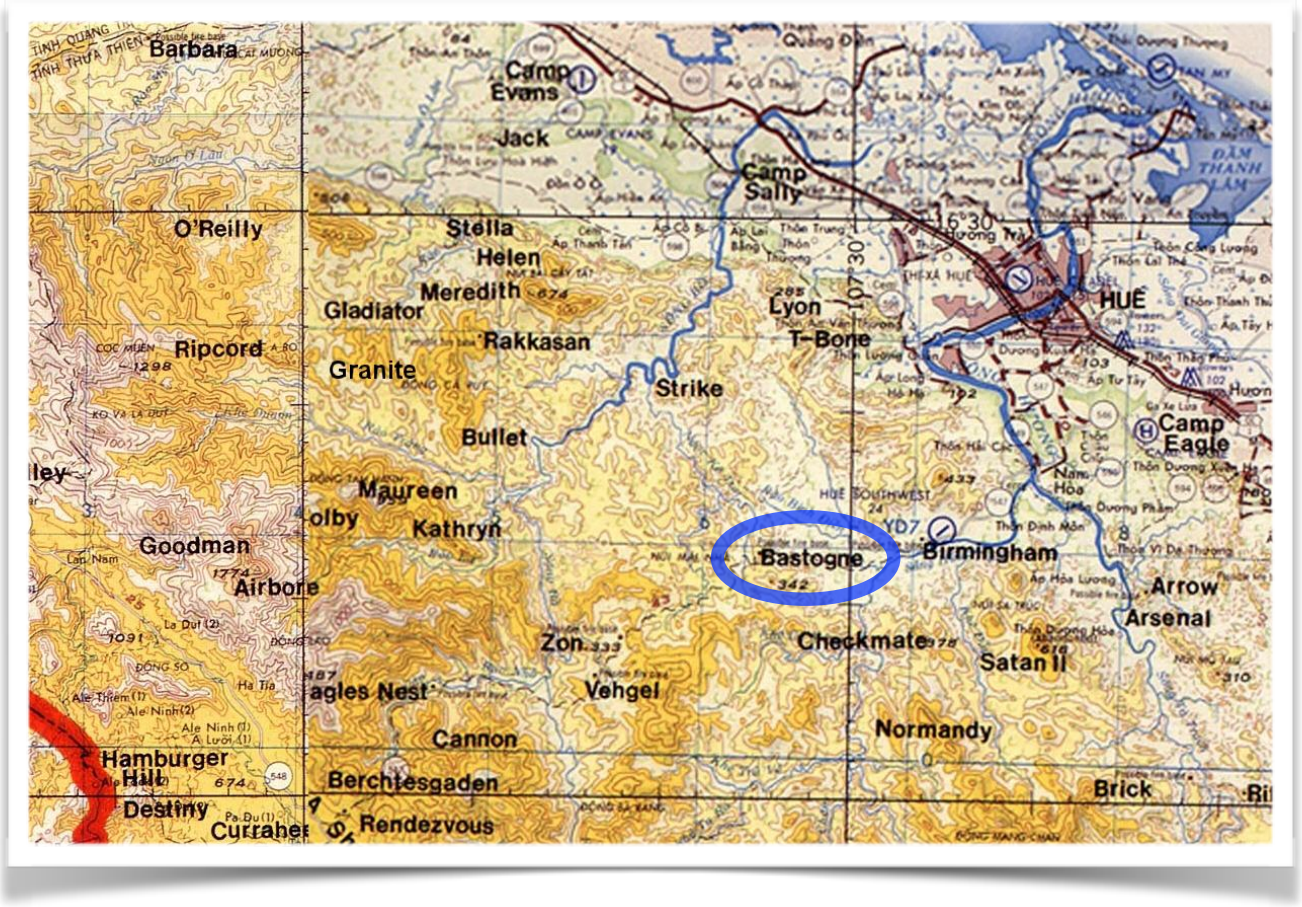
OH-6 (Cayuse)-U.S. Army helicopter primarily used for light reconnaissance and security; often armed with a 7.62mm machine-gun
OPCON-Operational Control; normally a temporary command relationship between units
PAVN-People's Army of Vietnam; another name for the NVA
Phantom- a U.S. Air Force F-4 fighter-bomber often used for close air support
Pink Team-one Scout Helicopter (usually an OH-6 Cayuse) and one Cobra gunship (AH-1)
PL-Platoon Leader
Point Man-the lead soldier during a tactical movement
PRC-25-the standard man-portable radio carried by infantry squads, platoon, and companies
PSG-Platoon Sergeant
PSP-pierced steel planking
PZ-Pickup Zone; normally referring to helicopter operations for troop or supply movement
Red Leg-slang for every Artilleryman
REUP-to reenlist in the Army
RF/PF-Regional Force/Popular Force units of the RVN
RPG-Rocket-Propelled Grenade-a shoulder-fired rocket assisted anti-armor weapon more often used against fortified positions or massed troops.
RPD-standard communist 7.62 light machine gun
RRC-Radio Research Company
RTO-Radio-telephone Operator
RVN-Republic of Vietnam
S1-Personnel Officer at battalion/brigade level
S2-Intelligence Officer at battalion/brigade level
S3-Operations Officer at battalion/brigade level

S4-Logistics Officer at battalion/brigade level
Sapper-an infantryman trained in engineer breaching skills to penetrate defensive positions (usually at night)
Satchel Charge- a crudely built NVA improvised explosive device most often used against fortified positions and/or troop concentrations
"SHADOW"-an Air Force AC-119 equipped with 20mm cannon to engage ground targets
SITREP-Situation Report
Slack Man or "Slack"-the 2nd soldier in the line of tactical movement providing security for the "Point Man"
"SLICK"- a UH-1 (Huey) used for troop/logistical air transport
"SNAKE"-an AH-1 (Cobra) attack helicopter
"SOP"- Standing Operating Procedure; standard method or established way of doing something
"SPOOKY" (or "Puff")-an Air Force AC-47D armed to engage ground targets.
"STINGER"-AC-119 Air Force Gunship
TAC CP-Tactical Command Post
TACP-Tactical Air Control Party
TOC-Tactical Operations Center
USAF-United States Air Force
USARV-United States Army Vietnam
VC-Viet Cong
VCI-Viet Cong Infrastructure
WIA-Wounded-In-Action
XO-Executive Officer

PROLOGUE

20 February 1970; Fire Support Base Bastogne (YD626096); South Vietnam; Thua Thien Province (southwest of Hue and along Highway 547).

"TODAY WOULD CHANGE MY LIFE FOREVER"



On February 20th 1970, I was a twenty-five year old newly promoted infantry captain (18 days in grade) and well into my fifth month of an anticipated one year tour with the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) fighting in the northern most sector (I Corps) of South Vietnam. I had been on active duty for two years and eighteen days and had arrived in Vietnam on 11 October 1969 having previously served as a mechanized infantry platoon leader and company commander (A Company) in the 2nd Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment (Mechanized), 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) in Europe for approximately one year. Oddly enough, I had been promoted

twice (to First Lieutenant and Captain) but never in the U.S. and I'd never served a single day in a stateside tactical unit. Only four days earlier I had reluctantly given up command of E (Echo) Company, 2nd Battalion, 501st

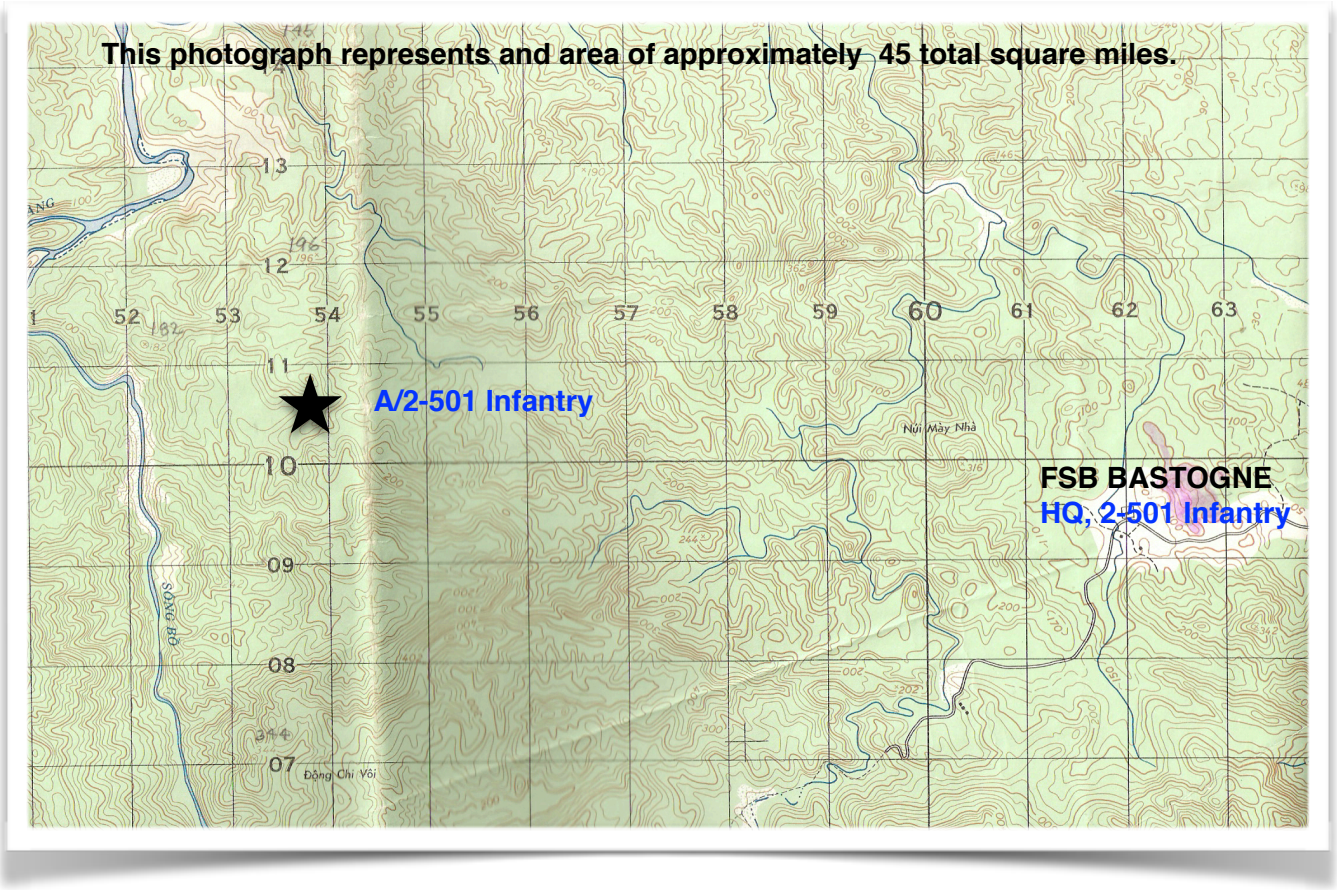
Infantry Regiment (Geronimo) to be reassigned to the staff as the Battalion's Intelligence Officer (S2). This would be my third job change in Vietnam in less than five months and my fifth assignment change in about a year's time. I could not have imagined at sunrise on the 20th that assignment number six to command A Company, 2-501 Infantry would come before this day ended. (Sometimes I questioned whether or not I could ever keep a job in the Army long enough to figure it out!)

I was now an intelligence staff officer (S2) in a combat battalion and anxious to get on with the requisite on-the-job-training. I had no intelligence training at all, never had a single day of staff training or staff experience, and frankly I had absolutely no idea what my new assignment entailed but I accepted the posting with a degree of excitement and challenge. Most importantly, I saw this new job as a unique opportunity for me to make significant contributions to the fight in the surrounding jungle-covered hills. I knew from conversations with the battalion's veteran leadership that there was a critical requirement to improve collection and dissemination of near real-time tactical intelligence. Our rifle company commanders out in the canopy around FSB Bastogne were in desperate need of actionable relevant assessments of the enemy situation, activity, locations, capabilities, and probable courses of action as they actively patrolled and ambushed within their assigned operational areas. Even in my first four days on the job I had been working literally around the clock to develop a rather detailed set of plans to address a host of serious intelligence shortcomings and I was more than anxious to get on with my plan's implementation.

February 20th in the 2-501 Infantry Tactical Operations Center (TOC), (my place of business on Bastogne) began as "business as usual". As the battalion's "nerve center" the TOC was the focal point and hub for all operational activity within the battalion and responsible for continuous twenty-four hour communications with our forward-deployed rifle companies (the 2-501 Infantry Battalion was organized with a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, four Rifle Companies [A thru D], and E Company with its Ground Surveillance Radar Section, 81mm Mortar Platoon, and the Battalion Reconnaissance Platoon). The staff members assigned to the TOC were a carefully selected group of "professionals", both officer and enlisted, and numbered less than a dozen or so per shift. Their missions included but were not limited to providing early morning and evening updates to leaders regarding all operational events and activities,

manning a suite of radios linked to subordinate units and higher headquarters, maintaining maps and overlays, and producing and/or distributing plans, orders, and overlays for all current and projected battalion operational activity. Around-the-clock, anything and everything that happened operationally in the 2-501 flowed through the TOC and was logged for either “action required” or for historical purposes in the battalion’s “Daily Staff Journal”.

Sometime during the early to mid-morning hours on the 20th I recall hearing the battalion’s command radio net suddenly surge with a series of urgent reports (and requests) indicating that A Company was “in contact” with an North Vietnamese Army (NVA) force of unknown size approximately six miles northwest of us near the Song Bo River, north of abandoned Fire Support Base Veghel. A Company was reporting U.S. casualties along with requests for artillery support, aerial medical evacuation, and helicopter gunship support. The sense of urgency in the TOC always peaked under such circumstances and our seasoned radio operators were absolute



masters in handling such traffic. In fact, in a matter of seconds our whole suite of radios were abuzz as operators documented the fight, relayed requests for additional support, and reported information to our higher headquarters. At the same time our TOC radio operators were monitoring A Company's internal net, the fire support net, the battalion command net, and the brigade command net simultaneously in order to understand and document more precisely what was happening on the ground. For me, even as the new S2, there was a nagging sense of helplessness in that we always seemed to lag in our ability to "see the fight". Those of us in the TOC seemed to always be slow in cutting through "the fog of war" in order to document/anticipate/respond appropriately to the needs of men on the ground directly engaged in the close combat we all knew was taking place. (I would learn in the years to come to accept this as "the norm" under circumstances of combat crisis monitoring and management).

Within minutes of A Company's report of the "contact" the TOC received notification that among the casualties were two U.S. soldiers killed-in-action

(KIA) and a number of others wounded. Collectively our hearts sank. Radios continued their incessant and elevated "chatter" but TOC operations and radio operators became eerily restrained. The loud "barks" of sharing information and instruction ceased almost immediately. We had been notified of the loss of two of our own and we were grieving as a family of warriors despite our separation from the battle itself. Later we would learn that the "Drive On" Battalion and A Company had lost **2LT David A. Hockett** and **SGT Victor Zaragoza** killed-in-action. In retrospect, I don't recall ever being in the TOC when fatalities were reported but to this day I can't adequately describe the raw emotions displayed in our headquarters miles from the fight.

Many of us were huddled around all our radios as reporting of the fight continued and at one point I recall hearing my own radio call sign come over the battalion command net (which had never happened before). The instructions I received certainly rattled my composure and the radio transmission to me personally went something like this, "S-2…get your rucksack and rifle and meet "Driver" (our Battalion Commander) at the helicopter pad…he will update you in flight". I quickly grabbed my M16, steel helmet, load-bearing equipment that hung along the TOC wall, and dashed to my bunker nearby to secure my rucksack. Fortunately I had learned to keep my personal "fighting load" ready at all times, to include ammunition, rations, and water. (This would become a trademark I would maintain throughout my career while assigned to a tactical organization). Then I literally sprinted the one hundred meters or so to meet Lieutenant Colonel Bobby F. Brashears at the PZ (Pickup Zone). When his Command and Control (C&C) UH-1 "Huey" touched down on Bastogne's logistical pad I tossed my ruck into the aircraft next to the door gunner and quickly jumped on board. Settling into the aircraft's bench-webbed seats I was immediately handed a communications head-set by Major Jim O'Connell, our Battalion Operations Officer (S-3). As our aircraft lifted off of Bastogne and turned westward Colonel Brashears told me over the aircraft intercom that Colonel Ray Kampe (2nd Brigade Commander) had made the decision to "relieve" (remove from command) Captain Clarence Donaldson (our A Company Commander) and I had been selected to replace him. Needless to say I was stunned…speechless…. shocked might be the better word. I certainly thought I had a reasonable grasp for what had transpired at A Company's location earlier that morning from the radio reports we had been monitoring in the TOC but a requirement to abruptly change company

commanders was absent from anything I had heard. For me the decision to relieve A Company's commander was both confusing and numbing. I had no idea why or under what circumstances our leadership had lost confidence in Captain Donaldson but I recall feeling an immediate deep sense of remorse for him personally (and for A Company as well). At the same time however I was elated to be offered a second company command in the 2-501. An opportunity to command a rifle company had been my initial request to LTC Brashears during our first encounter back in October 69 however he had assigned me to C Company as a rifle platoon leader and a few weeks later he moved me to command E Company. Needless to say I was more than humbled by LTC Brashear's confidence in me to lead A Company but equally apprehensive of his expectations under such unusual circumstances. I was also quite fearful of how A Company would accept me as their new leader once I joined them on the ground amidst the fight that was still in progress.

As our helicopter banked hard left and bled off air speed on "short-final" into A Company's one-ship landing zone (LZ) just east of the Song Bo River I recall being given specific instructions (over the aircraft intercom) for exiting the Huey. I was told to exit on one side of the aircraft as soon as the skids touched ground and Captain Donaldson would enter on the opposite side. I knew instinctively that we needed to execute the exchange as quickly as possible for the safety of our command group and aircraft (with its crew of four). Colonel Brashears also said he would give me further instructions once he was airborne. (Since those anxious moments I've ofter laughed that I was really nothing more than "a low kick-out" new commander for A Company). Captain Donaldson and I made the exchange precisely as we had been directed without a word or hardly a glance toward one another and the C&C aircraft departed in a matter of a few seconds. As LTC Brashears' Huey lifted off of A Company's LZ I was left laying alone, face down and prone, on the small tight one-ship hole in the jungle surrounded by thick, lush jungle canopy.

I didn't know a single person in A Company…not one, but I was their new commander and now firmly planted in their midst like an incoming mail bag. The noise of my boss's Huey quickly diminished as it gained altitude and distance from the LZ and I recall hearing sporadic small-arms fire a few hundred or so meters further south. About the same moment as quiet began to settle on the LZ I heard a single voice from the edge of the jungle canopy and as best I recall the words went something like this: "Hey

Captain….you better get your *** over here before you get it shot off!". I immediately responded by moving toward the sound of the friendly voice coming from the LZ's southern edge and I came face-to-face with A Company's Artillery Forward Observer, 1LT Russell Cook. After a brief introduction I asked Russ for a quick situation report and he complied pointing on his map toward the general locations of our platoons and an approximate direction of the last skirmish with the NVA. About the same time the company radio operators (Lewis, Boyd, Brothers, Jones, and Smith as best I recall) joined us and I gave instructions for our command element to immediately prepare to move south toward the last sounds of the fight. As best I recollect, (and before we began to move) I gave radio instructions to my three platoon leaders to consolidate themselves and prepare to move as well. Concurrent with my instructions to our platoons LTC Brashears radioed giving me orders to continue operations south in the direction the NVA had withdrawn and generally toward abandoned Fire Support Base Veghel three or four miles further south. Essentially our mission had not changed. A Company would continue to "search and destroy and conduct squad-sized ambushes at night" along likely enemy avenues of movement and infiltration in the AO (area of operations) I had hurriedly grease-penciled onto my map.

My assumption of command was certainly a traumatic experience for me personally and I believe the same was true for the men of A Company given the unusual circumstances of my arrival. However, my unpredicted arrival on scene and sudden replacement of Captain Donaldson was absolutely nothing to compare with the tragic loss of Dave Hockett and Vic Zaragoza only an hour or so earlier. Although I had not been privileged to know or lead either of these two warriors I quickly learned that both men were highly respected and admired leaders whose loss would not be quickly overcome. To this day we mourn their loss and remember both of them and their families forever. As best I remember we made no more contact with the North Vietnamese elements in our area of operations and exited our operational area by air-assault from FSB Veghel a week or so later eventually returning to Camp Sally (our battalion rear area). The brief forty-eight hour "stand-down" at Sally gave us time to recover, refit, rearm, and prepare for reinsertion into the 2-501 operational area . We lost two other soldiers (killed/died of wounds) during the month of March while we operated on or around Fire Support Base Bastogne. **Robert Goosen** died of wounds on 13 March (he had sustained a penetrating head wound on 7

February and was evacuated to the Hospital Ship Sanctuary) and **Daniel Kohl** was killed by an errant “friendly” 155mm artillery round fired from FSB Birmingham on the night of March 31st while standing watch atop his bunker on FSB Bastogne.

A Company’s brief respite (at Camp Sally) from the routine ambushes and search and destroy operations under the jungle canopy was a more than welcome opportunity for me to begin to get to know the leaders and soldiers I was privileged to serve (and for the unit to get to know me as well). As I recall, after the pause at Camp Sally we returned by air to FSB Bastogne for our rotation of fire base defense duties. The short break at Camp Sally also gave me a chance to see many of A Company’s soldiers in our rear area and a rare opportunity to sit down with **First Sergeant Guillermo R. Costello**, our company's senior noncommissioned officer. Given the circumstances (and conditions) under which we operated, rifle company commanders got precious little face-to-face time with the majority of the men doing the fighting (and I hated that). In fact, on missions other than defending a fire support base, company commanders could go weeks without ever meeting with each of their platoons. Throughout the time we were under the canopy in the Bastogne AO the 2-501’s rifle companies were usually operating with at least two of their three rifle platoons separated from the company headquarters. More often than not all three rifle platoons (approximately 30-40 soldiers each) operated separately from the company headquarters. We were saturation-patrolling beneath the canopy in search of the NVA during the daylight hours and at night each platoon sent out three rifle squads (approximately 10 soldiers per squad) each to ambush likely enemy routes of movement. Routinely each rifle company would report nine or ten ambushes each night; each squad was separated from other squads by at least four hundred meters or more for safety purposes. With missions under the canopy running three weeks or sometimes more and with such a “mission-tasking” there was precious little time for a commander to be in the presence of all his men. (I preferred to operate with my command group of ten or more men separate from our three rifle platoons….we were greater in numbers than any squad in the company and fully capable of ambushing by ourselves each night). For command and control purposes I always planned movement of my command group to a night ambush location that provided adequate communications with my platoon leaders. At the same time I generally

centered my CP within the three platoons and squads as they fanned out to cover likely routes of enemy movement or infiltration.

I recall vividly that my tactical intent from the day I assumed command of A Company was to somehow convey my own “offensive spirit” to not only the company’s leadership but to every soldier in the unit. My message to every member of A Company was simple: We were in the jungle to find, fix, and kill, (or capture) the enemy we faced….that was our mission. In contrast, I knew that some units (and some individuals) were more inclined to be in a “search and avoid” mode however I would do everything possible to both inculcate and inspire an “offensive spirit”. I knew we were better soldiers; we were better armed; we had a distinct firepower advantage; we were better led; and most importantly we could out maneuver the opposition in every fight (in the air or on the ground) because of our unique decentralized decision-making. I tried to make my message to my subordinate leaders as simple as I possibly could…in the jungle we would remain “on the offensive”; we would maintain the tactical advantage and I would always do my best to pick the place and time for decisive combat. When we found the NVA I planned as a matter of first priority, to “fix” them with both supporting direct and indirect fires and then (and only then) would I make the decision to commit elements of A Company by maneuver to finish the fight. As a rifle company I wanted every soldier to know that I was relentlessly looking for a fight, not avoiding one; we all would stay offensively oriented and our “offensive ethos" would prevail as long as I was in command. As an aside, I’m not certain everyone understood my war-fighting philosophy given our oft-times dispersals but I believe my platoon leaders understood and committed themselves to my intent and I deemed that critical.

April 1970 brought with it a monumental “change of mission” for the 2-501 Infantry Regiment and a reassignment that not only restructured our chain of command but also changed our operational area as well. By Division Order 2-70 we would leave our assignment to the 2nd Brigade and be placed under the operational control of the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). We were moving north to a substantially different area of operations several miles north of our Bastogne AO bisected by Highway 547 and we would be facing a significantly greater enemy threat buildup in an even more mountainous region. A new Division Operations Order 2-70, effective 1 April 1970, laid the plans to counter a significant NVA infiltration and buildup in the mountains north and west of Bastogne.

Ultimately our reassignment and change in area of operations would lead us to some of the most intensive combat anyone had seen in Vietnam since the war began.

Three significant A Company battles in the April-May 1970 timeframe (while I was commanding A Company) are described in chapters one through three that follow; chapter four is a summation of of my last missions with the company. As the A Company Commander, I've tried to document them as best I remember them. I make no effort here to document specific squad and platoon engagements but leave such descriptions to the individual soldiers, squad leaders, and platoon leaders involved. Above all else I wrote these personal accounts of the REUP Hill, Granite, Henderson, Piedmont Hills, and Brick operations as best I remember them for historical purposes in order to honor the brave warriors we lost (both killed and wounded) and to remind the rest of us that we were just "survivors" of the spring and summer offensive of 1970.

IN MEMORIUM

ROBERT HENRY GOOSEN

Died of wounds 13 March 1970
Wounded 7 February
Hostile; died of multiple fragmentation wounds.
MOS 11B(Infantryman); SP/4; A Company, 2-501 Infantry.
Muskegon, Michigan

DANIEL KYE KOHL

Died 31 March 1970
Non-hostile/accident; friendly artillery on FSB Bastogne
11B(Infantryman); SP/4; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Denver, Colorado

VICTOR ZARAGOZA

Killed-In-Action 20 February 1970
Gun or small arms fire
11B(Infantryman); SGT; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Holtville, California

DAVID ALLEN HOCKETT

Killed-In-Action 20 February 1970
Multiple fragmentation wounds
1542(Infantry Unit Commander); 2LT; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Richmond, Indiana

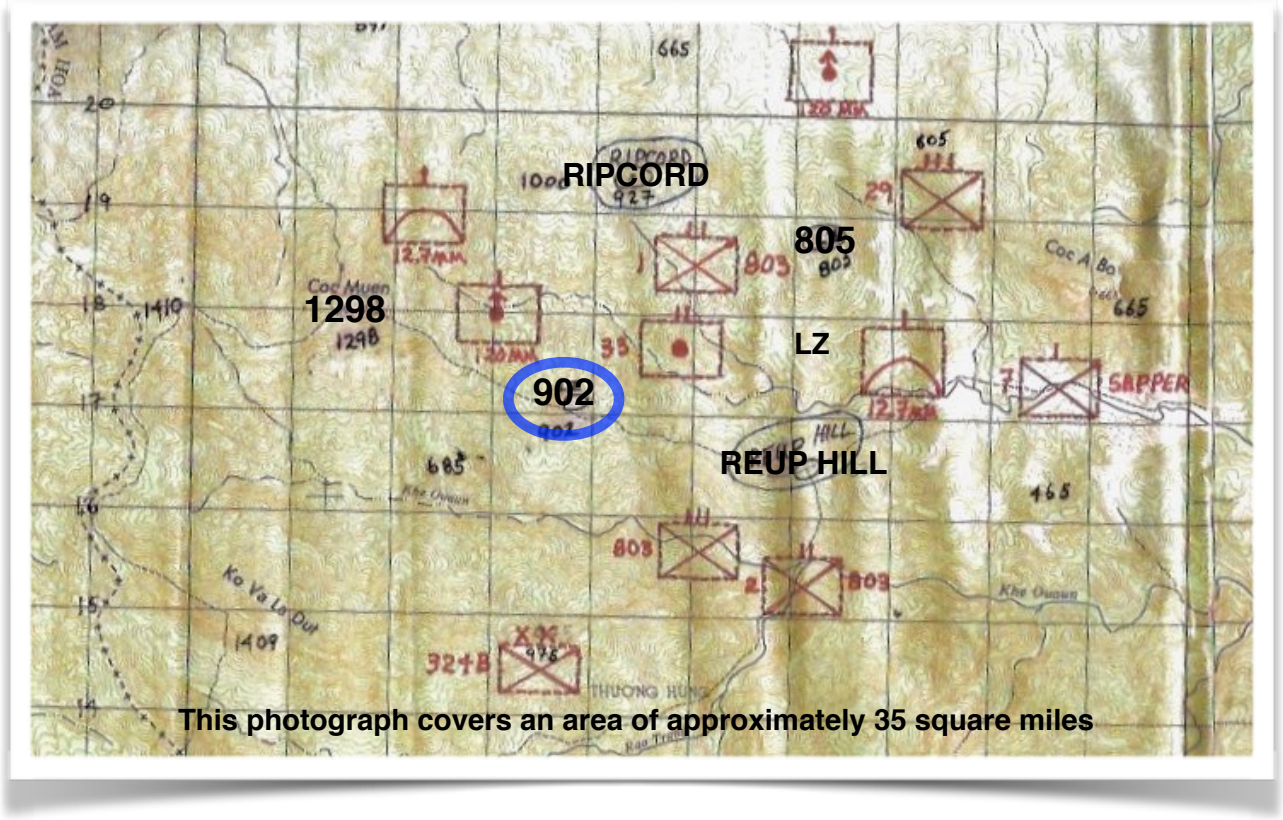
*SGT Vic Zaragoza and 2LT Dave Hockett were both killed-in-action less than two hours before I assumed command of A Company. Their names are listed as members of my casualty count out of profound respect for both of these superb infantrymen. Both of these men were loved and admired by those who worked with and for them and their loss had an immediate and lasting effect on me and all others in A Company.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FIGHT FOR REUP HILL

A Company, 2nd Battalion, 501st Infantry
101st Airborne Division (Airmobile)

"If the battlefield, according to the map/overlay below of suspected North Vietnamese (NVA) unit locations (**marked in red**), looked like this when I led A Company into the landing zone (LZ) at or near Hill 902 on or about



the 8th of April 1970, why didn't I have this kind of intelligence?" This simple question haunted me throughout my military career; sometimes even kept me awake at night; even challenged me as a professional soldier for more than thirty years. As I progressed through the ranks of both grade and command responsibilities I promised myself to do my best to NEVER lead the nation's finest warriors into similar UNKNOWN circumstances again and thankfully, I did not.

According to the 101st Airborne Division's G2 (Intelligence) Section, the units drawn in red on the previous map were the North Vietnamese SUSPECTED LOCATIONS at or near the time of our insertion into the fight. The truth is we air-assaulted into in the middle of a hornet's nest; right into the center of the 324B Division (NVA) forward deployed infantry regiments (the 803rd, 29th, 812th, and 6th Regional Force) whose strength amounted to at least fifteen to eighteen infantry battalions and their supporting 122mm artillery, 12.7mm anti-aircraft machine-guns, plus the large and very dangerous 7th Sapper Battalion. As the commander of A Company I didn't have a single scrap of intelligence to confirm any of these suspected enemy locations! To this day I cannot imagine a more fatal mistake in the distribution of battlefield intelligence to war-fighters on the ground and yet such blunders during this ill-fated operation would unfold over and over again as the TEXAS STAR operational days went by and U.S. casualties continued to mount. The grunts on the ground executing their own battles in the jungled mountains fought valiantly along the trailed ridge lines, deep stream beds, the precious LZ's, and fire bases and never lost a fight. However, for most of the spring and early summer of 1970 back at Camp Eagle and Camp Evans the intelligence and operational disconnects and blunders in decision-making appeared to mount at an alarming rate. Time after time understrength rifle companies were launched as single entities "piece-meal" into the fight just "chasing terrain". Sadly, the dissemination of near real-time tactical intelligence to those of us responsible for executing these ground operations was simply nonexistent. The senior leadership responsible for planning and execution of the 101st's spring 1970 offensive seemed to cast aside a goodly number of the principles of war, the basic tenets of offensive operations, lessons learned in almost a decade of fighting in Vietnam, and most importantly the strategic setting. The end results can best be described in the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) Operations Report - Lessoned Learned (dated 15 August 1970) Record of U.S. Casualties for the period 1 April until 31 Jul. Casualty figures for OPERATION TEXAS STAR were: 269 Killed-in-Action; 1,312 Wounded-in-Action; 18 Missing-in-Action; 42 Non-Battle Dead; 240 Non-Battle Injuries; **Total Casualties: 1,881**. Embedded within these numbers are the 2-501 Infantry casualty figures: 41 Killed-in-Action; 213 Wounded-in-Action; 2 Missing-in-Action; 2 Non-Battle Dead; 18 Non-Battle Injured; **Total: 274**. From my perspective the last great Division/Brigade fight of the war in Vietnam was a resounding operational failure but for the TACTICAL

SUCCESSES attributable solely to the warriors doing actual fighting on the ground and in the air. Years later I would come to the conclusion that those of us who actually did the fighting on the ground were just the pawns in a shameful contest plagued by a host of OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC DISCONNECTS at brigade level and above. I would eventually conclude with absolute certainty that the costs in American lives, both killed and maimed, was absolutely unacceptable and avoidable. Yes, we would attrit a substantial number of North Vietnamese units in our area of operations and damage their timelines for movement into the more populated coastal areas but the reality was that there would be no significant changes in the operational or strategic setting among opposing forces. Most importantly, we had engaged in the nation's last great brigade/divisional land battle in Vietnam with our "operational tempo" and "vision" totally disconnected from the strategic setting both in the theater and at home.

Meanwhile back in AO PEAR the offensive piece of OPERATION TEXAS STAR stumbled forward with all its grandeur in the northern reaches of Vietnam as U.S. forces down south were streaming back home by the tens of thousands as part of a revised Nixon doctrine. BOTTOM LINE: At the grande strategic level the U.S. war against North Vietnam was over…there would be no U.S. military victory. In the absence of a national military strategy for victory or operational plans in theater that synced with the President's "Vietnamization" plans, those of us at the company level just followed orders and above all else, "WE FOUGHT FOR ONE ANOTHER"!

What follows is my story, as best I remember it, of A Company's actions and activity as participants in OPERATION TEXAS STAR from 8 April until 16 June, 1970. These are my recollections of A Company's operational activity from our insertion into the TEXAS STAR fight on and around REUP Hill, the defense of Fire Support Base Granite and the defense of Fire Support Base Henderson which took place 29 April and 6 May, 1970, respectively. My recollections conclude with descriptions of A Company's operations in the piedmont hills southwest of Phu Bai Combat Base and operations in the Fire Support Base Brick AO southwest of Hue in the May-June timeframe until my departure.

As a prelude to my recollections of A Company's operations on and around REUP Hill(YD362165) in April, 1970, I would begin with a more detailed description of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) plans and operations for that time frame. The 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) Operations Report - Lessons Learned, dated 17 May 1970 for the period

ending 30 April states OPERATION RANDOLPH GLEN (the Division's operational plan from the fall of 1969 until 31 March 70) had ended and in mid March 1970, OPERATION ORDER 2-70 (TEXAS STAR) was published with an execution date of 1 April 70. The plan's purpose was to exploit the successes of RANDOLPH GLEN, incorporate the lessons learned during that operation, to continue the cooperation developed among all allied elements in the province, and to provide for movement of a portion of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) from Thua Thien Province, if it became necessary. Under Division Operations Order 2-70 (OPERATION TEXAS STAR), the 2nd Brigade assumed responsibility for pacification and development support throughout the province while the **1st and 3rd Brigades were tasked to conduct offensive operations against enemy units in the western portions of the province.** Concurrent with the repositioning of divisional units, the areas of operation of regiments of the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN) were adjusted to maintain the brigade-regimental relationships (U.S./ARVN) developed and refined during the preceding months. Further refined, OPERATION TEXAS STAR was initiated on 1 April 1970 to meet the challenge of the <u>forward disposition of enemy forces in the division area of operations.</u> (I suspect few if any members of the 101st Airborne Division [Airmobile] and its supporting units had any idea that we were preparing for the nation's last great offensive operation in the war in Vietnam). The division's primary missions were:

1. To **conduct extensive airmobile combined operations** in the area east of the A Shau Valley and west of the populated lowlands of Thua Thien Province **to locate and destroy enemy units, base camps and cache sites and to interdict enemy movement** into the populated lowlands to provide maximum security for the population.
2. To conduct operations in coordination with Government of Vietnam (GVN) forces to defeat Viet Cong (VC) Local Forces/Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) in the populated lowlands.
3. To conduct combined, limited objective, airmobile operations in reaction to hard intelligence within the Area of Operations (AO).
4. To place fires on acquired targets in the A Shau Valley on a continuous basis.
5. To conduct reconnaissance and surveillance in the AO.
6. To reinforce, on order, the Mai Loc Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Camp.

7. To provide one airmobile infantry battalion as Corps Reserve.

8. To support Government of Vietnam (GVN) pacification and development plans and programs.

9. To provide civic action assistance.

10. To assist GVN forces in the defense of the city of Hue.

11. To assist GVN forces in providing security for the Vietnamese Railway System within the AO.

12. To assist GVN forces to assume full responsibility for combat, pacification, and psychological operations in Thua Thien Province.

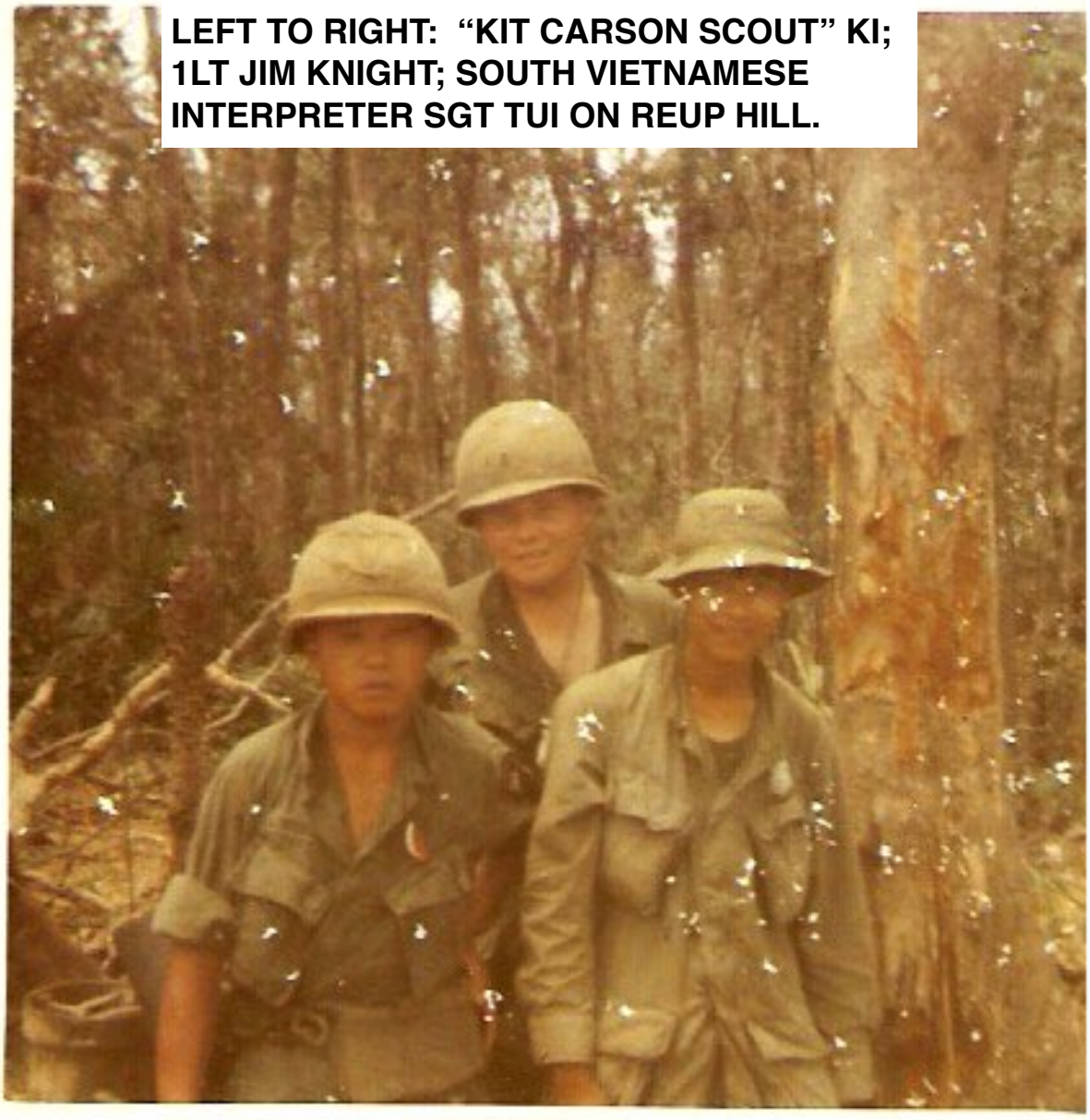
13. To prepare for operations in an expanded AO, on order.

With the execution of OPERATION TEXAS STAR on 1 April 1970, the 2-501 Infantry Regiment (the Division's "swing battalion"), was moved from the 2nd Brigade to the 3rd Brigade's "operational control" and the 3rd (Triple Threat) Brigade now had as it's four infantry battalions the 2-501(Drive On), 1-506(Currahees), 2-506(Currahees) and 3-187(Rakkasans). Supporting the 3rd Brigade were: 2-319th Field Artillery in direct support; D Company(-), 326th Combat Engineers in direct support; 3rd Forward Supply and Service Element, Division Support Brigade in direct support; Tm, 101st Military Intelligence Company (-) in direct support; 3-265th Radio Research Company(RRC) in direct support; 58th Infantry Platoon (Scout/Tracker Dog) in direct support; Tactical Air Control Party (USAF) in direct support; a Support Team from 501st Signal Battalion in direct support; 2 Teams from the 4th Psychological Operations Detachment in direct support and additional support, as required, from the Division's General Support units.

On or about 1 April 1970, elements of the 1st and 3rd Brigades, in conjunction with the 54th and 1st Regiments (1st Division, Army of Vietnam) began significant air-assault operations into the canopied Annamite mountains between the coastal lowlands and the A Shau Valley against the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces in accordance with Division OPERATION ORDER 2-70. Despite a mid-March failure to secure Hill 927 (later to be named FSB Ripcord), 3rd Brigade was ordered to execute another attempt to occupy Hill 927 and on 1 April the 2-506th Infantry inserted A, B, and D Companies around FSB Ripcord; C Company, 2-506th Infantry opened FSB Ripcord on 11 April and on 16 April the 2-506th Infantry TOC and B Battery 2-319th(105mm) Field Artillery arrived followed by C Battery, 2-11th (155mm) Field Artillery on the 17th. The

combined airmobile operations were conducted to locate and destroy enemy forces, base camps and cache sites. OPERATION TEXAS STAR was in full swing when A Company joined other U.S. infantry companies in the air-flow into our designated areas of operation according to the ground tactical plan. (A bit of battlefield calculus here might add some perspective to understanding the 3rd Brigade's fight. Example: Third Brigade's four infantry battalions with four rifle companies each were theoretically the "locate and destroy" ground maneuver elements of the brigade BUT on any given day the brigade was operating with three or more fire support bases operational and one battalion securing the Brigade Rear Area (Camp Evans). Each FSB required one infantry company for base defense. BOTTOM LINE: For planning purposes the 3rd Brigade had at best about eight infantry companies [two infantry battalions] for ground maneuver [about 900 to 1,200 infantrymen] fighting elements of two NVA Divisions and their significant reinforcements. We were heavily outnumbered [at least six to one] under the canopy [the NVA had at least fifteen to eighteen infantry battalions at their disposal] to say the least but I never felt out gunned!).

"LOCATE AND DESTROY ENEMY FORCES, BASE CAMPS AND CACHE SITES"….that was our mission as A Company air-lifted off of the pick-up zone (PZ) at or near Fire Support Base Jack as I recall around mid day on or about 8 April. The trail of doorless UH-1 transport helicopters ("slicks" in our vernacular) each with its Allowable Cargo Load (ACL) of five soldiers and the AH-1(Cobra) gunship escorts began to swing to the west and southwest passing over Vietnam's costal lowlands on a westward sixteen mile or so journey. Gaining altitude initially over the piedmont region we then began an even steeper climb to get into the jungle-covered mountains. Our destination was a one-ship landing zone on or near HILL 902 (YD337172) and a new Area of Operations (AO) code-named PEAR. As we lifted off of Jack we were climbing from near sea level to ultimately land at a small one-ship LZ roughly 2,700 feet above sea level. Like all air-assaults I found the rush of air through the open aircraft doors immediately refreshing and the altitude always gave me some sense of momentary security when compared to humping a ruck under the steamy canopy below. However, that sense of security was no more than a fleeting moment for all of us knew every aerial insertion brought with it the looming threat of being shot down, attacked while landing, or ambushed while moving off the LZ. Unlike most combat air-assaults (CA's) this one for A



LEFT TO RIGHT: "KIT CARSON SCOUT" KI; 1LT JIM KNIGHT; SOUTH VIETNAMESE INTERPRETER SGT TUI ON REUP HILL.

Company seemed far less threatening than most because we were flowing into an LZ already occupied by our own battalion's Reconnaissance Platoon who had gone into the LZ ahead of us uncontested. As we turned into the mountains at around eighty knots air-speed on a south-southwest heading, aircraft in a trail formation, we began reducing air speed in our descent into the LZ. As I laid back on my ruck, radio handset firmly pressed to my ear and sitting cross-legged with no restraints to hold me in the open aircraft door, I recall looking down and marveling at the beauty of

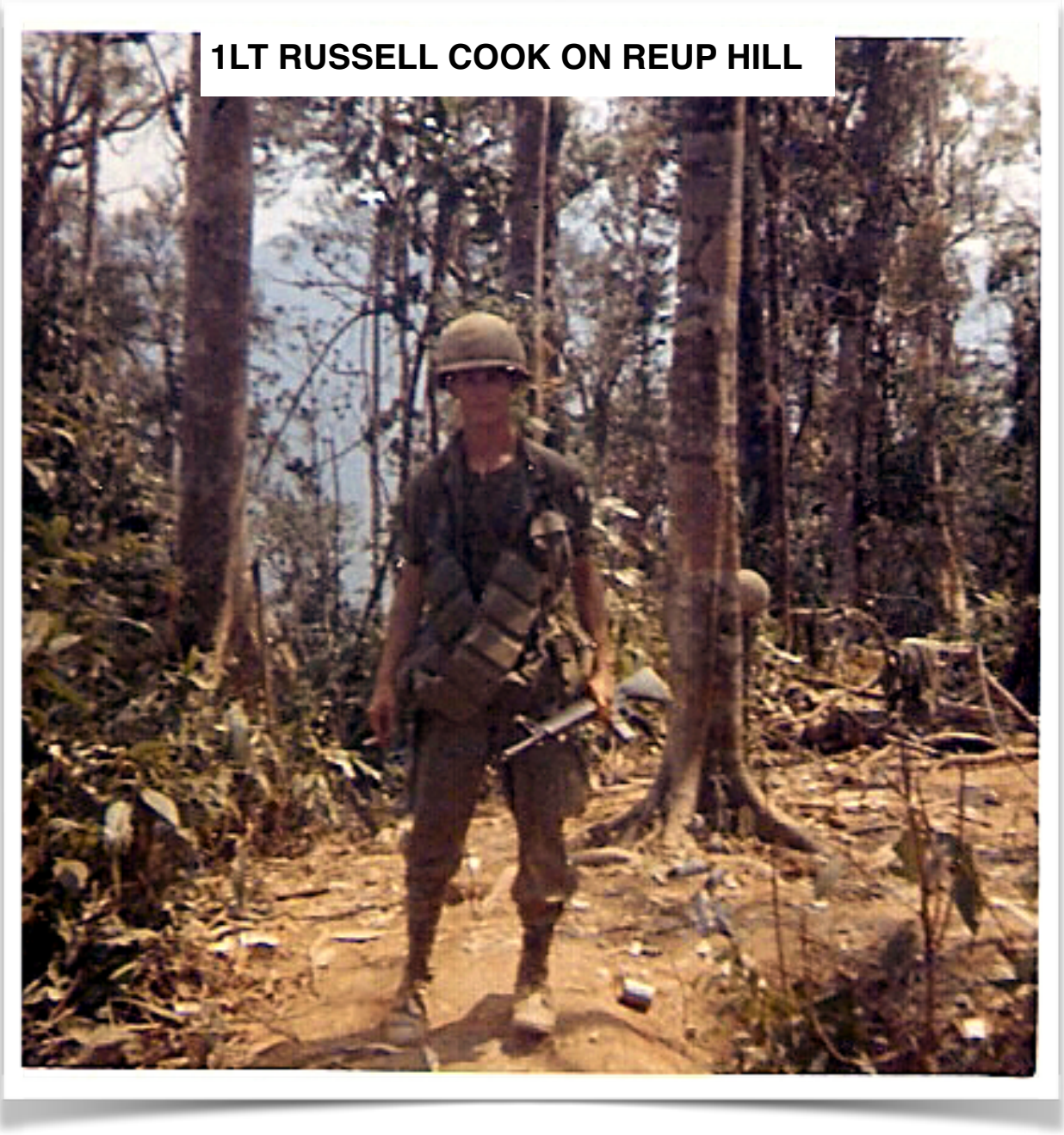
the landscape. The jungle below us was lush and green after months of monsoon rains…a tropical mountainous rain-forest in all its splendor that almost defied description…the flora and fauna were magnificent. I always thought, “What a shame we had to destroy such a quiet, beautiful setting in an area that had seen little if any human activity other than two combatant forces trying to kill one another”.

A Company’s closure into the LZ was thankfully unremarkable and for me a sigh of relief just in reporting our closure without incident. In going into a “secure” LZ we had missed seeing the tube artillery preparation of our point of entry into the fight…we’d missed the familiar roar of our AH-1 Cobra gunships firing rockets armed with “nails” into the LZ and we had missed the long bursts of door gunner machine-gun fire from our UH-1 “slicks” as they hit “short final” to ultimately deposit us onto the ground. As we landed one aircraft at a time we immediately began our push to the east-southeast following a well used and hard packed trail that snaked the jungle ridge line. (Unlike operations in our previous AO around FSB Bastogne we were now moving as a consolidated company (about 130 soldiers) with our three rifle platoons in column to meet a heightened threat and not as separated platoons and squads seeking ambush opportunities). Along our advance on the jungle trail the slope of the terrain both left and right was incredibly steep and the width of our route of advance along the canopy-covered ridge could not have been more than ten to fifteen meters wide at it widest point. My intent was to cautiously sweep down the ridge line conducting a reconnaissance-in-force for about two kilometers (about a mile) to a trail junction (YD362165) prominently marked on my map. “Trails”, as defined by dotted black lines on my 1:50,000 map sheet were at best no more than “footpaths” in the jungle perhaps wide enough to walk along or push a bicycle. The brown contour lines, each documenting a twenty meter change in elevation, suggested our move down the ridge would be "gentle" considering our personal loads. We would advance slowly and deliberately in search of any sign of recent enemy activity. Ultimately I intended to move into a company night defensive position (NDP) and dig in at the trail junction well before the sun set but I had sensed we might face a meeting engagement with the NVA as we moved down the ridge line. My intuition was that the NVA would have selected the trail junction (our objective for the day) as “key terrain” and “a must-hold” if for no other reason but to facilitate resupply activities to forward deployed forces north and northeast that were now threatening the area around FSB

Ripcord (Hill 927). A second and equally important implied task I had deduced in analyzing our mission was that the LZ at (or near) Hill 902 had to be considered "key terrain" (still occupied by our Reconnaissance Platoon and the 2-501 Tactical Command Post) therefore we had a critical task of clearing our route of advance in order to have rapid return access to their location, if required. We had crept no more than a third of the way down the trail toward our destination when our movement unexpectedly halted. I moved forward from the second platoon in the order of march to determine the holdup and quickly found that my senior "Kit Carson" Scout, Ki (a former NVA soldier who had "flipped" to the South Vietnamese) had refused to go any further. Coincidently we had halted near a small trail that headed steeply down to the south and on a tree at the trail junction were instructions in Vietnamese that read, "This Way To The Mess Hall". Needless to say, all of us immediately concluded that there would probably be no shortage of enemy forces in our new AO. In his best English, Ki said, "Boo-Coo VC" (meaning a lot of enemy troops) and he refused to go any further.

After about fifteen or twenty minutes of discussions with him through and with my Vietnamese interpreter (SGT Tui), we finally got Ki to agree to continue with us but the message was clear from him. We had moved into an area unlike anywhere we'd been before…an area that the NVA believed they owned and planned to vigorously defend. Later, as we moved on toward our planned NDP, several of us observed what appeared to be old French porcelain electrical insulators in some trees along our route. None of them were wired but I suspected they had been emplaced by the NVA to eventually "hard-wire" communications to their subordinate units. As we continued to "search and clear" southeast along the trail we also heard artillery impacting west and northwest of our LZ at HILL 902 and, as best we could tell, in or near Captain Chris Straub's D Company AO. Later, I heard over the radio that D Company had taken the first casualties of the day as a result of "a friendly fire artillery incident" although that was never confirmed.

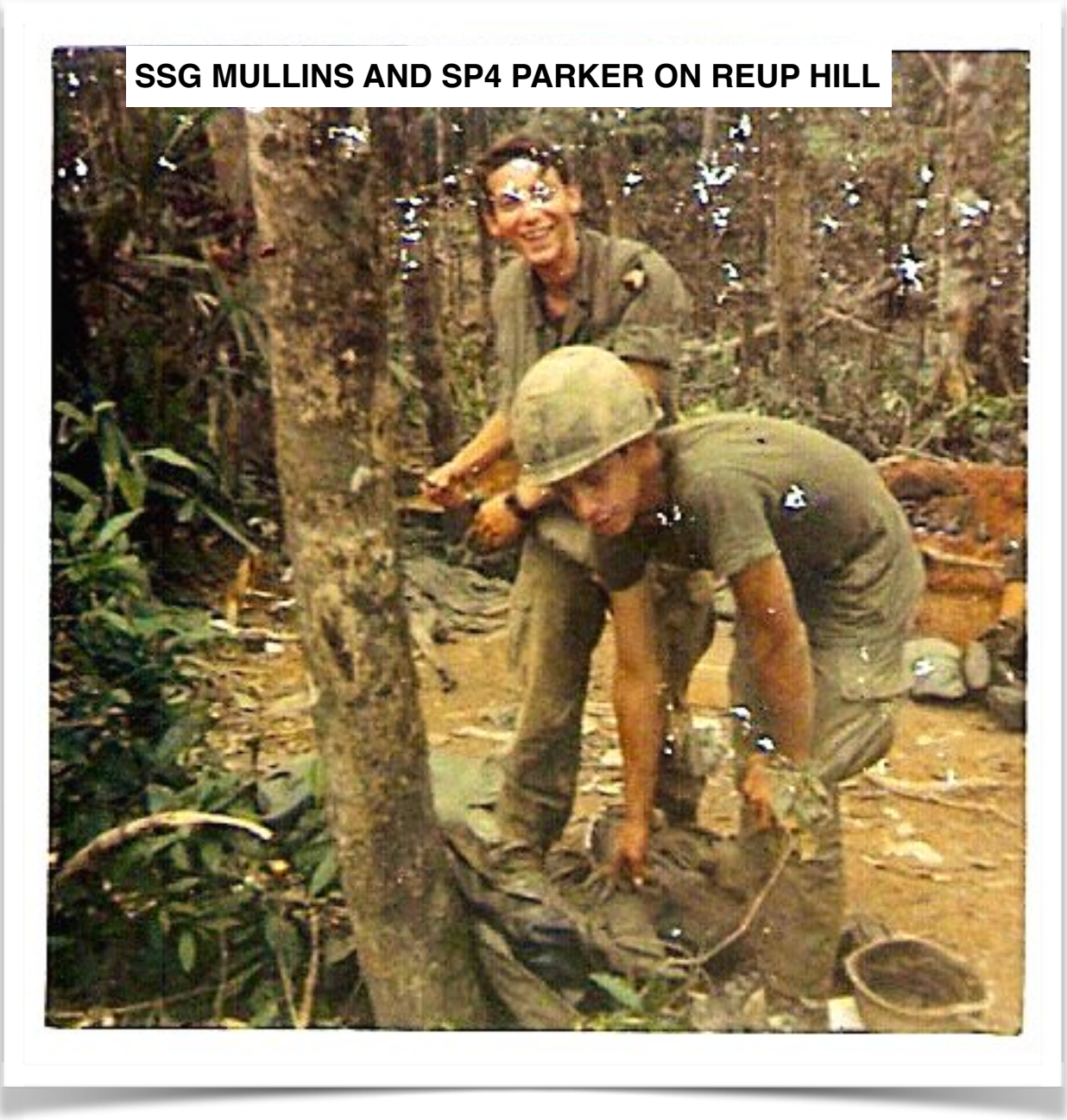
We finally arrived at our planned NDP site late afternoon without firing a shot nor finding any fresh signs of NVA activity along our planned route of movement. In accordance with my tactical plan and our priorities of work A Company formed its tight perimeter defense on a small knoll and began digging in for the night. The area I had selected by map inspection to defend overnight was pock-marked with scores of old foxhole fighting



positions. Most had been partially filled but each appeared to have been prepared by either South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces or the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces operating in the area. The fighting positions were far too small for us and certainly didn't match our strength or needs for emplacement of our crew-served weapons (M60 machine-guns). We subsequently made some radical adjustments to the old perimeter to accommodate our numbers and critical weapons, dug in as quietly as possible, emplaced our claymore mines and trip flares, and were

reasonably set up for the night well before End Evening Nautical Twilight (EENT). The first day for the approximately one-hundred thirty men of A Company participating in the 3rd Brigade's spring offensive was, for all intents and purposes, uneventful but that would change before midnight.

Around 2200 hours (10 PM) as I was leaning forward in my foxhole peering into the jungle's blackness one of my radio operators tapped me on the shoulder whispering that the Battalion Operations Officer (S3) in our Tactical Command Post (TAC CP) near HILL 902 wanted to talk to me. I grabbed the radio handset immediately knowing that his call was without doubt important. I remember Major Jim O'Connell's first words as if it were yesterday, "How long will it take you to get back to my location? (Hill 902)". I know there must have been a lengthy pause before I answered him for I could not imagine trying to silently break down a company NDP in total darkness and then move tactically back up the same route we'd just used. (Honestly, I had no idea how much time we would need to prepare to move nor how long it would take us to get back to Hill 902). I think my first response to him might have been out of frustration when I said, "About two days, Sir". I laugh about it now but it certainly wasn't funny at the time. I received the order to conduct the night move back to the LZ at or on Hill 902 in the next transmission from our S3 and I whispered to him we would execute as quickly and quietly as we could and hopefully without compromising our unit and location. The platoon leaders and A Company's leadership reacted without questioning the order from me. While they immediately circulated warning orders to execute our "change of mission" down to squad level, LT Russ Cook (my Fire Support Officer) and I hurriedly prepared and transmitted a revised target list of supporting indirect fires for the move to our supporting fire direction center. In total darkness soldiers silently stowed ammunition and personal gear, disabled and retrieved claymore mines and trip-flares, and in less than an hour platoon leaders gave me an "UP" to begin the move. I gave them the order of march by platoons to "wheel out" of our defensive positions and we began to advance in single file around midnight without my detecting even a whisper in "pitch black" conditions. (I certainly didn't like the idea of moving the entire Company about a mile single file back up the ridge line but I chose such a scheme of maneuver to limit "massing" our force and we could move almost silently along a hard-packed footpath we had cleared hours earlier). With the stealth only the most experienced and combat-seasoned light fighters could display we crept forward toward Hill 902. I



was both amazed and immensely proud of the men of A Company beyond words for their magnificent effort and to this day I don't know how we managed to escape an ambush or detection except for the stellar performance of every soldier under the most difficult and terrifying circumstances. (Night tactical moves such as this one routinely go unnoticed in the pages of military history but will always give testimony to the skill, will, and teamwork of the American soldier). We made the night two kilometer tactical move in the middle of two enemy infantry regiments

without incident or detection. As we drew within about four hundred meters of Recon's perimeter around the LZ near Hill 902 I halted the company and called the TAC CP asking that our Recon Platoon send a two-man linkup team to meet us on the trail to effect an orderly tactical passage of friendly lines and guide us through their defensive positions to the northwest on the opposite side of the hill. Within about thirty minutes we had linked up with the Recon Linkup Team and by first light we were pushing through the LZ to move northwest toward Coc Muen mountain's (YD317181) summit and a new company area of operations. As one might imagine all of us were exhausted but a spirited bunch to finally see daylight. As we trudged through our own battalion headquarters' Forward Command Post I unexpectedly walked into Sergeant First Class Baker, Recon's Platoon Sergeant (PSG), and the smile on his face said it all. He knew I had to have been more than just "hot under the collar" for having to risk the lives of so many just to undertake such an unanticipated and dangerous night move. I had been Baker's company commander (Echo Company) two months or so earlier so we knew each other quite well. We exchanged "pleasantries" for a moment or two on the trail and then I rejoined my own command group of radio operators, company medic, and forward observer team in the line of movement. That was the last time I ever saw SFC Baker. To the best of my recollection he returned stateside shortly thereafter and was fortunate to avoid the months of fighting that lay ahead for the 2-501 Infantry.

As A Company swept through and across the LZ near Hill 902 we were given a new and physically demanding "change of mission"….TO LOCATE AND DESTROY ENEMY FORCES, BASE CAMPS, AND CACHE SITES along a route that took us to the top of COC MUEN (HILL 1298) mountain. I think we had moved no more than 600 to 800 meters along a well used trail climbing west-northwest from Hill 902 when I made the decision to stop and set up a hasty defense to recoup from the night march. The ascent up to Coc Muen's summit by my map analysis suggested that we would be subject to a brutal tactical climb for infantrymen carrying seventy to ninety pounds or more on their backs. We had to get as much rest as possible before starting the trek up and I didn't want to risk the possibility of a late afternoon meeting engagement with the NVA near its summit. I knew I had exhausted troops who had been without sleep and had been humping for hours on end so the halt in movement was a prudent decision. To put the physical challenge ahead of us into perspective, we had left Hill 902 (an

LT RUSSELL COOK, MY FORWARD OBSERVER, ON REUP HILL

altitude of about 2,958 feet) and we were trying to locate and destroy enemy forces, base camps, and cache sites along a route that ascended to Hill 1298 (an approximate altitude of about 4,257 feet). We were climbing like pack mules a vertical 1,300 feet along a route of about 1.2 miles of thick canopied jungle and we we were doing it tactically! I had certainly faced similar physical challenges as a young Ranger student in the mountains of North Georgia but this wasn't a Ranger Company and this time the threats were real.

Again, as best I recollect, A Company moved out of its hastily prepared night defensive position early morning on 10 April (Friday) clearing the route and its flanks toward the top of Coc Muen mountain. Thankfully, we made no contact with NVA forces nor did we see any evidence of recent enemy activity as we pushed up and onto the summit late in the day. I recall quite vividly however that the rain and fog began to move in before we reached the top of Hill 1298 making the battered and muddy path up a slippery mess and perilous for many troops humping the heaviest of loads. (The chance of a serious injury from a fall while carrying almost one hundred pounds of gear along a mountainous jungle trail was a significant threat anytime we were moving. Any fall injury that limited mobility often meant an aerial [jungle penetrator] medical evacuation if we had no LZ nearby. Regardless of the type of evacuation required, such operations were risky and immediately compromised our security). At times many of us were on "all fours" in our efforts to reach the summit. Upon arrival on the top of Hill 1298 I think all of us were surprised by how small the peak really was. I had somehow expected that we would find a first rate LZ on top but the summit was covered with very thick scrub vegetation, void of the usual jungle canopy, and the peak was encircled by a number of very old and shallow foxholes. In a light rain we formed a tight perimeter defense pushing out and over the military crest of the hilltop and began to dig in fighting positions for what would eventually become a lengthy stay primarily as a result of poor weather across the 3rd Brigade's area of operations. For the next five or six days we were "weathered in" and totally isolated in our mountain top fortress. (The term "weathered in" here, by definition, implies significant tactical risks to the extent we were now without tactical air support, aerial resupply, or helicopter gunship support). Nights at our new altitude were generally clear, damp, and down right chilly but by daylight the clouds and fog moved up from the valley floor and we were totally "socked in" on Coc Muen's muggy, misty summit. Occasionally we could hear helicopters in the valleys below us toward Hill 927 (Ripcord), about two miles to our northeast, but we were totally isolated by thick fog and almost constant drizzle. (Despite the marginal weather, Ripcord was finally opened on the 11th with C Company, 2-506 Infantry air-assaulting onto Hill 927...we heard them going in). Unfortunately, we were still unable to get our routine aerial logistical resupply but thankfully we were constantly catching rain-water in our ponchos to fill canteens and stay hydrated. From a tactical perspective I felt as if we were occupiers of a true fortress due to

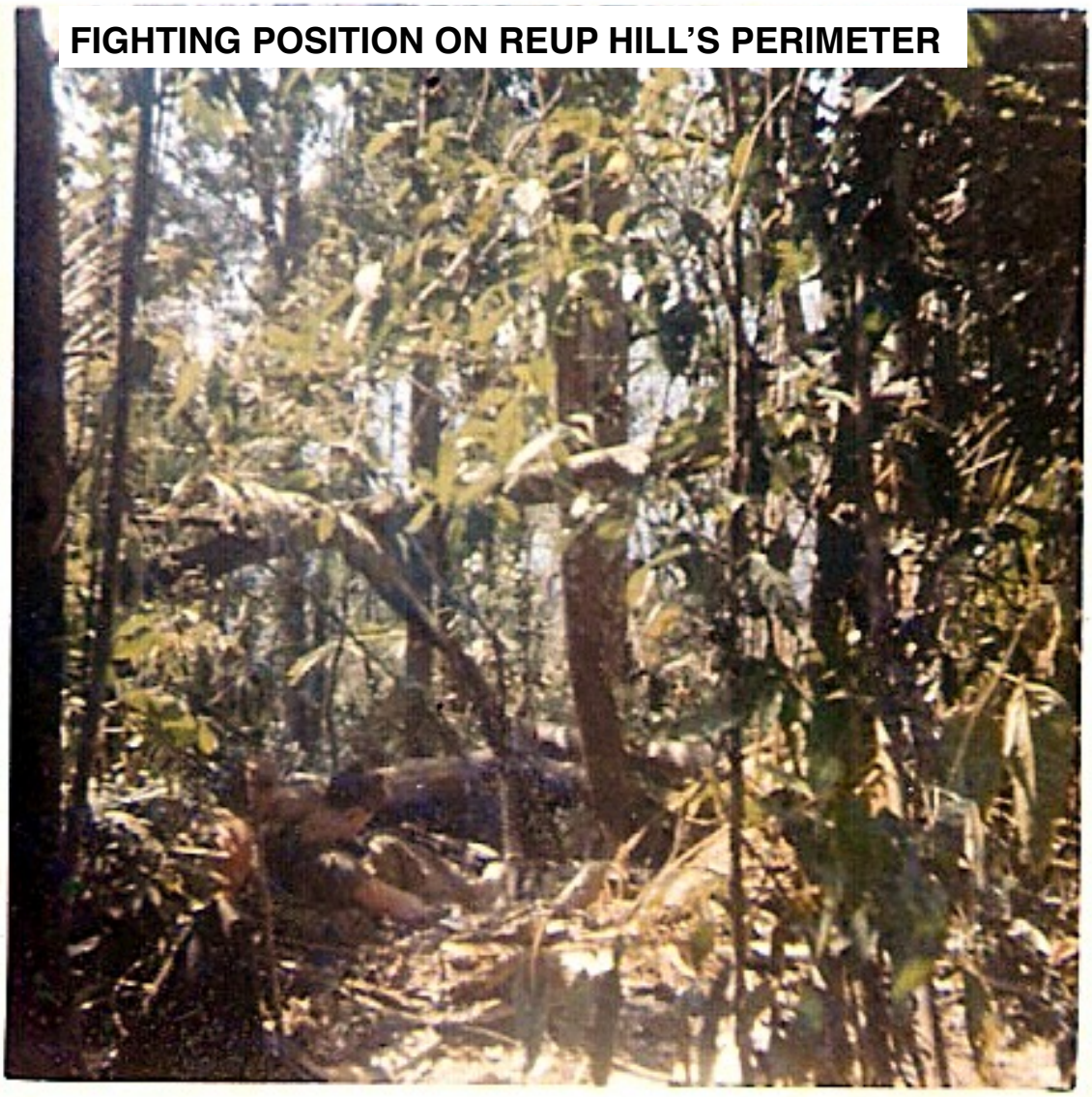
the steepness of the terrain on all sides. The foul weather would have forced the NVA on all-fours climbing to attack our defenses. Enemy indirect fires would have been all but useless due to their inability to see a point of impact for adjustment and as a target we were a tiny knob with a radius of no more than 25 meters on a 4,257 foot mountain top. We just sat there, occasionally sending out squad sized reconnaissance and security patrols from our perimeter. For seemingly days on end we were a cold, wet, hungry and miserable bunch but relatively safe from my perspective. Finally, with a break in the atrocious weather that had severely limited air activity throughout the Division area since 11 April, the brave pilots of the Division got a logistics helicopter (UH-1) into Hill 1298 on the 15th (Wednesday). At last A Company received our long awaited logistical resupply of rations (some had been without food for at least twenty-four hours), much needed radio batteries, and other critical mission-essential materiel. With our resupply and the welcomed break in the weather plus an improving weather forecast I could now anticipate another “change in mission”. I knew we were certainly destined to get back into the fight somewhere down below.

I believe I received a warning order for a change of mission late on the 15th along with a requirement to conduct a combat air-assault off of Hill 1298 to take place on the 16th (Thursday). (Coincidently, with the break in the weather the 2-506 Infantry TOC would finally get onto Ripcord as would B Battery, 2-319 FA (105mm) on the 16th; C Battery, 2-11 FA (155mm) would follow onto Ripcord on the 17th). Our move by air-assault, as part of a flurry of air activity on the 16th, would insert us about four and a half kilometers (approximately three miles) east-northeast of Hill 1297 into a small one-ship landing zone (LZ) about a kilometer south of HILL 805 (YD362187). Actually the LZ we were destined for was a no-name little spot located at YD361175. By my map analysis I was uncomfortable with its location in that the contour lines suggested that it was in a virtual bowl with high ground on at least three sides. Upon our arrival I had been correct in my assessment. In hind sight that LZ was one of the worst and most dangerous LZs I ever remember landing on. It was extremely narrow and had not been completely cleared of debris at the point of aircraft touch-down making our landings difficult plus it was surrounded on all sides by tall, dense jungle. Although the LZ was located on a small rise on the jungle floor its condition and location placed us at considerable risk as we approached by air and the egress for our outbound helicopters was equally

hazardous. Thankfully however we were going into another so-called "secure" LZ held by a sister company. Our mission upon closure was to immediately begin to move south to return to the trail junction at YD362165 from which we had made the scary night move almost two weeks earlier.

With the weather improving the air was filled with all sorts of aircraft supporting a resurgence of operational activity across the 3rd Brigade AO as we prepared to leave the top of a soggy, muddy Coc Muen mountain. We could see or hear much of the helicopter and artillery activity northeast toward Fire Support Base RIPCORD (less than 2 miles east-northeast of us) and by midmorning on the 16th, A Company finally began air-assaulting off of the top of Hill 1298 with its standard aircraft lift package…a command and control UH-1, six UH-1's (Slicks) for actual troop movement, and two AH-1 Cobra gunships flying in support and escort of our move. As air-assaults go the multiple sortie move of A Company's approximately 130 men into the LZ south of Hill 805 (YD362187) went as planned and by mid afternoon we had cleared off of Coc Muen and completed the move into our new AO safely and without incident. To the best of my recollection amidst the flow of air sorties on the 16th we finally received our new platoon leader, **1LT Jim Kwiecien**, to fill the vacancy in the 2nd Platoon. I had been notified several days earlier that Jim was trying to get to us but given the awful weather for the past week and the sudden break that spurred air activity I wasn't sure where he'd fit in the airflow priorities. Jim was a welcomed replacement to A Company and his arrival was especially meaningful to me in that I now had all three rifle platoons filled with lieutenants. We'd been short at least one lieutenant since I'd taken command on 20 February. With respect to platoon leaders, A Company had lost two superb lieutenants since about the time I had assumed command. **1LT Bob Morris** had been injured and was now back at battalion headquarters and **2LT Dave Hockett** had been killed 20 February just north of Fire Support Base Veghel the same day I had assumed command of the company in the Bastogne AO west of Hue. As an aside, I want to make clear that I had a superb group of platoon leaders throughout my tenure as A Company's commanding officer. Not once did I ever question the leadership abilities of these superb lieutenants or their tactical skills. I knew each of them would do their very best to accomplish assigned missions and take care of the men within their platoons. However, my greatest concern was that they knew very little about me, my style of leadership, or my philosophy for the conduct of tactical operations

FIGHTING POSITION ON REUP HILL'S PERIMETER



in a jungle environment. In hind sight I've often wondered how much more effective we could have been as a team if we had trained together even for a short period of time. Over time though, with reflection on the combat that we would see in the days and weeks ahead, I would conclude that **LT**'s **Jim Knight** (1st PLT), **Jim Kwiecien** (2nd PLT), and **Dave Poole** (3rd PLT) were among the very best infantry lieutenants Fort Benning produced. I could not have been more pleased with their performance and I owe them much for their valor, gallantry, and steadfast loyalty to me and more importantly to the men they led.

I would be remiss without mentioning my attached Artillery Forward Observers and their teams as well. **1LT Russ Cook,** and later **1LT Jim Norman** were top notch Artillerymen too (as were the enlisted members of their fire support team). All were absolutely indispensable assets in a combined arms fight in the mountainous jungles. Our "Redlegs" (artillery attachments) were as much "Infantry" under the canopy as those of us wearing "crossed-rifles". Russ (and Jim later) and I were always "joined at the hip" for tactical operational planning as well as execution and I could not have gotten the job done without their technical and tactical experience and expertise in the use and application of indirect fires. I suspect few men in A Company fully appreciated the contributions of our fire support team however all should know that I don't recall ever making a tactical decision without consulting Russ or Jim…they were always the critical element of my tactical planning and execution.

As quickly as we were inserted into the LZ south of Hill 805 on the 16th we began our move to gain some space from the massed gaggle of troops that always seem to be drawn like magnets to a landing zone. My plan to approach our new objective was a simple one. In keeping with our initial mission (which had not changed since day one) I would conduct a company reconnaissance-in-force with platoons in column, moving south and across the intermittent stream bed indicated on my map, clearing as we advanced. As quickly and quietly as possible we would move about half way to the trail junction (our objective) before nightfall. Essentially, I wanted to put as much distance as possible between us and the LZ and eventually "hide" A Company (if possible) for the night on the up-slope to the trail junction. Knowing that B Company was occupying the ridge line we would occupy the following morning gave me some assurance the move would probably be uneventful. B Company's plan, as best I understood it, was to defend the ridge line for the night and begin moving further east early morning on the 17th (we would linkup if time and the enemy situation permitted). With their departure we would receive an "AO extension" that would now include the trail junction and the old LZ nearby. I had switched over to the B Company internal company command radio net as we were moving in order to coordinate indirect fires, my movement plans, and my plans to effect a linkup and relief at the trail junction. As best I remember, B Company's CO was **CPT Bob Stanton** who had taken the company from **CPT Dick Dexter** only a few weeks earlier. In any event, I don't recall ever having met Bob face-to-face since he'd assumed

command but most importantly the two of us needed to make sure our two companies were distinctly separated to avoid the possibility of a direct or indirect fire fratricide incident overnight. Our conversations by radio confirmed the boundaries between us; we agreed that we would coordinate all fires (both direct and indirect) within four hundred meters of our shared boundaries; we would confirm plans for a linkup after I halted A Company within four to six hundred meters of B Company's perimeter, and we would support or reinforce one another, if required. (Such conversations between adjacent company commanders were not uncommon when we were operating relatively close to one another and our higher headquarters rarely got involved unless we needed a decision to resolve a conflict in our individual company plans and operations).

As the sun dropped below the ridge line above us on the 16th, A Company's approximately 130 men silently moved into a hasty, tight perimeter defense (without digging in) hiding in thick, heavily canopied jungle. We would spend the night in what I would refer to today as a "hide position" about 500 to 600 meters north of B Company. Essentially we were about half way between two heavily used NVA trails that ran generally east-west. B Company sat astride the southern-most trail junction and we had cleared and crossed the northern-most trail along the stream bed and quietly climbed onto a thick, heavily jungled finger leading up to our eventual destination. There we settled in for the night. According to 1LTJim Kwiecien the night of the 16th would be his first night in combat with the 2nd Platoon. A Company was now hiding just below the ridge line running from Hill 902 east to the prominent trail junction later to be named and forever remembered as REUP Hill. Once again I would make the point that A Company had now been "chasing terrain" for more than a week and had yet to fire a shot in anger…we hadn't even seen an NVA soldier or taken a single round of indirect fire while our sister companies operating in AO PEAR had been routinely engaging or being engaged by NVA units in multiple locations.

Around daybreak on Friday morning (17 April) as I was about to take my first sip of C-ration coffee the jungle's silence was suddenly disrupted by a hail of violent explosions and small arms fire at B Company's night defensive position at the trail junction about five to six hundred meters above us to the south. From our hide position below the melee we could distinctly identify M16 fire, hand grenades, perhaps claymore mines, M60 machine-gun fire, and possibly NVA mortars, satchel charges or rocket-

propelled grenades (RPGs). Within a matter of moments I concluded that the NVA obviously had no idea we were anywhere near the fight and about the same time I was scrambling my radio operators (RTO's) to get one of our radios (PRC-77's) on B Company's internal command frequency to hear their platoon leader's battle reports (I was listening to CPT Stanton's reports on our Battalion Command frequency too). As the firing became more sporadic I made radio contact with Stanton asking if he needed any assistance. His response was "No" and he said the NVA attack was coming against the southeast side of his perimeter near the ridge line's trail junction. We both agreed that we would be best served if our two units remained separated unless the fight intensified or was prolonged and A Company's help became absolutely necessary. In less than an hour the fighting ended and the NVA had apparently withdrawn further to the southeast. Command activity in B Company then transitioned to directing Cobra aerial rocket artillery (ARA), tactical air strikes (F-4 Phantoms) on suspected NVA routes of withdrawal, resupply, and casualty evacuation. I believe B Company lost one soldier killed-in-action and no more than a few wounded in the brief but violent attack. By around mid morning, as best I recollect, B Company began to push at least one or more of its platoons to the east freeing the terrain for our occupation. We then "rucked up" and began sneaking out of our hide site and slowly climbed through dense jungle to the ridge line where the fighting had occurred about two or three hours earlier. With relative ease we arrived at the trail junction and linked up briefly with the command elements of B Company still involved in directing air strikes on a suspected enemy location about 600 meters to the southeast. As the last elements of Bravo Company exited the area to the east A Company began its occupation of a hasty perimeter at the same location it had occupied ten days earlier. Now our priorities shifted to a more deliberate defense (the NVA knew we were there) and we began to "dig in" on the ridge line near where the two trails intersected. By mid afternoon I would then push out some combat patrols to conduct limited security operations south of our location in the most likely direction the NVA had withdrawn earlier that morning. To me the area we were reoccupying looked remarkably different from our first visit there more than a week earlier. The litter and evidence of the aftermath of battle were everywhere. The little jungled knob we were now occupying along the ridge line and trail junction was dotted with even more fighting positions of all sizes, shapes, and forms. What had been a rather small, nondescript knoll along the ridge

was now trashed with ammo crates/cans, C-ration boxes, spent brass, M60 linkage, and empty hand-flare canisters. Much of the pristine jungle foliage had also been stripped as a result of the morning's fight as well. Our immediate challenge in reoccupation of the terrain turned to planning for and executing a deliberate defense. Platoon leaders and their Squad Leaders moved with a purpose to precisely define our perimeter, establish internal boundaries, select crew-served weapons positions, assign sectors of fire, and concurrently plan for conducting limited reconnaissance activity further south. I was already beginning to "think through" a scheme of maneuver for follow-on operations from the trail junction which would now focus south of our location toward the direction the NVA had withdrawn after their attack against B Company earlier that morning. I had a general idea of where the NVA were likely to be by my own map inspection and I planned to go after them as quickly as possible (with absolutely no intent of spending too much time on the ridge line we now occupied). Once again, I still had no actionable intelligence regarding the NVA situation (size, activity, location, capabilities, or probable courses of action) but I knew by simple terrain analysis and my experience in the jungle that they had to be no more than a kilometer or so below us. I also recall quite clearly that for the first time since we'd arrived in the AO I was certain the NVA knew exactly where we were and that changed my battlefield calculus significantly. In knowing our location the NVA now had the tactical advantage of planning, rehearsing, and selecting the time to engage us and therefore we needed to get back on the offensive as quickly as possible. I always believed that one of the tenets of our strength (and safety) was maneuver followed closely by our firepower advantage. A second tenet in jungle war-fighting for me was that I would always do my best to select the place and time for decisive engagement and at the same time I would do all I could to deny the NVA that same tactical advantage. (I had learned as a platoon leader in C Company in my first "contact" with the NVA in October 69 that jungle fighting was instantly "face-to-face combat" usually initiated at no more than five to ten meters by either combatant. The first to engage seemed to always have an immediate tactical advantage as did the first to maneuver and I preferred to be first in both instances).

I knew well before relieving B Company on the ridge line that, for security purposes, we must immediately begin a "reconnaissance-in-force" with at least one platoon pushing south in the general direction of the NVA withdrawal route from the morning's probe. At the same time I concluded

LT JIM KNIGHT ON REUP HILL

that the trail junction we were occupying (with its nearby LZ) was “key terrain” for us and a “must hold” while we operated in the area. I also concluded that we could defend easiest from the high ground and the LZ/ ridge line (our current location) offered a host of other significant tactical advantages not the least of which was excellent communications, aerial resupply, and “friendly” recognition from the air. Also, another advantage the ridge line gave us was remarkable visibility of the terrain to the east and south across the Khe Ouaun stream no more than a kilometer below us. In fact, we could see an old LZ on the south ridge line on the opposite side of the Khe Ouaun and I knew the NVA had a perfect place to mass significant forces…. probably right below us along the stream bed. (I had no

knowledge that our Division's Intelligence Section had located the 803rd [NVA] Regimental Headquarters and its 2nd [NVA] Battalion in that same general area!).

I don't recall exactly when but I certainly remember that A Company began receiving what most of us believed to be NVA 60mm (or 82mm) mortar fire into our location mid to late afternoon on the 17th and we all scrambled for cover. As the mortar rounds rained into our location many detonated in the canopy above our positions spraying the ground (and us) with shrapnel. We could easily hear the "report" of the rounds as they left the mortar tubes below and south of us no more than a few hundred meters from our location. At one point during a lull in their fires I recall massing most of the company's M79 grenade launchers on the south side of our perimeter and sending several volleys (probably 20 or more rounds) of 40mm high explosive rounds in the direction of the sounds of the mortar tubes. The NVA mortar fires subsided quickly as a result of our fires. LT Russ Cook also called in several direct support artillery (105mm) missions into suspected enemy mortar locations and the mortar attacks immediately ceased for much of the remainder of our first day back on the ridge line running south from Hill 902.

Throughout our first night (17 April) back on the trail junction Russ Cook and I adjusted our 105mm artillery in to "danger close" (400 meters) along the trail running south to the Khe Ouaun and also adjusted our 155mm GS artillery onto the south slope near the stream bed below.

In keeping with my plan to stay on the offensive I believe by mid morning on the 18th (Saturday) I began to push one or more platoons south off the ridge line toward the stream below along the suspected route of the NVA withdrawal the previous day. With no confirmed enemy locations I would describe our movement as a "reconnaissance-in-force" with Jim Kwiecien's 2nd Platoon leading the way followed by Jim Knight's 1st Platoon (which included me and my command group). By afternoon, 2nd Platoon had cautiously moved no more than a few hundred meters down some extremely difficult terrain and, as best I remember, hooked a bit left (east) into a very steep and heavily vegetated ravine. Years later, **Chris Lingo** told me he was "walking point" for the 2nd Platoon (from **SGT Vitkow**'s squad) when he halted the platoon's movement suspecting "something wasn't right". SGT Vitkow moved forward to his point-man and Chris told him crossing the ravine was "a bad idea". Despite the assessment they were directed by their Platoon Sergeant to keep moving across. Within

moments, with Lingo having made it to the far side of the ravine, the NVA opened fire at close range. During the violent exchange 2nd Platoon lost two men killed by small arms fire…**SGT Michael J. Vagnone**, and **SP4 Robert L. Dangberg. PFC Lawrence J. Witherow** and perhaps one or more others were wounded. Chris told me that he had immediately returned fire killing at least one of the NVA soldiers that had fired on his squad. I then sent Jim Knight and his 1st platoon toward the contact area telling him to "find the NVA and get them". Jim told me years later that **SP4 Dennis Hunter** (in Knight's Platoon) was the first to spot the NVA as 1st Platoon cautiously moved forward and eventually almost parallel and on the right flank of the 2nd Platoon. When Hunter was engaged with small arms fire (the NVA soldier shot the "bug juice" [insect repellent] container off Dennis's helmet) Dennis returned fire killing the enemy infantryman instantly. Within a matter of a few minutes an AH-1 (Cobra) and an OH-6 (Cayuse) "Pink Team" responded to my request for air support and were overhead. All of us "marked" our friendly locations with smoke grenades and I immediately "handed off" the aircraft to LT Knight for a series of tense "danger close" aerial rocket artillery missions. The Cobras also engaged likely enemy locations south of 2nd Platoon's initial contact area where the fight began but remained under Knight's control until their departure.

With both 1st and 2nd platoons having made contact with the NVA, I closed with my command element immediately down to near where the 1st Platoon contact had been initiated. We were finally able to get both platoons together just before dark. All of us now had the difficult tasks of getting the wounded out and transporting the remains of our two KIAs back up the hill for evacuation. However, the most immediate requirement was organizing ourselves for a potential counter-attack by the NVA. We were in an awful location (in the ravine) to try to defend for the night but withdrawing back up the hill in the darkness was even more dangerous.

The harrowing first night south of the trail junction was one of my longest nights while leading A Company but I was inspired by the courage, commitment, and tenacity of every soldier as both 1st and 2nd platoons lay quietly on the jungle floor throughout the night in pitch black darkness. Their performance was absolutely magnificent under the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. I'm certain that all of us in the ravine that night knew the risks we were taking to get our wounded out as well as the requirement to secure and transport the remains of our two fallen comrades back up to the LZ. However, I never heard a whisper of discontent or

fear….not a single complaint nor a grumble….the resolve was written on the faces and in the quiet whispers from private to lieutenant. We would do whatever was necessary to take care of our own. For me the words, **"I Will Never Leave A Fallen Comrade"** kept me awake throughout what seemed to be one of the longest nights ever. That night I also learned perhaps the greatest and most valuable lesson of my life as a soldier and that is, **"American Soldiers, Above All Else, Fight For Each Other"**. They will take unimaginable personal risks to protect one another and they will rise from their fighting positions in the face of imminent danger and seemingly insurmountable odds over and over again just to defend one another…to give a "brother" on their right or left another chance to survive the horrors of combat. Some of us would survive to fight through the brutal days A Company would face in the coming weeks but I think that even today most of us would say we survived not of our own making but at the cost of lives of those who fought on our left and right. (Years later, Jim Knight reminded me that before the fight on the 18th of April his 1st Platoon strength was 29 soldiers but by the time we reached FSB Henderson on the 5th of May he had only 8 remaining soldiers from the original 29. Jim would join me on FSB Henderson as A Company's only surviving infantry lieutenant with a new Platoon Sergeant, new RTO, new Medic, and almost a totally new platoon of war-fighters. All of us in A Company, regardless of rank, position, or experience, became "brothers forever" as we shared these brutal, close combat experiences along side one another day after day).

Vagnone and **Dangberg**'s deaths hit us all hard that day. These two warriors were A Company's first killed-in-action since we'd moved into AO PEAR as part of the 3rd Brigade's offensive. The fight in the ravine has been described by some of those involved as an "ambush" but I felt that it had all the markings of a simple "meeting engagement" with an NVA security force whose mission was to provide early warning and deny, disrupt, or discourage our continued advance into their base area. I suspected that we had bumped the security elements protecting a fortified base area down near the stream bed not far below. The NVA had to construct base areas at or near a source of water and the Khe Ouaun stream nearby meet their needs perfectly. We however, could get our water and other critical stores (and we frequently did) by UH-1 as an emergency tactical resupply, if necessary. Our enemy had no such luxury.

The fight at the gorge with both platoons making contact with the NVA further solidified my belief that the NVA fortifications were no more than a

LEFT TO RIGHT: RILEY AND FRED WORTMANN ON REUP HILL; (FRED WAS KILLED A FEW DAYS LATER ON FSB GRANITE).

kilometer below us. I had all the intelligence indicators I needed to begin planning for a deliberate company attack to kill or capture the NVA and destroy their base camp. I had no clear indications of the actual size of the force we were up against but I knew we would not return to their suspected base area until I had done my best to pummel their suspected locations along the stream bed with all the indirect fires and tactical air support I could muster.

The 18th of April had been an unusually difficult day for me for a number of other reasons as well. First, as described earlier, we'd lost two fine soldiers killed-in-action in our efforts to find and fix the NVA below the trail

junction. First and Second Platoons had confirmed the NVA general locations below us and now my task was to develop a plan to pound them with continuous supporting fires of all sorts and then followup with a coordinated ground assault to finish them off.

After finally getting everyone back up to our base area on the ridge line early on the 19th (Sunday), Russ Cook and I were consumed with calls for fire and adjustment of direct support artillery fires into the suspected NVA positions below us. Concurrently, we were directing a succession of air strikes to the south and/or developing fire plans in support of our base area and the attack we were about to execute. We engaged the suspected NVA base area with aerial rockets from our supporting Aerial Rocket Artillery Battalion (4-77 FA), directed Air Force F4's striking with 250 pound high-drag munitions, and in between their sorties we pounded the area with both 105mm and 155mm indirect artillery fires. During one or more of the F4 passes both Russ and I heard NVA 12.7cal antiaircraft machine-gun fire coming from the south ridge line about two kilometers across the valley below. The NVA were massing their antiaircraft fires to engage our F4s as they pulled out from their bombing runs. At the same time I was using an Air Force Forward Air Controller (Call Sign: "Bilk") circling above us to confirm our locations and mark enemy targets to ensure we were a safe distance from the impact area. We were attempting to vector the "Fast-Movers" on their bombing runs along a single flight path between the mountain ridges to provide them the best angle of attack. The point to be made here is that managing close tactical air support, aerial rocket artillery, and tube-launched artillery fires simultaneously near unprotected troops in a mountainous, jungle-covered environment is a difficult, dangerous and complex task. On more than one occasion the high-drag tail-fin assemblies from bombs dropped by the F4's cut through the trees around or above us as we tried to bomb as close to our positions as possible. Our brave Air Force pilots were at high risk as well as they flew the same tracks over and over to deliver their munitions. That same afternoon we observed an NVA mortar crew dash onto an old LZ on the ridge line south of us (less than two kilometers away) and lay a mortar and base plate to fire on our location. As best I recall our artillery response drove them away before they ever launched a round in our direction. However, despite our best efforts to suppress the NVA mortar fire coming from other locations around us our casualty rate continued to climb and our company fighting strength was being attritted significantly by remarkably accurate NVA mortar attacks.

A second reason the 18th was a difficult one for me was that on this day the 2-501Infantry Regiment was giving up (by change of command) one of the finest combat commanders I would ever work for. **LTC Bobby F. Brashears** was being replaced by **LTC Otis Livingston**. Colonel Brashears had been my principle mentor since the day I arrived in the 101st Airborne Division and the 2-501 Infantry. He was masterful in the use of airmobile tactics, techniques and procedures; tough on those of us who worked for him; calm under pressure, and detailed in his planning and guidance to his subordinates. Colonel Brashears was absolutely dedicated to mission accomplishment while seeking to minimize the risks to his soldiers. He had assigned me to C Company in October 1969 as a "cherry" platoon leader to learn to be a jungle fighter although I had just given up command of a Mechanized Infantry Company in the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) in Europe. Within a few short weeks, he moved me from C Company to command the 2-501's E Company (Mortar Platoon, Recon Platoon and Ground Surveillance Radar Section) while we were operating off of FSB Bastogne and he then pulled me out of command to join his staff as his S-2 (Intelligence Officer). No sooner than I had begun to decipher the S-2 job he grabbed me off of his staff and personally flew me into the LZ along the Song Bo River to take command of A Company on 20 February, 1970 after Captain Donaldson was suddenly relieved of command by our Brigade Commander. I would have followed Colonel Brashears anywhere. I trusted him without question. On more than one occasion he instantly cleared "Danger Close" fires (inside of 400 meters) for me with his own initials (BFB). His leadership was infectious to me and to many others around him. I admired his Operations Officer with equal affection. **MAJ James (Jim) T. O'Connell** was equally skilled and experienced as a tactical airmobile planner and operator. I perceived that he and LTC Brashears were the consummate match as a battalion command team and I could not imagine two better combat leaders in our division. Over the next 28 years I would never see a better commander-to-S-3 relationship. In the few short months before taking command of A Company Major Jim O'Connell taught me far more about airmobile operational planning and execution than he could ever have imagined. He and he alone planted the seeds for the growth of my operations passions that lasted for the remainder of my career. With absolutely no disrespect for either of their replacements who both were fine officers and excellent leaders, I still maintain that the turnover of these two critical and combat-

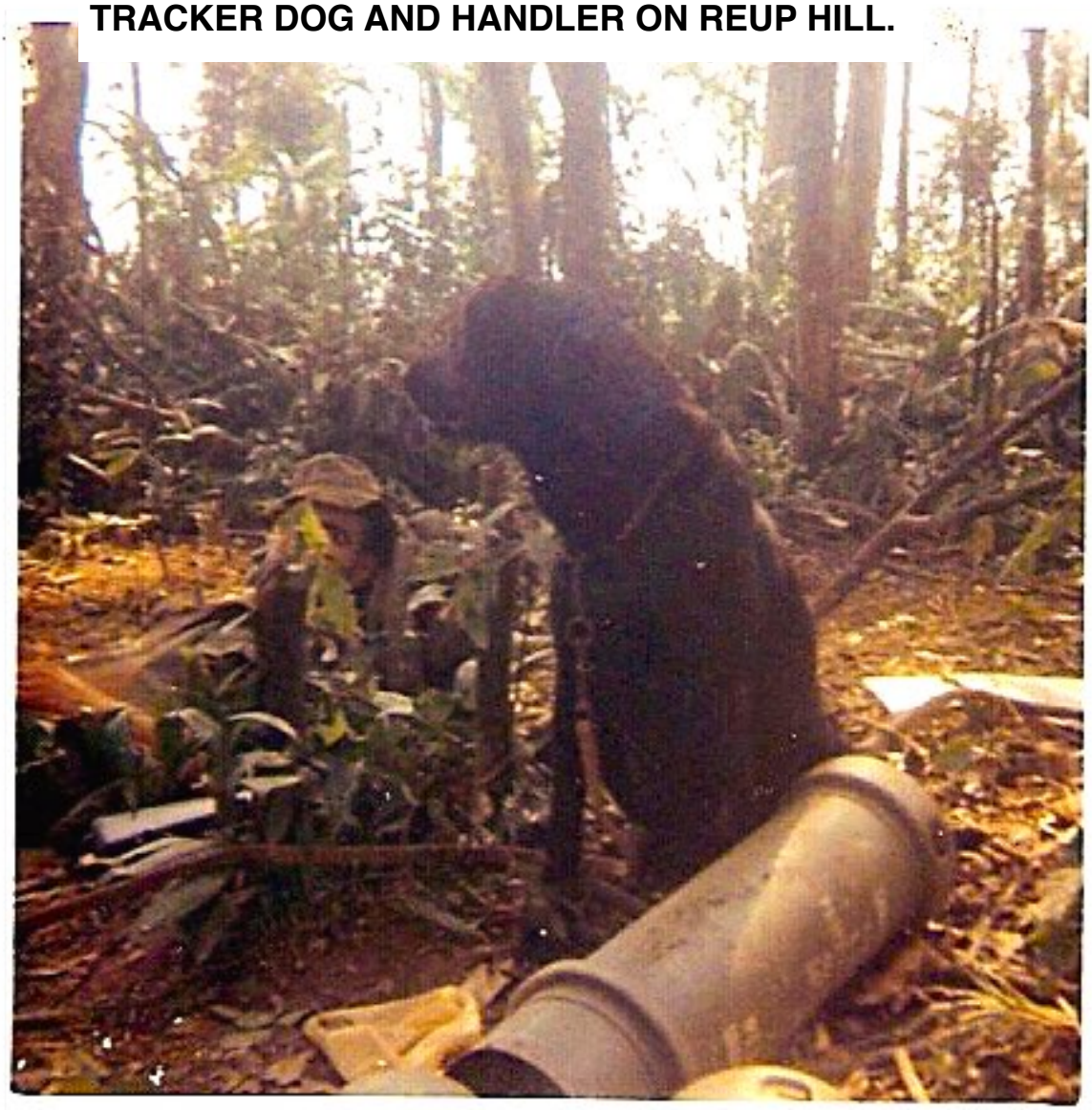
experienced battalion leaders in the midst of a difficult and complex operation was an unnecessary and avoidable risk for all of us. I still hold to that conclusion today.

A third reason 18 April was significant was that I made the decision to conduct a company coordinated attack to seize, and destroy what I believed were NVA fortified positions south of us and located between us and the stream bed about a kilometer or so below our ridge line location. That was the essence of our mission and purpose as an infantry company…"**TO LOCATE AND DESTROY ENEMY FORCES, BASE CAMPS, AND CACHE SITES"**. Although I had no specific indications of NVA strength in numbers I knew we had found them...now we would fix them in their defensive labyrinth and kill them by fire support and maneuver along the stream bed below us. I was absolutely opposed to just blocking the NVA main supply route at the trail junction knowing that we would be continually attritted by the increasing intensity of their mortar fires. An even more unacceptable scenario was to just wait for the inevitable deliberate night attack on our position at the trail junction at a time of their choosing. I absolutely knew that the NVA were dug-in on the steep slope below us because it offered the prefect "reverse slope" defense allowing them excellent terrain masking from our indirect fires. I was equally certain that their fortifications were near the valley floor and adjacent to their source of water, lines of movement, resupply, and communication. Now our task was to finish them off. My intent was to launch a coordinated attack by fire and maneuver but it's execution would be extremely challenging. First, we were a light infantry force now reduced in strength to no more than approximately eighty or ninety infantrymen preparing to attack a bunkered and well fortified enemy of unknown size and strength. Second, we would attack down the steep, heavily jungled reverse slope which made planning and execution of our supporting indirect fires the "tripwire" for the success or failure of our ground tactical plan. The precision of our supporting artillery, in all likelihood, would determine not only our success in seizing the enemy positions but would also determine the number of our own casualties during the maneuver phase. Third, I knew that command and control of fires was made even more technically complex because we were fairly close to the maximum effective range of our direct support (105mm) artillery. A fourth and more serious matter of concern centered on communications. I had learned during the fight in the ravine on the 18th that I had very sporadic radio communications with the 2-501 Infantry

Tactical Operations Center (TOC) when moving south of our ridge line defenses. Each time I tried moving my command and control element south of our ridge line our FM communications were “terrain-masked” from our higher headquarters. Russ Cook had similar communications difficulties trying to continuously talk with our direct support artillery Fire Direction Center (FDC) back at FSB Granite. On more than one occasion I was forced to either relocate my command post or establish my own radio relay site along the ridge line to pass information/requests to our higher headquarters. The radio relay alternative was never an acceptable risk for me to take while planning deliberate operations (sadly, I would confirm this unacceptable option while defending FSB Henderson less than three weeks later) . While leading A Company I had two fundamental principles that drove every decision I made before maneuvering the company: First, I would never purposely order or allow any element of the company outside the direct support 105mm artillery umbrella (about eleven kilometers) and second, I would not move my command group outside of direct communications with my higher headquarters. Attacking south of the ridge line would put both of these principles to test and made indirect fire planning and command and control a constant concern. As my planning for the attack intensified I determined that we could us the early warning assistance and tracking skills provided by dog teams so, as best I recall, I asked for and received both a tracker team (with their Lab) and a scout team (with their shepherd) from the Division’s 58th Infantry Platoon on the 18th. Each of the teams came to us with a dog and one or two soldiers well trained in the use of their canine companions. (On the first or second night after they joined us in our ridge line position the two dogs got into a fight thereby further compromising our location but that’s a story for another time).

As night fell on the 18th we put the finishing touches on the plan of attack and Russ Cook and I spent most of our time directing artillery fires on the NVA positions to our south using both 105mm direct support and 155mm general support artillery assets. Concurrently, we integrated illumination rounds into our calls for fire to confuse the NVA regarding our actions and intentions. During several calls for fire for illumination over our night location we were required to use 155mm artillery support (2-11 Field Artillery) which was in general support (GS) of our Brigade. As the 155mm parachute illumination popped over us we were on the “gun-target line” and coincidently inside the “canister impact grid” for the flare canisters. Under

TRACKER DOG AND HANDLER ON REUP HILL.



such conditions we were periodically pummeled with noisy, large aluminum casings (that housed the flare assembly) and such “missiles” posed a serious threat as they shrieked into our perimeter. Although we did not sustain any casualties from these errant projectiles they was certainly a reason for concern. Russ Cook was absolutely livid that we couldn’t get illumination without being subjected to constant “friendly” bombardment. I recall him moving from one artillery command radio frequency to another throughout the night trying to remedy the problem but to no avail. Without

getting into the details (and language) of his “heated conversations” over the radio with various artillery headquarters I can say he managed to make more than “a meaningful impression” on the artillery community (including our Corps Artillery Headquarters) tasked to support us. Without consulting me and with no prior notification the “Red Leg” (Artillery) leadership decided to replace Russ as soon as possible. I certainly hated to see him leave A Company in the midst of our preparations for the planned attack. His knowledge and experience as an artilleryman had always been a major contributor to our successes (and survival) under the canopy. Once again, I would opine that Russ Cook (my trusty Louisiana Cajun) and his fire support team were more “Avengers” than they were “Red Legs” and I deeply appreciated what he had done for all of us. Russ boarded a “Redleg" helicopter (on the 19th) sent to retrieve him and as the aircraft touched down on our landing zone, **1LT Jim Norman** jumped off to join A Company as our new Company Fire Support Officer/Forward Observer.

The night of the 18th had been a tense one as some elements of A Company were still scattered in hasty defensive positions on the edge of the ravine leading back up to the ridge line and our base area now held by a single platoon. All of us had laid in silence awaiting an NVA night attack that fortunately never came. For the Company CP it was made even more tense as we adjusted almost continuous artillery fires as close as possible on the south side of our defensive positions. We quickly determined that we were at nearly maximum range (for high angle fires) for our 105mm howitzer support coming from FSB Granite almost 5 miles northeast of us. For safety purposes we had to stay at “high angle” for our direct support 105mm howitzers rounds to clear our ridge line canopy but still hit the suspected NVA locations just below us. We were under the 105mm “umbrella” of both FSB Granite (approximately 5 miles northeast and FSB Gladiator to our north) but at times we needed greater “reach” further south well beyond the Khe Ouaun stream to hit both known and suspected NVA locations. My fire support team and I knew that we would be faced with significant risks attacking south and operating on the edges of 105mm range from both Granite and Gladiator. Our frustrations would build in the coming days as we desperately tried to take advantage of our vastly superior artillery firepower but we were severely limited by a combination of their limited ranges and distant locations. Simply put, my dilemma was that direct support artillery (105mm) would not reach many of the highest priority targets we were planning to hit in our schedule of fires supporting

my scheme of maneuver for the ground assault. As mentioned earlier, I knew with a high degree of confidence that the NVA were massed no more than a kilometer or so below the trail junction but I had no idea in what strength. However, I had determined that before I committed a single soldier down there I would lay to waste the reverse slope and suspected enemy locations with artillery fires in preparation for our maneuver.

On Sunday morning (19 April), under cover of almost continuous artillery fires on the NVA base area we finally got our two KIA's from the fight in the ravine back up to our LZ for extraction and consolidated all three platoons on the ridge line for resupply and final preparations for the attack south. I think around mid day we began movement south in a classic light infantry attack to locate, kill, or capture NVA forces and destroy their base camp and cache site. (I wrote a simple operations order for this mission on a card-board C-Ration box…the only "order" I wrote while in Vietnam). The scheme of maneuver, dictated by a lack of solid intelligence on the NVA strength (and the restricted terrain), drove my decision to attack as a movement-to-contact with platoons in column (one behind the other) following the trail south. My instructions to the three platoon leaders, as best I remember them, were as follows:

1. "The **lead platoon (LT Dave Poole's 3rd Platoon)** will attack south along our axis of advance (the trail down) to **find and fix** the NVA forces. Upon contact, engage and maneuver your squads to place maximum fires on the NVA positions as the **initial base of fire for the company** and report back to me as soon as possible the estimated enemy strength and dispositions with a recommended course of action either to flank with the second platoon in our order of march or reinforce your platoon. Maximize the use of indirect fires and aerial rocket artillery. **Do not attempt to "fight thru"** unless you are certain that your fires are overwhelming…remember, your **first priority** is to provide the company with **a base of overwhelming fires**".

2. "**Second platoon in the order of march (LT Jim Kwiecien's 2nd Platoon)** will plan to be the **first company element to maneuver and/or reinforce** the lead platoon, if necessary. I will accompany the second platoon in the order of march and travel with the platoon leader so that I can give face-to-face instructions after I've received reports from the lead platoon in contact".

3. "**Third platoon in the order of march (LT Jim Knight's 1st Platoon)** will be the **reserve platoon** and **initially secure our base area**.

Be prepared to reinforce, by fires or maneuver, either of the two forward platoons and, upon movement forward by the second platoon in the order of march, you will close on my location on the trail down for face-to-face instructions".

As a company commander, while we moved as a company, I always wanted the lead platoon to do their best to overwhelm an enemy force by all available fires. The jungle was no place to conduct a frontal assault by rushing head-long into a series of potentially fortified positions occupied by an enemy of unknown strength and disposition. My intent was always to set the conditions for maneuver with overwhelming fire support and then (and only then) I would make a decision to maneuver. I also took seriously the ability to look a maneuvering platoon leader in the eyes for instructions (rather than using a radio transmission passage of orders and instructions) before he and his men maneuvered into the fight. That is why I routinely tried to travel with the second platoon in the order of movement. The same command and control concept applied in planning for the Reserve Platoon. If circumstances allowed, I would give face-to-face instructions to the third platoon leader as the second platoon in the order of march moved forward and the third platoon in the order of march closed on my location.

(I suppose at this point it's worth mentioning that I don't recall ever providing LTC Livingston or the battalion's tactical operations center with any of the details, timelines, objectives, etc., for A Company's coordinated and deliberate attack on the NVA base camp below us. However, I think my reasoning for keeping the plan internal to the company centered on two issues. First, for security purposes I wanted to keep all matters related to our movement planning off of the radio [I assumed the NVA were monitoring every nonsecure radio net] and second, I was still uncertain of the size and scope of enemy activity in our objective area. Hind sight tells me I probably should have hooked up my "Delta One" secure radio [KY-38] and provided my boss with the general plan of attack and my anticipated "end state". At the very least I could have given my higher headquarters some time to do a bit of contingency planning to support us, if required.)

We moved off the ridge line on the trail south toward the Khe Ouaun stream with Dave Poole's 3rd Platoon leading followed by Jim Kwiecien's 2nd Platoon (including my command element) while Jim Knight's 1st Platoon held our ridge line base area and was available as our reserve, if needed. We moved slowly and cautiously south either on or guided by the trail that led to the NVA base area below. By mid to late afternoon during

one of the frequent halts in movement one of 3rd Platoon's squad leaders, **SSG Dean L. Frey**, came back up the trail to my location to share some information on their movements further south. While Dean and I were talking the lead elements of his platoon were engaged by small arms fire. He immediately said, "I've got to get back to my squad" and he abruptly broke away in a run back down the trail to rejoin his men. Within no more than two or three minutes LT Dave Poole called me with a casualty report… his point man (I believe **SGT Cox**) had been severely wounded and SSG Dean Frey had been killed by small-arms fire along the trail either just having gotten back to his squad or trying to rejoin them. SSG Frey's loss was especially difficult for all of us in that he'd just recently joined the company having been transferred from one of the redeploying division's down south. He was an impressive young NCO but was quick to admit that he had a lot to learn about fighting in the jungled highlands against hard-core regular NVA forces. We all mourned Dean's loss and I certainly had hoped that under Dave Poole's watch-care we could have taken advantage of his clearly recognizable leadership skills. Sadly, that was not to be. (Weeks later I received a letter from Dean Frey's sister (a twin as I recall) asking for more details regarding her brother's death. Despite a Division policy strictly prohibiting my response I believe I ignored the Division regulation and replied to her by letter stating that Dean had been felled by small arms fire during our attack of an NVA fortified position and he died within moments after having been hit [or words to that effect]. That was the the only contact I ever had with a family member of a soldier killed while assigned to or fighting with A Company under my command until after I retired).

Third Platoon's contact had confirmed at least a platoon-size (or more) NVA bunker complex near the stream-bed below and I knew we would not be able to fight through and complete its search and destruction before darkness fell. The reports I was getting indicated that the NVA were fighting primarily from large bunkered "A-framed fighting positions" with carefully concealed "spider hole" entrances from which they would just pop up and fire as we approached. The NVA had dug roughly eight foot by ten foot holes four to five feet deep near the base of the slope close to the stream. They had cleverly lashed large poles (four to six inches in diameter) together in an "A-Frame" configuration and emplaced them in the holes. The "spoil" was then back-filled against the A-framed wall and packed along the sides. Once completed and camouflaged such

fortifications were almost impossible to detect on the jungle floor and even more difficult to destroy with indirect fires. I recall at one point in the fight one of my radio operators and I crawled down close enough to observe one lone NVA soldier rise unexpectedly from one of the A-framed bunkers about 10 meters to our front and fire a burst of rounds with what appeared to be some sort of squad automatic weapon. He was firing erratically and spraying six to eight round bursts of fire across our front before disappearing back into the bunker's entrance. We crawled close enough to toss one or two hand grenades into the spider hole and he was quickly silenced. Almost immediately one my radio operators asked for my 38 caliber revolver and disappeared into the bunker's spider hole. After a few anxious moments he reappeared dragging out the dead NVA soldier by the shirt collar.

Within ten to fifteen minutes or so the direct fire engagements in the objective area ceased suggesting to me that all the NVA who had occupied the bunker system were either dead or had withdrawn across the stream south or escaped northwest along the stream bed. We then began our initial search to determine the size and configuration of the NVA base area and account for anything the enemy had left behind.

As darkness began to envelop our location our gunships broke station and we still had one seriously wounded soldier to get back to 85th Evacuation Hospital. The "Dust Off" was, as best I recall, for **SGT Cox** who had what appeared to be a gunshot wound mid to upper torso. We had to get him out in the dark with a jungle penetrator hoist lowered from the Medical Evacuation UH-1 through at least 60-90 feet of jungle canopy. By voice-vectoring over the radio and strobe lights in our helmets (to mark the exact pick-up point) we got the "Dust Off" UH-1 over us and at a hover. Even with a great flight crew and their aircraft directly above us I thought we'd never get an unconscious Watts tightly strapped on a jungle penetrator, hoisted up, and headed back for life-saving care. As SGT Watts was being hauled up through the canopy to the aircraft I got a frantic call from one of the pilots saying that they were taking enemy fire and had to "break station". Almost instantly SGT Cox's cable "life-line" to the helicopter was cut. Having been "punched off" Cox rode the penetrator in a crash landing from perhaps 20 to 30 feet above us and back into the jungle floor maybe 15 meters behind where we had initially prepared him for extraction. In a panic we rushed to find his point of impact and upon locating him we were shocked that he was still breathing! Immediately I called for another

“Dust Off” and another aircraft responded within minutes. This time I asked for a “litter-basket” extraction for Cox with the assumption that he had sustained additional injuries as a result of the fall. Thankfully, the second effort to get Cox out went without complication but many of us were fearful that he had little if any chance of surviving the ordeal of both a bullet wound and the hard crash to the ground. (Sometime around the 24th of April I had a rare chance to get back to 85th Evacuation Hospital to check on some of our wounded and I was ecstatic to find SGT Cox sitting up in a hospital bed sipping orange juice and talking. I asked him if he had any memory of his dramatic evacuation and being “punched off” by the evacuation helicopter and he said he didn’t remember anything after he had been shot).

After Cox’s evacuation I made the decision to back away from the bunker complex and hand it off to our robust indirect fire support systems again. I also concluded that the NVA had left no more than a covering force in their fortifications (probably due to our constant bombardment) and most of their forces had either been killed, wounded, or withdrawn. Frankly, their base camp had been obliterated by our indirect fires…thirty or more square meters of terrain they had once occupied was now a rubbled and bloody jungle mess. About the same time I made the decision to return to our perimeter on the ridge line to resupply and develop a plan to complete the destruction of what remained of a well fortified and well supplied base camp now abandoned by the NVA.

When I finally got back to my CP on the ridge line I recall thinking, “I will not order A Company back down to finish the search and destruction of that bunker_complex until I have done all I can to deny their reoccupation and I will continue to lay that piece of terrain to waste with tube artillery, gunship rocket fires, and all the tactical air strikes I can get. Then (and only then) we will move deliberately down and complete its destruction”. We had confirmed their exact location and size in our attack and killed those who elected to stay and fight while others obviously had fled. We would pound the surrounding area over night and return the following day to search the bunkers more thoroughly and complete their destruction with all the C-4 high explosives we could muster.

On the night of the 19th I don’t recall more than a few minutes of silence in our ridge line defenses due to continuous artillery fires we were calling in. That night for the first time I requested and received 155mm artillery support (2-11 FA) with “fuse-delay” munitions to employ against the bunker complex and the calls for fire were approved as requested. I was

reasonably certain that the “fuze-delay” rounds would get through the canopy and then perhaps penetrate the A-frame bunkers below us doing even more damage before our return. Sadly, many if not most of the 155mm rounds fired were determined to be “duds” on impact (we would hear them hit the ground in the area of the bunkers but without exploding). Needless to say Jim Norman and I were disappointed with the lack of effects but not with the effort of our supporting artillerymen. Also, as darkness crept over our night defensive positions I received my usual radio call from an Air Force “Shadow” (AC-119K with two 20mm cannons) aircraft on my company internal radio net. The pilot’s calm and reassuring words were always the same…“Penboy 20 (my radio call sign)….I’ll be monitoring your internal company radio frequency most of the night while I’m out shooting trucks in “the Valley” (A Shau Valley and the Ho Chi Minh Trail)…call me if you need some help”. I really appreciated his offer although I never got the chance to use him. We also had “Spooky”, nicknamed “Puff” (an Air Force AC-47D) routinely coming up on my company command radio net to offer assistance if we needed it. Having this kind of firepower on call at night was reassuring but its use was always problematic given that our fire fights under the canopy were likely to be of the face-to-face variety and our ability to clearly mark friendly locations at night was next to impossible. Under the most extreme circumstances I would have called for them but thankfully their support was never required.

On the 20th (Monday), while we received our aerial emergency resupply of rations, water, ammunition, and other stores, my Forward Observer Team and I spent most of the day directing fires into and around the abandoned bunker complex below us. Mixed with the unusually heavy schedule of artillery fires we also received at least two or more additional sorties of Air Force F-4 “Phantom” fighter-bombers dropping 250 pound high-drag ordinance on suspected NVA locations south of the trail junction. We put the air strikes into the area south and southeast of our location along the stream bed. That same day I believe we were visited by **LTC Livingston**, our new Battalion Commander, and perhaps one or two Chaplains as well. (As best I recall we had many helicopters in and out of our LZ on the 20th…most were bringing in supplies of water, C/LRRP-rations, munitions of all sorts, and thankfully a few precious infantry replacements).

Around the 20th (Monday), give or take a day or so, the rumors began to fly throughout the company that to escape the incessant NVA mortar fires

and otherwise miserable combat conditions we were experiencing (and would probably continue to endure) all a soldier needed to do was commit to reenlistment and he would be immediately pulled out of the field. Of course such an “escape option” was a “diamond in the rough” to some… particularly those who were considering reenlistment anyway. The idea of offering reenlistment as an “escape option” from combat certainly didn’t sit well with many of us who were determined to continue the fight but I obviously had no influence on such a Division policy. Frankly, I worried only momentarily about reenlistment losses and their immediate impact on the company’s foxhole strength. I was far more concerned about my own tactical decisions that would insure mission accomplishment and the safety and well-being of those of us who would remain in the fight. As best I recollect no more than perhaps six or eight members of A Company chose the reenlistment option to leave the field. I’ve never once begrudged their decisions...didn’t say a word to any soldier opting out of the fight but from the moment they departed our “No-Name” knoll on the ridge line near the trail junction would be forever known as “**REUP HILL**”. In fact, within twenty-four hours a sign was made from some wooden ammo crates and was nailed to a tree near the company CP that read, “REUP Hill”.

The night of the 20th we remained in our night defensive positions on the little knoll named REUP fully expecting an NVA attack. All day long we’d had UH-1’s in and out of our nearby LZ so the NVA knew exactly where we were and I had no doubts they were planning an attack that would probably occur at night. All of us knew the longer we remained at the trail junction the more likely we would get hit and hit hard...it was just a matter of time. While our perimeter was abuzz with resupply and work on existing fighting positions Jim Norman and I were either adjusting artillery or air strikes and also finalizing planning our move back down to the bunker complex for its total destruction. As light faded we turned to completing a robust schedule of indirect fires for the night. Again, our fire planning centered on three priorities of effort, (1) planning for and adjusting our direct support artillery (105mm) final protective fires and close defensive fires around our REUP Hill defenses, (2) hitting the bunker complex below us with as much 155mm artillery fire as we could possibly get to prevent the NVA from reoccupying their base camp before our return and (3) planning harassing and interdicting fires [H and I’s] against likely enemy locations in our assigned area of operations. We also developed a plan to periodically illuminate our own ridge line throughout the night and finally we made plans to execute a

“DOC” ROBERTSON, SENIOR MEDIC, ON REUP HILL.
(WITHIN A WEEK OR SO “DOC” WAS WIA ON GRANITE)

robust target list at dawn on the 21st focused on the bunker complex so that our move back down would be hopefully uneventful. The night of the 20th passed without incident around our perimeter but the noise was incessant as we rained hundreds of artillery rounds from 2-11 and 2-319 Field Artillery all around us.

On the morning of the 21st (Tuesday) elements of A Company returned cautiously to the bunker complex without opposition taking with them enough C4 high explosives to destroy the base camp. By now the area had been turned into a wasteland by the continuous indirect fire attacks for

the better part of two days. Where possible the bunkers were searched with contents either back-hauled or destroyed and then the bunkers themselves were destroyed. Several soldiers reported to me later that there were numerous blood trails leading away from the site and blood spattered on many of the nearby trees. I don't know how many soldiers the NVA lost in and around the bunker complex (I refused to waste time nor place lives at risk searching for and/or counting dead NVA) but I know they paid a terrible price for remaining anywhere near their base camp. Before returning back up to REUP Hill, A Company rendered the base area completely unusable….we had accomplished the mission with one of our own killed in the effort (SSG Dean Frey) and very few wounded in our coordinated attack.

The night of the 21st we remained in our night defensive positions on REUP Hill anticipating an attack on our position but it never came. Again, the night was tense and for the most part sleepless due to our almost continuous artillery fires as Jim Norman executed a carefully crafted target list. We had now become accustomed to adjusting our DS artillery as close to our perimeter as possible (often inside the 400 meter "danger close" limitations) and continued to place as much artillery as we could muster in and around the abandoned base camp we'd destroyed earlier in the day. Throughout the night we also did our best to periodically illuminate the ridge line we occupied although we were informed through artillery channels that artillery illumination munitions were now "restricted" due to a shortage across the Division.

On the 22nd(Wednesday) we received a few replacements as I recall and another resupply of ammunition and canisters of water. I believe each platoon may have dispatched some squad-sized security patrols nearby as well but we made no contact with the NVA. Like the previous few days, Jim Norman and I spent much of our time either adjusting artillery onto suspected enemy locations or working Air Force tactical air missions to our south with the help of an overhead Forward Air Controller. Within A Company and along our irregular perimeter the company's leaders were constantly adjusting fighting positions and relocating key weapons systems due to our losses resulting from sporadic but extremely accurate NVA mortar fires. As mentioned earlier, we were always vulnerable to very accurate NVA mortar fires and I don't recall a single day without casualties. Thankfully, none of the mortar attacks cost us a fatality but we were accumulating a heavy dose of wounded….many from tree-bursting mortar

rounds that came in as a volley of three or four rounds at a time. I don't remember a "safe moment" on REUP Hill and it paid all of us to be reasonably close to a foxhole to dive into as soon as we heard the familiar "thump" of rounds leaving the the enemy's mortar tube (or tubes). As mentioned earlier, I made every effort to keep helicopters away from REUP as best I could because their rotor noise limited our ability to hear the "reports" of NVA mortars as the rounds headed our way. The shouts of "INCOMING" became an all too frequent retort on REUP Hill and more often than not it was the precursor for casualties to be treated and/or evacuated. In fact, every soldier on REUP Hill dashed for a foxhole every time a helicopter came near our location….I think the NVA knew we were most vulnerable with helicopters in or around our LZ.

Like the previous nights on REUP, Jim Norman and I spent the last few daylight hours on the 22nd (Wednesday) planning for and transmitting fire plans and target lists back to the Fire Direction Center (FDC) at FSB Granite. Our assumption was that we would be hit with a probe or a substantial night attack every night we were on the hill but the probability increased with each night we stayed on REUP. I'm certain that A Company's platoon leaders assumed the same threat and the last hours of daylight around the perimeter were consumed with intense preparation for the expected NVA attack. Within an hour or so before sunset each day on REUP all activity was directed toward our night defensive preparations…a quick LRRP or C-ration meal gulped down; weapons checked and rechecked; ammunition carefully laid out including hand grenades; claymore mine wires checked; last minute checks of scores of trip-flares; and last minute instructions and checks by leaders, etc., etc.. A meticulously planned and well rehearsed NVA attack on our perimeter was inevitable; most if not all of us knew it was coming.

At approximately 0345 hours on April 23rd (Thursday) a single trip-flare popped unexpectedly in front of me at about my 10 or 11 o'clock position near the northeast side of our perimeter followed almost immediately by two or three other flares at a distance of no more than twelve to fifteen meters. In an instant I could see at least four or more North Vietnamese soldiers crouched motionless almost directly in front of my fighting position with AK assault rifles at the ready and just left of the trail running back up the ridge line northwest toward HILL 902. Just as quickly our perimeter opened up with small arms fire, hand grenades, M79 grenade launchers, and M60 machine-guns. Within seconds at least one or more claymore

mines were detonated. As quickly as the NVA had appeared in the soft glow of our trip-flares they disappeared in the smoke, dust, and ground clutter caused by the roar of our exploding munitions and back blasts on the jungle floor. About the same time I think we had at least one rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) impact inside the perimeter along with several satchel charges, grenades, or 60mm mortar rounds. At some point during the exchange of fire an explosion occurred relatively close to my position and I was hit by a piece of shrapnel just above my left ear. The impact threw me against the back wall of my foxhole and momentarily left me dazed, crumpled, and semiconscious lying between one or more of my radio operators. As I came to my senses I recall quite vividly hearing one my radio operators shouting into his radio handset, “SIX IS HIT” (“6” meaning commander) over the den of the fight and about the same time I could feel blood running down my face and neck. I also remember reaching above my ear to the point of impact to discover a piece of steel sticking out of my head and it was still quite hot! I think I may have grabbed it and reflexively jerked it out of the pencil sized hole and that increased the blood flow dramatically. Almost immediately someone in my CP group shined a red-lens flashlight in my face to find the wound and within moments it was covered with a bandage and I began to regain a bit of composure. Some time later during the exchange of fire I also heard someone shout, “GET DOWN…I’M GONNA BLOW THE BIG ONE”, and then there was a horrendous explosion between us and the NVA. One of the soldiers on our perimeter had detonated the “improvised explosive device” we had prepared a day or two earlier. We had packed one or more ammunition cans with two pounds or more of C4 explosive and front-loaded it with M60 machine-gun linkage and spent brass. We fused it with an electrical detonator and wired the IED to the front side of a large tree oriented toward the trail back toward HILL 902. Within moments of that blast the NVA ceased all firing from where they had tripped the flares. Thereafter for several hours our perimeter lay eerily quiet in darkness (other than an occasional artillery illumination flare) as our trip flares burned out. Other than a few soft whispers over the radio and the occasional whisper of…”frag out”...a signal that one of us had gently rolled a hand grenade forward of our foxhole to “clear” our immediate front, all was relatively quiet inside our perimeter. The NVA remained quiet as well.

During the lull in the fight some of our wounded crawled about for treatment or our medics moved silently from position to position to treat

others. Within an hour or so I was finally able to get almost continuous illumination over REUP Hill from a Navy aircraft that had been vectored in to help due to the Division's shortage of illumination rounds. To characterize our situation on REUP as "tense" would be a gross understatement but at least we were getting a lot of very senior leaders up early all over the Corps and Division area. Within the first hour or so after the battle had begun I received radio calls from our Division Commander and our Corps Commander on my company command radio net asking if I needed any help. (At the time I didn't know we were the western most infantry company in the Corps area). My answer was "No…not for the moment…we had things under control". I certainly appreciated my two general officer boss's concerns for our safety but honestly their calls "cluttered" our tactical net during some very tense moments. Frankly, I was decisively engaged with radio traffic whispering to platoon leaders about casualties, assessing the damage done to our perimeter, adjusting indirect fires, and a host of other tactical and logistical details. As one might imagine my conversations on the battalion command net were almost constant as well. I think at times I had PRC-77 radio handsets in both ears squatting in the darkness of my fighting position. Periodically, LTC Livingston called for situation reports and to make sure I was still physically capable of continuing to lead A Company and he too wanted to make sure we were getting all the support required and we certainly were.

At 0610 hours nearing daylight again without warning the NVA hit our perimeter in nearly the same location coming from the northwest near the trail running back to HILL 902. This time, without the trip-flares as warning, I believe we were primarily attacked by fire with rocket propelled grenades, satchel charges, and perhaps more mortar fire. Although I'm not certain, I think it may have been during this second attack that we lost **PFC Garry Lee Worley** killed-in-action about ten to fifteen meters to my right. I know many of us along that side of the perimeter felt the numbing concussion and the ear-splitting explosion at or near Garry's position. I knew instantly that anyone near that location in the 3rd Platoon's sector of our perimeter would have been gravely wounded or killed. Garry's squad had been attritted significantly while we were on REUP and one of the members of his squad told me years later that they were down to about five members when the attack occurred on the night of the 23rd. In fact, Garry's rifle squad had occupied only two fighting positions in the 3rd Platoon sector. **Richard Johnson**, **Dick Takos**, and **Brian Eveleth** were in the right most

position and Garry and their new Squad Leader, **SGT Delbert Cormeny** were in the left fighting position nearer my CP. I think SGT Cormeny had been slightly wounded moments after the initial attack and he had crawled away from the fighting position to get treated when their fighting position (and Garry) were hit by probably a large satchel charge (improvised explosive device). PFC Garry Worley was 18 years old when he died as a result of multiple and massive fragmentation wounds on REUP Hill despite our medic's heroic effort to save him. He was posthumously promoted to Corporal. Garry was a fine soldier and all of us mourned his loss.

As quickly as the second attack occurred the NVA just as suddenly ceased fire and apparently withdrew back to the southwest leaving A Company leaning forward in our fighting positions silently waiting for a third assault that never came. As dawn brought the first hint of light into the jungle I began to hear whispers between our fighting positions leading to some of us crawling forward of our foxholes to make sure the NVA sprawled across our front were actually dead (I recall wishing that I had a bayonet affixed to my rifle as I crawled forward to probe one NVA soldier lying five or so meters to my front). We counted seven dead NVA soldiers no more than about five to fifteen meters in front of our positions. Most remarkably, as best I remember, all but one or two of them were missing their legs from about the knees down. (I suppose they had blindly walked into our claymore mine's/IED kill zones at the moment we detonated them.) Even more remarkable was one dead NVA soldier grotesquely hanging head down approximately four to six feet up in a tree near the trail going back toward HILL 902. As we continued to search the area along the probable NVA direction of attack into our positions we found the area littered with discarded enemy weapons and equipment and too many blood trails to count. Years later I would come across a XXIV Corps declassified operational report of the 23 April attack on A Company that read as follows:

"Operation TEXAS STAR: at 0345 at YD362165, A/2-501 IN received RPG Fire and satchel charges in their NDP. The attackers were quickly silenced, but resumed the attack at 0610 with RPG, small arms and 60mm fire. Artillery was employed on suspected enemy locations and escape routes. A first light search revealed seven NVA KIA, two RPG launchers, one SKS and five AK-47 rifles. One U.S. soldier was killed-in-action and eleven wounded".

I will never know the actual size of the NVA force that hit us early morning on the 23rd but I know they paid a terrible price in testing A

Company's resolve to hold REUP Hill. I will always be proud of the skill, will, and teamwork A Company displayed in the defense of REUP Hill. We had been relentlessly pummeled by their mortars for almost a week but we had effectively blocked a main supply and a primary infiltration route supporting their forces around FSB Ripcord. We had subjected them to merciless artillery fires and tactical air strikes in their base areas. We had defeated them in at least one of their base camps below REUP Hill and destroyed their supplies as well as their hardened positions and we had killed at least seven of them in the attack on the night of the 23rd (along with many more during the fights in the ravine and at the bunker complex). After the night fight on the 23rd I suspected that the NVA would reassess the amount of combat power they would require to deal with the battered but determined "Avengers" of A Company. Thus far they had been defeated in every engagement with us and the men of A Company could take pride in their accomplishments.

Within a matter of a few hours after the night fight on the 23rd I received a radio transmission ordering a "change of mission" for us. We were to prepare for an air-assault extraction from the LZ near REUP Hill and we would be returned to Eagle Beach for "rest and reconstitution" given the intense week of combat we had endured on and around REUP Hill while in AO PEAR. I was also given a warning order that A Company could expect to receive as its follow-on mission the defense of FSB Granite (back in AO PEAR) around 26 April. I was more than glad to get the "change of mission". We needed the break to integrate new replacements in a safer environment, get some well deserved rest, and we still had a number of "walking wounded" who needed to be treated at the Aid Station (including me). The time at Eagle Beach would also provide us with a reasonably secure area to clean our equipment and "refit, rearm, and reorganize" for the defense of FSB Granite.

While still under the threat of NVA mortar fire, A Company air-assaulted off of the REUP Hill LZ uneventfully en route to Eagle Beach on the afternoon of the 23rd of April as best I recall. In retrospect however, I'm certain that none of us have ever forgotten those we lost; especially those who had paid the ultimate price for our gift of another day. Four "brothers" who had gone into this fight with us had been killed-in-action. None of us who survived the fights on and around REUP Hill will ever forget the events and circumstances surrounding their loss nor will we forget their sacrifices

for us all. These great patriots will forever be the real heroes of A Company and their names are listed on the following page:

IN MEMORIUM

MICHAEL JOHN VAGNONE

KIA 18 April 1970; from gun or small arms fire
MOS 11B (Infantryman); SGT; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Stamford, Connecticut

ROBERT LEE DANGBERG

KIA 18 April 1970; from gun or small arms fire
MOS 11B (Infantryman); SP/4; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Winside, Nebraska

DEAN LEE FREY

KIA 19 April 1970; from gun or small arms fire
MOS 11C(Indirect Fire Infantryman); SSG; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Oceanside, California

GARRY LEE WORLEY

KIA 23 April 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
MOS 11B(Infantryman); PFC; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Bristol, Tennessee

CHAPTER TWO

The FIGHT FOR FSB GRANITE

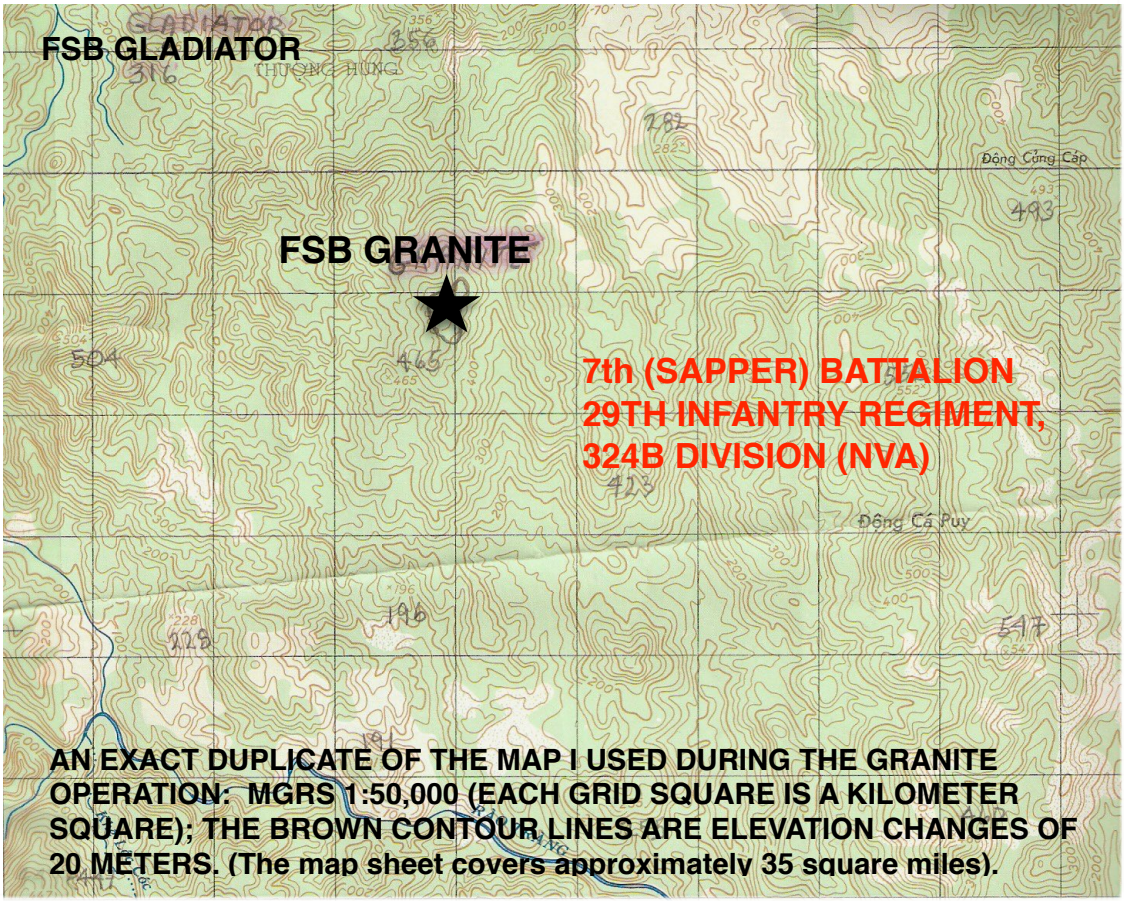
101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), (Operation Texas Star), 29 April 1970; South Vietnam; located at MGRS YD439188 (approximately 9 miles northeast of the A Shau Valley and 16 miles west of Hue City); Company A, 2nd Battalion, 501st Infantry and Attachments

I led A Company onto Fire Support Base Granite as its Company Commander. I was their leader throughout the NVA attack on April 29th.

I fought for and with them and led them off the hill when so ordered. The men of A Company were (and are) common Americans of uncommon patriotism, valor, and fidelity. They fought for me and I fought for them for "greater love has no one than this: to lay down ones's life for one's friends".

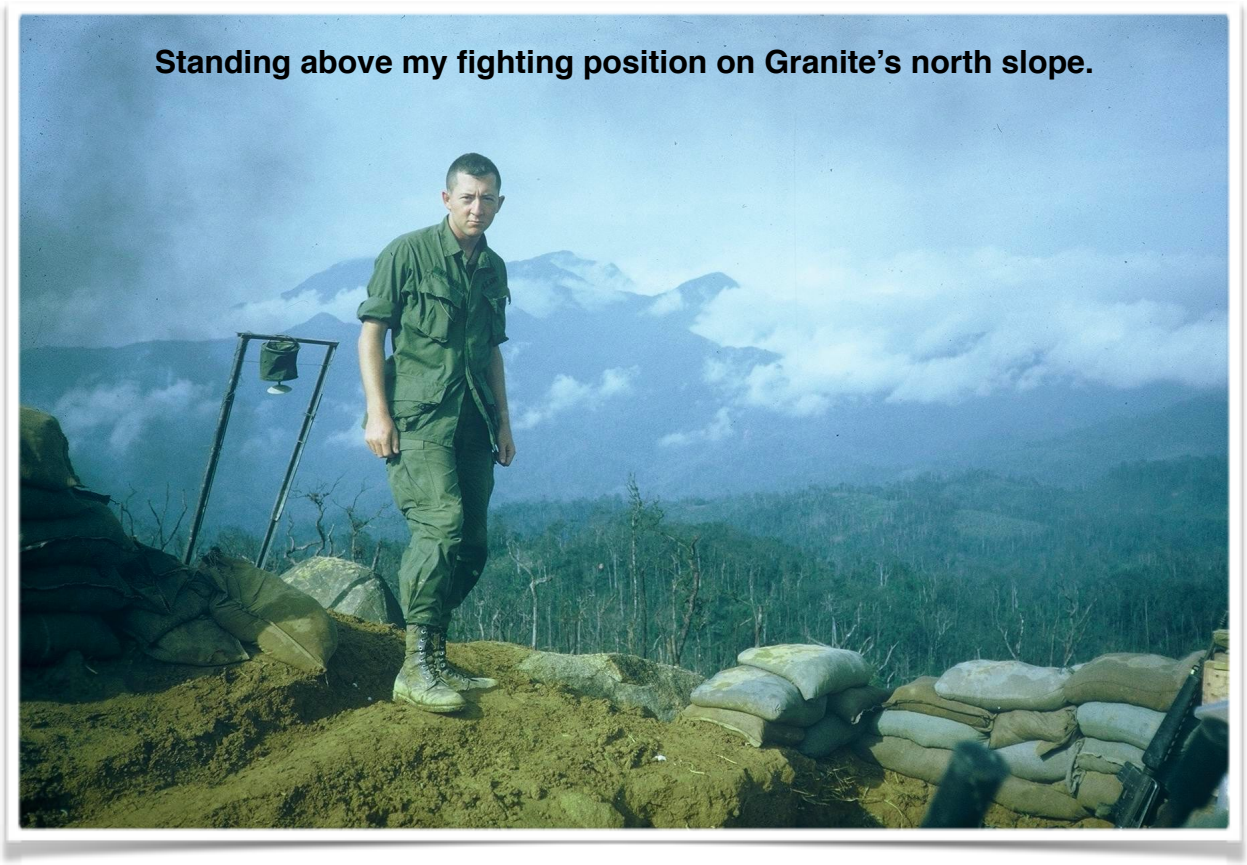
MY ACCOUNT OF THE FIGHT FOR FIRE SUPPORT BASE GRANITE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE WE LOST BUT ESPECIALLY IN MEMORY OF, SSG EDWARD J. BISHOP JR.; MIA 29 APRIL 1970; DECLARED KILLED-IN-ACTION ON GRANITE; REMAINS YET TO BE RECOVERED.

Following A Company's weeklong battles (18-24 April 70) with elements of the 803rd Regiment (NVA) along the ridge line from HILL 902 (YD348171) southeast to the trail junction we named REUP Hill



(YD362165) we moved to Eagle Beach for a two day "stand down" and then got back into the TEXAS STAR fight by air-assaulting into Fire Support Base Granite on or about 26 April. Our battalion mission remained

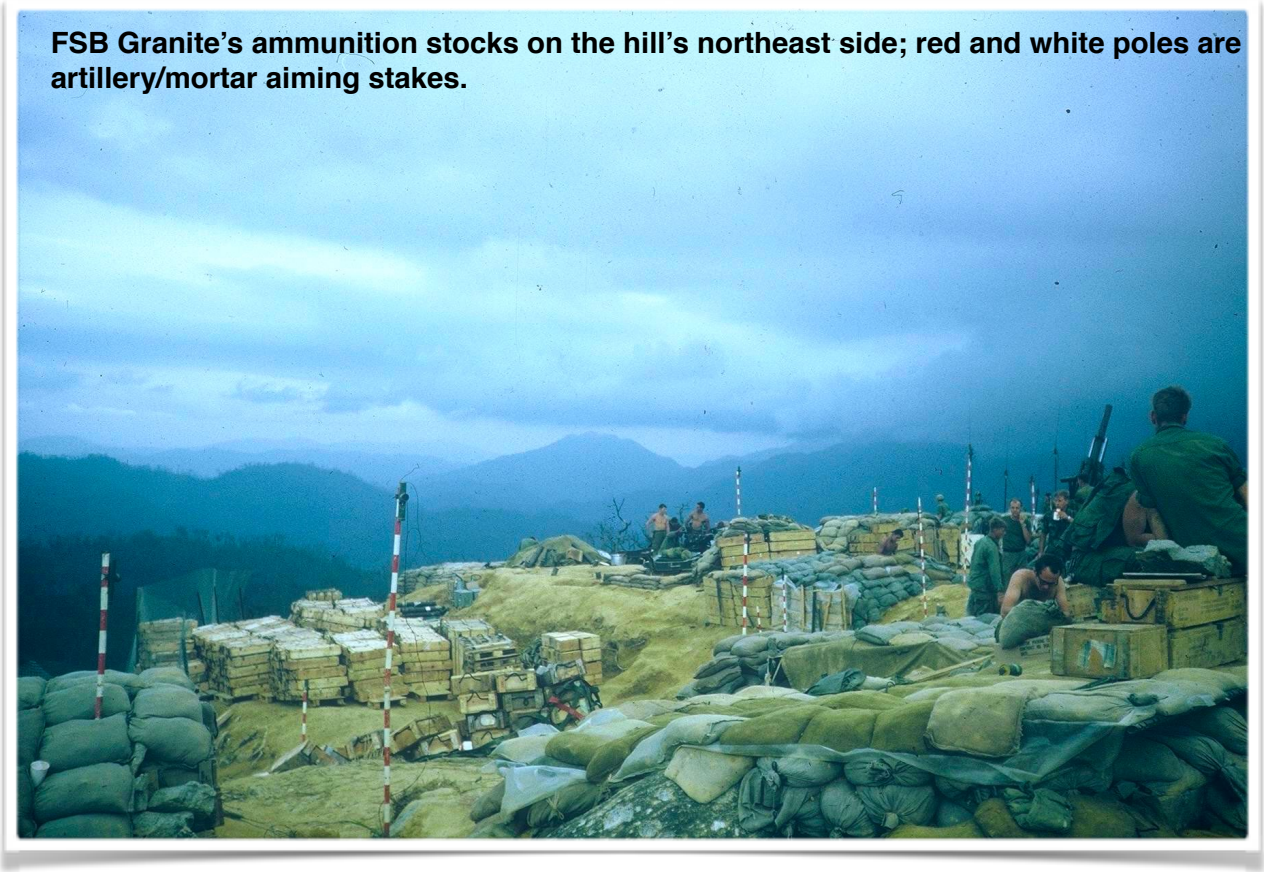
unchanged…."to **locate and destroy enemy forces, base camps, and cache sites**" within our assigned area of operations. During our short stint at Eagle Beach we'd picked up a precious few badly needed replacements



Standing above my fighting position on Granite's north slope.

and some of us were content to have a couple of days to get some shrapnel picked out, heal up a bit, and refit from the previous week's intensity. The short break was a welcomed operational pause for every "Avenger" but we all assumed that our days on Granite would be numbered before we would head back northwest and into the canopy to resume the fight.

As we air-assaulted into Granite's tiny landing zone one aircraft (UH-1) at a time on the north end of the hilltop and began to quickly fill the hill's fighting positions we were joining the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) of the 2-501st Infantry (under command of LTC Otis Livingston). Other principle tenants on Granite as best I remember them were our direct support 105mm artillery (C Battery, 2-319th Field Artillery), our general support 155mm artillery (A Battery 2-11 Field Artillery), and elements of our own organic 81mm mortar platoon. Granite's principle function was to



FSB Granite's ammunition stocks on the hill's northeast side; red and white poles are artillery/mortar aiming stakes.

provide a reasonably secure platform for artillery weapons systems forward deployed into the canopy in support of our infantry companies operating to our west and northwest. Our battalion's mission, as part of the 3rd Brigade's spring incursion into the mountainous canopy between the coastal lowlands to the east and the A Shau Valley to the west, was clear and unambiguous. We were there to "find, fix, and destroy" a formidable NVA force and our operational tempo, characteristic of an airmobile division, had kept the Geronimo Battalion's subordinate infantry companies constantly on the move. Having joined the 3rd Brigade in the canopied jungle the first week in April, we had been continuously leaping by air from one landing zone (LZ) to another and one fire base to another to locate specific enemy base camps and lines of communications and logistics. With the TEXAS STAR operation barely three weeks into its execution, A Company had conducted at least three or four combat air-assaults (as best I recall), and the 2-501 Infantry headquarters was now on FSB Granite and its third fire support base since the operation began (the others being FSB Jack, FSB Gladiator, and now FSB Granite).

Immediately after my arrival on Granite I dropped my rucksack at the Company CP (a roughly 8 by 10 foot hole in the ground covered by steel planking and sandbags) that overlooked the northern LZ and walked the hill's perimeter to get the lay of the land we were to defend and familiarize

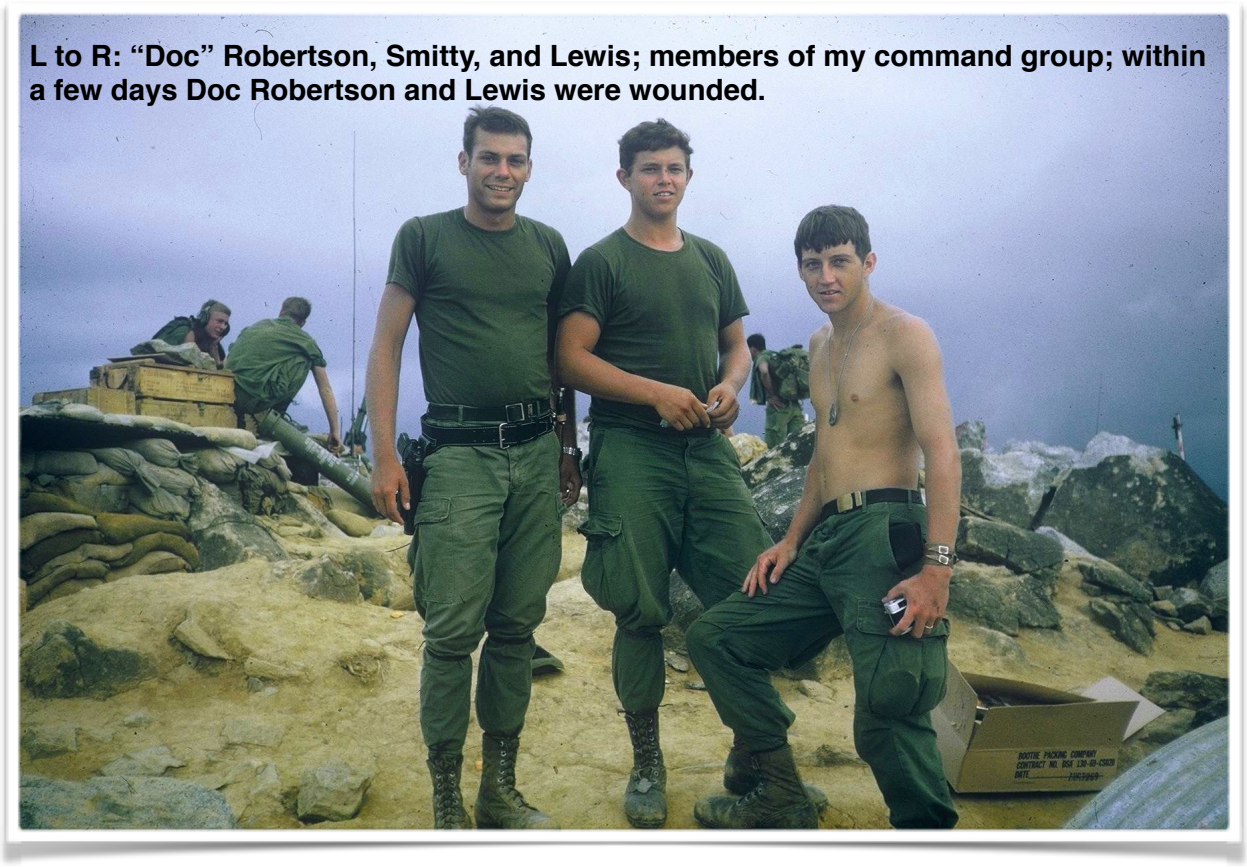
Air-assault operations off of FSB Granite's LZ in front of my CP.

myself with locations of the hilltop's tenant units. My first impressions of Granite were that we were really packed tightly onto the irregular, rocky hilltop. FSB Granite like many of the mountainous knobs in the Annamite chain was extremely rugged around the summit (making it difficult to dig), and the slope off of the western side was quite steep limiting the effectiveness of grazing fires from our automatic weapons. On the east, north, and south sides of Granite the ground leading into the jungle was much less steep however a series of rocky outcroppings and boulders provided excellent cover and concealment allowing an enemy force excellent hidden tactical approaches to within ten to fifteen meters of our existing fighting positions. From my initial reconnaissance of the hill I determined the most dangerous avenues of enemy approach were along Granite's northeast and southern slopes and along the finger leading down from the LZ on the northern end of the fire base. After my brief walk around the hill I recall thinking that we had much work to do to defend Granite's irregular shaped perimeter properly and I was concerned that we were still critically short the numbers of infantrymen needed to fill existing fighting positions. Once A Company had closed on the hill and while our platoon leaders were sorting out the occupation of fighting positions and sectors of responsibility I made my way up to the battalion TOC to gather the latest

operational and intelligence updates. I found the TOC (with its maze of antenna masts) housed in two or three sandbagged CONEX containers on the south central end of the hill. As usual the place was abuzz with receiving and passing up operational reports from our three other rifle companies deployed to our west and northwest. As usual, the staff was busily preparing plans and orders for subsequent operations and other such routine command and control functions. After a brief conversation with LTC Livingston and the routine updates from the battalion's primary staff (and some warm hand-shakes with some old friends) I headed back to my CP to get to work with my platoon leaders. By now A Company's platoon leaders would have confirmed tentative sectors of responsibility for the perimeter defense and general locations for placement of their command posts and our crew-served weapons (machine-guns). I would also take the opportunity to share with them my "terrain and threat assessment" and pass on any "guidance" or other general information I'd gathered or received while at the TOC.

Throughout the day as A Company settled into Granite's perimeter and started to work our howitzer batteries fired numerous missions responding to calls for fire from our subordinate units. The shouts of "Fire Mission!" from within or nearby Granite's artillery gun positions invariably scrambled gun crews to their howitzers and served as a warning to veteran infantrymen along the perimeter to stand clear or take cover immediately to avoid the ear-splitting reports and shock wave from their guns. Between fire missions I was impressed with our artillery battery's incessant work to improve their own defensive positions around the howitzers. I believe these same batteries had supported us during the REUP Hill fight and by my account they were superb outfits. The patron saint of artillery, Saint Barbara, would have been proud of the skill, competence, and confidence these men displayed for they were a professional group of soldiers displaying their talents in the finest traditions of the artillery. (Years later I would be inducted by the Artillery community into the Order of Saint Barbara [and my wife, Donna received the "Molly Pitcher" medallion] for our support of the artillery branch. Both of us take great pride in being adapted into their family).

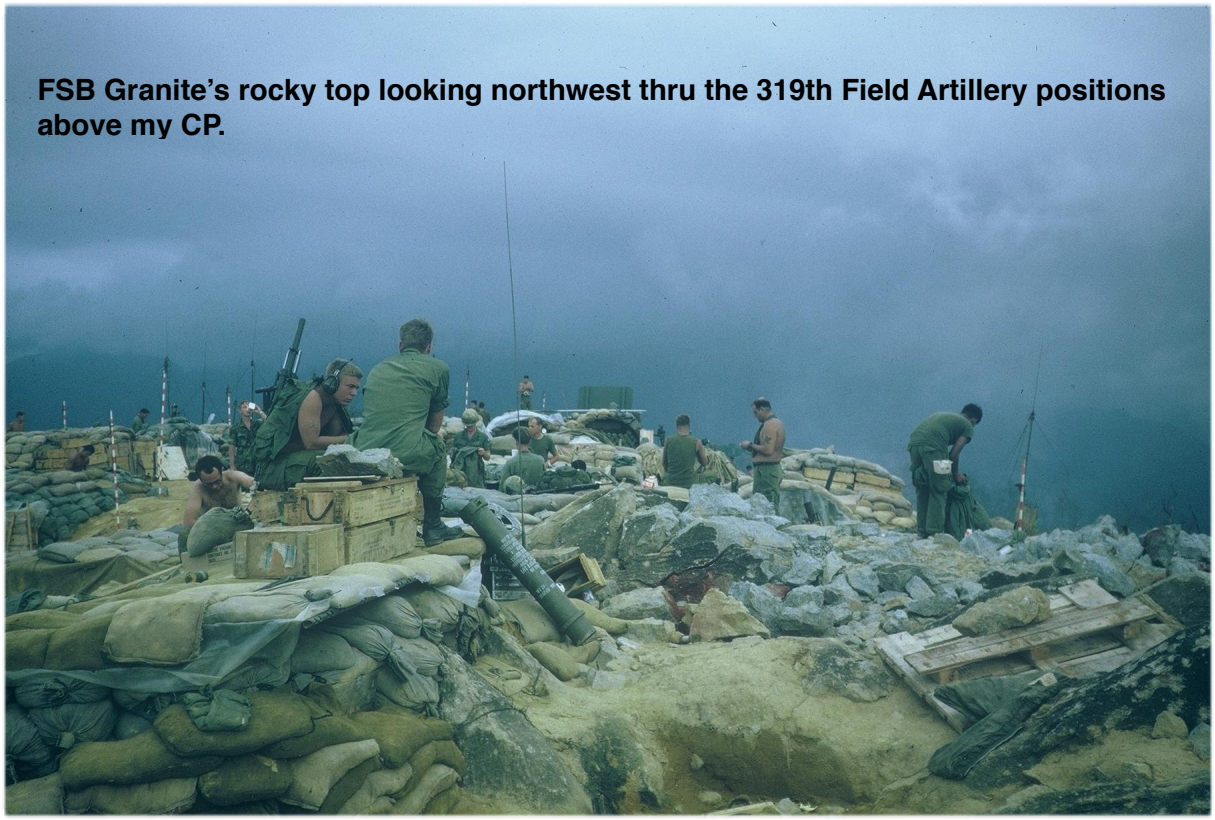
For A Company, our primary functions were to defend Granite while simultaneously conducting limited counter-reconnaissance patrols, improving the fighting positions and defensive wire obstacles that ringed



L to R: “Doc” Robertson, Smitty, and Lewis; members of my command group; within a few days Doc Robertson and Lewis were wounded.

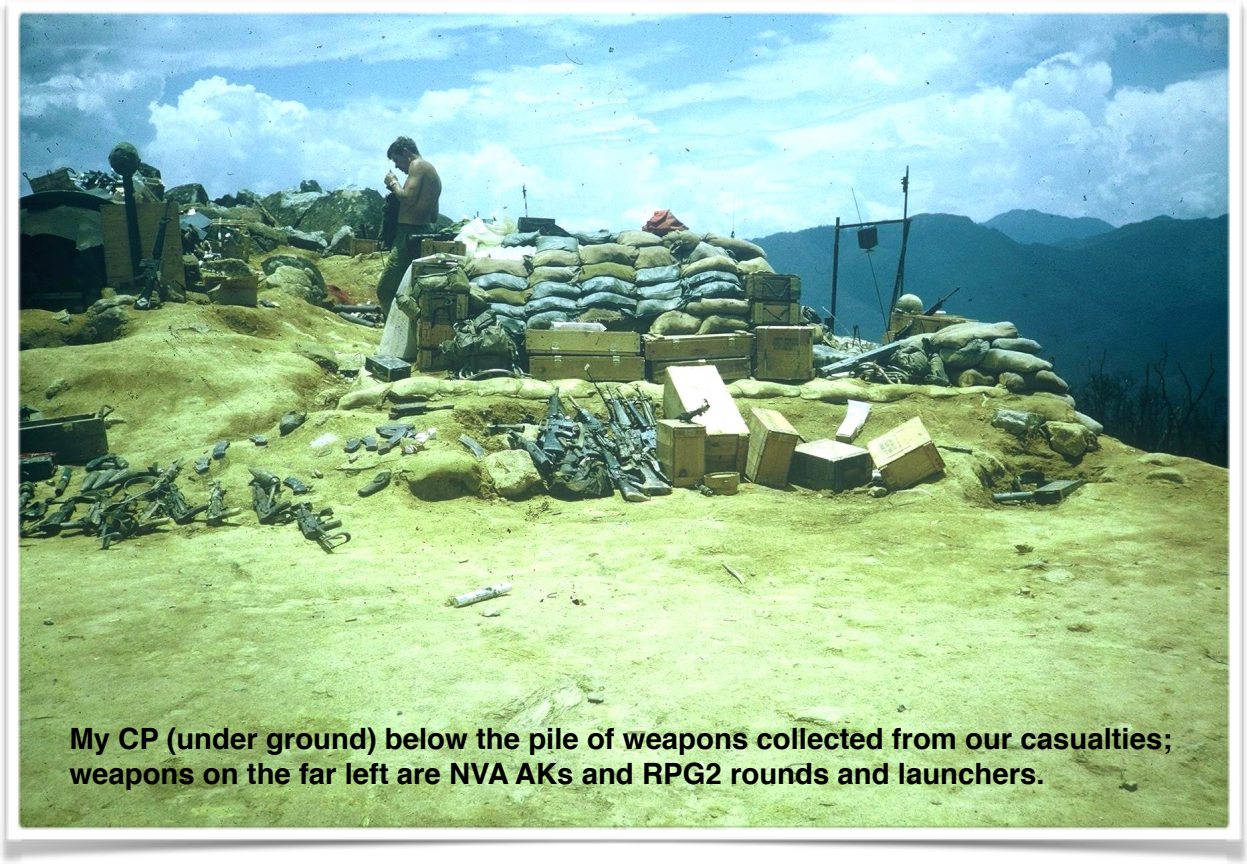
the perimeter of the hill, and refining defensive plans to ensure the security of the hill’s occupants. We were, by all accounts, still a severely under strength organization (infantry replacements were a critical shortage division-wide) but most our leadership was combat-seasoned and battle tested. We knew what had to be done to properly defend Granite but building a defense to our standards with limited manpower would take time.

A Company’s leaders and its veterans were fully aware that our work to defend the hill would be difficult and would entail never-ending hard labor made more challenging because of our severe shortages of 11Bs (Infantrymen). Despite virtually no intelligence describing the immediate threats to Granite every veteran in A Company knew the area around Granite had more than its share of NVA. We were no more than eight kilometers east of the location of our previous fights less than a week earlier. Every A Company leader understood the defensive priorities of work as we filled the perimeter and assumed sectors of defensive responsibility. We were certainly resource poor with respect to a labor pool of 11B infantryman but heavily laden with a host of new tasks to accomplish in a static perimeter defense. Our list of defensive tasks to be accomplished seemed endless but included counter-reconnaissance



FSB Granite's rocky top looking northwest thru the 319th Field Artillery positions above my CP.

patrolling around the surrounding hills, filling countless sandbags, improving fighting positions, clearing fields of fire to our front and flanks, emplacing dozens of rolls of defensive wire, positioning claymore mines and fougasse barrels (a flame 55 gallon barrel explosive), and most importantly, maintaining about a third of the force around the perimeter on full alert for possible probes or an NVA attack during daylight hours. As I watched the men of A Company close by air onto Granite and fill defensive positions I recall thinking that I was indeed fortunate to command such a great group of soldiers. To the man the seasoned combatants knew what needed to be accomplished and understood the demanding physical effort required. Our morale was high…the "Drive On" spirit (the motto of the 2-501 Infantry) was evident in the work ethic of every soldier. The men of A Company and our attachments arrived intent on going about our work day after day on Granite without complaint from dawn until dusk with great pride and a sense of accomplishment. We were determined to leave our professional mark on Granite and depart within a week or so "back into the bush" confident that we had left the hill far more defensible than we had found it. In retrospect, I suppose most of us were relieved to get onto



My CP (under ground) below the pile of weapons collected from our casualties; weapons on the far left are NVA AKs and RPG2 rounds and launchers.

Granite having had a couple of days at Eagle Beach after the REUP Hill affair. At least we could look at fire base duty for a week or so as a welcome break from heavy rucks to hump day after day and the constant threat of ambush. On Granite there was no lack of potable water… resupply of food and other necessities was reliable, and we could get some sun on the cuts, scratches, leech marks, and jungle rot that always accumulated while we were operating under the canopy for extended periods of time. Our Battalion Surgeon (CPT John Draus) was on Granite with us too so those needing special medical attention were indeed quite fortunate. We also welcomed a break from the frequency and intensity of combat we had experienced during our stent in the jungles to our northwest. Fire base duty was a tough, arduous assignment but often perceived by many of us as a welcome break from humping the mountainous jungle with the constant expectation of meeting the NVA face to face around every bend in the trail. I always assumed that our point men welcomed the break because our contacts with the NVA in the weeks before Granite had been up close and personal from the moment we had begun the spring offensive as part of the 3rd Brigade. Most of our meeting

My CP fighting position after the battle (my M16 laying over the ammo crate; silver canisters are spend hand flare tubes near the ruck sacks.

engagements with the NVA were at ten meters or less and we had ended almost three weeks of search and destroy operations sitting astride a critical NVA trail junction that drew their attacks or probes almost every night we were there. However, defending from fire bases like Granite occurred as a matter of normal rotation for rifle companies transitioning in and out of the canopy and therefore it was not an unexpected tasking. Our first few days on Granite were unremarkable and best described as business as usual. Other than seeing a few lights in the hills to our east (which we engaged with artillery) we had seen no enemy activity…no actionable intelligence had turned up and our patrols beyond our perimeter (including several air-assaults into the nearby hills) revealed no signs of any significant enemy presence. Our first few days and nights on Granite had been surprisingly quiet and we had worked relentlessly to improve our defensive posture.

As the sun approached the jungled mountain ridges lines to our west late afternoon on the 29th of April the mood and seriousness of purpose within A Company began its normal transition from tasks of preparation and

The axis of advance of the NVA main attack against Granite's northeast sector. The NVA used the large boulders to cover their movement; several lay dead between some of the large boulders.

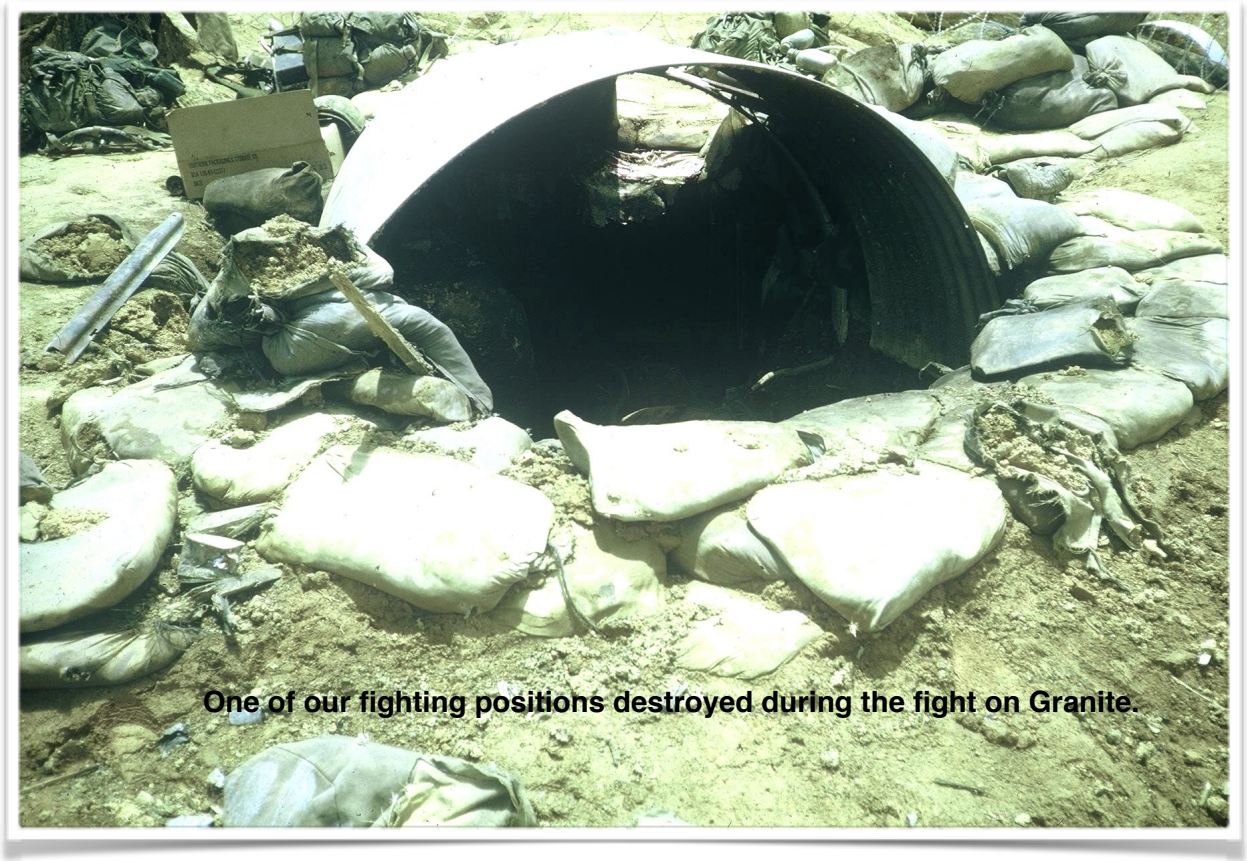
improvement of our defenses to an increase in our own alert status for a night defense. With a sense of determination and purpose soldiers along the ring of fighting positions on the perimeter turned to the tasks necessary to bring every fighter on the hill to a full "stand to" for the night defense well before darkness. As mentioned earlier, defending the hill was our primary mission on Granite therefore our first priority. The clammer and noise of picks, mallets, D-handle shovels, and entrenching tools around the perimeter positions was rapidly coming to its close. The normal joking and occasional shouts from position to position along the bunker line gradually subsided. The infantryman on Granite quietly and purposefully moved to emplace or check trip-flares, claymore mines and early warning devices to their front, verified that there were no "friendlies outside the wire" of our defensive lines and then without order slipped into their fighting positions. As the light continued to fade men began to conduct final weapons checks, lay out ammunition for easy access in the dark, arm claymore mines, and swap their "boony hats" for steel pots and flak jackets before darkness engulfed our hilltop. As darkness descended on Granite the defenders of

Our 81mm mortar pit just above my CP…destroyed in the early moments of the attack on Granite.

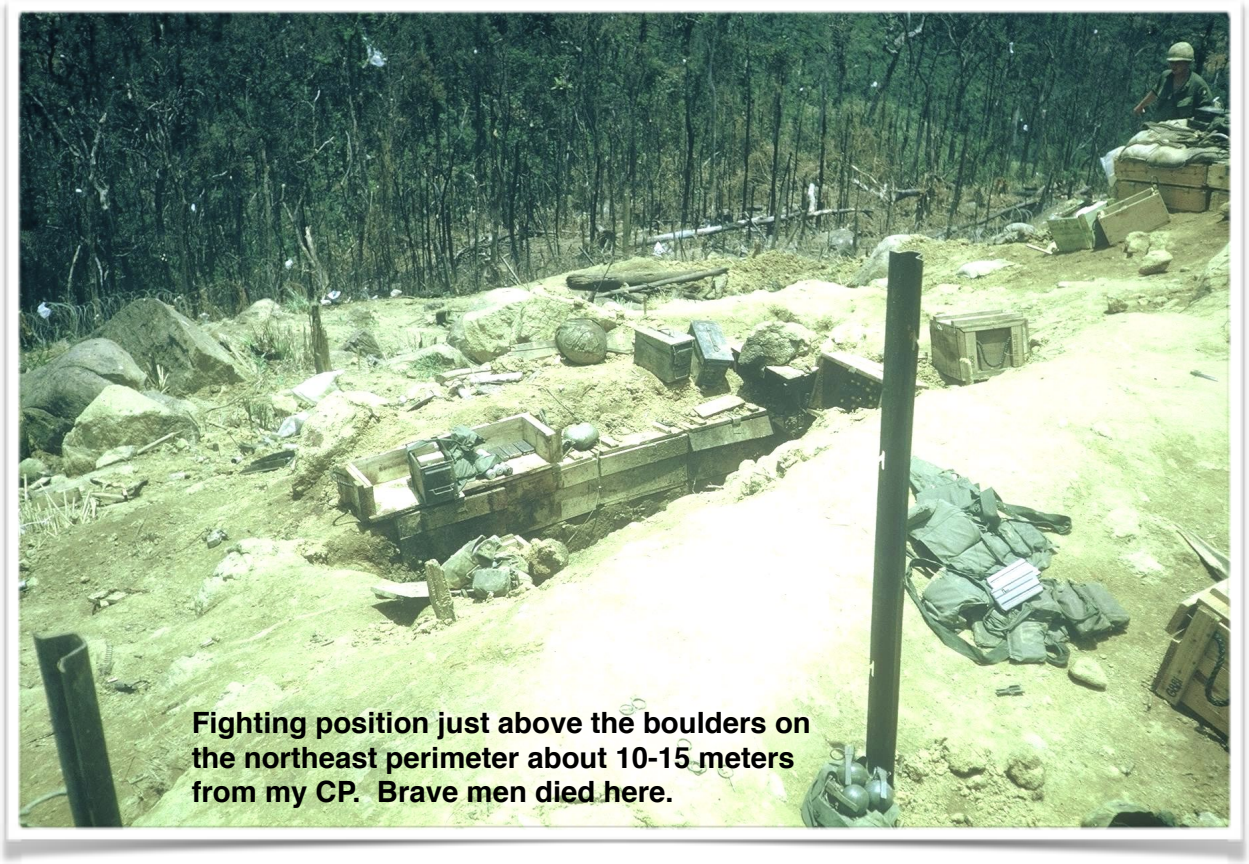
the hill were at “stand to” in their fighting positions and one hundred percent alert around the perimeter. Finally, as darkness enveloped Granite, A Company’s leaders (including me) walked the perimeter checking individual fighting positions, whispering quietly with the occupants of each foxhole, and giving last minute instructions for the night defense. Despite our limited counter-reconnaissance patrolling around the surrounding ridge lines we had discovered no concrete indications or warning of an imminent attack. We had no tactical intelligence of any kind to suggest that elements of the 7th NVA Sapper Battalion and the 29th Infantry Regiment, 324B Division (NVA) were moving into their attack positions around Granite’s east and northeast slopes with intentions of destroying our fire base and killing or capturing its defenders.

On the night of the 29th of April the clouds moved up from the valley floor below us quite rapidly and the heat of the day was replaced by a cooler, more overcast, almost light foggy condition. In my command post (CP) just above our one-ship landing zone (LZ) on the north end of Granite we were ”business as usual” as we accounted for the activities of the day by radio with subordinate platoons, confirmed last minute defensive decisions, and

discussed plans for the next day's work. My Forward Observer (LT Jim Norman) and I were engaged shoulder to shoulder reviewing defensive indirect fire plans and confirming last minute indirect fire target lists to be executed throughout the night and just before dawn on the 30th. My radio operators were also in radio contact with our three platoon command posts around the perimeter busily gathering the often mundane daily personnel/ logistics requests and relaying the collected information to our higher headquarters staff elements…..a usual activity each evening. As we settled in for the night defense I recall that all was quiet and quite dark on Granite other than the tiny red glows from our mortar and artillery red and white aiming posts atop the hill. On one or more occasions just after darkness I received complaints of occasional hand flares being fired from our bunker line along the northeast side of Granite but that ended with a radio call to the platoon CP responsible for that sector. By candle-light or red-filtered flashlight and a few C-Ration cups of coffee the work underground and inside my CP continued well into the evening as was the norm. We had worked tirelessly to improve Granite's defenses since our arrival but I knew much work lay ahead to improve our defensive scheme.



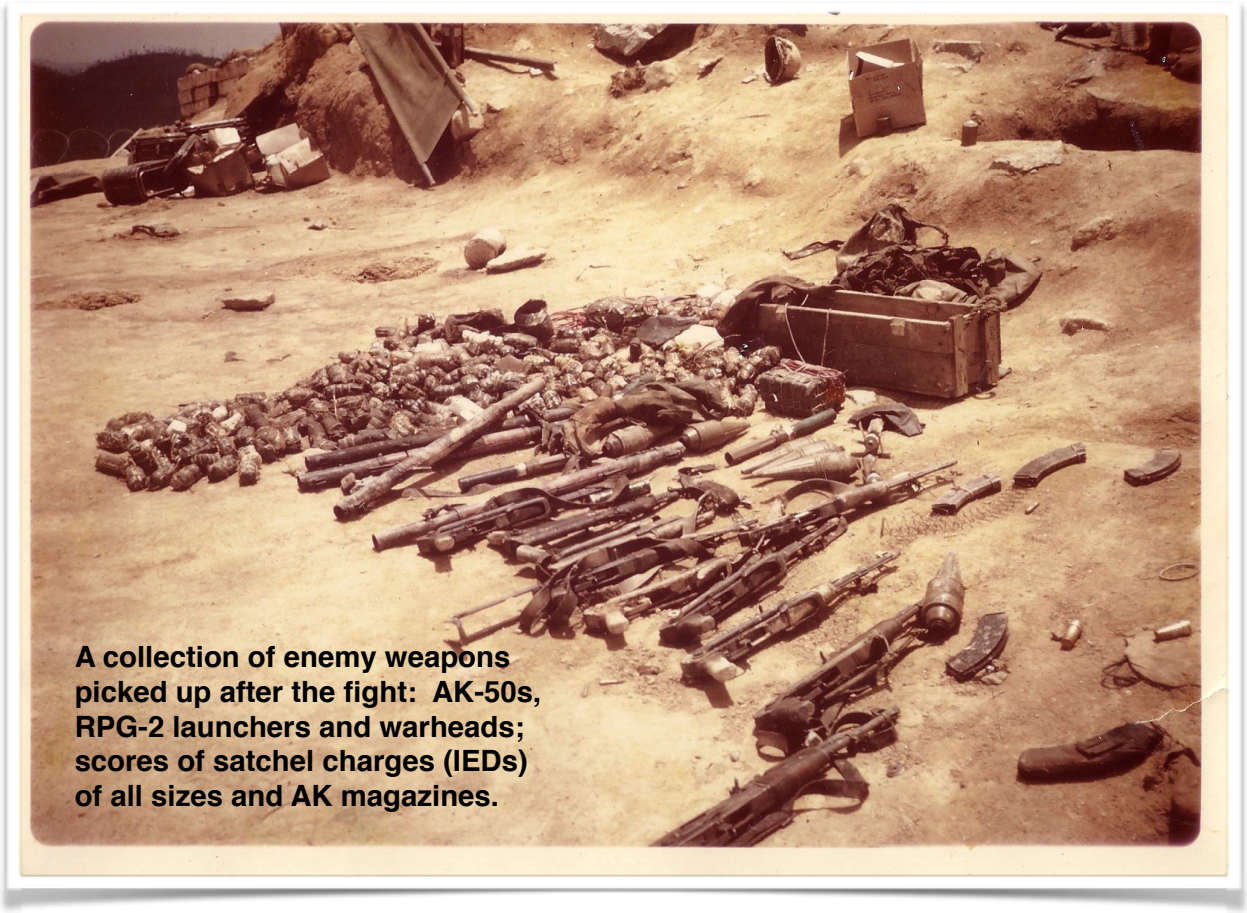
One of our fighting positions destroyed during the fight on Granite.



Fighting position just above the boulders on the northeast perimeter about 10-15 meters from my CP. Brave men died here.

We had completed solid direct and indirect fire plans, had done some counter-recon patrolling in the adjacent hills, and we had put in as much tactical defensive razor wire as possible with the manpower available. However, I was still concerned that we had done no counter-attack planning on the hill and there were no designated reserves. I don't recall any electronic surveillance around Granite nor was I aware of a plan for any to the best of my recollection. Our fire support base still had no well defined general obstacle plan and there were no listening posts established. I was also concerned that I had no "hard wire" communications from my CP to the TOC. To summarize, I was comfortable with the work A Company had done since our arrival but at the same time I knew we needed a well coordinated, written defensive operations plan/ order for the hill with appropriate annexes and overlays. We needed a written combined arms defensive plan for all tenants on the hill than included: direct fire plans; indirect fire plans; counterattack plans with designated reserves; counter-reconnaissance plans; electronic surveillance plans; obstacle plans; combat patrol plans; plans for listening and observation posts; and hardwire communications plans for all headquarters

on the hill. Such plans become orders and directives for defending and, in written form, ensure continuity of effort for everyone involved in the defense. The 2-501 Infantry had such a plan/order while it occupied Fire Support Bastogne through the winter months of 69 and early 70 but none existed on FSB Granite. (I still have my original copy of the FSB Bastogne Defense Plan.)



A collection of enemy weapons picked up after the fight: AK-50s, RPG-2 launchers and warheads; scores of satchel charges (IEDs) of all sizes and AK magazines.

At about 2140 hours on 29 April, while we were still hard at work in my command post, the east and northeast side of Granite's perimeter suddenly and without warning erupted with igniting trip flares, small arms fire, and in rapid succession a series of large, recognizable explosions immediately identified as satchel charges (improvised explosive devices) and RPG's (rocket-propelled grenades). Almost instantly a host of our own hand-flares from along the perimeter streaked skyward to provide immediate illumination and simultaneously the hill shook from the largest explosions coming from along the eastern bunker line and near our 81mm mortar position some twenty meters or so to my right rear. Even more hand-flares

ran their familiar contrails up into the foggy sky to further illuminate our hilltop as the crescendo of exploding munitions continued to build. I immediately knew we were under attack by a sizable, well armed, and carefully rehearsed NVA force that had obviously penetrated our outer defensive wire barrier in multiple locations. Standing chest deep in my hole I could see that the fighting positions to my front across the LZ and to my right along the east and northeast side of Granite were being hit hard with sporadic RPGs, small arms fire and a hail of satchel charges of various sizes and shapes, some weighing 10 pounds or more.

Our mortar position, an obvious NVA priority target, was neutralized almost immediately without firing a shot (as best I recollect) and its occupants were mortally wounded. A Company's infantrymen along the east side of the perimeter and to my immediate front (north) were countering the NVA assault with an almost indistinguishable roar of M-16, M-79, and M-60 machine-gun fire as well as detonating claymore mines and throwing hand grenades. Within the first 15 to 20 minutes or so our flame munitions were detonated along the eastern perimeter momentarily casting a bright orange glow beneath at least a dozen or more hand flares now illuminating Granite. Our shear volume and intensity of fire from the bunker line rapidly halted the NVA Sapper's mass advance into our positions. In fact, several soldiers who had been overlooking the flame munitions reported later that they observed scores of NVA soldiers on fire and running back into the jungle. However, for several more hours the fighting continued against a battered but determined NVA force as they appeared to attack piecemeal in small groups of two or three focused on specific fighting positions along and within our perimeter.

The NVA Sapper teams were a determined lot; they clearly had specific objectives assigned along and within our perimeter and never wavered in their destructive purposes unless we engaged and killed them. They appeared to be well rehearsed and fought valiantly to accomplish their assigned missions. (Over the years I've often marveled at the courage and tenacity of the NVA infantrymen….they were a formidable enemy with enormous battlefield discipline and were well rehearsed in their efforts to destroy specific assigned objectives within our lines). Throughout the remainder of the night there were occasional close combat engagements with small surviving teams of NVA still hellbent on penetrating our perimeter as we made adjustments in our lines to close gaps created by our own

losses. As the battle continued to rage other supporting divisional and non-divisional assets arrived at our request to reinforce the fight. While our supporting tube artillery pounded suspected NVA positions in the surrounding hills, aerial rocket artillery (AH1 Cobras) joined in the fight as did an Air Force AC-119 "Stinger" Gunship. At the same time Granite was illuminated by welcomed general support aviation assets as we were becoming dangerously low on our own supply of flare munitions. At first light on the 30th the aerial rocket artillery along with the Division's Air Calvary assets provided us greater precision in attacking suspected enemy locations with 2.75 rocket and machine-gun fire as the visibility improved.

As mentioned earlier, several of the fighting positions to my immediate front across the landing zone and also to my right rear along the northeastern perimeter were destroyed within the first few minutes of the battle. In effect, my CP had unintentionally become a critical component of the perimeter fight overlooking the only LZ on the northern end of the fire base. During the most intense hour of the battle I could see a number of my own soldiers in face-to-face encounters with attacking NVA soldiers no more than 15 or so meters to my front and front right. The advancing NVA attackers were being met with a hail of small arms fire and grenades. As is always the case the close combat to my front and right was chaotic and there were moments when all of us had great difficulty separating friend from foe as we identified human targets in the shadows created by drifting flares overhead. For a brief period anything moving on or near our LZ without a steel helmet was a target. Time and again I listened to and observed A Company's infantrymen engaging individual NVA soldiers as they crawled to within arms reach of our fighting positions. Above the pitch of the incessant explosions I could hear occasional shouts between our fighting positions identifying approaching enemy soldiers followed by quick, violent engagements to stop the enemy advances. For what seemed like much of the night the men of A Company raked known and suspected enemy positions with withering direct fire and scores of hand grenades were hurled at enemy soldiers attempting to close on our fighting positions. From my CP we were able to dispatch several NVA Sappers as they stood to toss satchel charges in our direction from across the LZ. At one point around dawn we used a LAW (Light Anti-Tank Weapon) to blast one or more NVA soldiers from a protective rock outcropping just below and left of my CP. I recall that at some point during the night fight MAJ Jim O'Connell

(our Battalion Operations Officer) bravely made his way down to my CP from the TOC and his presence was uplifting and reassuring. He certainly didn't have to take such a risk but his conspicuous valor in joining us for the fight at the LZ did not go unnoticed by me or the soldiers in my command group.

As dawn broke the direct fire engagements along the perimeter had all but stopped and our priorities shifted to evacuating our wounded and accounting for our own killed-in-action. At the same time we were reconsolidating our perimeter, redistributing and resupplying ammunition, and sweeping our immediate front for security purposes. As I personally walked the eastern sector mid morning below our perimeter some 20 meters or so I discovered a severely wounded but semiconscious NVA soldier desperately in need of medical attention. With some assistance we quickly began our effort to get the wounded enemy soldier back up the hill to our Aid Station for treatment. As I struggled up the hill helping to carry him we began to receive quite accurate NVA mortar fire (either 60mm or 82mm) for the first time and I recall dropping the enemy soldier at one point along our route to dive into a nearby foxhole to wait out the barrage of mortar rounds as they "walked" across Granite. When the mortars finally lifted we got the "NVA detainee" back to our Aid Station and he was later evacuated from Granite. I returned to continue a sweep of the eastern sector just forward of our defensive positions and found a number of dead NVA Sappers lying between and around several large boulders. Their bodies appeared to have been blackened from head to toe for the attack. All were shirtless...most were without footgear and wore nothing but short pants. As I recall most of them were equipped with folding stock AK assault rifles (often referred to as the AK50) and a shoulder bag containing an assortment of satchel charges and one or more AK magazines. I must admit that the scene forward of our defensive lines was a gruesome one and yet it was a testament to the courage and commitment of an enemy force determined to destroy our fire base. Several RPG launchers and RPG rounds with propellant boosters were spread among the dead NVA sappers as well and we collected their personal weapons and ammunition later that morning and piled them along side our LZ for evacuation.

For the remainder of our time on Granite there were no ground probes or direct fire attacks by the NVA although they were certainly anticipated. Our priority of effort at this point shifted to accountability of our own combatants,

reorganizing our defensive perimeter, rearming/refitting for potential counter attacks, and we continued to evacuate our own dead and wounded. The NVA mortar attacks on Granite which had begun as we were getting the POW up the hill around 1000 AM on the 30th continued in earnest for the remainder of the day and were a serious threat to anyone moving around our hill. On at least five occasions we were forced to stop all movement around Granite to seek cover as mortar rounds rained onto Granite's hilltop. Before the day was over U.S. forces on Granite would sustain approximately thirty more casualties from very accurate NVA mortar fires. I would emphasize that these indirect fire attacks came largely without warning and were very accurate which made them that much more dangerous. We were rarely able to detect the sounds of their launch from the surrounding hills due to the noise of our own supporting helicopters involved in resupply, medical evacuation, aerial reconnaissance, and almost continuous air strikes targeting the nearby hills. The NVA mortar attacks were both physically and psychologically a factor in hampering our reconstitution of Granite's defenses all day long on the 30th.

Those of us in A Company who had survived the NVA assault on Granite soon air-assaulted off the hill under mortar fire and not without our own grave concerns for ourselves and the brave air crews that risked their lives to extract us. As the UH-1 Huey's lifted us off of Granite and temporarily out of harm's way many of us were aware that we had left one of our own unaccounted for. All day on the 30th, despite the intense mortar fire, we had combed the hill and the immediate terrain around Granite's northeastern perimeter searching for **PFC EDWARD J. BISHOP, JR.**. Many of us knew his exact location along the eastern flank near the 81mm mortar position when the battle had begun yet his whereabouts after the ground attack subsided remained a mystery. In fact, Eddy's position was no more than 15 to 20 meters from my CP to my right rear and bore the brunt of some of the fiercest fighting and the greatest density of large satchel charges coming from the NVA's main attack in their effort to overrun Granite. Eddy Bishop was a great soldier and well liked by all who knew him. None of us.…not one, will ever rest until there is a full accounting for his loss and he has been returned home with appropriate honors.

The 101st Airborne Division Operations Report - Lessons Learned (dated 15 August 1970) lists seven U.S. killed, one U.S. Missing-In-Action, and seven wounded as a result of the fight on Granite that began on the

29th and another thirty-four wounded as a result of five separate mortar attacks on Granite the following day. The mortar attacks would continue on Granite through at least 2 May or longer. NVA losses were reported as 18 killed-in-action and one POW captured. With some degree of certainty I believe that the total U.S. wounded on Granite remains understated for many soldiers were treated for wounds at multiple Aid Stations after we had departed from Granite.

Although the Division listed seven killed and one missing-in-action, my research suggests eight men were killed during the FSB Granite battle and one (Ed Bishop, Jr.) was (and still is) MIA…. (later declared "killed-in-action"—remains not recovered). The names of our "fallen" are:

IN MEMORIUM

ROBERT SIDNEY BOGGS

MOS 11B(Infantryman); PFC; B Company, 2-501 Infantry

KIA 29 April 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds

Frankford, West Virginia

LARRY NEAL JONES

MOS 11C(Indirect Fire Infantryman); SGT; E Company, 2-501 Infantry

KIA 30 April 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds

Oakman, Alabama

DENNIS WAYNE HUNTER

MOS 11B(Infantryman); PFC; A Company, 2-501 Infantry

KIA 29 April 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar wounds

Santa Ana, California

CARL EUGENE PATTEN

MOS 11C(Indirect Fire Infantryman); PFC; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 29 April 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar wounds
Memphis, Tennessee

ROY HARRISON SNYDER

MOS 11B(Infantryman); SP/4; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 29April 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar wounds
Fabius, New York

FREDERICK EDWARD WORTMANN

MOS 64B(Heavy Vehicle Driver); SP/4; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 29 April 1970; of undefined cause
El Paso, Texas

ROBERT JOSEPH SHANNON

MOS 57A(Duty Soldier); SP/4; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 30 April 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Clinton, Iowa

LINWOOD ALFERONIA WALKER

MOS 11B(Infantryman); PFC; C Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 29 April 1970; died out right; misadventure
Baltimore, Maryland

EDWARD JAMES BISHOP, JR.

MOS 11B(Infantryman); PFC; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Listed MIA; later classified “died while missing-remains not returned”
Hartford, Connecticut

CHAPTER THREE

The FIGHT FOR FSB HENDERSON

101st Airborne Division (Airmobile); OPERATION TEXAS STAR;

5-6 May 1970; South Vietnam;

Approximately 9 miles northeast of the Laotian salient; 10 miles south of the DMZ and

15 miles west-southwest of Quang Tri

I was the A Company, 2-501st Infantry Regiment and U.S. Forces Ground Component Commander responsible for Fire Support Base Henderson's defense throughout the battle that occurred on 6 May 1970 until we were extracted with a "change of mission". I was their leader throughout the fight; I fought for and with them; I led them off of the hill when so ordered. The men who fought there were (and are) common Americans of uncommon patriotism, valor, and fidelity. They fought and held Henderson as determined warriors with great courage, skill, and

tenacity for me and for one another in the finest traditions of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), the United States Army, and our Nation.

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends". (The Gospel of John, Chapter 15, Verse 13)

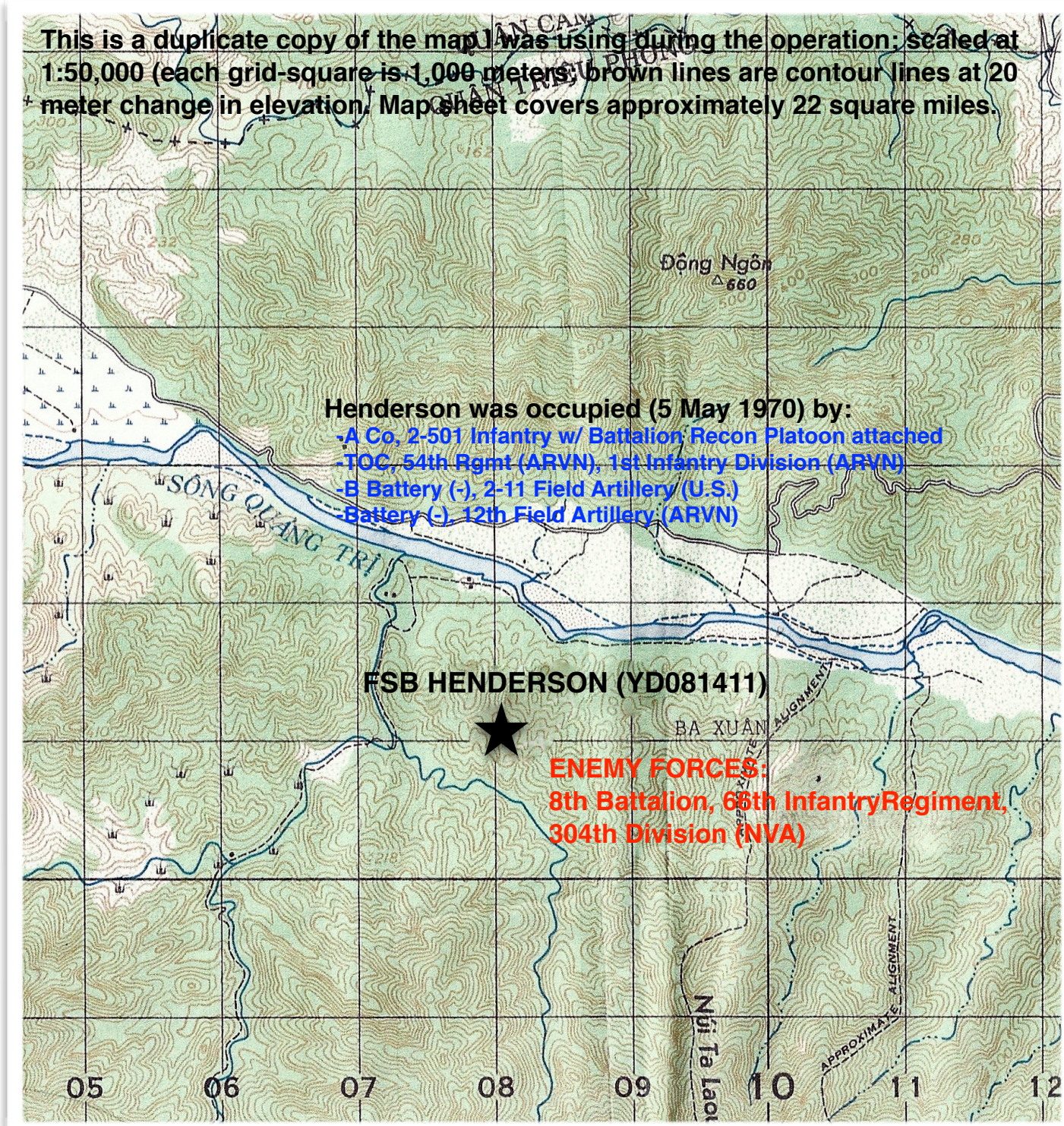
MY PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF HENDERSON IS IN MEMORY OF ALL PARTICIPANTS BUT ESPECIALLY FOR TWO BRAVE INFANTRYMEN WHO WERE LISTED AS "MISSING-IN-ACTION" FOR THIRTY-TWO YEARS: **SSG REFUGIO THOMAS TERAN, AND SSG LARRY GENE KIER.** THE REMAINS OF THESE TWO GREAT PATRIOTS WERE RECOVERED IN 1998 AND FINALLY IDENTIFIED IN 2002. MAY THESE WARRIORS FINALLY REST IN PEACE.

I don't recall the exact time my UH-1(Huey) touched down on the sun-baked one-ship FSB Henderson landing zone (LZ) on the 5th of May 1970 but I certainly recall the aerial view of the fire support base and its surrounding terrain as we executed the long sweeping left turn and flared on "short final" for our helicopter insertion. As I got my first glance of Henderson from the air I was taken aback by the prominent high ground overlooking three sides of the cluttered, orange hilltop. From the air our new home appeared to be a relatively irregular but generally goose-egg shaped 50 by 200 meter "bump" that straddled a sweeping ridge line running down eventually to the Song Quang Tri River about a kilometer north and below. I still remember as if it were yesterday scrambling to assemble the thick roll of map-sheets I had been issued in preparation for the lengthy move north (and the drill of getting these maps distributed to the company's leadership). We were preparing to enter an area that likely none of us had even seen before and an area quite foreign to most members of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) as far as I knew. By my initial map analysis during mission preparation I had concluded that we were being inserted no more than about 9 miles northeast of the Laotian Salient and we were uncomfortably closer to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Vietnam as well. Approximately 15 miles to our east-north-east was the city of Quang Tri. Just by simple map analysis I certainly didn't need the most recent Intelligence Summary for me to assume that our new area of operations (AO) was probably saturated with

large, well-trained and relatively uncontested North Vietnamese Army units. We were being inserted on the eastern flank of the NVA's primary travel corridor into South Vietnam from the north (unless they circled the DMZ to enter through Laos). We were to occupy and defend an old U.S. Marine fire support base no more than five miles or so from one of the NVA's primary troop and logistics infiltration routes used to funnel men and materiel into the fight. Even though I had not been issued a written operation order for the defense of Henderson and had not received an intelligence update before our air-assault into Henderson I knew the area would present us with a heightened threat immediately upon receipt of the mission. Fortunately, I had made an excursion even further north (up near "Charlie 2" and even nearer the DMZ, as I recall) once before in the October-November 1969 timeframe with the 2-501 Infantry while commanding Echo Company. The experience had left its mark on me with respect to the density and lethality of forces potentially operating in the region. From my perspective our new AO had to be far more dangerous when compared to our AO west of Hue City and perhaps even more threatening than the area around FSB Ripcord where we had been fighting for the past month. Operating this close to the DMZ and the Laotian Salient was unnerving to say the least and the few seasoned veterans left in A Company who had survived the REUP Hill battle and the Granite fights in April shared my concerns.

Only a few weeks earlier the senior leadership of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), in concert with our Army of Vietnam (ARVN) partners in the northern I Corps area, had jointly made the decision to conduct **combined operations** to interdict NVA forces moving across the DMZ with operations commencing 1 April. One interesting aspect of the plan provided for ARVN forces to continue "tactical control" of their areas of operation currently assigned however, as an additional tasking, **the 3rd Brigade, 101st was required to reopen FSB Henderson** in the ARVN operational area. In opening the fire base the **3rd Brigade assumed responsibility for providing base defense and security of both U.S. and ARVN artillery units and an ARVN Regimental Tactical Operations Center** located on Henderson in support of ARVN infantry operations to the south and west.

On 30 April, 3rd Brigade, 101st reopened FSB Henderson (formally a U.S. Marine Corps firebase) by air-assaulting one U.S. infantry company (**D Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry**, commanded by **CPT Bill**



Whitaker) onto the hill for fire base defense. Shortly thereafter, **B Battery (-), 2-11 Field Artillery [U.S.-155mm]** and B Battery (-), 12th Field Artillery [ARVN-105mm] plus the 54th (ARVN) Infantry Regiment/1st Infantry

Division (ARVN) Tactical Operations Center (TOC) and its supporting elements arrived on Henderson. (The firebase had been initially opened more than a year earlier by the U.S. 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines on 18 January 1969 and used to support Operation Dewey Canyon and subsequent assaults into the Da Krong River Valley and abandoned it with the operation's termination. Again, Henderson was reoccupied on 11 June 1969 by the U.S. 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines and 2nd Battalion,12th Marines as part of Operation Cameron Falls and later closed).

Meanwhile, with Henderson's reoccupation, the rest of the 3rd Brigade, 101st and its infantry battalions were operating well south with no designated brigade reserve force for us up north (as best I recall) and very limited capability to reinforce Henderson, if required. Concurrent with Henderson's opening, the 54th (ARVN) infantry battalions were initially inserted some distance from FSB Henderson. The 54th Regiment's 1st Infantry Battalion was inserted on 30 April well south of Henderson, and on 1 May the 54th Regiment's 2nd Battalion air-assaulted into its AO on abandoned Fire Support Base Tun Tavern even further from Henderson. In hindsight, the tactical decision to open Henderson without clearing the immediate surrounding terrain proved to be a fatal error that dramatically increased the hill's short-term vulnerabilities and provided the NVA with an immediate high priority, lucrative target. (I certainly had no idea that the surrounding hills had not been swept around Henderson when we arrived. This critical piece of battlefield intelligence/operational information was shared with me only AFTER the battle!).

To this day I recall thinking, "Wow…who in their right mind could have picked this piece of terrain to build a fire support base?". By simple map analysis and aerial reconnaissance one could quickly conclude that the hill was too large and irregular to be defended by a single under-strength U.S. rifle company. Henderson's elliptical yet jagged perimeter would ultimately house elements of two artillery batteries (with their ammunition), a regimental headquarters with staff, a rather large medical aid station component and a helicopter landing zone. Once on the ground what I found while I walked the perimeter of Henderson for the first time disturbed me even more. In absolute shock I instantly recognized that defensive preparations on Henderson were next to nonexistent. With almost a week of occupation most of Henderson's fighting positions along and within the perimeter were nothing more than perhaps waist deep foxholes with little if any overhead cover and very few fighting positions were even sand

bagged. At best no more than a single strand of concertina (protective wire) had been emplaced forward of the fighting positions and there was no tangle-foot wire or triple strand concertina wire fencing at all. Fields of fire had been cleared no more than 10 to 15 meters forward of the lines of defense leading into the dense vegetation on Henderson's south and southeast side thus providing very limited vision along at least half or more of the hill's perimeter. Individual fighting positions had been selected such that few supported one another, even fewer provided opportunity for grazing fires (for machine-guns) and there was no discernible defense in depth. Defensive materiel (concertina wire, pickets, and other engineering assets) normally pre-positioned around the perimeter of newly occupied fire bases was primitive at best and next to nonexistent. As best I remember the only positions with even minimal overhead cover were the ARVN Tactical Operations Center (TOC), a small ARVN Medical Facility, a few positions below the artillery batteries, and my Command Post (CP) some 15 to 20 meters north and below the TOC. I was dumbstruck to see such a lack of tactical preparation given the hill had been occupied by a U.S. infantry company for almost a week.

As A Company, 2-501 Infantry's 80 plus infantrymen (about 60 percent of our authorized strength) continued to land one aircraft at a time on Henderson and make their way up and onto the hill to occupy the defensive positions I conducted my usual "terrain walk" back through the two artillery battery's positions to better understand the terrain we were to defend. I was amazed to see so much unprotected artillery ammunition laying haphazard around the guns; some ammunition was still on pallets covered by their sling-load cargo netting. In addition there were several exposed large rubber fuel bladders positioned at or near the artillery positions. I could not have imagined a potentially more lethal mistake. (Little did I know of the effects these blatant tactical errors would cost us in lives in just a matter of a few hours). As I made my way back down to my CP I stopped by the ARVN TOC to introduce myself and gather as much information and intelligence as I could before meeting with my platoon leaders for a walk of our perimeter to define sectors of responsibility. I briefly spoke with the senior ARVN officer there, his attached U.S. Army Advisor (a Major as best I remember), and I met with an ARVN captain who proudly announced that he was a graduate of our Infantry School at Fort Benning. During our initial conversations I quickly determined that Henderson had **no combined defensive plans** at all! There were: (1) **no direct or** (2) **indirect fire**

plans, (3) **no counterattack plans w/designated reserves**, (4) **no counter-reconnaissance plans**, (5) **no electronic warfare surveillance plans**, (6) **no obstacle plans**, (8) **no combat patrol plans,** (9) **no listening post/observation post plans**, and (10) **no "hard wire" communications from my CP to any locations around the hill to include the ARVN TOC**. Essentially my visit with the 54th Infantry headquarters on Henderson provided nothing of intelligence value or operational importance with regard to defending the hill thus my immediate assumption was that the ARVN on Henderson were oblivious to anything relating to defense of the hill. As I departed the TOC for my CP my immediate conclusions were that Henderson was a disaster waiting to happen and I knew it within the first hour I was on the ground. I also departed with an even more unsettling realization that **the 54th ARVN Regiment and I had no "command relationship" at all…I wasn't even sure who B Battery (-), 2-11 Field Artillery answered to on the hill!** Not a single designated unit on Henderson could require anything of the other in defense of hill! I was absolutely dumbfounded by the **lack of "unity of command"** under such ominous circumstances. I left the ARVN TOC confused, frustrated, and down right angry for having had A Company casually tossed into such a tactical and operational fiasco but I also knew that we absolutely had to make the best of the remainder of the daylight hours to fix what we could along the perimeter before nightfall.

Arriving back at my Command Post (CP), (a roughly eight by ten foot hole covered by three or four sections of steel planking and sandbags) I found my Artillery Forward Observer (FO) Team, radio operators, and others in my command group frantically scrambling to set up our own static radio communications equipment in order to talk to the 3rd Brigade, my immediate higher headquarters. Others in my CP were taking the usual closure reports from our subordinate units as they quickly made the necessary adjustments to fill in Henderson's irregular perimeter. By radio, as I recall, I immediately instructed my platoon leaders to focus on preparing our own fighting positions along the perimeter with priority to getting fully dug in and appropriate overhead cover on as many fighting positions as possible before last light. Frankly, such instructions were not necessary for the work had already begun at the direction of A Company's superb group of platoon leaders and noncommissioned officers. The few seasoned veterans of A Company's successful defenses on REUP Hill and FSB Granite knew the importance of digging in properly with the requisite

overhead cover and the critical importance of crew-served weapons positioning for interlocking fires. From the moment A Company's infantrymen got on the bunker line there were frantic efforts along the perimeter to get "underground" and construct some form of overhead cover with the limited materials available. Getting dug in with appropriate overhead cover as soon as possible was a "first priority" message to my four platoon leaders: **LT Jim Knight** (1st Platoon), **LT Rick Hawley** (Recon Platoon), **LT Lyn Hargrave** (2nd Platoon), and **SSG Bob Nichol** (3rd Platoon). As a matter of record, Jim Knight and I were the only two A Company "line officers" left to make the trip to Henderson since we had moved north the first week of April as part of the 3rd Brigade offensive. I had lost **LT Jim Kwiecien** (2nd Platoon) to a shrapnel wound about a week earlier during the FSB Granite fight, and lost **LT Dave Poole** (3rd Platoon) to a noncombat-related knee injury a week earlier while we were on "stand down" at Eagle Beach. Rick Hawley and about 14 or 15 members of our battalion's Reconnaissance Platoon joined us as last-minute reinforcements given we were already so terribly under strength. (Rick and I were old friends having served together as platoon leaders in C Company, 2-501 Infantry back in the fall of 69. We had certainly "chewed some of the same dirt" along the Song Bo River out near FSB Veghel west of Fire Support Base Bastogne and I was certainly glad to have such an experienced platoon leader with us on this operation). Lyn Hargrave joined us on May 5th to lead the 2nd Platoon for the Henderson operation having formerly been a Platoon Leader in C Company, 2-501 Infantry and most recently he had been leading a Mobile Training Team for the 2nd Brigade back down south. SSG Bob Nichol had taken charge of the 3rd Platoon after LT Dave Poole's injury however I had absolute confidence in Bob as the acting Platoon Leader. He was an experienced A Company veteran…a smart crafty leader, and one of the finest noncommissioned officers I'd humped the jungle with while in Vietnam. Sometime around mid day we received a CH47 (Chinook) sortie of a few additional infantry replacements (I don't recall the exact number…perhaps 15 to 20 or more) but even with these and the attached Recon Platoon our foxhole strength around the perimeter was no more than about 120 to 125 soldiers. We were still well below our authorized strength and certainly far short of the infantry manpower needed to effectively construct and defend Henderson's large and irregular perimeter.

While A Company and its late-arriving attachments and new replacements were racing to dig in properly my senior RTOs (radio-telephone operators) and I had another battle on our hands in that we were unable to establish reliable radio voice communications with the 3rd Brigade TOC (our higher headquarters) approximately 30 miles southeast of Henderson. I had been forewarned that the 3rd Brigade was aware of the Henderson communications problems but little if anything had been done to remedy this very serious operational shortcoming. Henderson had now been "up and operational" for a week and yet the 3rd Brigade had failed in its responsibility to establish reliable, continuous, direct radio communications with the fire base's primary defenders (the 3rd Brigade had no "command relationship" at all with the 54th (ARVN) Regiment on Henderson). The 3rd Brigade's solution to the dilemma appeared to be that Henderson's primary defenders (A Company) would maintain radio contact through a distant "radio retransmission/relay site" using our own organic communications equipment and a single AN/GRC 292 radio antenna. Either faulty equipment (or operators) at the retransmission site or the extended distances made continuous communications next to impossible for us. (Only years later would I learn that the Division had provided a Multi-Channel Radio System to the 54th ARVN TOC twenty meters directly behind me and provided them with an operator or operators as well!). For a week the 3rd Brigade had ignored the requirement to provide reliable and redundant communications to the defenders of their most distant and vulnerable fire base! This "unpardonable sin" added to the litany of leadership and tactical shortcomings I found existent on Henderson upon my arrival. Despite our best efforts we never established continuous reliable command communications with our higher headquarters and we were forced to relay our hourly required situation reports by alternate means. On a more positive note, my company Forward Observer (FO), **1LT Jim Norman**, was able to maintain excellent communications with our direct support artillery Fire Direction Center (FDC) and I had absolute confidence in having adequate 155mm artillery support from FSB Sarge not far to our north (I don't recall who was providing our direct support [105] artillery but it had to have been an ARVN unit). For the record, I must say again that Jim Norman was still relatively new to A Company having replaced a seasoned and well respected "Redleg" (**LT Russ Cook)** about two weeks earlier during the REUP Hill battle but his skilled performance during the Granite fight gave me great confidence in

his abilities. I've always believed Jim Norman's communications link with our supporting U.S. artillery on FSB Sarge played a vital role in reporting the initial NVA assault on Henderson and in preventing an NVA reinforcing attack. In fact, Jim had 155mm fires (from Sarge) on the ground within a very few minutes of the NVA initial assault and we were able to strike likely enemy attack positions along their most probable avenues of approach during those critical minutes before our aerial rocket artillery arrived on station.

At this point in my chronicle of events leading up to the battle I must add that there were one or more suggestions of a 5 May visit to our hill by the 3rd Brigade Commander. I recollect a brief visit by the 1st Infantry Division (ARVN) Commanding General but I must admit I don't recall a visit by **COL William J. Bradley**, (my immediate commander) on the 5th of May….in fact, 101st records reveal that COL Bradley visited FSB Henderson on the 3rd and 4th of May before our arrival. However, and with all honesty, my sole interests on the day of our arrival were focused on reducing our immediate vulnerabilities and developing a plan to accomplish a seemingly endless lists of tasks to "harden" Henderson's perimeter. I would defer addressing the communications problems and the dysfunctional command relationships for matters of safety and security on our hill. Frankly, the last thing I needed was "a visit" by anyone from my newly crafted and highly unusual command and control structure.

With regard to "senior leader visits" to forward deployed tactical forces I must digress for a moment from the Henderson story and ask a pardon in advance for the requisite degree of personal cynicism about to be expressed. I had learned over time as a company commander to routinely despise senior leader "visits" from anyone other than my battalion commander (I'd seen lots of senior leader visits...I may have been just a twenty-six year old, two years in grade captain but this was my third company command...two in combat..."this wasn't my first rodeo"!). I had learned to characterize most "senior leader" visits as nothing more than just "face time with the troops" unless their purpose or purposes were to convey specific actions and orders. I had concluded months earlier that the majority of our senior leadership in the 101st (colonels and above) didn't have the slightest appreciation for what we "grunts" were enduring day-after-day in the mountainous jungles of Vietnam (nor were most "situationally aware" of the unique dangers and personal challenges we faced as jungle fighters). Frankly, most seemed absolutely oblivious to the

fact that our immediate and perhaps most difficult task was learning to survive in the environment in which we operated. For example, I believe the majority of us learned by mostly trial and error to exist/survive and ultimately live in harmony with the jungle or we were destined to become a casualty of its harsh circumstances rather quickly. I would further opine that with the expert tutoring of a few seasoned "jungle experts" we survived by shear determination, individual toughness, and "pack instincts". Typically those soldiers (including NCOs and officers)who ignored the sage advice and instruction of a veteran jungle fighter or could not make the necessary physical and psychological adjustments to the unique demands of the jungle environment became "casualties" of their own accord and were destined to be returned to the rear area. I had learned to give no "second chances"…."no quarter"…. to those who failed to adjust to our environment (including officers and NCOs). I simply sent them back to work in rear area jobs as quickly as possible. In reality I think all of us who were labeled "jungle fighters" eventually assumed the role of the most intelligent and dominant beasts in the jungle's food chain. Said another way, we were probably able to survive under the jungle canopy much like the creatures (both man and beast) we encountered. It was a cruel, survivalist, "kill or be killed-maim or be maimed" atmosphere made more hazardous by the enemy we were hunting. Even today I am convinced that unless you had humped an eighty to one hundred-plus pound rucksack with the humidity and temperature at ninety or above in the mountainous jungles every day, laid shivering on a wet ambush site every night during the monsoons, or faced every contact with the enemy at ten meters or less, you probably had little in common with those of us who did. Within a month or more of constant exposure to our environment we were physically and psychologically a different breed from the vast majority of those who led us! Those of us "humping the bush" were just as distinctly different from our brothers and sisters back in the divisional rear area…in some respects we were a different Army! Matter-of-fact, I often felt that "visitors" coming from "the rear areas" into our environment hardly spoke our language! It was as simple as that! Again (recognizing the degree of my own cynicism that comes with these observations) I would say that most if not all of us saw our senior leadership (and others coming from the rear area) as aliens when visiting our "jungle home". Inevitably our distinguished "visitors" helicoptered in from their stuffed chairs and elaborate headquarters with shaved heads; freshly showered/shaved and well fed; adorned in starched

jungle fatigues and spit-shinned boots; well air-conditioned, etc., etc.. They were always eager to shake a few hands, ask a few mundane or sophomoric questions we had all heard before, and then they would disappear into the sky aboard their shinny winged “limousines”. I always marveled at how we contrasted with our “guests” as they descended into a crude one-ship jungle LZ or muddy fire support base to visit us (I always wanted to ask them if they had ever cut a one-ship LZ in 100 foot jungle triple canopy). They leaped from their spit-polished command and control helicopters and immediately infiltrated the tattered, filthy, usually unshaven grunts who had been trudging the jungled mountains, often times for the better part of a month or more. To them we had to have looked like aliens ourselves for we were always a worn, torn, long-haired, stinky, weathered, gaunt, sleep-deprived, jungle-rotted, and a forever hungry lot with the perpetual “empty stare”. I’ve often made the point that we probably appeared to be more beasts than men having endured the seemingly endless and overlapping days and nights under the canopy. I certainly would not speak for all the men of A Company but all of my senses were distinctly modified after a month or so in “the bush”. Frankly, I learned to detest fire support bases and rear area base camps. In the canopy I was acclimated to nothing more than whispering for days on end and attuned to being instinctively alert day and night. My sleep cycle could be measured in minutes during the hours of daylight (I often wondered what idiot demanded that we move every day and then lie awake all night on a squad ambush site…when were we allowed to sleep!). We drank the jungle’s water (not that awful tasting stuff in the rear area) and ate from the green cans delivered to us every week or so. I could smell a fire from miles away and detect the smell of a freshly opened can of mackerel or the unmistakable stench of “Nuoc Mam” (a Vietnamese fish sauce) from almost the same distance if the wind was right. Even the slightest disturbances of Vietnam’s wildlife would catch my attention as well. For example, the Gibbons high in the jungle canopy were an early morning welcome with their whooping BUT midday howls from them meant a warning to all. Even the scream of Vietnam’s green iguanas (and we had a vulgar name for them) set me on edge as did the sudden screech of a variety of Vietnam’s birdlife. In contrast, when the jungle suddenly became eerily quiet, day or night, my internal “alarm system” screamed like an air-raid siren.

Sadly our uninvited “guests” were more often than not accepted as an unavoidable nuisance and their noisy arrival by air always compromised

our locations, disrupted my “battle rhythm”, and forced us into unnecessary movements thereby increasing our vulnerability of being ambushed or being caught up in an untimely meeting engagement near our LZ. Every time my radio announced the inevitable “visitor” my first thoughts were that we would be operationally compromised for the better part of a week. I even grumbled each time any helicopter flew over our AO unless it came at our request and I always tried to push our aerial resupply operations to the limit to avoid compromising our location(s). I learned a lot from these all-to-frequent senior leader “intrusions” and later in my career as a colonel and as a general officer I sought to make my encounters with subordinate units and soldiers in the field far more purposeful and much less intrusive. “Grip-and-grin” visits to men operationally forward deployed and mission focused never made my “to-do” list.

On the 5th of May 1970 the darkness enveloped FSB Henderson far too quickly for a severely under strength, somewhat battered, tired and edgy group of thrown-together defenders. Many soldiers on our hilltop’s bunker line had just been assigned or diverted to A Company to replace the losses we had incurred during the previous two weeks of savage combat on REUP Hill and FSB Granite. Others, like our severely under strength Battalion Reconnaissance Platoon, were making the necessary adjustments for operating within a rifle company structure which was operationally quite foreign to their normal routine. For some soldiers in A Company the night of 5 May would be their first night tactically deployed on a fire support base in Vietnam and their first exposure to a combat environment….tragically for a few it would be their last.

The seasoned few combat veterans of A Company (particularly those who had participated in the fights on REUP Hill and FSB Granite during the previous weeks) had all heard the rumors that Henderson would be a quiet and welcomed break to give the company some time to rest and reconstitute itself and integrate the many replacements that had just joined us after the losses we had incurred the previous month. That was the message I got from “higher headquarters” as well however most of A Company’s veterans (including me) just didn’t “take that bait”. First and foremost virtually all of us with experience building and defending fire support bases detested the mission but we knew the work had to be done. Secondly, every veteran of a sapper attack on a fire support base knew such static facilities were destined to be hit…they were a ‘sitting duck”...it was just a matter of time. The physical labor required to construct a fire

base was an overwhelming, backbreaking requirement for a single rifle company also tasked with the responsibility for defending the hilltop. However, the effort that inevitably drove the work of every experienced infantryman was always centered on surviving the initial assault on the bunker line and the indirect fires that preceded or followed the ground attack. From sun up to sun down, day after day, we would be pounding pickets, hauling and stringing wire for tangle-foot and double or triple-strand concertina fences, filling sandbags, digging fighting positions, clearing fields of fire.…the list of priority requirements is endless (and never changes). There was no rest for A Company…no time to integrate new replacements; no time to teach the particulars of the art and science of jungle fighting. We were pulling fire base defensive duty on back-to-back missions just having come out of the FSB Granite affair…we were an infantry labor pool faced with engineer tasks, not just an rifle company! The labor pool of infantrymen could have been doubled on newly opened Henderson to tackle the tasks required and still we would not have made a dent in the list of things that needed to be done and done quickly. Nights on a fire support base perimeter for the infantrymen generally required at least fifty percent of the foxhole strength vigorously defending and even during daylight hours a portion of the unit had to be "defending" rather than digging or swinging a mallet. Obviously a sleep cycle for the physically exhausted troops was a necessary part of the equation as well. Again, I hated occupying/building fire support bases and most veterans of such duty felt the same way. I never spent a comfortable night on a fire support base and I felt they were all a "ticking time bomb"…the perfect "bullseye" for an NVA attack at the time of their choosing. Inevitably fire support bases in the jungle were either miserably hot in the dry season or knee deep in mud during the monsoons and I deemed them all a serious health hazard as well. I know I always drew a sigh of relief when we lifted off of a fire support base LZ headed back into the canopy and many veterans of A Company felt the same way. In many, many ways a lot of us felt we were far safer in the jungle hunting down the NVA than sitting on some bald, noisy hilltop packed with explosives and waiting to get hit. It didn't take long for many of us to define the canopy as our "home" but on a fire support base I always felt like the visitor in the cross-hairs of every NVA.

All that said, I knew we were extremely vulnerable on our first night defending FSB Henderson but we had done our absolute best to improve our positions before darkness. I was hopeful that we could just get through

this first night and start a new day of making significant improvements in our defensive posture….I knew that just one full day's labor would make a huge difference. By around 2100 (9 PM) on the night of 5 May, FSB Henderson was quiet and the clouds and dampness from the Song Quang Tri River Valley less than a mile north and below us had crept up and onto our hilltop adding to its darkness.

At approximately 0430 on 6 May, after a sleepless night, Jim Norman and I were both up and out of our sandbagged fighting position and sitting on top of the company CP just below the ARVN TOC. We were both working the last minute details of a series of scheduled calls for artillery fire against preplanned targets on the hills and ridge lines that overlooked Henderson's three sides to the east, north, and northwest (we were atop our CP in order to observe and adjust fires onto our preplanned targets). Jim had prepared a robust schedule of defensive targets (DT's) as was our Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) while defending and it was almost time to execute. Such use of artillery was a routine piece of our company defensive fire planning any time we occupied a fire base and its purpose was to disrupt and/or deter early morning enemy reconnaissance and/or ground attacks. Often times while defending a fire base we would also execute a "Mad-Minute" (a sudden and violent firing of all small arms with grenades thrown forward along the perimeter) just before dawn to disrupt potential enemy advances. (I had deliberately made the decision not to fire a mad minute on the morning of the 6th given we were defending a "joint" base and I wasn't sure how the ARVN on our hill would react). Never-the-less, we had absolutely no idea that the assault elements of the 8th Battalion, 66th Infantry Regiment of the 304th Division (NVA) had already infiltrated our preplanned and scheduled defensive targets and lay in their final attack positions for the assault on Henderson. (The 101st Airborne Division G2 (Intelligence) section had previously reported that the 66th Regiment had moved into the upper Da Krong River Valley [about four miles southwest of FSB Henderson] increasing the threat to the central Quang Tri Province <u>but</u> I certainly had no such intelligence information). In retrospect, I would later conclude that the 66th Regiment's assault forces had infiltrated undetected to within perhaps fifty to one hundred meters or less from our perimeter and were just waiting for the signal to initiate their attack.

At precisely 0505 AM in the fog-shrouded darkness I recall the silence on FSB Henderson being broken by a single burst of automatic weapons

fire to my right rear coming from near or on Henderson's eastern perimeter (probably in or near the Recon Platoon's right flank). Within seconds the fire support base erupted in a roar of exploding grenades, claymore mines, satchel charges (improvised explosive devices), rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), and assorted types of small arms fire, both friendly and enemy. As Jim and I rolled from atop the CP into the chest deep opening of our fighting position along side my company RTO all of us instinctively knew from the experience a week earlier on FSB Granite that the NVA had probably penetrated our single strand of protective wire. I also knew without a doubt that the face-to-face perimeter fighting was in progress along Henderson's eastern side and things were probably chaotic along our thin lines of defense. My immediate efforts to contact Rick Hawley (Recon Platoon) and Jim Knight (1st Platoon) by radio for situation reports failed (which was not surprising given the roar of exploding munitions and close combat in both platoon sectors). Within a matter of a few minutes the NVA ground attack to my right rear and to my front intensified dramatically. I knew instinctively that at least two platoons (Recon and 1st Platoon) and perhaps others were fully engaged. As our hand-flares streaked into the low hanging cloud cover I observed and engaged several attacking NVA sappers to my immediate front between my CP and the bunker line below. The NVA movement across and along the bunker line to my immediate front led me to conclude that the soldiers who occupied those forward fighting positions had either been killed or severely wounded within the first few moments of the initial assault…there was no return of friendly fire from at least two fighting positions below the LZ and in front of my CP. Each of the NVA soldiers I engaged ten to twenty or so meters to my front appeared to be crouched or low-crawling toward us throwing improvised explosive devices as they advanced and it became immediately obvious that their attacks were focused on specific assigned objectives within our perimeter. (I have always marveled at how individual NVA soldiers attacked with such "tunnel-vision" to their predesignated targets oblivious to the chaos around them). I recall that at one point a single NVA soldier suddenly stood up from behind one of our neutralized fighting positions perhaps fifteen to twenty meters to my front and fired a single rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) directly at us before I could get off a shot with my M16. In a split second the RPG round struck a portion of our 292 radio antenna about eight to ten feet or more up its aluminum mast almost directly above my CP. With a deafening blast and associated concussion wave my radio

operator (RTO) Lewis and I were both showered with shrapnel and blown downward into our fighting position and the mouth of our command bunker. Both of us had been peppered with shards of metal fragments and temporarily deafened and stunned by its concussion effects. Although my RTO received a serious wound to the hand and I had collected a half dozen or so smaller pieces to the head and shoulder we were extremely fortunate to have survived the incident. I recall thinking some time later that we were probably not this NVA soldier's target at all. In the aftermath of the fight I would conclude that he was probably aiming at the ARVN TOC entrance behind us and his projectile accidentally hit our antenna mast or its wiring in the semi-darkness. For several minutes a number of those of us in the CP fighting position continued to engage and repel NVA attackers attempting to either come through us toward the TOC or move across our front, right to left. The fighting was close and intense under the drifting shadows of our hand flares. For at least twenty minutes or more we engaged anything moving that wasn't wearing a U.S. steel helmet (as did the ARVN defenders at the ARVN TOC door I would confirm later).

Behind me and to my right the NVA attack continued to build in intensity in or near the Recon and 1st Platoon sectors along the east and southeast perimeter and about that same time I lost all radio contact with all platoon leaders defending the hill. I immediately assumed that at least some elements of the NVA attacking forces had pierced our defensive lines in at least three of our four platoon sectors. The volume of fire and its general location also led me to believe that the enemy efforts were focused on our principle indirect fire weapons (our artillery batteries) located atop and center of Henderson. The volume of satchel charges and RPG explosions above and in the Recon Platoon positions near the B Battery(-), 2-11 Field Artillery location was so intense that it was difficult to distinguish each detonation individually. Radio communications from my CP to my subordinates and 3rd Brigade were almost nonexistent as the fighting above and behind me intensified. I recall at one point finally talking by radio to Bob Nichol (3rd Platoon Leader) asking if he could get to, reinforce, or assist Recon or 1st Platoon and he said the fires and exploding munitions prohibited such an effort. I would emphasize our communications problems were not due solely to radio or antenna failures or a lack of leader responsiveness. The problem of communicating by radio was primarily due to the shear noise of exploding munitions and small arms fire…even below ground with a radio handset at full volume pressed

to an ear you couldn't hear anyone at all. At the same time I knew at least two or perhaps three of my platoon leaders were decisively engaged and in a face-to-face fight to hold the hill. Smoke and fires quickly began to envelop the top of Henderson. Any effort to communicate visually or any attempt to move to reinforce adjacent units or positions on Henderson's eastern perimeter was not a viable option given that the hill was being savagely raked with small arms fire from both U.S. and NVA forces. Frankly, there was a period of time (perhaps thirty to forty-five minutes) when anything and everything attempting to move on Henderson's east and northern flanks was being engaged by either friend or foe in the fog and flare-lit predawn hours. Perhaps fifteen to twenty minutes into the intense battle I heard at least one or more long hissing sounds to my right rear with the audible characteristics of a flamethrower. At that moment I simply dismissed any notion that such a weapon was being employed against us by the NVA. I had seen and heard U.S. flamethrowers before in training demonstrations but never under combat circumstances (later the NVA flamethrower was found during a search of Henderson's perimeter and I'm told it eventually made its way to the 101st's museum and Fort Campbell, KY). Almost immediately, even with our own illumination over Henderson, I could see the orange and yellow flickers of fires growing in intensity in the vicinity of the stacks of unprotected artillery ammunition behind and above me. Within the first chaotic hour of the battle rounds of ammunition (both illumination and high explosive) began to "cook off" individually due to the intense heat and growing fires. For at least five to ten minutes or more the artillery rounds (high explosive and illumination) exploded one after another driving other hot unexploded artillery projectiles into the air and raining them down all over the hill. Finally, the ammunition fires became so intense that Henderson was suddenly and violently rocked with at least one or more deafening, ground-shaking, sympathetic detonations. (Records report that B[-], 2-11 Field Artillery [155mm] had approximately 1,000 rounds of ammunition in close proximity to their howitzers at the time of the attack). The whole fire base shuttered as if it had been hit by an earthquake with these devastating sympathetic explosions. Without a doubt these thunderous explosions of our own artillery rounds claimed many if not most of the lives of the exposed, both friend and foe (the majority of Henderson's twenty-seven U.S. killed-in-action died of "multiple fragmentation wounds"). At about the same time the bladder or bladders of fuel atop Henderson had been ruptured and

ignited sending a stream of fire across and down the hill on the east side of Henderson and into and around several of our fighting positions along the eastern perimeter. The chaos and carnage inflicted by flame and exploding ordinance on Henderson and along much of its perimeter on the east side was indescribable unless you were a witness to the inferno. Not only were we dealing with small groups of NVA still hurling explosives from several locations along the bunker line but we were trying to deal with our own exploding artillery ammunition, streaming fuel fires, and the fires they were creating in and around our fighting positions. Henderson's hilltop was at one point a roaring "blast furnace" and nothing above ground (or underground if exposed to streaming fuel) could have survived in the immediate area of the burning and exploding munitions.

I recall that as first light neared our attack helicopters (AH1 Cobras from either or both 2nd Battalion, 17th Calvary or 4th Battalion, 77th Aerial Rocket Artillery) finally arrived over Henderson. Initially they were limited in their usefulness primarily due to the low ceiling, foggy conditions at ground level, and the fires and smoke coming from the hilltop and along the eastern perimeter. I know the courageous pilots were frustrated as they boldly made continuous nap-of-the-earth "dry" gun runs screaming across the battered and burning hilltop just feet above us but without firing. A second reason they were unable to engage immediately was because of sparse targeting information from us on the ground given that we were dealing with other "fight-or-flight" tactical concerns to hold Henderson. However, their presence was a significant threat to the NVA and we were all encouraged by our pilot's zeal to protect us. Even without firing a shot initially I knew they were a critical component in deterring a determined NVA force that had committed itself to the destruction of Henderson. What a brave and courageous group of Cobra pilots answered our frantic call for help! Without specific targets and virtually no intelligence the Cobras flew at literally nap-of-the-earth on every gun run screaming into the Henderson melee with very limited visibility. They cast aside the threats of flying through our own incoming artillery, exploding munitions on the hill, errant ground fire (both friendly and enemy) and falling flares to help us hold on to FSB Henderson. I could not have been more proud of their heroic performance in our desperate hour of need. Those of us on the ground could never thank them enough. They were a critical element of the combined arms fight that led to our success in holding the hill during Henderson's most critical early morning hours and I suspect none of these

great Army aviators ever received the individual credit and awards they so richly deserved.

We were still taking an occasional RPG and some sporadic small arms fire as dawn broke but most of the NVA had withdrawn along the draws leading back to the ridge lines to the east and southeast. (In retrospect, I've always believed the NVA withdrawal may have been triggered by the death and destruction caused by our exploding ammunition…..no friend or foe could have survived, unprotected, along Henderson's eastern perimeter).

During the much needed lull (beginning around 0800 on the 6th) on a smoldering Henderson battlefield many of the surviving war-fighters began their frantic search to locate, collect, and treat our casualties. In many instances we were working side-by-side with our ARVN surviving "brothers" looking for those who had fallen (101st Airborne Division records reflect that the 54th Regiment (ARVN) with us on Henderson lost nineteen killed-in-action and 45 wounded). We also were frantically doing our best to rescue others trapped in and around many of the smoldering fighting positions along the eastern perimeter, account for the missing, and reestablish our defenses as best we could. At the same time our attack aviation assets continued to roar over Henderson's surrounding ridge lines under the cloud cover to attack suspected NVA targets in the nearby hills and draws as the dawn had turned to full daylight. Again, I cannot over state the arial rocket artillery contributions to the fight even if their targeting (and ours) was often suspect due to the weather or lack of information about known enemy positions. Concurrently, we were pouring all the tube artillery fires we could muster into suspected enemy locations along the eastern side of Henderson and along the route of their suspected withdrawal. (At this point in the battle my full attention had turned to the control of attack aviation assets and our own artillery fires an to a lesser extent to reconstitution of our perimeter and care for our wounded...I knew that unless I could block a potential NVA counterattack by fires nothing else really mattered; at the same time I knew A Company's leadership and its individual soldiers were doing their best to take care of one another and reestablish our defenses). I recall at one point the 12th FA (ARVN) 105mm howitzers almost directly behind me on Henderson cranked their tubes down into the direct fire mode and fired "point blank" into the ridge line no more than a hundred or so meters across from our location. I'm certain our

attack aircraft and these direct and indirect fires prevented NVA reinforcements from mounting a counterattack on a weakened Henderson.

In the 6 May early morning light A Company's surviving leaders crawled and scrambled from position to position to search for missing infantrymen all along the perimeter and to reestablish new lines of defense around the now rubbled and burning Henderson. There were many soldiers and leaders unaccounted for as daylight exposed our ragged an ruptured perimeter defenses. Many of Henderson's surviving defenders who had made it through the initial attack were thrust into new emergent leadership roles regardless of rank and their performance was nothing short of magnificent. As I was finally able to cautiously make my way up and behind the ARVN TOC and into the charred and blackened B Battery, 2-11 FA's positions I quickly determined that our 155mm howitzers were all abandoned and most if not all of them appeared to have been rendered inoperable. In fact I found much of B Battery severely cratered in several areas, burned (or burning), and hardly recognizable as an artillery firing position. The infantry fighting positions below them and along the eastern perimeter were horribly disfigured and their reinforcing timbers and sandbags were still burning fiercely. Many of the fighting positions along the eastern perimeter were now difficult to locate due to the fires and the damage done by the huge sympathetic explosions and fuel fires that had overwhelmed the hill only an hour or so earlier. Much of the area around B Battery, 2-11 FA's gun positions was now blackened and cluttered with charred unrecognizable rubble. Rick Hawley's (Recon Platoon Leader) fighting position just east and below the artillery batteries was a smoldering pile of burning timbers and unapproachable in my first attempt to reach it due to the intense heat. I knew that the NVA main effort had to have been focused into Hawley's sector with our 155 howitzers directly behind him and the first Recon casualty report I received was heartbreaking…ten killed-in-action, four severely wounded. I assumed that I had lost Rick and his entire platoon in the fight. (Late morning as the fires diminished I returned to search for Rick in and around his position but to no avail).

As quickly as we could safely land them our medical evacuation helicopters (MEDIVACs) were taking out the most seriously wounded. The crews of these "Angels of Mercy" time and again risked their lives to land on both ends of Henderson to extract those deemed most critically wounded. The LZ near my command post on Henderson's north slope quickly became a casualty collection point (CCP) for many of the most

seriously wounded and two or three of our surviving Medics (we had lost two killed-in-action earlier that morning….**SGT Melvin Bowman and SGT Jay Diller**) worked feverishly to administer morphine and perform other lifesaving measures to prepare the wounded for extraction. None of our surviving medics would ever receive the recognition they deserved for the heroic work they did during Henderson's most chaotic moments. They worked fearlessly as individual medics and as professionally as any trauma team one could imagine to save "life and limb" under the most hazardous conditions although short-handed given the number of casualties that littered Henderson's bloody LZ. The area between my fighting position/CP and the LZ on Henderson's narrow northeast corner was also abuzz with triage activity as casualties were sorted, categorized, and prioritized for aerial evacuation. Tragically, nearby there was an ever-growing line of the covered remains of those killed-in-action awaiting extraction as well. The hard-packed and trampled orange soil on and around my CP was a bloody mess of bandages of all sorts, used first aid compresses, and various bits and pieces of the contents of every medical aid kit available on Henderson. At one point I broke away from the operational activity on top of my CP and I moved among my wounded warriors as they lay on the PZ awaiting evacuation. I just wanted to grasp some hands and try to share a quiet word or two of comfort and hope to those who were still conscious and make sure our medics were getting all the support I could possibly give them. Many of the wounded wore multiple bent syringes as tags on their bloodied uniforms to account for multiple morphine injections but there was not an hint panic among these men…not a single face displayed fear. With chaos still all about our beleaguered hill there was a stillness and quiet among our wounded that I cannot account for even today! At one point I knelt beside one Sergeant whose foot was missing and a tourniquet was wrapped tightly just below his knee. Before I could say a word he looked straight into my eyes with a slight grin on his lips and said, "Sir, I got me a million dollar wound….I'm going home and at least I ain't gonna die in this place". All-the-while, the more able bodied war-fighters brought still more and more of our wounded to the LZ. The carnage and dismemberment around the hill, both enemy and friendly, was beyond my willingness to put to words as was the gallantry, bravery, and heroism of so many who had desperately fought to hold Henderson. During this precious lull in the direct fire engagements everything transitioned to saving those with life-threatening wounds and filling our perimeter with infantrymen still capable

of fighting. There are countless stories of the lightly wounded continuing to man their foxholes and protect those more seriously wounded who were unable to raise a rifle to defend themselves. Once again I would be reminded that **"SOLDIERS FIGHT, ABOVE ALL ELSE, FOR ONE ANOTHER…FOR SMITH ON THE LEFT AND JONES ON THE RIGHT"**. Time and again I had observed soldiers on Henderson's bloody summit rise from their fighting positions under the most intense fire to defend a brother in harm's way. For the remainder of my career I would cite this lesson learned over and over again to those preparing for combat. It is the essence of the American Warfighter…a critical element of our ethos. I will forever remind others that no other army in the world places such value on human life….on the life of a fellow soldier…that is why we are such a formidable force and akin to no other on this planet!

Sometime around mid-morning, hours after the face-to-face ground combat had reached its conclusion, I received (as best I remember) my first radio call from **Colonel William Bradley** (3rd Brigade Commander) since I had arrived on Henderson (I'm mindful that we had been involved in a savage fight-or-flight battle to hold Henderson for at least three or more hours and I had not yet heard a word from my immediate commander or anyone from the 101st command group). Bradley indicated that he was approaching our location by helicopter and his intent was to land at my LZ and move immediately to the ARVN TOC. I informed him that I felt a landing and a ground move (about 30 meters) up to the ARVN TOC was extremely dangerous and that any instructions he might have for me would best be radioed to the hill. I based my recommendations to him solely on my experiences a week or so earlier while defending FSB Granite in that we were all waiting on the inevitable NVA mortar attack that was without doubt imminent. (I believe I had already issued instructions to A Company to remain in their fighting positions with the expectation of an NVA counter-attack by indirect fire…only those directly involved with medical evacuations or critical ammunition redistribution were to be moving around the hill.) COL Bradley's immediate response to me was that he intended to land anyway and he would move directly to the ARVN TOC. I replied that if that was his decision he had best seek shelter in my CP bunker (below ground) as quickly as possible after exiting his helicopter. If all remained quiet on the hill (after his helicopter departed) he could then make his way up to the safety of the TOC. I watched from my CP fighting position with grave concern as he, his Operations Officer (**MAJ "Tex" Turner**), his Fire

Support Officer (**CPT Hopkins**), and his Command Sergeant Major (**CSM Ray Long**), stepped from their aircraft onto the LZ and started moving briskly toward the TOC in single file. I waved them toward my CP bunker but all of them ignored my efforts and continued on with heads down, past my position toward the ARVN TOC entrance. COL Bradley had just stepped past the blast wall and through the TOC door with his command group in trail when I observed a mortar round impact perhaps five to ten meters behind them and near the right front of the entrance. (The "rotor wash" from his helicopter had undoubtedly kept us from hearing the round as it had left the NVA tube[s] in the hills nearby so the impact was a complete surprise). I knew instantly that some of those trailing in his party had to have been hit and almost immediately I heard a shout for a Medic from near the TOC. My Company senior medic ("Doc" Wolfe) and I dashed from my command fighting position in answer to their frantic call. We reached the TOC in a matter of seconds and found CPT Hopkins leaning over a table suffering from multiple shrapnel wounds to his lower extremities and our Brigade Command Sergeant Major, Ray Long, was prone, face down, and motionless near the TOC entrance. "Doc" Wolfe instinctively went to attend to the CSM who appeared to have suffered a life-threatening head wound. Tragically our Brigade CSM's wounds to the head were fatal and he died almost immediately. While "Doc" Wolfe moved to render first aid to MAJ Turner and the more seriously wounded CPT Hopkins, COL Bradley turned to me and ordered that we evacuate CSM Long immediately as a priority patient on the first available medical evacuation helicopter. My immediate response was that I was not authorized to medically air-evacuate a deceased soldier however his response was to do it anyway. I complied with his directive and the medical evacuation helicopter pilot radioed me shortly after liftoff to express his ire over our blatant disregard for division medical evacuation protocol. The "Dustoff" Pilot had every right to be angry with me. Not only had we risked a helicopter and its precious crew to evacuate a KIA but one or more of our own wounded had to be "bumped" in the priority of ongoing evacuations and my soldiers involved in loading CSM Long's remains were placed at extreme risk as well.

It is my personal opinion that the tragic loss of CSM Long, 3rd Brigade's most senior noncommissioned officer, was absolutely avoidable and directly attributable to COL Bradley's blatant disregard for my warnings. His ill-advised decision to land on Henderson coupled with his

total rejection of my personal assessment of the immediate threat on Henderson resulted in unnecessary risks to many others, injuries to his own staff, and the loss of a great professional soldier. His order to medically evacuate by air the remains of CSM Long was equally egregious and a violation of Division regulations thereby unnecessarily risking the lives of countless others. I have never to come to grips with such blatant battlefield incompetence displayed by one of the Division's most senior leaders.

After Bradley's departure and later that morning as I recall, without my request, the 3rd Brigade inserted by air (OH6) one member from their S-3 staff onto Henderson to "provide assistance". Much has been written about this individual's contributions and/or gallantry while on Henderson however, as the senior U.S. ground commander still defending the hill let me make clear….<u>until A Company's air-assault off of the hill's north LZ there was no ground combat, no exchange of small arms fire, and no NVA probes on or near Henderson</u> other than sporadic incoming mortar fire and an occasional errant enemy recoilless-rifle round. Hour after hour A Company was holding on to Henderson with its "walking wounded" and a few others who had miraculously survived the battle. What I got from the 3rd Brigade Commander's visit to Henderson was a Captain from his S-3 section…what I desperately needed were immediate infantry reinforcements to shore up a thinly disguised perimeter now being hammered by mortar fire that all of us assumed at the time were preparatory fires for an NVA secondary ground assault. From around 0800 on the morning of the 6th until we were extracted (mid to late afternoon), A Company desperately held Henderson's perimeter with no more than 40 to 50 exhausted and/or wounded soldiers. Finally, B Company, 2-501 Infantry arrived to assist us and on the 7th the 2-501 headquarters along with B Company, 3-187 Infantry and D Company, 1-501 Infantry air-assaulted into the nearby hills. However, on the 6th, long before reinforcements finally arrived, Henderson's surviving infantrymen (including many wounded) were committed to holding the hill. For six or more hours we desperately held on to Henderson's perimeter without reinforcements awaiting a second ground attack that fortunately never came. Needless to say over those desperate hours I had lost all confidence in both my brigade commander and our division's senior leadership. Once again I was reminded that all we had to fight for was one another. Sadly, I would never place my full trust and confidence in them again while I was in Vietnam.

Throughout the remainder of much of the day we would conduct seemingly endless aerial evacuations of the hill's wounded and those killed-in-action and we also received tactical emergency resupplies of ammunition and water from a constant stream of UH1 helicopters manned by the bravest of flight crews. Again and again they landed to offload their cargo or carry out our wounded and the deceased under the constant threat of mortars and recoilless rifle fire that harassed Henderson. As resupply activity and evacuations continued our supporting tube and aerial rocket artillery (ARA) continuously pounded suspected NVA targets located on the ridge lines that looked down onto Henderson from several sides. Between the sporadic NVA mortar attacks many of us on the ground still defending continued our search for several missing soldiers and we too were harassed by inaccurate but unsettling recoilless rifle fire coming from the hills on Henderson's northwest side. (Either the NVA had faulty recoilless rifle ammunition or their gunners were untrained and for that all of us were quite thankful…we didn't take a single casualty from their errant recoilless rifle fire nor did the NVA ever put a round inside our perimeter).

As best I recall the remnants of A Company and our attachments received a "change of mission" and began air-assaulting off of Henderson's blood-spattered LZ late afternoon on the 6th of May as B Company, 2-501 Infantry air-assaulted in to relieve us. (On the 7th the 2-501 Infantry headquarters would air-assault into the Henderson AO with two additional rifle companies to look for remnants of the 66th Regiment north and west of Henderson but without contact with the enemy they departed on the 8th. All of the 3rd Brigade's forces were withdrawn from Henderson by nightfall on the 8th and defensive operations on Henderson were handed over to ARVN forces.

A Company's surviving warriors lifted off of FSB Henderson's northern LZ in orderly fashion late afternoon on 6 May still under the threat of NVA mortars and recoilless rifle fire. As my command group and I dove onto our designated Huey to be lifted off I still remember the haunting reality that I didn't have an accurate, by-name count of our casualties….my focus, by necessity, had been on holding the hill with every rifleman that could still fight. Arriving back at Camp Evans we were at best an infantry organization of no more than forty to fifty men and many were walking wounded who had rejected medical evacuation earlier. I must admit I didn't even have a solid by-name count of A Company's survivors (including our attachments) who had made the flight out. I simply needed to muster the

company, including our walking wounded, on the Camp Evans LZ to determine who had made the air-assault extraction back to safety! Despite our desperate searches prior to our air-assault off of Henderson I boarded my assigned Huey to depart the battlefield still unable to account personally for at least three soldiers (Rick Hawley, Refugio Teran, and Larry Kier). All three were reportedly last seen in or near their assigned fighting positions as the fighting commenced. The areas of their loss were still smoldering from the intense fires and horrendous explosions that had consumed several of the fighting positions they would have been in or near as the NVA assault progressed. (Just before our departure from Henderson I personally made a second search to locate the remains of my dear friend Rick Hawley. I carefully searched his fighting position that had been destroyed by fire. Although my search for him was unsuccessful I did find the charred remains of a Pentax camera similar to one I knew he carried… to this day I am unaware of the circumstances surrounding the recovery of his remains). We had made our best efforts given the circumstances to account for those missing but our search revealed nothing. We all came off of the helicopters at Camp Evans exhausted and those requiring medical treatment moved immediately to the nearest Aid Station for treatment. I recall standing in line with a dozen or so other wounded warriors to either have our shrapnel removed or have cuts cleansed and closed as a result of the melee on Henderson. As soon as we were patched up each of us walked back to the Evans LZ to find the remainder of the men of A Company "crashed" on their rucksacks around the LZ's edge. Those who hadn't "crashed" against their rucks for some much needed rest were gathered in twos and threes quietly talking to one another while sipping on coffee or hot chocolate brewed in a canteen cup around the LZ's edge. Only then did we begin to account by name as best we could for our losses. Even that task quickly became almost impossible given that we'd received a number of replacements only hours before the fight. We simply didn't have a unit roster that contained the names of those who had jointed us the previous afternoon. (**The late evening of the 6th of May 1970 would haunt me for a lifetime….I had lost men I was responsible for without even knowing their names and I had lost some who were still unaccounted for on that bloody hill called Henderson.**)

Within the first eighteen hours of my return to the Camp Evans LZ I recall receiving a summons to report to COL Bradley at his headquarters so I headed that way promptly. Upon my arrival at 3rd Brigade's headquarters

Army Times
May 7 1970

Fiery 5-Hour Battle

'I've Got Company Full of Heroes'

By SPEC. 4 SETH LIPSKY
S&S Staff Correspondent

CAMP EVANS, Vietnam — A battered 101st Airborne Div. unit which fought North Vietnamese for five explosive hours Wednesday morning at and on Fire Support Base Henderson, 45 miles northwest of Hue, returned here Friday. Although the soldiers say they lost more than the NVA, their captain said flatly, "I've got a company full of heroes."

Their captain is James E. Mitchell, 25. Mitchell and his men Friday recounted the story of an hours-long attempt amid fiery and fog-shrouded death to rescue a reconnaissance element trapped between the NVA and an exploding ammunition dump. Nearly all the while, the NVA was fighting all around the hill.

From the time the battle started, according to Mitchell, he had been unable to make contact with the reconnaissance element guarding the far end of the hill. And when the fighting began, he said, he told S. Sgt. Robert Nichol to get men and go down to find them.

Nichol, a veteran of heavy battle on the so-called "Re-Up Hill" and on Fire Support Base Granite during the past month, said he was on guard when the enemy touched off flares on his side of the hill. By the time he was ready to move down to contact the guards at the far end, Nichol said, the ammo dump straddling the hill in between was on fire and rounds were popping off.

As Nichol tells it, he told his captain, "there's a big fire down there. You can't imagine how big it is."

Still, Nichol moved his men toward the area. He pulled them back, he said, when he saw a pallet of ammo smouldering. Minutes later, he said, the pallet blew.

Then, Nichol said, they tried another approach. The explosions from the ammo dump had been, as Nichol and others described them, like an earthquake. They said one pilot in a chopper overhead radioed that one blast almost blew him out of the sky.

One of the men Nichol took with him was Sgt. Joe Waage, a former dice dealer in a Reno, Nev., Casino. Waage had been in Vietnam a week and he said he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

They said at one point a soldier, "a big farmer" who they knew only as "Silent Sam," ran up dangerously close to the roaring fire and dragged to safety a soldier who was screaming that his foot had been blown off.

It was several hours, Nichol and Waage said, before they were able to get around the searing fire. They said that as they tried to get around the flames, risking the explosions, they could hear the trapped soldiers calling for help, yelling "GIs, GIs.' "

"The first man we saw," one of them said, "was a recon medic and he was holding his head with part of it gone."

Despite his wounds, they said, the medic was tending to another wounded soldier.

The medic was telling the more seriously soldier about his home town, trying to keep him out of shock. "I'll tell you," Waage said, "a medic is the greatest thing in the world to see."

Just as great, they said, were dustoff medevac pilots who landed their chopper amid exploding rounds and incoming fire to rescue the men at the end of the hill. The recon element, they said, took 100 per cent casualties. Had it not been for the dustoff, and perhaps for the rescue through the fire, it might have been 100 per cent killed in action.

Waage said he couldn't tell what made men do what they did. Silent Sam, one of them said, "could just as easily have said he didn't hear anything." But they said he acted on what he heard. That, Waage explained, is why he himself acted. "You just had to hear them calling," Waage said.

area I was immediately offered the "VIP Hooch" for the night which I promptly declined. Frankly I was far more concerned for our wounded and the survivors of the Henderson fight still on the unprotected Camp Evans LZ and their immediate physical and psychological needs. I had no plans or desires to be anywhere other than amidst the soldiers of A Company for we had much to do in regenerating and reorganizing ourselves as quickly as possible. We were still a rifle company operating with a lot of "emergent leadership" having lost so many leaders and I really wasn't sure what I had left in noncommissioned officers and soldiers that could fight. I had lost all but one of my platoon leaders as well (at the moment and as far as I knew LT Rick Hawley was still missing and 1LT Lyn Hargrave had been wounded). Once again, LT Jim Knight and I were the only officers left in the company (other than Jim Norman, my FO).

I recall meeting with COL Bradley in his office for no more than about 15 minutes at most and our initial conversation centered on the operational aspects of the battle at Henderson. The meeting began very cordially and our dialogue was business-like and commander-to-commander regarding the events and actions that had transpired over the past 18 to 24 hours. I made it quite clear to COL Bradley that "I HAD A COMPANY FULL OF HERO'S" and I was proud beyond words of our organization's performance in holding the hill under the most difficult circumstances. While in his office I wanted him to understand the true intensity of the fight and the devastation caused by the exposed exploding artillery ammunition, but most importantly I wanted to convey to him the courage and bravery of so many magnificent warriors who had risked or had given their lives to hold the hill. (I suspect that my statement about the heroic performance of many in A Company was used in the printed account of the Henderson fight published in the newspaper article on 7 May although that was never confirmed). As we neared the conclusion of our conversation I was taken aback when Bradley's demeanor took a sudden and quite unforeseen turn in subject and seriousness. He quite sternly "informed" me (and I interpreted it as an order) that I would remain silent with respect to the operational details of the Henderson battle and that I was specifically prohibited from making comments to anyone from "the press" about our actions on FSB Henderson. Furthermore, I would only comment on the fight at Henderson if so ordered by the Division's senior leadership. I'm relatively certain that he noted my expression of dismay after having received such directives but I did not question or challenge his guidance at the time. Shortly thereafter I was dismissed and I returned to the Evans LZ and the remnants of the A Company team. (A few days later I gave my first and only official personal account of the battle at FSB Henderson to **LTC Bobby F. Brashears**, my former battalion commander in the 2-501 Infantry. To the best of my knowledge he had been appointed by the 101st Airborne Division, (Airmobile) senior leadership to gather facts and prepare a written report concerning the FSB Henderson affair). Years later I would discover a "classified version" of the facts surrounding the Henderson battle in the Infantry School's library at Fort Benning, Georgia.

I was glad to get away from the 3rd Brigade Headquarters and return to the LZ and the A Company family. Frankly, I had hoped the purpose in visiting with Colonel Bradley was to receive orders for another "change in mission" that would return us to our parent battalion's control. The 2-501

Infantry Battalion's structure was far more capable of tending to the company's personnel and logistical needs. Unfortunately that didn't happen and we were subsequently "missioned" for about a week to augment the Camp Evans base defense. (Apparently our Division had no plans for "reconstitution or regeneration" of tactical units.) During the remainder of our stay at Evans all of us began our own individual efforts to deal with the devastating losses of so many "brothers" who had given their lives so that we could survive to fight another day. As I recall, we were left on our own to grieve over our losses and to "lick our wounds in recovery". There were no memorial services for our fallen and no offer of help from the Division's chaplains either as best I recall. I, on the other hand, was overwhelmingly proud of A Company and its attachments for their heroic defense of Henderson and equally proud and amazed at their "Drive On" spirit as we recovered and reconstituted the organization for reinsertion into the ongoing fight. The cruel facts were that the surviving veterans of A Company (with our attachments) had seen at least 40 or more men killed and more than 100 wounded over a period of nineteen days of intense combat around REUP Hill and defending Fire Support Base's Granite and Henderson. Before returning to the jungle we would undergo an almost total reconstruction and regeneration of an airmobile infantry company. In a matter of a few days we were a transformed organization in numbers made up of many new faces (both in leaders and the led) after REUP, Granite, and Henderson but the esprit never faltered. I give all the credit for the morale and the fighting spirit of a new A Company to those few surviving veterans who had performed so magnificently during the most savage fighting one could possibly imagine. In fact, there were very few survivors of these three battles that were not awarded one or more Purple Hearts. To this day the acts of bravery, heroism, gallantry in action, and dogged determination have, for the most part, been ignored and thus gone unrecognized. Neither the 3rd Brigade, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Airmobile), or the Army bothered to fully document what actually happened to the defenders of Henderson on the 6th of May 1970. However the facts remain clear for those of us who fought there. A Company and its attached and supporting U.S. units on Henderson had inherited a disaster waiting to happen and the war-fighters on Henderson had made possible the impossible by shear courage and determination in the finest traditions of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), the United States Army and our Nation. A Company and its attached and supporting units had repulsed the

NVA's best efforts to kill or capture all U.S./ARVN forces on that hill and it remained under our control until we were ordered to leave. The 66th NVA Regiment had not gained or retained an inch of ground on Henderson and had paid dearly for their encounter with the soldiers of the A Company, 2-501 Infantry Regiment.

For the rest of my career I was often challenged or queried with the following: "Oh…were you on FSB Henderson when it was overrun?" In response, I've quite pointedly and proudly responded with the following: "Henderson was not overrun…A Company and its attachments and supporting units were never overrun! We held Henderson throughout the battle at a terrible cost of our own killed and wounded and we departed the hill when so ordered in an orderly fashion still under fire!"

U.S. casualties on Henderson have been the subject of considerable debate from the moment the battle concluded and there will likely never be absolute clarity in the count. Initial reports were thirty-two U.S. soldiers killed-in-action…in fact, the Division's Operations Report -Lessons Learned listed thirty-two were killed during the battle and thirty-three wounded as do a number of other unofficial documents citing the division's records. However, by my review and research of several available casualty resources I have been able account for only twenty-seven U.S. soldiers listed as "killed on Henderson or likely killed on Henderson". My research continues for others who may have died of wounds as a result of the fight at Henderson on 6 May 1970.

Similarly, an accurate account of U.S. wounded on Henderson as a result of the 6 May battle has been even more illusive. In all likelihood the number of wounded, although officially listed as thirty-three, will never be known as a result of questionable records keeping within our array of otherwise excellent medical facilities. To this day some of those wounded on Henderson still seek their Purple Hearts for Veteran's Healthcare purposes and shamefully they will probably go undocumented. I'm certain however that at least fifty or more U.S. soldiers were treated for wounds received as a result of the fight on the 6th of May 1970.

While my interests have always been primarily focused on U.S. casualties at Henderson, I would be remiss without mentioning that the ARVN forces with us on Henderson reported nineteen killed and forty-five wounded according to the 101st records. As a 'combined force" our losses during the battle would total forty-six killed and seventy-eight wounded.

Embedded in this count are our two MIAs (later identified) and the names of the twenty-seven I have been able to identify.

Over the years I have also maintained an intense interest in analyzing the Army's official "cause of death" data of the twenty-seven U.S. fatalities listed as "killed on Henderson or likely killed on Henderson" to look for "lessons learned". The numbers by "cause of death" reveal the following: two are listed as "unknown cause" (our MIAs); one is listed as died of "burns"; one is listed as died of "gun/small arms fire"; seven are listed as died by "artillery, rocket, or mortar fire" and sixteen are listed as died as a result of "multiple fragmentation wounds". I have always believed that most if not all of the sixteen killed by multiple fragmentation wounds lost their lives as a result of being exposed to the exploding artillery ammunition atop Henderson. Seven of the ten members of the Reconnaissance Platoon died from "multiple fragmentation wounds" along Henderson's eastern perimeter…the same area most directly exposed to our own exploding ammunition and flaming fuel that cascaded into their fighting positions. My premise seems even more plausible in that only eight men actually assigned to A Company were killed-in-action as the primary occupants of fighting positions along Henderson's perimeter and none were killed by "gun/small arms fire". My conclusions even now continue to be that most of the deaths on Henderson were either directly or indirectly caused by fires and/or our own exploding artillery ammunition on Henderson's summit. Amidst that burning inferno brave men fought for one another and many died to hold the ground they had been tasked to defend. As their commander, I could have asked for nothing more from such brave warriors….not from those that survived and certainly not from those who gave their all.

The list of the twenty-seven killed-in-action or likely killed 6 May 1970 on FSB Henderson (as best I have been able to confirm) are as follows with MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), unit of assignment and cause of death. The names of our MIA's (Missing-In-Action) at the time are listed in RED.

IN MEMORIUM

REFUGIO THOMAS TERAN

11B(Infantryman); PFC; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA while missing 6 May 1970; body not recovered
Repatriated 13 Jun 1996; identified 28 February 2002
Westland, Michigan

LARRY GENE KIER

11B(Infantryman); PFC; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA while missing 6 May 1970; body not recovered
Repatriated 13 June 1996; identified 28 February 2002
Omaha, Nebraska

GEORGE WILLY BENNETT, JR.

11B(Infantryman); PFC; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Dallas, Texas

GREGORY ANTON CHAVEZ

11B(Infantryman); SP/4; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 MAY 1970; died of burns
Colorado Springs, Colorado

DOUGLAS WAYNE DAY

11C(Indirect Fire Infantryman); PFC; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Hacienda Heights, California

ROBERT ANTHONY DENTON

11B(Infantryman); SGT; B Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from gun or small arms fire
Wichita Falls, Texas

LAWRENCE LEE GORDON

11B(Infantryman); PFC; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Noblesville, Tennessee

FRANK FREDERICK LEWIS

11B(Infantryman); SP/4; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
Affton, Missouri

RONALD DALE VAN BEUKERING

11B(Infantryman); SP/4; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Kalamazoo, Michigan

GARY FOSTER SNYDER

11B(Infantryman); SFC; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Toledo, Ohio

JOHN GEORGE WIDEN

11C(Indirect Fire Infantryman); SGT; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6b May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Owatonna, Minnesota

JOHN JAMES WILLEY

11B(Infantryman); SGT; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
West Covina, California

FREDERICK P. ZIEGENFELDER

11B(Infantryman); SSG; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
St Marys, Ohio

MICHAEL LOUIS ANTLE

11B(Infantryman); SP/4; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
Tulsa, Oklahoma

MELVIN BOWMAN

91B(Medical NCO); SP/4; HHC, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
Iva, South Carolina

JAY THOMAS DILLER

91B(Medical NCO); SP/4; HHC, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
Chambersburg, Pennsylvania

TOMMY IVAN HINDMAN

11B(Infantryman); PFC; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

RICHARD A. HAWLEY, JR.

1542(Infantry Unit Commander); 1LT; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Devon, Pennsylvania

DAVID ELLIS OGDEN

11F(Infantry Opns/Intel Specialist); SGT; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970 from multiple fragmentation wounds
Paramount, California

DICKIE WALTER REAGAN

11B(Infantryman); SP/4; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
Lumberton, North Carolina

EDWARD VESER

11B(Infantryman); SP/4; E Company, 2-501 Infantry
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

JAMES DALE JENNINGS

31M(Multichannel Trans-Systems); SP/4; A Company, 501st Sig Bn
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Brandon, Mississippi

RAYMOND LEON LONG, JR.

00Z(CSM); CSM; 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Mobile)
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Little Rock, Arkansas

MICHAEL FRANCIS BROWN

13B(Cannon Crew Member); SGT; B Battery, 2-11 Field Artillery
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
Baltimore, Maryland

JOHN EDWARD GRANATH JR.

13A(Field Artillery Basic); PFC; B Battery, 2-11 Field Artillery
KIA 6 May 1970; from multiple fragmentation wounds
McHenry, Illinois

DAVID YELDELL

13A(Field Artillery Basic); SP/4; B Battery, 2-11 Field Artillery
KIA 6 May 1970 from multiple fragmentation wounds
Greenwood, South Carolina

BILLY JOE WILLIAMS

2162(Operations/Training Officer); MAJ; Advisory Team 3; MACV
KIA 6 May 1970; from artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
Marion, Kentucky

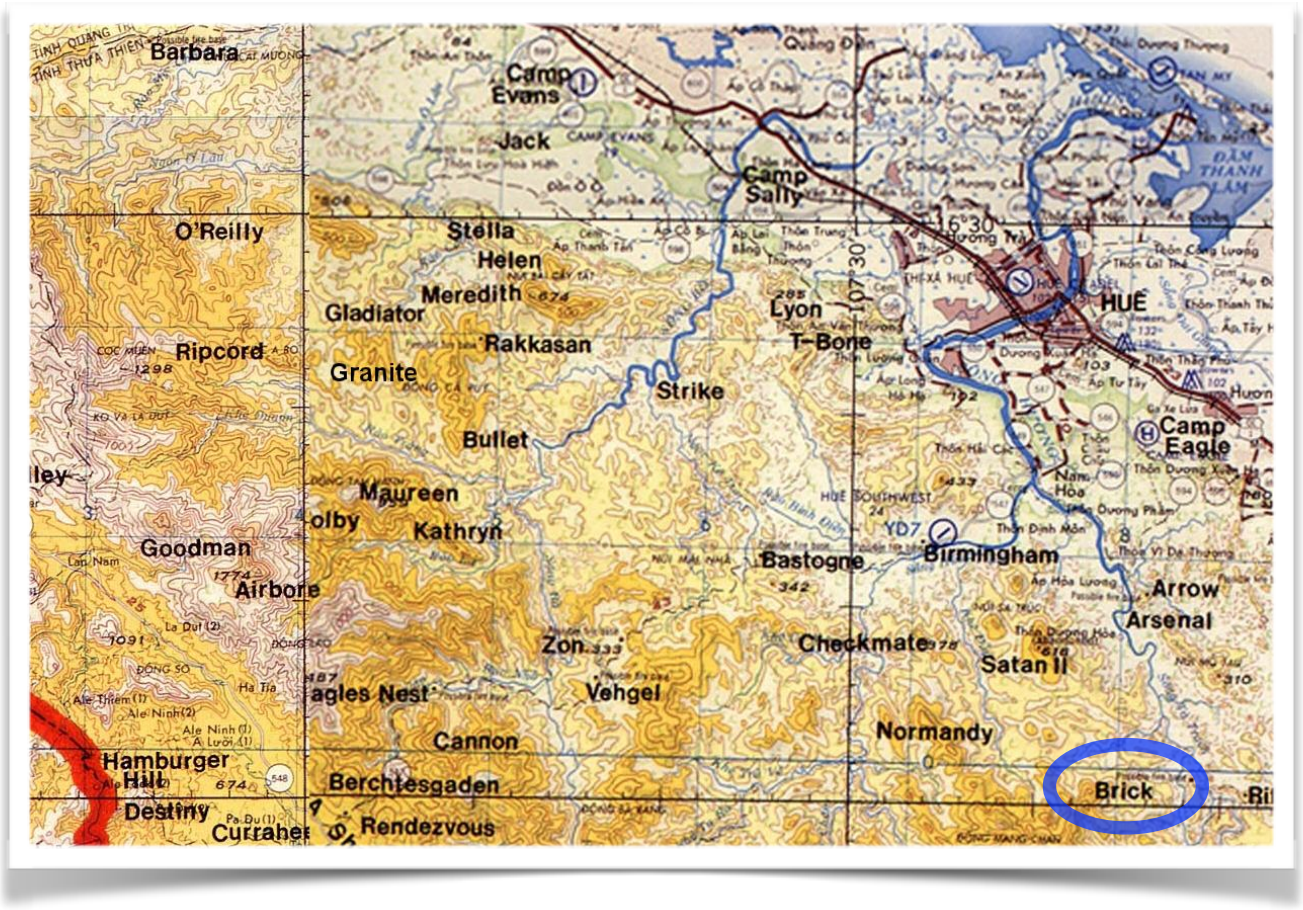
"To those lost on 6 May 1970 (or those who died later as a result of the fight at Fire Support Base Henderson), you will forever be remembered for your courage and unwavering commitment to those on your left and right. May you forever rest in peace. To the survivors of the Henderson battle, you too are brothers-in-arms forever".

CHAPTER FOUR

“CHANGE OF MISSION”

“The Piedmont Screen” with the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry and The Fire Support Base Brick Operation

101st Airborne Division (Airmobile); (OPERATION TEXAS STAR)
18 May-16 June 1970



The Eleven days (7 May through 17 May 1970) following the battle at FSB Henderson were some of the most difficult days I spent while leading A Company and without question the most difficult and trying days of my

thirty plus years in uniform. To say that I had been overwhelmed personally and professionally by the deaths and injuries of so many great “Geronimo” soldiers (as well as the loss of many others from other U.S. units fighting with us on both REUP Hill, FSB Granite, and FSB Henderson) would be a profound understatement. Even then I knew I would carry the burden of their deaths and injuries…the memories of their pain and suffering, and deepest sympathies for their friends, families, and loved ones for the rest of my life. As their commander I felt an almost unbearable sense of guilt for having led these brave Americans into and through nineteen days (18 April thru 6 May) of some of the most intense, close combat one could possibly imagine. In retrospect, I had been numbed by the experience. I had lost at least seventeen brave warriors assigned to A Company killed-in-action or missing-in-action (Ed Bishop and Larry Kier) and twenty-three others (one additional MIA-Refugio Teran) assigned to other units but fighting with us and under my direct combat command. Incredibly, I was still unable and incapable of accounting for all the wounded who had been evacuated from our midst (nor would I ever arrive at an accurate figure of our wounded). From 18 April through 6 May, A Company’s losses (either killed-in-action or wounded-in-action) had devastated our ranks and rendered us “not combat ready” by any readiness assessment. In addition, the Division’s personnel replacement system seemed to have been overwhelmed by the sudden rise in the cumulative casualty rate (particularly among 11B-infantrymen) during OPERATION TEXAS STAR’s execution in the spring and summer of 1970. The division was totally incapable of rapidly restoring us to our authorized strength. (Lesson learned: NEVER EXPECT TO GO INTO BATTLE AT YOUR AUTHORIZED STRENGTH AND WHILE ON THE BATTLEFIELD NEVER EXPECT TO GET TO AUTHORIZED STRENGTH...YOU WILL FIGHT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE!). Meanwhile, in Vietnam, infantrymen were streaming home by the thousands to meet revised national political objectives. I had seen at least a one-hundred percent battlefield turnover within A Company in less than thirty days yet the reality was that we were subject to being returned to the fight around FSB Ripcord in just a matter of days. For a host of reasons my best efforts to account, by full name, of all of those newly assigned to our ranks had failed as the battles raged and our casualties mounted. Men were being killed or wounded almost as quickly as they joined us….I (we) hardly knew them! A Company’s replacements would trickle in by twos and threes with almost every resupply helicopter landing bringing soldiers in to fill a foxhole

or fighting position and often they would become casualties within the first 24 to 48 hours after they had arrived. We were often just lucky to capture and record a last name before these men were wounded or killed. Through the REUP Hill, Granite, and Henderson battles I was content just to get a headcount of our “foxhole strength” early each morning or late afternoon. At the same time I knew that First Sergeant Costello (A Company’s top noncommissioned officer back in our base area) could not possibly build a reliable unit roster (it was literally changing by the hour) nor could he keep up with our wounded and their status as he dealt with an evacuation system that seemed to routinely exclude us from any updates on our casualties' status. (While we were deployed on a fire support base or into the canopy there were no provisions for me to have routine radio contact with my company First Sergeant or any others involved with unit administration). It was deeply painful for me then and remains a haunting memory to this day to have lost so many brave and courageous warriors in a series of savage, face-to-face battles with the NVA. Words could not possibly describe my emotions…I felt a sense of deep depression and remorse for our losses...perhaps a weariness from my own battle fatigue. I also suffered from an anxiousness for what I knew that lay ahead of us and my own confusion as to how I could make a positive contribution to A Company’s regeneration. It was also quite numbing for me to accept that these great American patriots I had lost would just be another number on the 6 PM national nightly news TV networks and newspapers back stateside. I grieved for them then and for their families back home knowing that a terrible, unforgettable knock on the door would bring with it a lifetime of suffering for a wife, a mother, a father, a sibling, children, and other family members and friends. The company had lost, both killed and wounded, some of the bravest and most experienced leaders and jungle fighters I would ever know. By the simplest definition these men were members of a close-knit family of ordinary Americans of extraordinary skill, toughness, and determination to fight, survive, and win in the jungle yet so many had been savagely taken away. Regardless of rank I simply could not expect to rapidly rebuild and restore their team skills at the squad and platoon level. I had no immediate answers to repair or replace this “family’s" leadership skills, practical knowledge of the jungle, and mastery of war-fighting tactics, techniques, and procedures unique to an airmobile infantry company….not along the timelines I knew we were destined to follow. I was absolutely distraught as well to have lost all but two of my

"brotherhood of fine lieutenants" in three horrific weeks of fighting (Dave Poole, Jim Kwiecien, Lyn Hargrave, Russ Cook [wounded, injured, or reassigned] and my great friend and former fellow platoon leader Rick Hawley, our Battalion Reconnaissance Platoon Leader who was killed on Henderson). In addition to these losses, A Company had lost LT Dave Hockett killed-in-action the day I assumed command and we had lost LT Bob Morris to and injury and subsequent reassignment. In about two months A Company had lost seven combat-experienced lieutenants; a near two-hundred percent turnover of officers! Lieutenants Jim Knight and Jim Norman (my Artillery Forward Observer) were A Company's only officers left other than me (at the time I had no idea Jim Kwiecien would eventually return to us). However, the losses in combat experienced, battle tested enlisted men and noncommissioned officers (many in special skilled and/or leadership positions) was perhaps my greatest and most pressing concern. There were simply no short-term "fixes" for replacement of the lost, experienced jungle fighters and especially those with proven battle-tested leadership skills. (One of the most important lessons I had learned as a leader in combat was to identify and "mark exceptional emergent leaders", regardless of rank, who "took charge" when the first shot rang out in the jungle. Such men proved over and over again their value to me and more importantly to their immediate subordinates given the mission requirements we all faced. Such "emergent leadership" was always characterized by a "follow-me" spirit, remarkable courage under fire, and a selfless commitment to "mission first-soldiers always". Such men led from the front…made things happen…set tough standards and were not only invaluable to me but to all others in A Company).

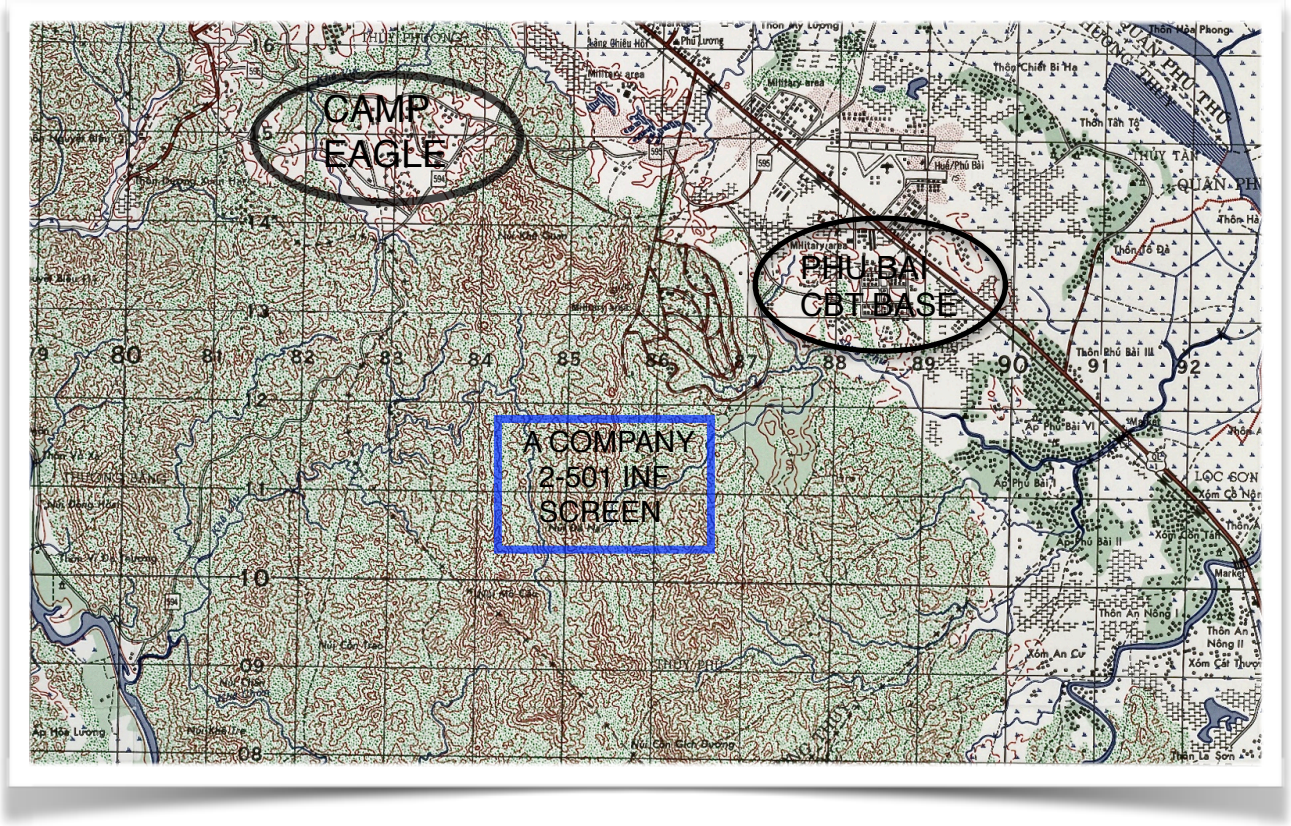
I knew from the moment we returned to the relative safety of Camp Evans after the Henderson battle that we were "on the clock" for a reentry into the fight around FSB Ripcord so reconstituting A Company became a daunting task…"a mission impossible" for me personally as the hosts of cascading "unknowns" continued to build. I was out of the fight with A Company temporarily but I lay awake every night during our brief respite at Camp Evans (and later at our battalion's new rear area in Phu Bai) trying to visualize how we could regain what we had lost. The challenge for me was to quickly rebuild A Company's "skill, will, and teamwork" in a matter of a few days, not weeks. In hind sight, I simply "didn't know what I didn't know"….I was too young and too inexperienced to recognize the complexity of tasks required to be accomplished nor the difficulties at hand

in order to replace what had been lost during a brutal three weeks of combat. I was simply overwhelmed by a host of "unanswerable questions". For example: I certainly didn't know how many of our wounded would return and on what timelines….How would the Division fill our personnel shortages? (I knew the Division was experiencing a critical shortage of infantrymen)….How would the ongoing battle in the RIPCORD area of operations influence the priority and availability of replacements for us?….On what timeline would we return to AO PEAR (the Ripcord AO) as part of the fight up north?….Did the leadership above me understand and have a full appreciation of and for what had really happened to A Company from 18 April to 6 May? Deep down I knew there was little I could do to adequately prepare A Company for the days that lay ahead other than to rely on the few remaining battle-hardened "survivors". It was their mission to seize the moment to coach, mentor, and teach the new replacements as they slowly trickled into our midst. Looking back I can say with absolute certainty that A Company's veterans (few as there were) picked up the mission to integrate the new arrivals into the company with very little direction from me! Those marvelous vets (from Private through Staff Sergeant) who had survived REUP, Granite, and Henderson "stepped up" to warmly welcome our replacements and without hesitation they began to share their combat lessons-learned and "fieldcraft". From Private to Staff Sergeant the veterans of A Company integrated/trained our newly assigned infantrymen and I never heard a complaint or a concern as our ranks slowly filled day after day. I could not have been more proud of those battle-hardened "grunts"…"warriors"…who had survived the three weeks of intense combat! I knew they, like me, were struggling with the emotions of loosing so many friends and the uncertainty of missions to come BUT they met my every expectation with the "DRIVE ON" spirit that defined the company as we slowly began to rebuild ourselves as a fighting entity.

On 8 May while we were still recovering at Camp Evans the 3rd Brigade abruptly terminated the FSB Henderson operation and on the 9th of May elements of the 2-501(-) Infantry who had temporarily replaced us in the Henderson AO returned to the FSB Gladiator area of operations. As mentioned earlier, A Company remained at Camp Evans to continue our recovery and to augment their local security forces posted around the Camp Evans perimeter. On 12 May, A Company moved back to rejoin the 2-501 Infantry at our new battalion rear area that had relocated from Camp

Sally to Phu Bai Combat Base (southeast of the city of Hue) with a mission to conduct “refresher training” and to continue A Company’s regeneration.

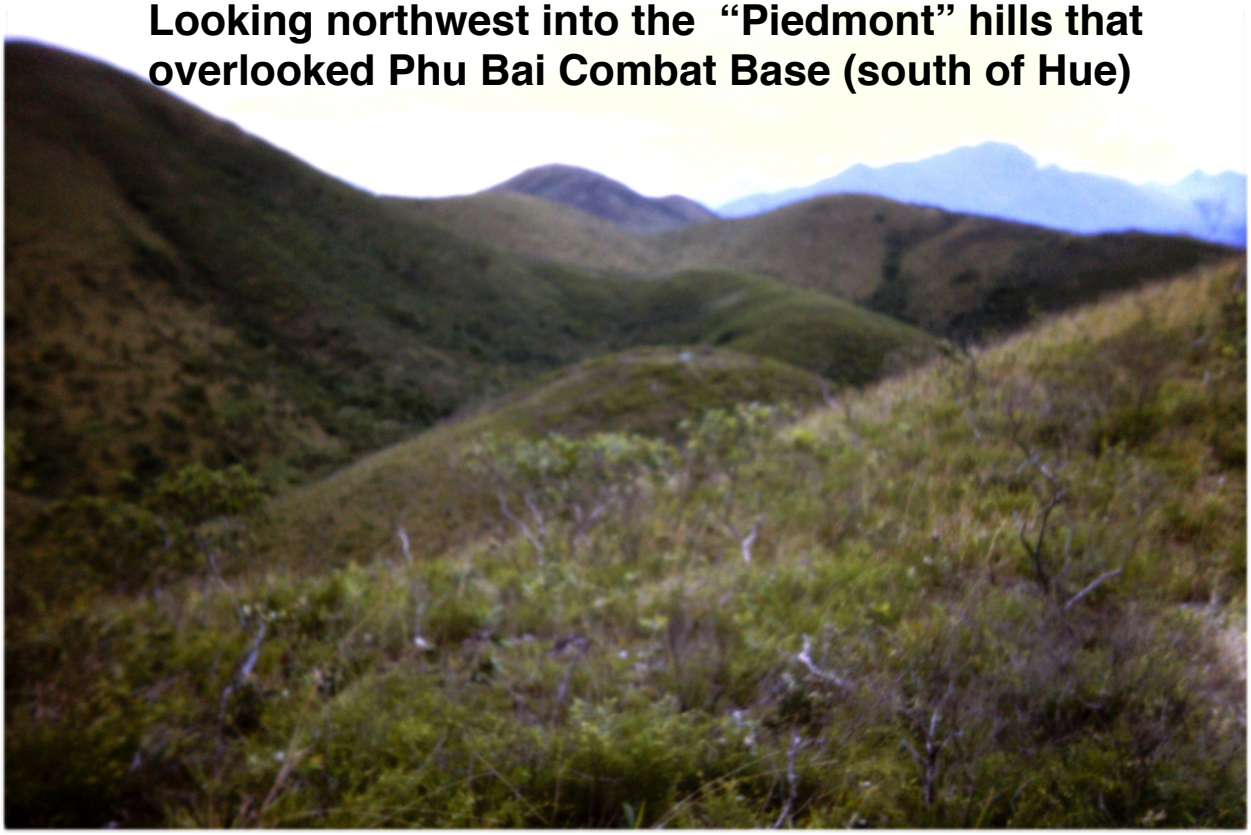
On 17 May, a scant eleven days after the Henderson battle, I received a “change of mission” warning order for A Company to reenter the operational environment under the operational control of the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry (our first time “on my watch” to be task-organized into another battalion in the 2nd Brigade). With the warning order for our return to the operational environment we also received a significant intelligence “threat assessment” of a possible attack on Phu Bai Combat Base by the NVA to celebrate the birthday of Ho Chi Minh. The Division took the threat quite seriously and issued a Division-wide order to immediately transition from our offensive focus and assume a “defensive posture” from 181200 May to 191200 hours on the 19th.



On the 18th and in accordance with the 1-502nd Infantry operational plan we moved out of our base area (on foot as best I recall) and into the piedmont hills southwest of Phu Bai Combat Base. Our mission was to conduct screening operations in the surrounding rolling hills between the

coastal flat lands and the jungle-covered mountains overlooking our sprawling base camp below. We fanned out across the scrub-covered terrain in a series of platoon positions to conduct ambushes and counter-reconnaissance patrols in order to locate and/or disrupt enemy forces that might be operating and/or attempting to infiltrate into the area. As best I recall we reported no enemy sightings or fresh signs of enemy activity anywhere in our area while under operational control of the 1-502nd

Looking northwest into the "Piedmont" hills that overlooked Phu Bai Combat Base (south of Hue)

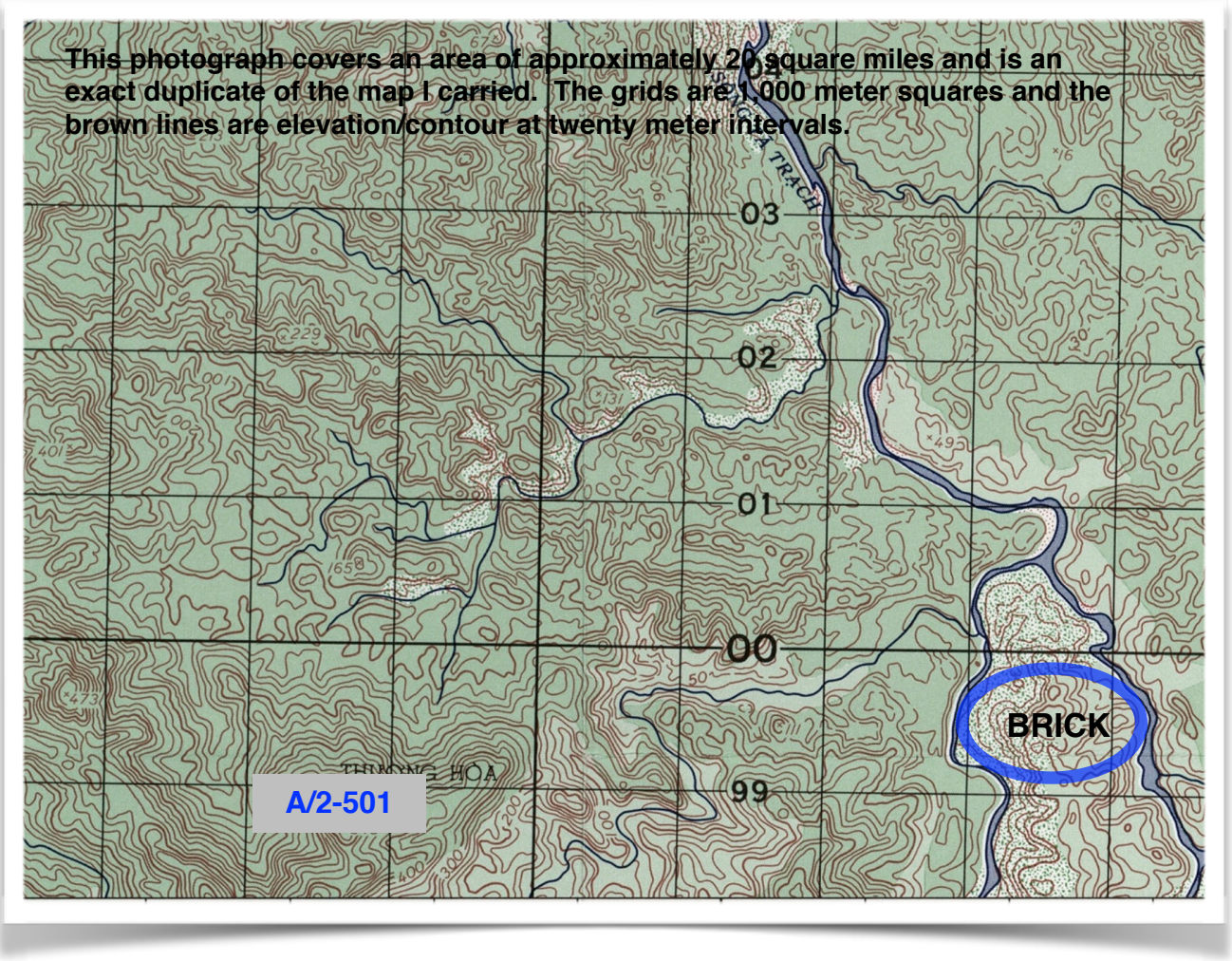


Infantry Regiment. The hills and scrub brush we were occupying on this mission represented quite a different environmental setting for those of us who had been accustomed to operating in the canopied jungle mountains. (The few veterans left in A Company who had hunted NVA day after day in the jungled mountains only a few weeks earlier were quick to "school" our newest troops reminding them that this mission was a "walk in the park" compared to what they would experience in the mountains in the weeks ahead.) The stark contrast in terrain, the lack of cover and concealment,

the potential for engagement by elements of the local VC, and our proximity to Phu Bai Combat Base were cause to modify my threat assessments which would now focus on concerns for booby traps, snipers, local insurgent/VC probes, and mortar attacks rather than large-scale NVA enemy activity in the area. While the Piedmont Screen may have been less than physically challenging for A Company I still worried that we might be too complacent and fail to take seriously a totally different and dangerous set of threats this environment offered. As a commander, I was constantly invoking the Division's mantra to the company's leadership..."STAY ALERT, AND STAY ALIVE!".

From the moment we moved into the piedmont hills I recall quite vividly having more than the usual number of radio conversations with LTC "Arv" West (Commander, 1-502nd Infantry), my new "boss" during the operation. I had immediate and utmost confidence in him due to his intense interest in the specifics of our company's operations planning for the mission. We both agreed on the near real-time threats in our area of operations and he approved without question my scheme of maneuver and concept for saturation patrolling in our newly assigned area of operations. (I had no idea that LTC West had only been in command for two weeks when we were placed under his operational control).

I believe some time around the 18th or 19th of May I received a radio transmission with a warning order for another "change of mission" to return to 2-501st Infantry Battalion's control and prepare for a combat air-assault back into the canopied mountains under operational control of the 1st Brigade. The rather spartan warning order for a "change of mission" triggered a significant company internal planning effort on my part to further refine the specified, implied, inherent, and mission-essential tasks to be accomplished before execution orders arrived. I would immediately begin planning for: a return to 2-501 Infantry which had been further task organized under operational control of the 1st Brigade; plan for aerial extraction (by helicopter [UH-1]) from our current location in the hills just southeast of Camp Eagle (and Phu Bai); and plan for a combat air-assault into multiple landing zones approximately ten miles south-southwest of Phu Bai Combat Base into the Fire Support Base (FSB) Brick area of operations on 20 May (about twelve miles southeast of FSB Bastogne). A Company's operational area would be provided to me as a map overlay and delivered by air to my CP as soon as possible. Other operational details I received were: 2-501st Infantry's C Company would air-assault onto Brick's summit



on the 19th to secure the barren hilltop and prepare to receive supporting artillery unit(s); the 2-501st Infantry Tactical Operations Center (TOC) would follow C Company in the order of air-flow and supervise the fortification of FSB Brick (Hill 132 at YD835995). Our battalion mission would be to conduct search and destroy operations in the Song Ta Trach River Valley approximately fourteen miles southeast of Hue City.

(As an aside, to provide some sense of understanding for the tremendous flexibility of an airmobile division one must note that as a company commander I was now planning an air-assault into an area of operations approximately forty-five miles southeast of FSB Henderson and twenty-eight miles southeast of FSB Ripcord).

Frankly, I thought we would probably be heading back into the Ripcord AO given the operational reports I'd been hearing but I think all of us were somewhat relieved to be headed into the Brick AO instead. When I got the warning order I also recall asking myself if A Company was really ready to

return to the mountains and hump the canopied jungle with so many new soldiers who had never seen such terrain much less experienced a "contact" with NVA regular forces. Admittedly, we were a dramatically different company now but I never doubted the "Drive On" spirit of our soldiers….it was the shortages in seasoned leaders, the lack of individual soldier's combat experience, and their lack of time in the bush that concerned me more than anything else.

For many in A Company our move into the Brick AO would be their first combat air-assault and their first trip into the mountainous canopy (and candidly, I would be glad to get that experience behind us). I was also glad our battalion was returning to the canopy and into an area of operations that at first glance seemed far less threatening. I really wanted to have some time to grow some "jungle experts", get to know what I had as a rifle company (with a lot of new soldiers as well as the emerging leadership) and also to work more closely with LTC Livingston and his relatively new S-3 (Operations Officer). Although LTC Livingston had been commanding the 2-501 Infantry for about a month I felt I hardly knew him given the pace of the battles A Company had experienced through the REUP, Granite, and

My Command Post hidden in the scrub brush of the Piedmont

Henderson operations and our oft times “detachment” from command and control by our parent headquarters. The frantic pace in the Ripcord AO and A Company’s extended separation from the rest of the battalion while we recovered from these fights only served to exacerbate the problem for me. From my perspective the FSB Brick operation seemed to be the perfect setting and opportunity to not only give A Company the jungle exposure and the “shake-down experience” we desperately needed but I also believed the new operational scenario would help reconnect us with our battalion family.

As the sun set on our last night with the 1-502nd Infantry Regiment screening the rolling hills southwest and above Phu Bai Combat Base I was busily planning the next day’s tactical move. As mentioned earlier, there were a host of “specified, implied, inherent, and mission-essential tasks” embedded in our mission statement that forced me into an intense period of planning even though we were still working the Piedmont Screen. The following are just a few examples: We were going into multiple LZ’s…I had ground tactical plans to consider….air-landing plans to finalize….there were air-loading/movement plans to be finalized… fire planning to be coordinated…aircraft “chalks” to be arranged, and other such details to be sorted out before committing 130+ infantrymen into a new area of operations. I was keenly aware too that this combat air-assault would be A Company’s first tactical insertion into a new AO under the command and control of LTC Livingston and his relatively new Operations Officer. This combat air-assault would also be the first such event for at least half of the company and I was excited for our new soldiers to experience and master our signature craft as part of an airmobile division. I recall being a bit more apprehensive about this operation because I had virtually no tactical experience in the conduct of airmobile operations with either of our newest leaders. I had no specific questions or reasons to question the competence of our battalion leadership but my concern was that I hadn’t trained with either of them nor had I had the opportunity to get to know them personally. I knew my own company command group and I would have a long night ahead of us as we refined and finalized plans for the air-assault and passed orders and instructions to subordinate platoon leaders for operations in our newly assigned area. As plans and oral orders neared completion I could not help but think, “Well…here we go again back into the fight”. **For me the mission planning for execution on the 20th reminded me that over the past forty-three days I had worked for three**

Late evening on 19 May as we prepared to air assault from the Piedmont into the Fire Support Base Brick AO

different battalion commanders (Brashears, Livingston, and West), four brigade commanders (Kampe, White, Root, and Bradley), two or more division commanders (Wright and Hennessey and perhaps Berry), and all three of the division's infantry brigades. On more than one occasion I would wake up and remind myself who I was working for today!

Sometime during the first hour or two of May 20th as we were wrapping up the planning for our looming air-assault all of us in the command group were suddenly shaken by the sounds of at least one or more probable hand grenade explosions. The unexpected explosions occurred no more than perhaps five hundred meters away from my CP and northwest toward the 3rd Platoon's defensive sector. Within seconds I was on the radio with SSG Bob Nichol, 3rd Platoon's acting platoon leader. Bob confirmed that the explosion(s) had apparently occurred in his sector and he would report back to me as soon as he could confirm what had happened. In less than an hour Bob radioed me back that he had confirmed two of our own soldiers dead as a result of an explosion of unknown origin and there appeared to be no signs of enemy activity related to the fatalities. As our

dialogue continued back and forth over the next hour or so we both agreed that all available evidence led us to believe the deaths' most probable cause was an accidental discharge of one or more hand grenades. To this day I don't think anyone knows with absolute certainty the causal factors that led to this horrible accident resulting in the loss of two fine soldiers. The report I received was that one or more grenades exploded between the two of them while they were in their fighting positions and the exact cause of the accident could not be confirmed. I had immediately notified the 1-502nd Infantry by radio of the incident as soon as SSG Nichol called me and I periodically radioed LTC West's headquarters with updates as the facts were gathered at the scene. Sadly, my last request to the 1-502nd was for aviation support to evacuate the remains of our deceased "brothers". We had lost two fine soldiers from the 3rd Platoon in this terrible accident and both men were relatively new to A Company. According to their records **SGT Tony R. Ward**'s tour began 2 May 70 and **PFC Roy L. Carter**'s tour began 30 April 70. Their loss was a shock to all of us and made even more difficult to deal with in that they had lost their lives as a result of an apparent accident. I believe their deaths were the second and third soldiers lost due to non-hostile accidents in A Company while I was in command (we had lost **SP4 Daniel K. Kohl** to an errant artillery round on 31 March 1970 while defending FSB Bastogne). However, such tragedies serve to amplify the inherent and ever-present dangers all combatants face. Only those of us who routinely operated twenty-four hours a day with all manner of dangerous weapons and explosive devices recognize the extreme risks that infantrymen experience beyond the enemy we sought to kill or capture. We constantly talked, taught, and trained to be as safe as possible but on this night we had lost two great warriors to an event whose investigation yielded no real answers as to its cause. I deemed every death in combat to be a tragic loss but those attributed to accidental causes or fratricides (we had lost one soldier to a fratricide incident on FSB Granite during the battle) were always the most difficult for me to deal with personally. The haunting questions for leaders are always the same…."What could I (we) have possibly done to prevent such a tragedy….What could (or should) I (we) have taught them that would have prevented the loss of life?" In the years that followed I would learn to recognize that such tragedies and the inherent burdens of responsibility associated with such losses wear heavily on every commander for a lifetime. In keeping with the almost sacred mantle of

command I assumed full responsibility for their deaths….I was their commander and with my “command responsibility” came the responsibility for everything that happened or failed to happen in A company.

I don’t recall when I got the radio message that our air-assault was a “GO” on the 20th but I remember being alerted an hour or so before our air move that I would be picked up by LTC Livingston’s Command and Control (C&C) helicopter to observe the combat air-assault preparatory artillery fires on our two landing zones as the company’s insertion occurred. I would return to my own PZ as the air-assault progressed and as my own chalk was timed for pickup. I did not contest this rather odd directive but it certainly wasn’t my preferred option and it obviously disrupted my own command and control scheme. My air-landing plan had me and my command group in the flow with the lead elements of the platoon going into the southern LZ of the two LZs in our new company AO. In any event, I boarded LTC Livingston’s C&C aircraft and slid into the nylon bench seats beside my boss and his operations officer and in front of the familiar radio console. After buckling in I donned a communications headset and began confirming my operational plans to the battalion’s leadership over the intercom as we banked westward and gained altitude en route to our objective area a few miles west of the pickup zone (PZ). We arrived near our new AO and began cutting the usual aerial donut holes in the sky at several thousand feet above ground level well before the troop pickup was scheduled but perfectly timed to observe out the Huey’s open doors the initial artillery preparatory fires as they struck the LZ’s we would occupy within minutes. I watched in absolute dismay as the first projectiles of 105mm artillery fire hit on a northern LZ not designated as one we were destined to occupy according to the map coordinates I had been given the previous day. Quickly I switched my radio from “command net” to “intercom” and informed our Battalion Operations Officer that our direct support artillery was prepping the wrong LZ (an LZ that was not part of my operational planning). With my map across my lap I frantically pointed to the grease-penciled and circled LZs I had been previously given and were a part my own tactical planning. By this time the first lift of A Company’s soldiers was in the air and headed toward the northern most LZ. There was no time to shift the artillery prep to the correct LZ but we could redirect the troop-carrying aircraft, if necessary. LTC Livingston’s Operations Officer immediately came back over the intercom to me saying that we would just go with an AH-1 (Cobra) gunship prep with “nails” (flechette

projectiles) on the LZ that was part of my original planning and forego the artillery preparation. I couldn't believe the colossal mistake...I was irate that my higher headquarters had made such an dumb error and placed one of my platoons at a substantially higher risk. Purposefully prepping the wrong LZ and then sending a rifle platoon into an LZ with only a Cobra Gunship prep was an unforgivable sin as far as I was concerned. I instantly made myself a mental note...never again assume my Battalion S-3 can plan and execute a company air-assault correctly. Fortunately, A Company's lead rifle platoon combat air-assaulted uneventfully into an uncontested one-ship LZ with only a Cobra rocket prep on the west side of the Ta Trach River and I could not believe I'd watched an artillery prep on the wrong LZ.

I was finally flown back to my own pickup zone in the piedmont hills just in time to meet the UH-1 lift package of six Hueys plus two AH-1(Cobra) gunships and within minutes my command group and I were in the air headed to the second and most southerly LZ (I was still furious having watched one of my platoons inserted into an LZ without an artillery prep). As we neared our objective area we banked right making a long sweeping right turn to the northwest and our six troop-laden Hueys (five soldiers in each aircraft) again lined up and widened distances between aircraft to begin our final descent. In preparation for landing I observed the white artillery smoke round hit on our LZ signaling the last round of the artillery prep fires. At about a kilometer out and on "short final" our AH-1 Cobra gunships flying armed escort provided us with a great 2.75 inch rocket "nails" prep of the LZ as they roared by our flanks no more than twenty meters from the open cargo bays on the UH-1s that were hauling us in. I'm certain the newest members of A Company were in absolute awe of the Cobra firepower as our "cherries" experienced the sounds and fury of the hydro-rockets shrieking in pairs from the rocket pods mounted on each side of our aerial armed escorts and impacted on the ground we would occupy in a matter of seconds. As the lead sortie of six UH-1's in trail formation carrying troops flared for landing onto another one-ship LZ their M60 machine-gun door gunners opened up to rake the jungle floor around the LZ adding to the purposeful chaos we were creating for our own protection. (At the same time our Cobra gunships were now circling us and "on call" if suppressive fires were necessary). I recall thinking this must bring terror to the hearts of A Company's newest soldiers but for the veterans the roar of

friendly fires hitting on and around the LZ was music to our ears and thankfully we were getting no return fire from the ground.

Needless to say (and as always was the case) I could not wait to get on the ground and back into the jungle with the men of A Company. Once on the ground and linked with my radio operators I confirmed that our air-assaults into both LZs went without opposition and that was the best news of the day. On the other hand I was distraught….angry that the actual air movement had been fraught with errors and misunderstandings. We had hit the wrong LZ with artillery, inserted one platoon on an LZ without the prerequisite artillery preparation, and I had not gotten on the ground in the sequence and timing that I had originally planned. In retrospect I should have been more thankful that we had survived the screw-ups without enemy contact…we were just lucky. Now we were back into the familiar confines of the jungle canopy and our "home away from home" for the few veterans that remained in A Company. Once again I would never speak for every A Company soldier but for me the jungle was my "comfort zone"….there was no place in Vietnam that I would rather have been. (Six days later our own direct support artillery battery (B Battery, 2-320 Field Artillery [105mm]) air-assaulted onto FSB Brick from FSB Kathryn giving us even more capability in our new AO.) As we quietly "rucked up" and began to move away from the landing zones to begin search and destroy operations in our new AO I knew we had enough veterans to coach and mentor the newest members of A Company in the basics of jungle life and jungle fighting. I also felt confident that we would bond as a single combat entity very quickly if we could avoid a major engagement with the NVA for a week or so. Thankfully, that was the case.

A Company conducted search and destroy operations throughout its assigned area of operations west of the Song Ta Trach River from 20 May until around the 14th of June (as best I recollect) without seeing a single NVA soldier or fresh sign of any recent enemy activity. Our rifle platoons routinely ambushed at night and most often moved during the early morning hours to cover our area of operations thoroughly. I recall the terrain in our new area of operations was quite similar to the terrain many of us had experienced around FSB Bastogne and along the Song Bo River no more than a few miles to the northwest. The jungled ridge lines were steep on either flank but much less difficult when compared to those around FSB Ripcord. Good hard-packed trails on the ridge lines afforded us relative ease of movement but subjected us to substantially more risks

from boobytraps while the ravines and draws were a thick, tangled mass of vines and occasional banana or bamboo thickets restricting movement under the best of circumstances. Given the amount of platoon movement and number of ambushes and saturation patrolling we conducted without contact throughout the first week along the Ta Trach I concluded that there were no sizable enemy forces to be dealt with nearby. More importantly I knew the men in A Company were gaining in character and confidence in themselves with each day as our newest replacements were “greened” in the skills necessary to lead, follow, survive, and fight in the jungle if and when that moment arrived. Of equal or perhaps greater importance, A Company’s newest leaders at the squad and platoon level were gaining in experience and I was gaining more confidence in them as well. One of a number of measures of my confidence in new leaders was in their ability to navigate precisely in the jungle. We had no modern-day GPS’s (Global Positioning System) to provide precise locations however I demanded that every leader know at all times his location to within at least fifty meters or less. I would routinely maneuver platoons purposefully into specifically designated zones and I expected subordinate leaders to squad leader level to be jungle experts with a map, compass, and pace-count for their safety and the safety of the company-at-large. Precise land navigation was paramount so that my forward observer and I could routinely plan both defensive fires as well as harassing and interdicting fires for each night from within my command group. Knowing the precise locations of every squad and platoon every moment of every day could determine life or death circumstances for any or all of us. There simply was no room for errors in navigation….I had to trust in their skills in map-reading and terrain association. A second critical measure of my confidence in subordinate leadership was my ability to talk to all three of A Company’s platoon leaders continuously by radio whether in a static location or on the move. I was absolutely ruthless in making sure radio operators were able to instantly recognize my personal radio calls to subordinates and instantly hand the radio handset to their platoon leader to answer my call (If I wanted to talk to a radio operator I’d call them with their own call sign). My reasoning was simple...experience had taught me that the timelines for leader-to-led critical decision-making during combat operations in a jungle environment were habitually compressed due to the unique nature of jungle fighting therefore not a second could be wasted (or lost) due to a failure to instantly communicate. I had learned to assume that every meeting engagement

between combatants in the jungle would occur at ten to fifteen meters or less therefore leader-to-led communications must be near instantaneous for passing fragmentary orders, sharing critical elements of enemy information, and transmission of immediate calls for assistance such as requests for indirect fires or aerial medical evacuation, etc.. In addition, I expected that radios be meticulously maintained and fully operational 24/7 with spares of batteries/handsets/antenna, etc., and every radio must be controlled by experts in communications; the antennae must be matched for terrain and distance (field expedient antennae, if necessary); routes must be chosen by careful map analysis of every contour line to prevent (terrain masking) loss of communications, etc.. There are certainly many more characteristics that led to or detracted from my confidence in subordinate leadership but I'm hard-pressed to think of more important ones than knowing precisely where my subordinate units were at every moment and being able to communicate with the organization's chain of command at all times near instantaneously.

On 1 June after almost two weeks of patrolling and ambushing in our AO without contact with the enemy I received an urgent call from the 3rd Platoon that one of their soldiers had detonated a boobytrap while the point elements of his squad were crossing an old abandoned LZ. The initial report was that a probable trip-wired mortar round had felled at least two members of the lead squad. Very quickly thereafter I was informed in follow-up communications that the wounds to one soldier's lower torso were characterized as life-threatening. While at least one or more medics and others from his platoon frantically tended to him we immediately radioed for an urgent medical air evacuation. **PFC Marcus W. Maddox** was evacuated shortly thereafter and the reports I continued to receive were that his condition, given the extent of his wounds and loss of blood, were "critical". Years later I would learn that Marc Maddox died as a result of his wounds on 16 June while in the hospital…just a day or so after A Company finally walked back onto FSB Brick. Like many in our midst, Marc was relatively new to A Company having begun his tour 22 April 1970. As best I remember, PFC Marc Maddox was the only soldier killed (or wounded) by a boobytrap while I was in command. Marc had been warmly welcomed into the Third Platoon and was well liked by all who knew him. All of us mourned his loss and especially those in his squad.

I don't recall when I was told we would be returning to FSB Brick nor do I remember when I was alerted for reassignment as the 2-501st Infantry's Air

Operations Officer but I vividly remember thinking that my days were now numbered with the “Avengers” and I dreaded the thoughts of leaving such a wonderful group of soldiers. I had been through the best and worst of circumstances since 20 February with many great American warriors from all walks of life while leading A Company. Along the way I had laughed with them and at times cried with some of them as we shared personal stories and grieved over our losses. (I had learned the names of many wives, girlfriends, children, hometowns, their aspirations, the cars they drove, etc., etc.). The soldiers of A Company had become “my family away from family” in the months I had been with them. In my own way I privately swelled with pride to have had the privilege of leading them and always felt humbled and honored to be in their midst. It was my opinion then and even today that these were (and are) America’s finest…they were tough, determined, protective of one another, and never once did they whence at getting the mission accomplished under the most difficult conditions. As my days with A Company began their count down I simply tried to “wish away” my inevitable departure from their midst.

I think around the 9th of June I called our Tactical Operations Center on FSB Brick giving them one or more LZ’s for A Company’s logistical resupply and/or aerial extraction for our eventual return to the fire support base to defend the hill. My assumptions were that we would move by air-assault from our current area of operations to FSB Brick and assume the fire base defense mission which was the routine for airmobile infantry companies. (I tried to tie our aerial extractions at the end of a mission under the canopy to our need for resupply with the idea that I could reduce “soldier load” i.e., arrive on an PZ low on everything but ammunition and “refit-replenish” on the firebase). Within twenty-four hours my request for aerial extraction was denied and I was informed that we would be <u>walking</u> back to FSB Brick. Candidly, I was dumbstruck…I think anger might have been a better word at the time! We were an airmobile infantry company with easy access to two excellent pickup zones for resupply and/or extraction. What was the tactical purpose and intent in “humping” back to Brick? Was the problem driven by lack of aircraft availability given all the activity up in the Ripcord AO? I had concluded much earlier in the operation that our saturation patrolling and night ambushes for about three weeks with no contact with the enemy had proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that there was little if any immediate threat to FSB Brick from the west. A Company had been humping the jungled mountains and gorges since 20 May (20 days) west of

Brick and although we were less than four kilometers (about 2.5 miles) from the fire base we were faced with a very difficult and dangerous route of return by foot. (To the novice the 2.5 mile trek might seem to be just a "walk in the park" for any infantry unit but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, on a number of occasions while I led A company I had received "guidance" to pick up and move a kilometer here or there as if it were nothing. The point to be made here is that there are no easy foot moves in jungled mountains and every move beyond a hundred meters or more brings with it a host of threats that must be addressed.)

As if it were yesterday I remember looking at my map very carefully to determine the best plan for our ordered foot-move northeast. I recall identifying two separate but distinctly different courses of action as possible routes for our return…both courses of action required water crossings with their obvious significant inherent risks. Option one was to follow a rather circuitous, cross-compartmented set of ridge lines and existing trail networks that would subject us to a substantially greater threat of more boobytraps (Marc Maddox's loss was still fresh on my mind). The second option was to bring all three platoons down from the high ground to a single designated location and as a company follow a prominent intermittent stream bed that would lead us directly to the base of FSB Brick. Following the stream bed had its disadvantages too…there was always the increased threat of ambush in thick cover and the route of movement would be far more physically challenging given the jungle thickened significantly below us near the water's edge. I chose the stream bed option for our route of movement and we would make our way back to Brick as a company… platoons in column, with my command group in its usual position moving with the second platoon in the order of march. This would be my first time to maneuver A Company as a company (a much needed training experience) since we'd left AO PEAR in the Ripcord AO and my last time leading A Company tactically. I should inject here that as I poured over my map-sheets studying every detail and contour line along our route back to FSB Brick I was, for all intents and purposes, a one-eyed company commander and had been for a week or more. I recall having been hit in the face with a blast of debris from a satchel charge during the Henderson fight that had temporarily effected my vision but I don't remember exactly when the eye itself became a real problem. In any event, I think the left eye problem worsened each day about a week after our insertion into the Brick AO and by the time we were ordered to walk back I could see light

with my left eye but not much else. About the same time I received the order to walk back to Brick I also concluded that the eye problem could be rather serious but I was determined that I would lead A Company back to Brick no matter what.

I think we began our move back to the FSB around 11 or 12 June by initially descending by platoons from the ridge lines and linking up as a company along the stream bed in the northeast zone of our operational area. The route we cleared on our way back to Brick was just as I had suspected it would be….thick, lower growth double canopy jungle near the stream…difficult to move through, but lush and beautiful along the water's edge. We moved slowly and cautiously given the number of intermittent small clearings we were required to cross along the stream. I know some of us even occasionally waded knee deep to perhaps chest deep in the clear, cool water. I recall that many of us were glad to wash up some as we slowly crept toward the west fork of the Song Ta Trach River on BRICK's western side. We were slowly clearing our way northeast toward FSB BRICK and searching for any sign of enemy activity along our axis of advance. I think we finally crossed the Ta Trach moving west to east below Brick early morning on June 14th after I had called the TOC to coordinate our passage of lines into the fire base's defensive perimeter. I know I was somewhat relieved to be finally getting A Company on our fire support base after the lengthy stay in the canopy (about 25 days) and we all needed some time off our feet and out from under the rucksack having completed the physically challenging trek along the stream bed. A Company quickly moved by platoons onto Brick and into the perimeter defenses to relieve others who were headed back into the canopy and our leaders immediately began making assignments and adjustments in the fill of fighting positions around the hill's military crest. The few veterans of fire base defensive duties knew the drill and went about FSB Brick's occupation quietly and professionally. I recall thinking that the survivors of Fire Base's Granite and Henderson, few as there were, would certainly share in the basic soldier skills necessary for defending and I had little doubt the men of A Company would be hard at work improving individual fighting positions immediately upon their arrival. As we slowly inched our way up the steep slope to Brick's hilltop in single file I recall thinking that our time under the canopy had "greened" our newest soldiers to life in the jungle…new leadership had been given invaluable time to get to know the men they were now leading and we were recovering nicely from the chaos experienced in April and

early May. I had not anticipated that we would go three weeks without a meeting engagement with the NVA but I also knew that A Company and the 2-501 were destined to return to the Ripcord AO and the battle than continued to rage north of us.

As usual, upon my arrival on Brick I immediately dropped my rucksack and with M16 in hand I circled the perimeter to get “the lay of the land” we were now responsible for defending. As I walked the perimeter I recall thinking that LTC Livingston and the 2-501st (with other supporting elements) had really done a superb job in developing the FSB defenses. Of course there was still a lot of work for A Company to accomplish but Brick was now a formidable fire base….not as well “hardened” as FSB Bastogne but certainly much easier to defend than Granite or Henderson. Along my route around the hilltop I stopped by the Aid Station to have our Battalion Surgeon (Captain John Draus) look at my eye and he immediately told me I would have to return to 85th Evacuation Hospital at Camp Eagle for diagnosis and treatment. From there I made my usual trip up to the TOC to provide the command group of the 2-501 with a situation/closure report on our status, get the usual intelligence updates and orders, and gather as much information as possible for defense of the hill. As a matter of priority I also had to let LTC Livingston know that I had been directed by our Surgeon to return to the rear area medical facility to have my eye examined. As best I remember in less than an hour I was alerted for a flight back to 85th Evacuation Hospital with the aircraft inbound. I don't recall ever getting back to my company CP on Brick. I simply laid my rifle and web gear just inside the TOC door and dashed for the waiting helicopter at flight idle on the nearby PZ. I recall telling the 2-501st leadership in the TOC that I’d get the eye taken care of as quickly as possible and I expected to be back on Brick before sunset. Little did I know that as I lifted off of the fire base I would be seeing A Company and the 2-501 Infantry for the last time. I would never have the opportunity to thank the men of A Company for having had the honor and privilege of leading them. I would never have the opportunity to look each of them in the eye and thank them for their selfless service, valor, gallantry, and steadfast commitment to one another and to me as their leader. I would never see the 2-501st Infantry Regiment again while on active duty nor would I have the honor and privilege of serving with the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) despite my best efforts to return to the “Screaming Eagles”.

My personnel records reflect that I relinquished command of A Company on 16 June 1970 with follow-on temporary stays at 85th Evacuation Hospital (Camp Eagle), 95th Surgical Hospital (Da Nang), 10th Surgical Hospital (Camp Zama, Japan), and finally the Army Special Treatment Center (Fort Gordon, Georgia). This was not the way I wanted to leave A Company, the 2-501st Infantry, the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) or Vietnam. I would have stayed with A Company as long as the Army would have allowed for these were the nation's finest and more importantly, these men were "family" to me.

We had lost three fine infantryman during operations in the piedmont hills above Phu Bai Combat Base and in the mountains west of FSB Brick between 20 May and 14 June 1970. We will forever remember them and honor their service and their supreme sacrifice. Their names are listed on the following page:

IN MEMORIUM

ROY LYNN CARTER

11D(Armor Recon Specialist); PFC; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Died 20 May 1970
Non-hostile, Accident
Circleville, Ohio

TONY ROBERT WARD

11B(Infantryman); SGT; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Died 20 May 1970
Non-hostile, Accident
East Point, Georgia

MARCUS WAYNE MADDOX

11C(Indirect Fire Crewman); PFC; A Company, 2-501 Infantry
Died 16 June 1970
Wounded 1 June 1970 - hostile explosive device (boobytrap)
Converse, Texas

EPILOGUE

"Medical Uncertainty and Malfunction"

Within the first hour or so after my arrival at the 85th Evacuation Hospital back at Camp Eagle (just southwest of Hue) on June 14th I knew I was not headed back to FSB Brick and the 2-501 Infantry Regiment before sunset as I had promised. In fact the doctors there determined that I had a very serious "eye infection and open corneal laceration". The principle area of medical concern seemed to center on an infected corneal laceration of the left eye thus I would remain hospitalized at the 85th until arrangements were completed for my transfer to 95th Surgical Hospital in Da Nang. In short order and by direction of one of the nurses I trashed my filthy jungle fatigues (I'd been in the same jungle fatigues since May 18th…28 days) along with my bleached/battered boots (I really hated to give up those boots) and enjoyed my first scrub-down in almost a month. Thereafter, I donned hospital attire and slippers and was escorted to a ward (officially reassigned as "hospitalized" 15 Jun 70). Even before my arrival at the ward the nursing staff had assembled the requisite paraphernalia to start me on a regimen of massive doses of antibiotics (mostly by IV injection in both arms). After a few days of treatment at the 85th LT Jim Knight (my former 1st Platoon Leader and now Company Executive Officer) visited with me and before departing handed me a folder containing a stack of orders for several awards and decorations. Jim's visit was certainly a pleasant surprise and I will always treasure the moments we had together. As my sole surviving lieutenant in A Company from the day I had assumed command on 20 February I could never thank him enough for his steadfast loyalty to me, his love and care for the men he led, and for his courage and valor under fire.

Within twenty-four hours of Jim's visit and an eye worsening each day I was finally airlifted to the 95th Surgical Hospital in Da Nang to be greeted by one or more doctors whose most pressing task was to define the type of infection I was battling, develop a medical treatment strategy, and limit further damage to the eye. My challenge and theirs would not be easy.

Literally the day I was wheeled into the hospital in Da Nang I began to recognize that there were probably no short-term fixes for my worsening

condition. About the same time I also came to the sudden realization that I had not just the eye problem to overcome but an emotional “mountain to climb” if I was to make an orderly transition (both physically and psychologically) from the jungle back to some sense of human civility. For months in the jungle I (and others like me) by necessity had adapted to a set of survivalist behaviors inconsistent with the acceptable norms of an otherwise civilized society. I took no real pride (then or now) in describing myself (and those I’d led in combat) as more like animals than humans having lived and hunted in the jungle for months but that was who I was. I had, by necessity, become a skilled predator in a target-rich environment and the proud leader of an unrelenting killing machine whose mission was to close with, kill, or capture an allusive and crafty North Vietnamese enemy. All of us had morphed over time into something rather sinister in the jungled mountains if for no other reason but to survive. By necessity we had first learned to become “pack mules” humping eighty to one hundred or more pounds of equipment per man for weeks at a time in the mountains. Many of A Company’s soldiers such as radio operators and machine-gun crews carried the greater loads. As a result we were by any description a gaunt, terrain-toughened, and weather-beaten group of men more recognizable by our perpetual battle hardened thousand-yard stare. We were conditioned to eat quite sparingly from an assortment of canned goods we were willing to carry on our backs and, more often than not, drank water gathered from the jungle streams (or caught in ponchos) along our routes of movement. (Months later I would be “medically decontaminated” as a carrier of a host of quite exotic intestinal parasites peculiar to Southeast Asia). Our verbal interactions with fellow infantrymen while on the move or laying on an ambush site were routinely nothing more than brief, crisp whispers….more often than not we would communicate by hand-and-arm signals rather than speak. Our group interactions and group dynamics “in the bush" were next to nonexistent unless we massed together temporarily for resupply activities. Our “lifelines” every moment in the jungle were most often our own instincts, the eight to twelve soldiers nearby, and our individual weapons. We trusted our battlefield instincts and trusted each other (both man and weapon) with our lives every moment of every day and with good reason. Most if not all of us had long since abandoned any sort of sleep cycle and, like predators in the wild, we often napped during the early morning hours in a patrol base setting or as other opportunities presented themselves. For me the days had no real

beginning or ending…I rarely knew the day of the week or the date…they simply didn't matter. (Some soldiers counted down the days until they were due to return to the U.S....I measured my time in Vietnam as "One Day At A Time", the title of one of my favorite hymns). Darkness for me became just another "period of limited visibility" and a heightened threat circumstance leading to another nameless day. All of our physical senses had been sharpened over time and adapted themselves to give immediate warning to both the dangers at hand and reminders of the harsh environment we endured. Sights, sounds, and smells in the jungle had become critical components of our alarm systems and keys to our survival. In retrospect, to say we had unknowingly morphed so dramatically (both physically and psychologically) while in the jungle would certainly be an understatement. I would never speak for others who were so abruptly returned to civilization but I suddenly realized after my arrival at 95th Surgical Hospital that I was totally unprepared for the return and the host of unforeseen circumstances this supposedly tranquil life thrust upon me. For example, once hospitalized I was expected to immediately return to a normal sleep cycle… for me a "mission impossible" for weeks on end. Overnight I was forced to adapt to a radical diet change (real food) that my digestive system rejected and by magnitudes made even worse by the massive doses of antibiotics I was being given. My nervous system was in a state of shock and confusion for weeks (perhaps months) as well. Sudden loud voices, ambient unrecognizable noises, and crowded conditions on the ward kept me edgy, unnecessarily guarded, constantly restless and irritable. Oddly enough, nurse's perfumes and the pungent smells of their makeup were immediately overwhelming and often quite nauseating. I recall on a number of nights being startled (or frightened) by a nurse bedside and right in my face announcing my time for medications and frankly that was an unsafe moment for both of us. On one such occasion I instinctively grabbed the arm of a nurse 2nd Lieutenant leaning over me, syringe in hand, and with all the calmness I could muster whispered, "Lieutenant, for your own safety and mine please just tap me on the foot to wake me or to get my attention when you approach my bed…that's all I'll need to be aroused and you'd best do the same with all of us who have just returned from the jungle". I also had immediate and serious trust issues with the hospital staff because we literally spoke a different language and seemed unable to effectively communicate with one another. Despite my worsening condition my hospital bed literally became a jail cell and I moved onto the

floor under my bed most nights for at least a week or more after my arrival. Finally, while in the jungle (with its constant enemy threat) I knew that I was "in control" of virtually everything around me but now with my hospitalization "the institution and insignificant others" were dictating every moment of my life and kept me in perpetual "information overload". I was now confined to a small space on the floor of a conical sphere (Quonset Hut) and subjected to almost constant chaos and confusion. For at least the first week or more on the ward I felt as if I was a caged animal in a zoo. Everywhere I turned there were new rules, new limitations, more restrictions of all sorts, and a variety of regulatory requirements in stark contrast to my life in the jungle. I recall on more than one occasion as I lay awake on the floor late into the night thinking, "Life in the jungle was so incredibly simple…just send me back into the fight among the warriors I love and left behind for within them there was a brotherhood like no other. …we were 'one' in caring for and protecting each other and we functioned with a common cause and purpose". Obviously, that was not in the cards.

Immediately upon my arrival at the 95th in Da Nang I was flooded with even more IV antibiotics (with "drip lines" in both arms and a variety of pills and other assorted injections). I also began to be treated with around-the-clock topical steroid drops in the eye. With each day my stay in 95th Surgical became a more miserable experience as I endured the side effects of a vast array of pharmaceuticals and the continuing "decompression" from my life in the jungle. The eye dramatically worsened as did my general physical condition. To add to my discomfort I had been assigned to a ward (open bay) with many soldiers (twenty or more) suffering from a vast array of physical as well as mental disabilities….some were recovering from combat wounds; some were suffering from advanced malarial symptoms and others had been diagnosed with a variety of behavioral disorders apparently as a result of hard drug use. There was never a quiet moment on the ward, day or night. Sadly I watched one soldier two beds down attempt suicide beneath his blanket (cutting his wrists with razor blades) and another across from me broke one or more arms (while in leather restraints) before he was eventually chemically sedated and casted up. As mentioned earlier, I recall spending most nights sleeping or lying on the floor under my bed rather than on it and at every opportunity during daylight hours I tried to escape the ward in my wheelchair (required to "rack" my IV bottles) to get away from the bedlam. On several occasions I even wheeled myself down to the 95th's ER facility

to watch our evacuation helicopters bring in flight after flight of combat casualties. With each visit to the ER (MASH) facility I became more amazed at the speed and precision of care afforded the most seriously wounded. On a number of visits there I observed stretcher after stretcher of our most seriously wounded off-loaded from helicopter(s) adjacent to the MASH. In less than two minutes after their arrival the individual casualty was stripped of his clothing and boots with scalpel and scissors (still on the combat stretcher) and a team of trauma experts were instantly at work along lines of common carpenter's "saw-horses" laden with field stretchers. More often than not the triage process immediately identified the most critically wounded who were rushed to a nearby surgical suite next door within 5 to 10 minutes of their arrival. A team of surgeons swarmed over those with life-threatening injuries and these men began to receive life-saving surgical care less than an hour from the moment they had been wounded. Despite what I was experiencing on my ward the phenomenon of surviving the "Golden Hour" as a wounded soldier was alive and well in the 95th. Such professionalism was reassuring to me because I knew many of A Company's most seriously wounded would have passed through this same facility and well over ninety percent of them who had beaten that "Golden Hour" would mercifully survive to tell their stories of the Vietnam experience.

After about fifteen days of absolute chaos on the ward at 95th Surgical Hospital (and an overall worsening of my physical condition) the doctors finally admitted that they were at a loss as to how to define and/or fix my eye problem. With such news I was also alerted for movement to the 10th Surgical Hospital, Camp Zama, Japan for further evaluation and treatment. Within an hour or so of my being alerted for reassignment and departure from Vietnam I wheeled myself down the hall to the American Red Cross office not far from my ward. Upon entry I politely asked if I could make a brief phone call home to inform my wife of my condition, imminent departure from Vietnam, and my new destination. My simple request was immediately denied despite the phone being an arm's reach away. More than a week later, by Western Union Telegram from The Department of the Army, my wife knew only the following:

"THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY HAS ASKED ME TO INFORM YOU THAT ***, CAPTAIN JAMES E. MITCHELL, WAS HOSPITALIZED IN VIETNAM ON 15 JUNE 1970, AND SUBSEQUENTLY EVACUATED TO

CAMP ZAMA, JAPAN, AS A RESULT OF A RETINAL HEMORRHAGE OF THE LEFT EYE. HE IS PRESENTLY MAKING NORMAL IMPROVEMENT AND IS ABLE TO WRITE TO YOU. HIS PRESENT CONDITION AND MORALE ARE EXCELLENT. PROGNOSIS FOR VISION IN THE LEFT EYE IS FAIR. EVACUATION TO THE UNITED STATES IS CONTEMPLATED IN APPROXIMATELY FIVE DAYS. PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT THE BEST MEDICAL FACILITIES AND DOCTORS HAVE BEEN MADE AVAILABLE AND EVERY MEASURE IS BEING TAKEN TO AID HIM. ADDRESS MAIL TO HIM AT THE U.S. ARMY HOSPITAL, CAMP ZAMA, APO SAN FRANCISCO 96343. YOU WILL BE PROVIDED PROGRESS REPORTS AND KEPT INFORMED OF ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN HIS CONDITION. DELAY IN NOTIFYING YOU WAS DUE TO THE LATE REPORT FROM THE OVERSEA COMMANDER.
SIGNED: KENNETH G. WICKHAM, MAJOR GENERAL, USA
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, WASHINGTON, D.C."

(My wife had already been notified by the Army [Western Union Telegram] on at least two or three other occasions that I had been either wounded or hospitalized and she still had no idea of my true condition). I must say I've yet to forgive the Army for their negligence nor have I forgiven the American Red Cross, regardless of their "regulations", for disallowing me the opportunity to place a simple short phone call home. Before my departure from the 95th I took the opportunity to discuss the deplorable conditions on my ward with the hospital commander. I told him rather sternly that hospitalized soldiers, whether ill, wounded, or otherwise, deserved much better care on the wards he was charged to supervise. (I rolled my wheeled chair away from his desk knowing full well that he could have cared less about my concerns).

I left Vietnam on 3 July, (still uncertain of my return to the 2-501) on a medical evacuation Air Force C-141 destined for Tokyo. (After an overnight at the U.S. Air Force medical holding facility near Tokyo many of us were moved northward to the 10th Surgical Hospital at Camp Zama, Japan). My heart was heavy as I boarded the C-141 in Vietnam headed for Japan. The aircraft, configured for medical evacuation, was stacked vertically to the bulkhead with litter patients who had suffered some of the most egregious wounds one could ever imagine. Flight nurses scurried up and down the

isles and climbed to reach patients stacked and strapped to litters from the moment we were boarded until our landing. Most of the combat casualties aboard suffered every description of serious wounds but were receiving the best possible care under the circumstances. About a dozen or so of us deemed “ambulatory” were seated near the rear ramp and we were privileged to watch these “Angels of Mercy” at work. Our flight nurses were absolute professionals and with both love and gentle compassion they worked tirelessly to comfort and care for the wounded. To this day I cannot imagine how those nurses endured the psychological trauma aboard such flights day after day. As I sat silently in the plane’s rear numbed by the endless drone of its engines while in flight I felt unworthy to be in the presence of so many gravely wounded warriors. Many of the wounded on our flight were in such critical condition that they were deemed “unstable” to make the long flight back to the continental U.S.. I kept reminding myself that I had endured absolutely nothing to compare with the pain and suffering these men had withstood. Even the threat of loosing my eye seemed absolutely insignificant when compared to the wounds these brave patriots had experienced or the trauma some would endure for a lifetime assuming that they could recover enough to survive the long and exhausting trip home. (Later during my stay in Japan I would walk through 10th Surgical Hospital’s Critical Care Unit…open bay and the size of a basketball court or larger…filled with men connected to every conceivable life-support tube and machine. Most of these men were literally on death’s doorstep and deemed unstable and incapable of surviving the long flight home. The experience, even today, is indelibly etched in my mind).

Immediately upon my arrival at 10th Surgical Hospital (Camp Zama), Sagamihara, Japan, I was seen by a team of two or more ophthalmologists and subjected to a hosts of eye exams and lab tests before being transferred to a ward. Within twenty-four hours my medical team had positively defined the problem….a tropical fungus common to Southeast Asia was eating its way into and through the corneal laceration in my left eye. Steroid treatments and a missed diagnosis while in Vietnam had exacerbated the problem but with anti-fungal treatments the eye could likely be saved (although some visual acuity would be permanently lost). With immediate and proper treatment I began to see positive results (no pun intended).

Life on the ward for me at the 10th Surgical was remarkably different and a very positive experience, all things considered, compared to my time in

the 95th in Vietnam. Nursing care from my perspective seemed to be carefully patient-centered and purposefully targeted to both physical and psychological recovery. From my personal experience I would opine that the nurses were the principle change agents in helping us make the difficult psychological transition from the battlefield to more civil circumstances (I will forever treasure their genuine compassion). Our senior ward master (a male Army Sergeant First Class) was the consummate medical professional with absolute attention to detail in the care of the patients assigned to his ward. I watched as he would read and reread the charts on every patient in his ward once or twice daily with meticulous attention to doctor's instructions and he tirelessly attended to matters of "good order and discipline" among his patients. He insured that we were well supplied with items for personal hygiene, required us all to meet appointment times promptly, and he vigorously and forcefully encouraged all of us to eat regularly in the hospital dining facility, if ambulatory. He also supervised the distribution of medications and physical therapy activities precisely according to doctor's instructions and demanded that we adhere to established policies for "quiet time/lights out" on the ward. Every nurse I interacted with while at Camp Zama was "a God-send" both personally and professionally and, from a personal perspective, helped me "decompress" and regain some sense of normalcy from the combat I'd managed to survive. My doctors were equally impressive.

Within a week or so after my arrival at the 10th Surgical Hospital my eye was responding nicely to the round-the-clock treatments and I was off the double IV bottles of antibiotics and daily fist full of pills and other injections prescribed while in Vietnam. For the first time in weeks I was beginning to eat regularly again and trying to regain the ten to fifteen pounds of weight I'd lost while hospitalized (I had lost at least twenty to twenty-five pounds while in Vietnam and most of it during my hospital stint). Even though I'd been out of Vietnam for quite a while I knew I desperately needed to regain the weight lost as well as strength before returning to the 2-501 Infantry to finish my last couple of months. Around the second week of July (as best I remember) I finally posed the question of when I would return to Vietnam to my senior attending ophthalmologist and his immediate response was "under no foreseen circumstances would I return". His medical recommendations regarding my case were clear: from the 10th Medical Hospital there at Camp Zama I would eventually return to the States to a Military Medical Treatment Center for continued treatment, observation,

and a lengthy recovery from “an open wound to the cornea”. His message was direct, unambiguous and without room for debate…. I was going home. I met that decision with a flood of mixed emotions. Certainly I was excited to know that I would soon reunite with my wife and daughter (and the rest of my extended family) but at the same time I felt a deep sense of remorse and a professional sense of regret for not being able to return to the 2-501 Infantry and the Battalion’s S-3 Air assignment until officially completing my tour in Vietnam. I felt that I owed every single day until my previously established DROS date (Date of Return from Overseas Service) to the men of the Geronimo Battalion.

As best I recall around July 14th I was alerted for medical reassignment back to the States and I left the 10th Surgical Hospital at Camp Zama (Misawa) on the 15th or 16th. Along with a number of other patients from Zama, we moved to Yokota Air Force Base Medical Transfer Facility near Tokyo. The following morning all of us boarded another medical evacuation Air Force C-141 destined for the U.S. and a number of other medical treatment facilities including the Army Special Treatment Center at Fort Gordon, Georgia. All things considered I was recovering nicely, both physically and psychologically, from my Vietnam experience and I was anxious to become a husband and father again. The medical care inflight home was superb. Again, the flight nurses on multiple aircraft along our route back did their very best to tend to our every need but they had no cure for the brutal forty-plus hours of travel we would experience. As an aside, I don’t think any of us knew as we departed Japan that we were manifested on a series of shuttle flights making multiple stops before arrival at our final destination. Some of our stops included Alaska to refuel, Chicago to drop off patients, and finally we made it into Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama for a overnight rest stop in their transient medical facility. The next morning many of us boarded another smaller “Florence Nightingale” (DC-9) commuter medical flight with stops at Fort Benning (Georgia), South Carolina, multiple stops up and down the Florida coast, and finally we arrived in Augusta, near Fort Gordon. Around 3 PM on 17 July with no idea what day it actually was (it was a Friday) we finally arrived at Gordon’s Medical Treatment Center. (I recall just before landing at the Augusta Airport we all had a laugh laying blame squarely on the Air Force for taking about seven hours by jet aircraft to fly us from one side of Georgia to the other. Our argument with the flight crew centered on the

premise that we could have easily driven the distance from Fort Benning to Fort Gordon in half the time.)

Between the jet lag, the international dateline change, and the all too frequent stops I would opine that none of us arriving at Fort Gordon even knew what day it was nor did we really care. "Welcome Home From Vietnam!!!; Welcome to your new home at Fort Gordon, Georgia…**NOT**!". There was no "Welcome Home"…no hugs and handshakes…no families gathered to greet us…no senior members of the military to "meet and greet" the returning war-fighters at the airport. Late on a damp, muggy, cloudy Friday afternoon our aircraft made its final stop and off-loaded perhaps fifteen or more exhausted patients. Like cattle we were quietly and quickly "herded" onto forty-one passenger (ambulance) buses for transport from the airfield to the hospital. There was no "welcome home" at the Special Treatment Center either. We were now back in the stateside Army's "hurry up and wait" environment so familiar to all soldiers. Upon our arrival at the hospital the ambulatory patients were driven to the rear of our ward and we filed into a small classroom setting for the obligatory mass "blood draw" (every overnight stop required a blood draw…I could never understand why). As best I recall some of our nurses were civilians…my first encounter with civilian nurses working in a military hospital. As we sat patiently (no pun intended) filling out more paperwork and waiting our turns to get stuck we were read the "do's and don't's" while assigned to the hospital and we were given our bed assignments on the open-bay wards. Before being released from the "blood-letting" the final words (as best I recall them) from our chief ward nurse (a civilian) were quite authoritarian and were as follows: "All of you are restricted to your assigned ward(s) and/or the hospital grounds until Monday morning when you will be seen by a doctor". I recall thinking, "Well…welcome back to the world of the eight-to-five work-day and the five day work-week".

Fort Gordon's hospital accommodation for us was the typical old dilapidated WWII wooden open-bay facility that would house twenty or so patients per ward in a series of ward-annexes off of seemingly endless windowed hallways. After "the blood letting" and lecture I found my bed, dropped off my "AWOL bag" of toiletries, and went immediately to the nurse's station for a confrontation with the head ward nurse who had so rudely "welcomed" us home. After the briefest of reintroductions I simply said to her, "Nurse, my wife, who I haven't seen in ten months, is probably waiting for me in a visitor's collection area not far from here. I'm going to

find her and I'm going to stay with her until I return to the ward on Monday morning at 6AM. You may choose to report me AWOL (Absent Without Leave) from this hospital facility if you'd like but I don't really care." I don't recall any rebuttal from her following my rather forceful pronounced intent but I do remember simply turning away and walking out of the ward to begin the hallway search for "my bride". (Within minutes, I found Donna exactly where I suspected she'd be in the waiting area and we departed the hospital to spend the rest of the weekend together in the post guest house).

As promised, by 6AM on Monday I was back in my ward and surprisingly without repercussions for my two-day absence. In short order I was seen by one or more ophthalmologists and subjected to another round of lab work and other physical examination appointments as if this hospitalization was my "first rodeo". Beyond the anticipated eye examinations the requirements were more akin to an entrance exam physical or pre-op experience although my medical records clearly reflected that I'd now spent more than a month hospitalized in both Vietnam and Japan. Frankly, from my perspective I was recovering nicely…the eye was "calm" but far from its normal 20/20 vision (about 20/400)…but my focus (again, no pun intended) had now turned to plans for getting back in a uniform and heading for a new assignment with my family in tow. That was wishful thinking.

As best I recall after about a week or two at Gordon I woke from my hospital bed one morning with a searing, stabbing pain in the left eye that had been otherwise "quiet" and healing nicely. Over the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours the eye problem and my general physical condition worsened dramatically. Lab tests determined that I had contracted a very serious bacterial infection, likely to have originated in the corneal scar, and it was spreading rapidly through the blood stream to other organs. My attending physicians (that suddenly increased to about a half dozen or more) immediately conveyed to me their concerns for my general health (the eye included) and immediately prescribed a new and radical change in my medications. As I recall the prognosis was, at one point, very bleak even after I was subjected to several days of another "cocktail" of powerful antibiotics administered by pill, IV, and injections directly into the eye ball. Finally, after about a week or so of treatment for a worsening infection my senior attending physician sat bedside with me for a "consultation" to inform me that one final effort would be made to save the eye (and my general health) with a relatively new but risky antibiotic. At the same time he said he felt compelled to tell me that he had alerted Walter Reed Army Hospital

for my transfer there for an eye removal within a few days. I told him I planned on leaving Fort Gordon with both eyes in tact and immediately waived any risks associated with the new antibiotic. I got the "magic drug" by both IV injection (IV push) on an operating table along with continuous direct injections into the eyeball. Within twenty-four hours the positive response was dramatic to say the least. My general health improved rapidly over the week or so and the eye showed remarkable improvement as well. The only unfortunate results were a deepening of my "dished cornea" and a significant and permanent loss of visual acuity. To say that I was elated an uniquely blessed with the outcome would be an understatement…once again I was on the road to recovery and still had both eyes!

For a period of forty-eight days I would be a patient there at Fort Gordon as I continued to endure a regimen of antibiotics (both oral and injections) to protect the eye as it recovered and to stop the possibility of infections elsewhere. (Only years later would I conclude that I might have been safer in Vietnam's jungles rather than being hospitalized stateside. My attending physicians finally told me that I had been felled by a well known bacterial "hospital killer" called pseudomonas while there at Gordon and subsequently I had been pumped with life-threatening doses of Amphotericin B as a life-saving measure).

By late August I was recovering nicely and to my surprise I was notified of my pending release and a request for orders for a follow-on assignment had been submitted. Shortly thereafter my reassignment orders arrived with instructions to report immediately upon my release to Fort Benning, Georgia. Supplemental assignment instructions within my orders stated that I would be assigned to the Ranger Training Brigade and 3rd Ranger Company there at Fort Benning. Immediately I knew, having been previously assigned to 3rd Ranger Company, that a return to the Ranger physical regimen was a definite "NO-GO" for me in my current physical condition (I had been continuously hospitalized since June 15th and it was now the last week of August; I was still more than twenty pounds below my normal weight and I could not run around the block). I immediately asked the hospital to put me on thirty days or more of "convalescent leave" but that was quickly denied…their answer was, "Once released you're for duty". Obviously neither the doctors, hospital administrators, or personnel managers had the slightest clue as to the physical riggers associated with being assigned to the 3rd Ranger Company. I immediately followed up with

an ordinary leave request of thirty days which thankfully was approved. On 1 September 1970 after 79 continuous days of hospitalization I began my out-processing at Fort Gordon's Special Treatment Center. During the out-processing affair I asked to personally transport my medical records to my next duty station as a precautionary measure however my request was immediately denied. Little did I know that would be the last time I would ever see my original official medical records….two plus years of my medical history from entry into the Army until 1 September 1970 were "lost" between Fort Gordon and Fort Benning. The location of my medical records from 1968 through most of 1970 remain a mystery even today. Finally, my family and I said farewell to the Fort Gordon Special Treatment Center and I was more than ready to get away to begin my own physical rehabilitation therapy.

Around October 1st my family and I arrived at Fort Benning after a month of quality time together. (On the humorous side and while on leave my two year old daughter (Beth) continuously referred to me as "That Man" in conversations with her mother about me….Beth and I had only been together for about four months of her life at that point in time and I was still a stranger to a two year old). Fort Benning was a sweet homecoming of sorts for Donna and me in that we'd started my career there with the Infantry Officer Basic Course and Ranger School in 1968 and I was more than ready to get back in uniform and get to work at the home of the infantry.

Before heading out to 3rd Ranger Company on October 4th to report for duty I decided to make the rounds in the Infantry School's Coffee Shop (Building 4) in search of some old friends (and confirm the status of many of my Officer Basic Course and Ranger School classmates). Within moments of my entry into the Coffee Shop I was confronted by my former mentor, cherished friend and fellow Mississippian, LTC Max Waldrop. He tapped me on the shoulder asking my purpose in being there. After sharing some of my Vietnam experiences and my assignment instructions he replied, "Don't you think you've spent enough time humping the bush?". I quickly responded that I agreed wholeheartedly and he escorted me immediately up to the school's 4th floor and had me reassigned as an instructor in the Infantry School's Brigade and Battalion Operations Department. In retrospect, my new assignment to teach brigade and battalion staff operations, the orders preparation process, and training

management was far more career-enhancing and quite timely as I continued to recover from both the Vietnam and hospital experiences.

I was now back in the Army that I loved so dearly and equally excited about teaching young sergeants, OCS candidates, lieutenants, and captains the lessons I'd learned while I was privileged to lead A Company in combat. However, I don't recall the passing of a single day as an instructor at Fort Benning without thinking about those I'd unexpectedly left behind back on FSB Brick in June nor those who had been wounded or killed while I was in command. Little did I know at that time that over the next 28 years of active duty I would cherish even more the memories of those I led while in Vietnam….just common Americans of uncommon patriotism, valor, and fidelity to the nation at a time when the nation-at-large had resoundingly rejected their service and sacrifice. The men of A Company gave the nation (and me) their finest hour and they gave me the resolve to continue to serve. I owe them a debt (as does the nation) that could never be repaid.

An Analysis of Our KIA's And Lessons Learned

Shortly after my return to duty at Fort Benning to teach I began an intensive search to identify by name every soldier who had lost his life while I was leading A Company including those killed who were either attached to us or fighting with us under my combatant command. Almost immediately I determined that the effort would be complex and would take years of research due to restrictions on the release of personal information and privacy restrictions imposed by the Army and The Department of Defense. Never-the-less, over time my portfolio of data swelled as electronic data bases became available and more information was deemed releasable to the general public. As an aside, over and over again I would update my 3 X 5 card listing the names and dates of the deaths of each solider. I routinely carried the card every day of my military career…a card I still carry (and even today I'm not certain I've captured the names of some who may have died of wounds years later as a result of their injuries).

During the course of my efforts to place names and circumstances with every soldier lost I quickly realized that there were significant tactical lessons to be learned in the aggregate information I had been able to

assemble. There was a moment in time when I suddenly realized not only had these men given their lives for all of us who had survived but even in death they were continuing to give me priceless “teachable moments”… lessons that enhanced my knowledge of both the art and science of war-fighting at small unit level. Over the course of the next twenty-eight years I would put these lessons learned into my own plans to train others; most especially young officers and noncommissioned officers who would lead our Army long after I had taken off my uniform for the last time.

The spreadsheets that follow (pages 1 through 6) provide a list of the forty-seven soldiers lost along with a representative small sample of some of the data I collected over the years. For much of my career I would spend countless hours analyzing the data and developing lists of lessons learned from these brave warriors who had given their all. My mantra was always the same…first, to honor and forever remember those courageous warriors for their sacrifice and second, to make their loss a supreme teachable moment for other infantry leaders to come. What follows is a small sampling of some of the lessons I learned:

In looking into the fighting elements of A Company that were killed I determined that over the course of just a few short months approximately 30% of our fatalities were noncommissioned officers (of course the loss rate was much worse if our wounded NCO’s had been included as an aggregate lose of leadership). By any measure, these numbers represented not only an unsustainable loss rate for us but for our Army as well. I quickly concluded that we (I) had to have a training problem… perhaps a leadership development problem, or both. In addition, given my sustained shortages in senior noncommissioned officers, I knew we had a personnel management problem at the highest levels in our Army (at no time during my command did I ever have more than one Sergeant First Class for duty as a Platoon Sergeant and the vast majority of my Squad Leaders were Sergeant’s (E-5s) rather than the authorized Staff Sergeants. (I would be remiss if I did not applaud the superb performance of the NCOs assigned to A Company but, like me, they lacked the training and seasoned leadership experience necessary for the duties and responsibilities they were required to perform under the most trying circumstances). Bottom line: I knew my immediate role in fixing the problem centered on building plans for NCO leader development, tactical training carefully tailored for NCO’s, and teaching them to “ always know their place on the battlefield”.

A second glaring statistic jumped from the pages listing our battlefield fatalities. Over the course of my time with A Company from February to June a startling 88% of our fatalities occurred while defending two Fire Support Bases (we had lost 34 of 47 killed on FSB's Granite and Henderson). My immediate conclusions came as no real surprise…fire support bases were our "deathtrap" and such static defenses appeared to me as nothing more than monuments to incompetent tacticians. The lists of mass casualty occurrences as a result of attacks on U.S. FSB's in Vietnam is dramatic and painful. I would opine that the deaths can be measured in the hundreds yet we "stayed the course" in building such monstrosities all over Vietnam (and more have been built by U.S. forces since on Middle East battlefields). Assuming the very worst, I knew I could expect to either be an occupant or a builder of fire support bases in the foreseeable future so I began to immediately plan and war-game more effective and efficient ways to defend them. After years of research and a fair amount of field testing I determined that "early warning" of an imminent attack was a first priority to successfully defend followed closely by a fully integrated plan for "defense-in-depth" (I had neither on Granite or Henderson). Over the coming years as both a battalion commander and a brigade commander I required every static defensive position be constructed with, as a minimum: (1) an Electronic Warfare Surveillance Plan, (2) a Combat Patrol Plan, (3) a Counter-Reconnaissance Plan, (4) a Listening Post/Observation Plan, (5) an Obstacle and Barrier Plan, (6) a Counter Attack Plan, (7) an Indirect Fire Plan, and (8) a Direct Fire Plan. I called these plans "The Fatal Eight". Each of these plans required transparent overlays of the area to be defended. All overlays were aligned atop one another in order to "see" strengths/weaknesses and the measure of overall "defense-in-depth". The effort required to prepare such plans and execute them on a piece of terrain was time consuming, exhausting, labor intensive, and required extensive materiel. However, I was absolutely determined to never put men in harm's way again without such preparations. Later in my career as an infantry battalion commander I would spend a full month training and constructing a model fire support base; each of my companies would eventually spend a week defending it and other companies would have their chance to penetrate the defense in a night coordinated attack (none were ever successful).

A third rather startling statistic in my analysis of the list of fatalities was that more than 80% of the actual war-fighting force had died from either

multiple fragmentary wounds, artillery, rocket, mortar fires, or accidents versus only about 2% had died of gunshot wounds! The obvious question was, "What could/should I have done to prevent deaths from blast/ fragmentation… what must I do now to avoid such losses on future battlefields?". The earliest answers seemed to come from two directions. First, I'm certain that body armor could (or should) have been our first line of defense against these causes of death. We did not routinely wear body armor while conducting offensive operations in the jungle but certainly had the heavy, hot, and bulky old flack jackets on fire support bases. However, getting soldiers to wear them continuously was problematic and with good reason; they were hot, heavy, cumbersome, and restricted movement in a labor-intensive environment. More often than not soldiers did not wear flack vests at night either given the weight and heat (with full disclosure, I wasn't wearing mine during the attacks on Granite or Henderson). Today our men and women are equipped with much better body armor and I would hope there is sufficient command attention (and supervision) to see that it is worn. A second major contributor to our deaths centered on safety, use, and storage of weapons/ammunition. We lost two fine soldiers due to a hand grenade accident and perhaps two others due to fratricide incidents. Such losses affected me perhaps more deeply than any others and caused me to move "safety" much higher among my priorities for the rest of my career (I never lost another soldier to such circumstances). In addition, I would be remiss without saying that I am certain that many of those killed on FSB Henderson were lost as a result of our own exploding/burning artillery ammunition and fuel stored almost center within our perimeter. Placing the munitions/fuel in mass, unprotected, and center of our defenses was an "unpardonable sin". Not withstanding the dangers we all faced working with or around deadly weapons and munitions, there were blatant safety violations related to many of the deaths we incurred and I learned that safety consciousness had to be a matter of command attention every day. There were many more "lessons-learned" hidden within our list of fatalities not the least of which are the mysteries surrounding the loss of our three "brothers" who were declared "missing-in-action". PFC Refugio Teran and PFC Larry Kier are listed as "died while missing" and were finally identified and returned home for burial in 1978. PFC Eddy Bishop was listed as MIA on 29 April 1970 and declared "died while missing" 29 August 1978-remains not returned. We long for the day when Ed Bishop finally returns as well.

NAME	RANK/MOS/SVC COMP/HOR	BIRTH/DEATH/ (AGE) AT DEATH	UNIT/LOCATION OF LOSS	STARTED TOUR	CAUSE OF DEATH/AWARDS
Carter, Roy Lynn	Private First Class E3/11D10 Armor Recon Spec Selective Service Circleville, OH	26 Aug 46 20 May 70 (23) died outright	A/2-501; Piedmont Hills near Phu Bai	30 Apr 70 KIA on day 21 of tour.	Non-hostile; accident (grenade?) CIB
Maddox, Marcus Wayne	Private First Class E3/11C10 Indirect Fire Inf Regular Army Converse, TX	24 Jul 50 16 Jun 70 (19) died of wounds	A/2-501; approx. 4 km west of FSB Brick MGRS (YC835995)	22 Apr 70	Died of wounds; boobytrap BS, PH, CIB
Ward, Tony, Robert	Sergeant E5/11B40 Infantryman Selective Service East Point, GA	31 Oct 49 20 May 70 (20) died outright	A/2-501; Piedmont Hills near Phu Bai	2 May 70 KIA on day 19 of tour.	Non-hostile; accident (grenade?)
Goosen, Robert Henry	Specialist Fourth Class E4/11B20 Infantryman Regular Army Muskegon, MI	13 Feb 50 13 Mar 70 (20) died of wounds	A/2-501	30 Nov 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds (7 FEB 70). PH,CIB
Hockett, David Allen	First Lieutenant O2/1542 Infantry Unit Cdr Army (Reserve) Richmond, IN	14 Mar 46 20 Feb 70 (23) died outright	A/2-501; 2 km north of FSB Veghel MGRS (YD549036)	3 Oct 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds SS, BS, PH, CIB
Zaragoza, Victor	Sergeant E5/11B40 Infantryman Regular Army Holtville, CA	3 Feb 50 20 Feb 70 (20) died outright	A/2-501; 2 km north of FSB Veghel MGRS (YD549036)	10 Aug 69	Hostile; gun or small arms fire. SS, BS(V), BS, PH, AM, CIB
Kohl, Daniel Kaye	Specialist Fourth Class E4/11B20 Infantryman Selective Service Denver, CO	11 Nov 47 31 Mar 70 (22) died outright	A/2-501; on FSB Bastogne MGRS (YD626096)	29 Jun 69	Non-hostile; Arty fratricide
Worley, Garry Lee	Private First Class E3/11B10 Infantryman Regular Army Bristol, TN	23 Jun 51 23 Apr 70 (18) died outright	A/2-501 REUP Hill MGRS (YD362165)	5 Feb 70	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds BS, PH, CIB
Dangberg, Robert Lee	Specialist Fourth Class E4/11B20 Infantryman Selective Service Winside, NE	11 Apr 49 18 April 70 (21) died outright	A/2-501 REUP Hill MGRS (YD362165)	22 Sep 69	Hostile; gun or small arms fire BS(V), PH, CIB
Frey, Dean Lee	Staff Sergeant E6/11C40 Indirect Fire Inf Selective Service Oceanside, CA	30 Jul 48 19 Apr 70 (21) died outright	A/2-501 REUP Hill MGRS (YD362165)	2 Nov 69	Hostile; gun or small arms fire BS PH, CIB

NAME	RANK/MOS/SVC COMP/HOR	BIRTH/DEATH/ (AGE) AT DEATH	UNIT/LOCATION OF LOSS	STARTED TOUR	CAUSE OF DEATH/AWARDS
Vagnone, Michael John	Sergeant E5/11B40 Infantryman Regular Army Stamford, CT	7 Oct 47 18 Apr 70 (22) died outright	A/2-501 REUP Hill MGRS (YD362165)	7 Jan 70	Hostile; gun or small arms fire PH, CIB
Bishop, Edward James, Jr.	Private First Class E3/11B20 Infantryman Selective Service Hartford, CT	27 Jan 48 29 Apr 70* (22) (30) 29 Aug 78 died while missing	A/2-501 FSB Granite MGRS (YD439188)	2 Dec 69	Hostile; died while missing SS, PH, CIB
Walker, Linwood Alferonia	Private First Class E3/11B20 Infantryman Regular Army Baltimore, MD	7 Jul 50 29 Apr 70 (19) died outright	C/2-501 FSB Granite MGRS (YD439188)	15 Dec 69	Hostile; fratricide PH, CIB
Shannon, Robert Joseph	Specialist Fourth Class E4/57A20 Duty Soldier Selective Service Clinton, IA	13 Jul 49 30 Apr 70 (20) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Granite MGRS (YD439188)	15 Dec 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds SS, PH
Wortmann, Frederick Edward	Specialist Fourth Class E4/64B20 Hvy Veh Driver Selective Service El Paso, TX	16 Mar 48 29 Apr 70 (22) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Granite MGRS (YD439188)	27 Jul 69	Hostile; other causes(undefined) BS, PH
Snyder, Roy Harrison	Specialist Fourth ClassE4/11B10 Infantryman Selective Service Fabius, NY	6 Oct 45 29 Apr 70 (24) died outright	HHC/2-501 FSB Granite MGRS (YD439188)	18 May 69	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar PH, CIB
Patten, Carl Eugene	Private First Class E3/11C10 Indirect Fire Inf Selective Service Memphis, TN	18 Oct 49 29 Apr 70 (20) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Granite MGRS (YD439188)	12 Feb 70	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar PH, CIB
Hunter, Dennis Wayne	Private First Class E3/11B10 Infantryman Selective Service Santa Ana, CA	4 Apr 51 29 Apr 70 (19) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Granite MGRS (YD439188)	2 Mar 70	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar SS, BS, PH, CIB
Jones, Larry Neal	Sergeant E5/11C40 Indirect Fire Inf Selective Service Oakman, AL	20 Jul 47 30 Apr 70 (22) died outright	E/2-501 FSB Granite MGRS (YD439188)	19 Aug 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Boggs, Robert Sidney	Private First Class E3/11B10 Infantryman Selective Service Frankford, WV	3 Jan 50 29 Apr 70 (20) died outright	B/2-501 FSB Granite MGRS (YD439188)	16 Mar 70	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB

NAME	RANK/MOS/SVC COMP/HOR	BIRTH/DEATH/ (AGE) AT DEATH	UNIT/LOCATION OF LOSS	STARTED TOUR	CAUSE OF DEATH/AWARDS
Teran, Refugio Thomas	Private First Class E3/11B10 Infantryman Selective Service Westland, MI	8 May 49 6 May 70* (21) (29) 29 Sep 78 died while missing	Recon/E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	17 Dec 69	Hostile; died while missing BS, PH, GCM, CIB
Kier, Larry Gene	Private First Class E3/11B10 Infantryman Regular Army Omaha, NE	29 Sep 49 6 May 70* (21) (28) 12 Sep 78 died while missing	A/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	N/A	Hostile; died while missing BS, PH, GCM,CIB
Bennett, George Willy, Jr.	Private First Class E3/11B10 Infantryman Selective Service Dallas, TX	19 Jun 50 6 May 70 (19) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	19 Dec 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Chavez, Gregory Anton	Specialist Fourth Class E4/11B20 Infantryman Selective Service Colorado Springs, CO	19 Aug 47 6 May 70 (22) died outright	E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	22 Jul 69	Hostile; died of burns PH, CIB
Day, Douglas Wayne	Private First Class E3/11C10 Indirect Fire Inf Regular Army Hacienda Heights, CA	24 Oct 49 6 May 70 (20) died outright	Recon/E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	22 Apr 1970 KIA on day 15 of tour.	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Denton, Robert Anthony	Sergeant E5/11B40 Infantryman Selective Service Wichita Falls, TX	30 Sep 48 6 May 70 (21) died outright	B/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	17 Apr 1970 KIA on day 20 of tour.	Hostile; gun or small arms fire PH, CIB
Gordon, Lawrence Lee	Private First Class E3/11B10 Infantryman Regular Army Noblesville, IN	16 Jun 51 6 May 70 (18) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	14 Apr 1970 KIA on day 23 of tour.	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Lewis, Frank Frederick	Specialist Fourth Class E4/11B10 Infantryman Regular Army Affton, MO	8 Jan 47 6 May 70 (23) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	6 Apr 70 KIA on day 30 of tour	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar PH, CIB
Van Beukering, Ronald Dale	Specialist Fourth Class E4/11B10 Infantryman Selective Service Kalamazoo, MI	7 Jul 49 6 May 70 (20) died outright	Recon/E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	7 Dec 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Snyder, Gary Foster	Sergeant First Class E7/11B40 Infantryman Regular Army Toledo, OH	19 Mar 40 6 May 70 (30) died outright	Recon/E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	15 Aug 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, GCM, CIB

NAME	RANK/MOS/SVC COMP/HOR	BIRTH/DEATH/ (AGE) AT DEATH	UNIT/LOCATION OF LOSS	STARTED TOUR	CAUSE OF DEATH/AWARDS
Widen, John George	Sergeant E5/11C40 Indirect Fire Inf Selective Service Owatonna, MN	11 Sep 48 6 May 70 (21) died outright	Recon/E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	13 Jul 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Willey, John James	Sergeant E5/11B40 Infantryman Regular Army West Covina, CA	21 Oct 50 6 May 70 (19) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	16 Apr 1970 KIA on day 21 of tour.	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Ziegenfelder, Frederick P.	Staff Sergeant E6/11B40 Infantryman Selective Service St. Marys, OH	15 May 49 6 May 70 (20) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	17 Apr 1970 KIA on day 20 of tour.	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Bowman, Melvin	Specialist Fourth Class E4/91B20 Medical NCO Selective Service Iva, SC	1 Jul 49 6 May 70 (20) died outright	HHC/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	2 Jan 70	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar PH, CMB
Diller Jay Thomas	Specialist Fourth Class E4/91B20 Medical NCO Selective Service Chambersburg, PA	22 Sep 48 6 May 70 (21) died outright	Recon/HHC/2-501; FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	3 Jan 70	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar PH, CMB
Hindman, Tommy Ivan	Private First Class E3/11B10 Infantryman Regular Army Cedar Rapids, IA	17 Sep 49 6 May 70 (20) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	23 Feb 70	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar PH, CIB
Hawley, Richard A., Jr.	First Lieutenant O2/1542 Infantry Unit Cdr Regular Army Devon, PA	12 Jul 44 6 May 70 (25) died outright	Recon/E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	13 Jul 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Ogden David Ellis	Sergeant E5/11F40 Inf Ops/Intel Spc Selective Service Paramount, CA	22 Jun 47 6 May 70 (22) died outright	Recon/E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	8 Dec 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB
Reagan, Dickie Walter	Specialist Fourth Class E4/11B20 Infantryman Regular Army Lumberton, NC	3 Feb 49 6 May 70 (21) died outright	Recon/E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	14 Oct 69	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar BS, PH, CIB
Veser, Edward	Specialist Fourth Class E4/11B20 Infantryman Selective Service Milwaukee, WI	2 Dec 49 6 May 70 (20) died outright	Recon/E/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	8 Dec 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, CIB

NAME	RANK/MOS/SVC COMP/HOR	BIRTH/DEATH/ (AGE) AT DEATH	UNIT/LOCATION OF LOSS	STARTED TOUR	CAUSE OF DEATH/AWARDS
Jennings, James Dale	Specialist Fourth Class E4/31M20 MultiChannel Spc Regular Army Brandon, MS	25 Aug 48 6 May 70 (21) died outright	A/501 Signal Bn FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	7 Feb 70	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds BS, PH
Long, Raymond Leon, Jr.	Command Sergeant Major E9/00Z50 Regular Army Little Rock, AR	20 Jul 34 6 May 70 (35) died outright	HHC/3rd Brigade FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	4 Oct 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH, GCM
Brown, Michael Francis	Sergeant E5/13B40 Cannon Crew Member Regular Army Baltimore, MD	9 Nov 46 6 May 70 (23) died outright	B/2-11 FA FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	18 Mar 70	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH
Granath, John Edward, Jr.	Private First Class E3/13A10 Field Arty Basic Selective Service McHenry, IL	11 Nov 49 6 May 70 (20) died outright	B/2-11 FA FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	4 Feb 70	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH
Yeldell, David	Specialist Fourth Class E4/13A10 Field Arty Basic Selective Service Greenwood, SC	6 Dec 48 6 May 70 (21) died outright	B/2-11 FA FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	19 Nov 69	Hostile; multiple fragment wounds PH
Williams, Billy Joe	Major O4/2162 Ops/Tng Officer Army National Grd Marion, KY	23 Nov 29 6 May 70 (40) died outright	Adv ™ 3 MACV Advisor FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	5 Aug 69	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar SS, PH
Antle, Michael Lewis	Specialist Fourth Class E4/11B20 Infantryman Selective Service Tulsa, OK	28 Sep 48 6 May 70 (21) died outright	A/2-501 FSB Henderson MGRS (YD081411)	10 Apr 70 KIA on day 27 of tour .	Hostile; Arty, rocket, or mortar SS, PH, CIB

BATTLEFIELD FATALITY ANALYSIS (20 FEB-15 JUN 1970)

	NON-HOSTILE-ACCIDENT OR FRATRICIDE	MULTIPLE FRAG WOUNDS	GUN OR SM ARMS FIRE	ARTY, ROCKET, MORTAR, OR BURNS	DIED OUTRIGHT	DIED OF WOUNDS OR DIED WHILE MISSING
MAJOR 1 KIA				1	1 Williams	
LIEUTENANT 2 KIA's		2 Hockett, Hawley			2	
CMD SGT MAJOR 1 KIA		1 Long			1	
SERGEANT FIRST CLASS 1 KIA		1			1 Snyder	
STAFF SERGEANT 2 KIA		1	1		2	
SERGEANT 9 KIA's	1 Ward	5	3		9	
SPECIALIST 4TH CLASS 16 KIA's	2	6	1	7	15	1 Gossen
PRIVATE FIRST CLASS 15 KIA's	2 Carter, Walker	6		3	11	4 Maddox, Bishop, Teran, Kier
TOTALS:	4	22	5	11	42	5
BATTLES						
REUP HILL 4 KIA'S		1	3		4	
FSB GRANITE 9 KIA's	1-Walker	3		3	8	1-Bishop
FSB HENDERSON 27 KIA'S		16	1	8	25	2-Teran, Kier
PIEDMONT HILLS 3 KIA's	2-Ward, Carter				2	1-Maddox
OTHERS 4 KIA's	1-Kohl	2	1		3	1-Goosen
TOTALS: 47 KIA'S	4	22	5	11	42	5

“Welcome Home From Vietnam”

Much has been written (and certainly far more said) about how returning Vietnam veterans were received by the American public (and also the Armed Forces) upon our arrival back on U.S. soil. I suspect most of us who boarded a “freedom bird” (or in my case, an Air Force medical evacuation C-141) had heard many of the rumors and read the newspaper clippings documenting the wide spread anti-war sentiment, the draft dodgers, the burning of draft cards, the riots, the Kent State killings, the seemingly endless protests, and the nation’s general disdain for the protracted conflict in Southeast Asia. Certainly by the late 1960’s those of us wearing the uniform around the world or returning from Vietnam were keenly aware of the war’s nationwide unpopularity. However, I could make a compelling argument that few if any of us returning from Southeast Asia were adequately prepared for the personal, sometimes violent attacks that frequently greeted Vietnam veterans. I would never attempt to speak for all or even the majority of returning veterans but I personally felt great pride for having answered the nation’s call-to-arms. (On the humorous side, back in 1968 I had received my “draft notice” to report for induction in the mail the same day I graduated from and was pinned with the Ranger Tab at the Florida Ranger Camp…I suppose my “2S-Student” deferred status had run it’s course with my college graduation and I’d failed to notify my Draft Board that I was already on active duty). I felt that I (and the soldiers I was privileged to lead) had done everything the Army and the nation had asked of us and even more under the most deplorable conditions and circumstances. I would make the argument that the majority of us were returning with immense pride for having served even though a lot of us came home with “our own inner demons” having seen the carnage of war. Many of us had held the hands of so many “brothers” who had paid the ultimate sacrifice as participants in “man’s greatest inhumanity to mankind” and we would relive those awful moments for a lifetime. For me however the shock of finding an ungrateful nation would cut deeply and permanently. I recall asking myself over and over again, “What nation would dishonor its own lost and purposely scar its returning warriors immediately upon their escape from the battlefield?”. What I saw at home in the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam conflict represented a darkness of epic

proportions. I would often ask myself, “Where were the defenders of the nation’s service men and women?”. The nation’s ambivalence and/or blatant rejection of returning Vietnam warriors made absolutely no sense to me. Collectively we were routinely rejected for our service and sacrifice by a large vocal and sometimes violent segment of the very nation that committed us to war! How could the anti-war activists and “significant others” choose to target those of us who either volunteered or were conscripted to serve? As Americans on a distant battlefield we had been “all for one and one for all…we had laid down our lives for one another”. We were fiercely loyal to each other in combat but in our own homeland we were often labeled as outcasts...social misfits in our own society! I too felt my country’s rejection (as did so many others returning from Vietnam) when I got home. I will never forget the first time I was warned for my own safety not to wear my uniform off the installation where I was assigned! Matter-of-fact, many soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers I knew wore civilian cloths to work each day and changed into a uniform for the duty day only to change back to civilian cloths for their return trip home each night. “If in uniform, you are restricted from entering any commercial facility outside the military installation”..“Don’t fly in uniform”....each of these “directives” became the mantra from our own senior military leadership! In other words, for your own safety don’t be seen in the uniform of your own country (the nation you’ve sworn to defend); your uniform has made you a target of opportunity amidst the general public as you travel! I often raged with the question, “What kind of country routinely treats its defenders with such disrespect or threatens bodily harm to its own who have taken an oath to defend the nation…to support and defend the Constitution?”.

Years later a wonderful old four-star general officer (a true American hero) and mentor of mine summed up my sentiments with respect to the anti-war movement and the hatred for those of us who served in Vietnam quite eloquently when he simply uttered four powerful words, “Some Scars Never Heal”. I think this old warrior, “soldier-of-soldiers”, and Vietnam veteran unknowingly spoke for perhaps the majority of those I know who served in that protracted and historic conflict. Most of us will NEVER recover from the blatant rejection...the “benign neglect” of an ungrateful nation.

However, many of us who remained in uniform long after our Vietnam experiences were just memories/nightmares vowed to NEVER AGAIN allow our combat veterans to return from the battlefield without an

appropriate and ceremonial welcome home. For many of us the promise of an appropriate welcome home for our war fighters became a silent but solemn oath; an obsession by a generation of rejected veterans of the Vietnam era who were still wearing the uniform. Many years later I would be privileged and honored to help organize and participate in an elaborate divisional "welcome home ceremony" for those returning from Operation Desert Storm. Our Division Chief-of-Staff (a Vietnam vet) and I both stood rigidly at attention at that ceremony to honor and salute our own returning warriors. Our eyes blurred with tears as we warmly welcomed home another generation of brave returning patriots. However, our tears flowed not so much with joy for these newest returning American warriors but in honor, remembrance, and recollection of the tens of thousands of Vietnam "brothers and sisters" lost and in memory of our returning Vietnam veterans our country had attacked, shamed, or ignored a quarter of a century earlier. Colonel Mel Case and I returned to his office after that emotional ceremony to engage in our own private "moments of reflection and emotion". I'll never forget that day as two old "Vietnam brothers", then colonels, sat quietly in his office sharing those tearful moments together. Like the vast majority of Vietnam veterans we were still waiting for our own "Welcome Home". Since then I have been honored and privileged to attend many "welcome home" ceremonies honoring our returning men and and women in uniform (including members of my own family) but the tears have always taken me back to some of our nation's darkest and most dishonorable days because……..."SOME SCARS NEVER HEAL".

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brigadier General Mitchell was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant and a Distinguished Military Student and Distinguished Military Graduate from the University of Mississippi in 1968 and retired in 1998 having served for more than thirty years.

While on active duty General Mitchell led two infantry platoons (one in combat) and commanded four infantry companies (two in combat). He commanded the 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry, the 3rd Battalion, 22 Infantry (Light), and the 1st (Lancer) Brigade(Light), 25th Infantry Division, (Light) at Schofield Barracks Hawaii.

General Mitchell's key staff assignments include: S3-3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry; Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Training, G3-25th Infantry Division (Light); Deputy Commanding General-Operations-25th Infantry Division (Light); Deputy Commanding General-Support-25th Infantry Division (Light); Chief of Current Operations/Mobilization-The Army Staff (Pentagon); Deputy Director of Operations-The Joint Staff (Pentagon); and Deputy Chief of Staff for Base Operations-TRADOC (Fort Monroe, VA).

General Mitchell is a graduate of the Infantry Officer Basic and Advanced Courses, Ranger School, Air Assault School, the Management Development Institute, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (National Defense University).

His most significant awards and decorations include: The Distinguished Service Medal, The Silver Star with two Oak Leaf Clusters, The Defense Superior Service Medal, The Legion of Merit with two Oak Leaf Clusters, The Bronze Star, The Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster, The Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Star, The Combat Infantryman's Badge, Air Assault Badge, The Ranger Tab, and The Army Staff and Joint Staff Badges.

General Mitchell and his wife Donna have three children, Beth Huntsberry, Kimberly Edwards, and Wendi Gordon along with twelve grandchildren.